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Poetry: Kansas

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in the same Dorsetshire countryside, bears a striking resemblance to his earlier work in structure and theme.

Simply, thus unfairly, stated, Fowles, like many of his predecessors in the tradition of the English novel, places his central character in a mysterious, sometimes personally threatening situation, moves him through a series of self-revealing crises which force him to assess himself and make crucial self-defining choices, and then demands that he act on his decisions. Usually, he incorporates an open scene in nature for critical events, a literal green world, which becomes a recurrent device in his novels, one that identifies Fowles with the ancient pastoral tradition. (Serious critics beware; Fowles holds little regard for academics; "classics-stuffed Strasbourg geese," he once called them). Thematically, the course of events usually brings the main character to understand that the only true freedom for the individual is the freedom he shapes by his own choices, that his identity is not to be bestowed by society or by tradition but by his own freely chosen acts. For Fowles, the individual must pass from self-delusion through self-analysis to choice. Fowles' obsession with this motif manifests itself in what in *The Magus* he calls "god games" in which one character manipulates situations through disguise, deceit, or, sometimes, truth, to force the main character to choose, in effect, to create himself.

Nicholas Urfe of *The Magus* (whichever ending is read), Charles of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (again, regardless of ending) and Daniel Martin of that novel instantly come to mind as examples. Fowles' existential humanism is clear, firmly stated at the end of Daniel Martin. Reflecting on the late Rembrandt self-portrait, Daniel Martin tellingly muses: "It is not finally a matter of skill, of knowledge, of intellect; of good luck or bad; but of choosing and learning to feel...No true compassion without will; no true will without compassion." Fowles' philosophic position extends to include an aesthetic position which not only postulates the artist as shaper, as manipulator controlling his own god games but also emphasizes the artist as observer of his own process of creation, as observer of his own work. The emphatic position of the self-regarding self-portrait of Rembrandt at the end of *Daniel Martin* acts as a perfect symbol of Fowles' notion of the artist as artist. In the novels, Fowles' use of double time -- historic past and narrative present, of art observed, serves this purpose as does his use of the intrusive author. A *Maggot* follows the same structural and thematic course.

Fowles uses the term "maggot" in its eighteenth-century meaning, which he ex-

plains in his "Prologue" to mean "a whim or quirk...an obsession with a theme." The maggot of his novel, the seed from which the story springs, is a fleeting, imaginary picture of a "small group of travellers, faceless, without apparent motive...in a deserted landscape..." From this modest scene Fowles gives his faceless group a local habitation and a name, and fashions an intriguing novel of adventure, mystery, suicide, suspected murder, deceit, sex and love, and, importantly, faith. Woven into the fabric of his material are consistent patterns of play-acting and stage directing, of known lying and suspected falsehood.

Fowles brilliantly invokes the spirit and flavor of eighteenth-century England (much as he did for the nineteenth century in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) by interlacing copies of pages from the *Gentleman's Quarterly* at strategic points in the narrative, by incorporating political and sociological commentaries by the intrusive authorial voice (when were undergarments adopted by eighteenth-century gentlewomen; what was the attitude of the clergy toward change and property), by re-creating the pompous reports of the officious lawyer, and by recapturing the eighteenth-century idiom in the dogged interrogations of the witnesses.

The opening narrative, striking in its control of detail and rhythm, carries the riders, five men and one woman, from London, through Salisbury, by Stonehenge, to Dorset on a mission whose true purpose is known only to one member of the group; the others, however, believe they do know. The party is comprised of his Lordship, the main figure of the party, second, his deaf/dumb servant who thinks he knows but is unable to indicate in words his understanding, then an actor, chosen for both his ability and his diplomacy, a serving man who lives by day to day labor, and, finally, a London whore, drafted for purposes known only to the Lord. After a stay at an inn the party travels to a deserted but symbolically described remote place in the wilds of Dorsetshire where an incident of significant magnitude occurs. The incident is followed by the disappearance of the Lord and the apparent suicide of his deaf/dumb valet. The rest of the novel is comprised mainly of the legal interrogation by Henry Ayscough, a lawyer, of members of the party (and others), to determine the whereabouts of the missing Lord, the cause of the apparent suicide, the purpose of the journey to the wild place, and, in general, what actually happened.

The center of the interrogations pits the ex-whore, repentant and renewed-in-Christ Rebecca Lee (the mother of Anne Lee, founder of Shakerism) against Henry

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Kansas lies down
because the rest of the country
won't. It rolls on one side
then the other,
verdant or brown. Here
the earth speaks only
to the earth. When people came
they were told to rest
or else continue on.

Because Kansas knows the value
of sleep, night hangs
just above the waist,
and in daytime the sky
rests on any hand
held up to it.

Fran Quinn

Ayscough, lawyer, rationalist, sceptic, protector of vested property interests and guardian of the *status quo*. In such a confrontation, of course, no middle ground can be reached. Rebecca has accepted Christ and faith; Ayscough believes in empirical evidence and the rule of property.

On the surface, the interrogations form the center of the novel. They seem designed to be the vehicle for the discovery of truth and in a way they are. We want to know the true identity of the members of the little band of travellers; we want to know their mission; and, especially, we want to know what happened to the Lord, Rebecca, and the deaf/mute in the cavern which is the core of the novel. Fowles presents varying versions of the incident in the interrogations, ranging from satanic copulation to divine revelation. One version comes from Jones, the servingman, who reports the incident as seen from his hidden vantage point outside the cavern and embellished by what he tells us Rebecca told him. Two additional versions come from Rebecca herself, one of which she insists is deliberately distorted, the other she quietly protests as the truth. Finally, objective investigators inspect the scene, within and without the cavern, and report their find-