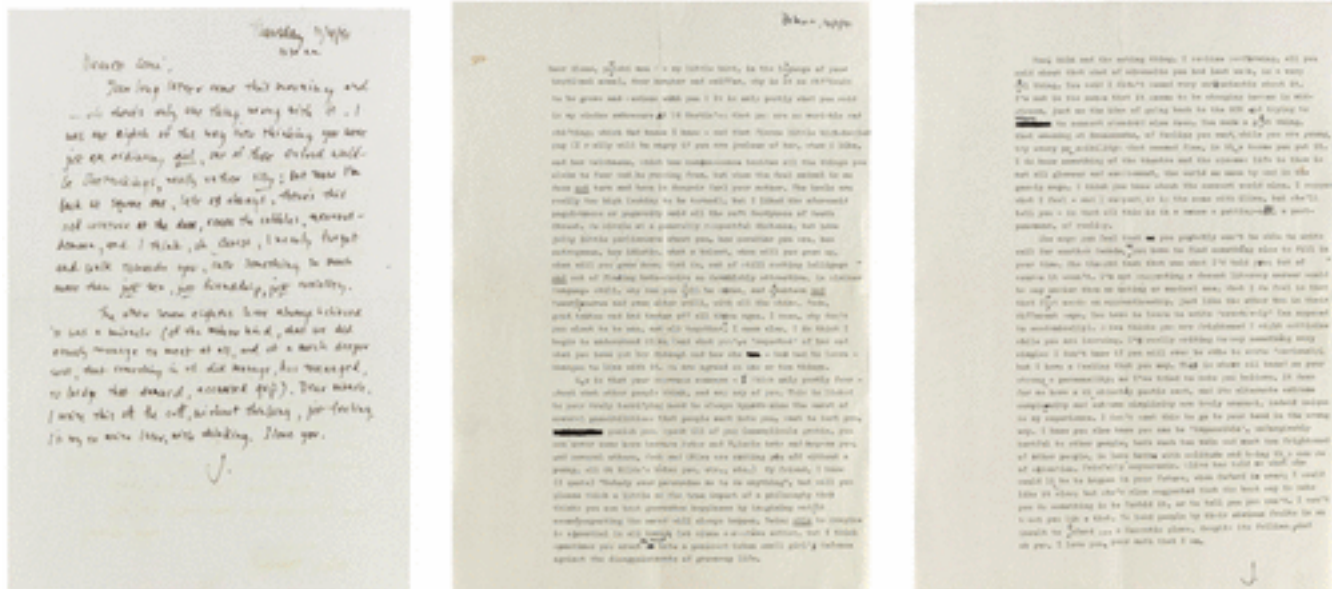


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LOT 206

- FOWLES, JOHN.

IMPORTANT SERIES OF OVER 120 LETTERS AND CARDS, TO HIS LATER COMPANION ELENA VAN LIESHOUT ("DEAR ELAINE", "DEAR YAPYAP", "DEAR SMALL PERSON", "SWEET LENI", ETC.), COMPRISING:

c.33 autograph cards, or series of two or more cards on particular dates, including some autograph notes on slips of paper, and c.92 typed letters and cards, usually initialised "J", some partly autograph or with autograph corrections, one letter enclosing a five-page

photocopy of printed "Diagnostic Criteria for the Major Mood Disorders"; together with eight letters addressed to Elena's parents, Jack and Olive; twenty-three pages of journal entries by Fowles in typescript with autograph corrections, partly photocopied, sent by him to Elena; several typed poems by him with autograph corrections; a photocopy of another one; and a typescript of "A Dialogue to be performed on a tightrope", c.240 pages in all, various sizes, chiefly 30 September 1990 to 25 February 1992 (where dated), a few in 1997-1998

ESTIMATE 20,000-30,000 GBP

Lot Sold: 25,000 GBP

LITERATURE

Eileen Warburton, John Fowles: A Life in Two Worlds (2004), esp. pp. 441-8.

CATALOGUE NOTE

a major and intimate series of letters and cards by one of the outstanding english novelists of the late twentieth century. the series is unpublished and was unknown to fowles's biographer eileen warburton.

Elena van Lieshout was a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate at St Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1990 when she first met Fowles, shortly after the death of his first wife, Elizabeth. He was then sixty-four. He immediately fell in love with her (describing her as "like a meteor in my life"), and was initially determined to marry her. The two enjoyed a passionate, but occasionally tempestuous, friendship until it fizzled out towards the end of 1992, although they were in contact until 1998. The relationship was, however, unconsummated, as is evident from one forthright letter here, where he speaks of "the wretched impotency" that had "killed off all sexual desire".

Fowles' intense feelings for Elena are also reflected in his diaries (now deposited at Texas), where over the course of two and a half years, in roughly 600 pages of entries, the novelist describes little but Elena's physical attributes and behaviour, and his obsessive feelings for her.

Though often written in a chirpy or whimsical manner, the present letters and cards are, however, often passionate and very erotically charged, as well as melancholic and moody, presenting a vivid picture of a creative writer of complex mentality and of powerful feelings.

Fowles writes repeatedly about his longing for Elena and of how much he misses her ("...and not only for the literal reasons. The more metaphorical ones...you know, you can guess...")

...Lyme without you is so stale, so empty, you can't imagine...

...I get desperately bored with my own company...

This leads to frequent philosophical musings on the intensity of his feelings for her. As well as on the nature of love and of beauty

...I'm not just in love with you, I'm in meta-love...

...I live in and by you...

...I love you precisely because you are fluid, uncertain, changeable, restless...

...you saved my life, as surely as if it had been that of a drowning man off the Cobb...

.....We lack a word for this, this apprehension of intense beauty, fixed in the tumultuous and often petty flow of ordinary life...One of its deepest beauties is indeed precisely its unrecordability; it can't be captured...

At times of turmoil, when he is victim of her alleged "venom", anger, jealousy, and volatility, in which, he says, she threatens to destroy "six months in three minutes", he does not flinch to say things "that may distress her"

...We can't go on like this, typecast by each other as a degenerate sex-obsessed old shit and a neurotic little self-obsessed spitfire. I must still love you, because I wouldn't otherwise be able to bear some of your attempts to destroy me both as person and as writer...

...You, or your persecution mania, seem convinced that everyone wants to betray you, that there's no ethical sense, let alone common decency, in the 'real' world. How many times have you told me I was an old idiot to maintain they exist, and that you, with your greater percipience and vast experience, knew better? That is the Satanic you...

At other times he gives way to literary musings, with frequent references to writers such as Charlotte Bronte (Jane Eyre), Hardy ("...He knew he wrote best when suffering most...I feel great friendly affection for him and constant shudders of repulsion..."), Byron (Don Juan), Meredith, Ford Madox Ford, the Marquis de Sade ("...it became so filthy I realized it was boring..."), Kingsley Amis ("all that school of the putdown and the sneer"), and Samuel Beckett ("...I've never really liked Beckett, but he did put his finger on an ultimate despair...I don't say I'm closer to it; but that I know it...how near nothingness is..."), as well as commenting on "the Booker Prize nonsense" when "the best novel, McEwan's, wasn't even listed" ("...something the winner, [A.S.] Byatt, said touched me: how people had forgotten how to read with passion...").

Elsewhere he records, often at length and in almost stream-of-consciousness mode, news about his life at Lyme Regis, conversations with friends and associates, and current and past writing activities ("...I thought once to write a booklet about why I hated England; and fancied this on the dust-jacket: small doomed, fussy, back to an incomprehensible wall..."), including writing "a little piece" on his father and his dealings with Hollywood and "money, money, money". In not infrequent musings on his loneliness he refers directly to the loss of his wife Elizabeth ...I have mourned her loss, my loss, intensely these last days, more even than at the beginning. You quite rightly objected to my always harking back to 'we' and 'us'...I have absolutely no belief (far less than you, I suspect) in an afterlife, and I can hear your humph if I seem to be offering the vacant role of ghost...just, there ARE psychological likenesses...

He also gives lyrical expression to his sense of the beauties of nature and his love of flowers ("the consolation of my life (apart from you)"), and even jokes about some of the scenes depicted on the various examples here from "the Fowles postcard collection", as well as commenting on Texas's being after his "archive".
a highly important unrecorded correspondence.

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