

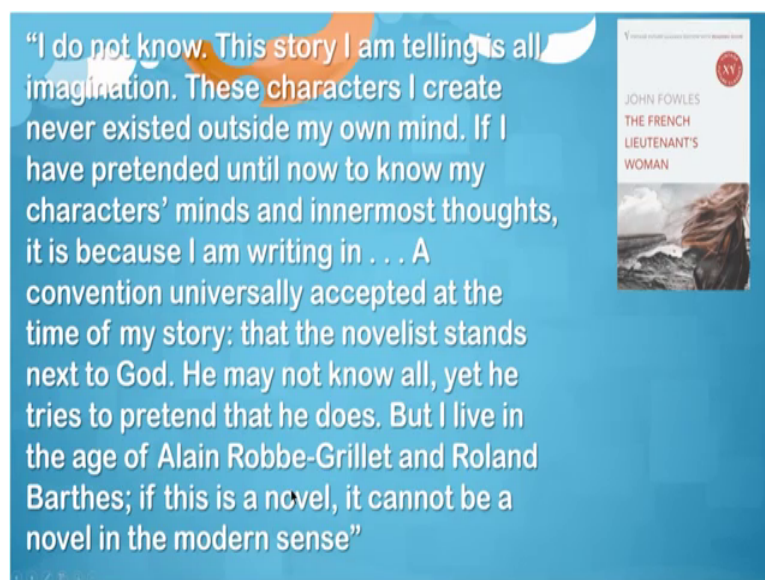
Postmodernism in Literature
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Lecture - 24

Reading Postmodern Fiction: The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles

Good morning. I am happy to welcome you to at another session of the NPTEL course title Postmodernism in Literature. In today's lecture we are talking about other postmodern fiction this is the French lieutenant's woman the novel written by John Fowles. This novel has been considered as one of the most successful and popular novels of the postmodern times.

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Let me begin this discussion with an excerpt from the novel which appears in chapter 13th of the novel and this passage has also been celebrated as a one of the most significant rendition of the postmodern elements and particularly in the field of fiction I read the except from chapter 13th to you this is how the chapter begins.

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. 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.

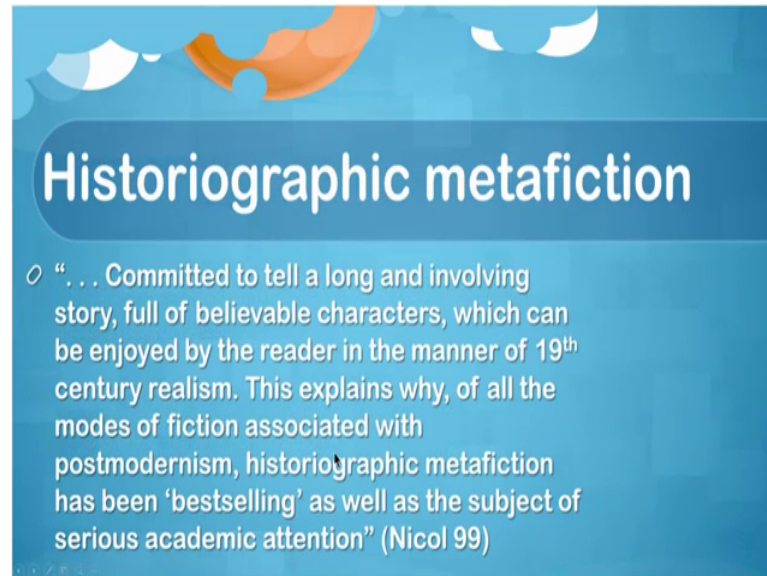
But I live in the age of Alian Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense” we valuations this passage to us to Roland Barth and to the metafictional aspect of the act of novel writing is very interesting and this could also be considered as fine enter point to the discussion of this novel the title the French lieutenants woman.

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This lecture also need to be seen in continuation of the discussion that we had in the previous section discussion of the novel slaughterhouse five authored by Kurt Vonnegut in the discussion slaughterhouse-five we saw how this an interest in self reflective historical reconstruction particularly in postmodern fictional retellings of history. And we also saw how the novel slaughterhouse-five staging to confrontation between metafiction and history.

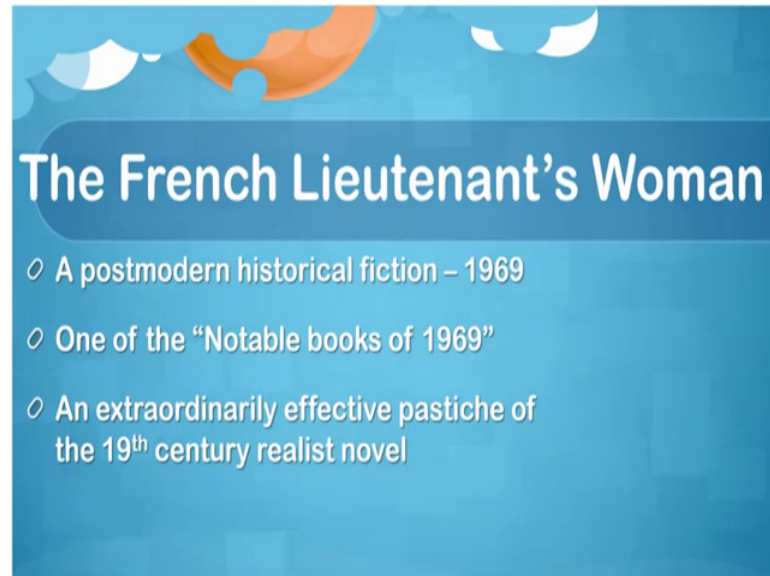
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So, here again we have a discussion of yet another novel which could also be cited as an example of historiographic metafiction the term coined by Linda Hutcheon and talking about the accessibility of historiographic metafiction particularly in the context of postmodernism brand Nicole notes that a work of historiographic metafiction is committed to tell a long and involving story full believable characters which can be enjoyable the reader in the manner of 19th century realism.

This explains why of all the modes of fiction associated with postmodernism historiographic metafiction has been bestselling as well as a subject of serious academic attention you also notice that most of the postmodern fiction that we have been dealing with they also employ the technique of historiographic metafiction it could be on account of two things is brand Nicole points out one the use of realist narrative technique and two there is certain readability associated with it; because it is a fine mix of the 19th century techniques of storytelling as well as a postmodern narrative elements.

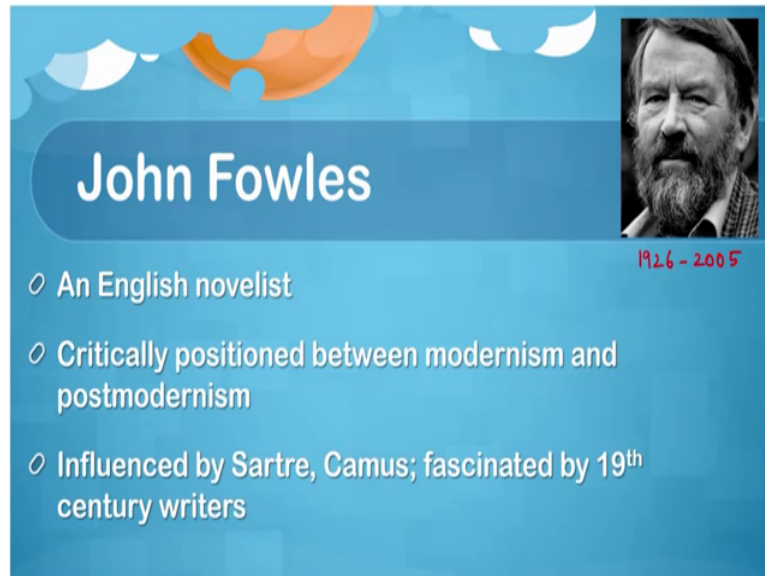
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In this novel the French lieutenants woman author by John Fowles again we see the play of history and fiction coming together this is being seen as one of the finest a postmodern fiction written in 1969 this was considered as one of the notable books of 1969 and this was significantly also the decade the end of the decade which also saw the emergence of postmodernism as well as post structuralism and he in that sense could also be seen as a novelist which is making use of an extraordinary effective pastiche of the 19th century realist novel.

And it is possible to say that John Fowles is also one among those who inaugurated the postmodern historical fiction.

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A blue slide with a decorative top featuring stylized clouds in white, orange, and blue. On the right side, there is a black and white portrait of John Fowles, a man with a beard and mustache. Below the portrait, the years "1926 - 2005" are written in red. The name "John Fowles" is written in large white letters on a dark blue background. Below the name, there are three bullet points in white text, each preceded by a small white circle.

John Fowles

1926 - 2005

- An English novelist
- Critically positioned between modernism and postmodernism
- Influenced by Sartre, Camus; fascinated by 19th century writers

And talking about John Fowles is an English novelist who left from 1926 to 2005 he is also a critically position between modernism and postmodernism he has been tremendously intervention by Sartre and Camus and he was also fascinated by 19th century writers which is evident in the way in which the innervations of French lieutenants woman takes place.

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A blue slide with a decorative top featuring stylized clouds in white, orange, and blue. It displays three book covers side-by-side. From left to right: "The Collector" by John Fowles, featuring a red dress with white laces; "The Magus" by John Fowles, featuring a figure in a red and white striped outfit; and "The Ebony Tower" by John Fowles, featuring a woman's profile. Below the covers, there is a line of text in white. At the bottom left, there are small navigation icons.

JOHN FOWLES
THE COLLECTOR

"A superb novel...
Evil has seldom
been so sinister."
—*Time*

JOHN FOWLES
THE MAGUS
A Revised Version

The EBONY
TOWER
John Fowles

Fowles's works were translated into many languages, adapted into films

These are some of the other works the collector the magus and the ebony tower and most of Fowles works were translated into many languages and they were adapted they also adapted into films.

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The plot

- An engaging love story – Dorset seaside town of Lyme Regis – 1867 – Charles Smithson engaged to marry Ernestina Freeman - courtship
- Charles is obsessively attracted to Sarah Woodruff – ‘the French Lieutenant’s woman’, the whore, a social outcast – had an affair with a French sailor who abandoned her
- Charles’ relationship with Sarah breaking off his engagement to Ernestina

Meryl Streep Jeremy Irons
The French Lieutenant's Woman
1981

The novels that we are discussing today the French lieutenants woman was also adapted into a movie in 1981 the novel has a very interesting plot it talks about an engaging a love story this story is set in the beautiful Dorset seaside town of Lyme Regis and 1867 is the year in which the story happens according to the novel and this is the story of Charles Smithson whose a wealthy Victorian gentleman and he is also engaged to be married to Ernestina Freeman her family.

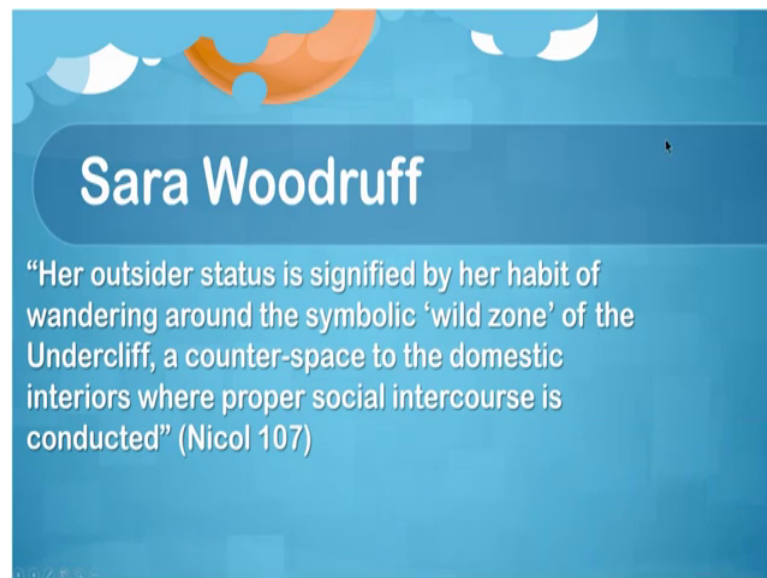
Ernestina’s father especially is also looking forward to claim up the social ladder through this a marriage to a Charles Smithson who is also about inherit a very important title and the first part of the novel also talks significantly about the period of courtship between Charles and Ernestina this is also in accordance with the courts of propriety that were prevalent during the Victorian times.

So, we to get a sense of reliving the narration of the 19th century literature when we read the first part of the novel and as a novel progresses we get to know that Charles is getting rather dangerously and obsessively attracted to Sarah Woodruff and Sarah Woodruff is this character who is also known as a French lieutenants woman the whole and also seen as a social outcast and the novel because she had a very stormy affair with a French

sailor who also abandoned her. So, that had made her respectability rather questionable and during those times which was predominantly Victorian.

Charles has this disastrous relationship with Sarah and also breaks off his engagement to Ernestina and the rest of the novel talks about the two month relationship that both of them have and also talks about the impacted this relationship has on their lives in general.

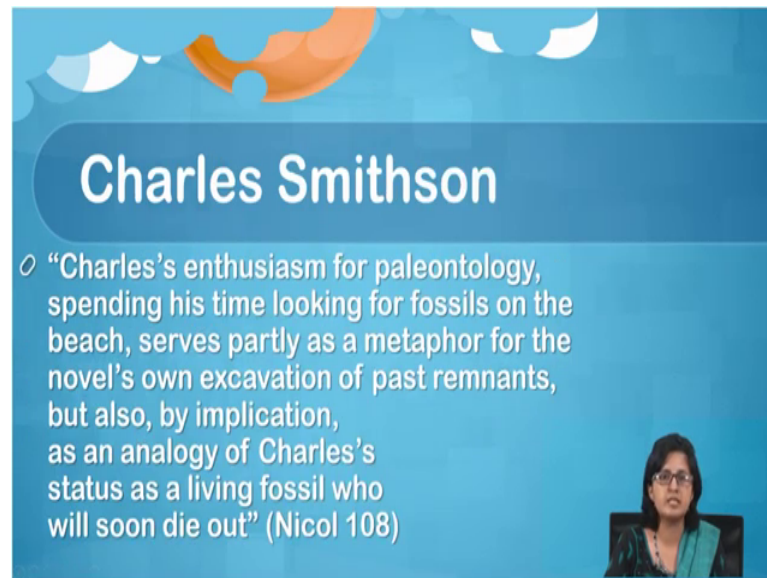
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These are two characters Sarah woodruff and Charles Smithson could be seen as a characters who are presented as an antique pieces to the Victorian sensibilities and the Victorian sense of moral behaviour according to brand Nicole the outsider the status Sarah would be signified by her habit of wandering around the symbolic ‘wild zone’ of the Undercliff, a counter-space to the domestic interiors where proper social intercourse is conducted.”

So, we find the critique of the Victorian sensibilities through this use of counter space which one is protagonist is also in habits.

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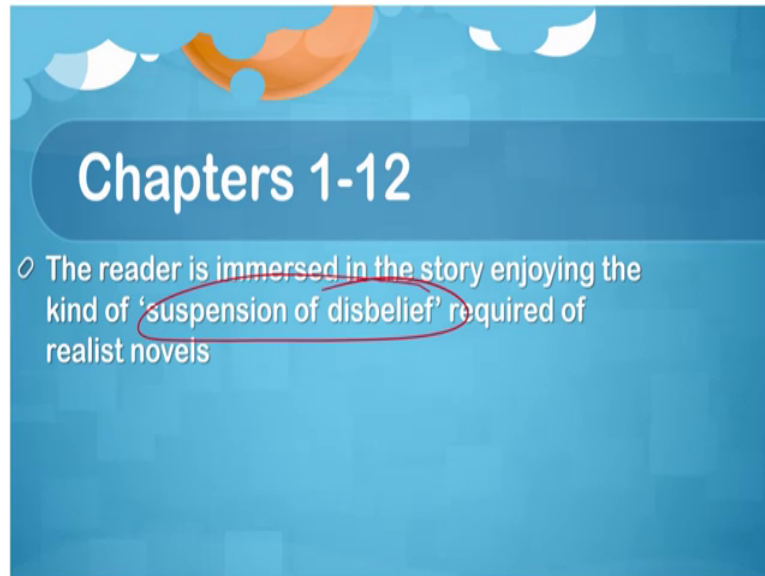
Charles Smithson

o “Charles’s enthusiasm for paleontology, spending his time looking for fossils on the beach, serves partly as a metaphor for the novel’s own excavation of past remnants, but also, by implication, as an analogy of Charles’s status as a living fossil who will soon die out” (Nicol 108)

And in the same way Charles Smithson is also seen as a very curious a character has been presented in a typical Victorian way as a Victorian wealthy gentleman who is also seen is a much convicted person as far as marriage is concerned and according to brand Nicole Charles enthusiasm for palaeontology spending his time looking for fossils on the beach serves partly as a metaphor for the novels own excavation of past remnants, but also by implication as an analogy of Charles status as a living fossil who will soon die out.

So, we find the character Charles Smithson also in acting the role that the novel is expected to play there is an excavation of the past remnants which this historiographic metafiction undertakes and we find the same in replicated in Charles life is well.

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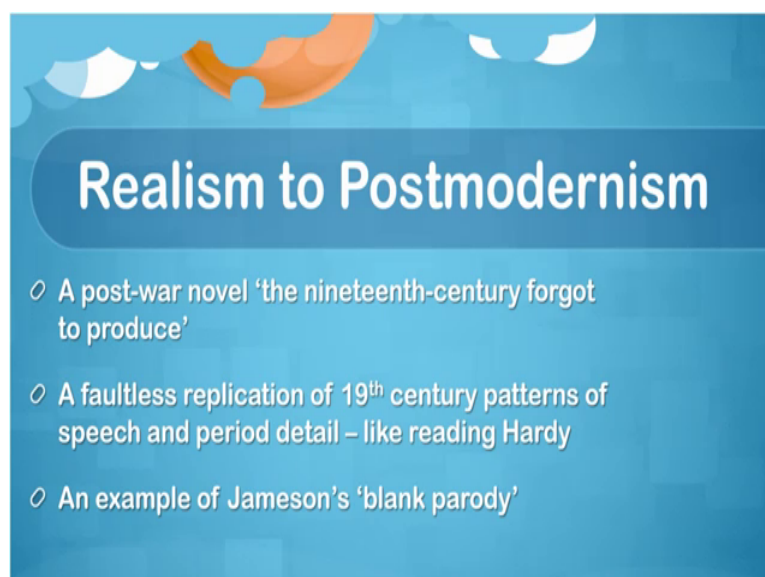


Chapters 1-12

- The reader is immersed in the story enjoying the kind of 'suspension of disbelief' required of realist novels

The novel French lieutenants woman is rather bulky and novel when compared to the slaughterhouse-five of (Refer Time: 07:55) the first 12 chapters they replicate the realistic tradition and the reader is fully immersed in the story enjoying the kind of suspension of disbelief which is required of realist novels. And it also gives the sense of high rateability and the beginning and it is in this context we also need to be attentive to the shift from realist narrative trends to the postmodernist narration.

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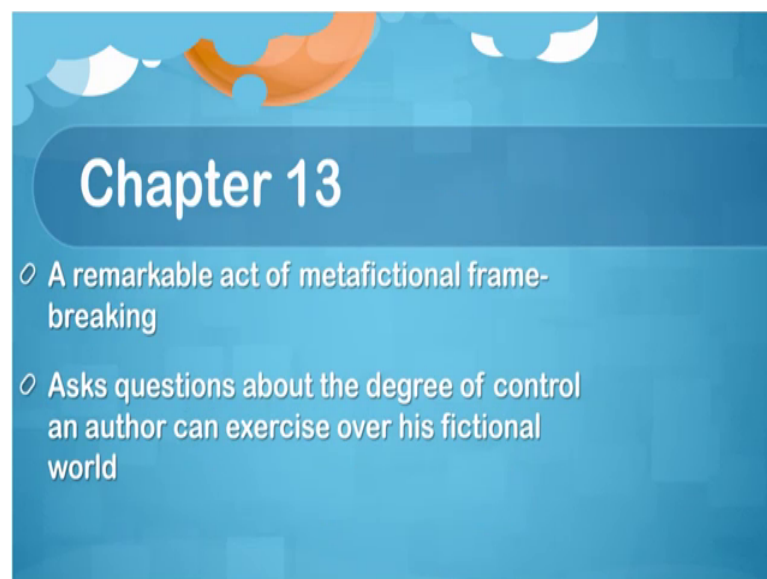


Realism to Postmodernism

- A post-war novel 'the nineteenth-century forgot to produce'
- A faultless replication of 19th century patterns of speech and period detail – like reading Hardy
- An example of Jameson's 'blank parody'

As one of the critiques for John Fowles points out this novel can be easily seen as a post war novel the 19th century forgot to produce because 19th century elements. So, pronounce that it can easily pass of his one among the Victorian novels what makes this narrative extremely interesting and postmodernist is the faultless replication of the 19th century patterns of speech and period details this can almost be like a reading one of the novels by Hardy this certify used the realistic technique within the postmodern narration could be seen as an example of Jameson's blank parody one of the concept that we have taken a look at in one of the earliest sessions.

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Its particularly, in chapter 13 that we find this remarkable act of metafictional frame breaking we begin to realize right in the beginning of chapter 13 itself; that this is not a typical realist narration that there are very evident postmodern techniques and very evident postmodernist metafictional elements which are being built into it.

We accept the past that direct to you at the beginning of this lecture as an example of this remarkable act of metafictional frame breaking; where the novel ask questions about the degree of control and also can exercise over his fictional world and in chapter 13 throughout the course of this discussion Fowles is engaging in a certain kind of a dialogue with the reader ruminating on the role of the author the role of the text and also about the different ways in which that has been changing in with respect to narration with respect to authorial voice and with respect to content itself.

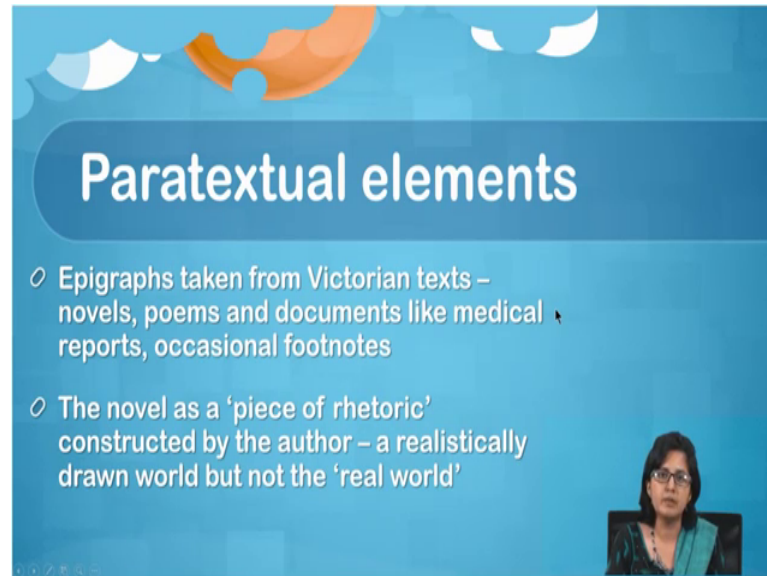
Here we find that Fowles is all replicating some of the discussions that the prevalent in the 1960s particularly at that critical junction during the transformation from the structuralist moment to the post structuralist face and it is rather significant to note of this point to that Fowles was writing this novel when a Barthes essay that of the author was published in 1967. So, we do find it cause of the post structuralist moment getting very firmly in acted in this novel particularly from all chapter 13 onwards where we find a a recudent occurrence of these kinds of metafictional discussions.

And in chapter 13 he also has these extensive discussions about the role of the author I read to you another passage from the text, but I am a novelist not a man in a garden I can fall of a very like, but possibility is not in permissibility husbands could often murder their wives and the reverse and get away with it, but they do not you may think novel is always have fixed plans to which they work. So, that the future predicted by chapter one is always inexorably the actuality of chapter 13, but novel is right for countless different reasons for money, for fame, for reviews, for parents, for friends, for loved ones, for vanity, for pride, for curiosity, for amusement.

As skilled furniture makers, enjoy making furniture as drunkard like a drinking as judges like a judging as salience like (Refer Time: 11:31) shotgun into an enemies back I could fill a book with reasons and they would all the true though not true of all only one same reason is shared by all of us we wish to create was as real as, but other than the world that is I repeat we wish to create words as real as, but other than the world that is that is why we cannot plan.

So, in chapter thirteen when John Fowles begins talking about the role of the author and how he or she has a limited role to play in the building of the narration he also draws our attention to this a fact that he believes in that our novel cannot be plant that the author is not the got figure here we also find again echoes of Barthes essay the death of the author.

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The slide features a blue background with a decorative header containing the title 'Paratextual elements' in white. Below the title, there are two bullet points, each preceded by a white circle icon. In the bottom right corner, there is a small inset video frame showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a green top, looking towards the camera.

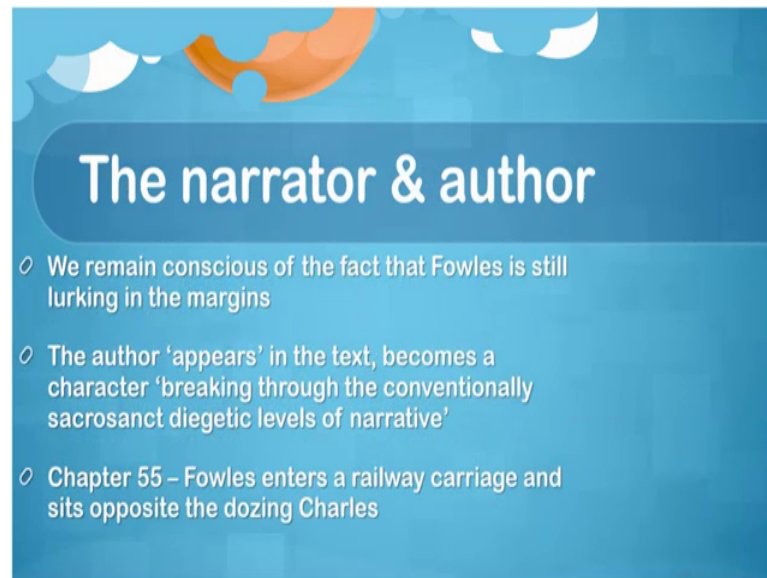
Paratextual elements

- Epigraphs taken from Victorian texts – novels, poems and documents like medical reports, occasional footnotes
- The novel as a 'piece of rhetoric' constructed by the author – a realistically drawn world but not the 'real world'

We also find a number of paratextual elements throughout this novel with there are epigraphs taken from a number of Victorian text. We find Fowles generously coating from Thomas Hardy from Jane Austen and a number of other text a particularly from the Victorian period he uses a epigraphs from novels poems and document such as medical report there are also occasional footnote which are part of this novel.

And this novel as that sense can seen as a piece of rhetoric constructed by the author this also reminds is that this is a realistically drawn world, but not the real world it is in this context that this transformation from realism to postmodernism assumes different level altogether.

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Another interesting way in which this novel the French lieutenants woman becomes typically postmodernism is through the interchangeable role played by the narrator and author figure; we the readers remain truly conscious throughout the reading of this text to the of the fact that Fowles the author is still lurking in the margins we find the presence of the author not just as an narrator.

But also as the author figure also as John Fowles himself being present and being a character and being part of the novel throughout this narration and the author in that since not just make appearances in the text, but he also becomes a character breaking through the conventionally a sacrosanct diegetic levels of narrative through such a circle are moves that the novel also becomes more postmodern is than realest these a very telling instance in chapter 55.

Where the author John Fowles enters a railway carriage and sits opposite the dozing Charles was protagonist of the novel. And in this chapter where the John Fowles himself becomes a character he sits opposite the dozing Charles and also wonders about what to do with this a character what to do with this protagonist and this instances also when scene is one of the alternate endings that are the other had plant (Refer Time: 14:22) except from chapter 55.

Now, the question I am asking as a stair at Charles is not quite the same as a two above, but rather what the devil; I am going to do with you I have already thought of ending

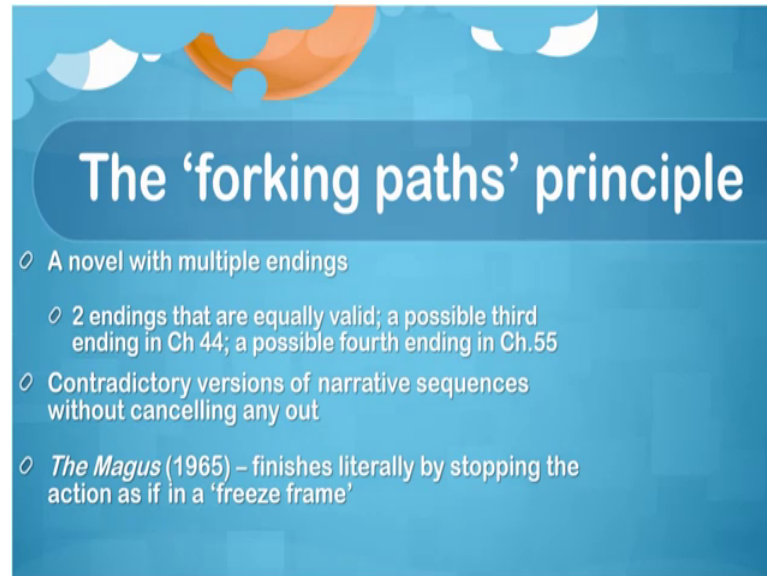
Charles carrier here and now of leaving him for eternity on his way to London, but the conventions of Victorian fiction allow allow to no place for the open in conclusive ending and at preached early year of the freedom characters must be given my problem is simple what's Charles want is clear it is indeed.

But what the protagonist evolves is not. So, clear and I am not at all sure where she is at the moment of course, of these two were two fragments are real life instead of two fragments of my imagination the issue to the dilemma is obvious the one want come backs over other want and fail to succeed as a actuality maybe fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality the writer puts a conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight.

But in fact, fix is the fight letting that what he himself favours when and we judge right as a fiction both by the skill they show in fixing the fights in other words in persuading us that they are not fixed by the kind of fighter they fix in favour of the good one the tragic one the evil one the funny one and so, on here in chapter 55 there is a metafictional discussion about the act of writing and also how the novel get activated to the act of fixing a fight.

He also here briefly very play free and get this with the possibility of ending Charles carrier at this a point within the while he is sitting right opposite to a Charles inside a railway carriage and this alternate ending this idea of toeing with an alternate ending is what makes this novel way typically postmodernist are extremely possible in terms of it is.

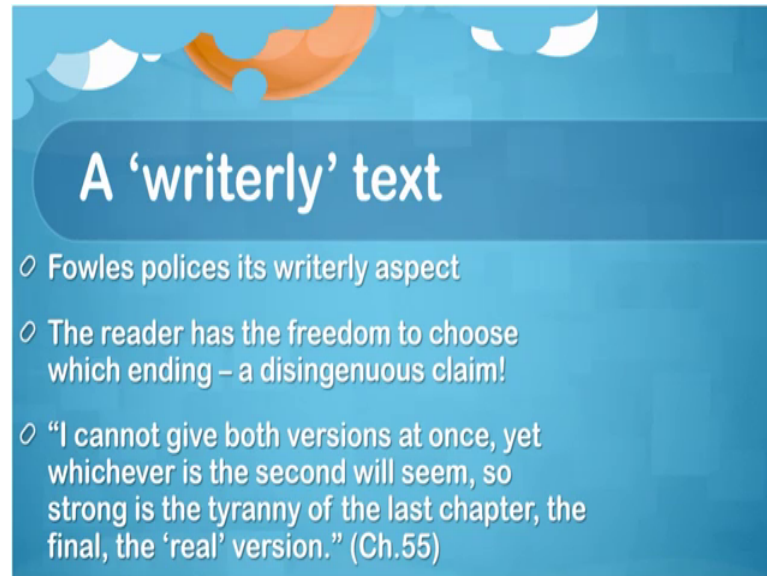
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Play fullness with respect to the different forking paths which are being adopted and this also brings us to this discussion of the forking paths principle and this clearly is a term it is been adopted from bohr has short story regarding of forking paths and this novel is a novel written with multiple endings.

There are two endings towards the end of the novel which are equally valid is a possible third ending in chapter 44 and a possible 4th ending in chapter 55 which we a just now her an expect from in chapter 55 where he also toys with this 90 of ending Charles carrier within a railway carriage. We find a celebration of contradictory versions of narrative sequences without cancelling any of them out and this is a technique that we find Fowles is been implying in some is other novels as well particularly in his 1965 work the magus he a finishes the novel literally by stopping the action as if in a freeze frame he will also notice that the idea of multiple endings is something that this novel engages with not just an terms of a theory.

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A 'writerly' text

- Fowles polices its writerly aspect
- The reader has the freedom to choose which ending – a disingenuous claim!
- “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.” (Ch.55)

But also in terms of a practice as a active skill for writing that it employees and this is also perhaps a appropriate time to flow ground the fact that this novel the French lieutenants woman is largely writerly text Fowles. The author polices it is writerly aspect through a very large extent though from the beginning; we have been told that this is a fitment of the all those imagination and the reader nevertheless has the freedom to choose which ever ending.

We also realise that this is a rather disingenuous claim that the author is making and this has been dealt with in a again in a very metafictional wave in a chapter 55 where the author John Fowles who also becomes a character tells the reader that I cannot give both versions at once yet whichever is the second will seem.

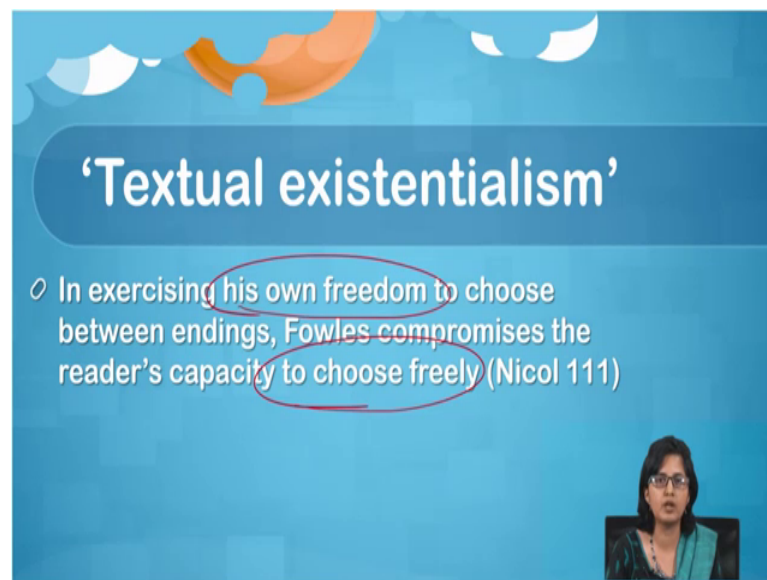
So, strong is the tyranny of the last chapter the final the real version here he has again drawing the retention to the impossibility of infinite a path the impossibility of having multiple endings let me also draw your attention to the discussions that we had a when we were talking about bohr has short story the regarden of forking paths that also we spoke about the impossibility of inhavliating different time frames.

In different spaces at the same time and in this novel why Fowles is playing with the idea of different a multiple endings while he is playing with this idea of a rejecting or single truth a single ending which is a conventionally been followed in all kinds of narrative sequences he is also a learn to the possibility he is also aware of the fact that it is not

possible to give two endings with the same kind of validity, because which of the ending that comes a second whatever is written in the last chapter as he terms at this as a tyranny of the last chapter.

It also runs the risk of becoming the final or the real version and John Fowles. The author is also telling us that though he is consciously not taking any sides just by virtue of placing one ending. In the last chapter he is also making the reader make a conscious decision of identifying the final the real or proper ending of the narration brand Nicole.

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Into Cambridge introduction to post modern fiction he also talks about the textual existentialism that this work of his and a; we it is also useful to remember that John Fowles is immensely influenced by the ideas of search through and the concepts of existentialism and according to Nicole in exercising his own freedom to choose between endings Fowles compromises the readers capacity to choose a freely.

Because, there is no way in which the author can continue to exercise his freedom and also allow the reader to choose freely, because it is always a question a one all the other again we may recall the tyranny of the last chapter that a Fowles talks about.

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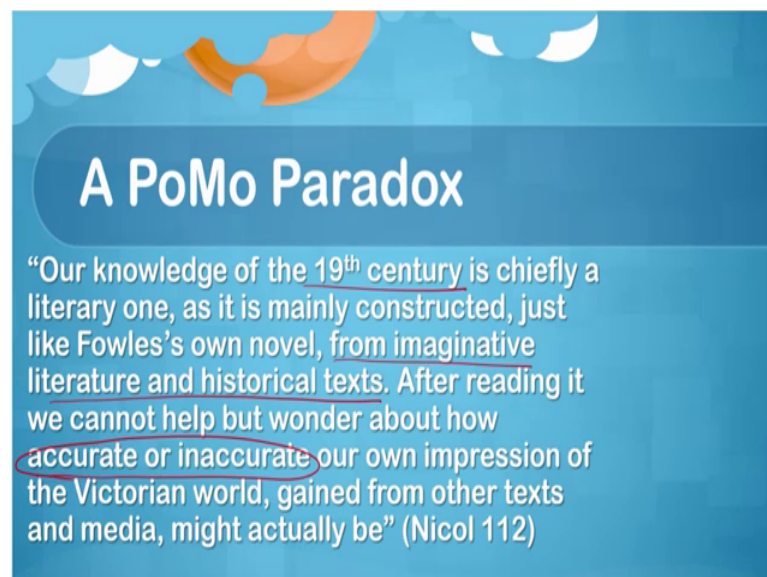


Self-conscious textuality

- o Narratorial interventions ✓
- o Epigraphs ✓
- o Multiple endings ✓

If we try to identify some of the telling postmodern elements in this novel the French lieutenants women we also realise that this employees a very succinct kind of a self conscious textuality, which is evident and the narratorial interventions in the epigraphs which are given in the beginning of every chapter and also the possibility of multiple endings that the novel rather play fully engages wealth.

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A PoMo Paradox

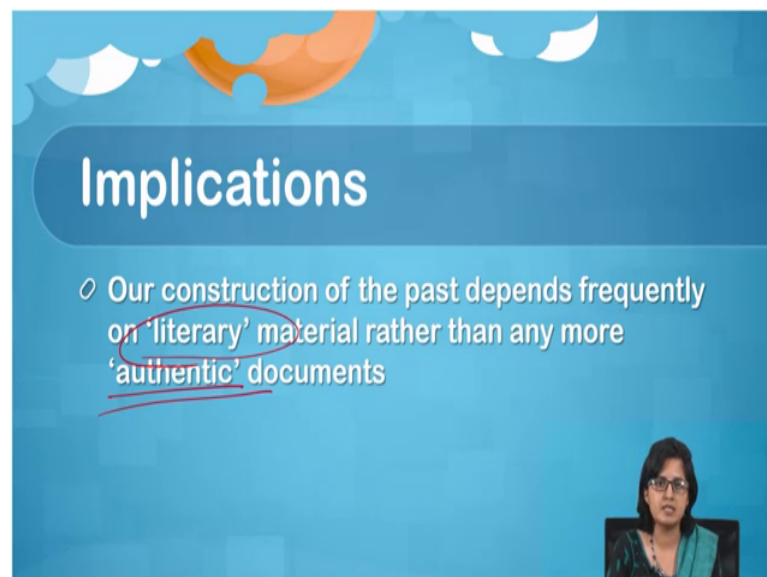
“Our knowledge of the 19th century is chiefly a literary one, as it is mainly constructed, just like Fowles’s own novel, from imaginative literature and historical texts. After reading it we cannot help but wonder about how accurate or inaccurate our own impression of the Victorian world, gained from other texts and media, might actually be” (Nicol 112)

This novel can be a seen as a critic of this post modern paradox a critic of how the knowledge of history is also mediated by a number of fictional tellings I read to you a

passage from a brand Nicole where he also talks about this a paradox. In the context of his analysis of the novel the French lieutenants woman brand Nicole right our knowledge of the 19th century is chiefly a literary one as it is mainly constructed just like a Fowles own novel from imaginative literature and historical text after reading it we cannot help.

But wonder about how accurate or inaccurate our own impression of the Victorian world gained from other texts and media might actually be have you been introduced to this a possibility or the impossibility of generating accurate or inaccurate historical knowledge and also about how much of what we know about 19th century Britain has been a recreation from imaginative literature and historical text there is an inability to distinguish one narrative from the other and it is this paradox in this complexity that a novel like French lieutenants woman is also critiquing and engaging wave and this if it reading also comes with certain implications.

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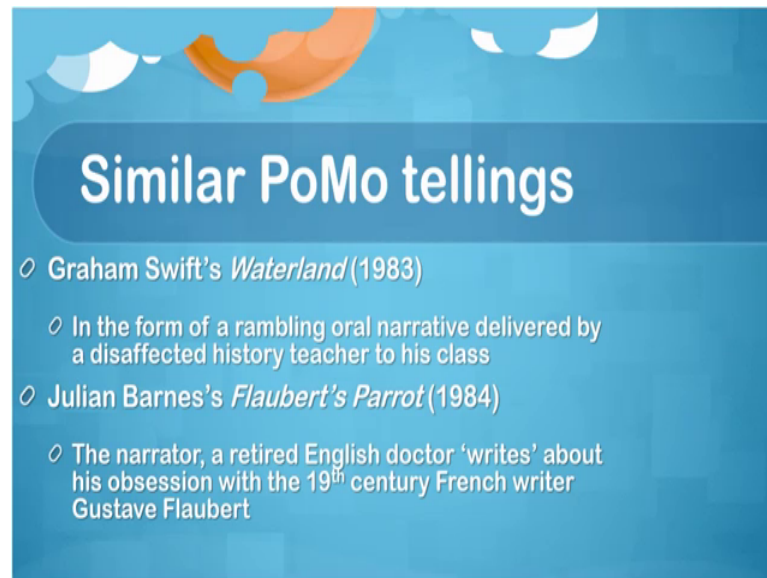


Implications

- Our construction of the past depends frequently on 'literary' material rather than any more 'authentic' documents

Because we also understand that are construction of the past depends frequently on literally material rather than any more authentic documents here. We are being allowed question and reject notions of accuracy and notions of authenticity and this is also in tune with many concerts which are part and parcel of postmodernism.

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A similar postmodern historiographic metafiction tellings could be found in a couple of other novel (Refer Time: 22:34) particularly graham swifts *Waterland* which is published in 1983 and in *waterland* the narration is in the form of rambling oral narrative delivered by a disaffected history teacher to his class is also another work by Julian Barnes *Titler Flauberts parrot* published in 1984.

Here we find the narrator retired English doctor he writes about his obsession with the 19th century French writer Gustave Flaubert. So, historiographic metafiction in that since they considered as one of the most important ways in which postmodernism get enacted particularly in the field of fiction. I hope this discussion of the novel the French lieutenants woman have been useful to you and that it will also encourage you to read more fiction which is part of historiographic metafiction.

Thank you for listening. And I look forward to seeing you in the next session.