MODERN NOVELISTS

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JOHN FOWLES

James Acheson

Macmillan Education

JOHN FOWLES

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For Carole – with all my love

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General Editor's Preface

The death of the novel has often been announced, and part of the secret of its obstinate vitality must be its capacity for growth, adaptation, self-renewal and self-transformation; like some vigorous organism in a speeded-up Darwinian ecosystem, it adapts itself quickly to a changing world. War and revolution, economic crisis and social change, radically new ideologies such as Marxism and Freudianism, have made this century unprecedented in human history in the speed and extent of change, but the novel has shown an extraordinary capacity to find new forms and techniques and to accommodate new ideas and conceptions of human nature and human experience, and even to take up new positions on the nature of fiction itself.

In the generations immediately preceding and following 1914, the novel underwent a radical redefinition of its nature and possibilities. The present series of monographs is devoted to the novelists who created the modern novel and to those who, in their turn, either continued and extended, or reacted against and rejected, the traditions established during that period of intense exploration and experiment. It includes a number of those who lived and wrote in the nineteenth century but whose innovative contribution to the art of fiction makes it impossible to ignore them in any account of the origins of the modern novel; it also includes the so-called 'modernists' and those who in the mid- and late twentieth century have emerged as outstanding practitioners of this genre. The scope is, inevitably, international; not only, in the migratory and exile-haunted world of our century, do writers refuse to heed national frontiers – 'English' literature lays claim to Conrad the Pole, Henry James the American and Joyce the Irishman – but geniuses such as Flaubert, Dostoevsky and Kafka have had an influence on the fiction of many nations.

Each volume in the series is intended to provide an introduction to the fiction of the writer concerned, both for those approaching him or her for the first time and for those who are already familiar with some parts of the achievement in question and now wish to place it in the context of the total *œuvre*. Although essential information relating to the writer's life and times is given, usually in an opening chapter, the approach is primarily critical and the emphasis is not upon 'background' or generalisations but open, close examination of important texts. Where an author is notably prolific, major texts have been made to convey, more summarily, a sense of the nature and quality of the author's work as a whole. Those who want to read further will find suggestions in the select bibliography included in each volume. Many novelists are, of course, not only novelists but also poets, essayists, biographers, dramatists, travel writers and so forth; many have practised shorter forms of fiction; and many have written letters or kept diaries that constitute a significant part of their literary output. A brief study cannot hope to deal with all these in detail, but where the shorter fiction, and the non-fictional writings, public and private, have an important relationship to the novels, some space has been devoted to them.

NORMAN PAGE

Preface

John Fowles is at the same time a best-selling novelist and one who attracts the attention of undergraduate students, thesis writers and professional academics. To the casual reader, he is a novelist who writes so well, who creates such an aura of suspense and intrigue, that it is difficult to put his books down. To the scholar, Fowles is a writer whose interest in existentialism manifests itself in his early novels, *The Collector* (1963), *The Magus* (1965) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), but wanes from *The Ebony Tower* (1974) through to *Daniel Martin* (1977) and *A Maggot* (1985). Fowles is particularly interested in the achievement of existential authenticity – the process by which the individual exchanges his conventional ideas and attitudes for ones that are consistent with the person he or she really is. In each of his early novels, Fowles presents us with characters who are living conventional lives and mouthing conventional opinions, then shows us how these characters either succeed or fail at gaining greater self-knowledge in response to the situation in which he places them. What follows is an examination of his early enthusiasm for existentialism, and of how his approach to fiction writing changed from the mid-1970s onwards.

I should like to thank my colleagues, William Walker and Peter Tremewan, for reading parts of this study and making many helpful suggestions. Another colleague, Gordon Spence, was very helpful with Chapter 7, on *A Maggot*. I also wish to thank the University of Canterbury for granting me the study leave and travel funding that enabled me to complete it.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Carole, to whom this book is dedicated, for her patience, good humour and consistently stimulating conversation on all matters related to English literature.

JAMES ACHESON
Christchurch, New Zealand

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