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Abstract: The paper focuses on the status of the intellectual and his/her function in the society producing or neglecting such a cultural role. The method of investigation is based on:

- a. the semiotic approach offered by John Deely (2005: 73) who considers that “what distinguishes the human being from the other animals is that *only human animals* come to realize that *there are* signs distinct from and superordinate to every particular thing that serves to constitute an individual ... in its distinctness from its surroundings”;
- b. Lacan’s theory of the ‘four discourses’ (Evans, 2005: 95-97), particularly the discourse of the master and that of the university;
- c. the strategies offered by cultural studies;
- d. the diachronic perspective of the topic applied to English literary texts (particularly to John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, 1967), having as a background Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859).

Starting from the hypothesis that an intellectual is the holder and ‘trumpet’ of new ideas, we want to show the reasons why such a cultural type is in full swing in some ages or in full neglect in others, and the effects produced on the society (un)breeding intellectuals. The ‘discourse of supersedence’ brings to surface, on the one hand, the power of the intellectual to metamorphosize him/herself in order to react and respond to the needs of an everchanging society, and, on the other hand, an intellectual’s relations with power and the way such relations are viewed and turned into discourse. The ‘death of the individual’ and the rise of an institutional structure with its specific language(s) are elements that build up an intellectual’s identity as a discursive effect within culture.