

***The Ebony Tower: Mythical Women and Powerful Men*¹**

The Ebony Tower: Mujeres míticas y hombres poderosos

Esther Muñoz-González
Universidad de Zaragoza
emunoz@unizar.es

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Resumen

The Ebony Tower (1975) es una novela corta deliberada en su artificialidad que constituye un perfecto ejemplo de la permanente reformulación de temas que John Fowles lleva a cabo a lo largo de toda su obra—como los pares opuestos de creadores vs coleccionistas, cómo el nacimiento y la clase social marcan la diferencia de oportunidades en la vida, la dificultad para comunicarse—, elementos míticos y una perspectiva existencialista. Teniendo en cuenta que la novela corta sigue escrupulosamente los pasos del “viaje del héroe” (Campbell, 1993: 245), el propósito de este artículo es, primeramente, debatir los elementos míticos en el texto de Fowles y cómo los personajes coinciden y divergen de sus arquetipos míticos. Y, en segundo lugar, probar que esos roles míticos podrían ser patriarcales y estar contribuyendo a mantener posiciones de subyugación para las mujeres ya como musas, colaboradoras o simplemente como objetos sexuales del deseo y para procrear.

Palabras clave: Mito, Arquetipo, Roles sexuales, Postmodernismo.

Abstract

The Ebony Tower (1975) is a self-conscious novella that constitutes a perfect example of John Fowles’s consistent reformulation, throughout his work, of themes—such as the oppositional pair creator versus collector, how birth and social class grant different opportunities in life, the difficulty to communicate—, mythical elements and the existentialist perspective. Considering that the novella follows scrupulously each stage in

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“the hero’s quest” (Campbell, 1993: 245), the purpose of this article is, firstly, to discuss the mythical elements in the novella and how the characters coincide on and depart from what can be expected from their mythical archetypes. And secondly, to prove that these mythical roles could have a patriarchal shape and may contribute to maintaining subjugated positions for the women whether as muses, collaborators or simply as sexual objects of desire and procreation.

Keywords: Myth, Archetypes, Gender Roles, Postmodernism.

1. INTRODUCTION

John Fowles is considered to be a key figure in the development of literary postmodernism in England, one of those first writers who were concerned with “the renewal of the novel form while preserving its intelligibility and the old humanist values of classic realism” (Onega, 2002:142). The American writer and critic John Barth included John Fowles in the list of main postmodernist writers in his ‘manifesto of postmodernism’ “The Literature of Replenishment” originally published in 1980 (1984:195). In this list of the fathers of the movement, John Fowles was the only British writer among Americans and continental Europeans. It is almost impossible to try and define postmodernist literature in a few words, but it could be said that it is a trend characterized by “the impulse to absorb and transcend not just one ‘exhausted’ form but two: classic realism and modernism” (Onega, 2002:143). Fowles was already a very well-known writer after the publication of three key works, *The Collector* (1963), *The Magus* (1966) and *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969). These three novels and the short story collection *The Ebony Tower* (1975) have recurrent elements that appear once and again in Fowles’s works. The working title of *The Ebony Tower* was *Variations*, and as Kerry MacSeeny has pointed out, “the fictions do present variations on the themes, motifs, dramatic situations, and narrative techniques of the three preceding novels” (qtd. in Holmes, 1985: 21). Fowles’s self-conscious writings have been studied attending to many different elements and perspectives, due precisely to this consistent reformulation, throughout his work, of themes and/or character types, such as the oppositional pair creator versus/collector, which is directly related to the opposition between science and art; opportunities in life depending on birth and social class; difficulties in communication related to language; mythical elements; and the existentialist perspective (See Holmes 1985; Onega, 2001; Onega, 2002). Nevertheless, according to Lenz, the novella *The Ebony Tower* is a transitional work that departs from a previous model of “authorial control and manipulation to a model that accepts uncertainty and multiple perspectives” (2008: 43). Furthermore, Fowles’s evolution, in terms of

philosophy, was also evident when he affirmed in 1979—five years after the publication of *The Ebony Tower*— that “he had come to consider existentialism . . . as only ‘a kind of literary metaphor, a wish fulfillment’ (Wilson, 2006: 140), and by 1988 he declared himself “no longer an existentialist” (Wilson, 2006: 140).

The Ebony Tower is the novella which gives title to the collection of short stories published by John Fowles in 1975. This novella narrates the story of a young painter and critic, David Williams, who travels to Coëtminais (France) to interview a famous British painter, Henry Breasley, in order to prepare the biographical introduction to a book on his paintings. The fact that the old painter cohabites with two young women, Diana—alias “the mouse” (Fowles, 1975: 8)—and Anne—“alias the freak” (Fowles, 1975: 19)—, contrasts with the conventional life that David has built in London. The novella reflects David’s thoughts and reactions after discovering the peculiar universe which Breasley has created in Coëtminais and his enormously different way of understanding life and art. As Frederick M. Holmes points out, *The Ebony Tower* consciously reveals its fictional character within a surface of formal realism. The influence of previous writings such as *Eliduc* by Marie De France or *The Magus* by Fowles himself is willingly displayed (Holmes, 1985: 24). The purpose of this paper is, firstly, to discuss the mythical elements in the novella and how the characters coincide on and depart from what can be expected from their mythical archetypes. And secondly, to prove that these mythical roles could have a patriarchal shape and may contribute to maintaining subjugated positions for the two women whether as muses, collaborators or simply as sexual objects of desire and procreation. This working hypothesis will be developed and tested through the analysis of the portrayal of Diana, Anne, and the off screen Beth, as well as of the relationship of these three women with the two men in the story.

2. THE HERO’S QUEST

It seems to be a general agreement among scholars who have analysed Fowles’s fictional works in that they “share a single unifying topos: that of the young hero’s quest for maturation and cosmic integration, usually carried out simultaneously in its archetypal, psychological and existentialist versions” (Holmes, 1985: 39). Still, the *male* hero in this quest motif almost always “pursues the mysterious, inspirational, and ultimately unattainable female . . . while she is relegated to a marginal existence as catalyst for the hero’s quest” (Lenz, 2008: 7-8). *The Ebony Tower* contains what Joseph Campbell called “the keys” (1993: 245) in the hero’s quest. David Williams is “called to adventure” (Campbell, 1993: 245), that is, he is asked to travel and interview Breasley and, in order to

do so, he undertakes a journey to Coëtminais, —located in the mythically charged, Celtic Brittany—and has to cross a land “exhaling a spent fertility” (Fowles, 1975:3). Chance, another important element in mythical terms, also intervenes in that David Williams is travelling alone, without his wife Beth, because their daughter has fallen ill with chicken-pox, thus provoking a “last-minute crisis” (Fowles, 1975:7). Until this moment, David had been living in the ordinary world of “common day” (Campbell, 1993: 245) outside the mythical land. When he steps over the threshold “of adventure” (Campbell, 1993:245), or, in other words, the frontier separating the real and ordinary world from the archetypal world “of wonder” (Campbell, 1993:245), and enters the manoir of Coëtminais, he encounters unfamiliar rules and values. In this mythical land, the hero meets tests, allies and enemies and, what is more significant, he gets in contact with wild nature, which is the “real” world according to Fowles:

Well, the real in the general sense, the real for me does not lie where we are now, in other words, in cities. It lies for me very much in the countryside and in the wild. They had a phrase in medieval art, the “hortus conclusus”, that is, the garden surrounded by a wall. Very often the Virgin Mary and the Unicorn would be inside this wall and, you see it in medieval painting, everything outside the pretty little walled garden is chaos. (Onega, 1988:70)

This garden has also been interpreted as a metaphorical Eden to which “a questing Adam character [is] guided out of Christianity both by mesmerizing Eve characters and sometimes also by mentors enacting the part as quasi-divine serpents” (Hyving, 2007: 8).

2.1. Diana and Anne: The Helpers

There are two naked girls in this *hortus conclusus*: Diana and Anne. Diana represents the self-sacrificing and devoted Virgin Mary and the archetypal white lily, as the narrator suggests: “there was something preternaturally grave about her, almost Victorian” (Fowles, 1975: 8). Innocent, almost always wearing white, Diana is the promising and skilful girl who puts her own aspirations and desires in the background. Henry Breasley, in his first conversation with David Williams, clearly establishes what for him is Diana’s role in his life: “Thinks she’s Lizzie Siddal.¹ Which makes me that ghastly little Italian fudger damn” (Fowles, 1975:18). Breasley’s comparison between Diana and Lizzie suggests that

¹ Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal Rossetti (1829-1862) was an English poet and artist who acted as a model for many pre-Raphaelite painters, mainly for her husband, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Although Lizzie had her own artistic aspirations, they were subordinated to those of whom eventually became her husband although the latter’s artistic productivity was directly related to the time they spent together, Bradley (1992:137-87)

his own production is linked to the presence of his muse while, at the same time, he diminishes the importance of Diana's artistic talents: "I let her help" (23). By classifying Diana as a helper, Breasley subordinates her talent to his own creative work, even though he recognizes his dependence on her: "Couldn't do without her, really", Fowles (1975:23). In other words, as Lenz argues, Fowles's heroines are "ultimately muses . . . [who] along with their need, desires and concerns, fade into the background or the male quest for enlightenment" (2008: 8). As Lenz goes on to say, even if Fowles's female characters at their best are talented, intuitive and mysterious and "represent progression, vitality, creativity, independence, and authenticity" (2008: 7), they are still trapped within a conventional understanding of gender difference that attaches to men all the virtues related to reason and to women all the emotional and 'irrational' ones, that is, a very essentialist view of gender difference.

Diana is not alone in the garden. Anne, alias the Freak, is with her. While Diana is the sexually innocent white lily, at first sight, Anne embodies Eve, the sexually experienced red rose, the other side of the Jungian archetype of the anima (Jung, 1981:175-78) —even her name, 'Anne', is phonetically included within the name 'Diane'. According to Frazer, in agricultural societies, goddesses sometimes appeared as two versions of the same divinity, such as Demeter and Persephone (2015: Chapter XLIV, 10), or even as three, what Robert Powell calls the *Trinosophia*, the Divine feminine "picturing the three aspects of woman: virgin, mother, crone" (2000:10). Anne is less conventional and moderate than Diana; she has a lower social class origin but is very supporting of her friend Diana. She fears that she has been a negative sexual model for Diana: "She thinks it's either like it is with Henry or the way I used to go on. She doesn't know what it's about" (Fowles, 1975:78). Anne believes this is the reason why Diana is scared to face the external world. She remains in the mythical manoir as an eternal virgin in the enclosed garden because the old king is unable to have real sex with her. Moreover Diana, in the fullness of youth, cannot truly create a fulfilling man-woman relationship with such an elderly man as Breasley.

2.2. The 'Old King': Breasley

Breasley openly confesses that he needs women around him as a source of inspiration because he sees sex as source of life, vitality and energy: "can't love, can't paint" (Fowles, 1975:43). In *The Golden Bough*, Sir James Frazer explained that, in Roman mythology, Diana was worshiped as a goddess of fertility in addition to being a goddess of the woodlands. Diana, the mouse/muse, in her mythical dimension, is the goddess of fertility not for the land but for artistic creation. The old and famous painter is supposed to be teaching Diana, and he lets her do "the donkey work" in his painting (Fowles, 1975:23),

but the reality is that he cannot create without her help. He is sucking up her life, her energy, and impeding her own realization. As Frazer points out, a goddess of fertility was also expected to be fertile herself and this is why she must be married, to propitiate the fertility of the people and the land (2015: Chapter XII, 3), but a “sacred marriage” with an old man incapable of creating by himself cannot be fertile. Diana is in a mythical sense a princess trapped by a dragon waiting for the hero to save her, as she herself confides to David: “I’m under a spell” (Fowles, 1975:83). She is unable to have full sexual intercourse with Breasley, and what is more, she does not love him: “I can’t love him physically” (Fowles, 1975: 82). This self-imposed sexual inability suggests that she embodies the virgin archetype and still feels like a virgin. Furthermore, Diana is perfectly aware that if she leaves the old artist, he will not be able to paint any more. Breasley has always needed art as a way of communicating. Moreover, this is the only way for him now in his old age, since his speech is hardly understandable. Diana, who has become his muse/helper/translator is a prisoner in a world that seems to be out of time, waiting for her valiant prince to save her. But to be saved is not the role expected from the muse, she has to inspire the artist. Fowles’s admiration for ‘female’ archetypes adorned with innate characteristics is “in fact an enthusiasm for a very old and very conventional idealization of women (Lenz, 2008: 9). Diana has to ‘save the prince’ first, and only then she will achieve her own personal and artistic freedom: “Women must liberate men from their misconceptions so that they can liberate women in practice. It is a dialectic that gives men almost unlimited power and imprisons women in liberating rather than liberated roles” (González-Gati, 1993: 15).

2.3. The Hero and ‘Mythical’ Women

If Breasley were the King of the Wood, who has to be replaced by a new king in order to restore fertility to the land (Frazer, 2015: Chapter I, 2), then David would be the aspirant, the young priest/king and consequently the main hero in this archetypal hero’s quest. *The Ebony Tower* intertwines two myths, as often happens in fiction, according to Laurence Coupe. As this critic eloquently explains, in some fictional narratives arising out of the move “from sacred ceremony (Ritual) to secular literature (Romance)” (1997:28-29), there is often a link between Frazer’s King of the Wood and Campbell’s hero’s quest unifying both myths. David had been chosen—the ‘call to adventure’—by Breasley to write his autobiography because he was “reasonably near the truth” (Fowles, 1975:63); that is, David could understand Breasley’s way of living and what for the old painter is living art, both inextricably related. Breasley speaks through his art because from Fowles’s point of view: “what is irreplaceable in any object or art is never, in the final analysis, its technique

or craft, but the personality of the artist, the expression of his or her unique and individual feeling” (Neary, 1992: 91). When David meets Diana, he becomes aware that: “for the first time in his life he knew more than the fact of being; but the passion to exist” (Fowles, 1975:95). Up to this moment David had been living a reasonable and logically projected life within society’s norms. He has only known an ordinary average existence, not heroic at all, a life without room for strong passions and imagination. He rejects the opportunity to be with a woman who physically and psychologically inspires him because he feels terror “of destroying what one had so carefully built” (Fowles, 1975:91). David is a narcissistic man “flattered by his own influence on Diana’s work, and stirred by Diana’s modesty and uncertainty in her abilities (Lenz, 2008: 144). He idealizes Diana’s intelligence, mystery and even sexuality whereas by contrast thinks of Beth—his wife—as “disappointingly real” (Lenz, 2008: 146). David has created a happy, stable and domestic family life, and suddenly, all his personal convictions are at risk. He experiences, a terrible fear “of losing that certainty” (Fowles, 1975:90). Conjugal fidelity would not originate the conflict, because both of them, Beth and he, are not against sexual liberation, but only “in other people, in some of their friends” (Fowles, 1975:90). What David finds hardly tolerable is the idea of losing the security that no other man will be in bed with his wife, a genuine patriarchal thought, simply related to “taste” (Fowles, 1975:91) in David’s claim, but in fact indicating a subtle possessiveness, ownership. Furthermore, Jabbar develops a Freudian interpretation—which also subordinates both women to David’s character—of the triangle formed by Diana, Beth and David, and identifies Diana with a “predatory id” (2014: n.p.) embodying David’s ego repressed desires, whereas Beth/super-ego “becomes inadvertently an enactment of the role of the conscience” (2014: n.p.).

In the first encounters with Anne, the Freak, David is only able to see a sexualized woman and by comparison he immediately establishes a sharp distinction between Anne and Diana. After their first meeting, Diana is endowed with all kind of virtues in his thoughts, whereas Anne is deprived of positive characteristics: “She seemed so much a mere parasite on the other girl’s poise and honesty; her only apparent virtue, that she was tolerated” (Fowles, 1975:56). Initially, David despises the Freak, and describes her as “preposterous”, as having “the look of a rag doll, a neurotic golliwog” (Fowles, 1975:19). She is ridiculed and sexualized as an object, not even a human being, following the sharp division in a patriarchal vision of women that divide women into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and makes the first worthy of men’s love, adoration and respect and transforms the latter into objects of desire and repulsion at the same time. If Diana is the virgin, Anne must be the whore. But as Phillips underlines, it is Diane “who is sexually involved with Breasley,

rather than Anne" (2009: 136), subverting this way the archetype and the expected 'purity' of the Virgin Mary/muse. Moreover, Anne is decisive not only in helping David see Diana's worth but also in encouraging him to confront Breasley: "The Freak's hand had reached along beneath the table, apparently to give him courage" (Fowles, 1975:38). She is an unselfish lover/nurse with Breasley and the only support to Diana, as she herself explains: "I feel she's my last hold on... the real world?" (Fowles, 1975:85). Furthermore, Anne is the clairvoyant inhabitant of the manoir, able to understand and recognize the aims and motivations of the others; she sees their failures, and at the end of the novella, she reproaches the hero his cowardice: "you should have made it, David. Just once" (Fowles, 1975:97). For all this, it is Diana who eventually teaches the purblind hero the most important lesson: to appreciate and respect her by learning that the archetypes of good and evil are not the exclusive patrimony of any single woman. *The Ebony Tower* does not send a monolithic message. On the contrary, it is rather ambiguous and emphasizes the impossibility of achieving "full and coherent understanding of others or of a text" (Lenz, 2008: 133). Furthermore, as Neary remarks: "Jung, I think, merely provide Fowles with archetypes to play with and deconstruct" (1992: 183).

2.4. The Hero and The Angel in the House

David Williams lives with the 'angel in the house': Beth, a woman who has learnt to be happy by taking care of their children and doing minor artistic works after a brief period of rebellion against "constant motherhood" (Fowles, 1975:15). Beth represents certainty, reasons and fact and by contrast, Diana excites David's animal instinctual side. After seeing Diana naked, swimming in the pond, David becomes aware of "a brutality totally alien to his nature" (Fowles, 1975:69). This knowledge takes him far from logic and reason and nearer the way Henry Breasley understands life and art, as passion, creativity. Still, David is caught in "the trap of marriage, when the physical has turned to affection, familiar postures, familiar games, a safe mutual art and science" (Fowles, 1975:93). He is a disappointing hero; In spite of the fact of possessing all the features of a true hero/artist, and of having been helped by both girls, Anne and Diana, he fails the test because he does not dare to risk his old life style, as he himself acknowledges: "one killed all risk, one refused all challenge, and so one became an artificial man" (Fowles, 1975:103). David is tempted by what is human freedom according to Fowles: "a craving to escape from the facts imposed on us" (Onega, 2001:162). To David, Diana and Coëtminais represent passion, sexuality in the Freudian sense of the term, that is, as a human activity far beyond biological need: "the concept of 'sexuality' and at the same time of the sexual instinct, had,

it is true, to be extended so as to cover many things which could not be classed under the reproductive function" (Freud, 1961:61).

David already has an ordered, reasonable sexuality with his wife. He even plans how to make Beth pregnant again (Fowles, 1975: 57). David does not take into account Beth as an artist. He only values her fecundity—as a woman not as an artist—and the predictive security and stability of his life with her. Eventually, he chooses routine, security and facts. At the end of the novella, David returns home, but as Onega convincingly explains, without "the knowledge of the arcana that would transform him into an artist/magus with the shamanistic power to heal the split between self and world" (2001:170). In other words, he returns to the world of common day without 'the grail' because he is not going to change either in terms of painting, or in terms of living. He is very conscious of his role and what can be expected of him as the mythical hero of this quest/journey, and he recognizes his failure: "He had failed both in the contemporary and the medieval sense" (Fowles, 1975:100). As Lenz claims, David's failure condemns him "to an extremely resigned view of Beth, the mother of his children and an artist in her own right ... [instead of] the mystery and vitality he might have seen in her had he embraced not Diana, but the alternative way of being she embodies" (2008:148).

3. MYTHICAL WOMEN AND FEMINISM

Anne wants Diana to be saved by the hero, because she knows that without help from the external world Diana will waste her life and talent, trapped by her generosity, innocence and sense of responsibility. Anne is compared with a doll twice, "an absurd sex-doll on the sofa" (Fowles, 1975:19; 30). Dolls have been related to regeneration, reproduction, the sexual aspect of the woman/goddess archetype of seasonal myth (Frazer, 2015: Chapter XII, 4; Chapter XLV, 4). In Breasley's laconic terms: "I have to have women round me. Sense of timing. Bleeding and all that." (Fowles, 1975:23). This remark associates both women with the cyclical time of myth in the *Manoir*. But in a much more contemporary and patriarchal sense, a "sex-doll" could be only an object of pleasure for men. Not in vain do some feminist critics such as Monique Wittig consider the very idea of being a woman a social creation, a "mythic construction". In her essay "One Is Not Born a Woman" Wittig, echoing Simone de Beauvoir, contends that matriarchy and patriarchy are both equally "oppressive because equally heterosexist" (1993:104). Writing from a lesbian perspective, Wittig is very critical of the division of humanity attending only to the idea of biological differences based on the capacity or incapacity to give birth. Moreover, as Giezen affirms:

We are not only men and women. The relationships between gender and identity are more complicated than the mythical binary opposition male/female. What we are or want to be is determined by a complex intersection of other identity forming categories as well, such as ethnicity and class. This is a story that myths do not tell. (2005: 23)

Myth seems to be insufficient to conceptualize gender relationships and identities since mythical story patterns are usually “based on conflicts that arise within the familiar framework of the patriarchal family and of a wider society in which authority and property are still distributed on patriarchal lines” (Doherty, 2003: 10).

Why should a young woman, such as Diana, need a hero to be saved in the twentieth Century? It could be argued that the white lily that Diana embodies is a patriarchal archetype that is always subordinated to man, a very chauvinistic model in a world in which, as Wittig claims, “it is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (1993:104). Furthermore, Diana has neither sexual nor artistic plenitude. She wants to be a painter, not a wife; but she does not trust her own value as an artist. In the novella, art is presented as the highest and most perfect medium to communicate, to express and acquire knowledge. As Onega concludes: “collecting and creating are the metaphors for expressing what he [Fowles] considers to be two basic ways of relating self and world” (2002:144). As artists, both writers and painters are creators and can be equated with each other. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously argued that women suffer a different process of anxiety regarding their works in comparison with their male colleagues. Male writers suffer from “anxiety of influence”, the fear of being so influenced by their strong predecessors that they will not be able to create original works. In the case of women, they do not have predecessors, the canon is made by male artists/writers who represent the patriarchal model and have the authority to typify woman either as an angel or a monster. Therefore, the female writer fears “that she cannot create” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984:46-49). This “anxiety of authorship” (46) is experienced by Diana as an artist who acts as Henry Breasley’s muse and helper but does not trust her own value. As Anne, the person who better knows her, says: “She’s stupid. The way clever girls are sometimes [...] the person she can’t see through is herself” (Fowles, 1975:67).

Furthermore, it is not only Diana who is critical with her own work; even David after watching her paintings is condescending. He appreciates in them “an analogy with his own development; in a more feminine, decorative kind of way”, Fowles (1975:81). This apparent recognition of femininity applied to everything that a woman does, could be in

contradiction to contemporary feminist thought, although even the author, Fowles was very conscious of this disagreement:

I am not a feminist in the fiercely active political sense it is usually used in England and America nowadays, but I have sympathy for the general “anima”, the feminine spirit, the feminine intelligence, and I think that all male judgements of the way women go about life are so biased that they are virtually worthless. Man is really being a very prejudiced judge of his own case and of course when judging against women. It is counted very bad taste in England now to talk favourably of women’s intuition. The real feminists in England do not like this sentimental talk of female intuition. I am afraid I still have some faith in that. Women cannot, I think, sometimes think as logically or rationally as men can, but thinking logically or rationally often leads you into error. (Onega, 1988:71)

Fowles acknowledged the differences between his ideological position and contemporary feminism. As Lenz rightly argues: “his enthusiasm for feminism was in fact and enthusiasm for a very old and very conventional idealization of women” (2008:9). Still, it is surprising that while “feminists have criticized Fowles for his attitude toward women, for example, many women readers seem to have appreciated his apparently genuine fascination with an archetypal characterization of women” (Lenz: 2008: 16). Thus, Fowles’s novels in general are read, on the one hand, as “texts of phallic reinforcement” (González-Gatti, 1993, 21) and, on the other hand, *The Ebony Tower* in particular could be read as a text marking an evolution in Fowles’s texts. According to Lenz it could be interpreted by using a “standpoint approach” that would emphasize its ambiguity and multiple possible perspectives. This would allow the feminist critic to “interrogate not only her own various perspectives but also Fowles’s various perspectives as they inhabit and emerge from his texts” (Lenz: 2008, 19).

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that Diana and Anne, the twin “goddesses” in the fertility myth, perfectly fulfil the archetype of the anima/muse that motivates both men, Henry Breasley and David Williams to create. Their sexuality provides the two men with creative impulse and force, while Beth has accommodated herself to the role of angel in the house in what for David is a land of certainty, common sense and lack of risk. From the point of view of contemporary women, this role, although impregnated with the ancient power of reproduction, can be seen as totally subordinated to the male role and, therefore, as a way of perpetuating gender inequalities. On the other hand, following the mythical pattern and expectations, David fails the hero’s quest, he returns without having changed, and totally aware of the choice he has made. What is

surprising is that he does make a choice, even though what he opts for is the wrong path in existential terms, whereas Diana and Anne remain passive, dependent and incapable of making any progress. From a feminist perspective it seems, in my opinion, very difficult to reconcile their attitudes with any message empowering women. From an existentialist perspective all of them fail, except Henry, who is the only one who remains faithful to his art and philosophy of life. It is a realistic but not a happy ending, perhaps because, as Fowles thought “life is hell, it is absurd, it is tragic, there are no happy endings” (Onega, 1988:64). This is why, in the end of the novella, the consolatory completion of medieval myth disappears in order to give way to real life of our angst-ridden age.

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