

**Performing on the Narrative Techniques in Fowles' The French
Lieutenant's Woman**

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Abstract

Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is a postmodern historical fiction novel experimenting with form and style. The book is well known for its pastiche of Victorian fiction, having alternative endings and playing with the narrator's intervention. The novel loosely plays with the primary techniques, and this paper interprets the themes of Intertextuality, metafiction, pastiche, meta-narratives, fragmentation, historiographic metafiction, and having multiple points of view. The postmodern writing techniques in this novel deconstruct and reconstruct Victorian society, and those who don't get to speak raise their voice in the novel with equal validity.

Keywords: postmodernism, victorianism, narratives, pastiche, historical fiction

First published in 1969, one of the classic postmodernist novels John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is an experimental and historical novel- a product of three centuries. The popularity of the novel was largely because of its postmodern writing techniques. Fowles centers his text around the protagonist Charles, who is engaged to Ernestina, a conventional and wealthy woman, but breaks off after having mysterious relations with Sarah, known as the forsaken lady of the French lieutenant. Set in the nineteenth century, the novel has elements of the Victorian period with post-modern techniques and alternate endings.

The novel is interested in Victorian sexuality. Fowles uses the aspect of prostitution to show that history isn't a linear narrative of change – in ways, the text inserts a selection of 18th-century pornography. Fowles uses it to describe what's happening in the nineteenth century, and the novel is published later in the twentieth. The concept was culturally produced, emerged in the eighteenth, and developed in the nineteenth century. In Chapter 39 of the book, Charles, on the one side, feels to move out of the car and wants to have an inter-

course on the other. The fact that his decision comes with the man's privilege says a lot in the novel.

This novel is a Pastiche of a typical Victorian novel. Fowles doesn't mock or ridicule Victorian novels, but he produces a reasonably authentic replica, and the novel runs at two levels. It is similar because it's a pastiche and different from the typical Victorian novels because it's an effective parody of the same. In Chapter 46 of the novel, he knows societal norms even tho he is passionate enough and remembers to lock the door. Fowles makes a point to say, "He cast a glance at the outer door and went to twist the key in its lock" (Fowles, 353). We never get to see the kind of episode in other Victorian novels the way Fowles describes it, and then Charles's sexual climax shows how intimately this book is connected to sexuality. He's creating an atmosphere where the two centuries are dialogically interacting and commenting upon each other. The fact that society wants to prevent Charles from having sex with Sarah makes it clear that he wants it more than anything. This is what Fowles meant when he said, "The Victorians might have had better sex because they're repressed" (Fowles, 271). The novel is described as a definitive study of the sexual repression of the Victorian age. Fowles uses nineteenth-century conventional modes and is able to exploit the very facets of the novel that he is questioning by imitating Victorian society, and he preserves "as much humanism for the novel as can be got" while at the same time confronting the forces which have threatened both humanistic beliefs and the elements of fiction allied with them. The Victorians get to their reader's sense of reality in order to validate the reality of their fiction; Fowles takes the reader to the fictionality in order to mark that all of life is a web of fiction.

Another theme that Fowles uses is the notion of dialogue to create the personality of his characters, and he often satirizes them as well. In the novel, how Charles talks to Ernestina and Sarah reveals his attitude as he becomes uncomfortable while talking to Sarah as she won't fit in the world the way Charles describes. And when Sarah, the intelligent woman in the novel, speaks, it totally doesn't fit under the conventions. She is a work of art but is often characterized as a whore by the society. When she speaks, she is already aware of herself; on the other hand, Charles doesn't know who he is yet and what he will do further. He sees himself playing different roles with everyone.

The text doesn't revolve around a love story or a romance type. He is not going to unite both the characters and give a happy ending. It's a writerly text; it invites the reader to the meaning and making. Postmodernism allows you to raise questions and gives you multiple interpretations. At one level, he is questioning and, on the other, reinforcing assumptions.

Fowles reintroduces the Victorian romantic technique of having an epigraph not only at the opening of the book but also at the opening of each chapter. He uses it to interpret the main text and to function as a kind of being dialogic with it. So, mainly, the purpose of using epigraphs is to set the tone for the chapter. He uses various literary authors and their works,

from the works of Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Mathew, Hardy, and Austen.

Intertextuality in the novel shows how each text is borrowed from another text, and then that text that's being borrowed from another text, and so on. It shows how each literary text speaks to other texts and parodies each other, dialogue with each other. What Fowles wants to convey here is that the connection continues to extend, and the concept of forming a web by putting on various epigraphs and footnotes makes the whole frame far more specific and fundamental. Fowles continuously keeps on addressing the readers directly and then interacting with the readers, waking them up and then not letting them forget that what you are reading is Fiction. Fowles tends to make continuous efforts to create parallels between the fictional world and the real world. He keeps questioning the basic idea that society is holding on to. He often mentions science, scientists, evolutionary theory, existentialism, and the theme of freedom, which runs into the novel. He even talks about 'The Survival of the Fittest'. By applying all these ideas to the characters, we see that Charles and Ernestina are bound to follow their convention, whereas Sam and Mary are direct and open with each other. The whole thing of describing theories and intertextuality is essential in understanding the characters mentioned in the novel.

The major theorists like Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Mikhail Bakhtin. They had this term and showed us how intertextuality works. Every text borrows from other text and, therefore, is a product of the system. We take examples like words with CAT, MAT, and BAT. The meaning takes a different place with the replacement of each letter C, M, and R. Since language and meaning involve a differentiation process. This is the same with the texts; if one wants to mean anything, one must return to other texts and create meaning. Derrida writes, "There is nothing outside the text". It means we can't separate the meaning of the text from the non-text. The difference doesn't exist as the language is outside, and you need to refer to non-text to create some sense out of it; what is precisely outside is inside the text, and the lines said by her works are opposite.

Ch 13 plays a very crucial role in understanding the novel. The chapter starts with 'I do not know. This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my mind' (Fowles, 95). With this technique, Fowles draws attention and wants the readers to raise questions and create a parallel between fiction and reality. It makes readers wonder whether the story we read is a lie or includes some sort of reality. Fowles makes a lot of effort to design this fictional universe, and at the same time, he questions the binaries and interrelation between the two worlds.

The text referred to the notion of fiction and reality when he mentions, "we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is" (Fowles 96). His point with the lines comments that our life includes some sort of fiction. It isn't a pure reality. "you cannot think of your past as quite real: you dress it up, gild it up. Fictionalize it and put it on a shelf- your book, your romanced autobiography" (Fowles 97). He says that fictionalizing is a basic

definition of Homo sapiens. The author makes proper use of fragmentation in the novel, as Sarah's identity is fragmented and split in the novel. There is a multiplicity of voices and narratives present in the text. Shifting notions and perspectives of time, place, and texts play an important role here. Fowles continues to create a world that is not confined to the boundaries of present, past, and future.

The author features Metafiction in the narratives. Literary theorist - Linda Hutcheon coins a term called "Historiographic Metafiction." It works intensely, self-reflexively, and paradoxically, claiming historical events and personages. It is a postmodern art form. It presents intertextuality to show the extent to which works of both literature and historiography depend on the history of discourse. It is drawing your attention to the way it has been constructed. It describes fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. It is a process of rewriting history through the past. There are a lot of meta-fictional qualities in the novel from beginning to end. He gives his characters a sense of freedom when he says, "To be free myself, I must give them their freedoms as well. The freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (Fowles 97). Fowles takes it to be an existentialist and believes in the idea of complete freedom. He didn't follow the same narrative progression that other Victorian novels did. The book doesn't have a happy ending or a typical romantic ending. The author creates multiple endings/alternative endings implying different narratives.

Charles doesn't marry Ernestina. But he makes Charles break his engagement with Ernestina. He created numerous finishes and a new style by experimenting with the ends. The novel is set in Victorian times and then produces a postmodern version. This time, readers get a chance to choose for themselves- a traditional happy ending in which Charles and Ernestina get married and have babies sort of thing, or Charles gets married to Sarah, or Sarah rejects Charles, and he is abandoned and left alone. Fowles showed three different moves going in three different directions. Your choices reflect the author what kind of person you are and what ending appeals to you. But then we, as readers, first come in shock of getting no particular ending as we did not get a single and determinate ending. But when one goes beyond the narrative and thinks deeply, one realizes that text is always like a life that comes with choices. Fowles emphasizes the importance of freedom and its aspects like searching, exploring, and improving their own selves. Fowles offers numerous possible outcomes, and through that, he challenges the conventional idea of close endings. He even has a third possibility, where he leaves Charles on the train and searches for Sarah. The whole novel then comes to an end.

The author reproduced and reconstructed the Victorian novel by employing its own language, dialogues, styles, and descriptions of events and settings and subverting conventional and traditional presuppositions. The absence of a single and clear ending makes the book an existential affirmation of freedom. The novel is a study of an individual where they are not reunited, but they achieve maturity, and the characters evolve and start looking

for answers in themselves. He transformed his characters in a way where they can make choices, look after themselves, and escape the conventions made by society. The novel tries to enlighten readers that we, human beings, are free and can make our own choices to obtain freedom.

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