

SPATIO-TEMPORAL DISLOCATION IN *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN* BY JOHN FOWLES

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ABSTRACT: *Michel De Certeau wrote: "Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice." There is no doubt that one of the matrixes of representation in postmodern fiction is the dislocation of space and time. This issue stretches through worlds which are hypothetically interconnected between widely separated regions of space-time. This paper attempts to consider John Fowles's well-known The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969). Fowles in The French Lieutenant's Woman offers brilliant spatial metaphors that blur the trajectory of narrative order and shape the human experience against narrative template. The concept of spatial-temporal dislocation can help us grasp the structure of narrative technique in the novel of John Fowles. It exceeds the protocols of narrative logic and exuviates the narrative habits, develops new perceptual skills and generates a stimulated reader. This reader, by virtue of the act of narration covers a wide spectrum of the cognitive challenges the novel offers. This paper investigates multiple spaces that generate freedom for the self, the intersection of these spaces form an entangled network heads toward transcendences of the self. Fowles tries to carve out a space for his characters, he gives them freedom by steeping out of their interior space. Thus, the movement of interior space casted in relief and inner implosion culminated in exterior explosion. Joseph Francese (1997) claims that "The conflict of order and disorder forces the immanent narrator to choose between interior calm coupled with exterior disorder or its opposite, exterior order coupled with interior disquietude." This shows plenty of jumbled spaces at a time, transpose transversally across an intricate web of play and trickery, the spatial change has to be read not just as referring to an external, physical space, an internal, mental state, but also as a temporal- spatial scene of writing. Fowles has frozen the movement of time and eliminated its temporality looking at it as a completed pattern of words, with all its parts existing simultaneously.*

Keywords: *space, temporal dislocation, movement.*

Narrative is deemed as an essential component of a literary work, it is studied for its ubiquity and importance. Many regard it as the Queen of Discourses for explaining experience and organizing knowledge. It is obvious that people tell their stories from the moment they begin putting words together, but when the subject starts being conjoined to a predicate, we are thrust into narrative discourse and we make narratives many times a day. Thus Narrative and language are closely related so much so that theorists have played up their inter-dependence. It is clear that

we engage in narrative so often and through narratives we present ourselves, our experiences and the experiences of others. Perhaps the largest assertion regarding the quintessential nature of narratives is contained in Roland Barthes' article on narrative (1966).

He writes the narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances, narrative is present in myth, legend fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mine, painting... . Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have there narratives... narrative is international transhistorical, transcultural; it is simply there, like life itself." (251-2)

Barthes' description obviously incorporates the literary genres in which the narrative designates itself. Through these innumerable genres, that narratives encode we can capture the mental record of who one is and translate it into a kaleidoscope of meaning. Thus, narrative is a vital human activity that gives shape to history, sociology and literature. Peter Brooks (1996) has stated that narrative "is very much bound up with the stories we tell about our own lives and the world in which we live. We cannot in our dreams, our daydreams, our ambitious fantasies, avoid the imaginative imposition of form on life."(19) This is the universal and transcendental feature of narrative, which generates meaning from the imaginative as well as the lived nature of its application. In other words, the association of narrative with humanity can be found not only inside the walls of our own individual consciousness and in unconsciousness as well. One truism about narrative is that it is a way of representation of actions or events. Susana Onega and Jose Landa (1996) have defined narrative as "the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way." (3) the most interesting part of the

definition of narrative is the difference between events and the representation of these events. In other words, the difference between the story (the event of sequence of events) and the narrative discourse (how the story is conveyed).

The distinction between story and narrative discourse is between two types of time, the time of narrative discourse is the duration of the presentation of the novel and the time of the story is the duration of the sequence of events that composes the plot. E.M. Forester (1927) has called the daily life "composed of two lives - the life in time and the life by values,"(29) qua narrative, it has two times, the internal as well as the external and we sort the story out of the narrative discourse, thus, the time of the story is quite different from the time of the narrative discourse. So far the time of the discourse is independent, it can move forward and backward, shrinks and expands. The time of the story can take one day, a year and a lifetime, so it has its own time.

Porter Abbot (2002) holds that "narrative time, in contrast, relates to events or incidents."(5) Abbot adds "Narrative, by contrast, turns these processes inside out, allowing events themselves to create the order of time."(3, 4) The characteristics of these statements is that they refer to the elasticity and flexibility of time, that it extends itself, slows down, stands still or moves rapidly. The story moves in the time of fiction across a space, it comes and goes, jumps from the past to the future and then to the present again. M. Freeman (1998) says "we seek to revisit the morning before we arrived at work, or the previous day or month or year, we land back in the present, now informed by the visits just made, we concentrate on what's next, both in the immediate and distant future..., in coming to terms with the past, 'we can only do so from the present, through the act of interpretation." (41) Narrative is therefore, not only paying attention to the incidents that give shape and dominate the sense of time, but also about expectation , memory, and complexities of time.

In twentieth-century experimental works, time becomes an object for manipulation, not only from the point of view of characters or their subjective perception, but also from the narrator's stand who becomes increasingly present, setting aside all conventions of omniscience. The time of the story telling enters therefore into an explicit, ironical, participating and bitter relationship with the time of the story (narrative time) experienced by the characters. The effect is

a split between the time of telling and the told time as well as the relationship with the real life of an actual author, thus, the game with that time deriving from that splitting. The result is a puzzled skein of crossing or overlapping of different spatial or temporal perspectives, but this puzzle seems to disappear and the riddle of time opts its ineffable unity and an unbreakable link with the existence of every individual, which is made up precisely of time itself.

As the movement of narrative involves time, it must also imply 'space'. Moving through the narrative all the incidents and events which must take place within a particular time-frame. Yet the oscillations of time between the time of telling (speech) and the time of the story must entail some kind of delay, diversions, detours and digressions. A narrative must move forward to its end and through its progression towards the disclosure, it lingers, delays and retards the events of the story and binds them in space. Thus, these digressions and detours are woven into narrative and they may not be apparent as intentional increments but rather as snatches of dialogue or sequential description. The effect produced is that space and time coordinates the contextual narrative structure and the notions of space and time are constructed around experiences of dislocations and relocations, bringing the narrating here-and-now to the narrated then-and-there, or from a then-and-there to a here-and-now. A . Giddens (1981) writes "we can only grasp time and space in terms of the relations of things and events; they are the modes in which relations between objects and events are expressed."(31)

This play with the maximizing or minimizing of time is one of the practiced dislocations of self-conscious experimental narrative fiction This new innovative fiction has challenged the two features of traditionally plotted fiction, the linear structure and the explication of actions and events. Time is not necessarily continuous and made up of sequential events, and life may be a subject of randomness and chance. In fact, narrative fiction has associated space as a structural issue, at the same time it is deemed as the aesthetic perspective that accounts for the practice of contemporary innovative fiction. Thus, narrative fiction has demanded new implications to map out its entire paradigm, and demonstrated its interest in a theory that fleshes out the structural organization of narrative elements. It is the spatial form theory that has aroused considerable interest and controversy. It has particularly tried to resolve the dilemma of time and castigated the

conventional causal and temporal sequence. Joseph Frank (1963) has described a scene that does not depend on time, he argues "the time-flow of narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationship within the immobilized time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independent of the progress of the narrative, and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relationships among the units of meaning." (11)

Frank again admits "these word-groups must be juxtaposed with one another and perceived simultaneously."(12) In this respect, the parallel fashion of space-time vectors move in a juxtaposed way along some curve so that they preserve their direction from one infinitesimal direction to the next, here, the spatial form seems to be freed of the conventional connections of temporality and causal taxonomies. Thus, it is a process of re-birth of the elements of the action which then develop into a story in the reader's imagination. Frank (1963) points out that it requires "its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity."(13) The replacement of conventional notions of action, character, point of view and thematic progression in favors of a self-conscious artifice is a disruption of the narrative technique. It has rebelled against the external reality and substituted it with the internal reality of the act of writing. There seems that the act of writing reflexes is the aesthetic of the narrative technique. Consequently, the narrative technique of spatial form is capacious. It amalgamates aspects of past and present so that these aspects are welded and embedded in one texture. Frank (1963) has claimed that "all maintain a continual juxtaposition between aspects of the past and the present so that both [past and present] are fused in one comprehensive view."(55) In other words, the events are reported in concurrent narration as they occur, as a sequence of present moments, or as a sequence of instant doings, happenings and visions of telling voice, the sequence as a completed texture may have a paratactical quality with actions being juxtaposed or bound together one after another. As a result, the cohesion between adjacent actions may be established in segments not as a whole, as the narrated domain is a world in the process of taking a guise as it is being narrated not a synthesized whole.

In this type of narration, a major shift occurs both in the temporal placement of the events relative to telling time and in the internal structure of the narrating schema that the retrospective narrative is supposed to occupy a single indeterminate point in time and that the time of telling is later than the told time yet the whole sequence of accounted events has glided away by the time of telling. The retrospective narratives repeatedly refer to positive, negative, probabilities, possibilities and facts unitedly evaporate what the narrator defined in referring to the world of the told time, thus, these states of facts exist in a paradoxical view of doubt and indeterminacy. Hence, the reader may be unable to resolve his lack of knowledge because of the narrator's incomplete absolute certainty, therefore the assumption of certainty in inherent indeterminacy is epistemological. On the other hand, the concurrent narrative is assumed to occur in a determinate point in time. That point consists of a sequence of new states and intervals that joined together to configure the course of events being narrated. Consequently, the retrospective narratives as well as the concurrent narrative run parallel and they possess the initial and terminal temporal points. In other words, the correlation of the time of telling and the told time on both levels of speech and events is precisely juxtaposed one after another, that is, narrative is now a record of what is happening at the moment of speech.

If we accept this model, we immediately realize that the reader is no longer confined to the temporal succession of events but rather to the stepwise passage of time, ongoing and progressive matching of reported situations and of their seeing and reporting. However, the passage of time of each segment tends outward into space and correlates with spatial form, thus, this model is based on the co-existence space and seems to suspend the flow of time and spreads narrative in space, a space that one world travels into its environment, that it is a shape of space, a shape of outer to inner and of inner to outer, that it is a shaping of the character to folded space of the distance between the point of view and that environment. To achieve this effect, the mechanical shuffling of time, twists of perspective, flashbacks and simultaneity emphasize the spatiality in spite of all the variations of conventional temporality. Jeffery R. Smitten (1981) has claimed that "still others,... involve dense mosaics of past and present the interrelations of whose parts completely displace concern with temporal progression in the present." (20) Thus, the reader must map out in his mind

the internal references and the relationships to perceive the meaning of a single event, as that event is digressed of the conventional causal/temporal sequence. However, the mechanism of those references and the juxtaposition is internally understood as a requirement of the narrative discourse to surrogate the departure from pure temporality, from pure causal temporal sequence. Thus, having spatialized the flow of time and created relations of meaning detached from succession, the plot seems to adjust itself in conformity with the constraints of pure temporal linearity. And the concatenation of causes and effects are supplanted by self-reflexivity of the work so that the reader has to discover the syntax of the work by paying attention to the synchronic relationship among the disconnected space-time. In so far as the conventional connectives are eliminated and the action is not evolving through time, the spatial form of narrative is concerned with rendering a multiplicity of events existing at about the same time. The spatial form of novels can therefore be said to contain a continual juxtaposition between aspects of the past and the present depending upon no reference to the temporal world.

John Fowles (1934-2005) is an anomaly, almost a literary contradiction. He is both a traditional writer and an innovative metafictionist. He draws upon past literature but changes the direction of the tradition in which he writes. He simultaneously accepts and rejects the literary past, while at the same time, he questions contemporary avant-garde attempts to redefine the novel genre. His fiction is a centrifuge in which past, future time and space are wrapped together. John Fowles's the *French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is a pastiche, novel, an attack on Victorian conventions, Malcolm Bradbury (1994) holds that the novel is "telling one of the era's key fables the male hero faced with the choice between the fair and the dark lady, between sentiment and sensuality, social reaffirmation and danger." (368) It is a picturesque description of two epochs – the 1860s and 1960s – the confrontation of the Victorian and the modern is reported as Marie-Claire Simonetti (1996) has pointed out "a highly self-conscious, contemporary narrator who comments on the nineteenth – century narrative from a twentieth – century perspective." (301)

The French Lieutenant's Woman, besides being a good story, demonstrates John Fowles' innovative technique. The opening sentence establishes the temporal location of the action: "One

incisively sharp and blustery morning in the late March of 1867." (9) The verb tense of the opening clause, "an easterly is the most disagreeable wind in Lyme Bay," (9) asks the reader to see the event and its narration as simultaneous. This narrative technique evokes a feeling of magnitude and pulls us into the fictional world of the story. Fowles later includes subtle references to the twentieth century "as full of subtle curves and volumes, a Henry Moore or a Michelangelo." (10) We realize that the oscillated present is in fact Fowles's own residence in Lyme, 1967, the date of the novel's origin. The town of Lyme Regis in the *French Lieutenant's Woman* is a graceful spatial metaphor that explicitly exposes the way that a human being imposes narrative order on non-narrative experience. With its charming system of roads, paths, streets and cart trades, it connotatively invites the reader to sit back, relax and begin a gradual process of immersion into an imaginary though life-like world. It is an impress on a landscape with its somber grey cliffs masked by dense woods, wild engulfing channel waters and caves of mysterious geologic and cosmic enchanting mysteries. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he mimics the openings of Victorian realism, the third-person objectivity of nineteenth-century realism with a unifying perspective centered in the narrating consciousness. The opening of the novel delineates the spatio-temporal setting, introduces the main characters and hints at a possible love relationship. What clearly diverges from the Victorian canon is the playful juxtaposition of intertextual allusions, by giving way to parody, as the omniscient narrator mischievously admits that he does not know what to do. Sarah Woodruff is the one who always represents this rejected –narrative reality. Sarah feels entirely out of place in the world. Sarah attempts to lead Charles Smithson to a rejected -narrative space, a space which may be gained through narrative; she prefers to make it appear that she is living the fallen-woman plot. She confesses that her choice to marry Shame by following the French lieutenant gives her freedom that other people cannot understand "What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I am truly not like other woman." (171) Charles feels that Sarah has fallen into the clutches of a horrible villain. But at the same time, Sarah plays games with the word 'Fall' as a concept and a word. Through a parody of falling, she locates and dislocates another sense of falling and turns the falling action of a 'whore' woman into freedom. "I think I have a freedom they cannot understand." (171)

Sarah wants to fall into a space where no reasons are claimed. She uses the falling precipice to free herself from narrative clutches. "I threw my self off a precipice.... I knew of no other way to break out of what I said... I have set my self beyond the pale." (171) Sarah approaches what Kellner and Stephen (1990) describe as, "the body that breaks free from its socially articulated, disciplined, semiotized, and subjectified state... to become disarticulated, dismantled and deterritorialized, and hence able to be reconstituted in new ways." (90-91) She in turn becomes a narrative space by such a dislocation. Sarah wants to be released from the plot as well as the narrative-bound sense of identity, she wants to find her own reality. Ironically, she does have a place in the community as its outcast.

Charles Smithson in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* also confronts himself and evaluates his own life in a mythic underground of interior space. Inside the room of a prostitute, in London, he sits on the commode, holding the child of the prostitute on his knees he dangles the watch in front of the eager small arms. Her instant change of mood, a gurgle of delight when at last she clasps the coveted watch, Charles is amused, she begins to call. Charles has a vision of Sir Tom and the bishop's son calling him at the moment,... the end of his great debauch. The strange dark labyrinths of life; the mystery of meetings. Charles realizes, in the spatial imagery of his own immediate situation, the truth necessary for survival in the "strange, dark labyrinths of life."

(308) He comes to the

"profound and genuine intuition of the great human illusion about time, which is that its reality is like that of a road – on which one can constantly see where one was and where one probably will be – instead of the truth: that time is a room, now so close to us that we regularly fail to see it." (FLW 308, 309)

This passage combines the idea of time with the image of space, that pictoria of life as a closed room that man must furnish and, then, open to the exterior world. The ontological man can live

only in present time; thus each individual has to explore the strange and dark labyrinths of life.

So, time and life are imaged as an underground room of present existence

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Charles Smithson moves through inner space to an existential destination in a succession of confrontation scenes. The image of tunnel represents not only isolation but a journey through his inner space of existentialism. Michel De Certeau (1988) has argued that: "Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice." (115) Charles has led an intellectual as well as emotional journey of transference as a victim of the Victorian age. Sarah, Charles' Dantesque guide, leads him on his journey into the mythic underground of the undercliff. This allows Charles to achieve a sense of self that raises him to the level of human, and this transformation makes him a model of the response that Fowles hopes to elicit from the reader. In the first meeting Charles and Sarah do not communicate at all. He comes upon her as she is sleeping on a deserted place and when they meet a second time, Charles begins to feel the gravity of Sarah. Their third meeting in the undercliff comes as Charles searches for fossilized tests, Charles suddenly finds Sarah staring at him. "Her figure standing before the entombing greenery behind her and her face was suddenly very beautiful, truly beautiful, exquisitely grave and yet full of an inner, as well as outer, light." (136) Sarah opens herself to Charles and plunges into her confession about Varguennes and her sexual sin. This scene is a journey of interior space through the landscape and it is made clear from the omniscient narrator, who says of Charles "deep in himself he forgave her unchastity; and glimpsed the dark shadows where he might have enjoyed it himself." (172)

The narrator wants to end the life of Charles, "I have already thought of ending Charles's career here and now, of leaving him for eternity on his way to London. But the conventions of Victorian fiction allow, allowed no place for the open, the inconclusive ending; and I preached earlier of the freedom characters must be given." (389) the narrator does not permit a closed space for the novel, thus, he lets Charles complete his journey. After leaving Sarah, Charles takes his second step. He plunges into the dark quarter of Exeter. He enters an unlighted, empty, deserted church where he undergoes a dark light of his spirit, Charles generates a mutation away from the conventions and organized church morality into existential, humanistic and realistic

religious context. Consequently, Charles emerges from this dark, empty, inner space a different free man of his own identity and reality.

Fowles has a problem, which he graciously explains in Chapter Fifty Five, while riding with Charles on a train to London. Literally, Fowles doesn't know what to do with his story. He cannot manipulate the plot, or as the narrator says, "Fix the Fight," (390) to "Show one's readers what one thinks of the world around one," (390) because this story happened a hundred years ago and "we know what has happened since." (390) The only solution, the narrator decides, is to write two endings to fill two spaces, "The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. That leaves me with 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, and the real version." (390) Ostensibly, in order to subdue this "tyranny of the last Chapter," Fowles presents the image of the florin, he flicks it, spinning, two feet into the air and catches it in his left hand so he proceeds. The first is heart-warming, gratifying, a very "great expectations" of an ending, a thorough domestication of eroticism, wholly consistent with Fowles's charming tale. Then comes the second ending. It explodes all the assumptions our sensibilities so willingly embrace. In a giant step, it covers the space between the Victorian novel and the roman nouveau. It leaves one wondering which century was more liberated. It is a shock. It is comic. It signals the sudden but predictable arrival of a remarkable genre that stills time to expand space-inner shrinking the outer. In this sense, John Fowles has said of his novel that it shows "an existentialist awareness before it was chronologically possible."

Related to the In his novel, Fowles has used a multiple-ending strategy which is obviously forking-path narratives in which mutually exclusive possibilities have been jointly realized. The tidy ending in the style of Victorian fiction, that Fowles's protagonist Charles wishes for, belongs to Charles' subworld, not to the world of the text. But the other two endings, coming at the true close of the text belong to the real world of the novel. Charles and Sarah are reconciled through their daughter; in the other Charles loses Sarah for good. At the beginning of Chapter Sixteen, and after the first ending the narrator intervenes and returns us to the point in the sequence at

which the bifurcation occurred, the result is that Fowles's world flickers and opalesces at the point where we conventionally expect clarity and definition (closed ending) or total opacity (an open ending), thus, his double ending represents a structure of no-ending, though this slightness is quite sufficient to destabilize the very self-conscious fictionality of writing to carry fiction forward

Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has connected and differentiated disparate elements encapsulated into a total experience, juxtaposed side by side in a spatial design. The past permeates the present, just as the present spins the representations of the past. The pastiche of these disparate elements is distinctly an imitation while permitting the referent to encompass **itself per se**. Consequently, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has taken an arduous task of redeeming past authentically. Moreover, the displacement of the referent seems to create an "intertextual" space and overtly reconstructs the Victorian past both its Victorian aesthetic and specifically the modus vivendi of Victorian social life. The concept of spatial-temporal dislocation can help us grasp the structure of narrative technique in the novel of John Fowles. It exceeds the protocols of narrative logic and exuviates the narrative habits, develops new perceptual skills and generates a stimulated reader. This reader, by virtue of the act of narration covers a wide spectrum of the cognitive challenges the novel offers

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