

Linguistic Labyrinths and Madness in John Fowles' *The Magicians*

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Abstract: This study aims to examine and analyse the role of intertextuality in John Fowles' *The Magus* (1965). As this work provides an introductory overview of intertextuality, in lights to Fowles' use of inspiration and direct quotation from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding." An evident through tracing to the chain of influence of other pre-existing works in the world of literature and in its opposition towards the traditional aspects of originality, authorial voice and fixed meaning. *The Magus* constructs a labyrinth narrative world, where it invites readers to stroll around the maze in pursuit of no definite truth. In addition, through Conchis, Fowles blurs reality and illusion, pushing Nicholas into a state of madness, paranoia and existential crises. As Michel Foucault suggests, madness in literature symbolizes self-examination, and Conchis' surreal scenarios vigorously forces Nicholas to question his sanity and acknowledge his inner chaos. Nicholas' journey through madness reveals deeper truths about human nature, highlighting the fragility of identity and the struggle to discern reality from illusion.

Keywords: Labyrinth, Metafiction, Intertextuality, mise en abyme, Authorship, The Magus, Madness

1. Introduction

Fowles' *The Magus* elicits deep insightful element of scepticism. As the core of deconstruction holds, meaning and language are inherently unstable and never absolute. This article aims to reveal how meaning is constructed and perpetually delayed through series of fabricated story telling in *The Magus*. The novel draws on intertextuality, alluding to Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Dante Alighieri and Friedrich Nietzsche, to postpone Nicholas' access to reality. Subsequently, this article will explore how language plays a vital role in altering individual's perception of lived experiences. In addition, it argues that the fragmented narrative structure of metafiction, as exemplified in *The Magus*, resembles that of the split consciousness of the postmodern individual as it systematically challenges the stability of fundamental concepts such as reality and truth, constantly blurring the borderline between the two. The article will examine the text's literary devices and techniques, such as intertextuality which creates a language maze and vigorously blurs the borderline between reality and fiction, ultimately leading Nickolas to a state of madness or even freedom. Hence, the protagonist's perception of reality undergoes constant alteration when confronted with a deconstructive understanding of the world, revealing the inherent instability of meaning and reality as well as the pivotal role of language in its transformative process.

The Magus employs postmodern techniques such as intertextuality, providing readers with multitudinous approaches to decipher texts from other existing texts. Quotations are one of the most fundamental techniques of postmodern literature, highlighting its interactive nature of crossing the reader from one place to another. Fowles' *The Magus* blurs the borderline between the aesthetical and the real. The novel employs self-reflexivity, self-awareness, narrative depth and texture. In *Constructing Reality: Constructivism and Narration in John Fowles's The Magus*, Barbara Rommerskirchen argues that "drawing the reader's attention to its own artificial status, metafictional literature

does not claim to make universal statements about reality but poses questions and thus intends to encourage the reader to think about the relation between fiction and reality" (1999, p.88). Similarly, *The Magus* encapsulates elements such as non-linear fragmented narrative and intertextuality, coupled with epistemological uncertainty, reflecting on the protagonist's mental state.

In "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept" (1996), Maria M. J. Alfaro discusses the influence of postmodernist theories on art and literature. She explores how an epoch, that once revered and canonized privileged works, is now characterized by rejection, as postmodernism challenges the border line between high and low culture. Hence, postmodernist works in art and literature are an amalgamation of classic and popular, art and commerce. They consist of recycling previously existing works and conventions and recontextualizing cultural material, creating works which are laboriously intertextual. As Alfaro argues, "this developmental has not occurred in a theoretical vacuum; it has actually been accompanied by a particular theory legitimizing and re-defining the status of texts and their producers: the theory of intertextuality" (1996, p.271). As a postmodern text, *The Magus* employs this defining feature of postmodernist works: intertextuality. Through this literary technique, we can explore the intertextual element of ironic reflexivity and its challenges to originality and authorial voice in *The Magus*. This novel exemplifies a masterful incorporation of other references within a work of literature, creating multiplicity of voices, ambiguity, confusion, and disorientation. It significantly pulls readers to live vicariously in a virtual maze filled with misleading literary clues. Metaphorically, Fowles paints the maze's walls with allusions and references, drawn from Greek mythology, philosophy and literature such as Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and Charles Dickens. This article analyzes *The Magus'* intertextual elements and argues that through these literary devices leading to the creation of a maze-like story, a world where one only gets lost in search for a definitive meaning or truth, the novel challenges the notion of artistic originality and authorship.

Intertextuality in *The Magus*

It is important to understand the concept of intertextuality with its diverse implications. Julia Kristeva is among the first scholars who have discussed the concept of “intertextualité” in *Desire in Language: A Semiotics Approach to Literature and Art* (1982), under the essay titled “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (1966). Kristeva has developed Bakhtins’ dialogism, by arguing that “each word (text) is intersection of other words (text) where at least one other word (text) can be read” (1966, p.64). She suggests that every given word or text is not isolated, but rather exists in a chain relation to other previous words or texts. Therefore, as readers, we should take into account other words and texts which are interlinked, echoed or alluded to. Kristeva intricately defines intertextuality as “a mosaic of quotation; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*” (1966, p.64). Similarly, Roland Barthes highlights the intertextuality of a text as an inherent quality of a text which “is a multidimensional space in which variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations” (1977, p.146). In *The Magus*, Fowles focuses on weaving together intertextual ideas, voices, and allusion to amalgamate multiple themes, and meanings. Through intertextuality, both the reader and Nicholas find themselves inexorably ensnared in a labyrinth of the interconnected narratives, only to create an ambiguous ending without a center and therefore questioning the Romantic concept of originality.

Maurice Conchis, who serves as Fowles’ fictional surrogate, possesses a keen awareness of storytelling’s transformative impact and its capacity to influence human perception. He recognizes its vital role in shifting multiple points of view, and deftly harnessing intertextuality as a potentially manipulative tool to subject Nicholas’ journey toward self-awareness. This manipulation aligns with the Foucauldian concept of the subject as elaborated in “The Subject and Power” (1982). Foucault argues that “there are two meaning to the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge” (1982, p.781). Within this context, Nicholas is subject to Conchis’ power due to his manipulating storytelling techniques and strategies. Simultaneously, Nicholas is bound to his own identity, and through his experiences in the godgame, he gains a deeper self-awareness. To prove his omniscience characteristic, Conchis tells Nicholas that, “I have lived a great deal in other centuries. ‘You mean in literature?’ ‘In reality’” (1965, p.105). With this first exchange, he demonstrates his experiences and knowledge in beyond literature, history, and philosophy in comparison to Nicholas. This statement only adds up to his mysterious nature towards Nicholas, being the only magus, who possesses a profound deep understanding of various discourses beyond anyone’s comprehension. Every time Nicholas interacts with Conchis, he finds himself diverted to another leading path. Despite his attempt to unravel one mystery, Nicholas finds himself only regressing. Conchis’ first impression towards his intentional hypocritical stance on the subject of reading fiction is exemplary. As Conchis questions, “[w]hy should I struggle through hundreds of pages of fabrication to reach half a dozen very little truths?” (1965, p.96). This shows his subjective aversion to and

rejection of falsehood and fabrication of truth and reality, revealing to Nicholas his theory of language. Rather than entertaining and distracting readers with fictional narratives, language is a medium whose sole purpose is to convey genuine information and verifiable facts about the world. As Conchis continues, “[w]ords are for truths. For facts. Not fiction” (1965, p.96). Nicholas is stirred by Conchis’ commitment towards honesty, clarity and authenticity, hinting at his disdain for deception and confronting reality without the embellishment of fiction. Furthermore, Conchis highlights that literature should serve no more than facts, eschewing fiction entirely. Even when Nicholas visits Conchis, he observes that there are no novels in his villa, for he has incinerated all of his novels but the diaries, biographies and autobiographies. To his satisfaction, they are “far more real than any historical novel—more moving, more evocative, more human” (1965, p.143). Significantly and most ironically, Conchis’ stories are often made up, and he assumes the role of a creator and director, embodying the trait of a psychotic fabricator. Thereby, to craft his own fictitious reality, he uses people to serve as characters in his elaborate narrative. For Nicholas, participation in the game is like reading a book, as he notices during conversations with Alison: As he puts it, “[t]his experience. It’s like being halfway through a book. I can’t just throw it in the dustbin” (1965, p.279). In this manner, *The Magus* consists of constructive parallel texts, where several references influence the reader and the protagonist’s interpretation of ambiguous clues. In understanding intertextuality, Fowles knottily makes references to “Little Gidding,” *The Tempest* and *Othello*, to establish a bridge between the primary text and other literary works and enrich his maze-like narrative. Through facilitating these elements, such as allusion, quotation, ironic parody, *The Magus* questions conventional notion of originality, authorship and fixed meaning.

Intertextuality resembles the concept of the palimpsest, where a manuscript of an earlier text has been erased and reused for a later writing, indicating traces of previous writings. The palimpsest exemplifies how all writings maintain traces of other writings. It highlights that writers cannot intrinsically produce something original without the influence of previous texts. From the outset of part 2 in *The Magus*, the reader is presented with the very first intertextual passages from T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding” (1942), from the collection of *Four Quartets*. This intertextual interplay is internalized as Nicholas’ first steps toward entering Conchis’ maze. Fowles epitomizes Eliot’s fundamental sentiment of the journey of self-discovery and the innate purpose behind the human existence. Eliot’s “Little Gidding” exhibits the natural essence of time, reminiscing the past and spiritual reconciliation. It draws the correlation between individual’s transformation and the search for meaning in life, which arguably reflects Nicholas’ journey throughout the novel. Once again, this highlights the idea that all works there are always referential interconnections of pre-existing works. Intertextuality demonstrates that rather than the spontaneous sense of originality, texts are made of the pre-existing texts. Subsequently, the dynamics of intertextuality challenges the concept of authorship, originality and autonomy of creativity and literary works. Authorship as “the author of one’s own thoughts, feelings, emotions, voices, etc.” can be defined as

“a particular combination of subjectivity and agency” (Aryan, 2021, p.112).

A scene when Nicholas discovers a hidden book behind a rock (which was secretly planted by Conchis), where one of the marked pages had four lines prominently highlighted in red ink, “Little Gidding” exemplifies these intertextual dynamics:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (1965, p.66)

Fowles incorporates Eliot’s poem to fundamentally create a narrative structure behind the journey of self - discovery and the natural purpose behind the human existence. Eliot’s lines self - reflexively reveal the novel’s own narrative structure. Fowles skillfully encapsulates and weaves the plot behind *The Magus* into three parts, as self - reflexively echoed in these lines. The first line refers to the first part of the novel and reveals Nicholas’ yearning for new excitement. As he puts it, “I didn’t know where I was going, but I knew what I needed. I needed a new land, a new race, a new language ... I needed a new mystery” (1965, p.12). This highlights Nicholas’ pursuit of new knowledge to discover the undiscoverable, to sustain the mind and soul with new adventure, away from the boring and mundane London. The next two lines echo the second part of the plot where you begin where you ended the process. This reveals a poignant disclosure that our sense of deep exploration and journey will inevitably flow back at us in circles, a postmodern belief where no final truth, meaning or metaphorically speaking end exists. The last line is used as a self - reflexive commentary on the very circular structure of the novel itself. As Ernst von Glaserfeld in “Reflection on John Fowles’s *The Magus* and the Construction of Reality” elucidates, “the answer comes to him. He has arrived where he started, is once more lost ... feeling insignificant and resenting the disinterest of the world” (1979, p.446). The acquisition of diverse discernment transcends our lens to a newfound perception—a sense of wisdom that one can always come up with new fresh interpretation. Nicholas’ discovery of the stanza was intentionally planned by Conchis, foreshadowing the voyage framework Nicholas is about to undergo.

At the heart of intertextuality is the recognition that every text is inherently an infinite network of other texts, either mixed, borrowed, transformed, and/or influenced. Thus, an author’s work always echoes and traces other texts. As Graham Allen argues, “the act of reading ... plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts” (2022, p.1). This explains a postmodernist dictum that texts are modified products of various other texts. The reader constructs their understanding of the past through literary texts, representing the natural progression of learning a text and expand upon it, and, as Hutcheon contends, “[a] literary work can no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any texts derive meaning and significance” (1988, p.126). As exemplified in the “Little Gidding” example, the direct quotation self - reflexively echoes the novel’s plot and

structure, demonstrating that texts and meaning are not autonomous entities. The meaning of a text cannot be dictated and controlled by the author’s intentions or its content alone. As Allen puts it, this suggests “a new version of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy” (2022, p.15). Hence, meaning is constructed through the interaction between Nicholas, “Little Gidding,” the reader and other previous texts. This is only the opening gambit as “Little Gidding” puts forward the very core essence of curiosity and creation. Nicholas demonstrates how authors do not intrinsically conjure their work out of thin air but are influenced by a spark of other existing works.

In the following chapter, Nicholas’ exposition to the influenced poem “Little Gidding” foretells his response attempt to write a poem for himself. As he roughly scribbles and pens a stanza out of response:

From this skull - rock strange golden roots throw
Ikons and incidents; the man in the mask
Manipulates. I am the fool that falls
And never learns to wait and watch,
Icarus eternally damned, the dupe of time... (1965, p.95)

The lines insinuate Nicholas’ captivation, affinity and enchantment by the mesmerizing performances curated by “the man in the mask”—Conchis, the mastermind of the enigmatic masquerades and artistic maze of allusions (95). Nicholas attempted poem exhibits a self - conscious awareness of his entrapped position in the maze of the godgame. For instance, in the last line, Nicholas refers to himself as Icarus, the son of Daedalus who flies too close to the sun which burns his waxed wings. Due to the heat, the wax melts and causes to disintegrate his wings and tragically Icarus plummets into the sea and drowns: “I am the fool that falls” (95). This given text is another example of the dynamic of intertextuality, highlighting the incompleteness of the novel’s meaning. As Aryan argues, “[n]othing has remained untouched. Everything has been removed from its ‘original’ status” and therefore, the myth of originality is debunked (2022, p.52). Inevitably intertextual, texts cannot retain any original status or meaning; its inherent interconnectedness links all literary and artistic works, thereby omitting the notion of originality.

Nicholas contemplates his relationship with the myth of Icarus, a self - reflexive allusion to the classical mythology presented in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. One of his well - known narrative poems involves a father named Daedalus and his son Icarus, who attempt to escape Crete. It is noteworthy to remember that Daedalus himself is a talented craftsman and a maestro in the construction of endless labyrinth designs. King Minos of Crete, fascinated by his talents, hires Daedalus to build a complex labyrinth to restrain and imprison a monstrous called Minotaur, a creature with the body of a man and the head of a bull. Ingeniously, Daedalus crafts the labyrinth to confound all who dared to step in its corridors, making anyone unable to find their way out. Within the labyrinth’s walls, the Minotaur roams freely feeding on human sacrifice from Athens as part of a tribute demanded by King Minos, in commemoration of his son’s death. Theseus,

volunteers to be one of the sacrificial youths is determined to fiercely kill the monster and bring an end to this bloodshed.

Build on this mythological intertextual allusion, Nicholas is conscious of having “entered a myth” (160). At first, Nicholas compares himself to Theseus. As he puts it, “[n]ow I was Theseus in the maze; somewhere in the darkness Ariadne waited and the Minotaur ... I am Theseus in the maze; let it come, even the black Minotaur, so long as it comes; so long as I *may* reach the center” (1965, pp.312 - 324, emphasis added). This indicates the impact of the maze metaphorically contributes to structuring and shaping Fowles’ narrative. Despite their distinct origins and contexts, Nicholas and Theseus share some key thematic similarities in exploring the labyrinthine nature of human experience and language as well as undergoing profound transformation. Arguably, they share a very distinctive stance in reflecting their narrative structure and themes. On a quest for self - identification and to bring meaning to a world replete with recursive illusions and deceptions, Nicholas finds himself involuntarily entangled in a psychological maze. In contrast to Theseus, he traces the labyrinth and is determined to overcome perilous obstacles and kills the Minotaur to save his people. At the end, Theseus slays the Minotaur and earns his legendary heroic status. However, Nicholas represents unattainable final meaning. As Rubenstein argues, “reality is like an onion, with infinite layers but, finally, nothing at the center ... the ambiguous motivation for such a production, reinforces the feeling that, as Nicholas later proclaims, ‘the maze has no center’” (1975, p.332). Fowles deliberately employs this intertextual technique to illustrate the multitudinous possible scenarios, borrowing and imitating from a cloud of copious earlier texts. As Allen emphasizes:

The myth of transparency is a myth, and a thoroughly intertextual process of bricolage, of appropriating, mixing and transposing styles and functions dominates the relationship between older and newer [mediums] ... thereby helping [readers] to recognize and to generate a sense of authenticity. (2022, p.215)

Within the intricate layers of the novel, Daedalus, the legendary craftsman, functions as a significant metaphor, bearing a striking resemblance to both Fowles himself and Conchis as creators of the intertextual labyrinth of the narrative. The Minotaur is arguably a symbolic and self - reflexive representation of the deeper, darker facets of Nicholas. Just like the Minotaur, Nicholas is rather trapped in circles in pursuit of a final meaning, reality, and originality, a pursuit which remains elusive throughout the novel and is never fulfilled. The novel’s sharp unfolding juxtaposition between *The Magus* and the myth reveals postmodernism’s view of concepts of originality, autonomy, and final meaning. While Theseus bravely manages to enter the maze and conquer the Minotaur, Nicholas is trapped in the duality and labyrinthine structure of the narrative. The Minotaur embodies a dual nature, being half human and half beast, mirroring Nicholas’ internal duality. Nicholas struggles with opposing facets of his identity and personality, feeling entrapped between his rational (human side) and his primal (instinctive) urges. Moreover, like the Minotaur, Nicholas experiences an imprisoning journey throughout the narrative’s labyrinth; both feel disconnected, disoriented, and

perpetually lost without a way out unless they are killed. Just as the Minotaur’s fate is in the hands of Theseus, Nicholas must confront and conquer his beastly facet to grow and transform from his dark impulses.

The inescapable language maze, a postmodernist perspective, critiques the concept of originality. As Aryan argues, Fowles portrays “the infinite labyrinth of text, language, in the story where the contemporary reader, together with the character himself (or herself), is no longer Theseus who, with the help of thread, is able to find his/her way back from it” (2020, p.37). Conchis’ intertextual references “implies a spatial web where different” narratives reside, each offering a viewpoint that may contradict one another, mirroring the essence of “a library, a multifaceted place/space where a number of books are kept each encompassing a distinctive world of words” (Aryan, 2020, p.37). Hence, Conchis fabricates a maze - like narrative in which Nicholas gets lost, to deconstruct his preconception and offer instead the multiplicity of meaning embedded in intertextuality. Unlike Daedalus and King Minos, Fowles constructs the labyrinth of illusions to questions the traditional notions of truth, originality, artistic autonomy, and spontaneous authenticity. It is worth noticing that postmodernism does not reject or discard the past; rather, it incorporates existing texts to highlight that every text is inherently intertextual, hence, not original. This approach implies that intertextual references facilitate new readings and interpretations which are never autonomous and are always dependent on other texts.

Madness and Artistic Creation in *The Magus*

Although madness is often seen as a negative or disruptive force, it can serve as an enlightening catalyst for understanding and self - awareness. In *The Magus*, through Conchis, Fowles deliberately blurs the borderline between reality and illusion, causing both the readers and Nicholas to lose their sense of rationality and enter a state of madness. In *The Magus*, madness can be interpreted through various aspects, including the intertwining themes of reality, illusion, psychological manipulation, and Nicholas’ journey towards his existential crisis. Conchis’ orchestrated surreal scenarios lead Nicholas to inexorably question his sanity, perpetually wondering if he is witnessing real events or merely succumbing to hallucinations. This pervasive uncertainty and the inability to grasp or distinguish between what is real and what is not are enviably a sign of incipient madness. Conchis’ insidious psychological games relentlessly push Nicholas to the furthest reaches of his mental and emotional limits. Driven by an irresistible force and an insatiable will to unravel the elusive truth, Nicholas is subjected to Conchis’ incessant cycle of trust erosion and rebuilding, a process deliberately forged to disorient and destabilize his senses. This horrid manipulation only descends Nicholas into paranoia, hopelessly entrapping him in an unsettling maelstrom of inner chaos and madness. In fact, it can be argued that Fowles projects his own fragmented psyche and paranoid delusions onto the world of fiction, externalizing them as characters. As Aryan argues, “paranoia can be viewed as a creative energy which is directed and channelled through storytelling that helps the writer maintain a degree of control and agency which would otherwise be existentially threatening” (2023, p.341).

Conchis dismantles Nicholas' perception of reality which exacerbates his psychological torment, making it increasingly difficult for him to distinguish between the fabricated and the authentic. Ultimately, Nicholas' descent into madness is marked by a sense of disillusionment and despair as he grapples with the ever-blurring boundaries of his own consciousness. Conchis' psychological machination serves not only to confuse the reader but also to lay bare the fragile and tenuous nature of human psyche. Undoubtedly, during the unfolding of Conchis' perplexing events, there are moments when both the reader and Nicholas believe they have neared some semblance of truth; yet, they only find themselves lost and ensnared in a perpetual cycle, swirling back into uncertainty on the fence of madness. As Nicholas narrates, "my sense of reality was like gravity. For a while I was like a man in space, whirling through madness" (1965, p.224). According to Ernst von Glasersfeld, this convention is "a widespread ailment ... casually connected with the belief that 'reality' is what it is, quite independent of us. Conchis demonstrates to Nicholas, and through Nicholas to us, that it is the experienter who creates his 'facts,' the relationships between them, and thus the structure that comes to consider real" (1979, p.446). Conchis' stories compel Nicholas to grow sceptical and question his collective grasp of reality. Rather than being grounded by the weight of truth, Nicholas describes being "like a man in space, spinning through madness" (Fowles, 1965, p.224). Despite his repeated attempts to puzzle together his experiences into a coherent rational understanding of reality, they evidently prove inadequate and futile.

In *Madness, Language, Literature*, Michel Foucault points out the relationship between madness and the mirror in literature. As he argues, "[t]he thematic relationship between madness and the mirror in literature, in legends, and in folklore is a strange one. Looking at oneself in a mirror can lead to madness. Spend too much time in front of your mirror and you will see the devil" (2023, p.44). In other words, madness in literature is a crucial aspect of exploring the human experience and self. This also reveals a thematic relationship between madness and mirror in literature, where the mirror serves as a metaphor for self-examination and introspection. However, gazing at oneself in the mirror for too long can lead to a certain level of madness, suggesting that excessive self-reflection may cause one to lose touch with reality. In *The Magus*, Fowles uses various literary elements to create a metaphorical kaleidoscopic labyrinth covered in mirrors, through which the reader and Nicholas self-reflexively examine themselves and the world around them. Fascinated by this kaleidoscopic labyrinth, Nicholas does not hold back from spending more time gazing into the mirrors. He endures by what he sees artistically either by Icarus, Minotaur, Othello, Iago, or Prospero. Similarly, through Nicholas' lens in the story, readers are engagingly reflecting on their own emotions and experiences. Through this metaphorical mirroring, the novel becomes a form of double-edge sword. Although it may offer a powerful tool for self-reflection, it can make one to lose touch with reality as the line between the inner world and external reality blurs, as Foucault pointed out.

Moreover, hyper-reflexivity or hyper-awareness, a quintessential attribute of metafiction, epitomizes the

fragmentation and dissolution of the self and psyche. As the narrative becomes intensely self-conscious, it incessantly draws attention to its own narrative structure. Such hyper-reflexivity incites profound introspection into the essence of identity. In *Madness and Modernism* (1992), Louis Sass defines hyper-reflexivity as "acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and by alienation from action and experience" (8). Therefore, as Aryan concludes, "the hyperreflexive person is alienated from their own thoughts, feelings, voices and consequently authorship" (2020, p.125). For instance, observing Conchis, Nicholas expresses that:

I ... [am] trying to comprehend the sadistic old man's duplicities: to read his *palimpsest*. His "theatre without an audience" made no sense, it couldn't be the explanation. The one thing all actors and actresses craves was an audience. Perhaps what he was doing did spring in part from some theory of the theatre, but he has said it himself: The masque is only a metaphor. (1965, p.475)

Arguably, this demonstrates a hyper-reflexive state of mind due to Conchis' reflection on the multifaceted nature of the "sadistic old man's duplicities," reaching out to unravel his "palimpsest." The reference to Conchis' "theatre without an audience" introduces a meta-theatrical feature which accentuates the aspect of life and narrative. This hyper-reflexive nature of the "masque" underlines the narrative's self-consciousness. It is a metafictional metaphor which draws attention to its own construction and the performative act of reading. Hence, what Nicholas observes exemplifies a hyper-reflexive element, which reminds the reader of the narrative's self-consciousness and its artificiality.

Nicholas' split psyche signifies his internal conflict and inability to discern between reality and fantasy. First, it is essential to emphasize that "the existence of madness is different" (Foucault, 2023, p.59) and in *The Magus* the notion of madness is multifaceted. This article argues that madness does not necessarily encompass individuals with signs of mental disturbance/illness, but rather creatively exhibits aspects of human experiences. In other words, madness could be viewed not simply as a clinical diagnosis but also as a creative capacity. As Foucault argues, "madness is more to less secretly, more or less openly a principle of classification and organization; the standard of binary distribution that societies enact spontaneously between two regions of existence: reason and unreason" (2023, p.59). In *The Magus*, madness pervades the entirety of Nicholas' experiences with Conchis' manipulative schemes and surreal settings. This reflection argues that Fowles projects parts of his own split psyche onto the main characters. Conchis and Nicholas artistically serve as a metaphorical embodiment of Fowles' internal conflict and preoccupation with split psyche. As explicated in the novel, it is "as if the island was split into dark and light" (Fowles, 1965, p.61), traversing between sanity and madness, rationality and irrationality, consciousness and unconsciousness, reality and fiction. To use Foucault's terms, madness "reveal[s] a deeper and more hidden truth, one that was unknown to us. Madness reveals the invisible" (2023, p.62). This implies that through the lens of madness, some forms of truth about human nature could be unveiled. In essence, fragmented and split psyche is central to Fowles' artistic creation of characters.

Nicholas experiences a psychological division since his days at Oxford, a period he describes, "I led two lives ... I went on leading a double life in the Army, queasily playing at being Brigadier 'Blazer' Urfe's son in public, and nervously reading *Penguin New Writing* and poetry pamphlets in private" (1965, p.10). From the beginning of the novel, Nicholas' struggle between a superficial existence and an emerging self-awareness is palpable. His life at Oxford is marked by emotional dissociation and numbness, while hiding behind a mask of cynicism and indifference. Nicholas' inner turmoil and the personas he adapts around his surroundings can be elucidated through Laing's concept of the divided self. Laing expounds on how individuals compartmentalize their identity:

The central split is between ... his 'own' self and ... "personality"... What the individual variously terms his "own," "inner," "true," "real," self is experienced as divorced from all activity that is observable by another ... One may conveniently call this "personality" the individual's "false self or a false - self system." The reason ... that one speaks of a *false - self system* is that the "personality," false, self, mask, "front," or a persona that such individuals wear may consist in an amalgam of various part - selves, none of which is so fully developed as to have a comprehensive "personality" of its own. (1960, p.73)

Laing suggests that individuals may develop a sense of "false - self system" which prompts them to adopt various personas or masks in different contexts. These personas serve as defense mechanisms against perceived threats to shield their true identity. Additionally, according to Laing, this divided self can lead to distortion of identity and incomplete development. Nicholas admits that, "I did absorb a small dose of one permanently useful thing, Oxford's greatest gift to civilized life: Socratic honesty" (1965, p.11). This concept, rooted in philosophical inquiry and self-examination, pushes him to confront his hollow existence. Acknowledging emptiness is a pivotal moment for Nicholas. As he puts it, "[b]oredom, the numbing annual predictability of life ... it was real boredom" (1965, p.11).

Madness, as illustrated in *The Magus* through Conchis and Nicholas, vigorously reveals deeper insights into one's self and the world. There are numerous incidents when Nicholas believes he is hallucinating or dreaming, especially after encountering several mystical figures running around the island. It is clear that Conchis subjects Nicholas to various psychological games. Nicholas' mental state exemplifies what Louis Sass calls "double bookkeeping":

It is remarkable to what extent even the most disturbed schizophrenics may retain, even at the height of their psychotic periods, a quite accurate sense of what would generally be considered to be their objective or actual circumstances. Rather than mistaking the imaginary for the real, they often seem to live in two parallel but separate worlds: consensual reality and the realm of their hallucinations and delusions ... a patient who asserts that the people around him are phantoms or automatons still interacts with them as if they were real. (1995, p.21)

Much like the schizophrenic patient described by Sass, Nicholas demonstrates a state of "double bookkeeping." Nicholas is aware that the experience he is subjected to is part of Conchis' manipulation. Yet, he continues to get swayed and engage with them. For instance, at Nicholas' second visit, he encounters a ghost-like figure: "a pale shape at the far end of the house move up the steps and under the colonnade. I could not see well ... a flowing whiteness, a long coat or a dressing gown ... I suspected, too that I had been meant to see her" (1965, 120). He oscillates between scepticism and belief, between perceived reality and illusion, similar to schizophrenic patients who wander between their delusions and real-life.

Moreover, the ghost-like figure is not the only figure Nicholas encounters. He also encounters Apollo and a satyr chasing after a nymph, who is later rescued by a strikingly beautiful goddess: "[s]he stood, cold and outraged and ominous for a long second, and then she reached back with her free hand and with a venomous quickness pulled an arrow out of the quiver," and kills Apollo after that, they withdraw into the shadows "as if nothing had happened" (Fowles, 1965, p.188). In addition, Conchis introduces Nicholas to people from his past who are believed to be dead. For example, Nicholas sees Lily Montgomery, whom Conchis had informed had died in the 20's. During another stroll through the village, Nicholas meets de Deukans, whom Conchis had also mentioned to be deceased. In a state of confusion, Nicholas struggles to understand whether he is experiencing hallucinations, delusions, and wavering on the brink of madness. This is an indication that Nicholas is projecting and externalising parts of his own split psyche onto the external world. In other words, seeing these figures indicates that he has lost a unified sense of the self and agency, and he is hallucinating. Fowles writes at a moment of "contestation of clear authorial agency and intention. . . [and] a dissolution of the humanist conceptualisation of authorship" (Aryan, 2019, p.108). Conchis vigorously positions Nicholas on the borderline between illusion and reality, past and present. Conchis' godgame reaches its most impactful point, by having Nicholas dangerously relive the experiences of the Nazi's horror. This demonstrates that Nicholas has a traumatised psyche due to the horror and therefore lacks a unified self and psyche. For instance, Nicholas, on his way back from Bourani, gets caught and taken prisoner by German soldiers:

A young man, evidently Greek, rather short. His face was atrociously bruised, puffed the whole of one side covered in blood from a gash near the right eye... hardly able to walk... I had a swift acrid stab of terror, that this really was some village boy they had got hold of and beaten up—not someone to look the part, but be the part ... I knew by then where I was. I was back in 1943, ten years before; I was looking at captured Resistance fighters. (1965, p.367)

Conchis successfully manages to blur the lines, risking great lengths to rapture Nicholas' sense of rationality. In "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud on Madness and the Unconscious" (1991), Daniel Berthold - Bond articulates Hegel's anatomy of madness. As he puts it, "is in many respects the inverted mirror of the developed consciousness, incorporating the structures of rationality within a different construction of the

relation between the self and its world” (1991, p.193). Subsequently, Conchis employs madness as a tool to reconfigure Nicholas’ mundane outlook in the relationship between himself and the world around him. At this point, Nicholas knows that these hallucinations are no more than a part of Conchis’ game within a game. Conchis confesses to be an experimental drama known as the “metatheater” (1965, p.396), a “theatre without an audience” (448). Through these intricate and somewhat distasteful manipulative games, how Conchis pushes Nicholas to the edge of madness. In so doing, Conchis enables him to make better choices. Furthermore, Conchis stages Bourani as a recreation, a parallel imitation of art, history and literature, of an imaginative alternative:

Madness plays a dual role: it shows the truth of things and people; it denounces and reveals; and at the same time, it serves as an image of literature, a kind of double within it ... as if literature doubled itself and observed itself through the play of madness; as if madness held a mirror up to literature in which it saw itself reflected. The role of madness is not only to reveal, as if by a trick, the truth of things but to also express the truth of literature, theatre, the novel. (Foucault, 2023, p.62)

Promptly, as Conchis discloses, “I conceived a new kind of drama. One in which the conventional relationships between actors and audiences were forgotten ... In which the continuity of performance, either in time or place, was ignored. And in which the action, the narrative was fluid” (Fowles, 1965, p.395). Hence, within his meta - theatre, the actors solely dictate their own destinies, and so should Nicholas. In the revised version, Conchis also warns Nicholas that “ [w]e are all actors here, my friend. None of us is what we really are. We all lie some of the time, and some of us all the time” (Fowles, 1977, p.420), emphasizing that everyone participating in the act is unreliable and untrustworthy. Conchis points out that, “ [w]e are all actors and actresses, Mr. Urfe. You included” (1965, p.180). Out of pure curiosity, Nicholas is willing to participate in the metatheatre: “ [a]fter all, it was a masque, and I wanted, or after a plan very short while began to want, to play my part” (1965, p.174). In other words, Nicholas is willing to welcome madness in pursuit of meaning and progression. This madness enables Nicholas to explore the quality of life. It also allows him to become more receptive to possibilities, and embrace the freedom of self and the multiplicity of life’s meaning.

However, Nicholas believes that the mysteries in Bourani are merely for his aesthetics enjoyment. Yet, with each unfolding event, he gradually comes to suspect that the godgame conceals a stupendous metaphor:

All my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behaviour—a godlike novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please, the sensitivity to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the novelist - god wanted ... I had always been incapable of acting freely. (1965, p.521)

Right at this very moment, Nicholas accepts that he will never be able to unravel the mystery behind Bourani, and that the

unknown is only “the great motivating factor in all human existence, ” which is a fundamental driving force of life (1977, p.302). Therefore, as this passage indicates, one can only explore the metaphors that attempt to explain one’s existence.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the intricate use of intertextuality in John Fowles’ *The Magus* profoundly challenges traditional notion of originality, authorship, and the search for absolute meaning. By employing intertextual elements such as allusion, quotation, and ironic parody, Fowles constructs a labyrinthine narrative that not only engages with prior references, but also invites reader to explore the layers of metaphors and meaning embedded within the story. This intertextuality suggests that all texts are reformed upon the remnants of previous writings, thus questioning the very possibilities of creating something original. Fowles influenced by T. S. Elliot’s “Little Gidding” reflects upon the Nicholas’ journey of self - discovery, as Fowles intricately weaves these intertextual references to illustrate the cynical nature of this journey, where the search for meaning only leads one to their starting point yet enriched with newfound understanding.

Moreover, *The Magus* explores the theme of madness through Conchis’ character, as Fowles deliberately blurs the line between reality and illusions, pushing Nicholas and the reader into a state of confusions and madness. This serves as a catalyst to dismantle Nicholas’ traditional perception of reality and to drive him to question his sanity, consciousness and actions. In the novel, madness is multifaceted and Conchis particularly encompasses this theme of psychological manipulation to ensnare Nicholas into a cycle of uncertainty and introspection to reflect on his emotions and perception of life. Also, Fowles uses madness as a tool to reveal the fragile nature of human consciousness and to understand deeper truths about the human psyche. The concept of hyper - reflexivity or intense self - awareness, as exemplified in Nicholas’ split psyche, emphasizes the narrative’s self - consciousness nature and its exploration of identity and authorship. The novel’s metafictional elements, such as the “theatre without an audience, ” (1965, p.475) serves as metaphors for the performative notion of life and literature, stressing on the artificiality and construct nature of reality. Ultimately, *The Magus* challenges readers to reflect on the nature of reality and the role of madness in unveiling insightful truths, and Nicholas’ journey through Conchis’ godgame is not just a descent into chaos but a lane towards greater existential enlightenment and philosophical growth.

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