Freedoms in

*The French Lieutenant's Woman*

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John Fowles has always been concerned with the general issue of human freedom, by which he usually means the freedom of individuals from the constraints of society and its institutions. In the 1960s, he defined this freedom in the context of existentialism, but even after his interest in the broader philosophy of existentialism declined in the 1970s, he maintained a concern with the achievement of “authenticity,” the result of the individual’s successful struggle with society. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is probably the best of Fowles’s works to examine closely on this subject, but it presents some difficulties, situated as it is on the edge of his change in thinking, perhaps about existentialism and certainly about the novel itself. Fowles experimented with narrative form to some extent in *The Collector* and *The Magus*, but his third novel is his first openly metafictional work—particularly in its double ending and in its use of a twentieth-century narrator for a novel set in the Victorian period. In itself, the latter would not necessarily constitute an innovation, for as Kerry McSweeney points out, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, set in the early 1830s, is narrated from the perspective of 1867—not a 100-year gap but an enormous distance in terms of social and historical concerns (138). In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, however, we have a narrator who also claims to be the creator of the novel’s characters and who makes cameo appearances in the narrative.

The novel is further complicated by the presence of different varieties of freedom, the effect of which, for a reader, can be equivocation on a large scale. Fowles is dealing in particular here with three different kinds of freedom: social, existential, and narrative, though in his state-
ments outside the novel, he does not appear to distinguish between the first two. In *The Aristos*, for instance, he declares, “All states and societies are incipiently fascist. They strive to be unipolar, to make others conform. The true antidote to fascism is therefore existentialism; not socialism” (121). In Fowles’s thinking, existentialism is primarily a response to social and political pressures on the individual to conform. His novel can be more clearly understood, however, if the two kinds of freedom are distinguished. Social freedom, a concept that will be elaborated on below, is the opportunity to choose between alternative social “realities” or support groups, which confirm and strengthen one’s identity. It is a way, therefore, of choosing an identity. There is some overlap between social and existential freedom in the sense that both give the individual the opportunity to *choose*, but existentialism necessitates a choice independent of any sustaining community. Sartre says that in choosing our own essence we are choosing, in a way, for all humankind, but he also states that “every man, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man” (353–54). There is a certain eventual reassurance, even comfort, that comes with social freedom; the emotions associated with Sartre’s existential freedom, in contrast, are anguish over our responsibility in choosing (351) and despair because we know we may rely only on “that which is within our wills” (357).

Narrative freedom, the “freedom” of fictional characters (or the illusion of it) from their authors, is a metaphor for freedom from God, a precondition for existential freedom in Fowles and Sartre. It is the freedom the narrator speaks of when he asserts that a “genuinely created world must be independent of its creator... It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live” (81). Such freedom is always difficult to claim, for although Fowles may not have a God who limits his freedom by determining his “essence” before his “existence,” his characters do. Sarah Woodruff does achieve a kind of social freedom in this novel, and she is the primary example of narrative freedom, to the extent that such a thing can be attained. But existential freedom within the possible world of a novel set in the Victorian period is more problematic for its characters, in spite of Fowles’s statement in “Notes on an Unfinished Novel” that the Victorian age was “highly existentialist in many of its personal dilemmas” (17). If Charles Smithson, often seen as a potential existential hero by critics, finds a road to freedom in this novel, he does so by learning his own narrative strategies.
Sarah and Charles can be judged, first of all, in terms of their reactions to the social conventions of the late Victorian period. Critics have generally agreed that Charles is a somewhat “conventional” rebel for much of the novel. John Neary, for instance, argues that, rather than achieving or even attempting freedom, Charles has merely replaced Christianity with “Duty, Culture, and Science,” which become substitute determiners of his character and actions (163). And Katherine Tarbox concludes that Charles never does, within the confines of the narrative, shake off the limitations imposed on him by his language and his Victorian assumptions about gender roles and conduct, although she holds out hope for the future Charles (62–63, 77–78). Sarah, on the other hand, is generally perceived as a more genuine rebel against social constraints. Thomas Foster, in fact, calls her a “female Heathcliff,” someone who ignores social convention (70). In spite of this apparent superiority, however, something funny happens to Sarah on the way to the endings: she becomes a catalyst in Charles’s development, a secondary character. Both Neary and Foster ultimately see her this way, and McSweeney, in an interesting comment on the narrative that will be discussed later, calls Sarah the “narrator’s surrogate,” deceiving Charles for his own good (140). Almost all who have written about the novel see Sarah as a “mystery,” but few have any trouble identifying what they see as her function in the novel.

Sarah may not be mere catalyst, though. She may represent a kind of social freedom that has been largely ignored or discounted by critics, perhaps because of Fowles’s emphasis on existential freedom. In The Social Construction of Reality, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe the possibilities for attaining what they term “individualism,” which they explain as a combination of awareness of choices among discrepant “realities” and identities, and the ability to construct a self out of the choices available (171). (Again, “constructing a self” may appear to be identical with the existential “choosing” of a self, but, as will be explained below, both process and product are substantially different.) Such individualism is made possible by unsuccessful socialization, a situation that may result from any number of causes.

According to Berger and Luckmann, all humans are born into “symbolic universes” (96), social structures a society has institutionalized as “reality.” Socialization is the process by which the new individual internalizes that society, making it his or her reality, too.3 This socialization is accomplished primarily through the mediation of significant others (the
parents in childhood; friends, coworkers, and others later on), with whose roles and attitudes, and ultimately with whose world, the individual identifies. In identifying with the significant others and their world, the individual acquires a coherent identity.

Sarah’s socialization has been very imperfect, although she is in some respects a type often found in Victorian fiction: the educated woman of limited means who finds respectable employment as a governess. She is different from the type, however, in that she is educated beyond her class at the insistence of her father, a tenant farmer as obsessed with his ancestry as Mrs. Pocket is in Great Expectations. Sarah’s education is, the narrator tells us, the second curse of her life, the first being an ability to see into others and understand their true worth. She has nothing in common with the other students at the boarding school and, far from internalizing their society and accepting it as “reality,” internalizes instead the fictional worlds of Walter Scott and Jane Austen, judging others as fictional characters (48). Nor does the role of governess suit her. In her happiest employment, as governess for the Talbot children, she does not understand why she cannot be Mrs. Talbot. She sees no equivalent social position for herself, only the position of outsider, forbidden to enjoy the paradise she sees around her (138). In a sense, Sarah identifies with Mrs. Talbot—they are the same age—but she cannot enter her world or form an identity for herself based on it. She feels condemned to solitude, “As if it has been ordained that I shall never form a friendship with an equal, never inhabit my own home, never see the world except as the generality to which I must be the exception” (139).

Simply living in the Victorian age is enough to render socialization an unsteady process. Successful socialization requires a close parallel between objective reality (the prevailing version of reality established by the society) and subjective reality (the individual’s perceptions and identity). As Berger and Luckmann put it, “Identity then is highly profiled in the sense of representing fully the objective reality within which it is located. Put simply, everyone pretty much is what he is supposed to be” (164). This is very much the sort of society Thomas Carlyle constructs in Past and Present around the figure of Gurth, the swineherd from Scott’s Ivanhoe. Gurth was happy, asserts Carlyle, because he had a definite place in society and a clear relationship to others—in other words, Gurth had no problem with identity. Carlyle laments the absence of such certainty in his own time, and if it was a problem in 1843 (the date of Past and
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*Present*, it was far more so in 1867, the date not only of John Stuart Mill’s attempt to persuade Parliament to grant voting rights to women (calling into question assumptions about gender) and the publication by Marx of the first volume of *Das Kapital* (calling into question assumptions about social class) but also of the Second Reform Bill, which gave the vote to workers in the towns and virtually doubled the total number of voters. Carlyle compared the Reform Bill to “shooting Niagara,” and there were fears that Victorian society itself might become radicalized to the point of losing its social and political identity. Sarah, from a social perspective, is one of Carlyle’s victims. She is not what she is “supposed to be,” either as the daughter of a tenant farmer or, in her own mind, as a governess. She asks Charles, “Where am I not ill placed?” (198).

Conditions sufficient to undermine Sarah’s socialization existed, then, both in the world of reference that provides the background to the novel and in her personal life in the narrative, but until the end of the novel, there is no alternative social “reality” available to her, no counterworld within which she could have a counteridentity. There is only the option of pretending to be what she is not (the French lieutenant’s woman) as a means of rejecting socialization in a social reality she cannot accept as a verification of her identity. Her role as the “fallen woman” is no threat to society (or to Charles), any more than the roles of other socially stigmatized types, such as those with physical deformities or those born out of wedlock. We can see this in the ease with which Sarah is written off by authority figures: as a social reclamation project (and an opportunity to demonstrate her charity) by Mrs. Poulteney, as a textbook case of the unbalanced woman by Dr. Grogan, and as the sexually exciting “mystery woman” by Charles. She may be more than that to him, but that she assuredly is.

In a society as complex as Victorian England, however, there is bound to be a more complex distribution of knowledge than in, say, the imagined society of Gurth, allowing for the possibility of “different significant others mediating different objective realities to the individual” (Berger and Luckmann 167). The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood provides just such an alternative set of significant others for Sarah. Two years earlier, she had made a desperate attempt to discover whether, in other circumstances, she might have had a “gentleman” like Charles—desperate because in fact, as she tells Charles, she never believed there was any chance he would marry her. Indeed, her experiment, if that is a reason-
able word for it, had only the effect of expanding the universe within which she was a “nothing.” When Charles discovers her two years later, she is manifestly not the Sarah he thought he was seeking. She is, as the young woman who greets him initially says, “no longer a governess” (346). This piece of information is given in response to a question from Charles that is more assumption than question. What else could she be, in her circumstances? But the woman who shows him in reacts to his question with “amused surprise” (346). In social terms, Charles has entered an alternative universe, one in which there are genuine options for intelligent women. Sarah need no longer suffer Victorian stereotypes because she has found that universe and the significant others she needed: “The persons I have met here have let me see a community of honorable endeavor, of noble purpose, I had not till now known existed in this world. . . . I am at last arrived . . . where I belong” (353). Sarah is “anchored,” as she puts it; she has a secure identity, and it does not appear to be existential in nature, as a number of critics have claimed, but a quite conventional social identity—although no less hard won in the circumstances.

Tony E. Jackson, in an essay on evolutionary theory in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, makes an interesting case for Sarah as a “suddenly occurring new kind of self” that “secures its survival” by reproducing itself as a type. Sarah does this, Jackson argues, by causing Charles to re-enact her own story and become a social outcast like herself (227, 233). There could be parallels between such an evolutionary reading of Sarah and the social process described above, but in that process conditions must exist to cause the discontent or “unsuccessful socialization,” and Sarah cannot have been from the start “naturally isolated and alienated,” as Jackson insists (230). In Berger and Luckmann’s scheme, such alienation can only exist initially as a result of an accident of birth that renders the individual a social outcast, or by the mediation of a significant person other than the parents—a nurse, for instance, who may represent a different social class with a different world view (165, 169). Neither of these situations applies to Sarah. Her alienation occurs for the very concrete social reasons given earlier, and not “naturally” (a term that begs too many questions). Further, Jackson views Sarah in the final, “existentialist,” ending as “the type who is at home with contingency, uncertainty, and anxiety” (239). I would maintain that she is simply “at home.” The contentment she expresses with her present situation in the passage quoted above exists in both endings, since the final ending does not be-
gin to displace the one before it until well after that passage. She betrays there neither uncertainty nor anxiety.

Sarah's description of her new community, one “of honorable endeavor, of noble purpose, I had not till now known existed in this world,” raises questions about Charles's own options. Should he not have been a member of just such a community, pursuing its own “noble purpose” in the area of science, as the Pre-Raphaelites were in art? Charles likes to see himself as different, “not like the majority of his peers and contemporaries” (107), and he revels in the idea that he and a select few others—Dr. Grogan, for instance—are advanced thinkers (132). But he wears his Darwinism as comfortably as Ernestina wears the latest fashions, and later in the novel, when Mr. Freeman uses the Darwinian principle of adaptation to changes in the environment to support the idea that “gentlemen” might find it necessary to go into trade, evolution becomes something Charles can do without (227–29). The terms intellectual or Darwinist have about the same reality when applied to Charles as governess does when applied to Sarah: they are convenient constructs for those who do not quite fit into mainstream Victorian categories but who are also not regarded as threats to it—as subversive “realities.”

This is not to say that Darwinism was not regarded generally as a threat to conventional thinking but that Charles’s version of Darwinism is the naïve variety Jackson describes as all too similar to Linnaeus’s “ladder of nature”—a comforting reaffirmation of the rightness of one’s position at the top of the evolutionary scale (225). When he goes to visit his uncle at Winyatt, the estate and its attributes “evoked in Charles that ineffable feeling of fortunate destiny and right order which his stay in Lyme had vaguely troubled” (157). For Charles, unlike Sarah, existence is just, and the order of things seemingly permanent. His satisfaction with Winyatt as his inheritance “seemed to him to explain all his previous idling through life, his dallying with religion, with science, with travel; he had been waiting for this moment . . . his call to the throne, so to speak” (158). His “real wife,” Charles thinks, is “Duty” (159)—the preservation of this order. The scene, like others in The French Lieutenant's Woman, contains the intertextual ghost of Great Expectations—in this case the scene in which Pip returns to the forge at the end of the novel with the idea precisely that it represents a peace and order he had not recognized earlier, and with the intention of proposing to Biddy (another previously unrecognized destiny). Like Pip, Charles is greeted by empty
rooms and changes he did not expect to see—in particular a marriage (his uncle’s) that forestalls any return to the past.

In terms of social freedom, Charles is a work in progress at the end of the novel. During his dialogue with himself in the church, where he goes to sort out his thoughts after having become Sarah’s first lover, he identifies the age as his enemy, with its

iron certainties and rigid conventions, its repressed emotion and facetious humor, its cautious science and incautious religion . . .

That was what he had deceived him; and it was totally without love or freedom . . . but also without thought, without intention, without malice, because the deception was in its very nature; and it was not human, but a machine. (283)

Charles reads a social phenomenon as “nature,” something nonhuman that has no choice but to act the way it does. As Berger and Luckmann explain, there is nothing natural or “logical” about such realities; social reality is a purely human construct. Once it exists, however, reification of the social reality—perceiving it as if it were a “thing” existing independent of humans—is likely (89). In addition, Charles, as an amateur scientist, is in the habit of objectifying social realities (making them “things”) through scientific metaphors. So the idea that women were brought into creation for the purpose of being wives and mothers is a “natural law” (353–54), and the continuing descent of a “fallen woman” is determined by “gravity” (347). Perhaps if the oppressions of the age could be read as “nature,” as nonhuman, Charles might be seen as a budding existentialist, but even at this stage he has yet to shake off the Victorian conventions he has helped to perpetuate.

Sarah, then, has found an alternative symbolic universe, a social frame of reference within which she is able to choose an identity, but Charles has not. He has been forced to resign his identity as a Victorian “gentleman,” but what he will replace it with is not at all clear at the end of the novel. In fact, although Charles is an adult in years (32 at the beginning of the narrative, 34 at the end), the novel has many of the elements of the bildungsroman, or parodies of those elements, and given the many false steps he has made in his development, it is appropriate to see Charles as “starting over.” So, in the second ending, the narrator tells us, “It was as if he found himself reborn, though with all his adult faculties and memories. . . . all to be recommenced, all to be learnt again!” (365). Fowles
claims in his foreword to the revised edition of The Magus to have been surprised when a student at Reading University found similarities between The French Lieutenant's Woman and his favorite Dickens novel, Great Expectations, a classic bildungsroman, but one wonders how much of a surprise it really was. I mentioned above the parallel between Pip's imagined return to the forge and Charles's imagined return to Winsyatt; Fowles's novel is filled with reminders of the Dickens work, even if one discounts the most obvious one: the existence of two endings. The scene at the end of chapter 17, in which Mary holds Sam's hand to keep it from "trying to feel its way round her waist" (111) is taken directly from Dickens's description of the same interplay between Wemmick and Miss Skiffins. Connections with Great Expectations in particular may be less important, however, than the bildungsroman category it falls into: a type of narrative that, especially in its emphasis on escape from the effects of primary socialization (the influence of parents and other conservative institutions), deals heavily with the protagonist's attempt to gain social freedom.

The characteristics of this kind of novel are conveniently identified by Jerome Buckley (17–23). The four basic elements are the loss of the father (by being either orphaned or alienated), the flight from provinciality (small town to city—usually London), the making of a gentleman (a moral test, since it involves deciding what a "gentleman" is), and trial by love (another test, involving two love affairs: one dangerous and de-basing, the other rewarding). All of these elements can be seen easily in The French Lieutenant's Woman. The breakaway from the "father," or an equivalent representative of tradition or conservative values, is parodied in Charles's pseudo-Darwinism, which allows him to see himself as an advanced thinker, in opposition to the narrow-minded views of his time. His actual father, we are told, died of "pleasure" in 1856 (17), and Charles shares no values with the remaining father figure—the fox-hunting turned claret-swilling uncle from whom he stands to inherit wealth. The alienation between father and son in this subgenre is frequently a result of a hostile attitude on the part of the father toward the young hero's new ideas, which are often acquired through reading. One of Charles's faults, we are told, was a "sinister fondness for spending the afternoons at Winsyatt in the library, a room his uncle seldom if ever used" (17–18). The "immortal bustard," the rare bird Charles mistakenly shot one day on the estate, is a kind of objective correlative for their relationship, evok-
ing different emotions from each: Charles is angry with himself for having helped to nudge the species closer to extinction; his uncle is delighted and has the bird stuffed and placed in a glass case in his drawing room.

The journey from the country, where the protagonist feels stifled intellectually and socially, to the city, where, according to Buckley, the hero is both liberated and corrupted, is also parodied. No doubt Charles feels limited (or just bored) by the provinciality of Lyme, but his “liberation” at the club and the brothel in London is ironic to say the least, and the corruption goes without saying. Buckley notes that the city almost never lives up to the hero’s expectations of it, and that is certainly true of Charles’s visit to London. He abandons the brothel to go looking for Sarah and ends up with a prostitute (ironically named Sarah) who, on closer inspection, looks disappointingly unlike the original. The third element—the making of a gentleman—is parodied as the unmaking of a gentleman. Charles in fact is forced by Ernestina’s father to sign a document stating that he has “forfeited the right to be considered a gentleman” (324).

The two love affairs are with Ernestina and Sarah. The relationship with Ernestina could very well be described as “dangerous and debasing,” if our concern is with Charles’s social freedom, or establishment of a self-chosen identity. His marriage to her would be the most conventional of arrangements, suggested in his “dreamed” ending to the novel. As the narrative explains,

It was simple: one lived by irony and sentiment, one observed convention. What might have been was one more subject for detached and ironic observation, as was what might be. One surrendered, in other words; one learned to be what one was. (264)

The Ernestina connection could also be “debasing” in a comic sense (though not comic from Charles’s point of view) if he had to accept Mr. Freeman’s offer and go to work in “trade.” To the extent that Sarah saves Charles from that surrender and puts him on the road to potential freedom, she represents a “rewarding” relationship, though she is not a reward in herself.

At the end of the bildungsroman, the protagonist is almost always on the road to some undefined destination, with an old identity left be-
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hind and a new one still in the process of forming, and that is certainly an accurate description of Charles. There are other parallels with the form—notably the several mock “epiphanies” Charles experiences—and Fowles was quite familiar with most of the novels Buckley discusses. In fact, as he notes in the foreword to the revised Magus, he was teaching Great Expectations at the time he was writing The French Lieutenant’s Woman.

Most of these parallels are in the form of parody, and so they appear to bode ill for Charles’s development, but as parody they are of a piece with the game-playing antics of the narrator who claims to be author.6 In the larger context of the narrative and its model author,7 there is still hope for Charles, whose own socialization has become unsettled, and it is a measure of Sarah’s power to affect him that she has been the primary agent of that unsettling. He does not know what she is, but he knows that she is not what she is “supposed to be”—the governess, the fallen woman, or whatever other convenient categories society has assigned her to. And to adapt a phrase from Berger and Luckmann, if fallen women “can refuse to be what they are supposed to be, so can others; perhaps, so can oneself” (167). Unsuccessful socialization begins with such questionings and opens up the essential question, “Who am I?” Once that question has been raised, individualism, as defined above, becomes a possibility. Charles is not there yet when he has his dialogue with himself in the church, but he has taken the first steps.

The conditions necessary for Sarah’s social freedom are not available earlier in the novel, so she must rely on a kind of narrative freedom until they are, although the latter freedom remains vital to her even at the end of the narrative. It is much easier for an author to give existence to characters than to give them their narrative freedom. In a 1974 interview with James Campbell, Fowles states that he does try to give his characters freedom, “but only as a game, because pretending your characters are free can only be a game” (456). It is an important game in his third novel, however, which straddles two ages with different attitudes toward the novel, and in which Fowles, or at least the narrator, is concerned with Robbe-Grillet’s argument that the true modern novelist does not attempt to pass traditional characters off on the reader, and that authors who do so give us mere “puppets in which they themselves have ceased to believe” (28). The only way to avoid the charge of being a puppeteer (a designation Thackeray so cheerfully adopted) is somehow
to free the characters in this novel set in a time period conspicuous for the absence of narrative freedom.

The game in question can only be played successfully within what Italo Calvino calls the “written world” (104). Umberto Eco refers to this world in The Role of the Reader as the \( W_N \)—the narrative world, or the possible world imagined by the author (235). Within that world, the characters (including the narrator) also have imaginations, and therefore a certain creative freedom. The \( W_{Ne} \) is a subworld imagined, believed, or wished for by a character in the narrative, and there may be as many of these subworlds or “possible worlds” as there are characters. Naturally, these subworlds include the character’s beliefs or imaginations about what other characters wish or believe. Not all subworlds or possible worlds imagined by characters (or by the reader, whose imagined world based on the narrative Eco labels the \( W_R \)) can be actualized in the narrative, since some are bound to be contradictory. Those that are actualized are said to be “real” within the \( W_N \). In some cases, as I will illustrate later, a character may sense that the desired world is not logically (or narratively) possible but may want it enough to believe in it nevertheless. In The French Lieutenant’s Woman, the most positive creation of narrative freedom takes place through the character of Sarah Woodruff, who believes firmly in the possible world she imagines.

Sarah’s imaginative creation can best be understood in terms of some early descriptions of types of narrative. Stephen G. Nichols, in his foreword to Michael Riffaterre’s Fictional Truth, refers to the ninth-century Irish scholar/philosopher Johns Scottus Eriugena, who defined two kinds of master narratives: historical (or “mystery”) and symbolic. Recollected events in the world (history) are mysteries because they cannot be known completely. So, all historical narrative is allegory, an attempt to represent the “truth” of events, and not an (impossible) attempt to represent the full external reality of events. Words are allegories for events, not direct representations of them.

According to Eriugena (as summarized by Nichols), “symbols” are not narratives based on historical events but

discourses recounting things that did not happen as though they had happened for didactic purposes. ... symbolic narrative may invent scenarios at will for the purpose of conveying truths that transcend specific situations. (Riffaterre ix–x)
Symbolic narratives thus represent the more “philosophical” truth Aristotle assigns to poetry, as opposed to history. Using this terminology, Fowles’s novel might be described as “symbol” masquerading as “mystery.” He is at pains to historicize the novel with period quotations and references to Victorian thinkers, but in his control of the novel (sometimes exaggerated rather than deflected by the narrator) and especially in his manipulation of time to create the two endings, he abandons all pretense of writing “history” and identifies his purpose as clearly “symbolic.”

In Eriugena’s scheme, the service of higher truth “authorizes” fictional scenarios; therefore, the truth of a parable rests in its clear identification of itself as fiction. In the conflict between Charles and Sarah, Charles wonders whether he will ever understand Sarah’s parables (360). Sarah, in effect, declares herself a “fiction,” a work of art (that is, a free character), who fears being understood entirely, even by herself—perhaps because being understood is the equivalent of being “planned,” or dead. The narrator compares the openness of her “confession” to Charles that she gave herself to Varguennes, in fact, with Pre-Raphaelite art. Such openness, according to the narrator, is not necessarily more real than the “claustrophilia” of Victorian social behavior; it is instead more idealized, a “mythical world where naked beauty mattered more than naked truth” (144). Beauty and truth are thus separated in the narrator’s mind, as they were not for the Pre-Raphaelites or for Keats, or, apparently, for Sarah. Charles Scruggs, in an article on the two endings, also judges Sarah by the standard of “referentiality”—in his criticism of her he says “art is not life” (104)—and not by the standard of her own “fictional truth” (to borrow Riffaterre’s phrase). In doing so, Scruggs echoes not only the narrator but also Charles Smithson’s complaint to Sarah. In calling her actions “parables,” however, Charles recognizes the fictionality of her existence and the ultimate purpose of her being—to be a “truth” and not an appendage to some other being (a Victorian wife).

Paradoxically, Sarah must (in Charles’s and Scruggs’s eyes) dehumanize herself, reduce herself to a work of art, in her analogy, in order to demonstrate her human complexity. Charles’s objection—“Wait a minute! You can’t use art to explain life!” (my paraphrase)—suggests that he has not consulted his author before speaking. Sarah’s act of reducing herself to a work of art is her only path to freedom—at least until she poses for Rossetti and finds the “social” freedom described above. The alternative
is to be a “historical” Victorian woman like Mrs. Talbot, and there she would be trapped like one of Charles’s fossils. The idea of Sarah as a work of art—she is the title of the novel—constitutes a “subtext,” a unit of significance that, in this case, helps the reader understand the larger narrative. Reduction is the key. Things must be reduced so that we may understand them, and that is after all what a novel does in asserting the possible world of characters and events imagined by the author—a world set against a larger world of reference that is itself only a perspective the reader is led to take on the actual world, unknowable in its totality. The concrete reality of things and an understanding of them cannot be had simultaneously, just as, according to Eriugena, a fruitless attempt to reproduce exhaustively external reality will not lead to truth.  

Scruggs notes that one of Fowles’s favorite themes is the extent to which “our tendency to fictionalize our lives” determines the kinds of lives we lead (104). But in the novel, fictionalizing is not necessarily mere wishful thinking, and such an activity can also be a way of taking control of one’s life, and of asserting it as a life, with its own separateness and value. Sarah fictionalizes with a view to the future (and the present), not, as others so often do, to make her own past more acceptable to her. Her fictionalizing is not self-delusional, then, but rather conscious and purposeful. To the extent that this activity does determine the kinds of lives we lead, art is life. Scruggs reads Sarah’s ultimate desire as the domestic happiness she sees at the Talbot home, but as Sarah tells Charles, she also wants “intelligence, beauty, [and] learning” (138). She explains her affair with the French lieutenant to Charles as an “act of despair,” committed out of the need to be different. Unable to stand being what she was—a woman too intelligent and educated to be content with her station in life, and shut out from any higher place—she felt that it was better to be nothing (142). The “naked truth” that she did not surrender to Varguennes makes no difference. The effect is the same: she has indeed made herself “nothing.”

At the end of the novel, Sarah explains to Charles that she has two simple desires: to be who she is and to be happy as she is. She knows who she is, but this is not a complete knowledge, for her happiness depends, again, on not understanding herself (354). Even though Sarah has at last found a social environment or “symbolic universe” within which she can have an acceptable identity, she still needs to be “nothing” in a way, because being too clearly defined in any sense risks being deter-
mined. Stephen Jay Gould, in an argument against biological determinism (an important theme in Fowles generally), quotes a line from Simone de Beauvoir that is particularly appropriate here: “We are, as Simone de Beauvoir said, ‘l’être dont l’être est de n’être pas’—the being whose essence lies in having no essence” (259). Victorian society and Charles have been all too ready to assign Sarah an “essence” in the past, and here at the novel’s end, Charles terms her argument an “absurdity.” His statement “You refuse to entertain my proposal because I might bring you to understand yourself” (354) is precisely the point, if we take “understand” to mean define or limit. Charles cannot accept the idea that she is happy, partly because she will not “submit to reason” (354)—a phrase that reflects his continuing beliefs about male dominance—and partly because he does not want to believe she can be happy without him.

Charles himself may achieve a kind of “nothingness” by the end of the novel that could allow him to move forward, but first he must endure an ironic or mock version of this freedom. The narrator finds something “noble” in Charles’s rejection of a career in trade with Mr. Freeman, “a sense that the pursuit of money was an insufficient purpose in life.” As a result of his refusal, Charles gains “a queer sort of momentary self-respect in his nothingness, a sense that choosing to be nothing . . . was the last saving grace of a gentleman; his last freedom, almost” (233). In spite of the narrator’s approval, Charles’s choice of nothingness is nothing like Sarah’s. In fact, he is choosing to be “nothing” in much the same sense that Pip is educated to be nothing in Great Expectations. And he appears to sense this more clearly than the narrator, who is busy constructing a theory of an “ethical elite” that endures throughout history, and to which he thinks Charles belongs (Carlyle’s “captains” and Fowles’s “few”). Charles’s image of himself as the hedgehog is appropriate: “an animal whose only means of defense was to lie as if dead and erect its prickles, its aristocratic sensibilities” (231).

The narrator is offered as another source of narrative freedom, since he claims to be the creator of the other characters, and positioning an author figure within the “written world” of the narrative gives the characters an accessible “author” to rebel against. There is a great temptation to identify the narrator in The French Lieutenant’s Woman with Fowles himself, or at least to see the narrator as Fowles’s “surrogate.” But Fowles, who is sometimes a little too helpful in these matters, says in “Hardy and the Hag” that Charles is his surrogate (145). To further complicate

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things, McSweeney contends that Sarah serves as the narrator's surrogate, with whom she shares a “special bond” or “intimacy” (140), and in whose service she deceives Charles. Mahmoud Salami weighs in on the subject of surrogates by associating the narrator with Charles, both of whose “domination” Sarah must challenge to win her freedom; in this analysis, Charles appears to function as a surrogate for the narrator (Salami 118). The narrator himself teases the reader with “Perhaps Charles is myself disguised” (80). In any case, Italo Calvino issues a standard warning against equating the narrative voice with the author:

> The preliminary condition of any work of literature is that the person who is writing has to invent that first character, who is the author of the work. That a person puts his whole self into the work he is writing is something we often hear said, but it is never true. (111)

Fowles may occasionally agree with the narrator’s views in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, but whether he does or not is irrelevant to the reader’s engagement with the text and with the “author” it offers us.

This particular narrator—who–would-be-author seems to have a split personality, declaring himself in chapter 13 unable to read Sarah’s mind or follow her into her room because he is not, after all, an omniscient narrator of the Victorian persuasion, and then later ostentatiously putting Charles to sleep on the train so he can enter the car and observe him undetected. In the earlier chapter, he tells us that he had only been pretending to know his characters’ thoughts, but in the process of identifying the preceding chapters as a parody of Victorian narrative conventions, he reestablishes himself as “god” by insisting that all the other characters depend on his imagination for their lives. So when the narrator says, “I do not know [where Sarah comes from],” he means, “I have no historical data regarding her existence,” and he also means, by implication, “I can make something up about her, though, since I made her up.”

It is not normally a narrator’s function to remind readers that the other characters are fictional, but this one does it constantly. The chapter in which he gets into the train with Charles begins, appropriately, with an epigraph quoted from Through the Looking Glass in which Tweedle-dum and Tweedledee tell Alice that she is “only a sort of thing” in the King’s dream, and that if she awoke, she would “go out—bang!—just like a candle!” (315). Alice indignantly insists that she has a real existence
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apart from the King’s dream, but the story only represents the position all fictional characters are in. It is as if the narrator, like Alice, is trying too hard to reassure himself of his own independent existence—different from the other characters, who still, whatever part they play in determining their essence, owe their existence to him. The tension created by his attempts to maintain this distinction is not unlike that created by Charles’s attempts to maintain class distinction, not only between himself and his servant, Sam, but between himself and his betrothed, Ernestina. That tension and the narrator’s emotional involvement with the characters—from his caricatures of Mrs. Poulteney (social evil) and Aunt Tranter (social good) to his frequent condescension to Charles (“poor clown” [234]) to his deference to Sarah—ensure an atmosphere of uncertainty about his real authority.

Earlier, I referred to the characters in The French Lieutenant’s Woman as rebelling against their narrator/author, but that’s not quite accurate. The narrator tells the reader that “his” characters disobey him from time to time, but there is no evidence in the text that they are aware of the existence of the narrator, or aware that they themselves are “written.” Such awareness is flirted with in “The Enigma,” a story in The Ebony Tower, and explored further in Mantissa and A Maggot, but not in the earlier novel. Since he speaks of the novel his voice appears in, the narrator in The French Lieutenant’s Woman might appear to be an exception—and a verification of Fowles’s statement in “Notes on an Unfinished Novel” that he is less “purely fictional” than the other characters (18)—but he has no apparent awareness of being “written” himself. Charles and Sarah are aware only of rebelling against the tyranny of their own age, and haven’t a thought for the narrator—and in one sense at least what greater freedom from their “author” could there be than to be unaware of his existence?14 It is a rough equivalent of the atheism some existentialists regard as necessary to their own freedom.

Sarah is aware of the social freedom she has won, and is, as she tells Charles, happy. But what of Charles? Is a consciously chosen freedom beyond his grasp? Some critics assert that he attains a kind of existential freedom in the course of the narrative, or is at least on the way to attaining it. Tarbox describes Charles as “poised on an existential fulcrum” (61)—torn between life as a story with a familiar Victorian plot and life as contingency. Others believe that The French Lieutenant’s Woman actually moves beyond existentialism. Lance St. John Butler, in a 1991 essay,
suggests that Fowles's third novel reflects a movement from a search for personal authenticity (or existential freedom) to poststructuralism, in which freedom becomes a "chimera," or an "endlessly deferred goal." The double ending of the novel in particular is an act of postponing "the closure that brings meaning," a closure that would have no integrity in the poststructural world. In this later world, Butler says, "Authenticity proves to be unavailable," so humans pursuing freedom must settle for "inauthentic 'play' (acting)." Closure would end the "game" that provides a sense of freedom. So freedom is available, but within limits, and limits not so different from those within which it is available to fictional characters, or as Butler says, "We are all in this fiction together" (63–69).

Sartre's "authenticity," however, is constituted by action, not an idea or "meaning" that closure brings (or the absence of that meaning). In his essay "Existentialism Is a Humanism" Sartre remarks, "in reality and for the existentialist, there is no love apart from the deeds of love; no potentiality of love other than that which is manifested in loving" (359). Any attempt to shift responsibility for what one is (or is not) to some other entity—God, other humans, the environment (including, presumably, the supposed "indeterminacy" of language and meaning)—is the equivalent of pretending to be an en soi, a "thing" manipulated by forces beyond its control. This is what Charles proposes to do, and what he invites Sarah to do, in the first ending. In response to Sarah's assertions that she does not want to marry, that she is happy with her present life, and that she wishes to be what she is, not what a husband would expect her to become, Charles appeals to Victorian convention as an immutable force of nature:

"But you cannot reject the purpose for which woman was brought into creation. And for what? I say nothing against Mr. . . ." he gestured at the painting on the easel "... and his circle. But you cannot place serving them above the natural law." (353–54)

Whether Fowles was waverin in his belief in existentialism at the time of The French Lieutenant's Woman or not, there is no doubt that he continued to be interested in the modern development of the concept of self as a precondition of what we may still call "existential" awareness, even as late as his last novel, A Maggot. James Acheson argues that the concept of "authenticity" is "central to Fowles's novels" (8), even if existentialism as a philosophy does not continue to be after his third novel;
and Tarbox asserts that “existential authenticity” is the single most important theme in all of Fowles’s novels (4). A number of critics rely on the double ending as evidence of existential themes. McSweeney declares the two endings necessary in an “existential” text to avoid confirming belief in an “overall plan” in things (141). John Neary, echoing McSweeney, believes that the double ending undermines the narrative voice’s “godlike powers,” since a single ending would be “authoritative” and would not allow Charles his freedom. The absence of a single, clear ending makes the book “an existential affirmation—of freedom” (Neary 175). Acheson sees Charles as achieving a measure of authenticity in the second ending because there is no “providence” or “intervening god” there (45). Thomas Foster relies less on the double ending but insists that Charles confronts existentialist realities, even if unconsciously, and becomes “an outsider who must confront his own lack of authenticity” (72). All of these critics appear to hedge their bets on connecting Charles directly with existentialism: they locate existential freedom in the structure of the narrative rather than in the character, or if they see it in Charles, it is “unconscious” or a “measure” of authenticity, or yet to be fully realized. But if he cannot be an existential hero in the twentieth-century sense, Charles has at least cut himself off from any social “symbolic universe” and become a sort of latter-day “wanderer,” and if he has somehow cut himself off as well from his author (a more difficult task), then perhaps he has achieved something analogous to existential “freedom.” In this novel set in the late Victorian period, however, existential freedom necessarily piggybacks on narrative freedom, and it is difficult to separate the two.

The analogy between freeing oneself from one’s “author” and freedom from God has been thoroughly examined by other critics, but not the mechanism by which Charles attempts to gain that freedom. Charles cannot walk “out of the world of Victorian society and Victorian fiction into a twentieth-century reality,” as McSweeney puts it (142); he has to work within the “reality” of the narrative world, so his strategy must be fictional. In the two endings of _The French Lieutenant’s Woman_, leaving the child and the young woman who initially greets Charles out of consideration for now, there are only two “actors”—Charles and Sarah. The question is, how many “roles” are there—roles that the two characters want to play, or that each character wants the other to play, or that the reader wants them to play, or anticipates that they will play? In the first
ending, as we have seen, Charles is anticipating clearly defined roles for himself and Sarah. He will be the shining knight rescuing the damsel in distress; she will be the “fallen woman” raised up again by his magnanimity. She must be a governess—the only respectable role she could have, according to his thinking. Charles is taking what Eco calls “inferential walks” (Role 32), making projections about character development and future events based on texts he is familiar with, including the text of Victorian society. From the existential point of view, then, Charles is less than “authentic” or “free” in the first ending, though he may be happier. Sarah, it could be argued, is also not existentially “authentic” in the first ending, not because she falls back on accepted (or expected) roles but because she has achieved a preexistential form of individuality and freedom, and is apparently satisfied with it. In the world of the late 1860s, one “finds” an identity in a symbolic universe, and nowhere else. That’s why Sarah has to be a “nothing” until she finds an alternative social group, but she cannot be content being a nothing permanently. In the first ending, Charles, still mired in the gender-based assumptions of his time, has to borrow freedom from Sarah, having achieved none of his own, and perhaps the unsatisfactory nature of that conclusion (unsatisfactory to Charles or his “author”) makes the second ending necessary. The second ending is also necessarily “open” compared with the first because there are no apparent options for Charles.

The second ending presents the reader with, supposedly, a different Sarah from the first—but is she really different? There is no textual evidence for it. There is only evidence that Charles’s view of her has changed. Sarah is what she is by virtue of the development of her character in the fabula. Charles, in his turn, has become “nothing” in the sense that the fabula has not ultimately defined him, reversing the narrator’s repeated demonstrations (or assertions) that he “knows” Charles in a way he does not know Sarah. In a sense, there are not two endings; there are two characters named Charles. The first ending vindicates Sarah, but not Charles. In the second ending, Charles attempts to vindicate himself. If he is attempting to do so by attacking Sarah, then it is a false justification (certainly in existential terms). But he may be attempting a true assertion of fictional/existential freedom by rejecting the playing of intertextual roles entirely. As Eco defines them, such roles are precisely intertextual, patterns or archetypes of the sort that Propp examined in Morphology of the Folktale (Role 213). In Charles’s break for freedom, Sa-
rah (the heroine in the “reality” of the fabula) becomes, in the second ending, a villainess (a temptress—an intertextual role if ever there was one). But she becomes so only insofar as the wishes or beliefs of Charles are concerned. She is what Charles needs her to be to allow him to escape roles. Of course, this means that any relationship with her must be sacrificed, but that is the only way Charles can see to attain freedom for himself. It is not merely the prospect of becoming the “starched soupi-
rant, the pet donkey” (364) that he worries about. It is any defined role. Tarbox says existential authenticity is achieved by seeing through the “roles we all play in ordinary life” (4), and that is certainly an element of what Camus calls the “awakening” in The Myth of Sisyphus. And in the “ordi-
nary life” of the narrative world, the “roles we all play” are the intertext-
ual archetypes referred to above. Escaping those roles entirely requires a radical act of the imagination. To adapt a statement from Eco’s analysis of Alphonse Allais’s Un drame bien parisien, Charles’s belief about Sarah in the second ending “acquires a sort of performative value; [he] does things with words” (Role 213). In this respect, Charles imitates the narrator in his desire to become Sarah’s “author.” This view of him also makes sense in that he assumes in the second ending the same “superiority” to her (364) that the narrator has demonstrated toward Charles.

In Allais’s text, the character who wants to imagine another charac-
ter a certain way, as her hero rather than the villain who is about to strike her, “knows that she wants what is logically (or narratively) im-
possible. But since she wants it she believes that this contradiction is pos-
sible” (Eco, Role 213). In a similar way, Charles wants to believe what is narratively impossible, and for that reason, readers are not convinced by his condemnation of Sarah in the second ending. It is much too harsh, and nothing in the narrative that precedes it leads logically to it. How-
ever much of a “mystery” the narrator has made of her through dis-
course, and Charles has made of her through intertextual guesses and false assumptions, we know her well enough as readers (no doubt partly through our own intertextual frames) to find Charles’s judgment false. Tarbox finds the second ending “ostentatiously bleak” (84), and I think a large part of that bleakness is the portrait of Sarah, but we have to re-
member that it is Charles’s portrait, and that there is method to his ap-
parent madness.15

So it is the absence of a role that defines Charles as a character moving toward “existential” freedom. In that sense, Sarah has gone through a sim-
ilar stage in her development, becoming a “nothing” for a time as a way of rejecting what was available to her as an identity. The fact that she has accepted an alternative identity by the novel’s end (either one) indicates that there are different kinds of “freedom” on the table in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. Whether Fowles meant to value one kind over another could presumably be answered by the author, but whether the narrative or its model author did is another question. Acheson defines existential authenticity as “the process by which the individual exchanges his conventional ideas and attitudes for ones that are consistent with the person he or she really is” (x). Sartre’s idea of individual freedom, however, is contained in the phrase “existence precedes essence”—which implies the freedom to become what one chooses, and not that there is a “real self” waiting to be uncovered. When Sarah tells Charles, “I am at last arrived, or so it seems to me, where I belong” (353), she appears to have discovered that “real self,” but Charles does not seem to have such an identity waiting for him. What he might choose can only be guessed at, by the narrator or anyone else, but for Sartre, “potentiality” is not enough. One of the great human illusions is what one “could have been,” but for circumstances (358–59). The value of Sartre’s kind of existential freedom in the novel, therefore, could only be demonstrated conclusively by the further adventures of Charles, who must move on from nothingness to some identity through actions, just as the “freedom” won by Stephen Dedalus at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist* can only be evaluated by examining his further adventures in *Ulysses*—not an especially promising parallel. Perhaps the best thing Charles’s author could have done for him was to leave his future open, a future that is at least, as Sartre puts it, “virgin” (354).

Notes

1. I am not treating Charles’s imagined conclusion in chapter 44 as an ending, since it is dispensed with in the narrative. The endings in chapters 60 and 61 remain as options for the reader or, perhaps better, as a sort of matter and anti-matter. Nothing in the narrative dispenses with either of them.

2. Mahmoud Salami makes a distinction between the narrator and a special persona “constructed” by the narrator to fill the role of author. I will discuss this issue later.
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3. Initially in a society, humans habitualize their repeated activities. When these habitual activities are recognized as shared among members of a social group, they are “typified” and become institutions. Such institutions “control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct” (Berger and Luckmann 55). With the addition of a second generation, these institutions become “historical.” Where before they were embodied in the individuals who established them, for the children of these individuals they are experienced as existing separately, as “possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact” (58). As Berger and Luckmann put it, the real relationship between man and his world is reversed in consciousness. Man, the producer of a world, is apprehended as its product. . . .

Even while apprehending the world in reified terms, man continues to produce it. That is, man is capable paradoxically of producing a reality that denies him. (89)

The symbolic universe legitimates the institutional order by integrating all its sectors in an “all-embracing frame of reference, which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the word, because all human experience can now be conceived as taking place within it” (96).


5. Foster, as an instance, describes Sarah as a sort of unwitting existentialist heroine:

Although she cannot recognize them . . . she exhibits the symptoms of existentialism as delineated by Sartre and Camus. . . . Her life is without essential meaning, and ultimately she must take charge of her life and invest it with meaning, must create her being as she goes. (72)

But an existentialist heroine must, by definition, recognize the symptoms and be prepared to create her being in that vacuum; and Sarah is unable to find meaning in her life until she discovers a community that will support it.

6. Tarbox argues that the narrator is deceptive, leading the reader down blind alleys and undermining his own integrity. He is not, by his own admission, anything like Wayne Booth’s “implied author” (68, 82). Booth warns us in The Rhetoric of Fiction, in fact, that a narrator is rarely if ever to be confused with the implied author, who is a “core of norms and choices” in the narrative. We “infer” this figure, to the extent it can be identified as a figure at all, from what we are given to read, including, presumably, the narrator and his discourse (74–75).
7. The concept of the “model author” (14–15) is described in Umberto Eco’s *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. It bears some resemblance to Booth’s implied author. Both expressions are identified with the strategies of the narrative more than with any particular voice in it, although Eco appears more willing to allow that his model author may be the “I” in some (usually “naive”) narratives. Booth lays emphasis on the relationship that may develop between the reader and the narrator as a representative of the implied author, particularly in a novel like *Tom Jones*, where the narrator seems to establish a more intimate relationship with the reader than with the characters in the story. For Eco, the important relationship is between the model author, however it manifests itself, and the “model reader,” a type the text itself is intended to create. The model reader is “born,” in a sense, with the text and inherits what freedom of interpretation it gives him or her like a genetic code.

8. Eco refers to this world as the *fabula*, which he defines in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* as the events of the story in chronological order, as distinct from plot (the rearrangement of the order of events) and discourse (33–35).

9. The truth of one of the most wonderful passages in modern literature is reflected here. In part 3 of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe remembers the Rayleys, Paul and Minta, in a series of brief, vividly realized scenes. The first-time reader is completely taken in, until Lily reveals what she is up to: “And this, Lily thought . . . this making up scenes about them, is what we call ‘knowing’ people. . . . Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same” (172–73).

10. Eco says that in reading and interpreting a text, we can only have a “world structure” that is a *perspective* we take on the totality of the world of reference. The totality of the world of reference itself is unattainable (*Role* 228).

11. On the subject of reducing reality to understand it, the irrepressibly intertextual Fowles may well have had in mind Lily Briscoe’s postimpressionist painting in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. Lily must reduce the scene she is painting—Mrs. Ramsay reading to her son James—to a geometric shape if she is to deal with the “mystery” of Mrs. Ramsay and the otherwise unmanageable emotional relationship she has with her. The resolution of that relationship and the completion of her painting coincide with her “vision.” Her friend William Banks prefers representational art, and his objection to Lily’s work—that “no one could tell it for a human shape” and that “objects of universal veneration” were “reduced” in it to a “purple shadow” (52–53)—essentially mirrors Charles’s objections to Sarah and her way of dealing with reality by recreating it.
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12. The narrator romanticizes medieval knights, Victorian gentlemen, and twentieth-century computer scientists, all of whom he insists “reject the notion of possession as the purpose of life” (233–34) in much the same way as Carlyle romanticized social stability in the Middle Ages. As a matter of fact, Charles does not reject the notion of possession of Winsyatt, and modern computer scientists have shown no tendency to reject “high profit at all costs” or “the right to dictate the speed of progress.” And, contrary to some courtly romance, medieval knights did not always pass up “possessing” a woman’s body.

13. This is the kind of freedom Fowles had seen in Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*, although there the characters are free from their equally written-world author, Dermot Trellis, only when he falls asleep. Fowles examines this situation again in *Mantissa*, in which the character Erato tells her author, Miles, that she can only speak the lines he gives her, but later negotiates an agreement that he will “consult” with her on future scenes she must act (86, 101). Naturally, Miles is in the same position: he can only give the lines to Erato that his own author gives to him. At the level of Eco’s “empirical” author, the fix is always in.

14. One might argue that all fictional characters are free in this sense, but the situation of an “author” in the text is a relatively special case. Charles and Sarah here stand in marked contrast to the characters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, who are fully aware that their author, Trellis, tyrannizes over them, and who rebel against him consciously.

15. Charles’s action here should be distinguished from his earlier stereotyping of Sarah, which in the context of Victorian society or in familiar narratives would be all too possible, narratively or logically. As Eco points out in his description of the relationship between “model authors” and “model readers,” readers tend to want to help the author construct a coherent universe, to “make sense” of the text, and will go out of their way to do so—generating imaginary futures, for instance, based on information they have so far been given, or based on other texts in their “encyclopedia”—their knowledge of situations from real life or other narratives (*Role* 205). Charles must break free of that coherent narrative, based as it is on archetypal roles. Ironically, he must use such an archetype (the transformation of Sarah into a temptress) to do it, but it is imported from an incompatible narrative, breaking the coherence.
Works cited


