



## The Adios of Shackles in John Fowles's novel The French Lieutenant's Woman

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### ABSTRACT

Following the consequences of the Second World War, the majority of authors wrote their literary works to respond to the world's massive destruction. The dominant idea that engaged authors' minds during a time when there was a big need to be free from all authorities that led man to encourage him blindly to kill his brothers and sisters in humanity and to destroy the world. The writer John Fowles assumed man has to be free from following those rules and constraints. John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* was written in Neo-Victorian prose's style but with Postmodernism perspectives. This paper attempts to analyze and apply the theoretical perspectives of "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes and "The Birth of the Reader" on the novel of John Fowles which is regarded to be a postmodern novel from multiple perceptions. Firstly, the storyteller's involvement to a variety of opinions as well as substitute endings. The second point, considering this book as a historical text, by applying the method of Linda Hutcheon, *Historiographic metafiction*, includes the meaning of rewriting history since postmodern writers do not believe in the originality of historical truths or the existence of absolute truths. Fowles wanted to free people from those dogmas. Those entire methods in this text disclose Fowles to reconstruct and deconstruct the Victorian culture through the main character Sarah Woodruff that makes Fowles's novel a perfect example of Postmodernism.

**KEYWORDS:** John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Postmodernism, *The Death of the Author*, *The Birth of the Reader*

### INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the term postmodernism is closely related to literary postmodernism, as most writers point out that the term's origin is related to the Second World War. The genocide of minorities that preceded or coincided with this war is why many scholars and artists lost their belief in Europe in innovation, which was connected with them with authority, certainty and identity, and a movement after it was called postmodernism to convey a new period in the Western civilization's history, one of its features is the feeling of anger with innovation and trying to criticize this phase and look for options. The postmodern novel, the historical in particular, questions the boundaries between history and fiction. Moreover, Postmodernism is concerned specifically with the political dimensions of the deconstruction of the hegemonic power. The postmodern novel made many attempts to fragment the narrative authoritarian structure on narrative techniques, if not destroying it. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles is a great instance of Postmodernism. Writing in this novel seems to pass through the hands of a

novelist who is keenly concerned in the Victorian era's problems and standing between two worlds; the first is a dead world, and the second is unable to give birth. It is also concerned with the connection between the present, past in the novel, and the future present in the novel. The relationship between the novel's impressive Victorian legacy and the twentieth century's situation makes it impossible to write within it. It is a clever novel that reveals the modern writer's benefit from the Victorian heritage, thus becoming a liberal novel whose construction is based mainly on moral realism and moral interpretation that belongs to the nineteenth-century style. In this way, the novel broadens the range of moral insight and becomes an addition to a more modern form of visualization; social awareness helps us increase historical knowledge and overflow good feelings. Moreover, the author deliberately draws the reader's attention because his characters behave independently; it is not what they look like or whom their role is being tried out. This is the controversy with the Victorian era, with completely normal social roles and behaviors, and postmodern authors about "the Death of the Author."



## LITERATURE REVIEW

John Fowles in his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* gives further consideration of Sarah's rebellious spirit and free characters; by analyzing her ambiguity and her free personality (Zheng, 2018). Fowles is looking for new methods of narration and new techniques to stand against the sole author as well as traditions (McElroy, 2001). The Second World War World's miserable effect on human life can cause depression (Listyawan, 2020). Sarah does not belong to the Victorian era but goes beyond that era; she passed her time in that sense. She is not Victorian (Fletcher, 2003). Fowles offers freedom throughout the narration process; by following Roland Barthes's concept of the death of the author, he puts his text under the multiplicity of voices through the narrator's behavior and characters, then set the readers in a place where they can practice freedom of option by multiple endings a study proving that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a postmodern text, on the roof appears as a Victorian fiction (Sanders, 2000). Sarah's character as an immoral woman is narrative; although Sarah has a relationship with the French Lieutenant is fictitious, it serves to be free from social norms and restrictions (Hutcheon, 1980). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* reflects how women in the Victorian era existed to fulfill prearranged fates and not to build their particular style in life (Helgadóttir, 2016). Fowles intends to portray the contradiction between modern thinking and Victorian thoughts in the novel by using Lind Hutcheon's concept metafiction (Hutcheon, 1988). Despite the patriarchy's domination in the Victorian era, Sarah leads Charles to be free from Victorian constraints (De Beauvoir, 1997). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* text's method is strengthen the technique historiographic metafictional. Sometimes the narrator intrudes to approve his opinions, give a quote, or clarify a notion. Regularly the reader understands that the whole fiction is not merely on Sarah and Charles, but it is on storytelling and time. Most of the argument on the narrator's emphasis on the process of telling the story and not on the intentions of the narrator, which is the fiction of Sarah and Charles. Also, in this novel the narrated history is defied (Amjad, 2016). The novel designed on the intertwined stories of many authors, Sarah, the organizer, the storyteller, and Fowles himself, whose stories produce the interlinked realms of the text (Hutcheon, 1980).

## METHODOLOGY

### The Death of the Author

The contemporary French critic Roland Barthes declared in his article "The Death of the Author" in 1968 writing is a reversal of every sound, pushing the author to death when he breaks the link between it and his creative text. From here begins writing, based on the fact it is the language that expresses, not the writer. The author, linguistically, has never been more than writing, and language defines a subject and not a person. Thus, the author today has become a small statue at the second end of the literary scene, and

the text has made and read in a way that makes the author absent from it. Moreover, if the author is an old one who stands in his book the father's attitude towards his child because he pre-existed him, then the matter is different today concerning the modern scripter as he gives birth at the same time in which he gives birth to his text, and that was the case except because the text does not include a previous being or later to write it. Thus, the imitator had buried the author. Barthes believes that the manuscript is no longer a verse of vocabularies resulting from a sole connotation, but an expanse of multiple dimensions that different texts are quarreled without any of them being original, because the book is a tissue of sayings causing from a thousand voices of nation, and because it is made of multiple writings and, as a result of multiple nations, each overlap with each other in dialogue, imitation, and opposition (Gass, 1988).

### The Reader Response Criticism

Barthes says, "The Birth of the Reader" should be at the expense of "the death of the author." The reader's job is to reveal the various codes and formats of text. He should not add anything from his own. A correct structural reading can arrive at the text's interior secrets in its structures, formats, and systemic relationships. This is why the structural reader is considered the text's creator again, giving it its connotations, because the text has no value without a reader. The significance of the text is what the reader determines (Logie, 2013).

## DISCUSSION

*The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles narrates a story of the character Sarah Woodruff, who lived in the Victorian age, yet shows rebellion to the traditions and norms in her society, and seeks to be free from those constraints. Therefore, this character is known to have a disgracing reputation in Lyme Regis, where most of the narration occurs. When she is found staring at the sea by Charles Smithson, his fiancée, Ernestina, tells him that she is known in the town to be a French Lieutenant's woman, and Charles tries to hunt her in order to listen to her on the truth about herself. Charles falls in love with her, and she knows that and asks for his help. Later on, she leaves Lyme and goes to Exeter, and on his way back from a journey, Charles stops in Exeter. However, we never know if he stops in Exeter to visit Sarah or if it was only a coincidence that he stops there. The future of his relationships with Sarah and Ernestina remains not clear to us. One of the points this essay will focus on as a matter of the postmodern aspect is that the narrator himself is not sure about the story's ending. Thus, he gives more than one suggestion for an ending. Regarding those different suggestions given by the narrator who does not have any certain answer about what will go on; we can say that it is as if Fowles intends to say neither the narrator nor I is all-knowing. We should not be; we should not be in an authoritarian position to the extent of knowing everything about the characters. Here, as we are analyzing

from a postmodern point of view, we can say that this shows what is called in postmodern literature and criticism of the author's death, as Roland Barthes calls it. The narrator in the novel and before giving the three options of the ending all have to do with Charles's relationship with Sarah. The freedom of narrative in the novel is another technique of postmodernism closely linked to Roland Barthes's *The Death of the Author*. Fowles in this novel suggests that the reader and the character should remain free from the author similarly; humans must be free from hegemonies and social norms, whether it is the text or another world. Besides, when it comes to the text, he associates freedom or the characters' disobedient to life itself, saying, "It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live. When Charles left Sarah on her cliff edge, I ordered him to walk straight back to Lyme Regis. But he did not; he gratuitously turned and went down to the Dairy" (Fowles, 1969, p. 41). It is not only the fact that the narrator rejects to be in an authoritarian position over his characters that reflect the notion of freedom in this novel, but also that the main character, Sarah Woodruff, is a free woman who lives in the Victorian epoch, in a place where women were known to be living under strict societal norms. In Sarah's character, it is as if John Fowles wants to convey his own vision of how an intellectual must be a rebellious character in the society and stands against norms. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Sarah's personality teaches Charles to be free, although he is the male, who is supposed to have more freedom than Sarah does because of their patriarchal society.

The freedom Sarah shows is one of the central indications of historiographic metafiction technique in the novel that includes the meaning of rewriting history since postmodern writers do not believe in the originality of any historical truths or the existence of absolute truths. As a postmodern character, Sarah entirely shocks us as readers since she comes from the Victorian era. The author wants to say there could be such a woman in the Victorian age; the spread "truth" that there was no woman at the time in that society cannot be absolute. Another aspect of historiographic metafiction in the novel is that the narrator narrates a story in the Victorian age, while he himself exists in the modern period. He consciously refers to that and says, "But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes" (Fowles, 1969, p. 41), who are both modern personages, as they lived in the twentieth century. Describing historiographic metafiction novels, states, "They are those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 2004, p.5). By this, she means those literary works that reflect their authors' points of view that belong to the postmodern era, yet narrate, and use characters from the past, like what we see in the *French Lieutenant's Woman*, narrates a Victorian protagonist's story. Sarah is Victorian in terms of the era when she lived, yet is postmodern, just like Fowles himself is, in terms of her free thoughts. Moreover, historiographic

metafiction that Linda Hutcheon talks about includes the notion of metafiction by itself, of course, where the author or the narrator never denies that what he is telling us no more than fiction. This is very clear in the *French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), says "Not only does the narrator refer to the fact that fiction pretends to conform to the reality, and then admits that he himself does not want to choose one end, but to not take part in the fight by showing two versions of it" (Fowles, 1969, p. 173); not only that but also he even literally refer to it states, "I do not know this story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind" (Fowles, 1969, p. 41).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), John Fowles seeks to be true to himself in front of us as readers because, just like other postmodern authors, he tries to be free. Postmodern man has become tired of societal hypocrisy and wars. Like Fowles, the postmodern writers wanted to release themselves from those burdens that were the bitter fruit of political and societal ideologies. Fowles chooses Sarah Woodruff, a free rebellious female protagonist, in particular, to express his yearning for a free world. Thus, Sarah can stand for John Fowles, who would like to have a society where people rebel against some norms and where intellectuals have the courage to speak up. One of the aspects of the free soul this author has is that he frees himself from pretending, says that what he writes is fiction, voluntarily leaves control over the characters he creates by making them disobey his orders, as well as over the reader by making them free from getting any decided ending, and by indicating clearly that he is not an omniscient narrator who knows about his characters. All those techniques in his novel: historiographic metafiction, freedom of narrative, and death of the author, reveal Fowles's belief in the loss of absolute truth, making him a perfect example of a postmodern writer.

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