

## MENIPPEAN STRATEGIES IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION: JOHN FOWLES'S *THE MAGUS*

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### ABSTRACT

*The genre of Menippean satire is very problematic in terms of the existence of fixed definition. Numerous attempts to propose a final definition have ended up having a blindspot. The most important reason for this is that most critics have focused on what Menippean satire is. However, 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. So the focus should rather be what it does. 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. His perspective towards the world, the way he uses literary tools and techniques, and the references he makes to other Menippean satirists enables one to consider him as a literary figure in the line of the Menippean tradition. He is a unique practitioner of the Menippean genre who not only employs the core characteristics of the tradition but also contributes to the evolution of the genre by using certain Menippean devices in his own unique way in *The Magus*.*

**Keywords:** Menippean satire, John Fowles, cynicism, carnivalesque

## MODERN İNGİLİZ EDEBİYATINDA MENİPPUSÇU STRATEJİLER: JOHN FOWLES VE *THE MAGUS*

### ÖZ

Özelliklerini tümüyle içeren bir tanımın varlığı konusunda Menippusçu hiciv problemleri bir tür olagelmıştır. Şimdiye kadar türün tanımlanabilmesi konusunda çeşitli çalışmalar yapılmıştır. Bu tanımların hiçbiri tamamıyla yanlış kabul edilemese de her tanımın kör noktaları olmuştur. Bunun en önemli sebebi, bu tanımların türün ne olduğu sorusu üzerinden yapılmaya çalışılmasıdır. Ancak türün değişken yapısı dolayısıyla, bu sorudan yola çıkarak üretilmiş tanımlar yeterince kapsayıcı olamamışlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı türün ne olduğundan çok, ne yaptığı sorusunu dikkate alarak bu tanımlama problemini çözmektir. Bu bağlamda Menippusçu hiciv türünün amacının insanlığa dair çelişkileri şüpheli bir perspektif ve karnavalesk bir yazım tekniğiyle su yüzüne çıkarmak olduğu söylenebilir. Kısacası, tür, tematik anlamda şüpheli, yapısal anlamda karnavalesktir. Bu çalışmada, tür bu yeni bakış açısıyla yeniden değerlendirilmiş ve türün çağdaş temsilcilerinden John Fowles'un *The Magus* adlı

*eserinde örneklendirilmiştir. Fowles'un dünyaya bakışı, edebi teknikleri kullanma tarzı, ve türün diğer temsilcilerine yaptığı göndermeler, onun bu geleneğin bir parçası olarak kabul edilmesini mümkün kılar. Fowles hem türün temel özelliklerini eserlerinde yansıtması hem de türe kendisinden bir şeyler katarak türün evrimine katkı sağlaması açısından bu geleneğin çok önemli bir parçası olmuştur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Menippusçu hiciv, John Fowles, şüphecilik, karnivalesk

As one of the most marginal and nonconventional genres in the literary history, Menippean satire, with its elusive, digressive and inclusive nature and its high inclination to adapt and evolve, has been very difficult to conceptualize, and this difficulty has borne various discussions concerning the genre's definition.<sup>1</sup> Taking its inspiration from the cynicism, chaos and grandeur of the Hellenistic age, the genre has kept reoccurring in history during the times of socio-cultural crisis, each time with a different face. The genre's emergence in Fowles's works, who wrote right after World War II and during the second half of twentieth century—another historical moment of crisis and instability—can also be explained within this frame. In such periods the Menippean spirit rises like a tide and uses the instability as an opportunity to question and test what has been impossible to challenge earlier.

Among all the critics that have attempted to define the genre, Mikhail Bakhtin has made the most reliable and comprehensive study of the genre. However, it is still necessary to systematize his approach to the genre to prevent contradiction in terms. Actually he proposes fourteen characteristics as generic to Menippean satire but actually all these characteristics can be classified under two essential features. The first one is that, above everything else, Menippean

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<sup>1</sup>Menippean satire is very problematic in terms of putting forward an encompassing definition. There have been numerous attempts to propose a final definition of the genre by critics. An-Chi Wang defines it 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” (6). Howard 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” (xi). Carter Kaplan defines it as “the shock of the familiar” (30) while Dustin Griffin highlights the genre's “carnavalesque” traits taking Bakhtin as his guide (113). None of the definitions that have been offered by these critics - or many other critics that have studied the genre - can be considered totally wrong but there has always been a blind spot. The most important reason for this is that most critics have focused on what Menippean satire is. However, 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.

satire is a genre of rejection. It questions, parodies, and ridicules every idea with a truth claim, including itself, without proposing an alternative. This first characteristic is supported and completed by another essential which is the carnivalization of the narrative in order to wipe away all the established values, ideologies and discourses under question.

The first and the most essential point regarding what Menippean satire aims to do is the rejection of absolutes. The absolutes under discussion here may be any kind of religious, cultural, or philosophical claims, dogmas and norms. The main aim of the genre is to put these absolutes into test through irony, parody, and ridicule without offering answers to the questions asked. It makes fun of these absolutes, tumbles them down, buries them into ground and in the end leaves the reader in an indefinite situation without offering an alternative perspective. The genre owes this characteristic to its cynical roots which suggest that there is no absolute certainty outside of us that we can know. Therefore, the legitimization of any kind of authority position—including the self—is out of question. Due to the rejectionist attitude of the genre, comicality becomes one of the essential attributes of the Menippean tradition. To the Menippean satirist, laughter is a means of liberation. It breaks the epic and tragic distance and seriousness. People laugh only when there is sincerity and closeness. Thus the laughing cynic connects the high and the low, giving the low an opportunity to have a voice. This freedom of speech is used to break the predetermined hierarchies. It is a power that opens up a new world of freedom and change.

The second essential characteristic of the genre is the carnivalization of the narrative. To put it simply, carnivalized text resembles a carnival scene which is quite without structure, highly comical, multi-dimensional, multi-textured and multi-voiced, vague and indefinite, ambivalent, free from hierarchies, codes and norms, close and sincere, inclusive, and liberated. It is also highly political, in the sense that it tumbles down the existing world order. There are countless techniques and devices that give a text the carnivalesque quality such as the meddling of prose and verse, the high and the low, various literary forms each representing a specific mode of thinking, various meters, excerpts from and references to other books (with or without making a reference to the source—or they may make references to the books that do not exist), different languages, dialects or jargons, various cultural elements, contradicting parties, different literary traditions, dual images and so forth. By making a medley of different parties or the opposites, the Menippean satirist aims to both confuse and enrich the readers providing them with several points of view regarding the same issue. The technique of meddling is used widely among the Menippean satirists, first, as a rejection of a fixed, standardized form and, second, to create moments of absurdity and to break the epic or tragic unity.

Fantasticity, perhaps, is one of the most important elements used in the carnivalization of the text. The reader mostly encounters fantastic journeys

to unknown, fantastic lands. These journeys mostly occur on a three-plane structure between heaven, earth and hell. In modern examples of the genre, this three-partite structure may be modified to some other forms. Dreams, for instance, are the most common replacements of these journeys to heaven and hell. These journeys are always dead ends. They turn out to be pointless at the end and none of them can be finalized successfully. Primarily these fantastic journeys are used to emphasize the pointlessness of looking for a fixed, higher and absolute meaning in this continuously changing, chaotic world. But they also serve as a medium to provide a freedom of plot, an opportunity for the reader to look at things from an unusual perspective.

Indeed, any kind of formal and thematic attempt to break the hierarchy between the high and the low can be listed under the carnivalesque traits of the genre. One of the most widely used technique, in this respect, is the excessive use of slum and vulgar characteristics. Vulgar elements, graphic descriptions of sexuality, profane language, and scandal scenes are widely used in Menippean satires. The Menippean satirist is aware of the fact that the slum aspect of life is a part of our existence and embraces it instead of ignoring. The embracing of the slum is, in a way, a violation of the myth of normality which tends to embrace the rational side of the human being and reject the body. Madness and folly are also other key terms that are used as the carnivalesque underminers of the hierarchy between the body and the mind. The concept of madness is also mostly used to break the perception of normality constructed as obedience to the dominant conventions of the time. It aims to subvert reason as the only way to knowledge and truth. Thus representations of psychological abnormalities such as madness, daydreaming, and schizophrenia are used to challenge official reason and the standardizing concept of normality. Grotesque is another element that is used to break the notions of idealized beauty. The use of grotesque can be considered as a way of breaking the classical conceptions of aesthetics and beauty as a higher party of the binary of normality and abnormality. It subverts the notions and the value systems constructed and imposed by the established world order.

Regarding the highly liberal and loose attitude of the genre, it should not be surprising to see that philosophical and fictional inventiveness or extensive experimentality is a very important carnival element in Menippean texts. There is no limit to what a reader can encounter in a Menippean satire. The narrative is never limited to a causal chain of events, and it is highly inclusive in terms of any kind of formal and thematic strategy as long as it remains loyal to the cynical rejection of absolutism and its embrace of relativity. Therefore, it is highly possible to say that complete liberty of a carnival is another defining characteristic of the Menippean genre. To begin with, the plot structure is, in no way limited to any kind of formation strategy such as verisimilitude, cultural or social codes, reason and so forth. Anything can possibly happen in a Menippean text which makes it totally unpredictable.

There is no authorial control of any kind in a Menippean text. Even the author's or the narrator's authority is undermined and no one in the text is allowed to have the last say. Characters are not voiceless subjects. They are, rather, free people who can talk on their own behalf and they can disagree with the narrator and even the author. The inclusion of the reader to the text is also one of the techniques used to break the hierarchy between the writer as the higher authority, the creator, and the reader, the passive receiver. It puts the reader to a state of judgement making, enabling him/her to be an active participant in the story by granting him/her the ability and opportunity to make judgements and contribute to the flow or development of the story.

To sum up, Menippean satire is a genre of questioning, rejection, and relativity. It is a search for an alternative in a world which is not pleasant to look at. However, it never offers a specific worldview to the readers. Rather, it presents them a bunch of alternatives, every one of which is both embraced and parodied at the same time. It destroys every established value system freeing the reader from any influence. It does not aim to take its artistic qualities to the top but rather aims to level the top to free the mind from socio-cultural constructs and hierarchies. It removes the mask of cleverness from the face of the thought systems that support the existing conventions breaking the artistic and philosophical ego and conceptualism.

John Fowles can be considered as a contemporary representative of the genre in terms of his use of the Menippean techniques of fiction writing. As a contemporary representative of the genre, he not only fulfills the rejectionist and carnivalesque attitude of the genre, but he also transforms it by using formal techniques in new creative ways. *The Magus* (1966) is the first novel by John Fowles, the story of which revolves around an English teacher, Nicholas Urfe, and his extraordinary experiences on a small Greek island. As he arrives in the island, he finds himself in the middle of a mysterious, sarcastic, and at times mean world, which is called the godgame. Fowles started writing the novel in the 1950s, basing the story on his own experiences on the Greek island called Spetses, where he worked as an English teacher for a while. The fact that the setting of the story is a Greek island is quite meaningful in the sense that stylistically the Menippean tradition has Greek roots.

The most outstanding characteristics of the novel, which also make it quite unconventional, are the metafictional, complicated and the playful nature of it. Mahmoud Salami argues that using these characteristics, Fowles aims to create an alternative perspective which functions both as a break in the dull seriousness of the world and as a metaphor for the elusiveness of the boundary between fictionality and factuality (78). On the other hand, Peter Conradi puts emphasis on the playfulness in the novel, taking it as the central trait of the work (42). Due to the playfulness and complexity of the novel Katherine Tarbox prefers to view it as beyond and above all existing genres and considers it as unclassifiable (34). All these characteristics that have been pointed out by

different critics are also some of the characteristics that make it Menippean. However, to make a more encompassing evaluation of the Menippean aspects of the novel, one needs to scrutinize the text more closely, taking the essentials and accidentals of the Menippean genre into consideration.

The first essential characteristic of the genre is its cynical attitude towards the world. Various references are made in the text concerning the cynical thought. Among these references, the most obvious one is Nicholas's representation as a cynic. He describes himself as leading two lives: "a wartime aesthete and cynic" (Fowles 12). He is the representative of the modern man who experiences the world as an existential void and a realm of nothingness. However, Nicholas's cynicism is not affirmed as an ideal way of life. His cynical attitude is questioned and criticized regardless of the cynical roots of the genre. Exposing the self-parodic nature of the text, Fowles implies in the novel that Nicholas's cynicism is not a real rejection. Rather, it is a kind of shield for him: "The truth was that I was not a cynic by nature; only by revolt. I had got away from what I hated, but I hadn't found where I loved, and so I pretended there was nowhere to love" (13). As opposed to a real cynic, he fails to take things—and especially himself—lightly. As he takes himself too seriously, he cannot help but attribute too much meaning to everything. The more he takes himself seriously the more he gets disappointed and feels himself "filled with nothingness" (54). This feeling of nothingness is deepened in the island where his rock beliefs are crumbled by the unreasonable events he goes through.

Another attribute to the cynicism in the novel is the notice hanged on the gate of Conchis's mysterious villa. On the notice board, it is written: "salle d'attente," waiting room. The importance of the metaphor of waiting is that it signifies pointlessness of waiting when it is for sure that nothing considerable is going to happen. Robert Huffaker suggests that the waiting room represents modern man's inability to act in his state of nothingness (52-53). The waiting room, in this sense, refers to the cynical belief that life is all willingly and desperately waiting for something meaningful to happen and end up in disappointment.

As Nicholas and Conchis start to discuss the nature of fictionality and fiction writing, the cynical attack is aimed at the novel as a genre. Conchis suggests that he does not value fiction in any way and that "novel is no longer an art form" (Fowles 92). He believes that "[t]he novel is dead, as dead as alchemy" and that each one of them needs to be burnt (92). To him fiction reading is a waste of time for it has very little truth in it. This discussion is quite ironic in the sense that he communicates his ideas through a novel. By taking fiction as unreliable, he also wipes away the reliability of the novel he is a part of. This is one of the most brilliant self-parodic strategies that Fowles uses. Furthermore, Conchis's cynicism is not limited to fiction writing but he also has distrust in language. Claiming that "[t]here are things that words cannot explain," he rejects the notion that language is a reliable means of

communication and that there are things in the world beyond the capacities of language (103). Yet he communicates this rejection of the reliability of language as a medium for communication through language, which is also quite ironic. This intentional incongruity is used by Fowles as a self-parodic strategy.

The self-parodic attitude is manifest in the characterization, as well. Conchis, for instance, frequently sabotages his own reliability by telling contradictory stories. Nicholas, also, explicitly lays bare his unreliability as a narrator when he tells when he comments on the story he told Lily about himself and Alison: "I gave her an edited version of the relationship; one in which Alison got less than her due and I got a good deal more; but in which the main blame was put on hazard, on fate, on elective affinity, the feeling one had that one liked some people and loved others" (324). By admitting that he manipulates the story to look like a better person, Nicholas evokes question marks in the minds of the readers concerning his liability to fictionalize certain cases.

The cynicism of the novel is most apparent in the hypnosis scene. As Nicholas is hypnotized by Conchis, at first he thinks that this is a part of the game and decides to play by the rules and pretend to be hypnotized. However, the experience really takes him to another state of mind. He loses the sense of what is real and what is not: "Every truth at Bourani was a sort of lie; and every lie, a sort of truth" and that there is no way of knowing the line between the two (273). This conflicting state of mind makes Nicholas question even God who gives him "no clues. No certainties. No sights. No reasons. No motives" (274). To Conchis, this is quite understandable because, indeed, "he was not God. But a liar" (274). The idea that Fowles tries to convey to the reader here is the rejection of ultimate authority—the divine power—which might also be referring to the authorial power. The novel tends to refuse to uphold anything constructed such as science, religion, nationality and so on. It only embraces what is human, the most simplistic way of life possible, which is represented by the Greek island. Greece for Nicholas turns out to be a promised land which is the only place one can strip off all the constructed identities and labels that are attached on one. This is the place where one can be reduced to the most basic, the simplest, and the purest form one can get.

Parody is one of the most efficient tools used to create the cynical atmosphere in the novel. The ridiculing of the *philosophus gloriosus*—or the boasting philosopher—is a very important element in the sense that it contributes to the cynical undermining of the supposed absolutes. By parodying the absolutist, superficial philosopher, the Menippean satirist aims to break the absolutes as well as the hierarchy between the high and sophisticated and the low and simplistic. In this respect, Conchis's treatment of very valuable works of art as merely "squares of painted canvas" is a very important detail (90). Besides, the ridiculing of Nicholas's grandiose self-image is also a part of the Menippean attack towards the concept of *philosophus gloriosus*. The main

attitude of the Menippean perspective is that people should never take anything too seriously. Conchis's remarks concerning the concept intensify the extent of parody even further. He considers the philosophus gloriosus as "the wrong people [...] miserable vultures who prey on the human longing for the solution of final mysteries. The spiritualists, the clairvoyants, the cosmopaths, the summerlanders, the blue-islanders, the apportists—all that galère" (221-22). With his denominations the concept of philosophus gloriosus is not only parodied but also despised.

As highlighted in the novel, the parodic element walks hand in hand with the concept of laughter. Conchis suggests that "[t]he ancient Greeks could laugh at themselves. The Romans could not. That is why France is a civilized country and Spain is not" (80). He considers laughter, and especially self-parody, as an essential for civilization. Conchis refers to the concept of laughter as "the innermost secret of life" (141). He tells Nicholas that smile is the only worthy truth one should pursue. In his own words: "That is the truth. Not the hammer and sickle. Not the stars and stripes. Not the cross. Not the sun. Not gold. Not yin and yang. But the smile" (142). The smile is praised as the ultimate value that people should depend on. It is one of the most efficient tools used for the breaking of absolutism. It is a sort of weapon that is used to degrade, to deglorify and to bring what is idealized back down to earth. Beyond all, comicality or humour is used in the novel as a representative of liberty. The freedom to laugh is equaled to the freedom to act, to criticize, to reject and to resist. As Conchis points out, only through laughter, can people free themselves from the grasp of the cultural constructions (398). That is why Conchis keeps telling Nicholas to "[l]earn to smile" (479). Because this is the only way for him to be able to relieve himself from the glass prison of socio-cultural values to which he has made himself a slave.

The cynicism of the novel comes as a smile, and it is an embrace as much as a rejection. It is the act of embracing all the possible readings and interpretations of the text regardless of what is intended by the creator. This is what *The Godgame* actually intends to enable with all the uncertainties it inflicts on Nicholas. One can make several interpretations of an event but can never be sure which one is true. The uncertainties and complexities of the text resulting from cynicism should thus be perceived as a kind of richness rather than incompleteness or lack. It is the embracing of every single bit of the endless possibilities of meaning and interpretation.

Along with the strong emphasis on cynicism, explicit metafictionality is observed in the novel as another essential of the Menippean genre. In this respect it is remarkable that Nicholas makes ironic remarks about how he feels as if he is in the midst of a living novel or a play and that he always feels like he is being watched. By playing these metafictional games, Fowles aims to scatter hints of carnivalesque playfulness on the one hand, and on the other he is playing with the boundaries of reality and fictionality. Fictionality is stressed

with every single detail concerning the island and what happens there. It is laid bare that they “are all actors and actresses, Mr. Urfe. [...] included” (170). This emphasis on fictionality also refers: to real life in which one is surrounded by rules, codes, conventions that are predetermined for people and to how people play the parts that are seen appropriate for them; as well as to the metafictional qualities of the text and to the fact that they are players in a work of fiction – both the novel itself and the godgame. Nicholas’s remarks are especially remarkable in terms of this two way metafictionality:

What was I? Exactly what Conchis had had me told: nothing but the net sum of countless wrong turnings. Why? I dismissed most of the Freudian jargon of the trial; but all my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behavior—a god like novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please, the sensitivity to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the novelist-god wanted. This leechlike variation of the superego I had created myself, fostered myself, and because of it I had always been incapable of acting freely. It was not my defense; but my despot. And now I saw it, I saw it a death too late. (487)

Here Nicholas’s words both refer to his being a novel character who can only act within the boundaries of the imagination of his creator and to the parallel situation that people have to face in real life. Fowles highlights the fact that real life can be as fictional and constructed as a novel. This parallel situation of the real life experience and the fictional world is exposed and questioned as suggested by the Menippean spirit.

The indefiniteness in the novel, which is another Menippean characteristic, basically contributes to the carnivalesque undermining of determinism. For instance, as Nicholas suggests about Conchis, “everything about him was difficult to tell” (82). He never lets Nicholas define and label him and he keeps telling him confusing stories about what his real identity is. He makes Nicholas believe in various truths about himself but all of these turn out to be untrue. His real identity is not revealed even at the end of the novel. This indefiniteness is manifest in everything about him and his stories. The text never allows one to wholly believe anything. Just like the reader, the only thing Nicholas can be sure of is that every single story he has been told is a lie and full of irony. The indefiniteness is kept even at the end of the novel, and neither the reader, nor Nicholas is allowed to reach a reasonable conclusion. Fowles uses these carnivalesque games to stress the cynical belief that nothing can be known for sure for there is no real difference or boundary between fact and fiction.

Fowles intensifies the carnivalesque atmosphere of the novel by details such as the small statue of Priapus, the son of Dionysus or the carnivals called

“paneyiri” organized by Conchis for his foreign guests (353). The name he gives to these Dionysian parties literally means ‘fair’ and alludes to the carnival spirit of the island:

Before the war we used to amuse ourselves in my private theater here. And during the war, when I had a great deal of time to think, and no friends to amuse me, no theater, I conceived a new kind of drama. One in which the conventional relations between audience and actors were forgotten. In which the conventional scenic geography, the notions of proscenium, stage, auditorium, were completely discarded. In which continuity of performance, either in time or place, was ignored. And in which the action, the narrative was fluid, with only a point of departure and a fixed point of conclusion... Here we are all actors. None of us are as we really are... Yes, I know. You think you are not acting. Just pretending a little. But you have much to learn about yourself. You are as far from your true self as that Egyptian mask our American friend wears is from his true face. (366)

On the thematic level, Conchis refers to the literary movements before and after the war, and this can be thought of as referring to the change from stability to chaos. The second part about acting and wearing masks is about how we are removed from our real selves under the influence of social conventions and boundaries. However, what is more important about the extract is that it reveals how Conchis has dragged Nicholas into such a carnivalesque play in which fact and fiction, lies and reality intermingle. Conchis’s story about this new kind of theater, which he calls “metatheater,” becomes the part of another metatheater starring Nicholas (367). This frame within frame technique makes the metafictional qualities of the novel even more effective on the one hand and contributes to the carnivalesque ambiguity on the other.

The carnival spirit can also be seen in the development of Nicholas as a character in the novel - especially if one takes a closer look at the change in Nicholas’s subject position and how he turns out to be an object in someone else’s narrative. He is the “I” of the story at the beginning, but he later ends up as a puppet in Conchis’s Godgame. He also loses his power position as a womanizer or as a contemporary Odysseus by becoming a fool for Lily/Rose. This change of power position parallels the topsy-turvy of the established hierarchies in a carnival scene. Just like the carnivalistic degradation of the king and the coronation of the jester as the carnival king, Nicholas is degraded from the higher position he places himself and degraded to the position of a fool. Therefore, Conchis’s godgame turns Nicholas’s world upside down just like the carnival does to the everyday scale of social hierarchies.

The fact that the novel is characterized by the shifts in the narrative voice is also important in terms of the carnivalesque atmosphere. Due to the shifts in the narrative voice, two different texts exist at the same time in the

novel. The first narrator is Nicholas who starts telling his own story at the beginning but then turns out to be the object of the story of the second narrator towards the end. The second narrator is Conchis who narrates the godgame. Mahmoud Salami interprets the coexistence of these two stories as “a *mise en abyme* of the novel; it is a novel within a novel” (85). The second narrative, thus, is a pirate narrative, an alternative voice to break the monodimensionality in the narrative voice. The narrator of the first story is an object of the second one and the narrator of the second story line is one of the characters in the first one. Creating such a co-dependent relationship between these two separate narratives and weaving them into such a complex structure, Fowles aims to break the hierarchical sorting that could occur between these two texts. He uses the shifts between the narrative voices of Nicholas and Conchis to break the conventional narrative structure that revolves around one center.

To attain the carnivalesque lack of center, Fowles also creates the illusion that characters are free to act independently. They are represented as free from both the author and the narrator as implied in the novel (Fowles 367). For instance, Conchis-as-the-narrator has to bargain with Nicholas about how their story with Jullie is to end (368). He wants Nicholas to go back to England and marry Alison. But Nicholas refuses to follow Conchis’ version of the story and moves on in a different way. Fowles/Conchis gives him a fake freedom of choice, an illusion of free will. Fowles is well aware that the authorial authority is inevitable and that the characters can never be totally free of their creator:

I certainly think, in my own personal view of the novel, that this is its most vital function—that is, the establishment of free views of society... I think the whole question of whether he can ever establish freedom in his relations with his own characters is very problematic. I don’t really accept that it can be done... [T]here always comes a point when the writer is the man who has the blue pencil in his hand. You are in fact a dictator, and I don’t think one can really dodge that. (Molony 29)

However, as it is quite important for the creation of the liberal carnival atmosphere in the novel, though illusionary, he grants his characters freedom to exist and act as they are rather than as stereotypes or split personalities.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the novel that corresponds to its Menippean nature is its intertextual, or in Bakhtin’s words, ‘dialogical’ nature. Dialogy or intertextuality in a Menippean text serves to the breaking of the single voiced, authoritarian discourses. In a Menippean text no voice is louder than the others. Every ideology, thought, or philosophy can represent itself, and this is mostly enabled by intertextuality or the dialogue between the representatives of those ideologies. This characteristic of the Menippean fashion of writing is highly relevant to Fowles’s novel. Fowles makes countless references that are in dialogue, which enables a multilayered, multidimensional formation of meaning.

The novel consists of three books and each of the books starts with quotations from Marqui De Sade's *Les Infortunes de la Vertu* or *Justine*. It is quite meaningful that Fowles chooses De Sade to begin his narrative in the sense that De Sade is an extremely nonconventional writer who acknowledges no boundaries of moral, religious or socio-cultural kind. He believes in living according to one's instincts and desires. He perceives the codes of civilization—such as religion, science, law and such—as the murderers of desire and claims that these codes alienate people. As the Menippean fashion of writing advocates the very same principles as De Sade, Fowles uses him as a highlight to advocate the Menippean spirit. All the epigrams contribute to the same idea which is the significance of depending on instincts rather than socio-cultural codes that make people hypocritical and untrue to their nature. The De Sade epigraphs also focus on the Menippean belief that life is too light to be taken seriously. This is an absurd world we live in and it operates beyond our reach. To try to control and understand it is impossible, to struggle or lament for it is meaningless. The only option left is to enjoy it.

Besides the epigraphs, a lot of other sources and books are referred to and quoted within the novel, as well—such as Conchis's being referred to as Prospero or the reference to Lewis's *Alice in Wonderland*. One of them is presented at the beginning of Book 2, when Nicholas wanders on the beach and finds a book on a rock with a note inside, which cites T.S. Eliot's lines from "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time. (65)

These lines are meaningful in the sense that the Menippean tradition generically points to the meaninglessness of the pursuit for absolute truths. Just like the Apuleian heroes, who end up with no wisdom of any kind at the end of their quests, this quotation foreshadows how Nicholas's pointless quest to discover the truth would end up in indefiniteness. As Nicholas goes through the pages of the book he encounters another marked page, and we come across another reference this time to one of the cantos of Ezra Pound:

Yet must thou sail after knowledge  
Knowing less than drugged beasts. (66)

This extract intensifies the same idea even further, indicating that human beings lack the wisdom to dare to pursue truth and also refers to the meaningless quest Nicholas is about to launch.

Beside the existence of different texts together, contrasting elements also coexist in the novel. Among the functions of these contrasting elements the most important one is to create abnormality and a grotesque effect that breaks the concept of normality and conventionality. These contrasting elements can be best observed in the representations of the characters as well as the island.

Conchis, as the host of countless contradictions in himself, is the most problematic character and is the most difficult to make sense of. As Thomas Foster comments, “Conchis is repeatedly contradictory, alternately gregarious and taciturn, forthcoming and elusive, while Nicholas, who by temperament and training expects consistency and clarity, desires simplicity over complexity” (44). Similarly the island is described as a chaotic space which can harbor the contrasting parties at the same time. As explicitly stated in the novel, it is “as if the island was split into dark and light” (Fowles 59). By attributing such contrasting characteristics to one body, Fowles aims to break the monodimensional representations as pure evil or good. He tries to break the classical images of goodness and beauty and chooses to represent things in a more realistic way, simultaneously attributing good and bad, normal and abnormal, beautiful and ugly elements to them.

The meddling of narrative styles, discourses and languages is also widely seen in the novel. To begin with, the meddling of prose and verse—as one of the oldest and the most characteristic features of the Menippean tradition—expands to the meddling of different genres, languages, dialects and so forth. The important point here is that these different styles and genres are not merely used as ornamentation in the text but as the main driving force of the story. Perhaps the most outstanding element of medley is the movie called *The Shameful Truth* (469). This is a pornographic movie starring Lily. As Nicholas watches the movie, Lily and her company in the movie walk in the room and they start to have sex in front of Nicholas. From this point on, the movie script becomes the main discourse of the novel, and the novel is a first that uses a movie script as a part of a Menippean text.

The quest theme, too, has a very important place in the texture of the novel as in all Menippean satires. The quest symbolizes man’s passion of gaining truth and power but in all Menippean satires this passionate search ends in despair. Ironically, the only thing the hero of the quest gets out of this passionate search is nothing but the truth about the uselessness of running after a truth. From the very beginning of the novel to the very end, Nicholas Urfe exposes his restlessness about himself and his haunting desire for something else which leads him to the quest. He tries many different things that give him neither satisfaction nor end this restlessness. Different schools, different occupations, different women all lead him only to the realization that he is not what he wants to be (11). As a result, he ironically sets out for this quest to Greece, the land of chaos, uncertainty and unknowability, to discover what he wants to be, only to realize at the end of the quest that to seek a rigid, definite, absolute meaning in life is a totally desperate act, for there is no unchanging thing in the universe. Fowles undermines not only the belief that there are absolute truths somewhere out there and that they can be attained by human beings but also the notion that these truths can be attained only through reasoning and the rational mind. At the end of his quest the only truth Nicholas

could reach is that the entire struggle he has gone through has been pointless and the myth of rational mind's incalculable potential is just an illusion. What he has gone through in the novel is Conchis's "way of telling [him] what [he] had already guessed, that detective work would lead [him] nowhere—to a false grave, to yet another joke, a smile fading into thin air" (507). If there is one thing this quest has taught him, it is to enjoy life rather than try to seek its meaning or purpose. This awareness is the main purpose of the godgame not only for Nicholas but also for the reader.

Structurally speaking, the quest theme, in Menippean satires, is usually exposed in a three-partite structure—namely heaven, earth and hell. The reader witnesses the protagonist's journey between the earth, heaven, and hell. However, the journey between these three planes does not have to be represented literally but can be structured in a metaphorical way as exemplified in Fowles's novel. To be more specific, London represents the earth with its fake, unreliable relationships in which Nicholas can find no rest and feels obliged to look for something higher. As a result of this unrest, he ends up in Praxos, a small Greek island which is nothing like London. Praxos here stands for the heaven as it is described as "simply heavenly" (16). From the very first moment that he is there, he falls in love with the island. "But with the love came a contradictory, almost irritating, feeling of impotence and inferiority, as if Greece were a woman so sensually provocative that I must fall physically and desperately in love with her, and at the same time so calmly aristocratic that I should never be able to approach her" (45). As the quotation explicitly indicates, the island has a double identity as heaven, a liberating force, and hell, a kind of imprisonment. Especially after Alison leaves him, the island turns into a prison, a metaphorical hell for him (52). Thus, the island of Praxos, in this three-partite structure, stands for both the heaven and hell -- which also contributes to the oxymoronic nature of the genre. The island, as both heaven and hell, enables the fulfillment of the Menippean travel motif in a unique way.<sup>2</sup>

The characters' psychological instabilities in the novel are quite remarkable in contributing to the Menippean nature of the text. Especially Conchis harbours hints of madness as described by Nicholas: "There was something masklike, emotion-purged, about his face. Deep furrows ran from beside his nose to the corners of his mouth; they suggested experience, command, impatience with fools. He was slightly mad, no doubt harmlessly, but mad" (76). The implication that Conchis's frame of mind can change any moment parallels the chaotic and unpredictable shifts that occur in the island. By attributing madness to such a wise and central character in the novel, Fowles

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<sup>2</sup>Besides, the island breaks not only the conventional perception of space by being both heaven and hell at the same time, but also the conventional notion of time by enabling the characters to travel back and forth in time. The time travel both occurs through photos, books, memories and stories and by actual reanimations of an event from the past that the characters are made to take part.

undermines the notion of rationality, normality, and conformity as sources of wisdom.

For very similar reasons, grotesque images are also widely used in the novel. They are intended to challenge the conventional codes of beauty and normality. In the characterization of Conchis, Fowles uses grotesque images with an implication of wisdom. Grotesque is generally used to arouse in the reader feelings of disgust, fear, pity or hatred. But Fowles especially in his grotesque representation of Conchis aims to evoke a sense of admiration, using the grotesque in a completely opposing way.

To conclude, Menippean satire is cynical in theme and carnivalesque in form. The thematic cynicism of the genre is exposed as rejection of absolutes and testing of the universal issues concerning humanity, in which parody, comicality and anti-didacticism are the most prominent tools.<sup>3</sup> 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 (101). However, this seeming negativity "serves a positive function, contributing to the powerful critique of mastery and monologism" (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 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

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<sup>3</sup> This attitude of the genre can be associated with the cynical nihilism of Nietzsche who considers the error of absolutism as "the worst, the most tiresome, and the most dangerous of errors" (*Beyond 2*). Nietzsche thinks that people's tendency to reach absolute truth is indeed a will to power and, like the Menippean satirist, he recommends his readers to "recognize untruth as a condition of life" (9). Nietzsche's tie to the Menippean genre is not limited to this similarity of attitudes. He also praises one of the ancient Menippean satirists, Petronius by considering him as a representative of "free-spirited thought" (41). Perhaps Nietzsche can even be considered as one of the contemporary representatives of the Menippean genre who fearlessly stresses what people do not want to hear, opens Pandora's Box, makes the reader uncomfortable and distorts all kinds of conformity with a cynical approach. Cynicism blended with his comicality and anti-didacticism, his *Zarathustra* can be considered a great example of the Menippean satire.

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" (33). 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 exemplified by Howard Weinbrot:

Menippean satire was resurrected in the Renaissance and as it subsequently became more complex over some 150 years in France and Britain. That often odd national couple fed off each other. The French give the English models, which they gladly adapt and denigrate as too constraining. The English give the French models, which they reluctantly adapt and denigrate as too liberating. In either case national practice illuminates and partially absorbs the Other and certainly illuminates the progressive softening of one version of Menippean satire. Lucian's harsh Menippean dialogues set in the underworld, for example, become civil, accommodating, and remarkably well bred. (xii)

Besides, it reappeared also in the works of Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne in the eighteenth century when great changes in the fields of science, philosophy, industry, commerce and politics occurred and old ways were replaced by the new ones.

Similarly the second half of the twentieth century has provided the grounds for the re-emergence of the genre due to the fact that the deepest beliefs concerning humanity, progress and science have tumbled down. Especially after the two world wars the truths people hold on to crumbled, and perhaps this is the reason Fowles puts so much emphasis in the world wars, especially in *The Magus*. As Robert Bocoock puts 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" (261). Antony Giddens also considers this time period as an era of rapid and uncontrollable change.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Marshal Berman points out the instability of the modern era and the unrest it creates in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*:

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<sup>4</sup> Giddens, Anthony. *Sociology*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997. 519-536.

The innate dynamism of the modern economy annihilates everything it creates – physical environments, social institutions, metaphysical ideas, artistic visions, moral values – in order to create more, to go on endlessly creating the world anew. This drive draws all modern men and women into its orbit, and forces us all to grapple with the question of what is essential, what is meaningful, what is real in the maelstrom in which we move and live. (288)

The socio-cultural environment of the modern world led people to develop a questioning and cynical attitude towards the world and what this world offers to them. Timothy Bewes labels this unrest as ‘cultural obsession’ and explains the reappearance of cynicism in this era under four headings: the cultural obsession resulting from the lack of sincerity (50); the cultural obsession that results from alienation, atomization and demystification of human nature due to the scientific developments which causes a kind of fear and unrest and reduces one to an object (52); the cultural obsession caused by acceleration and the fast expansion in the fields of knowledge, power, authority and any part of life (55); and the cultural obsession caused by the concept of immortality caused by the terror of the sense of meaninglessness (62). As these aspects of the modern era—which are extremely similar to those of the Hellenistic period when the genre first emerged—are considered, the rebirth of Menippean satire in this era does not strike as a surprise.

John Fowles can be considered one of the modern representatives of the Menippean genre. It cannot be proposed that Fowles’s works are written consciously in the manner of this ancient genre of satire but his perspective towards the world, the way he uses literary tools and techniques, and the references he makes to other Menippean satirists such as Flann O’Brien, Laurence Sterne and Lewis Carol make it possible to consider him as a literary figure in the line of the Menippean tradition. In his novels every ideology or worldview can be satirized, parodied and represented on the same plane as typical of Menippean satires, which free the reader from the authorial restrictions. With its cynical attributes and carnivalesque qualities, *The Magus* is one of the best contemporary examples of the Menippean genre. Fowles not only follows the generic characteristics of the ancient Menippean satires, but he also makes his own contributions that enrich the genre both in formal and thematic terms. Thus he can be considered as a unique practitioner of the Menippean genre who not only employs the core characteristics of the tradition but also contributes to the evolution of the genre by using certain Menippean devices in his own unique way.

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