

“*The Magus*” and “*The Miller’s Tale*”:  
*John Fowles on the Courtly Mode*

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ALTHOUGH JOHN FOWLES has frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the first version of what he once facetiously termed “this wretched book *The Magus*,” it has so far proven to be his most popular novel.<sup>1</sup> Begun in his late twenties when he was teaching in Greece, it will, as he remarks in his Foreword to the revised version, “remain a novel of adolescence written by a retarded adolescent,” its appeal mainly to youth and to that in the adult mind which continues to seek the meaningful core of existence.<sup>2</sup> Alluding, in a perhaps unintentionally cryptic manner, to the novel as a “metaphor” of his “own personal experience,” the author described it in 1971 as expressing his obsession with “the basic idea of a secret world, whose penetration involved ordeal and whose final reward was self-knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> The elusive nature of this self-knowledge has made *The Magus* almost as popular a source of controversy among critics as its youthful spontaneity of observation and its freshness of experience have made it a week’s fascinated reading among its admirers. It is clear to most readers that Fowles writes with serious purposes, and that serious motivation seems to have diverted critics, in their energetic neglect of his own admonition that “Novels . . . are not like crossword puzzles, with one unique set of correct answers behind the clues.”<sup>4</sup> “I think the thing that is good in *The Magus* — if one can defend oneself — is that it is readable,” he says, and this quality of his achievement, the ability of the novel to draw one toward its secret world, to seduce one into sensitivity to its author’s attitudes, the instruction of his audience, is ultimately what gives the book its tenacious hold upon the memory.<sup>5</sup>

Among elements contributing to this haunting quality of *The Magus* are the use of scenes, patterns of relationships, names of characters and indeed actual lines from various literary predecessors. Critics have dwelt upon the French influence, for instance, and to any reader familiar with English tradition, the uses of *The Tempest* strike compelling resonant chords.<sup>6</sup> No one of whom I am aware, however, has previously considered the fact that Fowles, who prides himself as a writer of fiction, adept at "this business of narrative, story-telling," borrows, in Nicholas and Alison, the names of the main characters of Chaucer's highly entertaining "The Miller's Tale."<sup>7</sup> I believe there are, beyond the shared names, extensive grounds for comparing *The Magus* with the Miller's narrative, which parodies "The Knight's Tale" and criticizes what the Miller and some members of his social class saw as the unrealistic nature of courtliness in that romance.

While nothing remains in *The Magus* of the "sely carpenter," or of the flood, or, in any literal sense, of the misdirected kiss or branded lover's rump, the hero and his friend preserve, in spirit as well as in name, an essential part of the tale. Indeed, much in the novel suggests its author used or found consonant with his own purposes the moral of Chaucer's reworked fabliau, ironically expressed in its prologue:

An housbonde shal nat been inquisityf  
Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wif.

(*CT*, I, ll. 3163-64)

For if there is anything upon which Chaucer and Fowles both insist, frequently, in their creations, it is that one must, indeed, seek the "pryvetee" of things, a consciousness of one's situation, to survive materially and, in the latter's case at least, spiritually. For Fowles, the recognition of "Goddes pryvetee," in existentialist terms, is the most serious of objectives — the search for the essential truth of existence, the struggle to realize the depths of the self.

*The Aristos*, Fowles's attempt at an organized presentation of his philosophical views, proved not altogether successful, a problem which Ronald Binns explains by using Mary Warnock's observation, in *Existentialist Ethics*, that the nature of existen-

tialism makes it more readily expressible in the narrative and dramatic arts than in systematic exposition.<sup>8</sup> It is also true, however, that Fowles has allowed, to Lorna Sage, "I teach better if I seduce."<sup>9</sup> "I can tell stories and make people listen," he explained to Dan Halpern, and commenting on the overwhelming popularity of the results this talent had achieved, he confided that he sometimes thought he abused it: "I suppose a parallel in sex would be a skilled seducer knowing his skill. Laying women right, left and centre. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Although interviews may be less conducive to honesty than to the gratification of the subject's ego, the terms in which Fowles has discussed his gifts on separate occasions suggest an insistent awareness of the power inherent in the quality of his entertainment and the responsibility a writer must assume for where that power will lead the reader. To understand better how the author provides that direction in *The Magus*, it may be helpful to consider the sense in which the novel's characters and conceptual vision echo the Miller's humorous criticism of the Knight's courtly romance.

Like Nicholas Urfe, the Nicholas of "The Miller's Tale" is an Oxford scholar who devotes himself to extracurricular activities — astrology and music among them, but with seductive purposes, for

Of deerne love he koude and of solas;  
And thereto he was sleigh and ful privee,  
And lyk a mayden meke for to see.

(CT, I, ll. 3200-02)

The talent of "hende Nicholas" is made manifest in the representation by the Miller of his hero's technique in approaching Alison, a passage which combines the clichés of courtliness with more physical expressions of interest:

And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,  
And seyde, "Ywis, but ich have my wille,  
For deerne love of thee, leman, I spille,"  
And heeld hire harde by the haunche-bones,  
And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones,  
Or I wol dyen, also God me save!"

(CT, I, ll. 3276-81)

This ironic juxtaposition of modes, critical of what the Miller dislikes in the more delicate expressions of passion, makes the Oxford scholar seem, from the point of view of the Miller, who could have known quite a few such youths, rather cynical in his pursuit of pleasure.<sup>11</sup> The narrator emphasizes the insincerity of the hero's claims with the simple statement that one day he "Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye" (*CT*, I, l. 3273), a situation making his passionate declarations all the more laughable. Clearly, "hende Nicholas" is not a paragon of courtly lovers — in fact, one critic has seen in him "Venus' clerk," who "does strictly what lechery demands."<sup>12</sup> Although Nicholas's victim, it must be admitted, is willing enough, there is an arrogance in his treatment of her, and his boast when she cautions him about her husband that

"A clerk hadde litherly biset his whyle,  
But if he koude a carpenter bigyle,"

(*CT*, I, ll. 3299-3300)

emphasizes the town-and-gown division sometimes violently celebrated in Chaucer's time, as it can still be in Oxford today.<sup>13</sup>

While Fowles's Nicholas, meant, says the author, to "be a typical inauthentic man of the 1945-50 period," claims he didn't "collect conquests," he states that "by the time I left Oxford I was a dozen girls away from virginity. I found my sexual success and the apparently ephemeral nature of love equally pleasing. It was like being good at golf, but despising the game."<sup>14</sup> Unlike his medieval counterpart, Nicholas prides himself upon contriving "most of my affaires [sic] in the vacations," away from Oxford, thus making it easy to "leave the scene of the crime." He claims that this rather cold-blooded method of allowing for extrication was only part of what he saw as his life-style, one dominated by a love of freedom (*M*, p. 21). Here and elsewhere, the nature of the modern fable and the depth of the author's intentions make this Nicholas a more complex figure psychologically, but he shares with the Miller's scholar at the outset of the novel a skill in secret love and, from the point of view of John Fowles, a regrettably casual regard for emotional responsibility.

The Miller's Alison is presented as a fresh and energetic beauty, dressed much in white, bright-eyed. She is

a prymerole, a piggesnye,  
For any Lord to leggen in his bedde,  
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.

(CT, I, ll. 3268-70)

Her dual social potential does not detract from her marital value — the carpenter himself is a good yeoman, or at least a wealthy one, who would have had some choice in his decision about marriage.<sup>15</sup> Alison, the primrose, is a realistically portrayed heroine, generally contrasted with Emily of "The Knight's Tale" by Chaucerian critics, who see her as the Miller's answer to the lady of the romance.<sup>16</sup> Fowles concerns himself with what Chaucer did not: the fact that etymologically Alison's name means without madness, thus, without illusion, real (*M.* p. 566).

When Fowles introduces Alison, several features of her appearance remind the reader of her forerunner in Chaucer's story. As Nick first sees her, she is wearing a "whitish mackintosh." Her "primrose shirt" is dirty (*M.* pp. 23, 24). A little afterwards, prepared for a party, she was wearing a "very simple white dress" — "She had no make-up, and looked ten times prettier." Nick's impression of her liveliness is heightened by her contrast with other girls at the gathering where they further their acquaintance — about her there is an unfinished quality, in her voice a vaguely Australian accent which for Nicholas veers between harshness, "nasal rancidity" and "a strange salty directness" (*M.* p. 24). Matching her speech is a directness of behaviour: "Let's cut corners. To hell with literature. You're clever and I'm beautiful. Now let's talk about who we really are." Thinking of the "white-faced English girl with the red smudged mouth" who has shown an interest in him just previously, Nick observes Alison, probably little different in her attractiveness to him than her predecessor was to his fourteenth-century self. "At least this girl was alive"; he comments, "crude, but alive," and one doubts whether her pilot fiancé presents an obstacle to his impulses much different from that of the "sely carpenter" in the earlier situation (*M.* p. 26).

Demographic realities of the later Middle Ages and of post-war England would suggest that Fowles's Nicholas might be conscious of belonging to a more select intellectual and social group, in some ways, than was the Miller's Oxford scholar, who in any case could not and would not have been inclined to marry.<sup>17</sup> Nicholas of the 1940's, attracted by Alison's realistic nature, is also repelled by it, by her ability to offend with directness, to say what, as a member of the rather insecure and constantly struggling intellectual element of the English middle class, Nicholas himself can't afford to say.<sup>18</sup> Although, as their affair proceeds, he comes to love her, he cannot think of Alison in terms of marriage, or even admit the seriousness of his disposition towards her: "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" (*M*, p. 35). Adopting none of the affectations of the intellectual middle class, Alison makes Nick uncomfortable with his Oxford friends, and she easily senses this: "You treated me as if I didn't really belong to you (*M*, p. 36). When, in the serious moment of their relationship, she realizes Nick's interest in her is, so far as he is aware, ephemeral, she lashes out: "And you wouldn't marry me because I'm a whore and a colonial." His response avoids the truth, retreats in priggishness which indirectly answers her observation affirmatively: "I wish you wouldn't use that word." In more polite terms, however, he sees her little differently than the observer of "The Miller's Tale" sees Alison, with her two-fold value to society, and the Australian pilot appears to be the fortunate yeoman: "You're going to marry Pete" (*M*, p. 35). Of himself, Nicholas naturally has on this, as earlier, occasions, subtler explanations, escaping in an over-intellectualized vision of himself as existential hero, justifying emotional irresponsibility with the assumption of "responsibility with my total being," mistaking relief at extrication "for a love of freedom (*M*, p. 21). The truth, however, as he admits in telling his story, is that he had not yet discovered what was true of himself. In another context he says, "I hadn't found where I loved, and so I pretended that there was nowhere to love," and this observation

describes the paralysis of his being at the start of the novel (*M*, p. 17).

It becomes apparent, with the progression of the narrative, that he suffers this paralysis because of a psychological disorientation which stems, ultimately, from views of love current in the Middle Ages. By means of Nicholas's forerunner and his entourage in the fabliau, the Miller, parodying the Knight's story, criticizes these same views. A continuation of this perspective in modern society is presented by Fowles, in the ordeal of the experience on the island of Phraxos, not only as the source of Nick's spiritual inhibition but also as a primary factor in the sickness of post-war European society. The search for existential freedom, generally seen as the quest of *The Magus*, is, in a more historical context, an attempt to escape a set of values which take their roots in the courtly mode of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Provence and which pervade, by their acceptance or, recently in some quarters, by their vehement rejection, many aspects of our relationships with our fellow human beings.

While I do not subscribe to Denis de Rougemont's theory of origin or, in some respects, to his disapproving attitude towards the modern influence of the courtly mode, most fully stated in *Love in the Western World*, his work was of controversial interest during the period in which Fowles undertook his first version of *The Magus*. The likelihood that some of de Rougemont's ideas informed the perspective of this novel, as well as of *The Aristos*, will be made clear below. De Rougemont sees the courtly mode as an outgrowth of pagan belief and the Manichaean interpretation of reality, a system contributing to a modern society in which "what stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is . . . not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion*."<sup>19</sup> He defines this passionate love at one point as that which wants "the faraway princess," as opposed to Christian love, which wants "our neighbour" (*LWW*, p. 283). What Tristan and Iseult, his paradigm of courtly lovers, love is "*love and being in love*" (*LWW*, p. 41). It is "*the active passion of Darkness*" (*LWW*, p. 46) that de Rougemont discerns in these and other medieval amorous courtly figures, stemming from the Manichaean woe "of being alive in the body" (*LWW*, p. 66), of being physically limited by the sin of birth, a

fate which makes death the ultimate good. This passionate love without physical, earthly fulfillment as its object, a persistent obsession in Europe, accounts, in his view, for "Western strenuousness," for the war frenzy: "Like passion, the taste for war follows on a notion that life should be ardent, a notion which is the mask of a wish for death" (*LWW*, p. 316). For various reasons, and whatever its highly disputed origins, the courtly mode clothed itself in the later Middle Ages in Christian spiritual garb — Guido Guinizelli envisioned his love as being like an angel, so that he mistook her for one, and Dante's love of Beatrice led him from the dark wood, in the middle journey of life, to Heaven and a preview of the Beatific Vision itself. Some aspects of this refinement, though at levels in England less austere than those achieved in the Italian school, troubled the Miller, certainly, and some members of his audience as well, as a perversion of reality that had gone too far. "The Miller's Tale," then, is a reassertion of bourgeois, if not universal human values. The Knight has dealt at length with subtle ideas; the Miller deals with life. In place of a conflict over refined passions there is animal attraction and its handily arranged gratification — Absolon's absurd delicacy proves futile; instead of the formality of the duel and the subtle justice of its outcome, there are swift, direct retributions for the various sins of Absolon and Nicholas.

De Rougemont deplores the fact that the obsession with passion's novelty as a means to revelation moves society in its adulterous quest: "The moderns, men and women of passion, expect irresistible love to produce some revelation either regarding themselves or about life at large" (*LWW*, p. 282). We meet a new person and become overwhelmed with the need to know more. "Duration is constipation," says Fowles, but in novelty there is always the possibility of relieving this hindrance to the emotional and spiritual flow.<sup>20</sup> Fowles uses David Williams, of "The Ebony Tower," to illustrate the poignant sense of loss which can accompany the frustration of this passionate need to know. Returning to his wife and family from a visit in France to the aged British artist, Henry Breasley, at whose estate he had met and felt strongly attracted to the latter's beautiful and sensitive young



assistant, Diana, he "suffered the most intense pang of the most terrible of all human deprivations; which is not of possession, but of knowledge. What she said; what she felt; what she thought. It pierced deeper than all questionings about art, or his art, his personal destiny."<sup>21</sup> It is this same desire to know, a desire to experience love, an urge he has hitherto thwarted with the practical assiduity of English intellectuals attempting to eschew the limitations of the struggling middle class from which they come, that leads Nicholas to pursue the attractions of "Julie" and Bourani. He tries to explain this poorly understood obsession to Alison when she visits him in Greece — and in the first version of *The Magus* she recognizes the force of "Julie" in his motives: "I must seem just like a lump of dirty old kitchen salt. And she's a beautiful cream jelly."<sup>22</sup> Nicholas says she is being ridiculous; their quarrel moves towards the old conflict over her naturalness, her crudity, the qualities of truth that make him uncomfortable.

For Nicholas, the problem is partly that he confuses the drive towards sexual experience with the drive towards love and marriage, a common aberration upon which Fowles comments in *The Aristos* (10:201) and that, because of his self-centredness and arrogance, he cannot see he has found in Alison someone worth loving in this sense. On the other hand, though, he suffers from what Fowles, in *The Aristos*, terms the "widespread belief that love and sex are incompatible," a belief directly traceable to that courtly perversion of love which de Rougemont finds rooted in the Manichaean interpretation of good and evil. (Fowles, 10:203, and de Rougemont, *LWW*, pp. 311-15), "I made it out to be an asexual thing, a fascination of the mind," he reports of his method of explaining to Alison his interest in "Julie" (*M*, p. 270). "She's totally unlike you. Unlike any modern girl" (*M*, p. 271). In persisting in his quest for the faraway princess, "Julie," or Lily, beautiful and sexy while at the same time supposedly educated in classics at Cambridge, he is brought, through the good influence of Conchis, to a fuller awareness of the necessarily harmonious nature of lasting love, the value of his neighbour, Alison. To understand Nicholas's problem more clearly, however, it is necessary to examine the difficulty as it is

presented in the author's own terms, which in some ways seems to be a modification of what one finds in de Rougemont.

Though with a less parochial perspective, Fowles, too, disapproves of the courtly remnants in modern society. In *The Aristos*, he observes that there is a tendency to judge the perfection of a marriage by the gauges of passion and harmony — and yet “passion and harmony are antipathetic” since passion is a pole, an extreme joining which requires separation, quarrelling. (5:147) “There comes a time when passion costs too much in quarrels. To survive familiarity, dailiness, it needs more and more violent separations.” (5:160) “Most marriages recognize this paradox: that passion destroys passion. That we want what puts an end to wanting what we want.” (5:156) Although “in the early stages of marriage passion is good,” (5:164) “necessary in its season,” (5:181) its season is that of the pre-adult, who despises harmony (5:193 and 195). Echoing de Rougemont further, Fowles suggests that “the two world wars were wars among societies dominated by the emotions of the pre-adult” (5:200). Maurice Conchis, in his role as Magus, controlling Nick's reality on Phraxos and especially at Bourani in order to bring him closer to self-awareness and the truth from which he is separated by his background if not by his inclinations, presents with this group a set of stories, masque episodes and experiences which generally outline the fundamental European problem, at the same time emphasizing elements in it particularly relevant to Nick's own difficulties. Conchis tells Nick of his youth, his love for Lily Montgomery and how this love drove him to volunteer for military service in the First World War. Ashamed of his “Greek blood,” which he saw as accountable for his erotic impulses, he allowed his fantasies about Lily to turn her into an “abandoned young prostitute,” and in the throes of this courtly passion, he believed she wanted him to fight in the war (*M*, pp. 116-17). “They are mad, I said to Lily,” of the exultant marching volunteers. “She did not seem to hear me. But when they had gone she turned and said, If I was going to die tomorrow I should be mad. It stunned me. We went home in silence. And all the way she hummed, I now — but could not then — believe without malice, a song of the day. . . . ‘We shall miss you, we

shall kiss you, / But we think you ought to go'” (*M*, pp. 117-18). After deserting and returning to England, he vainly sought Lily's understanding of the evils of war's madness: “Finally she put her arms round me, and still without words. And I felt myself all that was bad in Europe in the arms of all that was good.” She refused him her love unless he would return to the front, but this he was unable to do (*M*, pp. 151-52). Some time later in the novel, when Nicholas has become passionately involved with the modern Lily, or “Julie,” he is reminded of the war frenzy by an episode in Conchis's masque: making his way through the woods from an assignation at Bourani, he is confronted with scenes from the Nazi Occupation of the Second World War (*M*, pp. 372-81). German soldiers beat Greek rebels, emphasizing the brutality of war, the atmosphere of Phraxos during this period as Conchis will eventually describe it. “I will tell you what war is,” he then says to Nick, “War is a psychosis caused by an inability to see relationships” (*M*, p. 413).

As Conchis outlines his dilemma in the role of war-time mayor of the village, faced with the newly arrived Colonel Wimmel whose purpose is to tighten the island's security and instil a sense of rigour which his predecessor, Anton Kluber, a less viciously militaristic Austrian, had neglected, Nick is brought to recall his own psychological brutality in his treatment of Alison. The masque version of Colonel Wimmel had punctiliously stated “It. Is. Not. Ended” (*M*, p. 380), clearly with the same idea as that of Conchis when he summarizes the pattern created in the story of his decision not to murder a rebel, despite the fact that this inaction will cause the execution of eighty islanders, himself among them, because of the orders of Wimmel. Conchis concludes: “The event I have told you is the only European story. It is what Europe is” (*M*, p. 439). Considering the physical and spiritual pain of the situation Wimmel created, Nick remarks, “I was thinking of Alison, and I knew I had no choice. I felt pity for her” (*M*, pp. 438-39). Although he has come to a point where he is capable of this pity, his reorientation is not yet complete: “You are someone who does not understand what freedom is,” observes Conchis, “And above all that the better

you understand it, the less you possess of it" (*M*, p. 439). Partially aware much earlier of his love for Alison, Nick finds that his compassion for her only begins to impress itself on him with this occupation episode. The trial scene, with its revelations of the character of the hero, has in some respects been discounted by its author as a "sendup, I'd really worked in every piece of psychiatric jargon I could think of . . .," a convenient enough way of shedding responsibility for what one has written.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the moment of decision, at least, when Nick could punish Lily, is crucial in demonstrating to him the force of the commandment which he only later learns in formula: "*Thou shalt not inflict unnecessary pain*" (*M*, pp. 514-19 and 641).

He has come to a point where he realizes the impossibility of voluntarily causing pain to someone whose humanity he recognizes. But it is not until his second, post-Bourani interview with Mitford, one of his predecessors on Phraxos, that he finally comes to understand the sense in which the problem of what Europe is, is also his own problem. Mitford describes his experience with "June" and "Julie" in militaristic terms, as lexically aggressive as the vocabulary of courtly love in the romances, commented upon by de Rougemont (*LWW*, pp. 244-45), and he is unable to admit his humiliating defeat at their hands. Having been called a Nazi by them, he believes he reported to the Greek government that Conchis has associations with Communists. He is a small, mean-minded person, exploitive in his dealings with women and viciously dishonest when frustrated. Completely unaware of what really could have happened at Bourani, he marches from the interview, "eternally the victor in a war where the losers win" (*M*, p. 616). "I disliked Mitford because he was crass and mean," Nick ruminates, "but even more because he was a caricature, an extension, of certain qualities in myself; he had on his skin, visible, the carcinoma I nursed inside me" (*M*, p. 616). By this point, then, Nick is able to face his spiritual disease, the conflicts arising over confusions of love with sex, the pre-adult inability to admire harmony over passion, to see human relationships, to live outside of a state of war.

In his "A Personal Note" to the translation of *Eliduc*, in the *Ebony Tower* anthology, Fowles reminds his readers of three "real-life systems" against which the story is told: the feudal system, the Christian system, and courtly love, "where the same stress on keeping faith was applied to sexual relations. It is hardly a fashionable idea in the twentieth century; but *amour courtois* was a desperately needed attempt to bring more civilization (more female intelligence) into a brutal society, and all civilization is based on agreed codes and symbols of mutual trust" (*ET*, p. 122). The humanizing effect of the courtly mode is one with which de Rougemont does not argue, but both he and Fowles indicate the clear awareness that humanization has much further to go. As has been mentioned, Fowles complains of the popular assumption that love and sex are incompatible, and, with de Rougemont, he agrees that harmony, or *agape*, is the only means by which stability can be achieved or within which there can be lasting truth (Fowles, 5:169, 180, 182, and de Rougemont, *LWW*, pp. 310-11). The misconception observed by Fowles "that if you love (maintain a permanent relationship like marriage) you will sooner or later cease to enjoy sex" (10:203), an outgrowth, in de Rougemont's view, of the medieval obsession with passion for its own sake, is in a sense what plagues Nicholas, unknown to him, at the start of his adventure — and in the lessons taught him by Conchis and his band, one can't help seeing the punishments of Absolon as well as of Nicholas in "The Miller's Tale." The parallel is obvious between Absolon's misdirected kiss and Nick's misplaced emotion in the pursuit of "Julie," or Lily: "My daughters were nothing but a personification of your own selfishness," Mrs. de Seitas informs him (*M*, p. 601). The courtly vision of passion has led him, as the unfortunate Absolon was deluded by his unrealistic delicacy, down a false path. At the conclusion of *The Magus*, it seems possible that Nick's squeamishness of reality, responsible for this misjudgment, has perhaps been corrected by the experience at Bourani, and that his search for love may be more clearly directed towards that harmony on the other side of passion. He will thus exercise freedom responsibly, inflicting pain only when necessary and maintaining integrity in his recognition of and dealings

with other human beings. His outlook is therefore a good deal more hopeful than that for his fabliau counterpart, but one naturally hopes for a bit more from the hero of a romance of the sort Fowles tells.

In his 1973 study of Fowles's works, among them the first version of *The Magus*, Ronald Binns shows how, as a gothic romance, it is meant to have a metaphorical purpose.<sup>24</sup> The everyman whom the modern Nicholas represents, however, has roots in medieval Western society, as is clearly suggested by the parallels Fowles draws between him and the Miller's scholar. If *The Tempest* is used in this novel to study the freedom modern Europe must seek, then "The Miller's Tale" provides insight into that from which freedom must be sought. The characters in Fowles's modern fable attract not only in their resonance with those of "The Miller's Tale," but in their reference to a much older story, the narrative of the courtly mode itself.

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Omnes, enim, qui placendi causa scribunt  
qualia placere uiderint scribent.<sup>25</sup>

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Lorna Sage, "Profile 7. John Fowles," *The New Review* (October 1974), 32. In this interview, p. 33, in James Campbell, "An Interview with John Fowles," *Contemporary Literature*, 17 (1976), 457-58, and in Dan Halpern's interview with him, "A Sort of Exile in Lyme Regis," *London Magazine* (March 1971), 35, Fowles comments on the shortcomings of *The Magus*.
- <sup>2</sup> *The Magus: A Revised Version* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), p. 9.
- <sup>3</sup> Halpern, p. 35.
- <sup>4</sup> Foreword to the *Revised Version*, p. 9.
- <sup>5</sup> Campbell, p. 457.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Monaghan, "Portrait of a Man Reading: John Fowles," *Chicago Tribune Book World*, 4 January 1970, p. 2, comments on the French influence. E. von Glasersfeld, in "Reflections on John Fowles's *The Magus* and the Construction of Reality," *The Georgia Review*, 33 (1979), 444, discusses the use of Valéry. Fowles himself mentions his use of Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* in his Foreword to the *Revised Version*, p. 6, and with Campbell, p. 457.
- <sup>7</sup> Sage, p. 36. Passages from Chaucer are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John H. Fisher (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1977). I do not intend to present here any original views of "The Miller's Tale"; standard critical perspectives with a selected

- bibliography are in D. S. Brewer, "The Fabliaux," in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. B. Rowland (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 247-67. Subsequent references to Chaucer are noted in the text from the Fisher edition.
- 8 Ronald Binns, "John Fowles: Radical Romancer," *Critical Quarterly*, 15 (1973), 324, from Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 57.
  - 9 Sage, p. 35.
  - 10 Halpern, p. 36.
  - 11 On the dealings of millers with university scholars in Chaucer's time, see J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 5-8.
  - 12 P. A. Olson, "Poetic Justice in *The Miller's Tale*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 24 (1963), 228 and 229.
  - 13 C. E. Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford* (1924; rpt. London: Methuen, 1968), I, 138-202, has passages on these frictions during the university's early period.
  - 14 Campbell, p. 466. *The Magus: A Revised Version*, p. 21. Subsequent references to this work are noted with page numbers in the text.
  - 15 Bennett, pp. 26-31, for the carpenter's status.
  - 16 P. B. Ruggiers, *The Art of the Canterbury Tales* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 53-65, and C. A. Owen, "Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: Aesthetic Design in Stories of the First Day," *English Studies*, 35 (1954), 49-56.
  - 17 Bennett, pp. 117-19.
  - 18 von Glasersfeld, p. 445.
  - 19 Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Pantheon, 1956), p. 15, first published as *Passion and Society*, trans. Montgomery Beligion (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), from *L'Amour et l'Occident* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1939). Subsequent quotations from this work are noted with page numbers in the text. For a critical consideration of de Rougemont's views, see Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1977), pp. 37-39, 60, and 77-81.
  - 20 *The Aristos* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), Group 5: Paragraph 37. Subsequent references to this work are noted by Group and Paragraph numbers in the text. I have chosen to use the earlier version because it seems to me closer in perspective to the period in which *The Magus* achieved its first published form.
  - 21 "The Ebony Tower," in *The Ebony Tower* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 113. Subsequent references are noted with page numbers in the text.
  - 22 *The Magus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), p. 242.
  - 23 Sage, p. 33.
  - 24 Binns, pp. 318-19, 327.
  - 25 C. Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Epistularum Libri Decem*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), C. Plinius Vibio Severo Svo S., p. 93.