

## THE DISCOURSE OF HISTORY IN FOWL'S *THE LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*

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### Abstract

*There is a specific subgenre of fiction called a discourse of history, that questions the notion of history and argues that both history and narrative are human constructs, therefore, they are open to question. The author is regarded as a concept produced through previous works of art. Moreover, the past is seen as a provisional construct that contains multiple 'alternative worlds', which are as invented as the worlds of novels. The present paper offers an in-depth study with analysis of the novel *The Lieutenant's Woman* as a discourse of history following MLA eight edition of literary citations and reference style.*

**Keywords:** *discourse, history, fallen woman' Vagueness, Victorian, etc.*

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### Introduction:

In linguistics, discourse mean a unit of language longer than a single sentence. The word 'discourse' is taken from the Latin prefix 'dis' meaning 'away' and the root word 'currere' meaning 'to run'. The study of discourse is entirely context-dependent as it involves situational knowledge beyond the words spoken. In general, the meaning cannot be induced from an exchange of verbal utterances since there are many semantic factors tangled in a realistic communication.

A discourse of history as implied in various historical contexts integrates in a certain historical way. It is poly-discursive in nature, as it holds different texts reflecting varied aspects of human life in the past. A discourse as characterized by Foucault, alludes to approaches to comprising information, along with the social practices, types of subjectivity and power relations found in various proficiencies and relations between them. Discourses are meant for unique perspectives and delivering meaning to the literary text.

"Discourse is the way in which language is used socially to convey broad historical meanings. It is language identified by the social conditions of its use, by who is using it and under what conditions. Language can never be 'neutral' because it bridges our personal and social worlds," (Henry and Tator 2002).

John Fowles bears a high standing both as a novelist of outstanding imaginative power and as a highly self-conscious 'historicist' author as he fully registers the artifice intrinsic in the act of writing, the fictiveness of fiction, etc.

### About the Novel:

The French Lieutenant's Woman is a story of seduction in two senses: of 'fallen woman' Sarah Woodruff by a highly respectable gentleman geologist Charles Smithson. The novelist offers pleasure and sentiment in the way of the nineteenth century realist novels, with brilliantly realised characters, epigraphs and sets it in his own town of Lyme Regis in Dorset. Set against his socio-historical commentary, the characters are made more ambiguous. Sarah turns out to be an arch manipulator herself, whose story is an almost complete fabrication. Sarah's priggish employer Mrs. Poulteney is imagined falling into hell, and yet - the scene in which Smithson's naïve fiancée Ernestina is rejected by him is truly affecting. The novelist's cutting through fiction's illusion is, however, shown most frankly when Sarah has fled to a small room in Exeter. She unwraps a toby jug, sadly cracked, 'as I can testify', the author comments, 'having bought it myself a year or two ago for a good deal more than the three pennies Sarah was charged'. The

novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* won the Silver Pen Award and the WH Smith Literary Award and was adapted as a film in 1981 with a screenplay by Harold Pinter.

### **Analysis of the Novel:**

The novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, published in 1969, is the first English postmodern historical novel that challenges the issues of Victorian legacy. In this connection, Bradbury claims that:

This novel both constructs and deconstructs not just any single Victorian novel, but the Victorian novel as the archetype, by investigating conventions, doubts and social constraints of that period. (Bradbury 357)

It is both homage and critique of the Victorian period. Besides, Holmes adds that:

The adjective 'Victorian' is in this case paradoxical, because the novel's modernity stems from the pastiche of old-fashioned forms. (Holmes 185)

The story begins in the late March of 1867 in Lyme Bay. Charles Smithson, an amateur paleontologist and a supporter of Darwin's theory of evolution, and his fiancée, Ernestina Freeman, a prime example of a typical Victorian historical woman, are walking down the quay at Lyme Regis, when they stumble upon a mysterious woman staring out at the sea. This woman is Sarah Woodruff, a former governess, also called as *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. She was supposedly deserted by Vagueness, a French lieutenant who she became hopelessly enamored with in the wake of being his guardian in her previous manager's home. Promising to wed her, she gave herself to him, yet later figured out that he was hitched and that he simply needed to exploit her. This brought about her total implosion and her economic wellbeing as an outsider. She is currently arranged in Mrs. Poulteney's home, a strict lady who deceptively of needing to help Sarah, is really scared of misery, and figures this deed will recover her from her wrongdoings and award her a spot in paradise. Sarah and Charles steadily become a close acquaintance with and in the end fall head over heels. My investigation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* will zero in on various 'scholars' who make the novel and whose design is to parody both the Victorian culture and Marañ18 writing. I will show how Sarah's personality acquires story opportunity, and make sense of the significance of different endings considering historiographical fiction.

To begin with, it is important to explain how several personae create the novel: Sarah, the impresario, the narrator, and Fowles himself, each of them obtaining the role of different historian. Hutcheon explains this relationship between four personae that create the novel by Stating the presence of worlds within worlds: central world, outside world, and the world beyond them. The crucial world is the universe of characters hence Sarah has a place with this world. Manager, who once in a while enters this focal world hence being a piece of it as well, is likewise the piece of the rest of the world, which is the universe of the storyteller's voice. Ultimately, there is a world past these two, which addresses the creator himself, a brain who

interfaces past universes. In short, each universe has its own creator, Sarah, impresario and narrator, whereas outside, in the last of these worlds, stands Fowles. The twentieth-century impresario, or 'the local spy' (Fowles 2), accompanied characters and acts as a witness who has to accurately report back events to the narrator (Fowles, *Three Approaches Towards Historiography* 9) He is able to locate himself in the Victorian age, acting as a character that appears on several occasions near the novel's end.

First, the impresario shares the train compartment with Charles when he receives the message from his solicitor that Sarah has been located. Charles had a strange feeling about that man, as if he was spying on him, "as if he knew very well what sort of man this was..." (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* 173) Following this, he is found in the second ending, observing across the street Charles and Sarah's encounter in the Rossetti's house. And finally, he is the one who turns the clock back, thus enabling narrator to deliver the third ending.

The narrator is the one who uses impresario's reports of the events to create narrative facts and he is the one who frequently intrudes the story, ironically comments the plot, reveals future events, corrects his previous judgments, etc., but he is not Fowles himself. To be more precise, the narrator is Fowles's delegation, a surrogate, and we can argue that through him, Fowles communicates his own opinions and criticizes the Victorian era. Additionally, the narrator does not have full control over the characters he has created, what is more, he often states that they have disobeyed him and gained autonomy. Not only does the narrator assert his presence, but in Chapter 13, he also reveals the artificial nature of the whole novel and reminds readers that they are reading a fabricated story:

This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and "voice" of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word. (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* 41)

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, to conclude, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, focuses on the parody of Victorian traditions, not just social, but literary as well. It explains how four different characters create the novel, each persona being a historiographer in their own right and undermining traditional god-like figure of the author. The analysis also offers how Sarah, one of the protagonists, managed to achieve narrative freedom by fabricating her past. Moreover, three endings make this novel even more interesting, each ending representing one reality, one possibility, one past; denying the notion that there is only one, absolute truth.

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