

Reading, Rereading, and Misreading (in) The French Lieutenant's Woman as a Postmodern Text

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Abstract

Taking John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as the example and the contemporary narrative theories and strategies, this essay studies some of the important themes of postmodern discourse, such as "textuality," "intertextuality," and "writing / reading."

The first section discusses the complexity of Sarah's characterization, to delimit the status of writer/reader and to illuminate the "indeterminacy" and "anti-closure" in the postmodern text. The theoretical references include Barthes's "the death of the author" and Iser's phenomenological reading theory.

The second part alludes to Derrida's deconstruction, Kristeva's semiotics, and Bakhtin's "dialogism" and studies the novel's intertextuality and parody. The main concern is to disclose the transgression and critique of the postmodern text.

Avoiding the limitation of one-dimensional perspective, this essay presents an intertextual illumination of theory/novel, to substantiate the spirit of "heteroglossia" in the postmodern discourse.

摘要

本論文之目的在於藉由《法國中尉的女人》，參照當代各種敘述理論與策略，以釐清後現代論述——小說與理論——中「文本特質」(textuality)、「文本互涉」(intertextuality)、以及「書寫／閱讀」等重要課題。

第一部份討論小說人物莎拉(Sarah)之性格特質，藉此闡述後現代文本中作者／讀者在參與書寫／閱讀的過程中之角色，以及文本意義之不定性與開放性。引用之理論包括巴特(Barthes)「作者之死」(the death of the author)，以及伊舍(Iser)之閱讀理論。

第二部份以德希達(Derrida)、克莉絲蒂娃(Kristeva)等人之解構理論(deconstruction)，以及巴克汀(Bakhtin)之「對話論」(dialogism)解讀小說中「文本互涉」以及「諧擬」(parody)等主題，呈現後現代文本敘述之顛覆性與批判性。本論文透過多種理論與小說交互指涉，以避免單一觀點之偏狹性，體現後現代論述「多重語彙」(heteroglossia)之精神。

Introduction

This essay avoids setting out from any tendentious ideological or theoretical grounding in order not to join the still fervent debates, to celebrate or denigrate something which is called "postmodernity/ism": we have already enough confusion. However, beyond all those *dissident* stances, I believe that it is a *consentaneous* fact that the postmodernism/ity does exist, though the terminology to describe it may be different: for example, Fredric Jameson's *late capitalism*, Gianni Vattimo's *mass-media society*, or Daniel Bell's *post-industrial society*, to

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give only a few. Thus, logically, there must be something "modern" to be transgressed or challenged. To rationalize postmodernism/ity as the contemporary overall modality or style of cultural productions may run the risk of over-generalization and essentialization. Instead, I would like to assess it as, in Jameson's words, "a cultural dominant": such a conception can allow for "the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" (4). To be more specific, as my interest in this essay lies in the poetics of metafiction which is part of the postmodern cultural practices, not all the novelistic productions can be homogenized or categorized under the banner "postmodern" or "metafictional." Within this epistemological framework, as a postmodern (or metafictional) text, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* will be discussed.

In the traditional realistic fiction, the author manipulates the proceeding of narration in the guise of a single, dominant voice, either of the protagonist or of the detached narrator in the first or third person. The author's techniques and process of fiction-making are concealed, in order to maintain a closed form of narrative. The author virtually, in Roland Barthes's words, imposes "a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" ("Death" 171). Alongside with the concealment of codes and conventions, the author himself establishes the illusion that, through language, novel can provide the reader with the immediacy of reality. He has finalized the novel as, in Linda Hutcheon's words, "a mimesis of product" (*Narcissistic* 38). The reader is forced to identify with the verisimilitude the novel creates and relates it to the empirical living experiences. Therefore, the boundary between the author and the reader is unlikely to be transgressed: one is the producer and the other is the receiver (or consumer). Reading for the reader becomes a passive act, motivated by the established illusion linearly and teleologically.

According to Roland Barthes, it is the *episteme* and culmination of the capitalist ideology that text is the monopolistic product of its producer. Barthes means that the author stands as the hermeneutical center or the transcendental signified of the text: he is the past of his own book and the father of the child "text" ("Death" 168-70). The activity of explicating or interpreting the work must be legitimized by his authority, which suppresses the play of signs and structures the textuality within a formidable closure. Nevertheless, postmodernism/ity challenges all systems of homogeneity and closure. Thanks to this, text is emancipated from the author's hegemony. In fact, what causes such a breakdown of the author's legitimacy exactly characterizes the fashionable agenda of the contemporary anthropological, cultural, and philosophical discourses: *the death of the subject*. The Cartesian *cogito* or, in Jameson's words, "the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual" (15), is banished out of the text. In this respect, Barthes's proposition may be relevant and helpful to the further illumination.

As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this connection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing. ("Death" 168)

To be more precise, postmodernism/ity disrupts the arbitrarily constructed connection between signifier and signified and replaces the illusion that language mirrors reality with the accentuation of the play, the rhetoricity, and the self-referentiality of sign: language eludes the correspondence with reality or, as the Derridean playful motto shows, "there is nothing outside of text" (*Grammatology* 158). Consequently, the single textual voice "loses its origin," and "the author enters his own death" and all the identities that were thought self-apparent become illegible. Such a tendency manifests in metafiction in several significant ways.¹ First of all, the writer exposes the codes and the process of fiction-writing and discards the identification between the readers and the characters or the association between the novelistic verisimilitude and the empirical reality. The writer's self-conscious discourses on the ontological status of fiction-making problematize the nature of reading and raise, or even disturb, the readers' consciousness. As Hutcheon maintains,

[t]he unsettled reader is forced to scrutinize his concepts of art as well as his life values In so doing he might be freed from enslavement not only to the empirical, but also to his own set patterns of thought and imagination. (*Narcissistic* 189)

The role of reader and the activity of reading are even thematized in the narrative. Moreover, the differentiation "writing/reading" and "writer/reader" are blurred--theoretically, the writer is the first "reader" of his own text--since the author no longer possesses the authority as the signifying origin or the transcendental signified of the text. Thus, the figure of the author is transformed into a scripter who is writing *always here and now*. In other words, both the author and the reader henceforth, engaging in the complicit activity, must join together and confront the unfinished text, which is still being written and will only induce an open form of reading, rather than engender any determinate and univocal meanings. The construction of meanings is no more decidable or, at least, the readers have to construct their own meanings in their own ways.²

¹Self-consciously, I want to point out the danger that "theory" should be given any priority over "practice." No stance can justify the proposition that metafiction applies the post-structuralist theory of language. However, to deny their intersection will be as well a too ignorant gesture. A modest belief, as I hold it, will be that they both attribute to the formation of the cultural poetics of postmodernism.

²After all the explanations of the general poetics of metafiction, one point needs to be clarified. That is, the complexity of reading process, the laying-bare of the conventions of fiction-making, the play of the performativity of language, or the suppression of the author's subjectivity--all these properties do not belong exclusively to postmodern metafiction. Many modernist writers, for example, Mallarmé, Proust, or Brecht, have done nearly the same things in their experimental works. Early in the eighteenth century when novel appeared as a newly-born genre, some British novelists, such as Sterne and Fielding, were no less self-conscious in their direct addressing to the readers or commentary and reflection on their acts of novel-writing. However, the self-deconstruction of the narrator's/author's already established standpoints and the underlining of the intricate relationship between discourse and the social-ideological factuality distinctively characterize the poetics of postmodern metafiction. See Hutcheon, *Narcissistic*, pp. xiii-xv.

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* sets out to be "a treatise on the construction of meaning" (Hagen 439). In the novel, Fowles exhibits not so much a finalized product as a dynamic writing/reading process. Alongside with the persona in the novel--the narrator, Sarah, and Charles--readers are invited to participate in the complicated process of deciding the novel's meanings and to collaborate with the author's contemplation on the issues of fiction-making: the roles of author, reader, and character thus overlap (Hagen 441-43). In this essay, after so much abstract and generalized discussion, I will first focus on the reading as both an empirical experience offered by and the activity thematized in the novel, to examine the conditions of the production and the reception of the text. In so doing, 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 the narrator's) self-conscious treatment of intertextuality and parody. Tentatively, I hope this study can practically illuminate the poetics of postmodernism in which novel is its preferential genre.

(Re-)Reading / (Re-)Writing

As revealed above, Barthes's metaphor "the death of the author" at least implies two things: on the one hand, the author's hermeneutical privilege and his status as the monopolistic producer is expelled out of the text and writing for him is parallel with the reader's reading process; on the other hand, the reader must take the role no less active than the writer's in the activity of constructing the meanings of the text. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles highlights reading as the central issue to the narrator and Charles, and it is Sarah's paradoxical identity that textualizes their individual reading experiences. An analysis of reading experiences as the incisive point will broach effectively the framework of narrative of the novel. In Chapter Thirteen, when the narrator in that authorial voice claims the "possibility is not permissibility" and "it is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live",³ he virtually has negated his own authority and suggests not only the ontology of fiction-making and the existential autonomy of his characters [who resist any preemptive totalization] but also the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the novel whose textuality problematizes the reading process. Reading process, as Wolfgang Iser maintains,

is selective, and the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realization. This is borne out by the fact that a second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first On a second reading familiar occurrences now tend to appear in a new light and seem to be at times corrected, at times enriched. (55-57)

³John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (New York: Signet, 1969) 81. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated by page numbers placed in parenthesis immediately following the quotations.

Iser's points here make clear that the reader's conceptual schemata can never totalize the text: every reading for the reader is a rereading which engenders the necessity of revising his/her previous conceptual frameworks and of rewriting the text. Therefore, reading in this sense is an intricate process of anticipation and retrospection, in which the reader strives to construct a consistent signifying pattern that is not inherent in the text but is only the reader's own "illusion." Besides, as the narrator in the novel shows that "fiction is woven into all" and that we can retain our past experiences only by means of fictionalizing them (82), with whatever heterogeneous informations the text provides the reader in every stage of reading process, he/she has to make a decision: either to ignore it and refuse to change the pre-established illusion, or to incorporate it into the new conceptual framework and revise the previous experience of reading and reconstruct another illusion. Such a process of con- and de-constructing the illusion may be so discontinuous that the past experiences seem to be incompatible with the new informations and the progressing of reading is thus disrupted. A determinate and consistent interpretation of characters and events turns out to be impossible. For example, when Charles met Sarah at the Cobb for the first time, Sarah for him was as mysterious as the sea and what remained after this meeting was only Sarah's face, which was "an unforgettable face, and a tragic face There was no artifice, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness" (14). But this "illusion" did not last too long. Every subsequent confrontation always changed his perspectives towards Sarah and even motivated the reflection on his own existence and the meanings of the world. In their second secret meeting in the woods, Charles began to associate Sarah's face

with foreign women--to be frank (much franker than he would have been to himself) with *foreign beds*.⁴ This marked a new stage of his awareness of Sarah. He had realized she was no more intelligent and independent than she seemed; he now guessed darker qualities. (99)

In fact, through the whole novel, Charles never succeeded in concretizing the textuality represented by Sarah's enigmatic identity. Wanting of any proper language to communicate with Sarah verbally and interpretive modality to "read" Sarah correctly (Tarbox 62-63), Charles did not realize that he had misread Sarah, and his language was insufficient and erroneous to penetrate into the mystery of Sarah until the very ending of the novel in Rossetti's house.

He saw nothing; but only the folly of his own assumption that fallen women must continue falling--for had he come to realize to arrest the law of gravity? He was shaken as a man who suddenly [found] the world around him standing on its head. (347)

Charles's ironical allusion to the physical law accentuates the fact that his scientific viewpoints of cause-effect turns out to be groundless and inappropriate in demystifying Sarah and, in

⁴The italic is mine. This is the first time in the novel revealing that Sarah stands as the example of the convergence of both textuality and sexuality which challenges Charles's cognition and resists any definite interpretation. This will be developed further later.

other words, the version of the real Sarah is never identical with Charles's, which is only the projection of his Victorian conceptual framework. To a large extent, Charles incarnates the archetypal Victorian mind, which adheres to the mania of classification, teleological thinking, and the belief in human progress. Therefore, he submits to the Victorian narrative and cannot transgress its conventions (Booker 183), and fails to absorb the different Sarahs into a single version.

Obviously, as I have indicated above, Sarah can be seen as "the unplumbable mysteries of the workings of texts and narratives" (Booker 187), partly because of her experiences of reading literature which are transcribed as her assumed identity or her own story. But here, I would like to delay the discussion of the problem of intertextuality and point out another crucial fact: it is owing to the connection of textuality and sexuality converging in Sarah that invalidates any attempt of totalized interpretation of her identity. Consciously or unconsciously, Charles cannot help attaching sexual implication to Sarah in their confrontations -- both verbal and physical -- through the whole novel. Hearing Sarah's confession of her misfortune, Charles

saw the scene she had not detailed: her giving herself. He was at one and the same time Varguennes enjoying her and the man who sprang forward and stuck him down: just as Sarah was to him both an innocent victim and a wild, abandoned woman. Deep in himself he ... glimpsed the dark shadows where he might have enjoyed it himself. (143)

To enjoy Sarah sexually parallels his futile attempt of circumscribing Sarah's different, enigmatic identities into a single text. As the real sexual intercourse almost occurred in Chapter Forty-six, Charles's premature ejaculation closed this scene ironically, which once again proved the impossibility of "penetrating" into Sarah. To sum up, both textuality and sexuality cannot be totalized by any attempt and within any structure.⁵ And that is what Charles fails to perceive.

In the novel, besides Charles, even Dr. Grogan, Mrs. Tranter, Mrs. Poulteney, and the Vicar all fail to perceive the subjectivity of Sarah; their failure respectively exposes the inadequacies of their own conceptual frameworks. The narrator, as a novelist, undergoes the similar predicament of making a decision about how to continue his composition, as well as reading, of his characters and plots he is writing. Nevertheless, unlike Charles who fails to

⁵This concept of anti-totalization or, in Booker's words, "infinity" exemplifies the transgressive potential which characterizes most of the postmodern artistic practices (179). As far as the novel is concerned, Fowles's treatment of this concept brings to the fore the problem of boundaries: he creates several images that Sarah *may* represent--the governess, hysteric, melancholic, femmes fatale--whereas all these cannot contain Sarah once and for all. In a broad sense, although Fowles does not declare explicitly his own position in and attitude towards the postmodern art as a whole, he does purposely illegitimize and subvert all the closed forms of reading and interpretation in the novel.

absorb the different Sarah into a single version, the narrator declares openly the undesirability and the impossibility of struggling for any definite resolution. Early in Chapter Thirteen, the narrator has confessed his problems of being at the same time a novelist, who has to follow the conventions of fiction-making and whose *raison d'être* is to fictionalize the world and reality, and the reader of his own text. Appearing as an actual character of the novel, the narrator derides Charles for his dilemma about how to face his future after he found that Sarah had left.

I see the dilemma is false. The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. That leaves me only one problem: I cannot give both versions at once, yet whichever is the second will seem, so strong is the tyranny of the last chapter, the final, the "real" version. (318)

Here, once again, the narrator self-negates his own authority as a novelist and reiterates the character's psychological autonomy and complexity which resists the author's structuration. Charles's hostility towards the narrator's gaze on the train can verify this point.⁶ Moreover, the narrator demystifies the novelistic illusion, reminding the readers that the year 1867 is a century past in "reality" and "[i]t is futile to show optimism or pessimism, or anything else about it, because we know what has happened since" (318). Thus, he refuses to nail down the fight about how Charles is about to engage. He just leaves the two possible alternatives as they are.⁷

Through the whole novel, the narrator or Fowles himself as a novelist grapples with two dimensions of writing process, "between the initial, organic, exciting composition by pure hazard and the necessity of subsequent revision" (Smith 93). This duality of writing should not be misconstrued as the Victorian "mania for editing and revising" (289). In fact, Fowles suggests that we can know the real Mill or Hardy "far more from the deletions and alteration of their autobiographies than from the published versions" (289).⁸ In this aspect of (re)writing, Fowles employs "the style of accretion": he simply "permit[s] the new expression to remain in the text alongside with the old one which is revised, made more precise or pulled back" (Smith 88). Such a disposition directly results in the highly metafictional device of different endings coexisting in the novel.

⁶This materialized gaze technically creates the effect of *mise en abyme*: the "representing" is represented. To be specific, it reveals the fact that the authorial "I" is also the object of being looked, narrated, and represented.

⁷The traditional novelists may be aware of the possibility of different endings, too. However, they make choices. As for Fowles, "possibility is not permissibility": he does not choose but "presents" the choices of the protagonist. Such a gesture also conforms to his statement in Chapter Forty-nine that "every Victorian has two minds" (288).

⁸Another example can be found in Charles's letter to Sarah (290-91), ascertaining that the act of revision has been thematized in the novel and is not merely an empirical activity that Fowles as the actual author of the novel carries out.

Thus, theoretically rather than realistically, the novel has "three" endings, including the imaginary one. As a matter of fact, these three endings, in Charles Scruggs's words, "are mirrors that, taken together, continually shift our perspective, forcing us to admit that no single aesthetic reality will be truly mimetic, truly representative of the complexity of human life" (98); they respectively reflect different frameworks of narrative and respond to the different world views the novel as a whole presents. The imaginary ending illustrates Fowles's belief that we all concretize the past experiences and the future prospects by means of fictionalization. It can be regarded as the logical ending, which parodies romantic love story but is compatible with the previous relationship between Charles and Ernestina in terms of a highly realistic and Victorian narrative (Scruggs 99-100). Nevertheless, it is the other two endings that empirically finalize the novel as a real material existence. Developed through the whole novel and completed at the second ending, the subjectivity of Sarah as the "marginal", the outcast, and the alienated at last subverts the conventions of the Victorian narrative and becomes the "center" of the newly constructed reality out of which Charles is excluded: he in turn becomes the marginal, the real existentialist hero of the novel.⁹ However, the first ending just reinforces the perspective of the imaginary one: the dominance of the Victorian narrative still holds its sway. In other words, Charles continues to subject to it and Sarah's individuality is repressed within its omnipotence: she fails in her quest of selfrealization and has to yield to husband, child, and family. And, ironically, Sarah's final identity resumes what she has strived to abandon: a Mrs. Talbot. With all these different endings, Fowles not only creates three versions of the characterization, the narrative, and the novel but also intensifies the contrasts of different moral perspectives and cultural frameworks of narrative. Let me repeat: he does not choose or judge, and he just leaves them there, to be judged in each other's light.

Parodic Intertextuality/Intertextual Parody

In an interview with Carol M. Barnum, Fowles speaks of his personal philosophy of fiction-writing and comments as follows:

I don't think any art or science can describe the whole reality of nature. ... I often feel this in writing fiction—that one is trying to describe what one can't and ought not even to be trying; and so is condemned to a sort of vulgar futility, or eternal second best. (Barnum 188)

⁹The reason why the second version of ending is the real one is not because of its printed position that practically "close" the novel but the "open" form of reading it entails. The interchange of the role as the center and the marginal indicates the fact that following the psychological development either of Charles or of Sarah brings about the division of a "sub-text" under the main narrative. Whichever direction is chosen, this ending does paradoxically conclude their stories.

What Fowles defies here is, as the narrator of the novel explicitly maintains in Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fifty-five, the totalized form of narrative and interpretation and the arbitrariness, the pretense of the authorial omniscient viewpoint. In fact, through his highly metafictional devices does Fowles bring out the "extremely question of the assumptions upon which narrative is constructed and interpreted" (Booker 183). Meanwhile, these devices have virtually formulated the striking features of the narrative structure in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In addition to what I have discussed above--the thematized reading/writing activity, the style of accretion, the three endings--I would like to proceed to examine another two crucial concepts that are relevant to my concern here: intertextuality and parody. In so doing, on a broader scale, the poetics of postmodern art and the stances of postmodern theories will be broached.

As I have mentioned above, the single voice of the narration and the intelligibility of the subjectivity have been illegitimized. Thus, the postmodern writers rationalize the text, in Barthes's words, as "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" and "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" ("Death" 170). Kristeva, even more explicitly, theorizes the definition of the text as intertextuality: "in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (36).¹⁰ Whereas a text necessarily refers to other texts from the cultures of different spaces and ages, those texts being referred have already incorporated other texts within themselves, which transgress and at the same time expand the textual boundaries infinitely.¹¹ To be specific, intertextuality is synonymous with *textual infinity*, which can be thought only and cannot be represented. However, by means of his

¹⁰To a large extent, this brand of language theory exhibits a certain congeniality to Bakhtin's conceptions that the orientation toward the alien words resides in every single utterance and the internal stratification of various speech types or voices, or, in his own words, *heteroglossia*, characterizes the language of novel. Nevertheless, in this aspect, Bakhtin articulates the components of ideology in the formation of language use and conceives not only of the centrifugal (stratification and diversification) but also of the centripetal forces (centralization and unification) in language; and the latter seems to be lacking, or ignored, in the postmodern (or post-structuralist) theory of language, which somehow cannot dispense with the condemnation "too formalistic."

¹¹Perhaps, the Derridean "*différance*" can elaborate this point to a more philosophically sophisticated level. In Derrida's belief, the identification of signifier with signified is forever postponed. Meaning is never fully present in every single utterance. On the contrary, it is a flickering of presence and absence, because signified keeps referring to something else and transforming itself into other signifiers which are absent but at the same time leave a trace there. In other words, signification, as a dynamic process, is always *differed* and *deferred* and can be conceived as *différance*, a new coinage of Derrida himself. *Différance*, according to Derrida, "is simultaneously spacing and temporization" (*Margin* 13). In this sense, meaning is ever-vacillating in "the becoming-space of time" [spacing] and "the becoming-time of space" [temporization]; it just disseminates among the chain of signifiers and always keeps its trace from sign to sign, both present and absent.

notoriously self-conscious metafictional devices, Fowles undertakes the impossible task, *to represent the unrepresentable*.¹² The epigraphs of every chapter and the footnotes in the novel "blur the distinction inside and outside, openly proclaiming the infinite extendibility of all texts, the intertextuality of all narratives" (Booker 190). Similarly, Sarah's invented tales, her self-images, and her intuitive judgments on others are constituted by the literary works. The fiction and the poetry she read

served as a substitute for experience. Without realizing it she judged people as much by the standards of Walter Scott and Jane Austen as by any empirically arrived at; seeing those around her as fictional character, and making poetic judgments on them. (48)

Even Charles, the narrator, and the actual readers of the novel also contribute to the formation of intertextuality that Fowles devises: Charles reads Sarah through his experiences of reading science and literature (eg. Darwin and *Madame Bovary*); the narrator reads/writes his novel with references to other texts of literature, biology, history, sociology and sexuality (eg. Hardy, Arnold, Marx, Malthus, and even Brecht, Robbe-Grillet, and Barthes); and the readers read Sarah, Charles, and the novel with the texts of their own cultures.¹³ All these texts of miscellaneous genres are mixed up in the novel and, thus, the generic boundaries break down: all of them can be appropriated for fiction-making. On the one hand, through this (inter)-textualization, the distinction between fiction and reality is deconstructed. Discourse—be it fictional or empirical—cannot avert from the entanglement with the political, the ideological, the social, and the historical actuality. The readers are thus unsettled and called into attention to their status quo as a human construct, to rethink the history and their own world. On the other hand, perhaps more fundamentally, intertextuality resists any definite signification and exposes the impossibility of totalization in any use of language. As Derrida maintains,

[i]f totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play a field of infinite substitutions. (289)

¹²One may doubt whether Fowles does not acquaint himself with post-structuralism and carry out its theory into practice. As I have revealed, the boundary between theory and practice has been blurred in postmodernism, and to retain the argument which of them should be given priority or to exaggerate their immediate complicity will become trivial; both of them comprise the postmodern cultural practices. As Fowles confesses in the interview, he has ever read only one book on deconstruction and seems to be terribly baffled by the philosophically enigmatic writing styles of Barthes and Derrida, who become the targets of sneering in his *Mantissa*, though he has tried to understand them. See Barnum, p.198.

¹³Such a list can go on and on. Hutcheon classifies the devices of intertextuality in the novel into three layers; Fowles, the narrator, and the characters (*Narcissistic* 57-59). But I would like to add one: the actual readers. The texts in these four layers refer to one another and thus generate the effect of *mise en abyme*.

As far as the novel is concerned, this anti-totalization not only raises and then, unsettles the reader's consciousness but also explains away why reading, rereading and misreading are circulative and inseparable. And interpretation turns out to be a paradoxical activity both of con- and of de-construction. There is no way out of this *aporia* except by joining the play of "infinite substitutions," if one is to read a postmodern text.¹⁴

That the meanings of a text *disseminate* in the trace of the past/present and the multifarious systems of languages and cannot be totalized or exhausted in any definite interpretation does not mean the linguistic nihilism: the non-existence of objective meanings annuls all the acts of interpretation as illegitimate and unworthy. Incorporating numerous texts of, for example, the Victorian era or (post)modern society, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* coordinates different literary conventions or epistemological frameworks but *recontextualizes* them in its own interest. In fact, as Bakhtin maintains,

[a]fter all, it is possible to objectivize one's own particular language, its internal form, the peculiarities of its world view, its specific habits, only in the light of another language belonging to some one else, which is almost much one's own as one's native language. (62)

Relinquishing the centralized, unified monologue and replacing it with the trans-historical dialogue, Fowles *dialogizes* the languages in the novel: any expression or statement becomes double-voiced and "a highly unstable dynamic equilibrium" thus comes into being (Booker 193-94). That is, with the intertextual parody, Fowles places the Victorian narratives in contrast to but on the same scale with the (post)modern narratives. Like the Derridean critique of the metaphysics of presence, Fowles's novel includes within itself the norms it aims to contest but does not privilege or denunciate any of those polarized narratives; they are, in Hutcheon's words, "judged in each other's light" (*Poetics* 39). For example, when Charles appears at the Cobb with heavy clothes and equipments for his plaeontological survey, the narrator contends:

Well, we laugh. But perhaps there is something admirable in this dissociation between what is most comfortable and what is most recommended. We meet here, once again, this bone of contention between two centuries: is duty to derive us or not? . . . We think . . . that we have nothing to discover, and the only things of the utmost

¹⁴In this sense, the reader joining this (inter)textual play is named by Barthes as a subject who simultaneously keeps the *text or pleasure*--compatible with his/her own reading conventions and cultural background--and the text of bliss, the text that

imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts . . . unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (*Pleasure* 14)

Thus, the typical, ideal postmodern reader is schizophrenic in essence and can bear in mind contradiction, paradox, and indeterminacy.

importance to us concern the present of man. So much the better for us? Perhaps. But we are not the ones who will finally judge.¹⁵ (44)

Although the Victorian Society is the object of Fowles's critique in the novel (its form of narrative, repression of female subjectivity, hypocrisy of social values), however, as the example here shows, the modern conception of duty does not necessarily excel that of the Victorians. In Chapter Thirty-five, through the voice of the narrator, Fowles even refutes the assumption that the modernity is more *progressive* than the Victorian society in sexual gratification or pleasure. In fact, the naive belief in the historical progress is what Fowles denigrates in both the Victorian and the modern ideology (Booker 194). Obviously, Fowles retains and works within the norms that he attempts to contest. And, in a broader sense, the nature of parody in postmodern art like Fowles's novel lies in its *historicizing*--its critical reworking and resignifying--both the old and the present paradigms (*Narcissistic* 50). In other words, the intertextual parody (or parodic intertextuality) does not belong solely to the metafictional narratives like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It is, in the postmodernism/ity, according to Hutcheon, the only way that we can interpret the history and the world, since we cannot "escape complicity with some metanarratives" (*Poetics* 13), and have to *read, reread, and misread any narrative only through recontextualization*. Although postmodernism/ity may be defined, as Lyotard maintains, in terms of its "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (xxiv), it does not break with them completely: through the intertextualization, they are included parodically within its own cultural and artistic practices.

Conclusion?

As a postmodern text, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* reflexively and paradoxically discloses its own indeterminacy, anti-totalization, and anti-structuration. These properties can be seen as the common entities of postmodernism/ity. I do not deny the possibility in the postmodern texts that their iconoclastic artistic energies might be stagnated in the purely rhetorical games. However, Fowles's novel--though it resists any definite, finalized interpretation--displays no sign of nihilism which sustains the pessimistic view that all interpretation is pointless. It does not destroy all the boundaries but, through its postmodern metafictional techniques that I have outlined in this essay, accentuates the fluidity or instability of those boundaries and "suggests that the activities of reading and interpretation should participate in an endless ongoing process of textual and cultural examination and critique" (Booder 197-198).

¹⁵The themes of the anachronistic discourses like this suffice in the whole novel and include: the natural scenery (10); the fashion (10-11; 14; 39); the attitudes towards time (16); the social conditions (16; 19); Ernestina's health (28); Sarah's intelligence (47; 86); Mary's appearance (64-65); Charles's dull night (94); Dr. Grogan's intellectual background (121; 123); feminine sexuality (128); modes of thinking (197); the status of the bourgeois (197); sexuality (212); the hobbies of the rich (223); the traffic (229), to name only a few.

In the highly technology-oriented and commercialized society we live in, the inclination to efficiency and homogeneity seems to be so irresistible in mass culture that our perceptions of art and world become unbearably automatic and that we tend to take for granted the legitimacy of bureaucracy. Postmodernism may be notoriously subversive in its disturbing the congealing or the self-obviousness of our conceptual frameworks. Nevertheless, it affirms the play of multiplicity and encourages us to rethink critically all the narratives--history, science, philosophy, literature, and of course postmodern narrative itself--as human constructs. Does this *negative, paradoxical, and self-deconstructive* way of thinking say nothing *affirmative, essential, and constructive* to us? Or, as Gianni Vattimo doubts, do we have to "see it as a fad and to insist on its having been overcome" (1)? Or, even more apocalyptically, is it possible to announce that the word postmodernism/ity has no meaning at all in the contemporary society or never happens in the history? Some may chide me indignantly for my bothering them with all these trivial and insignificant questions and, paradoxically, say "yes, of course." As I have made clear at the very beginning of this essay, I have no attempt to defend for or protest against any critical stance concerning the issues of postmodernism/ity. Therefore, I intend no more response to those questions and decide to leave out the answer. Anyway, as Fowles says in his novel, "we are not the ones who will finally judge."

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