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The Literary Portrayal of the Madonna-Whore Complex in John Fowles's Novels "The Collector" and "The Magus"

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The Literary Portrayal of the Madonna-Whore Complex in John Fowles's Novels *The Collector* and *The Magus*

Literacki obraz zespołu madonny i ladacznicy w powieściach Johna Fowlesa *Kolekcjoner* i *Mag*

Key words: Fowles, madonna, whore, Freud

Słowa kluczowe: Fowles, madonna, ladacznica, Freud

*Where such men love they have no desire
and where they desire they cannot love.
S. Freud, "A Special Type of Object Choice
Made by Men" (1910)*

While writing his novels, John Fowles¹ was strongly influenced by various scientific theories, especially those of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Although a lot of critical papers have already been written about Freudian and Jungian influences on Fowles's oeuvre², not much critical attention has been given to the phenomenon known as the madonna-whore complex, originally created by Freud, and further developed by other

¹ John Robert Fowles (1926–2005) was a British writer educated at Oxford and specializing in French literature. His oeuvre is not substantial, as he wrote only a few novels: *The Collector* (1963), *The Magus* (1966, revised version 1977), *Daniel Martin* (1977), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), *Mantissa* (1982), *A Maggot* (1985). He is also the author of *The Aristos* (1964) – a book of philosophical essays – and a collection of short stories entitled *The Ebony Tower* (1974). He also wrote poems and books of non-fiction, including his journals, but he earned his acclaim thanks to his novels, three of which – *The Collector*, *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – have been adapted on screen. His writing style was heterogeneous and each of his books is different from the others. Literary critics often place him between tradition and postmodernism. On the one hand, he writes in a way typical of realism. On the other hand, he uses various experimental techniques characteristic of postmodernist writing, such as multiple viewpoints, alternative endings, metafiction, elements of magic realism.

² One example might be *Psychology in the Novels by John Fowles* by Christine Hneusheva: https://www.academia.edu/1609419/Psychology_in_the_Novels_by_John_Fowles [Accessed June 7, 2014]

psychoanalysts. Generally speaking, the madonna-whore complex is a kind of sexual/personality disorder which affects the way men perceive women. A man suffering from the complex divides women into only two categories: madonnas, that is honourable, respectable and pure women, and whores – dirty, promiscuous sex toys. The main problem for the sufferer – and the reason why the complex should be treated as a serious disorder – is the man's inability to combine love and sex in relation to a single female object. Such a man loves and respects the madonna figure, who often happens to be his wife, but is usually unable to have sexual relationship with her. This is the reason why a lot of men commit adultery and turn to the whore figure, with whom the relationship is based on sexual act without love. Pat Gaudette, the author of *Madonna/Whore Complex*, defines the disorder as a “sexual dysfunction in which some men believe that sex is a dirty act that is only enjoyed by «bad» women – whores. For these men, all women are divided into two very different groups: the whores/prostitutes/harlots, women who are easily seduced and who enjoy the dirty act of sex; and the Madonnas/virgins (...) pure women of virtue who would never enjoy sex and who would not be degraded by the sex act”³.

Typical of the complex is the dissociation of the “tender” and the “sensual” (or love and desire), which is caused by the fact that in the sufferer's mind the madonna figure is in fact a representation of the mother figure, either real or imaginary if the man did not have a mother or the relationship with her was devoid of warmth and affection. In both cases the man is unable to have a sexual relationship with the madonna figure for fear of committing incest, which consequently leads to erectile dysfunction called by Freud “psychical impotence”, which means that “this failure may (...) happen only with certain women [madonnas]”, whereas otherwise “the man may be fully functional”⁴. Moreover, a man who is romantically involved with the madonna figure needs some outlet for his sexual drive, and thus he starts looking for the whore figure, someone totally different from his real or projected vision of the mother, someone “ethically inferior”. The phenomenon is often referred to as “the degradation of the sexual object”⁵ and is the subject-matter of Freud's seminal essay entitled “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love” (1912). Nowadays, the complex is seen as quite a common sexual disorder and is often mentioned in popular culture and tabloid articles⁶ as well as medical

³ P. Gaudette, *Madonna/Whore Complex. Love without Sex. Sex without Love*, Lecanto, 2011, p. 9.

⁴ U. Hartmann, *Sigmund Freud and His Impact on Our Understanding of Male Sexual Dysfunction* [in:] “Journal of Sexual Medicine” 2009, Aug 6 (8), p. 2335.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2335.

⁶ A lot of celebrities and public figures are said to have the madonna-whore complex, for example Bill Clinton, Franz Kafka, Elvis Presley, to name but a few. See Gaudette, *op. cit.*

and sociological journals, but in Fowles's lifetime it was not so widely known. Nevertheless, Fowles's novels contain clear evidence that the writer heard about the phenomenon and undoubtedly utilized it extensively while creating his literary characters.

The aim of the following paper is to trace the elements of the madonna-whore complex in two of Fowles's novels, namely *The Collector* and *The Magus*. Since the disorder afflicts men, I concentrate on the male protagonists – Frederick Clegg and Nicholas Urfe respectively. The main objective is to analyze the way the madonna-whore complex shapes these protagonists' personalities and influences the way they perceive women in general, as well as how they create and maintain (or destroy) relationships with particular female protagonists. In fact, the madonna-whore complex may be treated as a scaffolding on which the relations between male and female protagonists are built up. Each of the two novels, however, does it in a slightly different way.

The Collector (1963) presents a male protagonist – Frederick (Ferdinand) Clegg – who suffers from more than one disorder. In fact, he exhibits a very broad spectrum of psychological, sexual and personality disorders. Not only is he a typical psychopath, but he shows signs of various sexual perversions, such as sadism and masochism, fetishism, voyeurism and various paraphilias. These deviations, however, are non-threatening in comparison with the madonna-whore complex. This disorder is the driving force behind all of Clegg's actions concerning Miranda and the way he treats her throughout her plight is dictated by this particular condition. The complex is also to blame for Miranda's death at the end of the novel. Frederick Clegg may be a despicable character, but he is in fact a sick man. His actions are beyond his control and, consequently, he should not be condemned but sympathized with.

According to Freud, the cause of the complex is connected with the sufferer's relationship with his mother during childhood (or lack of such)⁷ and the same may be said about the origin of Clegg's dysfunction. Clegg's childhood and his relationship with his mother are the main reasons why he has become what he is. His father was killed in a car crash when Clegg was two years old and his mother abandoned him soon afterwards. It is clear that Clegg has never forgiven her. While describing his early youth and his mother, for instance, Clegg, the Hero-narrator, comments: "Aunt Anne's always said good riddance in so many words, and I agree"⁸. After being forsaken by his mother, Clegg is raised by Aunt Annie and Uncle Dick, who also have a disabled daughter Mabel. Clegg has quite a good relationship

⁷ More information about the origin of the complex can be found in Freud's essay "A Special Type of Object Choice Made by Men" (1910).

⁸ J. Fowles, *The Collector*, London, 1998, p.11. Since all the quotations come from this edition of the novel, we will give the page numbers in parentheses.

with his uncle, but Dick dies when Clegg is fifteen and the young man spends his adolescence in the company of Aunt Annie and Mabel, both very bossy, inquisitive, frustrated, bitter and miserable.

After being immersed in such a toxic atmosphere for many years, Clegg becomes a hardened misogynist. As Andrew Brink puts it, “the novel works out the terrifying effects of Clegg’s hostility to the women who brought him up, or failed to do so”⁹. Misogyny, which may be defined as “a loathing and hatred of women by men (...) just because they are female”¹⁰, is strictly connected with the madonna-whore complex. As Sacco and Laino put it, “some men use women sexually not only in order to build up their own egos (...) but also (...) because they are angry with women in general. Exploitation through sex is a means some men use to get even with women. Moreover the women they use for sex are representatives of the women who have hurt them in the past through neglect and rejection”¹¹.

However, Clegg does not hate all women. After all, he falls in love with Miranda who becomes his obsession, but he loves her anacritically¹², not sexually. As a typical sufferer of the madonna-whore complex, he divides women into only two categories – saint madonnas and dirty whores. Of course, Miranda is the madonna whereas all the other women are – like his mother – “women of the streets” (C 11). Clegg’s perception of his love object is clearly based on this dichotomy; the narrator often makes comparisons between Miranda and other girls he knows. For instance, Clegg compares Miranda with his colleague’s girlfriend saying: “She was all Miranda wasn’t. I always hated vulgar women, especially girls” (C 12). At some other point he says: “She was not like some woman you don’t respect so you don’t care what you do, you respected her and you had to be very careful” (C 38).

Before the abduction and for most of Miranda’s imprisonment, he treats her with respect and he has no intention of abusing her sexually, and this lack of sexual drive is also typical of someone who has the madonna-whore complex. A madonna is someone to be admired and cherished, and this is how Clegg treats Miranda. He idolizes and idealizes her, he believes her to be innocent and pure: “people only married for love, especially girls like Miranda” (C 13). This kind of behaviour is also very characteristic of the

⁹ A. Brink, *Obsession and Culture. A Study of Sexual Obsession in Literature.*, Cranbury-London-Mississauga, 1996, p. 149.

¹⁰ P. Sacco, D. Laino, *Madonna Complex. Why men are wired to cheat on women*, Brentwood, 2011, p.23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹² According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *anacritic* means “relating to, or characterized by the direction of love toward an object (as the mother) that satisfies nonsexual needs”. In this kind of attachment, “falling in love is based (...) on confusion of the object with a preexisting ideal image we have in our heads: we equate the partner with our mother, father, or some other primary caretaker.” B. Fink, *Freud and Lacan on Love: A Preliminary Exploration* [in:] “Filosofski vestnik” 2006, Volume XXVII, Number 2, p. 265.

madonna-whore complex, in which “a man suffering from the complex chooses a sexually inexperienced woman for his wife and places her on a very high and lonely pedestal in order to worship her goodness and virtue”¹³. Hence, the complex is often referred to as the pedestal/gutter syndrome. Because of the idealization, the phenomenon is often linked with the concept of Marianismo, in which “moral virtue (...) places women on a somewhat semi-divine level”¹⁴. In the case of Clegg, such an idealistic perception of the kidnapped girl stems from the fact that he is looking for a substitute for his absent mother. This is what Miranda herself notices at one point: “I expect it’s your mother. You’re looking for your mother” (C 59)¹⁵.

At the same time Clegg channels his sexual desires somewhere else – he visits a prostitute, he photographs couples having sex in public places, he buys books of pornography¹⁶. However, he is ashamed of these activities: “(...) I bought all the books I wanted, some of them I didn’t know such things existed, as a matter of fact I was disgusted (...) it’s a lot different from what I used to dream of about Miranda and me” (C 17). Although he does fantasize about Miranda, his fantasies are innocent and devoid of sexual undertones. At one point, the narrator says: “I used to have dreams about her, I used to think of stories where I met her, did things she admired, married her and all that. Nothing nasty...” (C 10). According to Thomas C. Foster, Clegg sees himself and Miranda as “partners in life, in butterfly collecting, in art, but not in bed”¹⁷.

When Clegg starts to observe Miranda, he treats her as if she were a butterfly: “Like burnet cocoons (...) I was catching a rarity (...) A Pale Clouded Yellow, for instance.” (C 9). Because Clegg is an amateur entomologist and collecting butterflies¹⁸ is the only thing he is passionate about, such a comparison shows the depth of his affection for Miranda. However, the way Clegg treats Miranda changes throughout the novel. Since the girl is very desperate to regain freedom, she tries everything to achieve

¹³ P. Gaudette, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁴ P. Sacco, D. Laino, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁵ In a way, Clegg is like a man who was given up for adoption as a child, who – according to Pat Gaudette – “never was able to experience the early bonding of infant to mother” and, consequently, “may look for a mother substitute to fulfill that need” (P. Gaudette, op. cit., p. 10). The concept is known as “transference” (See P. Sacco, D. Laino, op. cit.), since certain feelings are transferred from the mother to the wife/girlfriend.

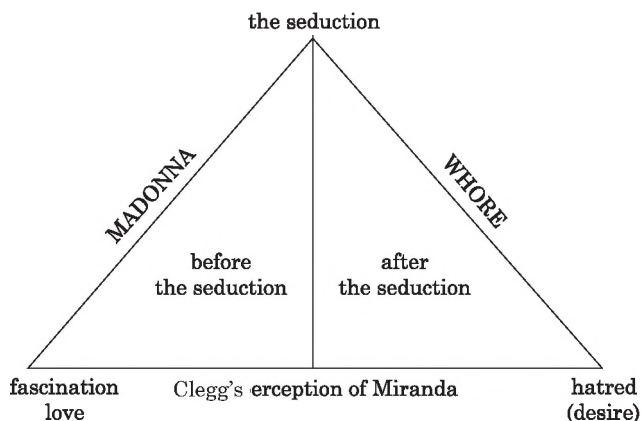
¹⁶ Contemporary studies show very clearly that there is a connection between the complex and pornography. As Gaudette writes, “this belief [that is the belief in the good girl-bad girl dichotomy] on the part of the man is frequently most manifest by his arousal to erotic literature, magazines, movies and fantasies, but not to his partner” (P. Gaudette, op. cit., p.12).

¹⁷ T. C. Foster, *Understanding John Fowles*, Columbia, 1994, p. 24.

¹⁸ Clegg’s personality and attitude to life are also shaped by the collector mentality. He appreciates those things and people that might be useful specimens in his collection. In many respects, he treats Miranda in the same way he treats the butterflies and collecting is the central metaphor on which the novel is constructed.

this aim, including seducing Clegg. At first she does it very subtly, but without success, so she finally decides to make the ultimate sacrifice. On November 30th she gets herself and her captor undressed, tries to kiss him and encourages him to have sex with her, but in vain. It turns out that Clegg is an impotent. After this event he starts to hate Miranda, not only because he feels extremely humiliated by what happened between them, but also because his perception of the girl as a saintly madonna is shattered; Miranda appears to be yet another “woman of the streets”.

What is unusual about Clegg’s case is that he fuses his opposing views of women as madonnas and whores in a single object, which is illustrated by the following diagram:



Another difference between Clegg and a typical sufferer of the complex is Clegg’s inability to have sex with “whores”. In fact, any kind of physical contact makes him feel uneasy and disgusted. For him, sex is a vulgar and primitive activity: “I never had anything to do with women, I never thought about women much before Miranda. (...) It’s some crude animal thing I was born without” (C 13). This is why he is unable to get excited during his encounter with a prostitute, which he describes as follows:

I won’t say what happened, except that I was no good. I was too nervous, I tried to be as if I knew all about it and of course she saw, she was old and she was horrible, horrible. I mean, both the filthy way she behaved and in looks. She was worn, common. Like a specimen you’d turn away from, out collecting. I thought of Miranda seeing me there like that. As I said, I tried to do it, but it was no good and I didn’t try hardly. (C 14-15)

In fact, he is so ashamed to talk about sex openly that he often refers to it euphemistically as “the obvious”.

This is why the events described in the seduction scene are so traumatic for the protagonist. Miranda crosses the border which should not be crossed, which eventually leads to her death. In fact, the seduction scene is the

climax of the novel, so it is worth looking at the scene in question more closely. As was said, the event takes place on November 30th. A few days earlier Miranda severely cuts Clegg with an axe during one of her several attempts at freeing herself. When he forgives her the attack, she asks: "Tell me what I must do to be set free. (...) If I went to bed with you?" (C 94), to which Clegg replies: "I didn't know you were that sort" (C 94). This is not the only occasion when Miranda implies that she is ready to do anything, including "the obvious", to be set free. However, Clegg does not treat her suggestions seriously, which shows how strongly he believes her to be the madonna, the mother-figure whom he wants to love only emotionally, not physically.

While introducing the seduction scene, Clegg-the narrator says:

I know what some would think, they would think my behaviour peculiar. I know most men would only have thought of taking an unfair advantage and there were plenty of opportunities. I could have used the pad. Done what I liked, but I am not that sort, definitely not that sort at all. (...) What she never understood was that with me it was just having. Having her was enough. Nothing needed doing. I just wanted to have her, and safe at last. (C 95)

The above passage gives a lot of information about Clegg's way of thinking. First of all, he wants to be seen as someone different, his is only one of many occasions when he compares himself to other men whom he describes as vulgar, primitive etc. What makes him different is his total lack of sexual drive towards Miranda, or anyone else. Secondly, the passage explains his motives for kidnapping the girl, which is just "having". Finally, the words "safe at last" are quite ambiguous and may imply that it is Clegg himself who wants to feel safe thanks to having Miranda, which supports the theory that he perceives her as a mother-figure. Miranda represents the motherly warmth, care, affection and love which he was denied as a child.

Not surprisingly, therefore, he describes the events of November 30th with emotions reminiscent of a rape victim. While describing the scene with Miranda undressing in front of him, he says: "It was terrible, it made me feel sick and trembling, I wished I was on the other side of the world. It was worse than with the prostitute; I didn't respect her, but with Miranda I knew I couldn't stand the shame" (C 99). In fact, the word "shame" appears several times in the description of these events. What is also worth noting is the fact that Clegg remains extremely passive throughout the scene; it is Miranda who does things to Clegg, not vice versa, he is so shocked that he is unable to do anything, which also makes him similar to a victim of sexual abuse. After stripping herself, Miranda undresses Clegg and tries to make love to him:

I kept thinking, stop it, stop it, it's wrong, but I was too weak. The next thing was I was naked and she was against me and holding me but I was all tense, it was like a different me and a different she. I know I wasn't normal then, not

doing the expected, she did some things which I won't say except that I would never have thought it of her. She lay beside me on the sofa and everything, but I was all twisted inside. (C 99-100)

Later on he confesses to be an impotent, which may or may not be true. What is certain is that he is unable to get excited with Miranda because for him having sex with her is like an act of incest. Thus, Clegg may suffer from what Freud calls "psychical impotence". At the end of the scene Clegg is mad and disappointed, he talks about his losing respect for Miranda: "(...) she didn't see how to love me in the right way. There were a lot of ways she could have pleased me" (C 102), "I never respected her again. It left me angry for days." (C 103), "(...) she had killed all the romance, she had made herself like any other woman, I didn't respect her any more, there was nothing left to respect" (C 103-104). While talking about the situation to Miranda a few days afterwards, he tells her: "You're not better than a common street-woman (...) I used to respect you because I thought you were above what you done [the seduction]. Not like the rest. But you're just the same. You do any disgusting thing to get what you want" (C 107).

Therefore, Clegg's perception of the girl totally changes after the seduction; the madonna changes into the whore, whereas fascination is replaced with hatred. Not only does he call her a "common street-woman", but he starts to treat her as such. Soon after the incident he offers to let her free if she poses for "obscene photographs", but she declines. Later, he makes her pose for the photographs by using violence. However, "the best ones were with her face cut off" (C 110), which may be interpreted in two ways. Clegg cannot look at her face because he is ashamed of what he has done to her or he cannot look at her face because he despises her for what she has done. In the light of the earlier remarks the latter explanation seems much more plausible – Clegg cannot stand the sight of Miranda's face because – in his perception – she is the whore and this is why she has to be degraded. What is unusual, the degradation of Miranda from the madonna into the whore does not entail Clegg's sexual attraction towards Miranda. Thus, love is not replaced with desire. However, he does rape her, not literally, but metaphorically, when he takes "obscene photographs" of her. As Pamela Cooper notes, "once Miranda (...) has crossed Clegg's psychic dividing line between the stereotypes «madonna» and «whore», he abandons his disproportionate chivalry and expresses his brute power through his camera. The relationship between Miranda and Clegg culminates in a photographic «rape»..."¹⁹.

¹⁹ P. Cooper, *The Fictions of John Fowles. Power, creativity, femininity*, Ottawa, 1991, p. 27.

Eventually, Clegg's hostile and cold attitude towards Miranda – made even more so after discovering her diary – leads to neglect and the girl's death. However, she is not a victim of Clegg-a criminal, but Clegg-a sick man, since the madonna-whore complex is a psychological disorder beyond the sufferer's control. Unfortunately, there is no one to help him, he has no family or friends. At the end of the novel he starts looking for another victim and it is very likely that her fate will be the same as Miranda's. At the same time Clegg's next victim is a simple shop-assistant, which means that the sexual object had been degraded²⁰.

A slightly different portrayal of the madonna-whore complex is presented in *The Magus*. Contrary to Frederick Clegg, the main protagonist of this novel – Nicholas Urfe – is everything but a sexual abstainer. On the contrary, at the beginning of the novel he – as the narrator of the story – presents himself as a sexual predator²¹, an attitude which is often typical of the madonna-whore complex²²:

I didn't collect conquests, but by the time I left Oxford I was a dozen girls away from virginity. I found my sexual success and the apparently ephemeral nature of love equally pleasing. It was like being good at golf, but despising the game. One was covered all round, both when one played and when one didn't. I contrived most of my affairs in the vacations, away from Oxford, since the new term meant that I could conveniently leave the crime scene. There were sometimes a few tedious weeks of letters, but I soon put the solitary heart away, «assumed responsibility with my total being» and showed the Chesterfieldian mask instead. I became almost as neat at ending liaisons as at starting them²³.

Not only is he proud of his “technique”, but the way he speaks of women is also devoid of subtlety and reflects his lack of respect towards them²⁴. Sexual gratification and satisfying his ego are the only reasons Nicholas

²⁰ More information about the phenomenon can be found in Freud's essay entitled “On the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love” (1922).

²¹ Such a view of the main protagonist is additionally emphasized by the epigraphs preceding each of the three parts of the novel and taken from *Les Infortunes de la Vertu* by De Sade. The epigraph to Part 1 refers to “un débauche de profession” – professional promiscuity or someone who is extremely promiscuous – which is a very good description of Nicholas before the transformation.

²² According to Gaudette, men suffering from the complex often lead a “sexually active lifestyle”, which simply means they are promiscuous.

²³ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, London, 1997, p. 21. Since all the quotations come from this edition of the novel, we will give the page numbers in parentheses.

²⁴ For example: “There was also a girl I was tired of.” (M 18), “She was about thirty, a born spinster, with a lack of sexuality so total that her smart clothes and too heavy make-up made her pathetic; like an unsuccessful geisha.” (M 20), “I passed a couple of uninteresting-looking girls on the stairs...” (M 22), “The ugly girls – they always arrive first...” (M 22). Such an attitude towards women may suggest that Nicholas, just like Clegg, is a misogynist, sexism and sexual exploitation being symptoms of such a stance: “A key component of misogyny is degradation brought about through the devaluing of women” (P. Sacco, D. Laino, op. cit., p. 63).

initiates and maintains relationships with women. As such a “Don Juan”, he meets and begins a relationship with an Australian girl called Alison Kelly. However, their relationship is based mainly on sex – subconsciously, Nicholas treats Alison as a whore-figure, he does not love her anaclitically. In fact, he uses her only to satisfy his sexual needs, for him Alison is only a sex object. When he feels that the girl would like to be more than just a lover, he leaves her and escapes to a Greek island to teach English, since he is scared of intimacy and is unable to combine desire with love because, as Sacco and Laino suggest, “love and sex do not match up for a man seeing the world through the lenses of the Madonna complex”²⁵.

On the island, Nicholas gets entangled in a bizarre psychodrama directed by a mysterious millionaire Maurice Conchis. During the experiment, Nicholas meets and falls in love with a girl called Lily. In many ways his fascination with the girl resembles Clegg’s fascination with Miranda, but Nicholas’s infatuation is not devoid of sexual undertones. The hero is denied sexual contacts with Lily, however, which leads to his frustration. Thus, the image of Lily in Nicholas’s mind oscillates between the madonna and the whore. At the same time, the aim of Conchis and his cabal is to show to Nicholas that it is Alison who should be seen as the madonna, not Lily. At the end of the experiment, the image of Lily as the whore wins over her madonna-like qualities, whereas the anaclitic aspect of this relationship is shifted from Lily to Alison. Finally, Nicholas is cured of the complex and is capable of forming a healthy relationship with his Australian girlfriend, with love and passion combined.

Nicholas’s treatment is a long and elaborate process which bears a great resemblance to psychoanalysis²⁶. In fact, the characters refer to Freud and Jung very frequently, there is also a scene in which Nicholas is hypnotized. On some other occasion he is presented with a very detailed description of his own personality, which contains a lot of psychoanalytical jargon. The report in question may seem strongly exaggerated, but there is also some truth in it, some of the remarks concerning Nicholas’s personality seem very accurate. For instance, the report draws attention to the fact that the beginnings of the hero’s problems are to be found in his childhood, which is typical of the madonna-whore complex. While describing his background, Nicholas-the narrator says:

I had long before made the discovery that I lacked the parents and ancestors I needed. My father was (...) a brigadier; and my mother was the very model of a would-be major-general’s wife. That is, she never argued with him and always behaved as if he were listening in the next room, even when he was thousands of miles away. (M 15)

²⁵ P. Sacco, D. Laino, op. cit., p. 39.

²⁶ Psychoanalysis, along with group therapy, is regarded as the best treatment for the madonna-whore complex. See P. Sacco, D. Laino, op. cit., p. 85.

His father was very demanding and strict, whereas his wife was totally submissive to him, which had a great impact on the relationship with her son. Nicholas-the narrator does not say much about his mother, which is very symptomatic of his lack of attachment to her, he was probably indifferent to her and did not respect her²⁷. Not surprisingly, thus, Nicholas accepts the news of his parents' tragic death without much emotion: "After the first shock I felt an almost immediate sense of relief, of freedom" (M 16). Undoubtedly, his lack of a close relationship with his mother – however cynical and indifferent he may pretend to be – made him an unhappy child and has had a great impact on the way he treats women, including the main female protagonists, Alison and Lily.

In order to examine Nicholas's disorder in more detail, it is necessary to look at these heroines through Nicholas's eyes and see how his perception of them changes throughout the novel. As was said, from the beginning of their relationship Nicholas treats Alison as a sex object only, which stems from the fact that, as Katherine Tarbox notes, he "has always difficulty understanding the complex relationship between sex and love. He divides women into two classes: those who are meant to be loved and those who are meant to be used. Consequently, his affairs with women are deformed by his inability to see beyond arbitrary categories"²⁸. Thus, the relationship with Alison – and all the women before her – is based solely on sex. What Nicholas wants Alison to do is only to satisfy his sexual appetite, he does not have any other expectations. From the first meeting, he sees her as an easy girl and a "colonial": "She had candid grey eyes, the only innocent things in a corrupt face, as if circumstances, not nature, had forced her to be hard. (...) She was bizarre, a kind of human oxymoron" (M 24). There are many moments when Nicholas looks down on Alison, thus degrading her in a way typical of the complex: "(...) I was teaching her, anglicizing her accent, polishing off her roughness, her provincialisms; in bed she did the teaching..." (M 35).

It is true that Alison is far from being a prude – after all, they go to bed on the same evening they meet – and she has quite a baggage of experience, including unhappy relationships and an abortion, but her expectations concerning the relationship with Nicholas go far beyond pure sex. She loves him, but at the same time she realizes that he is unable to offer more than

²⁷ He fits very well Gaudette's statement that "some men with the complex despise their mothers" (P. Gaudette, *op. cit.*, p. 16). Sacco and Laino also observe that "most males who possess the Madonna complex have searched for intimacy with their own mothers but have faced rejection. Their mothers are usually cold women who may or may not take care of them physically, but the lack of emotion is a constant..." (P. Sacco, D. Laino, *op. cit.*, p. 29). This statement explains very well the origins of the complex in both Clegg and Nicholas.

²⁸ K. Tarbox, *The Art of John Fowles*, Athens-London, 1988, pp. 21-22.

sexual desire. In fact, Alison is fully aware of Nicholas's perception of her as the whore figure. During one of their numerous quarrels, she shouts: "I'm a whore and a colonial" (M 35), expecting Nicholas to deny, but he only says: "I wish you wouldn't use that word" (M 35). Later on, she calls him "a snob, a prig, a twopenny-halfpenny Don Juan" (M 40).

When Nicholas leaves Alison, he feels a relief, but also satisfaction. While exchanging letters with her, he deliberately wants to hurt her even more: "I wrote a letter in reply to say that I had been expecting her letter, that she was perfectly free. But I tore it up. If anything might hurt her, silence would; and I wanted to hurt her" (M 55). At the same time, however, he sometimes thinks of Alison, but these are usually moments of sexual frustration: "I began to think erotically of Alison again; of the dirty week-end pleasures of having her in some Athens hotel bedroom..." (M 159). In fact, his fantasy comes true some time later – Nicholas and Alison meet in Athens and go on a trip to Parnassus. The encounter presents Nicholas with yet another occasion to use and hurt her. His behaviour during their encounter and what he says about it only confirm that his perception of Alison as the whore has not changed since they parted. He decides to meet her for very selfish reasons, "out of a desire to play my own double game with Conchis" (M 245) and derives a lot of pleasure from this "duplicity" (M 249), i.e. lying to both Alison and Conchis. Nick describes Alison with the following words: "There was something about Alison's manner and appearance; if a man was with her, he went to bed with her" (M 248), thus trying to blame her for the fact that she is treated as a sex object.

What is more, Nicholas is dishonest with Alison. In order to avoid having sex with her – not for noble reasons, but because he is already fascinated with Lily – he says he is not allowed to have sex because of syphilis which he contracted in a brothel in Athens²⁹. He also decides not to mention the other girl to Alison³⁰.

However, they end up making love twice, first in the chalet, then by a lake in the forest. This is how Nicholas describes the scene in the chalet:

She undressed me completely (...) 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 (...) Alison murmured, shifted, bit me, swayed over me in a caress she called the pasha caress, that she knew I liked, all men liked; my mistress and my slave. (M 263–264)

Throughout the scene Nicholas creates an impression of being a passive victim of the circumstances, which resembles Clegg's behaviour during the seduction scene. In the next love-making scene, however, he is more active

²⁹ The fact that he finds it easy to talk about venereal diseases, but not his emotions, is symptomatic of his fear of intimacy, which is yet another manifestation of the complex.

³⁰ Likewise, he initially does not tell Lily about meeting Alison in Athens. He only does it much later and for particular reasons.

and more aware of the implications of his actions, which is connected with the change already taking place in his mind, and which will be discussed later. The meeting with Alison ends with a big row and more accusations. The girl says: "Christ, you're not just afraid of the *thing* love. You're even afraid of using the word now. (...) You think love is sex" (M 273), which very well summarizes their relationship and Nicholas's attitude towards women in general. The way Nicholas treats Alison on Mount Parnassus is partly connected with the fact that he is already deeply infatuated with Lily, who – as was said – oscillates in his mind between the madonna and the whore.

From the beginning of his acquaintance with Lily Nicholas tries to idealize the girl in the same way as Clegg idealizes Miranda. Here the situation is additionally complicated by Lily's constantly changing identity. First, she is presented to the hero as a ghost of Conchis's dead fiancée. Although Nicholas knows it is just a game, he willingly accepts the invitation to play it and pretends to believe in the girl's supernatural provenance. However, such a perception of her creates distance because Nicholas may feel uncomfortable about desiring someone else's (Conchis's) woman and because Lily behaves in a very old-fashioned and prudish way. In one of the scenes, for instance, Lily says: "Are you asking me to commit osculation?" (M 198), which amuses Nicholas instead of exciting him. Later, the girl is presented as Conchis's schizophrenic relative called Julie Holmes. In this case, Conchis openly forbids Nicholas to make advances on her as he does not want his "patient" to get confused or hurt.

At the same time, the main protagonist makes comparisons between Lily and Alison. His perception of the two women is clearly based on the dichotomy madonna – whore, which is particularly visible in his account of the Parnassus episode. Nicholas sees Alison as less attractive physically – "Pretty enough body, pretty enough clothes, a good walk, the same old wounded face and truth-seeking eyes. Alison might launch ten ships in me; but Julie [Lily] launched a thousand" (M 246)" – but also less enticing intellectually, less sophisticated.

Nicholas thinks of Lily during his intercourse with Alison and – after coming back from Athens – feels guilty about sleeping with his ex-girlfriend. Although he is not in a relationship with Lily, he feels as if he has cheated on her: "On my side I knew the ghost of Alison, of what had happened on Parnassus; a flicker of adultery, a moment's guilt" (M 283). Thus, Nicholas's perception of the two girls resembles a triangle typical of the madonna-whore complex, the relationship involving three people, a man, his wife and his lover. In this case, however, the situation is created artificially by Conchis and Lily, whereas lack of sex is the result of denial on Lily's side, not Nicholas's "psychical impotence". Thanks to this imposed abstinence, the protagonist learns to appreciate other aspects of femininity.

Nevertheless, he finds it extremely difficult not to fantasize about the young girl. Nicholas craves Lily sexually and everything he does seems to be dictated by his hope that he will finally be given a chance to sleep with her. He is patient, but at the same time he cannot live without sex. This is why he masturbates so much, this is why he visits a brothel in Athens, finally, this is why he sleeps with Alison. He is so frustrated sexually that he even considers becoming a homosexual³¹.

Lily is fully aware of his sexual frustration and she develops their relationship in such a way on purpose. When she is finally ready to have sex with Nicholas, she claims to be having her period and only masturbates him. Later, when they finally have an intercourse, she behaves like a prostitute. She dresses quickly after the intercourse, whereas a group of men enter the room and kidnap Nicholas. However, the protagonist is shocked more by Lily's indifference rather than by being snatched by the men.

His idealized perception of Lily is further subverted during Nicholas's symbolic trial, when he is made to watch Lily in a pornographic film, where she is shown as a "whore" of a black "monster of the Mississippi" played by Joe. Later, Nicholas is presented with a live scene of the above mentioned characters continuing their sex act in front of his eyes. The scene is called "disintoxication", which Nicholas describes as "a metaphorical (...) flogging" (M 521) and its main purpose is to cure Nicholas of Lily, but also to cure him of the madonna-whore complex. The event totally subverts Nicholas's preconceptions about women: "Everything I have ever thought to understand about women receded, interwove, flowed into mystery, into distorting shadows and currents, like objects sinking away, away, down through shafted depths of water" (M 529).

The twist of events described above not only draws Nicholas's attention to Lily's real role in the game and his relationship with her, but it also makes him aware of his real feelings towards Alison. He slowly comes to see madonna qualities in his ex-girlfriend, whereas Lily becomes – literally and metaphorically – the whore. Nicholas's perception of Alison as the madonna figure does not come as a sudden revelation, though. While looking at the events from temporal distance, Nicholas realizes that there were many signs that Alison was more than just a lover. One of such signs appeared during the trip to Parnassus, when Alison stopped to talk to some local children. Seeing her with the kids Nicholas felt an unidentified emotion which much later appeared to be love. Only after the disintoxication does he realize that he loves Alison anacritically. Thus, his feelings towards Lily are authentic, but the recipient should be different. The realization that he is able to love is the first step towards becoming a healthy man. Unfortunately, it comes at

³¹ Nicholas shows a lot of symptoms of being a sex addict, which is another feature of the madonna-whore complex.

a moment when Nicholas thinks Alison is dead. The situation was devised by Conchis and it helps Nicholas appreciate Alison even more. When he learns that her suicide was just a fake, he is certain he wants to be with her not as a lover, but as a partner in life.

At the same time Nicholas starts to appreciate women in general. In Part 3 of the novel he makes friends with two females (Kemp and Jojo), which would be impossible for the Nicholas from Part 1. Thus, he stops seeing women as either madonnas or whores, he does not look at every woman as a prospective sex toy. As for the sphere of relationships, he undergoes a tremendous change, too. As Pat Gaudette states, in order to be cured a man suffering from the complex “must want to change and be motivated to do the work necessary in order to treat all women as whole persons – both good and bad”³². Undoubtedly, Nicholas is highly motivated to change and he does change in the end. He sees Alison as a single entity, a woman whom he loves and desires at the same time, without incest anxiety. Nicholas is no longer afraid of intimacy and begins to express his emotions more openly. Thus, he is finally cured of the madonna-whore complex.

Summing up, *The Collector* and *The Magus* present the same psychological phenomenon. Both protagonists suffer from the madonna-whore complex and, consequently, there are many similarities between their personalities and relationships with women. Both Clegg and Nicholas divide females into only two categories – madonnas and whores – and are unable to combine love and desire. What makes the characters different is mainly their attitude towards sex. Nicholas is promiscuous, whereas Clegg is an impotent. Moreover, only one of them (Nicholas) gets cured, whereas the other one (Clegg) will always divide women into these two groups, which makes him an extremely tragic figure. Thus, the two novels present two distinct literary portrayals of the madonna-whore complex, one optimistic and the other pessimistic, which reflects the nature of the complex itself – if not treated, the complex destroys the sufferer and the people close to him.

It is also worth noting that *The Collector* and *The Magus* are not the only novels by John Fowles in which traces of the madonna-whore complex can be found. Other male protagonists, such as Charles Smithson of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or the eponymous protagonist of *Daniel Martin*, seem to display some symptoms of the complex, too. At the same time, all female protagonists created by Fowles appear to fall into one of the two categories, they are either saint madonnas or dirty whores, or a combination of the two types.

³² P. Gaudette, op. cit., p. 38.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł zaczyna się od krótkiej charakterystyki zespołu madonny i ladacznicy, gdyż celem pracy jest znalezienie elementów tego syndromu w sposobie kreowania bohaterów w dwóch powieściach Johna Fowlesa, *Kolekcjonerze* i *Magu*. Pisarz stara się dowieść, że główni bohaterzy tych utworów – Frederick Clegg i Nicholas Urfe – cierpią na zespół madonny i ladacznicy, co wpływa na ich życie, zwłaszcza relacje z kobietami, a także jest siłą napędową ich działań i podejmowanych przez nich decyzji. Mimo licznych podobieństw między bohaterami, literackie obrazy kompleksu w tych dwóch powieściach są różne. Nicholas zostaje wyleczony i powieść kończy się szczęśliwie, podczas gdy choroba Clegga zdaje się być nieuleczalna, co prowadzi do śmierci Mirandy, a także przypuszczalnie przyczynia się do tragedii kolejnych kobiet w przyszłości.