CHAPTER SIX
INTERLUDE: MANTISSA

If Daniel Martin enacts an exploration of the unremittingly real conditions affecting situated men and women, Mantissa represents a flight into fantasy – or, more accurately, a retreat into the archetypal forces of masculinity and femininity. While The French Lieutenant’s Woman, The Ebony Tower, and Daniel Martin demonstrate a progressive process through which Fowles attempts to investigate the alternative perspectives that arise from the specific situations of his women characters, Mantissa represents an interlude in that progression, performing an abstract investigation of the authorial process entirely within the mind of its protagonist, an author named Miles Green. Examining the imaginative relations between Miles and his muse, Erato, Mantissa indulges in a great deal of irreverent, playful, academic, and even pornographic masculine fantasy, portraying the authorial process as both erotically charged and essentially confrontational.

Less a novel than a confessional and theoretical exercise, however, Mantissa proceeds from a profound sense of authorial anxiety. Both a snub and a taunt to academic critics, Mantissa seems obsessed with exposing the absurdity of critical theories that emphasize deconstruction and the death of the author. However, Mantissa also reflects significant authorial anxiety over woman as muse, as other, as character, and as function. As John Haegert convincingly argues, despite the oddities of the women in The Ebony Tower and Daniel Martin, Fowles’ heroines had become predictable, almost entirely functional elements of his novels by the time he wrote Mantissa. As “a way of revitalizing the role of woman, or restoring

1 Loveday, The Romances of John Fowles, 6.
and enlarging her subversive influence in the text itself”.
Haegert argues, *Mantissa* demonstrates Fowles’ desire to redesign both his women characters and his own authorial practices. As a response to the imaginative failures of *Daniel Martin*, however, *Mantissa* not only confronts Fowles’ archetypal conceptions of masculine authority and feminine creativity, but ridicules his compulsion to retreat into the god trick and establishes situated knowledges as essential for the vitality and spontaneity of his future authorial efforts.

Keenly aware of the critical response his work inspires, Fowles admits to some mischievous intentions in the writing of *Mantissa*:

> “I’ve always had this, I suppose, half-unconscious feeling that when you’re writing there’s a tease element: that something is always teasing you and making you have pratfalls. There’s some mysterious enemy who one knows also helps, but who can cause all kinds of problems and give you all kinds of misinformation. *Mantissa* came partly from that sense; partly, I suppose, from the sense that I think modern literary criticism has altogether got too serious and pious …. And also, I suppose, I wrote the book because I knew it was a book most people would disapprove of. Really, I wanted to give people an opportunity to kick me – which they duly did.”

As Fowles notes, *Mantissa* asserts a number of unpopular notions: his unfashionable belief in inspiration as the generative force behind his (and all) fiction, his notorious disdain for academic criticism, and his determination to write and publish despite the dictates of either the popular or the academic market. Perhaps most unsettling to Fowles’ readers, however, is the exhibitionism that defines *Mantissa*. A remarkably self-reflexive text, the novel exposes Fowles’ most intimate authorial processes through its portrayal of the combative, collaborative, and inherently erotic writing process in which Miles and Erato, the “mysterious enemy who one knows also helps”, engage. Despite the occasional theoretical debate, *Mantissa* consists almost entirely of sexual acts. The novel’s opening scene, for example, depicts a coldly clinical Erato in the guise of a neurologist named Dr Delfie, who arouses the amnesiac Miles and assists him in creating the “lovely little story” that is *Mantissa*’s opening chapter. Subsequently, Erato narrates her first sexual encounter in sensual detail, spars with

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4 Ibid., 170.
Miles in a number of narrative brainstorming sessions that involve various levels of sexual congress, and then merges with him in the couple’s climactic lovemaking. Finally, the novel ends with a dramatic reversal in which Erato embodies Miles’ ultimate sexual fantasies while simultaneously transforming him into a satyr. In fact, the sexual variations in which Miles and Erato engage both create and constitute the novel, revealing Fowles’ conception of authorship as an autoerotic process “intimately and mysteriously bound up with the writer’s libido”.

In exhibiting his inherently sexual authorial process, Fowles simultaneously situates readers as voyeurs, inviting them to participate in the fantasies that constitute his authority. Indeed, throughout the novel, Fowles implicates readers as voyeurs to his exhibitionism, dissolving the boundaries between the pleasures of the written text and the titillations of the writing process. Just as the hospital inhabitants observe Miles’ and Erato’s climactic lovemaking when the walls of Miles’ cell dissolve, readers of *Mantissa* witness their interactions without directly engaging in the sexual/textual pleasures of literary conception.

However, unless they are authors themselves, readers of the novel may identify not with the “sad and silent concupiscence” (155) of the hospital inhabitants who stare longingly at the harmonious union of author and muse for which they yearn, but rather with the more critically exasperated appraisal of Miles’ authorial process that Erato advances in her role as psychoanalyst:

“To me you are simply someone obliged to act out a primal scene trauma. As usual it has left you with a marked feeling of destructive revenge. As usual you’ve tried to sublimate that by an equally marked tendency to voyeurism and exhibitionism. I’ve seen it ten thousand times. You also obey the usual pathology in attempting to master the unresolved trauma by repetitive indulgence in the quasi-regressive activities of writing and being published. I can tell you you’d be a much healthier person if you regressed fully and openly to the two underlying activities concerned.”

Despite Miles’ sarcastic response that he should become “a peeping Tom and a flasher”, Erato identifies Miles’ underlying needs as inherently performative, and suggests that he should go into acting or

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7 Cooper, *The Fictions of John Fowles*, 205.
directing (143). Although he later complains that this analysis is “over the top … and a wee bit below the belt” (166), Miles admits that the structure of his encounter with his muse complicates that complaint, since Erato’s ontological status is inherently problematic. As both characters repeatedly argue, Erato is not “real” except as a figment of Miles’ imagination, a psychic reality, or, as Fowles would undoubtedly have argued, as an embodiment of his anima. Any analysis of Miles’ authorship that Erato advances must therefore come from Miles himself.

Similarly, as a product of Fowles’ imagination, Mantissa exhibits Fowles’ sometimes rather sordid writing process as a kind of performative confrontation, inviting readers not only to enjoy but also to evaluate the archetypal forces and pornographic processes that define his authority. Emblematic of the masculine authority through which Fowles defines his protagonists, Miles shares certain elements of his creator’s situation while simultaneously possessing characteristics Fowles notoriously despises. Likewise, Erato represents the feminine creativity that defines Fowles’ heroines, all of whom, their creator admits, comprise “just one woman, basically”. Indeed, the events within Mantissa mirror significant elements of all of Fowles’ other novels, primarily because Miles and Erato embody the characteristics and impulses of their fictional predecessors without the encumbrance of specific circumstances to which their interactions must adhere.

As one of Fowles’ typical antiheroes, Miles shares particular aspects of his creator’s situation: he is, for example, a successful English novelist, and he experiences authorship as the teasing, frustrating, often infuriating, and ultimately pleasurable process that Fowles described when discussing his own creative practice. However, like Fowles’ other protagonists, Miles also embodies attitudes and behaviors that Fowles repudiates. The most obvious of these attitudes is Miles’ absurdly deconstructionist view of authorship, but his pornographic and abstract approach to relationships places him most clearly within the ranks of Fowles’ protagonists. 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 occur entirely within the confines of a space.

11 Onega, Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles, 134.
he controls. Like Nicholas in his attitude to Lily/Julie in *The Magus*, Miles submits to the spectacular machinations of a mysterious woman who combines Mediterranean passion and the English reserve and intelligence indicative “of well-bred, even upper-class, background” (12), while simultaneously appreciating Erato’s erotic skills and denigrating her considerable sexual experience in a manner similar to Nicholas’ treatment of Alison. Moreover, Miles demonstrates a marked appreciation for the exotic reminiscent of Charles’ attraction to the dark and alluring Sarah in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, repeatedly complimenting Erato in her role as the West Indian Nurse Cory and fantasizing in fragmentary detail about Erato’s potential for exotic embodiment:

Polynesian, Irish, Venezuelan, Lebanese, Balinese, Indian, Italian, Russian and various points between; shy, passionate, pert, cool; dressed and undressed, tamed and wild, chased and chasing; teasing, in tears, toying, tempestuous ... a whole United Nations of female eyes, mouths, breasts, legs, arms, loins, bottoms prettily slink and kaleidoscopically tumble through, or past, the windows of his mind; but alas, like the images in the fluttered pages of some magazine; or like snowflakes, frozen because unrealizable. (184-85)

Such fantasies fail to materialize for Miles, he thinks, simply because of Erato’s refusal to accommodate him in his practice of “degradin’ women by turnin’ us into one-dimensional sex-objects” (56). However, Erato suggests that Miles’ imaginative failures result from his general lack of self-awareness (169), a characteristic he shares with Charles along with his inherent belief in his social superiority.

This belief proceeds not only from Miles’ self-importance – a characteristic he demonstrates while apparently suffering from amnesia, assuming himself to be a member of a “suitably senior and respected profession” certainly not associated with “the frivolity of the arts” (33) – but also from his affinity for the abstract. Like David in “The Ebony Tower”, Miles is unable to integrate the sensual and the theoretical. Instead, he defends his pornographic imaginings as purely metaphorical and denigrates Erato for her “astounding ignorance of what contemporary literature is about” (115) and her desire for “story, character, suspense, description, all that antiquated nonsense from pre-modernist times” (119). Indeed, in his approach to Erato, Miles resembles nothing so much as the sell-out screenwriter Daniel Martin, who views the women in his life as significant only in terms of his
own development. Considering her no more than a fairly amusing mistress, Miles effectively dismisses Erato with Dan’s characteristic attitude – “I’ve examined you, experienced you, learned from you, and it’s been amusing and interesting, but now I’d like to move on”\textsuperscript{12} – explaining, “You must learn to accept that for me, for all of us who are truly serious, you can never again be more than an occasional editorial adviser in one or two very secondary areas” (121). Totally convinced of his authority, Miles exhibits arrogance, self-absorption, excessive reliance on logic and abstraction, and unquestioned identification with dominant discourses – all characteristics that define Fowles’ antiheroes.

Similarly, Erato embodies the mystery, creativity, eroticism, and unpredictability of Fowles’ heroines. Like Miranda in \textit{The Collector}, Erato struggles for self-determination in opposition to the fantasies of her jailer. Indeed, she complains to Miles of the inauthentic roles she must play as the “programmed slave of whatever stupid mood you’ve created. Whatever clumsy set of supposed female emotions you’ve bodged up for me” (87-88) and actively resists Miles’ attempts to control her. Like Lily/Julie in \textit{The Magus}, Erato employs her epistemological and ontological advantages to expose her suitor’s shortcomings and advance piercing criticisms of his psychological hang-ups. Such analyses provoke a sarcasm in Miles’ response to her that mirrors Nicholas’ initial response to the godgame:

“I realize that destroying every belief a man has in himself, in effectively castrating him for the rest of his life, is a highly amusing situation. That you’re being enormously self-restrained in not rolling on the floor at the sheer fun of it.” (127)

Yet Erato also exhibits Alison’s paradoxical promiscuity and devotion, continuing to respond to Miles’ wishes despite his characterization of her as “a totally immoral and persistent old tart [who has] been a hot night out for every pen-pushing Tom, Dick and Harry, a pair of ever-open legs, for four thousand years” (91).

Of course, Miles tolerates Erato’s promiscuity primarily because it benefits him, especially when Erato, like Sarah in \textit{The French Lieutenant’s Woman}, seduces her suitor with suggestive tales that emphasize her vulnerability. Indeed, Erato repeatedly encourages

\textsuperscript{12} Fowles, \textit{Daniel Martin}, 239.
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Miles to consider her violation. As Dr Delfie, for example, she explains:

“I should like you to see and feel my defenselessness. How small and weak I am, compared to you – how rapable, as it were.” (38)

Later, as “herself”, she narrates in explicit detail her rape by a satyr (79-80) and includes her own rape in the outline of the novel she constructs for Miles’ enlightenment (106). Like Sarah’s “confession” to Charles of her affair with the French lieutenant, Erato's rape narratives stimulate Miles, inviting him to imagine himself both as a participant in and as a voyeur to a sexual violation she welcomes.

Yet Erato represents Fowles’ heroines most clearly in her creative power, resisting restrictive roles and operating through alternative epistemological and ontological systems. Like Diana in “The Ebony Tower”, Erato is artistically gifted, a peerless assistant to Miles as author, but also an original artist who successfully integrates the sensual and the abstract – she claims, for example, to be the true author of the Odyssey (171-72). Such an accomplishment is especially insulting to Miles, who strictly separates the cerebral from the sensual and objects, “You can’t have a male brain and intellect as well as a mania for being the universal girlfriend” (122). Indeed, what Miles identifies as Erato’s “asinine female logic” (89) bears a remarkable resemblance to Jane’s “right feeling”. Arguing that logic is “the mental equivalent of the chastity belt” (149), Erato repeatedly refutes Miles’ objections to her ideas, insisting, “Feeling right is terribly important to me” (109). Just as Fowles’ other heroines operate through alternative intellectual and intuitive ways of knowing and being, Erato breaks all the rules of Miles’ dominant discourse by employing oppositional knowledges to subvert his authoritarian efforts.

Through such flagrant comparisons to his other characters, Fowles defines Miles and Erato as archetypes, extreme versions of the masculine authority and feminine creativity that dominate his authorial consciousness. Unlike his other characters, however, Miles and Erato possess a hyperawareness of their own representation that leads to considerable ambivalence about the roles they play together. Lacking specific situations that might determine their interactions, Miles and Erato explore a wide range of extreme behavior, with Miles often assuming a savagely misogynistic attitude and Erato enacting a radically feminist agenda in between periods of mutual attraction.
During such antagonistic episodes, Miles rails against Erato, deciding finally on a Japanese geisha as the most attractive of his potential exotic mistresses, primarily because she is his “infinitely compliant woman, true wax at last, dutiful and respectful, uncomplaining, admiring, and above all peerlessly dumb” (190), and Erato complains about her sexual and ontological exploitation, defining Miles as “a modern satyr … who invents a woman on paper so that he can force her to say and do things no real woman in her right mind ever would” (85).

Despite these efforts to control one another through definitive situations, Miles and Erato actively resist associations with specific social categories, each preferring an unrestricted ontological status allowing for nearly boundless freedom from signification. For Miles, amnesia represents exactly the kind of godlike limbo through which he prefers to operate. It is in this amnesiac state that Miles enters the novel, conceiving of himself totally without categorical identity, an “it” who is blissfully “bereft of pronoun, all that distinguishes person from person; and bereft of time, all that distinguishes present from past and future” (3). Relishing the impression of supreme authority that accompanies this boundless state, Miles considers his entry into consciousness with a detached pleasure: “It was conscious of a luminous and infinite haze, as if it were floating, godlike, alpha and omega, over a sea of vapor and looking down … [with] a pleasing intimation of superiority, of having somehow got to the top of the heap, still attached to this sense of impersonality” (3-4).

This blissfully impersonal state dissolves, however, when Miles becomes aware “of murmured sounds and peripheral shadows, which reduced the impression of boundless space and empire to something much more contracted and unaccommodating” (3). Resenting this imposition of “the relentless demon of reality”, particularly because it threatens his sense of absolute authority, Miles objects especially to the humiliating signification of gender:

> With another painfully swift and reducing intuition it realized it was not just an I, but a male I. That must be where the inrushing sense of belowness, impotence, foolishness came from. (4)

This impression is strengthened by the circumstances in which Miles finds himself, since he is apparently at the mercy of two women, one a wife who is “too anxious to establish an ownership of him” (9) and the other a doctor whose inquiries suggest that he should recall a situation
he cannot grasp. Yet despite his initial terror, Miles persistently rejects the imposition of a specific situation on his consciousness. Even as his wife recites names and places he should remember, Miles reports, “He had perhaps heard them before, as words; but he had no idea what relevance they were supposed to have, nor why they should increasingly sound like evidence of crimes he had committed” (5). Offended by “his alleged wife”, Miles particularly resists the memory of marriage and fatherhood, justifying his “desire to be inviolable” by noting that his wife’s wheedling tone makes his children “sound more like overdue bills, past follies of spending, than children”.

Determined to escape this distasteful imposition of situation, Miles attempts to “regain the nothingness, the limbo, the grey, ticking silence” (9), but is prevented by Erato in the guise of Dr Delfie. Much more willing to trust this impersonal doctor than his wife, Miles notes approvingly that Dr Delfie’s eyes “held the muted irony of an old friend of the opposite sex – completely detached now, yet still harboring the ghost of a more affectionate interest” (8). This affectionate detachment serves Miles perfectly in his desire to remain “godlike, alpha and omega”. In contrast to his wife’s insistence of a limiting, personal situation including marriage and children, Dr Delfie offers completely impersonal radical sex therapy designed to satisfy Miles’ “unconscious desire to fondle unknown female bodies” (21). Considering nothing but his maleness relevant to this treatment, Dr Delfie rather easily convinces Miles to submit to her ministrations while he indulges in fantasies about his authority and influence and enjoys the seductions of both Dr Delfie and Nurse Cory. Yet even in this most gendered situation, Miles subverts the signification of gender, ending this pornographic tale with the birth of the tale itself, “a lovely little story” that he apparently creates “all by [him]self” (44).

Enraged by this sexual exploitation and appropriation of women’s creative powers, Erato interrupts Miles’ masculine fantasy with a violent eruption of radical feminist rage. Yet despite her feminist consciousness, Erato does little to insist that Miles own a situated perspective. Instead, she repeatedly berates him for exhibiting stereotypically masculine shortcomings, especially of a Freudian variety. Similarly, Erato relishes her status as “a female archetype with an archetypally good sense” (140), continuously changing her appearance and attitudes in order to subvert Miles’ controlling authority. In the course of the novel, Erato appears in numerous incarnations, sometimes simultaneously occupying several female
bodies, as in the opening sequence where she appears as both Dr Delfie and Nurse Cory. In her most traditional garb, Erato is classically stunning. Without her clothes, she is “both demure and provocative, classical and modern, individual and Eve-like, tender and unforgiving, present and past, real and dreamed” (71). Transcending all signifiers of social location, Erato claims to have been mistress to the likes of Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, H.G. Wells, and T.S. Eliot (148). Yet she objects to the process by which such authors constrain her to a particular representation. Indeed, she resists Miles’ repeated suggestions that she appear in their next variation only as the enthusiastic and exotic Nurse Cory and insists:

“I will not be turned into a brainless female body at your beck and call and every perverted whim. What you forget is that I am not something in a book. I am supremely real …. As well as being a goddess.” (59)

This resistance to limiting representation, however, emphasizes Erato’s ontologically problematic status. Although she objects to Miles’ preference for Nurse Cory because, she complains, “it does hurt me the tiniest bit that I’m not enough for you as I am” (183), Erato inherently lacks a specific situation that might preclude such variations in representation. Indeed, she summarizes the conditions of her existence – what she refers to as the “whole historical situation” of the non-existent muse Erato (92) – as though she is both real and imagined, insisting that she possesses an essential identity but appears to others only as they construct her:

“I suppose it’s never occurred to you what a horror it would be … to have to occupy a role and function that escapes all normal biological laws. All on her own. No outside help, never a day off. Constantly having to dress up as this, dress up as that. The impossible boredom of it. The monotony. The schizophrenia. Day after day of being mauled about in people’s minds, misunderstood, travestied, degraded. And never a word of thanks for it …. Never a thought for her as a person, only for what can be got out of her. Never a moment’s consideration for her emotions. Never enough imagination to realize that she may be secretly dying for a little tenderness and sympathy ….” (93)

Particularly exasperated by authors like Miles who consider only her physical appearance and sexual charms in their representations, Erato emphasizes her subjection to Miles’ misogynistic whims, noting that if she “has the effrontery to object to being treated as a mere sex-
object” he will simply “Toss her back to nothingness, like an old boot”. Oppressed by her abstract existence, Erato explains to Miles:

“I have absolutely no rights. The sexual exploitation’s nothing beside the ontological one. You can kill me off in five lines if you want to. Throw me in the wastepaper basket, never think of me again.” (94)

Confined to an existence that depends in all its particularities on the whims of the authors who invoke her presence but determined to enact an alternative way of being, Erato rails at her inability to secure a satisfactory situation and dissolves into tears at her frustration and confusion, admitting to Miles:

“I suddenly felt, what am I doing here letting this total stranger humiliate and insult me like this – distort what I really am. I mean I know I’m technically nothing. But what I began to feel I would be if I wasn’t. My true, serious nature.” (97)

However, Erato manipulates Miles through such nonsensical objections. Although she may indeed experience as oppressive the machinations of such misogynistic authors as Miles, her lack of situation simultaneously allows her the freedom to control the creative process. Eliciting Miles’ sympathy by “personifying every hurt and helpless female face, caught between reproach and appeal for sympathy, since time began” (96), Erato proceeds to abuse Miles physically with repeated blows to the head and ribs; to disappear, leaving Miles in a panic; and finally to become Miles’ fantasy geisha while turning him into a satyr. Through these events, Erato asserts her divinity, reproaching Miles by explaining:

“I was trying to get it through your thick skull that I have not just become invisible to you, I have always been invisible to you. All you’ve ever seen in me is what you choose to see.” (149)

As she demonstrates her authority through such manipulative machinations, Erato employs her changeability as an instrument of power, and ultimately seizes control of both Miles and the text precisely because she cannot be constrained by a specific situation.

Although Miles objects to his mistreatment by threatening to “write it down. Every damned word” (192), it is unclear whether
Miles or Erato can ultimately claim authorship over the text, since Erato responds by reciting the Greek alphabet, alpha to omega, a gesture that recalls Miles’ amnesiac fantasies of godlike authority (193). Indeed, despite Miles’ status as author, Erato occupies an oddly authoritative position in the novel’s opening sequence, at one point gazing down at Miles with a look that “seemed for a moment to be curiously speculative, as if she had not yet fully made up her mind what his treatment should be; as if she saw him as less a person than a problem” (15-16). This gaze recalls the narrator’s look upon Charles in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*:

Now could I use you? Now what could I do with you? It is precisely … the look an omnipotent god – if there were such an absurd thing – should be shown to have. Not at all what we think of as a divine look; but one of a distinctly mean and dubious (as the theoreticians of the *nouveau roman* have pointed out) moral quality.14

Clearly exhibiting “a distinctly mean and dubious moral quality” in their abuse of one another, Erato and Miles exercise a nearly equivalent authority, not only at the end of *Mantissa* but throughout the text.

While these abusive interactions advance Fowles’ most scathing analyses of his worst impulses as an author, the equally frequent sexual liaisons between Miles and Erato undermine his efforts at self-criticism. As Jan Relf notes, there seems to be a “dual author-persona here in *Mantissa* – one who is being ironic at his own expense (the writer plagued with the tormenting muse, the feminist plagued with chauvinistic fantasies), and the one who floats ‘godlike, alpha and omega,’ detached above it all”.15 In fact, critics have noted considerable ambivalence in Fowles’ self-critique, which is both brutally masochistic and theoretically suspect.16 Despite his self-reflexive and even self-abusive confessions, Fowles incorporates so many layers of irony and parody in *Mantissa* that it is difficult for readers to take his self-criticisms seriously.17 Indeed, Fowles claimed:

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17 Onega, *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*, 133-34.
“Mantissa was meant to be a joke …. Mantissa was really meant to be a comment, no more, on the problems of being a writer.”18

This claim, in conjunction with the direct disparagement of the critical enterprise that Mantissa enacts, defines Mantissa as a public joke, a deliberately disorienting and difficult text ultimately written primarily for its author’s pleasure and as an affirmation of his creative impulses.

Yet Mantissa also enacts a very personal confrontation between Fowles’ aesthetic affinity for absolute authority and his political commitment to multiple, situated knowledges. In this respect, Mantissa offers its author both pleasure and instruction in accordance with his early philosophical reflections on art:

All artifacts please and teach the artist first, and other people later. The pleasing and teaching come from the explanation of self by the expression of self; by seeing the self, and all the selves of the whole self, in the mirror of what the self has created.19

If Daniel Martin is a socially responsible but uninspiring novel, Mantissa is precisely the opposite: a fantastically absorbing but socially irresponsible investigation of archetypal forces rather than situated realities. Yet this irresponsible novel serves the important function of allowing Fowles to examine, as in a mirror, the most significant “selves” of his whole self – the author, the muse/ anima, the chauvinist, the feminist – in their purest and broadest forms.

Indeed, by ensuring that these selves lack specific situations, Fowles discovers the limitations of his archetypal conceptions. As completely non-situated author-gods, both Erato and Miles demonstrate the tyranny of the god trick, the “view from nowhere” that seeks to impose its authority indiscriminately and oppressively. Feminist critics have argued that Mantissa, while ostensibly criticizing Miles as “a writer satisfied with the onanistic display of his male fantasies and incapable of devising a faithful mirror of nature that would convey a morally edifying and sociologically useful message”, simultaneously affirms Miles’ pornographic chauvinism – especially because of “the too crude and heavy lampooning to which the amnesic writer is subjected” and Erato’s “waywardness and latent eroticism,

18 Onega, “Fowles on Fowles”, in Conversations with John Fowles, ed. Vipond, 175, 176.
19 Fowles, The Aristos, 207.
her unreliability and inconsistency, her militant feminism and flagrant stupidity as described by the resentful Miles Green. However, the novel equally affirms and repudiates Erato’s archetypal authority. Lacking the conditions that inspire reflective, responsible, and socially conscious standpoints, Miles and Erato repeat their antagonistic interactions endlessly – as the novel’s ending, a mirror of the novel’s beginning, indicates – never experiencing the personal development or interpersonal connection that result from an exchange of outsider within perspectives. Instead, they experience the perennial frustrations of the “battle of the sexes”, each eventually groaning with “an endurance stretched beyond endurance, an agony beyond agony” (152) in a “spine-chilling cry of frustrated rage” (193).

*Mantissa* thus establishes situated knowledges as an essential grounding point for Fowles’ archetypal creations. As Haegert argues, *Mantissa* does indeed reconfigure the heroine figure for Fowles, “reestablish[ing] her as the first principle and matrix of his art” rather than a mere catalyst for the antihero’s existential development. More importantly, however, *Mantissa* demonstrates that Fowles’ archetypal formulations, while provocative, satisfy only his creative impulses and do little to develop his genuine political and philosophical commitment to alternative ways of knowing and being. Indeed, the fantastically entertaining *Mantissa* illustrates Fowles’ immense talent for infusing his characters with archetypal energy. For him to exercise that talent without exploring the insights that arise from diverse and specific situations, however, “would be like playing in a game especially designed to suit [his] capacities and [his] alone; a game in which it was impossible to lose”. Insisting, as he so eloquently does in *The Aristos*, that “It is impossible to win a game that one can never lose”, Fowles chose instead in his final published novel, *A Maggot*, to privilege a narrative form characterized not by godlike authority, but by a firmly situated, self-reflexive, and manifold uncertainty. Creative, mysterious, hypnotic, and prophetic, *A Maggot* justifies Fowles’ decision to pursue his feminist advocacy of situated knowledges, offering a woman protagonist whose situated perspective explodes the dominant discourses of both her own past age and our own present era.

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20 Onega, *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*, 133-34.