

A Menippean Marvel: John Fowles's *Mantissa*¹

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ABSTRACT

Menippean satire, emerging in the 3rd century BCE, is a fluid, digressive genre that defies conventional definitions. Its adaptability across historical periods makes each example unique, often marked by cynicism, parody, and carnivalization. Menippean works question absolute truths through irony, challenging cultural, philosophical, and literary norms without providing alternative solutions. John Fowles's *Mantissa* (1982) exemplifies Menippean satire, exploring themes of metafiction, creative process, and literary theory. Through dialogues between author Miles Green and his characters, the novel blurs boundaries between reality and imagination. John Fowles' *Mantissa* challenges conventional fiction-writing through intertextuality, dialogy, and metafiction questioning the nature of existence, the boundaries between fiction and reality, and societal norms. The novel, through its playful, multilayered narrative, breaks binaries like sanity versus madness while satirizing traditional literary authority and high art conventions.

Keywords: *Menippean Satire, John Fowles, Mantissa.*

Meniposçu Bir Cevher: John Fowles'un *Mantissa* Adlı Romanı

ÖZET

Menipposçu hiciv, MÖ 3. yüzyılda ortaya çıkan, geleneksel tanımları reddeden akışkan ve dağınık bir türdür. Tarihsel dönemler boyunca uyarlanabilirliği, her örneği benzersiz kılar ve genellikle ayırt edici özellikleri alaycılık, parodi ve karnavalizasyondur. Menipposçu eserler, kültürel, felsefi ve edebi normları ironi yoluyla sorgular ve mutlak gerçekleri eleştirir, ancak alternatif çözümler sunmaz. John Fowles'in *Mantissa* (1982) adlı eseri, üstkurmaca, yaratıcı süreç ve edebiyat teorisi temalarını araştırarak Menipposçu hicvin bir örneğini sunar. Roman, yazar Miles Green ile karakterleri arasındaki diyaloglar aracılığıyla, gerçeklik ile hayal arasındaki sınırları bulanıklaştırır. John Fowles'in *Mantissa* eseri, metinlerarasılık, diyalog ve üstkurmaca yoluyla, varoluşun doğasını, kurgu ile gerçeklik arasındaki sınırları ve toplumsal normları sorgulayarak geleneksel kurgu yazımına meydan okur. Roman, oynak ve çok katmanlı anlatımıyla delilik ve akıl sağlığı gibi ikilikleri kırarken, geleneksel edebi otoriteyi ve yüksek sanat anlayışını hicveder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Menipposçu Hiciv, John Fowles, Mantissa.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Menippean satire is a genre characterized by its unconventional, elusive, digressive, and inclusive nature, both formally and thematically. Since its emergence in the 3rd century BCE, the genre has manifested itself in the works of numerous writers across different periods, each distinct from the other. Owing to its strong capacity for adaptation and evolution, every instance within the tradition exhibits unique formal and thematic strategies. Consequently, attempts to define the genre have led to diverse interpretations and ongoing debates regarding its precise nature. This study aims both to offer a more comprehensive definition of this ancient genre depending on what it does rather than what it is and to discuss John Fowles's narrative style as a modern epitome of the genre, through his 1982 novel *Mantissa*.

2. THE ORIGINS OF THE MENIPPEAN SATIRE

The origins of Menippean satire, also referred to as Varronian satire, can be traced to antiquity, particularly within the works of the Cynics. While Cynicism played a pivotal role in shaping the genre, it was not the sole influence on its development. The socio-cultural and political dynamics of the Hellenistic period were also highly significant. Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, the ancient world experienced profound changes. Alexander expanded his empire to become one of the largest and most notable in history, stretching from southern Italy to the Himalayas. This vast expansion brought about substantial economic and cultural transformations. Although this growth contributed to a degree of prosperity, it also generated confusion, insecurity, and fear. The merging of diverse Eastern and Western cultures exposed people to alternative worldviews, leading to a decline in their belief in the absolute values of the classical world.

These social and cultural changes were reflected in the literature of the Hellenistic period. As Kathryn Gutzwiller discusses in *A Guide to Hellenistic Literature*, this era saw the rise of new literary perspectives, which allowed for innovative literary strategies to emerge. She argues that while archaic and classical Greek poetry are marked by depth and grandeur, Hellenistic literature focuses on a more modern form of realism and complexity. This literature frequently highlights marginalized groups, such as laborers, women, and children, whose emotional experiences are depicted in ways that resonate with contemporary readers. Furthermore, gods are portrayed as earthly rulers, reflecting a shift in political power from homogeneous city-states to diverse monarchies, which fosters a deeper understanding of human commonality (2007, p. 26-27).

The rise of parody during this period was closely linked to the collapse of traditional absolutes and the emergence of new perspectives. Parody, characterized by a humorous and satirical tone, became a dominant form of expression. The literary atmosphere of the Hellenistic age was also influenced by Cynicism, which had much in common with “the popular philosophy of the Hellenistic age” (Dudley, 1937, p. 114). This philosophical backdrop, combined with the socio-political and literary environment of the time, provided

fertile ground for the emergence of Menippean satire. This genre embraced the cynical, sarcastic, and satirical tendencies of the age, pushing them to their limits.

Menippus of Gadara, who is believed to have lived in the first half of the third century B.C., is regarded as the founder of Menippean satire. Despite being well-known in satirical studies, little concrete information is available about his life. Menippus was a Greek, born in Gadara, who had once been a slave but managed to gain his freedom. Unfortunately, none of his complete works have survived, and only fragments remain. His writing covered a wide range of topics and was composed in a seriocomic form, blending prose and verse. Menippus's works dealt with themes of madness, chaos, and the excesses of the Hellenistic period, in contrast to the order, restraint, and stability of the classical age. The subversion of cultural myths and the collapse of classical values during the Hellenistic era gave rise to a carnivalesque attitude. This environment, marked by the breakdown of core societal values, spurred the development of Menippean satire.

Mikhail Bakhtin, a prominent literary theorist, linked the emergence of the carnivalesque to periods of instability and societal upheaval. He highlighted Rabelais's Renaissance and Dostoevsky's early twentieth-century Russia as examples of times when Menippean satire became prominent. Similarly, in the aftermath of World War II, John Fowles's works—written during another period of crisis—exhibited a Menippean spirit. In such moments of instability, Menippean satire rises to challenge and question ideas that were previously accepted without critique. The genre's distinctive features allow it to thrive in times of crisis, when the existing social and cultural order is in flux.

Despite its long history, Menippean satire has emerged and faded numerous times in various social and historical contexts, yet it has rarely been treated as a distinct literary genre. An-chi Wang explains one reason for this in her study of Menippean influences in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*: “the Menippean satire is a genre that has no settled definition, no canonized texts or models, and no linear historical development” (1995, p. 21). The genre lacks a rigid or fixed form, making it highly elusive in terms of textual organization. Attempts to categorize or schematize the genre often result in digression. As Milowicki and Wilson assert, Menippean satire is characterized by its digressive, transgeneric, and chaotic nature, so it “may be more profitable to ‘measure’ Menippean satire on the basis of what it does and does not do rather than trying to determine what it is and is not” (2002, p. 292).

Therefore, Menippean satire is an adaptable and fluid genre that has emerged throughout history in response to periods of social, political, and cultural upheaval. Its focus on parody, critique of traditional values, and exploration of alternative worldviews make it a powerful tool for social commentary. Although it has resisted strict classification, its recurring presence in literature across different eras underscores its importance as a literary form, particularly in times of instability and change.

3. TOWARDS A DEFINITION: ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MENIPPEAN SATIRE

Menippean satire is characterized by two defining traits. The first is its role as a genre of rejection. Menippean satire questions, parodies, and ridicules everything, including itself, without providing an alternative answer or a new perspective. This genre critically examines and rejects the so-called absolutes and universals in a comical tone. The second characteristic is the carnivalization of the narrative, which seeks to dismantle established conventions, hierarchies, and discourses.

The primary goal of Menippean satire is to reject cultural or philosophical claims, dogmas, and norms. It achieves this through the use of irony, parody, and ridicule, without ever providing clear answers. The genre mocks these cultural absolutes, overturning them, and leaving the reader in a state of ambiguity without offering any alternative solutions. Joel Relihan defines Menippus, the genre's founder, as "a dog with a loud bark and a vicious bite," with "the bite made all the worse because it comes with a smile" (1993, p. 16). This biting yet humorous attitude was adopted by many of Menippus's followers, who parodied prestigious works, philosophers, religions, sciences, historical accounts, and literary conventions. According to Relihan, the genre goes even further by incorporating a "parody of the self" (1993, p. 70), making self-ridicule a notable feature of Menippean satire.

The second key characteristic of the genre is the carnivalization of the narrative. A carnivalized text reflects the structure of a carnival scene, characterized by a lack of formal structure, abundant humor, and a multidimensional blending of voices and textures. These texts are vague, indefinite, and ambivalent, embodying a sense of freedom from hierarchies and norms. This subversion of traditional structures extends beyond literary boundaries to have political implications, as it challenges the prevailing world order. Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*, describes carnival as a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order," a time when all hierarchies and norms are suspended (1984, p. 10). Carnival becomes a metaphor for a mindset that represents a liberated, changing world—a world turned "inside out" (1984, p. 11). Bakhtin's metaphor draws on the medieval carnival, where societal norms and hierarchies were temporarily reversed, allowing for a freer exchange among different social groups. This ambivalence is central to carnival, allowing multiple perspectives to coexist without prioritizing one over the other, fostering dialogue between various viewpoints (Brooker, 1995, p. 1-2).

Various techniques contribute to a text's carnivalesque quality. These include the mixing of prose and verse, the blending of high and low cultural forms, and the incorporation of different literary forms reflecting various modes of thought. Menippean satire frequently employs allusions to other works—sometimes without explicit references or even alluding to non-existent sources. The use of different languages, dialects, or jargons, alongside the integration of diverse cultural elements, enhances the text's complexity. By blending opposing perspectives and viewpoints, the Menippean satirist seeks to challenge and enrich the reader's understanding by offering multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon.

This technique of combining opposing perspectives is a hallmark of the genre, as it rejects standardized forms and disrupts the unity typically associated with epic or tragic narratives. As Mayer highlights, Seneca exemplifies this technique by blending prose and verse in his writing (2005, p. 61).

A defining characteristic of Menippean satire is the inclusion of fantastical journeys to unknown, imaginary realms. These journeys frequently follow a tripartite structure involving heaven, earth, and hell, although modern examples of the genre often replace these with dreams or metaphorical journeys. Such journeys are inevitably futile, highlighting the impossibility of discovering a fixed, higher, or absolute meaning in a chaotic world. Nonetheless, they grant narrative freedom, offering readers an unconventional viewpoint.

The dismantling of hierarchies between high and low is a central carnivalesque feature of the genre. One common technique is the exaggerated inclusion of vulgar or slum characteristics. Menippean satires often contain graphic depictions of sexuality, profanity, and scandalous scenes. Rather than dismissing these elements, the Menippean satirist embraces the slum-like aspects of life, acknowledging them as essential to human existence. This technique disrupts the myth of normalcy, which tends to prioritize humanity's rational side while marginalizing the body.

Madness and folly also play crucial roles in Menippean satire, challenging the hierarchy between body and mind. Representations of madness question the socially constructed notion of normalcy, which is typically understood as conformity to dominant conventions. By undermining reason as the sole avenue to knowledge and truth, the genre employs psychological abnormalities—such as madness, daydreaming, or schizophrenia—to contest official rationality and the standardized concept of normality. As Dudley notes, “To Menippus the world was a vast madhouse; as Diogenes had said, most men are so nearly lunatics that a finger's breadth would make the difference” (1937, p. 72-74).

The grotesque is another significant element of the carnivalesque in Menippean satire, particularly in the works of Seneca. Grotesque depictions of bodily functions, feasting, and physical deformities challenge classical ideals of beauty. While classical bodies are portrayed as harmonious and complete, grotesque bodies are distorted, unfinished, and twisted. Additionally, as Emre Çakar highlights, the grotesque “means the juxtaposition of terrifying and comic” (2023, p. 110). This use of the grotesque disrupts conventional aesthetic values and challenges established societal norms. As Simon Dentith suggests, the grotesque body, characterized by its incomplete and open forms, contrasts sharply with the perfected body of classical art. Bakhtin emphasizes this point by referencing terracotta figurines from Kerch, which depict elderly, pregnant hags, embodying the grotesque's materiality and unfinished nature (1996, p. 67-68). The Menippean text itself can be viewed as a grotesque body—unfinished, incomplete, and carnivalized.

Given the genre's flexibility, philosophical inventiveness and narrative experimentation are also common features of Menippean satire. There are no strict boundaries within the genre,

and the narrative is not confined to a linear progression of events. This open-endedness reflects the cynical rejection of absolutism and the embrace of relativism. In addition, the lack of authorial control in these texts allows for an atmosphere of liberty, where no single character or perspective is granted the final word. Characters are autonomous figures who can challenge the narrator or author, and readers are made active participants in the process of meaning-making through various narrative strategies. This freedom is essential to the carnivalesque nature of the Menippean genre.

As Donald R. Dudley points out in *A History of Cynicism*, Menippus's satire was highly inventive, blending prose and verse into a hybrid form, a "strange phenomenon to all who hear him" (1937, p. 73-74). Menippean satire cynically questions and carnivalizes the world. As Bakhtin notes, whenever the genre reemerges, it evolves and brings forth new characteristics specific to its time. The genre is never static but changes, influences, and is influenced by other genres. In Bakhtin's words, the "generic characteristics of the Menippean were not simply reborn, but also renewed" (2006, p. 121). Thus, Menippean satire reflects the dynamic, evolving nature of its carnivalesque spirit across different historical periods.

4. FOWLES'S *MANTISSA* AS A MENIPPEAN NOVEL

John Fowles, a prominent contemporary British novelist, revitalizes the Menippean genre within his literary works. The latter half of the twentieth century provided a rich context for the resurgence of this genre, primarily due to the disintegration of foundational beliefs associated with modernity and its core principles. The aftermath of the two World Wars significantly contributed to this disillusionment, as the certainties that individuals once held began to dissolve. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Fowles' work, *The Magus*, where the impact of the world wars is pronounced. As Robert Bock observes in "The Cultural Formations of Modern Society," "the evolution of modern culture has not produced the increase in overall human happiness that many hoped for" (2005, p. 261). Antony Giddens describes this period as characterized by rapid and uncontrollable change, while Marshall Berman discusses the inherent instability of the modern era in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, noting the unrest it breeds (1983, p. 288). This socio-cultural climate has fostered a questioning and cynical disposition among individuals towards their environments and the offerings of life.

Timothy Bewes articulates this unrest as a 'cultural obsession,' categorizing the rise of cynicism during this period into four distinct themes: (1) a lack of sincerity, (2) alienation, atomization, and the demystification of human nature due to scientific progress, which incites fear and reduces individuals to mere objects (1997, p. 52), (3) the rapid expansion of knowledge and authority (1997, p. 55), and (4) the concept of immortality stemming from a terror of meaninglessness (1997, p. 62). The parallels between the modern era and the Hellenistic period, during which the Menippean genre first emerged, underscore the latter's revival in contemporary literature.

Joel Relihan defines the Menippean writer as an “experimenter, playing with a vast number of traditions... playing with the idea of conventionality itself, the ability of his narrators to deliver a commonplace truth and of his own text to convey it... the seriocomic author who understands how to use humor to make a subversive point” (1993, p. 103). This description aptly encapsulates Fowles' narrative approach, characterized by the parody of absolute or universal concepts, ranging from religious dogmas to contemporary political issues. He extends his critique to challenge the conventions of fiction writing, mockingly engaging with postmodern theories while simultaneously employing them. Fowles' novels weave together diverse languages, ideologies, and narrative styles, with none taking precedence over the others. He notably incorporates a movie script in one of his works, further blurring genre boundaries.

Fowles's narratives exhibit a loose, playful textual organization, devoid of predictable patterns. They are digressive both formally and thematically, frequently employing a tripartite quest structure alongside slum, profane, and grotesque imagery, as well as themes of madness, all in a manner that subverts literary, socio-political, and philosophical conventions. His Menippean texts are characterized by questioning, rejection, and relativism. While searching for alternatives in a complex world, Fowles refrains from imposing a singular worldview, offering multiple alternatives that are both embraced and parodied. By deconstructing established value systems, he liberates readers from external influences, aiming not to elevate artistic qualities but to equalize them. His Menippean narratives dismantle the façade of intellectual superiority within existing thought systems, thereby deconstructing artistic and philosophical egos and rigid conceptual frameworks. Dudley classifies Menippus as one of “the outstanding literary representatives of the Cynic nihilism” (1937, p. 108), and Fowles follows in this tradition, parodying existing value systems through his cynical lens, including his self-portrayal as a Cynic.

In 1982, Fowles released his fifth novel, *Mantissa*, which exemplifies his Menippean texts. The narrative is structured around dialogues between the supposed author and one of his characters, beginning with Miles Green attempting to awaken from unconsciousness. Upon regaining consciousness, he discovers that he has amnesia and is hospitalized under sedation. After meeting Dr. Delfie and Nurse Cory, he becomes embroiled in a series of erotic encounters, only to learn that these experiences are mere fabrications of his mind. A crash then interrupts and concludes the novel's first part.

The second part consists of Miles's conversations with Dr. Delfie, who appears in various forms, interspersed with scenes of eroticism and surreal occurrences. The narrative culminates with a clock's “Cuckoo” sound. While *Mantissa* received largely negative reviews for its chaotic structure, some critics offer alternative interpretations. Raymond J. Wilson argues that the novel critiques contemporary literary theory through a parodic lens (1990, p. 61). Ian Gotts views it as a critique of literary realism, suggesting that it reflects Fowles's diminishing confidence in art's capacity to imitate reality (Gotts, 1985, p. 81). Additionally, Katherine Tarbox and Tibor Toth highlight the novel's playful elements and structure, associating them with the freedom of authors and characters (2008, p. 51).

Meanwhile, Mahmoud Salami notes its self-referential qualities, and Pamela Cooper critiques the portrayal of women in the text (1991, p. 98).

The varied critical interpretations of *Mantissa* highlight its complex and nuanced texture. This novel stands out not only among Fowles's oeuvre but also within the Menippean genre by creating the illusion of being composed as the reader engages with it. The narrative unveils the process of its own creation. As Foster states, "In *Mantissa* the text is the story, or, rather, the story is of the text's coming into being" (1994, p. 111). A notable Menippean feature in the novel is its humor, which provokes an intelligent smile from readers. Fowles suggests that humor, while fitting for ordinary life, has no place in serious modern fiction: "There may be a place for humor in ordinary life, but there is none whatever for it in serious modern fiction" (1982, p. 117). The text subverts this idea by humorously mimicking serious fiction, critiquing its pretentious and paradoxical nature (Fowles, 1982, pp. 118-19).

Fowles humorously critiques deconstructivists by employing some of their techniques in a self-parodic manner, undermining his own authority as an author. By positioning himself as a character within the narrative, he aligns himself with both the characters and the readers, creating an illusion of a text devoid of authorial presence. Although Fowles acknowledges the inherent authority of authors in fiction, he fosters the impression of a kenotic, author-free narrative to evoke a sense of freedom. By crafting characters who can make independent choices, he infuses the text with a sense of carnival liberty, facilitating a playful subversion of established hierarchies.

The intrigue of fiction writing intensifies when Miles, who embodies the roles of author, character, and narrator, states that writers are "behind their times. And hair-raisingly vain. Most of them are still under the positively medieval illusion that they write their own books" (Fowles, 1982, p. 119). This remark highlights intertextuality and the constructed nature of reality, positioning writers as part of a predetermined narrative. Fowles suggests that writers confined by literary conventions cannot produce authentic fiction. He further critiques contemporary literary figures through self-parody, asserting, "if you want story, character, suspense, description, all that antiquated nonsense from pre-modernist times, then go to the cinema. Or read comics. You don't come to a serious modern writer. Like me" (Fowles, 1982, p. 119). In this vein, he engages in a carnivalesque parody of the glorified philosopher in the Menippean tradition, satirizing the pretentious novelists of his time.

The carnival spirit permeates the novel's chaotic and complex narrative structure, marked by indefiniteness. Julia Kristeva notes that the term "carnavalesque" embodies ambiguity and parody, suggesting that it transcends literary form to become a revolutionary act (1980, p. 80). This spirit enhances the parodic and comedic elements while contributing to the multifaceted (anti)structure of the genre. Menippean satire combines comic and tragic, low and high, and entertaining yet disturbing elements, allowing for an expressive freedom that

nurtures philosophical and creative exploration. Kristeva asserts that in a Menippean text, readers encounter limitless possibilities:

Adventures unfold in brothels, robbers' dens, taverns, fairgrounds, and prisons, among erotic orgies and during sacred worship, and so forth. The word has no fear of incriminating itself. It becomes free from presupposed 'values'; without distinguishing between virtue and vice, and without distinguishing itself from them, the word considers them its private domain, as one of its creations. Academic problems are pushed aside in favor of the 'ultimate' problems of the existence: this discourse orients liberated language towards philosophical universalism. Without distinguishing ontology from cosmogony, it unites them into a practical philosophy of life. Elements of the fantastic, which never appear in comic or tragic works, crop forth here. For example, an unusual perspective from above changes the scale of observation in Lucan's Icaro-menippea, Varro's Endymion, and later in the works of Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire. Pathological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, daydreams, dreams, and death, become part of the narrative (they affect the writing of Shakespeare and Calderon). (1980, p. 82-83)

Consequently, liberated from conventional values, the Menippean text celebrates "the endless joy of becoming." This polyphonic and structureless form dismantles familiar norms and established codes, which Julia Kristeva characterizes as a game, a synthesis of opposites, and likens to Nietzsche's notion of "Dionysianism" (1980, pp. 78-79). The most prominent formal quality of *Mantissa* is its carnivalesque indefiniteness. Through a dreamlike portrayal of surreal events, both characters and readers grapple with the reality of the narrative, often left uncertain whether the unfolding events are dreams or manifestations of madness. Whenever the narrative approaches closure, it eludes both characters and readers, maintaining its elusive essence. The only certainty is that nothing adheres to logic in this fictional realm, as the text subverts any resolution or fulfillment, challenging both authorial satisfaction and reader expectations.

The second book of the novel opens with Dr. Delfie dressed as a punk, further accentuating the novel's carnivalesque traits, with punk representing a rebellious subculture. The theme of masquerade and cross-dressing is prevalent in carnival contexts, continuing throughout the narrative. Dr. Delfie appears in various forms, including as Erato, a Greek deity (Fowles, 1982, pp. 80-81). Miles's transformation into a satyr (Fowles, 1982, p. 193) signifies both the novel's Greek origins and its Dionysian essence.

A pivotal moment occurs when Erato confronts Miles, the fictional author, challenging his authority by proposing an alternative narrative. This confrontation reveals Fowles's intention to introduce a multiplicity of voices within the novel, allowing characters to assert their agency. Erato engages in discussions and disputes with Miles, ultimately demonstrating that she operates independently of his control. Miles's resignation to her autonomy is evident when he acknowledges, "I'm not putting a single word in your mouth... you're talking exactly as you want" (Fowles, 1982, pp. 86-87). Despite his authority, she

defies his commands, asserting that she possesses no real freedom while simultaneously undermining his authority.

Erato's refusal to conform to Miles's narrative expectations exemplifies her resistance to male fantasy. Rather than being subjugated to his will, she asserts control, even making the room's door vanish when he attempts to exit (Fowles, 1982, p. 126). This frustration further humiliates Miles, as he reflects on her interference with his writing process. In contrast to his initial intent to craft a sexual fantasy centred on her character, she transforms into a matriarch who challenges the "female archetype," declaring, "When it comes to literary things that need true maturity and experience, like endings, I make the decisions. Is that clear?" (Fowles, 1982, p. 139). This act of degradation contributes to the novel's overall carnivalesque sense of liberation.

Intertextuality and dialogism are key features of *Mantissa*, reflecting the Menippean writing style. The novel opens with a quote from Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, in which he ponders his existence. Descartes claims he can imagine being without a body or external world but cannot fathom non-existence. His doubt about the reality of other beings affirms his own existence, leading him to conclude that his essence is fundamentally tied to thought. He argues that his "self," or soul, is separate from the body and more easily understood, asserting that the soul would persist without the body (Fowles, 1982, p. 1). By engaging with Cartesian ontology, Fowles invites readers to explore existential concerns, questioning whether fictional characters can exist independently of their creators and how the distinction between real and fictional existence is drawn. Given that Menippean texts aim to stimulate inquiry rather than provide definitive answers, *Mantissa* leaves readers with numerous unresolved questions.

Moreover, the novel engages in a dialogical relationship with Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Fowles, 1982, p. 7) and subtly alludes to Flann O'Brien's works, which are "slightly adapted" (Fowles, 1982, p. 157). Fowles employs a quintessential Menippean technique by borrowing and intentionally misquoting various texts. A crucial moment regarding intertextuality arises when Dr. Delfie acknowledges the novel's Menippean origins, referring to it as "an interesting little contemporary variation on an ancient theme" (Fowles, 1982, p. 66). This "ancient theme" relates to Menippean satire, primarily characterized by learned discourse during the Renaissance.

'I thought at least you'd have the sense to consult a few classical texts for a start.' Her finger traces obsessively up and down the swan's neck of the golden-armed lyre. 'it's so unfair. I'm not a prig. And humiliating. If my wretched family gets to hear about it.' Her voice grows increasingly hurt. 'They think it's all a huge joke, anyway. Just because I thought I was clever drawing love poetry when we picked lots in the beginning. Then getting stuck with the whole of fiction as well. I have to work ten times as hard as all the rest of them put together.' She broods over her wrongs. 'of course the whole genre is in a mess.' (Fowles, 1982, p. 66)

The direct reference to the classical text or the definition of the novel as a huge joke or a mess underlines the Menippean (self-)parody in the text.

As counterparts to the codes of normality which are created by official ideologies, mental abnormalities are widely used in *Mantissa* as in other Menippean texts. Indeed, the whole book is set on the mental processes of Miles and the story revolves around the abnormal functioning of his mind. The reader never finds out what really happens in the novel because it is never clear whether the events described are real or just the fantasies of the author/narrator. There is an ongoing implication that the events in the novel are happening only in Miles's mind, but at the same time this implication is continuously withdrawn. Thus, the reader can never be sure to what extent the events presented are really happening or being imagined. This undecidability or amorph texture of the narrative keeps bringing the reader back to the central question of the novel: where should the line be drawn between fact and fiction? Besides, the Menippean attitude is known to tumble down the hierarchies between the constructed binary opposition of sanity and madness - former one placed higher than the latter. It questions the definitions of madness and sanity suggesting that these classifications are constructed only to serve the official ideology of the time.

Metafictional qualities of the text intensify the carnivalesque quality of the novel. At the very beginning, when the narrator wakes up and asks the doctor how long he had been there, she answers: "Just a few pages" (Fowles, 1982, p. 14). Seeing that he is confused, she ironically explains that she is testing his sense of reality. Apparently, Fowles likes to play with the effect of reality and fictionality and to cross and violate the boundaries between the two. This playful attitude continues throughout the novel. Yet the most important reference to the metafictionality of the text comes at the end of the novel. After the prolonged argument between Dr. Delfie and the narrator/author Miles, after they insult each other for pages, they decide to make peace which is followed by a surreal love making scene. During the love making, absurd shapes start to appear in the room and then the room turns out to be a glass box with an audience watching them (Fowles, 1982, p. 156). The audience around the glass box points to the readers that are reading the text at the very same moment. By including such a scene in his narrative, Fowles aims to emphasize the self-referential nature of his narrative.

Slum elements are also very widely used in the novel which is characterized by a grotesque profanity. Accompanied by a scientific seriousness, the two create even more absurdity. The scientific discourse intermingles with the lowly slum discourse creating an oxymoron. The novel also has graphic representations of nudity, eroticism/pornography. Fowles' real intention in composing such an absurd medley of the slum and the serious, is highlighting that the "ego has lost in a conflict with your superego, which has decided to repress it - to censor it. All Nurse and I wish to do is to enlist the aid of the third component in your psyche, the id. Your id is that flaccid member pressed against my posterior. It is potentially your best friend" (Fowles, 1982, p. 26). Apparently, by representing id as one's best friend, Fowles breaks the binary opposition between the body and the mind, the instincts and the reason. By pointing to id in such a way, he tries to remind his readers of the other half of

humanity that modern man prefers to repress. Doing so, he emphasizes the carnivalesque revaluation of the Dionysian faculties of humanity, the body and the instincts. At the very end of the novel the reader is left one more time in a state of indefiniteness with the indication that the narrator of the story has been in a kind of trance and that everything has been happening in his mind. This is a typical carnivalesque ending and the Menippean influence is emphasized one more time by ending the novel with a reference to Flann O'Brien and his cuckoo clock. Only when the reader comes across this reference, s/he makes sense of another reference at the very beginning of the novel about a clock hanging on the wall:

It hung on the wall behind him, near the corner to his left, an absurdly fussy and overornamented Swiss cuckoo clock, with an alpine gable and a small host of obscure shapes, peasants, cows, alpenhorns, edelweiss, heaven knows what else, carved on every available brown wooden surface. 'It was left us by a previous patient. An Irish gentleman. We thought it added a human touch.' (Fowles, 1982, p. 11)

The clock here represents the process of change and the absurdity of the passage of time without taking us anywhere. On the other hand, representing O'Brien as a madman who stayed at the same clinique contributes to the subversion of the predetermined line drawn between the concepts of sanity and madness. Reducing authorship to a version of madness is another attempt to erase the distance and hierarchy between the reader as a passive receiver and the author as the divine creator. Fowles, here, tries to undermine the myth of high art and the image of artist as a superhuman. Instead of pointlessly trying to take his art to the top level, he tries to level the top and undermine the discourses of high art. As Tarbox also suggests, "Mantissa is a strategy to undermine the hyperintellectualization of literature by exposing its underside and reminding readers that it is a sometimes shady business surrounded by complex ethical problems" (1988, p. 131). The last thing to be pointed out about this specific reference is that these two Menippean satirists, as nonconventional voices cracking out of the mainstream discourses are doomed to be labeled as madmen and locked up in a hospital or out of the society.

Considering all these Menippean traits *Mantissa* employs and the unusual approach it takes towards fiction-writing and authorial authority, the novel can be considered as a manifesto of literary anarchy. The reader cannot even decide whether or not the narrative is Miles's inner dialogue. The narrative is true to its Menippean roots with its indefinite, complicated, parodic, playful and multilayered texture. It is the breaking of all the rules of fiction-writing. However, all these seemingly negative traits are indeed enriching and liberating for both the characters in the novel and the reader. The reference to Miles's being a novelist contributes to the metafictionality of the novel and the reference to Greece is very meaningful with respect to the Menippean satire's Greek roots.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Menippean satire as defined by An Chi Wang as a “debate form, derived from an ancient Greek genre, the Socratic dialogue, in which no truth is absolute and no issue is expected to be resolved once and for all” (1995, p. 6). Weinbrot, on the other hand, focuses on the fact that “Menippean satire is a kind of satire that uses at least two different languages, genres, tones, or cultural or historical periods to combat a false and threatening orthodoxy” (2005, p. xi). Carter Kaplan defines it as “the shock of the familiar” (2000, p. 30) while Dustin Griffin highlights the genre’s “carnavalesque” traits taking Bakhtin as his guide (1994, p. 113). None of the definitions that have been offered by these critics can be considered to be totally right or wrong but it is an evolving and elusive narrative form. Due to the genre’s liability to change, adapt and digress, in the attempts to propose a definition based on what it is, there has always been a left out. What this study suggests to handle this problem is to change the focus from what the genre is to what it does while attempting to develop a more relevant definition. In this context, what Menippean satire aims to do is simply to highlight the incongruities of humanity through a cynical perspective and to represent these incongruities in a carnival-like universe. Briefly, it is cynical in theme and carnivalesque in form. This study aims to exemplify and examine the genre in the light of this new focus in one of its contemporary representatives, namely, John Fowles. The thematic cynicism of the genre is exposed as rejection and testing of absolutes, parody, comicality and anti-didacticism are the most prominent tools in this. In his investigation of the genre Keith Brooker takes this attitude as “a skepticism toward any mode of investigation that would present itself as having a special access to the Truth, whether that mode involve art, philosophy, sex, or anything else” (1995, p. 27). He suggests that as the genre “mocks the pretensions of scientists, philosophers, and theologians to be able to know the Truth, it also suggests that the authors of the fictional texts don’t have all the answers, either” (1995, p. 65). Therefore everything the genre offers is an “assault on monologism, mastery, and authoritarianism” of “scientific, religious, secular, and literary authority” including that of the author (1995, p. 105). The carnivalesque texture of the genre is created by numerous formal tools that both create a chaotic carnival atmosphere and contribute to the cynical attitude. This carnival atmosphere is created by the medley of various discourses and genres in the first place, enabling a transgeneric and multi voiced texture. According to Brooker, this is the main reason of the genre’s seeming meaninglessness and incoherence (1995, p. 101). However, this seeming negativity “serves a positive function, contributing to the powerful critique of mastery and monologism” (1995, p. 120). The meddling in the genre contributes to the digressive, loose and elusive narrative structure and enables a carnivalesque playfulness which “asserts and then denies; holds up high, then tears down” (Milowicki, Wilson, 2002, p. 302). Another carnivalesque tool that creates playfulness is fantasticality and especially the quest motif in the sense that it leads the readers to re-evaluate certain values through fantastic scenes with a new outlook. The same kinds of re-evaluations are also triggered by the use of slum and grotesque elements and psychological abnormalities. These elements turn the familiar world upside down and lead the readers to question their deepest beliefs. The most outstanding carnivalesque characteristic of the

genre, however, is its being free of all formal necessities. Due to the genre's inventive, experimental and inclusive nature, any kind of formal tool can be used to create the carnival atmosphere enabling the freedom of a carnival in the genre. Menippean satire owes these characteristics to the time period it was born in and as An-Chi Wang suggests it was the most adequate expression of the characteristics of the epoch; it was formed in an epoch when national legend was in decay and ethical norms were being destroyed, in an epoch of intense struggle among numerous religious and philosophical schools and movements. However, after the turmoil of the Hellenistic period - when all the preestablished classical values were buried into ground – died away, the genre also faded away from the literary scene. Yet it has kept reemerging in the following centuries in historical moments of crisis when conventional values are challenged. Furthermore, the genre not only reemerged but also renewed itself each time as indicated by Howard Weinbrot (2005, p. xii).

This study proposes that John Fowles can be regarded as a modern representative of the Menippean genre. Fowles' worldview, his use of literary devices and techniques, and his references to other Menippean satirists such as Flann O'Brien, Laurence Sterne, and Lewis Carroll, position him as a significant figure within the Menippean tradition. As Kerry McSweeney suggests, "Fowles insists that there are no intervening gods, no absolute truth or reality, and that any Weltanschauung – social, cultural, intellectual, religious, aesthetic – that says there are and consequently gives man a feeling of security and certainty is inimical to authentic human existence," which is an inextricable characteristic of the Menippean perspective (1983, p. 106). In accordance with the Menippean self-parody, he calls "attention to himself and his own god-like powers within the novel's universe, and then subverting those powers by denying himself the ability even to end his own story authoritatively" (Neary, 1992, p. 174). James Aubrey highlights his "resistance to fixed ideas" which is also very characteristic of the Menippean genre (1991, 32). The Menippean notion of inseparability between factuality and fictiveness is clearly shared by Fowles as seen in a letter he wrote to Jo Jones in September 15, 1980: "I don't see how the 'lies' we write and the 'lies' we live can or should be separated" (qtd. in Warburton, 2004, p. ix). None of the Fowles critics mentioned here have approached his novels through a Menippean perspective. However, all the characteristics they point out intermingle with the Menippean characteristics that Fowles employs. In Fowles' novels, every ideology or worldview is subject to satire, parody, and representation on an equal footing, a hallmark of Menippean satire that liberates the reader from authorial constraints. These and other features are evident in Fowles' novel *Mantissa*. Consequently, Fowles can be regarded as a distinctive practitioner of the Menippean genre, not only employing its core characteristics but also contributing to its evolution by adapting Menippean techniques in a uniquely innovative manner.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

In all processes of the article, the principles of research and publication ethics of the Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Journal of Social Sciences were followed.

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