

John Fowles's *The Magus*: The Book and the World

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John Fowles's *The Magus* can be seen as a paradigm of the relationship between art and life and as such implicitly self-critical. It reveals the dilemma of the author who lives in the age of Roland Barthes and Alain Robbe-Grillet, as Fowles acknowledges he does, and who, while wanting to represent reality, is profoundly aware that literary "realism" is more likely to construct or transform than reveal the world. All around us, "things are there," Robbe-Grillet tells us, but these things are mysterious and alien and will not give themselves up through words.¹ In our efforts to humanize them, we do violence to them. Reality, then, may be finally unknowable, or alternatively, a fiction—a framework of causality or temporality by which the imagination gives shape to the unrelatedness of things. The work of art, according to Barthes, is "what man wrests from hazard."² It is by this definition not a figure discerned in the carpet of existence but a structure imposed on chaos. John Fowles demonstrates a marked awareness in *The Magus* of this problematic relation between art and reality and does so in a more sophisticated manner than has often been noted.³

Concomitant with these irrevocable developments in critical theory, there have emerged two distinct narrative modes, which are inherent in the entire history of the novel insofar as we accept Frank Kermode's explanation of that history in terms of a tension or "dissidence between inherited forms and our own reality."⁴ The novel as such has traditionally maintained a dialogue with contingent reality to which it gives shape and a balance between invention and representation. Now, if the self-aware novelist acknowledges that representation can be no more than naive invention, he has reached an impasse. He may elect to proceed along either of two opposing and radical trajectories, one embracing form at the expense of contingency and the other aspiring to a transparent "zero degree of writing," in Barthes's terminology, in order to open up on reality. The latter trend derives from the belief, to refer again to Barthes, that "the Novel is a Death"—a deterministic order which imposes its structures on the world of discrete facts.⁵ Consequently, the novelist who would represent "things" must subvert those forms by which we conceptualize reality: language, literature, and imagination. In subordinating form to contingency, novels of this type continually negate their own figurations. At the

¹Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 19 (italics in text).

²Roland Barthes, "L'Activité structuraliste," in *Essais Critiques* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), p. 217 (my translation).

³An important exception is Dwight Eddins, "John Fowles: Existence as Authorship," *Contemporary Literature*, 17 (Spring 1976), pp. 204-22. This is an excellent discussion of the tension between art and reality, "eidetic" images and the flux of existence, which suggests that Fowles resolves the dilemma in part by "examining existence as an exercise in creative artistry," primarily by portraying his characters as the authors of their existence. See also Malcolm Bradbury, "The Novelist as Impresario," in *Possibilities* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 256-71.

⁴Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 130.

⁵Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953), p. 32(my translation).

other extreme, we find those self-affirming creations which assume the irreality of the contingent world and the autonomy of fictional constructs. Such works may proclaim themselves co-equal with life, or they may attempt to transcend external "reality" by self-generation, supporting Hugh Kenner's observation that modern art tends to operate in a closed field as a self-sustaining and internally coherent system.⁶

These two narrative modes represent radical postures—both ultimately untenable. Between these extremes, we are left with the paradox that the form-giving (novelistic) activity involves a deception perpetrated at the expense of the real yet represents our only means of humanizing or conferring purpose on the material world. In *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, David Lodge describes the self-aware novelist as hesitating between two such modes, which he identifies as the fictional and the empirical, and building his hesitation into what Lodge terms a "problematic" novel.⁷ A second possibility, suggested by Gabriel Josipovici in *The World and the Book*, is for the novelist to make "his art out of the explanation of the relation between . . . his book and the world."⁸ For such a novelist, Josipovici explains, "reality must be seen as the fact that we are condemned to see through frames."⁹ Accordingly, an author who maintains an allegiance to both his art and reality may continue to create fictions while simultaneously signaling his activity and unweaving his fabrications. Or, he may make his text a model of his dilemma.

John Fowles has exercised the latter option in *The Magus*. By presenting a paradigm not of the world but of the relation between art and life, he traces the demarcation between formal constructions and amorphous reality, the margin of the creative/interpretive activity as it transforms experience into patterns. The examination of this boundary allows Fowles to build a creative ambivalence about his art into the work and thereby maintain in a new sense the fine balance between flux and form that has traditionally characterized the novel. *The Magus* is at once an implicitly self-affirming and self-effacing work.

The novel begins and ends in the realm of the real—London, 1952. Nicholas Urfe (whose name Fowles explains in the preface to the revised *Magus* stands for Earth) relates his own story and begins by describing himself as a well-educated young man of the middle classes who has some literary pretensions and who continues to see himself as a hero in a French existentialist novel. The mature Nicholas also explains that he had mistaken metaphor for reality. In London, he starts a relationship with Alison Kelly, whom we later learn is cast as reality and the letters of whose name, it is pointed out, form "the better part of 'Nicholas.'" Driven by a fashionable *malaise* and a thirst for romance, Nicholas leaves London and Alison for a job on the isle of Phraxos in Greece. There he enters a world of illusion, the timeless "domaine" of incipient myth, where he is caught up in a masque or godgame directed by the magus, Conchis—described by Nicholas as "a novelist *sans* novel." Within the domaine, Nicholas is manipulated by, and helps create, the beguiling fictions of Conchis and his beautiful accomplice Lily/Julie. Suddenly the masque ends and Nicholas is cast adrift in the quotidian life of London. Here he eventually confronts Alison, who has also been drawn into the masque, in relation to whom he must finally establish his role.

⁶Hugh Kenner, "Art in a Closed Field," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 38 (1962), 597-613.

⁷David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 22-23.

⁸Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 291.

⁹Josipovici, p. 296.

While Alison and London represent reality, the domaine of the magus signifies the labyrinth of the fictional world within the real one. We may notice that the letters of "Conchis" also form a part of "Nicholas." This would indicate that Nicholas is cast as reader and nascent author, a kind of Everyman, caught between life and the labyrinth—a favorite image of modern fiction. While this suggests that fiction and reality have equal part in Nicholas, he does not understand their respective roles and takes his life for fiction and art for reality. He has lived, he admits, as though he were a character in a novel, but confronted with the masque he tries to either possess its figurations or expose the "truth" behind it. Conchis has, however, warned him that they are actors and all is artifice. Accordingly, the more Nicholas "exposes," the more he immerses himself in fictions. His relation to the masque, of course, parallels the reader's own relation to the other magus, Fowles, and his novel/godgame. We are made acutely aware of this about midway into the book when Nicholas tells Alison that he cannot quit the masque because "it's like being halfway through a book."¹⁰ Nicholas, like the reader, runs through his labyrinth looking for the meaning at its center; however, this labyrinth has no center, indicating the unsuitability of aesthetic orders for providing answers to existence. What Conchis leads Nicholas to discover through artifice about the limits, as well as the uses, of art adds a final irony to a novel that employs fictions to show its own limits.

It is on the level of this irony that *The Magus* can be considered self-referential. Malcolm Bradbury has pointed out that the dilemma *The Magus* concludes with—"that of how the orders and symbols which transcend life but also reveal and order it can really be mingled with it—is the dilemma of the artist himself, and it is in this sense that the book is a self-conscious inquiry into its own structure."¹¹ I would add that a part of that dilemma is the tendency of those orders to falsify life as well, precisely because they are orders. Nonetheless, Bradbury has clearly defined here the sense in which the book examines its own structure—but only insofar as that structure serves as a model for its dilemma.

Many critical responses to *The Magus* have, however, ignored the complex and paradoxical nature of its inquiry into the situation of aesthetic orders in the world by taking the masque for the novel. This tends to place it alongside those self-referential fictions that examine and finally confirm their own structures at the expense of reality. *The Magus* has been termed a game novel, a trick novel, "a novel turned in on itself," and there has even been a question as to whether it had "any deeper commitment than a currently fashionable nastiness."¹² But it is not essentially as narcissistic and self-indulgent as such characterizations would suggest. The novel in fact critically considers the way in which such orders as it represents deform or contribute to life. While it may appear to turn in on itself through the reflecting mirrors of the masque, it does so by metaphorically turning outward as it presents

¹⁰John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1977), p. 273. Subsequent parenthetical references are to this edition.

¹¹Bradbury, p. 270.

¹²Ian Watt, in his review of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in *The New York Times Book Review*, 9 November 1969, p. 1, asked whether there was anything more "than a currently fashionable nastiness . . . behind the mind-blowing manipulations of 'The Magus.'" Bernard Bergonzi (*The Situation of the Novel* [London: Macmillan, 1970], pp. 75-76) claims that "Fowles likes tormenting the reader as well as his characters, and is constantly setting traps for him" and that "the novel is vitiated by its basic pointlessness, its inability to relate to anything except itself as a centripetal imaginative entity." Ronald Binns ("John Fowles: Radical Romancer," *Critical Quarterly*, 15 [Winter 1974], 329) calls *The Magus* "a novel turned in on itself, crammed with Chinese boxes which ironically mirror the broader meaning of the narratives." While Binns is not incorrect in thus describing the novel, his terminology fails to clarify its self-referential aspect and risks returning us to Bergonzi's point about pointlessness. A good discussion of Fowles's use of play and game theory in *The Magus* which does clearly distinguish between the novel and Conchis's godgame is Roy Mack Hill, "Power and Hazard: John Fowles's Theory of Play," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 8 (1980-81), 211-18.

a model of its own relation to the world. Moreover, the use of the masque as a metaphor for the novel allows the novel to move beyond itself and to transcend the limitations revealed to be inherent in the "domaine." By portraying the world of art as a labyrinth, it can at once traverse the maze and stand outside it. It can also move Nicholas as symbolic reader from the stylized world of art to a world representing reality and suggest by implication a similar course to the actual reader.

More critics than one have failed to make this crucial distinction between the maze and the novel, but let me take as an example Roberta Rubenstein's identification of the labyrinth as structural model of *The Magus*. As Fowles uses the labyrinth, she notes, it has no center. Therefore, to skirt the problem of the missing minotaur, Rubenstein has him implementing what she terms a disturbing structural shift, abandoning the Theseus theme for that of Orpheus and Eurydice.¹³ If we consider the famous labyrinths of Borges, and in particular that of "The Library of Babel," which images the world in an infinite library, we notice that these mazes offer neither center nor exit—rather a universe of endless fictional possibilities and permutations of the real. On the other hand, *The Magus* does open up on reality. If we therefore take its labyrinth not as the structuring principle of the entire novel but as a model for the world of fiction presented within it, we find that the dynamics of this shift, in fact, comprise the main issue of the work and the means by which it examines its own relation to the world. While Lily/Julie is the Adriadne of the fictional maze and as such cannot accompany Nicholas out of the domaine, Alison is Eurydice dead through fiction ("this reality lost through imagination," p. 645), both because her death has been a fiction and because Nicholas has been seduced from her by fictions. The labyrinth consequently belongs to the underworld of art upon which Nicholas must turn his back in order to return to life with Alison/Eurydice. And herein the novel again defines its own limits in terms of the readers, identifying its domaine as one to be left behind and maintaining a middle ground between transparency and ideation.

Conversely, many readings of *The Magus* have pursued its meaning through the outer framework of the story, apparently taking it to be co-equal with life and dealing in messages rather than magic.¹⁴ Like Nicholas in the maze, these readers are concerned with what *finally* it all means. As an example of a common complaint, Alan Kennedy, in his "John Fowles's Sense of an Ending," finds there is too much technical virtuosity and "flirting with theories of fiction" in *The Magus*. The technique, he claims, can only be justified by what he perceives as its concluding point: the necessity for a dramatic confrontation between "I" and "Thou." While Kennedy notes the book's repudiation of fictions, he feels the rational mind cannot be made to square with the idea of pursuing a complicated plot that focuses on its own expendability. Such convolutions, he implies, must be redeemed by a final kernel of truth.¹⁵ In keeping with Richard Poirier's characterization of a modern work as one that "includes the interpretations that will be made of it,"¹⁶ Fowles anticipates such criticism as Kennedy's in the objection Conchis raises to the novel as a genre: "Why should I struggle through hundreds of pages of fabrication to reach half a

¹³Roberta Rubenstein, "Myth, Mystery and Irony: John Fowles's *The Magus*," *Contemporary Literature*, 16 (Summer 1975), 333.

¹⁴See, for example, Thomas Churchill, "Waterhouse, Storey, and Fowles: Which Way Out of the Room?," *Critique*, 10 (1968), 72-87. Churchill states: "Beside the Alison story, however, I find Conchis' abuse of Nicholas nearly a bore, particularly after a first reading. A better scene than all the freaking around with Nicholas' mind and ego . . . is the one mid-book with Alison on Parnassus."

¹⁵Alan Kennedy, *The Protean Self* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1974), p. 256.

¹⁶Richard Poirier, *The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 4.

dozen very little truths?" (p. 96). Once again Fowles builds into the novel not only its problematic relation to the world, but his ambivalence about his own role in such a questionable project. What might have been the message transfers to the technique, or in Julie's final words to Nicholas, "it's also how, not why" (p. 487). This particular technique, as I have already remarked, can permit the self-aware novelist to continue to write without being guilty of existential *mauvaise foi*.

It would appear that Fowles's sense of an ending could be better gauged from either the inconclusive conclusion of *The Magus* or the multiple endings of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, both of which throw the reader back on his own devices. The end of Conchis's godgame offers Nicholas a similar warning about the dangers of seeking aesthetic solutions to the responsibilities of existence. In fact, the treatment Nicholas receives from his magus (a smile fading into thin air) predicts Fowles's own response to the questions from readers, about which he complains in "Notes on an Unfinished Novel," wanting to know the hidden meaning of *The Magus*. Moreover, the obsessive pursuit Nicholas engages in upon his return to London of the "facts" behind the illusory masque is strangely prophetic not only of the questions that would be addressed to Fowles about the novel's autobiographical element, but also of the sudden influx of young Britons into the island of Spetsai (the inspiration for Phraxos), looking for correspondences between the novel and reality, or magic. By exposing through Nicholas the foolishness of such searching, the author mirrors the impact a work has on the world, ironically predicts a typical response to his own book, and judges the peculiar power of imaginative constructs.

Fowles most clearly exemplifies his equivocal attitude toward the role of art in the world in his portrayal of the artist-magician, Conchis, and his domaine. Roberta Rubenstein has correctly identified the ambiguity Fowles shows toward Conchis and also his "uncertain relation to his fictional world"; however, she considers this a main problem with the novel and perhaps a justification for complaints from reviewers that it was too much the intellectual puzzle.¹⁷ I would like to point out that closer examination might reveal such uncertainty as comprising the only true certainty of a novel which sustains its "realism" not at the expense of reality but by pointing out the limitations of art. Moreover, as a believer in Sartrean *engagement*, the notion that "at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative,"¹⁸ Fowles is faced with the paradox that while fictions can be used for the purpose of instruction, insofar as they seduce us from the world by tempting us to substitute their forms for contingent reality (Julie for Alison), they impede the very commitment they advocate. Nor does their danger lie solely in their appeal as substitutes for life. They have also a capacity for transforming or replacing reality. Both alluring and deceptive, such constructions can imprison us, like the self-generating novel, if we take them for reality. Yet to resist them is to accept the chaos toward which the "new novel" tends. Fowles's intermediate stance dictates a very tentative relation to his own work—expressed first through his treatment of Conchis and later extended to the ending of the novel.

I made a distinction previously between self-affirming and self-cancelling constructions and situated *The Magus* with those novels that elect both art and life, form and content. Fowles does not simply employ artifice so it can mirror itself in a fiction that teaches its "reader" the importance of graduating from fictions; he also shows through Conchis how art can shape reality in a positive sense. Conchis indicates the interdependence of form and content when he tells Nicholas about

¹⁷Rubenstein, p. 339.

¹⁸Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 56-57.

the fragment of Latin left to him by his (invented?) benefactor de Deukans: "*Utram bibis? Aquam an undam?* What are you drinking? The water or the wave?" (p. 188). Nicholas takes it to be a matter of choice and a question of degree. Conchis insists that we all drink both but that it is a question that must always be asked, and then with a penetrating look he asks it of Nicholas. It is apparent here that "water" represents substance while "wave" is a figure of speech, a way of seeing water, a word that projects form onto a protean reality. Much later, Nicholas appears to have understood Conchis's meaning when he finds himself thinking of Alison's supposed death on an aesthetic rather than moral level and identifies this as a "characteristically twentieth-century retreat from content into form, from *aqua* into *unda*" (p. 402).

While Nicholas vacillates between water and wave, Conchis, like Fowles, traffics in both. Despite his disapproval of aesthetic orders, he deals in them and leads Nicholas to a clearer understanding of their possibilities. He exemplifies the importance of such forms in his tales of the burning of de Deukans's chateau and of a night in Norway when he observed a "madman" calling to God. He claims both events took place at the same time, and their temporal coincidence adds a mysterious significance to his story. Yet he states that no connection was possible, "or rather, I am the connection, I am whatever meaning the coincidence has" (p. 311). Invariably, this implies, we discern patterns in the hazard of existence that enable us to assimilate it into structures of understanding. Nicholas eventually learns that in this case Conchis has been more than a "connection." The de Deukans story, he discovers, has probably been pure invention, and although the other has certain verifiable elements, its "truths" are ultimately untraceable. Conchis's stories resemble fables in this respect. Like the fabulist, he makes an occasion of storytelling and calls attention to it as a "formal" activity. Moreover, a moral imperative underlies his stories. Fictions, it is implied, can only instruct as long as they expose their framing activity. And of course, Fowles's use of an ambiguous author figure implicitly calls attention to his framing activity.

Fictions then can be employed with discretion in the service of reality. When Nicholas first enters the domaine, some paintings (later recognized as forgeries, like the masque itself) reveal to him how art can "set a dense golden halo of light round the most trivial of moments, so that the moment, and all such moments, can never be completely trivial again" (p. 97). But Conchis does not only disclose the possibilities of artful seeing, he also shows the negative aspects of art. For one thing, it is not commensurate with the mystery and flux of existence. Here again is Robbe-Grillet on the elusiveness of "things": "All our literature has not yet succeeded in eroding their smallest corner, in flattening their slightest curve."¹⁹ We may notice an echo in Conchis's description of reality: "... 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" (p. 309). But art is not only inadequate to the demands of the real, it is subversive as well. So, the eb Conchis weaves, despite his instructional intent, lures Nicholas from the world, which will be difficult to recover.

This exemplifies the dilemma of the author who chooses to cast his truths in fiction. For his part, Fowles manages to mitigate the siren qualities and deforming powers of his craft by his portrayal of the magus and the dubious morality of his charade. At the same time Conchis, in his role as magus, engages in a parallel activity with regard to Nicholas: using his fictional creation, Julie, to disintoxicate him of the very illusion created to ensnare him. As Bradbury indicates in his essay

¹⁹Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, p. 19.

on the phenomenon of the novelist-as-impresario in Fowles's novels, "fictions are not existence, hence an element of the charlatan exists in the novelist's own role." Bradbury has him dealing with this aspect of his role by using "a substitute author-figure who is both powerful and deceptive."²⁰ Through the magus, who is by definition both wise man and trickster, Fowles considers how the imagination can give meaning to the world as well as the perils of such an activity. At the same time he presumes to avoid the pitfalls by making them in part his subject.

When Nicholas returns to England, *The Magus* presents a model of the confrontation between the "domaine" and the "world" which constitutes one of its most self-critical aspects. Although Bradbury claims that the novel "returns us to the day-to-day world conscious that the mysteries are not simply a theatrical extravaganza but a species of vision about our own needs and desires,"²¹ Fowles has indicated a much more problematic relation between the two worlds than this univocal one. Here he outlines most clearly the dubious commerce between his book and the world in the refusal of the domaine of art to acknowledge its boundaries and in its tainting of reality with its suspect activities. Art robs life: this is the very problem of the novelist who would represent life. Near the end of the "godgame," Nicholas notes that the masque has ceased to respect the limits of the domaine, but he does not realize by how much until he discovers that Alison, that crystal of truth and reality, has been appropriated by it. So, he returns to London with a small sense of the powers of illusion but with a deep fear of never being able to possess reality. Life appears as a conspiracy in the service of art; innocent events are imbued with a new significance. Nor is he able to trust the simplest human relationships to be free of Conchis's manipulations. Alison has lost her familiar transparency and inability to deceive, and even Kemp, the most stolid of characters, becomes part of the plot. So art infiltrates life, leading the reader to the parallel discovery that Alison and Kemp were always part of the plot as he directs his attention in the final pages of the book to the admitted manipulations of its author. Here Fowles effects the disintoxication of the reader.

In the move from the "novel" within the novel to a focus on his own framing activity, Fowles momentarily intrudes into the book for the first time, both as a powerful creator and as a sinister trickster. Nicholas and the reader are waiting for the end of the masque and the return of reality. Alison, the author explains, has been "lost through imagination," and "to say she returns is a lie" (p. 645). What comes next is the acknowledged and partial lie of artifice, for Fowles does have Alison return, although he declines to lie further. Like Conchis, he indulges in flagrant fabrication, and like Conchis he also refuses to impose a final order, for endings in fiction resume and fix the entire structure. Since such orders do not freely occur in life, they are tempting substitutes for it. Fowles reveals to the reader his need for aesthetic solutions to moral problems and refuses to fill it. In the end, that reader may, like Nicholas, prefer lies to silence, resenting "*not that he had done what he did, but that he had stopped doing it*" (p. 553; italics in text).

This denial of the satisfaction of an ending, as well as the multiple false endings of the masque, has the important function of throwing back at the reader the way in which he reads—both book and world—for the meanings that the endings of aesthetic orders presume to confer on life. To construe in such a fashion is to construct; the reader's role becomes homologous to that of the author. The masque constantly unmasks this reading activity, this groping after conclusions, which resembles the activity of the author who imposes static forms on the shifting material

²⁰Bradbury, p. 264.

²¹Bradbury, p. 270.

of reality. Frank Kermode's study of the ends of fictions and fictions of the end in *The Sense of an Ending* has interesting applications to *The Magus*. He begins with a discussion of Apocalypse. Men, he writes, live in the "middest" and make sense of their span by "fictive concords with origins and ends such as give meaning to lives and to poems."²² Thus, they create fictions of apocalypse to humanize the duration they inhabit. Following the disconfirmation of these predicted ends, new fictions are produced; as a result, the fiction survives by its constant adjustment in the interest of reality. The relevance of these fictions to literary plots, Kermode maintains, is in the falsification of naive expectations about the structure of the future. The more a fiction deviates from a given paradigm, the more "realistic" it appears and the more we feel "it is finding something out for us."²³ In order to remain useful to us, according to Kermode, a fiction must not regress into the patterns of myth but balance determinism and contingency in "a dissonance that leads to discovery."²⁴ In *The Magus* this dissonance is in itself instructive, leading to a discovery about our expectations of consonance, as they are constantly disappointed. Thus, *The Magus* tells us as much about our relation to fictions and our own participation in their designs as about the contingent world upon which its patterns of understanding, and our own, impinge. Endings that are constantly falsified or denied avoid the determinism that eventually renders literary constructs (like disconfirmed apocalypses) inadequate for our needs: "An ending is no more than a point in sequence, a snip of the cutting shears" (p. 645).

What Fowles's ending does tell us, in a roundabout manner, is something more about the paradoxical nature of art. Alison's final pose suggests the frozen lovers on Keats's Grecian urn who enjoy the dubious happiness of never growing old or falling out of love nor of ever possessing the object of desire: "She is silent, she will never speak, never forgive, never reach a hand, never leave this frozen present tense" (p. 656). By not merely refusing a conclusion but conclusively immobilizing the figures of his masque as well, Fowles indicates a Keatsian ambivalence toward art, which he, however, declines to redeem in the last lines. Although Keats concludes his ode by stressing that the truths of aesthetic orders are all we know or need know, he also expresses an awareness of the ways in which they deny life, addressing the urn as a "cold pastoral" and imagining a little town emptied by the urn of its real-life inhabitants. Such stealing from life resembles the relation Fowles has represented in the invasion of the "world" by the "domaine," an invasion which will transfer to his own fictional undertaking. For Fowles, one senses, the beauty of such forms, which may be our only way of knowing, is balanced by their rigidity and lack of humanity and the way in which they rob reality. In *The Magus* he has attempted to transcend this paradox by embodying it in the novel, thus modeling the relation between book and world and opting for the water as well as the wave.

²²Kermode, p. 7.

²³Kermode, p. 18.

²⁴Kermode, p. 148.