Fowles is an enigma in broad daylight. He is exceptionally open about his feelings and opinions, yet it is hard to be absolutely certain that one has understood his work or his position in post-1960s fiction. He is an erudite novelist who is at the same time immensely popular. He is obsessional about freedom and at the same time critical of the uses to which it has been put. Much of his work seems to have a left wing or feminist bias, yet he can also be seen as crypto-fascist and sexist. He is a self-proclaimed atheist whose most recent novel, *A Maggot*, presents a bigoted fanaticism of the eighteenth century as a necessary step towards freedom. He says that he has 'little interest' in the historical novel, yet he is an expert at the evocation of the past and at convincing period dialogue. The catalogue of enigmas could be continued almost indefinitely, but the daylight, the accessibility and the 'readerly' character of his work remains.

Some ways of approaching Fowles the novelist seem to hold more promise than others. Simon Loveday, for instance, proposes the chivalric romance, a genre studied by Fowles at university and explicitly present in *The Ebony Tower*, as a clue. Like Chrétien de Troyes and the other authors of the late medieval romance, Fowles is interested in the traditional quest in which the hero will prove himself in ambiguous competition with some *belle dame*, often *sans merci*, and he toys with the quasi-magical environment of the enchanted castle (the 'domaine') with its wizard-wiseman. Loveday's book is convincing when it deals with some of the fiction (*The Collector, The Magus*, most of the stories in *The Ebony Tower*), but it begins to break down when its thesis is applied to *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, *Daniel Martin* and *A Maggot*.

Fowles himself has taken a psychoanalytic approach to his...
novels in a fascinating essay, 'Hardy and the Hag', in which he explores the source of fictional creativity in (male) novelists with the help of an analysis of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* undertaken by Gilbert Rose, an American psychiatrist. Here we feel close to the intimate springs of Fowles's work, but we are not, in the end, led to any very clear interpretations. While it seems probable that we would learn more about how writing occurs if we were to familiarise ourselves with, say, Melanie Klein's *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, this will not lead us to anything like a complete account of a ludic piece such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or a work as baffling as *A Maggot*.

For the purpose of this essay I would like to attempt a less partial account (not that I would deny the Romance element or the probability of Fowles's version of the psychic generation of fiction) and offer a picture of a novelist coming to terms with freedom, both in the Existentialist sense, which would require that freedom be an indispensable absolute (which I think Fowles believes, at least as far as the indispensability is concerned), and in the more recent Poststructuralist sense, which would require freedom to be a chimera, an endlessly deferred goal (which I think is what Fowles now also believes).

In this way Fowles is the novelist *par excellence* of the period since 1960, in Britain at least. He belongs to the generation most profoundly influenced by Existentialism, and his development has followed the same course as developments that have in part sprung from Existentialism. This may help to explain some of the enigma – the early interest in the freedom of the individual consciousness thrown into the world later becomes the more limited Barthesian freedom of the author playing with the text. The 'pleasure of the text', Barthes' explicit connection of the play of fiction with the play of sexual encounter, becomes in Fowles an elaborate erotics of fiction that takes us well beyond the search for authenticity. The author's self, always closely bound up with that of his hero-surrogates in Fowles, seems to be exploring Existentialist choices in an early work such as *The Magus*, but by the time we reach *Daniel Martin*, that self has itself come to seem part of the problem of fictional creation. We are not dealing with self-obsession but rather with the position of the Postmodern/Poststructuralist author for whom the problem of writing is that he is at once all-powerful (the ludic God, the