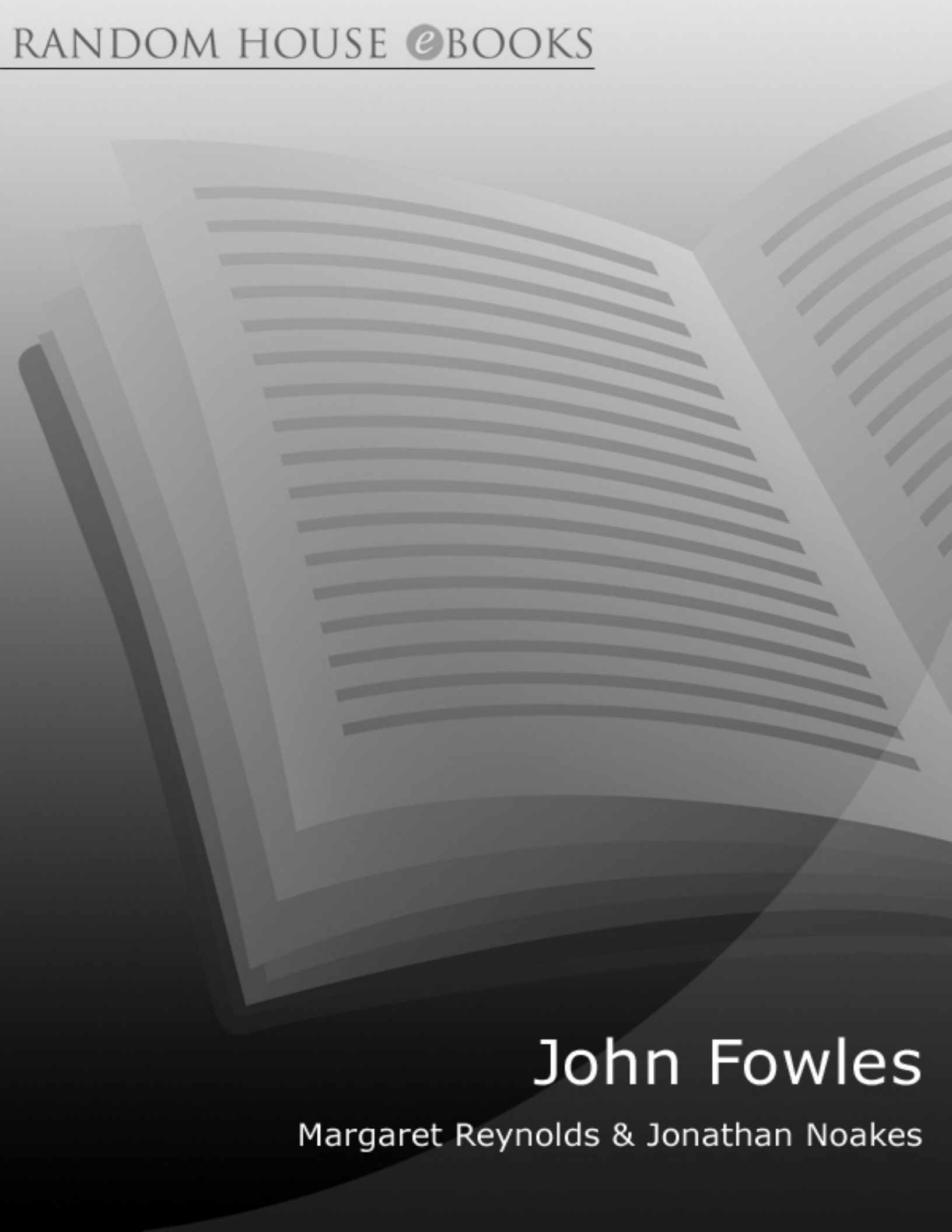


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



John Fowles

Margaret Reynolds & Jonathan Noakes

CONTENTS

Cover
About the Book
About the Authors
Also available in Vintage Living Texts
Praise
Title Page

VINTAGE LIVING TEXTS: PREFACE

About this series
Content
How to use this series
Who are these books for?

JOHN FOWLES

Introduction
Interview with John Fowles

VINTAGE LIVING TEXTS

The Collector

Reading guides
Reading activities: detailed analysis
Contexts, comparisons and complementary readings

The Magus

Reading guides

Reading activities: detailed analysis

Contexts, comparisons and complementary readings

The French Lieutenant's Woman

Reading guides

Reading activities: detailed analysis

Contexts, comparisons and complementary readings

VINTAGE LIVING TEXTS: REFERENCE

Selected extracts from critical writings

Glossary of literary terms used in this book

Biographical outline

Select bibliography

Acknowledgements

Copyright

About the Book

In Vintage Living Texts, teachers, students and any lover of literature will find the essential guide to the major works of John Fowles. Also included is an exclusive in-depth interview with John Fowles relating specifically to the novels under discussion.

John Fowles's themes, genre and narrative technique are put under scrutiny and the emphasis is on providing a rich source of ideas for intelligent and inventive ways of approaching the novels. Amongst many other features you'll find inspirational reading plans and contextual material, suggested complementary and comparative reading and an indispensable glossary.

About the Authors

Jonathan Noakes has taught English in secondary schools in Britain and Australia for sixteen years. For six years he ran A-level English studies at Eton College where he is a housemaster.

Margaret Reynolds is Reader in English at Queen Mary, University of London, and the presenter of BBC Radio 4's *Adventures in Poetry*. Her publications include *The Sappho Companion* and (with Angela Leighton) *Victorian Women Poets*. Her most recent book is *The Sappho History*.

Also available in Vintage Living Texts

American Fiction

Martin Amis

Margaret Atwood

Louis de Bernières

Sebastian Faulks

Susan Hill

Ian McEwan

Toni Morrison

Salman Rushdie

Jeanette Winterson

‘An excellent and timely series, very useful for students,
well-produced and well-written.’

Dr Robert Eaglestone, Royal Holloway, University of
London

‘I am impressed. Students will find these texts extremely
useful, and serious general readers, too.’

Professor Chris Woodhead, former Chief Inspector of
Schools

‘Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes are at the cutting
edge of providing English teachers with the support they
need for teaching the contemporary novel.’

Dr Vivian Anthony, Training Co-ordinator, Professional
Development Services for HMC schools

‘Two highly sensitive and intelligent teachers (from school
and university) lead us into dialogue with the author, the
texts and their contexts, and help us to question what and
how we are reading and to arrive at illuminating answers.
Such dialogue is the essence of good practice in teaching
literature.’

John Venning, Head of English, St Paul’s School for Boys,
London

‘This series is the first to teach students what they most
need to learn: how to teach themselves. It is informative,
rigorous and yet, more importantly, playful. It combines the
qualities of the best teaching.’

Anthea Church, Head of English, Kent College, Pembury

‘I didn’t realise just how good the series was until I started
working closely with it. The questions are so thoughtful and

probing, and the analysis provided allows the students to lift their own understanding. The texts really do occupy their own niche between guides purely for teachers and the ubiquitous student crib, and are much better than either.'

Michael Parker, Head of English, Newington College, NSW, Australia

'This is a terrific series. The text and the reader's response are at the heart of these guides; the tone is authoritative but never dogmatic, while the style is enthusiastic and approachable. The series is aptly named – not only are the subjects still alive, so too are the guides.'

Lucy Webster, *The English Magazine*

'*Vintage Living Texts* are very modern. They are certainly democratic as they give the literary text to the reader, prompting personal critical response without suggesting what those responses should be. They will be a blessing to teachers and students.'

Iain Finlayson, *The Times Play Magazine*

'These guides, designed to reflect the National Curriculum, are likely to appeal also to university students, and those who take their reading group seriously.'

Independent Magazine

'In addition to sixth formers and undergraduates, the series also works well for those taking the International Baccalaureate or on EFL courses.'

Liz Thomson, *Publishing News*

VINTAGE
LIVING
TEXTS

John Fowles

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE
TO CONTEMPORARY
LITERATURE

The Collector

The Magus

The French Lieutenant's Woman


V I N T A G E

VINTAGE
LIVING
TEXTS

Preface

About this series

Vintage Living Texts: The Essential Guide to Contemporary Literature is a new concept in reading guides. Our aim is to provide readers of all kinds with an intelligent and accessible introduction to key works of contemporary literature. Each guide suggests techniques for reading important contemporary novels, and offers a variety of back-up materials that will give you ways into the text – without ever telling you what to think.

Content

All the books reproduce an extensive interview with the author, conducted exclusively for this series. This is not to say that we believe that the author's word is law. Of course it isn't. Once his or her book has gone out into the world they become simply yet another – if singularly competent – reader. This series recognises that an author's contribution may be valuable, and intriguing, but it puts the reader in control.

Every title in the series is author-focused and covers at least three of their novels, along with relevant biographical, bibliographical, contextual and comparative material.

How to use this series

In the reading activities that make up the core of each book you will see that you are asked to do two things. One comes from the text; that is, we suggest what you should focus on, whether it's a theme, the language or the narrative method. The other concentrates on your own response. We want you to think about how you are reading and what skills you are bringing to bear in doing that reading. So this part is very much about you, the reader.

The point is that there are many ways of responding to a text. You could concentrate on the methods you might use to compare this text with others. In that case, look for the sections headed 'Compare'. Or you might want to do something more individual, and analyse how you are reacting to a text and what it means to you, in which case, pick out the approaches labelled 'Imagine' or 'Ask yourself'.

Of course, it may well be that you are reading these texts for an examination. In that case you will have to go for the more traditional methods of literary criticism and look for the responses that tell you to 'Discuss' or 'Analyse'. Whichever level you (or your students) are at, you will find that there is something here for everyone. However, we're not suggesting that you stick solely to the approaches we offer, or that you tackle all of the exercises laid out here. Choose whatever most interests you, or whatever best suits your purposes.

Who are these books for?

Students will find that these guides are like a good teacher. They introduce the life and work of the author, set each novel in its context, explain key ideas and literary critical terms as they arise, suggest comparative exercises in a number of media, and ask focused questions to encourage a

well-informed, analytical approach to reading the novels in a way that is rigorous, but still entertaining.

Teachers will find in this series a rich source of ideas for teaching contemporary novels and their contexts, particularly at AS, A and undergraduate level. The exercises on each text have been tailored to meet the various assessment objectives laid down in the subject criteria for GCE AS, GCE A level and the International Baccalaureate in English Literature, and are explained in such a way that they can be easily selected and fitted into a lesson plan. Given the diversity of ways that the awarding bodies have devised their specifications to meet these assessment objectives, a wide range of exercises is offered. We've had fun devising the plans, and we hope they'll be fun for you when you come to teach with them.

And if you are neither a teacher nor a student of contemporary literature, but someone reading for your own pleasure? Well, if you've ever wanted someone to introduce you to a novelist's work in a way that will let you trust your own judgement and read more confidently, then this guide is also for you.

Whoever you are, we hope that you will enjoy using these books and that they will send you back to the novels to find new pleasures.

All page references to *The Collector*, *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in this text refer to the Vintage editions.

John Fowles

Introduction

In 1977 John Fowles published his own translation of a French novel written in 1824 by Claire de Duras. *Ourika* was a story that Fowles had known and loved for many years and he quoted a phrase from the book in his 'Notes on an Unfinished Novel' (1969): 'Various things have long made me feel an exile in England. Some years ago I came across a sentence in an obscure French novel, "Ideas are the only motherland." Ever since I have kept it as the most succinct summary I know of what I believe.'

This reference suggests several elements that are typical of the unique and lucid ways in which Fowles's fiction – and his approach to fiction – works. It is a novel in French that intrigues him; it is a 'motherland' that he dreams of, yet also a home that is made up of 'ideas'; and it is the image of exile, or difference, or estrangement, that creates the necessary conditions for writing and for thinking.

Fowles is foremost among contemporary novelists, and the first among those whose experimental work has recently marked and enhanced the tradition of the novel in English. In the 1960s, when Fowles began publishing, his work was markedly different from that of any other writer at the time. In some ways he was the first 'postmodernist', exploiting the possibilities of fiction offered by techniques that have since been theorised as 'fragmentation', 'bricolage', 'metafiction' and 'self-reflexivity'. He was an exile in his own time.

Today, Fowles may not literally be 'in exile', but he has, since 1965, elected to live in an internalised exile. By choosing to settle in Lyme Regis in Dorset, Fowles situates himself in what he has described as 'a kind of exile': 'I have very little social contact with anybody. The old idea of exile for an English writer was to go to the Mediterranean. To do what Durrell has done, or Lawrence did. For me, the best place to be in exile, in a strange kind of way, is in a town like this, in England, because novelists have to live in some sort of exile. I also believe that – more than other kinds of writers – they have to keep in touch with their native culture, linguistically, psychologically, and in many other ways. If it sounds paradoxical, it feels paradoxical. I've opted out of the one country I mustn't leave. I live in England but partly in the way one might live abroad.'

Everything in Fowles's work leads back to this need for a different viewpoint. It is as if Fowles has to conduct all his analyses by creating separate spaces, or islands, which offer an alien ground from which he can conduct his experiments with literature, with man's relation to the natural world, with politics and power, with moral imperatives and personal freedom. He writes about this in a book called *Islands*, published in 1978. 'I have always thought of my own novels as islands, or as islanded. I remember being forcibly struck ... by the structural and emotional correspondences between visiting different islands and any fictional text: the alternation of duller passages ... the separate island quality of other key events and confrontations – an insight, the notions of island in the sea of story.'

If you look at the interview with Fowles published in this guide, you will see that he mentions his fondness for islands, and the meanings that can be attached to the idea of the island. It functions as a discrete, contained world, but one which can offer a perspective on other, different, worlds. So it is that Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus* can learn

about what happened to him in London only while he is on the island of Phraxos. So it is that Charles Smithson is 'islanded' in Lyme Regis – or even more specifically on Ware Commons or the Undercliff – and from this place can learn to see his own life. You will also see in the interview how often Fowles refers to doubleness, or ambivalence, as something that inspires and intrigues him. He likes the idea of twins; he thinks in French as well as his native English; he writes a pastiche nineteenth-century novel with an internalised authorial voice from the twentieth century. As he says here – and has said elsewhere – he is 'a great believer in having the alternative view of all life. That does interest me. I think it's very important, really, to think the opposite of whatever you were thinking ... If you don't know the answer to a problem think the exact opposite and work out if that works.'

If exile and difference are key terms for Fowles, another – closely related – is the concept of loss. The two years that Fowles spent living and teaching on the island of Spetsai in Greece were formative, not just because they gave him the setting and the germ of *The Magus*, but because they gave him an idealised land of delight that would always be perfect, because it would always be lost. He wrote of the period of his leaving Greece: 'It was agony ... I thought I'd never get over having left. I had not then realised that loss is essential for the novelist, immensely fertile for his books, however painful to his private being.' Again, the personal statements and the literary philosophy come together. And even a glance over the books Fowles names as his favourites suggests the same set of terms: Henri Alain-Fournier's famous story of a lost *domaine*, *Les Grands Meaulnes*; Daniel Defoe's parable of loss, of the island, of survival, *Robinson Crusoe*; Heraclitus's philosophy of isolation; Charles Dickens's novel of sadness and failure, *Great Expectations*.

Loss is an important theme for Fowles because it supplies – like the image of exile and the idea of the island – a place from which one can survey the ‘other’. Loss implies doubleness. You had something, now you don’t. This key patterning is one that governs Fowles’s constant and continuing self-examination. After he published *The Collector* in 1963, his next book was not a novel but a set of trenchant philosophical notes on the model of Heraclitus, *The Aristos*. Throughout his life, Fowles has kept journals, and there too he rereads and revises, tempering his version of ‘then’ with a vision of ‘now’: ‘I have recently been rereading the diaries I kept in the early 1950s, which I hope may one day be published exactly as written – I fear not much to my credit at all, since they seem largely an account of a man in paradise who had wilfully and obstinately blindfolded himself.’

As a result of this doubleness there is a provisional quality in Fowles’s work. He recognises that in his introduction to the collection of occasional pieces called *Wormholes*: ‘All serious writers are endlessly seeking for the wormholes that will connect them to other planes and worlds. I spasmodically collect old books; I live in an old house; I know the other wormhole only too well; thus the title. I shouldn’t like one, in any case, at which I could not smile.’

But if Fowles is smiling, the reader is allowed to smile too. The reader is always part of Fowles’s double enterprise, the other half that makes the text possible. It is for this reason that almost all of his novels have more than one ending – the best-known example being *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* which has two clear endings, and a third in the possibility that Charles may have married Ernestina after all. Another of his novels, *The Magus*, doesn’t have multiple endings, but it does have an unresolved ending. It’s up to the reader to decide what happens. Just as it’s up to the reader to unpick the double

stories in Frederick's narrative against Miranda's in *The Collector*, or Nicholas's experiences against Conchis's *masque* in *The Magus*, or Charles's story against Fowles's intruding narrative voice in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

If all this seems too shifting, too volatile and dreamlike, then maybe it should. Fowles's novels often begin with a dream. And often it is a dream about a woman. This is not surprising given that Fowles himself has said that 'my female characters tend to dominate the male. I see man as a kind of artifice, and woman as a kind of reality. The one is cold idea, the other is warm fact.'

Here is his own account of the origins of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

It started as a visual image. A woman stands at the end of a deserted quay and stares out to sea. That was all. This image rose in my mind one morning when I was still in bed half asleep. It corresponded to no actual incident in my life (or in art) that I can recall, though I have for many years collected obscure books and forgotten prints, all sorts of flotsam and jetsam from the last two or three centuries, relics of past lives – and I suppose this leaves me with a sort of dense hinterland from which such images percolate down to the coast of consciousness.

These mythopoeic 'stills' (they seem almost always static) float into my mind very often. I ignore them, since that is the best way of finding out whether they really are the door into a new world.

So I ignored this image; but it recurred. Imperceptibly it stopped coming to me. I began deliberately to recall it and to try to analyse and hypothesize why it held some sort of imminent power.

It was obviously mysterious ... I began to fall in love with her. Or with her stance. I didn't know which.

This – not literally – pregnant female image came at a time when I was already halfway through another novel and had, still have, three or four others planned to follow it. It was an interference, but of such power that it soon came to make the previously planned work seem the intrusive element in my life. This accident of inspiration has to be allowed for in writing, both in the work one is on (in unplanned development of character, unintended incidents, and so on) and in one's works as a whole. Follow the accident, fear the fixed plan – that is the rule.

We began with Fowles's quoting another (not literally) pregnant female, Claire de Duras. In fact, he misquoted her, but his freely interpretative version of her words is crucially revealing. What Duras actually wrote – as Fowles explains in a footnote to his essay 'Notes on an Unfinished Novel' – was '*L'opinion est comme une patrie*'. A 1995 translation for the Modern Languages Association of America translated this as 'A view of life is like a motherland' – rather different from Fowles's own rendering, 'Ideas are the only motherland'.

If there is one thing that holds all Fowles's novels and ideas together it is that 'motherland'. A home, a lost *domaine*, a place from which one is exiled, a scene of origin to which one can never return. Except that the motherland is, paradoxically, also always there, in dreams, in imagination and in fiction.

Interview with John Fowles

Lyme Regis: 21 August 2002

MR: *The Collector* is your first *published* novel, but in fact it wasn't your first book, was it? You'd already worked on *The Magus* for some time beforehand?

JF: Well, this is always difficult. All my life I'd felt like writing novels, and I'd written several before then. *The Magus* used up all my life for twenty years, and I used to lie awake at night thinking about what I should say.

MR: How many different versions were there?

JF: Do you know, I cannot remember now. When I got into the book I used to rewrite it almost every day.

MR: Did *The Magus* end up being such a big novel because you were working on it for such a long time?

JF: It became a long novel, yes. And I can remember the reaction of my poor publisher ... I was afraid of going in with this huge manuscript, but it worked out.

MR: Why did you decide to revise it in 1976?

JF: Because, like most of my work, I realised it had only been half done. There were many things that I hadn't really said, that needed to be said again. It's partly a confusion over what one is creating. One's not quite sure what one is doing.

MR: Does that mean you were creating yourself as a writer at the same time as you were creating these books?

JF: Yes. That's a good way of putting it. I wrote books primarily to discover what I am. Where I am. Certainly that was true with *The Magus*.

MR: And how important were dreams and hidden meanings in the creation of *The Magus*?

JF: I think fairly important, yes. I have recorded quite a lot about that which I hope will come out when I publish my journals. They are being published in New York by Knopf and over here in London with Jonathan Cape in 2003. My journals; I think of them as a last novel, the last novel in terms of my own life.

MR: You were going to call the novel 'The Godgame'. Why did you abandon that title?

JF: That was a name I thought of - and nowadays I wish I had called it that. But I didn't. And you can't click your fingers and say, I must have it back and rename it.

MR: Why did you invent this name, 'The Godgame'? Why did it speak to you?

JF: Because I basically wrote *The Magus* in pursuit of the idea that life really is a huge game between us and God, or whatever you choose to take as God.

MR: So how did you come to pick *The Magus* as a title? After the writing of it? Or during?

JF: I can't remember when. I was always very fond of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, and probably I began to realise that I was treading very much in his footsteps and

really it was seeing the word 'magus' [pronounced 'mag' as in 'bag'] – and it's pronounced in a hundred different ways, 'Maygus', 'Margus', 'Madji' – in a way, part of me knew that mysterious titles like that have always had some attraction.

MR: Were you conscious of wanting to draw the readers in by offering them a mysterious title?

JF: Allusions, references ... they all help draw the reader in.

MR: Your work includes a lot of literary references throughout. You mention Heraclitus, but there are a number of other writers and books that you have acknowledged. Henri Alain-Fournier's *Les Grands Meaulnes*, for instance. What was it about that book that made it so influential for you? Was it nostalgia perhaps, or the sense of a lost world?

JF: That is probably – of modern novels – the one I most like and admire. And I have always liked Alain-Fournier and everything to do with him, and I've got quite a collection of things about him. What particularly interested me was that he became friends with a famous French literary critic and they exchanged a long correspondence which I think is a marvellous textbook for any English novelist trying to write.

MR: There are other references too, especially in *The Magus*. You mention the way that Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* lies behind your own novel.

JF: Well, for years I was teaching the Cambridge Certificate and I was, in a way, using those skills as a critic and teacher, and criticising the things that I wrote for many years – and that was in a way valuable to me. I'd better say at once that I don't much like Dickens, but I do think *Great Expectations* is a great novel. Partly it's that somewhat