

**Authority and Authorship:
The Writability of the Female Character
in John Fowles's *Mantissa* and *The Collector***

Tamás Tukacs

In *The Fictions of John Fowles: Power, Creativity, Femininity*, Pamela Cooper paints a rather unfavourable picture of Fowles's attempt at redefining the man-woman relationship and his philosophy based on certain metaphysical and romantic oppositions. Speaking about *Mantissa*, perhaps the most experimental and postmodern of Fowles's text, she claims that Erato's endless transformations are downright boring (205). She goes on to assert that "this presentation of the female would-be narrator in terms of a fantasy of narratorial transvestitism is extremely cynical" (209), arriving at the final verdict regarding Fowles's 1982 novel: "*Mantissa*, like *The Magus*, reconstitutes and promotes [...] male egotism" (212). In this essay I wish to show that, as regards the conflict of male authorship and female autonomy, both *Mantissa* and its obvious predecessor in this respect, *The Collector*, are far from being examples of "male egotism." I am going to have a look at the concepts of supplement and repression to make sense of the woman characters' ontological status in these novels and show those self-reflective and textualising processes that subvert Fowles's didactic and metaphysical hierarchies, concluding that what a certain school of feminist criticism prefers to view as the conflict of tyrannical male authorship and the autonomy of female characters is, in fact, a dynamism endlessly reinforcing and mirroring these two sides of the antagonism in a mutually subversive manner.

1.

“I feel that the universe is female in some deep way,” John Fowles declared in an interview with James Campbell (465). In all of Fowles’s novels, women characters occupy a central role, and, in fact, nearly all of his writings may be considered explorations of the dilemma of the relationship between the two sexes. According to Fowles, men always embody immobility, passivity, whereas women stand for motion and innovation. In his interpretation of the story of the Fall, Adam embodies nostalgia, Eve the need for change (Haegert 164); as Fowles stated in *The Aristos*: “Adam is stasis, or conservatism; Eve is kinesis, or progress” (157). Women are generally portrayed as mysterious, enigmatic and erotic characters in Fowles’s novels and the enigma embodied by them sets the narrative in motion, and they serve as catalytic factors as opposed to the stasis of men (Haegert 161), offering men an alternative mode of behaviour, a possibility to rethink their position (Burden 165). Furthermore, Fowles tends to link external reality to men and internal imagination to women (Vipond 25). Elsewhere he claimed that he sees “man as a kind of artifice, and woman as a kind of reality” (Burden 167). Fowles also refers to the Jungian concept of the self, according to which man embodies the “I,” woman “the Other,” the “not-I.” Malcolm Bradbury points to another basic dichotomy in Fowles’s fiction: determination and authority, embodied by male characters and unpredictability, contingency, and “hazard,” symbolised by female figures (263). Susana Onega sets up yet another dichotomy in Fowles’s writings, that between “collectors” and “creators.” The abandonment of collecting activities is a prerequisite to achieving “whole sight,” for a collector to become creator, for man to become *Anthropos* (40). In general, Fowles attributes special importance to what he calls the “feminine principle.” In 1995 he said: “I am a novelist because I am partly a woman, a little lost in mid-air between genders, neither one nor t’other” (Vipond 14).

Commenting on *Mantissa*, published in 1982, he said, “I’ve always been interested in what goes on in an author’s mind when he’s writing fiction. [...] And I think the drive to write fiction is mainly a Freudian one. Male novelists, anyway, are really all chasing a kind of lost figure – they’re haunted by the idea of the unattainable female, and, of course the prime unattainable female is always the mother. The attitudes of most male novelists toward their heroines, I think, practically always reflect some sort of attitude toward the mother” (cited by Kakutani). According to this view, writing fiction is motivated by a sort of Oedipal drive, which includes, by definition, a desire towards the mother and at the same time the repression of this desire in fear of castration and of the authority of the castrating father. This repressed desire can refer not only to the actual mother but other women who could embody this forbidden and unattainable figure; in the case of the novelist, his heroines.

2.

It is relatively easy to link the Freudian idea of repression to the Derridean concept of the supplement. According to what is usually called “deconstructionist” philosophy, in the case of binary oppositions, one constituent of the pair always functions as inferior, a sort of addition, a supplement that must always be repressed, relegated to a minor role in order to exclude contradictions in the hope of a perfect system. As Derrida puts it, “as a substitute, it is not simply added to the possibility of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mask of emptiness” (145), which means that if a system has to be supplemented, its inherent deficiencies become manifest. Such a system of binary oppositions may also be based on the dichotomy of man/woman in the context of Fowles’s novels. Considering them supplementary may, however, also mean that the original system is not perfect, something has to be added, to make it, if not perfect, less deficient. Women, therefore, serve in most of his texts not only as inspiring forces or mysterious archetypes, but also as potentially subversive supplements in the patriarchal pattern. As Brooke Lenz asserts, *Mantissa* “reflects significant authorial anxiety over woman as muse, as other, as character and as a function” (187).

By assigning women characters a central role in his fiction, Fowles seems to invert the traditional view of women as figures of second-rate importance and to envision them as more active and catalytic than male characters. The problem arises, however, that if the author always grants his woman characters the same, albeit positive role, those characters’ freedom that he intends to rehabilitate is significantly endangered. Fowles, realising this risk, wished to carefully maintain the liberty of his characters. Among other reasons, that is why he wrote three endings to the *French Lieutenant’s Woman*. He gradually realised, however, that precisely because he always consigned his heroines to a recurring role, despite his efforts, “the heroine herself has become one of the least free of Fowles’s literary characters” (Haegert 168). *Mantissa* is a self-conscious treatment of this dilemma of character freedom, a novel trying to reconsider an author’s chances in and the traps of *writing* his heroines.

Towards the end of the novel, Fowles himself gives a definition of the title: “Mantissa: ‘an addition of comparatively small importance, especially to a literary effort or discourse’ ” (230). The connection of the term with the concept of supplement is evident (cf. Haegert 174). The female character, Erato, serves as the manifestation of a disturbing voice that threatens the construction of the male author, Miles, who is, “the structuralist poet par excellence” (Haegert 173). With her constant presence, she forces Miles to reassess and rewrite his structures, which seems to be a never-ending process. According to Harald William Fawkner,

Mantissa is an extreme postmodern experiment, the novel being not only a novel about writing a novel, but about the sheer impossibility of that, thus the text becomes “an endlessly interrupted nontext” (134). Erato’s interruptions are often characterised by inversions. At the beginning of the second chapter, she appears in the guise of a punk star in black leather jacket and with an electric guitar, “behaving just like a man,” as Miles points out (70). The disguised Erato tries to invert the situation and place herself in the position of the author by saying, “From now on, I make the rules” (71). The clearest example of Erato’s power, who thus occupies the role of a kind of magus, is the episode when, at the end of the novel, she transforms Miles into an actual satyr with hooves and horns (233). Erato’s role as an intruding, disturbing voice is recapitulated by Miles: “Then in you came and the whole neatly balanced structure is blown to smithereens” (148). Miles attempts to exclude this disturbing voice: “I order you to leave my mind. At once!” (236). Of course, he cannot, since Erato, as a supplementary female voice, remains there and forces infinitely the constructor to rethink and rewrite his fiction.

Not only the excluded female voice of Erato, who complains of her “ontological exploitation” (117), can be conceived of as a mantissa within the narrative, but each subsequent chapter following the first can be regarded as an addition to all the previous chapters. The first chapter turns out to be the “original” narrative within the novel, written by Miles. Appearing in the second chapter, Erato comments on this story and reproaches Miles for having degraded her to a pornographic character, forcing her to be, on the level of the narrative, what in fact she is not, and asks for a “minimal recognition of her metaphysical status” (76). Miles here appears as a theory-conscious writer: “Serious modern fiction has only one subject: the difficulty of writing serious modern fiction. The natural consequence of this is that writing about fiction has become a far more important matter than writing fiction itself” (146). Erato seems ignorant of these critical tenets: “You’ll be telling me you’ve never even heard of Todorov” – “Of who?”, she asks (143). However, it turns out from the third chapter that the reader has not “stepped out” from the initial fiction of the first chapter and is witnessing a conversation on what has been written so far, but that which the reader has just read also turns out to be a male construction: “I know childish minds have to get rid of their aimless energy somehow. But the role-playing, the joking, the pretending I haven’t even heard of Tzvetan Todorov – that’s all over now,” Erato claims (172). Erato’s figure remains a fiction, a part of the narrative construction, and it seems only until the beginning of each following chapter that she has gained a sort of autonomous voice. Likewise, at the beginning of the fourth chapter, Miles and Erato comment on the previous section culminating in a sexual scene between them as: “That was interesting. [...] Definite possibilities” (195). As Patricia Waugh claims, one rhetorical strategy of postmodern

fiction is “the insertion of the situation of writing into the text in order to evoke a space outside the text”, but that is “self-cancelling [...] because the assertion of the situation can exist only within the text” (54). Consequently, both characters remain within the confines of the text; each new chapter seems to be a mantissa, an addition, a supplement to what has been written, subverting the previous passages and pretending to make it possible for Erato to make comments and, as a character, try to gain a voice of her own. In the infinitely regressive structure of the novel, both Miles and his muse remain imprisoned in a fictional world. What results is a chain of supplements that can never lead to a full, contradiction-free construction.

All these considerations make it questionable that, theoretically speaking, the novel entitled *Mantissa* can be written at all. Partly this is what the novel itself presents: the unwritability of *Mantissa*. In this sense, the metafictional first chapter, the first fiction in the fiction recapitulates the whole problem of the novel: it arrives back to where it began. At the end of the chapter, Nurse Cory reads out the narrative to which Miles, the author “has given birth” (here conceived of in the literal sense, the birth of the novel being the result of the two Muse-figures raping the author), and surprisingly, Miles’s text begins exactly with the same words as the novel itself. The story theoretically would begin again and Miles’s novel could not but retell the story of its birth ad infinitum. The novel *Mantissa* seems to imply that its writing also ends up in this abyssal, mirror-like structure; as Mahmoud Salami asserts, Miles as an author “does attempt to reproduce an ‘unwritable,’ unfinishable and endlessly revisable text” (191).

Since both the woman character and subsequent chapters can be identified as mantissae, the female character within the novel can easily be conceived of as a sort of text, as something written by the male author(ity). And as *Mantissa* can never be finished, only arbitrarily closed off, the female character as a text can never be fully “narrated,” either. The novel presents Miles’s ceaseless attempts to make sense of, to put his finger on, to master, to narrate Erato, his character. This is realised by Erato, who explains that “all through your adolescent phase, pushing those... I know well-meant and you were doing best, and I did try to help, but let’s face it, hopelessly wild and inaccurate attempts to portray me [...]” (207). This inevitably repetitive structure is alluded to by Erato elsewhere: “Because [your imagination] is so crudely repetitive one has to be its victim for only a few pages to guess how it will always work” (108). As an author, Miles can only resort to one means, writing; that is, a significantly inadequate representation of the female character.

3.

Lenz claims that the novel is “a retreat into the archetypal forces of masculinity and femininity” (185). Erato thinks of herself an archetypal figure: “[...] I happen to be a female archetype with an archetypically good sense, developed over several millennia, of deeper values” (173). She, in her several masks (Nurse Cory, Dr. Delphie, the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, etc.), claims to embody some sort of essential “femininity.” With Miles’s writing, Erato is transformed into not only an archetypal but an allegorical figure sanctioned by convention. This is, in some sense, inevitable, since any attempt to reify, to portray “the” female leads to an allegorising technique on the male author’s part. This undoubtedly narrows the possible ways of writing the woman, but the novel seems to suggest that it is the only way for Miles to be able to talk about Erato or “the” woman at all. Though Erato criticizes Miles for the “eternal one-track [his mind] runs along” and for the fact that for him “nothing is real until [he] sees it on television” (99), she herself has to admit that she is “technically nothing” (121). It is only Miles’s “hopelessly wild and inaccurate attempts to portray” his female character that her existence depends on: “I know it can end at any moment,” Erato tells him (120). The process of allegorisation has to go on, which is manifested in the scene when Miles tries to leave the hospital ward, which turns out to be his own brain: he cannot go out and has to face his own mirror-image (159).

In the process of writing the female character, Miles is, however, equally written by her (Haegert 170). The fact that he cannot leave the room relegates him to the status of a character as Erato expresses her wish at the beginning of the second chapter. Within the framework of the novel, Erato could easily be substituted for Miles, the constructor of stories. She presents two longer narratives as possible variations of their story being in the phase of construction. The first is an ancient, mythic story with Erato as a character in it, relating how she was raped by a satyr. She points out that all this happened “in that absolutely marvellous time before the alphabet and writing was invented” (94). “I wanted to scream, to struggle. But I knew it would be in vain. It was either surrender to his lust or be murdered. Actually he wasn’t violent at all. He did bite my neck, but only in play. [...] I was beyond resisting then. Mere wax in his hands. I could only stare up into his lascivious, lecherous eyes” (100-101). The representation of the intruding other is equally stereotypical and allegorical, presenting a picture of the male as exceedingly sexually violent. Whereas she scolds Miles because he cannot “get [his] mind off the eternal one-track it runs along” (99), in her narrative she presents the other bearing precisely these characteristic traits. Later we get to know that Erato told this story in spite of herself: “What you made me do in the beginning, in spite of myself [...]. The story about the satyr [...]. I ought to have resisted telling it at all” (128). In her second narrative, however, she again tells (or is forced to tell) a story abundant in crude, overt symbolism.

It's very close, there's thunder in the air, I don't want to let you in, but you insist, and suddenly somehow everything boils over, your previous diffidence becomes dark desire, your manhood is at last inflamed, without a word you spring and tear the flimsy garment from my bare shoulders, I scream and struggle, I half escape, I manage to stagger to the French windows and out into the steamy pouring rain... I run onto the lawn, but you're much too agile and strong, too animal, and you catch me and throw me on the soft turf, I twist and wrestle, you take a brutal possession of me against my will, I weep, as your pent-up lust ravages my deepest principles [...]. (131-132)

Naturally, she as a character is forced to tell that story, but this is a double-edged weapon. Conceived as an allegorical figure, she can only narrate a narrowing, allegorical story of men, which in turn, makes it possible to view women allegorically once again (having an "eternal one-track mind"). This becomes a self-generating process, like mirrors infinitely reflecting each other. By becoming the author of certain narratives, she reinforces the process of her own allegorisation. At the end of the novel she turns Miles into the satyr who, according to her narration, raped her. By claiming that Miles has a repetitive imagination, she becomes the victim of the kind of cyclical representation she protests against, becoming a mere function in that repetitive pattern. By asserting that she was the Dark Lady who inspired Shakespeare to write a part of the sonnets, she remains ensnared in an image of the idealised woman. She also tells Miles that she wrote a book entitled *Men, Will They Ever Grow Up?*, or "*Men*, for short", which we know today as *Odyssey*. By putting herself into the position of the (male) author, producing (written) texts, authorship leads to constructions that narrow down the possibilities of the representation of the other, including herself.

4.

We have seen that within the context of the novel the term "mantissa" could be interpreted on essentially two levels: it can signify both the female character and the subsequent chapters as mantissae, as supplements. The most obvious interpretation of "mantissa" would be, however, if the novel *itself* was regarded as a mantissa, an addition to something else. Obviously, *Mantissa* can be seen as an addition to, a playful apology added to Fowles' whole oeuvre up to 1982, but the most appropriate specific text in this sense seems to be Fowles' first published novel, *The Collector*.

The similarities between the two texts are more than obvious. Both novels take place in an isolated, secluded setting; in both narratives a male and a female character are locked together in a cut-off scene, where they try to persuade the other, the male character making attempts to control and interpret the resistant female. As Susana

Onega puts it, “Miles Green’s aspiration to achieve original authorship and subjective autonomy by silencing his muse, that is, the intuitive, the sexual and emotional, and also the supernatural side of art, is invariably frustrated and remains forever entrapped within his own subjective world [...] Both [Clegg and Miles] fail to communicate with other beings and reconcile themselves with the world” (45; 49). In a slightly different formulation of Brooke Lenz: “Like Clegg in *The Collector*, Miles is a collector with a penchant for pornography, imagining, numbering and evaluating the vivid sexual encounters with his ideal woman that occurs entirely within the confines of a space he controls” (190-191). However, there are other less clear, more deeply rooted correspondences between the two novels, which a careful reading reveals.

Overt references may be found in the text of *Mantissa* to these parallels, which introduce Miles, in Erato’s interpretation at least, as a late version of the tyrannic and pervert Clegg: “You collect [your female friends] and mummify them. Lock them up in a cellar and gloat over them like Bluebeard” (118). In *Mantissa*, Miles twice addresses Erato as, “I know your game” (142; 186). This is a characteristic sentence uttered by Clegg in the dramatic situation when Miranda tries to convince him that she is really ill, while Clegg claims that it is only a cold: “Of course it’s a cold. And stop acting. I know your game” (121). In both instances the female character (at least in the eyes of Clegg and Miles) is the embodiment of one common stereotype of woman, the eternal actress, who pretends and plays games. The (male) construction generating this assumption takes the form of a surface/depth dichotomy that male characters claim to be able to identify and see “behind” the alleged surface. Another obvious similarity between the two texts is the episode when Erato “smooths idly down over his stomach and finds his limp penis, strokes it, then squeezes it gently. After a while he speaks, ‘You’re always up to something’” (223). This is a clear resonance of Clegg’s pathologic mind that always suspects something behind Miranda’s acts. In this respect, the seduction scene is crucial, where it becomes clear that Clegg is exclusively obsessed with “what is behind”: “I knew there was something wrong in the situation. [...] I saw what her real game was [...]” (106; 111). Apart from these otherwise important parallels, there are other fundamental analogies that call attention to themselves.

Just as Erato signifies an intruding, disturbing female voice that subverts male construction, Miranda is likewise a subversive and supplementary force that turns Clegg’s ordinary world upside down. She (the fantasy she has about her) continues to excite his imagination, but it is only hazard (the money he wins on the pools) that enables him to execute his plan and kidnap Miranda. When he starts to make the preparations, we see Clegg becoming an author who sets out to write Miranda’s story. To understand this, one has to be familiar with Fowles’s concept of authorship. According to him, the author has full power in the process of creation,

is a sort of quasi-god who can make his characters perform whatever he wants them to: as Fowles claimed, "It's silly to say that the novelist isn't God, cannot pretend to be God, because the *fact* is that when you write a book, you are potentially a tyrant, you are the total dictator, and there's nothing in the book that has to be there if you want to knock it out or change it" (Campbell 463). Clegg, embodying this tyrannical author, has full power over his "character," Miranda: "I can do what I like," he declares at one point (93). At the same time, (the idea of, the desire for) Miranda is something to be repressed and to be hidden. That is why he kidnaps her and confines her to a cellar of a country cottage, making her invisible (for others) and at the same time establishing full control over her, "mastering" her.

If we have a look at Clegg's personal background, we have a truly pathological case: his father died when he was two, his mother "went off with a foreigner" (7). After the death of his uncle, he lived with Aunt Annie and his crippled cousin Mabel. To satisfy his desires, he bought "books of stark women and all that," but he had to hide those books "in case [his aunt] tumbled" (12). Thus Miranda gradually becomes transfigured into a pornographic book in his fantasies that has to be hidden. On the other hand, Clegg is in search of his lost mother, whose idealised form he wants to rediscover in Miranda. From the perspective of Fowles's notion of the author, "chasing a kind of lost figure [...], haunted by the unattainable female," primarily the mother, Clegg becomes an author, in the sense that his goal becomes to attain the unattainable. Naturally, no "normal" love relationship is possible between the strange couple, as Clegg does not regard Miranda as a potential lover, in fear of a symbolic incest and castration, but only as the recovered idea of his lost mother. No wonder that the only time he touches her is when she tries to escape.

Similarly to *Mantissa*, the supplementary organization reveals itself within the structure of the novel as well. The text consists of four chapters, out of which the second comprises Miranda's diary. The female voice, suppressed in the first part, Clegg's narrative, now does become visible, but only to end up in desperately fragmented sentences: "I won't die I won't die. Dear dear G.P. this Oh God oh God do not let me die. God do not let me die" (267), which refers to both to Miranda and her symbolic voice not represented in the first part. The diary, a supplement, added to Clegg's narrative externally, is one attempt to make the story complete. The problem is that we only have two first-person narratives, both of which reconstruct the events from Clegg's and Miranda's point of view, respectively. With the death of Miranda, the process does not, cannot come to an end: Clegg has his eyes on another victim, trying to attain the unattainable woman figure, looking for a supplement whose subversive voice and presence are going to be repressed again. Like Miles, Clegg is not able to abandon the process of construction-building and fiction-making. Similarly to *Mantissa*, where there seems to be no way out of the

fictional construction and where both Miles and Erato remain entrapped, Clegg (and all the female “characters” whose story he is going to “write”) will also remain imprisoned in the world of fiction. This is, however, necessary in a sense. As Erato points out that “I can’t enjoy it when I have no status at all [...]. When I know it may end at any moment” (120), referring to the fact that she “exists” as long as Miles tries to narrate her. Miranda comes to realise that one of the subtexts of their story is *The Arabian Nights*, where storytelling is also of existential significance, a matter of sheer survival. It is only when Clegg can create no more fiction around the figure of Miranda that she dies.

5.

In trying to “write” the story of Miranda, Clegg (like Miles and Erato) resorts to certain allegorical constructions: he imagines her with the help of three basic stereotypes of women: the virgin, the prostitute and the mother. First he associates her with the ideal, unattainable, chaste, pure woman, who must not be touched, and who becomes a sort of taboo or fetish for him. “She was always clean, too [...]. She hated dirt as much as I do, although she used to laugh at me about it” (60). This is not altogether unlike the scene when Erato lets Miles “apologise” and he states: “You have always been my perfect woman” (78). After Miranda tries to seduce Clegg, offering a new kind of relationship, he falls into the trap of another stereotype, the woman as prostitute, thinking that “like all women, she had a one-track mind” (113). Erato’s accusing Miles precisely with these terms is the reversal of this situation, but the consequence is that if one conceives of the other as having a one-track mind, the interpretation of her/him will probably be similarly “one-tracked.” Most importantly, as has been pointed out, Miranda signifies a mother-figure for Clegg. What he wants is attention and caring, he has no sexual demands. The ideal situation in which he imagines them together is “sleeping side by side with the wind and rain outside or something” (111), which recalls the image of a frightened child sleeping beside his mother. Kidnapping Miranda is an attempt by Clegg to rediscover his idealised mother, but when Miranda tries to seduce him, Clegg is alarmed not wanting to commit symbolic incest. Moreover, he finds that she is his “real” mother, the “prostitute” who went off with a foreigner. Thus, Miranda is not a suitable figure to replace his mother, and soon afterwards she dies. A similar process takes place in *Mantissa* where it is Erato who claims (or made to claim) that “[her] chief characteristics happens to be a supreme maidenliness” (83) and that deep down she always remained “the eternal virgin” (101).

These interactions are characterised by a tendency to introduce something external, an alien pattern between experience and interpretation. The characters are looking for “subtexts” of their experiences and establish a binary system of surface

and depth claiming to “see behind the surface” and being aware of some “deep layer” of signification. The problem is that this distinction, under the peculiar conditions within Clegg’s cottage, is not valid. There is no “behind,” and, in this respect, the seduction scene is of central importance. This is the only instance when the veil (both physically and metaphorically) drops, and Miranda is “stark,” powerfully signifying the absence of the dichotomy of “reality” and “illusion.” Miranda’s fate depends on to what extent she “has capacity to accept this constructed reality as true” (Onega 50), like the Prince in *The Magus*, who, first wants to “know the real truth, the truth beyond magic” (552), but later, realising that nothing is “real” in the conventional sense, and all is fiction, he himself becomes a magician.

Nevertheless, the allegorical reading of the other is also true in the reverse: Miranda wants to apply patterns to Clegg, too. She conceives of him as a madman (126), a queer (63), a thrilling mystery, an enigma to be solved (126) or an “uneducated and ignorant [...] ordinary dull little person” (218) – a socio-political interpretation that regards Clegg as the representative of his social group. That is, he always remains something “other” for her, thus Miranda reproduces the same reading operation that she has fallen victim to: stereotyping and allegorisation. The most prominent way she conceives of Clegg is the psychoanalytical. She insists on “get[ting] to the bottom of him, to drag things he won’t talk about out of him” (159). She supposes a hidden centre in him, on the basis of which she could interpret her captor. However, Clegg is characterised by a pervasive sense of fragmentation, thus preventing Miranda from achieving what Fowles termed “whole sight”: his “hobby,” photographing Miranda is a clear symbol of his attempt to fragment her into pieces, to make her easy to “handle.” It is enough to have a glance at his aunt’s letter: its syntax is so fragmented that the text is almost incomprehensible (196–197). His second chief characteristic feature is emptiness and lack: he lacks parents, friends, proper education, imagination, erudition, and so on (the only thing he has is money). Miranda attempts to think of Clegg in terms of different allegorical constructions, but later she is obliged to give up this reading model. Revising her interpretive strategy, she has to find that it is *herself* in the middle of the centre she wants to discover: “I could never cure him. Because I am his disease” (257). In this respect, Erato’s remark is especially important in *Mantissa*, when she points out that “I was trained as a clinical psychologist. Who simply happens to have specialized in the mental illness that you [...] call literature” (176). The woman character is both the origin and the sufferer of that illness who thus cannot make it come to an end. The same mirror-effect begins to function here when Miles tries to leave the room and has to meet his own image (159). The situation has come full circle: Miranda in literally *writing* Clegg in her diary, can only impose subtexts on (or below the surface of) the story most notably that of *The Tempest*, but *Great Expectations*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Room at the Top*, *The Catcher in the Rye* also serve as subtexts for her experience. The characters cannot but reiterate allegorical

patterns and are not able to finish the construction of the other: Miles cannot leave the room at the end of the novel, Erato repeats the letters of the Greek alphabet ad infinitum, *Mantissa* ends with two allegorical images – the Japanese girl and Miles as satyr. Having buried Miranda, Clegg remains a prisoner of the obsession with the search after the unattainable – the chain of supplements does not end.

6.

If we look at the rhetorical mechanisms employed to assist the two pairs of characters in trying to conceive of each other, we find that one novel is precisely the inverted picture of the other. In *The Collector*, Clegg wishes to interpret Miranda with the help of essentially synecdochic relations. The most obvious manifestation of this is the taking of photos that fragment reality and represent only a part of it (cf. Sontag 33). The fact that he likes to glance at pornographic books, especially the one entitled *Shoes*, “with very interesting pictures of girls, mainly their legs, wearing different sorts of shoes, some just shoes and belts [...]” (119), reveals Clegg’s fetishist perversion. His self is constituted metonymically, he imagines himself a machine, which is manifested in the mechanical nature of his interpretation and the diabolic precision with which he makes preparations for kidnapping Miranda. In contrast to this, Miranda strives to build up a full construction, wants to achieve “whole sight”: he wants to “get” Clegg when she is drawing him: “You’re very difficult to get. You’re so featureless. Everything is nondescript” (62); “You won’t be picked up” (80). Her attempts to analyse Clegg psychoanalytically is a way in which she endeavours to reconstruct his story, to make a narrative of him. Thus she supposes, similarly to Clegg, that there is “something behind him.” However, the root of their mutual misinterpretation of each other is that nothing proves to be behind what they regard as the “surface”: Clegg is “not human, he’s an empty space disguised as a human” (234), and likewise, there can be no “game” behind Miranda’s actions. What seems to be role-playing is the ultimate reality for both of them.

In *Mantissa*, on the contrary, it is the female characters that make use of synecdochic relations in reading the man. In the first chapter, where the two nurses try to reanimate Miles, using a quasi-psychosexual treatment, psychoanalysis is regarded as a method exclusively dealing with desires, libidos and perversions, which represent only discreet aspects of the theory. Erato’s reading of the Freudian theory is exceptionally limited: “If you must know, Mr. Green, your memory loss may well be caused by an unconscious desire to fondle unknown female bodies” (33); “Anything that spurs your libido [...] Bonds. A whip. Black leather. Whatever you fancy” (35); “[...] all resorts to the imagery of defecation and urination are symptoms of a culturally induced guilt and repression” (35). Erato also concentrates on only one aspect when she says that she would imagine Miles as a “perfectly nice man in his way. Just a little [...] limited and deformed by his milieu and profession”

(130) (which is the resonance of Miranda's reading Clegg as a social allegory, a representative of the lower-middle class). The most crudely synecdochic interpretation proves to be the female characters' reading of Miles identifying him with his sexual organ: "All Nurse and I wish to do is to enlist the third component in your psyche, the id. The id is that flaccid member pressed against my posterior" (39). At the end of the novel Erato starts to "fondle [Miles's] penis", saying " 'I may not have read your books, but I have read you. I know you by heart, almost.' Now she pats the penis as if in a farewell [...]" (224). This whole-part relation structures the episode as well when "he felt the nurse reach down and catch his limp wrist on the rubber sheet, then lead hand to lie on the rounded contour of her right cheek. To the now quite unashamedly *suggestive synecdoches of her tongue* were added quiverings and tremulous little borings in the surface behind his hand" (45, my emphasis).

Miles, however, attempts to discover some essential femininity in his heroine, who resists this generalisation. By presenting contradictory statements of herself – once she asks for the "minimal recognition of [her] metaphysical status" (76), later claims that she is "not something in a book," but "supremely real" (77) – she eschews any attempt that would pin down her "essential" femininity.

7.

At first sight, the dominance of women in John Fowles's fiction may seem a simple inversion of the traditional order in which the female voice had been suppressed. However, looking more carefully at some of Fowles's works, we can discover more subtle mechanisms that govern the role of female characters in his fiction. He himself identifies the impetus to assign a central importance to women as a psychoanalytically inspired Oedipal process – the search for the unattainable female, the mother. The repression involved in this drive manifests itself on the level of the male characters who can very often be regarded as author figures trying, in the abstract sense of the word, to write the female other. The conjunction between the idea of repression and the supplement convincingly offers itself in his novels discussed above. In both *The Collector* and *Mantissa*, this concept of supplementation can be discovered, at the level of the characters (the female protagonist as a mantissa in the male author's structure), on the one hand, and, at the level of the novels' structure (the chapters functioning as additions to each other), on the other. The concept of supplement also occurs in the relation of the two novels to each other (*Mantissa* being a self-conscious epilogue to the problem of the "writability" of the female character either by the fictional authors, Clegg and Miles Green or by Fowles himself).

The cyclical framework of the two novels suggests that, for the male author, any attempt to master his female written text must necessarily fail, since he inevitably thinks of the female character as an archetypal other (a muse, a virgin, a temptress,

an actress), which is far from a proper understanding of her, if such a thing exists at all. Reciprocally, women characters perceive both male figures as embodying a type of people (in the case of Clegg, a madman, an enigma, a homosexual person, someone needing a psychoanalytic treatment; Miles is seen as an infant, a satyr, a tyrant, a magician). These mutual processes, intensifying each other result in cyclical, or mirror-structures that manifest themselves in many forms in the two novels, with the suggestion of the unwritability of the female character as a text of the male author figures. Erato and Miranda both remain mantissae, who can only temporarily be suppressed or neglected and thus make the writing process interminable forever.

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