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Difficulties with Pre-Post-Modern Stereotypes and Tradition

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The post-war period seems to generate an acute sense of amnesia which results in the commonly acknowledged difficulty of the arts to address most of the extremely disturbing dilemmas of the fifties and the sixties. I use John Fowles' *The Collector* and Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* to illustrate the two otherwise obviously different writers' ambition to reformulate the traditional and fashionable artistic forms of expression and prepare for the disturbing postmodern approaches of their later books.

Philip Roth complains that American reality exceeds the power of the artists' imagination, John Fowles sets to write the Victorian novel as the Victorians could not write it, and wishes the "inarticulate hero" (viz. the neo-realist hero type of the angry generation) to hell. These are only some examples of the uneasy relationship of the two artists with tradition(al) and contemporary narrative solutions employed by the artists of the post-war period. I start from the premises that the two novels discussed in the present paper Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and John Fowles' *The Collector* can be read, among other things, as comprehensive critical assessments of the Freudian and of the post war realist novel respectively and the two authors' discontent with contemporary solutions, their own included, highlights the necessity of new ones, which we now know as belonging to the (fading) tradition of "post(modernism)".

The two novelists discuss old as well as new social, ethical, moral and aesthetic stereotypes which they think create an ideal platform not with the intention to interpret the acute dilemmas of the period, but rather to cloud the issue and miss the target. In their understanding traditional mechanisms are regarded as typical and unquestionable under given social, ethical and moral circumstances, contemporary mechanisms are handled as brilliant solutions to ever renewing conflicts generated by the previous inadequate attitude on both sides of the Atlantic. The result is embarrassing.

Patricia Waugh in *Harvest of the Sixties* comprehensively documents the nature of the return of post war fiction to Freudian perspectives. She argues that the crisis of Marxist orientation in literature following the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet Union in 1956 brought emphasis on Freudian solutions in literature. She also notes that earlier attempts and solutions were not adequate to describe the far more complex and much changed conflicts between life and art:

"[…] psychoanalysis was gradually rejuvenated in redemptive and individualistic mode" (Waugh 66).

Like John Fowles or Albert Camus, Philip Roth suggests that art has a greater potential to discuss and analyse the human psyche than psychoanalysis. John Fowles also voices his doubts regarding the unconditioned respect of his contemporaries for scientific approaches when in the second paragraph of the section dedicated to the discussion of the importance of art of *The Aristos* reaches a relevant conclusion.

> The specific value of art for man is that it is closer to reality than science; … Finally and most importantly it is the best, because richest, most complex and most easily comprehensible, medium of communication between human beings. (Fowles, 1981: 10:2)

Philip Roth's early books attracted a great deal of criticism, both favourable and unfavourable. The tone, mode of presentation and authorial attitude characteristic of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1968), *Our Gang* (1971), *The Breast* (1972) and *The Great American Novel* (1973) caused much debate, but as Isaac Dan (Isaac, 1954: 32) admits most of the attacks were addressed not to his art but to Roth ad hominem.

John Fowles' works nearly passed unnoticed: he was still working on the first variant of his masterpiece entitled *The Magus* (1966, 1977) when he wrote and published *The Collector* (1963), a book, which only received genuine critical attention following the publication of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969).

The heated debates and the lack of genuine interest are due to the fact that Philip Roth and John Fowles reformulate the established stereotypical rhetoric of fiction and insist on the necessity to address their interpretations of the sense of chaos generated by the new world-order in a fashion available to 'the many' instead of joining the fashionable currents of the period. The period is embarrassing enough as technological development, the growing influence of the mass media, affluence and unparalleled advances in the sciences coexist with traditional social structures and the tension between them produces startling situations.

John Fowles' and Philip Roth's novels attempt to bring together tradition and contemporary needs so as to maintain as much as possible of the "conscience that has been created and undone a hundred times this century alone." (Roth, 1975: 150) This 'conscience,' its deconstruction and its renewal occupy a central position in their works, as their characters understand the world around them to be hostile, alien and even 'outlandish' and yearn desperately to be free and 'at home', yet they lack the capacity to understand the worth of traditional human and aesthetic designs and the results are predictable. Philip Roth's and John Fowles' books do not dissolve the tension between the social and the individual expectations their characters act against although this does not

as a rule mean that the authors abandon the conventional interpretations of the existentialist dimension in their works.

John Fowles admits that *The Collector* is to a certain extent based on disguised existentialist premises (Fowles, 1969: 17). John Fowles's handling of the existentialist implications is obvious, as the aesthetic and moral elements of the novel and its formulae regarding the obvious vacuum between post-war interpretation of freedom and tradition can be understood on the basis of its, or rather the fictional character's, reinterpretation, or rather willed misinterpretation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

This is a frequently discussed dilemma of the period and James Gindin argues that the collapse of public labels led to an attitude common to all the existentialists who followed Kierkegaard: the doctrine that the subjectivity of all genuine perception can be expressed through numerous and astonishingly different points of view.

Philip Roth and John Fowles insist on the importance of the continuum of past, present, and future on individual and social perspectives simultaneously and very often they reemploy artistic heritage with the intention of highlighting the complex nature, the acutely contemporary and eternal quality of the conflicts presented in their books. The result is that Portnoy and Miranda sense (im)possible illusions of reconciliation between individual freedom and tradition, the result is a status John Fowles dubs an 'elsewhere condition.' (Fowles, 1974: 221). Alex and Miranda become victims of their constant ignorance and misinterpretation of the worth of traditional stereotypes: Alex fights incessantly against his family, attempts to cut his roots and loses the chance of becoming an interpretable male member of the community; Miranda's previous prejudices against traditional male stereotypes prevent her from establishing a liaison with G. P., and by the time she realises she was wrong it is far too late.

Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* is the perhaps the most famous, or infamous of his early works. In this novel the title character Alex Portnoy rebels against his family and the Jewish community, and develops a sense of a secret-self and an extremely fragile illusion of freedom. Throughout the book the problem of authority as opposed to the individual's right to make his own decisions regarding his life constitutes Alex's basic concern. His mother's traditionally acknowledged excessive authority feeds on matters relating to Jewish identity, tradition and history. Alex is convinced that he has the right to be a liberal, acutely contemporary American youth but he never confronts his mother or community openly. Genuine sources of possible conflict thus are avoided, or are rendered subservient to the ironic perspective generated by the protagonist's ignorance.

This results in the fact that the tension between the mother's obsessions and those of the son increases incessantly. Sophie Portnoy is continuously trying to extend her overprotective authority over Alex in the name of goodness and she reacts against all possible sources of danger she suspects might threaten her son, friends, food, women, lifestyle included. Naturally, the teenager's growing

awareness of alienation urges him to freely revise the definitions of this, for him, frustrating traditional morality, although he seems to lack a valid strategy.

Thus, Alex Portnoy's paradoxical identification with 'evil' seems inevitable so he becomes a bad son indeed and being bad offers him certain advantages. Furthermore, revisions and re-formulations of Sophie Portnoy's orders seem easy, while alienation only refers to Portnoy's status as a Jewish son, but when he has to assess the sense of his 'free' male identity the young man is at a loss because, although he does not want to enjoy the warmth and protection of the parental home he is not able to live his life as a young liberated man. Alex Portnoy concentrates too much on how to 'outfox' traditional models, which he actually does not understand, chooses self-pity instead of confrontation and identifies with the archetypal victim of maternal (ancestral) insistence on goodness.

The stereotype strengthens his mother's influence over him instead of diminishing it and Sophie Portnoy's authority over Alex distorts the son's image of the woman with the result that the women he meets are for him not the source of genuine male desire but the enemies who threaten to dominate him, tell him what to eat, whom to meet, how to live etc.. The result is a disaster. This image takes on the form of a 'desired nightmare,' which, for the son, through transfer of Sophie Portnoy's overprotective omnipotence suggests an uneasy status characterised by dependency rather than freedom. This is a distorted rationale and as a result the son denies responsibility for his continuous mutilation of tradition, of erotic desire and blames his environment.

This limited revision, the miming of a heterosexual erotic act, is yet another source of alienation from his parents, from his Jewish identity and status as male, consequently he interprets his masturbation as a triumph over his environment but his victory is self-defeating and short lived. He is yearning for gentile partners, ones who might differ from his mother, and the above formula suggests Portnoy's need to generate dilemmas anew rather than search for real solutions.

Sex is not a source of pleasure for him but an attempt to defeat the 'sources of danger' his mother was speaking about and love is out of the question. In the hotel room in Athens he is playing about with sexuality as he makes love to the Monkey in the wild manner described in the book not for pleasure but for the sake of revenge. Alex Portnoy attempts to escape his simultaneous obsession and frustration through different types of women and when he meets Naomi, who displays her female sexuality and desire, he is defeated. At this point Alex Portnoy's lack of comprehensive interpretation of teenage sexuality, filial rebellion and freedom allows for yet another trauma that brings about further disturbing questions, furthermore his sexuality vanishes during the *rendez-vous* with Naomi, and Alex is defeated. In spite of the disastrous consequences, his visit to Israel teaches him that disregarding tradition does not automatically result in freedom.

Thus, Alex Portnoy becomes a rebel who insists on guilt in his sexual innocence. The most interesting aspect at this point is that he does not actually

communicate with those around him, does not confront his mother or father, nor does he search for the interpretation of his emotions. Thus the deprecating irony of the story does not actually fall upon the mother or the tradition bound community. They remain untouched by the real problems the teenager is confronted with, anyway serving as examples of the community haunted by its sufferings and acutely contemporary difficulties imposed by assimilation.

The only exception in this respect is essential though and it derives smoothly from Alex Portnoy's obsessive manipulation of his standing and of the status of those around him. His complaints should not be interpreted simply as a young patient's confessions painfully formulated on the analyst's couch. This can be relatively easily demonstrated as Philip Roth intentionally contrasts Alex Portnoy's dominant role at the level of the narrative to his victim status clearly formulated at the level of the plot. That is, Alex Portnoy's discourse is the principal one in the novel and his discourse governs the development of the themes of rebellion and of his misinterpretations of traditional stereotypes while the therapist only listens to his complaints and is masterfully mislead by the young man.

This also means that the statuses and the discourses of his parents, of the women he meets and even that of Doctor Spielvogel remain subservient to his machinations and the teenager's highly manipulative discourse clearly reduces reality in the novel to one level among the many possible. His confessions are not really meant to provoke compassion, but result in the becoming a huge joke, and it is important to remember that Portnoy is at pains to avoid this level, or at least, this is what he declares: "Doctor Spielvogel, this is my life, my own life, and I am living it in the middle of a Jewish joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke – *only it ain't no joke!"* (*P.C.* 36–37)

The duality of the joke that isn't a joke, is a reflection of the duality evident in Alex Portnoy's sense of alienation: he is a young man yet he can't control his sexuality or status in the world, he is the prodigal son who keeps his obscene practices secret. This suggests that it is Alex Portnoy who is 'playing' with all the participants in the novel, yet he does not understand tradition as he avoids renegotiating it with those around him. Thus the emphasis falls on the interpretation of the conflicting elements moulding his personality. This leads to, or rather reveals the brilliant strategy of the novel. Conventionally the analyst sorts out the kind of problems the young man claims to suffer from but Alex Portnoy intentionally misleads and manipulates Doctor Spielvogel. The son is taken to the famous analyst because he has to be cured and the 'magus' has the power to reinstate sanity and traditional reactions to a desired status.

Although the psychoanalytic setting promises easy access to Alex Portnoy's blockages and his inadequate response to a series of life situations, the 'inner' monologue discloses new dilemmas instead of elucidating the prefabricated, stereotypical ones. Thus the failure of Spielvogel's 'scientific' approach, the doctor's inability to dominate and 'cure' his patient through stereotypes can be interpreted as the patient's defeat as 'victory' over yet another, this time, contemporary, stereotype. Spielvogel knows Freud and should be able to offer

him adequate therapy, but under the given circumstances it would be difficult to state the sources of Alex Portnoy's victory in traditional terms. The paradox is that Alex Portnoy wins his freedom to remain a disoriented rebel which is a questionable form of freedom. Alex Portnoy complains about the regressive quality of his parents' inaccurate Jewish reflexes yet he grows to understand that rebellion against all conventions can be self-defeating. He complains that authority over his identity as a Jew is always revised by other Jews' self-proclaimed authority over past and present and considers that the above situation limits his right to an articulate Jewish American identity and he wants to get rid of these stereotypes. He feels that his status is self-defeating and ahistoric and he is subject to unavoidable disintegration, since any attempt on his part to define his identity as a Jew and a man can only deepen his alienation. This explains why, paradoxically, he distorts the interpretation of desire and need. It is also important to remember that Alex Portnoy knows not of true erotic desire, since his main concern is 'avoidance and sublimation' of the Jewish jokes from whose grips he seeks to free himself:

> Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew! [Portnoy shrieks on the psychiatrist's couch] It is coming out of my ears already, the sage of the suffering Jews! ... I *happen also to be a human being*! (*P. C.* 76)

For Alex Portnoy the possibility to manipulate through 'confessions' is essential and the above statement is supported at the level of the structure of the novel as well, as Alex Portnoy's confession on the analyst's couch creates a narrative frame, which allows for yet another typical Rothian formula.

The agonising teenager, the victimising victim remains the characteristic and dominant narrative voice, since most of the book consists of his manipulated and manipulative confessions. Spielvogel, the analyst, is clearly manipulated by Portnoy and the patient quite often contradicts the analyst, refusing him the status he is supposed to hold: "So [said the doctor]. Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?" (*P.C.* 274)

In *Portnoy's Complaint* tradition is questioned as revolt is followed by free acts, which lead to deception that feeds 'manipulated' complaints in the form of the joke that is not a joke which generates some sort of 'imprisonment phobia'. Yet Alex Portnoy experiences something that is not real, factual imprisonment. A similar, yet emphatically different tension between freedom and imprisonment is one of the central themes in John Fowles's *The Collector.*

John Fowles's *The Collector* also discusses the importance of the relationship between tradition and individual freedom in extremely negative terms but the comic elements and irony characteristic of *Portnoy's Complaint* are missing. John Fowles states the existential dimensions he intends to discuss in the novel equivocally through Frederick Clegg, an exponent of the unprivileged and uneducated who is dominated by the power of mass dehumanisation, subculture or counter culture but is aware of the power of

money and its capacity to shape the material world. We are told very early in the book that he misinterprets the concept of tradition and that his freshly acquired financial wealth offers him the possibility to demonstrate his power over the young woman he kidnapped.

A conventional, comprehensive interpretation of the above situation could reveal certain solutions and John Fowles employs a traditional pattern when he creates the young art-student who is supposed to teach this monster some of the secrets of life thus enabling her to claim her right to be set free, but the above strategy fails to lead to conventional solutions. Yet, the stereotype is reformulated in the novel so as to reveal the disturbing effects of the emergence of an inarticulate post war generation. Frederick Clegg is an 'underground' character in human, social and aesthetic terms who has no ambitions, no career. Alex Portnoy at least wants to be the son of a Jewish family who can enjoy life in a way similar to most American young men, but Frederick Clegg is devoid of any genuine human desire, he does not want to be anybody's friend or relative. It is also clear that there is no exit from this world for Miranda, a budding feminist, for she does not exist in the moment the book starts.

The novel's concern with the fate of tradition, culture, art, life and freedom develops under the shadow of the realities of the post-war period, yet John Fowles does not formulate his critique of contemporary Britain directly. Alex Portnoy revolts against his mother, the family model of his parents or the religious and moral 'lessons' stemming from assimilation, and he creates his own demons by trying to ignore the humane aspects involved. Frederick Clegg has no interpretable human characteristics and his central ambition is to collect, classify, dehumanise, and destroy. John Fowles stresses the sub-negative status of his male character and central theme through an inverted analogy between Ferdinand, who wins Miranda's love in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Frederick Clegg. One of the most disturbing aspects of the novel is that the acts of the demented collector document the validity and not the vitality of the extinct 'narrative' centre's bitterly critical reactions.

Frederick Clegg is undoubtedly consistent with his status as he is a typical product of mass dehumanisation. He abuses the power bestowed on him by money, he mechanically juxtaposes the norms of collecting, and classifying insects, porno magazines, or photos onto the demented idea of collecting beautiful women. Alex Portnoy is out to seduce young women in an exasperated attempt to demonstrate his superior male identity, but fails. Frederick Clegg contradicts our expectations in this respect as he does not try to use Miranda Grey as a means of ascending the social or spiritual ladder as most of the characters of British fifties novels would do, and he does not actually want to use her as a sexual object either. This makes of him the equivalent of the mechanical monsters of contemporary horror films and a threatening emblem of post war inarticulate heroes.

John Fowles identifies the source of the contemporary (deficient) 'Calibans' of Frederick Clegg's kind, and of the novels of the kind we are reading, in the influence of the 'perverted' mass media of the time. The collector doesn't even

enjoy his position as a conventionally villainous character would do and his negative treatment of life and culture drive him to ignore and sometimes fear art. This results in an exasperating negative atmosphere, a world dominated by infinite regression, as Frederick Clegg is the dominant narrative voice, in three sections of the novel.

Most of the text is 'hollow' and the situation is exasperating because he doesn't learn anything from Miranda Grey's 'lectures' on freedom and energy stemming from creativity and the magic quality of artistic might.

In the novel, similarly to *Portnoy's Complaint*, the odd thing about this unnaturally immobile negative complacency is that it is kept secret. The solution could mean that this subhuman creature knows that his practices exceed the accepted social and moral norms of the exterior world, which he essentially approaches through the point of view of counter-culture, yet John Fowles is not explicit in this respect.

John Fowles avoids the discussion of the above question, and the only help in this respect comes from the unusual design of the novel, the distinctly different narrative modes of presentation and the style characteristic of Frederick Clegg's texts which are the first, third, fourth part of the novel and Miranda Gray's text which constitutes the second part of *The Collector*. The 'help,' which is formulated at the level of the structure of the novel, is a paradox. The first, third and fourth parts reflect the sub-villain's character and view of life. Maniacal insistence on detail, taking the colour out of the language employed, separating the real aesthetic and moral contents from the silent victims of demented selection and categorisation mania dominate these parts of the book and lend it an unbearably negative, anti-humanist atmosphere.

The above reductive principle supports the negative climax of the plot and, when the jailer 'rapes' Miranda Grey by way of photographing her naked body this negative climax becomes another dominant element of the first section of the novel:

> I got her garments off and at first she wouldn't do as I said but in the end she lay and stood like I ordered (I refused to take if she did not co-operate). So I got her pictures. I took her till I had no more bulbs left. (*C*. 110)

The girl's voice is not 'heard' in Frederick Clegg's sections as the jailer cannot and does not listen to her although she desperately voices her yearning for traditionally interpretable rights, for freedom and eventually tries to act out her tradition bound strategies. Miranda Grey, the 'guest' in Frederick Clegg's prison tries to offer her jailer models of behaviour characteristic of a more imaginative male, George Paston. Her endeavour is doomed from the start to failure because Frederick Clegg instinctively knows that any human aspect could destroy his stable 'domain.'

He is not interested in the knowledge of art or genuine love, let alone humanism. Miranda Grey is handicapped, as the model she experienced in the

world outside the cellar was based on physical and financial domination that could be avoided at times by way of argument. This was possible in a world which maintained at least some sense of its traditional stereotypes, but she has to realise that behind the bars of the new world art has no redemptive power when confronted with impoverished souls like her 'host':

> Everything to do with art embarrasses him (and I suppose fascinates him). It's all vaguely immoral. […] Living art, modern art shocks him. You can't talk about it with him because the word 'art' starts off a whole series of shocked, guilty ideas in him. (*C*. 210)

Miranda Grey employs strategies normally applicable to such situations, but she fails as Frederick Clegg is not an incarnation of Caliban, a blue beard, or a contemporary satyr. In the face of this 'inarticulate character' Miranda can only remember with nostalgia her mentor's respect for individual freedom and is ready to revise her feminist stereotypes. John Fowles juxtaposes on the above 'revelation' process his interpretation of 'darkness.' The imprisonment of the artist and the degradation of art to the status of hollow pornographic photography seem to be most relevant elements of the book.

John Fowles contrasts the two artist figures with the figure of Frederick Clegg but does not resolve the conflict between the two parties involved. This is possible because John Fowles reduces the conflict to the state of a condition and this strategy is visible at the level of the structure of the novel as *The Collector* is in fact a 'random' selection, which includes two clearly separated 'books,' in four parts, which describe the same events from entirely different perspectives.

The above strategy is possible in *The Collector* as the dominant narrative voice belongs to Clegg and although the conflict between the two protagonists is described in more or less traditional fashion, the two characters are isolated because there is no genuine communication between them. From an existential point of view and at the level of the narrative Frederick Clegg seems to have achieved the right to manipulate the story as his text begins and ends the novel.

Yet, similarly to Philip Roth, John Fowles carefully reformulates the above conventional sense of hierarchy as Miranda Grey's section explains the tragedy in moral, ethical, social, existential and aesthetic terms. At the same time the insane tyrant lacks human reactions, cannot understand the stereotypes involved, consequently does not care about them, and becomes a highly unreliable, detestable narrator who refuses interpretation and thus cannot be understood, analysed or influenced.

The result of this strategy is predictable and, although the only narrator still alive 'selected' and 'edited' Miranda Grey's thoughts and notes, Frederick Clegg does not 'master' the fictional material as he is not able to interpret what happened. Furthermore, as the human and aesthetic dimensions of the text exceed his intellectual possibilities Miranda Grey's diary is 'dead' matter for him, similar to the butterflies he collected, and this is why he does not bother to

exclude them. Miranda's agonies, exasperated attempts to interpret her jailer on the basis of models of male behaviour and her tragic end can be interpreted in human terms, while Frederick Clegg's deeds and imprisonment cannot.

The two antagonistic points of view also conflict at the level of the narrative, that is, Frederick Clegg's 'perverse' narrative is the frame and it dominates the story, as he is the survivor of the tragedy. Yet, the attempt to bring tradition, corrections of contemporary and old stereotypes and individual freedom together, the central theme of the novel, is formulated in more or less conventional ways through Miranda Grey's diary, which constitutes section two of the novel.

It is also important to note that the two dominant narratives are isolated versions of both the captivity of the collector and of the art-student. Miranda is dead in the narrative present, but Clegg continues to exist in the 'horror cave' and thus the novel warns us that the 'show' is going on. The conclusions reached at this point are exasperating there are some attenuating, conciliatory authorial gestures which can help. Indeed, Miranda Grey's diary expresses the 'aborted' possibilities of art to direct the events of a strictly materialistic world. George Paston, similarly to Frederick Clegg, survives the tragic events and this could mean that art, though alien and remote to the horror cave, remains a dimension available for further interpretations.

The similarity between the two novels discussed is obvious: Philip Roth announces that the psychoanalysis is about to begin at the end of *Portnoy's Complaint* and John Fowles ends *The Collector* with the description of Frederick Clegg's preparations to kidnap another woman and thus both writers suggest that their stories, similarly to the world they live in, have been manipulated.

Thus John Fowles and Philip Roth render the world of their books 'more real' than the world that is (Fowles, 1969: 80-83), but to achieve this goal they have to create fiction anew, or rather revitalise traditional modes of expression employed by the novel. *Portnoy's Complaint* marks a serious departure from the conventional Freudian based novel, as Hermione Lee observes when discussing the psychoanalyst's function in Philip Roth's novels: "Roth's scenes of analysis often take the form of comic routines, two-handers between the funny man, and his stooge (roles that may alternate between patient and analyst)" (Lee, 1982: 76). She also states that the treatments Philip Roth's analysts provide are ineffective and that analysis draws our attention to dislocation from the Flaubertian 'le vrai,' which otherwise could be interpreted as constituting an extremely important element of the American novelist's fiction:

> Part of the originality of *Portnoy's Complaint* was in the use of the analysand's monologue as a literary stratagem where Portnoy's confession is highly stylised and expresses a fixed sense of himself. […] After *Portnoy*, analysis becomes a central, active ingredient in the comical blockages of Tarnopol and Kepesh. (Lee 76)

Actually Portnoy is quite honest about this situation, but of course nobody listens to him: "'With a life like mine, Doctor, who needs dreams?" (*P.C.* 186) Alex Portnoy refuses to accept a fake interpretation of the Oedipal Complex and much of the vulgar dimension or discourse of the novel results from his imagination, yet importantly he alludes to great works of art which discuss the agonies of life at a noble level: "Oedipus Rex is a famous tragedy, schmuck, not another joke!" (*P.C.* 301)

Alex Portnoy's disoriented rebellion determines the negative or substandard quality of the style and the language of the book, it subverts Freudian terminology and reduces it to the status of an obscene demagogy. Alex Portnoy's confession on the analyst's couch creates a narrative frame, which allows for yet another oft-used Rothian formula as the protagonist's deception stems from the fact that the exterior world is 'deadly earnest' and that the 'magus' figure is incompetent and makes exasperated attempts to impose his interpretation of the situation upon the protagonist, who knows that life, however terrible it might be, belongs to him: "[Life is]'Locked up in me!" (*P. C.* 280)

Philip Roth stresses the idea that satire is an adequate mode to describe American reality, which he finds sickening (Lelchuk, 1992: 43) and describes acute contemporary problems in the spirit of the great satires of world literature in *Our Gang*. Some of his arguments regarding the function of the comic elements and debased rhetoric and style can be employed to support my interpretation both of *Portnoy's Complaint* and of *The Collector*.

Philip Roth argues that the satiric and comic elements are entertaining and also disturb the reader because he discovers that he enjoyed a fantasy that he knows in reality to be terrible. (Lelchuk 54) Similarly, he asserts that books written in 'bad taste', as is defined by the community, aim to dislocate the reader in ways he may be unwilling or unaccustomed to think (Lelchuk 50). Most certainly John Fowles's *The Collector* introduces its readers to a world which no normal human being would like to inhabit. John Fowles employs a simulacrum of dual narrative, and constantly reinforces the contrast between the two characters, the two 'worlds' and the two fictional modes of presentation, which determine the complexity of the novel.

This technique serves to deepen the reader's understanding of the difference between the two modes of existence. Frederick Clegg's maniacal obsession with mechanisation empties his world of any comprehensive spiritual aspects. The material world thus presented is exasperating and it remains unchanged with the result that Miranda's death documents the impossibility to change reality on the basis of aesthetic re-interpretations. That the artist's memories survive her material destruction is clearly documented in the novel, and one is tempted to state that William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and George Paston's ideas on the power of art dismiss the validity of the conclusion that contemporary Britain is dominated by hollow monsters.

In *The Collector*, similarly to *Portnoy's Complaint*, the mode of presentation is essentially realistic and the personal involvement of the two characters is granted through first person narration. It is the jailer who describes

the underworld in detail. The point of view of the only survivor of the tragedy is only formally the dominant one and undoubtedly, it determines the formal inconsistency of Miranda's point of view. In spite of this situation, Miranda's text has greater influence because she voices human reactions to the inhumane violence on the basis of 'art experiences.' It is also important to remember that Miranda's narrative abounds in references to G. P., to painting, to the communicative and aesthetic function of language and even of art criticism.

The two artist figures employ adequate style and language to support the specific character of the problems discussed in relation to the tragic heroine's search for revisions of the situation and their texts are in striking contrast to that of Frederick Clegg's. Just like in a good old realist novel the quality of the style and language employed in the two narratives of *The Collector* are determined by the speakers' education and intentions. Thus the style of Frederick Clegg's section is monotonous, primitive and self-defeating. The minute descriptions of the hollow protagonist's subterranean mania for details results in accurate texts, yet it cannot even formulate his attempt to compensate for the human and aesthetic dimension by way of idolising mechanical 'solutions.'

The style of his text becomes heavy with details; it is trapped in the dead matter for which it expresses admiration and actually it can be interpreted as the author's 'workshop,' or fictional critique of the traditional realist narrative mode, which idolises a once adequate artistic form of expression and which, John Fowles seems to suggest, can be only employed in a creative way, much in the fashion suggested by the modernists. Miranda Grey's narrative on the other hand is articulate, dynamic and argumentative. What is more her section ignores the formal requirements of the novel. Her interpretation of the dialogues between her and Frederick Clegg are also excellent examples in this respect. In fact the nature of the fictional situation determines her open critique of the way in which Frederick Clegg employs language or interprets art:

> 'Do you know anything about art?'…Nothing you'd call knowledge. 'I knew you didn't. You wouldn't imprison an innocent person if you did.' I don't see the connection. … I'm an entomologist. I collect butterflies. 'Of course. … Now you've collected me.' (*C.* 41)

When Miranda Grey accuses Frederick Clegg of murdering his own mother tongue, of killing art she calls our attention to the quality of the style and language used in the jailer's narrative by John Fowles: "You know how the rain takes the colour out of everything? That's what you do to the English language. You blur it every time you open your mouth" (*C.* 69).

Also John Fowles repeatedly undermines the conventional structure of the plot in *The Collector*. First, the plot is shaped by a perverted criminal's selection of the material; second, the selection includes the memories of a dead protagonist, whose participation in the shaping of the actions presented is impossible; third, the meanings of both the existential and the aesthetic

interpretations of the conflict are provided by two inarticulate narrative 'filters' and finally, the fact that Miranda's attempts to analyse the psyche of Clegg demonstrate that it is impossible interpret any individual dominated by technological-Darwinism by way of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, Frederick Clegg is a subhuman who dwells in the 'horror cave,' he is not searching for 'articulate' meanings, and George Paston is only present as a dead art-student's recollection of a mentor figure. 'Horror cave' is not a bombastic denomination for the cellar as Hades or Hell would be inappropriate because they have meanings easily identifiable in humanist terms.

The dual narrative employed by John Fowles does not diminish the sense of 'claustrophobia' supported by the actual plot or the individual 'life stories' of the respective characters, but rather adds to it. The structure also suggests the need for new solutions that could help the author to select, rearrange and artistically reinterpret any seemingly 'stable' definition, interpretation, representation and even method or means of expressing aspects of contemporary or previous reflections on both art and life. The presence of the imprisoned girl becomes a possible, yet extinct centre of consciousness in the pseudo-consciousness of the jailer and this solution significantly supports the logic of Frederick Clegg's imprisonment in a form of expression, which is lifeless. It is important to remember that the carefully separated material and aesthetic dimensions remain essentially isolated and contrasted throughout the novel.

Frederick Clegg's narrative imposes the principles that determine the selection of Miranda Grey's narratives with the intentions of reducing her voice to the status of mere texts. Yet, Miranda Grey's diary stands for the voice of the potential artist and allusions to literature, 'art-experience' and writing, support her in her attempt to maintain her sanity in an insane situation. George Paston's memory is imprisoned in Frederick Clegg's memory of his captive's memory of her former mentor, but George Paston survives and will continue his existence outside the 'horror cave.' Naturally this is no happy ending.

John Fowles is convinced that literary tradition should be handled as a kind of 'experience,' yet in the context of the novel art cannot overwrite reality. The diary form (Salami 57) and the epistolary (Palmer 15) elements on the other hand demonstrate John Fowles' determination to avoid any suspicion that might suggest that literary or artistic tradition should be banned from the world of the post-war novel. On the basis of the above I consider that both *Portnoy's Complaint* and *The Collector* formulate their writers' creative critique of the kind of novel Philip Roth and John Fowles offer their readers.

Consequently, both authors employ specific technical solutions and occasionally reflect on 'the process of retooling.' Dual or dislocated narrative, an emphatically stated fictional schizophrenia of the novels, corrections of the story line and the modes of expression, literary allusions and intertexts and the two novelists' determination to cut conventional 'roots' help both novelists write into their fiction the constructive critique of the type of fiction in which their respective books are written.

These books are also exciting examples of the two author's search for adequate modes of artistic interpretation of the existential dilemmas involved. The result is a relatively new type of novel, which is simultaneously critical of itself and of the models it actually employs and criticizes. Albert Camus' logic might support the above thesis in that by portraying their fictional characters' distress, John Fowles and Philip Roth intend to offer a more 'real' interpretation of twentieth century reality than the one that can be directly, and comprehensively, experienced by the individual. For this reason they 'make' anew the traditional modes of expression and the different elements of fiction in self-reflexive books which can serve their ambitions.

Also, Albert Camus in an essay written in 1954 (Camus 389–394) starts from the premise that art has always reflected on the human condition and the great novelists had the ambition to offer a more real interpretation of reality than the reality that is. Albert Camus also brings together the reflective and the self-reflexive mode in literature, which is compatible with the two writers' ambitions. In the same essay Camus states that artists have to be self-reflexive as well, because if they accept indiscriminately the dictates of conventions their art lacks vigour and succumbs to oblivion. This duality leads to an ultra-liberal approach which was fast emerging under the generic name of the postmodern. The world seemed to fall into a willed or unwilled amnesia between 1956 and 1968 and consequently comprehensive dialogue among the different material and spiritual centres of power seemed to be out of the question. John Fowles' David Williams complains about the above state and states that "perhaps it was happening in the other arts as well" (Fowles, 1974: 110).

The artists of the period had to be content with anachronistic fragments of countless worldviews and they had no other choice than accept the anarchy generated by the new world order and tried to reformulate both old, established and new definitions of tradition and stereotypes. Re-forgetting and re-imagining are going to be narrative solutions employed by John Fowles and Philip Roth respectively for the reasons I hopefully managed to chart in the present paper.

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