

literary lives JOHN FOWLES

A story of seduction

Sir Christopher Ondaatje writes about the English novelist who blurred the boundaries of literature with experimental techniques.

The main themes of John Fowles's writings are obsession and delusion. He spent his early life (1951) as a teacher of modern languages at the Anargyrios and Korgialenios School on the Peloponnesian island of Spetses in Greece. While there, he met his future wife Elizabeth Christy – the wife of a fellow teacher at the school.

Inspired by his experiences there, he drafted his novel 'The Magus' (1966), which was set in Greece. He also began work on 'The Collector' which was accepted by Jonathan Cape, the English publishers. 'The Collector' was published in 1963, enthusiastically received, and received the highest advance payment for a first novel paperback right. This success changed his life and allowed Fowles to devote the greater part of his life to his literary career.

The deranged hero of 'The Collector' collected pretty girls as one would butterflies. It was an innovative thriller and was optioned as a feature film of the same name in 1965. 'The Aristos', a collection of philosophical essays, was published the following year, after which he set to work



Belmont House in Lyme Regis where John Fowles lived until he died.

on his most studied masterpiece, 'The Magus', based on his previous life in Greece.

John Fowles was born in Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, England, where he lived until the outbreak of the Second World War. He came from a middle-class family of London merchants and was educated at Bedford College School where he became head boy. He was an outstanding athlete: a member of the 1st Rugby Football XV, and captain of the school cricket team.

After completing his military service in 1947 Fowles entered New College, Oxford, where he read both French and German. Eventually he concentrated only on French for his degree. After reading Jean-Paul Sartre and