

The Collector

Biografie John Fowles

Uit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/books/author/fowles/pg3.shtml>:

Important works:

John Fowles' novels have brought him popular and critical acclaim. His first novel, The Collector (1963), was an immediate best seller. The Magus (1966, revised in 1977) followed and then the novel by which he is best known, The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969). The 1970s saw the publication of The Ebony Tower (1974) and Daniel Martin (1977), the 1980s, Mantissa (1982) and A Maggot (1985).

Fowles also writes short fiction, essays, poems and translations and a range of his non-fiction texts are to be found in introductions to other writers' books, periodicals and academic journals. The Aristos (1965) was a book about his personal philosophies. Wormholes (1998) and The Tree (2000) offer us his reflections on his life, art and a variety of personal concerns. References to several unfinished works have left fans hoping for another novel.

Education and background:

John Robert Fowles went to Bedford public school where he did well academically and eventually became head boy. In this role he developed early insights into the abuses of power - later explored critically in his fiction: "You had total power over 800 other boys, you were totally responsible for discipline and punishment. I suppose I used to beat on average three or four boys a day. Very evil, I think." (Interview in New York Times Book Review, 1969). A spell near the end of the war in the Marines interrupted his education. Then he entered New College, Oxford, where he read French and gained an admiration for European traditions of literature together with a "sincere belief in the virtues of doubt".

Fowles' upbringing was middle class and suburban, a way of life he has since described as "crippling and hideously insufficient". However, from his father came the love of philosophy we associate with his novels and The Aristos, and from an uncle, a passion for natural history. A key experience came too, through evacuation during the war to Devon and the discovery of the countryside as a place in which he could feel intensely alive and restored. Contrasts of the trap of social conformity and the renewing green places of the countryside run throughout his novels. More recently he has written passionately about a threatened countryside.

After graduating, Fowles taught for twelve years: at the University of Poitiers, France; in a boarding school on the Greek island of Spetsai which suggested the setting for The Magus and where he met Elizabeth Whitton, his wife-to-be, who would provide the inspiration for his heroines; then work in several London schools. With the commercial and critical success of The Collector he was able to give up teaching and devote himself to writing.

He lives in Lyme Regis, Dorset, with a view from the bottom of his garden of the famous Cobb. He is the curator of the local museum and when he is not writing he enjoys collecting old books and natural history. Since the tragic death of his first wife from cancer he has re-married. The Cobb itself has become a place of literary pilgrimage and Fowles is often besieged by PhD students wanting to talk about his work. Over the last few years he has been active in setting up a John Fowles Literary Trust which will, after his death, turn the home he loves so much into a place of retreat.

Samenvatting The Collector

Uit <http://www.freshlimesoda.com/reviews/thecollector.html>:

This is the story of a lonely young man who collects butterflies. He happens to admire a pretty art student from a distance and often fantasizes about her. One day, he wins a huge amount at the pools and gets the opportunity to live out his fantasy. And a fascinating encounter takes place. Between the introverted and involuted Clegg and the bright and intelligent Miranda. Between the Few and the Many.

There are only two principal characters in this novel and the rest of the characters are introduced through Miranda's jottings in her diary, which she maintains during her lonely days of imprisonment. It is interesting to read what an intelligent, pretty girl feels about life, her encounters with G.P., an artist with leftist leanings who becomes her mentor and guide, her attempts at becoming a real artist and to lead a meaningful life free of conformity. She recalls the long conversations with G.P., which helped to brush away the cobwebs from her mind. She also tries to reason with Clegg to free her and when that fails tries to escape but to no avail.

Many of us are likely to find a resonance with Miranda's thoughts and ideas; perhaps we too felt this way at some point of time. There is a poignant thought towards the end when she writes, "I would not want this not to have happened. Because if I escape I shall be a completely different and I think better person. Because if I don't escape, if something dreadful happened, I shall still know that the person I was and would have stayed if this hadn't happened was not the person I now want to be. It is like firing a pot. You have to risk the cracking and warping."

In spite of her intelligence and education, Miranda is unable to communicate with Clegg who treats her as one more butterfly in his collection, a live butterfly, forever trapped by human stupidity and ignorance, trying to escape.

*In the introduction, John Fowles explains his motivations behind *The Collector*. He writes: "Society has persistently seen life in terms of a struggle between the Few and the Many, between Them and Us. My purpose in *The Collector* was to attempt to analyse, through a parable, some of the results of this confrontation. Clegg, the kidnapper, committed the evil; but I tried to show that his evil was largely, perhaps wholly, the result of a bad education, a mean environment, being orphaned: all factors over which he had no control. In short, I tried to establish the virtual innocence of the Many. Miranda, the girl he imprisoned, had very little more control than Clegg over what she was - she had well-to-do parents, good educational opportunity, inherited aptitude and intelligence. That does not mean that she was perfect. Far from it - she was arrogant in her ideas, a prig, a liberal-humanist snob, like so many university students. Yet if she had not died she might have become something better, the kind of being humanity so desperately needs."*

If she had lived, Miranda would have become a better human being. Which begs the question: Do we have to go through a traumatic experience before we can change for the better? Is it not possible to change otherwise?

Enkele vraagjes:

Wat is 'compulsive hoarding'? Psychologische achtergrond? Welke rol speelt 'verzamelen' in het verhaal? Wie zijn 'verzamelaars'? Cf. Definitie 'compulsive hoarding' (<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Compulsive%20hoarding>).

1. Waarom is de **structuur** van het boek zoals hij is (delen 1, 3 en 4 verteld vanuit standpunt Clegg, deel 2 verteld vanuit standpunt Miranda)?
2. Fowles over Miranda: *"She was arrogant in her ideas, a prig, a liberal-humanist snob, like so many university students. Yet if she had not died, she might have become something better, the kind of being humanity so desperately needs"*.

Karakteriseer **Miranda, Clegg, G.P.**. Overeenkomsten? Verschillen? Is er een evolutie merkbaar? Is Clegg een psychopaat (cf. Definitie Psychopaat in <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/psychopath>)?

3. Doen de personages een poging om **elkaar te begrijpen**? Slagen zij daarin? Waarom (niet)?
4. Welke rol spelen **boeken** in het verhaal ('The Tempest', 'Catcher In The Rye', 'Emma'...)?
5. Clegg will Miranda **fotograferen**. Rol hiervan?
6. Stel dat Clegg voor een rechtbank zou komen: wat pleit voor/tegen hem, zijn er **verzachtende omstandigheden**?
7. *"Ever since its publication, John Fowles's The Collector (1963) has been a great commercial success – "an intriguing study in warped sexuality ... cunningly worked suspense" by "an artist of great imaginative power"¹ – as well as the object of intensive critical activity. It has been interpreted as a **psychological thriller**,² an allegorical treatment of **the struggle between "the Few" and "the Many,"** a modern version of the **Bluebeard** legend,³ a **Bildungsroman**, an existential journey towards self-discovery,⁴ and so on"* (- <http://www.insitegrafx.hu/theanachronist/html/2002/tukacs.html>). Wat is volgens jou het belangrijkste **thema** van het boek?
8. Enkele fragmenten uit het boek:
 - a. Hoe interpreteer je de scene waarin Miranda Clegg probeert te verleiden? Ze besluit de scene met *"We can't be further apart"*?
 - b. *"I can't stand stupid people like Caliban, with their great deadweight of pettiness and selfishness and meanness of every kind. And the few have to carry it all. The doctors and the teachers and the artists (...) What hope there is, is with them – with us. Because I am one of them.*
9. Enkele fragmenten uit T. Tukacs's artikel *"Close, But Not Touching – Readings and Misreadings in John Fowles' The Collector"*:
 - a. *The Collector is also a novel about reading. (...) Reading becomes the metaphor of interpersonal relationships and vice versa, intersubjective relationships represent certain modes of reading.*
 - b. *"Having Her Was Enough": Reading as Collecting; the Anal Aspect of Reading (...) Clegg is an anal reader, which means that instead of interpreting and understanding the object read, he is content with possessing, collecting, controlling, arranging and systematising it with extreme precision.*
 - c. Over Clegg als voyeur/lezer: *"The connection between voyeurism and reading has been pointed out by many critics. One key premise of some psychoanalytic*

theories is that the writer, presenting his own fantasies, allows us to enjoy our daydreams without self-reproach or shame,¹³ to “peer with impunity.”¹⁴ This instinct is activated through the reading process or watching a performance. Clegg wants to place himself in the role of the audience, and wants to watch Miranda’s “performance,” thereby also setting such primal scene fantasies in motion. When Miranda asks him to “amuse” her, “do something,” he cannot perform anything (79). He plays the role of the audience, and in this instance his expectations concerning the enjoyment of the “literary work” are frustrated. According to Holland, when we take a book in our hands, we expect two things: that the book is going to give us pleasure¹⁵ and that we will not have to take our share actively while reading, that is, we will not have to perform anything, act on the literary work: “in the literary situation ... we know no explosion will occur, for we know we are not going to act.”¹⁶ Clegg is frustrated because he realises he will have to act on the literary work he reads or the performance he watches. From the first moment, he would be willing only to watch Miranda, without having to do anything, considering her as an inanimate statue, picture or literary work. In other words, he is not willing to enter a dialogical process of reading, is not willing to risk himself. Therefore, Clegg can only fulfil his role as audience when Miranda cannot communicate with him: when he watches her from the window (5), when he watches his photos of her, when she is intoxicated, and finally, when she is dead. It is only then that he can “enjoy his daydreams” “without self-reproach or shame.” “They the photos didn’t talk back at me” (118), he summarises the essence of this pleasure.”