



## Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 18

Issue 1 *Empowering Future Generations of Women and Girls: Empowering Humanity: Select Proceedings from the Second World Conference on Women's Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Article 18

Nov-2016

# Tracing Variegated Streaks of Feminism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* through Pinteresque Jigsaw

Pushp Lata

Sanjay Kumar

Sonal Bhagat

Follow this and additional works at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>

 Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Lata, Pushp; Kumar, Sanjay; and Bhagat, Sonal (2016). Tracing Variegated Streaks of Feminism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* through Pinteresque Jigsaw. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 18(1), 293-306.  
Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol18/iss1/18>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

## Tracing Variegated Streaks of Feminism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* through Pinteresque Jigsaw

By Pushp Lata<sup>1</sup>, Sanjay Kumar<sup>2</sup> and Sonal Bhagat<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

Written for screen by one of the greatest English dramatists and Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter and directed by Karel Reisz, the film *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, appearing in 1981, is the cinematic adaptation of John Fowles' novel by the same name that created ripples in the literary circles in 1969. Keeping in with the appreciation of the novel, the cinematic version of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* too continued to capture the imagination of the classes and the masses alike bagging several prestigious awards. The proposed paper intends to study all these variegated shades and designs that further intensify the experimental spirit of the film.

Focusing on the movie within the movie that imbues the cinematic adaptation of the novel with a quintessential Pinteresque intensity, the paper explores in depth the subtle nuances offered for intellectual probing through the ingeniously contrived sub-plot. Running as a subtle counterfoil to the main plot of Sarah and Charles, the tempestuous love affair between Mike and Anna—the actors playing Charles and Sarah respectively—the subtext of the movie invites concerted critical endeavors in exploring the intellectual conundrum that confronts us on the silver screen. The paper engages itself in the task of reading through such intellectually stimulating improvisations which subtly reflect the post-modernistic tone and tenor. For this purpose, the paper focusses especially on studying the parallels and proselytes that characterize the protagonists as Sarah and Anna in the main and the sub-plot respectively. The paper also studies the mise-en-scene devices such as light, sound, colours, camera movements, focus, background music, and different types of shots employed in the movie, all of which poetically render the rich contours of the work.

**Keywords:** The French Lieutenant's Woman, cinematic adaptation, Pinteresque, mise-en-scene, textual and sub-textual maneuvers, postmodern tone and tenor

---

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Pushp Lata has been associated with Department of Humanities and Languages, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani since 1994. She did her P.G.D.T.E. from CIEFL, Hyderabad and Ph.D. from University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, India. In her 21 years' academic career, she has held various teaching and administrative positions. Prof. Lata is a passionate teacher and an avid researcher. She received Shiksha Ratan Award 2012 for Teaching and she has 45 research papers and nine books to her credit.

<http://discovery.bits-pilani.ac.in/Homepage/disciplines/languages/My%20Web%20Sites/Profiles/Pushplata>

<sup>2</sup> Dr Sanjay Kumar is as an Author and Consultant in English and Soft Skills Development Training. In 23 years' academic career, he has held teaching and administrative positions in various academic institutes including BITS, Pilani, Govt PG College, Loharu, Chaudhary Devi Lal University (CDLU), Sirsa, JK Lakshmi Pat University, Jaipur and ICFAI Tech, Jaipur. He has 45 research papers and nine books to his credit. He has delivered invited lectures and talks. He conducts workshops on communication skills, personality development, verbal ability, soft skills, placement skills, reading comprehension, and documentation.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Sonal Bhagat completed her Ph. D in 2015 from University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. She is an avid reader, a researcher and a passionate creative writer. She writes poems, short stories and travelogues. She also draws and paints landscapes.

Dealing with a work of art visited creatively thrice and critically on a numerous occasion is like walking into an intellectual conundrum where the clue at the vertical end leaves us out at the horizontal. The paper attempts to deal with one such intellectual puzzle and concentrates on *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a memorable film by Karel Reisz. Apparently, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), by John Fowles, is a novel inspired by the 1823 novel *Ourika*, by Claire de Duras (Warburton, 1996). Published in 1969, the novel stands as a unique example of twentieth century depiction of the nineteenth century Victorian society especially probing the male-female equations amidst the Victorian England hypocrisies.

Although a male writer, Fowles's deep understanding and critical perception and compassion for the women of Victorian times, is evidently observed in his portrayal of variegated female characters ranging from the intriguingly volatile Sarah Woodruff to the stereotypical Victorian woman such as Ernestina Freeman. One of the most outstanding features of the novel, the strong female characterization, puts Fowles on the pedestal of a male feminist writer of the twentieth century. In fact, though the text of the novel gets involved with varied issues such class distinction, capitalist society, poetry, the suffrage movement, but most engagingly Fowles explores the issue of woman's marginalized existence in a constraining patriarchal Victorian England. Understandably therefore, the overarching focus of the novel is on the issue of woman's sexuality—its repression and expression.

In 1981, director Karel Reisz and writer Harold Pinter adapted the novel as a film with the same title. Starring Meryl Streep, the film offers an artistic fusion of the strands of the Victorian and the postmodern times. Now regarded as the first major eighties film about a woman's quest for emancipation amidst circumscribing patriarchal world order, the film went on to bag prestigious awards including nomination to the Oscar, Golden Globes and BAFTA Awards for Meryl Streep and Harold Pinter. Adapted brilliantly by Karel Reisz, and written for screen by Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter the movie offers an intellectual feast in its technical nuances, philosophical genus and scopophilic delight.

Despite the phenomenal success of the film, a section of critics continues to believe that the film fails to rise above the mundaneness of the love affair between Anna and Mike. Prisca is one such observer. Prisca (2009) seems to be lamenting the depth and intensity of the movie in pointing out that unfortunately, the film adaptation lacks the depth provided by the text and falls short of thrusting the focus beyond parallel love affairs. The comment appears to be suggestive of an amateurish approach while dealing with the intellectual conundrum that Pinter's works usually throw up as a challenge to the audience. Endeavoring to explore such textual and sub-textual maneuvers, the purpose of this study is to establish that Pinter's screenplay for the movie, empowered by Karel Reisz's imaginative direction, acquires a structure that demands an oblique approach.

Another critical view holds that Anna and Sarah have nothing in common. Shoshana Knapp is one such critic who believes that "they have nothing to say to each other, even when they appear to speak the same language" (Knapp, 1988). For some other critics, the modern element in the story focusing on Anna-Mike affair is just repetitive and offers nothing else except irritating interruptions. For instance, Knapp in the same article, again ridicules Anna's statement "They'll fire me for immortality. They'll think I'm a whore," and hastens to add "Sarah's tragic gesture becomes Anna's comic jest, but the juxtaposition illuminates neither." Knapp however tends to overlook that the expressions used in a Pinteresque text does not "reflect the emotions that stand in front but an adjacent one..." It is so because in Pinter's works all that works is an indirect approach (Almansi and Henderson, 1983) and we are supposed to tackle his texts like a dog coming

to grips with a bone and since “a hard bone cannot be broken into with a frontal and perpendicular bite; it requires an oblique approach with the back teeth penetrating in between the splinters of the bones so that tongue can stealthily approach its succulent centre...”

It is owing to and amidst such diverse critical speculations, that the present paper proposes to contend the popular view that Anna is just a continuation of Sarah and though “more modern and animate,” is “perceivably the same character under the cloak, merely displaced by time and space manners.”(Pinter, 1981). We feel that it is very important to keep in view the Pinteresque structure of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* and approach it in the spirit that a Pinter text warrants. To begin with, the paper suggests to offer an alternative, a sub-textual perspective by which we can discern how the Anna-Mike plot adds an extremely relevant and important dimensions to the movie. The paper also highlights how Anna turns out to be an evolved version of Sarah and succeeds in achieving what Sarah fails to eventually clinch in her struggle against patriarchy. Contrasting Sarah’s mystical effrontery with Anna’s elusiveness, the paper attempts to discover how the film takes the story of woman’s rebellion from its Victorian abrasiveness to the subtlety of postmodern feminist discourse.

Exploring on the sub text of the sub-plot and other cinematic devices, the paper attempts to figure out how Pinter’s ingenious screenplay and Karel Reisz’s penetrative direction render to it an artistic coherence wherein both the expressed and the unexpressed become inextricably intertwined. Primarily focusing on Pinter’s deft syllogism, essentially the film underscores how in Pinter’s world one of the key issues to resolve is the contention between man and woman and when they “compete against one another, their conflicts not only are marked...but also are exacerbated by among other forces, sexual desires, repulsion, and jealousy. These emotions may bewilder or torment the characters themselves, whose doubts about what lies around them are made more painful by the uncertainty of what lies within them.” (Victor L. Cahn, 1993).

Before setting on this voyage however, it is important to recall how the imagination of the director has come to be regarded as a crucial factor in determining the sense and overall impact of a movie owing to the fact that it is the screenplay that provides the basic structure, besides offering the important undercurrents to a large number of films. It is probably because of this that “scripts have to be considered alongside, if not before, direction...” (Corliss, 1998). In the same context, Knapp too seems to recognize the importance that Reisz seems to have assigned to Pinter as a screenwriter. She suggests “Reisz proposes and Pinter composes, with contractual protection against any violation of Pinter’s artistic wishes” (Knapp, 1985). Substantiating her perspective, she refers to Pinter’s conversation with Garis who quotes Pinter while quizzing him on the issue of his, artistic autonomy in the making of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. This is how Pinter seems to have defended the citadel of his artistic autonomy: “In my contracts, I have something very explicit, precise and concrete: The screenplay is decided before we shoot. Done, that’s all. I mean, certainly Karel would ring me up during shooting and say, “Look, can we say...? And then it’s up to me to write the new... line, or whatever it is. It never came to speech. It was always a matter of phrases.” (Garis, 1981).

It would however, be wrong to construe that Pinter’s artistic exploration was anyway incongruent to that of Reisz’s masterly directorial exploration. The seamless fusion of Pinter’s slanted approach and Reisz’s ingeniously artistic endeavour is noticeably visible right in the beginning of the movie as the very first shot captures Meryl Streep briefly peeping into the hand-mirror before she appears before the clapper board and begins to play Sarah Woodruff who is supposed to be walking away to the long winding jetty which will take her to the threshold of a turbulent sea. This clapperboard device assigns to the action a sense of unreality as we are made

to intuit the presence of both the aspects—the real and reel—in the life of a professional actor. Delving straightaway into such convoluted subtleties, the film immediately begins to acquire a multi-layered textuality that warrants endeavouring critical enterprise.

Besides this intuitive opening stroke, the film strikes further insinuations right in the beginning. With the grey sky above and the turbulent sea below, the film assigns to it a nebulous tone that continues to characterize its essence. Moreover, the opening is noticeably set on a gloomy template. The soundtrack of the violin that accompanies the backdrop provides to it a melancholic appeal. Grief begins to set in as we see a lonely Sarah walking in black cloak and moving past the camera which registers her movement away from the audience. She keeps moving away from us, the camera does not chase her and lets her get reduced to a smaller figure amidst the raging sea below and the drooping sky above her. Visible to us only as a distant figure, her passion seems to rouse more for the turbulent sea ahead of her than the inviting world at her back. Steeped in gloomy and grey shades, the action begins to unfold the tale of a lonely woman whose anguish we have been made to sniff into right in the beginning.

Since the next scene takes us to the hustle and bustle of a small town, Lyme Regis, Sarah's isolation from the rest of the world is sufficiently outlined. Contrasted with a routine humdrum of everyday life, is a woman's pointless and persistent wait for her lover whose return she is sure of not achieving. In this way, despite being the adapted version of John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the film opens on a quintessentially Pinteresque note as even before we happen to see of the French lieutenant's woman, Sarah Woodruff, walking wrapped in a mourning cloak, we are made to catch a glimpse of Anna, played by Meryl Streep, the well-known actress for the audience, who peeks briefly into a tiny mirror before she launches herself onto playing the role of the grieving protagonist. At the very outset, therefore, we are made to sense the touch of unreality in what is being projected through the narrative.

By starting the movie on a candid defiance of make-believe celluloid world, Pinter's screenplay and Karel Reisz's direction beckon us to approach the cinematic adaptation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in a quintessentially post-modernistic vein. Even before the narrative intensifies, we are made to feel the illusory sense behind an apparently convincing and realistic story, arising out of the subliminally devised screenplay by Harold Pinter and ingeniously crafted direction, begins to assume complex images on the screen. It is this shifty, illusory sense of its entire tapestry that assigns to the movie the structure and style suggestive of a typically postmodern elusiveness and shiftiness.

The film continues to build on this elusive sense of the narrative as immediately after seeing Charles proposing Ernestina amidst all genteel Victorian chauvinism, we are catapulted into seeing Mike and Anna, the actors who have been entrusted with the task of playing Charles and Sarah of the novel, in bed together. In a jerky move, we are directly parachuted into a world of uninhibited sexuality wherein both the sexes seek to redefine social codes and ethos. In a striking juxtaposition, we witness the nervous Victorian anxiety, so laboriously built up, vanishing into the urban smoke as the nude couple is caught by the camera in each other's arms. Viewers are made to sense the superimposition of the present narrative on the earlier tale.

Reinforcing this visual juxtaposition, what we also confront is a verbal vacuity that wishes away the embroidered linguistic elaborateness with which Charles in the preceding scene had proposed to Ernestina. In a quintessential Pinteresque compactness, we come across an apparently banal and artless telephonic conversation in which what we get to hear mostly are monosyllables, pauses, or exclamations:

*A telephone rings.*

*MIKE turns, lifts receiver.*

MIKE: Yes?

*Pause.*

Who is it?

*Pause.*

Yes it is.

*Pause.*

I'll tell her.

*MIKE puts the phone down, turns on light, wakes ANNA.*

MIKE: Anna?

ANNA: Mmmn?

MIKE: You're late. They're waiting for you.

ANNA: Oh God!

What strikes us is the Pinterian economy of the words uttered. Devoid of ostentation, the sharp and snappy prose serves to expose the apparent façade of verbal pomposity that precedes this stunning montage. Suddenly, we are drawn into the blunt economy of expressions in which both Anna and Mike choose to interact with each other. Further augmenting the contrast, the natural green of the past also gives way to the world of aggressive concreteness of the urban posh, studded with modernly developed buildings, telephones, and cars, suggestive of the present, and offering a striking contrast in both the worlds. One cannot miss out on the startling nature of the contrast in both the worlds as in the preceding shot we were privy to witnessing Charles being driven in a horse carriage. In a real world for this actor, Mike, happens to see his beloved Anna being pulled to work in a chauffeur driven car.

With this apparently simple yet profoundly suggestive twist, Pinter's screenplay brings to the fore one of the primary concerns of the film which is to project the battle of supremacy waged between both the sexes. The scene also helps us observe how the movie begins to propose its counterpoints that constantly challenge and scuttle the Victorian archetypes that willy-nilly creep into the novel. The entire sequence thus exploits various cinematic devices such as the backdrop, light, sound and costume to drive home the contrasts in both the worlds. A deeper look into the tapestry with the help of mise-en-scene and the subtextuality of the script, also help us observe how subtly the film attempts to subvert the male hegemony decried differently in the novel. It is Charles, a male charging on a horse carriage, who has come to seek the hand of Ms Freeman. In the filmic version, i.e. the movie within the movie, however, it is Anna, a professional actress, who cannot continue to warm the bed of her lover and is seen going to work leaving her languishing lover behind.

Tilting thus the convenient patriarchal prerogatives on their head, Pinter's screenplay assigns to the movie the post-modernistic hue that outlines a protesting counterpoint against the constraining Victorianism. The strikingly different settings chosen for delineating different worlds, provide both to Sarah and Anna distinctive revelatory quality specific to their character and times. As we see Anna being driven to work alone, we prepare ourselves for a scene which will not involve Mike. The next shot confirms our anticipation as we find Sarah Woodruff sitting silently on stairs and busy sketching while two labourers move past her carrying a coffin. Despite being a screenplay improvisation, without alluding to any apparent counterpoint in the novel, this scene

serves to capture Sarah's aloofness and destitution. Again it is Pinter's ingenious use of words and pauses that capture our attention as Vicar's dialogues bring out Sarah's plight in having lost her foothold and territorial right that deprives her of a continuation in Miss Duff's place after her death. The Vicar's dialogue confirms her marginality and seclusion:

You realize that you cannot stay here any longer? I happen to know that Miss Duff has made no provision for you in her will. The place is to be sold.

*Pause.*

How much money do you possess?

*Pause.*

When did you last eat?

*Silence.*

Pushed to an extreme edge of her living henceforth, we witness Sarah entering into an apparently intolerable employment in Mrs. Poulteney's household. In quintessential Painteresque shorthand thus, we are made to realize how Sarah has been pushed to the limits of her existence before she begins to orchestrate her resurrection amidst a singularly patriarchal Victorianism. Not just that, the contrast between the lighted present and the gloomy past reflects woman's deplorable position in the bygone era. Having seen a liberated professional actress going to her in a chauffeur driven car and then confronting Sarah's destitute existence makes us realize the darkness that surrounded a solitary woman's existence in Victorian times.

The glimpses of such rebellion in the novel are outlined through Sarah's conscious disassociation with the conventional feminine image as she, rather than being furtive about her supposed alliance with a French lover, makes her relation with him rather pronounced. Her continued wait despite her own admission that the French lover in context is not likely to come, assigns to her rather intriguing connotations as well. Baffling the stereotypical codes of moralities - demanded particularly from a woman in Victorian times - Sarah Woodruff continues to dismantle the established archetypes in choosing to project herself as an estranged and jilted woman who seems to have been discarded by her lover for good. Her persistent visits to the Under cliff, the place notorious for illicit lovers' trysts, her consciously contrived seclusion from the society around her, her preference for a condemned and ostracized living to a socially amalgamated existence, and her willful choice for a depraved status, assign to her character richly enigmatic contours.

A deeper look into her character helps us also observe the craftiness of her rebellion as by presenting an image that ostensibly antagonizes the established feminine projection, Sarah challenges the very essence of patriarchy which expects a woman to not only choose a life of socially admired virtues but also make a sufficient show of such shenanigans through her conduct. Both in the novel and the movie, we see Sarah as an embodiment of rebellion as she throws overboard all the prescriptive norms of behavior and moves around unabashedly as the 'French lieutenant's whore.' The mystique of her character reaches a culmination at Exeter. Having been sent to a hotel in a place where both Charles and Sarah can maintain anonymity, she lets her passion achieve a consummation with Charles. Charles is shocked and so are we when it is discovered that Sarah had so far been a virgin. What perplexes Charles is Sarah's deliberate ploy in carrying herself as a 'fallen' woman in a deeply moralistic Victorian society.

From a feministic perspective, however, the ploy becomes a part of the gambit by which Sarah takes the Victorian bull of orthodoxies by horns in purposefully making sham of her assumed depravity. By rejecting to entertain the imposition of a forced virtue demanding that a woman maintain her virginity prior to her socially approved wedding, and making a pretense of being a 'fallen' woman and choosing to lose her virginity at will, Sarah appears to have knocked off the Victorian orthodoxies. Endowed with freedom of expression of her sexuality, her non-verbal defiance, she attempts to subvert the perpetual male prerogative that seeks to define a woman's character according to biased norms of patriarchy. Purposefully embroidering upon an image that is perennially scorned, Sarah comes forth as an adventurous feminist who chooses to assert her right to express her sexuality without bothering to comfort the principles of patriarchy.

It is through such enigmatic shades that the filmic version of Sarah Woodruff continues to mesmerize the spectators as well as her male pursuer. Interestingly, the cinematic version of Sarah reveals a touch of mystery that seems in consonance with most of the female characters in Pinter's plays. Many a time, disparaged for his portrayal of women as 'mothers,' 'wives,' and 'whores,' many of his female characters seem to have been "saved by their mystery and by a charging vitality that comes to life in production better than on the printed page." (Sykes, 1970).

It is also interesting to note how the word 'whore' is used by different characters, located in different times, in the movie. We get to hear this word for the first time from Anna, the professional actress when shown in bed with Mike. Anna is struck with the idea that the film unit must have come to understand her dalliance with Mike as it was he who picked the phone in her room. The dialogue that follows it is extremely interesting keeping in view the entire dialectics of the work:

ANNA: They know that you're in my room.

MIKE: Mm.

In your bed. I want them to know.

ANNA: Christ, look at the time.

They'll fire me for immortality.

They'll think I am a whore.

MIKE: You are.

This brief conversation, without any direct correspondence to the novel as it belongs to the additional plot of Anna and Mike, assumes vital significance. Despite their unlawful alliance, both Mike and Anna seem to accept its presence in their lives without any qualms. Anna's statement "they know that you are in my room," is devoid of any alarm. To her matter-of-factness, Mike adds with undaunted, almost stamping audacity "in your bed," and quickly adds "I want them to know." Interestingly, Anna's next dialogue is about time as like a true professional, she is worried about being late as she blurts out "Christ! look at the time." The fact that she worries more about keeping her professional commitment than living up to the conventional image of woman, indicates her equanimity at being a free, independent, and unconventional woman. Therefore, what she adds further in saying "they'll fire me for immortality," and that "they'll think I am a whore," rather than insinuating her sense of contrition or insecurity at being a libertine woman.

Compared to hers, Ernestina's use of the word "whore" is suggestive of sense of shame associated with the word. In a direct correspondence to the novel, Ernestina uses it while referring to Sarah when Charles sees her for the first time. "Whore" comes to haunt yet again when Sarah confides in Charles about her relations with the French lieutenant. Coming from Sarah, the word



becomes surcharged with anguish, pain and deep insult at being reduced to a “nothing,” “hardly human anymore,” and only “the French lieutenant’s...whore!”

Strategizing repetition thus, Pinter and Reisz ingeniously draw parallels between the mutually diverse livings—the circumscribed Victorian and the redefining post-modern. Seen thus, Sarah emerges as a catalyst who ushers in the force of rebellion against the tabooed Victorianism. While Sarah puts up a partly concealed and essentially symbolically silent protest against societal prescriptions and pressures, Anna, her movie counterpart, chooses to discard all such camouflaged shenanigans aimed at achieving emancipation and carves her freedom by deftly redefining social codes. Viewed perceptively, Sarah’s attempts to emancipate herself from the shackles of patriarchy do not fructify into her eventual liberation. Her dependence on Charles for her sustenance, her sudden disappearance into an unknown world, suggest her feminine suffering in the wake of onslaught of patriarchy and her resultant escape in the wake of it. Seeing Sarah’s journey start and stutter on the way, we are made to think in consonance with Laura Mulvey who suggests, “Hollywood films with a female audience in mind tell the story of contradiction, not of reconciliation. Even if a heroine resists society’s overt pressures, its unconscious laws catch up with her in the end.” (Laura Mulvey, 1989) It is probably in order to resist such perceptions that the cinematic version of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* improvises in pushing forward the film in the film the undercurrents of subtextuality to subvert the prevalent patriarchal hegemony.

In a remarkable departure from the novel, the movie, particularly the movie within the movie keeps itself committedly focused in delineating a rather subtle but keenly intense battle between the sexes. The film suggestively captures how Mike, despite his twenty first century beliefs, continues to obsess himself into pursuance of Anna who remains doggedly out of his reach in order to preserve her freedom and selfhood. Despite being conscious of the Victorian Charles’s urge in the narrative for keeping his woman harnessed to his desire – epitomized through his taking over as Sarah’s protector, provider and pursuer – Mike, the modernist actor, too seems to obsess himself in preserving his possession of Anna. The shot where Anna is seen sleeping in the bed and Mike, standing by a window and lost in possibly a critical review of his relations with Anna and is touched in observing her childlike vulnerability, his male instincts to shield a supposedly defenseless woman are sufficiently aroused. By calling him to come near her and by snuggling in sleep to Mike, Anna fleetingly betrays a touch of vulnerability about her. Rediscovering her adventurism, Anna quickly recovers from this momentary lapse of guard and begins to refurbish the citadel of her gender autonomy.

Evocative thus of many a female character in Pinter’s plays, Anna too seems “determined to avoid letting gender limit their territorial rights” (Victor L Cahn, 1993). In possession of an insight into male behavior and thought, Anna knows that Mike’s chauvinistic instincts are far stronger than his modernistic perspectives on gender equality. Having observed closely how Mike as Charles chooses to chaperone Sarah, Anna remains constantly wary of the prospects of male usurpation threatening to overwhelm her hard earned autonomy. When juxtaposed against each other, Sarah and Anna seem to represent two different levels of rebellion – the mystical and the elusive respectively. Both seek to reconstruct their femininity and wish to redraw the limits of their social existence. In her pursuit, Sarah chooses to keep rebellion safely stowed behind a smokescreen of enigmatic contours. Driven by her instinctive energies, she attempts to keep society at bay that seeks to hunt her down and make her a captive of its Victorian conventions. Miss Poulteney’s didactic discourse to her while she advises her to “read from the Bible,” rather than wander around the prohibited areas such as Undercliff, conspicuously projects what society expects from a woman.

Disregarding such impositions scornfully, Sarah not only visits the places she is not supposed to, but also carries out a supposed adultery with Charles at Exeter. Turning aside the prescriptive norms of Victorianism, Sarah walks alone in her search for the reality of her existence, testing in the process her spunk as a rebellious woman. Sarah's feministic adventurism however fails to substantially alter her fortune as a woman. Beginning as a forlorn and gloomy figure, she shows traces of emancipation before seeking her redemption through a man, Charles whose overtures she initially turns aside. Breaking down in between her journey however, she seeks to escape into the cozy confines of man-woman companionship. Filled with a sense of gratitude for her benefactor and overwhelmed with her own consuming passion, she lets Charles superimpose his authority on her.

Her vulnerability continues to govern her fate as on Charles' return from Exeter, Sarah disappears without informing her lover about her whereabouts. Her unexpected escape from having to oscillate between social expectations and her own conflicting desires, again establishes her predicament. Two of the three endings offered by Fowles seem to suggest either her return or escape from social roles. In one of the versions, she is found to be employed as an understudy of Rossetti which again confirms the continuation of her secondary existence in the wake of a male presence around. In the other ending, she is discovered by Charles and is reunited with him, confirming again her need for male support. It is only in one situation that she rejects Charles and refuses to go back with him. The vulnerability with which Fowles seems to have characterized Sarah, seems to have percolated to her celluloid version as well. Ingeniously characterized with an enigmatic mixture of vulnerability and temerity thus, Sarah Woodruff carves out an indelible impression on one's mind till we turn to explore the depths of Anna's gambit.

A deeper look into Anna's effort helps us observe that Anna, despite her deep feminine urges that seek protective care and concern, revels in her ability to thrive independently. Though in a tempestuous relation with Mike, the actor who plays the lover on screen, Anna is capable of putting mind over matter and continues to control adroitly the professional and the personal boundaries she defines for herself. It is primarily in this sense that Anna's character in the movie within the movie runs as a stunning counterfoil to her alter-ego in the printed narrative. Contrived with an extraordinary insight, Pinter's Anna is actually a perfect antithesis to Fowles' Sarah Woodruff. Karl Resiz, the accomplished director, uses subtle *mise-en-scene* techniques to underscore her comfort and equanimity while negotiating male hegemony.

Immediately after seeing Sarah's plighted and marginalized existence as an ostracized Victorian woman we are made to witness an independent Anna who is seen discussing the issue of sexual inequality with Mike. Her bespectacled visage suggests her intellectual agility while we see both the actors reading while preparing for their respective roles. The striking contrasts between the language, the body language, the costume and the overall ensemble with which we behold the two different images of the same woman as Sarah and Anna, assign to the movie the post modernistic intertextuality wherein both the texts seem to correspond as well as contradict each other.

Her rehearsals with Mike for the sequence wherein Charles has to succor and support a falling Sarah, renders the entire sequence rather parodied and somewhat inconsequential in the lives of the characters playing those roles. The contrast between the reel and the real life leaves a farcical impressions about the deeply ingrained archetypes wherein chauvinistic demeanor was not just admired but also desired.

In fact, the fleeting images of her feminine softness insinuating her vulnerability are created just to highlight the contrastive dialectics that both Sarah and Anna seem to underscore. One such

sequence emerges in the movie when Anna curls up to him in sleep straight after her screen image has sought his intervention in stemming the tide of her falling fortunes, Charles begins to thrust upon him the responsibility of controlling Anna even in her real life. Next couple of shots in the movie show Charles doing an excavation into woman's psychology with the help of Dr. Grogan. Entrusting himself with the task of providing redemption to Anna as well, Mike begins to exert his control for her possession. The remaining movie henceforth begins to excessively focus on the conflicting contests of wills that begin to deconstruct and reconstruct his relation with Anna so far constructed. Mike's effort however, leaves him obfuscated and totally bewildered while Anna's awareness of his desires for her assigns to her an authority which helps her emerge triumphant in this fiercely fought struggle for control and emancipation.

From here on, the film focusses on Anna's stratagem which helps us discover how she purposefully remains elusive both to the challenges posed by the tyrannical order of patriarchy that attempts to subjugate her through control and the familial trappings that conspire to tempt her to the circumscribing mundaneness of the household. The fleeting bout of envy for Mike's wife being in possession of a family including her lover Mike as husband leaves her on the wrong foot a little bit. She, however, recovers from this loss and comes to reassert her dodgy existence by remaining unfathomable to both the chasing lover and the incriminating wife.

Interestingly, Anna's clarity achieved by the time the movie comes to an end seems to bring into sharp focus the lack of it in Sarah's mind. At this point, it becomes worthwhile to recall how Sarah, while recounting to Charles her tragic tale, seems to have provided to the reader an outline of her feministic rebellion in which a woman shams debauchery just to challenge the edifice of patriarchy that survives on the propagation of false myths to continue perpetuation of woman's peripheral existence. It is through Sarah that Fowles' denunciation of male hegemony which attempts to control her fate comes to the fore. Speaking of the French lieutenant, Sarah says, "I did not know that men can be very brave and very false." Of her physical proximity with her lover, she chooses to reveal, "I could tell you that he overpowered me; that he drugged me. But, it is not so. I gave myself to him." Having confirmed her adultery to the increasingly disquieted Charles, she goes on to assert her purpose in doing so: "I did it so that I should never be the same again. So that I should be seen as the outcast that I am."

After a while, her masochistic self, returns as she suggests that in having sex with the French lieutenant, she deliberately married "shame," and in having done that, she does not have the right to "have children, a husband and the pleasures of a home." Immediately however, the feminist in her comes back as she seemingly mocks their chained existence, "Sometimes I pity them. They cannot understand the freedom I have. No ins, outs, no blame can touch me. I have set myself beyond the pain." Nevertheless though it is Sarah who outlines the agenda of her rebellion in this complex fashion, it is clearly Anna who finally achieves it through her resolved approach.

For a professional Anna, though it is a matter of curiosity, pity and a possible fleeting envy to see other women enjoying the pleasures of an ordinary living in having children, a husband and home. Deep inside however, she knows that it is not for her to think of leading a life of subordination and dependence. On the contrary, what thrives her is her capacity to out maneuver both Mike, her male pursuer, and the censorious society that criminalizes all expressions of a woman's sexuality beyond marriage. Through Anna's elusiveness, we gain to see a clearer shift in the perspectives that a modern woman shares as aware of the pitfalls of traditionalism, Anna chooses to stay afloat its enticing temptations. It is through Anna that we come to grips with Sarah's stunted progress. Not only this, it is through her evolution that we come to appreciate the evolution of a civilization, a society, from the circumscribing Victorian to a liberal modernist.

Anna's advancement over Sarah has been suggested not just ideologically but cinematically as well. In terms of the choice of costume, Sarah's gloomy and protective cloak stands in sharp contrast with Anna's present day professional and open attire. In this context, it becomes relevant to see the movie in consonance with Andrew Dix's observations, who, while commentating on *American Beauty*, observes "... woman's lack of flattering make-up and glamorous clothing as evidence of her distance from stereotypical feminine image" (Dix, 2010).

While Anna's apparel suggests her ease with her emancipated image that of Sarah accentuates circumscribed existence amidst suffocating Victorianism. It is an uncompromising Anna, and not the rebelling Sarah - the one who seems caught up in the complex tapestry of her emotions seesawing between the emotions of temerity, melancholia and masochism - who crosses the final frontier. Sarah's emotional obfuscation is suggestively contrasted with Anna's perspicuity as riding on the crest of modern outlook and debonair approach, she successfully negotiates the trammels of patriarchy and traditionalism.

The movie begins with extreme long shot, taken at the outset of the movie, insinuatingly puts into perspective the protagonist's relative lack of might against imposing structures of power beyond her. Comparatively, Anna is introduced to us through a medium close-up while we see her lying in bed with Mike. The background behind her—a modern drawing room—does not seem to possess the overwhelming eminence. Unlike Sarah, she does not have to confront the enormous natural powers—symbolized through the raging ocean—and the inhibiting Victorian society, represented through the other characters in the movie.

In many sequences camera comes to suggest the directorial counterpoint. Mostly it suggests the subtle game of power played between the sexes. In most of the sequences dealing with Charles and Sarah, it is Charles, the male who seems to revel in his dominance in his relationship with Sarah. Most of the time, Charles is seen observing Sarah either from a well rooted distance, or from a height, enjoying thereby the advantage of being a beholder who has the power to violate the spectacle of his object without being observed in return. Frequently shot in high and low angle shots, the sequences establish Charles's growing superiority over an exceedingly vulnerable Sarah. Male hegemony continues to rule the roost, the culmination of which we happen to observe in their sexual encounter at Exeter.

Contrastively, in all such situations, Sarah is captured through medium shots. Having seen her against the might of the sea, Charles envisions her again while standing on a plateau as Sarah is seen wandering amidst the thick foliage below him. While revealing to Charles the enigma of her anguish, Sarah is again seen sitting well below Charles. In capturing her images in the bedroom of the inn at Exeter, Sarah's position is successively diminished. In bed we see her through a high angle shot while she waits for Charles to undress himself and mount her. The camera descends on her only to register closely both her pulchritude and pulsation, emphasizing only her seductively feminine entity. The interplay of high angle long shots, some of which actually convert into geography shots suggesting her lack of control, continues to emphasize her diminutive existence while pitted against the dominating forces around her.

Compared to her diminished authority, Anna's effervescent and uninhibited individuality is repeatedly stressed through the subtleties of the camera movement, focus and angle in the movie. Standing as a remarkable proselyte to Sarah's intercourse with Charles is the sequence where Anna is seen lying on top of Mike and kissing down on him on a beach. Moreover, in all such frames Anna is successively viewed through deep focus shots. Riding on her postmodern advantage, Anna easily seizes the position of superiority that Sarah is tentative about claiming and holding.

Besides the camera shots, focus and angle, the chromatic pattern of the movie seems to signify its critical perspectives which increasingly bring to the fore the oppressive darkness that suggests a woman's position in the Victorian era. Ostensibly articulating Sarah's protest against her oppression, we see her moving in black robes. In order to emphasize the darkness prevalent in the era gone by, the movie captures images of desolate and forlorn nature. The depiction of the dingy, narrow, sliding streets seems to suggest the labyrinthine contours that Sarah has to negotiate on her way to self-assertion. The morose, bleak colours seem to repeatedly associate themselves with Sarah whose melancholia and masochism are both projected through the colours she chooses to wear. In fact, through subtle camera display, the dominance is assigned to the forces in the background and not the lamenting woman in front of it.

Observed from the chromatic perspective, the colours chosen to depict Anna and her surroundings are brighter, lighter and sharper. The vivid primary colours that she wears seem to emphasize her sprightly self. Introduced through aesthetically intuited editorial cuts, the movie actually seems to exercise the device of colour motifs wherein the dark and bleak is associated with Sarah to reflect on woman's plighted existence in the past and the lighter and brighter colours are chosen to highlight the modern woman Anna's unbridled individuality.

In order to portray this contrast between the Victorian and the modern world, the use of light also becomes a significant feature in the film. In the Victorian scenes, the director very consciously goes for an academic kind of lighting, the sort of high definition that is seen in Victorian paintings. It sticks to the use of the front and side light required to paint an object and, in the context of the film, underscores objectification of woman in the Victorian times.

It is not just the light, but other cinematic devices such as the shift in the musicality characterizing the scenes set against the twentieth century backdrop; the sharpness of the denuding modern light, suggesting clarity into human complexity of relationships and thought; and the costume, the landscape and the imagery all of which also help us observe the phenomenal shift in the perspectives from the Victorian times to the modern. In this context, it becomes interesting to note the different types of costumes and hair styles in which we see Sarah and Anna present themselves in the movie. Sarah, apart from her restrictive, mournful clothing, carries knotted hair. Instead Anna greets us with her wavy, stylish hair cut which again stresses her resistance to and rejection of feminine archetypes.

Interestingly, Sarah tries to unknot her ponytailed hair while she narrates her past to Charles. The act acquires symbolic connotations as her need for a male purveyor—in the form of Charles—seems to have been underscored. Without a male coming to her rescue, it is difficult for Sarah to envision an existence that is free from its knotted encumbrances and devoid of the precarious nature of her defiance and struggle against the circumscribing Victorian society. While Anna has a knack of remaining safely distanced from the trammels of patriarchy, Sarah lacks such adroitness and slips into messy conundrum of rejection and acceptance of conventional archetypes.

Nevertheless, Sarah too continues to perplex her male counterpart, a messenger of the society she has rebelled against, as she maintains her quintessential enigma and elusiveness. Keenly aware of her strength in being a woman that gives her the potential to keep her secrets intact and beyond the purview, or even, comprehension of man, Sarah's unfathomable enigma assigns to her a pivotal and centralized position in her relationship with Charles. One wonders how despite being socially inept, Sarah thrives in her capacity of being a woman and can flummox Charles with her quiet competence and enigmatic disposition. This reminds us of what Victor L. Cahn, in writing about Pinter's plays too observes:

“Many of the women in these plays operate with an understanding of their own bodies and minds and therefore of their own desires. The women also have insight into male behavior and thought. Pinter’s men, on the other hand, are constantly perplexed by what women know and, even more, by what women want” (1993: 280).

Many of the women in these plays operate with an understanding of their own bodies and minds and therefore of their own desires. The women also have insight into male behavior and thought. Pinter’s men, on the other hand, are constantly perplexed by what women know and, even more, by what women want. It is with such multi-dimensional characters that the movie continues to enthrall us becoming a rich tapestry of comparisons and contrasts, parallels and proselytes, paradoxes and allusions. Further, in a subtle interplay between the Victorian and the modern, or shall we say the postmodern world, the movie arouses in us the much needed self- reflexivity with which not just those who create this artistic expression of protest but also those who witness, need to recognize its significance. As both the worlds seem to be have intertwined through Meryl Streep who plays both Sarah and Anna, the movie offers double continuities in which “the feelings from the Victorian story carry over into the modern, the modern into the Victorian.”(Karel Reisz)

By being the central point of the story, the camera and the men they deal with, both Sarah and Anna however, continue to remain the pivotal figure and constantly seek emancipation in a hegemonic patriarchal order. Both resort to different strategies in order to keep their individuality intact. While Sarah leaves Exeter and Charles behind in order to find her freedom, Anna leaves Mike at the end of the film in order to keep hers.

Strongly reminiscent of Pinter’s world of uncertainty and enigma thus, both Sarah and Anna, the female characters in the cinematic version of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, offer diverse patterns of rebellion. While Sarah’s rebellion lies in keeping herself concealed behind her mystical persona, Anna’s effort is in projecting her emancipated womanhood and keep it safe from the controlling possession of patriarchy. Unlike Sarah, her mirror-image of Victorian times, Anna’s strategy lies in being aware of her emotional and physical desires and remaining chary of unwarranted patriarchal intrusion. One can safely deduce therefore that in Anna we rediscover the crystalline version of Sarah’s cryptic rebellion.

## References

- Almansi, Guido and Simon Henderson. (2012). *Harold Pinter*. London: Methuen, 1983.p. 9
- Cahn, Victor L. (1993). *Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold Pinter*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan, as quoted in Kumar, S. (1999). *Feminist English Literature*, p. 280.
- Corliss, Richard. (1998) quoted in Eds. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 314.
- Dix, Andrew. (2010) *Beginning Film Studies*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2010, p. 10.
- Duras, Claire de. (1823) *Ourika: An English Translation*. Translated by John Fowles. *MLA Texts and Translations*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1994.
- Fowles, J. *The French lieutenant's woman*. Little, Brown.
- Garis, L. (1981). Translating Fowles into Film. *New York Times Magazine*, 30, 24-25.
- Knapp, S. (1985). The Transformation of a Pinter Screenplay: Freedom and Calculators in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. *Modern drama*, 28(1), 55-70.
- Mulvey, Laura. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: MacMillan Ltd., p.43.
- Pinter, H. (1981). *The French Lieutenant's Woman: A Screenplay*. Little, Brown.
- Prisca Youn. (2008) "The French Lieutenant's Woman: The Underscore on 'Freedom' within Restriction, Fowles' Bridge between Realities," retrieved <http://depts.washington.edu/egonline/2008-2009/winner-the-fre...> Web 10 March, 2014.
- Reisz, Karel. (Director). (1981), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* [Film].
- Sykes, Alrene. (1970). *Harold Pinter*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 106.
- Warburton, E. (1996). *Ashes, ashes, we all fall down: Ourika, Cinderella, and The French Lieutenant's Woman*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42(1), 165-186.