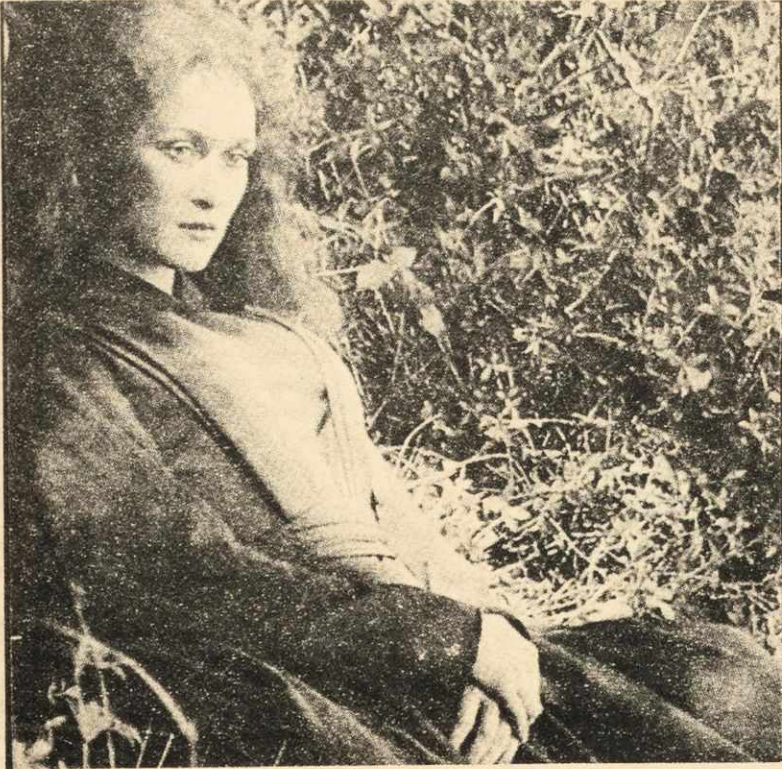


Footnotes to the French Lieutenant's Woman



by Stan Beeler

John Fowles begins his book **The French Lieutenant's Woman** with a quotation from Karl Marx's **Zur Judenfrage**: "Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself." (Marx is fun to quote but less interesting if you have to read the whole book.) It seems that that concise little statement may be applied as well to Harold Pinter's film adaptation of the book.

Colour, like music, can express mood. It may be in harmony or dissonance. The flow of colour in costume and scenery in this film is a magnificent composition that is quite capable of standing on its own; expressing as much (if not more) of the theme of emancipation as the dialogue.

Pinter has come up with the device of a movie about a movie in order to express the differences between the Victorian and modern periods. The male lead dresses with quiet good taste in both of his roles. (Well, actually, he sometimes appears naked in the modern scenes, but this is usually at the change of time from Victorian to present, and it heightens the contrast in morality.) Costumes become really interesting when they are on the backs (etc.) of the female characters.

Ernestina, the woman to whom Charles makes an expected and socially wise marriage proposal, is described by Fowles in this fashion: "The colours of the young lady's clothes would strike us today as distinctly strident...." And so they do, but they blend in rather well with the myriad potted plants in the glassed-in 'conservatory' that is the scene of Charles' awkward proposal. Here there is harmony of colour, but it is a harmony of bright, artificial colour with a hemmed-in, glass-walled nature. The stiff Victorian norms of the 'natural' relationship between a man and a woman is expressed perfectly by the symbols of colour and setting.

his honour. He is forced to admit publicly that he is a cad when he jilts Ernestina.

Sarah disappears for three years and Charles goes abroad, growing a full beard and acquiring some rather Bohemian looking clothes. Thus in the final scene of the movie within the movie they both appear to have cast off the last vestiges of Victorian artificial morality. The symbol of this departure is the happy couple leaving a dark tunnel and pushing out into the bright sunlight.

All too perfect an end for a modern movie, despite Marx's one-liner, don't you think? Well, at the same time that this historical movement from the straight laces of Queen Victoria is going on, we have another co-plot travelling in the opposite direction. The moviemakers have indi-

cated the changes in time with wonderful ingenuity. Helicopters, telephones, car horns and the ubiquitous colour theme all serve to tell the audience to shift mental gears and prepare for the worst. The worst is always the familiar in this case.

The leading figures in the historical movie are having an affair in 'real' life (talk about surrealism...) surrounded with all the problems of our own world. Schedules, sandwiches wrapped in plastic, ugly cafeterias plunked down in the middle of a forest, and above all, husbands and wives, must be taken into consideration in the natural attraction between a man and a woman in the modern world.

Charles/Mike's wife in his contemporary incarnation is a gardener too. When Sarah/Anna asks her rival who tends the

garden, she is distraught to hear that the woman tends it herself. The modern Sarah is not in harmony with nature and refuses to break with the conventions of her time. She returns to her own husband and once again love goes under in the face of an artificially created society.

So much for the 'restoration of the human world'. The sadness of the modern world is that it does not live up to bright expectations of those who left the Victorian. Men and women are still unable to relate to one another on a completely natural level. Of course, one can see the modern ending as positive in that it reaffirms the family, but one cannot help feeling a poignant sense of loss as Mike stares hopelessly out of the window at Anna's departing car.

In one scene Charles meets Ernestina in the lawn while she is practicing archery. The almost too blatant implication is the association of the young Victorian Woman with Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt.

An interesting fact is that in the modern settings almost all of the characters' costumes are brightly artificial. (More of that when we contrast the two endings of the movie.)

Sarah Woodruff, the title character of the movie, is completely different as far as costume is concerned. When Charles first meets her, she is standing on a quay during a storm, with the sea spraying up in impressive violence and the fog whipping around her as if it were an extension of her dark cloak. Out there, isolated from everything that the Victorian considered human and decent, she is the personification of the untameable wildness of nature. As Charles calls to her she turns, her pale, ghastly makeup serving to enhance this impression of something more than human. She is both frightening and desirable.

The next impressive juxtaposition of colour and theme comes in a scene in the forest. Charles, in the garb of a Victorian Scientist, is inspecting the fossils on a very masculine cliff. He spies the French Lieutenant's Woman walking through a

forest at the foot of the cliff. The scenery is perfect: Father Stone and Mother Forest. Sarah is again one with nature in the rough. Her cloak is the same shade as the dark tree boles; her hair, eyes and dress all lend to the harmony. As one would expect, the sight of nature in her unorganized, inhuman state fascinates and terrifies Charles. After all, he fancies himself a scientist.

Sarah is considered mad because she has given herself over to that side of her nature that the Victorian world refused to accept. Charles, through his growing infatuation with her, loses that quintessential attribute of the Victorian gentleman,

Dalhousie's Bookstore



Pre-Christmas Book Sale
Begins November 23rd