

A Foucauldian reading of ‘Technologies of the Self’ in Anatole France’s novel *Thaïs*

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Abstract:

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This study uses a phenomenological perspective supported by Foucault’s ‘hermeneutics of the self’ to analyse Anatole France’s novel *Thaïs*. The novel narrates the story of a Christian hermit, Paphnutius, and a courtesan, Thaïs. Living an abstemious life in the desert and reflecting on his sins of the past, Paphnutius recalls having met a delightful actress, Thaïs and how she seduced men, including him, into the sins of the flesh. Taken in by his exhortations, she leaves all her wealth and possessions and follows the monk to attain eternal beauty and bliss. Paphnutius successfully converts Thaïs to the courtesan before she dies as a ‘purified’ soul. However, after her conversion, Thaïs’s desire and love afflict Paphnutius, who ends up doubting the truth of his faith. When he comes to know that Thaïs is on her deathbed, he starts having doubts about the reality of death and hence of God/his belief. We attempt to add a theoretically driven analysis and set forth a few observations. This paper argues that *Thaïs* is the story of complex human interactions revolving around the axes of truth and subjectivity and provides an excellent narration of the aesthetics of existence in the pagan and early Christian world.

Keywords: Foucault, Care of the Self, Technologies of the Self, Hermeneutics, Subjectivity, Power and Knowledge, Ascetism, Spirituality, Paphnutius, Abstemious life.

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1. Introduction

*The quest for love changes the user. There is no seeker among those who search for love who has not matured on the way. The moment you start looking for love, you start to change within and without. [Rule 11: Elif Shafaq, *Forty Rules of Love*]*

*It is never too late to ask yourself, "Am I ready to change the life I am living? Am I ready to change within?" Even if a single day in your life is the same as the day before, it surely is a pity. At every moment and with each new breath, one should be renewed and renewed again. There is only one way to be born into a new life: to die before death. [Rule 38: Elif Shafaq, *Forty Rules of Love*]*

1.1. About the author (1844-1924)

Jacques Anatole Thibault, known as Anatole France (1844-1924), dominated the French literary scene for nearly half a century. His literary output is vast. Primarily a novelist, a critic, and a short story writer, he was also a poet and wrote biographies of many great French authors and contributed to dozens of journals. His first major success was *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* (1881). The novel received a prize from Académie Française. His other works included *Le Livre de mon ami* [*My Friend's Book*] published in 1885, *Penguin Island* (1908), *Le Petit Pierre* (1918), *La Vie au fleur* (1922) [*The Bloom of Life*], *La Vie littéraire* (1888-92) [*On Life and Letters*], *L'Histoire contemporaine* (1897–1901), *Crainquebille* (1903) and *Thaïs* (1890).

France's work depicts the different shades and paradoxes of his literary life. Like his contemporaries, he was destined to believe in science. His ideological skepticism appeared in his early works. *La Vie littéraire* imitated the skepticism of Ernest Renan. He became more of a skeptic of philosophy and the world around him, seeing them as mere illusions and change. He respected beauty and intelligence but believed in nothing (Shanks, 1917). France also leaned towards romanticism and hedonism and his later essays show an increasing pessimism in him. Though he became disillusioned with science and history throughout this flux, he retained confidence in reason. His historical fiction evoked past civilizations with charm and deep insight. The period of transition from paganism to Christianity was his favorite. *Balthazar* (1889) was a story of a Magi and *Thaïs* (1890), of the conversion of an Alexandrian courtesan during the Christian era. During the 1890s, he became involved in politics and social life. Soon he became a socialist but in his works *The Gods are Athirst* (1912), *The Revolt of Angels* and *Penguin Island* (1908) he seems to be skeptical of the arrival of a fraternal society. He was abandoned by the conservative circle due to his attack on the State and church with bitter irony. France's *Thaïs*, once an international bestseller, has been translated into eighteen languages including a 1923 Hindi translation by Premchand (1880-1936), the celebrated Indian novelist and short story writer.

1.2. *Thaïs*¹

Thaïs is the story of a monk Paphnutius and an Alexandrian courtesan Thaïs. Living an abstemious life in the desert and reflecting on his sins of the past, Paphnutius recalls having met a delightful actress Thaïs and how she seduced men, including him, into the sins of the

flesh. Pricked by a pang of his sinned conscience, Paphnutius leaves his hut and sets off on a journey to convert Thaïs to the life of a penitent. Thaïs, who dreaded old age and death, when met Paphnutius inferred from his appearance and his talk that the monk knew the secrets of the two infirmities. Taken in by his exhortations, she leaves all her wealth and possessions and follows the monk to attain eternal beauty and bliss. Paphnutius takes her to a nunnery where she can confess and repent her sins and pray. However, after converting her, Paphnutius himself is inflicted with confusing thoughts about the value of life. Instead of having a sense of contentment after returning a 'polluted soul' to God, he is overwhelmed by desire and love. When he comes to know that Thaïs is on her deathbed, he starts having doubts about the reality of death and hence of God/his belief. His 'Pride, Lust and Doubt' turn him into a hideous and depraved soul; Thaïs dies a saintly death having the virtues of 'Faith, Fear and Love.'

2. Literature review

The legend of Thaïs is older than the French literature itself (Engle, 2006). France's *Thaïs* appeals in a multitude of ways to the minds of its diverse readership and provides rich thought content. To some it is a moral story of a whore-turned-penitent, others may take it as a denunciation of religious hypocrisy, the relativity of all values, or praise of religious and spiritual life. Most scholars have used a historical-biographical method to analyze the novel, a method which is unable to look beyond the simplistic view, i.e., a typical story of a prostitute-turned-penitent. *Thaïs* covers the complex phenomenon of human interaction and varied themes some of which have been discussed in the available literature.

Before France's version of *Thaïs*, there were four versions in verse and a play by Hrotsvit. Hrotsvit's version contributed to the richness of France's version. These early versions were didactic in nature and provided little background details of the characters (Engle, 2006).

Sydney Douglas Engle (2006) provides a detailed discussion on shades of differences in different versions of the Legend from the 10th-century version to France's 19th-century version. Unlike other scholars, Engle gives an interpretation of the novel beyond its condition of existence and does not concern France's known religious skepticism. He disagrees with the idea that the novel is a religious disparagement, a view held by France's critics. In France's version, he argues, the choices faced by the characters and their human interactions are complex and intriguing. The key to understanding these intricacies is emotional and psychological. To this end, he uses Berne's (1964) theories of social intercourse, Structural analysis, and Transactional analysis to analyze the type of social interaction and communicative process between the monk and Thaïs as maneuvers, deceptive actions, and moves in a game. Like Van Hoof (Engle, 2006), Engle considers that a unique element of France's version as compared to Hrotsvit's is the background information of characters which is significant in convincing the positivist reader of the 19th century of the psychological probability of the conversion of Thaïs and Paphnutius from *a saint to a depraved soul* [italics authors' emphasis added].

Hrotsvit's play (St. John, 1966) is the only version of the legend written by a woman. Hrotsvit's version was a primary inspiration for France's novel (Engle, 2006) which incorporated elements from Hrotsvit's version. Despite being well-recognized as a proto-feminist, Hrotsvit takes a masculine position to tell the story and presents women as the cause of the ruination of men and advocates female submission to male reason and order (Scheck, 2013). According to

Scheck (2013) Hrotsvit's internalization of a masculinist and misogynist perspective could have been inspired by her advocacy of ecclesial reforms taking place in England at that time.

Scheck (2013) uses Julia Kristeva's concept to discuss the theme of abjection in Hrotsvit's version. She calls it a tale of abjection. Scheck offers a strong example of how cosmology is both threatened and supported by even extreme examples of sexuality. By rejecting prostitution, Thaïs rejects her embodiment. Through her clean death, she reasserts the cosmological order disrupted by her earlier profession, and through her willful renunciation of the self, she reclaims her alienated self/subjectivity. Pairing the text with the theory, Scheck explains the process of 'becoming' in Thaïs character from an abject being (a prostitute) to a subject (who shows agency and rejects the control of men over her body) to a willfully objected being (a penitent in the cell) and finally to a sublimated being at the end.

Schick and Tristan (1932) explain Nietzsche's *spirit of will to live* in France's version of *Thaïs*. From the Nietzschean point of view, their article observes an evolution in Paphnutius's character and a path of devolution in the character of Thaïs. Unlike Engle, Schick does not consider the details of Thaïs' background as significant for explaining her conversion. Schick gives her fear of death and her 'will to live' as an explanation for her conversion. He quotes Thaïs' own words: "Do not terrify me! I am already too frightened. Do not kill me! I am so afraid of death" (p. 61). Schick's is an interesting interpretation of the evolution of Paphnutius's character in denouncing his religious hypocrisy and his disillusionment with his faith by the end of the novel. Also, Paphnutius's will to live is evident from his words: "I will live. I desire to live." (p. 140). His attitude towards life transforms when he comes to know that Thaïs is dying.

Thaïs is dying! Then why the sun, the flowers, the streams and all creation? What good was all the universe? ... Fool that I was not to possess Thaïs while there was yet time! Fool to have believed that there was anything in the world but her! Oh, Madness! I dreamed of God, of the salvation of my soul, of eternal life, as if all that counted for anything when I had seen Thaïs ... Oh, how easy it will be to me to die of her death! But canst thou only die ... do you think you thou canst taste death, thou who hast never known life? ... God, heaven, both are nothing. Nothing is true but life on earth. (pp. 136-137).

France's *Thaïs* has also been translated into Hindi by Munshi Premchand (1992) with the title *Ahankar* [*egotism, pride, or vanity*]. Premchand perceived the novel with Indian values and found parallels in Indian mythology to what he considers is the theme of the novel, i.e., the pride and the consequent fall of the monk. Premchand makes some modifications in France's version to juxtapose Christian and Indian spirituality or even to depict Indian spirituality as superior to the latter. Trivedi (1997) contends that France's version is orientalist and racist by including references from some oriental settings like Egypt, and black slaves and that Premchand retains this racist/orientalist texture. For Trivedi, Premchand's translation is a distinctly political act given the colonial context. It was an attempt to liberate Indian literature from the tutelage of 'master' Imperial English Literature.

After reviewing the existing literature, we found that there is a scarce literary resource that critically analyzes the novel *Thaïs*. Hence, in this paper, we attempt to add a theoretically driven analysis and set forth a few observations that may lead future research into a more critical

inquiry into this classic piece of literature. To fill the gap in theory and method, we have used Foucault's 'Technologies of the Self' and 'Hermeneutics of the Self' in this phenomenological study to delve into the complex human interactions discussed in the novel. By doing this we attempt to push the readers to move beyond simplistic interpretation of an otherwise complex text that could tell us not only about the interrelation of truth and subjectivity but also the various modes of subjection of subjectification.

3. Theoretical framework: technologies of the self

Throughout his work, Foucault dealt with technologies of power and domination, with a focus on modes of objectification of the subject. In his historical inquiries into insanity, deviancy, criminality, and sexuality, he examined the institution and scientific discourses as 'truth games' based on concrete technologies through which *being* offers itself to be necessarily thought of and attains knowledge of himself [*sic*]. He identifies four major types of technologies: (a) technologies of production, (b) technologies of sign systems, (c) technologies of power, and (d) technologies of the self. These four technologies, Foucault (1988) argues, hardly function separately.

Technologies of the self is the result of the logical conclusion of his previous work. Its origin is found in the seminar at the University of Vermont in 1982. By that time, Foucault embarked upon an inquiry into the modes whereby human beings constitute themselves as subjects; how they attain knowledge of themselves through epistemic systems and use that insight to modify and control their behavior and turn themselves into ethical subjects. These technologies, Foucault argues, are a form of 'individual domination' albeit for ethical reasons. Depending upon the context, these technologies could involve practices called *askēsis* such as sexual abstinence, self-exploration, fasting, praying, meditation, writing, and confession to the spiritual directors. Foucault (1997) posits that these procedures are present in every civilization, offered to individuals to determine, maintain, and transform their identity (self) through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge.

In the seminar, he sketched out the hermeneutics of the self in two different but contiguous contexts, i.e., the Greco-Roman philosophy of the first and second centuries BCE and of the Christian world in the 4th and 5th centuries. For Foucault (1988), the care of the self in the pagan world of ancient Greece was a personal and collective duty. There was not as much concern about life after death and religion as with the relations to others (Edkins, 1999; Jan et al., 2022). Their concern was with the use of appropriate technologies/*techne* in order "to live a beautiful life and to leave to other memories of a beautiful existence" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 341). Life was an aesthetic object. Care of the self-meant self-actualization and involved self-examination which was not juridical but administrative in nature. Faults were not considered as defects of character nor used to judge or reproach one -. Ethics in pagan Greece was "aesthetics of existence" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 351). This was not the case in Christian spirituality.

In the Imperial Era, Foucault argues, there was a medical concern about sex. This medical advice was a long way from the Christian view of sex as a sin. With the rise of Christianity, the ethics of self-actualization became obscure and transformed. Taking care of oneself came to be seen as selfish immorality and was replaced with the Delphic principle of 'knowing thyself'. Christian asceticism involved self-renunciation. For Christian spirituality, care of the self involves knowing oneself to remove any obstacle that hinders one's progress toward the

‘Truth’. It involves submission to an [institutional] authority. One must disclose oneself to God or a spiritual director/monk. For Foucault, in monastic Christianity, obedience to the master is complete control of behavior by the master, a renunciation of one’s own will. To him, self-examination in Christianity is different from self-examination in the Greek world: in the latter, it leads to autonomy and action [self-actualization], in Christianity, self-examination/or revelation involves self-destruction, a sacrifice of oneself. In Christian care of the Self, the aesthetics of existence is linked with the problem of the purity, virginity, and the female integrity, whereas the Greco-Roman aestheticism, Foucault argues, has a virile model of self-domination.

Taking this theme of care of the self/technologies of the self from Foucault, we aim to cast a new light on France’s novel *Thaïs*. Ours is an effort to trace the Foucauldian technologies of the self in this novel and to set forth some novel observations which may induce others to work critically on this classic masterpiece.

4. Data collection, methodology, and methods

The primary data source for this study is Anatole France’s classic novel *Thaïs*, which has been translated by Robert B. Douglas into English. Besides the primary source, we have also used secondary supportive studies for an in-depth analysis. This study uses a phenomenological perspective, supported by Foucault’s hermeneutics of the self, to analyze the care of the self as a technology or government of the self in *Thaïs*. Foucault’s concept of care of the self is focused on an analysis of pagan Greece and the early Christian world. We find this relevant because the interaction between the characters in the novel depicts the tensions of what constituted the ethics of existence in these two different but coterminous historical junctures. The main question which led to our hermeneutic inquiry into the novel is: How can we approach a Foucauldian reading of the Care of the Self in *Thaïs*?

5. *Thaïs* and care of the Self

The idea of care of the self-remained a primary concern throughout human history and is not strictly limited to religious application. This question is at the center of contemporary moral thought (Peters, 2020; Salam et al., 2022). It involves lifelong work on one’s body, mind, and soul to live an ethically driven life. In Foucault’s work, care of the self constitutes the creation of the self and self-governmentality. It revolves around the concepts of *power*, *truth*, and *subjectivity* which are intertwined with each other in a complex and integrated way.

Institutions control and discipline the subjects by subjecting them to specific discourses. These discourses become truth because of power/knowledge relations whereby both directly imply one another (Foucault, 1991). Institutions and their discursive practices constitute, determine, and transform [identity of] the subject through divisions and classifications subjected to normalization (Rabinow, 1984; Ali et al., 2020).

In *Thaïs*, the power and authority of Paphnutius over the ‘truth’ produce identity/subjecthood/subjectivity of Thaïs through the normalizing power of religion. Thaïs’ subjectivity can be understood as a discursive category, the embodiment and reification of social [religious] structures (Pascale, 2011). The monk is the agent and instrument of normalizing pastoral power which establishes her identity throughout the novel as a delinquent

who needs to be corrected. Hers is the identity of a deviant as seen from Paphnutius's eye. For example, when Paphnutius comes to know about Thaïs' baptism in her early years he calls her 'a lost sheep' (France, 2005, p. 104). While she is accompanying him to the nunnery, he uses his authoritarian power over her and establishes/reifies her abject identity.

Woman, all blue seas cannot wash away thy pollutions ... More filth than a bitch or a sow, thou have prostituted ... and thy impurities are such that, now that thou knowest the truth, thou canst not unite thy lips or join thy hands without a horror of thyself rising in thy heart (France, 2005, p. 101).

Here the 'truth' about the self which is revealed to Thaïs is the truth discourse of the pastoral power; later developments in her character are 'truth effects'. Paphnutius also assigns the identity of 'an impudent monkey who copies the ways of anchorites' and, a besotted soul (p. 20) to the Timocles, a skeptic whom he met sitting naked by the riverside. In both situations, the identity of Thaïs and Timocles can be understood as subject locations or subject positions (Foucault, 1972) assigned through a process of interpellation (Althusser, 1971) which can be understood, as Pascale (2011), argues as "a dual process of ideological coercion and personal identification" (p. 31).

In Foucault's theory, the subject in addition to being a product of power, a passive entity, is also actively engaged in self-constitution. In his work on technologies of the self (1988) and *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005), he discusses the constitution of the subject through the care of the self and knowledge of the self. According to Foucault, (1988) "Individuals effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (p. 18). For his observation of practices of/on the subject, Foucault turns towards the ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures where *epimeleia heautou* "to take care of yourself," or "the concern with self," was the basic rule of conduct for the art of life (Foucault, 1988, p. 11). Foucault locates this principle of care of the self with Socrates at the beginning of Western philosophy. He also traces the *epimeleia heautou* in the stoic and cynic texts. Foucault calls this self-forming activity or technique of the self in the stoics *aeskesis*. *Aeskesis* or mastery over oneself is obtained through the assimilation of the truth and involves practices imposed on the self.

In *Thaïs*, France communicates these practices of *epimeleia heautou* and the *Gnothi seauton* in the pagan world through all the characters Paphnutius encounters. Nicias and Timocles do not believe in Christian morals, are skeptics, and do not believe in any good or evil. For Nicias, there is no knowledge except those of the senses (France, 2005, p. 53), and "the motive of human actions is seeking pleasure" (p. 99). Both believe that things do not have a truth of their own, they have qualities because of our opinion [of things]. When Paphnutius asks Timocles the sceptic, why one should deny themselves good things of the world when one neither believes in Jesus nor has the hope to get eternal riches, Timocles replies:

... there is no such thing as a good or evil life. Nothing is itself either virtuous or shameful, just or unjust, pleasant or painful, good or bad. It is our opinion which gives those qualities to things, as salt gives savor to meats. (p. 19).

Similarly, when Dorian, the epicurean, is asked about his idea of pleasure or goodness, his answer is “mediation” (p. 34), which was one of the techniques of *aeskesis* in Greco-Roman culture. Old Cotta’s view of goodness or aesthetic of existence is civic virtue or care for the city. For him, goodness constitutes serving the State. At the banquet at his place, to Dorian, he says:

An honest man should desire nothing better than to fill a responsible post in the State. The State is a noble thing. (p. 68)

His idea of care of the self relates to pagan values which care little about God, and life after death and are more concerned with the relation of self with the others [State and society]. When Eucrites plunged the dagger into his breast, Cotta said:

Die! To want to die when he might still serve the State! What nonsense!
(p. 87)

According to Foucault (1988), the principle of *epimeleia heautou* was replaced by *Gnothi seauton* as the imperative ‘know yourself’ in Christian spirituality. He argues that the injunction ‘know yourself’ was always associated with and appeared because of ‘the principle of care of the self’. One must be concerned with oneself before the Delphic principle came into action. Foucault argues, “I think we can say that in and of itself an act of knowledge could never give access to the truth unless it was prepared, accompanied, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject; not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his being as subject” (Peters, 2020, p. 1938).

The character of Thais is a conflation of pagan and Christian technologies of the self, care of the self, or hermeneutics of the subject at the historical junction of transition from Greco–Roman to Christian spirituality. Her subjecthood transforms with the transformation of what constitutes ethics in these two eras and hence is the complex embodiment of socio-religious structures and norms of what constitutes a beautiful life—‘an aesthetics of existence’. As an Alexandrian courtesan, her ‘care of the self’ was associated with the will to know (France, 2005, p. 53). She is afraid of death and bodily pains and has a thirst for the unknown which she wants to know. The future frightens her, and she wishes to know it (p. 53). When she readies to leave for the nunnery, she tells Nicias that she will accompany Paphnutius because he knows that sorrow is true joy (p. 98). It is with the help of Paphnutius that she is ready to experience or anticipate a real situation of suffering through what Foucault (1988) calls *gymnasia* (to train oneself) to overcome the suffering and to ensure that she can endure it. Hers is a care of self which comes with the knowledge:

I have lived amongst enchanted things, and I was exposed to the greatest perils ... I am weary of all I know, and I am therefore going to seek the unknown (France, 2005, pp. 91, 98).

This will know, which in Foucauldian philosophy is a will to power—since power and knowledge are inherently connected and co-constitutive, demands care of the self before the Delphic principle comes into action.

In Thais’ character, we can observe that transformation of the subject is not simply subjugation

or subjection to the power of the monk but is an act of subjectivization. Foucault (1983) derives two meanings from the term 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his [*sic*] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. "Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Bandol, 2015, p.73). Thus, subjectivity or subjectivization connotes an active subject, while subjugation refers to a passive one. The active subject transforms itself through a gaze turning inward (Bandol, 2015) which recognizes and recalls the truths of the self. The subject does self-examination and takes stock of oneself, a practice of self-care. This self-examination involves an administrative view of one's action and not the juridical model which rests upon a negative power [operating from above/the religious directors and self-renunciation].

In the Platonic current of thought ... the problem for the subject or the individual soul is to turn its gaze upon itself, to recognize itself in what it is and, ...to recall the truths that issue from it and that it has been able to contemplate (Foucault, 1997, p. 285).

In *Technologies of the Self* (1988) and *Confessions of the Flesh* (2021), Foucault focused on subjectivity and truth-telling and the complex ways in which in Christian spirituality, sexuality is related both to verbal prohibitions and obligations to tell the truth about the self. In the Christian moment between the 2nd and 5th centuries ACE, he observed an ensemble of practices of penitence '*exmologesis*' and confession *exagoreusis*. For Foucault, these two modalities are linked to the truth. Penitence is truth-doing and confession is truth-telling. He, in fact, observes how the Christian culture has moved from truth-doing to truth-telling and the implications this could have for us. In the Christian monastic tradition, the repression of emotions and bodily desires was seen to liberate and purify the soul in order to gain knowledge (the Truth). In the doctrine of penance, the world of matter is suspected, and the desire of the flesh is repressed in the pursuit of a higher virtue and 'Truth'. This detachment from the self became the basis for desert hermits and monks in the 3rd and 4th centuries ACE (Peters, 2020). Paphnutius himself led a life of dissipation and after lessons from the priest Macrinus, he emerges a new person—purified. In the desert, he was abstemious, denying himself food and bodily desires.

Paphnutius prescribes Thaïs penance in response to her wish to know eternal life, beauty, and Truth.

Thou must follow Him who has come to seek thee. He will separate thee from this present life, as the vintage gathers the cluster that would have rotted on the tree...I will conduct thee this very day to this nunnery, my Thaïs, and soon commingling with [these]holy women, thou wilt share in their heavenly conversation, ... their mother, the pious Albina will give thee the kiss of peace. (p. 89).

Penance in Christian spirituality is a way to purge bodily sins and involves self-renunciation and an abstemious life. In older versions of the legend, Thaïs is forced by the monk to live a full three to five years in isolation but in Anatole's version, the abbess reports sixty days of isolation before Thaïs starts living with other nuns. Engle (2006) argues that the more extended periods of penance in older versions of the legend depicted the inhuman torture and social and sensory deprivation in the idea of penance in medieval times. France's version is unique in that the period of penance is much shorter. Referring to Eric Bernes' theories from ego psychology

(1964), Engle posits that this social and sensory deprivation may cause mental health problems. Staying abstinent, Paphnutius suffers from the effects of prolonged social isolation in the desert and then atop the statue in the tomb. After converting Thais, Paphnutius is gnawed by desire and love; he decides to perform strict and extraordinary austerities. Palemon advises him that such sudden transitions could be harmful to his health. Palemon considers this extreme austerity as exposing oneself to great heat and cold at the same time and advises him to take such amusements as visiting the monasteries and writing as a practice for the care of the self and safeguarding against evil thoughts. (France, 2005, p. 110).

Penance, Foucault (1988) argues, is the effect of the rupture with the self and the world. In the case of Thais, reflection on her sin is the effect of this rupture. It was a way to show that she could renounce her sin and be ready to die rather than abandoning the ‘Truth’ or her faith. For her, there is a break from the past identity, a break from the self, and a break from the ego. This self-revelation in penance, according to Foucault (1988), then becomes self-renunciation and self-destruction. This *exomologesis*, or penitence, is not verbal, but ritual and symbolic. The second modality of truth-telling or confessions is verbal in which the penitent tells their master, the priest, about their temptations, their sins, and what tortures them. The truth obligations of the faith and the self are interlinked. This link makes the purity of the soul impossible without knowing the truth of the self. It demands complete obedience and control of behavior by the master. Confession to the master is the mark of the truth and, according to Foucault (1988), is the sacrifice of oneself and one’s free will. In the case of Thais, there is not much confession (or truth-telling to the master) except when the monk orders to destroy all her riches which also includes an ivory Eros, the god of love, she asks the monk to spare the Eros. She exclaims “...if I have sinned, it is not through him, my father, but against him (France, 2005, p. 93)”. She accompanies Paphnutius and is led to penance partly because of her fear of death and will to live, the will to know and partly to train herself (*gymnasia*) by exposing her to the greatest perils (p. 91), a practice for the care of the self.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed Anatole France’s novel *Thais* considering Foucault’s concept of *technologies of the self*. Care of the self in pagan and Christian morality is analyzed with a focus on the link between subjectivity and truth. This theory-driven work provides a lead for future works on this classic masterpiece and facilitates a critical inquiry into restricted ascetic practices. It rejects the reading of the novel from a simplistic perspective as a story of a courtesan-turned-penitent, a view that establishes the higher authority and Paphnutius’ status as a devoted monk. Instead, this study exposes the complex networks of power/knowledge and their relationship to the subject. Thais’s character appears as the other of Paphnutius or the religious structures and is subjected to the dynamics of normativity by the pastoral authority of Paphnutius. She is first disqualified as a delinquent subject and the juridical and negative power undertakes to train and correct its subject. She is then exposed to “confinement”, truth-doing and truth-telling techniques which Foucault observes to be practiced on a wide scale since the 17th century.

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Note:

¹ *Thaïs* in Italic is used for the novel by Anatole France and Thaïs is used for the character in the novel.