



**Ain Shams University
Faculty of Education
Department of English**

**The Concept of Free Will in John Fowles's Fiction:
A Study of *The Collector*, *The Magus* and *The French
Lieutenant's Woman***

A Thesis

**Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
M. A in Teacher Preparation in literature (English Language)**

Submitted By

Mona Ahmed Alsayed Ashour

Under the Supervision of

Prof. Ahmed Mohamed Aboud

Professor of English Literature

Faculty of Education

Ain Shams University

Dr. Noha Ahmed Radwan

Lecturer of English Literature

Faculty of Education

Ain Shams University

2015

For my Parents

Thank you for Your Endless Support and Love

To my Husband

*For being the source of inspiration, happiness and
love in my life*

Table of Contents

Subject	Page No.
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	
<i>Abstract</i>	
<i>Preface</i>	
<i>Chapter one:</i> The Concept of Free Will: defined and debated.....	1
<i>Chapter Two:</i> Captivity and Free will In John Fowles's <i>The Collector</i>	51
<i>Chapter Three:</i> Fantasy and Free Will in John Fowles's <i>The Magus</i>	107
<i>Chapter Four:</i> Social Obligations and Free Will in John Fowles's <i>The French lieutenant's Woman</i>	177
<i>Conclusion</i>	236
<i>Bibliography</i>	246
<i>English Summary</i>	273
<i>Arabic Summary</i>	277
<i>Arabic Abstract</i>	286

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Praise is to Allah, Lord of the words, by whose grace this work has been completed.

The work presented in this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance and support of many people who deserve mention. First, I would like to acknowledge the untiring help, constant encouragement, and amazing insight provided by Professor Ahmed Mohamed Aboud. My deep gratitude to Professor Aboud is also for encouraging me to do my M.A. in Modern literature and for teaching me how to be a researcher who never gives up.

Further, I gratefully acknowledge my appreciation and gratitude to my teacher and supervisor Dr. Noha Ahmed Radwan. Thank you Dr. Noha for helping me to accomplish my thesis.

I owe special thanks also to my family: my parents, my husband, my brother, my sisters, my niece and my nephews who allowed me to see the world through new eyes.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge John Fowles. His character and writings have strengthened my belief that free will is the undefeatable human power.



**Ain Shams University
Faculty of Education
Department of English**

**The Concept of Free Will in John Fowles's Fiction:
A Study of *The Collector*, *The Magus* and *The French
Lieutenant's Woman***

Submitted By
Mona Ahmed Alsayed Ashour

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to define and debate the concept of free will as presented in the fictional world of John Fowles. The proposed study is meant to highlight how and why the theme of free will is a focal concern in Fowles's narrative thought as obviously represented in his novels. With reference to Fowles's *The Collector* (1963), *The Magus* (1977) and *The French lieutenant's Woman* (1969), the study is expected to analyze the concept of free will and the various

obstacles standing in the way of attaining man's authenticity and freedom on both thematic and technical levels.

The study falls into four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one is entitled "The concept of free will : defined and debated". The researcher defines the concept of free will from different points of view, and discusses the postmodern debate around existential freedom and authentic self. Existentialism, determinism, indeterminism and compatibilism are the most commonly prominent trends of thought that debate the free will philosophy.

Chapter two is entitled "Captivity and free will in John Fowles's *The Collector*". This chapter illustrates Fowles's views on captivity and freedom of will as presented in *The Collector*. It focuses on how Fowles explores the conflict between free will and captivity by juxtaposing the excesses and abuses of Clegg's criminal behavior with Miranda's transformed self-awareness.

Chapter three is entitled "Fantasy and Free Will in John Fowles's *The Magus*". This chapter investigates how Fowles develops the conflict between rationality and analytical

consciousness by examining the power of Nicholas Urfe's free will against the fantasy and mystery of Conchis's manipulations and god games. Reality and fantasy are confused in *The Magus*, and the achievement of self-knowledge and exercise of freedom of will come along with the ability to distinguish between magic and reality. Urfe will be aware of the power of his free will only when he chooses to confess his failings and make a decision of change, since freedom of will requires action as much as self-awareness.

Chapter four is entitled "Social Obligations and Free Will in John Fowles's *The French lieutenant's Woman*". This chapter studies the concept of free will in Fowles's *The French lieutenant's Woman* which is a portrayal of England in 1867 that accurately captures various aspects of the time like social conventions and class struggles. Fowles meditates on the nature of individual free will and ultimately its price when it is resisted by social systems and ideologies. The chapter focuses on how Fowles represents the conflict between free will and social obligations through the sexual contest between Charles Smithson's conservative views of conformity, and Sarah

Woodruff's rebellious attitudes of free will. The conclusion is a synthesis of the findings arrived at and conducted in the previous chapters of the proposed thesis. The conclusion would introduce recommendations for future studies.

Key Words:

- 1- Free Will.
- 2- Determinism.
- 3- Existentialism.
- 4- John Fowles.
- 5- Fantasy.
- 6- Moral responsibility.
- 7- Social obligations.

Preface

The concept of free will was a problematic issue for the English society in the short time period between the late 1930s and the 1960s, around the time of World War II. Writers used to raise questions about: If we had free will, why did we choose to be involved in bloody and fatal World Wars instead of standing up for our humanity and human autonomy? What should we be doing now to prevent things like these from happening again? Obviously, thinkers needed to reexamine the concept of free will to see how it could be used to better human societies instead of damaging it. Pre-, mid-, and post-war times produced a philosophical and literary upheaval which aimed at re-defining traditional concepts of goodness and evil by investigating our human nature and free will in the light of the World Wars' experience.

John Robert Fowles is one of the contemporary novelists who is concerned with the issue of free will in his fiction. By 1947, Fowles entered New College, Oxford, where he was influenced by French Existentialism—the most fashionable philosophical movement at that time. Through the writings of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, and their philosophies about conformity and the will of the individual, Fowles developed his existential philosophy. He believes that

freedom of will is the revolt of the individual against all those systems of thought, theories of psychology, and social and political pressures that attempt to deprive man his freedom.

Fowles follows Camus's philosophy that we, as human beings, have no chance but this mortal life which we live, so man has to define his own values, make decisions and choices in order to survive absurdity. Man's existential mortality necessitates the creation of an authentic free will. Existential philosophers believe that an individual's life in this world is all he has, so he needs to make choices, which he will be held responsible for, that will enable him to strive towards his full individual potential. Fowles, working on developing human authentic self through his belief in existentialism, wants his fiction to urge readers to exercise their free wills, and to develop their true and authentic lives instead of conforming to social norms and ideologies.

Fowles's aim is transformation; he wants to alter society by exploring and re-examining the concept of free will as a primary theme in his novels. He is obsessively against all kinds of conformity and totally with freedom of human will. In this sense, he states, "how you achieve freedom that what obsesses me; all my books are about that." (*Aristos* 101). In one of his letters which was written as a reply to Tima Priess

who sent a letter to him asking about the meaning of his books, he writes "I suggest that the one valid reality or principle for us lies in *eleutheria* – freedom: accepting that man has the possibility of a limited freedom and that if this is so, he must be responsible for his actions; to be free which means rejecting all the gods and political creeds and the rest, leaves one no choice but to act according to reason: that is, humanely to all humans." (Fowles, *Encounter* 200)

Fowles' fiction mainly tries to define the boundaries of human free will by identifying the moments when choice becomes possible or impossible. He labors to create imaginative space for the free play of his own existential free will philosophy. Whether or not we have free will wasn't the question for Fowles. He believes that man has free will, but he felt that his fiction must enlighten people how to exercise freedom of will for the goodness of humanity. Fowles's novels teach us how to become better individuals and to help others better themselves.

The fiction of John Fowles presents the philosophy of free will on both thematic and technical levels. He believes that fiction may seem more real if the characters do not behave like marionettes in the hands of their creator. Fowles's characters are presented as individuals who have existential

failings, but, finally, they choose freely to change themselves and their lives. Fowles's readers are, also, granted a free will to evaluate his characters and choose from multiple ends. Fowles treats his readers as intelligent, independent and free-willed beings who deserve, through his manipulative representations of reality, education more than entertainment.

Fowles's narrative techniques support his free will philosophy. He offers his readers alternative endings, in order to exercise their free wills together with the action of reading. His use of theatricality is present in the dramatically fragmented narrative, play -within- the -novel structure, the authorial manipulation of both the reader and the character-spectator within the novels, the types of characters and narrators presented in meta-fictional fashion, his repeated and varied use of the art of the pantomime of life, and his frequent reference to Shakespeare and other playwrights.

In Chapter One, the concept of free will is defined and debated from different points of view by discussing the postmodern debate around existential freedom and authentic self. Existentialism, determinism, indeterminism and compatibilism are the most commonly prominent trends of thought that debated the free will philosophy. The concept of free will is also related with other corresponding values and

beliefs like duty, moral responsibility, commitment, authenticity and self- conception.

Chapter two focuses on Fowles's *The Collector*, which appeared in the spring of 1963. The novel is a mixture of thriller and analysis of conflict of wills. It is a story of the abduction and imprisonment of Miranda Grey by Frederick Clegg. Clegg, who is a sick- minded clerk, planned to kidnap Miranda regarding her an object from whom he may derive pleasurable control by collecting her will and depriving her of freedom and, finally, of life. The strong- willed Miranda, whose name refers to Prospero's daughter in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, calls Clegg 'Caliban' – the subhuman creature, and fights fiercely against his captivity and conformity, but finally dies without her physical freedom.

Miranda never knew or even thought, before meeting Clegg, how much she wanted to live, to become more self - aware, responsible and committed person. Miranda lost her life, but, certainly, she gained her spiritual freedom, and accomplished the liberation of her inner self. Miranda transformed her suffering into positive energy of change and evolution. She exercised her freedom of will, and developed her authentic self, in order to be able to stand in the face of Clegg's absurdity.

The concept of free will is presented through their physical and intellectual battle of wills and made more interesting by Fowles's technical devices. The novel begins with Clegg who tells the story first from his point of view. This part gives readers a chance to go deep into his psyche which we sometimes sympathize with, but other times we feel disgusted. Then, we read the story written by Miranda in her diary from a different vision. At the finale, the ending is open as Clegg plays with the idea of repeating his performance with a new girl, and the reader is free to choose his own ending.

Chapter three deals with *The Magus*, a quest story which is made complex by the incorporation of dilemmas involving free will, hazard and a variety of existential uncertainties. Using the elements of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *The Magus* tells the story of Nicholas Urfe who is drawn into an existential game designed by Maurice Conchis, the Prospero of the novel. Conchis created a game which leads Urfe gradually into deeper self-knowledge and spiritual re-birth. "All my life I had turned life into fiction, to hold reality away," Urfe says (*Magus* 337). Reality and fantasy are deliberately confused as Conchis takes Urfe on a series of illogical staged deaths, erotic encounters and ultimate betrayal. The game is made to confront Urfe with his past transgressions and self-

delusions. He learns valuable lessons about the meaning of free will, love, hazard and life.

The concept of free will in *The Magus* is ultimately dependent on the achievement of self- knowledge, along with the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Fowles presents his novel in the form of a mysterious story which is full of figures from classical mythology. He uses a wide range of mythic connotations and denotations as if teasing his readers to be free-willed in their process of interpretation. Fowles confesses, "I mislead them ideally to lead them into a greater truth. It's a trap which I hope I will hook the readers."(*Aristos* 21) Finally, Urfe breaks free from Conchis's power after perceiving the free will lessons that Conchis is aiming to share with him and Fowles with his readers.

Chapter four is devoted to analyze Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The novel is a meditation on the nature of individual free will and ultimately its price when it is opposed by social obligations. Sarah Woodruff, a passionate attractive, imaginative and mysterious Victorian governess is believed to have been deserted by a French lieutenant. That affair has ostracized her from society, and she was abused for that illegal relationship.