Postmodernism and Biology in John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*

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1. Introduction

John Fowles is known not only as an experimental postmodern novelist, but also as a nature lover, who wrote most of his novels in his house in Lime Regis. His love for nature can be seen clearly in his novels, but its significance seems to have been underestimated in criticism of his novels. Although John Fowles is widely recognized as an existentialist, Fowles revealed in his letter to Robert Huffaker that his ‘philosophy of life […] is much more biological than existentialist’.¹ The purpose of this paper is to focus on this biological philosophy of life and analyse its implications in his postmodernist novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*.

While love for nature may be easy to understand, his biological philosophy requires more explanation. To clarify it, I consider that Fowles’s following comment in an interview is helpful: ‘I do tend to take an ornithologist’s view of human beings. I like watching people’s behaviourisms as I watch the behaviourisms of certain birds in my garden’.² To Fowles,

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² Dianne Vipond (ed.), *Conversations with John Fowles* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), p. 17.
human beings were not so different from birds in terms of behaviours, for he regarded people as a part of the animal kingdom. Also, when his philosophical work *The Aristos* was criticized as being elitist, he emphasised the importance of genetic factors:

Biological elitism I certainly believe in – I don't see how you can dispute it. I mean you could get everybody in this country absolutely equal educationally and you would still end up with gross differences in intelligence, perception, memory. I'm not defending this; I'm simply saying that it is a biological fact about life.\(^3\)

As the last sentence clearly shows, he believed that biology was a determining factor in human life. Genetic inheritance of mental capacities might be a truism, but it is important to note that he asserted it in the age of post-structuralism.

In postmodernism, into which categories John Fowles is often assumed to fit, the self is generally conceived as a linguistic, cultural, and social construct. The nature/nurture controversy has a long history, with its pendulum swinging one way or the other, but postmodernism has represented an especially dominant preference for the explanatory power of nurture. Joseph Carroll, a leading figure in literary Darwinism, accuses post-structuralism, a major theoretical backbone of postmodernism, of neglecting the natural order and suppressing innate human dispositions, reducing reality to semantic systems or ideological structures.\(^4\) Considering this intellectual context, Fowles's outspoken acceptance of biological determinism

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\(^3\) Ibid., p. 44.

appears to be at odds with his postmodernist dimension. It is in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* that this discrepancy is most clearly discernible. On the one hand, featuring an amateur palaeontologist, the novel thematically pursues Darwin’s theory of evolution and its implications for human beings and society. On the other hand, being a work of historiographic metafiction, a typically postmodernist literary genre, it exposes how our ideas and values are constructed historically and culturally, by juxtaposing the Victorian age with the modern world. Also, in its frequent references to Karl Marx, another intellectual giant of the Victorian age, the novel reveals a concern for sociological structures as well.

Importantly, this apparent discrepancy corresponds to a dual focus of Fowles on society. The following comment in another interview epitomizes his philosophy of life: ‘I have all my adult life been torn between a biological and political view of society’.\(^5\) This statement clearly shows that he had two apparently contradictory approaches to society, involving biological and sociological perspectives. This dual focus remained with Fowles all his life and, consequently, is embedded in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. While his postmodernist dimension is widely acknowledged, less attention has been paid to his biological view of society. Like Charles Smithson, Fowles was a Darwinian, but unlike his protagonist, he knows that certain Victorian understandings of Darwinism, especially social Darwinism, contributed to the holocaust. However, he considers that Darwin provided a genuine advance in understanding: ‘But I still can’t feel, despite all the wellknown intervening horrors and disasters, that the world hasn’t progressed since

\(^5\) Vipond, p. 62.
the new reality Darwin and his followers introduced into life just over a century ago. This paper analyses two approaches to reality in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, namely, Darwinian reality, which sees human beings as a part of the natural world, and postmodernist reality, which emphasizes constructivist views of the self and the world. I argue that the novel is an attempt to reconcile these two different perspectives, although Fowles says that he has been ‘torn’ between them.

2. Narrative in postmodernism and cognitive literary studies

The novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is a representative work of metafiction, a self-conscious form of literature about narrative. In this section, I examine the novel in terms of narrative and analyse how postmodernist and Darwinian views of narrative coexist in the novel.

John Fowles’s career as a novelist is not easy to characterise, but it might be safe to say that his reputation as a postmodernist novelist was established through the works of such critics as Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh in the 1980s. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is particularly postmodernist among his works, and a salient feature of the postmodernist novel is its self-consciousness about fiction writing, which often take such forms as parody and metafiction. Thematically speaking, postmodernist fiction often explores and deconstructs the idea of reality, as Brian McHale states as follows:

The postmodern dominant [...] is ontology. Postmodernist fiction

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6 Ibid., p. 191.
implicitly raises issues about modes of being (which is what ontology is: the theory of being), and stages problems involving worlds – the worlds of fiction, but also those of ‘reality’ itself. In postmodernism, the real world and fictional worlds are not separated, as they are woven together with the same material of sign systems. To put this point differently, what is called reality is in fact a type of fiction. Demonstrating postmodernist views of the world, Patricia Waugh refers to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman’s constructivist theory, which regards reality as a social construct. Although constructivist theory is not usually considered as postmodernist, many postmodernist writers share its main ideas in that they view the world as constructed through a system of signs, as with literary fiction.

*The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is clearly concerned about intertextuality between fiction and reality. In the controversial chapter 13, the narrator reminds the reader of the fictionality of fiction, by saying ‘This story I am telling is all imagination’. By this *exposé*, the narrator not only discards the pretence of realism, but also subverts the dichotomy between fiction and reality:

> You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it . . . fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf – your book, your romanced autobiography. (p.97)

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9 Waugh, pp. 51-53.

In this didactic passage, the narrator tells the reader that the self is also a type of fiction, which is formulated through the same process as fiction writing. Moreover, as the phrase ‘fiction is woven into all’ (p.97) manifestly shows, Fowles’s understanding of reality was akin to the post-structuralist idea of the intertextual construction of reality. This confession of the narrator shares the same goal as deconstructionists; according to Waugh, by laying bare the fact that reality is an artefact, Fowles teaches the reader that because their common sense and values are neither universal nor absolute, they can challenge and change them.\textsuperscript{11} In this way, metafiction can be understood as a challenge to arbitrary conventions, both in literary tradition and in human society.

In the framework of post-structuralism, literary studies have mostly focused on ‘historical, social, and political, as well as intertextual’ aspects of postmodern fiction.\textsuperscript{12} However, I would like to emphasize that, in \textit{The French Lieutenant’s Woman}, there can also be found a recognition that the act of narrative is a biological propensity innate to human beings. In Chapter 13, after the passage cited above, the narrator’s discourse continues as follows: ‘We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of \textit{Homo sapiens}’ (p. 97). The use of the words ‘\textit{Homo sapiens}’ suggests that Fowles assumed that narrative construction of reality was a biologically endowed feature of human beings as a species. In other words, narrative is regarded as a basic biologically innate framework for human beings to understand the world and other people. This is a view expressed in other post-postmodernist

\textsuperscript{11} Waugh, p. 34.
fiction. For example, Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983) calls the reader a ‘story animal’ and shows that narrative is the primary means for human beings to understand life, while exploring the possibility of postmodernist historiographic writing.\(^{13}\) Now that the fictionality of reality is taken for granted among many writers, contemporary novelists tend to exploit this feature of narrative as a literary device. Kazuo Ishiguro’s biased narrators transform their experiences in their favour through the act of story-telling; and Ian McEwan exploits Neo-Darwinist and evolutionary narrative theories in *Enduring Love* (1997). Fowles can be regarded as one of the earliest contemporary novelists emphasising the biological aspects of narrative.

The conception of human beings as story-telling animals is most often seen in cognitive approaches to literature. As post-structuralist criticism is based on a linguistic paradigm, its emphasis tends to be on nurture, rather than nature. Of course, it would be unfair to claim that an innate drive for narrative was overlooked in the age of the linguistic turn; Roland Barthes begins ‘An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative’ with an acknowledgement of the universality of narrative,\(^{14}\) and Peter Brooks admits, in *Reading for the Plot*, that ‘[t]he narrative impulse is as old as our oldest literature’\(^{15}\). Still, the investigation of narrative as deriving from human nature is a specialty of the cognitive approach to literature. For example,


Walter Fisher coined the term ‘homo narrans’ in 1984 to describe the indispensable role of narrative in the construction of the self. Also, Jerome Bruner (1991) emphasised the importance of narrative for human beings to understand the world and their experiences in the world: ‘we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on’.  

The French Lieutenant’s Woman is a novel concerned with this cognitive aspect of narrative. As the following comment of the narrator shows, Fowles acknowledged that narrative serves as an essential framework of the human mind:

I said earlier that we are all poets, though not many of us write poetry; and so are we all novelists, that is, we have a habit of writing fictional futures for ourselves, although perhaps today we incline more to put ourselves into a film. We screen in our minds hypotheses about how we might behave, about what might happen to us; and these novelistic or cinematic hypotheses often have very much more effect on how we actually do behave, when the real future becomes the present, than we generally allow. (342)

The narrator argues that human beings are all writers of stories whose protagonists are ourselves, and that this inclination for story writing is of practical use; by envisioning future situations in our mind, we can be prepared to behave better in those situations and reduce the risks of

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confusion or panic. This aspect of narrative as a preparation for the future is also a point emphasised in cognitive approaches to narrative.\textsuperscript{18} It is probable that the open ending of the novel illustrates this function of narrative; as Bran Nicol points out, by offering multiple endings, the novel shows that fiction allows us to have various hypothesis on what might happen in the future.\textsuperscript{19} As Katherine Tarbox argues, The French Lieutenant’s Woman is ‘an anatomy of the relationship between human cognition and narrative’.\textsuperscript{20} While the novel demonstrates how dependent we are on a narrative framework in understanding everyday reality, it also poses the reader ‘radical cognitive challenges’ by exploiting subversive literary techniques of metafiction.\textsuperscript{21} The relationship between the narrator and the reader is similar to that between Sarah and Charles; as Sarah leads Charles to a new understanding of the world through her forged stories, the narrator’s deceptive narrative brings about a new intuition for the reader.\textsuperscript{22} For Charles, Sarah is a fascinating enigma; he is attracted to her but cannot ‘solve’ her. This is also true for the reader; the narrator offers multiple endings and does not indicate which ending is the ‘real’ one. In this way, the narrator presents cognitive challenges to Charles and to the reader.

It is true that Sarah is an enigma, but what tends to be overlooked

\textsuperscript{18} For example, Bruner emphasizes a function of narrative as enabling provision for unexpected situations. Jerome Bruner, Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003), pp. 27-35.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.
\textsuperscript{22} See Mike Marais, “I am infinitely strange to myself” : Existentialism, the Bildungsroman, and John Fowles’s The French Lieutenant’s Woman, JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory, 44, no.2 (2014), pp. 255-259; Tarbox, 98.
regarding Sarah is that she is very good at understanding the thoughts and feelings of other people. The narrator refers to her intelligence frequently, but she is also said to be 'a fine moral judge of people' (p. 53). In fact, her strong point lies in having in-depth intuition into the personalities of others:

Sarah was intelligent, but her real intelligence belonged to a rare kind; one that would certainly pass undetected in any of our modern tests of the faculty. [...] It was rather an uncanny – uncanny in one who had never been to London, never mixed in the world – ability to classify other people's worth: to understand them, in the fullest sense of the word. (p. 53)

According to the narrator, Sarah's intelligence cannot be rightly measured by any modern test, for example, an IQ test, because it is in her ability to understand people that she is truly exceptional. The ability is called 'uncanny' as she did not have opportunities to meet diverse types of people in the town she grew up in. Importantly, it is this ability that made her estranged: 'This instinctual profundity of insight was the first curse of her life' (pp. 53-4).

Sarah is good at what is called 'theory of mind' in cognitive psychology, which is a faculty to understand the intentions and feelings of others. Lisa Zunshine, a leading cognitive literary theorist, argues that story-telling is essential for human beings because stories function as a training for theories of mind by inviting us to walk in another person’s shoes.\(^{23}\) In fact, in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Sarah learns about people through literature:

Thus it had come about that she had read far more fiction, and far more

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poetry, those two sanctuaries of the lonely, than most of her kind. They served as a substitute for experience. Without realizing it she judged people as much by the standards of Walter Scott and Jane Austen as by any empirically arrived at; seeing those around her as fictional characters, and making poetic judgements on them (p. 54).

It is through literary works that Sarah has come to have intuitions into others. Fiction provided her with alternatives for experiences she could not have in the rural town. Although her interaction in the real world was limited, she developed a theory of mind through a variety of characters in literary works.

Another important feature of Sarah is her ability to empathize. Empathy is a key element for theory of mind, and Charles Darwin discusses its significance in terms of the struggle for survival in *The Descent of Man*. Sarah has a ‘sympathetic voice’ (p. 56); it is through her heartfelt reciting of the Bible that she managed to change Ms. Poulteney’s mind, after initially finding Sarah strongly disagreeable (p. 58). In this respect, the following evaluation of Sarah is quite intriguing in that it encapsulates her enigmatic aspect and her insight into others:

In a much earlier one [age] I believe she would have been either a saint or an emperor’s mistress. Not because of religiosity on the one hand, or sexuality on the other, but because of that fused rare power that was her essence – understanding and emotion (p. 59).

According to the narrator, her ‘essence’ is her ability to emphasize with and understand others. This feature of Sarah endorses the awareness of cognitive aspects of narrative in the novel. With her ability to emphasize and understand others, she tells stories and manipulates Charles. In other words,
Sarah poses Charles cognitive challenges. He keeps trying to understand her, applying narrative frameworks of hysteria cases, or pornography. Through a series of failures, he is forced to develop a theory of mind, and the final ending suggests that he acquires an existentialist view of the world.

3. History and Biology

The second wave of cognitive literary studies in the 1990s produced notable outcomes, including works by Mark Turner, Lisa Zunshine, Ellen Spolsky, Alan Palmer, and David Herman. Their interdisciplinary studies are rich in diversity, but their approach as a whole has been accused of reductionism, and of failing to take cultural differences into account. To illustrate this point, I cite a conversation in McEwan’s *Enduring Love*, in which the vogue of evolutionary biology since the 1970s is denounced as a new form of determinism:

‘It’s the new fundamentalism,’ she had said one evening. ‘Twenty years ago you and your friends were all socialists and you blamed the environment for everyone’s hard luck. Now you’ve got us trapped in our genes, and there’s a reason for everything!’ she was perturbed when I read Wilson’s passage to her. This conversation contrasts post-structuralist constructivism and a Darwinist biological approach. As mentioned above, post-structuralism envisions the self as an entity formed and constructed linguistically, culturally, and socially. Evolutionary biology, on the other hand, emphasizes genetics, which

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has resulted in it being criticized as a form of biological determinism. In other words, the passage above shows the swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the other in the nature/nurture controversy.

However, nature/nurture does not involve an exclusive dichotomy, and the interaction of nature and nurture is now an important object of study in cognitive literary studies. For example, Zunshine advocates ‘cognitive cultural studies’, comprising efforts to incorporate cultural aspects into cognitive approaches. While human beings are genetically determined to a certain extent, they are also social animals whose environment is not untamed nature but an artificially constructed culture. In Tony Jackson’s words, ‘Because cognitive structures are not determined in a strictly biological sense, specific cultural practices and ideologies will have a strong part to play in the actual manifestation of a given cognitive universal’. In this sense, it is worth noting that Zunshine claims that ‘cognitive cultural studies is cultural studies as originally conceptualized by Williams’. As cultural studies was originally established by Raymond Williams as a discipline, it was understandable to refer to the Marxist literary and cultural critic. Still, it is quite intriguing that cognitivists have tried to incorporate Marxist theory into their framework, considering that Darwin and Marx are the two intellectual giants most often referred to in The French Lieutenant’s Woman.

Exploiting intertextuality within Victorian literature, The French

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*Lieutenant’s Woman* refers to diverse literary works, but in terms of theoretical works, those of Darwin and Marx are the most noticeable for their presence. The significance of Darwin in this novel is obvious, but Marx is just as important as Darwin for the novel. The episodes of the novel are set from 1867 to 1869; 1867 marked the year *Das Kapital* was published, and the novel features Marx writing the book in the British Library. Thematically speaking, the plot of the novel consists of class struggle.\(^{29}\) In criticism of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Darwin and Marx have been discussed but mostly separately. However, Darwin and Marx had some intellectual interests in common. In this section, I examine the novel in relation to biology and social structure, which Darwin and Marx wrote on so memorably.

As Finney points out, Fowles rated highly a Marxist palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould.\(^{30}\) In an interview in 1986, Fowles made positive references concerning Gould, who was open regarding his Marxism alongside his views on evolution.\(^{31}\) Interestingly, in another interview in 1999, Fowles expressed appreciation for Edward O. Wilson’s *Consilience*.\(^{32}\) Despite their differences in attitudes toward biological determinedness, what is in common between them is their general approach. *Consilience* has been a controversial work which aimed for a unification of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Because of its extensive ambition, according to Nancy Easterlin, traditional humanists used the work as ‘as a convenient weapon against

\(^{31}\) Vipond, p. 135.  
\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.233.
anyone today attempting criticism informed by the sciences of the mind'.

Unlike traditional humanists, however, Fowles was able to appreciate *Consilience*; this fact suggests that we need to understand Fowles not only through the humanities tradition but also with a focus on his Darwinian preferences.

An attempted unification of Darwinism and Marxism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can be detected in its pursuit of human constants through historiography. The novel juxtaposes Victorian ideas and values with those of the modern age but its purpose is not to show the superiority of modernity over the Victorian age. As Hutcheon contends, while revealing how ideas and ideologies are set within a historical and social background, Fowles historicizes modernity and suggests that our ideas and values are also products of our social system.

Thus, Fowles acknowledged the relativity of values and ideas; however, he also searched for universal constants. In Chapter 35, Fowles contrasts modern and Victorian attitudes toward sexuality. Representing the Victorian attitude as different from the modern attitude, the narrator also argues that these differences are rather superficial:

> The Victorians chose to be serious about something we treat rather lightly, and the way they expressed their seriousness was not to talk openly about sex, just as part of our way is the very reverse. But these ‘ways’ of being serious are mere conventions. The fact behind them remains constant. (p. 270)

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According to the narrator, it is only forms of narrative or representation that change, and behind them something remains universally constant. In the words of Hutcheon, 'He says that he is dealing with human constants and that the only changes are those of vocabulary and metaphor. It is not the existence of this temporal telescoping, then, that is significant, but its function'.

This pursuit of universal constants was probably rooted in his interests in natural sciences. As Fowles stated, 'I suppose I'm a good field naturalist', and he was also an amateur natural scientist. Moreover, his enthusiasm for nature formed the basis of his literary works: 'I might keep claiming that natural history (as I knew it) was behind all my fictions'. The importance of natural history in The French Lieutenant's Woman is obvious, with its protagonist being an amateur palaeontologist. For Charles, evolution is not merely a principle in nature, but also provides him with a framework to understand human society and its changes. Using the theme of evolution, Fowles dealt with both the natural world and human history. As the story develops, however, Charles is forced to adjust how he applies Darwin's theory of evolution to human society and himself. Initially, as a prospective aristocrat, Charles thinks of himself as being at the top of the social hierarchy. Applying the principle of the survival of the fittest, he is convinced that '[h]e himself belonged undoubtedly to the fittest’ (p. 165).

This sense of superiority is visualized in the form of strata, which represent the vertical evolution of life:

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35 Ibid.
36 Vipond, p. 17.
[W]hat he did see was a kind of edificality of time, in which inexorable laws (therefore beneficently divine, for who could argue that order was not the highest human good?) very conveniently arranged themselves for the survival of the fittest and best, *exemplia gratia* Charles Smithson (p. 50)

However, this sense of superiority is to be undermined later. The rise of the middle classes in Victorian society forces Charles to reconceive the upper classes as being superseded by the middle classes through an evolutionary process. When an unexpected marriage of his uncle resulted in his inheriting much less than originally supposed, Mr. Freeman, a prospective father-in-law, suggests Charles become a business partner as a first step to becoming the successor of the business. Ironically, Mr. Freeman avails himself of the theory of evolution in his persuasive attempts, although he had once called it ridiculous:

> I would have you repeat what you said, what was it, about the purpose of this theory of evolution. A species must change [...]?

> 'In order to survive. It must adapt itself to changes in the environment.'

> 'Just so. Now that I can believe. (p. 290)

Thus, Charles recognises that the social order is changing and that, in the new order, he is no longer the fittest: 'He stood for a moment against the vast pressures of his age; then felt cold, chilled to his innermost marrow by an icy rage against Mr Freeman and Freemanism' (p. 299). Even worse for him, Charles could regard himself as a loser in the struggle for survival: 'He was one of life’s victims, one more ammonite caught in the vast movements of history, stranded now for eternity, a potential turned to a fossil' (p. 336).
Charles's evolutionist view of human society reflects Fowles's 'ornithologist's view of human beings', mentioned earlier. For Fowles, the world of human beings was a microcosm of the animal kingdom. Similarly, when Charles finds a hedgehog which cannot get rid of its fleas, this case of a subverted stereotypical host/parasite hierarchy has wider implications for him; the inept host reminds Charles of the predicament of the upper classes in Victorian society and of the potential reversal of the master/servant relationship between England and United States (p. 295). Applying Darwin's framework, Charles anticipates that one day the United States as a new species will supersede the older species called England: 'he even glimpsed, though very dimly and only by virtue of a Darwinian analogy, that one day America might supersede the older species' (p. 433).

It is Sarah who catalyses the transformation in Charles's understanding of Darwin's theory of evolution. Through interaction with Sarah, his confidence that he is the fittest in the struggle for survival is undermined. Elizabeth Rankin regards this as an example of Darwinian evolution changing Charles from a Victorian snob into the first existentialist.38 Locating the novel in the *Bildungsroman* tradition, Mike Marais regards the novel's understanding of Darwin as existentialist, in that evolution in the novel turns out to be a result of chance and contingency without a sense of purpose.39 On the other hand, Jackson discusses this loss of teleology and the emphasis on contingency in relation to the postmodernist aspects of the novel. For Jackson, the changing understanding of Darwin shows a transformation

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39 Marais, pp. 246-8.
from the Victorian Darwin to the postmodern Darwin: in the Victorian age, evolution was generally thought to be a providential process whose aim was to create human beings at the top of the natural world; however, the postmodern Darwin dismisses the Victorian teleology and anthropocentrism in evolution and emphasizes the role of chance instead.\textsuperscript{40}

Be it existentialist or postmodernist, the understanding of evolution in the novel leads to the recognition of horizontality in all life. With the force of a revelation, Charles suddenly grasps evolution as horizontal rather than vertical: ‘In a vivid insight, a flash of black lightning, he saw that all life was parallel’ (p. 207). This intuition is akin to the one that comes to Charles at Undercliff: ‘He stopped a moment, so struck was he by this sense of an exquisitely particular universe, in which each was appointed, each unique’ (p. 241). Importantly, this recognition affects his understanding of reality itself. After the revelation that ‘all life was parallel’, the passage continues as follows:

Time was the great fallacy; existence was without history, was always now, was always this being caught in the same fiendish machine. All those painted screens erected by man to shut our reality – history, religion, duty, social position, all were illusions, mere opium fantasies (p. 207).

Considering that this novel is a metafiction concerned with the fictionality of reality, it is understandable that social systems involving history and religion are denounced as fallacies or fantasies. Importantly, it is the

biological reality that is covered over by these fantasies; the narrator argues that these artefacts veil the universal, ahistorical condition of human life. As discussed, Fowles sought human constants while showing the plurality and arbitrariness of histories through exploiting the literary device of historiography. In this passage, similarly, linguistically/culturally constructed illusions are contrasted with biological reality. In other words, this passage is another variation of the traditional dichotomy between nature and nurture, and Fowles regarded the Darwinian view of nature as providing a foundational reality for cultural constructs.

However, it is important to note that these ‘opium fantasies’ cannot be dismissed easily. Fowles seemed to assume that universal constants appear repetitively throughout history, but in different forms in different ages. For example, Charles Smithson is a type which repeats itself in history with differences:

Perhaps you see very little link between the Charles of 1267 with all his newfangled French notions of chastity and chasing after Holy Grails, the Charles of 1867 with his loathing of trade, and the Charles today, a computer scientist deaf to the screams of the tender humanists who begin to discern their own redundancy. But there is a link: they all rejected or reject the notion of possession as the purpose of life [...] (p. 298)

Similarly, Charles’s Cockney servant Sam Farrow, with his peculiar interests in fashion, is a prototype of 1960’s mods, and the narrator compares him frequently with Sam Weller from The Pickwick Papers. Obviously, Sam Weller is a literary model for Sam Farrow, but Fowles illustrates how historical background affects their personalities, behaviours, and eventually
career courses: 'But the difference between Sam Weller and Sam Farrow (that is, between 1836 and 1867) was this: the first was happy with his role, the second suffered it' (p. 44). As a result, Sam Farrow desperately tries and fails to overcome his Cockney accent, an accent that was a typical feature of those servants in Sam Weller's generation. His attitude toward his accent is of minor significance in the story, but the narrator finds it to be a sign of social change: 'But his wrong a's and h's were not really comic; they were signs of a social revolution, and this was something Charles failed to recognize' (p. 43). Sam Farrow and Sam Weller are the same type but differences in social background result in their following different future paths. Farrow realizes his ambition to start a new career in the fashion industry, rather than being content with his role as a servant like Sam Weller. These instances suggest Fowles was willing to acknowledge the moulding power of a historically-conditioning environment.

As evolution involves an outcome of the interaction between genes and environment, so Fowles was concerned with interrelationships between human beings as a species and their environment or society with its historical and cultural backgrounds. As mentioned, Fowles rated highly both E. O. Wilson, a father of sociobiology, and Stephen Jay Gould, a Marxist evolutionary biologist. This fact resonates with his statement that he had been 'torn between a biological and political view of society.' With this point in mind, it is quite significant that Fowles quoted a sentence from Martin Gardner's *The Ambidextrous Universe* as an epigraph for the final chapter: 'Evolution is simply the process by which chance (the random mutations in the nucleic acid helix caused by natural radiation) co-operates with natural law to create living forms better and better adapted to survive' (p. 464). As
Finney points out, ‘all the epigraphs but the last are by or about Victorians’ so this epigraph is exceptional. This sentence epitomizes the interpretation of Darwin that Charles eventually reaches. It is important to note, however, that evolution is not the main topic of *The Ambidextrous Universe*. In other words, there is a question regarding why Fowles quoted a passing sentence from that book. A probable answer is that the sentence happened to match best with the understanding of evolution applied in the novel, but I suggest an alternative answer, that citing from that specific book was significant for Fowles. Gardner was an exceptional generalist whose interests covered mathematics, science, and literature. In the field of literature, he made a significant contribution to studies of Louis Carroll with *The Annotated Alice*. *The Ambidextrous Universe* is the epitome of Gardner’s multifarious approach, consisting of essays on symmetry and asymmetry, in such diverse topics as physics, astronomy, natural sciences, genetics, and, importantly, art including literature. Having an epigraph from such a work of scientific and cultural unification was quite appropriate for *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which is an ambitious attempt to reconcile apparently contradictory biological and cultural views of human life.

**4. Conclusion**

While *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* has often been discussed in terms of postmodernism and existentialism, insufficient attention has been paid to the naturalist aspects of John Fowles and his writing. Fowles had been ‘torn between a biological and political view of society’, and this novel

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41 Finney, p. 96.
can be regarded as a literary endeavour to reconcile these two views. Postmodernist textualism and Darwinian biology might appear incongruous together, but as Spolsky argues in 'Darwin and Derrida', the conception of evolution as a process of recategorization has an affinity for deconstructionist postmodernism.\textsuperscript{42} \textit{The French Lieutenant's Woman}, with its focus on both nature and nurture, is concerned with biological evolution and social changes. Just as Sarah is an enigma refusing stereotypical interpretations, the novel as a metafiction provides the reader with cognitive challenges to help deconstruct orthodox understandings of human beings and society. As a historiographic fiction with interests in human constants, the novel can be regarded as Fowles's quest to investigate how society affects us as an environment designed by human beings, and how we might make changes to society accordingly.