Schopenhauer, Barthes and the Bird

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Fowles demonstrates that he can create a doubling of the world through being self-consciously textual and still avoid the danger of a pastiche in his formulation. Through the story of Catherine, Fowles constructs a world that reflects Michael Foucault's recommendation for a return to the pre-modern Greek concept of techne, or self-conscious artistic making as a model for authentic living, with the predictable result of viewing the humanly fabricated truth as provisional.

Yet John Fowles is one of the outstanding exponents of the neo-Romantic celebration of the imagination as space outside commercial cultures, where new worlds could be envisaged. In "The Cloud"[1] he sacrifices the narcissistic pleasures of the private imagination and the projection of psychic interiority on the altar of neo-Romanticism. "The Cloud" formulates its author's awareness of the major paths taken by contemporary fiction to employ the possibilities offered by the side-paths not yet taken. To be more explicit, John Fowles locates his story in a physical space outside the British Isles. The second 'remove' is materialised through the self-reflexively intertextual world of literariness itself. Microcosm and macrocosm are presented both separately and in a deadly collision to which neo-romanticism is the only cure. As one of the central themes of the short-story is the corruption of the communicative system of the twentieth century, he opts for a formula which allows for the expertise of both the fragmentation and the unity of existence, thought and art.

John Fowles creates a neo-Romantic parallel to the 'fantastic'. He demonstrates that the fairy tale can achieve more than simply provide a comprehensive interpretation of the symbiosis of the fragments envisaged in the short story. The fairy tale, classically employed as fiction within fiction by John Fowles, has two immediately identifiable functions: it grafts the sublime onto the real, and by performing this it projects fiction and reality against a neo-Romantic metaphor of a harmonious, atemporal universe.

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[1] Fowles, John. 1996. "The Cloud" in *The Ebony Tower*. London: Vintage. 241–300.

"The Cloud" needs no sensationalist and cyber-, computo- fantastic plot or auxiliaries. Death, philosophy, communications theory, the inadequacy of social and national stereotypes and literary theory represent in themselves a remove from reality[2]. Discussing the above topics within a traditional form of the fantastic may tempt the reader to interpret them not only at an objective, theoretical level but as artistic alternatives to the conflicts described. Furthermore, symbols, poetic passages and lyrical interludes help John Fowles to formulate the final enigma of the short story about Catherine's fate and its implications.

The plot of John Fowles's "The Cloud" promises a trivial, rather boring story populated by too typical to be interesting characters against a pastoral French landscape that creates the background for a belated melodrama. It is the story of an Anglo-Saxon family and friends on holiday in central France. The characters form two groups, which later on will be arranged around shifting perspectives. These shifts are based on the exploration of various modes of perception. There are roughly two groups of characters we meet in the exposition. The first group consists of Peter, his girlfriend Sally, and Tom, his son by his deceased wife. They have joined the second group formed by a family: Paul and Annabel are on holiday with their two daughters, Constance and Emma.

Two incidents serve up the conventional conflict: there is a domestic dispute about the character's willingness or unwillingness to participate in the outing, and the 'problem' created by the presence of Annabel's sister Catherine. Catherine has lost her husband recently apparently through the latter's suicide. Annabel is convinced that the unavoidable communication between the other members of the group and Catherine will diminish the consequences of the trauma suffered by her sister. Contrary to Annabel's intentions, Catherine refuses to obey the rules required by a 'social activity,' and she resists the lures of superficial happiness. She remains isolated and the reader discovers that Catherine, through her sophistication, represents more than a mere opposition to the group's emotional balance. She becomes the super-auntie for Emma by telling her a tale about a princess and a prince. Catherine then tells Paul that she would like him to make love to her, but she refuses Peter after having deliberately provoked his sexual appetite. A strange cloud appears in the sky and the group prepares to go home. Peter responds to the calls of the group and leaves Catherine behind and to further complicate the situation Sally suspects that Peter was with Catherine. The

[2] Fowles John. (1967) 1996. "I Write Thefore I Am" in *Wormholes*. London: Jonathan Cape. 3–13

group starts back home leaving Catherine behind while Annabel calms the children by saying that Catherine might have already gone home.

There is no classical ending to the story except for our knowledge that Catherine refuses communion with the group and the group seems to have accepted the situation. Yet, with the last sentence the story starts building a different sense. The last sentence reads: "The princess calls, but there is no one, now, to hear her" (*T.C.* 300). The princess is the protagonist of Catherine and Emma's tale. To interpret "The Cloud" through the perspective created by the tale of the princess is to accept the very intention behind the 'secret' structure created by John Fowles. Catherine is telling the story to the insistence of Emma, and the forest serves as their shelter and becomes the setting for their tale. Catherine does not fail to maintain dialogue with Emma and adjusts the events to her expectations. The two are absorbed by the act of telling the story and Emma insists on linking the imaginary with the real:

> 'Was she pretty?'
> 'Of course. Very pretty.'
> 'Did she win beauty competitions?'
> 'Princesses are too grand for beauty competitions.'
> 'Why?'
> 'Because they're for stupid girls. And she was a very clever girl.'
> 'Was she more cleverer than you?'
> 'Much cleverer than me.'
> 'Where did she live?'
> 'Just over the hill there. A long time ago.' (*T. C.* 274-75)

Tale and reality are confronted and although Emma needs easily identifiable scraps of reality to be at home, she does not mind it if reality is abandoned. In Catherine's story the princess fell asleep and her parents did not notice she was missing, because even the king could only count to twenty. When she woke up she was alone under the thorn tree where Catherine and Emma are sitting. She could not go home because it was extremely dark. The beasts of the forest found her and protected her. Many years passed and she forgot her name and grew to be afraid of man whom she considered to be the only terrible creature on earth. A young man, a prince, made her understand that not all men are to be feared. They fell in love but the prince could not marry her because he had to marry a princess, and Emma could not prove that she was a princess. An old owl offered to help her, but as its magic power was limited it could not offer her both beautiful clothes and a palace. When they discovered that the princess could only have one symbol of wealth at a time, the king and the queen declared

her a young witch and forbade their son to marry her. The name of the prince was Florio and the princess had the young listener's name. All the owl could do was to offer a solution, which was no solution: the two lovers would never meet, but could remain seventeen till they would meet.

That we are participating in a narrative experiment is clear from the very beginning of the tale about the princess. The history of English literature has provided us with play within the play, the sonnet within the sonnet, the work of art within the work of art, so the story within the story directs our attention to the consequences of this experiment. The setting justifies the romantic perspective effectively supported by the little girl's demand for a happy ending and the narrator's repetition of 'If only' several times when preparing for the narrative act.

Catherine assimilates the different sources of perception available in nature to create her story and to support the plot she is creating. The setting is exactly the place where she and her niece are sitting. The little princess could hear the voice of the river Emma and Catherine can hear as well. The onomatopoeia "Laplaplaplaplap" translates "Too late, too late, too late [...]" (*T. C.* 275) establishing nature as the medium through which both imagination and real life become accessible to the human mind.

John Fowles instantly undermines the romantic mood and suggests that this is not classical romanticism, but a new, characteristically twentieth century version of it, which builds on fragments that could or could not reconstitute the harmony between creator, art and nature. Observe the technique by which the narrator traps the child into direct participation:

> It all happened such a long time ago that people didn't know how to count. Can you imagine that? Even the king could only count to twenty. And they had thirty-three children. So they used to count to twenty and make a guess. (*T. C.* 275)

Emma does not realize that she has been 'activated', dragged into the creative process, and the little girl continues the story with the, for her logical sequence: "They missed her out" (*T. C.* 275).

John Fowles reinforces the idea that Emma is listening to the story about the birth of a story through elements reminiscent of conventional dramatic technique. The dialogue is occasionally interrupted by asides or interior monologues that reveal secrets about the process of creating the story: " 'So she was all alone.' And from nowhere, storied; granted a future, peripetia. She tried to walk home. But she kept falling, and she didn't know where she was in the dark […]' " (*T. C.* 276).

Yet the authorial digression does not disrupt the conversational pattern creating the story within the story. The dialogue between the storyteller and

her audience recreates a typical John Fowles model. Emma is left to guess what happened to the little princess left alone in the dark forest. Her guess is based on stereotypes and is predictably false. The little princess was not eaten by wolves; what is more, she was found by a squirrel who aided by an otherwise fierce bear helped the princess build herself a nice house and taught her whom to fear. Emma's imagination is tested again and is once again found inadequate. How should she know that the greatest enemy of all is man? Although she is invited to contribute to the making of the story, she does not sense the subtle ambiguity that supports Catherine's secret intentions. Furthermore, Emma is trapped into the story at the birth of which she is assisting. The dialogue between listener and storyteller continues to construct the world of the tale:

> 'And that's how she lived. For years and years. Until she was a big girl.'
> 'How old was she?'
> 'How old do you want her to be?'
> 'Seventeen.'
> Catherine smiles at the blonde head. 'Why seventeen?'
> Emma thinks a moment, then shakes her head: she doesn't know.
> 'Never mind. That's exactly what she was. […]' (*T. C.* 277)

Emma is forced by Catherine's story to expose social stereotypes that contradict the logic of timeless beauty and suffering and this aspect contributes to the neo-Romantic formulation of the sublime. The prince falls in love with the princess, but the princess has already forgotten that she is a princess and she is naked as she is by now more the daughter of nature than that of the king and the queen who are her ignorant and negligent parents. Emma cannot understand this transformation and she acts once again in accordance with the stereotypes favoured by the world of her parents:

> ' … Because he was a prince, he could marry only a princess.'
> 'But she was a princess.'
> 'She'd forgotten. She didn't have pretty clothes. Or a crown. Or anything.' She smiles. 'She hadn't any clothes at all.'
> 'None!'
> Catherine shakes her head.
> Emma is shocked. 'Not even …?' Catherine shakes her head again. Emma bites her mouth in. 'That's rude.'
> 'She looked very pretty. She had lovely long dark brown hair. Lovely brown skin. She was just a little wild animal.' (*T. C.* 278)

Catherine does not hesitate to support the credibility of the text of her story with the sounds, shapes, and colours of the natural environment. Princess Emma has already acquired the status of a 'little wild animal,' the daughter of nature. Being left behind and the possibility of being assimilated by the natural environment become expressions of a Romantic perspective discordant even in the given context.

The relevance of this element links with the elliptical construct we are offered at the end of the larger narrative structure. The natural frame continues providing elements of credibility for the artistic work of art. As the question regarding the prince's name crops up in the moment when the oriole whistles again, the name of the prince becomes Florio. At this point we are powerfully reminded of the fact that Catherine is an accurate neo-Romantic artist when she intentionally links the nature-inspired name to her young listener's identity and gives the princess the name Emma. When Emma is incredulous she creates off hand a reverse element of motivation:

> 'Why do you think Mummy and Daddy called you Emma?'
> The little girl thinks, then gives a shrug: strange aunt, strange question.
> 'I think because of a girl in a story they read.'
> 'The princess?'
> 'Someone a little like her.' (*T. C.* 282)

Catherine seems to be enclosed into her adult interpretation of the tale (false stereotypes, the negation of love and life, the impossibility to communicate in the contemporary world et cetera) and can only bring her story to an end through bargaining it with Emma. The story has to have a kind of happy ending without actually having reached its end. So Emma is told that the two lovers are still seventeen and the oriole still calls: The situation fits Emma's expectations perfectly and it is the equivalent of John Keats's formula in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" when he writes "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard // Are sweeter, therefore, ye soft pipes, play on, // Not to the sensual ear, but , more endeared, // Pipe to the spirit ditties of not tone:// Fair Youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave // Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare, // Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss, // Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve // She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, // For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair."

> Once more the trisyllabic flute. Cathrine smiles.
> 'Flo-ri-o.'
> 'It's a bird.'
> Catherine shakes her head. 'The princess. She's calling his name.'

> A shaded doubt; a tiny literary critic - Reason, the worst ogre of them all - stirs.
> 'Mummy says it's a bird.'
> 'Have you ever seen it?'
> Emma thinks, then shakes her head.
> 'She's very clever. You never see her. Because she's shy about not having clothes. Perhaps she's been in this tree all the time. Listening to us.' (*T. C.* 282)

The tiny literary critic ordered from the very beginning a happy ending to the story. Catherine pretends that she knows from a very reliable source that the story has a happy ending and manages to persuade Emma to accept the story as credible:

> 'It doesn't end happily ever after.'
> 'You know when I went away before lunch? I met the princess. I was talking with her.'
> 'What did she say?'
> 'That she's just heard the prince is coming. That's why she's calling his name so often.'
> 'When will he come?'
> 'Any day now. Very soon.'
> 'Will they be happy then?'
> 'Of course.'
> 'And have babies?'
> 'Lots of babies.'
> 'It is happy really, isn't it.' [The contended client concludes.]
> (*T. C.* 282)

When Constance discovers Catherine and Emma, their secret journey into the world of the story of the prince and the princess ends. This was a way of putting it not very satisfactory for those who cannot understand the beginning of an end. Romantic hopes for a possible happy ending are not shared with the intruder.

The workshop on creative writing being disturbed, John Fowles takes us to another idyllic scenery. Annabel is reading Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy* aloud. She loves the 'green petals of Victorian words' and she believes in nature, peace in a soft equivalent of herself "watching gently and idiosyncratically behind all the science and the philosophy of cleverness" (*T. C.* 283). The reader is conversant with John Fowles's obsession with the Victorian spirit conclusively demonstrated in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. From the same novel the reader knows that John Fowles does not accept the dominance of the Victorian world even if it is exercised over a delicious mother of a large family. Consequently, we learn that Paul reads only occasional lines and Peter finds people's reading a poem too

pretentious. Annabel's inner monologue is an eloquent digression from her 'hereness' and it discloses her dissatisfaction with contemporary theories about art or the female Hamlet at Somerville. Her comments support Catherine's attempt to artistically interpret life in a traditional way although seemingly there is no contact between the two scenes and events.

She compares these intellectual 'willful flights from all simplicity' in art to the intentions behind the innovation announced by the *Observer* about how to dry leaves and keep their colour by using glycerin. Annabel revolts against "plots, drama, far-fetched action: when there are lovely green poems to live by" (*T. C.* 284). Peter feels the way in which people read poetry to be 'vaguely embarrassing' and climbs up a path, to enjoy loneliness and the proximity of the sylvan quietness. He envies his friend because Paul still acts and lives according to conventions, while Peter's life is a continuous attempt to 'suck the juice' and 'attack the next' and remain a guest everywhere. Peter seems to worship the traditional system of communication and the simple nearly natural structure it produces. The mountain and the falling rocks from which he wants to be secure are symbolic of a very daring adventure: Peter's visit to the Garden of Eden.

The moods created by the texts introduced under the headings 'erotic sun,' 'death,' 'childish,' 'tenses,' and 'Il faut philosopher pour vivre' lead to 'the black hole.' The reader grows uneasy about these symbols as there is a mysterious quality about the atmosphere suggested by these images. Characteristically, the mystery stems from the ambiguity of the character's insistence on false social stereotypes - Peter is after all the show-biz guru, who lives by the power conferred onto him by the often sensationalist, artificial mass media Bel has just condemned - and his attempt to justify his goals through persuasively traditional symbolism. The poetic quality of this mystery seems to refuse interpretation although John Fowles operates with a technique reminiscent of the one used by Virginia Woolf in *The Waves*. The by now 'classical' technique is inserted in ahead of the different streams of the narrative, and it functions as a dam that helps all the voices meet. The lyrical interlude both breaks and reorganizes the fictional material and it repeats its main themes.

John Fowles suggests that experience is too real to be true; therefore, there is need for more fictional alternatives, and the analysis of the symbiosis of these alternatives will result in the 'histories' offered up to his readers and protagonists alike. The interlude reflects on elements that are in search of both their reflection in the real world and a fictional author who could adopt them. Partial impersonation of these themes is possible at the level of the narrative fragments and the overall interpretation of the short story, yet none of the above can claim authority over them. Consequently, it also formulates

the impossibility to communicate meanings even through fragments of great narratives and thus the material invites remembrance of a conversation which preceded Catherine and Emma's story about Prince Florio and Princess Emma. The symbol of the erotic sun becomes understandable only when one is in possession of the story within the story and the meanings attached to it.

Communication gaps are persistent in the story. For example, the discourse employed by Paul in his defense of his socialist views irritates his woman companions. Catherine's interior monologue stamps Paul for being an 'expounder of the grand cultural rhubarb'. Yet there is no solution in conventional terms that could help to explain the world:

> When all one sees, somehow, is a tired rush of evening people, work-drained automata to whom one can be only profoundly lucky, above, chosen, helpless. To motivate, to explain them is the ultimate vulgarity and the ultimate lie … a kind of cannibalism. Eat butchered pork for lunch; then butchered other lives, chopped-up reality, for afters. The harvest is in. All that's left are the gleanings and leavings; fragments, allusions, fantasies, egos. Only the husks of talk, the meaningless aftermath. (*T. C.* 265)

The above train of thoughts determines Catherine to meditate on Roland Barthes. As a result, the confusion about the theoretical aspects and the sources of the chaos that renders human communication difficult is repeated at a (fictionally) theoretical level in the story. This marks a very serious departure from the story within the story, yet the two layers exist and are explicable only through their symbiosis. Subtleties abound - Roland Barthes is introduced through the perspective of hearsay. Peter's '[s]omeone was talking about him the other day' sounds as if he thinks it is spelt Bart and a it is a Christian name, and the intellectual chit-chat contends itself by defining Roland Barthes as the fellow who is difficult to understand. Catherine is addressed as the authority on the subject and she explains that Roland Barthes analysed tourist guides in a book of essays and found that they consider all modern things monotonous and that "the picturesque has come to be associated almost uniquely with mountains and beaches in the sun" (*T. C.* 267). Paul, who is ignorant of the ideas expressed by Roland Barthes, bases his answer on earlier stereotypes and answers that "[t]he mountain bit started with the Romantics, surely".

Their discussion develops into a philosophical debate concerning crucial concepts like 'the beautiful,' thirteenth-century architecture versus twentieth-century reality, 'false images of the British and the French' as selected reality and bourgeois stereotypes of national character. In response

to Paul's confession about him being said that 'this chap [is] fantastically difficult to understand,' Catherine explains her version about the general message of *Mythologies:*

> 'That there are all kinds of category of sign by which we communicate. And that one of the most suspect is language – principally for Barthes because it's been badly corrupted and distorted by the capitalist power structure. But the same goes for many other non-verbal sign-systems we communicate by.'
> Peter chews on a grass-stalk.
> 'You mean advertising – things like that?'
> 'That's a particularly flagrant field of manipulation. A lot of private communication is also advertising. Misuse – or just clumsy use, of signs.' (*T. C.* 269)

The interpolated 'aside' makes it clear that we are unobserving witnesses to Peter's attempt to manipulate Catherine in the name of the stereotype concerning male superiority. Catherine, this time on guard, identifies the message wrapped in both the verbal and non-verbal system of communication employed by Peter. Although she feels uneasy about being 'too much in the sun' she cannot master the situation any more:

> Too late to stop now, one is trapped. 'A sentence is what the speaker means it to mean. Which may be quite the opposite. What he doesn't mean it to mean. What it means as evidence of his real nature. His history. His intelligence. His honesty and so on.'(*T. C.* 269)

The two touch upon Roland Barthes's definition of originality as well:

> 'This chap who was talking about him … isn't there something about the religion of the middle classes being the platitude?'
> 'I think the ethos.'
> 'Because originality is disruptive – right?'
> 'It depends on the context.'(*T. C.* 270)

Earlier Catherine interpreted, that is, proofread the English translation of that difficult chap's *Mythologies.* Bel uses Roland Barthes's interpretation to stamp her husband's methods of rebellion:

> Bel stares at her sister's bowed head, speculating.
> 'How?'
> 'There are middle-class contexts where one is expected to sound original. Amusing. Even revolutionary. But the context is kind of countermanding sign. It trumps.'

> Bel says, 'For example, how quickly you go to sleep after lunch when you have finished cursing the society that allows you to go to sleep after lunch.'
> Paul murmurs, 'I heard that.' (*T. C.* 270)

The verbal duel between Catherine and Peter is devoid of the self-deprecating humour exposed by Paul. Peter insists on stereotypes defined by Catherine as middle-class platitudes. No matter how well Catherine understands these platitudes, they will help Peter to establish himself as an emblem interpreted by Catherine to be threatening:

> She sees out of the corner of her eyes, for through all this she has been looking down at Emma, then he nods. As if she has made a point. She realizes, it is very simple, she hates him; although he is fortuitous, ignorable as such, he begins to earn his right to be an emblem, a hideous sign. For he is not testing – or – teasing – Barthes and semiotics, but her. He means childish little male things like: why don't you smile at me, what have I done, please show respect when I match my language because I know you don't like my language. (*T. C.* 271)

The conversation makes it clear that Peter intends to seduce Catherine. At the surface the trap seems to be on an intellectual level, but as it proves to be rather trivial and conventional Catherine manages to escape. He wants Catherine to talk about Roland Barthes 'across the telly,' but the woman states that the material under discussion presumes the reader's direct contact with *Mythologies* and she manages to undermine the idea of the efficiency of the mass media in this respect, when she asserts the following: "I should have thought it was essentially to be read" (*T. C.* 271).

The situation is comic although at a surface level the communicative process is faultless. Catherine 'decodes' Peter's sign system, yet in her answer she supports her refusal by stating that the work the media specialist wants to employ her for is impossible to perform. Her declared reasons are strictly professional and moral in their character. Peter perverts the communicative function of the code system as his primary aim is to trap the woman into a situation where, he can unquestionably dominate her. Talking about Roland Barthes and his theory of communication he phrases his ideas with the adequate portion of ambiguity: "I mean, if these sign things aren't all verbal, it might be fun to illustrate" (*T.C.* 271). While he is saying this he is prodding some insect in the grass with his stalk, an act illustrative of his intentions with Catherine. No wonder Catherine is on the verge of panic. Yet she does not become one of the insects in Peter's collection because she can identify his intention to dominate and ridicule her in time. Peter has to put

his notebook back into his pocket and accept her unambiguous decision: "I honestly shan't" (*T. C.* 271).

The theoretical debate is just the first variant of a story told three times, the second, central one being the story of Emma and prince Florio I have already discussed. The third variant is the one that leads to Catherine's disappearance with the tragic possibility of her having committed suicide. The various interpretations and the plurality of perspectives and fragments that populate the fictional work of art are comprehensively postulated by Catherine. She explains that there are all kinds of categories of sign by which we communicate and that they are suspect for Roland Barthes because they have been badly corrupted and distorted. Similarly, the scrutiny of the communications theory with reference to the sign system of the Prince Florio story demonstrates that 'civilisation' cannot escape distortions, or faulty decoding. Yet, the fairy tale confronts the different meanings attached to the neo-Romantic concepts of the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime' as it bestows them onto the animal world and the 'human world.' Natural beauty comes to be interpreted by the royal parents as terrible and Catherine fails to provide a classical happy ending to the tale. The Roland Barthes interlude and the story about Catherine's tragic isolation through the loss of her husband allow for a totally different interpretation of the happy ending of the fairy tale. It is important to remember that the fairy tale allowed for an ambiguous end of the love-story: the prince and the princess will never grow old and wise enough to give up their search for happiness.

The third variant of the story enriches the already dense sign system of the short story by bringing in elements of the great narrative. The snake recalls the symbolic meaning of temptation and the Garden of Eden. The speaking names of the two male characters Peter and Paul, Catherine and Peter's private communication through non-verbal signs rhymes with the arguments used by them when discussing Roland Barthes' theory. Their gestures do not mean what they intend them to mean rhyming with:

> [Catherine] 'A sentence is what the speaker means it to mean.
> Which may be quite the opposite. What he doesn't mean it to
> mean. What it means as evidence of his real nature. His history.
> His intelligence. His honesty and so on.' […]
> [Paul]'Until everything about meaning matters except
> meaning. "Pass me the salt" becomes a pregnant sign-structure.
> And the poor bloody salt never gets passed.'
> Catherine smiles. 'Sometimes.' (*T. C.* 269)

When Peter, disturbed by a snake, arrives to Catherine's hiding place, the snake becomes the expression of her abusive defense as revenge. The snake is present throughout the story similarly to other symbols. Its first

appearance interrupts Peter's imaginary dialogue with the French estate agent, who charges him the 'inexplicably high sum of fifty new pence for the water-mill'. The kids see a snake in the grass and are terrified. Peter and Paul chase the snake into the water and the latter attaches a traditionally positive significance to its presence: "Oh well. Proves it's paradise, I suppose" (*T. C.* 245). The narrator's comment provides a different perspective through the as yet unclear statement: "The snake disappears among some yellow flags in the shallow water at the foot of the terrace wall. *With Peter everything is always about to disappear*. Now he turns and sits at the end of the parapet" (*T. C.* 254).

The snake appears again when Peter is searching for Catherine. He seems to observe the pattern on the back of the snake and tentatively identifies it as an adder. It will become an adder by the time he reaches the group, because an adder can provoke greater excitement than a harmless grass snake. Certainly, the transformation of the snake into an adder also supports the venomous character of Peter's adventure with Catherine with utmost accuracy: "It was gone almost before he saw it. But some sort of pattern on its back? He was almost sure. It must have been an adder. It would certainly be an adder when he got back to tell them" (*T. C.* 288).

For Peter the adder is the means of declaring himself a kind of near victim-hero, but he does not see the real danger of the snake's transformation into a definitely venomous reptile. He warns Catherine, yet Catherine understands the nature of the pending danger better than he does. The scene is followed by a frustrating love ritual between a reptile and a disoriented path-loser, that is, between Catherine and Peter. Actually Catherine has just concluded that the only philosophy that she can accept formulates the thesis that to live one must not love. The ritual of the reptile responding to the temptations earlier formulated by the superior male deconstruct the truth value of both theses on grounds that man and woman both lie in the contemporary variant of the Garden of Eden, which is easy to describe but nearly impossible to interpret.

Peter acts in the name of male superiority, while Catherine performs the ritual of the 'corpse' making love.

> 'Didn't mean to disturb you. Just the adder.'
> He is already turning away when she moves; her arm, almost with the rapidity of the snake. The fingers catch him … It is a change of attitude so sudden, so unexpected, so banal, so implicitly friendly despite the expressionlessness of her face, that he grins.' (*T. C.* 289)

Catherine hypnotizes Peter with her magic power as if she were a snake, she does not move, nor does she give the slightest sign, yet she manages to torture Peter into what he was yearning for all day: an erotic adventure:

> When all is erect, cocked, wild, in all senses wild; the bloody nerve, the savage tamed; the knowing one will; and somehow outrageously funny as well as erotic […] He reaches and takes the dark glasses away. The eyes are closed. He lowers himself on her, searching for the averted mouth. […] He insists, and she jerks the head wildly to the other side; a sudden willfulness, her nails in his shoulders, frantic pushing him away, writhing, struggling, shaking her head violently from left to right. He kneels up again, on all fours. Her hands drop. She lies still, head twisted away. […]
> Catherine turns her head and opens her eyes and stares up into Peter's face. It is strange, as if she can't really see him, as if she is looking through his knowing, faintly mocking smile. He has, will always have, the idea that it was something beyond him; not Peter. It is a pose, of course; just the sick game of a screwed-up little neurotic on heat. Very sick, and very sexy. To have it like this, just once; to have those pale and splintered eyes. (*T. C.* 291-292)

Peter's directly and vulgarly formulated discontent which stems from his frustrating adventure with Catherine, is essentially a lie. He hoped to use the snake as a topic that could help him enjoy sex as envisaged by him. Catherine does not only crush his sense of superiority to all women, but also fails to reformulate the philosophical thesis that one must not love. The result could be formulated as one cannot love which is a more pessimistic thesis.

That Peter does not understand the experiment he has just undergone is demonstrated by the fact that he continues using the adder as an excuse and a means to avoid the group's possible suspicions when he returns:

> 'Sorry. Rough country in them thar hills.'
> 'We've been shouting our heads off.'
> 'It's stiff with adders. I was scared the kids would try and meet me.'
> Sally flinches. 'Adder!'
> 'Damn near put my foot on one.'
> 'Oh Peter!' (*T. C.* 292)

In the context offered by the fictional situation, Bel nearly instinctively associates Catherine, the adder and the possibility of Peter's misfortune with her sister:

> Bel says, 'I should have warned you. There are a few.'
> […]
> Bel smiles. 'You didn't see Kate by any chance?'(*T. C.* 292-293)

The snake is further employed by the unknowing members of the group in their conversation, and their sentences naturally mean something different from what they want them to mean. That the meaning of things escapes Peter is demonstrated by his incapacity to interpret the frustrating incident as other than a not really successful attempt to seduce. Once again the meanings formulated by the symbol remain incomprehensible for the participants in the fictional situation we are in. Yet, John Fowles does not make allowances in this sense and makes Candida suggest that "Kate has been bitten by an adder" (*T. C.* 294). All we know is that the snake managed to bite itself and the conclusions cannot be specified as the possible Biblical analogy is also diminished.

It is important to note though that the ritual performed by Peter and Catherine avoids language, the 'suspect' sign system which Roland Barthes considers to be perverted and thus an inadequate means of communication. The way in which Catherine lures Peter into a wild erotic adventure without the intention of making love to him finds justification in the theoretical arguments of the 'salt' passage quoted above, and the Garden of Eden 'temptation scene' becomes a demonstration of the arguments of the theoretical speculations as well as that of Catherine's 'interior monologues' in the Roland Barthes section, and is illustrative of the distorted value system governing man's deeds in the fairy tale.

Another relevant presence is that of the bird. Its presence in all the relevant sections of the story renders the triple linkage obvious: theory, fairy tale/fiction within fiction, and reality are to be appropriated only if we accept the dominance of nature over the still interpretable fragments of narratives. This obviously leads to the acceptance of the 'book of nature' as the 'grand narrative' incorporating life, art, and science. The Roland Barthes section formulates, (although the tone used is cynical) the possibility of 'transsubstantiation' through nature in the following passage:

> 'But you have to change society first, don't you?'
> 'One hopes that's what more awareness does.'
> 'But I mean, you know … if it's just picking up people's platitudes, it's just word-watching. Like bird-watching. No?'
> 'I presume even ornithology has its uses.'
> 'Hardly central though, is it?
> 'It would be if the bird was the basis of human society. As communication happens to be.' (*T. C.* 270)

The presence of the bird in all the three sections discussed so far proves that there is more meaning attached to it. The bird is not just one of the many symbols employed by John Fowles, it charts the borders and the possibilities of trespassing between theory, narrative and the 'real'. It determines the essential links among these elements without revealing itself and of course, the bird itself is far from being an easily identifiable symbol. It appears at the very beginning of the short story as the group are heading for the river and Peter the 'animator' of the group comments on the idea why so many people are trying to buy houses in that area. Peter's lecture on the necessity of improvisation, his monologue which is supposed to be a dialogue with Paul is interrupted by the kingfisher as if to underline the futility of the exercise. It interrupts the idea that talk is unnecessary and that life should be similar to a news story that has to be done fast and by luck and improvised. The kingfisher, 'a flash of azure, skimmed away ahead of them,' is causing some panic and it is distracting their attention from the discussion of a TV production. The idea that concludes the passage is relevant: "What one lost, afterwards, was what one had never had strongly at the best of times: a sense of continuity" (*T. C.* 252).

Again the oriole interrupts Peter and Paul's discussion about a possible TV programme involving the 'curious 'middleclassishness' of the English relations with France.

> 'Listen,' says Bel. 'There's an oriole.'
> And for a moment, Paul stops. They hear the liquid whistle from across the river.
> Bel says, 'You never see them.' (*T. C.* 262)

The appearance of the bird manages to interrupt the two gentlemen's heated discussion for a short time though their inability to enjoy what they came for rhymes with the false stereotypes they are speaking about. The 'fascist' quality of all French governments and the French nation is inherently incapable of accepting fascism for long and the English accepting social structures that safeguard them against their real nature, the false pictures of the other nation by the English and the French, et cetera.

The bird reappears having another connotation when Peter and Paul are speaking about tourism, about why working-people do not visit France. When Bel offers a very palpable explanation which is contradicted instantly the bird is used in a pejorative meaning to describe a 'disoriented' tourist:

> Bel says, 'Working class people don't come to France because it's too expensive. It's as simple as that.'
> Peter grins. 'You're joking. You don't realize what some of them earn these days.'

> ‘Exactly,’ says Paul. ‘It’s a cultural thing. Here they assume the customer wants the best. We assume they want the cheapest.’
> We did a programme on package tours a couple of years ago. Unbelievable, some reasons they gave. I remember one dear old bird in Majorca saying what she liked best was knowing they all got the same food and the same sort of room.’ (*T. C.* 264)

The bird reappears in the already discussed passage focusing on sign systems, false stereotypes and social problems. The theory under discussion basically belongs to Roland Barthes and it refers to language being corrupted and distorted by the capitalist power structure. The seemingly dry professional register is maintained as Catherine also explains that advertising is a particularly flagrant field of manipulation and also adds that a lot of private communication is also advertising. Yet Catherine reminds one that the professional attitude is endorsed by ordinary everyday situations, the one we are reading about included as she also explains that a sentence is what the speaker secretly means it to mean.

The discussion on Barthes’s theory leads to the already quoted conversation on ‘word-watching’, a term which is easy to associate with bird-watching. Peter and Catherine’s communicative duel potentially comprises the theoretical elements that support the use of the bird as one of the story’s central ‘pluridimensional’ metaphors. I am speaking of pluridimensional metaphor because I consider that the term complex metaphor would be too conservative or traditional, and the bird carries ‘messages’ which are incompatible in the short story. Yet, the bird is present in the story from its very beginning to its end and formulates the symbiosis of the different layers of the short story. The bird is the expression of ungraspable magic, it is everlasting love, it is hope, the link between nature and the artist.

It is also the expression of the Schopenhauerian desire of death: it connects honest and corrupt sign systems, yet it does not attempt to reconcile the two moral, social or aesthetic dimensions involved. Instead it functions as a magnet that holds together the different layers without actually linking them. Most importantly it reconciles langue and parole as it links the visible and the invisible world and meaning with non-meaning.

No wonder, the use of the bird is persistent in the short story and Catherine, the magician who is in possession of the ultimate knowledge of signs, translates the song of the birds for Emma. Emma the impersonation of Catherine’s niece in the fairy tale is protected by the animals of the forest. A squirrel helps the lost princess and all kinds of animals and birds and the bird

is the basis of the fiction within fiction section of the short story. The watching eyes of the brown owl detect the distressed girl and the bird attempts to bridge the gap between the animal world and that of the humans by way of magic. Yet Catherine limits the owl's magic power and as a result her and Emma's journey into the world of art has also limited power. Yet the bird can attempt to shape the lives of the lovers.

We may add that it is only in the bird's power to do that, with the, improbable, possibility of changing Catherine's fate as well. After all, if a sentence means what the speaker intends it to mean, those sentences make up a tale that expresses the hopes formulated by a neo-Romantic moment celebrating the imagination as a space outside reality:

> 'Toowhitawoo, toowhitawoo, do-on't … yoo-ou cry.' chants the owl. …
> 'Then he flew down beside her and told her what he could do. By magic. To be a princess you also have to live in a palace. But he couldn't give her both things at the same time.'
> 'Why couldn't he?'
> 'Because magic is very difficult.'(*T. C.* 279)

When Emma is incredulous about the fairy tale, her aunt tells her that her parents gave her her name because of the beautiful fairy-tale. Emma, aware of her right to question anything ripostes: 'But I like questions.' 'Then I will never finish' is the threat formulated by Catherine. As if the threat were not enough, the song of the oriole approaches, and "Emma covers her mouth with a grubby hand. Catherine kisses her finger […]. The oriole whistles, closer, their side of the river now" (*T. C.* 281).

It is also important to remember that in the fairy tale the distressed princess returns to the tree under which Catherine and Emma are sitting to ask the wise old owl what she should do and the owl can do one last piece of magic the result of which is that neither Emma nor Florio would grow older until they meet:

> The oriole calls again, going away downstream. 'Listen!' (*T. C.* 281)
> […]
> Emma: 'It's a bird."
> Catherine: 'The Princess. She's calling his name.'
> 'Mummy says it's a bird.'
> 'Have you ever seen it?'(*T. C.* 281)

Also, right after the lyrical interlude Peter finds Catherine. Catherine looks at him 'accusing, craned, like some startled bird', and Peter warns her about the adder. The second to last appearance of the bird is expressive of

the sense of continuity negated by both the structure of the short story and most of its characters. When the group leaves the field by the riverbank, a tiny fable repeats the theme of death as part of the natural scheme:

> A minute, the voices fade, the picnic place is empty; the old beech, the grass, the lengthening shadows, the boulders, the murmuring water. A hoopoe, cinnamon, black and white, swoops down across the water and lands on one of the lower boughs of the beech. After a pause, it flits down on to the grass where they sat; stands, flicks up the fan of its curved bill, and an ant dies. (*T. C.* 295)

Retreat from the suddenly transformed riverbank also marks a final remove from the characters who earlier populated it. They become figures against the landscape that acquires a mysterious quality essentially different from the mystery it stood for earlier. The cloud becomes a trap and the 'islands' are 'floating' back into their common human roles. Paul and Bel have no power over Catherine's fate or her interpretation of the world so they give up looking back, showing their backs to the others and finally they follow the group.

Return to 'normality' is not Fowles's concern, yet in the logic of the story it is unavoidable. Still, John Fowles does not sacrifice the dominant atmosphere of the story and refuses to let reality trap the magic Catherine has created. The necessary distance from reality that allows for apocalypse, the pervasive 'Weltschmertz' that defines the dominant note of the story leads to a significant innovation. 'Natural' retains its connotation as mysterious subject for the philosophy that is a means of life; the 'islands' returning to 'normality' cannot contradict their status as islands. Catherine's loneliness is unique without losing the potential of explaining the standing of all of us in the real world. The key word for the technique allowing for this intricate interpretation is embedded into a traditional definition of the secret agent serving the writer's spying on his characters. The fly on the wall is replaced by the 'watching bird in the leaves' (*T. C.* 300) technique.

Concentrating on the characters smoothly transforms into a panorama, which renders conversation insignificant. The 'watching bird in the leaves' replaces conversation with description, movements, gestures, and directions. Thus, Paul, Bel and Emma perform a rite which announces the enigma of the narrative:

> The three walk on, less quickly, yet not idly; as if there is something to be caught up or, perhaps, escape from.
> They disappear among the poplars. The meadow is empty. The river, the meadow, the cliff and cloud.

> The princess calls, but there is no one, now, to hear her. (*T. C.* 300)

As I have managed to demonstrate, the symbiosis between the three layers, similar to the bird, remains a theoretical probability. Yet, it is a basis of a possible system (similar to the sign system serving as a basis for human communication), in John Fowles's interpretation it is the basic source of credibility for both fiction and the voice of nature. This practically impossible, yet theoretically valid symbiosis guarantees the credibility of all three layers. It is this invisible, mysterious status that challenges theory, fiction and reality. For example, Catherine demonstrates that the presupposition that the bird could be the basis of communication is applicable to the world they live in. She borrows the song of the bird to give name to the prince in the story she is just creating. Next the bird becomes the basis of the sign system used by the author of the Prince Florio tale in her creative act. When Emma's romantic expectations are in danger of being contradicted by the logical sequence of the narrative, Catherine amends her former conclusions about the prince not deserving Emma because he should have loved her for herself, not for her social status, again with the help of the bird. Correction of the logical sequence is possible because her previous choice of nature, the thorn tree, the very forest in which aunt and niece are hiding is at the same time the setting for her story, and provides her with another, equally acceptable strategy. The bird's song did not cease with the consummation of the conflict dictated by human stereotypes woven into the story. The singing goes on, and Catherine borrows again from nature: if the song of the bird is still audible, the love story of Emma and Florio has not ended either.

I can conclude that the importance of this multidimensional interpretation is rendered comprehensive by John Fowles's creating multiple models of communication. The sources of the story about Florio and Emma can be identified in Emma's desire to listen to a story created exclusively for her, Catherine's being enclosed in her own life-story by social stereotypes, and Catherine's attempt to respond to Emma's demand for harmony by way of transcending nature. As a result, she formulates the power of 'terror', of the sublime, without abandoning the desire of being forever young. The end of Emma and Florio's story demonstrates that return to hope and happiness is possible, yet return to this state also implies giving up real life.

In the final section of "The Cloud" the group prepares to leave because of the storm that is approaching. Peter answers the calls of the group and flees the frustrating situation he and Catherine have got into. He can only understand that she played with him, and is dominated by an uneasy sense of frustration. Sally notices that Peter's body emanates the scent of Catherine's

suntan-lotion, and we witness a trivial domestic feud which suggests that everything is back to normal. Peter invents an appropriate explanation and evades the uneasy situation by taking Tom's hand.

The fairy tale becomes top secret, yet it is going to be told to a third party as Emma demands that Annabel, her mother, swears she will not tell Constance about the story she intends to tell her mother. Emma is a very good 'student', and is telling her mother a revised version of the tale, which will end without ambiguity yet, the departing group have to leave the place because nature seems to be growing into some kind of threat.

> A cloud, but a mysterious cloud, the kind of cloud one will always remember because it is so anomalous, so uncorresponding with the weather knowledge that even the most unobservant acquire. It comes from the south, from behind the cliffs where Peter climbed, and whose closeness, at the picnic place, must have hidden what on the plain would have been obvious long before; so that it seems to have crept up; feral and ominous, a great white edged grey billow beginning to tower over the rocky wall, unmistakable bearer of storm. Always predicated by the day's stillness and heat … yet still it shocks. And the still peaceful and windless afternoon sunshine about them seems suddenly eery, false, sardonic, the claws of a brilliantly disguised trap. […] 'It'll thunder-and-lightning all night.' Then, 'We're worried about Kate.' (*T. C.* 297)

We are left with the impression that the cloud is our last vision of Catherine and she remains a mysterious illusion both to the reader and to the members of the group. The pain caused by her husband's suicide, the thanatic quality of her bodily desire, her will to understand life in its complexity, and her interpretation of life as a fairy tale do not allow for a definite conclusion. The superimposition of eros and thanatos becomes explicable, for example, through Schopenhauer. Catherine attempts to dominate her world through intellect, but the material world refuses or, rather, is incapable of healing her spiritual ills.

Catherine step by step detaches herself from the physical world, from individual essence and thus she renders her intellect subservient to a mysterious fundamental sense of the world, which she hopes will allow her to understand the condition of space, time and intellect. This fundamental sense or meaning can be roughly defined in the context of Schopenhauer's interpretation of will. Catherine submits her individual intellect to experience and understands this will. The similarity offers obvious advantages as it supports my statements regarding the structure of the

narrative, her act is possible as Schopenhauer says that the ends and ambitions of this will are episodes that do not exhaust it. Yet, individual contributions are not attached to the essence of the will because they are separated by it through the veil of illusion which in turn means that no sacrifice can render that will interpretable.

This leads to Catherine's possible acceptance of death as no evil, a thesis comprehensively formulated by the lyrical interlude of the short story. The ethical conclusion to Schopenhauer's logic is that there is no ultimate aim to human activity. Schopenhauer also considers that death cannot be evil since there is no death of the will in itself, only of its finite expression in an animal body. From this rejection of the fear of death, Schopenhauer leads to the renunciation of life. If will itself is aimless and all particular desire strives only for a brief state which generates the pain of its re-enactment, the only happiness we can know lies in renunciation. Catherine's acts exemplify transformations which ultimately lead to this kind of renunciation. If I bring together Catherine's role as a narrator, a character and a theoretician, my conclusions get me close to Schopenhauer's definition of the veil of Maya. He considers that the illusory objects of appetite have to cease to trouble us to allow us to see through the veil of Maya to the universal will, which underlies it. Schopenhauer considers that through the veil of Maya we can achieve a revelation of the fact that desire is illusionary. Here is the section which can convincingly support my above thesis:

> The erotic sun. Apollo, and one is death. … The other side.
> Peace, black peace. … Death. One had lied to the ox, it wasn't at all being unable to escape the present; but being all the futures, all the pasts, being yesterday and tomorrow. All was past before it happened; was words, shards, lies, oblivion. Ergo one must prove one sees. One saw, that is.
> Tenses.
> Pollution, energy, population. All the Peters and the Pauls.
> Won't fly away. The dying cultures, dying lands.
> Europe ends.
> The death of fiction; and high time too….
> Il faut philosopher pour vivre. That is, one must not love.
> Tears of self-pity, hand hidden in the furitive hair. The transfer of epithets. Burn dry and extirpate; ban; annul; annihilate.
> I will return. Not as I am.
> And Catherine lies, composing and decomposed, writing and being written, here and tomorrow … Where all is reversed; once entered, where nothing leaves. The black hole, the black hole.

> To feel so static, without will; inviolable shade; and yet so potent and so poised. (*T. C.* 287)

Yet, the short story is not an illustration of a philosophical thesis and actually whether experience creates a state of wisdom that leads to Catherine's romantic admiration for the act of final – but not premature – renunciation to life or not is not stated in the short story. Renunciation to life is present on two accounts in the short story, as both Catherine and her husband seem to have renounced their lives. Yet, Catherine's possible renunciation to life is only essential if it can be interpreted in relation to the other elements deliberately woven into 'the carpet' as meaningful figures and this involves the elements of Neo-Romanticism I considered central to my interpretation of the short story.

But as I have argued the fairy tale is placed centrally, between the Roland Barthes section and the final section of the short story and the conversational section of the short story formulates both the survival of descriptive interpretations prior to the events and dismisses them. For example, Annabel insists on the good old traditional interpretation of art and dismisses the female Hamlet as nonsense; she also enjoys Victorian poetry but her husband regards that poetry only partially enjoyable. The mountain as symbol is dismissed as having no meaning for contemporary interpretation because it belongs to the Romantics' system of interpretation of the world.

Significantly, the truth-value of the above declarations is undermined by the communications theory discussed by the participants in the conversational layer of the short story. It is also relevant that the 'authority' on the subject is Catherine, and she advocates some of the ideas set forth in *Mythologies*. For her the most important aspect formulated by Roland Barthes is the suspicion that the sign systems we employ are false. Most eloquently, Peter abuses language to which Catherine responds with an equally misleading speech of her body. Catherine's creative interpretation of both the incredibility factor incorporated into contemporary communicative patterns and individual relationships determines her to favour the 'romantic' alternative. Yet her romantic digression does not compensate for nor does it offer alternatives for her major concern: Catherine's inability or lack of determination to establish relationships that could convincingly bring her back among her friends and family, and everything they stand for.

The fact that the fairy tale breaks the logical flow of the fictional material is telling of the way her new-Romanticism operates and demonstrates that she is interested in the process, not in the truth-value it has: "One does not have to believe stories; only that they can be told" (*T. C.* 278). Catherine's sense of crisis is connected to her sense of fragmentation

and chaos of the world surrounding her. She sees no chance for reconciliation with the world except perhaps through art. She creates a metafictional fairy tale, which works with fragments available to it. Catherine projects herself into a neo-Romantic fiction in the way described by the philosophy of 'as if'. Also, the result is a personal history, a unique contribution to contemporary history of the kind of which Lyotard says that is made of 'clouds of narratives' that are reported, invented, heard, and played out.

John Fowles's obsession with Romanticism in "The Cloud" is obvious. The occurrence of the cloud of the title, the mysterious cloud at the end of the short story and the cloud of narratives Lyotard speaks about may or may not be accidental. What is sure is that Catherine attempts to project her self into a narrative that attempts to hold together the accompanying stories, transfers some of her magic power to Emma both because of her niece's insistence and to compensate for the sense of fall from harmony into fragmentation she herself experiences. The central character, and her narrative withdraw from the world, to crate a variant of the postmodern sylvan historian and this allows her to both approach and detach herself from the world of her creation and through this dialectic she reinterprets her and the story's relation to natural, human and divine. Yet the romanticism John Fowles operates by is essentially different from traditional Romanticism.

The threatening cloud, the bird, which watches, dominates and enchants the field from which the group has just departed contribute to an essentially neo-Romantic end to a convincingly contemporary story. It performs a function that is difficult to support, unless one unfolds the underlying meanings of some significant momentums in the story of Catherine. The linear progress of the short story, as observed on many occasions, is fractured by various authorial interventions, interior monologues, or theoretical interpolations, yet Catherine's figure remains central to all elements, facets of fiction, philosophy, and of course the reflections on reality involved.

That the character of Catherine was probably drawn onto the model of Catherine Mansfield should be noted, but is not significant from the point of view of our approach. The fact that her character raises cultural and ethical problems is obvious, and as it has already been demonstrated she is explained and explains her status by a variety of symbols and texts of different if not antagonistic qualities. Catherine - by virtue of her central position and mastery of the different aspects - manipulates the symbols, the texts, and the characters of the short story, yet her attitude is far from being narcissistic and thus she becomes the expression of a nonconformist expression of the current status of the artist-hero of much recent fiction. She

demonstrates the ability to specifically, yet comprehensively define the complexity of the relationships that exist between texts, characters, reader, author, theory of culture and the creative act, although she mystifies the final formulation of the otherwise deductible messages. The author and Catherine, because John Fowles does not lose control over his material for a single moment, essentially insist on traditional handling of reality and the different theoretical concepts, and the alternation of mimetic and contemplative strategies in a fashion which is by no means common.

The anaphoric symbols John Fowles employs both support the hic et nunc of the plot and enforce the traditional context they spring from in its status of subject for discussion. This is the instance of the great narrative, Romanticism, Apocalyptic fears, *Mythologies*, mass-media and twentieth century intellect et cetera, which are occasionally handled as intertexts. John Fowles creates from the intertexts he employs symbols which gain global importance in the short story and in spite of their antagonistic status they develop the cohesive system of the story. As a result, all the above-mentioned elements quit their traditional context and become subjective contributors to a distinctly original structure.

Catherine can also be regarded to be a referential character, rooted in a particular cultural environment who acts as an 'organizer' or anaphoric character because she serves to establish links among the different layers and functions that support the story. Performing the above function she is endowed with an intricate, yet explicit personal code system by John Fowles. It is this code system that shapes and guards the inner cohesion and autonomy of the story. It is also significant that the accessibility of this code system is denied to most characters, the only exceptions being Peter and Emma. The discontinuity of her relationship with the other characters supports the formal fragmentation of the short story and is also the guarantee for her remove from both the group and the real situation created by the journey. The same sense of discontinuity allows John Fowles to create of her a character essentially not at home if not alien in the context with which the author operates.

Catherine is a widow, an expert in communications theory, creative and able, but not always willing to match the expectations of those around her. In spite of her erotic desire she becomes asexual, although she is an expert in communications theory she refuses to comprehensively communicate, she creates a fairy tale to satisfy her niece, but she refuses to answer the challenge of speaking about Roland Barthes on television. Her physical disappearance from the field is the result of both physical and intellectual retreat, return to a condition envisaged in the 'islands' section of the short story. Discontent with the world around her is anchored in her

comprehensive interpretation of it, and it is essentially through her interpretation that the 'clouds of narrative' are organically incorporated in her mental journey. The possibility of discussing extremely complex problems like alienation, Romanticism in the second half of the twentieth century, communications theory, the relationship between mass media and literature, mortality and immortality, great narrative and fragments of original contemporary narrative is provided through her states of mind and free, related associations.

Catherine's final transsubstantiation is possible through the implicit association of the three significant theoretical 'participants' in the story: Schopenhauer, Barthes and the bird. All three elements have to undergo significant transformations in order to serve John Fowles's undeclared, yet clearly understandable authorial intention, which is to demonstrate that fiction is able and ready to develop forms that make it a potent rival for other forms of contemporary art.

The scarcity of Catherine's direct relationships with the other protagonists is balanced by her symbiosis with the 'participants' of the abstract layer of the short story. John Fowles openly declares her 'meta-fictional' existence on at least one occasion I have already discussed, when at the end of the lyrical interlude he states that Catherine is lying in the sun decomposing and decomposed, writing and being written, she becomes a snake in the erotic section, she looks back to Peter as if she were an accusing bird and death, the veil of Maya, and Apocalypse are comprehensively woven into her character, interior monologue and acts.

To conclude, here are a few words about the, probably, most controversial idea set forth in this paper, namely neo-Romanticism. The term is designed to stress the use of Romanticism as an experiment by John Fowles and other contemporary writers in whose works the myth of the Almighty Author plays an important role. The myth of the Almighty Author is part of John Fowles's Godgame performed with the intention of contradicting current theories of Apocalypse, with particular emphasis on theories about the death of the author, text, fiction et cetera. "The Cloud" does not formulate this intention explicitly although Catherine is envisaged as everlastingly absorbed by nature and able to avoid spiritual death. Yet, the short story is illustrative of the contemporary writer's experiment with Romanticism, his attempt to use fragments of Romantic thought and adapt them to his authorial needs.

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