67. One novel, two styles: *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

Aytaç ÖREN[1]

Abstract

The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Robert Fowles can be said in a way to shed light on the development of novel in a century. The Victorian narrative style is side by side with the postmodern narrative style one hundred years later, and the difficulties of writing a Victorian novel from a century later are expressed by the author within the novel. The Victorian era and its socio-dynamic structure are depicted both with various epigraphs and through the narrative. Accordingly, attempts to write such a novel are clearly noted by emphasizing these difficulties from time to time and this dual approach is shared with the reader. While the main story progresses, the century-long adventure of novel is written within the Victorian elements. Apparently, there is the Victorian novel in which a postmodern novel comes into existence. It is possible to see both together. Fowles makes metafictional manipulations with the acceptances of the period and also embeds the novel's century-old progress into the story of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In short, while presenting the main story of the novel, Fowles successfully reveals the perfect harmony of the novel styles of two different eras.

Keywords: John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, development of novel, Victorian, postmodern

Bir roman iki tarz: *Fransız Teğmeninin Kadını*

Öz

John Robert Fowles'ın kaleme aldığı Fransız Teğmenin Kadını adlı romanının bir yüzyıl boyunca romanın geçirdiği gelişimine de ışık tuttuğu söylenebilir. Viktorya dönemi anlatı üslubu, yüzyıl sonraya ait postmodern bir anlatı üslubu ile iç içedir ve bir yüzyıl sonra bir Viktorya dönemi romanı yazmanın zorlukları, yazar anlatıcı tarafından roman içinde dile getirilir. Viktorya Dönemi ve dönemin sosyo-dinamik yapısı hem farklı farklı bölüm başına konulan alıntılarla hem de anlatı üzerinden tasvir edilir. Aynı şekilde, zaman zaman bu zorluklara vurgu yapılarak böylesi bir roman yazma girişimlerinden açıkça bahsedilir ve ortaya çıkan bu ikili yaklaşım okuyucuyla paylaşılır. Ana hikâye devam ederken romanın geçirdiği bir yüzyıllık seyir, Viktorya dönemi unsurlarıyla beraberce verilir. Açıkçası postmodern bir romanın içinde varlık bulduğu bir Viktorya dönemi romanı söz konusudur. Her ikisini de bir roman içerisinde bir arada görmek mümkündür. Fowles, Viktorya Dönemi'nin genel kabullerine üstkurgusal manipülasyonlar yapar ve bununla beraber romanın bir yüzyılda boyunca katettiği gelişimi, Fransız Teğmenin Kadını'nın anlatı öyküsüne yerleştirir. Kısacası, Fowles bir taraftan romanın ana hikayesini sunarken diğer taraftan da iki farklı döneme ait roman tarzlarının oluşturduğu mükemmel bir harmanı başarılı bir şekilde gözler önüne serer.

1   Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Sağlık Bilimleri Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Bölümü (İstanbul, Türkiye), aytac.oren@sbu.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4208-548X [Araştırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 27.07.2022-kabul tarihi: 20.10.2022; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide. 1190356]

Anahtar kelimeler: John Fowles, *Fransız Teğmenin Kadını*, romanın gelişimi, Viktoryan, postmodern

Introduction

The Victorian Era is a time of profound changes in English society in the socio-economic and cultural spheres. It is, thus, a time of ebb and flow between traditions and these changes/conflicts. The period has still some dominant traditions as seen for the art of the novel. While John Fowles tries to write a novel, at first belonging to the Victorian Age, he also mainly points to these social changes and traditions with the epigraphs from various sources; for example, scientific works by scientists like Darwin, who plays an important role in the novel content, artists and also some reports of the time, in his *French Lieutenant's Woman* and shows with the example of a novel in the novel that a species undergoing a change can only survive when it transforms this change into a power in its favor in the fight against its rivals. The novel, which starts with the style used a hundred years ago, takes on a style used a hundred years later. Although the first twelve chapters generally seems like a Victorian novel, a break totally different becomes at the chapter 13. The novel moves on to the features of the novel a century later. The story gains a new integrity, the narrator sometimes turns clearly into an author, even he enters the fiction as a character, its ending becomes obscured with three different endings, some concepts belonging to the following period, such as the new novel, are mentioned... Fowles, who produces a novel whose bottom is Victorian and whose top is postmodern, actually gives an example of a novel that contains the novel's adventure of change in a century in a novel. The two novel approaches are side by side in the novel structure. Therefore, seeing the change of the novel, that is, the old and the new together, within the fiction gives an extremely different perspective to Fowles's work.

In this respect, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is an exact example to see both two styles together and the path the novel took over a century. It is Fowles's third novel, a postmodern historical one, and its plot explores the unrestful relationship, one the one hand, between a gentleman and also an amateur naturalist Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff, the former governess and independent woman with whom he falls in love, and, on the other hand, between the Victorian novel and the post-modern one. So, both the Victorian and the postmodern literary qualities can be observed in the book at the same time. The novel, which begins classically and continues like this for a while, is combined with elements like metafiction, historiography, Marxist criticism, and feminism. This novel is based on the nineteenth-century romantic or gothic novel at the beginning, which is a literary genre tracing its origins back to the eighteenth century. Even though Fowles perfectly reproduces typical characters, situations, and even dialogue, all of which resemble the Victorian novel, the reader should always be aware of the irony in the perception which Fowles creates; because his point of view, however cleverly disguised, is that of the twentieth century. We see it both in the authorial intrusions, which comment on the lives of people in Victorian England, and in his choice of opening quotations from the writings of some famous people of the time, whose observations disprove most Victorian assumptions about their world. Also, the novel is notable for the author's intrusive commentary and suggestion of alternative endings, an aspect represented in Pinter's screenplay by a double action of film-within-film (Drabble, 1996: 370), which gives the novel a metafictional quality. Therefore, it is possible to see two novel styles together with a century-long gap.

The Development Course of Novel in Fiction: One Novel, Two Styles

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles, whose novels are extremely technically complex, addresses the reader with a love story unfavorable to the Victorian age, which is perhaps one of the most conservative times in the world history and everything, including literature, is subject to strict rules and a sense of duty. The book owes its success largely to the dialogue and tension between the two main characters, who are pushed to the boundaries of their era and seek an outlet for progress. Maybe the first thing to consider is that epigraphs play an important role at this point and also in the dual novel approach in the novel. Epigraphs appear as essential elements of fiction in the novel, and these quotations from both fictional and non-fictional writings are carried into the fictional world. Fowles explains his success in weaving the novel with Victorian quotations as follows:

> ... the reason it turned historical may be that I have collected Victorian books all my life. I have a poor academic knowledge of the age, but I do know quite a lot about the byways of Victorian life just because I happen to collect Victorian books. So I didn't have to do much research, although I did have that very useful book by E. Royston Pyke, Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age, which in my opinion is the best of all anthologies about the nineteenth century. Another thing which I used a great deal was Punch. Punch was a great magazine in Victorian times, and that does all your work for you: you get your food details from it, and all your clothes details, and a lot of dialogue...

(Campbell, J. & Fowles, J., 1976: 464)

Each chapter begins with one or two quotes, and the book opens with the following quote:

> Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself.
> Marx, *Zur Judenfrage* (1844)

(Fowles, 1969: I)

This quote is actually a general framework of the novel because the Victorian age is a gateway to the liberation of both man and novel. As seen in only two examples below, one of the scientists and men of letters cited in the novel is Darwin, but he is the most mentioned person in the fiction:

> But a still more important consideration is that the chief part of the organization of every living creature is due to inheritance; and consequently, though each being assuredly is well fitted for its place in nature, many structures have now no very close and direct relations to present habits of life.
> Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859)

(11)

The epigraphs from Thomas Hardy, G.M. Young, Jane Austen, Tennyson, Karl Marx, Matthew Arnold, A. H. Clough, Lewis Carroll and many more shed light on the science and novel acceptances of that period. In terms of showing Fowles's adaptation of the novel to the Victorian era, it is also interesting that there are some citations of reports and documents from that period in the novel:

> At the infirmary many girls of 14 years of age, and even girls of 13, up to 17 years of age, have been brought in pregnant to be confined here. The girls have acknowledged that their ruin has taken place ... in going or returning from their (agricultural) work. Girls and boys of this age go five, six, or seven miles to work, walking in droves along the roads and by-lanes. I have myself witnessed gross indecencies between boys and girls of 14 to 16 years of age. I saw once a young girl insulted by some five or six boys on the roadside. Other older persons were about 20 or 30 yards off, ...
>
> *Children's Employment Commission Report* (1867)

(266)

These quotations about the socio-cultural structure of the period are to partially anchor the novel to the Victorian period:

> Duty--that's to say complying / With whate'er's expected here ... / With the form conforming duly, / Senseless what it meaneth truly... / 'Tis the stern and prompt suppressing, / As an obvious deadly sin, / All the questing and the guessing / Of the soul's own soul within: / 'Tis the coward acquiescence / In a destiny's behest . . . -- A. H. Clough, "Duty" (1841)

(334)

These different types of quotations from the Victorian era, on the one hand, set the novel in the 18th century. On the other hand, it adds a metafictional dimension to the novel by making them a fictional material, which is a characteristic of novels a century later called intertextuality. Building on the Victorian era, Fowles creates something new from the old in the context of intertextuality with these quotations, and traces one end to a later time. Since the postmodern writer claims that no discourse or text can be independent of its predecessor and its environment, he takes the narratives in other texts from their contexts and puts them in his own text for a specific purpose and constructs them in a new context; thus gaining the opportunity to produce new meanings from them (Hakkıoglu, 2019: 74). This is exactly the wholeness that Fowles creates with these quotations.

The novel, dated between 1867 and 1869, is in a face-to-face situation with the present; imitates the Victorian era and is a three-ended narrative (corresponding to Charles's possible choice) and is a work in which fragile relationships are established between the author, the narrator and the reader (Raimond, 2005: 153). The narrative time begins in late March 1867, but it is written a century later, and these time differences or gaps are made clear to the reader, which combines two different temporal novel styles:

> ... The colors of the young ladies would strike us today as distinctly strident:
> but the world was then in the first fine throes of the discovery of aniline dyes.

(Fowles, 1969: 5)

> ... After all, it was only 1867.

(11)

> Such folk-costume relics of a much older England had become picturesque by 1867, though not rare; every village had its dozen or so smocked elders.

(39)

> Duty, agreeable conformity to the epoch's current, raised its stern head.

(50)

These are just a few examples encountered throughout the book. While the author imitates the Victorian novel, he carries the version of the novel a century later to the Victorian novel. Because "the novel paradoxically assumes the form of a Victorian novel as an experimental work and Fowles goes crab-backwards to join the avant-garde, imitating George Eliot as a way to emulate "Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barhes" (Brantlinger et al., 1972: 339), which is a mixture of the old and the new in the art of novel. Of course, writing a Victorian novel from a later time naturally combines two different styles of novel writing. The novel begins with Victorian acceptances but goes beyond the limits set for itself as it progresses. Time transitions also bring novel writing -old and new- style conflicts, and both of them get caught in the spiral of fiction, which brings out *the French Lieutenant's Wife*.

Fowles crams in the whole Victorian era in a small town, Lyme Regis, and opens a door to the era from there. The town of Lyme Regis is a perfect microverse, a brilliant spatial metaphor that displays the way

that humans impose narrative order on non-narrative experience, with its hermetic system of roads, paths, streets, and cart tracks (Tarbox, 1996: 88-89). This town is like a passage of time between the old and the new. He brings "then" and "today" together by making comparisons. Fowles uses time to great effect, clashing past with present across centuries or across a character's memories (Carter & McRae, 2001: 424). The reader comes and goes between these two times. But in these time transitions, both the typical Victorian novel writing understanding and the approach to the novel after a century are also reflected in the novel as the narrator confesses in the book:

> Ah, you say, but women were chained to their role at that time. But remember the date of this evening: April 6th, 1867. At Westminster only one week before John Stuart Mill had seized an opportunity in one of the early debates on the Reform Bill to argue that now was the time to give women equal rights at the ballot box. His brave attempt (the motion was defeated by 196 to 73, Disraeli, the old fox, abstaining) was greeted with smiles from the average man, guffaws from Punch (one joke showed a group of gentlemen besieging a female Cabinet minister, haw haw haw), and disapproving frowns from a sad majority of educated women, who maintained that their influence was best exerted from the home. Nonetheless, March 30th, 1867, is the point from which we can date the beginning of feminine emancipation in England; and Ernestina, who had giggled at the previous week's Punch when Charles showed it to her, cannot be completely exonerated. But we started off on the Victorian home evening. Let us return to it. Listen. Charles stares, a faint opacity in his suitably solemn eyes, at Ernestina's grave face.

> (Fowles, 1969: 115)

On the one hand, rapid social changes such as the enrichment of the middle class, the formation of the working class, and the alienation of the noble class to change are given, on the other hand, a Victorian-era subject is handled in a manner appropriate to that period. The epigraph in the chapter 51 directly reveals this approach of the author:

> For a long time, as I have said, the strong feudal habits of subordination and deference continued to tell upon the working class. The modern spirit has now almost entirely dissolved those habits . . . More and more this and that man, and this and that body of men, all over the country, are beginning to assert and put in practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes: his right to march where he likes, meet where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes. All this, I say, tends to anarchy. -- Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (1869)

> (385)

Thus, Fowles gives the fictional form of settling and/or not settling in the past from the future in the novel. Also, tension and curiosity are constantly kept alive. The third-person narrator recounts an objectionable love story from his own observations. Religion, science, belief, rationality, moral values, social classes, internal conflicts are viewed with a Victorian eye. With frequent time breaks, a perspective is formed for the period, and therefore for the novel:

> This -the fact that every Victorian had two minds- is the one piece of equipment we must always take with us on our travels back to the nineteenth century. It is a schizophrenia seen at its clearest, its most notorious, in the poets I have quoted from so often--in Tennyson, Clough, Arnold, Hardy; but scarcely less clearly in the extraordinary political veerings from Right to Left and back again of men like the younger Mill and Gladstone; in the ubiquitous neuroses and psychosomatic illnesses of intellectuals otherwise as different as Charles Kingsley and Darwin; in the execration at first poured on the Pre-Raphaelites, who tried--or seemed to be trying--to be one-minded about both art and life; in the endless tug-of-war between Liberty and Restraint, Excess and Moderation, Propriety and Conviction, between the principled man's cry for Universal Education and his terror of Universal Suffrage; transparent also in the mania for editing and revising, so that if we want to know the real Mill or the real Hardy we can learn far more from the deletions and alterations of their autobiographies than from the published versions . . .

> (368-369)

In the chapter 34, the narrative stops and the author/narrator intervenes, which seems to be an attempt to break the Victorian narrative. The conversation with the reader coming out of the narrative time causes confusion between fiction and reality. The intrusive and parodically omniscient narrator once toyed with the possibility that "perhaps Charles is myself disguised" (95), and he also suggested on several occasions a puzzling identity between the flesh-and-blood writer and the fictional narrator (Onega, 1996: 43). With a postmodern novel style, he evaluates his writings, gives information about the novel and its author, and talks with the reader:

> 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. So perhaps I am writing a transposed autobiography; perhaps I now live in one of the houses I have brought into the fiction; perhaps Charles is myself disguised. Perhaps it is only a game. Modern women like Sarah exist, and I have never understood them. Or perhaps I am trying to pass off a concealed book of essays on you. Instead of chapter headings, perhaps I should have written "On the Horizontality of Existence," "The Illusions of Progress," "The History of the Novel"…

> (Fowles, 1969: 95)

The reader enters into the understanding of the novel a century later, and the narrator transforms into the author and interprets what has happened so far. He says that he can read the characters' inner world as the person who wrote the book, because this style is a worldwide accepted style at the time of his story, and it points to a god-oriented narrative indirectly. As a person living in the era of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes, he emphasizes the change in the concept of the novel. Here, there is almost a comparison of two different novel styles. The Victorian novel style is carried a century later with this chapter and gains a metafictional dimension. The story continues the way a possible Victorian novel should have ended. The reader is dragged into the possible progression of the story by being guided in line with Victorian assumptions and even by sharing reasons. The chapter 44 is the first alternate ending of the book. The author says the story is over and he doesn't know what happened to Sarah:

> And so ends the story. What happened to Sarah, I do not know--whatever it was, she never troubled Charles again in person, however long she may have lingered in his memory. This is what most often happens. People sink out of sight, drown in the shadows of closer things.

> (337)

Then it gives information about the later life of Charles. The reader thinks that the novel is over, even though he knows that there are still many more pages to read after that. Here, the following determination regarding Fowles's carrying the creative process into the novel is noteworthy:

> Fowles's examination of the creative process manifests itself in the increasing level of metafictionality in this first period, with multiple references to the means by which the novel is created, a reflexivity... The dramatic extreme of this process appears in The French Lieutenant's Woman, when the novelist effectively shatters the reader's suspension of disbelief (by announcing that the events described are, of course, figments of his imagination) and then again by the novelist appearing as a character in the novel. Interestingly, Fowles does this several times, at crucial points, thereby increasing the tension of the plot, so the genre expectations are not deconstructed in any overarching fashion, but quite specifically. The reader wonders whether the narrative will continue or not be resolved at all.

> (Buchberger, 2009: 54-55)

In the chapter 45, the author says that he has tied the novel with a traditional ending, that what is told in the last two chapters is actually to convince the reader, and that the events take place differently:

> And now, having brought this fiction to a thoroughly traditional ending, I had better explain that although all I have described in the last two chapters happened, it did not happen quite in the way you may have been led to believe.

<div align="right">(Fowles, 1969: 339)</div>

He states that the Victorian era was very tedious and unaccustomed to ambiguity. Then, he starts writing the novel again, going back two chapters. Here, by referring to the classical ending of the Victorian novels, Fowles adds a postmodern perspective to his novel by creating another alternative ending. We read of Charles and Sarah being dragged after their own inner voices. Going out of the novel period, the form of the story transforms into a hundred years later. This second ending ends unhappy. Charles breaks up with his fiancée, but cannot reunite with his beloved.

Another remarkable point is the use of concepts belonging to a hundred years later in the novel, which adds to the novel a dual sense of belonging and novel styles of two different periods.

> Had they but been able to see into the future! For Ernestina was to outlive all her generation. She was born in 1846. And she died on the day that Hitler invaded Poland.

<div align="right">(27)</div>

Hitler, who did not exist in the Victorian era, enters narrative time from the future. Again, the modes that were groundbreaking in world fashion the 1960s, the computer which was an invention of a century later, electricity and television that did not exist in those days, and many other terms used in the future are mentioned in the novel. In the chapter 47, he likens Charles being with Sarah to a city on which an atomic bomb was dropped from a calm sky, and describes his guilt using the word radioactivity. In the chapter 57, the narrator avoids using words specific to later years when describing a woman:

> Looking down, along the new embankment in Chelsea, there are traces of snow on the ground. Yet there is also, if only in the sunlight, the first faint ghost of spring. I am ver ... I am sure the young woman whom I should have liked to show pushing a perambulator (but can't, since they do not come into use for another decade) had never heard of Catullus, nor...

<div align="right">(418)</div>

The use of the words specific to the later years in the narrative creates an illusion and so, a metafictional quality in the narrator's time. Because exposing the gap between the date of the story and the date of its composition inevitably reveals not just the artificiality of historical fiction, but the artificiality of all fiction (Lodge, 1991: 133). Fowles uses this consciously and points to the difficulty of writing a novel, belonging to a time a century ago, a century later on purpose. And in doing so, he shows how the writing time intervenes in narrative time by deliberately showing the blending of words between two times. Therefore, the Victorian novel enters into a structure that reflects its period on the one hand and a later period on the other, which combines the approaches of two different periods in the novel.

In the chapter 55, the author talks to the reader, gives comparative information about his era with the Victorian era, turns into the author, asks two questions and then denies that Charles is a material for the author and using him is within his power:

> Now could I use you?
> Now what could I do with you?

> It is precisely, it has always seemed to me, the look an omnipotent god--if there were such an absurd thing--should be shown to have. Not at all what we think of as a divine look; but one of a distinctly mean and dubious (as the theoreticians of the nouveau roman have pointed out) moral quality. I see this with particular clarity on the face, only too familiar to me, of the bearded man who stares at Charles. And I will keep up the pretense no longer.

> (Fowles, 1969: 405)

The reader witnesses that the author enters Charles's compartment on the train he is traveling on, he travels with him and observes him. As the new novel theorists point out (this is an expression in the novel, "the nouveau roman"), he opens the problem of ending the novel for discussion. He decides to prolong the story a little longer. The chapter 57 begins twenty months later:

> And now let us jump twenty months. It is a brisk early February day in the year 1869.

> (418)

Charles always looks for Sarah and finally finds her and her surprise son. The chapter 61 ends with a happy ending after the pain. But in the chapter 62, the ending is changed again, "which provides not alternative versions of the same story, but two wholly different possibilities from the same premise and with the same characters" (Heptonstall, 96: 263). In this chapter, the author enters fiction as before, he is on the street, sets his watch and is about to go on a date. Meanwhile, Charles cannot convince Sarah this time and leaves the house. The author discusses the endings with and without Sarah with the reader and pretends to leave the end of the novel to the reader. It speaks of lives alternating between God intervention and human will:

> For I have returned, albeit deviously, to my original principle: that there is no intervening god beyond whatever can be seen, in that way, in the first epigraph to this chapter; thus only life as we have, within our hazard-given abilities, made it ourselves, life as Marx defined it--the actions of men (and of women) in pursuit of their ends. The fundamental principle that should guide these actions, that I believe myself always guided Sarah's, I have set as the second epigraph. A modern existentialist would no doubt substitute "humanity" or "authenticity" for "piety"; but he would recognize Arnold's intent.

> (Fowles, 1969: 466-467)

He concludes the book by commenting on life in the last paragraph of the book. The novel is left in the hands of the reader in a way with three endings, apart from the Victorian novel style. The handling of the story is generally Victorian, but its arranging way is postmodern. Here, the language he uses in the novel is also of notable importance because it is also observed that Fowles succeeds in portraying the Victorian and modern way of thinking through his language (Drzajic, 2013: 189).

Briefly, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles takes the reader back to the Victorian period in an ironic mode, in order to compare the nineteenth-century totalizing notions of the nature of fiction and reality, and self and world with those of existentialism (Onega, 1996: 42). By doing so, he maintains a Victorian style of writing in the novel, at the beginning but he points to what needs to be done in that period as the narrator in various ways. With the chapter 13, it literally moves into the writing style of the next century. As a writer, he enters fiction and leaves the different endings of the fiction to the reader's choice. It practically shows the version of the novel a century ago and a century later in the novel. While doing this, he actually reveals the path that the novel has taken, with epigraphs often from Karl Marx pointing to the progress of societies in a social sense and the evolution of living things from Charles Darwin in a biological sense. In the book, he reveals a metafictional fiction from the example of the Victorian novel. The one-century adventure of the novel, a novel style with Victorian at the bottom and postmodern at the top is presented practically.

Conclusion

In The French Lieutenant's Woman, Fowles handles the narrative story within the framework of Victorian acceptances, reveals the difficulties of conveying such a narrative from a century later in the novel and continues the narrative with old and new novel styles together. Therefore, there are both Victorian and postmodern reflections in the novel style. The narrative, which tries to stay in the period with the epigraphs belonging to the Victorian age, goes to a century later with its narrative style. The novel transcends its time with its pastiche, intertextuality and metafiction dimensions, which, therefore, creates a Victorian-looking postmodern novel. While the social and spiritual turmoil of the period in which a great change was experienced is told with a story appropriate to the period, the narrative is given from a point of view a century later. So, besides the main story, it is as if the novel also has another story shedding light on the qualities of novel one side a century ago and the other side a century later. The elements such as the narrative presenting alternative endings other than an ending that meets the expectation of the period, the author's entry to the novel, and the manipulation of the reader's imagination are the ones of this secondary story. While scientific and social developments are experienced, art also develops itself and Fowles wraps them into the way of the story told in the book. As a result, a novel which is Victorian at the bottom and postmodern at the top emerges.

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