

The Magus Study Guide

The Magus by John Fowles

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Plot Summary

This thematically complex novel is equal parts psychological study and mystery thriller, using the narrative structure of the latter as a framework for the former. It tells the story of a self-centered young Briton, Nicholas Urfe, who, over the course of a magical summer in Greece, discovers sometimes frightening truths about himself and about the nature of life. Vivid imagery, dense language, and intriguingly layered characterizations thread, collide and intertwine throughout the narrative until the reader, like Nicholas, is unsure of what's true and what's fabricated by the characters. Only on the novel's very last page are protagonist and reader alike assured that the carefully woven mystery is over ... and the free-flowing mystery of life is now ready to begin.

The novel begins with Nicholas in England, where he embarks on what he believes will be one of his customary manipulative and dismissive affairs with women. The object of his "affections" this time is the vulnerable, sexually eager, and emotionally manipulative Alison, equal parts victim and user herself. As their affair develops, Nicholas also pursues an employment opportunity at a school in Greece, finding himself unexpectedly and inexplicably drawn to both the job and the country. Once he gets the job, he contacts his predecessor, who issues mysterious warnings about life on the island, but refuses to elaborate. As Nicholas prepares to go to the island, intrigued and excited, he engineers what he believes will be a clean break with Alison, but which she experiences as extremely painful.

Nicholas arrives in Greece, immediately falls in love with the landscape and in hate with the school and its students. One day while exploring the island (Phraxos) upon which the school is built, he discovers a mysterious villa and signs of human, particularly feminine, habitation. After investigations of the villa and its inhabitants prove inconclusive, he returns to the villa (Bourani) to continue his explorations, where he unexpectedly finds himself invited inside by the tenant, the intriguing, enigmatic Maurice Conchis.

Over the course of several visits, Conchis draws Nicholas into an increasingly, and for Nicholas troublingly, complex web of half truths, dramatic histories, romance, and tantalizing sexuality. Several mysterious events involve the appearance of a beautiful young woman named Lily, with whom Nicholas falls instantly, and deeply, in love. At first, Lily rebuffs his advances but as more and more layers of Conchis' half-truths come into play, she becomes more and more flirtatious, eventually confessing that she is not what she seems, that Conchis is playing games with Nicholas and that she is prepared to break Conchis' manipulative rules in order to be with him.

As Conchis tells Nicholas the dramatic story of his life, and as Nicholas falls more deeply in love with the inscrutable Lily, events at Conchis' home (Bourani) take increasingly bizarre turns, which finally result in Nicholas' being kidnapped, confronted by a exotically masked and costumed tribunal and told that he has been the subject of a complex psychological experiment. Conchis and Lily, as well as others Nicholas has encountered, turn out to have all played key parts in the experiment, and at its



conclusion tempt Nicholas with the option of taking his revenge on them by punishing "Lily," the symbolic focus of his anger. Nicholas realizes that this is, in fact, the point of the experiment - to see whether he can transcend his feelings of anger and his desire for vengeance. He refuses to punish Lily and is then abandoned to find his way back to England.

Back in London, Nicholas attempts to track down both Alison and Conchis' allies, having little initial success in both but eventually discovering at least a degree of the truth. Eventually he's led into a reunion with Alison, who turns out to have been involved in Conchis' games and who, at first, refuses to get involved again with Nicholas. But as the result of everything that's happened to him, Nicholas has realized that it's time to live a life of personal integrity and attempts to force Alison to do the same. The novel concludes on the ambivalent note of Nicholas striding firmly into his future, unsure of whether Alison will join him on the way.



Part 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Part 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 Summary

This thematically complex novel is equal parts psychological study and mystery thriller, using the narrative structure of the latter as a framework for the former. It tells the story of a self-centered young Briton, Nicholas Urfe, who over the course of a magical summer in Greece discovers at times frightening truths about himself and about the nature of life. Vivid imagery, dense language, and intriguingly-layered characterizations thread and collide and intertwine throughout the narrative until the reader, like Nicholas, is unsure of what's true and what's fabricated by the characters. Only on the novel's very last page are protagonist and reader alike assured that the carefully-woven mystery is over ... and the free-flowing mystery of life is now ready to begin.

These first chapters introduce the novel's protagonist, Nicholas Urfe - self-involved child of uninvolved parents, user of women, disinterested teacher, and self-important amateur poet. As he searches for a job, he develops a relationship with the sexually eager, but emotionally immature, Alison. As the relationship intensifies, Nicholas realizes he's both using Alison and lying to her, but also realizes he doesn't know any other way to behave.

At the same time, Nicholas searches for a job, finding nothing that truly intrigues him until he learns of a job at a private boy's school, the Lord Byron, on an island in Greece. He describes in narration how the idea of being in Greece takes a powerful, almost obsessive hold over him, a hold amplified by mysterious comments made by his predecessor in the position, a stiffly-mannered soldier named Miftord, whom Nicholas meets before he's due to leave. Mitford describes life on the island as essentially dull, but then speaks mysteriously of one man who isn't so dull, hinting that he (the man) collaborated with the Nazis in World War II. Mitford concludes their conversation by telling Nicholas to be wary of "the waiting room." Efforts by Nicholas to gain more information from him are met with silence, and the two men soon part.

Alison, meanwhile, has begun to train as an airline stewardess and is making plans to visit Greece the first chance she gets. Nicholas realizes that when he goes to Greece he wants to make as complete a break from his old life as possible and therefore manipulates the situation so that he and Alison break up. As she walks away from him and their life together, Nicholas feels the unexpected desire to sing.

Part 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

Analysis of this book must be discussed in three contexts. The first is as a piece of writing - its style of language and development of characterization. Analysis on this level must consider the degree to which these elements are employed to bring the reader into Nicholas Urfe's journey of transformation. The second context is as a narrative of that



journey, the way its events (as well as the characters' actions, thoughts, and reactions) are structured and entwined to lead Nicholas deeper into external crisis and internal realizations. Analysis on this level must examine the way these elements, including foreshadowing, build upon one another to create an overall narrative and thematic point. The third context takes into consideration the revelation at the novel's conclusion that almost everything Nicholas experiences is carefully engineered and manipulated by other characters. The question at the heart of this context relates to just how much of this manipulation Nicholas is/becomes aware of, how much of what he experiences is based on something genuine, and how much of what he comes to understand about the second context can and/or should be accepted and/or questioned as the result of the third.

Within all three of these contexts, this first section functions almost entirely as exposition, laying the groundwork for what is to follow. As a piece of writing, this section defines Nicholas' identity at the beginning of his journey - selfish, overly and indulgently intellectual, lazy, and arrogant. Within this context, the significance of the name of the school must be considered. "Lord Byron" was a real person, one of the most famous of the romantic poets. His passionate, uninhibited verse was considered scandalous in its time, but was nevertheless imitated by several subsequent poets. The use of Byron's name for the school where Nicholas teaches is evocative of the same sort of passion, lack of inhibition and sensuality that Nicholas learns at what might be described as the school of Bourani, at the hands of Conchis and his other "teachers."

As to the theme of Nicholas' transformation, this first section serves to define him at the beginning of this journey. Specifically, the incidents of this section foreshadow a pattern of attitude and behavior that Nicholas attempts to follow in all his subsequent relationships with women. Later in the novel, once he's undergone his journey of transformation, Nicholas recalls his actions here, realizes how wrong they were for both him and for Alison and makes changes in the way he relates to her and to himself. This aspect of the narrative dramatizes one of its central themes, the relationship between men and women. Finally, this section also includes a significant piece of foreshadowing. This is Mitford's reference to "the waiting room," which turns out to be the home of Conchis, the magus of the book's title, and the setting for many of the events leading to Nicholas' transformation.

As far as how much of Nicholas' experiences are manipulated, there are two points to be considered. The first is that, as revealed later in the novel, Conchis is one of those responsible for hiring Nicholas. The second is that, as narration also eventually reveals, there has been a succession of young male teachers in the position Nicholas takes, teachers who (the novel implies) are put through similar experiences to Nicholas. Perhaps the position at the university exists to provide fodder (victims?) for Conchis and his games, which, in turn, suggests that the manipulation Nicholas experiences later in the novel actually begins in the narrative's earliest stages. An important question to be considered is whether Nicholas is hired because of the person he is. How much research do those hiring him do to determine whether he would be an appropriate, appealing candidate for Conchis' games? Because of the depth of manipulation

revealed later, it becomes all too possible to imagine that everything about Nicholas, his relationships and his attitudes, was taken into account prior to his being hired.



Part 1, Chapters 7, 8 and 9

Part 1, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Summary

Nicholas arrives in Greece and immediately finds himself captivated by the landscape, the light, and the atmosphere. As a result, his interest in continuing the relationship with Alison diminishes even more, with his letters to her eventually ending, and her letters to him indicating that she's planning to return to a former boyfriend. As the result of getting this information, Nicholas realizes he actually wants to hurt Alison.

Meanwhile, Nicholas is becoming increasingly disillusioned by his experiences with both the boys at the school and his fellow schoolmasters, all of whom he feels are dull and not really worth his time or interest. The only person who comes close to being a friend is the other English-speaking teacher, Demetriades, who seems to spend all his free time drinking and visiting brothels. At one point Nicholas accompanies him, but contracts what he believes to be syphilis. He pays what he considers exorbitant amounts of money to be cured and resolves to end his preoccupation with sex, filling his time instead with writing poetry. In a moment of dismaying, blinding insight, however, he realizes he's a very bad poet and that he's been dreaming false, dangerous dreams his entire life. He makes plans to commit suicide, but at the moment he is about to fire a borrowed gun into his head, he hears a young girl singing a wild, natural song and realizes he has no right to kill himself (see "Quotes", p. 58). He instead fires the gun into the air and returns it to the gatekeeper, saying it missed its target. He returns to his life at the school, determined to rebuild his physical and emotional health but on some interior level he is still convinced that the syphilis will return and destroy him, physically and spiritually. But then, he says, "the mysteries began."

Part 1, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Analysis

The focus in this section is almost entirely on the character of Nicholas. What's particularly noteworthy here is that both action and language create the sense that there is some kind of longing, an emptiness or ache beneath his glib intellectualism and superficial emotionality. This sense is evoked through the unexplained eagerness with which he embraces Greece and also by his despair, unexpected by both him and the reader, when he realizes he's not the poet he thinks he is. As far as the development in his character, this section presents him as ready on an even deeper level for the transformations to come. Not only does he need to know more about his relationships with the rest of the world, but it becomes clear that he also needs to know more about his relationship with himself. In other words, he's more ready than he knows for the increased awareness Conchis and his allies have to offer. Meanwhile, the principal piece of foreshadowing in this section is the reference to the mysterious song of the young woman, who the novel never identifies, but whose seductive, wild song foreshadows the equally seductive wildness of all the women with whom Nicholas becomes involved - Lily/Julie, Mrs. de Seitas, and even Alison.

Nothing happens in this section that is even tangentially linked to Conchis. It's important to note here, however, that some of the events here become used by Conchis, once he's made aware of them by Nicholas. Principal among these is Nicholas' experience of syphilis, the true nature of which is eventually revealed by Conchis as an illustration of just how naive Nicholas really is.



Part 2, Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14

Part 2, Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 Summary

On a hike to his favorite, most isolated place on the island, Nicholas discovers that one of its few villas, apparently owned by a wealthy Athenian, has smoke coming from its chimney. He reacts with a degree of anger, feeling that his almost-sacred solitude has been broken. Later in the day, he explores the land around the villa and discovers mysterious signs of feminine habitation. He also comes upon a sign that says, in French, "the waiting room." He realizes this is the place Mitford warned him about, assumes the villa belongs to the collaborationist with whom Mitford had argued (see Chapter 5), and debates whether to visit the villa. He finally decides to return to the school instead and, over the next few days, tries to find out more about the inhabitants of the villa by asking questions of Demetriades, other teachers at the school and some local villagers. He discovers that the villa is owned by a recluse named Conchis, who had not been a Nazi collaborator but had accidentally caused the deaths of several villagers during the time of the Nazi occupation. The teachers all claim that neither Mitford nor his predecessor, Leverrier, had ever visited Conchis, but Nicholas discovers, seemingly by accident, that Leverrier had, in fact, visited him. Nicholas resolves to find a way to do so himself. Meanwhile he takes the time to write a brief, superficial letter to Alison, in "a kind of ashamed hope" and feeling that his past is closer to him in the present than he might otherwise like (see "Quotes", p. 72).

The following day, Nicholas attempts to distract himself with a visit to the beach and with masturbatory dreams about Alison, but eventually finds himself unable to resist the lure of the villa. As he's circling it and looking at the patio, Conchis appears and invites him into the garden. The two men drink tea brought by a silent, elderly, female servant (Maria), and speak very little - but as part of their minimal conversation, Conchis refers to himself as Prospero (a central character in William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*). He later takes Nicholas on a tour of his garden, where Nicholas is surprised to encounter a small, but terrifying, sculpture that Conchis describes as a priapus - a representation of an ancient fertility god. As they continue their exploration, Nicholas attempts to get Conchis to talk about himself, but Conchis insists that Nicholas ask no questions. Conchis does volunteer a few pieces of information - that he was watching Nicholas that day at the beach, and that he was born and spent a great deal of time in England but that his mother was Greek. He also says that the villagers' stories of what happened in the war aren't necessarily true, that he knows Leverrier wasn't happy either on the island or at the school, and that Nicholas has been chosen for some purpose. He then invites Nicholas to visit the following weekend and stay for two nights, insisting that Nicholas tell no one they've met. They say their farewells, with Nicholas contemplating his reactions to and feelings about Conchis (see "Quotes", p. 84). As he leaves, he discovers a woman's glove on the beach and wonders to whom it could belong. He hypothesizes that Conchis is concealing a daughter, wife, or mistress, who may or may not be mentally stable. He also wonders whether Conchis is a transvestite, a possibility which Nicholas thinks might explain Mitford's warning.



As the days pass and as Nicholas becomes more bored with the lessons he's teaching, he ponders the mysteries surrounding Conchis and the villa. As the week between visits passes, however, the intensity of his curiosity wanes, to the point that it feels to him like little more than a passing interest.

Part 2, Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 Analysis

This section marks the point at which the novel, on both the first and second contextual levels of analysis, takes on additional qualities of a traditional mystery narrative. This genre focuses on unexpected events and circumstances which form layers of information and/or secrecy that build upon each other to create a sense of intrigue in both the central character and the reader, eventually leading to the central character understanding his heretofore unknown inner self. This process results in both character and reader being drawn into a deepening, increasingly-visceral determination to know and understand what's going on. In the case of *The Magus*, application of this narrative technique manifested initially in the book's first section with Mitford's enigmatic reference to "the waiting room," and develops further throughout the rest of the novel as more levels of what remains unexplained are either applied by Conchis or uncovered by Nicholas.

Several key elements contribute to a sense of mystery. Among the most important is the way that Conchis tends to speak in riddles, particularly when Nicholas questions him. Another lies in Nicholas' own character as someone who seems to want control - over his women (witness his treatment of Alison) and, perhaps most importantly, over his perspective. He is determined to understand and react to the world in a certain, very intellectual, distant way. Anything he doesn't understand, he attempts to force understanding, either by forcing those he doesn't understand to explain themselves or by forcing circumstances into his own preconceived beliefs. This aspect to his character is crucially important in defining the action - his ego, his self-certainty, and his desire to control is so important to him that he lets himself get drawn more and more deeply into Conchis' mysteries - he can't let go until everything is understood on his terms. Ironically, of course, this very aspect of his personality is what Conchis and his allies are determined to break down in him. In other words, the central conflict in this novel, like good conflict in all good narratives, is grounded in the diametrically opposed needs of its characters.

Important foreshadowing in this section include the references to Leverrier, which foreshadow the appearance of this character later in the action, and the hints of feminine presence, which foreshadow the appearance of Lily in the following section. Also, two important symbols appear in this section. The first can be found in the reference to the Shakespearean character of Prospero, who, like Conchis, is a magus, (a teacher who possesses apparently magical abilities and wisdom) and a powerful, sometimes insensitive manipulator, of people and events. The second key symbol in this section is the priapus statue, which with its overt and almost grotesque sexuality, both symbolizes and foreshadows manifestations of similar sexuality later in the novel.

This section is where Conchis' manipulations begin in earnest. Everything Conchis says and does from this point on can be considered to be at least partly a deliberate attempt to break down Nicholas' resistances and preconceptions. It's possible, in fact, that incidents such as Nicholas finding the glove is part of the plan.



Part 2, Chapters 15, 16 and 17

Part 2, Chapters 15, 16 and 17 Summary

Shortly after his arrival for his weekend visit, Nicholas is taken on an extensive tour of Conchis' home. He is astonished to discover several original, and potentially very valuable, works of art, including a framed photograph of an Edwardian girl, who Conchis says was his fiancée. Conversation between the two men is at times easy and at times difficult, particularly when Conchis asks Nicholas whether he has any women in his life. Nicholas, reluctant to speak or think about Alison, asks Conchis whether he would agree to ask no questions (in the same way Conchis asked Nicholas to ask no questions). Conchis agrees, and the two men part for a while. In narration, Nicholas comments that at that moment he felt a sensation that he can't describe - other than to say it was new.

In the couple of hours before dinner, Nicholas passes the time by exploring his bedroom, which is sparsely furnished and has a very small library of books, one of which is an obsessive, pictorial documentation of the female breast. He searches the nearby bathroom for signs of some kind of femininity, as a clue to the identity of the owner of the glove, but finds nothing. He lies down and reflects upon Conchis (see "Quotes", p. 98), wonders about the hints of strangeness he's encountered so far, and then realizes he's at the exciting beginning of something resting there in the silence of the house that was "much more a silence of peace than one of fear."

When Nicholas goes back downstairs, Conchis has not yet arrived. Nicholas looks around the music room and is shocked to discover that several pieces of art displayed there are almost pornographic. He also discovers, in the midst of these pieces of art, another picture of Conchis' fiancée. When he hears Conchis coming, Nicholas quickly goes out onto a terrace where Conchis joins him, and where they eat dinner, during which conversation is minimal. After the last course, as they sit in silence and look out at the deepening night, Nicholas hears the sound of light, quick footsteps.. Since they can't be Maria's, he assumes they belong to the owner of the glove. Conchis seems not to have heard the footfalls and tells Nicholas that a series of events brought Conchis there. Although the events seemed at first to be chance, they were, in fact, inevitabilities, bringing Conchis to a point where his past and future met, and he could finally and totally, just be. He describes people who come to that point in their lives as being "chosen," hinting that Nicholas is one of those sorts of people. Nicholas recalls his moment of attempted suicide (Chapter 8) and realizes that Conchis may be right, but asks Conchis to explain further. At first Conchis refuses, but eventually agrees. He goes out of the room for a moment, leaving Nicholas alone with his thoughts and his longing memories of Alison. A few moments later, Conchis returns.



Part 2, Chapters 15, 16 and 17 Analysis

In this chapter, events develop on all three contextual levels simultaneously. The curious, controlling elements of Nicholas' character combine with the suspense-building incorporation of the mystery structure and Conchis' deliberate manipulations to move the narrative of Nicholas' journey transformation along. These developments bring Nicholas and reader alike more deeply into that journey, and intensify the question of what Nicholas experiences and believes is real. Nicholas' conscious determination to understand what's going on and subconscious determination to use that understanding to control fuels both his questions and his resistance to being questioned. At the same time, more mysterious incidents occur - the footsteps, the reference to being chosen, the incongruous appearance of overt sexuality. As is later revealed in the novel, all these incidents are deliberately created and/or manipulated by Conchis to move Nicholas along on his journey of transformation. This chapter is an excellent example of the way plot, style and character can be shaped to affect, define, and motivate each other.



Part 2, Chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21

Part 2, Chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21 Summary

After Nicholas and Conchis settle into wicker chairs, Conchis begins the story of his life - of his English father's passion for his Greek mother, the discovery of his musical talent at a very young age, the exclusive focus of his education on that talent, and his growing friendship with a beautiful girl named Lily. Conchis talks at length about how his love for Lily grew, how he eventually discovered that his considerable talent was not enough to pursue a career, how his discovery of sexuality coarsened the purity of his feelings for Lily, and how he believed those feelings came from his Greek side. He joined the British army thinking he could exorcise his sexual nature by fighting in WWII. Conchis takes a break to fetch some brandy. While he's gone, Nicholas again hears rapid, light footsteps. He looks into the garden, sees a woman in white running up to the house, and realizes that he was meant to see her. Conchis returns with the brandies, and Nicholas asks him who the woman was. Conchis tells him to be patient, hinting that answers will be forthcoming. Conchis continues his story telling how he participated in one of the earliest and bloodiest assaults on Germany. He describes in graphic detail what he saw after the battle, and says that in its aftermath he came to some decisions - that nothing on earth was worth the fighting and loss of life of war, and that he was determined to live. He then puts Nicholas to a test - participating in a game of chance that, if lost, would result in Nicholas' death. This, he explains, is war in miniature - young men vowing to take a chance on dying. At first Nicholas refuses, but Conchis manipulates him into playing. Nicholas rolls, loses and then refuses to accept the fatal consequences. Conchis demonstrates that the game was fixed and explains that this is another analogy of war in miniature - the odds of survival are impossibly stacked against not only those individuals who fight it, but against the societies that insist upon it. He then returns to his story - how his troop was ambushed, how he pretended to be dead, and how as a result of a long day posing as a corpse, he experienced the joys of simple sensation - the recollection of moments with Lily, even the smell of the rotting corpse of a German soldier. Finally, he describes the duplicitous means by which he saved his life and got out of France, and then says he's going to bed. In spite of Nicholas' pleas for him to continue, Conchis refuses, saying he'll go on tomorrow. After a brief but telling exchange about how important it is for the individual human soul to live true to itself, or just simply live, Conchis and Nicholas say their good-nights and retire to their respective bedrooms.

As he undresses, Nicholas reflects on the strangeness of both Conchis' story and the circumstances in which he told it - particularly the sound of the running footsteps. Finally, he lies down and is about to go to sleep ... but then he hears the faint, slow voices of men singing a World War II marching song. As he gets up to look for the source of the sound, he also notices a rotting, sickening smell. Both the sound and the smell soon fade away, and Nicholas lies back down. In narration, he comments that that was the moment at which he entered "the domaine."



Part 2, Chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21 Analysis

On the first level of context, the writing in this section is extremely effective. The language throughout is finely calibrated, with the gruesomeness of the war and the beauty of Lily both defined in equally vivid, and emotionally evocative, detail. Development in characterization is of relatively less importance here, although the incident with the game of chance does define Nicholas' sense of self interest, specifically in terms of self-preservation, even further. On the second level of context, traditional, mystery structure manifests in the way initial curiosity in both Nicholas and the reader about the source of the running footsteps is deepened when the woman in white appears. Yes, the source of the footsteps is revealed, but the identity of the source is a new mystery. Unknown is piling upon unknown. Mystery structure also manifests in the way Conchis stops his story at a point of particular suspense, leaving both Nicholas and the reader hanging, and again at the conclusion of the section, in which even more mysterious events are foreshadowed by Nicholas' enigmatic reference to "the domaine."

The third level of context is the most important to consider at this point. Everything that happens is part of Conchis' carefully considered plan, even down to the timing of his exit to allow Nicholas to experience the appearance of the woman in white on his own. The question to be asked here, as it must be asked every time Conchis adds to the story of his life, is how much is true. It's certainly true, as Nicholas proves by investigation in the last section of the book, that Conchis did love a young woman named Lily - Mrs. de Seitas. On the other hand, because the beautiful Edwardian woman in the photograph is an actress, it must be assumed that everything Conchis says about Mrs. de Seitas in this story and in future stories is at least an elaboration on his true experience or at most a complete fabrication. Does this mean, by extension, that his stories of war may also be less than absolute fact? Ditto everything else he refers to in the stories to come? The reader, like Nicholas, can never be sure. At this point, however, all that either can know is, as Nicholas himself indicates, that something strange and wonderful is happening, and the way to find out the truth about that something is to go along for the ride ... which is exactly what Nicholas chooses to do.



Part 2, Chapters 22 and 23

Part 2, Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

The following morning Nicholas wakes late, is fed breakfast by the silent Maria and is told that Conchis has already eaten and is upstairs. After a fruitless exploratory search through the grounds, Nicholas goes to the beach to swim. A short time later Conchis invites Nicholas to go fishing. As they're heading towards Conchis' boat, Nicholas comments on the voices he heard the night before and is surprised when Conchis says he heard nothing. Nicholas says he believes Conchis somehow made hearing the voices possible, but Conchis denies it, almost huffily. Nicholas apologizes, but Conchis tells him he's not offended, asking Nicholas to simply believe what he experiences - or if he can't, to pretend to believe. Nicholas resolves to not be fooled. Soon they arrive at the site where Conchis plans to fish. He sets bait, patiently lures an octopus to its death, and, as he's cutting it up, tells Nicholas that soon another octopus will move into its home and will allow itself to be caught just as easily.

After a simple lunch, Conchis retires to his bedroom for an afternoon nap. Nicholas takes a magazine and a centuries-old journal, recommended to him by Conchis as being far more real than any novel could ever be, down into the trees. He reads the journal, written by a man named Foulkes during his time in prison, where he had been sent for killing the child he had fathered with a young girl. After reading the journal Nicholas falls asleep and wakes to see a man who looks, to Nicholas, exactly like Foulkes would look. The man is joined by a young girl. Nicholas flees in fearful panic. Once he reaches the safety of the house, he looks to where he saw the man and the girl, and sees that they've gone. He tries to imagine how Conchis might have arranged to have them there, tries to figure out what's behind the game Conchis seems to be playing, and realizes that he Conchis must have played similar games with Levierre and Mitford. In the middle of these musings, Conchis returns, and the two men have tea; Nicholas reveals nothing of what he experienced. As they drink, Conchis insists that Nicholas tell him about the girl Nicholas had refused to speak of before (Chapter 15). Nicholas indicates he still doesn't want to talk about it, and the conversation leads him to confess his having contracted syphilis. Conchis asks about the symptoms, and after Nicholas tells him, says that Nicholas didn't have syphilis at all, but a local disease, adding that the local doctor told him he had syphilis to fleece him of some money. Anger at this leads Nicholas to tell Conchis a little more about Alison and to talk about how he doesn't really know what love is. Conchis describes him as a defeated, pessimistic mess and tells him he must change. He then shows Nicholas a statuette which Conchis says displays the secret of eternal truth in its timeless, amused, intelligent smile (see "Quotes", p. 142-143).



Part 2, Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

The encounter with the octopus is symbolic not only of Conchis' encounter with Nicholas but also Conchis' encounters with Nicholas' predecessors, Leverrier and Mitford. In the same way as Conchis lures a succession of octopi to their deaths, he lures a succession of arrogant men to their spiritual deaths and hopefully subsequent rebirth. It's interesting to note here that the novel openly portrays only Nicholas as metaphorically dying and being cut up. Leverrier refuses to discuss his experience at Bourani, but given that he ends up cold and distant, it is reasonable to assume that Leverrier was deeply damaged by what happened and escapes into the life of a monk. For his part, Mitford gives an impression of being indignant but essentially undamaged - granted, his recounting of what happened later in the novel suggests that what he experienced wasn't as soul-challenging as what Nicholas went through. It's also possible to interpret that Mitford is in as much denial as Leverrier. It's also interesting to note that while the novel concludes with Nicholas determined change his life, there is no real indication that he succeeds.

Another important symbol appears for the first time in this section - the smiling statuette. The expression on the statuette, as indicated by Conchis here and by Nicholas when he refers to it in later sections of the novel, suggests a kind of cosmic sense of humor, a recognition that everything (tragedy, hate, love, fear, triumph, even freedom) is a part of the miraculous, insane, ecstatic, vicious wonder of life. Echoes of the smile appear in the expressions of several characters throughout the novel - repeatedly in Conchis, occasionally in Lily/Julie (in moments when her games with Nicholas are particularly interesting), once or twice with Mrs. de Seitas, and, very tellingly in the novel's final moments, in Alison. This last is perhaps the most important, in that it reinforces Nicholas' belief that Alison is his true love and soul mate, the ultimate means by which he can reach a soul-full understanding of himself and his relationship with life.

In terms of the novel's three analytical contexts, this section continues the pattern of functioning on all three levels. Insight into Nicholas, mystery and questioning of how much is being manipulated all deepen as a result of the events of this section. However, at this point, an interesting question arises in relation to the third level of context. How much does Nicholas want to believe he's being manipulated by Conchis as part of his determination to retain control of his perspective? In other words, is he determined to believe what he believes because questioning here would lead to questioning all his beliefs? This is something he clearly does not want to do, as evidenced by his continuing resistance to discussing Alison. On the other hand, it seems that such challenge is inevitable, as evidenced by the way Conchis, in no uncertain terms, demolishes his beliefs about the syphilis. This seemingly minor encounter is, in fact, a miniature version of the larger encounter Nicholas has with himself and his beliefs. In the same way he believes himself to be victimized by syphilis, he also believes himself to be victimized by the world, which means that the demolishing of his belief about syphilis foreshadows the demolishing of this other, deeply-held belief. This, in turn, is an integral component of Conchis' teaching and, consequently, of the novel's core theme.

Only by giving himself the freedom and power to choose can Nicholas be free of his self-victimization and embrace the true, enigmatic, smile-triggering nature of life.



Part 2, Chapters 24, 25 and 26

Part 2, Chapters 24, 25 and 26 Summary

Conchis picks up the story of his past where he left off, at the moment of his desertion from the British army. He tells Nicholas how he makes it safely back to England, lies to his parents about how and why he was there, and over the course of two weeks becomes as physically intimate with Lily as is possible in those semi-Victorian times (see "Quotes", p. 144). Eventually he leaves, taking refuge with a Greek uncle from his mother's side of the family, who uses his money and influence to gain passage for Conchis to Argentina. In the days before he leaves, Conchis confesses everything to Lily, who is unable to understand his situation and who dies shortly after he leaves. At that point, Conchis seems to have finished, and he and Nicholas sit in silence for a long time. They eventually discuss Nicholas' return to work the next day, and Conchis invites him to return the following weekend, saying he's welcome only as long as he keeps Conchis' stories private. Nicholas agrees, and they both go to their rooms. Nicholas, however, doesn't prepare for sleep - he stands by his window and waits.

After a long, drowsy silence, Nicholas hears Conchis leave his room and go downstairs. A moment later Nicholas hears music and goes downstairs himself. There he sees, and is seen by, a beautiful, young woman whom Nicholas believes is intended to be Lily - she resembles the photographs he's seen and is dressed in clothing of the period. With a look in her eyes that Nicholas describes as simultaneously acknowledging that they're involved in a charade and the necessity for keeping it up, she withdraws. Conchis seems to notice none of this. Nicholas leaves, goes outside to try to catch another glimpse of her, but discovers she's disappeared. He returns to his room, wondering about all the strange things he's experienced that weekend and why Conchis has made the elaborate arrangements necessary for them to be present.

Nicholas' sleep that night is fitful and his breakfast uncomfortable, but he enjoys his walk back to the school, feeling as though he's returning to reality. At the same time, he feels as though he's entered a myth, a story of humanity larger than himself - "as if the world had suddenly, during those last three days, changed from being the discovered to the still undiscovered." When he returns to the school, he discovers a letter from Alison, who must have been inebriated when she wrote it. In it, she says she's still not sure whether she ever wants to see him again, but that because she's now trained as a stewardess, she can possibly meet him in Athens. Nicholas realizes he doesn't really want to talk with her but that he'd is willing and eager to use her to satisfy his re-awakening sexual urges, dormant after the so-called encounter with syphilis. He writes her a careful letter, suggesting the possibility that they might meet but not making any firm plans. His thoughts the entire following week are filled with memories of, and growing desire for, Lily, as well as consideration of why Conchis would be playing what Nicholas still considers to be an elaborate game. He finally concludes that Conchis must be, at least to some degree, mad - but nevertheless plans to return as invited. On the morning of that return, Nicholas leaves the school after his classes and visits the small



cluster of fishing huts on the coast. He asks the women there, whose husbands are all away fishing, about Conchis and his "visitors." The women repeat the story of his "mistake," and say they've seen no visitors. They also comment that they haven't seen Maria, saying she isn't an island native. Somewhat disappointed, Nicholas continues his journey.

Part 2, Chapters 24, 25 and 26 Analysis

On the first (character-and-writing) level of analysis, the writing in this section begins to take on definite overtones of romance. Specifically, the sensations and feelings Nicholas experiences as the result of his encounter with Lily are described in phrasing that has a sense of delicacy that other writing to this point lacks. This sense of delicacy, fortified and tempered by evocations of intense and almost obsessive passion, continues throughout the remainder of the book - at least whenever Lily/Julie is referred to, even after Lily is revealed to have betrayed the man loving her and ostensibly writing about her. Along with this linguistic shift comes a shift in Nicholas' character, as he not only experiences passionate feelings of love for the first time but also, is inclined to behave differently towards women, Lily/Julie in particular because he loves her.

The irony is that everything Lily/Julie does and says is scripted for her by Conchis, dictated behavior as part of the game he's playing with Nicholas. It's interesting to note here, in this third contextual level of analysis, that Nicholas is at least to some degree aware that nothing he's going through is fully real, but he seems helpless to avoid the feelings he's experiencing. This appears to support the novel's secondary thematic

contention - that feelings of sexual attraction and love are true, real and valid whether they spring from a truth or a lie. Passion, the novel suggests, is the ultimate truth.

In terms of the novel's second contextual level of analysis, this section might be described as structurally transitional. The initial phase of narrative development (getting Nicholas intrigued by, and involved in, events at Bourani) has been completed, and a new phase (bringing the "real" Lily into his life and into indirect conflict with Alison over his heart) is beginning. Further investigation on Nicholas' part into the mystery proves inconclusive, but nevertheless increases both his and the reader's sense of curiosity and mystery.



Part 2, Chapter 27, 28, 29 and 30

Part 2, Chapter 27, 28, 29 and 30 Summary

Nicholas returns yet again to Conchis' home expecting some acknowledgement of his having seen the mysterious woman and surprised the acknowledgement does not occur. He's also surprised to see that the reading material in his room has changed - it now contains even more sexually explicit material, and also a book describing a masque, a kind of open-air improvised performance. He immediately concludes that everything happening to him at Bourani is part of such a performance and resolves to play along with Conchis in order to find out as much as possible about his still-enigmatic host. When Nicholas joins Conchis for dinner, their conversation turns briefly to an experiment Conchis intends to conduct the following evening, an experiment that Nicholas suggests might have something to do with psychic communication. Conchis tells him nothing more on the subject, but then surprises Nicholas by telling him they're to be joined by a visitor, a young woman whom Conchis says is to be treated as though she's an amnesiac. Before Nicholas can ask any questions, Nicholas hears the same quiet footsteps of the earlier visit, and the visitor appears. It is Lily, the young woman in the photograph, in the music room, and in the garden the week before. Nicholas is instantly attracted to her and curious about her real identity, having concluded that she's part of Conchis' "masque." Conversation with her is too careful and too polite for him to reveal his feelings.

Conchis continues the story of his life -his time in Argentina where he studied medicine, his return to Europe following his father's death, and his joining a group of idealistic physicians called the Society for Reason. Conchis then goes into the house to find their manifesto, leaving Nicholas and Lily alone. Their conversation continues to be careful and polite, with Lily embodying the perfect Edwardian reserve but occasionally allowing Nicholas glimpses of something a little more flirtatious and contemporary. Conchis returns with the manifesto, tells Nicholas to read it later, and continues the story of his life, speaking at length of his strange relationship with an elderly, wealthy, eccentric man named de Doukans, who, not unlike Conchis, had an extensive collection of art, that was the gamut of classical, contemporary, and bizarre. One piece, a moving sculpture of a nude woman who trapped unsuspecting men between her legs and killed them, is described in particular detail (see "Quotes, p. 173). Shortly after, the story is interrupted by a call from what sounds like a hunting horn. Lily becomes startled, says that her brother, Apollo, has come and starts to run out. Nicholas tries to stop her, but she tells him to let her go, to watch, and to pretend to believe. Nicholas releases her, and watches from a terrace as a man costumed as the Greek god Apollo appears, followed shortly by a woman who seems to be Lily and who is costumed as the goddess Artemis, Apollo's sister. They enact a scene in which an apparently lost hunter is himself hunted and victimized, a scene illuminated by what appears to be light coming from Bourani.

As abruptly as it starts, the scene is over. Nicholas strives to keep his curiosity, and his anger at what seems to be intense game playing, under control. He attempts to



question Conchis, but Conchis answers only that Nicholas has the option to leave if he chooses. Nicholas is too intrigued and agrees to stay. Conchis resumes his story of de Doukans, telling how a disgruntled employee burned down his home with all the art treasures inside, how de Doukans killed himself in despair, and how he left Conchis what money and treasures were not destroyed in the fire. He concludes his story with a reference to the words that de Doukans also left Conchis in his will, a saying in Latin which translates into "Which are you drinking? The water or the wave?" Conchis then retires for the night, hinting that Nicholas should ask himself the same question.

Back in his room, Nicholas examines the manifesto of the Society of Reason at length. The manifesto discusses how humanity and society as a whole must be governed by reason and nothing else, and how it's possible to communicate with other life forms on other worlds. He's far more interested, however, in thinking about the masque that Nicholas is apparently both witnessing and participating in. He wonders again why Conchis seems to be going to so much trouble and who Lily truly is, and then, in a fit of curiosity, about how the masque happened, goes out into the gardens to look for evidence. He finds nothing and, in intrigued frustration, returns to his room.

Part 2, Chapter 27, 28, 29 and 30 Analysis

The writing in this section simultaneously reinforces previous stylistic choices and introduces new ones. On the one hand, Conchis continues, in both dialogue and narration, to be as enigmatic, detailed, and occasionally patronizing as ever. And for the most part, Nicholas continues to be as self absorbed, intellectual, confrontational, and resistant to new perspectives. The exception to this aspect of his character is the way he changes when confronted by Lily - his dialogue becomes flirty and his narration becomes more passionate. These linguistic evolutions indicate at least the beginnings of change in his character - the armor is beginning to crack.

These growths in all three of the novel's core characters simultaneously manifest and reinforce developments within the second analytical context, that of structure. In the first place, unknowns about Conchis and Lily become more and more deeply layered with every word they speak and every story they tell. Simultaneously, as those words and stories become more and more farfetched (in particular, Conchis' story of the killer statue), Nicholas and the reader both become more and more intrigued about what's truly going on and what it all means. The deepening sense of mystery is further enhanced by the interjection, at a key point of Conchis' story, by the "masque" of Apollo and Artemis. The incident itself is strange and intriguing, but its placement in the middle of Conchis' story of the eccentric de Doukans (whom Conchis resembles) heightens the already-intense sense of curiosity about the narrative as a whole. This is another example of the way interruptions at points of climax are an effective technique for drawing readers into a story.

For the first time in this section the third level of analytical context is given a name - a "masque." The majority of the novel is, to varying degrees, a component of the masque. Perhaps even events in the novel's earliest sections are obliquely related to the



masque. The irony is that even though Nicholas is aware that everything happening to him is part of the masque and is therefore not real, he goes along with it. This is because he wants to find out how far it will go; he wants to follow through on his feelings for Lily/Julie, and perhaps because it's a manifestation of his basic character to do continue. He's lived his entire life according to lies he tells himself, and as a result of these lies has had a lot of sex; therefore, why should a lie told to him by someone else, particularly a lie which might result in him having sex with a beautiful and intriguing woman, be any different?

There is an interesting ideological/philosophical conflict hinted at in this section. The Manifesto of Reason and the reference to "the water or the wave" seem to represent opposite perspectives on life - a reasoned, thoughtful, logical approach vs. a passionate, impulsive, fully lived approach. Is this last what is meant by the expression "the water or the wave"? The novel never explicitly answers this question, but given its thematic and narrative emphasis on freedom and passion, it would seem to be a logical conclusion to draw. Further, it would seem that the action of the novel and its characterization of Nicholas paints him as a follower of the Manifesto of Reason in desperate need of being dipped in the water of life. In other words, is he merely coasting along in life, riding the wave, or is he the water - is he fully living? The novel would seem to suggest that at the moment he's the former, but as the result of events in the novel, he becomes the latter.



Part 2, Chapters 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37

Part 2, Chapters 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 Summary

The following morning, Nicholas encounters "Lily" on the beach. His flirtatious, probing questions about what happened the night before remain unanswered, but there continues to be something contemporary, mysterious, and flirtatious in her manner towards him. Their conversation ends with a brief, polite kiss on the cheek, followed by "Lily's" return to the house. Shortly afterwards, too soon for her to have actually returned, Nicholas sees a young woman who looks exactly like Lily on the terrace, in the company of a tall figure, all in black wearing a mask that looks like the head of a jackal. Nicholas interprets the figure as a representation of the Egyptian god Anubis. His vision is interrupted by the arrival of Maria, who brings a note from Conchis to say he's been called away. Nicholas also receives an opened telegram, delivered to the house by a messenger, who, Nicholas assumes, first tried the school and was sent to Bourani by Demetriades. The telegram was sent from Athens by Alison, who says she's going to be back in Athens the following weekend and invites Nicholas to join her. Nicholas returns to the beach and tries to reason through what he's just seen, realizing that Conchis must have read the telegram from Alison. Nicholas is resolved that under no circumstances should Conchis and Alison meet.

After a brief, unsatisfying lunch back at the house, Nicholas returns to the beach for a nap, but is prevented from sleeping by Lily, who playfully sings him a children's song. Their subsequent conversation is a little less guarded, with Lily admitting she knows about Alison's telegram and the trip to Athens. She also lets slip a few more hints that neither she nor Conchis is what they seem. Nicholas becomes aggressive with her, challenging her to admit that she has a twin sister, among other things. Lily tearfully asks him to be quiet as they go back to the house to greet the returning Conchis. Nicholas agrees, but as they return, they encounter a magnificent statue of the god Poseidon, an encounter that triggers further conversation, in which Nicholas again challenges Lily to reveal more truths than she's prepared to discuss. She eventually admits that Conchis wants to lead Nicholas into the same kind of trap that Conchis led Mitford, but then realizes she's said too much and tries to run off. She does, however, allow Nicholas to kiss her on the mouth before she goes.

When Nicholas encounters Conchis back at the house and asks him to explain about Lily's twin sister, Conchis tells him a complicated story about Lily having a split personality, hinting that both Mitford and Leverrier fell in love with Lily, were hurt when they learned the truth and became bitter. In narration, Nicholas indicates that he finds it hard to believe the story, but nevertheless agrees to Conchis' demand that he behave as though it had never been told.



Conchis then distracts Nicholas by insisting that Nicholas help in the reconstruction of a garden wall. Once the work is over Conchis irritates Nicholas by referring to Alison and the trip to Athens without apologizing for reading the telegram and tantalizes Nicholas with hints of something transcendent and special to take place that night after dinner - the experiment referred to before. Nicholas describes his disappointment at not seeing Lily at dinner, his wariness when Conchis offers him strong alcohol, and his sudden alarm when Conchis admits that Nicholas is to be hypnotized. Conchis reassures him; Nicholas allows himself to be hypnotized and has a powerful experience, described at poetic length and in great detail, of transcending earthly life and connecting spiritually with a star. Following this experience, he falls into a deep sleep.

The following morning Nicholas awakes, at first embarrassed at what might have transpired while he was under hypnosis, recalling with a deep joy the transcendence of his union with the star and becoming more and more torn between the two extremes of emotion. He returns to the school, musing on his feelings and letting his confusion spurt into anger at Demetriades, who, knowing of the telegram, asks crude questions about Alison. During the week Nicholas writes letters to Mitford and Leverrier, asking for information about their experiences at Bourani, and at the end of the week he leaves for Athens and his meeting with Alison.

Part 2, Chapters 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 Analysis

This section contains several turning points, moments at which the action of the narrative changes direction and leads both the character and the reader down an unexpected path. All three turning points function within all three analytical contexts, once again illustrating how writing, characterization, structure and mystery interrelate and affect each other, indirectly and/or directly.

The first turning point is the re-emergence of Alison as a motivating force in Nicholas' life and therefore in the narrative. On the level of characterization, it triggers in Nicholas a deeper re-consideration of his feelings and attitudes - not deep enough, as it turns out, since he still treats Alison badly, but his thoughts are still deeper than they were before. On the level of narrative, this turning point adds to the novel's overall sense of suspense. What will happen when Alison and Nicholas meet? How will he deal with his feelings for Lily? What will be the aftermath? How will he be changed? On the level of Conchis' manipulation, it's revealed later that when Conchis reads the telegram, he immediately decides to involve Alison in his plans for Nicholas, at the very least getting more information about him that he can use against him. It's also revealed later that not only does Conchis achieve this goal and not only does he follow Nicholas and Alison in order to gain filmic material to use in Nicholas' ongoing humiliation, but Conchis also enlists Alison's direct help in his schemes. In short, the telegram from Alison is a powerful catalyst for several vitally important events in the narrative.

The second turning point in this section is the conversation between Lily and Nicholas in which Lily lets Nicholas see just enough of her true self to make his interest in her intense and undeniable. As a piece of characterization, it takes the obsessive side of



Nicholas' character in a different direction - where before he had been obsessed only with himself, from now on he becomes obsessed with someone else as well as himself. As both an element of narrative and element of Conchis' manipulation, it reinforces the idea that there are real, perhaps unimaginable depths, to the games Conchis is doing.

The final turning point is Nicholas' experience with hypnosis, the importance of which is highlighted by the language with which it's narrated, as it is the longest, most intense, and most poetically-written sequence in the book. It seems that both Nicholas and the reader are intended to see this experience as Nicholas' first encounter with the transcendence of his soul, a soul which is the source of both the freedom and the power of choice that Conchis and the novel suggest are the most important manifestations of humanity. It's on that level that it functions within the novel's second analytical context. Not only has the action to this point built to the event of hypnosis, it's also built to the point of spiritual illumination. Neither the reader nor Nicholas understands its full implications, and it even by the end of the novel full understanding remains elusive. But structurally as well as emotionally and spiritually, the experience is a high and necessary point of Nicholas' journey of transformation. The question, however, is this - how much is the moment's importance undercut by the fact that it's part of Conchis' game? Yes, it's an emotional high point for Nicholas, but it's also the high point of Conchis' manipulations. Perhaps the positive intensity of the experience is the reason why Nicholas submits himself to the negatively intense experiences to follow - perhaps he wants more excitement, perhaps he wants more enlightenment. Does this excuse the manipulative lengths to which Conchis goes?

There is a relatively small, but nonetheless significant, element of foreshadowing in this section - the reference to letters written by Nicholas to Mitford and Leverrier. The responses to these letters play roles in inciting and defining later action in the novel.



Part 2, Chapters 38, 39, 40, 41 and 42

Part 2, Chapters 38, 39, 40, 41 and 42 Summary

Nicholas arrives in Athens and finds it unpleasant after so much time in the countryside. He meets Alison at the airport, and as they make small talk, Nicholas comments in narration on his determination to be faithful to his relationship to Lily by not having sex with Alison. When she indicates her desire for sex, Nicholas tells her he's still recovering from syphilis. She seems disappointed but resolves to have a good time with him anyway. They visit Mount Parnassus and Delphi, and for a while the trip is pleasant enough, but Nicholas finds it harder and harder to keep his vow, finding the desirable and eager Alison difficult to resist. At the top of Parnassus they find two huts abandoned by the Greek army at the end of World War II and are tempted to stay, but convince each other to start back down. Night is falling before they complete their journey, and they choose to return to the nearer summit rather than continue. They take refuge in one of the huts, eat, and prepare for bed, the whole while Nicholas being aware that Alison still wants him and that his resistance is weakening. Eventually, inevitably, they make love (see "Quotes", p. 250). As Alison sleeps, Nicholas realizes the right thing to do is tell her the truth - that he has feelings for Lily.

The next morning Nicholas and Alison are woken by a wandering shepherd, speak banteringly of their love for each other, and journey back down the hill. Nicholas becomes more and more aware of the depth of his love for her. Finally he confesses the truth to her, along with telling her of everything that's been going on at Bourani. Alison responds with hurt, anger and bitterness, leading Nicholas to respond with equal anger. They argue bitterly, making sharp personal attacks on each other and veering into physical violence. Alison finally locks Nicholas out of her hotel room. The following morning he discovers that she's gone and has left a bitter note for him saying their relationship is completely over. Nicholas tries to track her down at the airport, but has no success. He makes his lonely way back to the school, where he's greeted by Demetriades, who is eager to tell tales of his erotic, debauched weekend.

Part 2, Chapters 38, 39, 40, 41 and 42 Analysis

On the first level of context, that of language and characterization, the first element to note is the vividly portrayed difference between Athens and the countryside. This can be seen as an echo of the difference Nicholas sees between England and Greece - the urbanization of Athens, its impersonality and lack of connection with life, all parallel the same aspects of England and all come off unfavorably when Nicholas compares them with the magic and nature of rural Greece. The importance of Parnassus and Delphi are also relevant in this context. In ancient times both localities, but particularly Delphi, were sources of insight, revelation and confrontation with destiny. All this is echoed here, in terms of the surges of emotional and sexual truths that both Alison and Nicholas

experience while there and also in terms of the repercussions of these confrontations that play out later in the novel.

There is an important irony to note at this point. Nicholas tries to do what he thinks is the right thing, which ends up causing pain, which in turn results in his reverting to his earlier, less enlightened state of being. What must be noted, however, is that in fact he does the wrong thing for the right reasons. This means that in terms of his journey of transformation he is simultaneously taking a step forward towards genuine, selfless love and a step backward towards selfish, controlling desire. One final writing element worth commentary is the irony in Demtriades' leering eagerness at the close of this section - the wonderful time Demtriades had is vividly contrasted with the miserable time Nicholas has.

On the second, structural level of context, this section marks the point at which Nicholas' journey of transformation takes an irrevocable turn in the direction of Lily and deeper involvement with Conchis. Once again emotion drives plot, as Nicholas' frustration, anger and resentment define his actions. The action of the novel would progress no further if Nicholas didn't feel the way he feel.

In terms of the third level of analytical context, relating to Conchis' manipulations, there is little to consider in this section, other than the previously discussed fact that Conchis, without Nicholas knowing, is following and recording the entire trip. Also, once Nicholas returns to Phraxos, Conchis makes contact with Alison and enlists her all-too-willing aid in his manipulations.



Part 2, Chapters 43, 44, and 45

Part 2, Chapters 43, 44, and 45 Summary

An invitation from Conchis is waiting for Nicholas when he returns to the school, and he looks forward to his next visit. In the meantime he sends a letter to Alison, apologizing for what happened and saying he has every intention of loving her better when he returns to England. At the end of the week he returns to Bourani, where he's greeted by Lily and Conchis, who quickly excuses himself. Nicholas' and Lily's bantering, challenging, sexually-charged relationship picks up where it left off, as Nicholas lies about what happened in Athens, saying Alison called the trip off. Lily's reaction leads Nicholas to believe she cares for him enough to let him kiss her, which he does. She backs away, confused, but nevertheless agrees to meet Nicholas later that night at the Poseidon statue. At that moment Conchis appears holding an axe. He quickly passes by, and Lily just as quickly runs off. Nicholas follows Conchis, who is going into the woods to cut down a dead pine, and grills him about what happened the night Nicholas was hypnotized. Conchis assures him nothing untoward happened.

That night, Lily joins Conchis and Nicholas after dinner. Conchis tells a long story of what happened after the de Doukans fire (last referred to in Chapters 27, 28 and 29). He speaks of an encounter with an eccentric, Norwegian hermit named Henrik Nygaard, who Conchis describes as having a relationship with God and the spirit of life that changed Conchis' hitherto entirely rational understanding of existence. He concludes his story by recounting how Nygaard's ultimate encounter with what he believed to be God took place at exactly the same moment as fire was destroying de Doukans' home and all his treasures (see "Quotes", p. 289). As Nicholas and Lily both react with disbelief, Conchis sends Lily to bed and hints that it's time for Nicholas to do the same. Nicholas, however, says he isn't tired, adding that he intends to go for a stroll. He is actually going to meet Lily as arranged.

After Conchis goes up to bed, Nicholas heads for the Poseidon statue and his rendezvous. He waits for what seems to him like a long time, but finally Lily arrives and steps eagerly into his arms. Nicholas soon realizes it's not Lily and challenges her to reveal her identity. After some taunting banter, the woman reveals that she's Lily's twin sister, that Conchis' story about Lily being insane is untrue, that she and her sister are actresses hired by Conchis to "make a fool of" Nicholas, and that they've all gotten themselves into a deeply-troubling situation. She tells Nicholas that they all are to meet the following day. As they debate who trusts whom, Nicholas finds himself titillated by the idea of a mynage a trois with the two girls and tries to get the girl, who says her name is Rose, to stay. She refuses, he insists, and she calls for her guardian - Anubis, the figure in black from the earlier encounter. Rose leaves and Nicholas tries to follow, but Anubis blocks his way. Anubis eventually removes his mask revealing himself to be "a Negro." Anubis stands silently as Nicholas peppers him with questions, and eventually forces Nicholas to be quiet by shoving him to the ground. He quickly disappears, and Nicholas' mind reels with all he's seen and been told.



Part 2, Chapters 43, 44, and 45 Analysis

The most important level of contextual analysis to consider here is the third, since everything that takes place in this chapter (with the exception of Nicholas' letter to Alison) is part of Conchis' game playing. Conchis' disappearances, which enable Lily's flirtations, which lead to her arrangements to meet Nicholas, which leads to the substitution of Rose for Lily have all been engineered by Conchis in order to play games with Nicholas' mind. Then there is the lengthy Nygaard story, which may or may not be true, but which in either case is calculated to draw Nicholas further into Conchis' web. Finally, there is the encounter with Anubis which, of all these incidents, is perhaps surprisingly the most important. This is because of the revelation that Anubis is, as the narration calls him, a "Negro".

Later in the novel Anubis (or Joe as he comes to be known) makes unabashed, passionate love with Lily/Julie, a white woman, in front of Nicholas. This is clearly intended to be shocking for both Nicholas and the reader. In the time the novel was both written and set, inter-racial sex and/or relationships were were criminal and considered to be signs of mental illness and spiritual corruption. This particular encounter will be discussed further in relation to the section where it occurs (Part 2, Chapters 60, 61 and 62), but its ultimate meaning and impact are both foreshadowed in this section, with "Anubis'" physical assault foreshadowing the later spiritual assault.

On the first and second contextual levels of analysis, this section functions in parallel. In terms of both writing/characterization and structure, this fairly complete. The irony is that Nicholas believes his desire to know and understand, as well as his desires to know, control and have sex with the twins, are manifestations of a deepening consciousness. The truth is that they are continuing manifestations of his self-centeredness, taking him further away from what he eventually realizes is the true truth - his love for Alison. In other words, in spite of telling himself that he's going into these manipulations with his eyes wide open, he is actually becoming more blind to reality. Only when the illusions are completely removed and he becomes aware of what the realities of the twins and Conchis truly are does he realize the truth of his own reality, which is that he cannot live without Alison. This section, therefore, marks an important step along his journey of transformation - a step down the wrong road, but an important step in that he comes to understand the nature of the right road.



Part 2, Chapters 46, 47 and 48

Part 2, Chapters 46, 47 and 48 Summary

The following morning Nicholas discovers that Conchis has again been summoned to Athens. He has breakfast, goes for a swim, and from the water glimpses two girls at the house wearing identical dresses. A short while later, he encounters both at the Poseidon statue, where they reveal their real names - Lily says her real name is Julie, while Rose says hers is June. June leaves her sister alone with Nicholas, urging Nicholas to coax Julie to tell everything. Eventually she does, confessing that she and her sister are trained professional actresses hired by Conchis. As proof of what she's saying Julie shows Nicholas personal letters and newspaper clippings. Nicholas begins to believe her (see "Quotes", p. 313), becoming more certain she's telling the truth when she tells him that she and June are as trapped by Conchis as he is - the Negro posing as Anubis, she says, is actually named Joe and has been hired by Conchis as a kind of guard for them. Julie runs off, saying she has to get the next pages of her script (for the masque being enacted for Nicholas) from Conchis. As she goes, Joe/Anubis emerges from the shadows, and Nicholas realizes he's heard the conversation. From memory, he then writes down the names and addresses offered as proof by Julie.

After lunch Julie returns, telling Nicholas that Conchis wants her to encourage their romance, which both she and Nicholas realize is becoming real. They agree to meet later in the week and then offer each other their life stories. Nicholas minimizes his relationship with Alison, while Julie tells him about the few loves of her life. Their emotional closeness also brings them into sexual proximity, but just when it seems as though their making love is inevitable, Julie backs off, saying that when she was younger she was raped. This awakens new feelings of tenderness in Nicholas, tenderness that leads him to want to stay once the weekend is over. Julie tells him he must go, in order to conceal from Conchis that the romance she's simulating has become real. After confirming that they'll meet again soon, she hurries back to the house. Nicholas returns to the school, excited about the future and believing he actually has control of the situation with Conchis. Back at the school he writes letters to all the people mentioned by Julie, as well as another letter to Leverrier. He then spends his days fantasizing about what will happen when he again meets Julie.

Part 2, Chapters 46, 47 and 48 Analysis

This section continues the process of Nicholas becoming more and more deeply enmeshed in Conchis' games. On the first contextual level of analysis, the writing creates the sense that as a character, Nicholas is abandoning himself more and more to his feelings. He is still intellectual and analytical, but his desires for Julie are building, his frustrations are mounting and his determination is intensifying to the point of desperation as he becomes more and more intent upon making that release (i.e. sexual intimacy) happen. The irony is that he's experiencing these feelings in the context of a

false relationship. In the context of the third level of analysis, that of Conchis' manipulation, this fake romance is part of what Conchis is striving to do, which is to introduce Nicholas to feeling his emotions, so when it comes to emotions engendered from a real situation, such as his love for Alison, he's comfortable with the experience.

In terms of the second level of analysis, events are triggering reactions, which are triggering more events, which are triggering more reactions, all of which build upon one another to increase narrative suspense. The sense of curiosity about what will happen next deepens with each flirtation, each mysterious confrontation and each story, to the point where Nicholas and reader alike are in desperate need of resolution. To use a sexual metaphor, appropriate to this story, Nicholas and the reader are both experiencing steadily intensifying, tantalizing, narrative foreplay. Both are becoming increasingly desperate for the story to achieve the narrative and sexually climactic act of intercourse and eventually an orgasmic convergence of plot, character development, and theme.



Part 2, Chapters 49, 50 and 51

Part 2, Chapters 49, 50 and 51 Summary

Julie and Nicholas meet, aware that Joe is watching. After comparing notes about what they've found out about Conchis' plans, which isn't much for either of them, they kiss and discuss their mutual passion for each other, a discussion which leads Julie to run away in nervous fear. Following her to the house, Nicholas is suddenly surrounded by men in World War II German army uniforms and treated as though he's a Greek resistance fighter - beaten, tied and verbally abused. Aware the whole time that this is another part of Conchis' masque, Nicholas nevertheless is powerfully affected by the realism of the scene. He's eventually abandoned, still tied up, as the Nazis, who Nicholas speculates are actors hired by Conchis, abandon the island. He eventually frees himself and returns to the school. He attempts to focus on his routine, but his mind is filled with plans for revenge on Conchis, from whom he receives a letter saying he (Conchis) has again been delayed in Athens. Nicholas, desperate to see Julie again, resolves to return to Bourani the following weekend anyway, but when he goes, he finds it deserted. He goes into the nearby village to see if he can get any other information, and after talking with a pair of elderly locals, he discovers that parties and masques and visits have been going on at Bourani for many years. As he returns to the school, he again passes Bourani - still empty, but in Nicholas' mind silent and watchful.

As the school week begins, Nicholas constructs several theories about what might have happened to Julie. Eventually he receives a long letter from Julie explaining why they've been away, how Conchis wanted the "script" for their relationship to go differently from how Julie and June wanted to take it, and how Conchis took them away on his yacht while he reconsidered his plans. Her letter concludes with the warning that there's to be a surprise for him at the end of the game. He barely has time to register the contents of this letter when he opens a second piece of mail, which contains notice from Alison's old roommate that Alison killed herself, leaving a suicide note indicating despair over her doomed relationship with Nicholas as the reason. Nicholas surprises himself by weeping (see "Quotes", p. 361) and by realizing that Julie has now become "a total necessity." He writes letters to thank Alison's roommate for letting him know the news.

Part 2, Chapters 49, 50 and 51 Analysis

Once again the key contextual level of analysis is that of Conchis' game, which takes two dramatic turns in this section. The first is the dramatization of the encounter with the Nazis, which of all the various masques and mini-plays put on for Nicholas' benefit is perhaps the one most grounded in truth. As narration eventually reveals, the encounter is in fact a re-enactment of an encounter experienced by Conchis. This encounter gave rise to the rumor that he was a Nazi collaborator, and which, when Conchis elaborates on what happened in the following section, triggered in Conchis several important personal and spiritual revelations. The second turn is triggered by the news of Alison's



suicide, which as narration eventually reveals is another of Conchis' tricks. Having made contact with Alison in the aftermath of the disastrous visit to Athens and Parnassus, Conchis engaged Alison's willing help in his manipulations of Nicholas. The thing to note here, however, is not so much the manipulation, but Nicholas' reaction to news of her suicide - his breaking down and weeping. This act is a manifestation of the true, core truth Nicholas has been subconsciously drawing closer to, consciously striving to avoid, and inevitably faced with at the novel's conclusion. In other words, he weeps because he truly loves Alison but can't face that truth and so distracts himself with Julie and with deepening, willing involvement in what he knows to be Conchis' game. The weeping is also important within the first analytical context, in that it takes Nicholas' character into a simultaneous deepening and shallowing of his character. The deepening comes from the fact that his love-triggered grief is probably the first genuine emotion he's experienced in years, while the shallowing is defined by his immediate denial of that grief and his equally immediate determination to avoid feelings of any such intensity. Once again Nicholas takes simultaneous steps forward and back, and once again Conchis (or so the reader comes to believe by the end of the novel) bumps up his game and challenges Nicholas even more.



Part 2, Chapters 52, 53 and 54

Part 2, Chapters 52, 53 and 54 Summary

When Nicholas receives a reply to one of his investigative letters about Julie, he feels relieved she is who she says she is. He also feels an easing of his guilt over Alison, and resolves to tell Julie about her. He then pays a visit to Bourani, where he encounters Conchis and challenges him with his knowledge of Leverrier and Mitford. Conchis, however, seems unaffected, referring instead to the theatrical masque games that have always been played at Bourani (see "Quotes", p. 366) and confesses that he is not the director, but an actor like everyone else. He tells Nicholas that after the summer Nicholas will never see Julie again, a comment which Nicholas believes to be the surprise Julie warned him about. Conchis goes on to urge Nicholas to return to England and make up with Alison, and then invites him to come into the house and listen to him play.

As he listens, Nicholas is surprised to discover that several pieces of art, including the pictures of "Lily" (which are actually pictures of Julie) have disappeared. He doesn't get an opportunity to ask Conchis what has happened to them, since Conchis begins telling of the next phase of his life - when he moved back to Greece to, in the words of de Doukans, look for the water and not the wave. He then calls for a film projector and screen, which are brought in and set up by Joe. As Joe works, Conchis comments on the nature of war (see "Quotes", p. 373), suggesting that war is abhorrent to all real women and that's the reason Julie won't be watching the film with them. He then begins a long narrative, supplemented by film footage, describing the chain of events that led to his being considered a Nazi collaborator. He describes his awkward, but intensely cultural and intellectual, friendship with the commander of the Nazis occupying the island, a man he calls Anton. As he starts the film, which he says will show Nicholas Anton in person, Nicholas claims to have already seen him - in the simulated Nazi attack, which he now realizes was a re-enactment of Conchis' story. Conchis tells Nicholas he's about to see the real Anton, and the film begins.

As the film plays, Conchis tells Nicholas that Anton was relatively lenient with the Greeks on the island, but adds that word got back to German headquarters and a much tougher officer, Wimmel, was sent to take charge. When a group of Greek resistance fighters kills a group of German soldiers, Wimmel takes a number of villagers hostage and says they will be killed if the resistance fighters aren't turned over. The villagers desperately negotiate for time to try to find the fighters, and Wimmel, perhaps surprisingly, agrees. The villagers' search turns up nothing, but a woman not involved in the search (who, according to Conchis, had relatives among the hostages), discovers evidence of the fighters and turns them over to the Nazis. The fighters and their protective families are tortured, shouting out in their most pained moments the Greek word for "freedom." Conchis then recounts how he was brought to the scene of the torture and given orders to plead with the last living resistance fighter for information and to tell him that if he remained silent, the hostages would be executed. Conchis tells



how he struggled with his conscience and then pleaded with the fighter, but to no avail. He is taken prisoner, and then taken in front of the entire village, along with the rest of the hostages, where he is given a choice - kill the resistance fighter or be shot along with the rest of the hostages. He tells how he unsuccessfully begged for the atrocities to stop and then confronted the fighter, who from his tortured mouth spoke the same word as was screamed out the night before - freedom. Conchis tells how he realized that what the man was fighting for was more important than anything, the individual freedom to choose, and also realized the Nazis were placing him in a position where he no longer has that freedom. In the climactic moment of his story, Conchis tells of his decision that his "total being still tells [him] was right." He drops the gun and stands beside the resistance fighter - choosing freedom. He then recalls a blaze of machine gun fire, the impact of bullets tearing into him and the feeling of waking, blood-soaked and wounded, at the feet of the executed resistance fighters, surrounded by the bodies of the hostages.

Conchis explains that he was taken away by the surviving villagers and brought back to health, and that Anton killed himself. Nicholas compares his actions to Anton's, believing that Anton behaved more nobly and honorably by killing himself while that Nicholas, in his betrayal of Alison, committed moral suicide and is therefore much less noble a human being (see "Quotes", p. 399 - 400). In an atmosphere that suggests there cannot possibly be anything more to say, he and Conchis retire to their bedrooms. Nicholas stays awake a long time, thinking of the social inhumanity embodied by the Nazis, of his own personal inhumanity and of Alison.

Part 2, Chapters 52, 53 and 54 Analysis

On the first level of contextual analysis, the writing in this section is among the most effective sections of the book. The horror of life under Nazi rule is evoked with wrenching physical and emotional detail, by which neither the reader nor Nicholas can help but be affected. The question is whether this particular, and apparently deliberate, use of language is indicative that this is finally a truth - that Conchis is still playing games, but is for the first time using an actual incident to bring Nicholas into closer connection with his own actualities. The visceral and emotional impact of this section is so intense that the answer to this question would appear to be yes, a conclusion supported by the story's climactic evocation of the power of truth and freedom.

This evocation is a direct statement of the novel's key thematic points - that the true goal and worth of human existence is to live and choose freely. As such, it is an essential point to note within the novel's second level of contextual analysis, that being the way structure helps to strengthen and define theme there is the powerful sense that events, actions, and reactions have all built to this point, that everything Conchis has done and Nicholas has experienced have brought them both to a confrontation, for both of them, with a meaning of life. It's important to note, however, that Nicholas doesn't learn the full value of this confrontation until later in the novel. Yes, he considers the meaning of what he's just experienced here. But it's only later, when he's given the opportunity to actually apply what he's been shown about freedom of choice, that he

fully learns, appreciates, and understands the lesson. This happens twice - first when he's confronted by the opportunity to punish Julie (Part 2, Chapters 60, 61 and 62), and second, when he's confronted by the opportunity to truly make something of his life with the "resurrected" Alison. In short, this section marks another turning point, one that functions within all three analytical contexts - in terms of character and writing, thematic and structural development, and Conchis' manipulations.



Part 2, Chapters 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59

Part 2, Chapters 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59 Summary

The morning after Nicholas is told the story of the war, he meets Conchis for breakfast, and is surprised to see him dressed as a businessman. Nicholas then surprises Conchis by telling him he (Nicholas) has been in contact with Julie, and they're making plans to be together in spite of Conchis' apparent plans to play further games. At first Conchis seems taken aback, but then becomes resigned to his masque being over. He introduces some of the other participants - specifically Maria and Joe, both professional actors. Julie then arrives, expecting to play the part Conchis designed for her but soon realizing that because Nicholas has told Conchis everything, that part is no longer necessary. Nicholas notices that she's dressed in a contemporary style for the first time, and as Conchis leaves, thinks to himself that he's got a whole new Julie to discover. Over an intimate lunch and as Nicholas packs to leave for the last time, they give voice to their passionate thoughts for the first time, and Nicholas says he wants to marry her. Julie says she wants him to make love to her first, and they agree that that night in Athens, it will finally happen. Before they leave, however, Julie agrees to show Nicholas where she and June stayed while the masque was being played out. She takes him to a concealed cave, used by the Nazis in the war and now abandoned. She takes him on a tour, shows him the clothes she and June wore to play Lily and Rose, and then leads him out - but before Nicholas can climb the ladder to the surface, Julie is violently grabbed by unseen assailants, who also lock Nicholas in the cave. He eventually manages to get out, searches the house and the grounds without success, goes into the village and searches there, again without success, and finally returns to the school, resolving that if he doesn't hear from her by the end of the week he's going to Athens to look for her.

A few days later, Nicholas receives a surprise visit from June, who nervously tells him Julie's disappeared, that June is being followed, and that she's caught several menacing glimpses of Joe. As she talks Nicholas gets the impression that she's acting, that nothing of what she's saying is true. He allows himself to be lured back to June's hotel, where she confesses that Julie is completely under Conchis' control and that June has decided it's time to make her attraction to Nicholas known. Nicholas plays along, becoming increasingly certain that Julie is nearby. As June goes out to change, Nicholas waits, and when he feels a woman's hands playfully covering his eyes, realizes it's Julie. June joins them, and they tell Nicholas that the fake kidnapping, the secrecy, and the visit from June were all Conchis' idea - his last game. Nicholas asks what Conchis is really after, but neither sister is prepared to tell him. June leaves for Bourani, saying Conchis is letting them use it. Julie, meanwhile, has a bath, prior to what she and Nicholas both know is coming next - at last, they will make love. After some preliminary caresses they get into the bathtub together, (see "Quotes", p 432), bathe, and then return to the bedroom, where Julie suddenly and mysteriously adopts a series of postures - as a slave girl ready to be taken by her master, as Eve ready to be taken by Adam, as a dominatrix. Nicholas becomes impatient and Julie finally surrenders, but



before they can actually make love, several large men burst into the room, grab Nicholas and subdue him. After he's tied and placed on the bed Julie and June, now dressed quite severely come in with Conchis, who gives Nicholas a sedative, which makes him lapse into unconsciousness.

Part 2, Chapters 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59 Analysis

At first glance, the narrative action of this section appears to be building to the previously discussed, literally and metaphorically orgasmic congruence of plot, character and theme. It looks to both Nicholas and the reader as though the narrative of Conchis' games is drawing to a close (plot), as the result of Nicholas connecting to his true passions (character) and making the free choice to act on those passions (theme). But as the action reveals, what's really going on functions entirely within the context of the third level of analysis - everything is part of Conchis' game. He's not surprised when Nicholas confronts him over Julie, since as is later revealed Julie has told Conchis everything. The plans for revealing the true identities of Maria and Joe (that is, the current version of their true identities) were also made in advance, as were the plans for the kidnapping, the June/Julie switch, the seduction, and the kidnapping. In short, Conchis is pushing Nicholas to the very boundaries of perception and sanity, with the action of the following sections pushing him even further and thereby extending those boundaries.

On the level of the first two analytical contexts, the section functions effectively as both a character and story defining piece of narrative. As a direct result of the way this section is both written and structured, the reader is likely to empathize with Nicholas' progression of feeling. From his relief at finally being able to be honest to the questioning terror at Julie's kidnapping to the returning resentment resulting from the confrontation with June to the relief at the long-awaited lovemaking to the horrified, bewildered confusion at the kidnapping, the progression is well charted and evocative. Again, the point here is to break down Nicholas' pre-conceptions about himself and trigger new ones. An ever more complex tapestry of fabrications and lies is being woven in order to bring Nicholas, and therefore the reader, into a more intimate and honest understanding - in Nicholas' case, of a personal truth, and in the reader's case, of a universal truth.



Part 2, Chapters 60, 61 and 62

Part 2, Chapters 60, 61 and 62 Summary

Nicholas awakens on what he comes to believe is Conchis' yacht. He is no longer bound, but is kept under constant guard by several individuals who he recognizes from both the time when he was locked in the underground cave and the time when he was included in the Nazi masque. He reflects bitterly on Julie's betrayal and comes to consider Alison as a beacon of truth and honesty in his life. After a couple of days, he's visited by the man who played Anton in the Nazi masque, who tells him he's about to be taken before a court and judged. After urging Nicholas to shave and make himself presentable, Anton leaves. Nicholas rages inwardly, but does as he's obviously meant to do; he has no choice. After a series of seemingly bizarre, almost ritualistic, preparations, Nicholas is bound and gagged and taken into what has been set up to resemble a courtroom. To his surprise he's placed in what would usually be the judge's chair. To his additional surprise, a procession of male and female figures in bizarre, extreme, obviously symbolic masks and costumes comes into the room. Some of the figures he believes he recognizes by the way they walk - Anton, Joe, Julie, June, Conchis, Maria. At the end of the procession, four large men come in carrying a litter (a boxed-in, concealed couch on two sturdy poles, a centuries old means of transportation for the upper class). After the litter has been placed in the center of the room, two things happen simultaneously. The costumed figures begin to disrobe, and about twenty young people, apparently students, come in and sit. Nicholas watches as the masked characters reveal themselves - as he surmised, the group includes Conchis, Julie, June, Maria, Anton and Joe, as well as some familiar faces from other scenes in the masque and a few unfamiliar faces. One of the unfamiliar men stands, introduces himself and the others. Several (including Julie, introduced as Dr. Vanessa Maxwell) are presented as scientists, others (including June, introduced as Moira Maxwell) as theatrical professionals, still others (including Maria, introduced as Mrs. Conchis) as social activists. The empty litter is described as being symbolic of the eternal mother goddess.

While this is going on, Nicholas is simultaneously growing angrier and calculating what's really going on and becomes increasingly convinced that it's just another of Conchis' games - that no-one is any kind of scientist, professional or activist at all. The doctors explain that they have been studying Nicholas as part of an examination of the behavior of the mother-fixated, sexually-immature, selfishly-motivated, woman-using male. After the reading of a lengthy document describing the essential shallowness of Nicholas' personality, a second document supposedly written by Lily/Julie/Vanessa is presented, in which she indicates her belief that Nicholas' flaws of personality are the result of circumstances beyond his control, and he should, therefore, not be judged too harshly. Conchis comments that any further involvement with Nicholas would be both unproductive and unnecessary. One of the other doctors comments that Nicholas is still emotionally attached to both Lily and Julie, and suggests that Nicholas be on guard for possible inclinations towards suicide. Finally, yet another doctor suggests that since Nicholas has been judged by all of them, the time has come for him to judge them.



At that moment a flogging frame, designed to keep prisoners immobile while being whipped, is brought in and set up. One of the doctors explains that because of Nicholas' attachment to her, Lily/Julie/Vanessa has been selected as the potential object of Nicholas' anger. As she's placed in the frame and prepared for whipping, Nicholas' bonds are removed. Nicholas tries to consider which choice (to whip or to show mercy) would most upset the plans of those testing him. Amidst feelings of fury at Lily/Julie/Vanessa, of amazement that so much trouble could be taken over him, and confusion at what he should do, Nicholas indicates that he intends to inflict punishment. He is handed a whip, approaches the woman in the frame and is sorely tempted to inflict vengeful pain on her. Suddenly, however, he realizes he's been placed in exactly the same position as Conchis was in the encounter with the Nazis, and the only truly free choice is to not wield the whip (see "Quotes", p. 466). He hands it instead to Conchis, who Nicholas thinks expects him to say the word "freedom" in the way the resistance fighter did, but refuses to give him the satisfaction. He then returns to the judge's chair. The so-called "students" go out, the doctors go out, and Nicholas is left alone, but not for long.

Nicholas is violently taken into another room where he's forced to watch a pornographic film involving Lily/Julie and Joe preparing to have sex. Just before the act of actual penetration, however, the film is interrupted by footage of Nicholas and Alison on their trip to Parnassus. Nicholas reacts with fury, realizing they must have been watched the entire time. That section of film comes to an end, and the screen on which it was projected is lifted away to reveal Lily/Julie, nude and posed seductively on a couch. Joe appears, disrobes, and as Nicholas watches, makes tender, intimate love with Lily/Julie. Nicholas, analyzing every moment for its potential impact on him, is aware that he is on one level intended to be repulsed by the sexual union of a black man and a white woman, and on another level intended to be violently jealous that the woman he loves is making love with someone else. After the sexual performance is finished, Joe leaves, and Lily/Julie gives Nicholas a direct, frankly provocative look, which makes him realize that he knows her real name - a name that narration never specifically gives.

Conchis appears, tells Nicholas that he is now chosen, and that he must learn to smile (see "Quotes, 142-143, and 479). Nicholas is again bound, placed on a stretcher, and anaesthetized. He sinks again into oblivion.

Part 2, Chapters 60, 61 and 62 Analysis

This section of the novel brings both Conchis' games and Nicholas' confrontation with himself (the core element of Conchis' games) to a literal sexual climax as well as a narrative one. Extreme surprise layers on top of extreme surprise, manipulation piles on top of manipulation, moral confrontation succeeds moral confrontation. As a piece of writing functioning on the first contextual level of analysis, this section is quite effectively shaped and defined to bring the reader along with Nicholas' increasing disbelief, curiosity and outrage, all climaxing in the sudden clarity, available to both reader and protagonist, at the moment when the whip is placed in his hand. This moment, in turn, functions quite effectively on the second level of contextual analysis, to make the



novel's key thematic and narrative point - personal identity and integrity, both from an individual perspective and from the perspective of those observing a life and/or experience, depends on the power of choice, and the power to choose freedom of thought and feeling.

Ultimately, however, the key purpose of this section is on the third level of context, to bring Conchis' games to their pre-destined conclusion - a moment in which Nicholas must make a life-altering and soul-defining choice. What's important to note here is that at the end of it all, Nicholas is ultimately left with nothing, a spiritual oblivion symbolized by the physical oblivion he's ushered into with the anesthetic he's given at the end of this section. Yes he chooses freedom in the moment when he chooses to not whip Lily/Julie, but the irony is that the game isn't over. The encounter between Lily/Julie and Joe that he is forced to witness symbolizes the way that he must not only choose freedom but be stripped of the preconceptions that obscured that freedom in the first place - sexual, intellectual, romantic. After watching Lily/Julie and Joe, Nicholas' life is empty, his hopes are gone, his morality stripped away. What he has believed about love, sex and relationships, not only in terms of Lily/Julie but in terms of the concepts, is gone. In other words, after becoming aware of just how deeply involved Lily/Julie is in Conchis' games, he realizes he cannot truly love her nor be loved by her. He's also divested of any hope of redemption through his relationship with Alison, having decided that his faith in the sanctity and honesty of their relationship, which he had believed was separate from Conchis and his games, has been tainted by the way it was incorporated, with apparent casual heartlessness, into those games. As it turns out there are more shocks about the Alison relationship to come, a manifestation of the way Conchis repeatedly, and ever more aggressively, pushes the boundaries of Nicholas' beliefs and sanity. The following sections of the book chronicle his attempts to rebuild his life on a foundation of anger, self-righteousness, and petty curiosity, foundations which crumble when he's confronted first by the shallowness of his old habits and then by the depths of his re-awakened feelings for Alison.

A key question to consider at this point in the narrative relates to the scene of lovemaking between Lily/Julie and Joe that Nicholas is forced to witness. What does the author intend to be the bigger shock to the moral/emotional systems of both Nicholas and the reader - the fact that the object of love is being sexually free with another man, or the fact that a white woman is willingly and happily having sex with an equally willing and equally happy black man? As the writing indicates, Nicholas himself believes that both "shocks" are intended to have equal effect - it seems, at least to him, that he is meant to be shocked out of any kind of respect, attraction or love for Lily/Julie by all the levels of the encounter, including the fact that he's being forced to watch it. For him, it works. The question of how it works on the reader is another matter. As previously discussed, the socio-cultural perspectives on sex in the era in which the book was written and published would have seen the racial element here as the bigger shock. Present day readers, however, might find this much less dramatic, and also might be inclined to be somewhat dismissive of the way it affects Nicholas. It must be remembered, however, that Nicholas has been lured, perhaps in spite of himself, into feelings of love and respect for Lily/Julie, feelings that on some level create her as his savior. Seeing his vision of her compromised is clearly intended to break him down even

further - the fact that one level of compromise is less significant to the present day reader is, essentially, irrelevant to the novel's narrative and thematic point.



Part 2, Chapters 63, 64, 65, 66 and 67

Part 2, Chapters 63, 64, 65, 66 and 67 Summary

Nicholas wakes to find himself abandoned in a ruined shack in an isolated village, left alone with food and directions on how to get back to the school. As he eats and prepares to leave, he feels somehow triumphant, not only that he'd survived Conchis' test, but that he'd proved them wrong about him - he has transcended their beliefs that he would be judgmental and petty (see "Quotes", p. 481). Later, however, he realizes that this joy is as much an illusion as everything else that went on. He returns to the school to find several letters waiting - one from Leverrier, refusing to speak any further of his experiences at Bourani, another confirming Julie's identity, another from Alison's mother acknowledging his letter of condolence on Alison's death, and a fourth from Alison's old roommate, containing photographs Alison took on the Parnassus trip. As he returns to the school, he describes his feelings of loneliness, which trigger anger and frustration, which results in a public outburst of anger at Demetriades, which results in his being dismissed. As he's packing to leave, he's visited by an assistant administrator, who admits (without actually saying so) that he was in the pay of Conchis, and kept him informed of Nicholas' whereabouts and activities. He also offers to provide Nicholas with a good reference as long as Nicholas keeps quiet about what happened with Conchis. Nicholas agrees, stores his bags, and then goes out to Bourani to see what secrets he can uncover.

Nicholas' first stop is the underground cavern, where he discovers copies of the script followed by Conchis, Julie and June. He also discovers a handwritten fairy tale about a lonely, idealistic prince, a manipulative king, and the prince's discovery that everything about the king and about life is an illusion. The tale concludes with the revelation that everything the prince experiences is created by the king who describes himself as a magician, and who says, now that the prince has discovered the truth, that he too is on his way to becoming a magician. Nicholas avoids the house, tempted to vandalize it but deciding that doing so would do no good, and returns to collect his bags, passing the Poseidon statue one last time and realizing it represents the all-powerful stillness and watchfulness at the core of his experience.

When Nicholas reaches Athens, he searches for traces of Conchis, only to find that Conchis is apparently dead and buried in an Athenian cemetery. He has a miserable dinner and an even more miserable evening, but then back in his hotel room receives a mysterious phone call telling him to look out his window. He does, and catches a glimpse of Alison getting into a taxi. He tries to trace the phone call, but to no avail. He realizes that Alison was involved with Conchis' game and spends the next day trying to prove his theory. He learns that circumstances in England support his belief, angrily resolves to punish Alison in the way he couldn't bring himself to punish Julie and prepares to return to England to put his plans into action.



Part 2, Chapters 63, 64, 65, 66 and 67 Analysis

The physical circumstances in which Nicholas awakens in this section symbolize his emotional and spiritual circumstances - isolated, bereft of anything but the barest means of sustenance, and faced with no choice but to go on. On the first level of contextual analysis, the writing in this section effectively evokes the sense of a suddenly barren life, a kind of uneasy, uncomfortable stillness that sits uncomfortably with both Nicholas and the reader after the upheavals of the previous sections. This is also an effective structural element on the second contextual level of analysis, in that Nicholas has reached a point in his journey of transformation where he has no place to go but onward, except that for a while he doesn't know what direction that should be. He soon makes up his mind, however, and this is where he moves in a direction that is essentially backward, rather than forward. His actions here are evocative of his old, pre-Conchis self - his desire to understand and therefore control, his determination to be a self-righteous victim, and his lack of genuine self-awareness. And then he catches a glimpse of Alison, a moment that at first glance solely functions within the third contextual level of analysis - it's still clearly part of Conchis' games. On another level, however, this moment is an externalization of what is becoming an internal truth. Nicholas is slowly, but surely, becoming aware that his connection with and feeling for Alison is actually the seed of a new personal truth, a new life that has the potential to be grounded in honesty and real feeling. This seed, like a garden seed in the spring, is germinating beneath the surface, not breaking through to the sun and the light of new life until after a period of intense struggle. That struggle, the new truth striving to emerge through the dirt of an old life, old attitudes and old actions, is dramatized in the following sections through Nicholas' angry relationship with Mrs. de Seitas and a selfish, shallow sexual relationship with JoJo.



Part 3, Chapters 68, 69, 70, 71 and 72

Part 3, Chapters 68, 69, 70, 71 and 72 Summary

On his way back to England Nicholas stops off in Rome to pay a visit to Leverrier, now a monk in a reclusive monastery. Leverrier continues to refuse to speak of his experience at Bourani, telling Nicholas he (Leverrier) is determined to continue to live in peace and that by recalling everything that had happened, that peace will be eroded. Nicholas leaves, unsatisfied but still determined to uncover everything possible about Bourani and Conchis. When he returns to London, he's immediately and depressingly re-introduced to its dingy climate, buildings and inhabitants. He becomes more and more depressed as he obsessively searches and watches for Alison, always without result. Finally he resolves to become a little more settled and takes an apartment owned by an opinionated ex-bohemian, female artist named Kemp. As time passes, his attitudes towards Conchis and Bourani soften (see "Quotes", p. 525), as do his attitudes towards Alison and Lily. He prepares to move on, but as part of that process he also conducts extensive investigations and contemplations of everything about Conchis and his masques - his personal life, his stories of the war and the people he encountered, his masks and costumes, the people he hired, etc. There are a few factual elements, the Nazi invasion of the island among them, but, for the most part, he discovers that everything else was a fabrication.

Something that does come to light, following intense investigation, is the fact that as a child Conchis did in fact live next door to a girl named Lily, who Nicholas discovers is now named Lily de Seitas. He manipulates his way into meeting with her, presenting himself as doing research into Conchis, whom he describes as an obscure but brilliant writer. Mrs. de Seitas, however, who seems to be vague and not too bright, disclaims all knowledge of Conchis' present life, remembering him only as a little boy. Frustrated and seemingly defeated, Nicholas starts on his way back to London - but when he stops for lunch at a local pub and mentions that he was visiting Mrs. de Seitas, the friendly bartender casually mentions that she has two beautiful twin daughters, whom Nicholas immediately assumes to be Julie and June. Nicholas rushes back to confront Mrs. de Seitas, who drops the pretense of being vague and distracted and immediately becomes cool and articulate. She tells Nicholas she's been waiting for him and explains what she can - that Conchis is the girls' godfather, that her daughters' real names are Lily and Rose, and that she is good friends with Alison and is unwilling to tell Nicholas where she is. In spite of Nicholas' attempts to shock her with sarcasm, violent language, and graphic descriptions of the sexual activity he watched Lily undertake, Mrs. de Seitas tells him she knows everything her daughters did, and that she approves. She says she and Conchis, and their friends as well, all believe in sexual freedom of expression and of the ultimate power of love (see "Quotes", p. 551). When Nicholas again asks about Alison, Mrs. de Seitas refuses to tell him anything, adding that he's free to check up on anything and everything she's told him. He promises to do so, and leaves.



Part 3, Chapters 68, 69, 70, 71 and 72 Analysis

Leverrier here, and Mitford in the following section, both represent and embody the fate that awaits Nicholas if he is ultimately unable to integrate what he has learned about himself and about the world as the result of his experience with Conchis. Leverrier is cut off from his past, while Mitford is eventually revealed to be deluded about his past. Both are portrayed as unfulfilled human beings, a narrative choice on the first level of contextual analysis that warns the reader, if not Nicholas himself, of the fate that conceivably awaits him. This possibility becomes more and more apparent as the result of his ongoing relationship with Mrs. de Seitas, founded as it is in Nicholas' desire for revenge, for knowledge and control - his determination, in other words, to play the self-righteous, but knowledgeable victim. He is drawing himself further and further away from the truth that Conchis and his allies want him to experience - in other words, he is becoming more Leverrier and less himself. On the third level of contextual analysis, this section makes it clear that the game is still afoot - that manipulations are still swirling around Nicholas and Alison alike.

Nicholas' return to his earlier ways of thinking and believing and acting are symbolized by his return to England and specifically to London. The writing here effectively evokes an environment with a grayness and shallowness of spirit that seems to mirror the same grayness and shallowness with which Nicholas began his journey, and which he re-experiences with the pervasiveness of a seeping, dank London fog. He began to escape and/or transcend while he was in Greece, but because the experience there was so traumatic and because he can't yet fully face the more fully-realized seed of deeper humanity germinating beneath the surface of his life, he reverts to his old ways. These ways are dramatized further in the following section.



Part 3, Chapters 73, 74, 75, 76 and 77

Part 3, Chapters 73, 74, 75, 76 and 77 Summary

As Nicholas investigates Mrs. de Seitas' story and finds it's all true, supported by impeccable documentation, he's contacted by Mitford. They meet for lunch, where Nicholas manipulates him into telling him several things - that "the waiting room" was Conchis' teasing name for the villa, that Mitford was sexually and romantically toyed with by the twins in a similar way as Nicholas, and that Mitford's theory is that Conchis manipulated the whole situation out of voyeuristic impotence. Nicholas' narration describes how he finds Mitford increasingly disgusting, and that in later years, he found out that Mitford had been convicted of passing checks under a false identity - the one he presented to Nicholas. After their conversation, Nicholas calls Mrs. de Seitas and asks to visit her. She agrees, but before he can go, he's visited by an American, Briggs, who's been invited to take over the teaching position at the Lord Byron school and is to be interviewed by a member of the board, a "Mr. Conchis," who directed him to Nicholas for information about the situation. Nicholas realizes he's again been placed in the position of choosing. His options are to tell Briggs everything or to keep the secret. He chooses the latter, and after a long conversation which includes the revelation that Conchis has already invited Briggs and his girlfriend to visit, Briggs leaves.

That same day, Nicholas and Mrs. de Seitas meet for tea. Nicholas asks her several questions - about Alison, whether anything Conchis told him of his experiences was true, what the purpose was in sending Briggs, whether the game is over. Mrs. de Seitas comments that Conchis told her once that any answer is a kind of death and provides no new information. She also presents him with a gift - a piece of pottery, which she says symbolizes his new knowledge and the new life that awaits him. As they leave, Mrs. de Seitas encounters an old friend and prepares to leave with him, telling Nicholas as she goes a story of how an assassin came close to killing a beautiful queen, but at the last moment couldn't bear to hurt her and broke down in tears. The suggested parallel is obvious - that Nicholas is asked to not do any damage to her, to Conchis, and/or their circle of friends and fellow believers. Her last words are of Alison - that she has to be won over, not browbeaten into being with him.

Nicholas spends the next few days waiting for Alison, considering how he'd deal with her differently, and tempting himself with easy sex and then refusing it as part of his self-imposed tribute to her. Finally, however, he responds to the temptation in the smile of a not-too-pretty girl from Scotland, JoJo. Over the course of several days they spend time together, time that Nicholas insists be viewed solely as friendly. JoJo, however, develops romantic and sexual feelings for him. He rejects her, and as part of his attempt to ease her hurt feelings, tells her everything that has happened to him - with Alison, with Lily, and with Greece. As he speaks, Nicholas realizes the truth that all his experiences have been, apparently, intended to show him - that he must live with compassion, for those with whom he's involved and for himself.



The following morning, Nicholas wakes to realize that JoJo has gone - not just from his flat, where she'd spent the night (platonically), but from his life. He feels anger at being brought to this situation, frustration at Alison, and disgust with his life. He decides to move and tells Kemp, who berates him viciously for using both her and JoJo. As he packs he accidentally breaks the piece of pottery Mrs. de Seitas gave him, and collapses to the floor in tears. Kemp offers him rough comfort, and he decides to stay with her.

Part 3, Chapters 73, 74, 75, 76 and 77 Analysis

There are several important elements in this section, all of which dramatize growths in Nicholas' perspective through personal encounters. The first is with Mitford, who in his self-absorbed self-delusions not only represents the kind of person Nicholas might become if he is unable to incorporate Conchis' teachings, but also represents the kind of person Nicholas was before his "education" began. The second encounter is with Mrs. de Seitas, whose enigmatic gentleness and evident compassion act as a kind of spiritually-soothing balm to Nicholas' troubled soul. Yes, he's still being manipulated and yes, on some level Conchis is still behind everything that's going on, but where Conchis seems to have been more interested in the intellectual side of the game, Mrs. de Seitas seems to have more compassion - for both Nicholas and Alison. It is, perhaps, through her that Nicholas learns about the meaning of true humanity, having the lies about false humanity stripped from him by Conchis' games.

The third encounter is with Briggs, notable for the way in which Nicholas is, perhaps unconsciously, incorporating what he learned at Bourani from Conchis. In choosing to not tell Briggs what he experienced, he is essentially doing what Conchis did to him in the early stages of their relationship - Conchis gave Nicholas freedom to choose to leave, Nicholas is giving Briggs the same option. It might not be going too far to suggest that in both cases, Conchis and Nicholas are in fact offering the same choice as the Nazi commander offered Conchis - the freedom to choose free thought. In short, this particular encounter indicates that the seed of personal awareness, germinated in the sub-surface darkness of Nicholas' soul, is inching its way towards the light. The fourth key encounter here is with JoJo, an encounter that simultaneously illustrates how Nicholas has changed and how he hasn't. Yes, he manages to not use her sexually, in the way he has so many other women. He still uses her, however - he avoids thinking about himself, examining his feelings and situation, by filling his time and his thoughts with her. To his credit, however, he's honest with both her and himself, with the result that he loses her friendship but gains self-understanding. The seed of personal awareness is moving closer to the surface.

All in all, this section is notable for the way in which it functions on all three levels of contextual analysis, for the same reasons. As a piece of character development, as a stage in structural development, and as the final moves of Conchis' games, the encounters here all move closer to the book's final moments - Nicholas' declaration and manifestation of free, personal choice. Those moments appear in the following section, which contains the last in a series of climaxes, all of which simultaneously function on

all three levels - to bring both Nicholas and the reader alike to an awareness of Nicholas' true character, and, ultimately, the character of all humanity.



Part 3, Chapter 78

Part 3, Chapter 78 Summary

After ten days of waiting for Alison to contact Nicholas, the suddenly-motherly Kemp just as suddenly takes Nicholas for a walk. When they reach a small park she goes to get a cup of tea, and Nicholas suddenly realizes she's brought him to meet Alison (see "Quotes", p. 595-596), whom he finds seated quietly on a bench. His first comment is to ask where the others are. Alison says she's alone, but Nicholas accuses her of lying. After a long silence, she begins to explain - that she and the others got Kemp to bring him, that she didn't want to come but the others made her, and that she's not seeing anyone else. Nicholas strives to remember what Mrs. de Seitas told him about how to win Alison back, but nevertheless pushes her to reveal what she went through with Conchis and "the others." When she remains silent, he protests that he's changed and that he's prepared to admit he loves her. She refuses to believe him and begins to walk away. As he follows her, Nicholas realizes he's through being watched and manipulated and predicted, and resolves to change everything. He challenges Alison, roughly and passionately, to accept that he's finally beginning to realize a fuller and better way of being, to cast aside the influence of those that have been manipulating them both, and to join him in taking a chance that they can build a life of love together. On the spot, he invents a scenario he believes will convince "the others" that their final efforts at manipulation have failed, and then challenges her to play it out with him. She seems doubtful, and Nicholas realizes that they're both facing the moment of freedom-making choice. He waits in desperate anxiety for her to complete her portion of the scenario, which includes him striking her in the way he never struck Lily but has wanted to for ages. She does, and in the moment following the slap, she smiles - "that archaic smile, her variant of theirs, steadier, braver, far less implacable, without malice or arrogance, yet still that smile. Mocking love, yet making it." The smile of knowing and understanding the pain and passion of life ... the smile of the statue. Nicholas realizes that they are both finally free of the watchers, but as he walks away from Alison to complete his part in the scenario, he wonders whether he's as sure as he thinks. He walks away, not looking back, not sure what he'll find when he gets to their pre-arranged meeting place, and experiences "fragments of freedom" - a singing bird, soaring pigeons, someone burning leaves.

Part 3, Chapter 78 Analysis

This section contains the ultimate climax, Nicholas' confrontation with his true self as embodied by his confrontation with the person who embodies and externalizes that self - Alison. On all three contextual levels of analysis, this final determination of Nicholas' character, the final manifestation of personal awareness and freedom and choice, brings events to a close - Nicholas' journey of transformation, the reader's empathic journey of identification with his situation, the novel's narrative journey from beginning to end, and perhaps most importantly, the ultimate repudiation of Conchis' games. It's



important to note here that neither Nicholas nor Alison is sure about what they're doing. They're both free for the first time in their lives, free to choose - and free to choose more freedom. This is the novel's core thematic point, that freedom must be at the heart of every human experience and every human choice. This is the ultimate meaning of the transcendent smile of the intriguing statue at Bourani, as well as cool smile of Conchis, the mischievousness smile of Lily/Rose, and the warm compassionate smile of Mrs. de Seitas. Transcendent wisdom is present in all of them, but because each human being is different that wisdom manifests differently as well. It remains to be seen just how Nicholas' smile will manifest that wisdom, but there is the sense that because he, unlike Leverrier and Mitford, is willing to accept both his pain and his new learning, he actually will smile ... and mean it.

The novel's final images, subtle and simultaneously life affirming (the birds) and death-proclaiming (the burning leaves), are the ultimate reinforcement of the novel's key theme. All there is, in life and death and in everything in between, is freedom.



Characters

Nicholas Urfe

Nicholas is the novel's protagonist, with the story of his journey of transformation making up its narrative spine, or through line. He is, on some level, the archetype of The Hero, a character similar to that found in many myths and legends, one whose external conflicts trigger internal transformation and ultimately spiritual transcendence. Unlike many other Hero characters, however, Nicholas is more reactive than active - where other Hero characters fight and conquer, Nicholas experiences and reacts, taking genuinely overt action only at the end of the novel when the external obstacles placed in his path by the various antagonists (Conchis, Alison, Lily, etc) are ostensibly removed. This reactive side to his character makes him more like The Fool, an equally archetypal aspect of humanity portrayed on the first card of the ancient Tarot, that mysteriously enlightened and prescient deck of cards that reveals both inner and outer destiny. The Fool is reactive to the universal forces affecting him, whereas the Hero challenges them. Nicholas, as a manifestation of the Fool, begins his journey in a very foolish place - selfish, manipulative, and insensitive. As the result of his experiences with Conchis, Lily and Alison (who, like many of the other encounters, are in their own way equally archetypal from the Tarot perspective), he awakens to deeper self-awareness, compassion and accountability. He also learns the responsibility and the right of each individual to choose freely, a discovery that embodies the novel's key thematic point - that to choose freedom, in any and every situation, is the ultimate responsibility. The novel is narrated in his voice, with the language used defining him as cerebral, well read, and with a tendency towards verbal, emotional, and intellectual self-indulgence. He is also, in both narration and action, ironically observant, examining even the simplest comments and actions for layers of hidden meaning. He is this way partly the result of his own, self-absorbed, almost paranoid, nature, but as the narrative progresses it's also the result of the situation in which he finds himself. Ultimately, as the result of all these factors, the reader is treated to an exhaustive, almost overwhelming amount of intellectually, rather than emotionally-defined detail. This is true even at the novel's close, when he has presumably become more enlightened.

Conchis

Conchis is the novel's principal antagonist, the primary force of change Nicholas encounters and is ultimately changed by, the Magus of the book's title. "The Magus" is one of many names identifying an archetypal character in the Tarot - that of a wise, all powerful, manipulative magician whose actions bring the Fool (Nicholas) to new knowledge and wisdom. Conchis is a powerful and skilled manipulator, one with seemingly limitless material resources and an equally limitless capacity for quick thinking and improvisation. Interestingly, his motivations for making Nicholas the focus of his plans are never fully or completely defined, but there is the sense about the novel that it doesn't matter. As an embodiment of the process of life, of challenge and



confrontation, he doesn't need a motivation. As an embodiment of the spirit of change, he just is what he is and does what he does.

Alison

As a character, Alison functions on a number of levels - as a primary love interest, as an antagonist, and as an embodiment of several Tarot figures. These include the High Priestess, who initiates the fool into the mysterious, instinctive, and the intuitive; as well as the Star, the embodiment of hope; and the World, the embodiment of wholeness, unity, and the eternal cycle of life. It's interesting to note here that Alison is also something of a Fool-character herself, in that she begins her own journey of transformation in a similarly emotionally immature place and is challenged by Nicholas in the same way as Nicholas himself is challenged by Conchis to, in simple terms, grow up.

Lily / Julie / Vanessa

This character, like Alison, functions on the levels of love interest, antagonist, and Tarot embodiment. On one level her multiple identities define her as representing the Moon, the Tarot card evoking changeability and the eternal cycle of transformation. In each identity, she evokes an additional archetypal Tarot figure - as Lily she embodies Temperance (a female figure embodying balance and restraint), as Julie she embodies the Empress (an embodiment of earthy, sexual, sensual energy), and as Vanessa she embodies Justice (an embodiment of clear-eyed, rational, unemotional thinking). It's important to note that the novel never makes it clear whether she has a single core identity, or what that identity might be. She exists, for the purposes of the novel, solely in terms of Nicholas and never in terms of herself.

Demitriades

This secondary character is Nicholas' one "friend" and ally at the school where he teaches. He is, contrary to Nicholas' suspicions, not involved in Conchis' plans. Nevertheless there is the possibility that he, too, represents an archetypal Tarot figure - that of the Devil, the spirit of unrestrained desires and appetites, particularly sexual.

Maria

This character, at first, appears as Conchis' silent servant, is later presented to Nicholas as an actress, and then still later, when Nicholas faces the tribunal, as Conchis' wife and fellow scientist. She is essentially silent and, like Lily, is never defined with a single, core identity. She comes across as essentially one of Conchis' human props, and, as such, doesn't seem to have a parallel Tarot archetype.



Rose / June / Moira

This character is the twin sister of Lily / Rose / Vanessa, but plays a substantially less important role in the action. She is essentially employed by Conchis to confuse Nicholas, and, like Lily, embodies manifestations of three Tarot archetypes, and like Maria is basically one of Conchis' human props.

Anubis / Joe

This character is a black actor employed by Conchis to fulfill two roles. The first, as Anubis, is the silent, menacing guardian of Lily and Rose (jackal-headed Anubis was the guardian of the underworld in Ancient Egyptian mythology). Joe's other, and perhaps more important, role, is as an embodiment of what the novel, with the perspective of the time in which it was written (the 1950's), views as taboo sexuality. In other words, when Joe (a black man) has sex with Lily (a white woman), it's intended to shock Nicholas into one of two primal acts - repulsion or a transcendent acceptance of sexuality. In both these roles Joe can be seen as an aspect of the Tarot archetype of strength - in the first he is a manifestation of pure physical strength, while in the second he provides a direct challenge to Nicholas' strength ... will Nicholas be able to rein in his repulsion and/or transcend?

Anton

Another of Conchis' human "props," this character is, like Anubis/Joe, an actor employed to fulfill several roles. The most important of these is as Conchis' ally and friend in the re-enactment of Conchis' experience with the Nazis during World War II. Later, Anton is essentially a prison guard. Like Maria, his roles don't seem to have any particular resonance with figures in the Tarot.

Lily / de Doukans / Henrik Nygaard

These three characters are the prime figures in three of the lengthy stories Conchis tells about his life. They are all portrayed as having a profound spiritual and emotional affect on him, but by the novel's conclusion (at which point Nicholas realizes there may be very little of the truth in most of Conchis' stories) there is some question as to whether these characters are real. For example, there was a real "Lily" in Conchis' life, a young girl who grows up to be Lily de Seitas and who has a very different childhood from that described by Conchis. Nicholas' investigations in the novel's final sections reveal no real trace of a de Doukans, while what he discovers about Nygaard is inconclusive. The novel never fully answers the question of whether they're real, or if they are how much of them is real.



Mitford and Leverrier

These are the two previous inhabitants of Nicholas' teaching position at the school. Nicholas discovers that they both had similar experiences as he did, i.e. being entrapped and manipulated by Conchis. Neither man has been able to incorporate those perspectives into a new life. Mitford is both able and prepared to talk about what happened, but from an essentially unenlightened perspective - all he knows is that he was manipulated and toyed with; he has no understanding of why or what the manipulation taught him. By contrast, Leverrier is both unable and unwilling to discuss what happened, giving the impression that he was quite traumatized. The reaction of these two "victims," when considered alongside that of Nicholas' reaction, would seem to suggest that in their case, Conchis' "experiment" was a failure - the two men didn't open themselves to a deeper understanding of the world or themselves. Nicholas does, and where Leverrier withdraws from the world by becoming a monk and where Mitford ends up corrupted and destroyed by the world, becoming a criminal, Nicholas is portrayed as becoming more fully human. In short, Mitford and Leverrier are contrasting characters, whose primary narrative purpose seems to define the central character (Nicholas) by embodying something quite different.

Lily de Seitas

This character appears only in the novel's final section, is revealed to be the "Lily" who the "Lily" in Conchis' stories and masques is based on and is also revealed to be one of Conchis' allies. At first she presents herself to Nicholas as vague and un-intellectual, but as his awareness of what's been done to him deepens, she lets him see the real person - wise, passionate, compassionate, and determined. She, like her daughter Lily / Julie / Vanessa, carries with her elements of the Tarot archetypes of the Empress, Temperance and Justice, with the emphasis in her particular character perhaps being on the sexually-enlightened, motherly, life-birthing aspects of the Empress.

Kemp / JoJo / Briggs

These characters appear in the novel's final chapters. In relation to the Tarot metaphor, Kemp is a no-nonsense Empress type, more earthy and direct than Lily de Seitas and the other women Nicholas encounters but nonetheless an embodiment of the nurturing / sexually aware mother spirit. JoJo is a vulnerable, needy, High Priestess/Star/Fool archetype, similar to Alison in that they're manipulated and hurt by Nicholas in similar ways. Both women serve as the final reminders to Nicholas that he still has a long way to go towards becoming a better man, and as such mark the beginning of the final stage of his journey of transformation. For his part, Briggs is like Nicholas, an embodiment of the Fool archetype, a young, intellectually and spiritually naive sort with a lot to learn. His appearance at the end of the novel brings Nicholas full circle - from student to teacher.



Objects/Places

London

The emotionally and physically dingy city in which Nicholas both begins and ends his journey. It symbolizes the emotional, physical and spiritual dinginess of Nicholas' spirit at both the beginning of his journey of transformation (where he's desperate for a new life) and at the end (where hope for a new life seems to have abandoned him).

Phraxos

This is the island upon which the school at which Nicholas teaches and the villa in which he's transformed are both built. Its natural, light-soaked and life-filled beauty are vividly contrasted to the darkness and deadness of London. As such, it symbolizes the spiritual transformation Nicholas begins to undergo while there.

The Lord Byron School

This is the school on Phraxos at which Nicholas works. The school's name is important, in that Lord Byron was one of history's most noted and influential poets - romantic, emotional, and passionate; Byron's work embodies the spirit of life to which Nicholas awakens.

Bourani

Conchis' villa on Phraxos, where the majority of Nicholas' encounters with the individuals and experiences that change his life and perspectives take place.

The Priapus

This small statue of an archetypal male figure with a grotesquely huge penis symbolizes and foreshadows the spirit of sexual freedom and power that Nicholas is both confronted by and challenged to embrace. The fact that it's placed in the gardens at Bourani symbolizes the way that Nicholas' experiences at Bourani are the source of this challenge to his previously-precious beliefs about how sex is meant to be experienced.

The Statue of Poseidon

Poseidon was the Greek god of the oceans, storms and earthquakes. He is an embodiment and/or manifestation of primal forces that shape the earth and human existence upon it. The presence of a statue of him, as well as the way Nicholas meets



several important characters in its shadow, suggests that while on the island and at Bourani, Nicholas is, on some level, encountering the primal forces of existence.

Masks

Masks appear in several manifestations throughout the novel, both in literal and metaphorical ways. For example, characters challenging Nicholas wear literal masks over their faces and wear masks of different types of clothing on their bodies. They also wear different identities and emotional characteristics as masks and tell stories to mask their true pasts. It's also possible to see the journey undertaken by Nicholas as the removal of the selfish, insensitive, unenlightened mask he's worn all his life. Once that mask is removed, he's able to commit his life to Alison, to their love and to their relationship in a fully human, more realized way.

The Underground Cave

Originally a hiding place used by Nazis during their invasion of Phraxos during World War II. Caves in myths, folk tales and stories play host to characters embodying wisdom and insight, or are the places in which hero characters encounter wisdom and insight. Here, the cave plays host to Lily/Julie and Rose/June, the triggers for the development of Nicholas' wisdom and insight, and is used by them as a hiding place during their invasion of Nicholas' psyche.

Dinsford House

This is the home of Lily de Seitas, where Nicholas learns what seems to be the truth about the origins of Lily/Julie and Rose/June and about what's been happening to him.

The Pottery Dish

This gift from Lily de Seitas is a symbol of the new knowledge and the new sense of self-awareness into which Nicholas grows as the result of both his encounter with Conchis and his encounter with Lily de Seitas, who explains what the Conchis experience was all about. The fact that Nicholas accidentally breaks the dish represents the ultimate fragility of this new knowledge, while the fact that he breaks down in tears is an indication that despite the importance of the gift and its evident value, he still has a ways to go before he reaches full emotional and spiritual maturity.

Social Concerns And Themes

The Magus was the first novel Fowles wrote, although not the first he published. He wrote and rewrote it for a dozen years before its publication in 1965. Still not happy with it, despite its commercial and critical success, he reworked it again and the revised version was published in 1977. Fowles's obsession with The Magus and his fascination with it have given it what he calls "favored child" status. He still marvels from time to time that he could write it. It is an important work for its autobiographical connections, its portrayal of the protagonist trapped in a meaningless world who must learn to choose life and love, and its use of myth and mystery to define what is lacking in the protagonist's life. The Greek island setting is important as the "other world" in which the journey takes place, and it is important to Fowles as the place where he began writing and where he first felt connected to the timelessness of myth.

As with all of Fowles's fiction, a central theme of this novel is one of "unmasking" to get at the essential core of a person. To dramatize the masks each person wears, as he adopts various personas, Fowles sets up a "godgame" with Conchis as the magus, or magician, who brings forth the actors and actresses, only to unmask them as they take on new roles. Nicholas, intrigued by the mystery he suspects awaits him within Conchis' realm, soon finds that he, too, becomes one of the players in the godgame.

At the heart of the godgame is the unmasking of Nicholas, which takes place in the pivotal underground trial scene, and from which he emerges reborn into a higher state of consciousness, a new awareness of who he is and of what it means to be one of "the elect."

Although the end of the novel provides a reunion with Alison, who must choose Nicholas as he has come to choose her, the story, like most of Fowles's fiction, does not have a clearcut ending. Nicholas has learned to choose, and thus learned how to be free, but the lack of certainty which characterizes modern life creates hazards that imperil freedom, and while knowledge should be the aim of modern man's quest, it does not necessarily ensure his stability or happiness.



Techniques

The technique Fowles uses in *The Magus* gives it richness, complexity, and mystery, all of which mirror its theme. The protagonist, Nicholas, has a rational, cynical view of life which must be challenged. To do this, Conchis exposes Nicholas to the mysteries of the godgame, which intrigue and challenge him. As the mysteries unfold, Nicholas tries to decipher their meaning rationally and logically. So, too, does the reader. Each time Nicholas arrives at a conclusion, which seems logical and sensible, the reader, too, is prone to believe it. Then Conchis, the magus, unmask the players and the logical answer proves false.

Using such a technique, Fowles brings the reader, along with Nicholas, to the truth behind the masks: the need for Nicholas to choose truth by choosing life in a world of hazard. The technique of unmasking players and plots demonstrates Fowles's concern with stripping away appearances so as to get to the essential truths.



Themes

Freedom and Choice

This is the novel's core theme, both evoked and specifically defined at three principal points. These are the climax of Conchis' story of his experiences during the Nazi occupation of World War II, the climax of Nicholas' trial when he is presented with the opportunity to punish Lily, and in the book's final moments, in which he forces Alison into a position similar to the one he experienced on the previous two occasions. In all three of these instances, the choices made by the characters are portrayed as embodying an ideal, and, therefore, also embody the book's main thematic point - that ultimate freedom lies in the ability to choose, and the ultimate choice is freedom. Forced choice is not freedom, and where there is no freedom there can be no choice. There are two ironies here. The first is that Nicholas only learns the value of freedom and choice only after having both taken from him by Conchis and his cronies, an action that echoes Nicholas' own actions and attitudes. The second irony is that throughout the book, Nicholas is given the freedom to choose and repeatedly makes choices that keep him entrapped. In the first and second phases of his relationship with Alison, he is given the freedom to choose a different way of relating to women, but he chooses to remain imprisoned in his old attitudes. Also, Conchis repeatedly gives him the choice of not returning to Bourani, but because Nicholas lacks freedom from first his curiosity and later his passion for Lily, he becomes more and more trapped, an experience climactically symbolized by his being kidnapped, bound and tried.

Sexual and Emotional Freedom

This secondary theme is a manifestation of the novel's primary theme, and is specifically referred to by Lily de Seitas as one of the primary reasons why Conchis and his allies do what they do. This is because they believe that sexual repression is a source of profound spiritual un-enlightenment, particularly in the case of the almost-stereotypically British, repressed Nicholas. It's important to note that Nicholas is not the only individual being challenged to change his perspectives here. It's very clear from narrative elements such as the scene of sexual intimacy between Joe and Lily (a black man and a white woman) that the author intends to challenge the reader's sexual sensibilities as well. At the same time, and some would say paradoxically, societal morality about love and its uninhibited expression is also being challenged. Nicholas, through his experience with Lily, also experiences an increasing lack of inhibition in feeling his own passion, desire and love, a transformation that he ultimately applies to his relationship with Alison, who he realizes has the potential of becoming a source of true, honest love in his life. Ultimately the book is saying that physical liberty in terms of sex, as well as emotional liberty in terms of both experiencing and expressing love, are essential manifestations of both the power of choice and freedom.



Male/Female Relationships

Various manifestations of male/female relationships appear throughout the novel and are the means through which Nicholas expresses and understands both his imprisonment and his freedom. His imprisonment is defined through the first and second stages of Nicholas' relationship with Alison, through his initial attitudes about what his relationship with Lily should be, and his reluctant, but nonetheless habitually dismissive, treatment of the hapless JoJo. His sense of freedom is defined through his growing openness to his passion for both Lily and Alison, his choice to not punish Lily at the "trial," and in his subsequent letting go of his desire to punish Alison. Yes, in his story about his discovering the power of choice and free will during the Nazi occupation, Conchis plants the seed that triggers Nicholas' transformation, and yes, that particular story has little or no element of female/male relationships in it. But the novel isn't about Conchis; it's about Nicholas, whose experience of the world, in moral, physical, and sexual terms is defined by his relationships with women. This aspect of the novel is an excellent example of the way characters in general, and the transformations of one character in particular, can embody and/or dramatize theme. It's also an example of how theme can define and shape character, and the way theme and character both can manifest in plot, which is often defined as an escalation and evocation of cause and effect. In this case, the novel's plot, theme and character transformations define, and are defined by, actions undertaken by both Nicholas and the women in his life to trigger, resist, affect and be affected by reactions.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written and narrated from the first person, subjective point of view, that of the protagonist, Nicholas Urfe. The essential value of this point of view is that it puts the reader in the same position as Nicholas, experiencing what he experiences and in much the same way - visceral, immediate, and often unexpected. While the technique of first person narration is often employed over a wide range of genres, its application here is particularly effective because what Nicholas goes through over the course of the novel becomes increasingly extreme, complicated and mysterious. As a result of this narrative choice, the reader goes through a similar progression of intrigue, bewilderment, and quite probably frustration. A secondary aspect of this use of point of view is the language "Nicholas" uses. On one hand, the quality of language "he" uses tends towards the intellectual, and is threaded with references to classical mythology. This might perhaps prove somewhat inaccessible to readers who aren't as well read as the central character. On the other hand, this language might be interpreted as an internal defense mechanism that Nicholas deliberately employs to avoid emotion and / or personal truth, the kind of experience that Conchis seems determined to make Nicholas have. There is, of course, a significant irony here - for a character clearly intended to be profoundly self-unaware, the language with which Nicholas describes his experience is remarkably poetic, self-insightful, and discerning.

Setting

The action of the novel is set in two distinct locations, England and Greece, each representing an aspect of Nicholas' spiritual condition. As discussed in the Objects/Places section, England represents emotional and spiritual grayness, deadness and lack of enlightenment, while Greece represents deeper humanity, passion, and spiritual growth. It's important to note that the London scenes bracket the Greece scenes, which make up the vast majority of the novel. England, with all its spiritual connotations, is the land Nicholas leaves behind - the geographical land as well as the spiritual land. Greece, with all its spiritual challenges and encounters with new truth, is literally the new world - again, geographical and spiritual. Nicholas' return to England later in the book represents a spiritual and intellectual return to his old ways of being and thinking, his selfishness and self righteousness. Witness the way he spends so much time and energy attempting to prove to himself just how much of a victim he's been, which is the way he saw himself when he first lived in London - as a victim of the world's indifference. In short, the specifics of setting in this novel illuminate and echo important, relevant specifics of character. Meanwhile, it's worth taking note of the era in which the book is set - the 1950's, a few years after World War II. The horrors of intolerance and hatred are still alive in the characters' minds, and society is looking inward - for ways to make sure that such horror never happens again, and for ways to personally celebrate its recent, and hard won, freedom. This is perhaps an additional



layer of motivation for Nicholas being the self-serving, self-indulgent hedonist he is. At the same time, however, the 1950's were still a fairly conservative time - hence the sense of repulsion that seems to be expected from Nicholas, and perhaps even the reader, when Joe and Lily (a black man and a white woman) participate in such obviously uninhibited, consensual, and mutually fulfilling sexual activity.

Language and Meaning

As previously discussed in the analysis of "Point of View," the language of the novel is generally very rich, intellectually and poetically dense and full of references to classical literature. In particular, there are several references to Greek mythology, which is certainly appropriate, given two facts. The first, and perhaps most obviously relevant, is that the novel is set in Greece. The second is that Nicholas is on an archetypal journey undertaken by many heroes of Greek myths and legends - a troubled individual, usually a man, undertakes a journey that challenges him physically, causes him to grow spiritually, and come to a broader understanding of himself and his place in the world. This particular type of journey appears in narratives of almost all spiritual belief systems over the centuries, but arguably reached its zenith in the multiplicity of Greek myths that are founded on its template. The implication of this aspect of the novel is that its overall meaning, aside from its specific thematic perspectives, is that an experience such as the one Nicholas has is, in spite of the bizarreness of its specifics, ultimately a universal one. In other words, just as Greek heroes like Odysseus, Theseus, and Heracles undertook perilous physical journeys in order to achieve transcendence and growth, just as Nicholas undertakes a perilous psychological (and at times physical) journey to achieve transcendence of his personal demons, so every human undergoes similar processes of transformation on every aspect of his/her personal life journey.

Structure

The structure of the novel is straightforward and linear, progressing on a relatively un-diverted path as it sets its protagonist in a place of relative stability and innocence, moving him through a period of confrontation, confusion and challenge, and bringing him to a place of conclusion and resolution. As with many stories that follow this pattern, the ending is in fact a beginning - the central character has undergone a process of transformation, and, as the book draws to its close, is prepared to move into the rest of his life with a different perspective. This structural template is the traditional foundation for the types of stories referenced in the section on "Language and Meaning," in which the central physical and spiritual journey of its characters constantly moves forward in a linear fashion through time, space and experience. Yes, there are diversions into the past in this book - specifically, Conchis' long, elaborately detailed stories of his history. It's important to note, however, that these diversions are incorporated into the forward motion of the main narrative, told as stories for the purpose of affecting Nicholas. They are not flashbacks - experiences narrated as though they were/are lived by the character involved.



Quotes

"Girls, or a certain kind of girl, liked me; I had a car - not so common among undergraduates in those days - and I had some money. I wasn't ugly; and even more important, I had my loneliness, which, as every cad knows, is a deadly weapon with women." p. 17.

"I discovered two things about Alison: that behind her bluntness she was an expert coaxer, a handler of men, a sexual diplomat, and that her attraction lay as much in her candor as in her having a pretty body, an interesting face, and knowing it. She had a very un-English ability to suddenly flash out some truth, some seriousness, some quick surge of interest." p. 24.

"I couldn't get the smile on [Mitford's] face out of my mind. It secreted an omission; something he'd saved up, a mysterious last word. Waiting room, waiting room, waiting room; it went round in my head all that evening." p. 41.

"The thing I felt most clearly, when the first corner was turned, was that I had escaped. Obscure, but no less strong, was the feeling that [Alison] loved me more than I loved her, and that consequently I had in some indefinable way won. So on top of the excitement of the voyage into the unknown, the taking wing again, I had an agreeable feeling of emotional triumph." p. 44.

"In England we live in a very muted, calm, domesticated relationship with what remains of our natural landscape and its soft northern light; in Greece landscape and light are so beautiful, so all-present, so intense, so wild, that the relationship is immediately love-hatred, one of passion." p. 45.

"I waited, I waited, I heard the siren closer, I waited for the will, the black moment, to come ... and I could not. All the time I felt I was being watched, that I was not alone, that I was putting on an act for the benefit of someone, that this action could be done only if it was spontaneous, pure, isolated - and moral ... I was trying to commit not a moral action, but a fundamentally an aesthetic one ... a death to be remembered, not the true death of a true suicide, the death obliterate." p. 57-58.

"I knew that on the island one was driven back into the past. There was so much space, so much silence, so few meetings that one too easily saw out of the present and then the past seemed ten times closer than it was." p. 72.

"At times [Conchis] was so ... dogmatic that I wanted to laugh ... at times, rather against my will, he impressed me, and not only as a rich man with some enviable works of art in his house. And now he quite definitely frightened me. It was the kind of illogical fear of the supernatural that in others made me sneer; but all along I had felt that I was invited not out of hospitality, but for some other reason." p. 98.



"I [Nicholas] wished there was someone beside me, an Alison, some friend, who could savor and share the living darkness, the stars, the terraces, the voice ... but ... I had the comforting sense that this terrace, this strange story-telling and meeting, was my reward. The passion to exist: I forgave myself my failure to die." p. 126.

"The little head watched our watching; bland, certain, and almost maliciously inscrutable. It flashed on me that this was also the smile that Conchis sometimes wore ... it was above all the smile of dramatic irony, of those who have privileged information. I looked back up at Conchis' face; and knew I was right." p. 142-143.

"[Lily] gave me what was beyond any doubt a contemporary look ... a quick, questioning glance that flicked from me to Conchis' averted head and back again. At once I had the impression that we were two actors with the same doubts about the director." p. 166

"...unless one moved a small lever at the back of her head, at a certain pressure her arms would clasp with vice-like strength. And then a stiletto on a strong spring struck upwards through the adulterer's groin ... de Doukans ... said "It is the most lifelike thing about her."" p. 173.

"[Alison] undressed [Nicholas] completely, then led my hands all over her body, to know it all again, soft skin, small curves, slimness, her always natural nakedness. Her hands. As she caressed me, I thought, it's like being with a prostitute, hands as adept as a prostitute's, nothing but a matter of pleasure ... and I gave way to the pleasure she gave me." p 250.

"Every truth at Bourani was a sort of lie; and every lie there, a sort of truth." p. 273.

"There was no connection between the events. No connection is possible. Or rather, I am the connection. I am whatever meaning the coincidence has." There was an unusual shade of vanity in his voice, as if in fact he believed he had in some way precipitated both events and their common timing ... that the two episodes were linked in significance, that I was to use both to interpret him." Conchis to Nicholas, and Nicholas on Conchis, p. 289.

"[Julie's] eyes begged for belief; and imperceptibly I began to stop only pretending to believe her. I knew documents can lie, voices can lie, even tones of voice can lie. But there is something naked about eyes; they seem the only organs of the human body that have never really learnt to dissimulate." p. 313.

"...I knew those two sides of Alison- the hard practical side that misled one into believing she could get over anything' and the other apparently rather histrionic Alison that one could never quite take seriously. In a tragic way these two sides had finally combined: there would have been no fake suicides with her, no swallowing a few tablets when she knew someone would come in an hour's time." p. 361.

"Before the war we used to amuse ourselves with my private theatre here. And during the war, when I had a great deal of time to think, and no friends to amuse me, no theatre, 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." Conchis to Nicholas, p. 366.

"Men love war because it allows them to look serious. Because it is the one thing that stops women laughing at them. In it they can reduce women to the status of objects. That is the great distinction between the sexes. Men see objects, women see the relationship between objects. Whether the objects need each other, love each other, match each other. It is an extra dimension of feeling that we men are without ... war is a psychosis caused by an inability to see relationships. Our relationship with our fellowmen. Our relationship to our economic and historic situation. Our relationship to nothingness, to death." Conchis to Nicholas, p. 373.

"I felt all [Conchis'] energy then, his fierceness, his heartlessness, his impatience with my stupidity, my melancholy, my selfishness. His hatred not only of me, but of all he had decided I stood for; something passive, abdicating, English, in life." p. 399-400.

"All Conchis' maneuverings had been to bring me to this; all the charades, the psychical, the theatrical, the sexual, the psychological; and I was standing as he had stood before the [resistance fighter], unable to beat his brains out; discovering that there are strange times for the calling in of old debts, and even stranger prices to pay." p. 466.

"... for [Conchis] the smile was something essentially cruel, because freedom is cruel, because the freedom that makes us at least partly responsible for what we are is cruel. So that the smile was not so much an *attitude* to be taken to life as the *nature* of the cruelty of life, a cruelty we cannot even choose to avoid, since it is human existence ... if anything, it meant 'Learn to be cruel, learn to be dry, learn to survive.'" p. 479.

"...added to this now was a feeling, to which the great airy landscape contributed, of release ... a euphoria, a buoyancy and resilience ... the extraordinariness of the experience ... transferred a uniqueness on me, and I had it like a great secret, a journey to Mars, a prize no-one else had ... *they* were the ones who had been finally humiliated ..." p. 481.

"... I looked back to the events of Bourani, which could not have happened, but which had happened, and found myself, at the end of some tired London afternoon, as unable to wish that they had not happened ... slowly I came to realize that my dilemma was in fact a sort of *de facto* forgiveness, a condonation of what had been done to me ... still too sore to accept that something active had taken place, I thought of "done" in a passive sense." p. 525.

"...if [Conchis] were here he would tell you that sex is perhaps a greater, but in no way a different, pleasure, from any other. He would tell you it is only one part - and not the essential part - in the relationship we call love. He would tell you that the essential part is truth, the trust two people build between their minds. Their souls ... that the real



infidelity is the one that hides the sexual infidelity. Because the one thing that must never come between two people who have offered each other love is a lie." Mrs. de Seitas to Nicholas, p. 551.

"All the time I had expected some spectacular reentry, some mysterious call, a metaphorical, perhaps even literal, descent into a modern [hell]. Not this. And yet, as I stared at her, unable to speak, at her steady bright look, the smallest smile, I understood that this was the only possible way of return; her rising into this ... reality as plain and dull as wheat." p. 595-596.

Adaptations

Fowles wrote the screenplay for a movie version of *The Magus*, which was filmed on the island of Majorca and which starred Anthony Quinn as Conchis, Michael Caine as Nicholas, Anna Karina as Alison, and Candice Bergen as Lily-Julie. The film was not a commercial success.



Topics for Discussion

Assuming that the conclusion that Nicholas comes to is the correct one, that he is in fact the subject of some kind of strange experiment by Conchis, et al, discuss whether what Conchis does is moral or immoral. Does any human being have the right to test and/or challenge and/or manipulate another in the way Conchis does to Nicholas? Is Conchis a hero for getting Nicholas to see a broader truth, or is he a sadist, spiritually turned on by causing another human being spiritual pain?

Discuss the meaning of the question posed by de Doukans to Conchis - "Are you living the water or the wave?" What is the meaning of the image? What is the relevance of this meaning to the way a life is lived? Is Conchis living the water or the wave? Is Nicholas?

Consider the moving statue described by Conchis in Part 2, Chapter 27, 28 and 29 and Quotes, p. 173. Discuss the metaphorical ways in which the physical wounds caused by the statue echo, foreshadow, and resemble the emotional wounds caused by the various women in Nicholas' life - Alison, Lily/Rose/Vanessa, Lily de Seitas, JoJo, Kemp. To what extent is the damage experienced by those embraced by the statue a reflection of Nicholas' own attitudes?

Consider Leverrier and Mitford, the other individuals, who, as the novel hints, went through similar experiences at Bourani to those undergone by Nicholas. Consider also the novel's implications that Leverrier withdraws from the world, from feeling and from thought, as a result of his experience, and that Mitford becomes a petty criminal. Within this context, discuss the likelihood that Nicholas will be different. At the end of the novel he seems to be taking steps towards a new, more enlightened, more feeling-oriented life. How likely is he to succeed? How likely is he to end up spiritually crippled like his predecessors?

The action of the novel seems to suggest that for an individual to understand, accept, and live his/her personal truth, he/she must push, or be pushed, past the boundaries of what he/she understands or believes. Discuss whether this is a valid perspective, whether taking such action is healthy and/or necessary, and what the consequences might be for society if everyone lived, and ultimately acted, from such a perspective.

Consider the character of Mrs. de Seitas, and her relationship with Conchis. Discuss whether her relationship with Nicholas is controlled and/or planned by Conchis, or whether she does what she does on her own accord. Debate whether bringing Nicholas and Alison together is her idea or that of Conchis - is Conchis interested in "happily ever after," to coin a phrase, or is he only interested in breaking Nicholas down? Is he interested in Nicholas and Alison only on a clinical level? If so, how is this different from Mrs. de Seitas' perspective - or is it?

Consider the references to "the waiting room". What might the name mean - waiting for what? Why would Conchis post such a sign?



Consider the quote from p. 273, and discuss Nicholas' experiences at Bourani. What is a lie, and what is the truth? If Nicholas emerges from his experiences with a new truth, does that mean that the lie that gave rise to that truth is in fact a truth itself? Conversely, if what he experiences is a lie, does that ultimately make the truth he emerges with a lie as well? How do lies and the truth intertwine?

Literary Precedents

Fowles's acknowledged literary precedent in the Celtic or medieval romance is apparent in *The Magus* with its notion of the questing hero in search of the meaning of life and the need for love. Fowles specifically acknowledges several other literary influences in his foreword to the revised version of *The Magus*. These include *The Wanderer* (1913), by Alain-Fournier for showing a secret hidden world to be explored and Jefferies's *Bevis* (1882) for projecting a very different world.

Another influence was Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), to which Fowles plays homage by specifically referring to Miss Havisham in the revised version. Still another important influence was T. S. Eliot whom Fowles sees as a great "phrasemaker." Nicholas is called to the quest by some lines from Eliot's poem *Four Quartets* (1943).

Other allusions are to Odysseus, Theseus, and numerous other Greek mythical heroes, all of which strengthen the connection between previous questing heroes and this one.



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