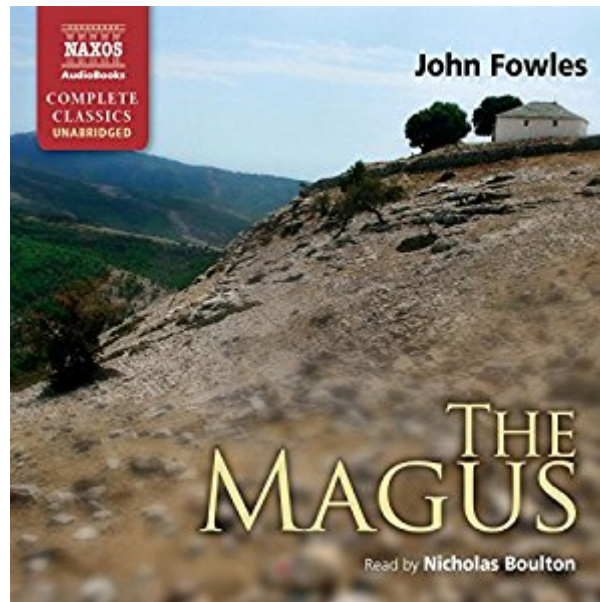


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# The Magus



## Synopsis

John Fowles' *The Magus* was a literary landmark of the 1960s. Nicholas Urfe goes to a Greek island to teach at a private school and becomes enmeshed in curious happenings at the home of a mysterious Greek recluse, Maurice Conchis. Are these events, involving attractive young English sisters, just psychological games, or an elaborate joke, or more? Reality shifts as the story unfolds. *The Magus* reflected the issues of the 1960s perfectly, but even almost half a century after its first publication, it continues to create tension and concern, remaining the page-turner that it was when it was first released.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

John Fowles describes *The Magus*, published in 1965, as his first novel. The protagonist is Nicholas Urfe, a young, middle-class Englishman, an Oxford graduate. The book begins in England, describing Nicholas' confused affair with Alison. They part and Nicholas takes a job teaching at a private boys' school on a beautiful Greek Island, Phraxos. On one of his island wanderings, he comes across a remote villa, owned by Conchis, the Magus or magician of the story. Conchis, an elderly man with enormous wealth, hypnotic presence, and mysterious background, entices Nicholas into a series of surreal, often fascinating, often bewildering events, the reality and meaning of which continually elude both Nicholas and the reader. Alison reappears in the story along with many new and mysterious characters, most notably a phantom-like young woman with whom Nicholas falls in love. In an illuminating foreword, written in 1976, Fowles acknowledges the "obvious influence of Jung." Jung theorized that human behavior is based on archetypes -- characters or

patterns found in humankind's collective unconscious, embodied in its myths. One of the more fundamental archetypes is the character of The Magician - a archetype related to the shaman, or trickster, or even the divine fool -- an entity capable of moving between worlds and manipulating reality. The Magus explores this archetype both through the character of Conchis, but also through the author himself who plays trickster to his readers, with plot twists, misdirection, and ambiguity. The character Nicholas is a curious blend of archetypal patterns -- the emotionally regressed adolescent, the sophisticated intellectual, the callow seducer of women, the "mark" ensnared by his own stupidity and questionable motives.

I finished "The Magus" a few days ago and I'm still turning the images over and over in my mind. It refuses to leave my psyche, even while I'm trying to read a new book. "The Magus" is about a young English man named Nicholas Urfe who gets a teaching job at a private school on a small Greek island. On a remote part of the island, he discovers a luxurious villa owned by a mysterious wealthy man named Conchis who apparently keeps to himself. The two of them meet and strike up an odd friendship, whereupon Conchis invites Nicholas to visit his villa on weekends. In the course of these visits, Nicholas realizes that Conchis is not as solitary as he had been led to believe. Conchis tells Nicholas the story of his life in gradual installments, but because Conchis's world is so illusory, Nicholas doesn't know how much, if any, of it he can believe. Conchis likes to play mind games, dropping bizarre clues about himself and staging impromptu "scenes" designed to look like hallucinations. He is the consummate magician, pulling ever more unpredictable things out of his hat with which to puzzle and torment Nicholas. Nicholas is not sure why Conchis is doing these things, but he keeps returning to the villa because the bemusing games provide an interesting diversion from his boring life at the school. Also, there is the evasive beautiful young woman who is often found in Conchis's domain and who, Nicholas is sure, holds the key to his fate... The plot unfolds like an elaborate, surrealistic con game, the kind David Mamet makes films about ("The House of Games" and "The Spanish Prisoner").

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