
THE 'REAL WORLD(S)' OF FICTION: *THE FRENCH
LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*

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That modern fiction has become increasingly introverted, self-reflective, and self-conscious, is by now a truism: witness the fact that a name - "metafiction" - has even been to what seems to be a recent development in narrative. Yet by this term we presumably do not mean to imply simply "fiction for fiction's sake" or even the predominance of literary concerns to the exclusion of the traditional (and likely undeniable) mimetic orientation of the novel genre. We must ask ourselves if the novels of Sterne and Cervantes are any less self-conscious of their narrative being than those of Barth or Coover today. "Meta-fiction" is not new, nor (more significantly) is it anti-mimetic as some theorists would have it. If it still imitates, however, it does so on a different level, on that of process rather than product. In other words, the act of fiction-making, of *poiesis*: takes on the moral as well as the significance usually only attributed to the completed fictions or to authorial intent.

John Fowles's novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is one such modern work in which the main subject matter is the making of its own fiction - as self-consciously discussed in the narrating framework and, more interestingly, as allegorized within the central plot action. The participation of the reader demanded in this process adds a third dimension to the mimetic relationship between fiction (and its making) and "reality" or more accurately, what we usually consider some sort of "life experience". Fowles's work provides a particularly rich basis of discussion about this mode of self-reflective fiction and about the requirements it seems to suggest for a broader critical concept of mimesis and "realism" in the novel as a genre. Its combined use of allegory, parody, self-mirroring structures, and overt commentary make it a kind of summation of metafictional techniques. It is this paradigmatic value of the novel, as well as its intrinsic value as a mimetic text, interested in process, not product, that shall concern us here.

That our critical apparatus for dealing with fiction has not yet expanded sufficiently to evaluate "metafiction" in its own terms is clear from the immediate response to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Overwhelmed by the illusion-destroying theoretical Chapter 13, the reviewers, while labouring the

obvious Victorian parody, the motif of existential freedom, and the theme of social evolution, denounced the coyness of Fowles himself, whom they apparently took to be the narrator of the novel - an error about which college freshmen are constantly being warned.

That the narrator is *not* Fowles is what makes an otherwise commonplace literary device both interesting and problematic. Here we are dealing with a number of worlds within worlds. The central or most traditional novel world is that of the characters themselves. Outside and including this world is one in which exist the man in the train, the impresario - in other words, the narrator's various *personae* who enter that central world at times. Outside is the world of the narrator's voice. But beyond this stands John Fowles - the man who masterminds both the creation of the Chinese-box structure *and* the tensions which exist between these worlds, and which function within the novel as a whole. In each universe there is a creator figure - Sarah, the *personae*, the narrator - and *outside* the last of these worlds stands the author. Realism, as the novel reveals and as the narrator suggests in Chapter 13, has once more been redefined - with the aid of the *nouveau roman* - and the allegorical structure of this novel and its preoccupation with imaginative process belie the narrator's modest opinion that this cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word.

One of the concerns of the novel that becomes a theme within it and which is openly theorized upon in Chapter 13, is the problem of the real *versus* the imaginary. The narrator realizes that, like Sarah and himself, the reader constantly fictionalizes his own life, that the act of making fictions is a natural and vital human function. All novelists, we are told, also "*wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is.*" The narrator continues: "We know a world is an organism, not a machine. We also know that a genuinely created world must be independent of its creator; a planned world (a world that fully reveals its planning) is a dead world. It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live." The romantic awkwardness of this formulation can perhaps be avoided by translation into more formalistic terms: there is a certain inner logic, or motivation, which comes with the process of creating the fictional universe and which makes imperious demands upon the novelist, forcing him to abandon any plans conceived *before* putting pen to paper.

The narrator hastens to assure his reader that he is not being unduly artificial or coy, for the act of creating a self-contained world analogous to our own is a very natural act - for each of us. He writes: "I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No" (97). Yet we could reply, yes, only to establish a new illusion of which he is a part - another more encompassing world. When he remarks: "My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken," then we could just as easily claim that *his* new reality is the reader's new illusion. For the reader, fiction is "woven into all"; on another level, he is, however, drawn into the reality of the creative process, while

remaining distanced from the illusion of the product created, the characters' world .

Despite his intentions in the chapter - to unfold Sarah's true state of mind- the narrator finds that "possibility is not permissibility," that his character refuses to allow him his creator's liberty, *and* that he is morally as well as aesthetically bound to obey her. Fowles here is within that tradition of modern writers - Unarnuno, Pirandello. Gide - who have rejected the theological and artistic implications of the novelistic illusion: firstly, that the novelist is a god who - like God - creates what and how he pleases, since art imitates life and its myriad possibilities; and secondly, that the reader is reading a verisimilar "slice of life to which, paradoxically, he need not seriously respond, since it is "only a novel." only entertainment, only fictive. In the traditional narrow view of mimesis, art has its significance in the fact that it mirrors the real. However, a dichotomy exists, since this very mirroring is once removed from reality and is therefore inferior *ult*, as Plato pointed out. In one sense, then, the moral stress of such mimesis or realism is only ostensible. Fowles, in breaking down this dichotomy, works to establish a different moral and human connection between *and* life for the novel genre.

First, however, we must examine the means by which Fowles effects this new and broader reconciliation. Most of the reviewers and critics of the novel have dwelt lovingly on the Victorian parodic elements - which, it must be allowed, are dutifully pointed out by the narrator himself. Fowles's debts to Scott, Ccorge Eliot, Thackeray, Arnold, Dickens, Froude. and Hardy are perhaps more or less evident; his narrator too hides nothing, mentioning Cervantes, Proust, Brecht, Ronsard, Flauberr, Milton, Radclyffe Hall, Carullus, Jane Austen, Arnold, Goethe, Dana, Tennyson, Hardy, Dickens - and so on. If such a narrator can be accused of playing literary games, the reader is at least carefully taught the rules. Even the characters' thought patterns allegorize the novelist's creative process: as Charles looks at Sarah, "it was suddenly, out of nowhere, that Emma Bovary's name sprang into his mind." "Such allusions are comprehensions; and temptations" (120) adds the wary narrator.

Such a use of allusion (or as it is now called, intertextuality) has a function within the novel similar to that of the Victorian parody as a whole. In Russian Formalist theory, parody is said to develop as an autonomous art, based on its discovery of "process." Parody is the result of a conflict between realistic and aesthetic motivation which has become weak and obvious. The unmasking of the system, whose function has degenerated into mechanical convention, brings about the establishment of new forms. Perhaps the subject matter, once taken seriously and presented with detailed motivation (aesthetic and realistic), may become prey to irony; or the authorial voice may be heard, destroying the mimetic illusion of authenticity.

Fowles's use of self-conscious parody establishes a new seriousness, a new code by which he attempts to deal with the ambiguities of both fiction and

reality. Out of a temporally and philosophically superseded literary mode comes the illumination of a new form which goes one better than the ideal of Conrad and Ford. not only will Fowles make us "see" but he will also reveal to us the mechanisms of vision-creating. He will let us see through the spectacles of books in order to let us see more and see differently. Historically, he has no choice: he writes after the *nouveau roman*. While remaining faithful to the moral and social concerns of Henry James and the English *novel* tradition, Fowles knows that a new form must emerge from its antiquated conventions. If he self-consciously imitates George Eliot, it is as a way to Roland Barthes.

At various times, Fowles has compared *his* (and not his narrator's) handling of the parodic material to Stravinsky's eighteenth-century reworkings, to the use of Velasquez made by Picasso and Francis Bacon, to Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony." His earlier works reveal the same functional role of parody. In *The Collector*, it is the fiction of Fowles's own generation of "angry young men" and *The Tempest* as well, which are played upon parodically. *The Magnus* is constructed upon the forms of the *Bildungsroman*, the gothic tale, the masque, psychodrama and fantasy (such as *LeGrand Meaulnes*). He admits to earlier unpublished efforts in the modes of Gide, Flaubert, Lawrence, Defoe, Hemingway, Chandler, and Hammett. His recent work, *The Ebony Tower*, confirms both the literary and broader human functions of parody. The old artist of the title story manages to "buttress" and "deepen" his art through parody. His visitor, a younger painter, sees that "behind the modernity of so many of the surface elements there stood both a homage and a kind of thumbed nose to a very old tradition,"³ and that it is precisely what his own abstract modern art lacks. None of Fowles's *novels* lacks such support.

Obviously this parodic rehandling could be said to function thematically and structurally on purely internal aesthetic level within *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. However, it also has another role, directing the reader to the moral and social concerns of the *novel*- concerns which critics seem to have felt were somehow independent of their "coy" self-reflective "tricks." The theme of a century's social evolution would be blatant and unsubtle, if Fowles were claiming that we are free and better than the Victorians whose style he is parodying. The narrator certainly makes us aware of the temporal telescoping, but he is not telling us that change is improvement or *even* that *we are* so very different from the Victorians. "I suspect," writes the narrator, about Victorian and modern sexuality, "we are in reality dealing with a human constant: the difference is a vocabulary, a degree of metaphor" (268). It is not the *fact* of temporal telescoping, then, that is significant, but the *function* of it. This is the point at which literary parody takes on moral and social dimensions: the reader of this novel is never allowed to abstain from judging and questioning himself by condemning or writing off the novel's world as "Victorian" (as well as fictive). The real and the imaginary. the present and the past merge for the reader.

This moral function is related to the structural and thematic use made of the concept of existential freedom. In his first two novels, Fowles mocks the existentialist pretensions of G. P. and Nicholas Urfe respectively, while presenting aesthetic metaphors or allegories of existential freedom within the novels' fictions. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* it is the ironic, parodic function of the modern narrator to suggest that existentialism is the only view possible for a modern individualist who *will* see Sarah as Sarah and not as the French Lieutenant's Whore. In *The Aristos*, Fowles's remarks suggest that existentialism is a philosophical counterpart to his own use of parody in the novel: "Existentialism is not a philosophy, but a way of looking at, and utilizing, other philosophies. It is a theory of relativity among theories of absolute truth."⁷ Fowles was attracted, he claims, to the English Victorian age not because of its differences from the present, but because it too was "highly existentialist, in many of its personal dilemmas."⁸ He did not choose it to make trite and obvious moral statements about the superiority of modern existentialism. The Victorian period is a vehicle rather for both the aesthetic and moral preoccupations of the novel.

Ian Adam once noted - rightly - that Sarah is not a fully developed character: "The quarrel becomes not one with an existentialist heroine but with her existence. My final reservation about an important novel is aesthetic rather than moral."⁶ However, in so asserting, Adam is attempting to separate the inseparable. In the face of Mrs. Poulteney's servant Millie and her "ten miserable siblings," the narrator has come to loathe the dishonest paintings of the "contented country laborer and his brood" by George Morland and Birket Foster. The aesthetic always involves the moral. "Each age," claims the narrator. "each guilty age, builds high walls round its Versailles; and personally I hate those walls most when they are made by literature and art" (158). The bowdlerized fiction of the time is therefore abandoned for the "cold reality" of the Commission Reports. The narrator chooses to blur the distinctions between real and fictional in order to stress the necessary link between moral and creative honesty and freedom.

In *The Aristos*, Fowles claims that freedom is inherent in the best art, as it is in the best science. Both are essentially demolishers of tyranny and dogma [10: 181]; this is a positive stating of Marx's social and linguistic observation that forms the epigraph to Chapter JO: "But the more these conscious illusions of the ruling classes are shown to be false and the less they satisfy common sense, the more dogmatically they are asserted and the more deceitful, moralizing and spiritual becomes the language of established society" (24J). There is an obvious connection between the desire for power over someone and a lack of hedonism - be it from a Marxist, existentialist, or aesthetic perspective. Marx provides the epigraph to the entire novel: "Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relations to man himself."

In the central world of the novel, it is the ironically named Mr. Freeman and

his daughter who pose the greatest threats to Charles's freedom, asking him to pay the price of "the best of his past self" to enter their bourgeois world. Charles perceives the need to "reject the notion of *possession* as the purpose of life" (295), yet in his attempt to release himself from the constraints of his age, to become a free outcast like Sarah, Charles must face another reality: he wants to *possess* Sarah sexually. That he does so *only* physically and not in any more significant way, and that he does not see that sexual possession is as negative and freedom-denying as any other act of possession, is made clear at the end of the novel. But even after the seduction scene, Sarah's "You cannot marry me" means "you may not," a refusal Charles is not capable of even imagining - as witnessed by his letter to her about "our future" (370, italics his). Sarah chooses the freedom of imagination and individuality over the bondage of marriage: "I wish to be what I am, not what a husband, however kind, however indulgent, must expect me to become in marriage" (450).

It is one of Sarah's moral functions in the novel to teach Charles this lesson. She sends him her Exeter address and he sees at once that he must make a choice: "He had not the benefit of existentialist terminology; but what he felt was really a very clear case of the anxiety of freedom" (.340-1). After the seduction, Charles believes that the "false version of her betrayal by Varguenes, her other devices, were but stratagems to unblind him" (.368), but he does not recall that Sarah's fictional identity was created *before* his arrival in Lyme and therefore had another function for Sarah herself, as free woman and as fiction-maker.

That the narrator should characterize her by "passion and imagination" (189) reveals his intuition of the strong ties between the moral or sexual and the artistic: the Victorian saw the former trait, we are told, as censurable sensuality, the latter as merely fanciful. Much of the central world of the novel is concerned with passion and morality; much of the self-conscious story-telling of the wider one is about imaginative process as a serious and natural human faculty. Imagination and its articulation in verbal fiction constitute profoundly necessary acts for Fowles, and therein lies the importance of language as our most precise, inclusive, and most evolved human tool, shared by literature and life, art and society.⁷ The existential theme of freedom takes shape on the aesthetic level; the only boundaries to a novel are words. Anything that language can do, the novel can do. Fowles feels that the novel is the ultimate free literary form: "This is its downfall and its glory; and explains why (it has) beer, so often used to establish freedom in other fields, social and political."⁸

In the short piece, "Is the Novel Dead"?⁹ Fowles contrasts this imaginative freedom of the writing and reading of words to the tyranny of the film makers' imagination upon that of his passive viewer. Television's threat is not directed towards fiction, he feels, but towards something much more essential to human development and happiness - "the right, the power and the need to exercise the individual imagination" both of writer and reader. This recalls Sarah's alleged

moral purpose in *her* fiction-making. She freely creates an identity, telling Charles that she has lost her virginity in order to be different: "I did it so that people *should* point at me, *should* say, there walks the French Lieutenant's Whore - oh yes, let the word be said. So that they should know I have suffered, and suffer, as others suffer in every town and village in this land" (174-5). Charles is quite right in saying: "you cannot tell me it is your duty to offend society" (181), but not for the reasons he presumes. Sarah's identity as the fallen woman is a *fiction*, yet it may perhaps even attain the status of social reminder, a result more morally commendable at least than the separation of art and reality effected by Victorian painters.

However, the implications of the fiction-making process are moral in a more subtle way. "I said earlier," recalls the narrator, "that we are all poets, though not many of us write poetry; and so are we all novelists, that is, we have a habit of writing fictional futures for ourselves" (339). In positing the relationship between fiction-shaping and reality in these terms, the narrator hearkens back to a kind of classical aesthetics. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle saw art as form shaping, guiding, and developing the concrete into a unified meaning and completeness. Art as mimesis had a cultural and moral function - to shape and form man. Moral worth is inseparable from action and events - our own fictionalized ones or those in art. The narrative act (*diegesis*) which Aristotle saw as mimetic as well, is a moral act and it is as a moral act that Fowles chooses to introduce the act of story-telling itself into his novel.

The baring of the mechanism of fiction-making - the element of the trickster, the charlatan, the magus - has always existed in the novelist's role. The narrator here reveals it flagrantly. He jumps easily in one page over twenty months in time, as had Stendhal. He has his characters share time and space with historical realities, as had Scott. He footnotes his usage of certain epigraphs, clarifying by quotation of further documentary evidence, and so on. What is interesting is that by using these conventional devices which are usually employed to authenticate the novel's central world, the narrator manages instead to achieve opposite results, validating instead his wider universe. The voice of the narrator is not an exterior authenticating authorial one; it is the voice of a character.

In *The Magus*, Urfe realizes that he has created an imaginary god-like novelist to order his own life, to turn it into a fiction in which he is a character. Charles, on the other hand, tries to be that god himself, to control, to possess. His various fantasies turn out to be unrelated to his reality, however, and it is only in the church in Exeter that he has a "glimpse of another world: a new reality, a new causality, a new creation" (365). But this new fictive universe is again one in which Charles feels the need to be in control, ushering Sarah to Winsyatt, and later around Europe. The narrator is careful to separate the unlikely nature of the *content* from the valid *process* of Charles's fantasizing.

It is not until the end of the novel that Charles perceives that fiction-making is

a freedom-inducing act, not an act of possession, of planning, of control, as it is at this earlier point in the novel. Giving himself up to thoughts of his future with Sarah, Charles dreams of his wedding trip: "Moonlight the distant sound below of singing gypsies, such grateful, tender eyes ... and in some Jasmine-scented room they would lie awake, in each other's arms, infinitely alone, exiled, yet fused in that loneliness, inseparable in that exile" (400). The descent into romantic cliché tonally underlines the narrator's - and soon Sarah's - rejection of a fiction that does not respect the integrity of the protagonist. Sarah rightly fears and refuses the demands his love would make upon her freedom, demands she senses without ever having received Charles's revealing letter.

This freedom and integrity is ultimately also what the narrator's dandified impresario *persona* denies. From his vantage point outside his *persona*'s world, the narrator does not like this character, for "he very evidently regards the world as his to possess and use as he likes" (462). This is not to say that the narrator condemns *himself* for being a creator, although any creator who does not respect the inner logic and motivation of his characters, his creatures, is, as we have seen, morally suspect. In the first "on stage" appearance of his *persona* on the train, the narrator describes this figure's look as being like that of some omnipotent god: "Not at all what we think of as a divine look; but one of a distinctly mean and dubious (as the theoreticians of the *nouveau roman* have pointed out) moral quality" (405). By creating for his prying *persona*, in Unamuno fashion, this other world somewhere between his own and his characters', the narrator breaks through the illusion of mimetic mirroring by decompartmentalizing what was traditionally considered to be a simplistic relationship of author to reality. *Neither* of these last two entities appears in the complex Chinese-box structure of the novel. Both are *outside* the novel proper; it is their fictional surrogates who are present within the text.

The arbitrary *persona* gives way to the narrator who recognizes the aesthetic demand for *harmonia*, for a sense of unity of interconnection within the novel world. He must respect the literary integrity of his characters as an allegory of his respect for that of other human, non-fictional beings. Charles, when playing fiction-maker himself "became increasingly unsure of the frontier between the real Sarah and the Sarah he had created in so many such dreams" (429). Indeed, the "real" Sarah is the greatest fiction-maker of the novel, creating her own identity, one which is not totally accounted for in any of Charles's versions: "the one Eve personified, all mystery and love and profundity, and the other a half-scheming, half-crazed governess from an obscure seaside town. He even saw himself coming upon her again - and seeing nothing in her but his own folly and delusion" (429). She is a little of each, and more; she is No One's Woman.

Fiction-making as a potential mode of control, of freedom-denying, is indeed linked in the central world to sexual possession and even love. However, it is also connected to a broader social concern. This is clear in the epigraph to Chapter 37 - Marx's comment about the bourgeoisie's forcing all nations to

adopt its mode of production (and thereby becoming bourgeois as well): "In a word, it creates a world after its own image" (280), like an omnipotent creator. In rejecting the Freemans' bourgeois values, Charles chooses first his gentlemanly liberty and later the greater freedom which Sarah forces him to face.

Earlier, when Charles had stood at the window of Grogan's office, looking out into the night where Sarah was, he "felt himself in suspension between the two worlds, the warm, neat civilization behind his back, the cool, dark mystery outside" (151). Charles is indeed suspended between two worlds - Ernestina's and Sarah's - both of which are potentially worlds within himself as well. He first hears Sarah's tale from his fiancée: "I wish you hadn't told me the sordid facts. That's the trouble with provincial life. Everyone knows everyone and there is no mystery. No romance" (10). Ernestina rightly mocks him as "the scientist, the despiser of novels." The irony is that to the end no one will know Sarah and that to label, to know the "facts," is not at all to destroy the mystery.

Charles had looked to the malleable young Tina for a cure to his restless boredom. Unable to indulge his "Byronic ennui," he had reverted to convention, since he in essence shared his wife-to-be's world view: "Life was the correct apparatus; it was heresy to think otherwise" (78). Sarah, of course, is that heretic in this society. Charles's early response to her is ironic: "here, if only some free man had the wit to see it, is a remarkable woman" (182). In fact, the term "free man" is doubly ironic: Charles is engaged (*his* intended meaning) but he is also not free existentially at this stage. Secondly, Ernestina *Freeman* and her father would *not* have "the wit" to see it, although Charles still does.

It takes Sarah's speaking eyes to make him perceive in his fiancée a certain shallowness, a cuteness he took for acuteness. Ernestina, in fact, gives the novel its title: "They call her the French Lieutenant's ... Woman" (9), but it is Sarah who demands that "Whore" be used, for she is free of the frivolity, the prudery, and even most of the feminine vanity of Ernestina, who is presented as a Victorian cliché: she would like children, but "the payment she vaguely divined she would have to make for them seemed excessive" (29). Sarah, however, suspects that there is more to sex than a "bestial version of Duty," but the Victorian Charles presumes her disgust after his seduction. There is great irony in Charles's earlier response to Sarah upon hearing her story: "He was at one and the same time Varguennes enjoying her and the man who sprang forward and struck him down; just as Sarah was to him both an innocent victim and a wild, abandoned woman" (176). That Charles *is* her Varguennes is underlined by Sarah's writing to him in French (208).

Yet Sarah has something beyond her sexual power to separate her from other women. Charles is surprised by her directness of look, of thought, and of language "less an equality than a proximity, a proximity like a nakedness, an intimacy of thought and feeling hitherto unimaginable to him in the context of a relationship with a woman" (182). Sarah leads him to believe that she is indeed

the French Lieutenant's Who re, an identity we and he later discover to be fictional. However, this role does allow her a means of self-definition: "If I leave here I leave my shame. Then I am lost" (180). When Charles assures her that she has done her penance and is forgiven, she voices the fear implicit above "And may be forgotten." It is only at the end of the book that Charles tells her he will never forget her; again it is through her fiction-making that she has effected this permanence. After Charles has seduced her, she admits to wishing it so and indeed, has long imagined such an event (352). Now that she knows that he once loved her, she implies, she can live on with rich food for more imaginings, with none of the constrictions Charles's love would impose upon her. To his vanity and resentment at being the dupe of her imagination, she replies: "Today I have thought of my own happiness" (356). It is only after her disappearance that Charles begins to see that beneath "all her stories and deceptions she had a candor ". an honesty" (417). The sex conflict here is not just a narrative cliché: it is closely related both to power and to fantasy.

Despite appearances, it is the enigmatic Sarah who is the named protagonist of the novel, the veiled Isis, the dark Maker of the epigraph to the theoretical Chapter 13. She acts out, on the level of the fiction, an allegory of the narrator-novelist's freedom of creation of the novel itself. Why choose a female for this role? Perhaps because in the novel the narrator, who continually forces the reader to unite the moral and the artistic in a contemplation of the meaning of freedom, is writing of an age in which "there was an enormous progress in liberation in every other field of human activity; and nothing but tyranny in the most personal and fundamental" (267), and woman was the victim. In the *Aristes*, Fowles himself presents woman as a symbol of the challenge of the Fall of the belief that humanity can develop by consciousness and imagination to achieve new powers (4:24).

Sarah is the narrating novelist's surrogate within the fictional world. Like him, she has existence only within that fictive world: the narrator is not Fowles himself, and Sarah too can be known by no outside structures ("outside" here being the Victorian world of the core), for she creates her own story, her own identity. There is no doubt that Sarah "lies" in order to bring Charles to a realization of the "truth," just as the novelist was condemned traditionally for creating lies in making fictions for his readers. At the start Charles looks at Sarah's "unforgettable" face and sees "no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask" (10). Just as up to Chapter 13, despite several hints to the contrary, the reader is almost convinced of the narrator's typical Victorian conventionality, almost unaware of the modern mask. As Sarah frees Charles from Illusion by fiction-making, so the narrator frees the reader from his illusions about fiction-making.

At times, Sarah is not unlike the narrator's impresario *persona*. She is a consummate actress, carefully setting the scene for her revelations to Charles (123), pricking her finger on a hawthorn (180) for sympathy and Hardy-esque

claustrophobic and unrealistic (therefore immoral) art of the period: "Hide reality, shut out nature. The revolutionary art movement of Charles's day was of course the Pre-Raphaelite: they at least were making an attempt to admit nature and sexuality" (176). This they did, but they also possessed two other qualities which would render them attractive to the narrator and to creator. Firstly, they were seriously dedicated to the artistic life and saw one of their responsibilities as artists as being the duty to paint contemporary life and its problems - social and moral; witness Ford Madox Brown's "Work" and Rossetti's "Found". Fowles's use of Marxist epigraphs suggests a similar concern. Secondly, the Pre-Raphaelites chose their subjects from the past, as do Fowles and his narrator, and were themselves inspired by literature.

Sarah's world is like that of the Brotherhood, for she shocks social propriety as much as does the "celebrated, the notorious" Rossetti. She tries to reassure Charles of her innocent status in the house by mentioning another inhabitant - likely Swinburne. Although Charles suspects her of a certain naivete with regard to her fellow housemates, he fails to see why she is at home here. He does not know of the Pre-Raphaelites' unique respect - not to say idolatrous admiration - for their models: Rossetti and Lizzy Siddal, Morris and Jane Burden, later Rossetti and Jane again. In fact, the descriptions of Sarah in the novel resemble those of the paintings of Jane - the hair, the mouth, the voluptuousness combined with the dreamy, the intense with the languid. Jane Burden, like Sarah, was of a lower class.

The other marginally Pre-Raphaelite figure who enters the novel is Ruskin, whom Charles glimpses ("the famous lecturer and critic... widely respected and admired"), but whose presence in the Rossetti "den of iniquity" he cannot comprehend. It is Sarah, the artist surrogate, who makes the connection with Ruskin: "I have since seen artists destroy work that might to the amateur seem perfectly good. I remonstrated once. I was told that if an artist is not his own sternest judge he is not fit to be an artist. I believe that is right. I believe I was right to destroy what had begun between us. There was a falsehood in it, a -" (448). Here she uses Ruskin's term "inconsistency of conception": "the natural had been adulterated by the artificial, the pure by the impure." Sarah attributes the negative part to herself, to her fictions, but Charles now sees that it is he and his language that are guilty of artificiality, of betraying "a hollowness, a foolish restraint." But even now he has not perceived Sarah's role: you cannot answer me with observations, however apposite, on art" (449). Sarah rightly replies, as would the narrator, that they were intended to apply to life as well.

Charles suspects that Sarah is manipulating him, feigning contentment, suffering still, "and that was the mystery she was truly and finally afraid he might discover" (453). This is likely true: Sarah told Charles after her seduction that she had that day thought only of her own happiness, *but* should they meet again, as now, she would think only of *his*. If she is to give Charles his freedom, it will be at her own expense: "something of the terrible outrage in *his* soul was

reflected in *her* eyes" (454, my italics). In those eyes he sees "a spirit prepared to sacrifice everything but itself - ready to surrender truth, feeling, perhaps even all womanly modesty in order to save its own integrity" (465). Sarah is free and will force Charles to be so, to react against her fiction-making, to refuse to let *her* possess *him*.

Why must he leave? Why are there two endings? In life there are any number of possibilities, but this is not life, but fiction, and the novelistic universe has its own logic and inner coherence which "fix the fight" for the reader. This is not a Victorian novel and cannot have a conventional closed ending. The flipping of a coin or the turning back of a clock do not have any final effect on the reader, who is still prey to that "tyranny of the last chapter" (406) however it was chosen. Were Charles the protagonist (and of a Victorian novel), the first ending would be possible, but even then violence would need be done to the text. Since Sarah is the named protagonist, the painful freedom-granting second ending of a modern novel is the only probable one.

Fowles, as well as Sarah and the narrator, has fixed the fight for both Charles and the reader long before this final scene. We, like Charles, have been manipulated, controlled within the coherent world of the text. Early in the novel, Sarah warned Charles: "What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I am truly not like other women. I shall never have children, a husband, and those innocent happinesses they have" (175). Instead she chooses fantasy, freedom, and her integrity.

After her seduction she tells Charles that he cannot marry her, that is, she will not let him. She begs him to leave her - unlike Ernestina - because she loves him enough to bring him and leave him to his own painful freedom. He says to himself in the church after the seduction: "You know your choice. You stay in prison, what your time calls duty, honor, self-respect, and you are comfortably safe. Or you are free and crucified" (362). He has a vision of Sarah, not as his wife, significantly, but as someone to uncrucify him, to allow him to be free and happy. But he learns that he must make the liberating move, and that freedom is painful.

Perhaps the best indication of the textual impossibility of the first ending is the very similar scene of Charles with the red-haired prostitute, Sarah, and her daughter. It is true that in both cases he amuses the child with his watch and chain, but despite the glaring ironic similarity of situation, the language of the earlier scene denies any link to the Victorian conventional ending. With the first girl's child, Charles has an intuition about time as "here and now" rather than as a road going forward to the future and back to the past. With this existential realization, he feels his sense of irony return as "a kind of faith in himself." He feels "suddenly able to face his future, which was only a form of that terrible emptiness. Whatever happened to him such moments would recur; must be found, and could be found" (320). Indeed they are found - in the second ending where Charles at last has "an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness" (467).

He sees now that Sarah is not the Sphinx, that she cannot choose for him, that life too "is not a symbol, is not one riddle and one failure to guess it, is not to inhabit one face alone or to be given up after one losing throw of the dice; but is to be, however inadequately, emptily, hopelessly into the city's iron heart endured. And out again, upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" (467). The echoing of Charles's favorite poem, "To Marguerite," in the last line reaffirms his realization that his freedom is both necessary and inevitable, no matter how much he might wish the contrary ("Oh might our marges meet again!" wrote Arnold). For this desire is rendered vain in Arnold's poem by "A God," and in Fowles's novel by three gods - Sarah, the narrating novelist, and Fowles - whose various worlds each logically allow only this ending - in structural, artistic terms and in thematic, moral ones.

As is usually the case in "metafiction," what first appears as merely self-conscious literary introversion functions as the means by which new connections are forged between art and life. And the most significant of these lies in that act of creating - by the reader as well as the novelist - "worlds as real as, but other than the world that is."

NOTES

1 *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Boston 1969), p 96. his italics. All further page references will be in parentheses within the text. Spellings in this edition are Americanized.

2 See "Notes on Writing a Novel," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1968, pp 89-90; "On Writing a Novel," *Cornhill Magazine*, 1060 (Summer 1969), 287-88; and Richard Boston, "John Fowles, Alone but Not Lonely," *New York Times Book Review*, 9 November 1969, p 2.

3 (Boston 1974), p 18.

• (Boston 1964), 6:105.

5 "Notes on Writing a Novel," p 90.

6 In Patrick Brantlinger, Ian Adam, Sheldon Rorhblatr. "*The French Lieutenant's Woman: A Discussion*," *Victorian Studies*, 15 (March 1972), 347.

7 See *The Aristos*, 7:163; 177; 178; 180; 198 and *The Ebony Tower*, pp 186, 277-280.

8 "Notes on Writing a Novel." p 92.

9 *Books*, 1 (Autumn 1970), 2-5.