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## THE PROBLEMS OF SCREEN ADAPTATION IN HAROLD PINTER'S SCREENPLAY OF *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*

The complicated process of adapting a novel into a film invariably poses some crucial problems, which stems from the undeniable fact that these two media, that is a novel and its film equivalent, differ greatly on various levels. For example as far as the manner of presentation is concerned the film obviously favours visual images rather than words, which in turn affects the structure of the novel, as well as our perception of the events presented. What is more, unlike the novel, its adaptation is limited by the average film-length time. Therefore, the screenwriter is forced to compress, elide and find cinematic analogues for the novel's quantities (Conradi 48).

Apart from these generally encountered complications, however, John Fowles's novel, unique in itself, presented a prospective screenwriter with some additional difficulties and a real artistic challenge. The very factors that made *The French Lieutenant's Woman* popular, at the same time made it also an unfilmable novel (Gale 70). The complexity of the omniscient narrative, the twentieth-century perspective from which the story is told, numerous authorial intrusions, the author as one of the characters and, last but not least, three alternative endings all proved to be extremely problematic as regards rendering them on screen. Therefore, both John Fowles and his agent Tom Maschler realised that they needed "a demon barber ... someone sufficiently skilled and independent to be able to rethink and recast the thing from bottom up" (qtd. in Gale 70). Consequently, they had agreed that Harold Pinter, one of the most acclaimed of contemporary British playwrights and screenwriters, was the most suitable writer for the task.

In the introduction to the published screenplay of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* Pinter notes: "The problem with adapting this novel was that of the active role the author plays in the book. To have the author on screen, talking to us, as it were, seemed to Karel Reisz [the director] and me

impossible" (vii). Even John Fowles rejected the introduction of the narrator figure on screen as "unfeasible, awkward and time consuming" (Klein 147). Another solution could have been to use a voice-over narration and although Pinter had successfully employed this device in his previous films, this time he seemed reluctant to do so (Gale 70). It became obvious that the perfect solution, as far as the problem of narration goes, would be to invent an entirely ingenious scheme so as to capture the complexity of the novel and at the same time transform it into the cinematic medium. Such referential language was finally found by the director:

Karel solved this dilemma brilliantly, I thought, by proposing that the actors playing Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson in 1860 also play the actors themselves in the present, so that the two narratives run concurrently and the perspectives constantly shift. The two narratives, in other words, complement and illuminate each other. (Pinter vii)

Having abandoned the concept of the on-screen narrator or an off-screen voice-over, Pinter decided to employ the film-within-the-film technique, which received immediate approval from John Fowles:

I am convinced now, in retrospect, that the only feasible answer was the one that Harold and Karel hit upon. We had all before been made blind to its existence by the more immediate problem of compressing an already dense and probably over-plotted book into two hours' screen time. The idea of adding an entirely new dimension and relationship to it would never have occurred to us: and quite reasonably so, with almost anyone but Harold Pinter. (qtd. in Gale 74)

This film-within-the-film device has simultaneously become the equivalent of the twentieth-century perspective from which the nineteenth-century story is narrated. To achieve that, Pinter resolved to invent two additional main characters: Anna and Mike, the actors portraying Fowles's Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff respectively. Their contemporary relationship remains parallel to the Victorian story they are both supposed to act. Thus this modern love-affair serves as a constant point of reference, "an acoustic chamber within which the Victorian affair can resonate, amplifying and ironising some of its meanings" (Conradi 49). Moreover, it skilfully replaces the narrator's all-pervasive present-day comments as regards the Victorian times. In other words, it provides the required juxtaposition between the two time periods. As Steven Gale suggests, such "paralleling of the two affairs as indicative of their respective societies serves to reflect the limitations of each society, the constraint of the Victorian and the license of the modern" (74).

Inevitably, just like in case of many other novels adapted to the screen, some of the book's complex meaning has been lost or altered in the process. Unlike Fowles's story, it lacks the features of vast and at times

extremely detailed historical documentation. Peter Conradi opines that while Fowles greatly elaborates on the numerous contradictions of the Victorian era, the screenplay reduces them substantially (50). Nevertheless, Pinter's attempts to preserve this theme, at least partly, are visible mostly in the scene in which Anna is reading a book on the Victorian England, alluding to the problem of prostitution in the nineteenth-century London. She quotes: "In 1857 the *Lancet* estimated that there were eighty thousand prostitutes in the county of London. Out of every sixty houses one was a brothel" (26). Similarly, by making Ernestina refer to her father's company as an "empire" (17), Pinter draws our attention to the social changes that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and brought about the formation of a new wealthy middle class to which Mr Freeman belongs. The problem of class division is also highlighted by the servants sub-plot preserved in the script.<sup>1</sup> By making Charles's servant Sam reveal his future plans of becoming a tradesman early on in the screenplay, Pinter alludes to Fowles's description of Sam in chapter 7, where he is presented as a representative of a new generation of servants conscious of their potential. His Cockney wrong pronunciation of a's and h's that used to be comic thirty years before, now becomes the unquestionable sign of a social revolution (41).

Appropriate as the film-within-the-film technique was, it obviously required some further alterations as far as the structure of the novel's narrative is concerned. While "Fowles's sequence of action is digressive, so that the story emerges largely through leaps forward and backward in the chronology of events," Pinter's screenplay rearranges the plot into a cause-effect sequence (Klein, 151). The film-within-a-film depends on the convention that it is likely to be shot in chronological sequence. Thus the action of both plots can simultaneously move from Lyme to Exeter, from Exeter to London and eventually from London to Windermere (Conradi 54). Since the narration is fragmentary, it is only by the juxtaposition of the two parallel time planes that the audiences perceive the story presented in the screenplay as a complete whole.

The contemporary and the Victorian plots shift constantly. As a consequence, the modern story of Anna and Mike foreshadows the future predicaments of Sarah and Charles. It also raises certain expectations as far as the further development of the nineteenth-century plot is concerned. "Both Fowles and Pinter, through different means, plant the attachment of Sarah and Charles long before it occurs" (Klein 155). Already in the

<sup>1</sup> This theme is substantially reduced in the film. According to Peter Conradi, scenes involving Sam and Mary were apparently shot but eventually made redundant, as they were believed to detract from the central story-line (50).

first chapter Fowles highlights Charles's fascination with the intriguing girl during their first encounter on the Cobb. Correspondingly, in the initial present-day scene of the screenplay, Pinter suggests the possibility of a love affair between Charles and Sarah by depicting their modern counterparts, Anna and Mike, together in bed. Thus, the actors' progressing romance skilfully foretells Sarah and Charles's mutual attachment. Simultaneously, Pinter seems to imply that Charles's engagement to Ernestina, shown in the preceding scene, will not last long:

HOTEL ROOM. EARLY MORNING. PRESENT. 1979.

*Dim light. A man and a woman in bed asleep. It is at once clear that they are the man and woman playing Charles and Sarah, but we do not immediately appreciate that the time is present.* (12)

Not only these visual images, however, but some of the contemporary pieces of dialogue as well, augur the imminent love-affair between the Victorian characters. For example, Mike's remark to Anna, as they discuss the script: "You know what is going to happen in Exeter? I'm going to have you in Exeter," partially reveals Sarah and Charles's sexual encounter in the Endicott hotel in the scene that follows (89).

More importantly, the actions of the four principal characters evoke the strong notion of mimicry. For example when Sarah abandons Charles and goes to London, a few scenes further on Anna goes to London as well to meet her lover David, significantly a Frenchman, and she leaves Mike behind.

As the action develops, the shifts between the Victorian and the modern plots become more frequent and intense. The two stories gradually merge to finally become one. This skilful device solves the problem of rendering the novel's multiple endings in the film version, since each of the two subplots undoubtedly deserves a separate ending. As Peter Conradi rightly observes, "the precise imbrication of the modern and Victorian love-stories ... permits a stunning and ingenious solution to the problem of the endings, as each story can pursue, separately but with increasing ironic mirroring and doubling, and finally with increasing convergence, its own crisis" (50).

Both the screenplay and the novel offer a happy and an unhappy ending. Instead of relying closely on the book, however, Pinter invents an entirely new resolution to the Victorian plot. First of all, he changes the location from Chelsea, the house of the famous Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to Windermere, The New House belonging to an architect named Elliot. Steven Gale justifies that while the coincidence of Sarah "ending up at the home of one of the century's better-known and more liberal characters is a little far fetched and a bit of overkill, the

architect's abode is more realistic." Moreover, he observes that Dante Gabriel Rossetti's name, just an additional intricacy in the novel, may capture the attention of the film audience and thus unnecessarily distract them from the main story (72).<sup>2</sup> We learn that Sarah is working as a governess but she is also encouraged to develop her own inborn talent for drawing. Unlike in the novel, there is no child that would bring the lovers together. By making Sarah the author of Charles's invitation to The New House (in the novel it is Sam who informs Charles about Sarah's whereabouts), Pinter indicates she is now ready to build their relationship afresh. As Joanne Klein implies, Sarah offers herself to Charles "not from desperation, but from freedom" (180). "You misjudge me. It has taken me this time to find my own life. It has taken me this time ... to find my freedom," she confesses during the violent exchange in the studio (134).

The conventionally romantic rowboat scene ultimately confirming the reunion between the Victorian characters is immediately followed by the contemporary shot of the unit party with Anna and Mike among other actors. This abrupt shift in time constitutes the onset of the second and final ending closing the modern plot.

As Anna proceeds to her dressing room to change her clothes, Mike follows her but is stopped on the way by the actress playing the prostitute who kisses him, and then by the actor portraying doctor Grogan. By the time he reaches Anna's dressing room, she is already gone and only Sarah's long red wig remains hanging from a block. Mike hastily walks to the adjacent room which coincidentally is the white room, the studio, where the penultimate ending has just taken place. Unlike previously, however, the interior is almost completely dark, only faintly lit by the moonlight. Suddenly, Mike hears the sound of a car engine starting up and he rushes frantically to the window calling out: "Sarah!" (138).

At this point the previous dream-like rowboat scene seems even more unrealistic and idyllic. By means of this powerful contrast of scenery and overall mood in the two final episodes, Pinter suggests that happy endings belong to fiction, rather than to reality. Only then do the two parallel plots finally become divergent. "When Mike, detained by social obligations, searches for Anna he duplicates Charles's route to Sarah in the final scene of the fiction" (Klein 181). Mike and Anna's relationship, whose general pattern closely imitates the one from the film they were making, fails to survive as soon as the script is withdrawn. Liberated from their roles, Anna and Mike should now go their separate ways.

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<sup>2</sup> As Tomasz Kłys opines, what we should see on the screen, are solely those events and facts that remain absolutely irrelevant to the main plot (38).

The greater the convergence between the Victorian and the modern plot which the viewers can observe, the more Anna and Mike seem to identify themselves with the characters they play. This psychological process is indicated already in the second scene depicting Anna and Mike together. As the actress reads the passage about prostitution, not only does she immediately associate it with one of Miss Woodruff's lines from the script, but she also uses the form "I say" instead of the third person singular while referring to Sarah:

ANNA (*reading*): 'We reach the surprising conclusion that at a time when the male population of London of all ages was one and a quarter million, the prostitutes were receiving clients at a rate of two million per week.'

MIKE: Two million!

ANNA: You know when I say – in the graveyard scene – about going to London? Wait. *She picks up her script of The French Lieutenant's Woman, flips the pages, finds the pages. She reads aloud:*

'If I went to London I know what I should become. I should become what some already call me in Lyme.'

MIKE: Yes?

ANNA: Well, that's what she's really faced with. (26)

This growing identification with Sarah and Charles eventually leads to the confusion of the actors' identities. During the rehearsals for the film they have difficulty in maintaining whether they talk about themselves or about their characters, mixing their own qualities and actions with those of Sarah and Charles:

INT. CARAVAN. PRESENT. DAY.

*Anna in her caravan. A knock on the door.*

ANNA: Hello!

*Mike comes in.*

MIKE: May I introduce myself?

ANNA: I know who you are.

*They smile. He closes the door.*

MIKE: So you prefer to walk alone?

ANNA: Me? Not me. Her.

MIKE: I enjoyed that.

ANNA: What?

MIKE: Our exchange. Out there.

ANNA: Did you? I never know...

MIKE: Know what?

ANNA: Whether it's any good.

MIKE: Listen. Do you find me – ?

ANNA: What?

MIKE: Sympathetic.

ANNA: Mmm. Definitely.

MIKE: I don't mean me. I mean him.

ANNA: Definitely.

MIKE: But you still prefer to walk alone?

ANNA: Who? Me – or her?

MIKE: Her. You like company.

*(He strokes the back of her neck.)*

Don't you? (34)

The extent to which both actors identify with their fictitious counterparts, however, differs substantially as far as intensity and duration are concerned. Unlike her partner, Anna is able to liberate herself from her role as soon as the film is completed. In the end she manages to distance herself from her screen persona and is thus superior to Mike who starts to confuse reality with fiction. After the unit party, Anna, "divorced from her role playing, healthy and happy," escapes in the world of her real life. On the contrary, "Mike is lost between reality and illusion, which he cannot distinguish between" (Gale 76).

In this respect, the screenplay undoubtedly imitates the novel. Both seem to stress the female dominance over a man. Anna is conspicuously much stronger than her screen partner. Pinter stresses this quality in several dialogues that depict this modern woman as a snug and self-assured person, contrary to anxious and insecure Mike:

MIKE: Stay tonight.

ANNA: I can't.

MIKE: Why not? You are a free woman.

ANNA: Yes. I am.

MIKE: I'm going mad

ANNA: No you're not. (96)

Furthermore, in one of the scenes Pinter additionally highlights Anna's strength and liberation from restraints by showing her wearing jeans while Mike is still in his Victorian costume. Thus, it becomes obvious that her freedom is greater than his, especially that, as Peter Conradi notes, the opposite combination never occurs (53).

The decision to introduce a pair of additional characters, is by far one of the major alternations, next to the film-within-the film convention, instituted by the screenwriter as regards John Fowles's story. In Harold Pinter's presentation of Sarah and Charles, however, one may also notice some discernible changes with respect to their literary counterparts. The selection and sequence of events presented, certain significant additions and omissions, the dialogues, not to mention the screenwriter's directions as regards the way in which particular lines should be uttered (e.g. "SARAH: *fiercely*"), or "CHARLES: *(softly)*"), exert a considerable influence on these characters' personality and the motives for their actions.

Peter Conradi claims that the only instruction concerning Sarah Woodruff Pinter is said to have received from Fowles was to "keep her inexplicable" (47). Much as the screenwriter wished to fulfil his desire, he did not manage to make her as unexplainable as in the original version. It is probably due to the great amount of compression the film required that the complexity of Sarah's personality fails to be fully revealed, especially as far as some contradictory features of her character are concerned. The book contrasts her meekness and inclination to help others with the manipulative aspect of her character. Consequently, the readers are confused and, therefore, unable to form any final judgement. Sarah who on the one hand saves Milly and other servants from being dismissed, and on the other deliberately manipulates Charles, seems far more enigmatic. The screenplay fails to depict this perplexing duality. In order to account for Sarah's hidden designs, Pinter substitutes her apparent timidity with an aggressive pattern of behaviour (Klein 166). Consequently, she is presented as a woman that forces herself on Charles, though aware of his other obligations. Therefore, the audiences are more likely to form a definite opinion about Sarah, i.e. to classify her as an evil, rather than as an impenetrable character.

Furthermore, her inexplicability in the novel results greatly from the way in which she is presented. Contrary to other characters, described by the third person omniscient narrator, Sarah's thoughts remain a mystery to the readers, as in her case this omniscience is purposefully withdrawn. For obvious reasons this technique could not be successfully rendered in the screenplay. Even though, according to Charles Garard, there exists a cinematic equivalent of the omniscient and non-omniscient narration, obtained by combining an objective or neutral point of view shot with a subjective perspective, Pinter seems to have left this issue, with a few exceptions, almost entirely to the director's choice (7). Consequently, all the characters in the screenplay are presented in the same manner.

Both Pinter and Fowles emphasise Sarah's neurotic qualities. It should be stressed, however, that the exact means by which this effect is achieved in the screenplay differ considerably from those adopted in the novel. The plausible explanation is that Pinter might have regarded them as ineffective and insufficiently convincing in the cinematic language. Instead of mentioning Sarah's father's mental derailment or Dr Grogan's accounts of various female psychiatric deviations, Pinter depicts her drawing sketches. Although they certainly symbolise her desire and talent for art and correlate with her subsequent employment at Windermere, their more significant role is to emphasise the girl's state of mind (Gale 72). Thereafter, Pinter invents two scenes in which Sarah's habit of drawing reflects her anguish and highlights her detachment from reality. In the first instance the drawing

portrays an old woman on her death bed, presumably Sarah's former employer, Miss Duff. Sarah's behaviour is peculiar; while the labourers are carrying the coffin downstairs, she seems totally indifferent to everything that surrounds her as if wishing to distance herself from the outside world. Engrossed in her drawing she remains deaf to the vicar's polite inquiries:

VICAR: You realize 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?

(Pause). (15).

Several pages further she is crying softly as she draws a self-portrait. The situation in which she finds herself is again dramatic. The audiences realise that she will be dismissed from Marlborough House after her walks in the woods of Ware Commons have been discovered. Unlike in the novel, however, it is not stated in the screenplay that Sarah was actually aware of being spotted by Mrs Poulteney's housekeeper, Mrs Fairley. Therefore, if we assume that, according to the screenplay, she has no reason to suspect the misfortune that is about to befall her, then her irrational despair may exhibit her neurosis.

Pinter also makes Sarah the author of several messages, some of which occur in the novel, in which she begs for Charles's assistance. They are deliberately provocative and reveal Sarah's manipulative strategy. The first note is slipped under a napkin that she secretly gives to him during tea with Ernestina, Mrs Poulteney, and Mrs Trantner. It reads: "I pray you to meet me at nine tonight. St Michael's Churchyard" (48). In the novel this meeting takes place on the Undercliff without any previous arrangement and it results in Sarah's telling the story of her seduction. By making it not a purely coincidental meeting, Pinter implies that the false confession was from the start an element of Sarah's devious plan to deceive Charles. The second letter is sent in more dramatic circumstances, shortly after Sarah's dismissal from Mrs Poulteney's house. It includes a suicidal threat: "The secret is out. Am at the barn on the Undercliff. Only you stand between me and oblivion" (63). Ignoring Dr Grogan's sound advice, Charles, who fears about Sarah's life, comes to her rescue. When safe in Exeter, Sarah sends her address to Charles's lawyer, Mr Montague, who in turn orders the letter to be delivered to Charles as it is clearly stated on the envelope that the content is "for the Personal Attention of Mr Charles Smithson" only (86). Eventually, she discloses her whereabouts once more to summon Charles to Windermere. During the confrontation

between them Charles flings her away violently when she tries to prevent him from leaving. She hits her head, which makes him stop. She looks at him and smiles. This smile may be interpreted as a sign of complacency, as her manipulative efforts eventually bring the desired results.

As far as Sarah's independence is concerned, it is even more explicit in the screenplay than in the book. In Exeter she carries her luggage herself. The omission of a porter symbolises her self-reliance. Moreover, the decision to eventually answer Charles's newspaper advertisements belongs solely to her. The fact that it is she who chooses the time and place emphasises her superiority over Charles. In the end, Sarah proves to be a woman who does not need male protection and guidance, as she is able to control her own life and take her own independent decisions. The position she achieves in the screenplay, not an artist's model but an artist herself, additionally highlights her emancipation.

Contrary to Sarah, Charles's qualities presented in the screenplay do not seem to diverge greatly from those found in the novel. Pinter mentions his interest in palaeontology, which is initially established by two scenes, one that depicts him in his hotel room in Lyme, as he examines his fossils under a microscope, the other on the Undercliff in his fossil-hunting clothes. His first conversation with Dr Grogan provides even more specific description of the young gentleman: "GROGAN: I understand you're a scientist, a seeker after fossils" (54). During tea with Mrs Trantner, Ernestina, Sarah and Mrs Poulteney one remark made by the latter informs the audiences that Charles is an ardent supporter of Darwin: "MRS POULTENEY: Even a disciple of Darwin, such as I understand you to be, could not fail to notice the rise of the animal about us. It no doubt pleases you, since it would accord with your view that we are all monkeys" (46). The screenplay, however, omits to signal his upper-class idleness, as well as lack of purpose in life other than to inherit his uncle's fortune. This aspect of his life is not conspicuous, since Pinter does not include the uncle's subplot as such.

Consequently, there is no mention of the sudden change in Charles's financial situation. As a result of his uncle's unexpected marriage, he ceases to be his only prospective heir. Therefore, Charles is compelled to seriously consider Mr Freeman's suggestion of going into trade. In the screenplay, due to the omission of the uncle's subplot, the circumstances are entirely different. Charles's social status of a wealthy gentleman suggests his equality, if not superiority, to his future father-in-law. As a consequence, Charles's deep aversion to trade is not highlighted. When Mr Freeman suggests Mr Smithson should perhaps one day start "to explore the world

of commerce," Charles does not object (17). It is only the subsequent dialogue that reveals a glimmer of his disdain for such an occupation, but his contempt is by no means as obvious and noticeable as in the novel:

ERNESTINA: Oh dear, don't tell me. Did he talk of his famous 'empire'?

CHARLES: He did.

ERNESTINA: And did he propose that you might one day join him in the ruling of it?

CHARLES: He was most respectful of what he called my position as a 'scientist and gentleman'. In fact he asked me about my ... my work. But as I didn't think fossils were his line exactly, I gave him a brief discourse on the Theory of Evolution instead. (17)

Additionally, the chronological placement of Charles's conversation with Ernestina's father is altered. In the screenplay it merely provides an abbreviation of Charles's financial situation, as well as Mr Freeman's mercantile alternative (Klein 159). In the novel, however, this confrontation occurs much later and its role is to stress Charles's sense of entrapment, as he has become dependent on his wife's considerable dowry.

The above-mentioned departure from the novel shows Charles's decision to break his vows to Ernestina in a completely different light. In the novel he is aware that, as a "bought husband" shackled to social conventions, he would inevitably lose his independence. He finds such prospects unbearable and he subconsciously wishes to free himself from his matrimonial obligation. Suddenly, he perceives his love affair with Sarah as an answer to his dilemma. While Ernestina becomes for him the symbol of entrapment, through Sarah he hopes to find his way to freedom. By omitting the lost inheritance subplot, Pinter suggests that Charles's decision to cancel his engagement was purely the result of Sarah's skilful manipulation. She is presented as the only reason why he decided to break his promise.

Further omissions account for the differences between the novel and the screenplay as regards Charles's reaction to Sarah's unexpected disappearance. Fowles's Charles understands that his indecisiveness might have been one of the reasons for Sarah's departure. Moreover, he discovers that his servant Sam, tempted by Mr Freeman's pay, has betrayed him. As a result, Sarah never received his letter in which he informed her of his intention to break the engagement to Miss Freeman in order to spend the rest of his life with her. Pinter excludes the existence of the letter, substituting much of its content by tender conversation between Sarah and Charles, still lying in bed together, during which he promises to terminate his engagement and then to take her with him. By omitting Sam's non-delivery of his note, Pinter leaves Charles with no plausible explanation of Sarah's leaving him. Therefore, he feels terribly deceived, which results in his violent outburst:

INT. ENDICOTT'S HOTEL. EXETER. HALL. NIGHT.

*Charles comes in the front door. Mrs Endicott looks out of her room. Charles gives her a coin.*

CHARLES: Miss Woodruff expects me. I'll find my own way.

*He turns to the stairs.*

MRS ENDICOTT: The young lady's left, sir.

CHARLES: Left? You mean gone out?

MRS ENDICOTT: No, sir. I mean left.

*He stares at her.*

She took the London train this afternoon.

CHARLES: What?

MRS ENDICOTT: She took the three o'clock to London. Didn't leave no address.

CHARLES: You're a liar.

*He turns and bounds up the stairs.*

Sarah!

MRS ENDICOTT: Where are you going?

INT. SARAH'S ROOM.

*Charles bursts in.*

MRS ENDICOTT (*off screen*): What are you doing? You can't do that.

*Charles goes to the writing table, shelves, etc., lifts objects, table cloth, goes into bedroom through the open door.*

*Mrs Endicott comes into the room.*

MRS ENDICOTT: You have no right! You're trespassing.

*Charles stares at the unmade bed.*

Did you hear what I said?

*Charles turns to her, speaks with great violence.*

CHARLES: Get out!

*She retreats to the door. Charles follows her and slams it. He looks about the room, silent in the moonlight. He sits down and stares at the window. (105)*

Apart from the already mentioned omissions, there are also other, less significant ones, resulting mostly from the screenwriter's obligation to abridge the novel's contents. As Joanne Klein observes, Pinter omits the economic themes including, among others, Marxist implications owing "probably as much to disinterest as to a need for editing" (159). Other scenes, such as for example Mrs Poulteney's dismissal of Sarah, were regarded as redundant (both the audience and Charles learn about this event from Dr Grogan) and consequently not included in the screenplay. Similarly, Pinter does not elaborate on Mrs Poulteney's cruel abuse of her servants, as it is already visible in her interrogation of Sarah, as well as Mary's comment: "It's that Mrs Poulteney. The one who kicked me out on to the street" (44). The screenplay also includes several changes as far as both the chronological order and the location are concerned. Both the engagement scene and Charles's conversation with Mr Freeman occur at an early stage in the screenplay, as they were supposedly meant to introduce the characters and the connections between them. Correspondingly, Sarah's employment at Marlborough House takes place about a year before the events involving Charles and Ernestina. Pinter, however, makes these

two plots simultaneous in order to "exploit the episode as a direct cause for her despair" (Klein 159).

The role of the setting presented in the screenplay, correlates with that in the novel. The alternating shots of civilised towns and wilderness reflect the dichotomy between the constraints, not only of the Victorian but also contemporary times, and freedom. Nevertheless, the emphasis placed on the symbolic meaning of the *mise-en-scène* is not that strong. The depiction of Lyme, and Exeter alike, is limited chiefly to two locations, i.e. Charles's hotel room with its window overlooking a busy street and aunt Trantner's remote estate. Briefly we are offered the sight of dark interiors of the Marlborough House and Dr Grogan's study. On the contrary, the description of the Undercliff is extremely detailed, unlike any other in the screenplay, which is probably due to its significant role in the story. In order to remain faithful to Fowles's way of describing this place, which is made "from the air...", and interrupted by comments like: "if one flies low enough one can see...", Pinter invents a scene in which Mike views the woods from a helicopter (67)<sup>3</sup>.

INT. HELICOPTER.

*Mike sits beside the pilot.*

*They speak pointing at the ground but we do not hear their words.*

EXT. UNDERCLIFF FROM HELICOPTER. DAY.

*Travelling eye-line from helicopter. The viewpoint, at first at sea level, swoops dramatically up from the rocks of the falling coastline to a high view of the vast wilderness of the Undercliff. (28)*

Pinter's aim was not only to preserve the overall character of the novel's narration, which he achieved by introducing the film-within-the-film equivalent, but also to render its main themes in the screenplay. Stephen Gale believes that the structure and theme of the novel alike were what made the challenge of adaptation irresistible (75). While *The French Lieutenant's Woman* abounds in references to the mechanisms of writing, the screenplay continuously alludes to the art of filmmaking. Both Fowles and Pinter draw our attention to fictional nature of the events presented. While the novelist states openly that fiction is woven into this all, the screenwriter uses elaborate visual techniques to prove his point. The first scene depicting Anna, as she prepares to play Sarah, at once establishes "the fictional nature of what we are watching" (Conradi 53). Similarly, the clapperboard and off screen voices shouting in technical jargon focus on the mechanics of cinematic illusion. From that moment on, the audiences are constantly reminded that the events they are witness to are detached from reality. Furthermore, this impression of artificiality is conveyed by an omnipresent

<sup>3</sup> This particular scene, however, has been omitted in the film.

“awareness of mask” the characters wear (Klein 151). This is not an entirely new concept, since several allusions of this kind are to be found in Fowles’s novel, for instance: “She [Sarah] had her usual mask of resigned sadness” (211). Pinter, however, intensifies this concept by emphasising the fact that ‘the mask’ pertains equally to all the characters presented. Occasionally, we can see these masks being removed. Apart from the final unit party, which depicts all the actors, except Anna and Mike, liberated from their Victorian identities, there are other scenes focusing on selected protagonists. For example, during the conversation between Charles and Ernestina that results in breaking off their engagement, by abbreviating the dialogue Pinter highlights the contrast between Ernestina’s tears and the subsequent abrupt change in her behaviour when she levels accusations at Charles and issues threats against him and Sarah. This sudden change in her attitude is to be attributed to her taking off her mask:

ERNESTINA: Charles ... I know I am spoiled. I know I am not ... unusual. But under your love and protection ... I believed I should become better. I would do anything... you see ... I would abandon anything ... to make you happy ...

*She covers her face.*

*He stands still.*

*She suddenly looks at him.*

ERNESTINA: You are lying. Something else has happened.

*Pause.*

CHARLES: Yes.

ERNESTINA: Who?

CHARLES: You don’t know her.

ERNESTINA (*dully*): I don’t know her?

CHARLES: I have known her ... many years. I thought the attachment was broken. I discovered in London ... that it is not.

ERNESTINA: Why did you not tell me this at the beginning?

CHARLES: I hoped to spare you the pain of it.

ERNESTINA: Or yourself the shame of it. Who is she? What woman can be so vile as to make a man break his vows? I can guess. She is married.

CHARLES: I will not discuss her. I came to tell you the truth, the most terrible decision in my life –

ERNESTINA: The truth! You are a liar. My father will drag your name – both of your names – through the mire. You will be spurned and detested by all who know you. You will be hounded out of England ... (99)

Similarly, Charles’s mask is represented by his language. Accepting Fowles’s suggestion that Mr Smithson had more than one vocabulary, Pinter juxtaposes his elegant and formal discourse with Ernestina (“it cannot have escaped your notice that it is fully six weeks since I came down here to Lyme from London” (10)) with the way how he refers to Sam (“Where the devil is he?” (4)). As far as Sarah is concerned, the mask is exposed by her sketches, especially the self-portrait, which later becomes a pose she

assumes in front of Charles.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the screenplay always displays her "carefully posed in some precarious state," for example, as she stares out to sea or sits on the ledge of grass on the Undercliff (Klein 164). Anna, on the other hand, is frequently contemplating her face in the mirror, or taking off her wig, which intensifies the effect of artificiality. Correspondingly, Anna's rehearsals with Mike constantly remind us that the whole story is fictitious.

Both the theme of existential freedom and the manipulation of time are also retained in the screenplay, although they seem to be less significant than in the novel. The issue of choice is underlined, as Charles is compelled to take a decision whether to reject the possibility of prosperous marriage, and therefore abandon the conventions. The ideas related to time pervade the whole film-within-the-film structure which combines the Victorian and contemporary plots.

The notion of social upheaval, a secondary theme in the novel, seems to be much more emphasised by the screenwriter. While Fowles elaborates on the development of the new social class in Britain, Pinter concentrates on the effects these changes have exerted over our times. Making reference to Fowles's brief comment about Mary's great-great granddaughter who is said to have become a famous actress, Pinter focuses our attention to the lack of social divisions in the modern world. Thus during the Sunday lunch at Mike's house we see the actress who portrays Ernestina playing a piano-duet with "Sam". Similarly, during the final party "Grogan" dances with "Mary", "Sam" with "Mrs Poulteney"; the "Prostitute" with "Mr Freeman" etc.

The necessity to economise, as well as the obligation to conceive and implement various cinematic equivalents that would render a given book's narration in a series of visual images, are invariably connected with numerous both slight and radical changes any screenwriter is forced to implement. As Peter Conradi rightly observes, "the fidelity of the transposition of a novel to the screen must result from the writer's skill at finding analogues in cinematic terms for the novel's qualities" (48).

It was not accidental that Harold Pinter agreed to perform the challenging task of adapting *The French Lieutenant's Woman* into a film, since, as Joanne Klein points out, many of the novel's themes correspond to those found in his own works and have thus captured his imagination (8). The screenplay he produced is as faithful to the original source as it was technically possible, but it also possesses the specific Pinterish touch. "And it is Pinter's strength that he is so unafraid of his own signature," Peter Conradi adds (48).

<sup>4</sup> Though this is more conspicuous in the film, not in the screenplay.

Consequently, the screenplay (and the film alike) should be rather called a variation on the novel than its faithful interpretation. Enriched by Pinter's own associations and feelings, it is therefore to be treated as a separate artistic entity, a brilliant commentary on a remarkable book.

In view of the fact that the so called faithful film adaptations do not necessarily guarantee success, one may venture to say that it was this very detachment of the screenplay from the original source in particular, that encouraged such a warm reception of Karel Reisz's film by the viewers and the critics alike.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Gale refers to it as "an extremely good film verging on greatness" (69). Roger Ebert calls it "both simple and brilliant" (qtd. in Gale 69).