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Deconstruction of the Self in Aldous Huxley's **Island**
and John Fowles' **The Magus**

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Deconstruction of the Self in Aldous Huxley's **Island** and John Fowles' **The Magus**

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ÖZ

Bu tezin amacı, *ben* öznesinin sosyal ve kültürel bir olgu olarak yapılanışını incelemek ve bu yapılanışın hangi yollarla gerçekleştiğini ortaya koymaktır. Tez, Aldous Huxley'in **Ada** ve John Fowles'in **Büyücü** eserlerindeki *ben*'in çözülüşü temasını, ana karakterlerin öz bilince ve sahte hayatlar sürdüklerine dair farkındalığa ulaşmaları üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma bunu yaparken bir yandan da, her ikisinin de *ben*'i bir yanılsama olarak algılamaları açısından, Doğu Felsefesi/Mistisizm ve Yapısalcılık Sonrası Edebiyat Kuramı arasındaki paralel noktalara değinmektedir.

Deconstruction of the Self in Aldous Huxley's **Island** and John Fowles' **The Magus**

Seçil Erkoç

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to show the ways in which the self comes to be recognized as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. It examines the notion of unselfing in Aldous Huxley's **Island** (1962) and John Fowles' **The Magus** (1977) by analysing the protagonists' initiation to self-consciousness and their ultimate recognition that they have been leading inauthentic lives. While doing that, the study also draws parallels between Eastern Philosophy/Mysticism and the Post-structuralist approach to language in that they both consider the self/ego/I as illusionary.

PREFACE

This study involves an analysis of Aldous Huxley's **Island**, and John Fowles' **The Magus**. It focuses on the question of unselfing and tries to examine the process in which the self comes to be recognized as an illusion. Through Nicholas Urfe and Will Farnaby it analyses the condition of the war-stricken, selfish and decentralized subject who is bound to learn the act of unlearning as an attempt to stand against rationalism/materialism. While doing that it draws parallels between Eastern Philosophy and the Post-structuralist approach to language in that they both regard the human being as constituted by a system.

In the Introduction, apart from giving an outline of what **Island** and **The Magus** are mainly about, common points that the texts share are mentioned. It is also highlighted that the novels bear clear references to Eastern Philosophy, and they re-evaluate the relationship between man and woman through the theme of 'real' love. In Chapter I, the passage from Modern to Postmodern is scrutinized by giving information about the historical, economic and social changes in the 20th century. In Chapter II, the affinities between Postmodernism and Mysticism are examined in detail. In relation to the idea of the construction of the self as an illusion, Lacan's psychosexual development of the subject is focused on, so as to be able to give basis for the terms that are to be used frequently in this thesis –such as the 'real' and the 'reality.' In Chapter III, biographical information about Aldous Huxley is provided – with the main intention to trace cause and effects of his pathway to Mysticism and Spiritual Reality. In Chapter IV, the transformation Will Farnaby undergoes is examined through specific examples from **Island**. In Chapter V, John Fowles' idiosyncratic stance towards life and literature is brought to the fore in the light of the interviews the author gave and also by referring to some biographical information about his life. In Chapter VI, in order to give an impression of the various aspects in which the novel has been analysed so far, a brief study of research on **The Magus** is presented. Then Nicholas Urfe's initiation to self-realization is analysed through

focusing on the text itself. Finally, in the Conclusion, it is attempted to tie all loose ends together by providing an extensive look at the notion of the self as a construct.

To start with, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor Assist. Prof. Canan Şavkay who showed me the right way whenever I lost my focus and felt disappointed with myself. I thank to her for her encouraging comments and guidance throughout this painful process. I also would like to express my kind appreciation to each and every member of the English Language and Literature Department at Istanbul University with whom I had the opportunity to be colleagues within the last few months of my Master Studies.

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Last but not least the biggest thank goes to my father, my mother, my dear brother and my closest friend. Had it not been for their understanding and affection I would not have been able to complete this study. I thank them again and again for their endless patience with me and invaluable support that cannot be measured by anything. Thank you all.

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INTRODUCTION

“If one waits for the right time to come before writing, the right time never comes”, says James Russell Lowell. Starting off with such a quotation, maybe I subconsciously try to convince myself that no matter how systematic and disciplined academic studies may seem to be, they are actually very similar to those infamous surprise-boxes out of which you can never estimate what will come out. However, it is beyond my intention to situate the process on a shaky ground, claiming that it is impossible to apply a clear-cut methodology to it. On the contrary, I celebrate the idea that there needs to be a free space in all forms of ‘sharp-edged’ thinking models; otherwise it would be a certain waste of time to talk about the notion of ‘mystery’ or of ‘hazard’. Here, I refer to these concepts in an introductory sense, almost superficially, as each one of them is to be elaborated on as detailed as possible in the following chapters. For now, suffice it to say that – quoting from the movie “Bright Star” which portrays the life of the English poet John Keats – “The point of diving in a lake is not immediately to swim to the shore but to be in the lake, to luxuriate in the sensation of water. You do not work the lake out. It is an experience beyond thought.”¹ This is why the right moment does never come. It simply appears. Therefore, instead of blurring the mind by focusing on the ‘end’, it is much better to feel the availability of the ‘means’ at hand. In other words, rather than waiting for the most suitable time or trying to find a distinctive label for it, it is much more promising to feel the moment –that is the ‘eternal now’. After all, ‘now’ is powerful enough to amalgamate all segregated perceptions concerning time –past, present, future– into a single concrete body. From that stage onwards, the act of ‘waiting’ also comes to an end, the suspension gets suspended, and nobody needs to hang up anymore. Nonetheless, these particular lyrics of the song “Talkin’ World War III Blues”, sung by Bob Dylan who is an American musician, poet and songwriter, illustrate the other side of the coin –which implies that waiting can never come to an end, but constantly repeats itself:

¹ “Bright Star,” **Shooting Script**, 4th April, 2008, p. 29, (Online)
<http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~ina22/splaylib/Screenplay-Brightstar.pdf>, 15 December 2012.

I was feelin' kinda lonesome and blue,
I needed somebody to talk to.
So I called up the operator time
Just to hear a voice of some kind.
"When you hear the beep
It will be three o'clock."
She said that for over an hour
And I hung up.²

Similar to the image of the waiting man in the song, John Fowles's **The Magus** and Aldous Huxley's **Island** depict the condition of the 'by-standing' man who finds himself loitering around the metaphorical *abyss* that was 'constructed' through the tension between suspension and action; body and spirit; concrete and abstract; brain and heart –and his ultimate fall into the abyss itself. . . However, through Nicholas Urfe and Will Farnaby both of the writers show that it is also possible to rise above this 'constructed' tension and get a glimpse of the ultimate unity. It can also be summarized as the quest or ascending of the 'self-stricken' subject who aspires to reach a balanced point in his life. It is an endeavour to get rid of your 'self' so that it will be possible to see the distinct parts of the same coin as being whole. Yet, the journey proceeding out of the *self* to the *not-self*³ is never an easy-going and peaceful adventure. On the contrary, this symbolic path is full of thorns, mysteries, hazards, dangers, fiends, rocks and pebbles. If it were not that wearisome, it would be a too optimistic and illusionary approach to wait for the total transformation of the subject on its own accord. He needs to be beaten metaphorically so that just like a dirty carpet which is cleansed by shaking or hitting; the self also becomes purified, leaving all the dust on him behind. As world-wide famous Sufi mystic Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi puts it in his 'multi-dimensional' saying, "I was ripe, I got cooked, I became burnt"⁴, the self/the insulated ego/I is gradually to be annihilated as well –if the ultimate aim is to 'come to the not-self'. The expression is very paradoxical, because we can easily wonder how it can be

² Fawcner, H. W., **The Timescapes of John Fowles**, London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984, p. 99.

³ *The Self* with the capital S will be used as an alternative referring to the *not-self*; therefore it should not be confused with *the self*. *The Self* and the *not-self* mean the same in this thesis.

⁴ After his meeting with Shams, whom Mevlana called his 'spiritual twin', in 1244, Mevlana summed up his whole life with three words "Hamdim, pistim, yandim", which means "I was immature, I suffered and became enlightened."

possible to forget one's self just to be able to find it again or reconquer it in the long run. Actually, this is the very point where the mystery stays, and hopefully the paradox will clear itself away as we proceed into the novels. Rumi vividly expresses his ideas on the theme of 'returning' or 'coming back to one's Self' in his major work **Mathnawi**, which is about 25,000 verses long: "Return to yourself, oh heart! For from the heart a hidden road can be found to the Beloved. If the world of the six directions has no door, then come to heart –you can make a door [M 6685-86]."⁵ Correspondingly, the process may also be termed as an 'inner unfolding' where – analogous to the act of peeling the skins of an onion to find or grasp its core/centre/heart– the subject, too, rips away the veil of his self and thus becomes subjected to his inmost core in the end. The veil covering the 'heart' cannot be thrown open without the help of 'love'. Here, 'heart' as the ultimate centre of man's total being or consciousness ought not to be confused with the bodily organ (*qalb*). They are totally different from each other. In William Chittick's words, "As for the lump of flesh within the breast, that is the shadow or outermost skin of the heart. Between this heart and that heart are the infinite levels of consciousness and self-realization."⁶

In this respect, it seems initially possible to shed light on the reasons behind Fowles's and Huxley's placing the notion of 'real' love or affection at the *heart* of their works. On the other hand, it is also important to note that both novels do have clear references to Zen and Mahayana Buddhism respectively. According to Buddhism the self is unreal and illusionary. Ironically enough, in order to escape from the insulated selfhood, the subject is to go deeper into his self and understand the process in which he has become what he is. In this way he can have the opportunity to change for the better in the future. Nicholas Urfe and Will Farnaby are carried deeper down into their selves so that they will be able to ascend beyond the self in the end –that is to transcend it. Otherwise they get trapped on a superficial ground and try to fill the empty space within themselves via illusionary constructions. Such a despairing condition inevitably increases the gap between the

⁵ Chittick, William C., **The Sufi Path of Love**, State University of New York Press, 1983, p. 37.

⁶ **Ibid.**

real and the illusion to the degree that the person is no longer able to differentiate between which is which and feels disconnected.

For that reason it is not surprising that the main settings of **The Magus** and **Island** –as it is also verified by its title– are not connected to the land, but ‘autonomous’ places. The island of Phraxos and the island of Pala are fictional locations, created by the authors themselves. It adds to the feeling of loneliness and points to the existential suffering felt by the protagonists who are torn between two choices: Nicholas Urfe, the English instructor at the Lord Byron School in Greece has to come to a conclusion by whether to prefer fantasy over the real; Lily over Alison; myth over history or vice versa. Similarly, Will Farnaby the cynical, ship-wrecked journalist is also obliged to make a decision between finding a lot more about his not-self or negotiating a lease between Southeast Asia Petroleum and the Palanese government. All in all, it is an in-between state of either knowing your own self –realising that there is no self– or letting it escape from your fingers, therefore reducing your ‘I’ to the position of an aimless instrument, an object to be directed by the others. Here I do not bring up a self-centred position; on the contrary I want to illustrate the disastrous destiny of the objectified self who cannot see through and prefers himself to be controlled. In fact, it is nothing other than the subject’s running away from the burden of taking responsibility of his actions so that he will not have to face their results. Enjoying the suggestion that he is taking part in a ‘game’, Nicholas finds nothing wrong in being guided or misguided through Conchis’s directions, because it creates a sense of security and comfort for the ‘objectified self’. As a result, he cannot go beyond the surface and ends up with misinterpreting love. As he says to Conchis:

‘I suppose I don’t know what love is really. If it isn’t all sex. And I don’t even really care a damn any more, anyway.’

‘My dear young man, you are a disaster. So defeated. So pessimistic.’

‘I was rather ambitious at once. I ought to have been blind as well. Then perhaps I wouldn’t feel defeated.’ I looked at him. ‘It isn’t all me. It is in the age. In all my generation. We all feel the same.’

‘In the greatest age of enlightenment in the history of this earth? When we have destroyed more darkness in this last fifty years than in the last five million?’

‘As at Neuve Chapelle? Hiroshima?’

‘No man is an island.’

‘Pah. Rubbish. Every one of us is an island. If it were not so we should go mad at once. Between these islands are ships, aeroplanes, telephones, wireless –what you will. But they remain islands. Islands that can sink or disappear for ever. You are an island that has not sunk. You cannot be such pessimistic. It is not possible.’⁷

The dialogue between Nicholas and Conchis takes place just before Nicholas is hypnotized and is shown the “innermost secret of life”. Conchis says to him: “‘Come with me.’ He stood up as if time was vital. ‘Come. I will show you the innermost secret of life. Come.’”⁸ This scene may be considered as illustrating the crudest and the most distanced version of Nicholas in the first place, because it is only after getting hypnotized that he starts descending the steps into his self and gets exposed to his own image. Here, it is possible to see the extent of the darkness prevailing in Nicholas’s whole being. I term it as ‘darkness’ in the sense that, not knowing ‘love’, he is disconnected from true knowledge –that is light. If love is to be interpreted as an epistemological process that brings ‘truth’ alongside, Nicholas may be compared to the prisoner in the cave who mistakes what he perceives on the surface of the wall with the sun-lit intelligible world outside. However, here Nicholas mistakes love with sex. In relation to this, Plato’s “The Allegory of the Cave” serves as a useful example because it illustrates how the people who are tied or chained to their own senses or selves get distanced from the real. They mistake the real with the shadows of the puppets that are reflected on the wall of the cave. What is more, in the absence of light they can see neither themselves nor the other prisoners nearby, and this makes them double blind. As Socrates speaks:

Next said I, here is a parable to illustrate the degrees in which our nature may be enlightened or unenlightened. Imagine the condition of men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground, with an entrance open to the light and a long passage all down the cave. Here they have been from childhood, chained by the leg and also by the neck, so that they cannot move and can see only what is in front of them, because the chains will not let them turn their heads. At some distance higher up is the light of fire burning behind them; and between the prisoners and the fire is a track with a parapet built along it, like the screen at a puppet-show, which hides the performers while they show their puppets over the top.⁹

⁷ John Fowles, **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 146.

⁸ **Ibid.**

⁹ Plato, “The Allegory of the Cave,” **The Republic**, qtd. in **Phil 111**, p. 197.

The parapet and the puppets have direct reference to Conchis's set of the 'Godgame' on the island—it is Conchis's representation of the 'real' by making use of the theatrical elements such as the costumes, masques, make up; mythical figures coming alive in the body of actors and actresses alike, the adaptation of the setting, the puppet-like twins, the victimized tragic hero stuck between the opposing ends, etc. All of these elements need deeper analysis. Still the association between the game and the cave cannot be skipped at this moment in that it portrays the condition of the disillusioned Nicholas/prisoner whose connection with his Self/light is sternly severed. And the foremost step of reconnection can be achieved through the medium of *self-knowledge*, which will help Nicholas escape from the symbolic cave of blindness and illusion. Thereby he will manage to get out of the total darkness of his self-intoxication. Nevertheless, it would be an unfavourable mistake to assume that 'disintoxication' happens in the most comfortable and the easiest way possible, because the prisoner who goes out of the cave and looks at the sun for the first time is temporarily rendered sightless by the sun. It takes a certain amount of time for him to get accustomed to the light. In consequence we can say that learning as a process by itself is supposed to be as painful as giving birth; if not, then the delivery cannot take place. As Socrates continues:

Now consider what would happen if their release from the chains and the healing of their unwisdom should come about in this way. Suppose one of them set free and forced suddenly to stand up, turn his head, and walk with eyes lifted to the light; all these movements would be *painful*, and he would be too dazzled to make out the objects whose shadows he had been used to see. What do you think he would say, if someone told him that what he had formerly seen was meaningless illusion, but now being somewhat nearer to reality and turned towards more real objects, he was getting a truer view?...And now he would begin to draw the conclusion that it is the Sun that produces the seasons and the course of the year and controls everything in the visible world, and moreover is in a way the cause of all that he and his companions used to see.¹⁰

Having been exposed to the light, the prisoner gets to know the form behind the shadows, and he goes back to the cave to help his friends escape from the cave too. At first he is rejected but then he achieves to make them leave the cave and look

¹⁰ **Ibid.** pp. 198-199 (italics mine).

at the sun. In this context, Conchis may be compared to the ‘enlightened’ prisoner, who having seen the world of ‘forms’, thus having tasted knowledge; does not want to keep it only to himself and wants to ‘inspire’ the other prisoners/ignorant men – represented by Leverrier, Mitford and Urfe on the island. He wears the role of a transcendentalist existentialist who guides the ignorant through their passage from the self to the not-self and shows that truth lies in self-knowledge.

Likewise in **Island**, Will Farnaby “learns a technique for getting from the self to the not-self, paradoxically by going deeper into the self, that is paying attention to the present self, and in this the first two chapters anticipate the spiritual journey of the novel.”¹¹ The ‘unenlightened’ Will Farnaby assumes that there exists a stable self; however on Pala he is shown that there is no such thing as a stable self, and it is nothing but an illusion. He learns how to go beyond the restrictive grip of his insulated ego and to become whole with the other(s); that is to be reconnected to the real. It is an emancipation of the conscious from an illusionary conception of the self and reaching a heightened awareness.

Within the scope of this thesis I will try to show the way in which the self comes to be recognized as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. According to Buddhist thought, the external world is considered to be an illusion that is created by the human mind; so is the first person pronoun, ‘I’. Similarly, in postmodernism –especially in deconstructive criticism– everything is interpreted to be relative, therefore there does not exist any objective truth. Postmodernism and Buddhism –or Eastern philosophy in general, meet on a common ground in that they both consider the ‘I’ as being illusionary and constructed. According to deconstructive criticism human beings are constituted by the language they speak:

As we have seen, deconstruction asserts that our experience of ourselves and our world is produced by the language we speak, and because all language is an unstable, ambiguous force-field of competing ideologies, we are, ourselves, unstable and ambiguous force-fields of competing ideologies. The self-image of a stable identity that many of us have is really just a comforting self-delusion, which we produce in collusion with our culture, for culture, too, wants to see itself as stable and coherent when in reality it is highly unstable and fragmented. We don’t really have an identity because

¹¹ Alex MacDonald, “An Existential Reading of Aldous Huxley’s *Island*,” **Utopian Studies**, Vol. 12, No: 2, 2001, p. 105, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/20718318, 13 February 2013.

the word identity implies that we consist of one, singular self, but in fact we are multiple and fragmented, consisting at any moment of any number of conflicting beliefs, desires, fears, anxieties, and intentions. However, as we grow up, we internalize through language the ideological conflicts and contradictions of our culture, each finding a way to “fit in” by finding a way to deny, both to ourselves and others, the fragmented experience of ourselves produced by the fragmented, ambiguous language within which we live.¹²

In **The Magus**, Conchis sets out to deconstruct Nicholas’s self by putting him under hypnosis so that he transcends what is illusionary and misleading, and becomes one with the whole universe. In **Island**, Susila MacPhail guides Will Farnaby through a visionary experience –as he takes the moksha-medicine, which is a hallucinogenic mushroom used by the Palanese– and he, too, moves beyond his self. In this way, just like Nicholas’s having a glimpse of the not-self/Self inherent within, Will transcends the duality of the world:

“Do you feel like telling me what's happening?”

It was a long time before Will answered her [Susila]. Speaking was difficult. Not because there was any physical impediment. It was just that speech seemed so fatuous, so totally pointless. “Light,” he whispered at last.

“And you're there, looking at the light?”

“Not looking at it,” he answered, after a long reflective pause. “Being it. *Being* it,” he repeated emphatically.

Its presence was his absence. William Asquith Farnaby—ultimately and essentially there was no such person. Ultimately and essentially there was only a luminous bliss, only a knowledgeless understanding, only union with unity in a limitless, undifferentiated awareness.¹³

This is the moment when the fragmented experience of the self is replaced by the transcendentalist recognition that everything is connected to one another and there is no stable ‘I’. Only then is it possible to lead an authentic life.

¹² Lois Tyson, **Critical Theory Today**, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 257-258.

¹³ Aldous Huxley, **Island**, London: Vintage Books, 2005, p. 263.

1. MODERNISM/POSTMODERNISM: DECONSTRUCTIVE OR CONSTRUCTIVE?

Modernism comes to be recognized as a literary movement after the First World War. Nevertheless, its roots go back to the Renaissance which gives birth to the concept of the individual. In this period through the study of art, philosophy, poetry and with the revival of ancient Greek and Roman ideals, man replaces God as the measure of all things. In consequence, he comes to be recognized as the ultimate controller of his own destiny who is capable of grasping the nature of the universe through his rational capacities –that is reason. In the 18th century, humanist confidence in reason turns out to be the ultimate measure pointing to the potential of the individual. Hence, people start to believe that only the enlightened mind can reach truth. Reason gets recognized not as a means but as an end in gaining knowledge. However, by the end of the 19th century, the shiny promises of the Enlightenment get tainted by corruption and colonialism. What started as an effort to understand the world without reducing its meaning to divine inspiration, and to spread knowledge to the people in need gave rise to enslavement, personal enrichment, imperialism; thus reducing the rank of mankind to that of an animal. In the end, following the First World War, modernism's belief in man's perfection terribly destroys itself:

It is true that many advances have been made in science, technology, medicine, education, suffrage, life expectancy, and physical comfort, but is the world a better place for all that? Has the modernist experiment resulted in the creation of a better human society? For an increasing number of the people the answer is no. For some, problems in the pursuit of modernism were already apparent early in the 20th century. The senseless, mechanized slaughter of the First World War showed that modernism's faith in scientific and technological progress as the path to a better world was tragically misguided.¹

The ideals of modernism such as freedom, progress, democracy, equality, human rights and morality have been transformed into excuses for invasion,

¹ Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, "Modernism and Politics," **Modernism**, Art History Resources, 2009, pars. 3-4, Online, <http://arthistoryresources.net/modernism/>, 15 January 2013.

slaughter, exploitation and suppression of the 'other' –under the euphemism of educating the 'uncivilized'. In the 20th century, rejecting the 19th century optimism and Victorian bourgeois mentality, the modernist artists set out to convey a much more realistic but equally pessimistic representation of the world. Concerned with breaking away from the established rules, traditions and conventions of the past, modernist writers, too, begin experimenting with the novel as a literary genre. Releasing themselves from the determination of a single plot, they employ 'stream of consciousness' technique in their works. It is characterized by representing the feelings of the character/s and allows the reader to find an entrance into their private thoughts. Pointing at the relativity of truth –which is shown to be changing from one character to another– this technique is regarded as an attempt of escape from the tenets of traditional objectivity:

Modernism it would seem, like Stephen Daedalus, is striving to escape from the nightmare of history, trying to rule out the dimension of time. Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel² approach this issue from a slightly different angle but reach a parallel conclusion: "Modernism seeks to intensify isolation. It forces the work of art, the artist, the critic, and the audience outside of history. Modernism denies us the possibility of understanding ourselves as agents in the material world, for all has been removed to an abstract world of ideas, where interactions can be minimized or emptied of meaning and racial consequences. Less than ever are we able to interpret the world –much less change it."³

Rather than proposing a solution to the chaos lurking deep inside, modernism creates its own 'anti-heroes'. They are anti-heroes, because they have lost the 'true' meaning of being connected to an exterior world and are locked up in an abstract world of ideas. As a consequence, modernism begins to be associated with a type of aesthetic heroism, which "sees art as the only dependable reality and as an ordering principle of quasi-religious kind. The unity of art is supposedly a salvation from the shattered order of modern reality."⁴

² Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel, "Modernism and History." **New Literary History** 3, Autumn 1971, p. 198 (qtd. in Eysteinnsson: 1990, 13-14).

³ Astradur Eysteinnsson, **The Concept of Modernism**, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 13-14.

⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 9.

Similar to Stephen Daedalus's condition in **Ulysses**, who "complains that history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake,"⁵ Nicholas, too, struggles to find an escape in the mythological atmosphere of Bourani, so that he will no longer need to encounter his past. Myth replaces the real for him. As he says in **The Magus**, "When Alison's letters stopped, I was also increasingly isolated in a more conventional way. The outer world, England, London, became absurdly and sometimes terrifyingly unreal."⁶ Ironically enough he gets reconnected to the 'real' once it becomes an unreality for him.

The Second World War, the horror of the death camps, the global terror of the nuclear bombs and the Nazi holocaust shattered modernism's remaining faith in the inner composure of mankind. Not only had the outer world, represented by tradition; but also the consciousness of the individual failed in offering a solution. "In 1949 the philosopher Theodor Adorno commented that 'writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'. After the Second World War, optimism in the future was difficult to sustain. And to make matters worse, with the advent of the cold war and the constant threat of nuclear destruction, any sort of future looked doubtful."⁷ Now that modernism is destroyed by its own hand, the subject finds himself in a period of transition, which is widely called postmodernism.

It is not easy to come up with a particular definition of the term postmodernism, because it has been used in many different contexts. "For some it means anti-modern, while for others it means the revision of modernist premises."⁸ As for attributing a historical sense to the movement however, it can be said that it begins in the post-World War II period and gains popularity in the 1960s:

There is general agreement among critics and historians alike that the 1960s was a period of crisis, heralding a complex change of sensibility in the Western world at large. This decade was characterized by widespread demands for engagement and commitment, expressed for example, in the Student Revolt of May 1968 in France and in the United States, in the anti-Vietnam War Civil Rights protests, in Black and Feminist activism and in the appearance of the New Left. These popular movements, together with an increase of interest in pacifism, in anti-militarist and "green" political

⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶ John Fowles, **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 56.

⁷ Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, **op. cit.**, par. 17.

⁸ **Ibid.**, par. 14.

options became the most evident expression of what Frederic Jameson⁹ has described as a “mutation in the sphere of culture,” leading from the old humanist to the new postmodernist “cultural dominant (56).”¹⁰

Postmodernism is also interpreted in the context of post-structuralism. According to Terry Eagleton, “Post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968 [the student movement]. Unable to break the structure of state power, post-structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language.”¹¹ It might be useful to give some information about structuralism first, so that we can understand the reason why such a counter movement appeared.

Structuralism is a theory of literature which claims that the order we perceive in the world is not inherent, but the product of linguistic structures. Accordingly, the literary text is regarded as the function of a system, not as the product of an individual. In other words structuralism argues that signifying systems lack origin and it is the already existing structures (langue) that enable authors to formulate stories (parole). In this system, man does not originate language, but language originates man. Therefore, meaning gets derived from the structure, and language becomes the centre of the self.

A controversial figure of the 20th century, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida undermines the structuralist hunt for binary oppositions. Still, he does not say that the binary oppositions do not exist. On the contrary, through ‘deconstruction’ Derrida shows the way in which the contrasting poles of a single pair, such as man/woman, white/black, good/evil turn out to have meaning not as opposites but as being the mutual components of each other.

‘Deconstruction’ is the name given to the critical operation by which such oppositions can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning. [...] Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien also intimate –so that man needs to police the absolute frontier between the two realms as

⁹ Jameson, Frederick. “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” **New Late Review** 146, 1984, pp. 53-92 (qtd. in Onega: 1996, p. 31)

¹⁰ Susana Onega, “Self, World, and Art in the Fiction of John Fowles,” **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 42, No. 1, John Fowles Issue, Spring, 1996, pp. 30-31, (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441674>, 5 January 2012.

¹¹ Terry Eagleton, **Literary Theory: An Introduction**, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p. 123.

vigilantly as he does just because it may always be transgressed, has always been transgressed already, and is much less absolute than it appears.¹²

In this respect, postmodernism may be interpreted as ‘deconstructing’ the core values of modernism. Once subjected to analysis, the ideas that compromise modernism such as truth, meaning, self, equality and freedom are shown to be nothing other than intellectual ideals that serve Western social and political aspirations. It is true that postmodernism frees us from merely relying on rational thought as the guiding principle. Nevertheless, it also shows that it is the language systems that create the meaning, thus “there can be no ground of meaning for such terms as God, history, humankind or even reason, since these, [...] are merely a part of linguistic system. In fact many post-modernists go so far as to speak of the death of the human subject.”¹³

This approach labels postmodernism as a highly anti-modernist movement, and this on a wider scale may result in nihilism and loss of meaning. Notwithstanding, Bauman does not take the premises of postmodernism as being completely negative. He explains: “However, in following this radical form of relativism, it is said by some in critique that deconstructive postmodernism itself constitutes not a radical break from our modern past, but a continuation, or intensification of some of its most deeply rooted and destructive strains, what we might call ‘hyper-modernism’.”¹⁴

There is also an alternative comprehension of postmodernism. As opposed to ‘anti’ or ‘hyper’ forms, this version aims at revising the institutionalized premises of modernism –liberty, equality, rights, freedom – so that they will no longer be devalued by an ideological mind-set. “[...] the aim is to challenge the logic of the oppressive modernist state and undermine the legitimacy of prevailing conservative forces. Sometimes termed *constructive postmodernism*, it seeks to provide a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious institutions.”¹⁵

¹² **Ibid.**, p.115.

¹³ Lynn C. Bauman, “‘Mystery’ and Scriptural Text in the Post-Modern Age,” **Sacred Web Journal**, Vol. 3, Summer, 1999, par.9, (Online) http://www.sacredweb.com/online_articles/sw3_bauman.html, 18 December 2012.

¹⁴ **Ibid.**, par. 10.

¹⁵ Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, “Modernism and Postmodernism,” **Modernism**, Art History Resources, 2009, par. 22, (Online) <http://arthistoryresources.net/modernism/>, 15 January 2013

Obviously what we call postmodernism, mainly due to the lack of a better term, is an elusive concept. On the one hand, it is set apart from modernism by its reaction to the rational, scientific and empirical approaches of the modern age. On the other, postmodernism problematizes the overly emphasized position of the modern subject, because such a position results in the loss of objectivity and the creation of a myriad of images; among which the subject loses his own Self. Having seen that his trust in reason is crumbled into pieces, modern man finds the escape in turning his face to his inner world, but desperately enough ends up with denying the presence of everything else around him. In other words, he constructs an ideal platform where his connection to the people around is severely cut. As a consequence, he ends up totalizing his self and turns out to be utterly selfish:

[Modern man] perceives only the objects of his lusts, breeding through them a world of concupiscence, exploitation, commodification and wanton consumption – a world in which desire is reduced to the need for the instant gratification of individual wants and cravings, and the indulging of personal appetites. In such a world, the notion of the perfectability of desire as love, or the conformity of the soul to the Beauty of the Spirit, is all but forgotten – replaced by modernist explanations of desire in terms of behavioural instincts, or the pleasure/pain principle, or libido, or the evolutionist's creed of the "survival of the fittest."¹⁶

Nicholas Urfe portrays the tragic condition of modern man who is lost in his self-constructed world. Just like Oedipus, his tragedy results from his turning a blind eye on his own condition, so much so that he cannot realize his leading an inauthentic life. Therefore, he is not able to discern the difference between the real and the fantasy, content and form; even between Lily and Rose if it were not for the scar Lily has on her wrist. As Conchis says to him:

Your first reaction is the characteristic of your contrasuggestible century: to disbelieve, to disprove. I see this very clearly underneath your politeness. You are like a porcupine. When that animal has its spines erect, it cannot eat. If you do not eat, you will starve. And your prickles will die with the rest of your own body.¹⁷

¹⁶ M. Ali Lakhani, "What Thirst is For," **Sacred Web Journal**, Vol. 4, Winter, 1999, par 6, (Online) http://www.sacredweb.com/articles/sw4_editorial.html, 15 December 2012

¹⁷ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 105.

By feeding Nicholas with illusions, Conchis makes him starve for the real. Although Conchis's intention behind the 'godgame' is not stated explicitly, it is possible to say that he is applying a method through which the 'starving' self will get the opportunity to gather himself together.

Likewise, Will Farnaby in **Island** is gradually released from the pressures of modern society. He is trained in the art of spiritual insight on Pala and reaches an awareness –which is about coming to learn his not-self. In this process he unlearns his phenomenal ego and goes beyond his self.

The postmodern subject is no longer interested in the question 'how'. Instead he asks 'why'. I consider it as an important step in mankind's search for deeper meanings in life. By deconstructing the supremacy of the binary oppositions, postmodernism opens the doors into the transparent, paradox, irony, ambiguity, indeterminacy, fluidity, contingency and mystery. "There is no way of knowing whether postmodernism will assume a nihilistic, potentially anarchic, anti-modernist form, or become a desirable variant of modernism with a spiritually heightened and self-conscious awareness and sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, and human experiences. It may be neither."¹⁸ We may not have the answer for now. Perhaps we still need to wait for that. However, it cannot be denied that postmodernism teaches us to look from a different perspective, and thus broadens our vision.

As Lily says to Nicholas: " 'That is also *how*, not *why*.' "¹⁹

¹⁸ Witcombe, "Modernism and Postmodernism", par. 28.

¹⁹ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 487 (italics mine).

2. THE SELF: DECONSTRUCTED

No matter how unrelated they may seem to be, Mysticism and Postmodernism have many points in common. To start with; they both reject rationality and celebrate paradoxes. Postmodernism appears as a radical reaction to the failure of Modernism. In the first part of the 20th century, this failure becomes evident following the two great world wars that devastate not only the cities and the nations but also the hopes for a better future. The destruction leaves its marks both on the body and the mind of the societies.

In such an atmosphere, the previous trust held on the existence of objective truth gets destroyed as well. In the modern period, it was believed that truth could only be gained via rational means; and authority was derived from science and human reason. With Postmodernism, however, authority becomes relative; each individual comes up with his own interpretation. Personal experience gains importance. Objective narratives such as history, fact and doctrines get replaced by metanarratives. It no longer becomes possible to talk about clarity and definition. Distinctions between the binary oppositions get blurred, dichotomies overlap with each other, and moral values are turned upside down. Eventually, postmodern thought replaces objective truth with mystery, wonder, ambiguity and does away with 'reality' –because it gets to be recognized as being socially constructed.

In this scheme, 'the self', too, starts to be regarded as an illusion. In other words, it is seen as the construct of the totalitarian mind-set that showed itself in various ideologies of the modern period: such as Fascism, Communism, Socialism and Nazism. Before this period though, the notion of 'the self' had never been problematized and scrutinized that much. What was considered to be a self was merely related to the position the subject held in society. It was basically about the exterior image –that is the practical function the subject fulfilled.

Similarly, in humanist thought there was the long held idea that the self was stable and concrete. He had a free will and was capable of determining his own actions. The first blow to this ideal image came from Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who is an important figure in the field of twentieth century psychology. His theory of

the unconscious was quite shocking for his time as it showed that the self was no longer the master of his own house; but was controlled by his impulses that he repressed. In this respect Freud's 'unconscious' was interpreted to have destabilized the humanist ideal of a stable self to a certain extent. Consequently, the focus was shifting from the exterior to the interior realm.

In other words, it was a turn away from history/society to the inner world/psyche. This world, which might be represented by a more comprehensive term as *human self*, was not homogenous for Freud. It was split into the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious, also called the id, was the centre of instincts, sexual drives and aggressive impulses. Consciousness or the ego, on the other hand, had developed out of the id's interaction with the exterior world and was functioning as a controlling medium. According to Freud, the tension between these contradictory sets of forces within the individual could not be disregarded. His intention was to strengthen the ego by making it aware of the impulses that were present in the unconscious. It could have been achieved in various ways, however Freud was totally against consolation –which is the repression of desire– because he thought that through the renunciation of the instinct, consolation was disguising the suffering of the subject and obscuring who he was.

What does mysticism have to do with it then? Freud destabilized the humanist ideal of the self by dividing it into two distinct grounds: the conscious and the unconscious. In this division, rather than bringing them together, he wanted to give power to the ego, the 'I'; so that it could rule the unconscious. However, in mysticism there is no such thing as ego; but complete unity in all things. Hence what we consider as 'I' is illusionary and misleading. Therefore the intention is to go beyond the limits of the ego and to escape it. Only then there appears unity and harmony.

In his work **Civilization and Its Discontents** (first published in 1930) Freud refers to the term "oceanic". It is described as a "sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded –as it were 'oceanic'".¹ In this particular vision, subject and object become one, the differences in between disappear. The subject or

¹ Sigmund Freud, **Civilization and Its Discontents**, Tr. and Ed. James Strachey, W.W. Norton & Company, 1962, p. 11.

the 'I' feels like belonging to the whole world and gets rid of his ego. It is also analogous to the state of being in love; the lovers' becoming one in body and mind. Nevertheless, this unity is dismissed by Freud. He considers it as being an infantile response to the world, and as the dissolution of the ego. Therefore he considers mysticism as merely an illusion to which people give themselves to be able to escape suffering. Yet, in mysticism it is the self itself which is illusory, because it is built upon misconceptions that are determined through culture. On the contrary, it is important to develop a change of consciousness, and set the subject free from an illusory conception of self. Then it can be said that mysticism deconstructs the socially constructed self and shows that it is nothing but the product of culture and language.

On the one hand, Freud attacked the humanist tradition which believed in the existence of a stable self –since through the unconscious he had shown that there were aspects of the mind which the individual was unaware of–, on the other hand, he continued to believe in the ego's capacity to get the better of the unconscious. Therefore, it would be wrong to conclude that he completely destabilized the self. He was not as post-structuralist as he first appeared to be.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) took Freud's scheme to a deeper level. Unlike Freud, he questioned the constitution of the self –both on the conscious and on the unconscious levels. To say it more precisely he was interested in the process in which our conscious and unconscious lives were designated through linguistic structures. He was against the notion of a stable and unique self.

Whereas Freud continued to be tempted by organic models and with a desire to find the neurological and, thus, "natural" causes for sexual development, Lacan offered a more properly linguistic model for understanding the human subject's entrance into the social order. The emphasis was thus less on the bodily causes of behavior (cathexis, libido, instinct, etc.) than it was on the ideological structures that, especially through language, make the human subject come to understand his or her relationship to himself and to others. Indeed, according to Lacan, the entrance into language necessarily entails a radical break from any sense of materiality in and of itself. According to Lacan, one must always distinguish between *reality* (the fantasy world we convince ourselves is the world around us) and *the real* (a materiality of existence beyond language and thus beyond expressibility). The

development of the subject, in other words, is made possible by an endless *misrecognition of the real* because of our need to construct our sense of “reality” in and through language.²

As a post-Freudian psychoanalyst and post-structuralist thinker Lacan reinterpreted Freud in structuralist terms. According to Freud, dream interpretation was the royal road leading down to the unconscious. However, for Lacan, the dream was nothing but a form of discourse; and the unconscious was structured like a language. Therefore the ego was an illusion. It was the product of the unconscious itself. In relation to this, “reality” did not exist either, because it was socially constructed through language. In this symbolic exchange, the ‘I’ produced an illusionary image out of the unconscious and fancied that there existed a self.

Now it is possible to see the similarities between mysticism and the deconstructionist premises of postmodernism more clearly. As Veith³ also expresses:

The deconstructionists dissolve every positive statement, every rational argument, every truth claim—destroying form, they say, so as to open up what lies beyond the possibilities of representation... The inadequacies of language will be left behind,...

Postmodernism, in its rejection of objective truth, [does] have clear affinities with Hinduism and Buddhism, which teach that the external world is only an illusion spun by the human mind.⁴

Bearing the reference to the above mentioned Eastern philosophies – Buddhism especially– in mind, it should be noted that Lacan’s model of the self has clear affinities with Derrida’s *différance* as well. It is a play on the French verb *différer*, which means both ‘to defer’ and ‘to differ’. According to Derrida, one signifier succeeds another in a stream of significations without being able to reach any central point –thus the meaning is always ‘deferred’. Similarly, Lacan’s notion of the unconscious is based on the idea of a constantly shifting chain of signifiers that

² Dino Felluga, “Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development,” **Introductory Guide to Critical Theory**, Jan. 31, 2011, par. 1 (*italics mine*), Purdue U, (Online), <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandevlop.html>, 25 March 2013.

³ Gene Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* [Wheaton: Crossway, 1994], 193, 198, 199. (qtd. in Silva: 2012, par.4)

⁴ Ken Silva, “We Know More of the Bible than Many Now Think,” **Apprising Ministries RSS**, 01 May 2012, par. 4, (Online) <http://apprising.org/2012/05/01/we-know-more-of-the-bible-than-many-now-think/>, 17 March 2013.

cannot be fixed to a stable point. The self gets the illusory satisfaction when he ties this chain of signifiers to a fixed point and comes to know himself as an independent being that has a “name”. Nevertheless it is only an illusion that is triggered by a semiotic system such as language. What happens actually is that the system or the representation always comes before subjectivity and determines the “name” of the subject –that is his “I”. Lacan describes it as the subject’s fall into language –which brings a series of losses alongside.

This loss is a fall from the primal sense of unity that the infant has been through –up until the moment it begins to recognize the difference between itself and its mother. According to Lacan, once the infant realizes that it is a separate entity from its mother, it desperately demands to get united again.

At this point it is necessary to introduce the idea of the Lacanian psychosexual development of the child. Lacan talks about three distinct fields: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. This division is reminiscent of the Freudian categorization of the oral, the anal, and the phallic stages that influence the subject’s development from an infant to an adult member of society. However, it should be remembered that Freud’s analysis was conducted on a biological basis; whereas Lacan’s was related to language. “Lacan’s version of psychosexual development is, therefore, organized around the subject’s ability to recognize first, iconic signs and, then, eventually language.”⁵

In the earliest stages of the development, Lacan’s infant is a kind of blob that does not have any sense of identity. It is not able to distinguish its self from its mother or the exterior world, thus it experiences everything as a complete whole – without any boundaries or restrictions. Lacan terms this stage as “the Real”, which is a primal state of nature and unity. There is no absence or loss in the Real, because there is no language.

Next follows “the Imaginary”, which is also known as the “mirror stage”. At this stage Lacan’s infant starts distinguishing between its body and the exterior world. It realizes that it is a separate being from its “mother”, therefore the idea of the “other” emerges. As I have mentioned before, this awareness of the otherness

⁵ Felluga, “Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development,” par. 2.

creates a sense of loss on the part of the infant. As a result, it starts to demand a return to the primal sense of unity and non-separation that it had experienced in the Real. However, its demand to be merged with the mother is insatiable; because in order to function as a cultural being, the infant is bound to experience that sense of loss and otherness.

In the Imaginary, after realizing that the “mother” is in fact an “other”, the infant happens to see its reflection in the mirror one day. According to Lacan this is a significant moment in that the infant starts to formulate a notion of self after the experience, and recognizes itself as the object of its mother’s desire. Here, unable to be a whole being, the infant draws its attention to its own self –that is the image– and begins to anticipate being whole:

What the child anticipates is a sense of self as a unified separate whole; the child sees that it looks like what “others” look like. Eventually, this entity the child sees in the mirror, this whole being, will be a “self,” the entity designated by the word “I.” What is really happening, however, is an identification that is MISRECOGNITION. The child sees an image in the mirror; it thinks, that image is “ME”. But it’s NOT the child; it’s only an image. But another person (usually the mother) is there to reinforce the misrecognition. The baby looks in the mirror, and looks back at mother, and the mother says, “Yes, it’s you!” She guarantees the “reality” of the connection between the child and its image, and the idea of the integrated whole body the child is seeing and identifying with.⁶

This is the reason why Lacan considers the ego/self/I as being illusionary. It results from the infant’s misrecognizing and then internalizing the image reflecting from the mirror –as a perfect self that does not lack anything. “In Lacan’s terms, this misrecognition creates the ‘armor’ of the subject, an illusion or misperception of wholeness, integration and totality that surrounds and protects the fragmented body. To Lacan, ego, or self, or “I”dentity, is always on some level a FANTASY, an identification with an external image, and not an internal sense of separate whole identity.”⁷ It is an “Ideal-I”, not a Real one. Thus Lacan terms this stage as the Imaginary. The image that the infant sees in the mirror allows it to imagine a self-

⁶ Dr. Mary Klages, **Klages on Lacan**, Associate Professor of English, University of Colorado, Boulder, w.date, par. 22, (Online)
<http://www.Colorado.EDU/English/ENGL2012Klages/1997lacan.html>, 25 March 2013

⁷ **Ibid.**, par. 23.

unity that would compensate for the separation from its mother. Still, it is nothing other than the fiction of a stable, unified self.

Having internalized the Ideal-I the infant is ready to take up its position in “the Symbolic”. This stage marks the child’s entrance into the realm of language where he will be able to generate symbols and formulate himself through a speaking “I”. “The Symbolic order is the structure of language itself; we have to enter it in order to become speaking subjects, and to designate ourselves by ‘I’. The foundation for having a self lies in the Imaginary projection of the self onto the specular image, the other in the mirror, and having a self is expressed in saying ‘I’, which can only occur within the Symbolic, which is why the two coexist.”⁸ These two orders exist within each other. In contrast to the Imaginary, however, which is largely focusing on the mother; the Symbolic mainly focuses on the father who in Lacanian terms stands for cultural norms, laws, power and language –that is to say, the Other/ the Phallus/ Law/ Name-of-the-Father.

As it has been pointed out, the Symbolic order is the structure of language; therefore “the Other” has a structural function in it. “It is the place that everyone is trying to get to, to merge with, in order to get rid of the separation between “self” and “other”. It is, in Derrida's sense, the CENTER of the system, of the Symbolic and/or of language itself. As such, the Other is the thing to which every element relates. But, as the center, the Other (again, not a person but a position) can't be merged with.”⁹

The position of the Other –as the centre of the language system – “creates and sustains a never-ending LACK, which Lacan calls DESIRE. Desire is the desire to be the Other.”¹⁰ However, no one is able to get to the centre, thus the desire can never be satisfied. It renews itself again and again.

The centre is also called the Phallus; through it Lacan propounds the patriarchal or the paternal nature of the Symbolic. As the centre, it governs the whole structure and limits the play within the system. “The Phallus anchors the chains of signifiers which, in the unconscious, are just floating and unfixed, always sliding and shifting. The Phallus stops play, so that signifiers can have some stable meaning. It is

⁸ **Ibid.**, par. 29.

⁹ **Ibid.**, par. 33.

¹⁰ **Ibid.**

because the Phallus is the center of the Symbolic order, of language, that the term “I” designates the idea of the self (and, additionally, why any other word has stable meaning).”¹¹ Consequently, the “Ideal-I” turns out to be an instrument within a particular language system, and is further removed from the primal unity of the Real. “By acquiring language, you entered into what Lacan terms the “symbolic order”; you were reduced into an empty signifier (“I”) within the field of the Other, which is to say, within a field of language and culture (which is always determined by those others that came before you).”¹²

For Lacan, the infant’s entrance into language marks its permanent separation from the Real. To be able to make up for the loss and to fill the hole/the void in himself, the subject constructs an alternative version of the Real –which is “reality”. To say it more precisely, in the Symbolic order he lives on the level of fantasy construction and is alienated from the “state of nature” present in the Real:

Lacan almost describes this as a fall from Eden presence and fusion with the world into a post-lapsarian world of subject and object, division and desire. Lacan’s notion of desire is at its heart a desire for wholeness –“a hole in the self” that subject attempts to close through an endless, metonymic chain of supplements: the perfect car, the perfect boyfriend, a tenure track job etc. But as soon as one supplement is acquired, desires moves onto something else. Desire is a (representational) itch that can never be fully scratched.¹³

Lacan’s desire, then, constantly reproduces itself and can never be satisfied. The perception of the subject is determined by the language system that he belongs to. Therefore, he cannot lay claim over his desires either, because they have been manipulated by the discourse of the Other:

Desire, in other words, has little to do with material sexuality for Lacan; it is caught up, rather, in social structures and strictures, in the fantasy version of reality that forever dominated our lives after our entrance into language. For this reason, Lacan writes that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.” Even our unconscious desires are, in other words, organized by the linguistic system that Lacan terms the symbolic order or “the big Other.” In a sense, then, our desire is never properly our own, but is created through fantasies that are caught up in cultural ideologies rather than material

¹¹ **Ibid.**, par. 38.

¹² Felluga, “Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development,” par. 2.

¹³ Warren Hedges, “Some Useful Theory Terms,” (Online)
<http://beauty.gmu.edu/AVT472/AVT472%20Paula/TheoryTerms.doc>, 29 March 2013.

sexuality. For this reason, according to Lacan, the command that the superego directs to the subject is, of all things, “Enjoy!” That which we may believe to be most private and rebellious (our desire) is, in fact, regulated, even commanded, by the superego.¹⁴

Freud’s intention was to replace the unconscious with the conscious. He wanted to strengthen the ego so that the subject could learn to come to terms with his repressed side – without denying his impulses or escaping into an ideal state. Nevertheless, Freud never proposed that there was an ideal way of being.

However, Lacan re-adjusted Freud’s theory. He showed that it was impossible to strengthen the ego/self/I; because it was an illusion already –a product of the unconscious itself. For Lacan, it was not possible to live in accord with our desires either as they did not belong to us in the first place. They were the products of the Symbolic order –the fantasy version of “reality”.

It is important to understand the distinction between “reality” and “the real”. Though they can be confusing at times, Lacan’s theories on the development of subjectivity will be helpful in determining the division in between. His de-centring the notion of a stable self/I/ego is also significant in that it showed the inconsistencies in the 20th century post-war human psyche that is represented through the protagonists of Fowles’s **The Magus** and Huxley’s **Island**. The novels both refer to Buddhist philosophy and deny the validity of a stable self.

This thesis will analyse the idea of ‘self-transcendence’ through the characters of Nicholas Urfe and Will Farnaby who are both stuck in the Symbolic order. Their selves have been shaped by the ego-centric and materialistic view of the society and culture. Hence, they have problems with making authentic decisions in life. They are both paralyzed by their inauthenticity, so much so that they find the escape in constructing a cynical self –which only exacerbates their condition. Finding themselves on the islands of their selves –on Phraxos and Pala– they are gradually brought to moral awareness. It happens through crumbling their version of “reality” to pieces so that they will be able to reach higher states of consciousness and set themselves free from the misconceptions of the self.

¹⁴ Dino Felluga, “Modules on Lacan: On Desire,” **Introductory Guide to Critical Theory**, Jan. 31, 2011, par. 2, Purdue U, (Online)
<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandesire.html>, 25 March 2013.

3. ALDOUS HUXLEY: BEYOND DEFINITION

Aldous Huxley whose mind dwells on an extensive set of philosophies at a time, is an intellectual with a wealth of knowledge. The unpredictable manner of his thinking style can be traced back to the way he welcomes and rejects ideas quite quickly; which in turn brings his various capacities to the surface at different periods. These capacities range from the satirical sceptic to the optimistic moralist; from the confident mystic to the defeated youth. According to Peter Firchow, “within that variety there was unity” that indicates “a single fundamental personality that was capable of expansion and inner transformation.”¹ Before explaining what this unity is about, it is essential to focus on the traits of Huxley, the novelist first.

Is Aldous Huxley a novelist? This is a simple question; however, it is difficult to find a comprehensive answer that describes his position on a literary ground. According to Peter Bowering, “While no one today would dispute Huxley’s place as a moralist, there still remains considerable doubt as to whether he is a novelist in the true sense of the word.”²

The general reaction against Huxley falls heavily on the idea that he was not a novelist. “As Daiches³ points out, there is little interest in the elements of form and structure, the characters do not develop and the plot is minimal. What we have in their place might be described as a highly charged dialectic of ideas shaped in the form of a moral fable.”⁴ His characters are seen as mediums through which Huxley’s own thoughts get distilled and find their expression:

Broadly defined, what this meant was that Huxley was incapable of conceiving and creating “real” human beings. His characters, so this line of criticism ran (and still runs), were either mere allegorical statements of moral or intellectual positions or else, what was even worse, mouthpieces

¹ Peter Firchow, **Aldous Huxley Satirist and Novelist**, University of Minnesota Press, 1972, p. 27.

² Peter Bowering, **Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels**, University of London: The Athlone Press, 1968, p. 5.

³ “David Daiches in *The Novel and the Modern World* states quite emphatically that ‘Huxley is no novelist; he has never mastered –is not really interested in –even the elements of form and structure in fiction. . . His novels are either a series of character sketches or simple fables or tracts’ (qtd. in Bowering: 1968, p. 5).

⁴ **Ibid.**

for Huxley's own ideas, which could be and often were much efficiently and appropriately presented in essay form.⁵

If one has no idea concerning Huxley's particular attitude towards the process of writing a novel, it will be inconsequential to question his capacity or incapacity in creating 'reliable' characters. "For him, though he was usually too self-effacing to say so outright, being a novelist was not enough. What he sought to be was at the same time a philosopher, a critic, a scientist, an economist, a moralist – and, yes even a human being."⁶ Accordingly, it would also be misleading to evaluate him in the light of the 'common' image of a 'real' novelist. Huxley himself elaborates on the difference between this image and the particular novelist that he is. Ironically enough, the description comes from the mouth of his fictional self-portrait, Philip Quarles, in his novel **Point Counter Point**:

Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas in which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalizations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express –which excludes all but about .01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books [ch. xxii].⁷

According to Huxley, the congenital novelist "is a writer who has no interest outside of fiction."⁸ In his interviews he explains that for such writers "writing novels is 'an absorbing thing which fills up the mind and takes all his energy, whereas someone else with a different kind of mind has these other, extracurricular activities going on.'"⁹ These activities put Huxley in the category of "a master of the form of fictional essay which has been called 'the novel of ideas'."¹⁰ It also results from the way Huxley considers the novel as a means of reflecting on the conflicts he comes across both on the personal and social levels; and from his search for a solution to these conflicts. "Almost from the beginning he saw in the novel an

⁵ Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 6.

⁶ **Ibid.**

⁷ Bowering, **op. cit.**, p. 6.

⁸ Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 6.

⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰ Bowering, **op. cit.**, p. 2.

exploratory vehicle for moral values; and his work soon became characterized by the search for a way of life which, in his own words, would ‘fit all the facts of human experience’ (Introduction to J.D. Unwin’s *Hopousia*).¹¹ In his interview with J. W. N. Sullivan in the early thirties, Huxley says that “his chief motive in writing . . . has been to express a point of view . . . [to make] clear a certain outlook on life . . .” and he goes on explaining: “My books represent different stages in my progress toward such an outlook. Each book is an attempt to make things clear to myself so far I had gone at the time it was written.”¹² Therefore the novel, as a literary genre, turned out to be the ground on which Huxley’s personal transformation was possible to be traced. In this respect his final novel, **Island**, occupies a distinct place among his other books, because it is the work in which Huxley presents an overall summary of his ideas that have reached their ultimate form. As McMichael also describes, “*Island* marks the culmination of a lifetime of speculation on the problems of the modern world and on possible solutions for these problems.”¹³

What were the problems that Huxley noticed in the so called ‘modern’ world? Was he unsatisfied with the modern way of life? More importantly, what were the reasons that brought about the conversion from Huxley the sceptic to Huxley the ‘mystic’ who was in search of a better path in life? “The novels themselves, thinly disguised accounts of his thoughts, record the stages of Huxley’s growth from the detached sceptic of [his first novel] **Crome Yellow** to the contemplative mystic of the later works.”¹⁴ And finally, what do such words as mystic, mysticism, seeker, path, quest signify and what is their function in Huxley’s life? Hence, at this point, it is necessary to give some biographical information about the author.

Aldous Leonard Huxley was born into an intellectual family in 1894 –as the third and youngest son of Leonard Huxley and Julia Arnold. His paternal grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley, notoriously known as ‘Darwin’s bulldog’, was a prominent

¹¹ **Ibid**

¹² Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 21.

¹³ Charles T. McMichael, “Aldous Huxley’s ‘Island’: The Final Vision,” **Studies in the Literary Imagination**, Vol.1, No: 2, Apr. 1968, par. 1, Rpt. in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Ed. Daniel G. Marowski and Roger Matuz, Vol. 35, Detroit: Gale Research 1985, Literature Resource Center, Web, (Online)

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1100001356&v=2.1&u=bogazici&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>, 12 February 2013

¹⁴ Bowering, **op. cit.**, p. 3.

biologist of his time. He was a great supporter of scientism – “the belief that there is no area of human experience or understanding into which science will not eventually advance, or which the scientific method will be unable to explain.”¹⁵ On the other hand, Huxley’s mother was the grand-daughter of Dr. Thomas Arnold who was the “originator of the ‘muscular Christianity’ style of boarding school education for boys, and father of the poet Matthew Arnold.”¹⁶ Obviously, Thomas Arnold and Grandfather Huxley stood in dark contrast to each other; in parallel to the way science and religion were harshly separated from the Renaissance period onward. “To T. H. Huxley, science and religion were natural enemies; one produced progress and enlightenment, the other darkness and confusion –human progress was directly proportional to the victory of one over the other.”¹⁷ Unlike these seemingly contrasting poles however, Aldous Huxley was able to form a synthesis between them, as it is apparent in the way “he maintained a lifelong interest in science, and he treated the religious instinct with utmost respect.”¹⁸

Despite the fact that Huxley grew up in an intellectual atmosphere and came from an established class of society, life was difficult for him as a young man. First, his mother died of cancer in 1908. A few years later, while he was planning to educate himself for a career in biology at Eton, he was afflicted with a particular disease of the eyes¹⁹ in 1911. The blindness “forced him to withdraw from school and which only gradually began to improve after several operations, though even these left him practically blind in one eye and with severely impaired vision in the other.”²⁰ And in 1914 his brother Trevenen committed suicide. Huxley had all the valid reasons to let himself sink into despair; nevertheless he did not give himself up. He learned Braille to be able to read and go on with his studies. Continuing with his education at Oxford, he managed to graduate with a first in English. While the problem with his eyes prevented Huxley from pursuing the career he first intended –

¹⁵ John Derbyshire, “What happened to Aldous Huxley?,” **The New Criterion**, February 2003, p. 14.

¹⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁷ Bowering, **op. cit.**, p. 24.

¹⁸ Derbyshire, **op. cit.**, p. 14.

¹⁹ Years later Huxley writing about his illness: “At sixteen I had a violent attack of keratitis punctato [an inflammation of the corneas], which left me (after eighteen months of near-blindness, during which I had to depend on Braille for my reading and a guide for my walking) with one eye just capable of light perception” (*Art* vii, qtd. in Paulsell: 1995, p. 84).

²⁰ Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 12.

that is to become a doctor; it also kept him out of military service during World War I –for which he felt grateful later in his life:

Only a short time passed before the casualty lists began to make him aware that many of his friends and acquaintances would never return to Oxford. [...] he gradually moved to a point of almost total disillusionment with the war, which he voiced to Julian about a year later [1915]: “At the beginning I shd. have liked very much to fight: but now, if I could (having seen the results), I think I’d be a conscientious objector, or nearly so [L97].”²¹

Huxley’s disillusionment was not only related to the war; it was much deeper than what it first seemed to be. He had an inquiring mind that questioned everything happening around him –which in turn endowed him with an increased level of sensitivity and consciousness. I do not think that it would be a far-fetched conclusion to say that his near-blindness strengthened his inner vision. Therefore, he was able to see through the nihilism and symbolic darkness of the early 1920s:

The second and third decades of the twentieth century were notoriously an age of failed gods and shattered conventions, to which many thoughtful people responded in obvious ways, retreating into nihilism, hedonism and experimentalism. Literature became subjective, art became abstract, poetry abandoned its traditional forms. In the “low, dishonest decade” that then followed, much of this negativism curdled into power-worship and escapism of various kinds.²²

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Huxley did not go for ‘the philosophy of meaninglessness’ as an escape. On the contrary, he used this philosophy as a means for expressing his criticism against the spirit of modernism. “In one of his rare moments of self-revelation Huxley confessed, ‘For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation [*Ends and Means*, ch. xiv, qtd].”²³ As Peter Bowering explains further in his study on the author, Huxley’s novels of the twenties “‘epitomized the disillusion, desperate gaiety and moral confusion’²⁴” of the period, therefore “the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²² Derbyshire, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

²³ Bowering, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁴ Geoffrey Bullough, ‘Aspects of Aldous Huxley’, *English Studies* (1949), p. 233. (qtd. in Bowering: 1968, p. 19)

critical epithets which greeted his work were invariably ‘cynical’ and ‘irresponsible’.”²⁵ Nonetheless, it was the liberty of being able to speak behind the curtain of the ‘irony’ that allowed Huxley to express his ideas as freely as possible; so there was much to see through the ‘cynical mask’ that he was deliberately wearing:

As A. C. Ward²⁶ pointed out, behind his cynicism, there was always a hint of resolution: ‘. . . his disgust and despair are not vented against human life as such, but only against the distortion of life he observes around him . . . Aldous Huxley can be claimed as a non-decadent and moral writer because there is always in the background of his books the implication that a more desirable way of life exists and must be found.’²⁷

Huxley’s search for a ‘more desirable way of life’ should not be interpreted as a too idealistic and dreamy attempt that ignored the social, political and economic atmosphere of the post-war world. The intention was not to go back to the insincere optimism of the Victorian age, either. On the contrary, it was an attempt to allocate a meaning to a meaningless world, of proposing a solution or, perhaps even if no solution is to be spotted, of becoming aware of the problem at least.

In *Ends and Means* Huxley describes how the ‘philosophy of meaninglessness’ itself engendered the desire for a more harmonious way of life. The impossibility of living in a world which denied meaning raised the question whether truth and goodness could not somehow be correlated into the nature of things. Following on this the approach to the perennial philosophy as a source of moral and spiritual value was essentially an empirical one: the fact that ‘so many philosophers and mystics, belonging to so many different cultures, should have been convinced, by inference or by direct intuition, that the world possesses meaning and value’ was sufficiently striking in itself to demand investigation.²⁸

Now the problem at hand was to locate where the ultimate meaning resided. Huxley was well aware of the restrictive categorizations and labels of the late nineteenth century: the increasing materialization of modern life, the growing dissatisfaction with the development of Western culture and the dehumanization of human existence. By the end of the century, the mechanistic view of the world,

²⁵ **Ibid.**

²⁶ *The Nineteen Twenties* (1930), pp. 118-19. (qtd. in Bowering: 1968, p. 19)

²⁷ **Ibid.**

²⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 29.

“which had prevailed since Descartes and Newton was gradually extended from the realm of non-living matter to man himself.”²⁹ As a result, faith in man’s position as the measure of all things was shaken badly. “It now appeared as a formidable challenge ‘that man himself was biologically only a part of the system of creation and that his special place in nature on which his religion, his ethics and much in the creative arts had depended was a mere illusion’.”³⁰

During the First World War, Aldous Huxley must have witnessed the way in which people were turned into killing machines that were serving the ideological aspirations of the system itself. Other than that, following his graduation from Oxford, he had worked in various places such as Garsington Manor where he was “doing ‘odd jobs such as cutting trees’ ” – and the Manor “became both a haven for conscientious objectors, like Olive Bell, who occupied themselves with farm chores, and a focal point for opposition to the war.”³¹ He also became assistant editor, drama critic and journalist apprentice in different magazines. This period was highly exhausting for such a person as Huxley who had problems with his eyes. “Small wonder, then, that looking back at this period some ten years later, Huxley was to observe that he had “nearly killed [himself] with overwork’.”³² Nevertheless, it was during this period that Huxley gained experience and seized the opportunity to have a close look at the social dynamics of the nonliteral world. In other words, he dealt with the heart of the problem from inside.

These years of intensive and extensive exposure to a society and art was still struggling to be reborn after four years of bloody labor also served to force Huxley into thinking deeply about social and cultural problems and led him to become increasingly disgusted with the course modern culture and society were taking. Publicly his insights and disgust precipitated in the stories and novels that were to make him famous while the century and he were still in their twenties; privately they took the form of a desire to withdraw from the pointless activity of that society and culture (while still commenting on it) and to travel to other countries and to study other societies and other cultures, past and present.³³

²⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 24.

³⁰ **Ibid.**

³¹ Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 16.

³² **Ibid.**, p. 20.

³³ **Ibid.**, pp. 20-21.

With the publication of his first novel **Crome Yellow** in 1921, Aldous Huxley started to establish his reputation; thus his financial status began to flourish. This gave him the chance to leave England. Starting from 1923, he travelled through Europe, went to India and the United States. In the early 1930s, he stayed in southern France for a while. Eventually, in 1937 he left Europe for the United States where he stayed till his death in 1963.

Huxley's tendency to change his location and his willingness to travel to different countries of the world were mainly triggered by his on-going search throughout his life. It was not just a physical voyage, but also "the perennial voyage of the mind in search of meaning, with the desperate urge to put a positive point against a great many negative counterpoints and thereby establish a harmony."³⁴ As David Bradshaw indicates, "If Huxley had been intent on exposing the meaninglessness of life in the 1920s, from the mid-1930s he was preoccupied with seeking the meaning of existence."³⁵

Correspondingly, in the second half of the thirties especially, Huxley became "convinced that he could no longer be a detached and heckling observer standing above the melee, that he had to try to do something meaningful and constructive."³⁶ It gradually brought him to the realization that:

[...] what was needed was "some definitive and comprehensive outlook", a system that would tie things together, *all things*, and create order out of a seemingly chaotic world.³⁷ The first hints that he had discovered such a system were to be found in *Eyeless in Gaza*, *The Olive Tree and Other Essays* (both published in 1936), and *Ends and Means*. The hints turned into lectures in *After Many a Summer* (1939), into deeply perceptive psycho-historical observations in *Grey Eminence* (1941), into visionary dreams in *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), and into a paradoxically fragmented but unified religion in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945).³⁸

The change in Huxley's attitude is considered to be an abrupt shift by many critics, and it was vehemently criticized. "Donald Watt concurs that 'in the minds of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁵ David Bradshaw, "Introduction," *Island*, London: Vintage Books, 2005, p. x.

³⁶ Firchow, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁷ "As he said to J. W. N. Sullivan and he was to say again at much greater length and with much more passion through Propter in *After Many a Summer* (1939)" (Firchow: 1972, p. 24).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

a majority of critics Huxley was fixed as an entertaining recorder of the frenetic 1920s who later recoiled into an aesthetically suicidal mysticism’.”³⁹ His conversion to spiritual faith was regarded as Huxley’s complete break-up from his earlier thoughts. But, on the contrary it was a direct result of his growing disillusionment with the increasing complexity and materialization of modern life. In her analysis of Huxley’s pathway to spiritual reality through the images of color and light, Sally A. Paulsell looks at Huxley’s spiritual journey chronologically; starting from his book of poetry in 1915 to his last novel **Island** in 1962. As she puts it, “Huxley published his first book of poetry, *The Burning Wheel* –reminiscent of the Buddhist ‘wheel of becoming’ –he was already exploring the importance of light and color as it relates to mysticism in his need to find order in his grievous, chaotic world.”⁴⁰ The similar motifs were also evident in his following works:

Huxley’s mystical attachment to color and light –ranging from bright jewel colors to the clear light of mystical union –encompassed his forty-seven years as a writer. As early as 1922, his use of color and light in *Crome Yellow* connects with his explorations into mysticism. His spiritual quest materializes not only through the light which blinds and transforms Saul on the road to Damascus, but also through his symbolic use of color, light, and form in examining the relative merits of Western and Eastern religions. By 1925 Calamy’s hope for mystical illuminating emerges as a dominant theme in *Those Barren Leaves*. Poetry such as “The Yellow Mustard” conjoins color and light with inner faith in 1931. One year later in *Brave New World* Hemholtz Watson seeks mystical union in the silence of the islands on which he is exiled, foreshadowing Huxley’s utopian *Island* with its bright colors and transcendent Clear Light –the unity of all things.⁴¹

It is not surprising that Huxley’s unifying outlook found its nearest equivalent in mysticism; particularly in the Hindu and Buddhist way of thinking. According to this outlook, “There exists a single universal consciousness, the ‘Mind at Large’, of which individual selves are manifestations, extrusions into the world of space, time and language. It follows that our individual consciousness, our private selves, are in

³⁹ Sally A. Paulsell, “Color and Light: Huxley’s Pathway to Spiritual Reality”. **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 41, No: 1, Spring, 1995, p. 81, (Online)

www.jstor.org/stable/441716, 25 February 2013

⁴⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 84.

⁴¹ **Ibid.**, p. 105.

principle capable of apprehending the whole of reality.”⁴² Through this apprehension, there appears freedom and liberation from the overly mechanistic, fragmented and materialistic view of the universe. It is also an escape from time and history. It is an experience of eternity, of the here and now.

It should be noted that Huxley did never consider himself as a mystic in the ‘true’ sense of the word. He did not experience the mystical union with a ‘Larger Entity’ –as it was described by ‘true’ mystics – either. “He told Rosamond Lehmann in 1961 that he had never had a religious experience. He did not actually like religion as a social phenomenon.”⁴³ Still, it did not prevent him from taking lessons on meditation from the Indian philosopher, Swami Prabhavananda, at the Vedanta Society in Hollywood; regardless of the fact that, “In 1926 he had dismissed meditation as ‘the doze’s first cousin’, but it was to a life of quietistic contemplation Huxley now devoted himself.”⁴⁴ In addition, he took part in experiments with mind-altering drugs, such as mescaline⁴⁵ and LSD –the effects of which he described in **The Doors of Perception** (1954) and **Heaven and Hell** (1956). While these experiments enlarged his vision, as in the way a mystic experiences a sense of unity with a transcendental being; “he never equated these in a simplified way with the complexities of mysticism.”⁴⁶ He knew there was always more to be discovered behind the curtain, thus “he approached mysticism in a pragmatic, empirical way, much as he had approached the Bates eye-training method.”⁴⁷ In return, he was able to find a balance between scepticism and total affirmation. As Firchow explains:

He clearly understood that the mystics were all, no matter of what time or what official or unofficial religion, describing essentially similar experiences, that they were almost always exceptionally sensitive and perceptive men, and that logically it was impossible to explain this perennial

⁴² John Derbyshire, “What happened to Aldous Huxley?,” **The New Criterion**, February 2003, pp. 18-19, (Online) <http://www.newcriterion.com/archive/21/feb03/huxley.htm>, 15 February 2013.

⁴³ **Ibid.**, p. 19.

⁴⁴ David Bradshaw, **op. cit.**, p. xi.

⁴⁵ “On a ‘bright May morning in 1953’ Huxley took mescaline for the first time, under the supervision of a Canadian psychiatrist, Dr Humphrey Osmond. It was, in fact, in the subsequent correspondence between the two of them that the term psychedelic was coined to denominate those drugs –mescaline, LSD and psilocybin –that were ‘mind revealing’ or ‘mind opening’” (Letters, 795, qtd. in Beuchamp: 1990, p. 59).

⁴⁶ Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 25.

⁴⁷ **Ibid.**

phenomenon as a mere delusion. Even if it was not sanctioned by twentieth century science, it had too much of the feel of reality to be dismissed in the way this positivistic science had dismissed it.⁴⁸

Huxley's interpretation of mysticism is not a 'strict' attempt of juxtaposing the materialistic and the sceptical mind-set of the Western world against Eastern philosophy and religion. True that by the time he had started to write **Island**, he had taken interest in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and had also experienced visionary experiences under the effect of psychedelic drugs. However, these were all conducted similar to the way a researcher tries to find a solution to a problem at hand. And the problem for Huxley was bringing the fragmented pieces together and forming a harmonious unity that would put an end to the social, political, economic and psychological conflicts of the post-war world. In this sense, for Huxley mysticism meant more than its parts. It was not merely about the spirit but the body as well –since both were necessary for the ultimate realization of the human potential in an increasingly dehumanizing world. In **Island**, Huxley investigates the ways in which this potential can be realized and it "represents Huxley's final and maturest thoughts on the fate of humanity in the modern world, his Summa Philosophica, as George Woodcock calls it."⁴⁹ Before analysing Huxley's application of his mystical understanding in **Island**, there is a question that needs to be answered: What is mysticism?

The Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions summarizes a variety of inclusive definitions: "an apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a direct apperception of deity, the art of union with reality, an immediate contact or union of the self with a larger-than-self. Several stages in a mystic's experience are also listed, such as the fivefold classification of awakening, purgation, surrender, illumination, and union."⁵⁰

The 'true' mystic, then, is the person who knows there is unity under diversity. "Most of us, claimed Huxley, have some consciousness of this unity, a consciousness implicit in our use of words."⁵¹ In his profoundly detailed anthology of mysticism,

⁴⁸ **Ibid.**

⁴⁹ Gorman Beuchamp, "Island: Aldous Huxley's Psychelic Utopia," **Utopian Studies**, Vol.1, No:1, 1990, p. 59, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/20718958, 12 February 2013

⁵⁰ Paulsell, **op. cit.**, pp. 82-83.

⁵¹ Ronald Hope, "Aldous Huxley's Philosophy," **Contemporary Review**, 2001, par. 4, Literature Resource Center, Web, (Online)

The Perennial Philosophy (1945), he explains how language gives us the necessary clues about this underlying unity:

For example, how significant it is that in the Indo-European languages, as Dramsteter pointed out, the root meaning “two” should connote badness. The Greek prefix dys- (as in dyspepsia) and Latin dis- (as in dishonorable) are both derived from “duo”. The cognate bis- gives a pejorative sense to such modern French words as *bévue* (“blunder”, literally “two-sight”). Traces of that “second which leads you astray” can be found in “dubious”, “doubt” and *Zweifel* –for to doubt is to be double-minded.⁵²

Huxley does not suggest that we have to be mystics to be able to become unified with a larger being than ourselves. This being is described as the Divine Ground or the Godhead, so it is possible to ascertain a religious tone to the process. However, according to Huxley, what to be aimed at is transcending the misappropriated conception of the self and realising the spiritual Absolute on a wider scale. The signs or the names that stand for the Absolute might vary,⁵³ but the destination is the ultimate union. It can be reached through the annihilation of the ego which is illusionary and misleading.

In relation to this, Alex MacDonald draws attention to the title of Huxley’s last novel. As he puts it, “Aldous Huxley wrote eleven novels in his career. It is interesting to note that the titles of all but one contain two or more words. The exception, of course, is **Island**, which illustrates clearly the movement toward unity which is characteristic of Huxley’s thought.”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that Huxley did not come to this encompassing vision without effort. It was the sum of his continuous search in a world where individuals were no longer able to see beyond physical matter and became desensitized; it was Huxley’s quest for the meaning of human existence.

<http://gdc.gale.com/gale-literature-collections/literature-resource-center/>, 12 February 2013

⁵² Aldous Huxley, **The Perennial Philosophy**, HarperCollins Publishers, 2004, pp. 10-11.

⁵³ “In Hinduism the divine Ground is the Brahman; in Mahayana Buddhism it is called Mind or Pure Light of the Void; in Christianity, Eckhart and Ruysbroeck postulated an Abyss of God-head underlying the trinity; and in Mohammedan tradition, the authors of the Sufi Texts conceived of *al haqq*, the Real, as being the divine Ground or Unity of Allah, underlying the personal aspects of the Godhead” (Bowering: 1968, p. 30).

⁵⁴ Alex MacDonald, **op. cit.**, p. 103.

4. ISLAND

Island can be considered as a patchwork of Huxley's ideas on various subjects. Therefore the plot is easy to follow, and the character development is weak. For some critics the book "hardly merits the title of novel; it is, as Anthony Burgess¹ noted, 'profoundly didactic, less concerned with telling a story than with presenting an attitude to life, weak on character but strong on talk, crammed with ideas, uncompromisingly intellectual'."² According to Ronald Lee Zigler; Alan Watts³ aptly captures the real purpose of the book in his conclusion that "*Island* is a 'thinly fictionalized collection of essays on education, psychology and metaphysics.'"⁴

As it has been noted earlier, **Island** marks the culmination of Huxley's lifelong contemplation on the conflicts of the modern world and his disillusionment with the fragmentary and reductionist view of 20th century Europe. Therefore, it is not surprising that he used the plot effectively enough to make room for the expression of his ideas. In relation to this, Peter Firchow points out: "[T]hose who insist that a novel should first and foremost tell a good story will not get much satisfaction here. And perhaps they should not."⁵ He goes on arguing that, "it would have been a mistake to have constructed too effective a plot. A plot that is too good, after all, distracts the ideas, and it is in the ideas that Huxley is ultimately interested."⁶

The plot is easy to be summarized. Will Farnaby, a cynical journalist from England, finds himself shipwrecked on the island of Pala where an ideal society has flourished. Secretly however, Farnaby is working for his boss, Joe Aldehyde, who is the head of the Southeast Asian Petroleum Company. Aldehyde is an industrialist

¹ *The Novel Today*, p.14 (qtd. in Bowering, 181)

² Peter Bowering, **Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels**, University of London: The Athlone Press, 1968, p. 181.

³ Watts, A. (1977) Some remembrances of Aldous Huxley, in; MICHAEL HOROWITZ & CYNTHIA PALMER (Eds) *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's classic writing on psychedelics and the visionary experience (1931-1963)*, pp. 292-294 (New York, Stonehill Publishing) (qtd in Zigler: 2002, p. 158)

⁴ Ronald Lee Zigler, "Revisiting Huxley's *Island*: advancing pragmatic ideals through a vision of utopia," *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Vol. 23, No: 2, 2002, p. 158, (Online)
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/rlz2/blogs/thetranspersonalhumanist/Revisiting%20Huxely's%20Island.doc.pdf>, 16 February 2013.

⁵ Peter Firchow, **Aldous Huxley Satirist and Novelist**, University of Minnesota Press, 1972, p.183.

⁶ **Ibid.**

who is interested in the oil reserves of Pala and he in fact sends Farnaby for a negotiation with the Palanese. After his shipwreck, while trying to climb the cliff, Will Farnaby falls and injures his knee. Thus, the islanders allow him to stay on Pala till he gets better. During his recuperation period, Will finds the opportunity to learn more about the Palanese society. As he learns more about them, his cynical attitude gets transformed and he gives up his previous plans for a secret negotiation. In the end, however, Pala gets invaded by the 'greedy' outside world.

To me **Island** is a novel with a moral purpose. It describes the characteristics of an ideal community that is created by Huxley the novelist, satirist, and the human being in the broadest scale. It is a utopian synthesis of Eastern philosophy and Western science. It is debatable whether Huxley presents a pessimistic or optimistic view at the end of the book –since Pala is 'doomed' to be destroyed by the troops of its military neighbour Rendang. Nevertheless it is worth saying that Huxley points at a place where salvation is possible to be realized; hence the novel is a 'realistic' representation of a possibility, and in this possibility Huxley does not ignore the impossibilities that are bound to appear on the way:

"If one is to be realistic" –and Huxley did try to be realistic. From the Aristotelian epigraph, "In framing an ideal we may assume what we wish, but should avoid impossibilities," to the sounds of gunfire and loudspeakers blaring at the end of the novel, we are aware of Huxley's intention to make his fiction fit, as the mynah birds have it, into the here and now.⁷

Huxley himself best describes his intention behind writing **Island**. As he tells an interviewer for the *Paris Review*⁸ in 1962:

[At the moment I'm writing a rather peculiar kind of fiction.]⁹ It's a kind of fantasy, a kind of reverse *Brave New World*, about a society in which real efforts are made to realize human potentialities. I want to show how humanity can make the best of both Eastern and Western worlds. So the

⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 184.

⁸ *Writers at Work: The "Paris Review" Interviews* (second series; New York, 1963), p.198 (qtd. in Donald J. Watt: 1968, p. 160).

⁹ Gorman Beuchamp, "Island: Aldous Huxley's Psychelic Utopia," **Utopian Studies**, Vol.1, No:1, 1990, p. 59, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/20718958, 12 February 2013.

setting is an imaginary island between Ceylon and Sumatra, at a meeting place of Indian and Chinese influence.¹⁰

In *Island*, Huxley adopts a syncretic approach to the existence of versatile elements that influence the actions of the individual on a micro- and a macrocosmic level. He tries to steer a middle course between reason and intuition; body and spirit; fall and rise; man and woman; self and not-self; Western progress and Eastern philosophy.

In this endeavour, Huxley's island of Pala can be seen to integrate the practical, pragmatic value of scientific research for Western culture along with the enduring qualities of personal subjective religious experience as found in the traditions such as Zen. This synthesis is most readily symbolized in the two individuals in *Island* who are credited with founding Huxley's utopian society: Dr Andrew McPhail, a Scottish physician and the 'old Raja': a Buddhist leader.¹¹

Dr Andrew saves the Old Raja's life by painlessly removing the tumour growing on his face. They become friends and decide to designate a peaceful community on Pala where the main ambition is to make its inhabitants realize their potential by increasing their self-awareness. They make the best of two worlds of which they are a representative: Dr Andrew represents Western science; the Old Raja, Mahayanist Buddhism.

Due to its geographical location, Pala has little communication with the outside world. However, this does not prevent the Palanese from interacting with the outsiders. In addition to their local language they can talk English as well. They are able to adapt scientific developments, such as eugenics and artificial insemination, into their daily lives. As for education, they use a special technique to condition the babies from the period of infancy. While the baby is fed, the mother strokes his head and utters affectionate words into his hear while anything –it might be an animal or a person– she wants him to love is introduced. Unlike classical conditioning, with this

¹⁰ Donald J. Watt, "Vision and Symbol in Aldous Huxley's *Island*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 14, No: 3, Oct., 1968, p. 149, (Online)

www.jstor.org/stable/440780, 12 February 2013

¹¹ Zigler, *op. cit.*, 158.

method the baby learns compassion, love, tolerance and how to live in tune with nature. They train the body and mind as a whole.

Pala is not just an island in geographical terms, but more than that. It is “isolated in more ways than one; it is an island literally and an island spiritually. It is surrounded on all sides by insane and powerful and threatening barbarians.”¹² The shipwrecked visitor to the island, Will Farnaby, epitomizes the main characteristics of the world of the barbarians. “In comparison with the Palanese, all his ideas about reality and his persistence in not taking yes for an answer are just insane barbarism.”¹³ During his stay on the island, Will gets introduced to the Palanese way of leading a harmonious life. Consequently he begins to question his previous cynical attitude and undergoes spiritual enlightenment. As Alex MacDonald also points out, “The progress from dualism into a unitary view can be seen in microcosm in the development of Huxley’s protagonist Will Farnaby, who moves through psychological, relational and spiritual changes to his final enlightenment.”¹⁴ His enlightenment comes when he dares to look at his emptiness inside. It is neither a state of forgetfulness –concerning the mistakes he had committed before in his life– nor finding the relief in a mystical euphoria. On the contrary, it is a state of complete awareness, determination, robustness and willingness to take responsibility for his actions; of bringing the contrasting poles side by side.

This unifying vision is a direct reflection of Huxley’s personal experiences. The reader may find the transformation in Will’s perception too sudden to be taken seriously. However, it should not be ignored that Huxley’s intention in writing **Island** was to form a synthesis of his reflections and investigations that he had accumulated so far. This is the reason why the characters in **Island** –especially the Palanese, do not do anything more than to explain how their society functions. “The main point of the novel, then, is to introduce through Farnaby’s guided tour of Pala a means of describing an ideal society.”¹⁵ I do not think that Huxley could have

¹² Firchow, **op. cit.**, p. 179.

¹³ **Ibid.**, pp. 178-179.

¹⁴ Alex MacDonald, “Choosing Utopia: An Existential Reading of Aldous Huxley’s *Island*,” **Utopian Studies**, Vol. 12, No: 2, 2001, p. 105, (Online)
www.jstor.org/stable/20718318, 13 February 2013

¹⁵ Watt, **op. cit.**, p.150.

outlined the main characteristics of this ideal society without sounding didactic. He knew that it would make it hard for him to write a utopian novel:

Writing to his son Matthew in the late summer of 1959, Huxley commented that “it may be that the job is one which cannot be accomplished with complete success” (L875), and then went on to observe that complete success in the genre had never been achieved. Still, he hoped to “lighten up the exposition by putting it into dialogue form, which I make as lively as possible (L875).”¹⁶

Despite its flaws, **Island** manages to be a utopian novel of ideas in which Huxley “explored principles expressed in **The Perennial Philosophy**, such as the potential for all human beings to be identified with the Godhead and the beneficence of humility rather than ego.”¹⁷ In his encounter with an ideal community, the protagonist of the novel, Will Farnaby, learns how to move from his self to his not-self by reaching to a heightened sense of perception:

The heightened awareness of what Meister Eckhart termed *Istigkeit* or Is-ness, or “the sacramental vision of reality”, was, Huxley writes in *The Doors of Perception*, a gift of “gratuitous grace” that allowed the “Not-self” to achieve liberation from the constrictive grip of the workaday ego and receive the infilling of the “Mind at Large” or what the Buddhist call “Universal Mind”. (17-22 and passim). “If the doors of perception were cleansed,” wrote Blake in a passage that Huxley selects as an epigraph, “everything would appear to man as it is, infinite”. For Huxley, then, psychedelics cleaned the doors of his perception.¹⁸

The un-enlightened Farnaby experiences a spiritual transformation at the end of the novel and passes beyond the island of his self to the all-encompassing ocean of selflessness. The process which is reminiscent of Huxley’s experience in **The Doors of Perception** is triggered by the *moksha* medicine –a hallucinogenic mushroom used as a drug by the islanders to bring them closer to their Not-self.

In this respect **Island** is a ‘transcendentalist utopia’ that makes use of Eastern philosophy and problematizes the projection of the self in post-war Europe. It

¹⁶ Firchow, **op. cit.**, pp. 177-178.

¹⁷ Sally A. Paulsell, “Color and Light: Huxley’s Pathway to Spiritual Reality”. **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 41, No: 1, Spring, 1995, p. 102, (Online)
www.jstor.org/stable/441716, 25 February 2013

¹⁸ Beuchamp, **op. cit.**, p. 60.

dissolves the 'constructed selves' that society has created and urges the subject to go beyond or 'transcend' the limitations imposed on him. It evaluates the idea of the self as a construct and goes on deconstructing it. In line with postmodern thinking which does not accept that there is objective truth, **Island** teaches that there is no stable self. Through Will Farnaby, Huxley shows how to annihilate the self through union and non-duality.

4.1. Confrontation

Dr. Robert rose and laid his hand for a moment on Will's arm. "Till this evening." Halfway to the door he halted and turned back. "I almost forgot to give you this." From one of the side pockets of his sagging jacket he pulled out a small green booklet. "It's the Old Raja's *Notes on What's What, and on What It Might be Reasonable to Do about What's What.*' "

"What an admirable title!" said Will as he took the proffered book.

"And you'll like the contents, too," Dr. Robert assured him. "Just a few pages, that's all. But if you want to know what Pala is all about, here's no better introduction."¹⁹

This is how Dr. Robert introduces Will Farnaby into the world of Pala. Having injured his knee after the fall, Will is resting in Dr. Robert's bungalow and is given the chance to have a close look at the Palanese way of living. It is important to note that Dr. Robert gives him *Notes on What's What* just after changing the dressing on Will's knee. Obviously, his intention is not merely to cure Will's physical wound but also to ignite the first spark of the transformation that will happen in Will's psyche as well. However, he does not force it on Will. It is Will himself who should open the book and start reading it first, and this is what he does: "Will watched him go, then opened the little green book and started to read."²⁰

The reason why I am drawing attention to Will's opening the book is that I want to show the importance of *free will*, because without it the subject can neither release himself from the restrictive grip of his ego nor take moral responsibility for his actions. Consequently, he cannot actualize himself completely and continues to repeat himself in a vicious circle of inauthentic decisions.

The Irish novelist Bram Stoker in his worldwide famous novel **Dracula** puts importance on free will, too. With the intention to elaborate more on my point here, I think, this particular scene, where Count Dracula welcomes Jonathan Harker for the first time into his house, serves as a useful example:

The old man motioned me in with his right hand with a courtly gesture, saying in excellent English, but with a strange intonation: –

'Welcome to my house! Enter *freely* and *of your own will!*' He made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture

¹⁹ Aldous Huxley, **Island**, London: Vintage Books, 2005, pp. 37-38.

²⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 38.

of welcome had fixed him into a stone. The instant, however, that I had stepped over the *threshold*, had moved impulsively forward and holding out his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed as cold as ice –more like the hand of a dead than a living man. Again he said: –
'Welcome to my house. Come *freely*. Go safely. And leave that something of the happiness you bring!'²¹

Nicholas Urfe in **The Magus** and Will Farnaby in **Island** gradually learn to step over the threshold by taking complete responsibility for their actions first, and then they give up the habit of putting the blame on exterior factors –as an escape from their faults. In this process, Conchis acts out as a transcendentalist existentialist who shows Nicholas that his materialistic and ego-centric view has been shaped by society and his culture; which is why he is leading an illusionary life –which stands for the Symbolic order in Lacanian terms. Similarly, for Will Farnaby; Susila MacPhail acts out as the catalyst that helps Will to unlearn his society's or culture's exploitative and selfish attitude. In this respect Maurice Conchis and Susila MacPhail can both be seen as existentialist and mystical teachers that guide the *self* in his voyage to the *not-self* –that is back to the Real.

But it is Susila MacPhail, who lost her husband in a climbing accident, who has the most important role as *psychic healer and teacher*. One of Will's major turning points comes when he and Susila are discussing "how to remember and yet be free of the past" and Will recognizes his problem of dealing with the duality of past and present: "Will you help me?" he asks (119).²²

Nevertheless it should be noted that neither Conchis nor Susila give mystical teaching to their 'students' in the strict sense. Conchis makes use of art as stimulation to consciousness, and aims at increasing Nicholas's existentialist responsiveness to life. Susila, too, takes Will to a heightened level of consciousness with the help of another stimulant –that is the moksha medicine– at the end of the novel.

²¹ Bram Stoker, **Dracula**, Penguin Popular Classics, 1994, p. 26 (italics mine).

²² Alex MacDonald, "Choosing Utopia: An Existential Reading of Aldous Huxley's *Island*," **Utopian Studies**, Vol. 12, No: 2, 2001, p. 106 (italics mine), (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/20718318, 13 February 2013.

Apart from reaching a heightened level of consciousness that recognizes the untruth²³ lurking deep beneath the self –since the self has been constructed and misappropriated– Nicholas and Will are to recognize the power of freedom without hurting others and without being selfish. Nicholas and Farnaby both inflict pain on women who ‘really’ love them; Alison and Molly respectively. The women are objectified through the selfish desires of the men who are not able to see that love goes far beyond the physical person of the beloved; and the male reductionist attitude results in the metaphorical and literal suicides of these female characters in both novels. True enlightenment comes when Urfe and Farnaby catch a glimpse of the unified existence of body and spirit; heaven and hell; death and life; horror and beauty; consciousness and unconsciousness. In other words, his ‘enlightenment’ happens when Will realizes his mistake in placing Molly into such categorizations as “Sister of Mercy” or “wife”, and starts suffering from his fault in not taking her as a whole.²⁴ Likewise, for Nicholas it happens when his problematic attitude towards women –his seeing them as either *to-be-loved* or *to-be-used* objects– is challenged following his disillusionment with Lily; and this either/or dichotomy gets replaced with the theme of the union of the opposites. Only then is he able to discern the ‘mystery’ inherent in ‘the real’ and starts seeing Alison as she is:

She was mysterious, almost a new woman; one had to go back several steps, and start again; *and know the place for the first time*. As if what had been free in her, as accessible as a pot of salt on the table, was now held in a phial, sacrosanct. But I knew Alison. I knew how she took on the colour and character of people she loved or liked, however independent she remained underneath. And I knew where that smooth impermeability came from. I was sitting with a priestess from the temple of Demeter.²⁵

Here Nicholas goes beyond ‘reality’ and experiences an unmediated and ‘real’ contact with the mystery of existence. “ ‘This unmediated contact with the mystery of existence is what the Mahayana Buddhists have named ‘Suchness’ or *Tathata*: It is to see things as they are in themselves, to understand them in their state

²³ “ ‘I am.’ Two tiny words but what an enormity of untruth! ” (*Island*, p. 175)

²⁴ Huxley, *Island*, p. 104.

²⁵ John Fowles, *The Magus*, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 650.

of self-nature, to accept them as themselves’²⁶.”²⁷ It cannot be achieved while the subject remains selfish and egoistic, because in such a state he will not be able to go beyond the distorted perception of his ‘I’-identity and will continue to perceive things as being divided and polarized. However, in the Real order there is no division between being and becoming; everything is in a relationship with one another and interconnected. There is union of opposites; thus it is a heightened awareness of harmony and mystery.

“This *coniunctio oppositorum* is also emphasized by Jung as necessary for the emergence of the wholeness of Self. For example, there is the theme of the union of a male mystic with his female (Divine) Beloved.”²⁸ Accordingly, the self’s reunion with the Self might also be interpreted as the *other*’s becoming whole with the *mother* in a materiality of existence that is beyond language and expression – according to Lacanian psychosexual development of the subject.

Here I would like point out the role of women in bringing about the deconstruction of the socially constructed selves in both novels. They pave the way for the apprehension of mystical/spiritual reality by helping the not-self to achieve liberation from the constrictive grip of the ego and to become whole. “In *The Magus*, the central female characters orbit Nicholas Urfe, peripheral in a sense, but each has her own contribution to Urfe’s movement towards becoming elect or fully perceptive.”²⁹ Nicholas’s becoming elect is his reaching a heightened awareness of *Suchness* –the sacramental vision of reality. It should also be remembered that Fowles had originally conceived Conchis as a female character. “In the essay ‘Notes on an Unfinished Novel,’ a documentary of the creative process written alongside *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Fowles noted that, “If technical problems hadn’t been so great, I should have liked to make Conchis in *The Magus* a woman.”³⁰

²⁶ Beatrice Lane Suzuki, *Mahayana Buddhism* (1959), pp. 24-5. (qtd. in Bowering: 1968, p. 201)

²⁷ Bowering, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

²⁸ Fredrica R. Halligan, “The Creative Imagination of the Sufi Mystic, Ibn ‘Arabi,” **Journal of Religion and Health**, Vol. 40, No: 2, Summer, 2001, p. 284, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/27511533, 5 January 2012

²⁹ Michelle Phillips Buchberger, “Metafiction, Historiography, and Mythopoeia in the Novels of John Fowles,” **Doctor of Philosophy Thesis**, School of Arts, Brunel University. February, 2009, p. 79, (Online) <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/6558/1/FullTextThesis.pdf>, 18 December 2012

³⁰ Alice Ferrebe, The Gaze of the Magus: Sexual/Scopic Politics in the Novels of John Fowles,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 34, No: 2, Summer, 2004, p. 208, (Online)

Similarly, as Charles T. McMichael puts it, "*Island* is not merely the bringing together of old Huxleyan ideas, however. Although it is without question the culmination of many years of thought in various areas, there are definitely ideas to be found in this novel that are completely new to the thinking of Aldous Huxley, principally the concept of the proper relationship of man and woman and the role of woman in the bringing about of a proper awareness of spiritual reality."³¹ Thus it is not surprising that the change in Farnaby's perception is shaped through his interaction with women: Molly, Babs and eventually Susila MacPhail.

www.jstor.org/stable/30224603, 25 March 2011.

³¹ Charles T. McMichael, "Aldous Huxley's 'Island': The Final Vision," **Studies in the Literary Imagination**, Vol.1, No: 2, Apr. 1968, par. 7, Rpt. in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Ed. Daniel G. Marowski and Roger Matuz, Vol. 35, Detroit: Gale Research 1985, Literature Resource Center, Web, (Online)
<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1100001356&v=2.1&u=bogazici&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>, 12 February 2013.

4.2. Transformation and Liberation

Huxley explains in **The Perennial Philosophy**, “Spiritual progress is through the growing knowledge of the self as nothing and of the Godhead as all-embracing Reality.”³² Nonetheless ‘Godhead’ is not necessarily to be interpreted in religious terms.³³ What is important here is to be aware of the consciousness of unity that is present in the subconscious. It is a state of being that was lost in the subject’s passage from the Real into the Symbolic order. In order to regain this state, the identity needs to be deconstructed –which is the self’s transformation back to the not-self.

How to experience this unity and realize that the self is not stable; and what is the function of love in all of this? Nicholas Urfe and Will Farnaby are incapable of loving with their whole being, because they mistake love with a selfish, mean and egoistical notion that places them at the mercy of their egos. They suffer from being incomplete and try to fill the hole in themselves via selfish desires. On Parnassus and Pala, however, they come to the realization that there exist several kinds of love –the strongest among which is the one that recognizes another person as unique and valuable. Love, in this context acts out as a ‘selfless’ medium of releasing everything good in a person; of respect, affection and consideration. As the Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl puts it:

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.³⁴

³² Aldous Huxley, **The Perennial Philosophy**, HarperCollins Publishers, 2004, p. 163.

³³ “Huxley did not, of course, suggest that there was any proof, in the mathematical sense, of the existence of God. We cannot divide matter by nothing and call it infinity, as one of Huxley’s fictional characters tried to do. But there is, according to Huxley, abundant evidence that certain people, by no means extraordinary except in this mystical respect, have directly experienced and realised the spiritual Absolute, have become united in God” (Hope: 2001, par. 7)

³⁴ Maria Popova, “Viktor Frankl on the Human Search for Meaning,” **Brain Pickings**, w.date, par. 12, (Online)

Then, 'love' on Pala allows the not-self to achieve liberation from the constrictive grip of the ego and brings a heightened awareness alongside. It is a contemplative action, since the actualization of the human potentials can only be realized through a momentary awareness of the not-self. As long as the self remains confined within the boundaries of the image that he has constructed, he cannot reach the all-encompassing ocean of selflessness.

It is of utmost importance that the subject *chooses* to attain a higher level of awareness. It has to come from within and he must decide upon it. Before his spiritual transformation, Will's cynical attitude towards life and his not taking yes as an answer⁸ mainly resulted from the denial of his own being so that he would be able to escape from the burden of his conscience. " 'But I don't want to be more aware,'" said Will. 'I want to be less aware'. "³⁵ Ironically enough, even his decision to visit Pala was directly linked to Will's escapist tendency. He shipwrecked himself on Pala for selfish reasons. In his talk with Mr. Bahu –the ambassador of the neighbouring Rendang– and the Rani, Will says to them:

"And now," he went on with deliberately indecent frankness, "let me explain my position in this matter. All *I'm* interested in is money. Two thousand pounds without having to do a hand's turn of work. A year of freedom just for helping Joe Aldehyde to get his hands on Pala."
 "Lord Aldehyde," said the Rani, "is remarkably generous." "Remarkably," Will agreed, "considering how little I can do in this matter. Needless to say, he'd be still more generous to anyone who could be of greater help."
 There was a long silence. In the distance a mynah bird was calling monotonously for attention. Attention to avarice, attention to hypocrisy, attention to vulgar cynicism . . . There was a knock at the door.³⁶

He accepts Joe Aldehyde's offer to be able to get as much money and freedom as he wants. Still, on Pala Will learns what it truly means to be free: "It is the liberation

<http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/03/26/viktor-frankl-mans-search-for-meaning/>, 15 March 2013.

⁸ "I'm a journalist," Will explained. "Our Special Correspondent, paid to travel about the world and report on the current horrors. What other kind of noise do you expect me to make? Coo-coo? Blah-blah? Marx-Marx?" He laughed again, then brought out one of his well-tried witticisms. "*I'm the man who won't take yes for an answer*" (*Island*, p. 20, italics mine)

³⁵ Huxley, *Island*, p. 236

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

from the prison of yourself.”³⁷ In other words, it is self-transcendence and going back to the materiality of existence that the not-self experienced in the Real order. As Dr. Robert explains to Will in the novel:

“Liberation,” Dr Robert began again, “the ending of sorrow ceasing to be what you ignorantly think you are in fact. For a little while, thanks to the *moksha*-medicine, you will know what it’s like to be what in fact you are, what in fact you always have been. What a timeless bliss! But, like everything else, this timelessness is transient. Like everything else, it will pass. And when it has passes, what will you do with this experience? What will you do with all the other similar experiences that the *moksha*-medicine will bring you in the years to come? Will you merely enjoy them as you would enjoy an evening at the puppet show, and then go back to the business as usual, back to behaving like the silly delinquents you imagine yourselves to be? Or, having glimpsed, will you devote your lives to the business, not at all as usual, of being what you are in fact? All that we older people can do with our teachings, all that Pala can do for you with its social arrangements, is to provide you with techniques and opportunities. And all that the *moksha*-medicine can do is to give you a succession of beatific glimpses, an hour or two, every now and then, of enlightening and liberating grace. It remains for you to decide whether you’ll co-operate with the grace and take those opportunities.”³⁸

In **Island**, Huxley portrays the characteristics of an ideal community. However, as I have mentioned before, while doing this he does not paint a too idealistic picture. He points to the problem at hand and allows people to choose their own path, because he is well aware of the fact that the change is to start off with the subject himself –on a microcosmic level– and it makes **Island** not only a transcendentalist but also an existentialist utopia. “Indeed, we have a moral responsibility to try, and in implying this position **Island** might be called an existential utopia.”³⁹ Here it is necessary to have a general understanding of what existentialism is about. The basic premise of existentialism is that existence precedes essence. The subject defines himself through his actions and gives meaning to his life through his capacity to make decisions. According to MacDonald, “The idea of choice” deserves special attention in **Island**, because “the Palanese considered

³⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 76.

³⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 169.

³⁹ MacDonald, **op. cit.**, p. 109.

alternatives in a hard-headed and realistic way and chose to create utopia rather than not to, chose not to give in to despair.”⁴⁰

An existentialist does not put the blame of the catastrophes happening on the face of the earth on the shoulders of another being –since that would be an irresponsible and inauthentic attitude. The unenlightened Will Farnaby is one of these people who refrain from taking the ultimate responsibility for their actions and find relief in spotting a scapegoat.

In **The Magus** Nicholas assumes that he is observed by a God-like figure, therefore he has difficulty in coming to terms with the results of his actions. Likewise, Will Farnaby goes for the easy path and accuses God of increasing human misery and of playing a joke on mankind. “It’s the kind of cosmic practical joke that God seems really to enjoy”, Will says to Ranga.⁴¹ Here Ranga’s reaction to Will’s comment allows the reader to see the traces of existentialist philosophy on Pala:

“God has nothing to do with it,” Ranga retorted, “and the joke isn’t cosmic, it’s strictly man-made. These things aren’t like gravity or the second law of the thermo-dynamics; they don’t have to happen. They happen only if people are stupid enough to allow them to happen. Here in Pala we haven’t allowed them to happen, so the joke hasn’t been played on us. We’ve had good sanitation for the best part of a century—and still we’re not overcrowded, we’re not miserable, we’re not under a dictatorship. And the reason is very simple: we *chose* to behave in a sensible and realistic way.”⁴²

In Pala there is “Self-Determination”, which is also known as “Destiny Control.”⁴³ As Susila explains to Will, it is taught to the Palanese children in all of the elementary schools. It is basically about knowing that you are not the slave of your destiny, genetics or impulses, but are capable of pressing your own buttons. It can be described as having control over your insulated ego and even to surpass it. With the help of Self-Determination Will finds himself to have been released from the pain of his knee –by simply paying attention to Mary Sarojini’s psychological

⁴⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 110.

⁴¹ Huxley, **Island**, p. 82.

⁴² **Ibid.**, p. 82 (*italics mine*).

⁴³ **Ibid.**, p. 95.

first aid in the beginning of the novel.⁴⁴ And then, there is Susila's hypnotically transporting him into a peaceful and 'floating'⁴⁵ state by invoking Will's happy memories from his past. As Susila describes the after-effects of the trance to Dr. Robert: "I got him to be conscious of his body image. Then I made him imagine it much bigger than in everyday reality—and the knee much smaller. A miserable little thing in revolt against a huge and splendid thing. There can't be any doubt as to who's going to win."⁴⁶ Here Susila helps Will to get away from his body-consciousness which makes him concentrate on his pain in the knee, and tries to make the pain less significant. In this state, Will no longer feels the pain on his knee, because he transcends himself in the body form. Still, Destiny Control (DC) does not do away with all types of the pain forever. Later on, Susila tells Will, "DC can give you a completely painless childbirth. But a completely painless bereavement—no. And of course that's as it should be. It wouldn't be right if you could take away all the pain of a bereavement; you'd be less than human."⁴⁷

Having lost her husband in a rock climbing accident Susila does not give in to her suffering. She does not deny her husband's death either and accepts it as it is. Will Farnaby, too, loses his wife Molly in a car accident. Rather than coming to terms with her death however, he finds escape in occupying his mind with feelings of guilt and self-hatred. This sinks him further down into nihilism as it is apparent in the way he continues sleeping with the woman that caused Molly's death –this will be

⁴⁴ Finding him on the scene of the accident –after his fall– Mary helps Will to come to terms with his desperate condition, by making him realize that it is not as bad as he has thought it to be. The child urges Will to talk about the fall: "Gradually the sobbing died down. The words came more easily and the memories they aroused were less painful. 'I fell,' he repeated for the hundredth time. 'But you didn't fall very far,' Mary Sarojini now said. 'No, I didn't fall very far,' he agreed. 'So what's all the fuss about?' the child inquired (*Island*, p. 17).

⁴⁵ Susila guiding Will Farnaby during the hypnotic trance: " 'Life flowing silently and irresistibly into ever fuller life, into a living peace all the more profound, all the richer and stronger and more complete because it knows all your pain and unhappiness, knows them and takes them into itself and makes them one with its own substance. And it's into that peace that you're floating now, floating on this smooth silent river that sleeps and is yet irresistible, and is irresistible precisely because it's sleeping. And I'm floating with it.' She was speaking for the stranger. She was speaking on another level for herself. 'Effortlessly floating. Not having to do anything at all. Just letting go, just allowing myself to be carried along, just asking this irresistible sleeping river of life to take me where it's going—and knowing all the time that where it's going is where I want to go, where I have to go: into more life, into living peace. Along the sleeping river, irresistibly, into the wholeness of reconciliation' " (*Island*, pp. 33-34)

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

analysed in detail in the upcoming chapter. Yet, even before meeting his wife, Will had lost contact with the Real and was imprisoned in a phantasy world, a ‘reality’ – which is the Symbolic order. As he describes it to Susila:

“Do you know what it's like,” he asked at length, “*to feel that nothing is quite real—including yourself?*”

Susila nodded. “It sometimes happens when one’s just on the point of discovering that everything, including oneself, is much more real than one ever imagined. It’s like shifting gears: you have to go into neutral before you change into high.”

“Or low,” said Will. “In my case, the shift wasn’t up, it was down. No, not even down; it was into reverse. The first time it happened I was waiting for a bus to take me home from Fleet Street. Thousands upon thousands of people, all on the move, and each of them unique, each of them the center of the universe. Then the sun came out from behind a cloud. Everything was extraordinarily bright and clear; and suddenly, with an almost audible click, they were all maggots.”⁴⁸

Here it is seen that Will’s perception of the real is badly impaired. He sees people around him as “little pale worms with black heads that one sees on rotten meat.”⁴⁹ Worse than that, as he continues describing:

“Nothing had changed, of course; people’s faces were the same, their clothes were the same. And yet they were all maggots. *Not even real maggots—just the ghosts of maggots, just the illusion of maggots. And I was the illusion of a spectator of maggots.* I lived in that maggot world for months. Lived in it, worked in it, went out to lunch and dinner in it—all without the least interest in what I was doing. Without the least enjoyment or relish, completely desireless and, as I discovered when I tried to make love to a young woman I’d had occasional fun with in the past, completely impotent.”⁵⁰

At this point in Will’s life, it is not the real that disappears into illusion; on the contrary it is the illusion that disappears into reality.⁵¹ Consequently he is no longer able to distinguish between the real and the reality; his incapacity to do so is also reflected in his impotence with women. Ironically enough he is well aware of his

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99 (italics mine).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100 (italics mine).

⁵¹ See the first sentences of Jean Baudrillard’s book **The Perfect Crime**: “This is the story of a crime –of the murder of reality. And the extermination of illusion –the vital illusion, the radical illusion of the world. The real does not disappear into illusion; it is illusion that disappears into integral reality” (xi).

impotence but pushes it around to see the result. As an answer to Susila's question " 'Then why on earth . . .?' " he went on with the act in the first place; Will replies, " 'As a matter of scientific interest. I was an entomologist investigating the sex life of the phantom maggot.' 'After which, I suppose, everything seemed even more unreal.' 'Even more,' he agreed, 'if that was possible'." ⁵²

It is necessary to note that the 'maggot-world' that Will finds himself in has been constructed since his childhood. The death of his aunt Mary, whom he describes as "the only person he ever loved" hits Will hard. ⁵³ As he puts it cynically, Mary's death gives him a *liberal* education "In Pure and Applied Pointlessness." ⁵⁴ His 'education' continues through World War II, and the ensuing Cold War. In the end, similar to Nicholas Urfe in **The Magus**, he realizes that he does not have the talent to be a poet, " 'And all this time I'd been wanting to be a poet and finding out that I simply don't have what it takes. And then, after the war, I had to go into journalism to make money'." ⁵⁵ All of these, including his dissatisfaction and humiliation ⁵⁶ with his work add up to the formation of the fantasy world that was teeming with "Not even real maggots: phantom maggots." ⁵⁷

It is his wife Molly who, seeing through Will, manages to 'exorcise' most of these maggots from his life. They meet in a "high class maggot party in Bloomsbury" and there, on her asking him to learn why he is so sad, Will mentions Molly about the maggots. ⁵⁸ The next morning they go to the country together. Feeling closer to nature, and perhaps happier in Molly's company, Will undergoes a transformation:

"Anyhow, next morning she called me at breakfast time. Would I like to drive down into the country with her? It was Sunday and, by a miracle, fine. I accepted. We spent an hour in a hazel copse, picking primroses and looking at the little white windflowers. One doesn't pick the windflowers," he explained, "because in an hour they're withered. I did a lot of looking in that hazel copse— looking at flowers with the naked eye and then looking

⁵² **Ibid.**, p. 100.

⁵³ **Ibid.**

⁵⁴ **Ibid.**

⁵⁵ **Ibid.**

⁵⁶ Will asks Susila: " 'Wouldn't you be humiliated if you found yourself making money by turning out the cheapest, flashiest kind of literary forgery? I was a success because I was so irremediably second-rate' " (**Island**, p. 101).

⁵⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 101.

⁵⁸ **Ibid.**

into them through the magnifying glass that Molly had brought with her. I don't know why, but it was extraordinarily therapeutic— just looking into the hearts of primroses and anemones. For the rest of the day I saw no maggots.”⁵⁹

Will sees no maggots there, because he feels connected to nature; namely to the essence of his consciousness –which is pure and revealing. At this moment temporal reality gets transfigured and Will is able to transcend his constructed self which has been tainted by his fear of death, anxiety, and cynicism.

On Pala Molly is replaced by Susila and now she is the one who will guide Will in his passage from his self to the not-self –the ‘transcendentalist’ state which he had a glimpse of, years before in the country with Molly. However this time it is Will himself who is willing to unlearn what he has been taught so far, because he does not want to escape into another ‘maggot-world’ anymore:

“Does one learn how to forget?”

“It isn't a matter of forgetting. What one has to learn is how to remember and yet be free of the past. How to be there with the dead and yet still be here, on the spot, with the living.” She [Susila] gave him a sad little smile and added, “It isn't easy.”

“It isn't easy,” Will repeated. And suddenly all his defenses were down, all his pride had left him. “*Will you help me?*” he asked.

“It's a bargain,” she said, and *held out her hand*.⁶⁰

The bargain is for Will's releasing himself from the constrictive grip of his ego and his getting ready to take the first step into the not-self, so that he will be able to give meaning to his actions. In relation to this, towards the end of the novel Will is to be examined through a decision that he has to make. While on the way to hospital –to visit Dr. Robert's wife, Lakshmi– with Mary Sarojini, Will gets detained by the Rani's son Murugan. He hands Will the Rani's letter and asks him to come at once to finalize the negotiations –another bargain that is going on between the Rani, Lord Aldehyde and Colonel Dipa. But Will has already made his decision:

⁵⁹ **Ibid.**

⁶⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 107 (italics mine).

Losing all patience, Murugan caught hold of Will's arm and gave him a savage pinch. "Are you coming?" he shouted.

Will turned on him angrily. "What the devil do you think you're doing, you little fool?" He jerked his arm out of the boy's grasp.

Intimidated, Murugan changed his tone. "I just wanted to know if you were ready to come to my mother's."

"I'm not ready," Will answered, "because I'm not going."

"Not going?" Murugan cried in a tone of incredulous amazement. "But she expects you, she . . ."

"Tell your mother I'm very sorry, but I have a prior engagement. With someone who's dying," Will added.

"But this is frightfully important."

"So is dying."

Murugan lowered his voice. "Something's happening," he whispered. "I can't hear you," Will shouted through the confused noises of the crowd.

Murugan glanced about him apprehensively, then risked a somewhat louder whisper. "Something's happening, something tremendous."

"Something even more tremendous is happening at the hospital."

"We just heard . . ." Murugan began. He looked around again, then shook his head. "No, I can't tell you—not here. That's why you must come to the bungalow. Now. There's no time to lose."

Will glanced at his watch. "No time to lose," he echoed and, turning to Mary Sarojini, "We must get going," he said. "Which way?"

"I'll show you," she said, and *they set off hand in hand*.⁶¹

And, Will takes the hand, *freely*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251 (italics mine).

4.3. Self-Transcendence

Why the need to transcend the self in the first place? Where do we get after allowing the not-self to achieve liberation from the constrictive grip of the ego? What is the significance of passing from the Symbolic back to the Real? In “The Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudun*”, which was published in 1953, Huxley expresses his opinion about the importance of self-transcendence. His thoughts are guiding enough to help us find the answers for the questions that have been put above. As he states in the epilogue:

Without an understanding of man’s deep-seated urge to self-transcendence, of his very natural reluctance to take the hard, ascending way, and his search for some bogus liberation either below or to one side of his personality, we cannot hope to make sense of our own particular period of history or indeed of history in general, of life as it was lived in the past and as it is lived today. For this reason I propose to discuss some of the more common Grace-substitutes, into which and by means of which men and women have tried to escape from the tormenting consciousness of being merely themselves.⁶²

He describes ‘transcendence’ as a means of going beyond the limits of the insulated ego. It is a process in which the subject is called out of himself and enters the realm of mystery where all the conventional rules are suspended. In Lacanian terms it might be interpreted as the individual’s passage from the Symbolic (self) back to the Real (Not-self/Self) where the liberation from the ego is achieved and there no longer exists any Lack(s), but complete satisfaction, harmony, and unity.

According to Lacan it is impossible to re-experience the primal state of nature and wholeness that are present in the Real order, because once the subject enters the realm of language –the Symbolic order– he will never be able to go back to where he has come from. However, for Huxley, there are distinct avenues of escape from the ‘imprisoning identity’ and of experiencing not-self.

⁶² Aldous Huxley, “The Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudun*,” New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953, par. 1, **The Psychedelic Library**, (Online)
<http://www.psychedelic-library.org/loudun.htm>,
25 March 2013

The first was the ‘upward self-transcendence’. It happens when a person realizes that he is in fact part of a ‘larger being’ than himself –that is the ‘omnipresent self’. In the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy of the Palanese, this omnipresent self is described in such terms as “Tat tvam asi , thou art That, mind from Mind is not divided.”⁶³ Still, it takes time and effort to be able to reach this stage. In relation to this, in one of their dialogues Susila tells Will Farnaby:

“Not at that age”, she answered. “Children *have* to be Manichean dualists. It’s the price we all pay for learning the rudiments of being a human. Seeing turds as gentians, or rather seeing both gentians and turds as Gentians with capital G —that is a post-graduate accomplishment.”⁶⁴

The other avenue is ‘downward self-transcendence’. It is divided into ‘sub-avenues’ in itself, among which ‘intoxication’, ‘elementary sexuality’ and ‘crowd-delirium’ are the most popular. They are not necessarily to be considered negative, because they are received in different ways in different periods in history. For instance, while ecstasy through intoxication (drug-taking and alcohol) was considered to give an experience of the divine in earlier periods, this belief undergoes a change in the modern period. Correspondingly, Huxley points out:

In modern times beer and the other toxic short cuts to self-transcendence are no longer officially worshipped as gods. Theory has undergone a change, but not practice; for in practice millions upon millions of civilized men and women continue to pay their devotions, not to the liberating and transfiguring Spirit, but to alcohol, to hashish, to opium and its derivatives, to the barbiturates, and the other synthetic additions to the age-old catalogue of poisons capable of causing self-transcendence. In every case, of course, what seems a god is actually a devil, what seems a liberation is in fact an enslavement. The self-transcendence is invariably downward into the less than human, the lower than personal.⁶⁵

He goes on describing that the interpretation of the ‘elementary sexuality’ has also undergone a change in theory since it is no longer considered to be a god. “Like intoxication, elementary sexuality, indulged in for its own sake and divorced from love, was once a god, worshipped not only as the principle of fecundity, but as a

⁶³ Huxley, *Island*, p. 116.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶⁵ Huxley, “The Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudun*,” par. 4.

manifestation of the radical Otherness immanent in every human being. In theory, elementary sexuality has long since ceased to be a god. But in practice it can still boast of a countless host of sectaries.”⁶⁶ As a transcendental power, sexuality is powerful enough to carry the individual beyond the limits of his insulated self. Nevertheless in its ‘squalid form’, the subject turns out to be a lower entity than he actually is and forsakes his individuality for the wrong cause. Huxley draws a distinction between the opposing forms of it. As he describes: “*The sexuality of Eden* and *the sexuality of the sewer* both of them have power to carry the individual beyond the limits of his or her insulated self. But the second and (one would sadly guess) the commoner variety takes those who indulge in it to a lower level of subhumanity, evokes the consciousness, and leaves the memory, of a completer alienation, than does the first.”⁶⁷

Will Farnaby suffers from the void in his self and tries to get it filled through sleeping with other women. It is his downward self-transcendence; in other words it is his attempt to escape from the burden of his consciousness. He is not happy with his wife Molly, because he thinks that she is too affectionate towards him and is sensually incapable. As Will tells Susila –referring to Molly, “And a Sister of Mercy, unfortunately is not the same as a Wife of Love.”⁶⁸ Therefore he starts having affairs in the first year of their marriage:

“How soon,” Susila asked, after a long silence, “did you start having affairs on the side?”

Will smiled his flayed smile. “Three months to the day after our wedding. The first time was with one of the secretaries at the office. Goodness, what a bore! After that there was a young painter, a curly-headed little Jewish girl [Rachel] whom Molly had helped with money while she was studying at the Slade. I used to go to her studio twice a week, from five to seven. It was almost three years before Molly found out about it.”⁶⁹

Despite the fact that Molly learns about her husband’s affairs, Will does not give up his infidelity. As a consequence of this, he grows hating himself and Molly at the same time, because of the suffering he has caused in her. He starts considering

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 5 (italics mine).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 6 (italics mine).

⁶⁸ Huxley, *Island*, p. 102.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

his wife as constricting his freedom –in this way he denies coming face to face with his mistake and attempts to whitewash it –unsuccessfully:

“By loving me so much and being so miserable about what I was doing—what she really forced me to do—she was putting pressure on me, she was trying to restrict my freedom. But meanwhile she was genuinely unhappy; and though I hated her for blackmailing me with her unhappiness, I was filled with pity for her. Pity,” he repeated, “not compassion. Compassion is suffering-with, and what I wanted at all costs was to spare myself the pain her suffering caused me, and avoid the painful sacrifices by which I could put an end to her suffering.”⁷⁰

Will’s misinterpretation of freedom and his problematic attitude towards women have clear parallels to that of Nicholas’ in **The Magus**. Nicholas, too, is not able to engage himself in an authentic relationship with women and he reduces them to the position of mere objects to be played with. Just like the way he gets bored with girlfriends and jumps from one to another, Will too finds relief in collecting relationships and usurps them for his own purpose.

Will and Nicholas are both dishonest with themselves and this is reflected in their relationships. Mistaking love for a sensual need, Will is further removed from his wife and the gap between them grows wider. He supposes that he will be able to put things back to their order, but commits another grave mistake in assuming as such:

And this aesthetic pity of mine was so intense, every time her unhappiness came to a head, that I could almost mistake it for love. Almost, but never quite. For when I expressed my pity in physical tenderness (which I did because that was the only way of putting a temporary stop to her unhappiness and to the pain her unhappiness was inflicting on me) that tenderness was always frustrated before it could come to its natural consummation.⁷¹

His making love to Molly –with the intention to make up for his mistake or to make Molly happy– shows the way in which he objectifies even the act itself. It is reminiscent of the way Nicholas thinks about sleeping with Alison after she learns about his ‘selfish’ interest in Lily and gets angry with him: “Perhaps after all there was a solution; to get her back into the hotel, make love to her, prove to her through

⁷⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 103-104.

⁷¹ **Ibid.**, p. 104.

the loins that I did love her ... and why not, let her see that I might be worth suffering, just as I was and always would be.”⁷²

Similar to Lily’s function in **The Magus**, Will’s ultimate affair with a woman –called Babs–, whom he met on a plane flying to London from Nairobi, turns everything upside down. He gets influenced by her sensuality⁷³ to such an extent that he almost gets addicted to her. “‘Could not have liked less,’ he repeated, ‘or disapproved of more. But if you’re an addict you’ve got to have your dope –the dope that you know in advance is going to destroy you’.”⁷⁴ Unlike his previous affairs, the one with Babs satisfies Will’s sensual needs, thus he feels himself happier than ever. However, as it has been mentioned before, Will’s affair with Babs also makes him more self-conscious than before:

And the unhappiness that, because of Babs, he had inflicted upon Molly was proportionately greater than anything she had had to suffer on account of Rachel. Proportionately greater, too, had been his own exasperation, his own resentful sense of being blackmailed by her love and suffering, his own remorse and pity, his own determination, in spite of the remorse and the pity, to go on getting what he wanted, what he hated himself for wanting, what he resolutely refused to do without.⁷⁵

His sense of guilt reaches its climax when he decides to break up with Molly to be completely alone with Babs, and it results in Molly’s death in a car-accident. On the very same day of his wife’s death, Will sleeps with Babs despite the fact that he has promised himself never to see her again.⁷⁶ Will is not able to keep up his word, simply because he is ready to be haunted by the fantasy that Babs represents, just like

⁷² Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 272.

⁷³ “He could do it, for all practical purposes was compelled to do it, because . . . well, because Babs had certain physical peculiarities which Molly did not possess and behaved at certain moments in ways which Molly would have found unthinkable” (**Island**, pp. 9-10)

⁷⁴ Huxley, **Island**, p. 105.

⁷⁵ **Ibid.**, pp. 105-106.

⁷⁶ “At the funeral, when the coffin was lowered into the grave, he had promised himself that he would never see Babs again. Never, never, never again. That evening, while he was sitting at his desk trying to write an article on ‘What’s Wrong with Youth,’ trying not to remember the hospital, the open grave, and his own responsibility for everything that had happened, he was startled by the shrill buzzing of the doorbell. A belated message of condolence, no doubt. . . He had opened, and there, instead of the telegram, was Babs dramatically without make-up and all in black. ‘My poor, poor Will!’ They had sat down on the sofa in the living room, and she had stroked his hair and both of them had cried. An hour later, needless to say, they were naked and in bed” (**Island**, pp. 106-107).

the way Nicholas is ‘bedazzled’ by Lily and everything she stands for at Bourani. As Nicholas explains it to Alison, “I still don’t know what it is about her [Lily]. Honestly. I only know *I’m haunted, possessed* by everything over there. Not just her.”⁷⁷ Correspondingly, Babs and Lily are to be interpreted on similar grounds here. They both stand for the fantasy generators through which the empty subject attempts to fill up the void in himself.

Nicholas and Will are both trapped in the illusionary projections of their imaginary selves. Not being able to see the emptiness inside they desperately try to busy themselves with the reflections of an ‘Ideal’ image. It is justified through their inclination to satisfy their ‘selfish’ needs with the images of ‘ideal’ women who are too perfect to be real. Lily gives Nicholas the opportunity to make his dreams come true. By chasing after the ‘figure’ that Lily represents –a damsel in distress that waits to be rescued, unprecedented in beauty and endowed with virgin-like traits– Nicholas assumes the qualities of a heroic ‘figure’. Thus, he gets further removed from the Real. For him the Real is represented by Alison, for Will it is Molly. The awareness comes when their imaginary selves are crumbled into pieces –Lily and Babs disillusion Nicholas and Will respectively– and it urges them to face their own emptiness inside.

Will’s interpretation of love is restricted to a physical world. As a result, he cannot go beyond the physical person of the female figure(s) who he takes as his beloved. He is trapped by his own limited perception; he is not able to distinguish between matter and spirit. There are clear stereotypes in his mind; hence he is not able to replace them with what is real and natural out there, either. Therefore, he finds himself in an *ad infinitum* chase of women and of sensual desires that can never be satisfied completely. This stems from a hole in Will’s self. In other words, it is the lack of wholeness that constructs the desire to fill the void –in the Lacanian Symbolic order. He desperately tries to fill it up, but this cannot be achieved without his becoming aware of his emptiness within.

In this respect, Will’s affair with Babs –who he considers to be almost an other-worldly being, as it is apparent in the way he describes her: “Babs had been

⁷⁷ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 270 (italics mine).

Rachel raised, so to speak to a higher power –Rachel squared, Rachel to the *nth*” – is his escape from his self.⁷⁸ It is his ‘downward self-transcendence’ where he frees himself from his responsibilities, and creates an illusionary image. This image, ironically enough, grows bigger as he further feeds the desires of his insulated self/ego/I and gets locked up in an imaginary world.

And meanwhile Babs had become more demanding, was claiming ever more and more of his time—time not only in *the strawberry-pink alcove*, but also outside, in restaurants, and nightclubs, at her horrible friends’ cocktail parties, on weekends in the country. “Just you and me, darling,” she would say, “all alone together.” All alone together in an isolation that gave him the opportunity to plumb the almost unfathomable depths of her mindlessness and vulgarity. But through all his boredom and distaste, all his moral and intellectual repugnance, the craving persisted. After one of those dreadful weekends, he was as hopelessly a Babs addict as he had been before.⁷⁹

“‘Downward self-transcendence’ is defined as the escape beyond the limits of the insulated ego, not to liberation but to enslavement.”⁸⁰ However, soon enough Babs begins to grow tired of Will and she breaks up with him just to be together with “an absolutely divine man from Kenya.”⁸¹ The strawberry-pink alcove continues to haunt Will’s thoughts later on, since it is a sensually powerful image that reminds Will of his affair with Babs. Now the alcove is prepared to welcome Babs’s new partner and it is a very harsh blow on Will’s ego.

One thing had led to another and when three days later, Babs came home, it was to prepare the alcove for a new tenant and give notice to the old.
“Do you really mean it Babs?”
She really meant it.⁸²

This is the moment when Will’s downward self-transcendence reaches its ultimate depth. Now it is up to him to decide whether to sink deeper in or rise from it. In **Island** it is also shown that the descending road might open the door into self-

⁷⁸ Huxley, **Island**, p. 105.

⁷⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 106 (*italics mine*).

⁸⁰ Bowering, **Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels**, p. 195.

⁸¹ Huxley, **Island**, p. 107.

⁸² **Ibid.**

awareness and spiritual enlightenment in the end. As Huxley explains in “The Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudun*”:

This raises a very important and difficult question. To what extent, and in what circumstances, is it possible for a man to make use of the descending road as a way to spiritual self-transcendence. At first sight it would seem obvious that the way down is not and can never be the way up. But in the realm of existence matters are not quite so simple as they are in our beautifully tidy world of words. In actual life a downward movement may sometimes be made the beginning of an ascent. When the shell of the ego has been cracked and there begins to be a consciousness of the subliminal and physiological othernesses underlying personality, it sometimes happens that we catch a glimpse, fleeting but apocalyptic, of that other Otherness, which is the Ground of all being.⁸³

Will’s symbolic fall turns out to be a literal one at the very beginning of the novel. Shipwrecked on the island of Pala –which stands for the island of his self –he tries to climb off a cliff. Being frightened by the snakes, he loses his balance and falls down. However, he does not let it go and resumes his climbing. “His knee hurt him excruciatingly; but he climbed on. There was no alternative. And then the light had begun to fail. In the end he was climbing almost in darkness, climbing by faith, climbing by sheer despair.”⁸⁴ Now his suffering becomes real. The pain makes itself felt both mentally –via his wife’s death; and physically –via his knee. On Pala he does not get rid of the pain but learns how to go beyond it through upward self-transcendence and next follows awareness of the not-self:

So long as we are confined within our insulated selfhood, we remain unaware of the various not-selves with which we are associated –the organic not-self, the subconscious not-self, the collective not-self of the psychic medium in which all our thinking and feeling have their existence, and the immanent and transcendent not-self of the Spirit. Any escape, even by a descending road, out of insulated selfhood makes possible at least a momentary awareness of the not-self on every level, including the highest.⁸⁵

Not-self is reached through the deconstruction of the self/I/insulated ego in the Symbolic order. It is achieved through transcending the misappropriated perception

⁸³ Huxley, “The Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudun*,” par. 17.

⁸⁴ Huxley, *Island*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ Huxley, “The Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudun*,” par. 17.

of the “I” –which is culturally, socially and linguistically constructed. According to Huxley, it is impossible to talk about the existence of a stable self:

In ‘The Education of an Amphibian’, an essay in *Adonis and the Alphabet*, Huxley likens man to an amphibian inhabiting different and incommensurable universes; below the threshold of the consciousness every human being has a not-self, or more accurately ‘five or six merging but clearly distinguishable not-selves.’ There is the personal not-self, the region of the subconscious drives and repressions to which Freud paid so much attention; the not-self in charge of the body, the vegetative soul or the entelechy; the not-self from which ‘we derive our insights and inspirations’, the not-self of the shared symbols which stand for man’s deepest tendencies, the Jungian archetypes; the not-self of visionary experience which provides the various religions with their ‘notions of the Other World, of Heaven and Hell; and finally, ‘beyond all the rest, but immanent in every mental or material event... that universal Not-Self, which men have called the Holy Spirit, the Atman-Brahman, the Clear Light, Suchness’. The true function of education, therefore, is to find out how human beings can be taught to make the best of all worlds, from ‘the world of self-conscious, verbalized intelligence’ at one end of the mind’s spectrum to the ‘world of the unconscious intelligences immanent in the mind-body’ at the other. This calls for a system of education that is more than a device for passing on correct knowledge.⁸⁶

Huxley’s thoughts on the true function of education find their expressions in **Island**. On Pala, children are taught from infancy to be completely aware of the world, and of themselves. However, in other parts of the world there is miseducation and it prevents the subject from getting to know who he ‘really’ is.

Murugan, the next Raja in line, is a good example in that he shows the way in which a person might be abused –due to not being allowed to actualize himself. Having been raised by a zealous mother –who has been the princess of Rendang and currently the Rani of Pala– in Switzerland, Murugan is alienated from the Palanese way of life. Therefore his perception of reality is misappropriated. Referring to Murugan, Viaja says to Will: “He’s had miseducation in Europe –Swiss governesses, English tutors, American movies, everybody’s advertisements– and he’s had reality eclipsed for him by his mother’s brand of spirituality. So it’s no wonder he pines for scooters.”⁸⁷ As a consequence of this, Murugan finds relief in the subject-object relationship. For him true satisfaction comes when he becomes a consumer himself.

⁸⁶ Bowering, **Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels**, pp. 191-192.

⁸⁷ Huxley, **Island**, p. 141.

He is easily tempted by the 'shiny' promises of the industrial world. He is totally blind to his emptiness inside and it turns him into an easy prey for Colonel Dipa who starts whetting Murugan's appetite with his white Mercedes.⁸⁸ This becomes evident when Will finds Murugan deeply engrossed in reading the catalogue⁸⁹ Colonel Dipa has given to him:

"Colonel Dipa?" What an odd kind of present from Hadrian to Antinous! He looked again at the picture of the motorbike, then back at Murugan's glowing face. Light dawned; the Colonel's purpose revealed itself. *The serpent tempted me, and I did eat.* The tree in the midst of the garden was called the Tree of Consumer Goods, and to the inhabitants of every underdeveloped Eden the tiniest taste of its fruit, and even the sight of its thirteen hundred and fifty-eight leaves, had power to bring the shameful knowledge that, industrially speaking, they were stark-naked. The future Raja of Pala was being made to realize that he was no more than the untrousered ruler of a tribe of savages.⁹⁰

However for the Palanese it is the world outside that is barbarious and savage. " 'But whether we shall be able to persuade you people to follow our example, or whether we shall even be able to preserve our tiny oasis of humanity in the midst of your worldwide wilderness of monkeys—that, alas,' said Dr. MacPhail, 'is another question'."⁹¹ During Will's visit to a school office on Pala, Mr Menon, Under-Secretary of Education, elaborates further on the educational differences between these two worlds –on and outside of Pala. Associating the education system in America with the intention to serve mass consumption, and that of Russia to strengthen the state; Mr Menon says that the Palanese boys and girls are "neither for mass consumption, nor for strengthening the state."⁹² And here come Will's question and Mr Menon's subsequent answer:

"And what in fact are they for?"

"For actualization, for being turned into full-blown human beings."

⁸⁸ "Looking up into that beautiful, sulky young face, Will suddenly recognized, with a start of surprise, the elegantly tailored youth he had met, five days before, at Rendang-Lobo, had driven with in Colonel Dipa's white Mercedes all over the island" (*Island*, p. 22).

⁸⁹ " 'What a tome!' Will pulled the ponderous volume out of the bag and laid it on the table. 'Sears, Roebuck and Co.,' he read aloud, 'Spring and Summer Catalog'" (*Island*, p. 133).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 202

Will nodded. “*Notes on What's What*,” he commented. “Become what you really are.”

“The Old Raja, said Mr. Menon, “was mainly concerned with what people really are on the level that's beyond individuality. And of course we're just as much interested in that as he was.”⁹³

The Mahayanist philosophy of the Palanese is basically about making it possible for the individual to *actualize* himself. This can happen through a unifying and welcoming attitude that does not ignore the presence of the matter/the body and the spirit/the mind, but takes them as a whole. In **Island** the actualization is possible through Eastern philosophy and mysticism. “Buddhism, Huxley tells us, came to Pala about 800 A.D.; not from Ceylon but from Bengal so that the Palanese were not only Mahayanists but also Tantrics.”⁹⁴ What is significant about Tantra is that it does not appeal to a limited perception. To say it more precisely, it neither renounces the world nor puts it on a highest pedestal. As Ranga elaborates about it:

“If you’re a Tantrik, you don’t renounce the world or deny its value; you don’t try to escape into a Nirvana apart from life, as the monks of the Southern School do. No, you accept the world, and you make use of it; you make use of everything you do, of everything that happens to you, of all the things you see and hear and taste and touch, as so many means to your liberation from the prison of yourself.”⁹⁵

In her article Velma Lush explains that “Nirvana is a blissful state or freeness of mind. You can see the true essence of things; you can see their Reality. The Palanese are taught to understand and appreciate life by being constantly aware of who you are in relationship to all experiences.”⁹⁶ Then the main idea behind the Mahayanist philosophy is that people are parts of a larger universe –which is described as the Clear Light of the Void, Mystical Divine Ground, or Godhead– however, they are also encouraged to evaluate themselves individually. It is not just about losing the distinctions of your identity in complete unity. On the contrary, the question is to be

⁹³ **Ibid.**

⁹⁴ Bowering, **Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels**, p. 195.

⁹⁵ Huxley, **Island**, pp. 75-76.

⁹⁶ Velma Lush, “The Influences of Eastern Philosophies in Aldous Huxley’s *Island*,” w.date, par. 4, (Online) <http://www.huxley.net/island/>, 5 March 2013.

able to pass beyond the confinements of the constructed self/ego/I and to experience the existence of not-selves that are present within:

“Well, as I was saying,” Mr. Menon continued, “adolescents get both kinds of education concurrently. They’re helped to experience their *transcendental unity* with all other sentient beings and at the same time they’re learning, in their psychology and physiology classes, that each one of us has his own constitutional *uniqueness*, everybody’s different from everybody else.”⁹⁷

In this way, the subject gets the opportunity to have a clear understanding of his Self/not-self. Only then there appears freedom. It is a state of enlightenment that does away with all types of binary oppositions and breaks down the subject/object relationship. “ ‘Liberation,’ Dr Robert began again, ‘the ending of sorrow, ceasing to be what you ignorantly think you are and becoming what you are in fact’.”⁹⁸

Therefore the main purpose of education on Pala is to teach its people how to become themselves by means of contemplation, awareness and mindfulness. This is the reason why they are constantly reminded by the mynah birds to pay *attention* to their not-selves, and are trained in the art of spiritual insight and pure receptivity.

Attention, Huxley, explains, is the whole point. Attention to the experience of something given, a momentary escape from the memories and anticipations, from all the symptoms of the conscious ‘I’. In a similar way work and love-making through constant awareness, are transfigured into the yoga of work and the yoga of love-making.⁹⁹

As I have mentioned before, Will’s relationship with Babs was his downward self-transcendence. In this way he thought that he would be able to escape beyond the borders of his insulated ego and become free. However, it resulted in his enslavement and total depravation which, eventually, transformed itself into total addiction. Unlike the yoga of love that carries elementary sexuality to a higher means of self-enlightenment, Will’s affair with Babs sank him deeper into the darkness of his self:

⁹⁷ Huxley, **Island**, p. 202 (italics mine).

⁹⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 169.

⁹⁹ Bowering, Bowering, **Aldous Huxley: a Study of the Major Novels**, p. 204.

Will did not answer immediately. He was thinking of what had happened between himself and Babs on the evening of Molly's funeral. The yoga of anti-love, the yoga of resented addiction, of lust and the self-loathing that reinforces the self and makes it yet more loathsome.¹⁰⁰

In contrast to Will's sensualism or Murugan's interest in scooters, it is highly difficult to lure the Palanese into consumerism –on any level– because they do not suffer from any lack(s) in being; therefore their desires are not insatiable. They get complete satisfaction in non-duality and union that are expressed in the yoga of love – that is *maithuna*. It is a technique for self-enlightenment and self-transcendence – for getting from the self to the not-self. It brings awareness alongside, and the secret is to pay attention:

“And it *does* make it easier,” Ranga confirmed. “And that's the whole point of *maithuna*. It's not the special technique that turns love-making into yoga; it's the kind of awareness that the technique makes possible. Awareness of one's sensations and awareness of the not-sensation in every sensation.”

“What's a not-sensation?”

“It's the raw material for sensation that my not-self provides me with.”

“And you can pay attention to your not-self?”

“Of course.”

Will turned to the little nurse. “You too?”

“To myself,” she answered, “and at the same time to my not-self. And to Ranga's not-self, and to Ranga's self, and to Ranga's body, and to my body and everything it's feeling. And to all the love and the friendship. And to the mystery of the other person— the perfect stranger, who's the other half of your own self, and the same as your not-self. And all the while one's paying attention to all the things that, if one were sentimental, or worse, if one were spiritual like the poor old Rani, one would find so unromantic and gross and sordid even. But they aren't sordid, because one's also paying attention to the fact that, when one's fully aware of them, those things are just as beautiful as all the rest, just as wonderful.”¹⁰¹

Maithuna is just one of the ways that helps the person to divest himself of the illusions present in the Symbolic order, and allows an emancipation of the consciousness from an illusionary perception of the self/I alike. It is the breakthrough of a consciousness that is limited to the ego form.

At the end of the novel, by realizing that he, in fact, is part of a unity, Will Farnaby achieves to take a humble view of his ego once he is brought closer to

¹⁰⁰ Huxley, *Island*, p. 261.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

Oneness –the materiality of existence in the Real order. Susila MacPhail guides him out of his self to his not-self. Here he pays attention to the mystery of the other person –that is Susila– and to everything that this new awareness provides. He can no longer differentiate between who is touching and who is touched: “ ‘One touches and, in the act of touching, one’s touched. Complete communication, but nothing communicated. Just an exchange of life, that’s all’ ” says Susila.¹⁰²

¹⁰² **Ibid.**, 278.

5. JOHN FOWLES

John Fowles is generally considered to be a postmodern writer. However, I think that it will be futile to try to come up with a single definition for him. Nevertheless, for the start, it can be said that Fowles is one of the most prominent and prolific writers of his era and the inability to define him is particularly related to his idiosyncratic stance towards life.

Fowles's celebration of mystery and his paying crucial attention to the function of hazard/play in life imbues him with the qualities of both an intellectual and a philosophical thinker. Having been raised by Victorian parents, hence witnessing the obsession of Victorian mentality at first hand –which was the tendency to allocate a clear definition or sign to everything around– it was not unexpected that Fowles would develop a dislike for the authorities of any kind. This is why he quitted the army and decided to go to New College in Oxford to be able to study French. By the time he graduated, he was familiar with the works of important French writers such as Sartre and Camus. However, as he honestly explains in his interview with Charles Managhan dating back to 1970, “...existentialism hit the world when I was at Oxford and we all read Sartre and Camus and completely *misunderstood* them.”¹ In relation to this, “Fowles utilizes and satirizes the *misinterpretation* of the existentialists in the attitude of the young Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus* who with his friends forms a club called Les Hommes Revoltés.”²

In his interview with John Fowles, Roman K. Singh best explains what kind of an author he is:

Any man who writes *The Magus* cannot be interviewed in the proper sense of the word; he can only be encountered. The distinction is an important one. The usual format of an interview is too rigid for a man who admits that he is not logical, that he is uncomfortable with the restrictions of logical thinking. Not that he is illogical; he simply sees the limits of a purely rational mind.³

¹ Oya Başak, **John Fowles: Novelist as Thinker**, Boğaziçi University, February, 1976, p. 6 (italics mine).

² **Ibid.** (italics mine)

³ Raman K. Singh, “An Encounter with John Fowles,” **Journal of Modern Literature**, Vol. 8, No: 2, 1980/1981, p. 181, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/3831226, 5 January 2012.

In **The Aristos**, which according to the author is “the most unreadable book”⁴ he has written, Fowles evaluates his ambiguous position on the literary scene by saying, “I am a poet first; and then a scientist. That is a biological fact not a recommendation.”⁵ In this way, he finds a path between intuition and cognition and brings these contrasting poles together. This is why I am inclined to side with the critics who consider John Fowles as “a key writer linking modernism and postmodernism.”⁶

Having been inspired by Zen Buddhism, John Fowles, in a 1969 interview for *Life* magazine said, “More and more I have been influenced by Zen Buddhist attitudes. What matters is the thing itself.”⁷ In the following year he further elaborated on the same topic –in an article published in *Sports Illustrated*, “As soon as we have a thing named, says Zen, we start forgetting about its real nature.”⁸

It is also possible to trace Fowles’s ideas about Buddhism in **The Magus**. Obviously, in the act of ‘naming’ there is a sense of loss and what Conchis has been trying to do is to make Nicholas realize the emptiness lurking within himself. This loss is the direct result of the subject’s entrance into the Symbolic and getting disconnected from the Real. In return, the meaning gets enclosed in a restricted environment and words begin to replace facts –very much in touch with Conchis’s assertion, “Words are for truth. For facts. Not fiction.”⁹ Nevertheless in Conchis’s domain Nicholas exchanges reality with the real. Here the distinction between the painting and the painter gets blurred, the illusion knocks out the concrete, and the flux of life gets frozen on a static point. This is why Nicholas Urfe yearns for an untitled/fresh mystery in his life –as an escape. Just like a broken branch, Urfe has been disconnected from the trunk of the tree –which stands for the Real/Alison; so he tries reconnecting himself via a ‘shiny’ new, but proportionately ‘dark’ and artificial pseudo-branch that will only satisfy his bodily longings –which is his entrance into the Symbolic. In his passage from the Real into the Symbolic, Nicholas does not

⁴ John Fowles, **The Aristos**, London: Picador, Macmillan General Books, 1993, p.196.

⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 13.

⁶ Roula Ikonomakis, **Post-War British Fiction as ‘Metaphysical Ethnography’**, Peter Lang, 2008, p. 19.

⁷ Peter Wolfe, “The Passion to Exist,” **John Fowles, Magus and Moralist**, London: Associated University Press, 1976, p. 33.

⁸ **Ibid.**

⁹ John Fowles, **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 96.

refrain from formulating a name for Alison so that he can objectify her, and turns a blind eye on her true ‘nature’. Needless to say that he finds what he looks for at *Bourani*. However, it leaves a bitter taste in his mouth. After all, nobody can swim in *Death Water* –which is the literal meaning of the place itself. It lacks authenticity and depth. For Nicholas what was once in close proximity is now in a faraway land. Ironically enough, to be able to see the true dimension of what he has already ignored, he is to be disconnected from the everyday ‘thing’. As he says, “I had just written a letter to Alison, but already she seemed *far away*, not in distance, not in time, but in some dimension for which there is no name. *Reality* perhaps.”¹⁰ Appropriately it is possible to say that ‘truth’ was ‘hidden’ just in front of his nose.

When a Zen master was once asked what Zen was, he replied, “Your everyday thought”. Is this not plain and most straightforward? It has nothing to do with any sectarian spirit. Christians and Buddhists can practice Zen just as big fish and small fish are both contentedly living in the same ocean. Zen is the ocean, Zen is the air, Zen is the mountain, Zen is thunder and lightning, the spring flower, summer heat and winter snow; nay, more than that, Zen is the man.¹¹

In parallel to Zen’s celebration of a world which is not tyrannized by the shackles of ‘prejudiced’ and therefore ‘constructed’ rules of reasoning/naming and logic; Rumi also supports the idea that man should not be distracted by the exterior image. He addresses to us from the 13th century: “Pass beyond form, escape from names! Flee titles and names toward meaning [M IV 1285]!”¹² In another couplet he gets astonished at those people who do not have the capacity to make the distinction between form and meaning: “Day and night, the Sea keeps on churning the foam. You behold the foam but not the Sea –how strange [M III 1271]!”¹³ Here, the question that Conchis asks Nicholas should not be skipped –in that it goes very much in line with Rumi’s comparing the exterior (*zahir*)/form to the foam and the interior (*batin*)/meaning to the sea:

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49 (italics mine).

¹¹ D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Ed. Christmas Humphreys, Rider Press, 1991, p. 45.

¹² William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, State University of New York Press, 1983, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

“*Utram bibis? Aquam an undam?*” Which are you drinking? The water of the wave? ‘He [de Deukans] drank the wave?’

‘We all drink both. But he meant the question should always be asked. It is not a precept. But a mirror.’

[...] He led the way through to my room, and lit my lamp, and wished me good night. But in his own door he turned and looked back towards me. For once his face showed a moment’s doubt, a glimpse of lasting uncertainty.

‘The water or the wave?’

Then he went.¹⁴

The reader cannot ‘hear’ Nicholas’s answer, because the chapter ends here. Maybe Nicholas was not ready or ‘ripe’ enough to come up with an answer and he preferred to keep silent. He still had several tests and trials on his way. Nicholas’s path to knowledge/love is to be analysed at length. Now, it is only my intention to point out the collective aspects that go hand in hand with the text(s) and Eastern philosophy in general. Nonetheless, I do not think that –as I have also stated in the very beginning of the “Introduction” – it is possible to formulate an exclusively static and frozen explanation.

John Fowles is not the type of a writer who clutches the reins firmly; on the contrary he holds them as freely as possible and allows the reader to wander in whichever direction he likes to go. He wants them to make their own decisions. In relation to that, in one of his interviews dating back to the 1980s, Fowles states:

I think there’s a tiny modicum of free will if you keep yourself very open. I think occasionally you can make a decision which is possibly free. I wouldn’t like to argue this on philosophical ground, but I sense that ninety percent of human life is conditioned. But, you see, that tiny fragment where there’s a doubt is vital. All my novels are about how you achieve that possible -possibly nonexistent- freedom. The problem of seeing yourself.

And the price one has to pay –

The price one has to pay. The difficulty in the smallest reward; heaven knows you rarely see yourself clear. It comes as almost a shock.

It’s terrifying. Would you say then, that your work really portrays one or more of what one calls these passions? In other words, the search for knowledge, or whatever?

Search for self-knowledge...I’m an optimist in that. I think self-knowledge always does bring you greater happiness, although it’s painful. It is rather like psychoanalysis, I suppose. It can be very painful in process, but I think on the whole one comes out slightly better in the end.¹⁵

¹⁴ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 188.

¹⁵ Singh, **op. cit.**, pp. 185-186.

Fowles's highlighting the importance of being able to make 'free' decisions in life is a recursive idea that can be discussed from endless points of views. Even Philosophy, as reasoning or as a thinking system, came into being with the question: 'Is man free?' If he is free, then to what extent is he aware of his freedom? Where does freedom start and where does it end? If it starts and ends at different locations, does it not mean that 'freedom' –as a value by itself, is already a 'restricted' and 'bordered' concept? If everybody is free to do anything they want, how then is it likely to lead a peaceful and social life? What are the ethical and religious interpretations of it? Obviously, the existing questions incessantly give birth to other question marks and the process goes on, only to culminate in a Gordian knot. For the moment I will only engage in 'undoing' the knot by plainly asserting that freedom has a mysterious quality, therefore it can never be completely apprehended. It escapes all concrete definitions. Besides, the mystery lies not in the *answers* that are given by different philosophers, writers, poets, thinkers, critics that appeared on the history scene; but in the *questions* that it incurs. Sometimes, questions are asked not with the expectation of an answer, since most of the time the answers act like clots that stop bleeding. If there is no flux, there is no life. As Conchis also expresses it in **The Magus**, "An answer is always a form of death."¹⁶ It kills the mystery.

Mystery asks for a paradoxical ground in the very first place. This is why, as he himself also states, Fowles is a "poet-scientist"; he is a writer who occupies not only an ambiguous, but also a clear place in the realm of literature. In my opinion, this is the very quality that makes him naturally mysterious, since he is the one who believes in the *heart*. As Fowles puts it in his interview with Roy Newquist in 1964:

I must deplore the stress on purely clever writing—the mere manipulation of words...The danger of this I think is that you breed a sort of rococo cleverness which may be interesting to literary cliques and other stratospheric elements of the literary world, but which basically says nothing about the human condition, which teaches nothing, which doesn't touch people's hearts. *I believe in the heart*. In other words, I think writing tends to be too cerebral...¹⁷

¹⁶ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 626.

¹⁷ Başak, **op. cit.**, p. 12.

Fowles considers 'the manipulation of words' as a dangerous activity, because it points out an arrangement in which feelings, ideas and thoughts have been stripped off their meaning; thus not being able to convey anything reliable to the other side. It also brings to our mind the discrepancy between language and reality on the one hand and the interaction in between, on the other hand –that is to say the structuralist and poststructuralist approaches in essence. Derrida's criticism of the logo-centric standing of Western thought has certain similarities with John Fowles's assumption that novel-writing is the art of the impossible. Logocentrism is centred on the claim that all knowledge is rooted in a transcendent signifier that remains beyond the binaries. Applying what logocentrism proposes to the act of writing –which is considered as an art of 'beyond' by Fowles– we can see the reason why he is a great supporter of mystery and the unknown. For him, novel-writing mainly focuses on a meaning/centre that escapes both the author and the reader. Thus it cannot be substituted by an alternative, as it would hamper the notion of mystery or deferral that is inherent in the text or life in general. Similarly, Derrida holds the idea that each text can be deconstructed, because it is grounded upon conceptual hierarchies that rise from logo-centric assumptions. Therefore it is inevitable that every single attempt to fasten a meaning to a text is to be proven fruitless in the end, since meaning always evades us. We may assume to have grasped reality, however, according to Derrida, it is already an appropriated interpretation of our egoistical perception. This is what Western thought has been attempting to achieve for years – to lay claim to reality and fill it up with its own interpretation; and as a result of this, exterminating the grey areas in the long run. However it is not possible to come up with a replacement for what has been lost already, and this is exactly the point where energy and creativity are located. In Fowles's own words:

Novels may also be seen, without exception and even when set in future, as salvage operations. Of course what is to be recovered and repaired can vary immensely, but always at the heart of it lies a sense of loss –and one the novel can never remedy, though it may assuage in part. I have argued elsewhere that this seemingly tragic (an adjective many writers secretly cherish in their self-pitying image of themselves) failure, or inability to recover all one wants is really so much petrol in our psychic engines –and it is also why novel-writing appears to be so markedly obsessive an activity. The truth is that if we ever did, by some miracle, recover our loss (in

psychoanalytical terms, gain both intellectual and emotional insight into why we are as we are), we should be dead as novelists. If politics is the art of the possible, novel-writing is quite certainly the art of the impossible. Deep down we are much closer to pathological gamblers than pathetic martyrs crucified on a failure to win.¹⁸

In the light of the quotation above, it would not be wrong to say that politics cannot exist without rhetoric. It is a system that works through manipulation, illusion, forgery, dreams, shiny promises that meddle with the subject's interaction with the real. It is mainly foregrounded on a level which cannot even bear the presence of 'loss', because it contradicts with the supposedly self-sufficient aspect lurking deep beneath the term itself. To say it more precisely, politics is the art of filling all the empty holes with its particular interpretation(s), therefore not granting the individual the opportunity to come up with his personal conclusions; very much like the logocentric approach. Needless to say that, as a consequence of this, the loss becomes artificially eradicated and the subject gets alienated from his own source – namely the ultimate knowledge or the pre-logocentric state. Accordingly, Fowles's naming novel-writing the art of the impossible becomes justified in the sense that, unlike the politics or the manipulation of words, this 'authentic' art does not give lip service, but brings the individual face to face with his own unmediated reality –that is the loss.

20th century modern man can no longer bear the emptiness that appears before him, thus he finds the solution in engaging himself with what is already out there on the surface, without feeling the need to contemplate it. In this way, he does not learn anything but gets lost in an endless bombardment of information. He attempts to fill the hole in himself through artificial means, but can never become successful.

Fowles does not cherish the vision of a static world, because in such a condition there would be no movement, change or chance for upgrading. As an author who has always been on the side of 'becoming', he does believe in the eternal flowing that takes place both on the macrocosmic and the microcosmic levels. Having been influenced by the thoughts of Heraclitus, "He too sees life as a constant

¹⁸ H. W. Fawcner, "Foreword," **The Timescapes of John Fowles**, London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984, p. 10.

struggle of opposites: reality and illusion, matter and spirit, love and hate. Such struggle leads to complexity and paradox, elements which enrich the fluid and continuous motion which constitutes life.”¹⁹ For Fowles, paradoxes and conflicts are utmost necessities in life, since they bring the power of an intrinsic energy alongside. This is why **The Magus** is full of riddles to be solved –for both Nicholas and the reader. As readers not knowing where to place our foot on the next step, we, in fact, find the medium to return to ourselves and meet the results of our own actions, which can only happen if we step inside. Accordingly, what John Fowles achieves here is actually nothing other than removing the outlines of the frame and making us see through our own eyes. Furthermore, he does never manipulate words; he does not say, yet suggests. In other words, by putting art as a means of involvement in life he whispers through his work, because life is too mysterious to be analysed by the ‘all-seeing’ eye of reason only. As Virginia Woolf also writes: “Life is not a series of giglamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.”²⁰ It goes without saying that John Fowles’s **The Magus** stands as a fictional ‘art’ work that illuminates the inner conflicts of the self-blinded subject who has been imprisoned in the figurative chamber of his ‘freedom’. In parallel to it, a prominent figure of the Aesthetic Movement, Walter Pater (1839-1894) thinks that art is the only way to stop time, as it highlights the importance of the ecstatic single moment. He also holds the idea that only through art and the senses is it possible to escape from the ugly and industrial reality:

In the famous “Conclusion” to “The Renaissance” (1868-1873) for instance, he [Walter Pater] speaks of how every person enclosed in the “narrow chamber of the individual mind” can directly experience only “the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations”; these are unstable, flickering, inconsistent, and the individual mind is therefore condemned to keep “as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.”²¹

¹⁹ Başak, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁰ Ian Watt, **A Norton Critical Edition, Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness**, Ed. Robert Kimbrough, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Fourth Edition, p. 350.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

The self-exiled protagonist of **The Magus**, Nicholas Urfe –in his “limitless” capacity to do whatever he wants, in fact falls victim to the dictates of the external powers. Instead of putting an end to his figurative exile from his own Self/the Real; Nicholas gets reduced to the position of an escapee whose longings have already been shaped by the system.

I think the inability to identify Fowles with precision has been justified in this chapter. He may be termed as ‘elusive’ writer who does not like cherishing a distinct place that is reserved for him by the literary critics. Still, it would be inappropriate to consider him as a writer only, since he is much more than that single label, he always goes beyond the scope of what he says or writes. Accordingly, the attempt to analyse **The Magus** itself is as challenging as coming face to face with the author, because throughout the process it is not only John Fowles who is confronted, but also the prejudices of the self/the ego. Here the act of reading, too, assumes a distinct character –with the help of which the disoriented subject comes to himself. It results from the mysterious quality that is present in the act of writing, which is regarded as a medium for self-discovery. As Fowles states, “I write fiction very much to *discover* myself through texts -more precisely during the process of writing them- and very little to stake a claim on the fragrant quickstand of contemporary reputation.”²²

From a wider perspective, both reading and writing may be considered as the struggle of the postmodern subject to spot an authentic branch to clutch –in this deeply shattered abyss that we call life. It is self-therapy, the re-conquest of the lost state, the ability to see the whole picture. It is an escape from the surrounding world, where everything is so much terribly crystal clear, into the shelter of the not-self. It is a euphoric state, becoming whole again with what appears deep inside. This is why writing is not only a purposeful, but also an obsessive activity for Fowles:

It is therapy, isn't it? All writers must have a tremendous fix; they're obsessive. This is what's so marvellous about this psychiatrist's ...analysis of why people write. Why is it that you're never satisfied? Why do you go on trying, trying, trying again? Obviously what you are trying to do is -this is my theory- trying to achieve some primal state of perfection and total happiness, which you're doomed never to experience, because you will never be one year old again.

²² Fawknor, **op. cit.**, p. 9 (italics mine).

So you're doomed to failure?

You are doomed to be on an eternal hunt, and therefore obviously it's partly therapy. But I'm dubious about whether it's good therapy unless you're successful at it in critical and commercial terms. Sure, it solves one problem if you write.²³

The eternal hunt that Fowles talks about is the on-going search for meaning – both in life and in the text. It is similar to the deferral of meaning in a literary text – according to Derrida. This is the very source, as I have mentioned before, from which ‘mystery’ arises. From that point onwards, it is up to the reader to decide whether to take part in this ‘carnival’ where the distinction between fantasy and the real is blurred. It is a matter of either sitting on the armchair comfortably or rolling up the sleeves to take part in the ‘game’ itself. In other words, it is a question of being able to put yourself in the shoes of Nicholas Urfe. Perhaps, this is what John Fowles is also asking from us –to salvage ourselves from the artificially constructed identities of the age we live in, and face up with our genuine, naked, unmasked not-selves that are to appear in the land of dreams, mysteries, illusions –that is to say in fiction. The fantasy that is proposed in **The Magus** –which is a figment of the author’s imagination–, has the potential to be more authentic and reliable than our assumption of the reality in the literal world. Nicholas has already exchanged the real with the virtual on Bourani, and by further removing Nicholas’s raft from the shore, Fowles in fact tries to bring him back to the *primary state* in which he will be able to look at the world not from the outside of the mirror, but from the inside. Only then will he be capable of questioning the degree of the virtuality that he has been through. Just as Alice followed the rabbit and fell into the hole –by this means cutting all of her ties with what she has been regarding as the constituents of the real world– the reader is also bound to enter through the gate, without ever looking back.

²³ Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 199- 200.

6. THE MAGUS

The Magus is a philosophical novel. Originally titled **The Godgame**, it may be described as a challenging piece, not only for the readers and the commentators alike, but also for its author. Despite being published after **The Collector** (1963), it is the first novel written by John Fowles. Having been inspired by his own experiences as an English teacher on a Greek island, Fowles starts to form the ideas of **The Magus** in the 1950s.

I had arrived at the boarding-school on the island of Spetsai (in *katharevousa*, the so-called “pure” form of Modern Greek; it is Spetses in the domotic) at the beginning of January 1952. If Athens, then still some way from its present hideously polluted and overcrowded condition, had impressed me, the six hour boat voyage from the Piraeus to the island, in the armpit of Peloponnesus, had neighboured heaven. The five blocks of the school, a mile or two outside the small main village, were very nearly grotesque (actually and architecturally much more so than I made the place in *The Magus*, the novel I was much later to write about the island), yet I found it all both moving and amusing . . . to be only a glaze away from the hills above Epidauros, and those near Mycenae and Tiryns; and above all, to be so miraculously remote from the suburban deserts of Essex.¹

Spending over ten years for writing it, he finally publishes the first version in 1965. However, not being completely satisfied with his work, he spends another ten years for rewriting it and the revised version gets published in 1977. As he indicates in an interview, “It always disappointed me technically. It was full of mistakes; stylistically irritated me. I missed a number of tricks and means of telling a story.”² In the same interview, Fowles goes on explaining the reason why **The Magus** has a different place for him, “I like the worst best” he says and continues, “You know it is the first book I wrote. It’s a young man’s book for young people. I feel a kind of tenderness for it. I told someone the other day it’s really where I taught myself to write the novel. We all need a book where we teach ourselves what the novel is.”³ In

¹ John Fowles, “Behind *The Magus*,” **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 42, No:1, John Fowles Issue Spring, 1996, pp. 59- 60, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/441675, 5 January 2012.

² Raman K. Singh, “An Encounter with John Fowles,” **Journal of Modern Literature**, Vol. 8, No: 2, 1980/1981, p. 186, 2012 Periodicals Archive, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/3831226, 5 January 2012.

³ **Ibid.**, pp. 186-187.

that respect **The Magus** is the first experimental novel of the author, which portrays his attempts at striking a balance between the artifice of fiction and real life. In the foreword to H. W. Fawcner's **The Timescapes of John Fowles**, he refers to the act of writing as being a discovery, through which he is able to form and get transformed:

I write fiction very much to discover myself through texts – more precisely during the process of writing them – and very little to stake a claim on the flagrant quicksand of contemporary reputation. Studies like Dr. Fawcner's, that help me discover, even where I may disagree, are much more to my taste. My fictions are far more experiments than anything else – that is, in search of something, or things, always beyond the outward narrative and themes. This is a main reason why I find that writing, except on one or two superficial technical levels, does not get easier as I grow older; and why I have changed direction so often in the past, in orthodox literary terms.⁴

In the same vein, it is not an easy process for the readers to ascertain a 'clear' definition to shed lights on the meaning of the novel either. In his paper "The Dialectics of Debasement in *The Magus*", Novak talks about the novel's effect on the college readers in unexpected and unsettling ways:

Although praising the novel as a compelling and absorbing work, students frequently express an uneasy concern about various problems: the meaning of Nicholas Urfe's bizarre experience, the extent to which he learns and changes, the unresolved ending, the motives and morality of those who conduct the godgame. One detects a sense of desperate urgency as these readers struggle to solve the book's mysteries.⁵

Considering the act of writing as a discovery of the self, it is not surprising that Fowles asks the same from his readers. Instead of spoon-feeding the reader, he wants them to be able to reach their own conclusions. In his opinion, every interpretation is unique on its own, so is the individual. As he states in his foreword to the revised edition of the book, "Its meaning is whatever reaction it provokes in the reader, and

⁴ John Fowles, "Foreword," Fawcner, H. W., **The Timescapes of John Fowles**, London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984, p. 9.

⁵ Frank G. Jr. Novak, "The Dialectics of Debasement in *The Magus*," **Modern Fiction Studies**, Vol. 31, No:1, Spring, 1985, p. 9, (Online)
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mfs/summary/v031/31.1.novak.html>, 5 January 2012.

so far as I am concerned there is no given 'right' reaction."⁶ This is why **The Magus** has been interpreted in a wide range of perspectives that not only contradict, but also complement one another.⁷

As Fowles explains, **The Magus** is a puzzling work for him as well: "It still slightly puzzles me how I could have written it. I know that I've had a whole series of relationships towards what it meant."⁸ Therefore, the reader is presented with a bunch of questions that wait to be resolved. Fowles goes on explaining: "I have been accused of making readers work; giving them different endings to choose from, leaving moral dilemmas unresolved, using words most will have to look up in a dictionary, and so on."⁹ The challenging nature of the novel is best shown in the great number of different interpretations it received from different critics in different periods. "As Jeff Rackham has pointed out, Fowles was 'generally dismissed as a teller of yarns and suspense and while even the earliest reviewers praise[d] his craftsmanship, most [found] no need to search for symbolic echoes.'"¹⁰ **The Magus** was not well received in Britain as it was in America in the 1960s. "In Britain it was only after the publication of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in 1969 that academic critics started paying systematic – although not always sympathetic – attention to Fowles's work."¹¹

The novel has been analysed from different points of views since its publication. Following a chronological order I will briefly mention these aspects and try to depict the inexhaustibility of **The Magus** as a literary text which is still capable of sustaining numerous explanations.

⁶ John Fowles, "Foreword". **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 9.

⁷ "With regard to the final chapter, Richard B. Stolley relates the following anecdote: 'In response to a gentle letter from a New York lawyer, dying of cancer in a hospital, who said he very much wanted the couple to be united, Fowles wrote back, 'Yes, of course, they were'. On the same day he got a 'horrid' letter from an American woman who angrily demanded, 'Why can't you say what you mean, and for God's sake, what happened in the end'? Fowles replied curtly: 'They never saw each other again'. (In "The French Lieutenant Woman's Man, Novelist John Fowles," *Life*, 29 May 1970, p.60. qtd. in Olshen: 1976, p. 924.)

⁸ Carol M. Barnum, "An Interview with John Fowles," **Modern Fiction Studies**, Vol. 31, No:1, Spring, 1985, p. 193, 2012 Periodicals Archive, (Online) <http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/>, 5 January 2012, p. 193.

⁹ John Fowles, "Foreword," Fawcett, H. W., p. 13.

¹⁰ Susana Onega, "Self, World, and Art in the Fiction of John Fowles," **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 42, No. 1, John Fowles Issue, Spring, 1996, p. 29, (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441674>, 5 January 2012.

¹¹ **Ibid.**

The 1970s is the decade in which the book begins to receive serious attention. The main concern of the critics was to analyse the various elements present in the novel, such as classical mythology, the occult, existentialism, psychology, mysticism and to explain how all of these were connected to the search for self-realization. Jeff Reckham, in his paper titled “John Fowles: The Existential Labyrinth” (1972), points out that “while even the earliest of his reviewers praise his [Fowles’s] craftsmanship, most find ‘no need to search for symbolic echoes’”¹², therefore he undertakes the ignored task of seeing through the symbols used in Fowles’s work and attracts attention to its multi-layered structure: “*The Magus* is a brilliant puzzle, long and complex, and probably best compared to that old Chinese box within a box, or the fascination of a play within a play, and yet its theme is surprisingly simple.”¹³ In the same year, Delma E. Presley concentrates on the motif of “the quest for meaning through the mundane avenues of modern experience” and shows the way in which this motif functions as the main substratum on which the book is built.¹⁴ In Ralph Berets’s “*The Magus: A Study in the Creation of a Personal Myth*” (1973) Fowles is compared to the mythological figure Daedalus, manipulating the reader in the maze of his fictional work. According to Berets, Fowles’s aim is not to uncover the labyrinth, but help the *amazed* person to learn the multiplicity of the turns in the *maze* so that he becomes the perpetuator of self-mystery in the end:

Nicholas, the central character of *The Magus*, in the course of the novel must learn to act like both Daedalus and Minotaur. First he must try to understand and attempt to solve his own predicament, while later he is asked to view the whole experience as if he, himself, were the creator and manipulator of his environment. The objective of this novel is then not to reorient man so that he will be more able to cope with his feelings of alienation and impotence, but to construct an individual myth that will consequently enable an “elect” individual to impose a meaningful pattern on his existence.¹⁵

¹² Jeff Reckham, “John Fowles: The Existential Labyrinth,” **Critique**, Vol. 13, No: 3, 1972, p. 89, 2012 Periodicals Archive, (Online) <http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/>, 5 January 2012.

¹³ **Ibid.**, p. 95.

¹⁴ Delma E. Presley, “The Quest of the Bourgeois Hero: An Approach to Fowles’ *The Magus*,” **Journal of Popular Culture**, Vol. 6, No: 2, Fall, 1972, p. 395, (Online) <http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/>, 5 January 2012.

¹⁵ Ralph Berets, “*The Magus: A Study in the Creation of a Personal Myth*,” **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 19, No: 2, April, 1973, pp. 89-90, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/440890, 25 March 2011.

William J. Palmer's book **The Fiction of John Fowles** (1974), subtitled **Tradition, Art, and the Loneliness of the Individual** presents a detailed analysis of the two basic themes that feed each other in **The Magus**:

The aesthetic theme, which analyses the relationship between art and life, is correlated to the existential theme, which dramatizes the struggles of individuals to define themselves and to make moral decisions about the conduct of their lives in worlds which discourage self-expression and deny existential freedom. Fowles's greatest strength as a novelist lies in his continuous and artful linking of these two themes.¹⁶

Though various in number, the critical receptions the novel receives are centred on similar motifs in this period. They are mainly about the way in which Nicholas's experience in Conchis's domain is interpreted in mythic terms –he is supposed to pass through the world of illusions so as to be able to understand the true merit of 'the real' in the end.

In the later part of the 1970s, in his paper "John Fowles's *The Magus*: An Allegory of Self-Realization" (1976) Barry N. Olshen presents an overall summary of the points the book refers to. Here he talks about four different models of experience that Fowles makes use of: "mythology, psychology, philosophy and mysticism."¹⁷ The mythological and psychological patterns are combined in Nicholas's quest for an existential self. The mythic pattern of his journey is "exemplified with variations in the journeys of the literary and mythological figures to whom Nicholas compares himself throughout the narrative: Odysseus, Orpheus, Theseus, Alice, Crusoe, Gulliver, Candide and others."¹⁸ The psychological model is the Jungian process of individuation. "In this model the maze comes to represent the unconscious, and Nicholas's struggle consists in a confrontation with his own inner center."¹⁹ And finally linking the psychological and mystical patterns to each other, Olshen states: "Lastly, the occult way is revealed by the process of becoming a

¹⁶ William J. Palmer, **The Fiction of John Fowles: Tradition, Art, and The Loneliness of Selfhood**, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974, p. 78.

¹⁷ Barry N. Olshen, "John Fowles's *The Magus*: An Allegory of Self-Realization," **Journal of Popular Culture**, Vol 9, No: 4, Spring, 1976, p. 916, 2012 Periodicals Archive, (Online) <http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/>, 5 January 2012.

¹⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 918.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 916.

magus, an image which, we are reminded by the epigraph to the novel, comes from the Tarot, but which also appears as one of the archetypes of the collective unconscious.”²⁰

In the 1980s, the direction of the critical perspective on **The Magus** gets shifted. Obviously, Fowles’s publishing the revised version of the novel is influential in this change. “Seldom does a novelist rewrite a novel he has already published, especially when it has proved successful and found large audience. John Fowles’s revision in 1977 of *The Magus*, originally published in 1965, is worth a close look” says Michael Boccia in his comparative study of two editions in “Visions and Revisions: John Fowles’s New Version of *The Magus*.”²¹

In this period, instead of concentrating on the mythical allusions, the commentators come up with fresh interpretations of the work. For instance, Elen McDaniel’s “*The Magus*: Fowles’s Tarot Quest” (1981) interprets the quest motif from a different perspective this time. She considers **The Magus** as illustrating the initiatory quests of the past from an ironical perspective: First, she mentions the shamanic initiation rites where to be able to “become a ‘shaman’ (medicine man, magician, wizard or magus), the ‘elected’ man embarks on a personal ‘quest’ through ‘dreams, visions, trances’.”²² Then she describes the Homeric quest of Odysseus and Christ’s story, in which both “descend into the underworld in order to rise as kings.”²³ She continues with “the picaresque heroes of the new-born, realistic genre of the novel” who are also supposed to encounter initiatory ordeals of the primitive shamanic initiation.²⁴ According to McDaniel twentieth century man has lost the initiative to be part of an initiatory quest, because he does not know what he is searching for; thus an alternative is needed:

²⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 917.

²¹ Michael Boccia, “‘Visions and Revisions’: John Fowles’s New Version of *The Magus*,” **Journal of Modern Literature**, Vol. 8, No: 2, John Fowles Special Number (1980-1981), p. 235, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/3831230, 25 March 2011.

²² Elen McDaniel, “*The Magus*: Fowles’s Tarot Quest,” **Journal of Modern Literature**, Vol. 8, No: 2, John Fowles Special Number, 1980-1981, p. 248, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/3831231, 25 March 2011.

²³ **Ibid.**

²⁴ **Ibid.**

John Fowles in *The Magus* is looking for a new set of mythic symbols, for a myth less shopworn, a journey less travelled. He finds that new myth in the Tarot, which successfully embodies Fowles's own version of the twentieth century ironic quest. The author grounds his novel in the intricacies of this ancient and mysterious pack of seventy-eight cards – the same number of cards as there are chapters in *The Magus* – and draws a deliberate parallel between the quest of Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus* and the journey of the Fool through the graduated levels of the Tarot.²⁵

In his paper, "Fowles and Physics: A Study of *The Magus* as a Revised Version" (1981), Robert L. Nadeau evaluates the work from a 'scientific' approach, and draws parallels between it and the new physics – the scientific study of matter. Unlike the Newtonian order of the universe,²⁶ which sees the natural law as transcendent absolute and gives utmost importance to man's faculty of reason; the new physics suggests that there is an element of relativity in nature. This limits the former trust on knowledge and man's ability to reach objective truth. "In the new physics, space and time become space-time, correlative aspects of one unified process, and any assertions made about the nature of process are 'relative' and depend upon the position of the observer."²⁷ Einstein's Theory of Relativity, which is a direct refutation of Newtonian science, goes against the premise that things or substances are separate. For him, matter and energy are one and the same. Such a vision disrupts the sense of confidence in matter's fixed status, because as energy, matter is subject to perpetual transformation. Humankind is aware of this transformation; however, they cannot rationalize it. Eventually Nadeau associates Relativism with Fowles's appreciation of indeterminacy, mystery, creativity and hazard in **The Magus**.

Roy Mack Hill's "Power and Hazard: John Fowles's Theory of Play" (1981) investigates the idea of playing and the godgame on a wider scale. He thinks that in **The Magus** Fowles posits two kinds of games: "chess, associated with external

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁶ Newton saw the universe as a huge machine operating according to mechanical laws of interaction. He also regarded space and time as absolute identities that provide a fixed framework.

²⁷ Robert L. Nadeau, "Fowles and Physics: A Study of the *The Magus* A Revised Version," **Journal of Modern Literature**, Vol. 8, No: 2, John Fowles Special Number, 1980-1981, p. 262, (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831232>, 5 January 2012

authority, and dice, indicative of a universe subject to hazard and change.”²⁸ Then he comments on the godgame as being the essential ground on which Nicholas is disengaged from the myth of external authority (divine, human or social). Only then does Nicholas start questioning what it means to be free in the face of these control mechanisms.

It can be said that the 1980s is the time when the surface of **The Magus** begins to be scratched. As Susana Onega also puts it: “Though Fowles’s work drew more critical attention in the 1970s, much of it was shallow (and pejorative) criticism as late as 1977.”²⁹

Starting with the 1990s, the critics go much beyond surface scratching. They attempt at going deeper into the text. Now the attention is mainly directed to the interaction between reality and illusion, modern and postmodern, novel and romance, fiction and metafiction. Rather than drawing clear-cut distinctions in between, the purpose is to show the way in which Fowles brings them all together. This happens due to the poststructuralist approach to criticism which examines the interrelation between discourse, literature and ideology.

“John Fowles’ *The Magus* as a Postmodern Romance” (1995) is a study which concentrates on Fowles’s reviving the romance pattern in the guise of twentieth century prose. “For instance Elan stresses that both ‘romance’ and ‘postmodernism’ re-think history and culture [...]” in that “romance ‘threatens to expose ‘reality’ as constructed referent rather than as a ‘natural’ state of existence to which we are neutrally, textually refer.”³⁰ Similar to the way the romance denies the real world by introducing alternative realms; with its labyrinthine structure **The Magus** too raises suspicions concerning the validity of historical knowledge. Here Busato juxtaposes the tenets of the ‘less real’ romance against the ‘more real’ world of the novel as a ‘realistic’ genre. What Fowles does is making them collide and

²⁸ Roy Mack Hill, “Power and Hazard: John Fowles’s Theory of Play,” **Journal of Modern Literature**, Vol. 8, No: 2, 1980/1981, p. 212, (Online) <http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/>, 5 January 2012.

²⁹ Susana Onega, “Self, World, and Art in the Fiction of John Fowles,” **Twentieth Century Literature**, Vol. 42, No. 1, John Fowles Issue, Spring, 1996, p. 29, (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441674>, 5 January 2012.

³⁰ Cristiane De Oliveira Busato, “John Fowles’s *The Magus* as a Postmodern Romance,” **Graduate Thesis**, November, 1995, (Online) <http://dspace.c3sl.ufpr.br/dspace/bitstream/handle/1884/24518/D%20%20BUSATO,%20CRISTIANE%20DE%20OLIVEIRA.pdf?sequence=1>, 25 December 2012, p. 43.

expose 'reality' as an artefact. He follows the path from different routes, however the destination is the same: "By exploring the issue of reality and illusion in terms of characterization, metafictionality, setting, intertextuality and the theme of love, Fowles shows that illusion and reality are interdependent, two sides of the same coin."³¹

As the chronological gap between the first publication date of **The Magus** and 'today' gets narrower, the work turns out to reflect a much deeper tone than it was first thought to have. The insidious passage from modern to postmodern shows itself through Nicholas's transformation into a potential *elite*³² and the change occurring in his perception –from epistemological into ontological. Busato explains: "Fowles reworks the epistemological questions of modernism, parodying and placing them in the frame of an ontological dominant which address issues such as who we are and what we are doing here."³³ As a result, arbitrariness and the infinite mysteriousness of 'being' supersede the long-held reliance on the availability of a totalitarian explanation.

With these issues in mind, critics continue digging deeper into **The Magus** in the following decade. The fusion of the mythological elements, the question of 'reality', the multi-layered structure of the work and its self-reflexive quality attract their attention in this period, too.

In "The Use of Metanarrative" (2006) Dr. Al-Sudairy examines the way in which Nicholas's past is brought under scrutiny in the metatheatrical world of Conchis at Bourani. By witnessing the illusion of what he has been regarding as 'real', Nicholas comes to the realization of his false identity. As Al-Sudairy puts it:

Fowles, successfully uses the metanarrative to emphasize the development of Nicholas's self. Metanarrative helps Nicholas to explore his place in society, and his relationship with others. It also makes him realize his weaknesses and faults and exposes him to his reality before and after Bourani experience. [...] Nicholas's gradual realization of the self and its

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³² Here I use the word *elite* to refer to the change happening in Nicholas's perception –indicating his passage from the self to the not-self.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.49.

real needs, and the acknowledgement of the others' right to be noticed and respected is the aim of 'metanarrative'.³⁴

Despite the fact that Nicholas tries to gain a total grasp of "the truth of the [Conchis's] whole narration", his attempts prove fruitless in the end.³⁵ Because, "truth doesn't lie behind the old man's narrated past [...] [but] in self-knowledge."³⁶

The reader's looking for an ultimate meaning behind Fowles's narrated work is doomed to failure. Related to this, Michelle Phillips Buchberger, in her inspiring study (2009) on **The Magus** explains that, "Throughout the novel, both the reader and Nicholas Urfe are confronted with the fact that to unquestioningly accept surface realism as an indicator of truth, to attempt to understand events based solely on empirical or logical reasoning is to be deceived. Rather one must think that other than logically –mythically."³⁷

Now the question which waits to be answered is whether man will continue to live in the midst of uncertainties because he no longer believes in the presence of the 'real', thus exchanging it with fantasy, illusion, ambiguity; or will he accept the fact that the 'real' is too deep to be represented and therefore is placed beyond the grasp of his comprehension.

³⁴ Dr. Hend Al-Sudairy, "The Use of Metanarrative in *The Magus*," **Umm Al-Qura University Journal of Educational, Social Sciences and Humanities**, Vol. 18, No: 1, January-2006, p.14, (Online) <http://libback.uqu.edu.sa/hipres/MAGZ/3200014-5.pdf>, 15 December 2012.

³⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 18.

³⁶ **Ibid.**, p.15.

³⁷ Michelle Phillips Buchberger, "Metafiction, Historiography, and Mythopoeia in the Novels of John Fowles," **Doctor of Philosophy Thesis**, School of Arts, Brunel University. February, 2009, (Online) <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/6558/1/FullTextThesis.pdf>, 18 December 2012, p. 79.

6.1. Self-Reflection

We sat in silence and got our breaths back. I watched the yellowing sky through the delicate fenestrations in the pines. The sky in the west was hazy. A few evening wisps of cloud were curled high, tranced over the stillness of the world.

Then once more out of the blue he said quietly, '*Are you elect?*'³⁸

This is the question Conchis asks Nicholas before introducing him to the 'mysteries' in his domain. The meaning of the word 'elect' may be interpreted from different angles. Conchis associates it with being chosen by 'hazard'. As he puts it, "Hazard makes you elect. You cannot elect yourself."³⁹ Likewise, 'hazard' is the answer John Fowles gives in an interview, replying to the question whether there is a certain path he takes while writing fiction:

And you are not quite sure, very often, which road to take. It's been a great dilemma for me. I don't think this basically matters too much. It's the quality of the chapter-by-chapter writing that's important. And also I think it is true of life. I'd be suspicious, I'm always suspicious of beautifully automatic plots. You know that go click, click, click. They're attractive in detective novels and films, but that's not what real life is like. Real life is far more complex and ill functioning.

And the painful decision –

Yes, yes.

And very often you get it wrong. You write a chapter and you suddenly wake up one morning and you realize you've got to forget it. You go back and take the other fork.

*Hazard. I think that's the key thing.*⁴⁰

Placing Fowles and Conchis side by side, I would like to suggest that 'to be elect' is 'to be involved in a process of thinking which is 'self-reflexive' and to be aware of the fact that everything starts and culminates in 'hazard'.

The Magus portrays the condition of the young middle-class intellectual Nicholas Urfe, who has lost the "key thing" Fowles refers to in the interview above. In his struggle to redeem himself from this sense of 'loss' –which is the subject's fall into a postlapsarian world, and his entrance into the Symbolic order– Nicholas takes

³⁸ Fowles, **The Magus**, pp. 86-87 (italics mine).

³⁹ **Ibid.**, p.87.

⁴⁰ Singh, **op. cit.**, pp. 191-192.

shelter in an imaginary world that is set up by the eccentric millionaire on the island, Maurice Conchis. Further getting disconnected from the ‘really’ real, he becomes a character in Conchis’s godgame, only to realize that he has already been acting all throughout his life. Replacing the real with fiction and turning his back on his past, he carries the traits of post-war British man: “excessive respect for iconoclastic *avant-garde* art, contempt for tradition, paranoid sympathy with fellow-rebels and non-conformers in conflict with frequent and depressive and persecutory phases in personal and work relationships.”⁴¹ So as to portray Nicholas’s passage from the shallow cynic to a person who is now able to reflect on his past, Fowles makes him the protagonist-narrator of his work. Hence, the reader is able to discern the different stages in Nicholas’s personal development at first hand.

The novel has clear parallels in line with the Greek version of the ancient hero’s journey back home. In this journey, the hero passes the threshold by solving the difficulties he meets on his way, he bears the pain and all of these add value to his name and strength. What makes **The Magus** a modern version of this quest pattern is that unlike the larger-than-life heroes of the ancient world, Nicholas Urfe is a problematic figure who has lost track of his inner composure, thus he is an anti-hero. He finds solace in the total denial of his responsibilities, because it gives him the opportunity to take comfort in the belief that there is no meaning in life. As the events unfold, he apprehends the degree of his own self-disillusionment and starts looking beyond his self.

Structurally, **The Magus** is divided into three main sections which goes in tune with Joseph Campbell’s threefold pattern of the mythological adventure. As he puts it, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men.”⁴² Similarly, the novel also shares the structural framework of romance. “According to Northrop Frye,⁴³ the three facets of a romance are quest,

⁴¹ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 510.

⁴² Susana Onega Jaen, “Form and Meaning in The Magus,” **Miscelánea**, 1986, p. 70, (Online) <http://www.miscelaneajournal.net/images/stories/articulos/vol7/Onega7.pdf>, 18 December 2012.

⁴³ Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*. Ed. by Robert Sandler. New Haven and London: Yale UP. 1986, 178 (qtd. in Brax:2003, p. 152)

ordeal and vision.”⁴⁴ These facets are brought into effect through Nicholas Urfe’s experiences in the novel. “He is in *quest* of an authentic selfhood and a sense of direction in life, gets into an *ordeal* that tests his courage and morals, gets involved in a strange masque or Godgame, and experiences fantastic *visions* within.”⁴⁵ Last but not least **The Magus**’s narrative mode is extended to that of the Bildungsroman, which illustrates the developmental phases of its hero. It is true that we do not see Nicholas as a child or youth in **The Magus**, therefore it is difficult to consider him as a Bildungsroman character. Nevertheless we cannot deny the change happening in his perception –for the better. As Jeng explains, despite the affinities between **The Magus** and that of a Bildungsroman “the hero in *The Magus* constantly *ponders* the significance of his journey while *reflecting* on his role and the consequence of his actions in the adventure rather than taking all his life predicaments for granted.”⁴⁶

Then it can be said that **The Magus** is a fictional autobiographical novel that remains critical of itself through the use of metafiction. According to Patricia Waugh,⁴⁷ “metafiction ‘is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality’.”⁴⁸ Turning the hero’s mythological adventure upside down, parodying the patterns of romance and that of the Bildungsroman, Fowles frustrates the expectations of the reader and invites them to *ponder* on the process in which the work is constructed. He implies that nothing should be taken at face value, but be evaluated from a deeper perspective. “Specifically, he examines how through the novel form one can apprehend reality and yet paradoxically how the conventions of narrative realism both support and

⁴⁴ Klaus Brax, “Poetics of Mystery: Genre, Representation, and Narrative Ethics in John Fowles’s Historical Fiction,” **Academic Dissertation**, University of Helsinki, Faculty of Arts, April, 2003, (Online) <http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/hum/taite/vk/brax/thepoeti.pdf>, 28 December 2012, p. 152.

⁴⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 153.

⁴⁶ Jeng, “Mirror-Text, Adventurous Journey and the Rebirth of a Hero in John Fowles’s *The Magus*,” **Graduate Thesis**, Graduate Institute of Foreign Language and Literature. National Sun Yat-sen University. January, 2006, (Online) <http://www.openthesis.org/documents/Mirror-Text-Adventurous-Journey-Rebirth-232188.html>, 18 December 2012, p. 17 (italics mine).

⁴⁷ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.68 (qtd. in Eysteinsson: 1990, p. 110).

⁴⁸ Astradur Eysteinsson, **The Concept of Modernism**, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 110.

detract from this possibility.”⁴⁹ By this means, he exposes ‘reality’ as being constructed and demasks the pretensions of both his protagonist and the reader –both in fiction and in life.

Fowles creates in this strategy a vertiginous overturning, a disruption of readerly norms, of rational expectations. The novel enters into a state of flux, or destabilization. And yet many familiar coordinates remain, the core of the nightmare is essential, its basis for what appeared existentially authentic to that point. The overarching effect also foregrounds a central theme of the novel: the thin line between reality and fiction, between history and fiction, and the permeability of those spheres or economies. Fowles suggests neither nihilism nor anarchism of the text, but rather that artificial constructs must be augmented with other modes of perceiving the real in order to approach something potentially “really” real. The structural demand is suggestive, for the reader just like Urfe is constantly challenged to discern what is real from what is fiction.⁵⁰

Through the self-reflexive narrative discourse of **The Magus**, it is seen that what Conchis asks of Nicholas is in fact the reflection of what Fowles asks from his reader –not to take everything at face value. By merely looking at the multi-layered structure of the novel, various metaphorical interpretations of the characters in it, and the constant deferment of an ultimate meaning, the novel can be regarded as typically postmodern. In his study **John Fowles’s Fiction and The Poetics of Postmodernism**, Mahmoud Salami approaches **The Magus** through a deconstructive lens, since he argues that “Within this fictionality, meaning is therefore always deferred. When the reader is asked to go beyond the sign in order to find the meaning, s/he indeed finds another sign. There is always this promise of the meaning but it is always deferred.”⁵¹

Salami’s approach illustrates one side of the coin only. On the other side though, it should be remembered that deconstruction is also to be interpreted in constructive terms. As Jack M. Balkin elaborates on this subject:

Deconstruction does not show that all texts are meaningless, but rather that they are overflowing with multiple and often conflicting meanings.

⁴⁹ Buchberger, **op. cit.**, p. 53.

⁵⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 65.

⁵¹ Mahmoud Salami, **John Fowles’s Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism**, Associated University Press, 1992, p. 153.

Similarly, deconstruction does not claim that concepts have no boundaries, but that their boundaries can be parsed in many different ways as they are inserted into new contexts of judgement. Although people use deconstructive analyses to show that particular distinctions and arguments lack narrative coherence, deconstruction does not show that all legal distinctions are incoherent. Deconstructive arguments do not necessarily destroy conceptual oppositions or conceptual distinctions. Rather, they tend to show that conceptual oppositions can be reinterpreted as a form of nested oppositions. A nested opposition is an opposition in which two terms bear a relationship of conceptual dependence or similarity as well as conceptual difference and distinction.⁵²

As explained before, postmodernism in this context does not stand against the premises of modernism such as liberty, truth, beauty, love, and meaning; but shows the way in which they have been manipulated by ideological purposes. In this scheme, Nicholas stands for the overly solipsist subject who is disillusioned by the ideal image which he has constructed for himself, and Maurice Conchis is the catalyst that helps Nicholas to see through. He says to Nicholas: “The object of the meta-theatre is precisely that –to allow the participants to see through their first roles in it.”⁵³ In other words, Conchis is to guide Nicholas back to the Real order by simply exposing him to the false conception of his self in the Symbolic order. Similarly, Conchis also shows Nicholas ‘the possibility of the impossible’ –that oppositions are *nested* in each other. It is apparent in the way he tells about the ‘death’ of his fiancée Lily:

He was staring into the night. The bat flitted so low that I saw its silhouette for a brief moment against the Milky Way.
‘Is this why you never married?’
‘*The dead live.*’
The blackness of the trees. I listened for footsteps, but none came. A suspension.
‘How do they live?’
And yet again he let the silence come, as if silence would answer my questions better than he could himself; but just when I had decided he would not answer, he spoke.
‘By love.’
It was as if he said it not to me, but equally to everything around us; as if she stood listening, in the dark shadows by the doors; as if the telling of his past

⁵² Jack M. Balkin, “Deconstruction,” **Yale University**, 1995-1996, par. 9, (Online) <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/deconessay.pdf>, 3 January 2013.

⁵³ Fowles, **The Magus**, pp. 408-409.

had reminded him of some great principle he was seeing freshly again. I found myself touched, and this time let the silence stay.⁵⁴

Constructive postmodernism does not look for a fragmented apprehension of reality. Instead, by focusing on the nested structures, it assumes an initiatory depth and seeks to provide a new unity. Here it is significant to note that, “Aspects of constructive postmodernism will appear similar to what is also called ‘New Age’ thinking. The possibility that mankind is standing on the threshold of a new age – the Age of Aquarius, which is currently replacing the 2000-year-old Age of Pisces (according to the calculations based upon the precession of the equinoxes) – informs the more ‘spiritual’ side of postmodernist thought.”⁵⁵ It should be noted that Conchis never gets Nicholas to his true self, because there is no such a thing. What Nicholas considers as his true self is in fact an illusion. It is the product of the Symbolic order. Instead Conchis tries to show Nicholas that his egocentric perception has been shaped by society and his culture; thus his vision has been distorted. As the distorted modern individual Nicholas Urfe is bound to unlearn his culture’s attitude by deconstructing his self so that he will be able to come to the not-self. At Bourani, he undergoes a process of initiation that; if it does not completely bring him back to his not-self, nevertheless opens his eyes to the falsity of his *constructed* life. It is evident in the way he starts questioning his ‘self’ in the end:

*What was I after all? Near enough what Conchis had had me told: nothing but the net sum of countless wrong turnings. I dismissed most of the Freudian jargon of the trial; but all my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good and bad behaviour – a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please, the sensitivity to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the novelist-god wanted. This leechlike variation of the super-ego I had *created* myself, fostered myself, and because of it I had always been incapable of acting freely. It was not my defence; but my despot. And now I saw it, I saw it a death too late.*⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153 (italics mine).

⁵⁵ Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, “Modernism and Postmodernism,” **Modernism, Art History Resources**, 2009, par. 24, (Online) <http://arthistoryresources.net/modernism/>, 15 January 2013.

⁵⁶ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 539 (italics mine).

This is the moment when Nicholas takes his first step back into the 'hazard'. Now he sees that the unknown and mystery are primordial essences of life. It is the only way through which he can assume his own freedom and undergo an ontological reintegration with the real. 'Hazard' makes him accept the total responsibility of his actions, so that he will become 'elect', self-conscious, self-reflexive and involved in life.

The metamorphosis in Nicholas Urfe's perception does not take place on its own, but under the guidance of a 'magus'⁵⁷ who may be compared to a spiritual teacher that applies to different methods while training his pupil. "Urfe's 'Magus' is Maurice Conchis, who uses a combination of art and education to bring Urfe to a greater level of understanding of the extremes of human suffering."⁵⁸ Nicholas does not know what it means to suffer. As Conchis says to him, "Greece is like a mirror. It makes you suffer. Then you learn. [. . .] To live with what you are."⁵⁹

Nevertheless it would be wrong to interpret Conchis as being a mystical teacher in the strict sense. He does not have a certain concept of religion or of God. He only directs Nicholas to question his self-centredness through art and stories that contradict one another. While doing that he leaves room for freedom of choice. In this respect Conchis is both existentialist and transcendentalist. He combines these traits in the role of a mystical teacher who shows that there is no stable self.

⁵⁷ Paul H. Lorenz presents a detailed description of the title of the novel: "While the original edition began with an identification of the word 'magus' with the magician in a pack of Tarot cards, the revised edition makes this only one of the possible interpretations or masks which the title assumes (485). The word 'magus' is also related to the Magi of the Bible who were among the first to recognize the arrival of a new World of values. Though the identity of the Magi, who lived in Persia, is an unresolved issue in religious studies, many regard Magi as the guardians of tradition of Aryan religious poetry and even claim that Zarathustra was a Magus. In this view, the Magi are clearly associated with the celestial, masculine religion of the Indo-European invaders of the Mediterranean and the continuance of Indo-European religious tradition in Christianity. Others regard the Magi as "an aboriginal tribe of sorcerers and necromancers who were "responsible for the degradation of Zoroastrianism" (Eliade, *History* 1.321-22). The Magi are reported to have used no temples, altars, or statues for religious purposes. In other words, the Magus may also be seen as the enemy of organized, male-dominated, celestial religion. Fittingly, Fowles's magus exists in the marriage, in the tension between these Heraclitean religious extremes" (1996: p.75).

⁵⁸ Buchberger, **op. cit.**, p. 65.

⁵⁹ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 99.

6.2. A Passage to the Mysteries

At the beginning of the novel Nicholas is bored with his life in London –as he puts it in the novel: “Boredom, the numbing annual predictability of life, hung over the stuff like a cloud. And it was real boredom, not my modish ennui” – and with a relationship “There was also a girl I was tired of”⁶⁰, therefore he seeks out an exit door into an alternative realm. 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.”⁶¹ On the very same day when he sends his application forms to work as an English tutor at the Lord Byron School in Greece – the so called ‘mysterious’ place he has been desperately looking for – he meets a young Australian girl, Alison Kelly at a party downstairs in his apartment, and they start an affair. Nicholas states: “That same evening, by a curious neatness of fate, I met Alison.”⁶² At that time, his distorted vision does not let him notice that he does not need to look beyond, since mystery stands just before his nose. It is love, *suchness*, an unmediated contact with the mystery. It is everything Alison stands for, thus too complex to be put into words: “And her voice, only very slightly Australian, yet not English, veered between harshness, faint nasal rancidity, and a strange salty directness. She was bizarre, a kind of human oxymoron.”⁶³

His application having been accepted, Nicholas decides to leave his past behind, Alison included, and starts working on the Greek island of Phraxos. His first impressions about the country have been formed before his arrival there. They get confirmed once he puts his feet on the island. Associating the land with an imaginary female figure, Nicholas says, “What Alison was not to know – since I hardly realized myself – was that I had been *deceiving* her with another woman during the latter part of September. The woman was Greece.”⁶⁴ He is more than ready to get moved by what he terms as the “Circe-like quality of Greece; the quality that makes it

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49 (italics mine).

unique.”⁶⁵ Hence, he slowly gets alienated from his life in Britain, cutting all his ties with what is real and dives headlong into the fantasy:

It was like a journey into space. I was standing on Mars, knee-deep in thyme, under a sky that seemed never to have known dust or cloud. I looked down at my pale London hands. Even they seem changed, nauseatingly alien, things I should long ago have disowned.⁶⁶

Through Nicholas’s retrospective narration in the novel, it is possible to see that by then he was not aware of the extent of the illusion he was constructing on the island. It was not Alison that was deceived, but he himself. As he says: “It was too exactly as imagined to be true. But I felt as gladly and expectantly disoriented, as happily and alertly alone, as *Alice in Wonderland*.”⁶⁷ His sudden interest in nature and the Greek landscape is also misleading. It does not bring him to any sense of security, either:

With no company but my own boredom, I began for the first time in my life to look at nature, and to regret that I knew its language as little as I knew Greek. I became aware of stones, brides, flowers, land, in a new way, and the walking, the swimming, the magnificent climate, the absence of all traffic, ground or air – for there wasn’t a single car on the island, there being no roads outside the village, and aeroplanes passed over not once a month – these things made me feel healthier than I had ever felt before. I began to get some sort of harmony between body and mind; or so it seemed. *It was an illusion*.⁶⁸

“The word ‘illusion’ comes from the Latin *illudere*, to play with or mock. When we are the victim of an illusion, something is playing with us, deceiving us, misleading us.”⁶⁹ Ironically enough Nicholas prefers to be played with, and it puts him in a worse state than that of a victim, because he is deceived by his own hand. By reducing life to the position of a playground, he loses the distinction between the means and the end.

⁶⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶⁶ **Ibid.**

⁶⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 50 (italics mine).

⁶⁸ **Ibid.**, pp. 52-53 (italics mine).

⁶⁹ Ian Almond, **Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative study of Derrida and Ibn ‘Arabi**, Routledge, 2004, p. 110.

This is the reason why even 'love' becomes a game to be won for him, and Alison an opponent to be got rid of. When he leaves Alison in Greece, he thinks: "The thing I felt most clearly, when the first corner was turned, was that I had escaped; and hardly less clearly, but much more odiously, that she loved me more than I loved her, and that consequently I had in some indefinable way won."⁷⁰ This sense of relief is not unfamiliar for Nicholas. He reacts exactly the same way to the news of his parents' death in a plane crash: "After the first shock I felt almost an immediate sense of relief, of freedom. My only close relation, my mother's brother, farmed in Rhodesia, so I now had no family to trammel what I regarded as my real self."⁷¹

Soon enough however, Nicholas's retreat into the imaginary atmosphere of Phraxos starts bothering him as well: "I began to loathe the school irrationally: the way it worked and the way it was planted, blind and prisonlike, in the heart of the divine landscape."⁷² His walks to the unknown spots of the island do not quench his dissatisfaction either, but make him feel much worse:

I often started off on a walk out of sheer boredom, but there were always new solitudes, new places. Yet in the end this unflawed natural world became intimidating. I seemed to have no place in it, I could not use it and I was not made for it. I was a townsman; and I was rootless. I rejected my own age, yet could not sink back into an older. So I ended like Sciron, a mid-air man.⁷³

He even thinks about resigning from his job, but considering it as "another failure", changes his mind; "I told myself that things would be better once spring began."⁷⁴ Now he escapes into his poetry, which is another exit door for Nicholas: "And there was my poetry, I had begun to write poems about the island, about Greece, that seemed to me philosophically profound and technically exciting. I dreamt more and more of literary success."⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 50.

⁷¹ **Ibid.**, p. 16.

⁷² **Ibid.**, p. 56.

⁷³ **Ibid.**

⁷⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 57.

⁷⁵ **Ibid.**

Here, it is significant to understand the breaking points in Nicholas Urfe's gradual denial of the 'real', and his passage from it to the 'imaginary'. Back in London he was not able to cope with the fact that it was his emptiness within which brought about the unbearable boredom with his own life. Not wishing to face it, he developed a cynical approach so that he would be able to deny his being. As he says, "I was too green to know that all cynicism masks a failure to cope – an impotence in short; and to despise all effort is the greatest effort of all."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, one day, with the help of his "Socratic honesty" – which he describes as "Oxford's greatest gift to civilized life – he sees through his inauthentic attitude, and realizes that "The truth was I was not a cynic by nature; only by revolt. I had got away from what I hated, but I hadn't found where I loved, and so I *pretended* that there was nowhere to love."⁷⁷

His unexpected love affair with Alison, though he is not able to confess it to himself, shows that love can be a real possibility for him. He can feel it but cannot name it properly, because it is tainted by his escapist tendency:

I remember one day when we were standing in one of the rooms at the Tate. Alison was leaning slightly against me, holding my hand, looking in her childish sweet-sucking way at a Renoir. I suddenly had a feeling that we were one body, one person, even there; that if she disappeared it would have been as if I had lost half of myself. A terrible deathlike feeling, which anyone less cerebral and self-absorbed than I was then would have realized was simply *love*. I thought it was *desire*. I drove her straight home and tore her clothes off.⁷⁸

By seeing Alison as an 'object' to meet his physical needs, thus confusing love with desire, Nicholas assumes to have created a safe ground to stand on – as in this way he thinks that his freedom will not be restricted and it will allow him to turn his back on Alison a lot more easily. Nicholas feels the need to guard himself against Alison, because she has the potential to see through him. As he says: "I knew the affaire was

⁷⁶ **Ibid.**, p. 17.

⁷⁷ **Ibid.** (italics mine)

⁷⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 35 (italics mine).

like no other I had been through. Apart from anything else it was so much happier physically.”⁷⁹

Parallel to the way Nicholas does not want to face the real behind his cynical mask and wants to escape from it; he cannot cope with Alison’s being so open. For this reason he tries to break her resistance by ‘pretending’ to love her: “But those grey, searching, always candid eyes, by their begging me not to lie, made me lie. ‘I like you. Really very much’”, he says to her.⁸⁰ However, it takes a painful experience for him to understand that it was not a lie at all.

There are several steps in Nicholas’s gradual descending into the imaginary and Phraxos occupies the ‘secondary stage’ in this picture. As he puts it: “I had just written a letter to Alison, but already she seemed far away, not in distance, not in time, but in some dimension for which there is no name. Reality perhaps.”⁸¹ I call it ‘secondary stage’ because on the island Nicholas is further removed from the ‘reality’ that he has constructed back in London. And now in Greece, his misrecognition of the real is double fold, because he goes on constructing his sense of reality in a fantasy world this time. “Greece whets his escapist tendency of forsaking the moral for the aesthetic sphere. A would-be poet, he reduces life to a literary game, particularly in times of stress; an artistic problem is easier to cope with than a human one.”⁸² Accordingly, it can be said that taking shelter in an aesthetic sphere on Phraxos Nicholas tries to escape not from reality but from illusion. However, the moment his aesthetic shelter crumbles away, the real hits him harsher than ever:

The truth rushed down on me like a burying avalanche. *I was not a poet*. I felt no consolation in this knowledge, but only a red anger that evolution could allow such sensitivity and such inadequacy to coexist in the same mind. In one ego, my ego, screaming like a hare caught in a gin. Taking all poems I had ever written, page by slow page, I tore each into tiny fragments, till my fingers ached. [. . .] Poetry had always seemed something I could turn to in need – an emergency exit, a lifebuoy, as well as a justification. Now I was in the sea, and the lifebuoy had sunk, like lead. It was an effort

⁷⁹ **Ibid.**

⁸⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 30.

⁸¹ **Ibid.**, p. 49.

⁸² Wolfe, **op. cit.** p. 89.

not to cry tears of self-pity. My face set into a stiff mask, like that of an acroterion. I walked for hours and I was in hell.⁸³

The penultimate blow to his ego comes when he learns about the venereal disease he may have possibly caught after visiting a brothel in Athens. It strengthens his sense of nothingness, and he starts thinking about committing suicide. “I had created nothing, I belonged to nothingness, to the *néant*, and it seemed to me that my own death was the only thing left I could create; and still, even then I thought it might accuse everyone who had ever known me.”⁸⁴ Obviously, Nicholas wants to put an end to his life not for moral but for aesthetic reasons. As the “mature narrator in retrospect”⁸⁵ indicates: “It was a Mercutio death I was looking for, not a real one. A death to be remembered, not the real death of a true suicide, the death obliterate.”⁸⁶ So he gives up the attempt and realizes that no matter how “hollow” or “diseased” he may become, he will “always want to go on living” with himself.⁸⁷ Now, not only his life, but also his death becomes ‘inauthentic’. Having nowhere to take shelter in, neither in death nor in poetry, Nicholas descends deeper down into the third stage, which is the mysterious world of Maurice Conchis’s meta-theatre in *Bourani*. “The pattern of destiny seemed clear: down and down, and down. But then the mysteries began.”⁸⁸

⁸³ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 58 (italics mine).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁸⁵ Onega Jaen, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁸⁶ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 62.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

6.3. Nicholas: Disillusioned

The word ‘mystery’ is related to the word ‘myth’, which comes from the Greek term *mythos*.⁸⁹ Its meaning is explained in different ways. On the basic level, any sound that comes out of the mouth is mythos –that is speech. On another level mythos refers to a specific kind of speech, which is narrative story; and finally it is used to denote made-up stories that are false.

According to Roberta Rubenstein, Fowles’s use of mystery can be applied to two different interpretations in **The Magus** –which are the *sacred* and the *profane*:

[T]he 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). The mysteries begin soon after Nicholas’ arrival on the Greek island when he meets the inscrutable Maurice Conchis, the owner of a private beach on the island. The beach is called Bourani, which means, Nicholas learns, both “death” and “water”. These two meanings anticipate the *mythical experience* of initiation and return which Nicholas will soon begin under Conchis’ tutelage.⁹⁰

Nicholas’s return will be back to the place where he first set out for this experience, namely to London. The circular pattern of the novel indicates the multi-dimensional aspect of the book –both structurally and thematically.⁹¹ In this pattern we are able to witness the development of Nicholas’s self –that is to say the way he explores how his self has been constructed by his society and culture. During the process Nicholas encounters his weaknesses and is exposed to the real –that what he has considered to

⁸⁹ “Before defining the term ‘mythology’ one needs to define the meaning of the word ‘myth’. The word itself comes from the Greek ‘mythos’ which originally meant ‘speech’ or ‘discourse’ but which later came to mean ‘fable’ or ‘legend’. In this document the word ‘myth’ will be defined as a story of forgotten or vague origin, basically religious or supernatural in nature, which seeks to explain or rationalize one or more aspects of the world or a society” (Doyle: 1997, par.1).

⁹⁰ Roberta Rubenstein, “Myth, Mystery and Irony: John Fowles’s *The Magus*,” **Contemporary Literature**, 16, Summer, 1975, p. 329, (Online) www.jstor.org/stable/1207406, 5 January 2012. (italics mine)

⁹¹ According to Susana Onega Jaen: “From a structural point of view, the novel may be said to follow a circular development involving three major movements: from London to Phraxos and back to London again. [...] From a thematic point of view, the situation d’Urfé has lived with Alison in England, the situation he is living with Lily at Bourani, and the situation Conchis describes when he narrates his life bear clear-cut analogies, so much so that both the metadiscourse and the metatheatre may be considered as inverted *mises en abyme* of the primary discourse” (1986: p. 109).

be his self was in fact an illusion, and the only way to get out of this illusion is to deconstruct his self.

Getting further removed from his cynical image (first stage); Nicholas constructs an aesthetic self-image in Greece (second stage). When this image is destroyed by his realization that he is not what he has been designing himself to be – that is a poet – he gets entrapped in the slippery relationship between the *sacred* and the *profane* (third stage). As a result he can no longer differentiate between the real and fiction. He gets terribly ‘confused’ in Conchis’s domain.

To confuse etymologically, is to make things flow together. To remove the boundaries/borders/distinctions which separate things into categories, which enable differences to be. To be confused is to no longer know whether one thing might not be something else, to be uncertain of the identities and meanings of the things around us, to see the familiar suddenly turning to the unfamiliar before our very eyes.

Confusion takes place when we realize that our rational faculties are not enough to understand what is happening. That something has taken place in a language our rational faculties do not speak. In a sense, confusion takes place because of our rationality, because we insist on clinging to something which is blinding us to the ‘actual situation.’⁹²

Likewise, Conchis ‘trains’ Nicholas by exposing him to confusion, bewilderment, perplexity and hazard. In this way, Conchis tries to enlarge his vision so that Nicholas will no longer be afraid of diving into the ocean of wisdom,⁹³ and will attain a much more comprehensive and welcoming attitude towards life; since life itself is full of mysteries that wait to be discovered, but not to be categorized. “You have the one thing that matters. You have all your discoveries before you”, Conchis says.⁹⁴

⁹² Almond, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁹³ See the question Conchis asks to Nicholas:

“*Utram bibis? Aquam an undam?*” Which are you drinking? The water or the wave?’

‘He [de Deukans] drank the wave?’

‘We all drink both. But he meant the question should always be asked. It is not a precept. But a mirror.’

[...] He led the way through to my room, and lit my lamp, and wished me good night. But in his own door he turned and looked back towards me. For once his face showed a moment’s doubt, a glimpse of lasting uncertainty.

‘The water or the wave?’

Then he went. (*The Magus*, p. 188)

⁹⁴ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 82.

As mentioned previously, for Fowles mystery is the most significant component of our lives. He describes it as being as “vital to man as water.”⁹⁵ According to the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, on whose ideas Fowles mainly grounds his philosophical work **The Aristos**, everything is in constant flux. Therefore it is not possible to step into the same river twice since both the person and the river itself have changed in the meantime. Then it can be said that everything and everybody is *en passage*, striving to become themselves in the long run. Nevertheless, the passage is not a blissful one. It is marked by pain and confusion.

According to Susana Onega Jaen, “Turning his life into fiction, rejecting the real in favour of the unreal -as the octopus did- is d’Urfé’s major *sin*, generated by his short-sighted interpretation of reality. If Nicholas is to be healed he must learn to distrust his senses and to foster his imagination.”⁹⁶ On the other hand, Urfe’s *sin* also gives him the opportunity to repent his misdeeds. He cannot learn to hit the nail on the eye, without *missing* it first. To elaborate more on this analogy, it is necessary to have a look at the concept of *sin* and its meaning:

The word “sin” which outside of the religious circle, has fallen out of favour in the modern world, is probably related to the Saxon word that meant “to wander”. Sin is an English translation of the Hebrew term “*het*”, which like both its Arabic and Greek counterparts – *khati’ah* in Arabic and *hamartia* in the New Testament – is originally an archery term for a miss. The idea being that sin, in a metaphysical sense, originates in a sound attempt at achieving a good but “misses the mark” by mistaking an apparent good for a real one. Repentance is, in essence, redressing the miss and realigning one’s spiritual sights for the next attempt.⁹⁷

Mistaking the artificial/symbolic world of Conchis’s metatheatre for real, Nicholas finds himself gasping for truth in the end. In Bourani, he *misses* the mark twice; because it is the third stage in which he is distanced not only from his cynical image back in London, but also from his aesthetic image in Greece. He convinces himself that all of the mysterious events taking place in Conchis’s masque are stage

⁹⁵ Aldous Huxley, **The Aristos**, London: Picador, Macmillan General Books, 1993, p. 27.

⁹⁶ Onega Jaen, **op. cit.**, p. 99 (italics mine).

⁹⁷ Hamza Yusuf, “Climbing Mount Purgatorio: Reflections from the Seventh Cornice,” **Zaytuna College**, Witherspoon Institute at Princeton University, 2008, p. 5, (Online) <http://www.mujahideenryder.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/hamza-yusuf-climbing-mount-purgatorio.pdf>, 15 December 2012.

managed, therefore they have nothing to do with the real world; nevertheless he cannot feel his feet safe on the ground, since his interpretation of the real is already problematic. Thus it needs to be reconstructed through loss and pain. Ironically enough, it is the very thing which he has been despising throughout his life that causes the biggest suffering for Nicholas. It is love. He is to be brought to self-knowledge via real love – that is Alison:

Through the convolutions of Conchis' macabre "meta-theatre" (p.367) Nicholas does come to some painful new truths about himself –about choice, lust, love, pain, and freedom. As truth, invention and improvisation mingle, he slowly comes to realize that mystery is itself the underside of ordinary experience, and that the relationship which he had taken for most granted – his connection with Alison – is in fact the most mysterious and valuable of all, since the nature of love is beyond reason and rationality. However, like the hero of the mythological journey, he can only appreciate that knowledge after experiencing suffering and loss.⁹⁸

In Conchis's masque he 'falsely' falls in love with a perpetually role switching woman, Lily/alias Julie and *misses* Alison in Lily's inauthentic reflection. Lily is a metaphor; she stands for the image of an 'ideal' woman in Nicholas's mind, who is attractive and inviting, yet equally pure and is "turning the mouth away in the last moment."⁹⁹ She is a mysterious piece to be won. As he says:

Indeed, I knew already that this was what attracted me to her, beyond the physical. In a way the flirting had been over-kill. I had been set to *chase* from the moment I saw her ambiguous smile, the week before. In short, if it was her role in the charade to seduce me, I should be seduced. I couldn't do anything about it. I was both a sensualist and an adventurer; a failed poet, still seeking resurrections in events, if not in lines. I had to drink the wave, once offered.¹⁰⁰

Conchis constantly hints at the poly-semantic nature of his meta-theatre and talks through images. Not being able to see through these metaphors, Nicholas seeks for relief in an imaginary world of appearances. Lily is indisputably the most powerful metaphor Conchis has in this world. Ironically enough, long before

⁹⁸ Rubenstein, **op. cit.**, p. 331.

⁹⁹ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 266.

¹⁰⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 202 (italics mine).

Nicholas meets Lily, Conchis prepares Nicholas for what is to come. First, he shows the photo of his dead fiancée Lily Montgomery to him. “She looked out of the oval silver frame with alert, smiling eyes. Her splendidly *white* skin and fine neck were shown off by a square *décolletage*, messy swatches of lace tied over her bosom by what seemed a *white* shoe-lace.”¹⁰¹ Then –as a foreshadowing– Conchis hunts an octopus with “a piece of white cloth” in the sea:

Conchis led me a little way to a deep fissure between two boulders, and there suspended a piece of *white* cloth on the end of a line. I hung like a bird in the water overhead, watching for the octopus he was trying to entice. Soon a sinuous tentacle slipped out and groped the bait, then other swift tentacles, and he began skilfully to coax the octopus up. I had tried this myself and knew it was not nearly as simple as the village boys made it seem. The octopus came reluctantly but inevitably, slow-whirling, flesh of drowned sailors, its suckered arms stretching, reaching, searching. Conchis suddenly gaffed it into the boat, slashed its sac with a knife, turned it inside out in a moment. I levered myself aboard.

‘I have caught a thousand in this place. Tonight another will move into that same *hole*. And let himself be caught easily.’

‘Poor thing.’

‘You notice *reality* is not necessary. Even the octopus prefers the *ideal*’.¹⁰²

Nicholas is the octopus to be seduced in Bourani –which means both death and water– and the white piece of cloth is Lily. However, he is not as desperate as the poor animal, because he will have a second chance. Conchis, again, implies what this chance may be about:

Slowly, disconnectedly, prompted by him, I told him a bit about Alison; remembering his frankness the night before, produced some of my own. Once again I felt no real sympathy coming from him; simply his obsessive and inexplicable curiosity. I told him I had recently written a letter.

‘And if she doesn’t answer?’

I shrugged. ‘She doesn’t.’

‘You think of her, you want to see her – you must write again.’ I smiled then, briefly, at his energy. ‘You are leaving it to hazard. We no more have to leave everything to hazard than we have to drown in the sea.’ He shook my shoulder. ‘Swim!’

‘It’s not the swimming. It is knowing in which direction.’

‘Towards the girl. She sees through you, you say, she understands you. That is good.’¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104 (italics mine).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 138 (italics mine).

Now, Nicholas is ready to be torn between two choices: the real and the imaginary. Thus, the bait is dropped into the water and the line between art and life gets blurred. In Conchis's music-room, Nicholas, for the first time, sees with his own eyes that the photo of Lily Montgomery comes to life. "I knew I was supposed to be looking at Lily. It was unmistakably the same girl as in the photographs; especially that on the cabinet of curiosa. The Botticelli face; grey-violet eyes."¹⁰⁴ They exchange glances and the figure beckons Nicholas to go away, since she does not want Conchis to notice him. Only then does Nicholas become convinced that she is not a ghost, but is pretending to be the dead fiancée of Conchis. It fills him with curiosity and desire to learn her 'real' identity. "But I waited most for whoever had acted Lily. I had to know the owner of that young, intelligent, amused, dazzlingly pretty North European face. I wanted to know what she was doing on Phraxos, where she came from, the reality behind all the mystery."¹⁰⁵ Each time though, he encounters another role behind her face which ranges from mythological women to literary characters: Miss Montgomery, the schizophrenic, the amnesiac, Conchis's patient and godchild, the scar-Lily, Julie Holmes the actress and the school teacher, Doctor Vanessa Maxwell in the trial, Artemis, Miranda, Astarte, and finally the daughter of Mrs. Lily de Seitas. In short, she is a plethora of images/roles; as she says: "We are all actors and actresses, Mr Urfe. You included."¹⁰⁶

Lily stands at the centre of the masque. Her artificiality is strong enough to betray Nicholas's sense of touch, since in the end Lily shows him that even what he touches physically can, in fact, be an imaginary artefact. Therefore Lily can only be decentred via Alison who can never "hide behind metaphor."¹⁰⁷

While other dramatized events¹⁰⁸ serve mainly to deceive his other senses, Lily is kept for throwing the ultimate blow to Nicholas's ego. "Last night's had

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146 (italics mine).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁰⁸ "These dramatized events include: an apparition of the Reverend Robert Foulkes, executed in 1679 for murdering his unborn child; Conchis's desertion of his trench-bound military unit during the First World War; a mythic masque depicting Apollo and Artemis; and finally, the execution of Greek villagers, where during the German occupation, Conchis had, he implies, been mayor. These episodes force Urfe to re-evaluate his own ambivalence towards specific historical events, to examine his

covered smell and hearing; this afternoon's, and that glimpsed figure of yesterday, sight. Taste seemed irrelevant – but touch . . . how on earth could he expect me even to pretend to believe that what I might touch was 'psychic'?¹⁰⁹ As Conchis tells Nicholas later on, "*All here is artifice. She is acting, amusing herself with you. Playing Olivia to your Malvolio.*"¹¹⁰ "Lily's role in the masque will be, then, to convince d'Urfé of the fact that it is possible to touch a woman who only exists in his own imagination."¹¹¹ In this way he starts dropping the shield of his scepticism and becomes ready to be involved in spontaneous imaginative processes.

Conchis confuses everything and makes them flow together¹¹² in Bourani. In this metaphorical 'stream' Nicholas gets distanced from his previous trust on the solidity of objects, similar to the way Conchis –supposedly– experienced a significant change in his former perception of the world after witnessing Henrik Nygaard's meeting with God in Norway. As he tells:

'Up to this point in my life you will have realized that my whole approach was scientific, medical, classifying. I was conditioned by a kind of ornithological approach to man. I thought in terms of species, behaviours, observations. Here for the first time in my life I was unsure of my standards, my beliefs, my prejudices. I knew the man out there on the point was having an experience beyond the scope of all my science and all my reason, and I knew that my science and reason would always be defective until they could comprehend what was happening in Henrik's mind. I knew that Henrik was seeing a pillar of fire out there over the water, I knew that there was no pillar of fire there, that it could be demonstrated that the only pillar of fire was in Henrik's mind.

'But in a flash of terrible light all our explanations, all our classifications and derivations, our aetiologies, suddenly appeared to me like a thin net. *That great passive monster, reality, was no longer dead, easy to handle. It was full of a mysterious vigour, new forms, new possibilities.* The net was nothing, reality burst through it. Perhaps something telepathic passed between Henrik and myself. I do not know.

desires and impulses on a deeper, subconscious (mythical) level, and to break through his desensitized reactions to extreme situations" (Buchberger: 2009, pp. 65-66).

¹⁰⁹ Fowles, **The Magus**, p. 144.

¹¹⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 406 (italics mine).

¹¹¹ Onega Jaen, **op. cit.**, p. 100.

¹¹² Conchis describing his 'new drama' to Nicholas: "During the war, when I had a great deal of time to think, and no friends to amuse me, no theatre, I conceived a new kind of drama. One in which the conventional separation between actors and audience was abolished. In which the conventional scenic geography, the notions of proscenium, stage, auditorium, were completely discarded. In which continuity of performance, either in time or place, was ignored. And in which the action, *the narrative was fluid*, with only a point of departure and a fixed point of conclusion" (**The Magus**, p. 404, italics mine).

‘That simple phrase, I do not know, was my own pillar of fire. For me, too, it revealed everything. For me too it brought a new humility akin to fierceness. *For me too a profound mystery*. For me too a sense of the vanity of so many things our age considers important. I do not say I should not have arrived at such an insight one day. But in that night I bridged a dozen years. Whatever else, I know that.’¹¹³

Although it is not stated explicitly, Conchis’s aim is to expand Nicholas’s vision and enable him to apprehend the transcendental quality of contemporary experience –that is to see things as they are in themselves¹¹⁴– so that Nicholas will recognize what he has forgotten. Nicholas says: “I had forgotten that there are metaphors and metaphors, and that the greatest lyrics are very rarely anything but direct and unmetaphysical. Suddenly she [Alison] was like such a poem and I felt a passionate wave of desire for her.”¹¹⁵

Nicholas’s desire is to be connected back to the real which is the materiality of existence that is represented via Alison. He assumed to have forgotten her and got lost in a ‘dreamy’ world only to be able to shake himself off the pretensions to which he was strictly enchained. This is why Conchis appears with a bunch of illusions in his domain. However, he does not ask Nicholas to believe in them, since as a disoriented/misappropriated self at this third stage, Nicholas is more than willing to take part in the Godgame. Nicholas assumes that in this way he will be able to escape from the burden of looking inside and from coming face to face with his own being. Needless to say that it also helps him to disregard responsibilities that he is bound to take in his life.

This is where Fowles’s criticism against the ‘inauthentic’ person comes to the surface. He believes in the necessity of individual growth, the process of self-realization, or getting reconnected to what has been forgotten for too long. Instead of ‘acting’ according to the script of the socially/culturally/ideologically constructed selves, an authentic person must realize the causes and effects of his unmediated decisions and claim his freedom in the end. As Fowles himself also states, “All my novels are about how you achieve that possible – possibly non-existent – freedom.

¹¹³ Fowles, *The Magus*, pp. 308-309 (italics mine).

¹¹⁴ *Suchness*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

The problem of seeing yourself.”¹¹⁶ Then, it can be said that **The Magus** is a novel which is mainly about curing the short-sightedness of the 20th century selfish man, whose view has been badly impaired by the disintegrated perception of the age he lives in.

Urfe is confounded by the masques because they appeal directly to his senses which he has become accustomed to repressing in his favour of logic. However, it is the ‘otherness’ of these experiences, their complete antithesis to all he has known, that forces him to abandon his inductive logic. Their ‘otherness’ reminds Urfe that he is “a long way from home” (*The Magus*, 182). Ultimately, distancing Urfe from all that is solid and stable is key to Urfe’s realisation that there is more to human existence than that which is open to logical apprehension and comprehension. The mythic masques *reconnect* Urfe to his less rational and empirically dependent self, forcing him to consider alternate modes of thinking, which are alien to his post-Enlightenment roots.¹¹⁷

Accordingly, as a transcendental existentialist, Conchis exposes Nicholas to the ‘reality’ of his problematic egocentric view and shows him the way in which his perceptions have been misappropriated by society and culture that he is in. By telling him stories that contradict each other, he tries to show Nicholas that “he is a long way from home” indeed, in other words, he is a long way from the real and is desperately struggling to fill the hole in himself. Therefore he has to unlearn the dictates of his “empirically dependent self” by transcending it and coming to his not-self.

¹¹⁶ Singh, **op. cit.**, p. 185.

¹¹⁷ Buchberger, **op. cit.** pp. 72-73 (*italics mine*).

6.4. Learning to Unlearn

Conchis says to Nicholas, “You have much to learn. You are as far from your true self as that Egyptian mask our American friend wore is from his true face.”¹¹⁸ In order to find his true Self –which is the not-self–, Nicholas must learn to pass beyond his illusionary self. More precisely, he must learn to ‘unlearn’ everything that he has been cherishing all along. In this symbolic training he needs a guide who will show him the way, and a ground where he will be able to pass from one different state to another –as a means of justifying his metaphysical transformation. From the start of his experiences in Bourani he is aware of this educational tone underlying Conchis’s behaviours: “I thought I could discern two elements in his ‘game’ – one didactic, the other aesthetic. But whether his cunningly mounted fantasies hid ultimately a wisdom or a lunacy I could not decide. On the whole I suspected the latter. Mania made more sense than reason.”¹¹⁹

Epitomizing the traits of the modernist individual who insists on empirical evidence as the foundation for his claims; also of the postmodernist view which considers all truth as being relative and constructed, Nicholas finds himself in a blind spot where everything that he has taken for granted turns against him. Neither his cynical mask nor his aesthetic stance towards life are able to offer any refuge in Conchis’s domain. As a result, he feels the need to reconstruct and heal his distorted perception, if not change it totally. In other words, he undergoes a ‘deprogramming’ process which, according to Buchberger, is “necessary to eradicate preconceived notions of the boundaries of the real so that the individual might be receptive to a broader and richer interaction with events and experience that lie outside of the human realm that has been artificially defined by language.”¹²⁰

It would be wrong to say that Nicholas grows into a completely different person at the end of the novel. However, the transformation in his vision, especially after the trial, should not be disregarded either. It is evident that he steps over a fundamental threshold in his life and Conchis holds up a mirror for him during this

¹¹⁸ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 405.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹²⁰ Buchberger, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

process. He makes Nicholas encounter his illusionary self indirectly –by telling him stories that have different functions each:

In all, these stories Conchis narrates conveys three major lessons: know thyself, as the Swiss shepherd did; don't limit yourself to just one side of reality, as both De Deukans and Nygaard did, but, on the contrary, learn like the prince turned magician, to appreciate its polymorphous nature; and use freedom discriminatingly. The three lessons are interrelated, as they sum up complementary aspects of man's one great need: to understand his position in the world.¹²¹

The transition from the modern into the postmodern is basically shaped by the growing interest in the nature of meaning and of human consciousness. Nicholas Urfe signifies the initial step leading up to the emergence of a radically new Self of the 'constructive' period, in which he will have the opportunity to be reconnected to the multiple dimensions of the real. As I have discussed before, postmodernism is not merely about fragmentation, relativism and loss of meaning. It is also marked by its reliance on a spiritually heightened, self-conscious world. "The spirit of modernity which discarded its traditional wisdom in favour of the truth of a 'value-free' science and the power of technology is now being challenged. Postmodernism's hope is to create a passage beyond that failed assumptions of modernity in order to radically reorient culture in a new direction."¹²²

There are different stages in the overall development of Nicholas's consciousness. With the help of Conchis, Nicholas learns to re-ascribe a meaning to the previous states he has been through; thereby his egoistic description of the self gets challenged. The masque/godgame inviting Nicholas to take part in its mystical realities opens up a totally new world in front of him. Becoming an actor/player in the field of mystery, he suspends his reason¹²³ – which in turn helps him to move toward a more expansive understanding. In that respect **The Magus** is a novel which

¹²¹ Onega Jaen, **op. cit.** p. 98.

¹²² Lynn C. Bauman, "'Mystery' and Scriptural Text in the Post-Modern Age," **Sacred Web Journal**, Vol. 3, Summer, 1999, par. 8, (Online)

http://www.sacredweb.com/online_articles/sw3_bauman.html, 18 December 2012.

¹²³ "All humans can fall into the intellectualization trap. When we think we know, we are not open to receiving revelations. The role of the gnostic, the prophet, or the Sufi is to temporarily *suspend* rational judgement in order to perceive through the inner imaginal pathways" (Halligan: 2001, p. 278, italics mine).

illustrates the stages or levels of mystical journey that its protagonist takes in his progress of initiation. The purpose of this journey is to make Nicholas realize his not-self by means of a gradual ascending to the Real/Love/Alison.

The German philosopher Jean Gebser argues that consciousness is in constant transition and its transformation is related to the development of various stages in human evolution:

He [Gebser] traces human evolution starting with the level of the archaic, which moves through the succeeding levels of magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic and ending in the integral level. In explanation of these levels, the *magic* is an egocentric level of development where identity is of self and everything is seen as meaningful only to one's own self; *mythic* is the traditional worldview, or ethnocentric, where identity is with the tribe; *rational* is the modern level and is world-centric, where identity is with humanity at large; *pluralistic* is postmodern and represents a fuller world-centric identity which is associated with the cultural creatives, multiple realities, with no major universals governing anything, and is accepting of cultural inclusivity; and the final level, *integral*, is cosmo-centric, where identity is with nature, the manifest world and oneness. With each degree of evolution the perspective advances to include and transcend the degree before it, becoming increasingly expansive and capable of comprehending a wider and deeper perspective.¹²⁴

Nicholas Urfe carries the characteristics of all these states of consciousness in himself. On the *magic* level, he is the highly solipsist individual who quickly grows tired of everything around him once they fail to answer his needs. His problematic relationship with women and his selfish attitude towards them clearly illustrate his egocentric temperament. This is also expressed in the report that is read to him during the trial:

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

The motives for this attitude spring from an only partly resolved Oedipal complex. The subject shows characteristic symptoms of mingled fear and resentment of authority, especially male authority and the usual accompanying basic syndrome: an ambivalent attitude towards women, in

¹²⁴ Nikos Yiangou, “Ibn ‘Arabī, Human Potential, and the Postmodern Self,” **Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society**, Ed. Stephen Hirstenstein, Vol. 50, 2011, p. 103 (italics mine).

which they are seen both as desired objects and as objects which have betrayed him, and therefore merit his revenge and counterbetrayal.’¹²⁵

On the *mythic* level he takes pleasure in becoming part of a congregation that defines who he is and distinguishes him from other people. His Oxford education and the club he formed with his friends enable him to feel a sense of attachment to a concrete cause: “We formed a small club called Les Hommes Révoltés, drank very dry sherry, and (as a protest against those shabby duffle-coated last years of the ’forties) wore dark-grey suits and black ties for our meetings.”¹²⁶ He also uses his national identity as a shield against Alison’s Australian roots. During the talk with one of his friends from Les Hommes Révoltés, in a bar, Nicholas feels irritated by Alison’s accent: “Alison said very little, but I was embarrassed by her, by her accent, by the difference between her and one or two debs who were sitting near us”, and he goes far enough to ‘commodify’ her by looking down on her position in his life. He describes her in materialistic terms, “Cheaper than central heating.”¹²⁷

On the *rational* level he associates his identity with the ‘group’, not as an end in itself but as a means of escaping from responsibility. When Conchis accuses him of being a pessimistic person who is likely to disbelieve anything that is beyond his comprehension, Nicholas in turn finds an excuse, saying: “It’s not all me. It’s in the age. In all my generation. We all feel the same.”¹²⁸ He is not a humanist at all. Instead he turns the premises of humanism into a mouthpiece for his insulated ego. It is apparent in the way he repeats the famous quote from John Donne¹²⁹ and in Conchis’s subsequent reaction:

‘No man is an island.’

‘Pah. Rubbish. Every one of us is an island. If it were not so we should go mad at once. Between these islands are ships, aeroplanes, telephones,

¹²⁵ Fowles, *The Magus*, pp. 508-509.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹²⁹ “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” (Donne, “Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions,” *Meditation XVII*, 16 November 2010, par. 3, Online, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/meditation17.php>, 12 February 2012).

wireless –what you will. But they remain islands. Islands that can sink or disappear for ever. You are an island that has not sunk. You cannot be such pessimistic. It is not possible.’
‘It seems possible.’¹³⁰

On the *pluralistic* level Nicholas falls into the trap of relativism and gets disoriented by his fragmented perception. He denies the existence of the real and loses his track in a world of signs which forever undermine their own assumptions. As a result, it is not surprising that he deludes himself by holding the idea that there is no meaning in life and he rejects the possibility of the impossible – that Alison can be two different things at the same time: dead and alive, whore and virgin, absent and present, ugly and beautiful, guilty and innocent, Lily and Rose, imaginary and tangible, immanent and transcendent; in one word ‘mysterious’:

Alison was always feminine; she never, like so many English girls, betrayed her gender. She wasn't beautiful, she very often wasn't even pretty. But she had a fashionably thin boyish figure, she had a contemporary dress sense, she had a conscious way of walking, and her sum was extraordinarily more than her parts. I would sit in the car and watch her walking down the street towards me, pause, cross the road; and she looked wonderful. But then when she was close, beside me, there so often seemed to be something rather shallow, something spoilt-child, in her appearance. Even close to her, I was always being wrong-footed. She would be ugly one moment, and then some movement, expression, angle of her face, made ugliness impossible.¹³¹

Robert L. Nadeau argues that, “In order that Nicholas can begin to perceive Alison as an individuated human being, it is essential that the old Alison; disfigured in Nicholas’ consciousness by the either-or, die.”¹³² So she commits suicide, but in a metaphorical world. She fakes her own death to teach Nicholas what sadness truly means.¹³³

The fact of the matter is that Conchis’s psychodrama in Bourani is the training field which prepares Nicholas to upgrade the level of his consciousness up to

¹³⁰ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 146 (italics mine).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹³² Nadeau, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹³³ “After a long time she [Alison] said, ‘I don’t think you know what sadness truly means’” (*The Magus*, p. 47).

“It was not only that I felt guilty of jettisoning Alison. I knew, with one of those secret knowledges that can exist between two people, that her suicide was a direct result of my having told her of my own attempt — I had told it with a curt meiosis that was meant to conceal depths; and she had called my bluff one final time. *I don't think you know what sadness means*” (*The Magus*, p. 399)

the *integral*, the stage in which everything is ‘interconnected’ with one another. **The Magus** illustrates the various stations in this mystical journey where “the traveller (salik) or seeker (taleb)”, undergoes a spiritual awakening by deconstructing his ego in order to become an authentic person who is able to take responsibility and meet the results of his actions.¹³⁴

Nevertheless it should be remembered that Conchis is in no way a mystical teacher in the strict sense. He does not have strict views about God or any fundamental system such as religion. He is an existentialist mystic who combines the role of the mystical teacher with his use of art. All he wants to do is to bring the subject to his not-self (the Real order), and show the illusion (the Symbolic order) that he has been through. It is up to the subject himself to decide on which path he is to choose. Conchis only directs Nicholas to question his misappropriated self.

“In mystical teaching the deconstruction of the ego does not result in complete and unreconstructed obliteration. According to both eastern and western mystical traditions, the deconstructive and reconstructive processes operate upon separate ego-consciousness so that as the old ‘self’ is abolished, a new self is reconstituted allowing it to participate in a greater fullness.”¹³⁵ It is very much in line with Nicholas’s description of the after-effects of the change he is experiencing:

I was being taught some obscure metaphysical lesson about the place of man in existence, about the limitations of the egocentric view. But it seemed much more like a piece of gratuitous cruelty, closer to tormenting numb animals than any true teaching. I was drowned in a sea of mistrust – not only of outward appearances but of deeper motives as well. For weeks I had had a sense of being taken apart, disconnected from a previous self – or the linked structures of ideas and conscious feeling that constitute self; and now it was like lying on the workshop bench, a litter of parts, the engineer gone . . . and not being quite sure how one puts oneself together again.¹³⁶

Then, it can be said that Maurice Conchis functions as the catalyst that paves the way for the disciple’s¹³⁷ transition from the ego to the transcendent and spiritual realms of the Self. The relationship between Nicholas and Conchis does not have a

¹³⁴ Bauman, “‘Mystery’ and Scriptural Text in the Post-Modern Age,” *op. cit.*, par. 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 30.

¹³⁶ Fowles, **The Magus**, pp. 386-387.

¹³⁷ Nicholas’s compares himself to a disciple figure, with Julie: “In some way we were now both cast now as his students, his [Conchis’s] *disciples*” (**The Magus**, p. 311, italics mine).

fixed status; nevertheless it is mainly centred on the motif of training and education. “I was intensely aware that our relationship or my position had changed again; as I had been shifted from guest to *pupil*, now I uneasily felt myself being manoeuvred into a butt”, Nicholas says.¹³⁸ It is true that we can never be sure that Conchis is serious in his attempts; still it cannot be denied that he assumes the role of a spiritual master who guides the wayfarer on his journey back to his true origin and tries to reconnect him to the integral level –that is back to the Real order. He starts off with reminding Nicholas that he too is a psychic, “I am going to say something about you that you do not know yourself. [...] You too are psychic Nicholas. You are sure you are not. I know that.”¹³⁹ Nicholas does not believe that he can be a psychic because he is not awakened at this stage and his consciousness is still disconnected. He does not know what ‘transpersonal experience’ means:

When notions of spiritual awakening, nonduality and enlightenment enter mainstream awareness, spiritual emergence can no longer be said to be the sole domain of mystics. Olga Louchakova’s work¹⁴⁰ reports that people are experiencing changes in their lives as a result of spontaneous spiritual awakening with increasing frequency, a kind of ‘fast’ track for contemporary Westerners. This self-creative activity of consciousness has been labeled *ontopoiesis*¹⁴¹ by the philosopher and phenomenologist Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. It has been called the mechanism of consciousness underlying human development, and ‘kicks in’, so to speak, after an adult person experiences a nondual insight, restoring wholeness and initiating a restructuring of the self.¹⁴²

Nicholas experiences the non-dual insight before his arrival on Phraxos, actually. However, at that stage he does not know that ‘love’ can go beyond the body. His relationship with Alison carries the characteristics of the ‘transpersonal experience’ mentioned above, because it creates a sense of unity and belonging that not only brings about the annihilation but also the restructuring of the self. This sense of unity is triggered by nothing other than ‘love’. On their trip to mount Parnassus, Nicholas recalls what that feeling was like. Talking about his own father, he realizes that

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192 (italics mine).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁰ Olga Louchakova, ‘Prayer of the Heart, ego-transcendence and adult development’ in *Existential Psychoanalysis*, 2007b, 18(2), pp. 261–87. (qtd. in Yiangou: 2011, pp. 107–108)

¹⁴¹ Greek: ‘create according to being’.

¹⁴² Yiangou, *op. cit.*, pp. 107–108.

Alison is the only person with whom he can be really comfortable: “[. . .], it came to me that she was the only person in the world that I could have been talking like that to; that without noticing it I had slipped back into something of our old relationship ... *too close to need each other's names.*”¹⁴³

In Conchis’s *godgame* Nicholas lowers his shield of scepticism little by little and his self gets infiltrated. “Also, to lose one’s ‘self’ in play as a child is similar in effect to the loss of one’s ego in a state (hal) of spiritual ‘intoxication’ (or ecstasy) [...]”¹⁴⁴ His getting hypnotized by Conchis is the most concrete and deliberate effort in connecting Nicholas back to the infinite ocean of the ‘real’. During the hypnosis he goes through a momentous recognition “That reality was endless interaction. [...] The endless solitude of the one, its total enislement from all else, seemed the same thing as the total inter-relationship of the all. All opposites seemed one, because each was indispensable to each.”¹⁴⁵ In this fusion he visualizes his self as *nothing*, and strangely enough it brings absolute fulfilment¹⁴⁶ alongside:

I felt like a germ that had landed, like the first penicillin microbe, not only in a culture where it was totally at home, totally nourished; but in a situation in which it was infinitely significant. A condition of acute physical and intellectual pleasure, a floating suspension, a being perfectly adjusted and *related*; a quintessential arrival. An intercognition.

At the same time a parabola, a fall, an ejaculation; but the transience, the passage, had become an integral part of the knowledge of the experience. The becoming and the being were one. [...] It was like walking through a door, going all round the world, and then walking through the same door but a different door.

Then darkness. I remember nothing.

Then light.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 254.

¹⁴⁴ Lynn C. Bauman, “Initiatic Grace in the Masterwork of Jalal ud-din Rumi,” *Sacred Web Journal*, Vol. 6, Winter, 2000, par. 40, (Online) http://www.sacredweb.com/online_articles/sw6_bauman.html, 5 January 2012.

¹⁴⁵ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 239.

¹⁴⁶ “The Sufi seeks to “die before death,” to transcend the ego and experience union with God. Transcending the ego is called *fanâ* (annihilation), and is one of the most important stages on the path, leading to *baqâ* (everlasting life in God). In the depths of the heart the lover becomes lost in the formlessness of love. Merging with the infinite ocean of the Self, he experiences a complete nothingness that is absolute fulfilment” (Llewellyn: 1995, 183).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

It is significant to note that Nicholas meets Alison in Greece only a few days after the hypnosis. Here, Conchis wants to bring Nicholas to a higher level of understanding and also to show him that “Love is the mystery between two people, not the identity.”¹⁴⁸ He even closes his villa for a week so that Nicholas will agree to meet Alison in Athens. Upon their meeting, Nicholas and Alison decide to climb mount Parnassus and the adventure turns out to incur similar ecstasy-infused sensations in Nicholas: “There came back the memory of that mind-voyage Conchis had induced in me under hypnosis. They seemed almost parallel experiences; except that this had all the beauty of its immediacy, its uninducedness, its being-now-ness.”¹⁴⁹ It results in Nicholas’s dropping his mask the following day when they climb down the mountain. He tells Alison that he does not have syphilis and they become one, physically: “... it was love that finally drove me to confess, not cruelty, not a wish to be free, to be callous and clear, but simply love. [...] And we did make love; not sex, but love; though sex would have been far wiser.”¹⁵⁰

Nicholas’s refusal to surrender to “the better part in himself” paves the way for more pain to come –Alison’s faking her suicide, the disintoxication with Lily, the trial. Nicholas could have stopped the game earlier since Conchis gives him the necessary clues during the hypnosis, so does Alison during the trip. She says to Nicholas, “‘That reminds me. A crossword clue. I saw it months ago. Ready?’ I nodded. ‘She’s all mixed up, but the better part of Nicholas... six letters’.”¹⁵¹ Yet Nicholas’s answer is ‘no’¹⁵², he is not able to see through her, completely.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁵² Alison asks Nicholas to make a decision:

‘I’ve saved some money. And you can’t be exactly broke. If you say the word, I’ll walk out of my job tomorrow. I’ll come on your island and live with you. I said a cottage in Ireland. But I’ll take a cottage on Phraxos. You can have that. The dreadful responsibility of having to live with someone who loves you.’ [...]

‘Or?’

‘You can say no.’

‘An ultimatum.’

‘No sliding. Yes or no.’

‘Alison, if —’

‘Yes or no.’

‘You can’t decide these things ...’

Her voice sharpened a pitch. ‘Yes or no.’

I stared at her. She gave a tiny humourless twist of her lips and answered for me.

During the climatic trip to mount Parnassus Nicholas has had the opportunity to realize both (complementary) aspects of Alison, but he has been incapable of interpreting them. First, during the night in the wooden hut, while Alison tempts to have sex with her, Nicholas thinks, as she caresses him, ‘It’s like being with a prostitute, hands as adept as a prostitutes (p.263).’¹⁵³

And the next morning, when they stop by a pool during their descent, “Alison runs naked through the long grass to take bath in the ice-cold water, and then sits on the grass with a garland of wild-flowers around her head, like a ‘Queen of May’, Nicholas suddenly feels her Eve-like innocence.”¹⁵⁴ Here Alison is carrying the traits of both a temptress and a virgin therefore she is all mixed-up; simply because she is real: “Alison, like all real women, possesses in herself both the potentialities of the ideal virgin and the ideal temptress. They are there, waiting for the man to appreciate them.”¹⁵⁵

Only after his disintoxication with Lily does Nicholas notice that the mystery is in fact inherent in what he has been ignoring and that the answer is Alison; she is “the anagram made flesh” in the puzzle –thus he starts appreciating her.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he travels on a path shaped by the pain of separation to reach this heightened awareness –which is *suchness*, the sacramental vision of reality. It does not come by itself:

History had in a sense smashed the ten commandments of the Bible; for me they had never had any real meaning, that is, any other than a conformitant influence. But sitting in that bedroom, staring at the glow of the fire on the threshold of the door through to the sitting-room, I knew that at last I began to feel the force of this super-commandment, summary of them all; somewhere I knew I had to choose it, and every day afresh, even though I went on failing to keep it. Conchis had talked of points of fulcrum, moments when one met one’s future. I also knew that it was all bound up with Alison, with choosing Alison, and having to go on choosing her every day.

‘No.’ (*The Magus*, p. 276, italics mine)

¹⁵³ Onega Jaen, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 656.

Adulthood was like a mountain, and I stood at the foot of this cliff of ice, this impossible and unclimbable: *Thou shalt not inflict unnecessary pain.*¹⁵⁷

When he is dismissed from Conchis's domain, Nicholas's ego is shattered, and now he is ready to step over an important threshold that will mark his transformation. "By the end of the novel, Urfe has undergone a sufficient enough transformation to enable him to recognize his overreliance on the logical rather than the intuitive to make meaning or comprehend the objective not under his control, rejecting the underlying egoism of the enlightenment [...]."¹⁵⁸ In the trial Lily is tied to a flogging frame and Nicholas is handed a cat, however he declines punishing her and takes the first step into his not-self:

I looked round the faces of the group. I knew they were only actors and actresses but that even the best of their profession cannot in silence act certain human qualities, like intelligence, experience, intellectual honesty; and they had their share of that. Nor could they take part in such a scene without more inducement than money; however much money Conchis offered. I sensed a moment of comprehension between all of us, a strange sort of mutual respect; on their side perhaps no more than a relief that I was as they secretly believed me to be, behind all the mysteries and the humiliations; on my side, a dim conviction of having entered some deeper, wiser esoteric society than I could without danger speak in. As I stood there, close to their eleven silences, their faces without hostility yet without concession, faces dissociated from my anger, as close-remote and oblique as the faces in a Flemish Adoration, I felt myself almost physically dwindling; as one dwindles before certain works of art, certain truths, seeing one's smallness, narrow-mindedness, insufficiency in their dimension and value.

I could see it in Conchis's eyes; something besides *eleutheria* had been proved. And I was the only person there who did not know what it was. I looked for it in his eyes; but that was like looking into the darkest night. A hundred things trembled on my lips, in my mind; and died there.¹⁵⁹

Here it is Nicholas's self that gets dwindled and he realizes how small he in fact is, so now he is ready for the final disintoxication: "I understood that I had been 'forced' to forgive so that I could be moved on to this ultimate humiliation; a metaphorical, if not a literal, flogging."¹⁶⁰ In this final blow to his ego, Nicholas gets tied to the frame

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

¹⁵⁸ Buchberger, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ Fowles, *The Magus*, pp. 518-519.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

and is compelled to watch the film which shows Lily making love to her boyfriend, Joe. Thus he understands once again:

And then, out of that pain, the sheer physical torture, I began to understand. I was Iago; but I was also crucified. The crucified Iago. Crucified by ... the metamorphoses of Lily ran wildly through my brain, like maenads, hunting some blindness, some demon in me down. I suddenly knew her real name, behind the masks. Why they had chosen the Othello situation. Why Iago. Plunging through that. I knew her real name. I did not forgive, if anything I felt more rage.
But I knew her *real* name.¹⁶¹

According to Onega Jaen, "Lily's real name is, of course, 'Alison'."¹⁶² She is *the real* –a materiality of existence that is beyond expressibility. And Lily is *reality* –the fantasy world for which Nicholas has forsaken the real. Through an endless *misrecognition of the real* Nicholas has been constructing his own sense of 'reality' by attributing himself an ideal 'I'. However, Conchis shows Nicholas that there is no such thing as self –because it is constructed–, and only then can he lead a responsible authentic life and can learn to smile:

A figure appeared in the door. It was Conchis. He came to where I hung from the frame, and stood in front of me. I closed my eyes. The pain in my arms drowned everything else.
I made a sort of groaning-growling noise through the gag. I did not know myself what it really meant to say: whether that I was in pain or that if I ever saw him again I would tear him limb from limb.
'I come to tell you that you are now elect.'
I shook my head violently from side to side.
'You have no choice.'
I still shook my head, but more wearily.
He stared at me, with those eyes that seemed older than one man's lifetime, and a little gleam of sympathy came into his expression, as if after all he had put too much pressure on a very thin lever.
'*Learn to smile, Nicholas. Learn to smile.*'¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 530-531 (italics mine).

¹⁶² Onega Jaen, *op. cit.*, p.103.

¹⁶³ Fowles, *The Magus*, p.531 (italics mine).

CONCLUSION

The post-structuralist approach to language regards the human being as constituted by the linguistic system. Accordingly, it asks the question: “What does it truly mean to be a speaking subject –the ‘I’?” This ‘sceptical’ approach urges the subject to question his position within a language system, and thus allows him to think from a wider perspective. As a consequence, he comes to the realization that what he has been regarding as a stable ‘I’ identity is in fact nothing other than a comforting self-illusion.

The French psychoanalyst and poststructuralist thinker Jacques Lacan considers the ego/self/I as illusory. For him, the self is always a construction; a fantasy which is generated through the subject’s misperception of wholeness and integrity that he once experienced in the Real order. Following his entrance into the Symbolic order, the subject desperately attempts to regain the sense of unity and harmony that was present in initial state of his existence, but constantly fails. This is also described as the subject’s fall from Eden presence into a postlapsarian world of subject/object division. And in order to compensate for this ‘Eden lost’, the subject tries to fill up the hole within himself through an endless chain of supplements so that a stable meaning (‘I’) becomes possible. But this possibility is only an illusion; he can never satisfy himself totally.

In its rejection of a stable self, post-structuralism’s theory of language bears affinities with Eastern philosophy. According to Buddhism particularly –and Mysticism in general– the self is unreal, because it is built upon the misconceptions that are determined via exterior factors such as culture and society. It also teaches that the external world is just an illusion; it is nothing other than a puppet show and is constructed by the human mind which regards itself as the centre of the world. In other words, it is a misappropriation of the real –a ‘reality’. It is only through destroying this version of ‘reality’ that the subject can set himself free from the misconceptions of the self and reach higher states of consciousness. It is the moment in which the misleading perception of the self is replaced by a transcendentalist vision which recognizes that everything is in fact in constant relationship with each

other and therefore there is no separate and stable 'I'. To say it more precisely, it is a process of 'unlearning' that is marked by the passage from the *self* to the *not-self*. It is an escape from insulated selfhood; an emancipation of the mind from deception regarding the self. It is coming to the knowledge of the non-ego; the break-through of consciousness limited to the ego-form.

Aldous Huxley's **Island** and John Fowles's **The Magus** both refer to Buddhist philosophy and deny the validity of a stable self. Although it is much easier to trace the references to Eastern philosophy in **Island** than those in **The Magus**, still it cannot be denied that the transformation which Nicholas Urfe undergoes in **The Magus** has clear affinities with the 'mystical' process in which consciousness divests itself from an illusionary perception of the self and manages to go beyond it.

The protagonists of the novels illustrate the tragic condition of the modern man who is lost in a self-constructed world. They suffer from a lack deep within themselves and try to fill it up through illusions and fantasy constructions. However, this desire can never be satisfied completely because it moves to something else each time –which is tragic. Correspondingly, Nicholas's and Will's tragedy stems from their being trapped by the illusionary projections of their 'imaginary' selves, thus they are not able to see through their roles and inauthenticity. As a result, they find the escape in developing an irresponsible and cynical attitude towards life. This is the reason why they are both afraid of commitment and responsibility. This can be seen in their incorrect interpretation of freedom and in their problematic relationship with women especially. They use women as instruments to strengthen their egos. Nevertheless, their 'initiation' to self-realization is eventually triggered by their interaction with women, in the end.

Within the scope of this dissertation I have tried to show the ways in which Nicholas Urfe and Will Farnaby have undergone psychological, relational and spiritual changes through the guidance of Maurice Conchis and Susila MacPhail who both wear the role of transcendentalist existentialists. They both direct Nicholas and Will to question their self-centredness by showing that their materialistic and egocentric views have been shaped by the system itself, thus they have to unlearn its materialistic, selfish and exploitative attitude –namely to deconstruct the self. While

doing this Conchis and Susila MacPhail both leave room for freedom of choice. In this respect, they are not mystical teachers in the strict sense, but figurative catalysts.

Nicholas learns to know his place in society through the metanarratives that Conchis presents him with in Bourani. In this way he witnesses his weaknesses and gets exposed to his 'reality' –that he has been leading an inauthentic life. After taking part in Conchis's godgame and losing the distinction between what is real and not, he understands that truth lies in self-knowledge –that is to say, in knowing that there is no stable self. During this process, Conchis makes use of art as stimulation to self-consciousness, so that Nicholas can free himself from his egoistical stance and can acknowledge the rights of others. In Bourani he witnesses how his illusionary self-image is broken into pieces – the trial and his disintoxication with Lily serve for this purpose – however only through 'real' love and affection can he understand what it truly means to dissolve the illusionary frames of the self and realise the mysterious reality of another being –that is Alison.

According to Lacan to be able to enter culture we lose our unity with the *mother's* body –which is the primal state of nature. But we tend to protect ourselves from the knowledge of this loss by misperceiving ourselves as not lacking anything and as being complete in ourselves. Still this is a fantasy, an illusion –a secondary state, thus *decadence*. Conchis, with his self-reflexive strategies (the meta-theatre), batters Nicholas's self-comforting stance and brings him to a point where he will start questioning his position in an unreal world. By this means, Conchis attempts to direct Nicholas back to the now, to the real, to Alison. Only then can Nicholas learn to smile with him. As it is put in the novel:

He looked out to the sea. 'The object of the meta-theatre is precisely that –to allow the participants to see through their first roles in it. But that is only the catastas.'

'I'm afraid I don't know what that word means.'

'It's what precedes the final act, or catastrophe, in classical tragedy.' He added, 'Or comedy. As the case may be.'

'The case depending on?'

'Whether we learn to see through the roles we give ourselves in ordinary life.' [...]

'Liking other people is an illusion we have to cherish in ourselves if we are to live in society. It is the one I have long banished, at least from my life

here. *You wish to be liked. I wish simply to be.* One day you will know what that means, perhaps. And you will smile. Not against me. But with me.’¹

In **Island** Will Farnaby gets exposed to his ‘reality’, too. Similar to Nicholas Urfe, he rather wishes to be liked, than to be. He wants to escape from the burden of taking responsibilities and thus adopts a cynical attitude. However, on the island of Pala Will learns how to go beyond the restrictive grip of his ego and to become whole with the other(s). It is Will’s passage from the island of his self to the all-encompassing ocean of selflessness; in other words, it is his passage from the self/ego/I to the not-self/non-ego.

In the aftermath of two great world wars, the world is no longer regarded as a peaceful place. Therefore, more than any other time in history, people get influenced by the side-effects of the ideological aspirations which reduce them to the rank of mere objects. This sense of insecurity causes them to put their egos on a highest pedestal possible and it results in a superficial flight from the real.

In relation to this, as a moralist, Aldous Huxley aims at tearing away the masks of human pretensions and wants to bring the self to a heightened level of awareness. As a reaction to this, Huxley in **Island** creates a transcendentalist utopia where people are in harmony with the universe and with themselves. By making use of Eastern philosophy –Mahayana Buddhism– he criticizes the egocentric projection of the self in post-war Europe. Through Will Farnaby, who as a modern subject is not able to see anything beyond physical reality, Huxley evaluates the notion of the self as a construct and shows how to annihilate or to dissolve it in union and non-duality.

In his “Foreword” to the revised edition of **The Magus**, John Fowles, too, criticizes the fragmented perception of the ego which can see nothing beyond its own ‘reality’ and comments on the indispensable need to deconstruct it:

I did intend Conchis to exhibit a series of masks representing human notions of God, from the supernatural to the jargon-ridden scientific; that is, a series of human illusions about something that does not exist in fact, absolute knowledge and absolute power. The destruction of such illusions seems to me still an eminently humanist aim; and I wish there were some super-

¹ John Fowles, **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 409 (italics mine).

Conchis who could put the Arabs and Israelis, or the Ulster Catholics and Protestants, through the same heuristic mill as Nicholas.²

Obviously the most effective shortcut to speed up the dissolution of the ego comes in the form of *love* in both novels. It functions as the heuristic mill that grinds the self. Nevertheless it should be noted that although **Island** and **The Magus** seem to end in a pessimistic tone, as Pala gets invaded by the troops of its military neighbour Rendang and Nicholas slaps Alison on her face –following their confrontation in Regent’s Park– neither Huxley nor Fowles bring their works to a complete end. Instead, they leave the decision to the reader. Now it is up to us to decide whether to believe in the possibility of the impossible or not:

“ ‘Karuna, Karuna.’³ And a semi-tone lower, ‘Attention.’ ”⁴

Cras amet qui numquam amavit quique amavit cras amet^{*5}

² John Fowles, “Foreword,” **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 10.

³ Karuna is the Sanskrit word which means ‘compassion’.

⁴ Aldous Huxley, **Island**, London: Vintage Books, 2005, p. 286.

* “Most critics have interpreted the ambiguous ending positively, basing their opinion on the quotation from the *Pervilium Veneris* that closes the novel, which, translated, means, ‘Tomorrow he who has never loved will love, and he who has loved, tomorrow will love’ ” (Onega Jaen: 1986, p. 108).

⁵ John Fowles, **The Magus**, London: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 656.

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