

Fowles's *Mantissa*: trying to escape the prison-house of language¹

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Summary

A tension between freedom and determinism prevails in Fowles's fiction and, in *Mantissa*, this tension exists on the level of language. It is argued here that the novel explores the extent to which language determines existence, and provides a model of language which posits the possibility of liberation from such determinism. *Mantissa* lends itself to such an exploration of language because it is a metanovel, that is, a self-conscious language-construct. Indeed, *Mantissa* imitates the form of the novel while it invades the realm of post-Saussurean critical discourse on language, in the context of which it demands to be read. The first part of the essay traces the novel's preoccupation with linguistic determinism, while the second part deals with the possibilities of liberation suggested by the novel. In the third part, the paradox of a bounded freedom, which resolves the tension between freedom and determinism, is discussed.

Opsomming

Fowles se romans word dikwels oorheers deur 'n spanning wat ontstaan tussen vryheid en determinisme en, in die geval van *Mantissa*, manifesteer die spanning op 'n taalvlak. Daar word in hierdie artikel aangevoer dat die roman ondersoek instel na die mate waarin die menslike bestaan deur taal bepaal word, en dat dit 'n taalmodel verskaf wat 'n moontlikheid voorsien vir die bevryding van dié determinisme. *Mantissa* leen hom tot so 'n ondersoek van taal aangesien dit 'n metaroman is, dit wil sê 'n selfbeslissende taalkonstruksie. Die vorm van die roman word trouens in *Mantissa* nageboots, terwyl dit die gebied van post Saussureaanse kritiese diskoers binnedring. Die eerste gedeelte van die artikel ondersoek die roman se beheptheid met linguistiese determinisme, terwyl die tweede gedeelte die bevrydingsmoontlikhede wat in die roman gesuggereer word ondersoek. In die derde gedeelte word die paradoks van gebonde vryheid, wat 'n oplossing bied vir die spanning tussen vryheid en determinisme, bespreek.

This paper aims to investigate Fowles's contribution to the debate on linguistic determinism. To speak of a novelist's contribution to a debate dominated by post-Saussurean critical theorists is, of course, possible since metanovels such as *Mantissa* (Fowles, 1982) subvert the distinction between creative and critical discourse, thereby invading the realm of the latter and turning the novel into an instrument of critical inquiry. Indeed metanovels, as self-conscious language-constructs, are eminently suited to an exploration of linguistic determinism. This essay hopes to demonstrate that *Mantissa* provides a model of language which recognises the possibility of emancipation from such determinism.

1 Determinism

The way in which *Mantissa* invades the realm of critical discourse is evident

on the opening page, in which Fowles presents the reader with a character recovering consciousness. The stages of this recovery are carefully delineated in terms of the advent of language. Initially the character is only conscious of a "luminous and infinite haze" (1982: 9). It soon emerges that this "luminous and infinite haze" is the boundless continuum of a world without signification, that is, a world which has not yet been articulated by language (Belsey, 1980: 40). As the character regains consciousness, this boundless continuum is increasingly reduced by the gradual advent of language:

It was conscious . . . after an interval of obscure duration, of murmured sounds and peripheral shadows, which reduced the impression of boundless space and empire to something much more contracted and unaccommodating. From there, with the swift fatality of a fall, the murmurs focussed to voices, the shadows to faces. As in some obscure foreign film, nothing was familiar; not language, not location, not cast. Images and labels began to swim, here momentarily to coalesce, here to divide, like so many pond amoebae; obviously busy, but purposeless. For a while a pleasing intimation of superiority, of having somehow got to the top of the heap, still attached to this sense of impersonality. But even that was soon brutally dispersed by the relentless demon of reality. In a kind of mental somersault it was forced to the inescapable conclusion that far from augustly floating in the stratosphere, couched as it were in iambic pentameters, it was actually lying on its back in bed. (1982: 9-10)

This passage makes it clear that language precedes the existence of independently existing concepts and makes the world intelligible by differentiating between concepts, a commonplace of post-Saussurean critical discourse (Belsey, 1980: 38). It is only with the advent of structured language that human beings are able to attain their conception of reality – what is referred to as the "relentless demon of reality" in this passage is later revealed to be language: "With women one always ends in a bog of reality, alias words" (1982: 184).

Language makes the world intelligible by imposing form on chaos. The derivation of form from chaos is the essence of the creative process, hence the allusion to the archetypal creation: "It was conscious of a luminous and infinite haze, as if it were floating, godlike, alpha and omega, over a sea of vapour and looking down . . ." (1982: 9). The allusion here to the opening verses of Genesis is fairly explicit:

1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
2. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:1-2)

Apart from the allusion to Creation, the reference to the beginning and end of the Greek alphabet in the novel's opening sentence points to the role of language in the construction of reality – in the beginning was the word and the world is shaped by the word.

These allusions to the creation of the world, at the beginning of *Mantissa*, suggest the novel's highly complex relationship to the world. The novel is created through language and, *Mantissa* proposes, so is the world – both are

language-constructs, the former merely an alternative linguistic structure. As such, *Mantissa* exemplifies Waugh's contention that the novel as genre "becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself" (1984: 3) and for "understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems" (1984: 9).

While the metanovel as text becomes an image of the world as text, its characters become a "model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world" (Waugh, 1984: 3). Indeed, the metanovel not only shows that the world is "word-shaped"² but also that "it is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects" (Belsey, 1980: 59). *Mantissa*, for example, does this by subordinating character, a traditional element of creative writing, to its theoretical concern with the indeterminacy of self and language. The character Miles Green is initially referred to in the third person as "it": "It was conscious of a luminous and infinite haze . . ." (1982: 9). At the end of the first paragraph, the narrator tells the reader that, "It was conscious, evidently; but bereft of pronoun, all that distinguishes person from person . . ." (1982: 9). As the character recovers consciousness "it" becomes aware that "for some reason it was a centre of attention, an I of sorts" (1982: 10). The final deduction follows shortly afterwards: "With another painfully swift and reducing intuition it realized that it was not just an I, but a male I. . . . It, I, it must be he . . ." (1982: 10).

Fowles's depiction of Miles Green's entry into language resembles Lacan's analysis of the child's entry into language, which Belsey summarizes succinctly:

The child has no sense of identity, no way of conceiving of itself as a unity, distinct from what is 'other', exterior to it . . . it is only with its entry into language that the child becomes a full subject. . . . In order to speak the child is compelled to differentiate: to speak of itself it has to distinguish 'I' from 'you'. In order to formulate its needs the child learns to identify with the first person singular pronoun, and this identification constitutes the basis of subjectivity. Subsequently it learns to recognize itself in a series of subject-positions ("he" or "she", "boy" or "girl", and so on) which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to itself and others. . . . Subjectivity, then, is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates. (1980: 60–61)

Fowles's depiction of the primacy of language over subjectivity in Miles Green's entry into language refutes Descartes's *Cogito, ergo sum* proposition – which centres subjectivity (Culler, 1975: 28–30) and forms the first epigraph to the novel (1982: 5) – and decentres the idea of the Cartesian subject as *homo significans*, the source of meaning, to replace it with "the differential, structural and semiotic relation, which articulates the signs that confer meaning" (Burden, 1980: 11). In this respect *Mantissa* validates Heidegger's assertion that "language speaks, not man" (quoted in Hawkes, 1977: 159) and Culler's contention that the subject is the result of an artificial system of conventions, a linguistic construct (1975: 29).

Such a view of the subject leads to a rejection of the conventional conception of character in the novel, a conception based on the corollary notions of psychological depth and individuality, and in its place forges a new relation between character and human being (Culler, 1975: 230–232). Novels such as *Mantissa* lay bare the linguistic nature of characters – they are self-consciously exposed as “verbal constructions, *words not beings*” (Waugh, 1984: 26). Thus Erato, the character-figure, tells Miles Green, the author-figure: “I have absolutely no rights. The sexual exploitation’s nothing beside the ontological one. You can kill me off in five lines if you want to. Throw me in the wastepaper basket. . . . I’m technically nothing” (1982: 94–96). This depersonalization of characters through the exposure of their linguistic make-up images the reduction of the subject to a language-construct and, in *Mantissa*, initiates a dialectic between freedom and determinism.

Since all experience is mediated by language and meaning can only be constructed by participating in the available system of differences, humankind is trapped within the relational structure of language with no access to raw reality (Belsey, 1980: 44–45;61). Language is thus a “prison-house”³ and the individual is subject to linguistic determinism. Here again the characters in the novel provide a useful model for the imprisoned self – trapped in the verbal texture of the novel, they reflect the individual’s imprisonment in the prison-house of language. Fowles develops this resemblance by means of elaborate punning on the word “cell,” bearing on the setting of the novel:

The walls were grey-quilted like the domed ceiling. Even the door opposite the foot of the bed was quilted. Only the floor had been spared, in some attempt to lighten the monotony of the rest: it was carpeted in a dull flesh-pink, the tone painters once called old rose. Quilting, padding, prison: the connection escaped him . . . (1982: 16)

Some pages later there is a reference to the “cruel grey wall of amnesia” (1982: 28). These two quotations reveal an implied pun on the word “cell” which, in the context of the novel, denotes both prison cell and brain cell. The connection between the setting and brain cells is further revealed in the following exchange between Miles Green and Erato:

‘I bet you haven’t even cottoned on to what these grey quilted walls really stand for.’ He pauses in the buttoning and looks at her. She shakes her head. ‘I knew you hadn’t. Grey walls, grey cells. Grey matter?’ He taps the side of his head. ‘Does the drachma begin to drop?’

‘It’s all . . . taking place inside your brain?’

. . .

‘Now we’re getting somewhere.’ He stoops to pull on his underpants. ‘The amnesia?’ (1982: 114–115)

and the connection between the setting and a prison cell is emphasized in Miles Green’s words: “We’re two people who happen to be locked in the same prison cell” (1982: 128). Miles Green’s reference to himself and Erato here as “people” lays bare the analogy between character and human being.

Human beings, like the characters in a novel, are imprisoned in a text – that is, in language. The specifically linguistic nature of the imprisonment emerges clearly on the opening page of the novel, which traces Miles Green's entry into language – the description of which marks the first occurrence of the cell motif: "It was conscious . . . of murmured sounds and peripheral shadows, which reduced the impression of boundless space and empire to something much more contracted and unaccommodating" (1982: 9). The advent of language is concomitant with the imposition of the prison-house, the one being a corollary of the other.

2 Possible freedom?

Mantissa, however, suggests that there *can* be an escape from linguistic determinism. The object of the novel is to make the reader see the structure of his or her language anew, to make him or her understand the way in which language imposes its mediating, shaping pattern on an apparently objective world (Hawkes, 1977: 110) and, with this understanding to grasp the possibility of liberation, that is, to speak language and not allow it to speak him or her. In order to achieve this emancipation, Fowles foregrounds language by means of punning as, for example, in the case of the word "cell." Puns, as Walker explains:

[make] explicit the interplay between signifiers and signifieds which short-circuits the arbitrary link between sign and referent (and which, for this reason, 'realistic' use of language seeks to suppress). Instead of pointing towards elements of a putative reality beyond the text, the words combine with each other in such a way as to highlight the relational structure of language in general. (Walker, 1980: 205)

Because puns exert a dislocating strain on the signifier-signified ligament, freeing the one from the other, the reader comes to see that it is the *connection* between the signifier and signified that generates meaning, and not any "real" world beyond to which the sign refers (Hawkes, 1977: 121). Puns consequently counteract "automatization," the term used by the Russian Formalists to designate the process of habituation whereby the native speaker of a language ceases to see the world s/he lives in, because of the assumed natural resemblance between signifier and signified, and becomes anaesthetized to its distinctive features (Erlich, 1981: 181; Hawkes, 1977: 62). It is this automatization which leads to humankind's imprisonment in language. By reversing the process of automatization, puns jolt the reader into a fresh perception of the structure of his or her language. This heightened awareness of the nature of language is important because language, through its relationship with social formation and ideology, and because of its apparent transparency, imposes its own mediating, shaping pattern on the world and so conditions and determines our access to "reality," thus serving to institutionalize a particular version of "reality." Fowles, by using paronomasia as an *ostranenie* device, hopes to liberate the reader by attempting to break this pernicious anaesthetic grip that language has on the individual's perception of

reality, to “free semiotic practices from the ideology that holds them in check” (Culler, 1975: 241).

Puns, in *Mantissa*, function on another level to that outlined above. They testify to the infinite productivity and generative potential of language which offer a further possibility of liberation. Language, through the play on certain words in the text, generates the very structure of the novel. Fowles’s deployment of language as a structural phenomenon is evident in his choice of names for the various characters in the novel, characters being part of the verbal design of the text. The name “Miles,” for instance, puns on the linear measurement, as emerges at an early stage in the novel:

The other woman spoke. ‘Miles?’

‘What miles?’

‘Your name, Your name is Miles, darling. Miles Green.’ (1982: 12)

The pun is revealed typographically by the use of the upper case for the proper noun, as opposed to the use of the lower case for the common noun. With a few significant exceptions, linear measurements elsewhere in the novel are in the metric system. One of these exceptions is Erato’s reference to Clio: “I’d know those wretched fish-green eyes a mile away” (1982: 137). Fowles, by playing on the name “Miles Green” in this sentence, fuses this character and Clio, the muse of history. Moreover, the sentence refers to Clio playing the role of Staff Sister who, in turn, is referred to as follows: “There is a malignant light in the pale-green eyes behind the spectacles” (1982: 136). These characters, linked together by paronomasia, form a group. There is another such group in the novel – the reader’s attention is drawn to the play on the name “Delfie” by Erato’s words: “Dr A. *Delfie*,. That’s not a pun, it’s a dog’s turd” (1982: 54). The name “Delfie” puns on “Delphi,” the seat of Apollo’s temple, which is situated on Mount Parnassus, the domain of the muses (Graves, 1960, 1: 66–67; 79). This pun links Erato to Dr Delfie, because the former is the muse of fiction – a link which is strengthened by Erato’s reference to the muses as the “Delphi Dancing Girls,” managed by “Aunt Polly” (1982: 74), that is, Apollo. Moreover, Erato is the daughter of Mnemosyne – Dr Delfie’s “special field is mnemonology” (1982: 19). Fowles further fuses these two characters by means of the roses and myrtle motif. Erato is associated with roses and myrtle by the second epigraph to Part Two, which states that she was “represented as crowned with roses and myrtle” (1982: 49). This is significant for, throughout Part One, Dr Delfie is also associated with roses (1982: 19; 26; 28). Furthermore, Nurse Cory also enters the group of characters related by the roses and myrtle motif: Miles Green, when he kisses her, detects “the same tarry fragrance as with the doctor” (1982: 35), that is, the scent of myrtle. These characters are further fused by the colour of their eyes: Dr Delfie’s eyes are “dark brown” (1982: 12), as are those of Nurse Cory: “her eyes were exactly the same colour as the doctor’s” (1982: 21). Claire, Miles Green’s wife, also has brown eyes (1982: 10). Dr Delfie, Nurse Cory and Claire Green are thus personae of Erato, whose eyes are “like loquat pips” (1982: 62), that is, dark brown.

By incorporating his characters into the novel's structure of quibbles and verbal associations, Fowles departs from the conventional basis of characterization, establishing affinities between the various characters which "cut across the traditional autonomy of characters in a novel" (Walker, 1980: 193–194) and fuse them together. In this way the number of characters in the novel is effectively reduced to two: Erato and Miles Green – a situation which is mirrored by the story of the satyr which Erato tells Miles Green in Part Two of the novel. This story functions as a *mise en abyme*⁴ which directs the reader to the structural importance of the novel's sex scenes. Moreover, the sexual conflict between the two characters in the *mise en abyme*, namely Erato and the satyr, reflects the sexual conflict between Miles Green and Erato on the level of the story proper. Indeed, Miles Green is identified with the satyr by Erato's words, "He was rather like you" (1982: 78), which he confirms by mounting her in exactly the same position as the satyr did, precisely when she reaches that part of her story:

to my horror I felt the intruder's hairy body and . . . something else lower itself on my innocent twelve-year-old olive-oiled bottom.' There is a silence. 'Oh honestly. Do you have *always* to be so literal-minded?' (1982: 79–80)

The structural importance of this passage in the story becomes clear when Erato rebukes Miles Green, shortly afterwards, with the following words: "Well you should jolly well have thought of that before you had that ridiculous doctor in the same posture" (1982: 81). In the story, the satyr assumes a position astride Erato which reflects Miles Green's position on her while she narrates the story. Miles Green's position on her forms an inverse parallel with the position Dr Delfie, Erato's persona, assumes on him at the end of Part One of the novel. This, in turn, anticipates and mirrors Erato's position astride Miles Green at the end of Part Three. The reader is directed to this structural parallel in the second last paragraph of Part Three: "It is done; and now the oblivious pair lie slumped, in an unconscious reprise of their position after the first and clinical coupling . . ." (1982: 154). It follows, then, that the end of Part Three also forms an inverse parallel with the sex scene in the *mise en abyme* and its immediate counterpart on the level of the story proper. Finally, the sex scene in the *mise en abyme* anticipates the penultimate scene of Part Four, in which Miles Green is metamorphosed into a satyr. Part One and Part Two end with coitus, whereas Part Two and Part Four end with Miles Green lapsing into unconsciousness. Since the novel consists of four parts, the end of Part Two is the middle of the novel. The state of unconsciousness therefore makes for an aesthetically pleasing correspondence between the beginning, middle and end of the novel. Furthermore, it is linked to the sexual positions by paranomasia. Earlier in the novel the importance of the word "position" is emphasized by Dr Delfie's words: "If you would prefer some other position, we can offer most of those in the *Kama Sutra*, Aretino, the *Hokuwata Monosaki*, Kinsey, Sjostrom" (1982: 44). Now, in the concluding paragraph of the novel, unconsciousness is also revealed to be a position: "The oblivious patient lies on his hospital bed, staring in what must now be

seen as his most characteristic position, blindly at the ceiling; conscious only of a luminous and infinite haze, as if he were floating, godlike, alpha and omega (and all between), over a sea of vapour" (1982: 192). The link between unconsciousness and sex, generated by the word "position," is further revealed, in this passage, by the reference to the Greek alphabet: in the story, Erato claims that she and the satyr "went through the whole alphabet" (1982: 82). Paronomasia thus plays a primary and vital role in the composition of the novel.

A closer look at Parts Two and Four reveals a tension in each between the possibility of Miles Green and Erato's exchanges ending with reconciliation in sex, or on a note of estrangement; the latter being the actual ending in both cases – Miles Green falls unconscious as a result of aggressive behaviour. Two pages before the end of Part Two Erato says, "I don't want us to stop until we're friends again. Till you let me sit on your lap and give you a little cuddle. And a kiss" (1982: 127). Shortly before the end of Part Four, Erato "turns over on her stomach, props her chin in her hands, and smiles wordlessly round and up at Miles Green" (1982: 188). In both cases, Miles Green rejects the overtures. His rejoinder to Erato's offer in Part Two is "Oh for God's sake" (1982: 127). His reaction to her silent gesture in Part Four is "you tasteless . . . I didn't mean *that!*" (1982: 188).

Fowles, in Part Three, has Erato refer twice to her proposal, in Part Two, of a sexual reconciliation, in terms of a comic ending:

'It could have come to a perfectly happy ending twenty minutes ago' (1982: 138).

...

'Instead of *this*, Miles, I might have been sitting on your lap . . . we might quite naturally have ended up in a mutually satisfying position . . . The whole episode would have closed on that, it would have redeemed all the stupidity of the rest . . . Our fused bodies in final togetherness, eternally awaiting climax.' (1982: 145)

In *Mantissa* coitus thus comes to represent a prosperous conclusion.

Part Two, instead of ending with Erato and Miles Green in "a mutually satisfying position," ends with Miles Green unconscious, which the end of Part Four shows to be "his most characteristic position" (1982: 192). The passage quoted above further reveals the relationship between sex and endings in the pun on "climax". This pun echoes an earlier one in the following exchange Erato has with Miles Green:

'Certainly for many chapters. Perhaps to the very end.'

'The climax?'

She looks down, but with the trace of a prim smile.

'You're incorrigible.'

'It wasn't intended.' (1982: 104)

If sexual intercourse represents a comic ending, then unconsciousness represents a tragic ending. The novel, consequently, has a tragic ending.

The tension Fowles builds into the novel between comedy and tragedy is

related to the conflict between Erato and Miles Green. He makes it clear that Miles Green favours a tragic ending: "There may be a place for humour in ordinary life, but there is none whatever for it in serious modern fiction . . . The obvious candidate for the modern novel was your sister Melpomene" (1982: 116–117). Melpomene is the muse of tragedy (Bulfinch, n.d.: 22). The author has Erato, on the other hand, favour a comic ending. In Part Four, he makes her claim to have written the *Odyssey*: the conventional paradigm of comedy (Fielding, 1980: 3; Leech, 1969: 30):

'Actually, darling, I've got yet another ghastly sister. She's just like Clio, another frightful snob. They always side together. Her name's Calliope, she's supposed to be in charge of epics. And her example [that is, the *Iliad*] was the most killingly dull thing you ever saw. Not a single bit of decent sex or a laugh from beginning to end. So just to put her silly nose out of joint I took one of her rotten hero characters, and wrote *Men* [that is, the *Odyssey*] about him.' (1982: 169)

Erato, the muse of fiction, is supported in her view of the novel as a comic form by the traditional view of the novel as a "Comic-Epic Poem in Prose" (Fielding, 1980: 4).

Fowles, however, brings the novel to a tragic close, the reason for which may be deduced from the *mise en abyme*. The relationship of predator to victim which characterizes the relationship of Miles Green, the author-figure, and Erato, the character-figure, is represented in miniature by the relationship between the satyr and Erato in the story. The importance of this emerges when Fowles has Erato describe Miles Green as a "modern satyr": "And I'll tell you what a modern satyr is. He's someone who invents a woman on paper so that he can force her to say and do things no real woman in her right mind ever would" (1982: 85). He then has her describe herself as Miles Green's victim:

'I'm just one more fantasy figure your diseased mind is trying to conjure up out of nothing . . . I only seem real because it is your nauseating notion that the actually totally unreal character I'm supposed to be impersonating should do so. In fact a real me in this situation would avoid all reference to the matter, especially as she would never have got herself into the situation in the first place. If she had any choice. Which she doesn't. As she isn't real . . . I wouldn't be caught dead in your dialogue. Of my own free will. If I had one.' (1982: 85–86)

The character-figure is the victim of the author-figure's tyrannous manipulation, being "mere wax in his hands" (1982: 86). Fowles, towards the end of the novel, makes Miles Green indulge in this power by having him conjure up a fantasy of a Japanese geisha girl, "His infinitely compliant woman, true wax at last . . ." (1982: 186), which recalls his words to Erato in Part Two: "Actually you'd have made an excellent geisha girl" (1982: 119). Immediately afterwards the metaphor of the tyranny of manipulation is made literal – Miles Green is metamorphosed into a satyr. The author-figure's despotic control consequently leads directly to the tragic ending. This is apposite because Greek tragedy is concerned with the conflict between the individual

and his destiny, with the gods' interference in human affairs (Leech, 1969: 12; 16; 40–41; Henn, 1963: 296–303). It consequently deals with a confrontation between free will and determinism. In *Mantissa*, Fowles translates this theme into the artificial conflict he constructs between the character-figure and the author-figure. The individual in Greek tragedy is a victim of the divine plot. *Mantissa* draws to a tragic conclusion to acknowledge the fact that the character-figure is a victim of the author-figure's deterministic plot, his arbitrary control. If the novel had ended happily, that is, in the "mutually satisfying position" Erato envisages for Part Two, the implication would be that author-figure and character-figure attain a harmonious bond of mutual freedom. Since this is impossible – characters in a novel can never be free – the novel ends with Miles Green in "his most characteristic position," that is, unconscious.

As an avowal of determinism, the novel's tragic ending denies the possibility of freedom posited by language's infinite generative capacity. In fact it constitutes a structural paradox, for, although Fowles deploys language to generate the novel's structure, and paranomasia directs the reader to the tension between comedy and tragedy, this celebration of language's infinite productivity as an expression of freedom is subverted by the tragic ending which affirms determinism. This paradox is dealt with in the following section.

3 Bounded freedom

The debate between freedom and determinism with regard to the author-figure and character-figure reflects on Fowles in his capacity as the actual author of the novel. Miles Green's apparent manipulation of Erato is an image of Fowles's control of *his* characters, namely Miles Green and Erato. The setting of the novel is thus likened to a cell for yet another reason: it is the prison-house in which Fowles keeps his characters. What Erato tells Miles Green *actually* applies to Fowles: "You just collect and mummify your female characters. Lock them up in a cellar and gloat over them, like Bluebeard" (1982: 95). Further, the inference that Miles Green, the putative author in the text, is himself manipulated by a higher authority suggests by extension that John Fowles, the author of the text, is also manipulated by a higher authority. As author, Fowles's relationship with his characters is that of subject to object – he reifies them. The novel, however, has earlier suggested that subjectivity, of which the concept of the author is an affirmation (Heath, 1972: 36), is linguistically constructed. As such, Fowles is merely an author-figure; like Miles Green he too is a character in a text, that is, in the world viewed as a text. The imprisonment of Miles Green in the novel thus reflects Fowles's imprisonment. Moreover, it now appears that the novel, regarded earlier as evidence of language's infinite generative capacity and therefore as testimony of the individual's potential liberation from linguistic determinism, is itself a specific *parole* determined and generated by the "system of enabling [codes and] conventions which constitute and delimit the varieties of [literary] discourse" (Culler, 1975: 30), that is, the *langue* of the novel tradition. This

distinction between *langue* and *parole* is an application to literature of Saussure's isolation of *langue* from *parole* in the field of linguistics – the former being the abstract set of rules of the language system and the latter being the individual utterances which take place in this system (Culler, 1975: 8). That *Mantissa* self-consciously derives, as *parole*, from the deterministic *langue* of the novel as genre, is apparent from its title, which means “An addition of comparatively small importance, especially to a literary effort or discourse” (1982: 185).

The strong suggestion that both text and author are determined initially appears to negate the earlier optimistic view of the text as testimony of the individual's potential freedom. This negation seems further apparent in the novel's tragic ending which, it has been argued, is a consequence of the many levels of determinism in the novel. The novel, however, still advocates freedom – the suggestion of determinism merely complicates and qualifies its view of freedom. Although the novel acknowledges the inevitability of determinism, it recognizes the possibility of achieving a relative freedom, a freedom within bounds. This is a paradox which Fowles outlines clearly in *The aristos*: “We are in a prison cell, but it is, or can be made to become, a comparatively spacious one, and inside it we can become relatively free” (1980: 68). *Mantissa* testifies to the individual's potential freedom, albeit a limited potential and a qualified freedom, by constituting a *parole* which self-consciously resists the *langue*'s determinism by breaking and transforming its codes and conventions. This resistance should be seen in the context of Saussure's findings on the relation of *langue* to *parole* and the infinite productivity of language: “Saussure . . . saw the speaker's ability to produce new combinations of signs as an expression of ‘individual freedom’ which escaped the rules of an interpersonal system” (Culler, 1975: 29). The distinction between *langue* and *parole* is dialectical rather than absolute and *Mantissa*, by breaking and transforming the codes and conventions of the *langue* of literature, exposes their provisional, because arbitrary and conventional, nature. Furthermore, because *Mantissa* explores literary codes to discover the coercive role of codes in everyday life, it leads the reader to a new awareness of how meanings and values have been constructed in the world through codes and how they, being provisional and not absolute, can be challenged or changed.

Despite the fact that the *langue* and not the author is the origin of meaning, the author cannot be dispensed with altogether: “He may no longer be the origin of meaning, but meaning must move through him. Structures and relations are not objective properties of external objects; they emerge only in a structuring process” (Culler, 1975: 30). The novelist controls this structuring process: s/he chooses when to write, what to write and how to write despite the fact that these acts are possibilities created by systems which escape his or her control. S/he is therefore not simply a “facilitating medium” (Fowler, 1977: 80) through which the *langue* is transferred to a specific *parole*, further testimony of which is the fact that s/he need not simply conform to timeworn conventions, s/he can choose to deconstruct them and in this way lay bare their provisional nature. If the codes were determinate and absolute this choice of resistance would not be open. The possibility of this limited choice

presupposes a freedom within bounds; within bounds because, while the novelist partly moulds his or her material, the material is also moulded by the constraints of the codes which, although resisted, are still "the conditions of possibility of his [or her] discourse" (Culler, 1975: 30). This struggle between the writer and the codes points to a "reciprocal authorization"⁵ – while the author is not entirely free, neither is s/he entirely determined.

This espousal of the author's freedom within bounds means that *Mantissa* does not altogether abandon subjectivity to language – the author as originating consciousness being an expression of subjectivity. Thus the earlier analogy between human being and character, namely that both are static verbal constructs trapped in similar linguistic structures, is qualified. An individual is now seen as being faced with the choice of either becoming the writer of his or her life, which is the choice of comedy, or of being determined like a character in a novel, which is the choice of tragedy. Human beings are entities with volition and, like the writer, they are potentially free (although this freedom is limited and qualified) to resist linguistic determinism, to struggle with language and culture's coercive linguistically-coded values. Character, on the other hand, lacks volition, is a nonentity, a "verbal construction," that is, a "word, not a being" (Waugh, 1984: 57) and, as such, is determined by the writer. This choice with which the individual is faced reflects on the reader of the novel and his or her relationship with the author. Fowles, in *Mantissa*, endeavours to draw the reader's attention to the nature of his or her language and "bring to a crisis his [or her] relation with [it]" (Barthes, 1976: 14). If he succeeds, the reader will begin to see the world as a text and, being trained in semiosis by the novel, learn how to create a new text (Eco, 1977: 274). The reader will thus have chosen comedy, that is, to become a "writer," and not a "character," having realized that "composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one's reality" (Waugh, 1984: 24). When this happens, the distinction between aesthetics and existence or, alternatively, fiction and history, blurs and the two merge.

1. The financial assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council is hereby acknowledged.
2. This term is used by Mr J.B.S. McDermott, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Port Elizabeth.
3. See the title of, and epigraph to, Jameson, 1972.
4. Walker describes the device of *mise en abyme* as a structural feature through which "a component of the narrative is transformed into a mirror reflecting in miniature, within the work, the work's formal or thematic import" (1980: 190), while Rimmon-Kenan provides the following description: "An analogy which verges on identity, making the hypodiegetic level a mirror and reduplication of the diegetic" (1983: 93).
5. Lane (1976: 124) uses this term apropos the writer and his or her language.

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