

The Novel is Only a Game or The French Lieutenant's Woman as a Piece of Postmodernist Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Postmodernism is a multifaceted phenomenon of the mid to late 20th century, ubiquitous, ambiguous, paradoxical, fluid, double-coded (cultural) that simultaneously shows intellectual assimilation and mass culture, is also a continuation, disposal, and even succession of Modernism. This tripartite construction is an umbrella term related to several things at once, as it "left its mark in every cultural discipline from architecture to zoology, following the ways of biology, forestry, geography, history, law, literature and art in general. , medicine, politics, philosophy, sexuality, and so on. Yet these formless objects are still ghostly, and to some people, terrifying. Postmodern research methodology is an approach to research that emphasizes understanding of the complexity and diversity of social reality as well as the diversity of viewpoints and interpretations. Postmodern research suggests that the deployment of this "contemporary" device in stories set in Victorian England is a deliberate departure from traditional realist modes of writing. However, according to postmodern philosophy, the break from the old forms is not complete. The French Lieutenant Woman equally challenges the conventional constituencies of fiction, yet simultaneously installs what she opposes by openly demonstrating the possibility of continuation of the "old" within the "new".

Introduction

Postmodernism is a mid-to-late 20th century multifaceted, ubiquitous, ambiguous, paradoxical, fluid, double-coded (cultural) phenomenon that concurrently denotes intellectual assimilation and mass culture, likewise a continuation, a discard, and even a succession of Modernism. This tripartite construct is an umbrella term associated with several things at once, as "it leaves its traces in every cultural discipline from architecture to zoology, taking in on the way biology, forestry, geography, history, law, literature and the arts in general, medicine, politics, philosophy, sexuality, and so on. Yet this amorphous thing remains ghostly, and for some, ghastly..." (Docherty 2). In effect, Postmodernism may be reduced to three basic conceptual levels: first, postmodernity, the post-World War II high-tech media driven consumer capitalist historical era with unclear origin but new attitude; secondly, the postmodern thought, a body of philosophical ideas and critical studies, likewise a progressive quasi-nihilistic perspective on the self, language, reality, reason, time, knowledge, meaning, truth; and lastly, the aesthetic/literary postmodernism, a style, a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies and works. Even with a questionable 50's/60's American counterculture onset, Postmodernism developed into an international movement once it went full circle on his European philosophical and linguistic roots, i.e. Friedrich Nietzsche's attack on metaphysics and Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic relativism, and converged in the 70's with the European Existentialism, thus being gradually

drawn into a poststructuralist orbit. As a result, “philosophical conceptions of the subject, representation, causality, truth, value, and system were attacked, replacing Western philosophy with a perspectivist orientation for which there are no facts, only interpretations, and no objective truths, only the constructs of various individuals or groups” (Best and Kellner 1991), and “nature, language, and, mind, no longer congruent, defied the articulations of a sovereign code” (Hassan *The Postmodern Turn*: 52 in Mudasir 2012). Ultimately, up until late 80s and the 90s, postmodernism already closed links with feminism, post-colonialism, multiculturalism, globalization, consumerism and high-technology. This is basically the (under)structure for the postmodern mapmakers’ critique of objectivism, technological rationality and metaphysics based modern epistemology with its ‘Enlightenment’ pretenses. Essentially, the poststructuralist postmodernism’s end result is the dismissal of the Cartesian self, the de-mystification of history, the attack on the objective knowledge and absolute truth, language’s self-reflexivity, limitless meaning, the end of representation, the power-knowledge relationship, the institutionalized discourses, the postmodern skepticism towards the ‘politics’. All of which, ultimately, gave prominence to a new, political type of questions, such as ‘Whose history/truth gets told? In whose name? For what purpose?’. All in all, postmodern theory extended to postmodern art/literature resulted in the celebration of diversity, multiplicity, heterogeneity, pluriperspectivism, relativism, openness, difference, fragmentation, ambiguity, paradox, pastiche, parody, juxtaposition, collage, hybridity, double-coding.

Once the self is a mere linguistic construct shaped and limited by historical, social and cultural context, postmodernist literature often celebrates chance over craft and subverts the traditional concept of the author as a single, originating and original artist through metafiction. Consequently, the paradoxical postmodern text, on the one hand, renders no concrete meaning, only ambiguity and a subconscious level, yet, on the other hand, it becomes a ‘living’ organism (sustained by difference), that comes to a new life with each different reading. Subsequently, postmodern literature becomes interactive. Namely, by reversing the role of the creator, it ‘reconfigures’ the postmodern reader into an active participant in the meaning-making process as a collaborator on the text production. Reading, then, becomes a dynamic process once the reader enacts “facts” and generates meaning according to his/hers pre-judgments, pre-notions, experience, as well as the historical, social and cultural context in which the text is received and interpreted, and the context in which it was produced. Furthermore, readers find themselves in the network of numerous intertextual references and allusions, and their cognitive thinking is incited to start linking the various threads of presented texts once they view these intertexts as inspirational sources for the author, as well as building blocks of the work. Moreover, the postmodern distrust of totalizing mechanisms extends both to authenticity and originality and the distinction between high and low culture, the postmodern double-coding is achieved through pastiche, quotation, allusion, appropriation, intertextuality, so that the meaning could be re-contextualized in a different linguistic and cultural context, but also to emphasize a difference between the past and the present, as well as between past and present forms of representation. For postmodernist writers, the world is a mere representation or an imitation of reality, and the truth is a relative aspect, reduced to and limited by one’s perception and interpretation, hence no theory or fact is ultimate. Therefore, they question the accuracy and credibility of the historical facts, they review the past events from a contemporary perspective, and they study the influence of past events on the present condition.

Congruent to postmodern theory, since text and discourse are situational, postmodern literature suggests that the essence of history and knowledge depends on the contexts of time and place. Thus, by means of historiographic metafiction, postmodernist fiction presents the happenings associated with history as being discursive, situational and textual. In an ambiguous, paradoxical, double-coding postmodernist fashion, historiographic metafiction uses the conventions of realist literature to depict itself as a historical account, while at the same time insisting on its self aware artificial status, that the novel is a linguistic construct. In other words, it assumes its referentiality on account of its use of history as a departure point, but at the same time it is self-referential because it acknowledges its fictionality. The very first literary work labeled by Linda Hutcheon as historiographic metafiction is British writer John Fowles’ 1969 novel, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. My paper aims at analyzing *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* as a piece of postmodernist fiction. After this generalized discussion, I will focus on how in terms of content and style, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, a classical nineteenth century tale of upper-class life on the surface, is in fact a text that the author destabilizes and by invoking a 20th century perspective. In conclusion, as the reader is rather challenged by a history produced in a particular context, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, a novel written between 1967 and 1969, is a twentieth-century version of the Victorian era, and readers are constantly reminded about it. In doing so, I proceed to analyze what distinguishes *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* as a postmodern text whose general characteristics are revealed in light of the author’s (or narrator’s) self-conscious treatment of parody, intertextuality and historical re-conceptualization.

Research Methodology

Postmodern research methodology is an approach to research that emphasizes the understanding of the complexity and diversity of social realities as well as the diversity of viewpoints and interpretations. Postmodern

research sees that reality cannot be understood objectively and that there is no one right or wrong point of view. Understanding of diversity: Postmodern research recognizes that reality cannot be understood objectively, because reality is always influenced by individual viewpoints and interpretations. Postmodern research views diversity in viewpoints and interpretations as a positive thing and needs to be considered in research. Qualitative approach: Postmodern research generally uses a qualitative approach in data collection and analysis. This is done to understand individual experiences and capture the complexities of social reality. Use of Narration: Postmodern research often uses narratives or stories as a way of conveying research data and results. This allows researchers to understand the complexity and diversity of social reality. Understanding of power: Postmodern research recognizes that power is an important factor in social reality and influences individual interpretations. Postmodern research analyzes power relations in social reality and how influence influences individual viewpoints and interpretations. Criticizing objectivity: Postmodern research has criticized the view that objectivity is possible in research. Postmodern research views that objectivity is impossible to achieve because reality is always influenced by individual perspectives and interpretations. In conducting postmodern research, researchers need to pay attention to several things such as understanding various points of view, using appropriate qualitative approaches, and criticizing views about objectivity.

Results and Discussion

Postmodernist Games in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

The following analysis is based on a postmodern reading of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a perfectly realistic capture of the Victorian world presented from a 20th century perspective. In terms of content and style, this particular postmodernist work gained prestige for its venture to fuse the scope and solidity of Victorian fiction with experimental narrative devices. Like many other postmodernist writers, John Fowles uses multiple different stylistic and structural techniques to highlight his thematic interests. Firstly, this postmodern analysis focuses on the novel's content, by paying close attention to the plot, themes, and its subject matters. Secondly, in doing so, it follows to show how Fowles' brilliant style, without disturbing the smooth and uncomplicated flow of the solid Victorian narrative, revokes and subverts the realistic claims of the 19th century novel by shedding light on its fictionality and provisory character. Structured like a well-made traditional Victorian novel, yet with variations, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a simultaneous dialogic engagement with the Victorian and the contemporary. Accordingly, the postmodern subversion is achieved through the employment of postmodern devices such as shifts in authority, de-mystification of history, parody, intertextuality, metafiction resulting in a postmodernist hybrid coined by Linda Hutcheon as *historiographic metafiction*. With regard to the particular part of *The French Lieutenant's Woman's* content, the novel's plot, themes, and subject matter are to be put into perspective. Firstly, concerning the plot, Fowles' novel presents an artless on the surface, typical Victorian story with the protagonist, Charles Smithson, meeting two women and having to decide between the superficial and conventional Ernestina Freeman and the complex and independent outcast, Sarah Woodruff. Next, in terms of themes, on the one hand, the novel is full of historical detail and information about the Victorian time, but it also deals with the critical realist literature's harsh attacks on the Victorian age. As such, readers are given a thorough and insightful look into the 19th century society thinking and learn about Victorian attitudes to duty, love, sex and religion; about the view of life and prevailing fear of death; about the permeating evolutionary ideas and their impact on old beliefs; about the twists in class relationships and the differences between those who are gentlemen by birth and those who become gentlemen through wealth; about the social role and position of women, ranging from miserable prostitutes to the daughters of well-to-do upper-class families. On the other hand, a more profound reading of the text reflects, along with the importance it is placed onto the discussion of formal features and processes of writing, existential themes such as freedom, choice, personal responsibility, selfhood, rejection of authority, devaluation of "traditional moral values", self-actualization, self-determination, social constraints, existential authenticity, to name but a few. For instance, defying the rigid conventions of the Victorian society, that is, the nineteenth century England, a society which has no freedom at all, by choosing Sarah over Ernestina, Charles is heading towards existential authenticity, whilst Sarah, a woman of inferior social position attains her freedom and pays the high price of proscription and misconstruction. Furthermore, the parallel plots of secondary characters Sam and Mary, Mrs. Poultney and Dr. Grogan add to the complexity of the novel's construction and formulate judgments on strict social hierarchies, narrow-minded mentalities and progressive scientific research. Thirdly, the fusion of tradition and experimentation is also reflected in *The French Lieutenant's Woman's* subject matters such as setting and characters. The novel, set in 1867 Lyme Regis, a coastal town in West Dorset, England, provides the reader with an absorbing story and distinctive characters that actually steal the spotlight. More specifically, Fowles has taken two traditional romantic characters, a young hero and a mysterious woman, and has transformed them into human beings. For, this story is not really a romance since Fowles' objective is not to unite his two protagonists, Sarah and Charles, but to show what each human being must face in life in order to be able to grow. Insofar, this paper analyzed John Fowles's *the French Lieutenant's*

Woman in terms of content. Henceforth, the postmodernist reading and analysis is based on the text's style, specifically form, structure and experimental strategies and techniques.

The premise of this paper is that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a postmodern meta-fictional novel, which means it is self-reflexive, namely, as any other of the postmodernist works, it tends to investigate its own fictional status by incorporating a continuous meta-fictional commentary on the process of its own construction. In effect, the genre of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is confusing: although the first twelve chapters seem to nod at the prospect of historical novel, the legendary thirteenth chapter abruptly 'changes gears' with its meta-fictional perspective. Thus certainty, reality, fact and fiction, literary representation, 'narrativization' and 'fictionalization' are being challenged, inverted and inferred in the resulting novelistic hybrid, or what Hutcheon came to identify as the first historiographic metafiction, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Considering all the above, the boundaries of the novel's form are continually explored and contested by its structural level on account of Fowles' simultaneous dialogic engagement with the Victorian and the postmodern, precisely what makes *The French Lieutenant's Woman* a clear case of *historiographic metafiction*. This book is structured like a traditional well-made novel, yet with variations. That is, borrowing literary pieces from the writers of the age, Fowles composes the structure of the novel combining conventions of the Victorian novel along with creating new fictional devices (3). On the one hand, in the Victorian fashion, Fowles uses similar techniques to the 19th century novels such as extended length, a Victorian setting - at the primary level of the story (characters' world) in this case, or the interruption of events' sequence as well as the change of location from one chapter to another. To exemplify the later two, whereas on account of chapter eight's end, namely Charles preparing to return from Undercliff, the next chapter is expected to open with Charles's reunion with Ernestina. However, the following chapter begins with a description of Mrs. Poulteney.

Moreover, Fowles makes use of epigraphs at the beginning of each of the sixtyone chapters, and notes drawn from the great Victorian writers and scholars such as Thackeray, Hardy, Dickens, Browning, Darwin, Marx, Arnold, Ruskin and others, together with quotes from late nineteenth century journals, magazines, legal and political writings. Additionally, he analyses and portrays characters with typical Victorian qualities, thus this more traditional, pseudo-Victorian work of Ernestina Freeman, Aunt Tranter, Mrs. Poulteney, et al., offers a relatively linear chronological progression through its traditional realist narrative and straightforward dialogue. Its themes of love, duty, marriage, and class are common to the British tradition, as Ernestina's chapter two reference to Austen's *Persuasion* signifies. This framework of narrative and traditional world view is even reflected in a typical Victorian alternative ending. Last but not least, one of the most interesting Victorian literary techniques is the usage of an omniscient narrator – which, actually, Fowles overtly uses and abuses. For instance, as Irina Strout (2015) has suggested, in the first chapter, the narrator openly addresses himself to the reader, situating the action on "one incisively sharp and blistering morning in the late march of 1867" (FLW 2). He further describes the Lyme Regis quay and its beauty, its location in the South of England, then suddenly stops to address the reader: "I exaggerate? Perhaps, but I can be put to the test, for the Cobb has changed very little since the year of which I write" (FLW 2). Having a 'cinematic eye,' the narrator freely moves from one character to another, describing events that are happening simultaneously. Fowles realizes "of course the novelist is a God" ("John Fowles: Profile 7" 35). Similarly to God, he shifts and moves not just the characters, but also places and events. Nevertheless, in chapter thirteen he refuses to intrude Sarah's inner consciousness: "There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to this definition" (FLW 41). He insists that his characters are free since he cannot violate ideas of human behavior as "freedom of will is the highest human good" (Fowles qtd. in Strout 3). As a consequence, the 3rd person narrator undergoes an evolution into a more obvious intrusive presence, resulting in the appearance of a 1st person narrator, contemporary to the time of the novel's writing, who obtrusively comments on events and analyzes characters while contributing to the novel's overarching narrative. This first-person voice evolves into another first-person narrator, more closely associated with the author, who directly addresses the reader while reflecting on the craft of writing novels. And this is perhaps the most ingenious feature of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, namely the invention of an author-figure, a commentator who breaks the ontological frame in the famous thirteenth metafictional chapter, and challenges the conventional narration with its 'own' admission of limited power and the deliberate overt exposure of the process of meaning-making in the novel. As a result, readers' attention is drawn from the contents of the story to the circumstances of its creation. The narrator's voice guiding us through the story changes into the voice of a creator of the story, and this voice openly acknowledges that:

I do not know. 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". (FLW 41)

For that reason, at closer inspection, the third-person narrator transcends the expected narrative time line of the traditional Victorian novel as he consciously moves back and forth between the 19th and 20th centuries. The transformation of the third-person narrator into the meta-aware, intrusive first-person commentator fractures narrative progression and signifies a toying with spatiotemporality as the postmodern novel, the Sarah Woodruff novel, emerges. This contemporary work is superimposed on, and therefore part of, the pseudo-Victorian novel; however, it lacks its structure. This postmodern work is not linear, not planar. Instead, the commentator and Sarah create their aleatory narrative worlds above, between, and beyond the linearly-progressing narratives of the Victorian novel. Through internal and external manipulation of time, character, plot, and theme, the postmodern work exists multi-dimensionally. In it, Charles Smithson the Victorian gentleman is not the master of his world, as he is in the other novel. In the realist narrative, he is master of Ernestina. In the postmodern novel, he is a puppet controlled by Sarah Woodruff. In turn, Sarah is at once a fictional creation of herself and an extension of the commentator, who disingenuously claims ignorance of the Woodruff character when he questions who she is, and then answers that he doesn't know. Sarah is enigmatic throughout the text, a "Sphinx."

Her vague origins and murky characterization subvert any meaningful insight into her character, ambiguity furthered by her actions and the non-expositional nature of Fowles' postmodern style. The nineteenth-century novel is real-tangible, concrete, and residing within the lines of the text. The twentieth-century novel is abstract-implied, inferred, assumed, and residing between the lines. Together, they reflect the overall novel's questioning of authority and reality and its challenge to the constraints of narrative time and space. The commentator does not judge the merits of the two novels, does not privilege one over the other. Instead, he uses both novels and their overarching narrative to continue his challenges to the constraints of form. (McElroy 78-79) As insofar debated, one thing must be emphasized, namely, that it is through the binary structure of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* that Fowles manages to subvert the realistic literary canon, thus creating the archetype postmodern novel. Specifically, by means of experimental literary strategies and techniques such as shifting authorial roles, re-construction of history, parody, intertextuality, metafiction, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is acutely and explicitly aware of its 'self' as well as its past, its present, its authorship, and its readership. For that reason, the text's parallel stories, shifting timeline, intertwined 1st person meta-aware commentary, 3rd person detached omniscience, intertextual and paratextual elements, frame-breaks, anachronistic writing, juxtaposition of reality and fiction, conflation of past and present, open ending, the postmodern questioning of 'politics', require readers to collaborate with the author, the narrator, and various textual elements in constructing the text and creating meaning. Firstly, there is a shift in authority. By challenging the role of the author as a godlike figure, Fowles managed to leave open the authority position for the reader, whom as a result evolves into the text's constructor. Phrases such as "I think", "I doubt", "I have no doubt" or "I do not know" dismiss readers' traditional passive role by actually granting them the freedom to draw their own conclusions, to further fill the blanks Fowles intentionally designed one omitting certain information, not fully explaining specific events, so that readers can become actively involved in the creative process of the novel. As a result, the readers are thus provoked to "deduce and to make connections with the previously acquired knowledge and experience, so that they make their picture complete" (Valentova 27-28). As for example, what the reader may deduce is that Sarah, in 'reality' set Charles a trap in the hotel in Exeter, because, apart from a Toby jug, she bought a dark-green shawl, a nightgown to look seductive and a bandage to help her pretend to have a twisted ankle. This scene takes place in Chapter Forty-six and when she says upon Charles's visit: "Forgive me. I ... I did not expect ..." (FLW 148), the readers can deduce that she not only expected him, but also planned to seduce him, because she is sitting there in her new nightgown and a flattering shawl over her shoulders. Her motives, however, remain shrouded in mist, and thus left to readers' imagination.

Next, Fowles' virtuoso performance lays in presenting the realities simultaneously resulting in the demystification of history through the insertion of Victorian texts into the narrative, thus both installing and subverting Victorian ideology, culture, and literary canon. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*' metafictional perspective combined with parodical intertextuality and intertextual parody creates the opportunity for a postmodern double-coded reading. Namely, Fowles makes use of intertextuality in order to contest the realistic claims of the 19th century novel. The fact that canonical texts were supposed to perfectly mirror the contemporary reality is the perfect opportunity Fowles seizes in order to bring out "the discursive contexts in which they were produced and received" (Kollaroth 88). The narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is extremely critical to the world that authors such as Dickens, Austen and Hardy presented in their novels. Paradoxically, Fowles' realistic narrative and the Victorian intertexts of his choosing share the same value in significance, namely, they legitimize "a philosophy of life and ideology generated by a particular section of the society that is the middle and the upper classes" (88). Still, Fowles' brilliancy is brought into play: without disturbing the smooth and uncomplicated flow of the solid Victorian narrative, the author revokes and subverts the Victorian ideology and literary conventions and sheds lights on its provisory character by bringing parallel commentary in the form of epigraphs and authorial interventions. This aligns with the postmodernist stand on complex reality, perspectivism, contextuality, suggesting that a narrative with specific conventions and a

supportive ideology cannot reflect the world as it is (108). For that reason, in accordance with the postmodern subversion of the objective truth and ultimate knowledge and postmodernism's constant questioning of the 'politics', Fowles' novel indirectly asks "Whose truth gets told?". The narrator emphasizes the fact that, somewhat, every available textual trace regarding the past is compromised, because, evidence of the past is more or less distorted since its final, "official" version depends on those who make the accounts. Chapter thirty-five, for instance, is where the authorial intervention makes reference to the discursive context and ideology of certain prior textualizations of the Victorian past:

The vast majority of witnesses and reporters, in every age, belong to the educated class; and this has produced, throughout history, a kind of minority distortion of reality. The prudish puritanity we lend to the Victorians, and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorian society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos. Dickens's working-class characters are all very funny (or very pathetic) and an incomparable range of grotesques, but for the cold reality we need to go elsewhere—to Mayhew, the great Commission Reports and the rest; and nowhere more than in this sexual aspect of their lives, which Dickens (who lacked a certain authenticity in his own) and his compeers so totally bowdlerized. (FLW 115)

This cold reality that Fowles makes reference to is best described by Karl Marx, "the beavered German Jew quietly working, as it so happened, that very afternoon in the British Museum Library; and whose work in those somber walls was to bear such bright red fruit" (FLW 6), and his prefigured socialism/communism at which Fowles hints with his mentioning of the color red. What Fowles managed to bring to the fore by making use of the Marxian text, is exactly a contrast to the "reality" constructed by the Victorian literature and ideology. Thus, the miserable working conditions, the insufficient wages and the inhuman living conditions that the underpaid "factory hands" (Kollaroth 90) endured during the rise of the "factory production and large-scale manufacture that introduced radical changes in the economic and social set-up of Victorian England" (89) are foregrounded. Fowles addresses the theme of exploitation of domestic laborers presented in his text by masterfully depicting two simultaneous, nevertheless different realities via Karl Marx, whose theories he acknowledged as truly representative of the Victorian life, thus totally challenging the old, unrealistic portrayal of the nineteenth century England as in, for instance, Dickens' *Hard Times*, a dominant Victorian text that dealt with mid 1800 lower class, but more in a negative vein. Thirdly, the postmodernist novel is also achieved by means of an ironical commentator, ontological worlds and multiple endings. Firstly, the commentator behaves in a complete different Victorian didactical manner due to the fluctuations in his tone, namely he has a predilection towards irony and the comic. For example, a funny instance is when the narrator says that the cockney maidservant Mary's great-great-granddaughter is one of the celebrated younger English film actresses, or in chapter sixteen, in the light of Ernestina's choice of book, namely Mrs. Caroline Norton's "The Lady of La Garaye" poem, an early Victorian text on women's rights, both text and issue not taken so seriously at the time. All these intrusive comments, more comic than serious, only confuse the reader. Secondly, when the narrator introduces the author-figure/"author"/narrator's personae into the fiction, he creates Chinese-box of worlds, namely four realities according to Linda Hutcheon (1980): bottom to top – the fourth is the core world/level/the characters' reality/universe – 1867, namely what is written on the page; outside and including that is the third 'reality' in which exist the man in the train, the impresario, in other words the narrator's personae/author-figure/"author", who sometimes enter the core world; secondly, outside that there is the narrator's voice diegetic/metafictional world – 1967, namely the reality of writing itself; and of course the primary world is Fowles', the real physical author, "the man who masterminds both the creation of the Chinese-box structure and the tensions which exist between these worlds and which are fictional within the novel as a hole" (1980: 57-58), namely the act of writing that has produced *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 1967-1969. Additionally, Hutcheon maintains that "in each universe there is a *mise en abyme* of a creator figure – Sarah, the personae, the narrator – and outside the last of these worlds stands the author, outside it" (58).

Thirdly, the playful rebellion against the old conventions and restrictions is also achieved through the employment of alternative endings, each granting new readings on the novel while addressing different ideological supporting structures. The first one is a customarily traditional 'happily ever after ending', despite the narrator's humorously comments, that creates no irritation to the immediate society, frees Charles from the heartburn caused by Sir Robert, his elderly uncle's marriage to Mrs. Bella Thomkins, and deals Sam and Mary quit a generous hand. The other two endings are more intricate. The second ending suggested in chapter sixty does right by Sarah and elevates her from the status of the fallen woman. She attains a 'New Woman' images through her unconventionality in dressing, but mainly through her association with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and her espousal of these values which "have challenged the artistic and moral standards of the period" (Kollaroth 128). However, Sarah decides not to let Charles leave before divulging the existence of their child named Lalage. The outcome is with the three of them on the threshold of some kind of future together. Yet, with this melodramatic union, the narrator lets down both the

reader and Sarah's character, whilst this may be the only context when Charles appears in a winning situation. Lastly, chapter sixty one offers the third ending of the book. The narrative resumes with the same encounter at Sarah's (the Pre-Raphaelites') house, only this time there is no love and understanding between them, therefore no prospect of a marriage, once Sarah declares: "I cannot love you as a wife must" (FLW 198). Outraged at her intentions of establishing a Platonic, friendly arrangement, Charles leaves without grasping that the child he looks at on the way out is his. The two separate for ever, yet Charles is left with "an atom of faith in himself" (199), now capable of understanding the importance of freedom and existential authenticity, reborn to a new life. This last ending is probably the most 'realistic' one out of the three offered not only because it does not impose an overstated happily ever after outcome, and it is "the kind of ending, even though it stands problematised in the context, that is suggested by a benevolent author-figure, with freedom as his first principle, not authority" (Kollaroth 131-132); but also it is consistent with Charles' portrayal throughout the course of the novel, in that, despite his amateur interest in the natural sciences, he is unable to decipher the world around him and its functioning, incapable of decoding the meaning of evolution, more so 'the new woman' Sarah. Therefore, he concludes in the end that "from the first she manipulated him. She would do so to the end" (FLW 199). Ultimately, this resulting hybrid, as a historiographic metafiction, juxtaposes reality and fiction, closes the gap between past and present through shifting temporalities, a comparison between the two ages and anachronisms. In accordance with the aforementioned conflation of past and present that characterizes historiography metafiction, a play with the time levels starts right at the beginning of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Here, according to Valentova (13), the narrator operates within three time levels: "the first is the time of 1867, the time narrated: "if you had turned northward and landward in 1867, as the man that day did..." (FLW 2); the second is the present time, the time of narration: "I can be put to test, for the Cobb has changed very little since the year of which I write" (FLW 2); the third is the "future" with respect to the time in which the story is set: "style that the resident ladies of Lyme would not dare to wear for at least another year" (FLW 2)". Additionally, this interconnection of all time levels generates many comparisons between the Victorian and the twentieth-century world, once the generally employed traditional omniscient narrator is not that detached from the story as expected and begins to reveal himself as an intrusive presence, commenting on Ernestina Freeman's clothing with an intelligence that indicates a historical perspective: "The young lady was dressed in the height of fashion, for another wind was blowing in 1867: the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet.

The colors of the young lady's clothes would strike us today as distinctly strident; but the world was then in the first fine throes of the discovery of aniline dyes" (FLW 2). When the narrator uses the inclusive "us" and "today" he actually places himself into the same ontological world as the reading audience: "We, who live afterwards" (FLW 48), therefore he identifies himself with the time of the creation of the story, which gives the novel a dimension that cannot be found in classic historical fiction. Precisely this temporal distinctness is what grants him the possibility to compare the Victorian and the modern age, the two socio-cultural contexts, "in terms of contemporary perception and interpretation of certain nineteenth-century phenomena" (Valentova 13). By juxtaposing the two centuries, the narrator, with his twenty century perspective, only presupposes and debates on what would probably be the readers' reaction to the fashion of those times. What the narrator ultimately achieves with his parallel between the remote ages is a more realistic and relatable image of the actual Victorian times, because, despite this temporal distinctness which makes it clear that it is not a Victorian who is painting this historical picture, it can be more believable and understandable to the readers as they share the narrator's modern context and inevitable some common ground. Finally, what makes the openness of the past to the present even more compelling is the abundant deployment of anachronisms, hence postmodernist juxtaposition. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* holds numerous nineteenth-century referents in the twentieth-century context, referents which are, nevertheless, only alluded to and employed within the ontological world of the modern narrator, without entering the world of the characters. As Valentova (17-18) points out, some of the skillful anachronisms are employed in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* once Mrs. Poultenev gets compared to a member of "Gestapo" (FLW 9) and her weakness for laudanum, a near equivalent "of our own age's sedative pills" makes the narrator call her "an inhabitant of the Victorian valley of the dolls" (FLW 39); "Charles of today" is a "computer scientist" (FLW 126), his feelings are without the "benefit of existentialist terminology" classified as "anxiety of freedom" (FLW 145), and his fondness for sciences is asserted to prevent him from being shocked "had news reached him out of the future of the aeroplane, the jet engine, television, radar" (FLW 6); Sam's fashion style is compared to the "'mod' of the 1960s" (FLW 19); Sarah's "computer" (FLW 23) in her heart assesses and stores impressions of the people she meets; people are a lot more isolated because the distance was then "unbridgeable by radio, television" (FLW 55) and the Victorian evenings are spent "without benefit of cinema or television" (FLW 48).

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the discussion of the main postmodern elements and on their depiction and analysis in the *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a Fowlesian masterpiece and a perfect example of postmodern playfulness.

The deployment of these “contemporary” devices within the story that is set in the Victorian England intentionally foregrounds its split from the traditional realist mode of writing. Yet, in concord with the postmodern philosophy, the break from the old forms is not complete. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* both challenges the conventional constituents of fiction, yet, it simultaneously installs what it challenges by overtly showing the possibilities of the continuation of the “old” within the “new”. Discussing intertextuality necessarily stimulates questions about the author and his or her originality; about opening the present to the past; about the status of both fiction and history as human constructs and, consequently, about the reliability of historical records; intertextuality also provokes considering the role of the reader, his activity and participation in the meaning-making process; about the meanings changing with re-contextualization, and thus about the parody of texts, and the list could go on. Parody is, in fact, a strategy which permeates all the themes and strategies in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Novels of historiographic metafiction, a typical genre of postmodern literature, always cross the boundaries between the worlds traditional historical fiction kept isolated, thus are always double-voiced, installing, yet subverting the tradition; mocking, yet enshrining its sources. Just like the worlds of the present and the past; the fiction and the reality; the elitist and the popular; the mockery and the reverence and the continuity and the change blend in the novel, so do blend the postmodern themes and strategies. They are all interconnected, one necessarily evoking the other. (Valentova 68)

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