John Fowles and Nature

Fourteen Perspectives on Landscape

Edited by James R. Aubrey

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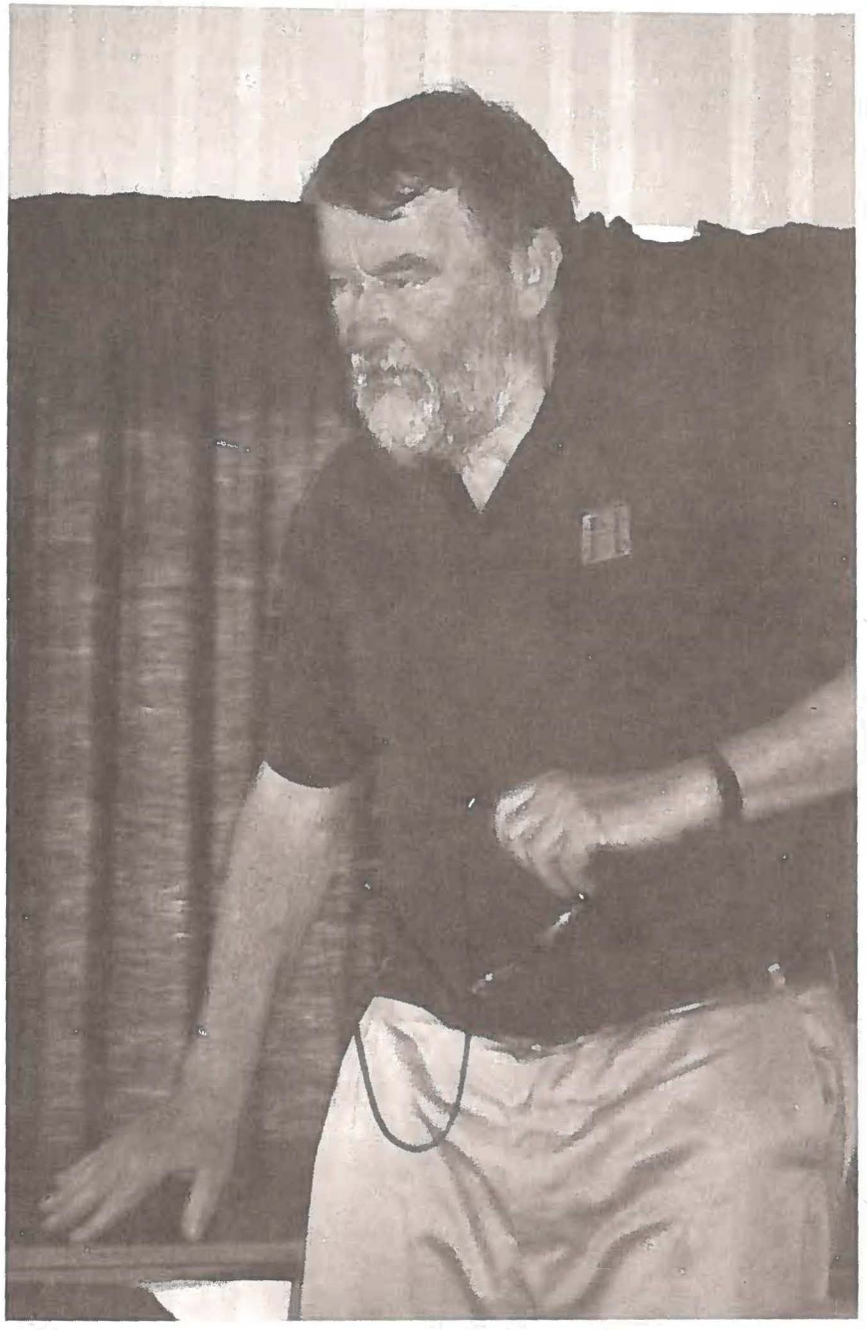


John Fowles. On July 11, 1996, Mr. Fowles was interviewed in the Masonic Hall of Lyme Regis, England, by scholars attending the John Fowles Symposium. Photograph by Yvonne Ou-Yang.

Introduction

JAMES R. AUBREY

> Even a bare grassy isle which I can see entirely over at a glance,
> has some undefined and mysterious charm for me.
> —Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*

> Now I live here, another island,
> that doesn't seem like one, but who decides?
> —Elizabeth Bishop, "Crusoe in England"

WHEN JOHN GARDNER PREDICTED THAT THE WORKS OF JOHN FOWLES would "stand as literary classics" of the late twentieth century, he was thinking of Fowles as a fellow novelist—"the only writer in English who has the power, range, knowledge, and wisdom of a Tolstoi or James."[1] Another feature of Fowles's writing that should make him a spokesman for the age is the call to awareness of the natural world that has long informed his writing, nonfiction as well as fiction. Perhaps Fowles's success as a novelist has obscured his recognition as a nature writer, for by tradition prose fiction and essays about nature are very different kinds of writing. Depictions of the natural world in a novel typically provide the setting for a more important plot, whereas nature writers are typically seeking empirical truth in their essays, the kind of nonfiction associated with Charles Darwin or Henry David Thoreau. Both kinds of writing can be artful, but they are usually considered distinct. Because Fowles writes in both genres and sometimes blurs their distinctions, critical readers would be wise to consider his fiction and nonfiction comprehensively, and in relation to one another.

A comprehensive view of Fowles's writing would be in the spirit of ecology, of course, the very field whose name has been borrowed for literary studies of nature: ecocriticism. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty notes that the field of literary studies has been late to join other disciplines that have been "'greening' since the 1970s." She explains that ecocritics should continue to avoid restricting and systematizing what they do, so that the field will invite "suggestive and open" study of literature and the natural environment, of how

nature is represented, understood, or ignored, and even of how the human species is constructed through literary discourse. Just as feminist critics sometimes examine the conditions of the lives of particular authors, she points out, ecocritics sometimes study the influence of place on the imagination of an author.[2] This volume of essays, taken as a whole, constitutes such a study.

The attachment to natural places is particularly strong in the imagination of John Fowles. One critic to recognize this fact is Robert Huffaker, who observed in 1980 that Fowles is "one of the few writers whom one may call a lover of nature without being trite."[3] Fowles displays his love of nature without sentimentalizing it, not only because he is tough-minded and a close observer of the natural world but also because he brings to nature considerable scientific knowledge. One need only read an essay such as "The Chesil Bank" to be reminded how informed Fowles has made himself:

> Many rare native plants such as the sea pea and sea kale, the yellow horned-poppy and shrubby sea-blite, survive this difficult environment. One of the most charming—and commonest—is the scurvy-grass, *Cochlearia danica*. Its myriad tiny flowers mist the bare shingle with an ethereal lilac-tinged ashy light in spring. Closer to, you must kneel; they are like alpine plants. Here as elsewhere the Chesil is lined at the back with groves of tamarisk. Nearby grows another "foreigner," the Duke of Argyll's tea-plant, a favourite shrub of mine because of the colour of its newly opened flowers. One *Hortus* I have describes *Lycium chinense* as "dull lilac purple," which deserves a suit for libel."[4]

Fowles knows fauna as well as flora, from butterflies and spiders to mammals; he once remarked casually that he could not bring himself to see the movie *Jurassic Park* "because I know too much about dinosaurs."[5] He recognizes, however, that knowledge forms only part of a satisfactory relationship with nature. Indeed, he has long recognized that knowledge can interfere. In a 1977 letter, Fowles observed," . . . though I suppose I can call myself a fairly good orthodox field botanist, ornithologist and the rest, the quasi-scientific approach had come to seem more and more inadequate (to me) emotionally, psychically, whatever you want to call it. I think I cannot be understood properly if this attachment to nature, and to natural history, and its disciplines, from the scientific to the 'Zen' aesthetic / poetic is not taken into account."[6] His relationship with nature is complex by his own account, then, and it has a significant bearing on his fiction writing, as he asserts in *The Tree*: "The key to my fiction, for what it is worth, lies in my relationship with nature."[7] In effect, Fowles was

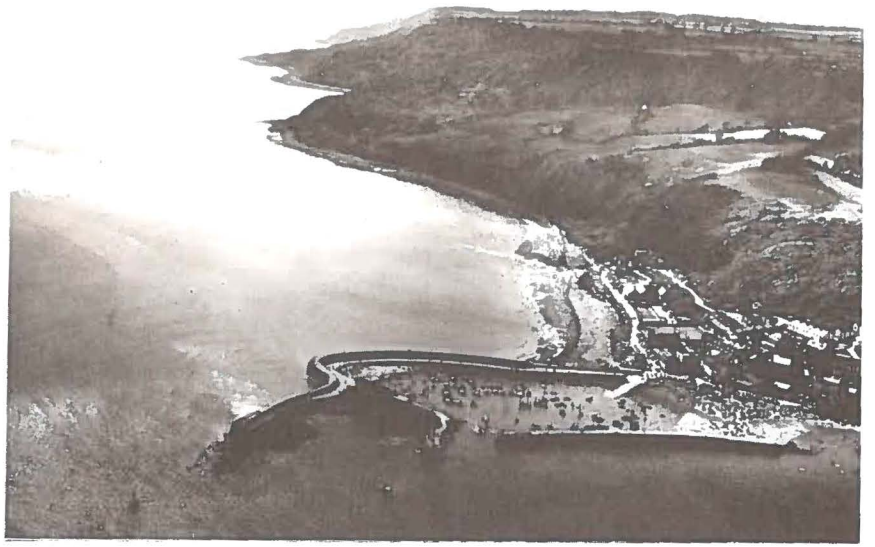
advising readers to take an ecocritical approach to his novels before the strategy had been named.

A novelist is not always the best judge of how to read his or her novels, but Fowles is a shrewd self-critic. To take his advice, to consider his "relationship with nature," one must consider who he is, this "I" who advises. The affection he feels for rural places seems partly to have been bred into him as a boy, during his urban childhood. When Fowles was about ten, he delighted in butterfly hunting with his uncle, away from his immediate neighborhood in a London suburb. Chasing and exploring in some pleasant, exurban "elsewhere" seems to have made a strong impression on him. Later his family joined the wartime evacuation from the London area, to Devon, so the adolescent Fowles was able to experience similar, rural pleasures when he was on leave from boarding school. His activities included shooting and trapping, but on reaching adulthood, Fowles gave up the pursuit of animals to become their protector, eventually advocating the preservation of biodiversity—not merely preservation of the rural look of the countryside.[8] In 1965, only three years after Rachel Carson sounded an environmental alarm with *Silent Spring*, Fowles published a travel piece titled "Swan Song of the European Wild," which describes "victims of an unbalanced ecology" in northern Norway, where one might suppose that inaccessibility would protect nature. At a lake in Finnmark, Fowles reports having met a hermitlike "Norwegian Thoreau" who tells him that "the cranes and the geese and the swans are all going or have gone to Russia. It's the people in Oslo. They think timber and tourism are everything and wildlife nothing."[9] In 1970 Fowles was again advocating biodiversity, this time in "Weeds, Bugs, Americans," an essay that pleads with readers to stop spraying their lawns with insecticides and weed killers.[10] Fowles's attitude today would be labeled "green," but it is evident that his views were taking that coloration well before green parties were formed in the 1980s, even before the environmental activism of the 1970s.

Fowles's later nonfiction continued to reflect his keen interest in preserving and protecting wild places and things. In his 1971 essay "The Blinded Eye," Fowles laments the decline of various species, even as he offers instruction on how to look at and be responsive to what nature remains ("with just as much science . . . as the poetry requires").[11] Roughly half of his reviews for the *New Statesman* in the mid-1970s were of books about the natural world, from *Whales, Dolphins and Seals* to *Birds, Beasts and Men*.[12] His book *The Tree*, first published in 1979, is Fowles's autobiographical tribute to wild nature, concluding with a description of a walk in the woods.[13] His 1984 essay on the Chesil Bank advocated increased care when visiting

there, and increased sensitivity to the threatened Dorset coastline generally.[14] In 1987 Fowles contributed a jeremiad to the Greenpeace book *Coastline*, in which he laments that humanity's true profession has become destruction of the environment: "[Man] is a wrecker; and what he wrecks now is not just ships."[15] In the 1990s Fowles wrote a series of similarly impassioned reviews of books about nature for the *Sunday Times*, one of which prompted a reader to complain that Fowles must hate people if he hates cities so much.[16] It is fairer to say that Fowles dislikes the commercialism that he associates with cities, where people tend to see their environment as a place for making money. He disapproves of such attitudes in the country, as well, where monoculture planting reduces biodiversity and agribusiness inhibits people from feeling connected to the landscape. Fowles's 1995 work "The Nature of Nature" is a memoir testifying to the importance to him of wild nature, which he calls *la sauvage*. In the course of that essay, Fowles praises D. H. Lawrence for having "reached nearest—especially in his poetry—to penetrating that strange otherness" about nature. Like an English Thoreau, Fowles urges readers to adopt a double consciousness of feeling and knowing, art and science: "We need to institute an oscillation between the two sides, like a heartbeat; not to understand just the nature of things, but the nature of understanding them."[17]

Fowles's life, like his writing, reflects this attachment to wild nature. In 1966 he and his wife, Elizabeth, bought a derelict farm in Devon, just west of Dorset, on the edge of a coastal woodland. This adjoining tract of public, natural landscape, the now well-known Undercliff, would become, in effect, Fowles's playground—a wilderness that he might explore as he wished—"an English garden of Eden," as he calls it in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.[18] A few years later, when he purchased nearby Belmont House in Lyme Regis, overlooking the Cobb and harbor, he was pleased to acquire with the house more than two acres of hillside, space that has since been maintained as a kind of wild garden.[19] His father, whose garden near London was carefully domesticated, was initially horrified by the wild garden at Belmont, but for the son that garden—like the Undercliff—represented independence from confining, middle-class values.[20] "We make our destinies by our choice of gods," Dr. Grogan reminds Charles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (151), and our choice of gardens would seem to have a similar function. When in 1977 Fowles was instrumental in establishing a nature sanctuary on the Bristol Channel island of Steep Holm, he was in a sense giving England its own wild garden, like his at Belmont.[21] It is perhaps significant that Fowles has chosen as his own garden god—the only sculpture in



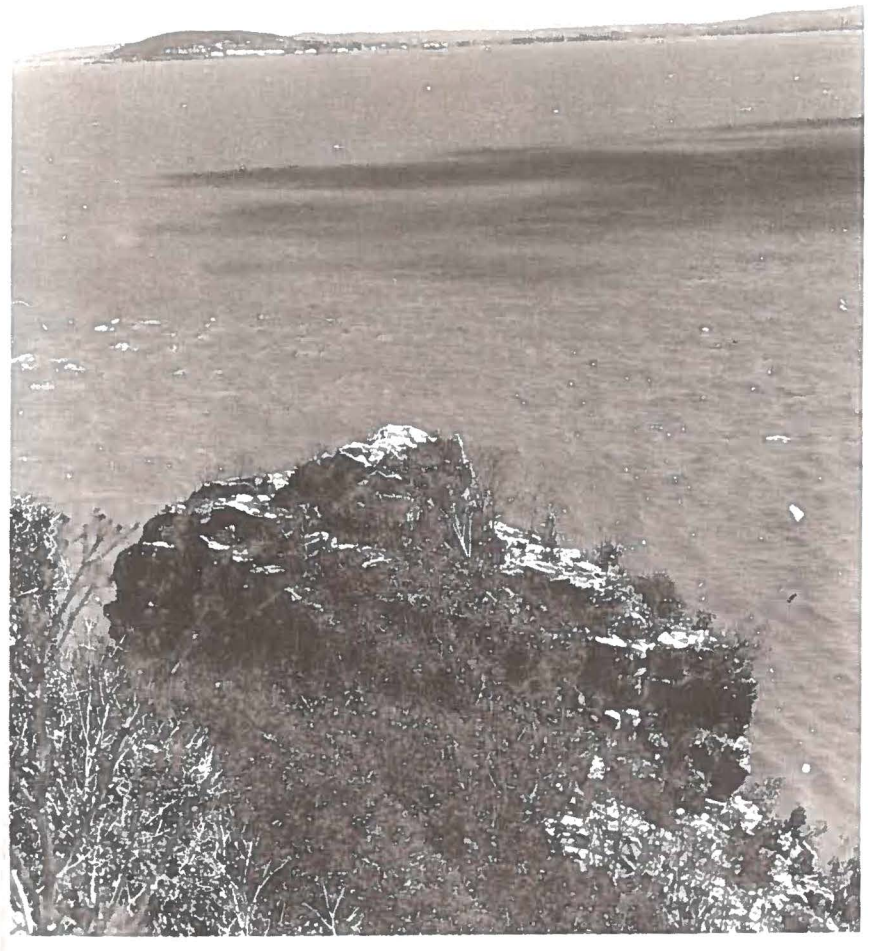
The Cobb and Undercliff, Lyme Regis, Dorset. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the narrator describes the Undercliff, the wooded slopes west of the artificial harbor formed by the Cobb of Lyme Regis, as "one of the strangest coastal landscapes in Southern England" (Little, Brown, 1969, page 66). The open fields just below those woods comprise Underhill Farm, where John Fowles lived when he was writing the novel. Photograph courtesy of the Lyme Regis Philpot Museum.

Fowles's garden, half hidden in the trees—a statue of Ceres, goddess of fertility and, as Demeter, a central figure in the Eleusinian mysteries, a Greek ceremony of liberation from the mundane world.

Fowles's life offers a rich store of experience to draw on for the construction of landscapes in his novels. Again Thoreau-like, Fowles has kept detailed records of his perceptions in a journal, which he began keeping about 1949 and from which he sometimes draws when he writes fiction.[22] In *Behind "The Magus,"* for example, Fowles acknowledges that the novel's descriptions of haunting pine forests and a private villa are based on his notebooks from 1952–53, when he was living in Greece.[23] His other novels appear to have similar relationships with places Fowles knows. In *The Collector,* Clegg kidnaps Miranda in Hampstead, London, where Fowles was living at the time he wrote it. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the main character, like the author at the time he was writing that novel, is recently arrived from London to Lyme Regis and the nearby Undercliff. Also like Fowles, the title character of *Daniel Martin* decides in middle age to

Belmont House, Lyme Regis. This late eighteenth-century house overlooking the English Channel has been the residence of John Fowles since 1968. His two acres of wild garden descend to the right, southward, almost to the breakwater known as the Cobb. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1992.

move from London to a farm in Devon, whose countryside he loved as a boy. *A Maggot*, too, chronicles a movement from London to Devon, again by characters whose lives are changed by their experiences in wild parts of the West Country. Even the setting of "The Ebony Tower," in the Brittany woods of France, is not far from Poitiers, where Fowles lived from 1950–51.[24] In fiction by Fowles generally, actual landscapes that he knows provide settings for events where characters struggle for personal emancipation. Central characters typically arrive at these rural places from urban locations and find the countryside magical. Each natural setting helps to create this sense of magic by the way a place in it exists as some kind of special case, geographically—an interruption of the surrounding topography by a cliff or a cleft, a secret valley or a dark forest, a mesa or an island, a large cave or a large rock. Sometimes the interruptions are built by humans, such as Clegg's isolated country house in *The Collector* or, in *A Maggot*, Stonehenge, whose extraordinary stones on Salisbury Plain are well known and thus likely to resonate with readers—as they evidently do with the author, who has discussed his fascination with the place in *The Enigma of Stonehenge*.[25] The contrast of such special



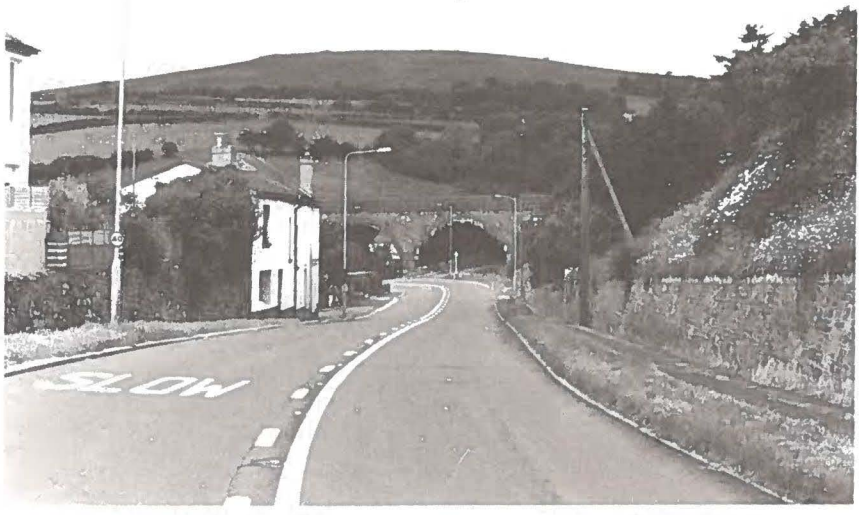
Steep Holm, near Weston-super-Mare, Avon. In 1976 John Fowles was instrumental in having this island in the Bristol Channel designated a nature reserve in memory of Kenneth Allsop, a promoter of environmental preservation. The photo of Tower Rock, on the southeast corner of the island, looks across the water to the town of Weston-super-Mare. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1994.

***Ceres*, by Randolph Rogers. A sculpture of the fertility goddess Ceres, or Demeter, holding a sheaf of grain, occupies a transitional space between the formal lawn and the wild garden of Belmont House. Fowles's fascination with the Eleusinian Mysteries makes Demeter a particularly appropriate *genius loci*, or presiding spirit for his garden. Rogers was an American sculptor who lived from 1825–92. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1996.**

John Fowles on Spetses, Greece. He is writing in his notebook in the garden of the Villa Yasemia, model for the house of Maurice Conchis in *The Magus* (2nd edition, Little, Brown, 1978). After a 1996 celebration of his work in Athens, Fowles revisited the island for the first time since 1951–53, when he had lived and taught there at the Anargyrios School. Photograph by Kirke Kefalea, 1996.

sites with the surrounding landscape helps Fowles to construct in his own mind and to reconstruct in the mind of the reader an environment that conveys a sense of the sacred and the mysterious in life.

What, besides its discontinuous form, constitutes such an exceptional place? In *Daniel Martin* the narrator purports not to know, exactly: "Some skylines will not be forgotten; one from my childhood, on the southern edge of Dartmoor, is like that. It has always haunted my dreams; and the secret template of its contours still inhabits outwardly quite different vistas. . . . I have never quite understood why some places exert this deep personal attraction, why at them one's past seems in some mysterious way to meet one's future, one was somehow always to be there as well as being there in reality" (323–24). Elsewhere in that novel Fowles uses the words *sacred* to describe such places, and in a discussion of *Round About a Great Estate* he uses the word *special* to describe Burderop Park and its fictional equivalent, Okebourne Chase, as Richard Jefferies' "special land-



Dartmoor, Devon, from Bittaford. In *Daniel Martin*, Fowles's most autobiographical novel, the narrator observes, "Some skylines will not be forgotten; one from my childhood, of the southern edge of Dartmoor, is like that. It has always haunted my dreams; and the secret template of its contours still inhabits outwardly quite different vistas" (Little, Brown, 1977, page 323). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1996.

scape, in every sense: personally, historically, spiritually, aesthetically."[26] The experience of such places, which obliterates a sense of elapsed time as the place resonates with one's deepest self, can be literary as well as geographical, can be generated by verbal as well as visual stimuli. Fowles has often acknowledged having been profoundly affected in this way by reading Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meulnes*, whose protagonist is similarly haunted by the longing to find a magical place he once discovered in adolescence, then could not find again.[27] In each of these three instances, Fowles is revealing his own sympathy with the feelings of another character or author for a special place—feelings not easily explained. Environmental psychologist Stephen Kaplan has attempted to account for such complex responses to the natural environment in terms of "internal representations," a phrase useful for describing the way one's previous experiences help to form a prototypical experience that influences later, specific percepts—as Fowles's childhood "template" of Dartmoor haunts him in middle age.[28] Kaplan acknowledges that perception occurs "at a molecular level," so his model (derived from William James) offers only a partial

understanding of this kind of mental event. Scientists working to trace correspondences across neuron pathways between what one sees and what one feels will, no doubt, eventually develop a more sophisticated model for explaining how people experience landscape.[29] For now, in unscientific language, Fowles seems especially capable of feeling deep resonances between the nature he looks at and the person he is—and he seems exceptionally aware that he is doing so. This sensitivity enables him to derive exceptional pleasure from nature. To the extent that Fowles can shape his own experiences into verbal representations, these resonances and pleasures are made available to his readers as well.

Fowles once used the traditional phrase *spirit of place* to describe what his novels typically create, the illusion that a fictional world exists and constitutes an imagined physical environment for the characters.[30] Part of the pleasure of being in nature—or in an imagined version of it—is that one senses unfamiliarity; because no two landscapes are formed exactly alike, any such experience will involve mystery. On various occasions Fowles has compared writing a novel to walking through a wood, where one pleasurably experiences a sequence of complex environmental cues and makes decisions as one moves forward.[31] One possibility is that similar brain activity is occurring when one reads a narrative, writes a narrative, or walks through the woods. For Fowles the pleasure of these analogous experiences seems to depend on the presence of the aleatory, on an unpredictableness in art like the wildness in nature that invests both inner and outer worlds with a mysteriousness that differentiates those worlds from more predictable environments—particularly from cities.

Fowles's best-known novel is *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, where wild nature is present as the Undercliff. This densely wooded, sometimes junglelike area west of Lyme Regis is physically extraordinary, of course, as the narrator explains in the first sentence of Chapter Ten, where he calls it "one of the strangest coastal landscapes in Southern England" (66). The Undercliff is constructed in the novel as a magical place, partly by means of reference to other cultural texts. For example, Fowles describes the Undercliff as "an English Garden of Eden" (67) to give it mythic resonance as well as to suggest that its Victorian counterparts to the biblical Adam and Eve are about to fall from innocence. But Fowles's Undercliff is not a morally symbolic landscape in the same way Eden is, a function of the moral character of its inhabitants. Nor does it symbolize social depravity, as Mrs. Poulteney thinks. In the novel, the Undercliff is a morally neutral landscape that is just there, not necessarily associated with either guilt or innocence. In this unsymbolic naturalness, however, the Undercliff

does come to be associated with unbiblical views in the novel and thus becomes aligned with the politically charged names of Darwin, Marx, and Freud. So Fowles's Undercliff acquires a moral charge by its associations with both religious and counter-religious texts. The symbolic value of the Undercliff in Chapter Ten is further promoted by means of the allusion to Renaissance art, to "the ground that Botticelli's figures walk on," perhaps in the painting *La Primavera* (68). Even readers unfamiliar with Botticelli can infer that his ground must be solid, "real," unlike the ground in other paintings; a look at *La Primavera* reveals that the remarkable thing about the ground is that it is covered with flowers, not stylized but particular-looking. A comment by the narrator gives the allusive description a specific political dimension, as well, for we are told that the previous, medieval era in art history (when backgrounds were typically abstract) is associated with "chains, bounds, frontiers." Thus the flower-decked, natural-looking ground of a Botticelli painting links the Undercliff with cultural change, specifically with the Renaissance, described as "the green end of one of civilization's hardest winters" (68). The Undercliff is thus constructed to represent conditions that will allow the evolution of the modern self to continue in the character of Charles Smithson, and likewise in the novel's readers. Natural landscape functions this way in Fowles's fiction generally: to help enable a character, a writer, and a reader to attain heightened awareness of his or her freedom.

The idea that one can enhance one's sense of personal freedom by means of engagement with wild nature may have contributed to the formation of a central metaphor in Fowles's writing: each man is an island. The last page of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* implies this reversal of John Donne's declaration that "No man is an island," concluding as it does with an allusion to the Matthew Arnold poem "To Marguerite," quoted earlier in the novel. Arnold's poem begins with a description of the human condition, "in the sea of life enisl'd," where "we mortal millions live alone," and ends by declaring that sea to be "salt, estranging" (427). Fowles's narrator calls this "the noblest short poem of the whole Victorian era" (426), and it is also useful to Fowles at that point for the way its island metaphor anticipates the condition of existential aloneness that he wants to attribute to Charles. Another of his characters, David in "The Ebony Tower," wishfully fantasizes about becoming "locked away, islanded" somewhere in the West Country, away from London and his daily life of "getting and spending" (80). As a prominent feature in a natural setting, then, an island is nicely analogous to a Fowles protagonist in a natural landscape, or to an evolving reader or writer in that fictional world. As Fowles would later declare more explicitly, "*Every* man is an island."[32]

***La Primavera* (detail), by Sandro Botticelli (circa 1475–78). In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, describing the Undercliff "prospect" in front of Charles Smithson, the narrator notes by name the presence of seven particular kinds of wildflower, then comments, "Only one art has ever caught such scenes—that of the Renaissance; it is the ground that Botticelli's figures walk on, the air that includes Ronsard's songs" (Little, Brown, 1969, page 68). Photograph by Marco Rabatti, courtesy of the Uffizzi Gallery.**

Fowles's attraction to the analogy seems related to a longstanding fascination with islands in various forms, both literal and metaphorical. "Islanders" is the title of the first poem in *Poems,* whose contents date "mainly from 1951–52" when he was living on the Greek island of Spetses. The opening lines of a later Fowles poem express a view similar to Matthew Arnold's reply to John Donne, this time via Daniel Defoe's famous islander:

> Crusoes all of us
> stranded
> as solitary grains of sand.

Fowles's early novel *The Magus* is set mostly on a Greek island called Phraxos, and the crucial episode of an embedded narrative in Norway takes place on a near-island, "a long, tree-covered spit of land that ran into the river," a literally sacred place whose name, Seidevarre, readers are told, means "hill of the holy stone" (299–300). *The Collector* takes place metaphorically on an island, as Miranda is kidnapped from London and locked away in a country house, surrounded by a "sea" of open landscape near Lewes; Miranda notes the resemblance between her own situation and that of Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, also stranded on an island by forces beyond her control, in exile from the mainland with a monster for company. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the Undercliff is another metaphorical island, a Galapagos of wild nature in the sea of self-estranging culture that is Victorian England, where Charles and Sarah find refuge. In "The Enigma," in *The Ebony Tower,* Hampstead Heath is an area of wildness surrounded by London development, a relatively isolated place where the female character shows her rational detective friend how intuition might enable him to solve the case of a mysterious disappearance he is working on. In *A Maggot,* solutions to the novel's central mystery are similarly tentative, but the characters, likewise, have been affected by their experiences at distinctive sites in otherwise open landscapes of the West Country—Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain and the fictional Dollin's Cave on Exmoor. Stonehenge is particularly dramatic in appearance, standing in vertical contrast to the surrounding Salisbury Plain. Wistman's Wood, the copse of dwarf oaks that Fowles re-visits in the conclusion to *The Tree*, from a distance resembles an island of contrasting dark green foliage on the sealike expanse of Dartmoor. Fowles has written a book titled *Islands,* best described as a meditation on them, and *Shipwreck* is another book in which island life is his focus. Fowles has even rescued from obscurity the autobiography of an eccentric inhabitant of the

Ouse River valley, Sussex. This open countryside, south of Lewes, is near to where Frederick Clegg imprisons art student Miranda in *The Collector,* (Little, Brown, 1963). This particular view is from the garden of the house where Virginia Woolf—another doomed artist—was residing at the time of her suicide. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1994.

Isle of Wight, *The Book of Ebenezer Le Page.*[33] And Fowles is an islander himself, of course, not only as an inhabitant of one of the British Isles, but also as the inhabitant of his own, metaphorical "island," a two-acre garden surrounded by the town of Lyme Regis.

In *Daniel Martin*, more than in the other novels, there are various islandlike, specially-felt sites at which the main character undergoes transformative experiences: Kenwood House on Hampstead Heath, the ruins at Palmyra, the seashore at Tarquinia, the river at Oxford, the farm at Thorncombe. Tsankawi, the site in New Mexico of a former Anasazi village on top of an isolated mesa, is compared to an island by Dan himself, who is reminded of Phaestos, on Crete, by the way that the mesa rises dramatically from the terrain surrounding it. And Kitchener's Island on the Nile at Aswan, with its botanical garden, is literally an island. *Daniel Martin* includes some reflections on what and how such places mean, particularly in the chapter called "The Sacred Combe"—Fowles's label for a magical landscape, a sacred

Goat Island, in the Undercliff. Viewed from the coastal path, this face is the one that remains most visible of the large chunk of landscape that separated from the Bindon Cliffs during a dramatic landslip in 1839. Goat Island has since become surrounded by vegetation that masks its islandlike features. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1996.

Hampstead Heath, London. a relatively wild, urban oasis, this environment is the setting for a crucial scene in "The Enigma" when a female character in a natural landscape uses her imagination to solve a case of mysterious disappearance that has been baffling her more rationalistic friend, a male detective (*The Ebony Tower*, Little, Brown, 1973). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1993.

place, or a *locus amoenus*. A "combe" (pronounced to rhyme with *room*) is West Country dialect for a dell, or small valley, and Fowles illustrates his concept of "sacred combe"with reference to the French autobiography *Monsieur Nicolas*, by Restif de la Bretonne, who uses the local expression *bonne vaux* to describe a valley that is "miraculously lush, green, secret, and full of birds and animals."[34] Such a place, remarks Dan, is "outside the normal world, intensely private and enclosed, intensely green and fertile, numinous, haunted and haunting, dominated by a sense of magic that is also a sense of a mysterious yet profound parity in all existence." Examples in literature, Dan further points out, include the Garden of Eden, the Forest of Arden, and Shangri-La. Such isolated, magical places are, like islands, distinctly marked out from their surroundings, and they provide the settings for crucial, narrative developments in works by Fowles.

Perhaps because Fowles thinks of people as islandlike in their individuality, Fowles finds himself fascinated by both eccentric people and geographical sites that, like islands, stand out from their surround-

Exmoor, Devon. Naming this wild, "desert place" helps Fowles to constitute the imagined landscape of *A Maggot*, whose characters have a mysterious experience at a cave near here, "some ten miles from Barnstaple" (Little, Brown, 1985, pages 55, 212). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1988.

ings. The most important such place, for Fowles, is a twenty-foot high, vertical limestone formation in the Undercliff called Whitechapel Rock, which he has described as a "white tooth projecting from the cliff."[35] It marks a once-literally sacred site where religious dissenters held secret meetings in the seventeenth century, and Fowles seems to admire this place as a distinctive site, a metaphorical island of independent thinking in a sea of religious conformity. Evidently in part because dissent is associated with the idea of emancipation—a key word in the epigraph to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*—Fowles has said that he could not imagine some of the conversations between Sarah and Charles in that novel to have taken place anywhere else.[36] Fowles may likewise have imagined a crucial scene in *Daniel Martin* to have occurred at this place. Dornafield Farm (near Ipplepen, in Devon), Fowles's acknowledged model for Nancy's home, "Thorncombe," is more than thirty miles from the Undercliff. However, Dan and Nancy seem suddenly to be at a place very much like the Undercliff and very different from the farm country between their houses, after they leave the road and enter "a common, dense with brambles and bracken," where Dan leads her "through the trees to where the rocks

Stonehenge, Wiltshire. This prehistoric, inland "island" of stones on Salisbury Plain provides a setting in *A Maggot*, whose female protagonist lies on the altar stone and sees either Satan or a space ship, if one can believe either version of events. Another character describes Stonehenge as "a place said to have special powers," a view similar to that of Fowles in *The Enigma of Stonehenge* (Summit Books, 1980) about the hold this place has exerted over others as well as himself (*A Maggot*, pages 245–47, 320–23). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1993.

rose vertically for twenty feet from the earth" (354–55). Fowles appears imaginatively to have blended two separate geographical locations in his novel so that the characters' sexual initiation could take place at a site that resembles Whitechapel Rock, with its remarkable features and associations with personal emancipation. Fowles may have worked in a similar, creative fashion in *A Maggot*, whose seemingly supernatural mysteries take place in a cave at the foot of "a scarp of stone, as high as a house;" this stone is perhaps another representation of White Chapel Rock, this time imaginatively transferred to Exmoor, where it helps to constitute a remarkable, imaginary space in the otherwise traceable landscape west of Taunton (218). Fowles seems to find it energizing as he writes to imagine crucial scenes at this real location that he considers sacred, and he helps to create in the reader a similar sense of being in a special landscape by

Wistman's Wood, Dartmoor, Devon. The copse of dwarf oak trees in the center is described in *The Tree* as an "infinitely rare fragment of primeval forest," isolated like a dark green island of foliage on the "dour wasteland" (Ecco Press, pages 80, 83). Fowles concludes the book with a narrated walk to Wistman's Wood. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1996.

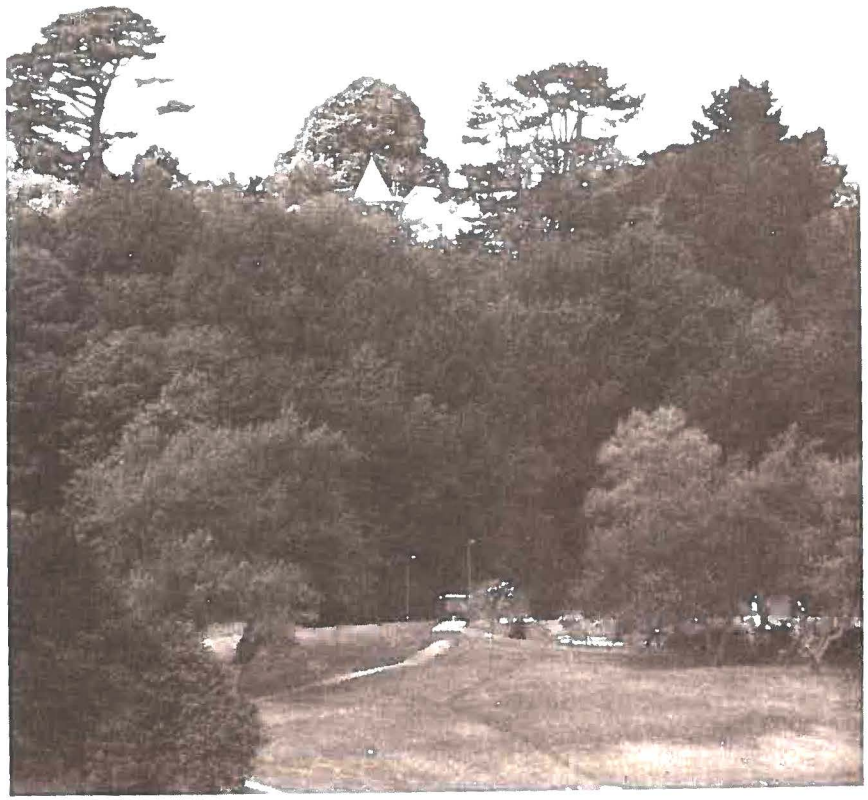
marking out the location from its surrounding physical environment with an upright feature—also the essential form that an island takes as it rises out of the water.[37]

When Fowles narrates his visit to Wistman's Wood at the end of *The Tree*, he reminds readers of "the inalienable otherness of each, human and non-human" (91). Estranged I-lands that we are, this separateness from everything else provokes a desire in us to discover through literature some tenuous, verbal connection—readers like spiders casting out filaments, wishing to connect with what is not ourselves. Fowles appears to be acknowledging a need like this when he says, "I came to writing through nature, or exile from it, far more than by innate gift" (89). When he writes about natural landscapes and sacred places, he is partially recovering that "nature," a world that seems at once familiar, hence timeless, but never fully accessible. Nature may be more nearly accessible to Fowles when he walks in the woods than when he writes, so being in nature may serve to remind him that, ultimately, he cannot find language that will adequately represent the world outside himself. His need to engage that world and to keep trying to represent it, is surely the core "relationship with nature" that Fowles describes as the key to his fiction.

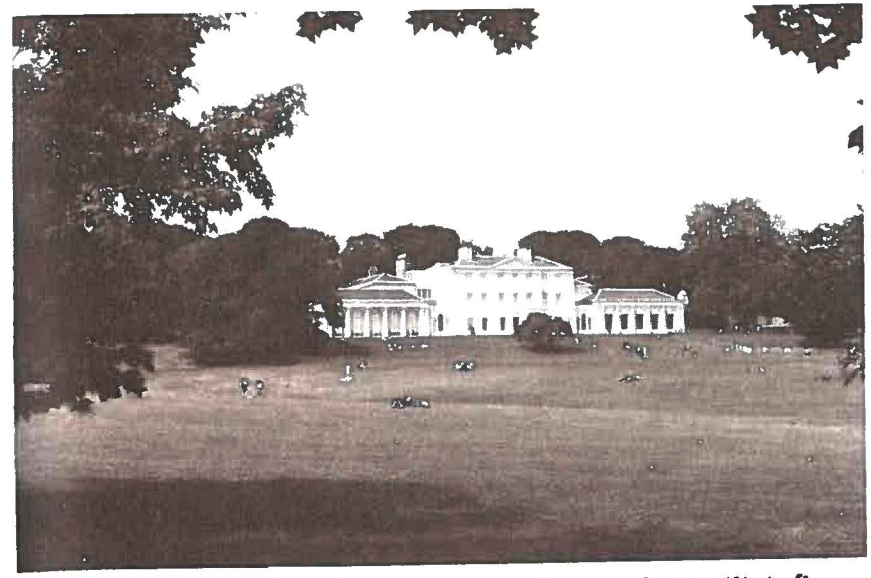
***Aerial View of Scilly Isles*, Cornwall. This perspective emphasizes the isolation of the Scillies and serves as the first illustration of the book *Islands*, by John Fowles and Fay Godwin (Little, Brown, 1978). Photograph courtesy of Collections / Fay Godwin.**

* * *

Each of the fourteen essays in this volume is a new contribution to Fowles studies, and each offers a perspective on how natural landscape is represented in the writing of John Fowles. The essays originated in a call for proposals for the John Fowles Symposium on "Love, Loss, Landscape," which took place in Lyme Regis July 10–12, 1996. The fact that most of the contributions I received were



Belmont House and garden, Lyme Regis. In this view from the Cobb, John Fowles's wild garden occupies the hillside between the golf course at the bottom and his house at the top, partly visible above the trees. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1993.



Kenwood House, London. This museum and its grounds constitute figures of order on the wilder Hampstead Heath. The dining room inside contains a self-portrait by Rembrandt and provides the setting for important scenes in two Fowles novels, the character test by G. P. in *The Collector* (163–64) and Dan's meditations at the end of *Daniel Martin* (628–29). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1993.

Dornafield Farm, Two Mile Oak, Newton Abbot, Devon. This idyllic place near the village of Ipplepen, where the Fowles family lived during the war, was the model for Thorncombe in *Daniel Martin*, the "secret farm" which Fowles has remarked "was meant to be symbolic of certain landscapes of adolescence to which you're eternally attached" (James R. Baker, "An Interview with John Fowles," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 25 [1986], page 681). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1988.

Tsankawi, Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico. Besides its physical distinctiveness, the narrator of *Daniel Martin* observes, "In some way the mesa transcended all place and frontier; it had the haunting and mysterious personal familiarity . . . but a simpler human familiarity as well, belonging not just to some obscure and forgotten Indian tribe, but to all similar moments of supreme harmony in human culture; to certain buildings, paintings, musics, passages of great poetry. . . . Tsankawi defeated time, all deaths. Its deserted silence was like a sustained high note, unconquerable" (page 325). Photograph by James Aubrey, 1987.

about landscape alerted me to the possibility that a shift might be underway in how Fowles is being read. The essays collected here, I believe, together with illustrations that add a visual referent to many of the landscapes being discussed, mark a new phase in Fowles criticism. The critical frameworks being used relate to the emerging field of ecocriticism, if one label should be applied to all, but the insights are locally informed by various critical approaches. Diverse as they are, these essays cohere thematically and provide insightful perspectives on John Fowles and nature.

Several essays draw on Fowles's fascination with islands in order to arrive at fresh insights into his writing. Katherine Tarbox explores how, for Fowles, islands metaphorically represent a valued kind of mental activity that takes place somehow apart from the narrative plot, which serves as a metaphorical mainland. Tarbox shows the

Kitchener's Island, Aswan, Egypt. In *Daniel Martin*, Dan hires a felucca to take him to this island in the Nile River, where he discovers that although "some attempt had been made to maintain the island as the great botanical garden Kitchener had initiated . . . the place had a charmingly haphazard and unkempt quality. . . . It was an Alhambra composed of vegetation, water, shadow; and perhaps nicest of all, it remained almost exactly as Dan had remembered it—one of the loveliest and most civilized few acres in his knowledge of this world, a tropical *bonne vaux*," (pages 535–36). Photograph courtesy of AA Publishing / Rick Strange.

central importance of the nonfiction book *Islands* for readers of Fowles's fiction. More than a meditation on landscape, she argues, *Islands* is also a demonstration of how to read like an islander and an invitation to become that kind of reader—Fowles's ideal reader, who can feel magic in the island space outside the mainland narrative. Clark Closser uses a related analogy between landscape and consciousness to help generate a new interpretation of events in "The Cloud," the final story in *The Ebony Tower*, which has often left readers in perplexity or disagreement. His suggestion that chunks of narration from various points of views are like metaphorical islands in a sea of narrative can be applied to much of Fowles's other fiction, as can his suggestion that, for Fowles, birds are often narrator-like, a kind of natural chorus. Based on such considerations, Closser offers a plausible way to understand Catherine's enigmatic behavior—and disappearance—at the end of the story. Lynne Vieth explores relationships between

Whitechapel Rock, the Undercliff, Devon. The toothlike outcropping in the center marks a densely foliated dell that was a gathering place for religious dissenters in the seventeenth century. Its history, the extremity of its isolation, and its rich wildness all seem to have made this a supremely important place for Fowles, who says in *The Tree* that he could not have imagined the crucial encounters between Charles and Sarah in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* to have taken place anywhere else (page 75). In the 1981 screen adaptation Charles is shown at the base of Whitechapel Rock when he first observes Sarah walking in the Undercliff. In this photograph, to the left, Undercliff warden Norman Barns is lopping some branches. Photograph by James Aubrey, 1991.

image and text in several Fowles books that have included photography or woodcuts by other artists. Vieth sees a development in Fowles's work of increasing value placed on the written over the spoken word, and a shift away from valuing the painterly arts over the graphic arts. With particular attention paid to Fowles's collaborative work with landscape photographer Fay Godwin and to variations among illustrated editions of *The Tree*, Vieth employs some of Walter Benjamin's ideas about art to explain the evolution of Fowles's attitudes in both verbal and visual domains.

Several other essays work with psychological theory. Carol Barnum uses Jungian thought to establish the nature of Fowles's relationship with nature and its profound effect on his writing process. Barnum shows that archetypal analysis can help to account for images of nature in Fowles's fiction and traces the evolution of Fowles's novel-writing as a personal quest for individuation. Barry Olshen examines a particular archetype, the Green Man, both as a symbol of the boundary between inner, psychological nature and outer, wild nature and as an image with a history, particularly in England. Drawing on the psychological views of D. W. Winnicott, among others, Olshen shows that the image of the Green Man serves Fowles as an important, personal symbol of the private, wild aspect of the self. Eileen Warburton sees psychological significance in the way the image of a dead woman in a natural landscape recurs in various writings by John Fowles. Paying particular attention to *Daniel Martin* and drawing on unpublished correspondence between Fowles and a psychoanalyst, Warburton links this pattern of reviving a fictional dead woman with insights that include the author's wish to restore the lost, paradisial landscape of early childhood.

Several other essays focus on the role of natural landscape in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Although the novel itself provides vivid descriptions of the Undercliff, readers will better appreciate this landscape when they also have read "The Undercliff of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: A Note on Geology and Geography," an introduction to the features of this unique locale written by three experts: Liz-Anne Bawden, Kevin Padian, and Hugh Torrens. Although their historical information ranges from tens to millions of years ago, their perspective reveals yet another dimension of that complex character Sarah Woodruff. In the essay "Deep Time, Evolutionary Legacy, and the Darwinian Landscape in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," Kevin Padian explores what kind of nature the name Darwin represents, both in the popular mind and in the mind of Fowles who, like Thomas Hardy, has a deep understanding of Darwinian thought. In "The Undercliff as Inverted Pastoral: The Fowlesian *Felix Culpa* in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," Patricia Beatty contrasts the Undercliff with conventional, pastoral landscapes in order to show the richer mental life that results from a less convention-bound view of nature. Seen as a stage in Jung's process of individuation, the expulsion of Charles and Sarah from their paradise in the Undercliff is, Beatty points out, a fortunate fall. For Suzanne Ross, likewise, the Undercliff is a place where personal liberation is represented as a primal event. Ross cautions, however, against reading the characters of Sarah and Charles with the traditional view linking nature with the female and culture with the male, but instead urges the more ecological perspective on the Undercliff as a place where both males and females may be comprehended and transformed. In "Landscape This Side of Landscape: Transcendence and Immanence in the Fiction

of John Fowles," H. W. Fawkner uses phenomenology to examine representations of landscape in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *The Magus*. Fawkner's discussion extends the meaning of *landscape* to include one's orientation to the world, and he concludes that the pre-Modernist outlook that occasionally emerges in the novels is not valued deeply enough by Fowles, or widely enough by his readers.

The essays by Lisa Colletta and Kirke Kefalea emphasize the importance of landscapes elsewhere, that is, away from England. In "The Geography of Ruins: John Fowles's *Daniel Martin* and the Travel Narratives of D. H. Lawrence," Colletta discusses a similarity in ways that Lawrence and Fowles both regard traveling as instrumental in the discovery of who one is. Lawrence is a felt presence in *Daniel Martin*, particularly, where travel by Dan to various historical sites in Italy, Egypt, New Mexico, and Syria—as well as to a site rich with personal history in the West Country of England—engages him with his past and enables him to understand his present. Kirke Kefalea discusses Fowles's use of the literary past and the geographical present to construct an engaging, personal mythology from a feminized Greek landscape.

In the last critical essay, focused on Fowles's poetry, Dianne Vipond extends the discussion of Greece as an important theme, along with several others, in "The Landscape of Loss in the (Love) Poems of John Fowles." Like some other contributors,Vipond uses the word *landscape* to refer to mental representations as well as to external places. Poetry has long been a form of writing Fowles values highly, even if it is not the form for which he has become so well known, and Vipond helps to establish why his poems, both collected and uncollected, deserve critical attention.

In an afterword composed for this collection, John Fowles reflects on the symposium that led to the writing of these essays. In addition to some personal reminiscences, Fowles writes about his hopes for gynecocracy and expresses concern that his life has become too fragmented.

When Fowles wants solace from such doubts, he probably goes for a walk in his garden. His relationship with nature has long been one involving personal need and deep respect, as he himself pointed out in 1971: "However strange the land or the city or the personal situation, some tree, some bird, some flower will still knit us into this universe all we brief-lived things co-habit; will mesh us into the great machine. That is why I love nature: because it reconciles me with the imperfections of my own condition, of our whole human condition, of the all that is."[38] Fowles's attitude has not changed in essentials since he wrote this passage, but he has intensified his attention to the

problem of humans in their environment. Although he continues to work on fiction projects, he has published only nonfiction, mostly about nature, since 1985. This shift from fiction writing to nature writing is not so dramatic a shift as it might seem, however, for as the contributors to this volume collectively establish, John Fowles has for most of his career been an important nature writer as well as an important novelist.

James R. Aubrey

Notes

1. John Gardner, "In Defense of the Real," review of *Daniel Martin*, in *Saturday Review*, 1 October 1977, page 22.
2. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pages xxii–xxiv.
3. Robert Huffaker, *John Fowles*, Twayne English Authors Series 292 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), page 15.
4. John Fowles, "The Chesil Bank," in *Britain: A World by Itself: Reflections on the Landscape by Eminent British Writers: With Commentaries by Dr. Franklyn Perring* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), page 26.
5. Interview with James R. Aubrey, 8 July 1993.
6. Huffaker, page 17.
7. John Fowles, *The Tree* (New York: Ecco Press, 1983), page 31.
8. The biographical sketch is condensed from James R. Aubrey, "Life of John Fowles," in *John Fowles: A Reference Companion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991), pages 4–13.
9. John Fowles, "Swan Song of the European Wild," *Venture: The Traveler's World*, October 1965, pages 136, 141. The "victims" are trees devastated by caterpillars, but the analogy with logging, later, is evident. The "Norwegian Thoreau" is probably a source for the episode in *The Magus* at Seidevarre, where Henrik Nygaard also lives alone by a lake, not blind but similarly bitter (2d ed., Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).
10. John Fowles, "Weeds, Bugs, Americans," *Sports Illustrated*, 21 December 1970, page 88.
11. John Fowles, "The Blinded Eye," *Animals* 13, no. 9 (January 1971), page 89.
12. John Fowles, "Voices of the Deep," *New Statesman*, 15 June 1973, pages 892–93, and "All too Human," *New Statesman*, 20 July 1973, pages 90–91. Fowles contributed twenty reviews to this publication, from March 1973 to February 1977.
13. Fowles, *The Tree*. This book has been reprinted in various forms since it originally appeared in 1979, with color photographs by Frank Horvat, without pagination, from Aurum Press in London and Little, Brown in Boston. Ecco Press in New York published an unillustrated but paginated version in 1983, the one generally cited in this volume. The Sumach Press in London published a paperback edition in 1992. The Nature Company in Seattle published an abridged version with photographs by William Neill in 1994. The Yolla Bolly Press in Covelo, California, published a limited edition with woodcuts by Aaron Johnson as *"The Tree" and "The Nature of Nature"* in 1995. Excerpts from the middle of *The Tree* are included in *Second Nature*, ed. Daniel Halperin (New York: Antaeus, 1986), pages 244–51; in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, ed. Robert Finch and John Elder (New York: Norton,

1990), pages 657–70; in *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing*, edited by Richard Mabey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pages 232–34; and in *The Nature Reader*, eds. Daniel Halperin and Dan Frank (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1996), pages 132–34.

14. Fowles, "The Chesil Bank," page 27.

15. John Fowles, "South Cornwall, Devon and Dorset," in *Coastline: Britain's Threatened Heritage* (London: Kingfisher Books, 1987), page 153.

16. Review of *Collecting*, by Werner Muensterberger, *Sunday Times*, 6 February 1994, pages 6.1–2; review of *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing*, by Richard Mabey, *Sunday Times*, 5 March 1995, pages 7.8–9; review of *The Song of the Dodo*, by David Quammen, *Sunday Times*, 18 August 1996, page 7.5; review of *Flora Britannica*, by Richard Mabey, *Sunday Times*, 20 October 1996, pages 7.8–9; review of *The Killing of the Countryside*, by Graham Harvey, *Sunday Times*, 2 March 1997, pages 8.6–7. The reply was from A. Krouwel, *Sunday Times*, 16 March 1997, page 8.2.

17. John Fowles, *"The Tree" and "The Nature of Nature"* (Covelo, Calif.: Yolla Bolly Press, 1995), pages 84, 96.

18. John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), page 67. Most works by Fowles have been published in both the United Kingdom and the United States, in hard- and soft-cover. In general, citations in this book are to the American hardcover editions.

19. In 1996 Fowles expressed an interest in seeing his house and garden preserved as a retreat for "'young people inquisitive about nature and art'" in remarks to the *Sunday Times*, 15 September 1996, page 7.8.

20. Fowles, *The Tree*, page 22.

21. Rodney Legg has speculated that acquisition of Steep Holm for a nature reserve would not have occurred without the support of John Fowles, in various ways (interview with James R. Aubrey, 23 August 1994). A history of the island, including this development, has been written by Stan and Joan Rendell, *Steep Holm: The Story of a Small Island* (Dover, N.H.: Allan Sutton, 1993). John Fowles has edited and contributed to *Steep Holm: A Case History in the Study of Evolution* (Sherborne, United Kingdom: Kenneth Allsop Memorial Trust).

22. James R. Baker, "The Art of Fiction 109: John Fowles," *Paris Review* 111 (1989), page 48.

23. John Fowles, *Behind "The Magus"* (London: Colophon Press, 1994), pages 15, 22.

24. John Fowles, *The Collector* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963); *The Ebony Tower* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); *Daniel Martin* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); *A Maggot* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985).

25. John Fowles discusses his fascination with the site in *The Enigma of Stonehenge*, co-authored with photographer Barry Brukoff (New York: Summit Books, 1980), page 5.

26. John Fowles, introduction to *Round About a Great Estate*, by Richard Jefferies (1887; reprint, Bradford on Avon, United Kingdom: Ex Libris Press, 1987), pages 9–10.

27. John Fowles, afterword to *The Lost Domain (Le Grand Meaulnes)*, by Alain-Fournier, trans. Frank Davison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), page 285.

28. Stephen Kaplan, "Perception of an Uncertain Environment," in *Humanscape: Environments for People*, eds. Stephen Kaplan and Rachel Kaplan (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ulrich's Books, 1982), pages 30–35. This topic is also discussed in Scott Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), pages 7–8.

29. See, for example, L. H. Snyder, et al., "Coding of Intention in the Posterior Parietal Cortex," *Nature*, 13 March 1997, pages 167–69.

30. Eileeen Warburton, "Fowles Takes a Risk for 'Minor' Work," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1982, page 5.19. In this interview Fowles points out that his novel *Mantissa* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982) is different from his other novels in that it has "'no spirit of place really.'" The name of his protagonist, Miles Green, suggests that the novel does have an interior landscape, for "miles of green" describes a forest, and *Mantissa* is an exploration of the metaphorical woods of a creative mind.

31. The analogy between writing and walking in woods is developed explicitly (and more elegantly) in *The Tree*, pages 53–54. Fowles often uses the word *fork* to describe diverging paths or roads that can represent the choices to be made as one writes, for example, in his interview with Robert Foulke, *Salmagundi* 68–69 (1985–86), page 374. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, there may be metafictional weight in the moment when, just before Charles discovers Sarah sleeping in the Undercliff, he determines his own future as a character by choosing the lower path when his route forward, "in the unkind manner of paths—forked without indication" (69).

32. In *Islands* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), page 12, Fowles writes, "In terms of consciousness, and self-consciousness, every individual human *is* an island, in spite of Donne's famous preaching to the contrary." He puts the reversal more boldly, quoted here, in "Such Darling Dodos," *Sunday Times*, 18 August 1996, page 7.5.

33. John Fowles, introduction, *The Book of Ebenezer Le Page*, by G. B. Edwards (New York: Moyer Bell, 1981), pages vii–xiv.

34. *Daniel Martin*, page 272; a longer excerpt from *Monsieur Nicolas* is quoted in Fowles's introduction to *Land*, by Fay Godwin (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), page x. Restif explains the phrase *bonne vaux* parenthetically as an *"expression du pays, qui signifie un endroit abondant en quelque chose que ce soit"* (1793–97; reprint Paris: Jonquière, 1924), volume 1, page 57.

35. Letter to James R. Aubrey, 30 December 1996.

36. *The Tree*, page 75. In the 1981 screen adaptation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Charles is shown hammering flints at the base of Whitechapel Rock when he first observes Sarah walking in the Undercliff, twenty minutes into the film.

37. In *The Magus*, likewise, a crucial episode takes place at Seidevarre, whose name we are told is Lapp for "'hill of the holy stone,' the dolmen" (300) but which in the novel is "not a true dolmen but simply a tall boulder that wind and frost had weathered into a picturesque shape" (304) on a spit of land jutting—almost an island—into the Pasvik River; however, Fowles may have written this description before he developed his particular attachment to Whitechapel Rock.

38. John Fowles, "The Blinded Eye," *Animals* 13.9 (January 1971): 392. An earlier version of this essay concludes with almost the same passage, less only the phrase "or the personal situation," in "'Your Blinded Eyes, Worst Foes to You,'" *The Traveler's World*. June/July 1966, page 84.