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THE WORK OF JOHN FOWLES AND ITS PLACE IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE

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Annotation: *In this article, John Fowles' work and his contribution to postmodern literature will be discussed briefly, as well as an analysis of the works. In addition, in this article, one can learn about his early literary efforts, creative ways and many manuscripts for publishing his works. He is also said to have honed his craft by studying and imitating the works of writers he admired, such as Flaubert, D.H. Lawrence, Defoe, and Hemingway.*

Key words*: lepidopterist, postmodernism, publication, fiction, metafiction, Victorian Age, writer*

Introduction. John Fowles (born 1926) was an award winning post World War II novelist of major importance**.** John Fowles was born on March 31, 1926, to middle-class parents living in a small London suburb. He attended a London preparatory school, the Bedford School, between the ages of 14 and 18. He then served as a lieutenant in the Royal Marines for two years, but World War II ended before he saw actual combat. [10]

Following the war, Fowles studied French and German at New College, Oxford. He later referred to this period as "three years of heaven in an intellectual sense," and it was during this time that he was exposed to the Celtic romances and the existential works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. After graduating from Oxford, Fowles began a teaching career that took him first to France where he taught English at the University of Poiters and then to Spetsai, a Greek island, where he taught at Anorgyrios College. It was on Spetsai that Fowles met

Elizabeth Whitton. Three years later, on April 2, 1954, they were married in England.

Mr. Fowles, who started writing in his early 20's, wrote: "I began because I have always found it easy to fantasize, to invent situations and plausible dialogue; partly because I have always rejected so much of the outward life I have had to lead. In one way at least teaching is a good profession for a writer, because it gives him a sharp sense of futility."[8]

Analysis of material. His earliest literary efforts were marked by false starts and stops, as he discarded many manuscripts that he thought weren't good enough for publication. He honed his craft by studying and imitating writers he admired, including Flaubert, D. H. Lawrence, Defoe and Hemingway. In 1963, he began work on "The Magus," his second novel, and published his first, "The Collector."

The methodological base of article is based on the investigations of literary critics as Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge, Loveday, S. (1985) The romances of John Fowles and Muller, H. (1979). Reflections on post-modernism. The specific features of the writer's legacy is thoroughly investigated by James Aubrey, in his work John Fowles: A Reference Companion, Greenwood Press, 1991. In the research process, the principles of historical-cultural, biographical, functional description, narrative style, holistic aesthetic approach and genre analysis of postmodernism, systematic methods and approaches were widely used.

Results and discussion. Fowles continued to earn a living through a variety of teaching assignments until the success of his first published work, ***The Collector***, allowed him to retire with his wife and her daughter to Lyme Regis in Dorset. He continued to live in this quiet sea-coast town—intentionally isolated from English literary circles—where he wrote, gardened, and pursued his interests in natural and local history.

Fowles worked on several manuscripts but was dissatisfied with his efforts and submitted none for publication until 1963, when *«The Collector»*

appeared. *«The Collector»* is the story of Frederick Clegg, a poorly educated clerk of the lower-class and an amateur lepidopterist, who becomes obsessed with a beautiful young art student, Miranda Grey. In "*The Collector*," Mr. Fowles painted an eerily plausible portrait of a psychopath who kidnaps a young woman out of what he imagines is love, telling the story from the two characters' opposing points of view until, at the end, the narratives converge with a shocking immediacy. "The Collector" became a 1965 film directed by William Wyler, starring Terence Stamp as Clegg and Samantha Eggar as Miranda.

Fowles' next published work, ***The Magus***, was, according to its author, *"in every way except that of mere publishing date ... a first novel." [9]* Using Spetsai as his model, Fowles created the island of Phraxos where Nicholas Urfe, a young English schoolmaster, meets Maurice Conchis, the enigmatic master of an island estate. Through a series of bizarre "godgames," Conchis engineers the destruction of Nicholas' perception of reality, a necessary step in the achievement of a true understanding of his being in the world. While *The Magus* was first published in 1965, Fowles issued a revised edition in 1977 in which he had rewritten numerous scenes in an attempt to purify the work he called an *"endlessly tortured and recast cripple"[8]* which had, nonetheless, *"aroused more interest than anything else I have written."[5]*

And in "The Magus," the story of a young Englishman who gets caught up in the frightening dramatic fantasies of a strangely powerful man on an Aegean island, he again wrote an ending of self-conscious ambiguity, leaving the hero's future an open puzzle that readers are challenged to solve for themselves.

"The Magus" was more complicated and opaque than its predecessor, leading its hero, an English schoolteacher named Nicholas Urfe, to a remote Greek island and putting him at the mercy of the elaborate fantasies, or "godgame," concocted by the title character, the rich, mysterious Maurice Conchis. ("Magus" means sorcerer or conjurer.) There, Urfe begins to doubt what is real and what is fiction, and is forced, agonizingly, to question who he is.

Some critics complained that the novel was an overcomplicated pretension. But others took its part with passion, saying Mr. Fowles had more than succeeded in using the novel to illustrate the existential dilemma of life: that people must decide for themselves how to act in the face of absurd, unpredictable circumstances.

Mr. Fowles wrote the screenplay for the film version of "The Magus," starring Anthony Quinn and Michael Caine, but considered it a disaster and vowed never to write another script from his work.

He once told an interviewer that he had received a sweet letter from a cancer patient in New York who wanted very much to believe that Nicholas, the protagonist of "The Magus," was reunited with his girlfriend at the end of the book -- a point Mr. Fowles had deliberately left ambiguous. "Yes, of course they were,"[4] Mr. Fowles replied.

By chance, he had received a letter the same day from an irate reader taking issue with the ending of "The Magus." "Why can't you say what you mean, and for God's sake, what happened in the end?" the reader asked. Mr. Fowles said he found the letter "horrid" but had the last laugh, supplying an alternative ending to punish the correspondent: "*They never saw each other again."[6]*

Fowles was at work on a new manuscript when in 1966 he envisioned a woman in black Victorian garb standing on a quay and staring out at the sea. She *"was Victorian; and since I always saw her in the same static long shot, with her back turned, she represented a reproach on the Victorian Age. An outcast. I didn't know her crime, but I wished to protect her."[8]* The vision recurred, became an obsession, and led eventually to ***»The French Lieutenant's Woman»,*** a Victorian novel in manner and mores, but contemporary and existential in viewpoint. Fowles' rejection of the posture of omniscient narrator exhorted both characters and readers to grapple with possibilities and to grow through the pursuance of mystery which *"pours energy into whoever seeks the answer to it."*[2] The novel was made into a popular film of the same name in 1981. He was best known for his next novel, "«The French Lieutenant's Woman»" (1969), which Karel Reisz

made into a successful movie in 1981, starring Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons, from a screenplay by Harold Pinter. The book, set in 1867, tells the story of Charles Smithson, a gentleman geologist (as was Mr. Fowles) in Lyme Regis and a budding adherent of the theories of Charles Darwin. Engaged to a young woman of his class and station, Smithson finds himself drawn to a willful governess who has been wooed and abandoned by a French sailor. On the surface, the story seems classically Victorian, with elaborate 19th-century language, highly wrought plot twists and extensive epigraphs introducing each chapter.

But the book's narrator is straight from the 1960's, and it is his all-knowing voice -- constantly interrupting the narrative with mini-lectures on extra-textual subjects, freely discussing people who haven't been born and historical events that haven't yet happened -- that makes "The French Lieutenant's Woman" so unusual. Along the way, the reader is treated to the narrator's -- that is, Mr. Fowles's -- views on Victorian England, Freud, Marx, the dilemma of the modern novelist and 20th-century existential despair. [2]

In 1974 ***Ebony Tower***, a collection of stories, appeared. The work was televised 10 years later. The title story is a concise re-evocation of the confrontation between the pseudosophisticated man of the world with the reclusive shaman who shatters his poorly conceived notions of reality, a theme more broadly enacted in *The Magus.* This volume contains a translation of a 12th-century romance written by Marie de France, and in a personal note preceding this translation Fowles paid tribute to the Celtic romance, stating that in the reading of these tales the modern writer is "watching his own birth." Fowles' original title for this collection was Variations while these stories are original and unique, they are connected to each other and to the earlier works by an underlying sense of loss, of mystery, and of a desire for growth. At the height of his success in the 1960's and 70's, Mr. Fowles was regarded by many as the English-speaking world's greatest contemporary writer and its first postmodern novelist, but his work became less fashionable in his later years.

Daniel Martin, perhaps the most autobiographical of Fowles' novels, draws upon his early experiences of the Devonshire countryside as well as his later involvement in the Hollywood film industry. It appeared in 1974 to mixed reviews. While some critics faulted its rambling structure and lack of narrative suspense, others regarded it as a more honest, straightforward recounting of personal confrontation with one's own history.

Other fiction included **"Mantissa"** (1982), an extended dialogue between a successful author and his difficult psychiatrist-cum-muse; "The Ebony Tower" (1974), a collection of five linked stories that included Mr. Fowles's translation of the Celtic medieval romance "Eliduc"; and "Daniel Martin" (1977), an autobiographical work about a middle-aged British writer re-examining his life, in which Mr. Fowles again blurred the line between the narrator and his fictional creation. Mantissa (1982) though more cerebral, demonstrated a continuing concern with the artist's intrapersonal conflicts.

Among Mr. Fowles's numerous works of nonfiction were "The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas" (1964), a philosophical examination of life in the 20th century modeled on Pascal's "Pensées"; "The Enigma of Stonehenge" (1980); and "A Short History of Lyme Regis"[1] (1983).

He published his last novel, "A Maggot," in 1985, although he told an interviewer in 1998 that he was working on another one. Mr. Fowles was also celebrated for "A Maggot," a book heavy with symbolism, ambiguity and multifaceted meanings. The first part tells the story of a group of mysterious travelers who set out on a journey on horseback in 1736; the rest concerns the Rashomon-like testimony of the survivors after one of the group, a manservant, is found hanged, and another, a nobleman, goes missing.

Conclusion. While Fowles' reputation was based mainly on his novels and their film versions, he demonstrated expertise in the fields of nature, art, science, and natural history as reflected in a body of non-fictional writings. Throughout his career, Fowles committed himself to a scholarly exploration of the place of the artist in contemporary society and sought the personal isolation and exile that he

felt essential to such a search. While his roots in Western culture were broad and deep, he earned a reputation as an innovator in the evolution of the contemporary novel. He was a spokesperson for modern man, steeped in science, yet ever aware that what he more deeply needs is *"the existence of mysteries. Not their solutions."[3]*

Mr. Fowles was married twice. His first wife, Elizabeth, whom he married in 1956, died of cancer in 1990. He is survived by his second wife, Sarah.

As much as it frustrated some of his readers, Mr. Fowles always believed he had done the right thing by leaving the endings of his most celebrated novels open-ended. But he was not above bending his own rules when the occasion called for it.

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