

**Portrayal of Social Realism in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman***

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**Abstract**

Social Realism is depicting social inequality and financial crisis from unvarnished pictures of hard life and it is portraying human behaviour as courageous. It describes the daily life of the workers and poor people's social reality; it is also tried to show how people are live in a realistic way. John Fowles's concern is about the vulnerability of forms, the changing ideas progressive cultural, social, and economic situations require the ethnic to adapt. It is clear that he sees this principle is to speak, reflexive: it has an indicationon not only for the fact being observed but for the experimental process itself. John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* attempts to conform to the requirements of social consciousness and its experimental features are neither difficult nor self-indulgent, but rather are straightforward in dignified expression that needs for conversion which is one of its midway insistence. The present paper highlights how John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* focuses on the love affair of the nineteenth-century woman that richly documents Social realism. In this novel, Fowles mainly concentrates on Charles and Sarah's love story and they are discussing their future and how to fulfill their goal of finding a way to live in society. The woman character Sarah appears like an anonymous figure at the seashore and her life filled with misery and frustration. Her character presents as a typical woman who is driven mad with sorrow by a girlfriend who has left her. They are constantly fighting against the restrictions of society and find a solution for their free will. This paper also brings out the reality of the novelist, and how he blends the sufferings, vices, virtues, ambiguities, and complexities, as life is all about a realistic way. The main point of this paper is to identify the realism in the light of the struggles of the protagonist, who tries to eliminate his fragmented identity and to achieve a sense of wholeness.

**Keywords:** Realism, meta-fiction, society, frustration, mystery, seashore, existential, identity.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

John Fowles is a notable post-war English novelist, short story writer, poet, autobiographer, essayist, and committed teacher. He was born on 31 March 1926 in Bedford, England. After graduation from Oxford University, he became a teacher in France and also worked on a Greek island. After few years, he returned to England and started to write his first novel, *The Collector*, published in 1963. Fowles' next work was *The Aristos*, a collection of philosophical aphorisms, published in 1965. His other novels, *The Magus* (1966), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969),

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*Daniel Martin* (1978), *Mantissa* (1982), and *A Maggot* (1985). Fowles' collection of a short story is *The Ebony Tower*, which was published in 1974. Even though Fowles has written different genres, this present study focuses on his novels, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. This novel is distressed with the reaction of society on the particular consciousness and how that awareness dominates and contorts their whole life, including relationships with other people. In this novel, the major characters are moulded by their own experience and from others. In this regard, their lives are controlled by the principles of the Victorian Age ideas which were correct about the nature of men and women and their relationships to one another.

The title, "The French Lieutenant's Woman" is an example of the black, strangelady of the orthodox Victorian romantic novel. They are one of these times the villainess and sometimes the heroine, such a lady was a symbol of what was impermissible. The same aura of peculiarity reflects through Sarah Woodruff that first admires Charles Smithson's awareness. The novel was developed surround this couple reflection other romantic novels of a related category, wherein a man Comedown in love with a strange and one of these time evil woman. Charles' relationship with Ernestina Freeman produces another sort of love story, one that creates the basis of several Victorian novels. In this novel, the romantic situation develops around the pair of aristocratic young people who are not permitted to prevail over the forces, including the black woman that would usually keep Charles and Ernestina apart. Thus, Fowles presents the common man and woman characters during the Victorian age and the protagonist and other character's actions reveal the reality of human minds and values.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to trace the Social realism presented in John Fowles's novel, *The French Lieutenants Woman* concentrate on his themes and style. This research paper aims to bring the following objectives:

1. To study how social realism is effective in the novel and how to get the better of this kind of problem of Nineteen century Victorianism, moral, reality, and identity crisis.
2. To bring into focal point varied aspects of the novelist language, experience, vision, and from a different angle.
3. To find a realistic picture of Fowles's characters portrayed by recording the changing England social and political issues and values.
4. To study the difference between the middle class and poor social life and how the major characters are isolated from their social values through their love.
5. To recognize and undertake that the protagonist's peers will never see her as an equal, and at last decides to embrace her seclusion and status as a refugee quite dramatically.
6. To understand the real nature and character of the contemporary woman and how she becomes a firm, deep voice, strong eyebrows, a well-modelled, and feminine face.

## 3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is varied. British literature divulges the life and experiences of contemporary society and focuses mainly on the themes like gender, sexuality, politics, religion, discrimination, culture, colonialism, slavery, satire, humour, politeness, sensibility, sentimentalism, and generational gap. Realism reveals that the power of human natures such as tenderizes can bring so much to the deeper of forlorn, digging one into an abyss ever unreachable in their vast perturbation. Also, the power of human nature is to abolish the old, gainsay them. The writer John Fowles' ideas on women and femininity are natural; he developed

during his lifetime, which spanned most of the twentieth century. His novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is based on nineteenth century Victorianism and governed to describe the women in a realistic, and less "perfectly moral" manner than the Victorians would have liked. Therefore, Ernestina and Sarah are not cut from the same spiritual mould as an ideal Victorian woman would have been but have their own characteristics, flavour, affections, and minds. Their characters and identity have, therefore, been made and found by the combined impact of their upbringing, experiences, and social level. In this novel, Fowles draws our attentiveness to this by giving a taste of the irritation we feel when it looks as though the success might go the other way. He points out that the derangement in the realist heritage. While aspiring to act out a plan of realism, its writers and readers have nevertheless tacitly concurred to the tactical attenuation of its devices. Its final claims upon us, including certain of its overt moral necessities, have to cope with the frame, the border which is accepted between the fanciful and the real worlds.

### 3.1 Review of Literature

**A.J.B. Johnson 1981**, in his article, "Realism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*" reveals that the novel usually pretends to confirm the reality. Fowles puts the conflicting, wants in the ring and describes the fight--but fixes the fight, letting that he wants he favours win. Here, Fowles assiduously avoids fight-fixing. He refuses to collect either his characters or his readers. He desires to allow the reader the same psychoanalytic and reconstructive experience as the protagonist with its attendant, sometimes uneasy freedoms. Fowles is trying to do in the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* that men like Brecht have done for the drama or Godard for the cinema. It is to re-examine certain assumptions latent in the way in which the technique of a given genre or medium has developed. He may not always be either consistent or convincing, but this is no reason to dismiss his experiments as though they were detachable from some other prior and unrelated intention.

**Brooke Lenz 2008**, in his article "A Crisis of Authority: Fantasy and Feminism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," reflects on Fowles' exceptional storytelling abilities and experimentation with literary form. The novelist was unique in his generation of British writers for achieving both critical acclaim and popular success. He progressively created women characters who subvert voyeuristic exploitation and his alternative narratives through which they can understand their experiences, cope with oppressive dominant systems, and envision more authentic and communities. As a novelist, Fowles was gifted with a unique ability to compel his reader's attention from the beginning of his novels to the end. This novel is highly allusive, erudite, and philosophically and psychologically complex, seducing readers into profound explorations of human existence and relationships. Fowles' two most profound influences were medieval romance and existentialist philosophy, both he studied at Oxford University.

**Frederick N. Smith 1985**, in his article "Revision and Style of Revision in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," deals that Fowles is a fanatical revisionist who has taken the drudgery of revision work and turned it into an art. He is on a fanatical etymologist, and chooses every word for its gamut of historical meanings, as well as its common meaning. Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* creates a subtext of referential material. Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further, his reproduction is prohibited without permission. In the novel, he demonstrates that not only all language but most behaviour is highly metaphorical. Fowles' protagonist's struggle toward knowledge and selfhood, as well as in the reader's endeavour to understand the text, the metaphors and symbols act as guide-posts that we should learn to see and

interpret properly. Here, Fowles demonstrates a connection between living well and reading well: both activities depend on a high degree of competence of perception.

**James Acheson 2005**, in his article “John Fowles ‘s*The French Lieutenant’s Woman*” states that John Fowles's novels are best-sellers is clear enough. He has tremendous narrative techniques, the ability to compel his reader’s attention from the beginning of his novels to the end. In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Charles Smithson is one of the most important characters who leave his fiancée. Sarah Woodruff is a woman whose haunting eyes draw Earnestine Freeman to her. After making love to Charles in an Exeter hotel, she drifted into prostitution in London, or survive in some more respectable situation. It reveals a real situation of Sarah. The novel might have an object that does an inadequate job of representing the world's complexity, a job that could only be done by a novel of endless length, with an infinite number of endings. Fowles’ makes the convention of omniscient narration that he makes it clear not only is that it inappropriate for the novelist to mimic God’s omniscience in a century characterized by widespread loss of faith. But the world is far too complex to be represented fully in any but a novel that would be impossible for any human being to write.

**Pamela Faber and Celia Wallhead 1995**, in their paper “The Lexical Field of Visual Perception in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* by John Fowles” states the novel would seem logical, it is using an analysis of particular segments of lexical fields and their metaphorical extension highlighted within the work of a writer. It provides valuable information about how and why that writer has constructed this particular fictional universe. In this article, Faber and Wallhead show how the techniques are used in functional lexicography to structure semantic domains can be applied in the literary analysis of a novel. The novelist confidently, using a functional-lexemic analysis that we have structured the lexical field of visual perception in terms of lexical hierarchies, relevant oppositions, and metaphorical projections, and examine of these are significantly used in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. The novel is centered on visual perception; it is meaningful that the novel itself begins with a mental image. The characters spend much of their time looking off into the distance at themselves in the mirror. These observations are often translated into the categorization of the perceptual object in question, and subsequently to a mental awareness of feelings and more abstract concepts.

**Qiming Ji and Ming Li 2013**, in their article “Freedom in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*,” portrays that Freedom is the motif of John Fowles’s fictional writing strategies, the most important information that he wishes to disseminate to the readers who are expected to understand profoundly and comprehensively. As a postmodernist experimental writer, Fowles’ works infuse a new current for both English and American literature. It tries to combine the postmodernist and existential critic method with the element of freedom in Fowles’ novel. Though many research studies have been carried out by critics and scholars both home and abroad, the combination of postmodernism, existentialism, and freedom element is a new perspective. Through this article, the readers are expected to gain a comprehensive knowledge of freedom, make their choice freely in their daily life as well as deepen their understanding in “*The French Lieutenant’s Woman*.” The whole novel is trying to enlighten readers that human beings are free and should have the endurance to pursue their freedom, no matter how hard it is to obtain. Otherwise, their life will be fossilized. This existential theme of a life-long quest for freedom is flowing out through the novel.

#### 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Social Realism in Literature

Realism means 'reality as something that exists prior and completely separate from human thought or speech. Consequently, it is literature's responsibility to accurately interpret and represent reality. Realism depicts the anxieties, desires, and achievements of the Victorian period. It certainly encompasses its unique ideas, the genre continued to utilize the strengths of empiricism and romanticism. Realism began as a literary departure from the idealism of the Romantic period. It was emerged in literature in the second half of the nineteenth century, most predominantly in novels. It was characterized by its attention to detail, as well as its attempt to recreate reality as it was. As an effect, the plot was no longer central to the focus of the writer but slightly creating interesting and complex characters took precedence. Realism emphasized describing the material and physical details of life, as opposed to the natural world as characterized by the Romantic period. Several Realistic novelists deviate away from the softer aspects of Romanticism, such as intense tenderness and idealism, because they believed these characteristics misrepresented the harsh realities of life. It emphasizes accurate descriptions of setting, dress, and character in ways that would have appeared inappropriate to earlier authors. It is also highlighted that the importance of the ordinary person and the ordinary situation, it rejects the heroic and the aristocratic and embraces the ordinary working-class citizen.

The term "Social Realism" is derived from the Russian Language inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist society. The international production of social realist fiction is characterized by a belief in the power of the word and in the writer's ability to portray in a satisfying documentary fashion the structure of social reality. Social realism is inspired in different ways by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism, and international Marxism. It is the need to respond in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanisms of repression and the frustration of personal and collective aspirations. Realism is an endeavour to portray life as it is. It shows life with reality, omitting nothing ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing. It is the writer's most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. Realism began as a recognizable movement in art in the eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was a principal art form. In past, realism has been an upheaval against classicism and romanticism – artistic movements characterized by works that idealize life.

Social realism is concerned with active interpretations of life to change the existing reality. In the nineteenth century, in England, Dickens and George Eliot, Meredith, and Thackeray endeavoured in this direction. These writers' writings faced political persecution but were ultimately recognized. The concept 'social realism' in the strictly scientific and philosophic sense has come to us with the philosophy of Marxism. The Victorian writers are close to socialist interpretation of the problems of their time. The fiction of social realism has several ramifications. When the narrative is restricted to a particular ethnic group, it has a distinctive flavour of its own. Realism sharply focused on a distinctive social section, bound by ties other than those of ethnicity, creates its world which is real.

"Realism" is spoken of in this kind of connection, it will always include a reference to that which is held to be the objective world, the world that goes on outside of the artwork. One of the meanings it always carries with it involves the idea of accuracy to what we mean by reality. We speak of a novel as being "realistic" if it seems to reproduce the features of the world we live in, or at least the world man lives in or has lived in. All of these are geared to the demand for "realism," to the creation of greater immediacy and credibility, ultimately to reducing the gap between the experience of art and the experience of life, to making the medium, the artwork, so

transparent that it disappears. But obedience to the criterion has become mindless at a popular level. However, it is probed at what might be called an academic level, it needs only the most casual scanning of paperback shelves, films, television to see that the authority of “realism” has never been so naively and extensively taken for granted.

There are numerous reasons for using the word naïve here. Two of them at least involve false assumptions which relate to the fact of authorial selectivity. One of the false assumptions is if that there exists complete agreement as to what is “out there” waiting to be realistically portrayed. The other, and less widely discussed, is that given a provisional degree of consensus as to what is “out there” the artist simply has to “copy it down,” as it were, with a minimum of distorting mediation in such a way as to create to the fullest possible degree the impression that it really is there. It assumes that all that is demanded of realism is that given agreement as to what is real, it seeks only to work becomes convinced he is a witness to the event it describes.

Fowles’s experimental energy is devoted to exposing them, particularly those contained in the second. Among other things, Fowles is showing that “realism,” “truth to reality,” unfiltered fidelity to the world we live in is, ultimately, not what the traditional novel has presented or even tried to present, even while implicitly endorsing the rumour that it has. The chief tactic by which he reveals this involves applying the common assumptions about what constitutes realistic devices as far as it is possible to apply them. Then, it revealed that they work against, or retreat from the very aims they appear to set for themselves. The best test of the proposition that the law serves justice lies in applying the law to the limit of its implications, so with the proposition that the techniques of novelistic realism achieve an absolute recreation of reality. Fowles adverts to the contradictions that seem to be involved with the demands of realism and credibility:

The genuine dialogue of 1867 (insofar as it can be heard in books of the time) is far too close to our own to sound convincingly old. It very often fails to agree with our psychological picture of the Victorians - it is not stiff enough, not euphemistic enough, and so on; and here at once I have to start cheating and pick out the more formal and archaic (even for 1867) elements of spoken speech. It is this kind of cheating, which is intrinsic to the novel that takes the time. (284)

Fowles feels that it is the “cheating” to sustain the illusion of reality which is “intrinsic to the novel, that takes the time,” any serious experimentation with form must involve some tampering with the received notions of realism.

Fowles reveals that if the devices of realism are pushed to their fullest extent they conclude only by emphasizing the fictional, “unreal” quality of what they describe. We do not normally recognize this anomaly in what we have come to think of as conventional realism, because the devices associated with it have become so refined along entrenched and conventional lines that the contract of illusion between author and reader remains unbroken. That which is artificial, even arbitrary, in the game of realism has so thoroughly impregnated the popular conception of the novel as to seem not artificial but natural, not arbitrary but cognate. The conception has achieved such a degree of authority that the full complexity of the relationship between reality and descriptions. It remains hidden at that level where the bulk of realistic workbooks, films, television is produced and consumed. In the face of this, Fowles’s procedure involves showing what happens if what the realistic device pretended were true, were true. Realism seeks to reproduce reality as convincingly as possible. It is pushed to the utmost and succeeded utterly in doing what it implicitly aspired to do. Popular conceptions of the ultimate aspiration of realism

tend in this direction, and it is clear that without reassessing our most fundamental assumptions, we would not be able to cope with this. We have to remember Orson Welles's broadcast of War of the Worlds to be reminded of this in the firmest possible way. The point is what a policy of realism, insofar as it involves a convincing recreation of reality, can only appear to be implemented and cannot, in conventional terms be tolerated if it is as successful as standard formulations of it suggest it aspires to be. The novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is its experimental aspect that includes precisely this matter in its considerations.

#### 4.2 Social Realism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

In this novel, Fowles returns to the theme of the successful quest. The quester is Charles Smithson, much like Nicholas in social standing and education. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is set in Victorian England and the protagonist Charles is in his thirties, a decade older than Nicholas, reflects the older view of the author. His twentieth-century counterpart, Charles is representative of his age and class. He is somewhat bored with his circumstances, even though he is finally taking the proper course of the marriage to the proper lady, Ernestina. Nicholas is not nearly so aware of his boredom and nevertheless, Charles is immediately attracted to Sarah upon their first meeting, sensing instantly that she is not like other women. Charles is meeting her again in Ware Commons and it's a more secret Undercliff, he finds in this "other world" the mythic encounter for which he unconsciously yearns. A seeker after fossils, he subconsciously fears his extinction in the receding waters of the Victorian age, a gentleman left behind in the face of the rising tide of the Industrial Revolution.

The novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* seems to tack between the fictive world of art and the "real" world of history. Of course, in a larger sense, the two do interpenetrate. But our practical reading habits tend to require that at the back of it all the reading keeps them separate, even while implicitly judging realistic works according to how far that separation is broken down. It is this anomaly that Fowles is exploiting, not necessarily in the order that the state of affairs is changed, but at least they are recognized. One of how he achieves this end is to push the criterion of documentary realism so far as to invite us actually to confuse the fictive with the real, to be unable to distinguish them. There are a great many forms of this device, not all of them necessarily original in respect of the tradition of the historical novel. There is a violent and disturbing oscillation between two different orders of being here. Lyme Regis and the Cobb do exist, in such a way that he can live in one and walk on the other. The Cobb is being eroded in the darkness on the other side of the world. But Louisa Musgrove never fell down its steps, not in the sense that I could. It is, on the other hand, true that Jane Austen said she did, yet it is not true, in the same sense Fowles speaks casually as though all these things are true in the same way; he invites us to make certain kinds of confusion which would mark the total success of the putative aspirations of realism-principally, the confusion of the real with the fictitious.

In this novel, Fowles used the technique of realism, he is insistent upon the "truth" of his scenario and devious in the devices by which he seeks to establish it, that he achieves its undoing. In responding in the usual way to the usual kind of realistic literature, one has not really been looking at and admiring the work according to the degree to which it implements a criterion of realism, even though there is a tendency to use that criterion as one of the foundations of evaluation. However, naturalistic or "life-like" the details of the image, it conventionally obeys that rule which insists that there be a frame around it. In the realistic tradition, the image must be made so that we think it looks like a real-life, but not so much so that we confuse it with real life. So, no matter how far the realistic image seems to want to go in recreating the world, and no

matter how far we frame our judgment of it accordingly. In fact, will not go as far as it could, nor, with our present expectation anyway, could we cope with it if it did. There must be a frame to limit the impression of the real, and we realize this when Fowles removes that frame and induces mental discomfort in the reader. There has to be a complex act of prestidigitation: literary mimesis, realism, notwithstanding its traditional implicit promise to provide an immaculate mirror of reality, nevertheless has always secretly guarded its fictive status.

The practical limits imposed upon a strategy of literary realism are exposed when Fowles exceeds them, even though he does appear in the interests of the complete fulfillment of the strategy. It reveals that what is so generally taken to be a tradition of remorseless realism is a high man neared convention which has included among its elements a sort of fail-safe device: it holds out the threat of its ultimate implications but ensures that they are never enacted. It includes a clause that prohibits from making precisely that mistake that would testify to the achievement of total realism- the mistake of confusing the world recorded in fiction with the world we inhabit. A certain kind of plausibility would be violated, a plausibility that is actually at odds with the kind we usually mean when we talk of the realistic novel. It is that plausibility that takes as its foundation our agreement that, when all is said and done, the whole thing is a pretense. That is, whatever may be implied in the doctrine of realism, the fact remains that in its application it has always withdrawn from its implication; it has maintained carefully its fictive equality, within which its pretensions to copy "real life" are circumscribed. We are all relieved that the literary attempt to recreate the world is defeated by the intractability of the medium.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles refers to Sarah as the protagonist of the novel and suggests that she is more obviously than Charles, the central character in a tragic action. Charles has a claim to being the protagonist, too. In this novel there are four actions in which Sarah, the antagonist is the society against whose stifling conventionality she struggles to establish a place for herself as an individual in her own right. Fowles emphasizes that Sarah is superior to the majority of her contemporaries, though in intelligence rather than in social class:

[Sarah's] intelligence belonged to a rare kind; one that would certainly pass undetected in any of our modern tests of the faculty. It was not in the least analytical or problem solving, and it is no doubt symptomatic that the one subject that had cost her agonies to master was mathematics . . . It was rather an uncanny — uncanny in one who had never been to London, never mixed in the world — ability to classify other people's worth: to understand them, in the fullest sense of that word. She could sense the pretensions of a hollow argument, a false scholarship, a biased logic when she came across them; but she also saw through people in subtler ways . . . [She] saw them as they were and not as they tried to seem. (FLW 50)

This statement is problematic because Sarah does see through people — she sees that Mrs. Poultney is a hypocrite — but at other times she makes significant mistakes. She is mistaken about Vagueness, following him to Weymouth on the understanding that he will marry her, only to find that he is already married.

Sarah is the only daughter of rich parents who finds a titled husband, whose station could raise her family's status to the highest class. Nonetheless, Ernestina does not appear to have a problem with fulfilling that duty, even though she insists on choosing her husband. Both women have adapted quite well to their surroundings and understand what is expected of them. Since they are born into very different circumstances, it is to be expected that the prescriptions and

sanctions of the people closest to them are very different. Sarah comes to realize and accept that her peers will never see her as an equal, and eventually decides to embrace her loneliness and status as an outcast quite dramatically. Ernestina, on the other hand, tries to restrict and shape her natural character to fit society's standards and become the perfect Victorian woman, by reining in her stubbornness and pretending to be more submissive and naïve than she actually is.

As Charles and Ernestina first spot Sarah out on the Cobb, it takes them a while to realize that the dark figure is a woman, for they first assume that it is a fisherman. Sarah is described as masculine several times in the novel, but it seems to be more the result of her attitude than her actual appearance. The engaged couple has approached Sarah on the Cobb, Charles addresses her:

She turned to look at him – or as it seemed to Charles, through him. It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favoured feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy. [...] It was not a pretty face, like Ernestina's. It was certainly not a beautiful face, by any period's standard or taste. But it was an unforgettable face and a tragic face. Its sorrow welled out of it as purely, naturally, and unstoppably as water out of a woodland spring. There was no artifice here, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness. (FLW 13)

Furthermore, Sarah is described as having a firm, deep voice, strong eyebrows, a well modelled and feminine face, a wide mouth and beautiful and sometimes wild brown auburn hair. Her eyes are attributed a particular intensity, and Charles considers them to be “abnormally large, as if able to see more and suffer more” (FLW 78). Charles is from looking into Sarah's eyes, he also infers a great deal about her character: "They could not conceal an intelligence, and independence of spirit; there was also a silent contradiction of any sympathy; a determination to be what she was" (FLW105). Ernestina is quite different and a rather more narcissistic character. She is quite happy with her appearance, and one night, while inspecting herself in front of the mirror, she even admits to thinking that she is, “one of the prettiest girls she knew” (FLW 29). She is described as having very pretty, although short-sighted, grey eyes, smooth brown hair, she is:

Exactly the right face for her age; that is, small-chinned, oval, delicate as a violet. [...] At first, meetings she could cast down her eyes very prettily as if she might faint should any gentleman dare to address her. But there was a minute tilt at the corner of her eyelids, and a corresponding tilt at the corner of her lips – to extend the same comparison, as faint as the fragrance of February violets – that denied, very subtly but quite unmistakably, her apparent total obeisance to the great god Man. (FLW 27)

Thus, she is described in a very different manner from Miss Woodruff: Sarah's features are more masculine whereas Ernestina's are more feminine. Therefore, it is concluded that the former must be strong and dramatic and the latter delicate and childish. The conclusions the male narrators draw from the ladies' appearance do seem to be somewhat farfetched. Nobody can describe what a face without hypocrisy looks like nor can a tilt of a woman's eyelids deny her "total obeisance to the great god Man" in any way. These assumptions and deductions are highly subjective and therefore questionable and may tell the reader a lot more about the male

characters than the female ones. The insistence that Sarah's face contains no artifice and no mask is clearly in contrast with the portrayal of Ernestina's "act," which can be considered as rather ironic because Charles is eventually deceived far more by Sarah than Ernestina.

Miss Freeman and Miss Woodruff's wardrobes and daily dress are very different, with Ernestina putting a lot more effort into her outfits than Sarah. As was previously mentioned, Ernestina was raised to value her appearance, because society regarded it as her most valuable asset, after her inheritance. She is noticed by a prospective future husband, she needed to stand out from the other rich women by looking her best. Therefore, she puts in a great deal of money and effort to ensure that she is always wearing the latest fashions. Sarah, on the other hand, was raised to be a governess: a person whose appearance is expected to be neat and tidy while at the same time inconspicuous. She needed to be able to fade into the background of the homes she served in, while also remaining pleasing to the eye, by wearing neutral colours and clothes that would in not overshadow her mistress.

Sarah is before meeting Varguennes, desperate to get married, she finds it distressing to experience the happiness of family life as an onlooker — as a governess — rather than as a wife and mother. She was originally from an undistinguished agricultural family, and she has been educated to a point where no man of her background would seek to marry her. At the same time, she is too poor to attract a husband of the middle or upper classes. Varguennes offers her an escape from the dreariness of spinsterhood, she jumps at it rashly. In terms of classical tragedy, she is an essentially good person whose miscalculation leads to a tragic end. Her dealings with Varguennes lead to some important elements of tragedy. As she tells Charles the story of her pursuit of the lieutenant to Weymouth, we experience, just as he does, feelings of pity and fear in anticipation of the outcome. Sarah experiences tragic recognition when she sees that Varguennes is a "worthless adventurer" who had "appeared far more a gentleman in a gentleman's house" (FLW 67). Her reversal fortunes are when she discovers that the lieutenant is married. What follows is her fall from good fortune: she leaves Lyme Regis as a governess with an unsullied reputation and returns as a fallen woman.

Sarah has recognized her uniqueness in a world of conformity, relishes her position apart from others, particularly in its ability to give her freedom other women do not possess. As the French lieutenant's woman, she is outside of society's bonds. In her position, she has already begun her quest when she meets Charles; Sarah leads him to his path for the journey. Ernestina represents the known, the predictable, the respectable. Sarah represents the opposite: the unknown, the mysterious, the forbidden. Charles is torn between the two choices, he eventually comes to know himself well enough to be able to make the more hazardous choice, the one more fraught with danger yet far more likely to lead to wholeness. The feeling and reasoning aspects of Charles's psyche war within him. He is seeking advice from Dr. Grogan, he gets the proper scientific viewpoint of Sarah and it is prescribed the proper course of action. Thus, after much wrestling with the problem, Charles chooses Sarah, breaks his engagement to Ernestina, and returns to Sarah for what he thinks will be the beginning of their beautiful life in exile together—only to find her gone. At this point, Charles's real journey begins. Sarah has brought him to the point of resisting the predictable and recognizing his feeling side; he must learn to live alone with such newfound knowledge.

The choice is not a simple one, the reader must choose as well, for there are three "endings" in the novel. The first is not an ending, it comes in the middle of the novel. In this novel, Charles rejects Sarah, marries Ernestina, and lives, as it were, happily ever after. One knows, if only by the number of pages remaining in the novel that this is not the ending; it is merely a Victorian

convention, which the novelist Fowles quickly steps in to tell the reader is not the actual ending. The reader passes through another hundred pages before coming to another choice of endings, these more realistic. The endings themselves indicate the evolutionary process that Charles, as well as the novel, takes for if one includes the hypothetical early ending, one moves from the traditional Victorian view to the emancipated view of Charles and Sarah's union to the final existential view of the cruelty of freedom that denies Charles the happy ending.

The fact that Sarah is referred to like the protagonist does not alter the fact that Charles, too, has a claim to this status. In an interview with Melvyn Bragg, Fowles commented that "practically everyone's assumed the central character is the heroine Sarah. Fowles makes a central character of Charles by entering his mind repeatedly, and by presenting most of the action of the novel from this young man's point of view. Sarah, as the antagonist, is a quintessential female temptress, Charles thinks of her as being a "siren" and a "Calypso" (FLW 125) at one point, and Grogan comments later that she has "eyes a man could drown in" (FLW 195).

Nevertheless, Fowles emphasizes that Charles would have done better, in existential terms, to remain with Sarah. His married life leads to Ernestina will be a conventional Victorian life, characterized by an unwillingness to question what societal norms dictate. By contrast, Fowles implies, the life Charles would spend with Sarah would be one in which convention would be eschewed in the interests of attaining existential authenticity. However, Charles visits Sarah in Exeter and makes love to her, but discovers to his surprise that she is a virgin — that she lied to him about sleeping with Varguennes. Later, she will tell him that she cannot explain why she lied, "I cannot explain it. It is not to be explained" (FLW 309). Although this statement is open to several interpretations. Here, Charles experiences, in existential terms, the "anxiety of freedom — that is, the realization that one is free and the realization that being free is a situation of terror" (FLW 296). He has made love to Sarah, Charles can see that he is free to choose between living a conventional life with Ernestina, or breaking off his engagement to her and taking up with Sarah. "You know your choice," Charles reflects himself. He feels that "You stay in prison, what your time calls duty, honour, self-respect, and you are comfortably safe. Or you are free and crucified. Your only companions the stones, the thorns, the turning backs; the silence of cities, and their hate" (FLW314). Charles does not imagine that he is a Christ figure, or that he will be crucified: he simply sees that making choices without reference to any established conventions or sets of values will be a lonely business, filled with anxiety and self-doubt. It is that he sees that Sarah's role is to "uncrucify" him, to help relieve his anxiety by serving as a mentor and friend.

The visionary experience to Sarah gives rise enables Charles to see her no longer as a temptress figure but as a saviour who might help him to enjoy a life of existential freedom. However, when he returns to her hotel room, she has departed without leaving a forwarding address, and he is left to face a life of existential anxiety on his own. We now begin to experience the pity and fear of the audience attending a tragedy: we pity Charles because he has been abandoned, and fear that his new vision may lead not to a sense of existential authenticity but to a tragic fall. Charles employs a private detective to find Sarah; but after the search has dragged on for some time he begins to doubt her status as savior, distinguishing "between the real Sarah and the Sarah he had created in so many such dreams: the one Eve personified all mystery and love and profundity, and the other, a half-scheming, half-crazed governess from an obscure seaside town" (FLW 367).

According to Charles, Sarah's status is uncertain, and His novel has two remaining endings. Charles finds himself ultimately in the position of Oedipus at the end of Oedipus Rex. Although

he has believed himself to be free, he is subject to forces beyond his control. Charles finds that she has been living and working in the home of the Rossettis, that she now has the appearance of a self-supporting "New Woman"), and that she is uninterested in marriage and children. She is an intimidating figure and causes Charles to reflect that "Some terrible perversion of human sexual destiny had begun; he was no more than a foot soldier, a pawn in a far vaster battle; and like all battles, it was not about love, but about possession and territory" (FLW 387). Here, Charles appears to experience a moment of tragic awareness similar to Oedipus' final recognition that he is a pawn of fate.

Although Charles, is filled with a sense of his true superiority to her, here pictures himself melodramatically as "the last honourable man on the way to the scaffold" (FLW 397). It is unclear that he is necessarily proceeding to a tragic fate. It may be that what he is to experience after leaving Sarah is a better life than the one he has known, and, if that is the case, it would be inappropriate to think of him as a tragic protagonist who has come to a disastrous end, or to think of Sarah as his antagonist. In the novel's closing sentences, Fowles suggests that Charles has become a better person and can look forward to a better life. His decisiveness about no longer needing Sarah to bolster his freedom indicates that Fowles says:

At last found an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness, on which to build; has already begun . . . to realize that life, however advantageously Sarah may in some ways seem to fit the role of Sphinx . . . is not one riddle and one failure to guess it but is to be, however inadequately, emptily, hopelessly into the city's iron heart, endured. And out again, upon the unplumbed, salt, estranging sea. FLW 399)

The last sentence in this passage, the last in the novel, echoes a line from Matthew Arnold's "To Marguerite" (1853), a poem Charles has "committed to heart" (FLW365). Arnold's poem tells how the ancient continents were joined together, only to be divided by the seas, and suggests that people are like those continents, wanting to be reunited in love. Charles has memorized this poem because, before Chapter 61 of the novel, he has yearned to resume his romantic involvement with Sarah.

Fowles's use of the last line of this poem in the concluding sentence of his novel might suggest that he intends to be a conventionally tragic ending, with God intervening malevolently at the last moment to separate Charles and Sarah. However, seems more probable, is that Fowles echoes the line from Arnold for the sake of suggesting that hard he has tried to make his characters seem free, as their author he is ultimately the God who separates them. He separates them for the sake of emphasizing that true existential freedom is only to be found in solitude on the "unplumbed" sea of life, with the sea representing life's unfathomed depths, its flux, and hidden mysteries. Charles may perish tragically on the voyage, but Fowles "think[s] not": having acquired a certain "faith in himself" (FLW 399). He will more probably attain increasing existential authenticity. For all of the narrative complexity of Fowles's novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* does an inadequate job of representing the world's complexity, a job that could only be done by a novel of endless length, with an infinite number of endings.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In *The French Lieutenants Woman*, Women's relationships with Charles is compared to see if their sensuality is in line with the high moral standards of Victorian times when women were supposed to be "virginal," "innocent," and "sensual" at the same time, the women struggled to

adhere to those standards. Sarah and Ernestina's early upbringing and childhood life were examined to determine the real nature women's early memories and life lessons have shaped their characters. Subsequently, Ernestina and Sarah's natural beauty and acquired vanity are contrasted to establish these characteristics have influenced their personalities and people's perception of them. Also, Ernestina and Sarah's wits and intelligence is compared with that of Charles, and it is examined whether they could be his intellectual equal or not. It is also examined whether the women can have any influence on their destinies, or they are always destined to fulfill their predetermined and socially accepted roles. This overprotection has been the factor that caused Ernestina to preserve some of her rebellious streaks into early adulthood because despite the Victorian pressures and ideals imposed upon her she always goes her way; refusing all the suitors that her parents approve of until she meets Charles Smithson.

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