

约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

THE FRENCH  
LIEUTENANT'S  
WOMAN

法国中尉的女人

John Fowles



LONGMAN  
LITERATURE  
GUIDES

# YORK NOTES

General Editors: Professor A.N. Jeffares (*University of Stirling*) & Professor Suheil Bushrui (*American University of Beirut*)

John Fowles

# THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

江苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章

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LONGMAN  
YORK PRESS

世界图书出版公司  
北京·广州·上海·西安

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This edition of York Notes on  
The French Lieutenant's Woman  
is Published by arrangement  
with Addison Wesley Longman  
Limited, London. 1997  
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约克文学作品辅导丛书: 法国中尉的女人(福尔斯)

H·斯皮尔 著

英国朗文出版公司出版  
世界图书出版公司北京公司重印  
北京朝阳门内大街 137 号 邮编: 100010  
北京中西印刷厂印刷  
世界图书出版公司北京公司发行  
各地新华书店和外文书店经销

\*

1998 年 1 月第 1 版 开本: 850×1168 1/32  
1998 年 1 月第 1 次印刷 印张: 2.75  
印数: 0001-2000 字数: 70 千字

ISBN: 7-5062-3345-2/I·22

著作权合同登记 图字: 01-97-0675 号

定价: 5.30 元

## 《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。



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## Part 1

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# Introduction

JOHN FOWLES was born in March 1926, in the little Essex town of Leigh-on-Sea, a town which he himself described as 'dominated by conformism – the pursuit of respectability'\*. A little over a month after his birth the General Strike began, and though it was short-lived it left behind a legacy of anger and frustration. Then, in October 1929, the economic bubble burst, and America and Europe found themselves in the midst of what came to be known as the Great Depression.

Fowles's father, a cigar importer, weathered the economic storm comfortably and was able to send his son to Bedford School, where the boy did well; he excelled intellectually and was good at sport, particularly cricket. Forced at first to accept the discipline of his seniors, he later became Head Boy. This experience gave him an insight into power and domination and the evils which accompany them; it instilled in him 'a violent hatred of leaders, organizers, bosses: of anyone who thinks it good to get or have arbitrary power over other people'†. The shadow of war hung over his school life, and when he left school he was called up into the Royal Marines where he served as a junior officer.

In 1947, the war and his military service over, Fowles went up to Oxford where he studied French at New College, completing his BA degree in 1950. The following year he spent in France as a *lecteur* in English at the University of Poitiers; whilst there he reinforced his interest in French literature, reading Jean Giradoux (1882–1944) and going through what he has called his 'Gide phase' (André Gide, 1869–1951). His interest in style and in the artistic processes of creation, as well as his slightly mocking flirtation with existentialism, with modernism, with structuralism and various other contemporary 'isms', owe a great deal to French influence from Flaubert to the present day.

Following his appointment at Poitiers, he went on to teach English at a boys' school in Greece and fell in love with the country. His second novel, *The Magus* (1966), is set on a Greek island; steeped in magic

\*Autobiographical entry in *World Authors: 1950–1970*; quoted in *Current Biography 1977*, ed. Charles Moritz, H. W. Wilson Company, New York, 1977, p. 159.

†Quoted from *World Authors: 1950–1970* in *Current Biography 1977*, p. 160.



and myth, it is perhaps the only possible setting for the intricate and fantastic deceptions perpetrated upon the narrator, English schoolteacher Nicholas Urfe, by the 'Magus', Maurice Conchis.

In 1956 Fowles married Elizabeth Whitton. They settled for a while in London, where he taught in a girls' school and simultaneously experimented with writing fiction. His first novel, *The Collector*, was published in 1963 and was seen by many critics as a masterpiece. It is often difficult to live up to that kind of praise lavished on a first book, and his next book, *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas* (1965), which veered away from fiction to offer a series of philosophical thoughts for the twentieth century, was less popular.

When he left teaching, Fowles, who has always disliked towns and people *en masse*, moved from London to Lyme Regis on the Dorset coast, where he felt more able to live his own private and secluded life. There, he is Curator of the little Philpot Museum and follows his own pursuits and interests, enjoying the natural surroundings, reading, writing and generally taking pleasure in remaining out of the limelight. It is in this part of England that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is set. Published in 1969, this novel was an immediate success. It has been followed more recently by a book of poetry, *Poems* (1973), a book of stories, *The Ebony Tower* (1974), the text to accompany a book of photographs, *Shipwreck: Photographs by the Gibsons of Scilly* (1974), three novels, *Daniel Martin* (1977), *Mantissa* (1982) and *A Maggot* (1985), *A Short History of Lyme Regis* (1982) and a number of other non-fiction books. It is apparent from this list that Fowles is a prolific writer and one at home in diverse genres, though his principal interest is in the novel. His novels show considerable diversity, particularly of setting and technique, though all have a similarity in the extreme demands they make upon the reader. Following the publication of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he was presented with the PEN Silver Pen Award (1969) and the W. H. Smith Award (1970).

*The French Lieutenant's Woman*, though published in 1969, belongs to 1967 when it was written, exactly a hundred years after the overt action begins; moreover, the plot of 1867 is seen through the interpretations and perspectives of a hundred years later, and our twentieth-century judgments are reinforced by the duality of the presentation.

The year 1867 is central to the Victorian Age and can thus be seen as embodying the philosophies and moral values of that era. It was also the year in which Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) left London and returned to Dorset and, furthermore, the year in which he decided to abandon poetry for prose and began his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, which was never published and the manuscript of which has been lost or destroyed. It seems hardly likely to be purely fortuitous that *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, with its detailed references to

Hardy, was set in 1867; it may perhaps be seen as Fowles's *The Poor Woman and the Gentleman* in a kind of reversal of Hardy's title.

Fowles makes considerable use of the historical background of the period in which his novel is set. It was a significant period of social reform, 1867 being the year the Second Reform Bill was passed. This bill brought about household suffrage in the towns but did not enfranchise the poor labourers of the county constituencies. In Chapter 16 of his novel, nevertheless, Fowles points out that in the debate on the Bill (which was passed in March and therefore during the action of our story) John Stuart Mill (1806–73) tried to argue for equal rights for women at the ballot box; he goes on to claim that 30 March 1867 'is the point from which we can date the beginning of feminine emancipation'. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, however, is more concerned with social than with political injustice: it draws our attention to the gulf between rich and poor, to the lot of women, to the male chauvinism which ensured that the laws of morality governing the actions of men were infinitely more liberal than those governing the actions of women; it shows us something of the lives of rich and poor, of the contrasting working and living conditions and of the indignities suffered, particularly by the women of the working classes.

The Victorian Age is commonly viewed as an age of prudery and of hypocrisy. We are simultaneously aware of the existence of the great thinkers, the great writers, the great politicians of the time and of the abject poverty portrayed by novelists such as Charles Dickens (1812–70). In addition to the novelists of the period, John Fowles makes particular use of a book entitled *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age* by E. Royston Pike, the timely publication of which in 1967 coincided with the writing of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It is almost essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the novel, and in his list of 'Acknowledgments' Fowles recommends it 'to any reader who would like to know more of the reality behind my fiction'.

Another significant landmark was the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's (1809–82) *Origin of Species*, with its then revolutionary theory of evolution. Its implied rejection of the biblical Creation story in Genesis was a shock to traditional religious belief and a source of argument and dissension both among the intelligentsia and more widely. Fowles uses Darwin as a point of contact between Charles and Dr Grogan, both of whom are ardent Darwinians. It is, of course, appropriate that Charles should be an amateur geologist, for it was a geologist, Sir Charles Lyell (1797–1875), who earlier in the century had first challenged theological beliefs about the age of the earth with his *The Principles of Geology* (1830–3). We might observe, too, that Charles Smithson inherits his Christian name from these two great

doubters. More significantly, perhaps, the geological and the Darwinian theories of the nineteenth century marked a point of no return. It was no longer possible to ignore the findings of science, and the task of theologians since has been to reconcile them with faith. (For further discussion of the books mentioned in this and the preceding paragraph, see Part 3 of these Notes.)

It is in this crucial period, when traditional beliefs were being overturned, that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is set. Charles, Victorian though he is, is one of the 'New Men' of his age; Sarah, on the other hand, lacking Charles's education and knowledge, gives an intuitive response to events, coloured by the author's own twentieth-century perspective; she is wise before her time and she suffers for it, since she lives in a nineteenth-century world that has no conception of twentieth-century ideas about individual freedom and women's liberation.

*The French Lieutenant's Woman* is not an historical novel in the usual sense, for it is not contained within the chronological period in which it is set. Were it to be seen merely as an historical novel, many of the allusions and references and much of the language would be anachronistic. Fowles, however, deliberately introduces perceptions which do not belong to the period, engaging his reader in the creative process from the outset and insisting that author and readers may have twentieth-century sensibilities which are at odds with the Victorian plot.

The late 1960s, when the novel was in gestation, are significant mainly because they represent a time a century later than the story of the novel; this enables the author to indulge in the duality of action which makes us aware of the gulf between the lives of the Victorian characters and our own. This can be illustrated by the description of Charles as he sets out in Chapter 8 on one of his geological forays. The true historical novelist would simply have described his dress so that we saw him as a typical Victorian; Fowles, too, describes his dress, but puts it in a twentieth-century perspective, explaining to the reader that he 'would have made you smile' and going on to describe in detail his 'stout nailed boots and canvas gaiters', his 'breeches of heavy flannel', his 'tight and absurdly long coat', and his 'canvas wideawake hat'. The list of the contents of his rucksack which follows makes us wonder how Charles was ever able to carry such a load on his trips to the Undercliff. We view him as a Victorian, but we judge him in the light of our own contemporary knowledge and customs. He has become a slightly comic figure in our eyes because of the invitation to us to 'smile' and the use of such words as 'absurdly . . . ludicrous'. Yet, to the Victorians he would have been neither absurd nor ludicrous, but rather, simply conventional.

The main problems in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* lie not in the language itself, though the use of foreign words and phrases, particularly Latin, may be a stumbling block, but in the innumerable allusions and references drawn from diverse sources. In Part 2 of these Notes words which can be looked up in a good short dictionary, such as *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, have not been explained but difficulties which might not easily be resolved by recourse to a dictionary are annotated. Further discussion of the text may be found in Parts 3 and 4.

## A note on the text

*The French Lieutenant's Woman* was begun on 25 January and completed on 27 October 1967, taking nine months from conception to birth! It was published in hardback in 1969 by Jonathan Cape in Britain and by Little, Brown & Company in the United States. It has been reprinted several times and has also had several paperback publishings in both countries. A number of minor revisions were made for the American edition, particularly in the 'American' Chapter 59. The edition used in the preparation of these notes is the 1971 Cape reprint of the first edition, but since students may well be using different editions chapter references rather than page numbers are used here.

## Part 2

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# Summaries

of THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

### A general summary

This novel is a love story which leaves us troubled and bewildered. It takes place in Hardy country on the south coast at Lyme Bay. Although it is a Victorian novel, it is seen from a twentieth-century perspective; the characters are simultaneously part of the nineteenth-century world and the creatures of their author's invention. The action takes place in 1867, but its conception belongs to 1967.

The French Lieutenant's 'woman' is the heroine, Sarah Woodruff. Her male counterpart is not the French Lieutenant but the dilettante geologist, palaeontologist and follower of Darwin, Charles Smithson, who is engaged to Ernestina (Tina) Freeman. Other significant characters are Charles's uncle Sir Robert who, by marrying late in life and producing an heir, disinherits his nephew; Sam Farrow, Charles's manservant; Ernestina's father, and her Aunt Tranter; an Irish doctor called Grogan; Mrs Poulteney who, in the hope of earning herself some credit in heaven, takes Sarah Woodruff as her companion; Mrs Fairley, Mrs Poulteney's odious housekeeper; and finally, the enigmatic figure of the author himself.

Today we might well think that Charles Smithson and Ernestina Freeman were ill-suited to each other, but theirs would have been a perfectly acceptable Victorian marriage: a handsome, intelligent man, well-behaved, with prospects of a modest fortune and a title, and a vainly pretty young lady, the only child of her father and heiress to a massive fortune acquired through trade; moreover, they thought themselves to be in love, which would have been an added bonus.

Charles, however, almost by accident finds himself involved with Sarah Woodruff, an ex-governess, the 'wicked woman' of Lyme Regis, whose putative affair with the French Lieutenant has become the talk and the scandal of the neighbourhood. Through curiosity, and sympathy with her plight, Charles allows himself to be gradually ensnared by Sarah until at last he sleeps with her, only to discover that the stories that have circulated in the village are without foundation – she was a virgin!

After a terrible scene with Ernestina, in which she threatens him with legal action, he breaks his engagement to her; he now determines to find Sarah again and put matters right between them by offering her

marriage. At this point Sarah disappears; Charles searches for her assiduously, even employing a detective agency to trace her, to no avail. To help him forget, he travels abroad, first on the Continent and then to America. At last, nearly two years later, news comes of Sarah; Charles returns to England and goes to visit her.

At this point the author, who had already attempted to end the story prematurely in Chapters 43 and 44 by proposing that Charles should not visit Sarah at her hotel but should instead return to Ernestina and marry her, intervenes again. He offers us two possible endings: first that Charles finds Sarah again, meets the child he had fathered and – of course, because it is a Victorian romance! – marries Sarah to live happily ever after; alternatively, Charles finds Sarah again, does not recognise the child he had fathered and – of course, because it is a story seen in the light of twentieth-century cynicism – the two quarrel and Charles leaves in anger, never to see Sarah again.

## Detailed summaries

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### Chapter 1

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It is March 1867, and on the quay at Lyme Regis a couple are walking. Seen through the eyes of a mysterious third figure, they are shown to be fashionably dressed and appear to be rather superior people, not belonging to Lyme itself. There is yet another person, dressed in black, standing completely still at the very end of the quay.

As the novel progresses we realise that the observer in this scene is the author himself. This short chapter deliberately evokes the atmosphere of a Hardy novel; it contains two of Hardy's favourite narrative devices: the depiction of lonely figures in a landscape, and the use of an observer to draw a picture which has more in common with visual than with narrative art. At the same time, the choice of Lyme Regis and the Cobb for the background of the story calls to mind Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, a book to which our author refers in the next chapter.

#### NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

- The Cobb:** the long harbour wall at Lyme  
**what familiarity breeds:** that is, contempt (*old proverb*)  
**Piraeus . . . Athens:** Piraeus is the seaport for Athens  
**Armada:** the Spanish Armada set sail to attack Britain in 1588, but was destroyed in storms at sea  
**Monmouth:** James Scott, Duke of Monmouth (1649–85), the illegitimate son of King Charles II; on the king's death in 1685, Monmouth, who had been banished from the country, landed with a small force at

<b>Henry Moore:</b>	Lyme Regis. He was defeated and beheaded (1898–1986) well-known English sculptor
<b>Michelangelo:</b>	(1475–1564) Italian painter and sculptor
<b>dundrearies:</b>	long side-whiskers

## Chapter 2

This chapter takes us directly into the observed scene of the previous one. The two figures walking together are now introduced through their own conversation; Tina, the daughter of a very rich man whose wealth comes from the drapery trade, is engaged to Charles, grandson of a baronet and a dilettante scientist. Their conversation also introduces the third figure to us: she is known locally as Tragedy or, more vulgarly, as the French Lieutenant's Woman, and she works for old Mrs Poulteney.

The two approach the strange woman and Charles briefly addresses her; her only response is a penetrating look, but she says nothing, and Charles and Tina retrace their steps back along the Cobb.

It is apparent to the reader that Charles is intrigued by the encounter and that, despite his assertion to the contrary, he feels a sense of mystery and romance. Tina, on the other hand, wants nothing to do with the woman and hurries him away from the scene.

### NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

<b>Neptune:</b>	Roman god of the sea
<b>galant:</b>	( <i>French</i> ) gallant, showing chivalry
<b>Mr Darwin:</b>	Charles Darwin (1809–82), English naturalist who propounded the theory of evolution
<b>Et voilà tout:</b>	( <i>French</i> ) and that's all
<b><i>Certhidium portlandicum</i>:</b>	technical term for a particular kind of stone found near Portland
<b>Jane Austen . . .</b>	<b><i>Persuasion</i>:</b> the English novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817) wrote <i>Persuasion</i> in 1815, and it was published posthumously in 1818. The incident in which Louisa Musgrove falls down the steps at the Cobb occurs in Chapter 12

## Chapter 3

The story is now back in the mind of the observer (or author), who briefly outlines Charles's family history for us. We learn that Charles has a little money inherited from his extravagant father, but that his real hope of both fortune and title rests on his ageing, unmarried uncle. The chapter ends with an account of a discussion between Charles and

his uncle about marriage. This discussion is more significant for both men than we realise at the time.

Fowles deliberately introduces a number of anachronisms into the narrative, showing us the mid-nineteenth century through the perspective of the mid-twentieth century.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

- palaeontology:** the study of life in the geological past
- adagio:** musical term meaning 'at a slow pace'
- Chartists:** those who supported the 'People's Charter' of 1838
- German Jew . . . Hamburg:** Karl Marx (1818–83), the father of international communism, was a German Jew. He settled in London in 1849 and wrote *Das Kapital* whilst working in the Reading Room of the British Museum
- Almack's:** Almack's Assembly Rooms in St James's in London were the home of a celebrated gaming-club
- Thirty-nine Articles:** the articles of religion to which a person taking orders in the Church of England has to assent
- Oxford Movement:** a movement towards High Church principles in the Church of England; it started in Oxford in the 1830s
- propria terra:** (*Latin*) own ground
- voyant . . . s'assurer:** (*French*) seeing too much to reject and too little to confirm
- Huxley [footnote]:** Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), English biologist
- infra dig.:** (*Latin*) colloquial for 'beneath one's dignity'; from Latin, *infra dignitatem*
- Gladstone:** William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98) was British Liberal Prime Minister in 1868–74, 1880–5 and 1892–4
- Macaulay:** Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–59), British historian
- Lyell:** Sir Charles Lyell (1797–1875), a Scottish geologist, published *Principles of Geology* (1830–3); see Fowles's comments about him in Chapter 19
- Disraeli:** Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81) was British Conservative Prime Minister in 1852, 1858–9, 1868 and 1874–80
- Byronic:** George Gordon, sixth Baron Byron (1788–1824), was an English poet



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## Chapter 4

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We are now introduced to Mrs Poulteney, a wealthy inhabitant of Lyme, whose housekeeper, Mrs Fairley, is as harsh and unkind as her mistress.

In the previous spring, Mrs Poulteney, fearing for her soul, had decided that she must do a charitable deed by taking as companion someone who had fallen on hard times; in the belief that he was helping Sarah, the local vicar had suggested Sarah's name to her. This chapter rehearses for our amusement the conversation between Mrs Poulteney and the vicar and shows us her hypocrisy.

### NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

- Regency house:** a house in the style of architecture belonging to the Regency period (1810–20)
- Stygian:** associated with the Styx; in classical mythology it was the river over which the shades of the dead were ferried to Hades
- Gestapo:** secret police of the German Nazi regime
- other, more Grecian, nickname:** that is, Tragedy, which was 'Grecian' in that Melpomene, one of the nine Muses, presided over the art of Tragedy
- Duke of Wellington:** Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington (1769–1852); his distinguished army career culminated in victory over Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815
- parable of the widow's mite:** see the Bible, Mark 12:42 and Luke 21:2–4
- de haut en bas:** (French) from the heights to the depths
- de bas en haut:** (French) from the depths to the heights

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## Chapter 5

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This chapter tells us about Ernestina's earlier life and explains why she is staying with her Aunt Tranter at Lyme. It also shows us a slightly un-Victorian side of Ernestina as, half-dressed, she admires herself in the mirror, and suddenly the thought of sexual intercourse comes into her mind.

There is a slight feeling here that the author is making fun of Ernestina and of Victorian conventions; certainly some of his descriptions appear to parody the attitudes commonly put forward in Victorian novels.