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AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH TO FREEDOM OF CHOICE
IN
JOHN FOWLES'S *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*


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Title of the Thesis : **AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH TO FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN JOHN FOWLES'S *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN***

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ABSTRACT

AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH TO FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN JOHN FOWLES'S *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*

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This thesis concerns itself with a comprehensive analysis of John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* with a special focus on the philosophy of existentialism. The main argument of this study is that, as a typical example of postmodern fiction, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* explores the idea of existential freedom in a historical perspective. The study also reveals Fowles's conviction that existential freedom is a significant challenge that confronts the individual with the need to prove his existence. Fowles presents existential freedom throughout the narrative process and the conduct of the employed narrator and the characters. Fowles puts the readers in a position where they can exercise freedom of choice. The study proves that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a postmodern novel though, on the surface, it looks like a Victorian novel. This study explains the basic elements that make the novel a distinctively postmodern work. Furthermore, this thesis aims to show that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* reflects a worldview which challenges the traditional narrative techniques. The study also illustrates the way Fowles criticizes and breaks up the established methods of the traditional narrative style.

Keywords: John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Existentialism, Freedom of Choice, Postmodernism, Victorianism, Narrative techniques.

ÖZ

JOHN FOWLES, *FRANSIZ TEĞMENIN KADINI'NINDAKI* ŞEÇME
ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜNE BİR VAROLUŞÇU YAKLAŞIM

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Bu tezin amacı John Fowles'un Fransız Teğmenin Kadını adlı romanının varoluşçuluk felsefesi altında kapsamlı incelenmesidir. Bu çalışmanın temel argümanı post modern romanın özgün bir örneği olarak Fransız Teğmenin Kadını romanı tarihsel görüş içerisinde varoluşsal özgürlük fikrini keşfetmesidir. Bu çalışma ayrıca Fowles'un varoluşsal özgürlüğün bireyin varlığını kanıtlamada karşılaştığı önemli bir sorun olduğu hakkındaki görüşünü ortaya koymaktadır. Fowles anlatım sürecinde varoluşsal özgürlüğü ve anlatıcının ve karakterlerin tavırlarını sunar. Fowles okuyucuyu seçme özgürlüğünü kullanacağı bir pozisyona koyar. Çalışma Fransız Teğmenin Kadını post modern bir roman olmasına rağmen, ilk bakışta Viktoryen bir roman gibi görüldüğünü kanıtlar. Bu çalışma bir romanı ayırıcı bir şekilde postmodern bir eser yapan temel unsurları açıklar. Ayriyetten bu tez çalışması Fransız Teğmenin Kadını geleneksel anlatı tekniklerini sorgulayan bir dünya görüşünü göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma Fowles'un geleneksel anlatının yerleşik methodlarını eleştirisini ve yıkışını da tanımlamaktadır.

AnahtarKelimeler: Jon Fowles, Fransız Teğmenin Kadını, Varoluşçuluk, Seçme Özgürlüğü, Post Modernizm, Viktoryanizm, Anlatı Teknikleri.

DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents,
Maysoon and Taha*

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INTRODUCTION

John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is concerned with the theme of freedom of choice in existentialist sense, as clearly observed in the demeanor of the narrator, the characters and the readers, which lead to infinite possibilities and unpredictable consequences. Though published in 1969, the novel builds around the events that occur in 1869. In fact, Fowles sets the story a century before the time of writing it. The story develops around the incidents that take place in Lyme Regis, Dorset, in Victorian England in the late 1860's. On the surface, the story appears to be a simple conventional love story between a rich Victorian man Charles Smithson and a seemingly fallen woman Sarah Woodruff. In his *Notes on an Unfinished Novel*, Fowles says "this image [of Sarah Woodruff] rose in my mind one morning when I was still in bed half asleep" (Bradbury, 1977: 136). When the image of Sarah comes to Fowles's mind, he falls in love with her, just as Charles does. As Katherine Tarbox points out, "So into Fowles's life she came, in much the same way she came to Smithson's: commanding undivided interest and attention, and pushing rivals aside with a look" (Tarbox, 1988: 60).

Though written in the twentieth century, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has certain features that make it look like a novel written during the Victorian period. This is primarily because the novel was influenced by the conventions of novel-writing in the nineteenth century. As Bernard Bergonzi points out, "No matter how unflinchingly the novelist may try to deal with wholly new kinds of experience, he can't escape being influenced by the novels that have been written before him" (Bergonzi, 1970: 20). However, the novel has certain characteristics that set it apart from a conventional romantic story. Fowles's aim is not to tell the reader a story involving a couple living in Victorian era. Rather, he wants to portray various aspects of the Victorian society such as social and religious norms, moral values, class struggle, sexuality, prostitution as well as people and their attitudes to these

standards. Therefore, he “use sex to celebrate a radical freedom from older novelistic conventions and from existential restraints on the individual” (John Neary, 1992: 162). In order to present this picture to the reader, Fowles employs various types of postmodern techniques, which are clearly observed in the narrative process of the novel. In order to understand the novel and its narrative techniques, the reader must have some idea about what postmodernism is.

Postmodernism is the name given to a trend that became highly popular toward the end of the twentieth century. From the name, it is obvious that this trend followed the period of ‘Modernism’. Etymologically, the term postmodernism is composed of two words: ‘Post’, which in Latin means ‘behind’ or ‘after’, and ‘modernism’, which refers to the modern period. Postmodernism emerged as a reaction against the practices and principles of the movement that preceded it. In the extract below, David Galens comments on the distinctive features of postmodernism:

Writing from 1960s onwards characterized by experimentation and continuing to apply some of the fundamentals of modernism, which included existentialism and alienation. Postmodernists have gone a step further in the rejection of tradition begun with the modernists by also rejecting traditional forms, preferring anti-novel over the novel and the anti-hero over the hero. Postmodern writers include Alain Robbe-Grillet, Thomas Pynchon, Margaret Drabble, John Fowles, Adolfo Bioy-Casares, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. (Galens, 2009: 897)

In fact, postmodernism stands against nationalism, which it often regards as the cause of war and racism. This trend also refuses most traditional and religious values and norms. Postmodernism differs from the previous literary movements in that it challenges the fundamental principles and assumptions of the trends that preceded it. As Galens puts it, “What sets postmodernism apart from its predecessors is the reaction of its practitioners to rational, science, and historical aspects of the modern age” (Galens, 2009: 615). Postmodernism refers to a period when almost everything went through a change in form and style. The trend rejects the traditional techniques commonly used in literature, architecture, music, art, theatre, dance and

even photography. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon defines the term postmodernism as:

A contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges –be it in architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or historiography. (Hutcheon, 1988: 3)

The term “postmodernism” does not have a precise definition: “Postmodernism is difficult to define, because to define it would violate the postmodernist’s premise that no definite terms, boundaries, or absolute truth exist” (AllAboutPhilosophy.org, 2002). Postmodernism has effected significant changes in many fields of study. Thinkers and critics come up with different definitions of this term because the changes have taken place in a wide variety of fields such as social sciences, architecture, philosophy and literature. Besides, it is hard to set a starting point for postmodernism. These are the reasons why postmodernism has no exact definition: “That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015: 1). However, there have been various attempts by some critics to define postmodernism. Among them is the definition made by Mary Klages, who defines postmodernism as:

A complicate term, or set of ideas, one that has only emerged as an era of academic study since the mid-1980s. Postmodernism is hard to define, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. It is hard to locate it temporally or historically, because it’s not clear exactly when postmodernism begins. (Klages, 2014: 1)

In order to get a better understanding of a specific movement in literature from a historical perspective, one should have an idea about the features of the previous movements. Understanding modernism will help clarify the process of

change that postmodernism has gone through so far, because the latter was built upon the former. Commenting on modernism from a historical perspective, M.H. Abrams says, “The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and style of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the present century, but especially after World War I (1914–18)” (Abrams, 1999: 167). In other words, modernism rejects the Victorian style of art, literature, music, dance, and architecture and creates its own way. Postmodernism also rejects the conventional forms and techniques, but in a different way from what modernism does. While it is possible to consider postmodernism as a continuation of the experimentation that characterizes the period of modernism, the former tries to break up the modernist methods of composing literature and other arts. As Abrams points out, “Postmodernism . . . involves diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional” (Abrams, 1999: 168). Concerning literature, writers of postmodernism want to come up with something different from what has been done in the previous movements. John Fowles’s novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is a good example of the kind of fiction in which postmodern writers experiment with new techniques and approaches in their works. What makes this novel particularly interesting is the fact that Fowles comes up with new narrative techniques by which he breaks the traditional patterns of narration. Chapter Three of this thesis provides further insight into this subject.

John Robert Fowles (1926 – 2005) is one of the major postmodernist writers whose works concentrate on existentialist thought. In fact, existential freedom is the main theme in most of Fowles’s novels. As Mahmoud Salami points out, “Fowles’s fiction is in fact an embodiment of freedom, of individuality, and of existentialism” (Salami, 1992: 13). In a conversation about his childhood, Fowles said, “I was brought up in an intensely conventional suburb not far from London by, in social terms, conventional parents. I have tried to escape ever since, and have admired the unconventional, the breaker of rules” (Dianne L. Vipond, 1999: 193). These words reveal Fowles’s refusal to conform to the requirements and standards of his society. As John Sutherland says, “Fowles came to despise his father as ‘a Victorian rabbit’ and his mother as a ‘Victorian vegetable’. . . He would get sweet revenge on Victorian England in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*” (Sutherland, 2011: 619). The

nicknames Fowles gives to his parents reveal his critical attitude towards the Victorian society. He seems to have suffered his parents' oppression, for they represented a serious threat to his freedom. This is why he was always in favor of an unconventional life and wished to be the breaker of rules. Fowles wanted to set himself free from the rigid rules and restraints of the society, and he had a strong desire to enjoy full freedom in shaping the course of his life.

After World War II, Fowles joined Oxford University, and studied French and German for four years. Consequently, he was highly influenced by the French existentialism of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir. In his interview with James Campbell, Fowles says:

I'm interested in the side of existentialism which deals with freedom: the business of whether we do have freedom, whether we do have free will, to what extent you can change your life, choose yourself, and all the rest of it. Most of my major characters have been involved in this Sartrean concept of authenticity and inauthenticity. (Vipond, 1999: 42)

Fowles believes that having freedom is the way in which the individuals achieve meaning for their lives and self-construction. In his meeting with Daniel Halpern, Fowles stated, "Freedom, yes. How you achieve freedom. That obsesses me. All my books are about that. The question is, is there really free will? Can we choose freely? Can we act freely? Can we *choose*? How do we do it?" (Vipond, 1999: 14). This confirms the idea that the key motif of John Fowles's fiction is existential freedom. In his preface to the 1968 edition, Fowles states, "My chief concern, in *The Aristos*, is to preserve the freedom of the individual against all those pressures-to-conform that threaten our century" (Fowles, 2010). Fowles wants to convey the idea that freedom is the ultimate means by which one can escape from the society's limits and pressures as well as from the threat of being imprisoned in a cage-like life. To quote Noakes and Reynolds on the subject:

Fowles described existentialism as 'the great individualist philosophy', and its key concept as the 'authenticity' of the individual – which he interprets less as an external moral

ideal and more as a person's ability to resist social pressure, to control his or her own life, to exercise free will. (Noakes and Reynolds, 2003: 173)

On the surface, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* appears to be a novel that involves certain elements of the Victorian fiction. As Bran Nicol explains:

Fowles's interrogation of the Victorian world from the perspective of existentialism makes *The French Lieutenant's Woman* a fascinating and valid analysis of the social and personal dilemmas faced by the Victorians: love, freedom, the emerging middle class. (Nicol, 2009: 111)

Fowles chooses to imitate the Victorian style of fiction in order to convey the principles of existentialism in a Victorian setting. To quote Linda Hutcheon, "Fowles was attracted to the English Victorian age, he claims, not because of its differences from the present, but because it too was 'highly existentialist, in many of its personal dilemmas'" (Hutcheon, 1980: 61). Fowles also uses the Victorian narrative style and breaks it up only to show his own style. He differentiates his own narrative by using a postmodern narrator who has freedom in the narrative process, while at the same time granting freedom both to his characters and readers. Fowles uses the typical Victorian narrative style up to Chapter 12 of the novel, but then shifts to the modern narrative technique from Chapter 13 onwards. Within this context, Salami says:

This novel has received considerable praise and criticism for its themes of Victorianism and modernism, its violation of conventional rules of narrative, and probably most of all, for its overt authorial intrusions in the narrative, which has frequently been misinterpreted by critics. But what is especially important in this novel, and what remains suspended, is the element of existential freedom for human beings as overshadowed by the narrative structure of the text. (Salami, 1992: 104)

The multiple narrative style of the novel – Victorian and postmodern – helps it to express various themes. In fact, the time gap between the setting of the story

(Victorian) and its narrative time (postmodern) leads the author to use two narrative styles. Within these styles, the author uses the authorial intrusions. These features attract the critics' attentions, and make the novel interesting for the analysis. Fowles employs this multiple narrative techniques only to represent his belief in existential freedom, which is observed in the text.

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is regarded as a representative existentialist novel in contemporary British literature. The novel involves themes that are closely associated with existentialism, Victorianism and postmodernism. The theme of existential freedom offered to the narrator, the characters and the reader makes the novel an existentialist one. Fowles donates to his narrator freedom of choice; and the narrator, in turn, grants the characters and readers the right to choose. Existential freedom is clearly observed in the narrative process as well as in the characters' behaviors. Fowles's narrator uses his freedom throughout the process of arranging the events of the story. In order to confirm his belief in freedom, the narrator delegates part of his own freedom to the characters he portrays. As he does so, the reader, too, is granted the freedom to construct some events of the story. Accordingly, this thesis will be concerned with the idea of existential freedom seen in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

In Chapter One, the theory of existentialism will be discussed, with special focus on the need of the individual for freedom of choice. References will be made to the prominent writers of existentialism and their perspective on existential freedom. In view of the principles of existentialist thought, an attempt will be made to explain how vital it is for the individual to have freedom of choice. This study will also shed light on the consequences of having freedom.

In Chapter Two, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* will be studied as a Victorian novel in which the ideas of existential thought find reflection. Within this framework, the existential freedom of the main characters, Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff, will be discussed in detail. These characters try to exercise their freedom of choice within the constraints of the Victorian era. Specifically, this chapter will be concerned with the stages that the characters go through as they attempt to construct an identity.

Chapter Three mainly focuses on the idea of existential freedom reflected in the narrative process, which is one of the reasons why the novel is considered a postmodernist one. Within this context, this chapter involves a comprehensive discussion of the way Fowles grants his narrator freedom of choice, as well as how the narrator grants his characters part of his freedom of choice. Also, an attempt will be made to explain the illusory freedom, which causes the characters to seem to be free of the narrator's authority. The last part of this chapter will focus on the special kind of freedom the reader is given by the narrator, which is one of the features that make it a postmodern work.

CHAPTER ONE

EXISTENTIALISM

In daily life, everyone tries hard to become the best that they are capable of becoming. People set similar goals for themselves, but everyone follow a different path to achieve their goals. Hence, the results they achieve are different. Just as there are no two persons with an identical fingerprint, no two persons have the same way of life. Some have acquired values from societies to follow, and some follow a set of religious features, and some use different approaches of their own, to reach a certain level of moral excellence. Near the end of the nineteenth century, a philosophical theory of life has emerged in order to achieve that level. This theory or movement is called “Existentialism”. There are many dictionary definitions of this term, and each of them carries some aspects of truth, but there is no accurate one for its complex ideas. However, a general conception can be given that this philosophy is mainly concerned with the nature of human existence, and that human beings are free to choose, and responsible for the choices they make. Existentialism can be defined in terminological and philosophical terms.

Terminologically, existentialism is derived from the word “Existence”. Stephen Michelman states, “In Latin and in Greek, ‘to exist’ means ‘to stand outside of’” (Michelman, 2008: 133). The existence of something means that this thing stands out of itself. It is a fact that thing is present in the world as a real thing. To simplify it, we can say that existence refers to a concrete entity. Philosophically, existentialism is opposed to the theory of “rationalism”, which holds the insight that opinion and action should be based on reason rather than personal experiences, and it focuses on an objective conception of truth. Using reason means to be an observer and detached from whatever you think of, and people are not detached from their existence. Therefore, existentialism focuses on subjective conception of truth and personal experiences.

Existentialism is concerned with the subjective or personal aspects of existence. It does not study existing things like table, chair, or human, it rather studies the existence itself. Existentialism is defined as:

A 20th century philosophy concerned with human existence, finding self, and the meaning of life through free will, choice, and personal responsibilities. The belief that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs, and outlook without the help of laws, ethnic rules, or traditions.
(Allaboutphilosophy.org 2002)

Existentialism then, is the philosophy which stresses the importance of human existence and the purpose of our existence on earth. It also searches the meaning of life, and in which way we are supposed to act when we do not have a guidebook. Besides, it concentrates on human experience and moods. Existentialists argue that moods are the main elements that can give a better understanding of how human existence is constructed, because they are experienced from the inside of him. As Leonard Clark says, “The existentialists think that allowing your emotions and feelings to explain reality is important when trying to find answers to the meaning of life” (Clark, 2012: xxii). These existentialists give feelings and moods special importance as seen in the individual’s participation in the world. For instance, there are many situations that cause dread and anxiety, and these feelings, according to most existentialists, are the starting point for any kind of research related to existentialist thought. Christopher Panza and Gregory Gale point out, “Existentialism is at odds with most philosophy because it favors the use of emotions and feelings as vehicles for disclosing important insights into the nature of life” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 51). The most important feeling, according to the existentialists, is anxiety, which is described in Martin Hiedegger’s *Being and Nothingness* as “a fundamental mood that reveals deep truth about the human being” (Michelman, 2008: 7). Existentialists, according to Panza and Gale, “believe that anxiety reveals that people are individual, that a kind of nothingness lies at the heart of themselves and the world, and they’re ultimately free as a consequence” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 48).

This feeling proves that the individual is free to choose, and he or she, is waiting for the outcome of his/her choice.

Existentialism mainly focuses on the individual existence, individual freedom, individual responsibility; as well as the consequences of freedom and responsibility such as dread and anguish. These concerns show that the main themes of existentialism are: the focus on the concrete existence of the individual, the emphasis on the freedom of choice, existence before essence, moral individualism, anguish and subjectivity.

There are several kinds of existentialism, two of them being “Atheist Existentialism” and the “Christian Existentialism”. Both types of existentialism agree on the idea that existence comes before essence. In his work titled *Existentialism is Humanism* Jean-Paul Sartre maintains:

There are two kinds of existentialists: on one hand, the Christians, amongst whom I would include Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholic; and on the other, the atheistic existentialists, amongst whom we should place Heidegger, as well as the French existentialists, and myself. What they have in common is simply their belief that *existence* comes before *essence*. (Sartre, 2007: 20)

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s famous slogan “God is dead” can be considered as the starting point of atheistic existentialism. This type of Existentialism, says Galens, “seems to recommend abandonment any belief in God because the concept of God contradicts the idea of personal responsibility that is at the center of the philosophy” (Galens, 2009: 228). According to atheistic existentialists, the death of God means that there is no God to construct essence for them. As Panza and Gale put it, “The death of God means human beings no longer have a ready source of values” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 26). This conception supports the idea that existence comes before essence. This means that humans must construct their own essence by what they choose. Feodor Dostoevsky maintains, “If God did not exist, everything would be permissible” (qtd. in Sartre, 2007: 22). This means that the death of God gives freedom of choice to the individual. There is no divine

law or religious set of features that determine the individual choice, or guide him/her to the right path. As a result, he or she will have to bear the responsibility of their choice for creating their identity. Within this subject, Galens points out:

Followers of atheistic existentialism believe that the individual is alone in a godless universe and that the basic human condition is one of suffering and loneliness. Nevertheless, because there are no fixed values, individuals also can create their own characters – indeed, they can shape themselves – through the exercise of free will. (Galens, 2009: 884)

Among the major atheistic existentialists are Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976), who is regarded as the founding figure of this kind of existentialism (2008, 5), Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir (1908 - 86), and Albert Camus (1913 - 60).

The Christian existentialism shares most of the ideas associated with atheist existentialism. It also focuses on the existence of individual, the freedom of individual and the responsibility that individual must bear. As Ana-Teresa Tymieniecka puts it, “The basic insight of existentialist thought that is common to all the thinkers we have considered, atheistic and Christians alike, is that existence is given without essential values inscribed in it prior to the exercise of human freedom” (Tymieniecka, 2009: 389). However, the Christian existentialism contradicts the atheist existentialism in the point that there is a God, and the individual must totally submit him/herself to God without reasoning. Christian existentialist, says Galens, “believe that only in God may people find freedom from life’s anguish” (Galens, 2009: 884). This means that there must be an absolute faith in God and God’s love and wisdom. That faith must be independent of any kind of philosophy. As Michelman argues, “The central concern of existentialists, both Christian and Jewish, is the human experience of the divine, in contrast to the theological arguments about God’s nature or God’s existence, or questions of religious doctrine” (Michelman, 2008: 283). The existential writers of this kind combine existentialism with religious feelings. The main figures of religious or Christian existentialism are Soren

Kierkegaard (1813 - 55), Karl Jasper (1883 - 1969), and Gabriel Marcel (1889 - 1973).

1.1. Notions of Existentialism

The main focus of existentialism is the study of the individual existence. However, “Being” cannot be studied objectively, because it is shown and felt by the individual through his/her own experiences. This is why existentialists put their emphasis on existence as the main and central problem of their philosophy. The French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre’s slogan “existence precedes essence” can be best seen as the key point where existentialists have affiliated themselves with existentialism. Other existing things like table and chair are created for a special purpose, which means that there is an essence and meaning for their existence. Yet, human being has no pre-essence to be created. The human being as a being is nothing. In the words of Wesley Barnes, “Existentialism is that view of the nature of man which asserts that there is no objective oral or written history of past natural and human events which exists or which he must consider” (Barnes, 1968: 4).

Existentialism searches the meaning of life, and the purpose of being on earth without having pre-existing values to follow. It rejects the conception that human being has a fixed nature or essence like some other animals and plants do. It argues that human being exists first then he creates his own nature or essence by his actions and free choices. David Galen defines existentialism as “a philosophical approach that rejects the idea that the universe offers any clues about how humanity should live” (Galens, 2009: 222). It means that there is no internal or external set of features that we can rely on to describe who a person is, because who a person is depends only on the choices he or she makes. Sartre also explains this point by saying:

Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world, and defines himself afterward. If man as the existentialist sees himself is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is

no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. . . Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself, such is the first principle of existentialism. (Sartre, 2007: 22)

This point is based on the idea that the individual is the only author of his own life. Everybody must set their own features and choose their own path freely, because they will be the outcome of their actions. Commenting on this subject, Galens says “A person’s identity does not exist in anything except that person’s actions” (Galens, 2009: 230). Any kind of choice can be made and no one can be blamed for the choices they make, for there is no pre-established human nature given. Human beings do not know what is right and what is wrong. However, they are the only ones who are going to carry the responsibility and put up with the consequences of their choices.

The other important concern of existentialism is freedom of choice. The absence of essence is the main source of the freedom that the individual is going to have in constructing his/her essence. As Galen points out:

Existentialism derives from the principle that human behavior is based on nothing except free choice. It rejects those theories that try to find other factors that control behavior, such as economic, social, or psychological systems that exist in order to explain what people do. (Galens, 2009: 229)

According to most existentialists, the freedom of the individual, which is one of the main themes of existentialism, is the primary distinction of human beings. Sartre states, “The fundamental aim of existentialism is to reveal the link between the absolute character of the free commitment by which every man realizes himself” (Sartre, 2007: 43). Existentialists believe that freedom is directly linked with existence in the sense that it gives the individual the freedom to make choices to confirm his level of existence. As Karl Jaspers argues, “Man is . . . endowed with possibilities through the freedom he possesses to make himself what he will be by the activities on which he decides” (Jasper, 2014: 146). Without this freedom, the

existence of individual will be limited and hence the individual will not be able to realize himself/herself. As Robert C. Solomon points out, “Freedom is the recurrent theme in every author who is identified with this movement” (Solomon, 2001: 279).

Man is free to choose what he wills because he does not have the set of features that can be seen in other living things. Within this context, Sartre maintains, “Man is condemned to be free” (Sartre, 2007: 29). Here, Sartre uses the word ‘condemned’ because man is not the author of his creation, and not responsible for being created without any predetermination. Although he is troubled by the fact that he is free, man has no other alternative but to choose, which puts on him the heavy burden of responsibility. As the individual is free to make his own choice, he, then, must bear the risk and consequences of his commitment wherever it takes him to. Hence, as the central issue of human existence, freedom of choice is inescapable. Existence implies freedom, an obligation to create one’s own nature or essence through one’s choices. Even the rejection to choose is a choice in itself. The refusal to choose does not necessarily mean that the individual has no freedom. When there are two alternatives: to choose or not to choose, and if the individual chooses the latter, this decision is a result of their freedom of choice. Some people may make an attempt to escape from that freedom by refusing to choose at all. This happens when the individual follows a specific set of values which deprives him of his freedom to choose and assume any responsibilities. According to Sartre, this escape from freedom and the burden of responsibilities is called ‘bad faith’.

The responsibility of the individual is the burden he or she must bear when they make a choice. Human existence presupposes human freedom, which puts the heavy burden of responsibility on his shoulders. On the subject, Galen argues:

One of the central concerns of existential thought is that, in the absence of divine or biological rules, people must be responsible for their own actions. This is the price of freedom; with no rules from God or psychological traumas to excuse what one does, the responsibility for each action falls on the individual. (Galens, 2009: 229)

Man is free; therefore he is responsible for the consequences of his own actions, otherwise, he needs a set of values that will guide him through his life. Panza and Gale point out, “Everyone bears responsibility. If no one is going to give you a guidebook to life, you have to bear responsibility for making your way through it and creating some kind of meaning for it” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 12).

Freedom and responsibility cause human to feel ‘Anxiety’. Michelman defines anxiety as a “central concept of existentialist philosophy, alternately rendered as “dread”, as “anguish” or left in the original German as *Angst*” (Michelman, 2008: 35). A human being feels anxious when he recognizes that he is doomed to be free without any idea about what and how to choose. One also feels anxious when he is waiting for the outcome of his choices. Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness*, points out, “it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself” (Sartre & Barnes, 1992: 29). Feeling anxiety is an indication of the individual’s beginning to question his own existence and the reason why he exists in the world. As Panza and Gale point out, “anxiety seems to be focused on the way in which you exist in the world” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 62). The only way of being away from anxiety is by submitting oneself to ‘bad faith’. As Sartre puts it, “bad faith is obviously a lie because it is a dissimulation of man’s full freedom of commitment” (Sartre, 2007: 47). Sometimes people try hard to avoid feeling free because it is an unpleasant experience. Those who escape from the idea of freedom and follow the principle of ‘Determinism’ deny their own existence by ignoring their freedom. Sartre describes those people as ‘cowards’.

1.2. Exponents of Existentialism

1.2.1 Jean Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980).

Sartre is a French philosopher, playwright and novelist. He is considered as the main figure in the development and popularization of existentialism. Sartre believes in a radical freedom that is not determined by human nature. As Michelman

says, “Freedom became the watchword of Sartre’s philosophy” (Michelman, 2008: 290). Sartre explains some of the key terms associated with existentialism such as anguish, despair and forlornness. His most famous phrase says that existence comes before essence. He definitely believes that human beings are thrown into the world without any essence or nature that will guide them when deciding on how to shape the course of their lives. This is why Sartre puts on the human being the heavy task of constructing his essence by himself. In his most famous philosophical work *Existentialism is Humanism*, Sartre discusses the key issues regarding the theory of existentialism. He divides existentialism into two types: Christian and Atheistic existentialism, and he affiliates himself with the latter. He believes that there is no God to give man any essence that will provide him with a set of values to follow. Sartre says, “God does not exist” (Sartre, 2007: 27). As a result, man is free in constructing his essence, for there is no external source from which he can get it. Actually, this freedom is regarded as a condemnation because man does not know what the right path to choose is. Therefore, man must put up with the risks and consequences of his choices. Within this context, Sartre points out, “we must bear the full consequences for that assertion” (Sartre, 2007: 27). Human is the only responsible for his choice. Sartre thinks that man is the outcome of his actions: “Man is nothing other than which he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism” (Sartre, 2007: 22). He calls this process of self-making ‘subjectivity’, then, he explains subjectivity that it is when human realizes that he exists without essence, and he has to use his will to define essence for himself.

1.2.2. Soren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855).

Kierkegaard is a Danish Christian philosopher, theologian, poet and social critic. He is considered as the father of modern existentialism. He is the first European philosopher to bear the existentialist label. Kierkegaard is recognized as a representative of religious or theistic existentialism. As Galen points out, “for Kierkegaard, there was no contradiction between freedom and God” (Galens, 2009: 229). Truth, subjectivity and personal freedom are the main concepts of Kierkegaard’s works. Farah Yeganeh maintains, “Kierkegaard believed that truth can

be communicated only indirectly. It arises out of the experiences of life. The communicator may provoke awareness of truth, but he cannot tell another what to believe” (Yeganeh, 2006: 534). Kierkegaard focuses on subjectivity and personal experiences, because he believes that the immediate situation that human faces is more important than objective truth.

Kierkegaard’s fundamental idea about existence is that man exists, and has a limited time to construct his nature or essence by his choices. Man has the freedom to choose the way in which he wants to define his essence, but has a specific time to make that choice. As Panza and Gale point out, “Kierkegaard, as an existentialist, thinks that freedom is an essential part of being a person” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 133). This freedom distinguishes human from other creatures. Therefore, a human has to define his nature and live in a way that is different from other creatures like animals and plants. In Kierkegaard’s existentialism, freedom is about to choose good or evil. Man must make his choices before God, and these choices are behind his salvation or condemnation. This is why the outcome of this freedom is anguish, because there is no certainty of the result of these choices.

1.2.3. Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976).

Heidegger is a German philosopher and seminal thinker of existentialism. He is considered as the founding figure of atheistic existentialism. He did not consider himself as existentialist, though his most famous philosophical work *Being and Time* (1927) is regarded as the foundational statement of existentialist philosophy. The main question in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is ‘what is the meaning of human existence’. It investigates human existence in relation to what he calls “being-in-the-world”. Heidegger argues that human needs to analyze his existence from personal experiences, which means from the inside of him. Human has to understand his existence from the insider’s perspective. When human starts to investigate the meaning of his existence, it means that he gets some clues about it. He rejects the science and rational investigation of existence because they are impersonal and investigate existence from outside. What makes human existence matters to him is

his being in a world in which things have purposes. In his *Being and time*, Heidegger maintains, “Taking care of things is a character of being which being-with cannot have as its own, although this kind of being is a *being toward* being encountered in the world, as is taking care of things” (Heidegger, 1996: 114). When human recognizes the meaning of things around him, he then starts to ask about the meaning of his existence. Being alone in the world is being void of any question concerning existence. Panza and Gale point out, “Heidegger’s point hints at a further claim: that your existential existence depends upon the existence of others” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 120).

CHAPTER TWO

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN AS A VICTORIAN EXISTENTIAL NOVEL

In John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the theme of existential freedom is well observed in the main characters of the novel. Fowles discloses his belief and interest in existentialism, particularly the concept of freedom throughout the characterization of Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson. He puts these characters in devised social situation and setting, and exposes their true intentions. Fowles focuses on the social aspect of the phenomenon of freedom. He uses sexual activity to explore existential freedom from restraints and conventions imposed on the individual. Therefore, the social analysis of Sarah and Charles will prove that they turn to be existential characters enjoying their freedom of choice. In order to create meaning for their existence, Sarah and Charles should free themselves from the convention and morality of the Victorian society. They "both seek to break 'iron certainties', the social, moral, religious conventions of their day" (Andrew Sanders, 2000: 618).

2.1. An Analysis of "Sarah Woodruff" in a Social Context

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the character "Sarah Woodruff" has freedom of choice. She is a perfect existentialist character who creates her own fate after an individual decision against the rigid rules and conventions of the Victorian society. She prefers not to be part of the Victorian norms and conventions for women, so she finds the solution in taking up the role of a whore. By breaking the values and morals of the society, Sarah proves her existential freedom in shaping the course of her life, thus inspiring her existence with meaning. As Mary Lynn Dodson puts it, "Indeed, Fowles's primary existential concern – freedom – is personified in

the character of Sarah Woodruff' (Dodson, 1998: 298). Sarah makes three choices to express her understanding of existential freedom of choice; she wears a mask of adultery and then pretends to be proud of it in Lyme Regis. Next, she has sex with Charles to enjoy her sense of freedom. Finally, she rejects the idea of marrying him not to be imprisoned in the cage of marriage.

Sarah suffers a strong sense of isolation from her main class. As the narrator puts it, "Her father had forced her out of her own class, but couldn't raise her to the next" (FLW: 43). Her ancestors belonged to the aristocracy, but when it came to her father's generation, they descended to the lower class. To quote the narrator, "Four generations back on the paternal side one came upon clearly established gentlemen" (FLW: 44). To gain more respect, Sarah's father sent her to school in order to turn her into an educated lady: "He most wisely provided the girl with a better education than one would expect" (FLW: 26). After becoming educated, Sarah feels torn between the lower and the upper class. Therefore, "to the young men of the one she had left she had become too select to marry; to those of the one she aspired to, she remained too banal" (FLW: 43). Sarah does not want to get married to men from the lower class, because she considers herself superior to them. At the same time, she is not likely to be proposed to by men of the class she aspires to, because she is inferior to them. She does not belong to either of the classes, and then she becomes condemned to remain a spinster. She rejects the idea of going back to the lower class for two reasons; her education and the gentility of her ancestors. And at the same time, she is not allowed to go to the upper class because she is poor: "She has been forced out of her own class without being raised to the next" (Barry Olshen, 1978: 74). After the death of her father, Sarah became an orphan and has no one to support her. She is excluded also because she seems to have transgressed public words. Hence, she has to work as a governess, which she describes as an unbearable job.

The first choice Sarah makes to initiate her freedom is wearing the mask of adultery. She understands that the only way to get rid of the dictates of the society is to "marry shame" (FLW: 139). When the opportunity comes to Sarah in the form of a shipwrecked French naval officer, she feels very happy. A woman of "passion and imagination", Sarah makes up a story of having an affair with a French lieutenant in order to be seen as a fallen woman (FLW: 149). In the words of Hutcheon, "Sarah's

identity as the fallen women is a *fiction*, yet it may perhaps even attain the status of social reminder” (Hutcheon, 1980: 63). Though Sarah’s relation with the French officer is a fictional one, it serves to satisfy her need to be free from social constraints.

The term “fallen woman” in Victorian society is applied “to a range of feminine identities: prostitutes, unmarried women who engage[d] in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as variously delinquent lower-class women” (Anderson, 1993: 2). This particular term simply refers to women who had or were thought to have had sexual relationships outside marriage. The Victorians considered the fallen woman as a moral and social threat to the society. Fallen woman was regarded as a disease-ridden outcast. Victorian people ostracized that kind of woman and humiliated her. To look at the issue from the perspective of fallen women, besides being a victim of men’s seduction, they suffered the unforgiving attitude of a rigid social system which punished them for their fall and made them outcasts. In Sarah’s case, she cleverly chooses to put herself into the position of a victim (fallen woman), which shows that she has a deep insight into the nature of the society, particularly the nature of the religious women in Lyme Regis. As Brooke Lenz points out it, “Sarah possesses a penetrating and socially conscious gaze that uncovers the essential qualities of both individuals and institutions” (Lenz, 2008: 118). She has her own smartness, which helps her much in dealing with the people around her. With a great insight and ability to analyze social situations, she finds out how to come up with a fake story that makes people sympathize with her. As Fowles puts it:

She has some sort of the psychological equivalent of the experienced horse dealer’s skill – the ability to know almost at the first glance the good horse from the bad one; or as if jumping a century, she was born with a computer in her heart. I say her heart, since the values she computed belong more there than in the mind. She could sense the pretensions of a hollow argument, a false scholarship, a biased logic when she came across them; but she also saw throw people in subtler way. Without being able to say how, any more than

computer can explain its own processes, she saw them as they were and not as they tried to seem. It would not be enough to say she was a final moral judge of people. Her comprehension was broader than that, and if mere morality had been her touchstone, she would not have behaved as she did. (FLW: 43)

Sarah deliberately spreads rumors about turning herself into a shameless woman. She intends to publicly reveal her sexual immorality in order to release herself from all the requirements and restraints of Victorian society. As the narrator puts it, “her exhibition of her shame had a kind of purpose” (FLW: 53). Sarah’s effort to appear to be shameful can be seen as the starting point where she begins to practice her existential freedom: “Sarah flaunts her ‘supposed’ sexual immorality, thereby freeing herself from all of the demands of Victorianism, i.e., once she chooses to blatantly offend society, she no longer has to concern herself with its approval” (Dodson, 1998: 297 – 98). This choice also leads Sarah to become an outcast and isolated from the others around her in Lyme Regis. In his journal, the significance of Victorian background in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* of John Fowles: A study case, P. Muthusivam argues:

In Victorian era, the restrained sexual attitudes and the system of sexual regulations exclusively belong to the bourgeois and upper class. The Victorian bourgeoisie is demanded and regulated to espouse a set of sexual moral values: sexual repression, non-premarital intercourse, and the strong social decorum between two sexes. The purpose of sexuality in marriage is reduced to getting offspring. Any sexual transgression, such a prostitution, adultery, or extramarital intercourse, over the procreative delimitation means the sexual impurity and immorality. Sexual indulgence, for the bourgeois class, is considered to degrade personal morality and threaten the social order. (Muthusivam, 2003: 3)

Sarah willingly becomes a free outcast in the society. She “lets people believe that she was seduced by Varguennes because one of the free freedoms still available to her in the world of Mrs. Poulteney is the power to dictate the terms of her own rejection” (Greaney, 2006: 15). Sarah allows people to think something about her, which is not true, and therefore, marginalizes herself from society, which provides her with some relief from the confines of that society. In order to create a united society, Victorian people refused anything that did not conform to the established norms of the society. Hence, Sarah is totally rejected by the society in Lyme Regis. People in Lyme Regis do not even want to approach her. Ernestina tells Charles, “I do not like to go near her” (FLW: 7). Sarah succeeds in turning herself into a social rebel. As Dodson points out, “Sarah’s scandalous choice in favor of freedom gives her the opportunity to pursue a ‘do-your-own-thing’ lifestyle” (Dodson, 1998: 298). She chooses the role of victim, which enables her to make decisions as she wishes.

From the very beginning of the novel, Sarah appears standing motionless and staring out to sea. It is said that she waits there for the French lieutenant to return. Walking around, Charles Smithson and his fiancée Ernestina Freeman see Sarah staring at the horizon where “she felt herself nearest to France” (FLW: 51). Ernestina tells Charles that Sarah is rumored to have had an affair with a French naval officer who eventually left her. This is why people in Lyme Regis commonly call her “the French Lieutenant’s Woman” (FLW: 6). This point makes Charles curious to know more about Sarah. Charles is “intrigued” and attracted to Sarah, who appears to be a mysterious figure. He seeks to find out why she is called the French lieutenant’s woman.

When Charles encounters Sarah in the Undercliff, she tells him, “I have sinned” (FLW: 111). She informs him about her fictional story with the shipwrecked French naval officer. As Hutcheon argues, “Sarah leads him to believe that she is indeed the French Lieutenant’s Woman, an identity the reader and Charles both later discover to be fictional” (Hutcheon, 1980: 66). Sarah’s act of creating her own story can be seen as the first sign that Sarah has freedom of choice. She tells Charles that someday she nursed a French lieutenant and made love with him. She says “I gave myself to him” (FLW: 139). This is why people in Lyme Regis call her “the French lieutenant’s woman” or a “whore”. As Hutcheon argues, Sarah “freely creates an

identity, telling Charles that she has lost her virginity, in order to be different” (Hutcheon, 1980: 63). In Victorian society, it was a deplorable act for women to become involved in any kind of sexual intercourse; hence, they were condemned to be ‘fallen women’ or ‘prostitutes’. Thus, Sarah confesses to Charles that she gave herself to the French naval officer to make people point at her and say that she is a fallen woman.

Sarah’s confession to Charles shows her desire to be called a “whore”. She tells him, “I am the French lieutenant’s whore” (FLW: 140). To quote Hutcheon, “It is Sarah who demands that “whore” be used, for she is free of the frivolity, the prudery, and even must of the vanity of Ernestina” (Hutcheon, 1980: 66). Sarah herself wants to use the word “whore” instead of “woman” to exploit it in being an outcast of the society. She feels pleasure to display her disgrace to people in Lyme Regis. To quote Salami, “She herself demands the epithet of an outcast, a ‘whore’ because it makes her free from all Victorian conventions” (Salami, 1992: 127). This point shows Sarah’s smartness in that she chooses to wear a mask of adultery to differentiate herself from the other women around in Lyme Regis. At the same time, she seeks to release herself from the conventions of society. She succeeds in convincing people in Lyme Regis about her story. As Lenz points out:

Appalled by Sarah’s refusal to renounce her desire and conform to convention, Mrs. Poulteney and Mrs. Fairley together define Sarah as a ‘public scandal’ and ‘wicked Jezebel’ (244, 245), both traditional labels for women who challenge patriarchal religious and sexual norms. (Lenz, 2008: 106)

Sarah turns herself to a so-called whore so that she can be liberated and no one can have control over her life. On the subject, Lenz argues:

Deliberately sacrificing her respectability and her acceptable but restrictive social identity, Sarah embraces this role with a specific aim of provocation; she wants her community to contemplate the conditions that could prompt a woman in her position to take such a radical step. In fact, she does not

actually engage in intercourse with Varguennes – a decision in keeping with her self-protective and insightful character – but allows her community to believe that she has. In doing so, Sarah liberates herself from conventional narratives through which her society defines and constraints woman. (Lenz, 2008: 121)

Eventually, Sarah feels impelled to explain to Charles why she decided to bear the shame of the nickname “whore”. She shows her complete satisfaction and willingness for being a whore as far as she believes that this is what liberates her. She tells Charles “So I am a doubly dishonored woman. By circumstances. And by choice” (FLW: 139). She conveys the idea that she did not love and want to marry the French lieutenant. However, she used him as a means to gain the notorious nickname, which she considers to be her savior since it helped her retain her sense of freedom in a hypocritical society. She tells Charles that she sacrificed her reputation in order to achieve emancipation from social bondage. To quote Sarah:

What I beg you to understand is not that I did this shameful thing, but why I did it. Why I sacrificed a woman’s most precious possession for the transient gratification of a man I did not love. I did it so that I should never be the same again... I did it so that people should point at me, should say, there walks the French Lieutenant’s Whore . . . 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 . . . I think I have a freedom they cannot understand. No insult, no blame, can touch me. Because I have set myself beyond the pale . . . I am the French lieutenant’s whore. (FLW: 139)

Sarah expresses to Charles that she is very happy to have this nickname, which sets her free from the conventions of her society. She enjoys her life because she is freer than other women. She tells Charles that she is the happiest one among them, and that other women will be deprived of the chance to enjoy her happiness as long as they live under the bondage and constraints of the society. She even describes

them as being dead for not having their freedom. She shows how much she values her freedom of choice by deliberating becoming a victim to the French officer when she tells him “if I had left that room, and returned to Mrs. Talbot’s, and resumed my former existence, I know that by now I should be truly dead . . . and by my own hand” (FLW: 139).

In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Sarah’s existential freedom manifests itself in her second choice: having sex with Charles. Sarah’s rejection of following the established values of the society and her request for emancipation can be clearly observed in having sex with Charles. She has sexual intercourse with Charles, which confirms her existential freedom. Sarah creates a new sense for herself by resisting the moral principles of her society. Victorian society is known by its restricted conventions and the cruel treatment of women. Victorian women were not supposed to enjoy their sexuality before their marriage. They were categorized into two contrasting types: pure woman who later becomes a good wife and mother, or fallen woman who is rejected by society: “they might be either the idealized wife and mother, the angel in the house, or the debased, depraved, corrupt prostitute” (Kent, 1990: 61). Also, they were forbidden from the fundamental rights of their society most of which were meant for men. It was believed that women existed for particular purpose – to become wives and mothers –, and their main role is to reproduce children and take care of the house and their husbands. As Ji and Li point out, “In Victorian England, a woman should be a demure, elegant lady who is expected to be a future good mother as well as a good wife. Therefore, they suffocate the desire for sex and will never talk about it on formal, public occasions” (Ji and Li, 2003: 4). Before marriage, women should be completely innocent and away from any sexual thoughts. As Penny Kane points out, they must be “free from any thought of love or sexuality” (Kane, 1995: 97).

In the novel, Fowles portrays Ernestina Freeman as a typical example of the Victorian woman – angle in the house – who has the previously mentioned features: “Ernestina was only the rigid product of that age” (Ji and Li, 2003: 4). As regards female sexuality, she is far away from sexual experiences. When she undresses herself in her room and looks at the mirror, she “suddenly stopped turning and

admiring herself in profile; gave an abrupt look up at the ceiling” because she believes her action “to be vaguely sinful” (FLW: 23).

To Ernestina, Sarah’s deliberate flaunting of Victorian conventions, and the social critique it implies, is profoundly unsettling, particularly because of Sarah’s assumed sexual misconduct. So frightened of sexuality that a mere glimpse of her bed while admiring herself in the mirror causes her to hastily cover herself (28). Ernestina cannot even bring herself to use the local term for Sarah, who allows the town to believe that in making herself sexually available to the French lieutenant’s she has become his “Hoer” (86). (Lenz, 2008: 105)

Ernestina’s profound ignorance of sexuality frightened her so much that she feels ashamed to see her image appear in the mirror. Also, in her mind sexuality is a disgusting act having connotations of violence and animal instincts. To quote the author:

It was the aura of pain and brutality that the act seemed to require, and which seemed to deny all the gentleness of gesture and discreetness of permitted caress that so attracted her in Charles. She had once or twice seen animals couple; the violence hunted her mind. (FLW: 24)

Ernestina’s fear of sexuality reveals the mindset of a typical Victorian woman who considers her own sexuality as something to be feared rather than fully enjoyed.

Sarah, as a free woman, stands in sharp contrast to the conventional Ernestina. Her actions violate the norms and morals of the society. By inventing a fictional tale of having a sexual intercourse with the French lieutenant, Sarah aims to display her sexual desires to the society. Thus, she starts the mission of seducing Charles to get him involved in a physical relationship. Commenting on the subject, Lenz says:

In Charles, however, Sarah finds an individual who is intrigued by her unconventional resistance to social norms. Sensing his attraction, Sarah appeals to Charles for assistance, specially noting his difference from the inhabitants of Lyme and suggesting that his travels and studies must have endowed him with a more generous and varied perspective than she generally encountered. (Lenz, 2008: 121 – 22)

In a sensual detail, she describes her encounter with the French naval officer. She tells Charles, “I stayed, I ate the supper that was served, I drank the wine he pressed on me. . . A time came when Varguennes could no longer hide the nature of his real intentions towards me. Nor could I pretend to surprise. . . I gave myself to him” (FLW: 138). Sarah’s detailed confession has erotic implications. “Once he heard the tale, Charles intuits, his ability to consider her a conventional woman, to focus on her mask of innocence, will dissolve. Instead, she will become fixed in the “eternal” darkness of the erotic other” (Lenz, 2008: 112). In order to show that she is willing to have sex, she says “my innocence was false from the moment I chose to stay” (FLW: 138). These words are intended to give Charles a hint that she is interested in having a sexual relationship with him. At the same time, in Sarah, Charles finds that “there is no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness” (FLW: 8). This is why Charles was attracted to Sarah.

Sarah, after her confession, succeeds in attracting Charles to her. She stimulates Charles to imagine himself as having sex with her in the position of that French lieutenant and in the position of a man who would strike the French officer down. Through his imagination, Charles fancies himself having sex with Sarah:

He saw the scene she had not detailed: her giving herself. 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. Deep in himself he forgave her her

unchastity; and glimpsed the dark shadow where he might have enjoyed it himself. (FLW: 140)

After recognizing Charles's readiness to make love with her, Sarah starts to prepare the situation to have sexual intercourse with him. She is already accused of being a whore, which further drives her to have sex with Charles. She has been feeling free since the moment she openly declared that she made love with the French officer. But Sarah wants to prove to herself that she can enjoy this freedom by having a real intercourse. At the same time, Sarah wants to move Charles up to a higher level in society. She urges him to discover his existential freedom. She aspires to make Charles part of her own class, which is characterized by freedom of choice. Noticing Charles's sexual weakness, Sarah leads him into the Endicott's Family Hotel in Exeter. She sends him the address of the hotel to see the result of her smart plan. Charles then makes up his mind and goes to the hotel. As Ji and Li argue, "Sarah has prepared for his arrival, having feigned a sprained ankle so that the landlady sent Charles up to her room instead of calling her down" (Ji and Li, 2003: 6). Sarah smartly arranges the situation to be an erotic one. The author says:

Sarah was seated by the fire in a chair facing the door, her feet on a stool, with both them and her legs covered by a red Welsh blanket. The green merino shawl was round her shoulders . . . Her hair was loose and fell over her green shoulders. (FLW: 271)

After having a short conversation with Charles, Sarah pretends to be crying. Through this action, she takes advantage of Charles's weakness and seduces him to sexual intercourse.

And it was while she made little dabbling motions with a handkerchief that he was overcome with a violent sexual desire; a lust a thousand times greater than anything he had felt in the prostitute's room. Her defenseless weeping was perhaps the breach through which the knowledge sprang – but suddenly he comprehended why her face haunted him. Why he felt this terrible need to see her again: it was to

possess her, to melt into her, to burn, to burn into ashes on that body and in those eyes. (FLW: 272)

Sarah's intelligent plan of seduction succeeds exactly as she intended. Now it is time for her to assert her freedom of not following the society's rigid rules for women. After her intentional erotic motions, Sarah and Charles have a sexual intercourse. Sarah, for the second time, has violated the Victorian sexual ethics through her non-fictional intercourse with Charles. It is a big surprise for Charles to find that Sarah was a virgin. To quote Ji and Li, "Unlike Ernestina, Sarah is a bold, brave woman who follows her will and pursues her love openly, indomitably. Regardless the Victorian conventions, she gives her to Charles out of pure love. Here, we see a modern woman enjoying freedom" (Ji and Li, 2003: 6). She has willingly lost her virginity with Charles, which reveals that her tale of having sexual intercourse with the French naval officer was a fictional one. She has deliberately chosen to lose her virginity to maintain her existential freedom and to confirm that she enjoys this freedom and makes choices according to her wishes. Sarah tells Charles, "you have given me the strength to go on living ... in the here and now" (FLW: 297). To Sarah, having sex with Charles makes her a real outcast; now she can enjoy her freedom of choice in its real sense. In the words of Ji and Li, "sexuality embodies freedom, particularly when Sarah did not demand marriage from Charles after their sexual intercourse and refused his proposal after they met two years later" (Ji and Li, 2003: 8).

Sarah's existential freedom can be seen in her third choice: her rejection of marriage. She resists giving up her freedom to find security in marriage, choosing to enjoy the freedom of spinsterhood. So, Sarah refuses Charles's offer to marry her in order to be as free as she has always been. She believes that the happiness of being free is more enjoyable than the happiness of having a husband and children.

In Victorian period, England was a patriarchal society in which men were considered as decision-makers and women as property. Therefore, women were dependent on their husbands and could not be expected to lead a happy life without them. As Susan Kingsley Kent puts it, "barred by law and custom from entering trades and professions by which they could support themselves, and restricted in the

possession of property, women had only one means of livelihood, that of marriage” (Kent, 1990: 86). This is why marriage was extremely significant, especially for women. It was considered to be the only way a woman could find protection from social troubles. In fact, “marriage and motherhood were the crowning achievements of a woman’s life” (Kent, 1990: 82). In order to achieve a successful marital life, women had to follow the conventions of marriage. They were completely under their men’s control. Women were obliged to obey their husbands in whatever they demand because, by law, men were responsible for their wives.

Victorian women were not allowed to work outside the house as a convention of their society. Thus, there was an inescapable dependence upon men’s income, because they were not allowed to have any kind of property, nor were they to hold any job unless it was a servant or a teacher. Women were not allowed to be involved in professions or skilled trade, and if they were to work, they would work in jobs where higher education was not required. This is why marriage was their best solution to have a good life as far as they do not have any other supplier of money except prostitution or a low-paid job. To quote Kent:

Marriage resembled nothing more closely than a commercial contract, in which women exchanged themselves – their legal rights, their property, their bodies, and the fruit of their labor – for a wage paid in the form of material substances. (Kent, 1990: 88)

Therefore, no matter what the women wanted, most of them were destined to get married because of their economic dependence on men. This point shows that marriage at that time was made for economic purposes rather than emotional ones.

Fowles in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* presents Ernestina on the conventional Victorian woman. She willingly conforms to all the standards and norms of her society: “Fortunately she had a very proper respect for convention” (FLW: 23). Like other women, Ernestina aims to get married and have children. As the narrator puts it, “Ernestina wanted a husband, wanted Charles to be that husband, wanted children” (FLW: 24). She seems to be a woman who cannot live without a husband. When Charles tells her about breaking their engagement, she says “perhaps

I'm just a child, but under your love and protection ... and your education ... I believe I should become better" (FLW: 296). Ernestina does not want to free herself from the marriage bondage: "Ernestina oriented herself as the appendage, subsidiary of a man as if her life would mean nothing if Charles abandoned her. She did not live for herself, for her own freedom but the others' influence, protection, even control" (Ji and Li, 2003: 4). Besides her desire to get married, she wants a rich man in order to guarantee her marital life. Ernestina is concerned more with money than with passion. She tells Charles "It's quite impossible that I should marry a mere commoner" (FLW: 205). Here Ernestina shows her interest in marrying a rich man. "Indeed, she reveals her own class-consciousness as one who seeks to improve her social position" (Salami, 1992: 123). It is even seen when Charles tells her that he is not likely to inherit anything from his uncle, she becomes angry and "uttered a discreet curse against rich uncle" (FLW: 152).

Sarah's deliberate refusal to marry Charles signifies her existential freedom. After making love with Charles, Sarah decides to leave Exeter in order to carry on with her life as she wishes. When Charles finds Sarah two years later, he proposes to her. But she revolts against the feeling of confinement a woman suffers in marriage. Because marriage -or a house in some cases- could be "a prison governed by a drunkard or a gambler or a sexual monomaniac", Sarah does not want to be imprisoned in the cage of marriage (Kent, 1990: 83). At the beginning of their relationship, she makes a hint to Charles that she does not seek marriage. She tells him "my hand has been several times asked in marriage. When I was in Dorchester, a rich grazier – but that is nothing" (FLW: 134). Sarah prefers to be out of the marriage bondage and free from its responsibilities. She tells Charles "I do not wish to marry because... first, because of my past, which habituated me to loneliness . . . I do not want to share my life. I wish to be what I am, not what a husband, however kind, however indulgent, must expect me to become in marriage" (FLW: 348). She believes that marriage is a threat to her freedom. Thus, "she refuses his offer of marriage because she wants to remain free" (Salami, 1992: 131). After having sex with Charles, Sarah tells him "I know you cannot marry me" (FLW: 276). Here, Sarah chooses to endure the sadness of being separate from her lover; but she does not want to be under his control. As Ji and Li argue, "Sarah could not bear the man-

chauvinist family life in which Charles would protect her” (Ji and Li, 2003: 6). Now, Sarah is “so different that he [Charles] thought for a moment she was someone else” (FLW: 342). To quote Bruce Bawer:

He [Charles] discovers that Sarah has become a “new woman,” a member of the bohemian Rossetti circle – which, like Coetminais and Bourani, is “a community of honorable endeavor, of noble purpose.” But she shows him no affection, remarking coolly that she treasures her independence too much to marry anyone. She has become the complete modern woman, “a spirit prepared to sacrifice everything, but itself – ready to surrender the truth, feeling, perhaps even all womanly modesty in order to save its own integrity. (Bawer, 1987: 21)

In the end, Sarah becomes the woman she has intended to become. Sarah intentionally refuses to follow the established standards of the society. She violates them in order to release herself from social restrictions and become an independent woman. As James R. Aubrey puts it, “Sarah is already emancipated in that she is willing to live as a social outcast in a high conformist community, which is a microcosm of English Victorian society” (Aubrey, 1991: 107). Sarah creates her own principles of life and tries to live up to them. By so doing, she constructs meaning for her existence. To quote Lenz, “Sarah creates an alternative space in which she can proactively pursue a more intuitive and personally authentic way of being” (Lenz, 2008: 127). Sarah locates herself in her own class which seems to stand beyond the Victorian society - a class in which people have freedom of choice and feel that they are by no means obliged to follow the established conventions of society. As Aubrey points out, “By the end of the novel, she has found a small community of artists who allow her to be herself without feeling like an outcast” (Aubrey, 1991: 107). Sarah feels that she really belong to this community because she is able to retain her identity within the group.

2.2. An Analysis of “Charles Smithson” in a Social Context

In John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Charles Smithson becomes a man of existential freedom. Though Charles appears to be a conformist at the beginning of the novel, later on, thanks to Sarah, he turns out to be a non-conformist: “For reasons never made clear in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Sarah manipulates Charles into awareness of his freedom to be himself” (Aubrey, 1991: 108). Sarah’s resistance to the values and conventions of Victorian society inspires Charles with the desire to seek his own freedom. However, he rebels against the established norms of the society he is a part of, thus trying to construct meaning to his own existence. His freedom of choice is clearly manifested in two incidents; when he decides to meet Sarah in the Endicott’s Family Hotel, and when he refuses to marry Sarah at the third (existential) ending for the novel.

Charles Smithson is a healthy Victorian gentleman who belongs to the upper class. He is thirty-two years old. Charles is a well-respected man in the society. He is not only heir to the diminished fortune of his father, but to his uncle as well. Charles’s main hobby is collecting fossils: “Charles liked to think of himself as a scientific young man” (FLW: 9). He has an interest in paleontology and the Darwin theory of evolution: “He called himself a Darwinist, and yet he had not really understood Darwin. But then, nor had Darwin himself” (FLW: 40). Charles makes a marriage proposal to Ernestina Freeman; the daughter of a healthy Victorian man. However, when he meets Sarah Woodruff, everything changes so much so that he breaks his engagement with Ernestina. By Sarah’s help, Charles goes through three stages to construct his identity. Finally, he releases himself from the restrictions of the society.

Charles first appears to be walking with his fiancée Ernestina in Lyme Regis. When they see Sarah staring out to horizon, he is keen to know about her. Charles’s eagerness may give a hint that he has an interest in investigating things: “He had always asked life too many things” (FLW: 9). Charles starts to ask Ernestina many questions about Sarah. When Ernestina tells him one of Sarah’s nicknames, he asks “and what are the others?” (FLW: 6). Then, Ernestina tells him about the rumors over Sarah’s affair with a French lieutenant. After this, Ernestina asks Charles to go back home, but he insists on knowing more about Sarah. He says “but I’m intrigued.

Who is this French lieutenant?" (FLW: 7). Charles's curiosity to know more about Sarah is the main factor underlying his transformation and growth. He asks Ernestina to go along with him to see the French lieutenant's woman: "So they went closer to the figure by the cannon bollard" (FLW: 7). When Charles tells Sarah that she is not alone, she looks at him, or as it seems to Charles, looks "through him" (FLW: 7). In the following extract, the narrator comments on the significance of the way Sarah looks at Charles:

It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favored feminine look was the demure, the obedience, the shy. Charles felt immediately as if he had trespassed; as if the Cobb belonged to that face, and not to the ancient borough of Lyme. It was not a pretty face, like Ernestina's. It was certainly not a beautiful face, by any period's standard or taste. But it was an unforgettable face, and a tragic face. Its sorrow welled out of it as purely, naturally, unstoppably as water out of a woodland spring. There was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness. (FLW: 7)

The first meeting of Charles with Sarah has a great impact on his existential desire to achieve freedom. He sees in Sarah something that cannot be seen in other women in Lyme Regis: the freedom, the strangeness and the mysteriousness of a woman who does not belong to his time. Charles feels that he has found an alternative woman to the conventional Ernestina. As Salami points out, "(Charles) feels that his desire can only be fulfilled through 'strange' and mysterious women" (Salami, 1992: 121). Accordingly, to Charles, Sarah is a mysterious woman with whom he can fulfill his desires.

The next day when Charles goes to hunt fossils, he sees Sarah sleeping in the Undercliff. For Charles, "there was something intensely tender and yet sexual in the way she lay" (FLW: 58). The way Sarah is lying there reminds him of a girl he has met in France. Therefore, Charles starts to visit the Undercliff in order to discover

the mysteries surrounding Sarah rather than hunting fossils. These two meetings represent the first stage of Charles's efforts to build a new identity.

In their third meeting, Charles begins to listen to the story that Sarah invented; namely, her being the victim of the French naval officer. Charles imagines himself to be in the position of the French naval officer. The more Charles listens to her story, the more he feels attracted to her. Then "Sarah and Charles keep stumbling into each other – finally into each other's arms" (Dodson, 1998: 297). After this incident, a romantic relationship develops between them. Charles starts to love Sarah for the comfort he senses in being with her as well as for her strange and mysterious nature.

Charles goes to the Endicott's Family Hotel to meet Sarah. This is the first choice that Charles makes, which means that he is able to enjoy his freedom. Sarah sends the address of the Endicott's Family Hotel to Charles in order to seduce him. At this point, Charles becomes a decision-maker: he is confronted with the necessity to make a choice between the conventional and unconventional modes of life. As H. W. Fawcner argues:

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* Charles can either drive on home and dismiss the whole idea of Sarah and the vast vistas of possibilities and freedoms that she embodies; or else he can choose another road by telling Sam that they will spend the night in Exeter, where Sarah is staying at hotel. To emphasize the existence of an actual situation of choice, there is at the precise moment when Sam asks Charles whether they will be staying in Exeter, a fork in the narrative. (Fawcner, 1984: 83)

Charles has got two choices: he will either go back to Lyme Regis where he is supposed to marry Ernestina and live a conventional life, or go to that hotel and meet Sarah whose mysteriousness has strongly attracted him. As a Victorian gentleman who is "dominated by his social conventions, particularly in his attitude towards women", Charles is expected to go back to Lyme Regis where his fiancée Ernestina resides (Salami, 1992: 121). But now Charles sees Ernestina as an ordinary

woman with no sense of mystery: “There were so many things she (Ernestina) must never understand: the richness of male life, the enormous difficulty of being one to whom the world was rather more than dress and home and children” (FLW: 103). To quote the narrator:

But above all it seemed to set Charles a choice; and while one part of him hated having to choose, we come near the secret of his state on that journey west when we know that another part of him felt intolerable excited by the proximity of the moment of choice. He had not the benefit of existentialist terminology; but what he felt was really a very clear case of the anxiety of freedom – that is, the realization that one is free and the realization that being free is a situation of terror. (FLW: 268)

Accordingly, Charles makes the choice which grants him the freedom he craves. In this context, Aubrey points out, “Charles recognized his freedom of choice and ‘actually’ did decide to put up at Exeter for the night” (Aubrey, 1991: 105). Thus, Charles has found the opportunity to live up to his personal principles and values. He is ready to face all the consequences of breaking the Victorian conventions. Therefore, Charles willingly decides to take the path that leads him to Sarah. Salami argues that after Charles’s second meeting with Sarah, he starts to love her for her mysteriousness. Ernestina, on the other hand, seems to him “too conventional”; so she does not fit in with the image of the ideal woman he wishes to marry (Salami, 1992: 121). Charles wants to make sure that he can really experience his freedom of choice. He meets Sarah in that hotel and this is the second stage in his attempt to construct a new identity.

The second choice Charles makes to achieve his freedom lies in his refusal to marry Sarah. This is the final stage in which Charles constructs his identity. He does not want to be possessed by others. It must be noted that when Mr. Freeman offers him a job in his trade, Charles refuses the offer in order to be out of anyone’s control. Within this context, Ellen Pifer argues, “In rejecting the Freemans’ bourgeois values, Charles chooses first his gentlemanly liberty and later the greater freedom which Sarah forces him to face” (Pifer, 1986: 126). Charles rejects “the notion of

possession as the purpose of life, whether it be of a woman's body, or of high profits at all costs" (FLW: 233). After his meeting with Sarah in the Endicott's Family Hotel, Charles goes back to Lyme Regis where his fiancée lives. He decides to break his engagement with Ernestina and marry Sarah. As Hutcheon puts it, "(Ernestina) poses the greatest threats to Charles's freedom" (Hutcheon, 1980: 62).

After breaking his engagement with Ernestina, Charles goes back to Exeter to propose to Sarah. But this time Charles cannot find Sarah because she has disappeared without leaving any sign behind her. Charles then "threw himself into the search for Sarah" (FLW: 322). He appoints four men to find Sarah for him. However, he decides to go abroad in order not to be in London anymore. Charles makes this decision partly because he has lost his title as a penalty for breaking his engagement with Ernestina, and partly because he has not been able to find Sarah in Exeter. Regarding Charles's travels, the narrator says:

His greatest enemy was boredom; and it was boredom, to be precise an evening in Paris when he realized that he neither wanted to be in Paris nor to travel again to Italy, or Spain, or anywhere else in Europe, that finally drove him home. You must think I mean England; but I don't; that could never become home for Charles again. (FLW: 332)

Charles does not like the countries of Europe because their traditions are similar to those of England: "there was something in his isolation that he could cling to; he was the outcast, not like other men, the result of a decision few could have taken no matter whether it was ultimately foolish or wise. . . . However bitter his destiny, it was nobler that the one he had rejected" (FLW: 331). However, when he visits America, things seem different to him. Charles senses the freedom of women in America because "the transatlantic emancipation movement was already twenty years old" (FLW: 335). He is highly attracted to this freedom, which cannot be seen in the people of London, except Sarah. These free American women remind him of Sarah: "in so many of these American faces he saw a shadow of Sarah; they had something of her challenge, her directness" (FLW: 335). Charles starts to feel better in this society which allows freedom to people. To quote the narrator, "Charles was no longer bored. What the experiences of America, perhaps in particular the America

of that time, had given him – or given him back – was a kind of faith in freedom; the determination he saw around him, however unhappy its immediate consequences, to master a national destiny had a liberating rather than a depressing effect” (FLW: 337). This experience promotes his need for freedom. He has been highly impressed by the freedom he has witnessed in America.

Two years after his isolation in his travels, Charles receives a message which informs him that Sarah has been found in a house in London. Charles makes up his mind to go to see Sarah: he says “the truth is, I don’t know what I feel. I think I shall not know till I see her again. All I do know is that . . . she continues to haunt me. That I must speak to her” (FLW: 339). He finally meets Sarah after a long search. Sarah decides to show her daughter to Charles and to be united with him. But this time Charles, “saw his own true superiority to her: which was not of birth or education, not of intelligence, not of sex, but of an ability to give that was also an inability to compromise. She could give only to possess; and to possess him” (FLW: 360). Charles refuses her offer in order to stay out of anyone’s possession and to fulfill his individual aspirations. He wants to enjoy his freedom and willingly accepts its consequences. “He threw her one last burning look of rejection, . . . He left the house” (FLW: 360). In the novel, this is the last decision Charles makes in order to achieve full freedom. When Charles leaves the house in which he rejects Sarah’s offer: “the future made present, found he did not know where to go. It was as if he found himself reborn, though with his all adult faculties and memories. But with the baby’s helplessness – all to be recommenced, all to be learned again” (FLW: 360). Charles has finally come to the end of his self-construction process. He has found his true self and achieved his personal freedom.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN AS A POSTMODERN EXISTENTIAL NOVEL

The theory of existentialism plays a vital role in the postmodern fiction. Existentialism, as previously defined, is a philosophical thought which refuses the idea that the individual has a set of principles about how he or she should live. Rather, it puts its main focus on the individual himself, and then questions his existence. It questions the reason why human being exists on the earth. After World War II and the destruction it caused to society, everything has come to be questioned. As Gerhard Hoffmann puts it, “The emphasis on human resistance against a meaningless universe made existentialism (and the absurd) particularly attractive after World War II” (Hoffmann, 2005: 202). Accordingly, many realities, beliefs and religions have come into being because human power of reasoning has failed to find out an absolute truth to stick to. Briefly put, there has been no absolute truth. Truth is understood as an illusion and it is abused especially by those who desire to achieve control over others. As a result, freedom has become a means by which the individual can choose what he or she thinks the truth is. Recognizing their freedom, people start to question the aim of their existence and feel the ‘absurdity’ of that existence, for there is no absolute truth or reason given. Absurdity is one of the main themes of existentialism. For the existentialists, Panza and Gale say, “life is absurd; it makes no sense and has no meaning or ultimate purpose” (Panza and Gale, 2008: 12).

An important point to consider is how existentialism has found expression in modern fiction. Some writers in the late nineteenth and twentieth century tried to reflect the thought of ‘existentialism’ treating its various themes in their literary works. These writers wanted to show the individual status as free and devoid of any ready-made values to follow. At the same time, they wanted to portray the suffering

of that freedom throughout their fictional works. Michelman divides existentialism in fiction into three types:

The first type is “works of literature written by existentialist philosophers” (Michelman, 2008: 143). Examples for this type are the existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Simone De Beauvoir, who contributed to the spread of the existentialist ideas through their novels. Michelman argues that “their novels and plays, published during and after World War II, were more accessible and more widely read than their philosophical works, and it was mainly through them that existentialism was initially conveyed to the reading public” (Michelman, 2008: 143). In fact, these writers intended their novels as a means to express and support the philosophy of existentialism.

The second type of existentialist fiction, according to Michelman’s division, has to do with “works of literature influential to the development of existentialist philosophy” (Michelman, 2008: 143). In this category, he describes those writers whose literary works have a great influence on the development of the existentialist philosophy, yet who are not labeled as existentialists. Examples of this kind are the novelists Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy.

The third type of existentialist fiction, which is the main concern of this thesis, involves “works of literature that express an idea or content associated with existentialism, such as absurdity or alienation, but that otherwise are unconnected to existentialist philosophy” (Michelman, 2008: 143). This type of fiction is associated with the writers whose literary works are not written with any intention to expose the philosophy of existentialism. However, in some of their works, existential concepts like alienation, absurdity and freedom can be seen as the main themes. Samuel Beckett (1906 – 89) is one of the well-known fiction writers who try to show the nothingness and absurdity of human existence. In his most famous work *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Beckett depicts this notion of absurdity through two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who keep waiting for someone named “Godot” who would never come. In the 1950s and 1960s, works like Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* and Franz Kafka’s novel *The Trial* were often regarded as examples of “existential fiction” owing to their atmosphere of alienation and absurdity (Michelman, 2008: 144).

3.1 Existentialism in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's woman* is a good example of postmodernist fiction that takes as its theme the idea of existential freedom. Fowles offers existential freedom to all the participants in the novel; the narrator, the characters and the readers. In other words, the narrator, the characters and the readers are all free in an existentialist sense. Fowles emphasizes the importance of freedom when he says, "There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must confirm to that definition" (FLW: 78). The existential freedom seen in the narrative process of the novel turns it into a postmodernist work, taking it farther away from being a conventional Victorian novel. Fowles uses his own narrative style in writing this novel, setting the story a century before the time of writing it. However, Fowles's aim is not to tell the reader a Victorian couple story. Rather, he intends to depict certain features of the Victorian society such as social and religious norms and conventions, moral values, class struggle, sexuality, prostitutions, as well as people and their attitudes to the established norms. As Dodson argues, "Fowles manages to allow the reader to experience Victorian England through the eyes of a stereotypical young lady, an educated and refined gentleman and an ousted woman – the mysterious Sarah" (Dodson, 1998: 296). By using postmodernist features in the narrative process, Fowles succeeds in obscuring the line between past and present, as well as the one between fiction and reality. He comments on Victorian events by using an unconventional narrator who uses postmodern narrative techniques: "modern narrator employed in narrating Victorian events" (Salami, 1992: 105).

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the fact that the narrator has existential freedom is clearly seen in the way he breaks the conventional rules of the Victorian narrative. Throughout the story, the narrator alternates between the Victorian conventional techniques of narration and the postmodernist ones. Though the events in the novel take place in 1869, the time of narration is 1969. This intermingling of two different times lays the foundation for different styles of narration, with different ways of understanding reality. These styles are also supported by the narration of historical facts, for Fowles usually connects his fictional writing with some historical facts and figures. To quote Salami on the subject:

The narrator constructs a special persona who takes the responsibility for arranging the novel's various texts, constructing the three endings, selecting the Victorian epigraphs, taking the role of godlike novelist who is able to intervene in his narrative, and who can probe the minds of his characters as he wishes. (Salami, 1992: 105)

At the beginning, the narrator uses the conventional style of narration, the omniscient narrator, to tell the events of the story. From chapter one to chapter twelve, the reader has a feeling that s/he is reading a traditional Victorian novel. Most of the stylistic features associated with Victorian narrative are found in the novel: dialogue, footnotes, and epigraphs. As Salami points out:

There are various techniques that are typical of the Victorian novel. There is the traditional suspension of plot and the sudden shift in situation from chapter to chapter, which suits the form of realization . . . through the use of epigraphs of various kinds, the narrator is able to reconstruct, represent, and 'colonize' the cultural milieu of the Victorian age by the representation of aspects of its literary world through the poetry of Hardy, Arnold, Tennyson and Clough. (Salami, 1992: 107)

Since *The French Lieutenant's Woman* builds around the events that are thought to have occurred in the Victorian era, Fowles uses conventional norms to create a realistic story as seen through the eyes of the twentieth-century reader. In the depiction of events, the author relies on the omniscient narrator to ensure that an objective perspective can be sustained throughout the novel. In *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*, Susana Onega points out, "From the beginning John Fowles places his tale within the tradition of the Victorian novel, choosing for it an omniscient narrator" (Onega, 1989: 71). Fowles's selection of omniscient point of view is meant to give the reader a better understanding of the novel. Accordingly, the narrator links the first-person with the third-person narrative to comment on the events of the story and to help the reader gain insight into the characters' feelings, thoughts and attitudes.

Fowles uses a postmodern narrative technique which affords the narrator the freedom to make allusions to certain historical events that occurred in the nineteenth century. Hence, the reader is made to feel that the novel is a historical text because, on many occasions, the narrator relates the fictional events and characters of the novel to some historical figures (since he quoted the epigraphs of many famous figures), facts or even scientific documentaries. As Salami puts it:

the novel's narrative is historicized through its evocation of a particular period in the past, with detailed representation from all classes and real personages such as Marx, Darwin, Rossetti, Ruskin, Henry Moore, Michelangelo, and the Victorian poets whose text are often quoted. (Salami, 1992: 108)

The omniscient narrator depicts the actions of the novel as though they happened in Victorian England, intermingling historical facts with fiction. The gap between the time of the historical events or figures depicted in the novel and the time of narration gives the narrator the freedom to act at once as a historian and a narrator. As Onega argues, "We as readers implicitly accept the reality of such action, and what is more, the reliability of the narrator, who presents himself to us as an impartial- if somewhat erudite and pedantic- historian" (Onega, 1989: 72). The process of retelling historical facts is one way to authenticate fictional narratives. Within this context, Salami says "Fowles uses the historical documentations in order to authenticate his fictional narratives and foreground the materials used to create the illusion of reality" (Salami, 1992: 26).

In Chapter Thirteen, often considered to be the turning point of the novel, Fowles shifts his focus to questioning the presence of the omniscient narrator. To quote Pifer, "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" (Pifer, 1986: 128). With the narrator transformed into a self-questioning person, a

significant change occurs in the narrative style: self-conscious narrative technique alternates with omniscient narrator in the rest of the novel. As Salami points out:

The omniscient narrator continues only as far as chapter 13, where all rules of mimetic narration are shattered. The narrator undermines the traditional mimetic narration by revealing himself as a modern narrator who is anti-mimetic and anti-referential, and who emphasizes instead the novel's self-reflexiveness. (Salami, 1992: 115)

Between past and present, fiction and reality, levels of ontology and narration, is the presence of the narrator wearing different masks to get the reader confused and keep him wondering what all that means. In fact, the changing roles of the narrator break the frame of the novel and violate the conventional norms. The narrator turns things upside down; his first shift occurs in the last two lines of chapter twelve. "Who is Sarah?" he asks, pretending as if he were not the one arranging the events in the story. Then he continues with another question, "Out of what shadows does she come?" (FLW: 94). With these two Victorian rhetorical questions, Fowles breaks the illusion that he is constructing the plot of the story, as he begins to shift the machinery of narration from the Victorian style to a postmodernist one. On this subject, Salami argues, "the narrator admits that he breaks the illusion because he does not want to continue being a Victorian godlike novelist" (Salami, 1992: 116).

The answers to these two questions come in Chapter Thirteen, where the self-conscious narrator appears to say:

I do not know. This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in . . . a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Ronald Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word. (FLW: 77)

Here, the narrator starts to comment on the narrative process rather than on the story itself. In the words of Salami, “Fowles is a contemporary writer who violates the rules of narrative traditions, . . . undermines and problematizes his narrative by shifting the reader’s attention away from narrative content towards the actual narration or circumstances in which the story is produced” (Salami, 1992: 13). Fowles gives freedom to the narrator to break the illusion which was created from the first chapter of the novel. At the same time, he gives the narrator the freedom which enables the latter to change his role from being an omniscient narrator to a modern one – observer – who watches the events of the novel and does not control them. Then, the narrator intrudes upon the process of narration, and he does so on many occasions in the novel. This intrusive narrator breaks many times the illusion of the narration, which has already been constructed by the omniscient narrator only to deconstruct the illusion again.

Perhaps, the most confusing situation between the ontological and the narrative level is when the narrator appears in a person as a character in the novel. He becomes the stranger who stares at Charles when travelling to London by train. The narrator appears as a bearded fellow who is trying to make up his mind about how he should end the novel. First, the omniscient narrator describes him from the perspective of Charles, but later, and suddenly, the reader is surprised by the use of the first person narration:

It is precisely, it has always seemed to me, the look an omnipotent god—if there were such an absurd thing—should be shown to have. 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. I see this with particular clarity on the face, only too familiar to me, of the bearded man who stares at Charles. And I will keep up the pretense no longer. Now the question I am asking, as I stare at Charles, is not quite the same as the two above. But rather, what the devil am I going to do with you? I have already thought of ending Charles’s career here and now; of leaving him for eternity on his way to London.

But the conventions of Victorian fiction allow, allowed no place for the open, the inconclusive ending; and I preached earlier of the freedom characters must be given. (FLW: 408)

It shows the levels of narration in which the narrator alternates between various styles and roles of narration. As H. W. Fawcner points out, “This narrator is in himself an arresting feature in the constant oscillation between fiction and reality” (Fawcner, 1984: 113).

To emphasize his freedom in breaking the conventional narrative rules, the narrator devises two endings for the novel. In chapter 13, he argues that, to achieve his freedom, he must give freedom to others. As Salami points out, “the narrator emphasizes, on various occasions, that he does not control his narrative, and does not plan events” (Salami, 1992: 117). In fact, the novel includes many different forms of narrations. This shift in the line of the narration and the movement from one style to another is a result of the multiple possibilities for narrating the texts. Gradually, the whole text of the novel turns into an ever-changing piece of writing. Moreover, the multiple forms of narration confuse the readers to such an extent that they cannot depend on the narration process, which spontaneously creates an unreliable narrator.

Another reflection of existential freedom in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can be seen in the way the main characters behave. This freedom is observed in the novel at two levels: the first one is the freedom granted to Sarah and Charles in the Victorian society (explained in Chapter Two). The second one is the freedom given to the characters in the narrative process, which allows them to act independently of the narrator's will (illusory freedom). As Salami argues, “In this novel, Fowles constant concern with the thematic implications of the existential freedom of his characters becomes deeper than in such earlier novels” (Salami, 1992: 105). In Chapter Thirteen, Fowles aims to convey the message that the “novelist stands next to God”, a common convention in the nineteenth century – the time of the story. This refers to a convention in which the “novelist has only to pull the right strings and his puppets will behave in a lifelike manner; and produce on request a thorough analysis of their motives and intentions” (FLW: 77). According to this convention, the narrator has full control over his characters, for he stands next to God. However,

Fowles shifts the reader's attention by admitting that he is writing at the time of the French postmodernists, who refuse the authorial intrusion and the author's power to 'play God to his characters'. Hence, Fowles's characters have freedom of choice - they are not mere "puppets" in his hands. As Salami argues, "the narrator stresses that his characters are given freedom. He insists that they are free to decide their own lives and to construct their own subjectivities" (Salami, 1992: 117). The narrator conveys the idea that he is not the creator of the characters' fate. He also may not understand the characters' behavior or predict their further action.

The employed narrator promotes his characters freedom of choice because he believes that "a planned world is a dead world. [And] It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live". Describing Charles's freedom, the narrator says "When Charles left Sarah on her cliff edge, I ordered him to go straight go back to Lyme Regis. But he did not; he gratuitously turned and went down the Dairy" (FLW: 77). The narrator confirms that the idea of going to the Dairy "come(s) clearly from Charles, not myself" (FLW: 78). By doing so, he shows the reader that the characters are not under his control: "instead, he foregrounds the characters' subjectivities in a manner that shows mainly the illusion of freedom" (Salami, 1992: 117). At the same time, the narrator grants his characters a degree of privacy in order to achieve the same effect of the characters' freedom of choice: "Whether they met the next morning in spite of Charles's express prohibition I do not know" (FLW: 106). It is also seen that the reader is not allowed to know about Sarah's thoughts or motivations. Commenting on this subject, Tarbox argues, "The narrator calls his authority into question by frequently losing control of his characters, such as when Charles disobeys his order, or when Sarah disappears and even he does not know where she is" (Tarbox, 1988: 82).

In order to understand the existential freedom the narrator gives to his characters, the second ending for the story (in chapter 61) should be taken into consideration. The narrator cannot give his characters freedom unless he is free. Based on this principle, one can assume that the second ending is the one that best suits the narrator, because this is the best way for him to give his characters the freedom to shape the course of their own lives. As Aubrey puts it: "Novels may seem more real if the characters do not behave like marionettes and narrators do not

behave like God. So the narrator, in effect, promises to give his characters the free will that people would want a deity to grant them” (Aubrey, 1991: 104). In this ending, Sarah refuses Charles’s suggestion in order to be free from the bondage of marriage. Charles also refuses to be united with Sarah to maintain his individuality and stay free from the restraints of marriage.

In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, the reader, too, has freedom of choice. Fowles’s narrator gives the reader freedom of choice in order to be faithful to his belief in existential freedom. He puts the readers in a position in which they can freely construct some events of the story. Traditionally, the reader is put in a position of an addressee who gets the writer’s message throughout the text. However, in Fowles’s novel, Tarbox points out, “The reader takes over the function of novelist and his imagined end becomes a disclosure of his identity” (Tarbox, 1988: 85). In order to achieve this depiction, Fowles employs different postmodern characteristics. The postmodern characteristic, which grants the reader freedom to choose and makes him co-author, is the open ending of the novel. As Salami points out:

The novel’s open-endedness is a form of freedom to Charles as well as to the reader, a factor that undermines authority in the narrative. . . like Charles, Sarah, and Jenny, the reader is free of manipulation, in the sense that s/he can maneuver his/her own position in the narrative. (Salami, 1992: 134)

By so doing, Fowles breaks the conventions of a closed ending. If it were a conventional Victorian novel, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* would have one ending. If it were so, the reader could predict the ending from the events that occur in the story: As the narrator says, “you may think that novelists always have fixed plans to which they work, so that the future predicted by Chapter One is always inexorably the actuality of Chapter Thirteen” (FLW: 77). But Fowles’s narrator ends his novel with an open ending to confirm that the novel is a postmodernist one, a novel that seems to be a product of the modern age: “the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Ronald Barthes” (FLW: 76). As the narrator points out, “we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is. Or was. This is why we cannot plan. We know a world is an organism, not 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” (FLW: 78).

Fowles’s narrator intentionally disappoints the readers by not meeting their expectations about the ending of the novel. At this point, there is a similarity between Sarah’s and the narrator’s role in the novel. When Sarah tells Charles, “Do not ask me to explain what I have done. I cannot explain it. It is not to be explained”, she obliges Charles to come up with his own explanation (FLW: 279). The same thing happens to the reader when the narrator leaves him without fixing the fight. Both Sarah and the narrator, Tarbox argues, “give their listeners the freedom to make their own explanations” (Tarbox, 1988: 84). The narrator leaves the readers with two possible endings to enable them to choose either way, as they wish. Thus, the readers are made to become fully involved in the construction of the text. As Salami maintains:

As Sarah frees Charles from his Victorian conventions, so the narrator frees the reader from the restriction of the omniscient, godlike narrator and provides him/her with the possibility of being a character in this fiction. Like Charles, the reader must face the anxiety of freedom by him/herself without the help of the narrator and without his authorial domination. The reader must undertake the task of linking the various layers of text, epigraphs, fiction with history, and most importantly the two epochs within which the novel is submerged. (Salami, 1992: 134)

In chapter 13, the narrator says, “the novelist is still a god, since he creates . . . what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority” (FLW: 78). Accordingly, in the final chapter of the novel, the readers are left with two endings, a position where they can fully enjoy their freedom of choice. As Aubrey points out, “In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, the narrator breaks into the narrative to insist that the reader enter into the game and choose how the narrative will end. He does to the reader what Sarah does to Charles – offers a situation as a heuristic” (Aubrey, 1991: 108). This undermines the

authority of the narrator and gives readers the freedom to end the novel according to their choice. Within this context, Salami points out, “In order to demonstrate his refusal of an authoritative stance, the narrator, then, displays two versions of the novel’s ending” (Salami, 1992: 118).

By using various styles of narration -Victorian and postmodernist ones- mixing historical with fictional events, and granting illusory freedom to the characters in the narrative process, Fowles succeeds in achieving the freedom of the text as well as granting the reader freedom in the process of reading the text. By so doing, Fowles asserts his belief in the importance of existential freedom.

CONCLUSION

In John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; the narrator, the two main characters, and the reader have freedom of choice in existentialist sense, which leads to infinite possibilities and unpredictable consequences. The central message Fowles conveys in the novel is that, for the individual, this kind of freedom is at best a mixed blessing. While on the one hand freedom of choice is a key factor that enables the individual to shape the course of his own life, and thus making life meaningful, on the other hand it brings a heavy responsibility to the individual because he has to put up with the consequences of his actions. This means that the individual has to tackle many difficulties in the process of retaining and exercising his freedom. Fowles suggests that the individual can be free only if s/he struggles with and resists the pressure and the established values of society.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles depicts the conventions and standards of the Victorian society; he uses the Victorian society as a setting for his story, and at the same time, he criticizes that society for the pressure and restrictions it imposed on the people of that time. In the novel, Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson are existential characters for they resist the conventions of their society in order to become free. Within this context, Galen argues, "In fact, the term 'existential hero' came to be used to describe characters in books or movies who acted alone, who had no ties to anyone, and who followed the rules of behavior set down by his own understanding of the world" (Galens, 2009: 230). They both sacrifice their reputation to be able to live as they wish, to exercise their free will to the fullest. These characters refuse to comply with the norms of the society because they know that blindly following these norms will mean imposing limits on their lives. Both Charles and Sarah are convinced that they need to create their own essence to prove their existence. However, one's attempt to construct an identity often involves going through arduous stages that usually take the form of a challenging journey. Refusing to be guided by the legacy of the past, these characters focus on the present moment,

trying to make the most of every single day of their lives. Driven by a desire to have full control over their own lives, Sarah and Charles want to shape the course of their lives as they wish. In this context Salami argues, “Both Charles and Sarah are existentialist since they concentrate on their freedom as it is maintained in the present, in the constant now; they refuse to evolve or to change according to history” (Salami, 1992: 125).

With its main focus on existential freedom, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* distorts the traditional conventions of the narrative process. In line with the basic tenets of existentialism, Fowles confirms the freedom of the text by breaking up the traditional narrative pattern. The godlike narrator, commonly used in the conventional narrative, has full control over the behavior of his characters, so that they act the way the narrator wishes. By contrast, Fowles rejects the idea of the omniscient narrator. Instead, he comes up with a modern narrator who shares his characters part of his own freedom, allowing them to behave as they wish. Accordingly, the narrative of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* centers on the theme of existential freedom. John Fowles's main concern in the novel is to emphasize the existential freedom of the individual. As Fowles puts it, “Existentialism is not a philosophy, but a way of looking at, and utilizing other philosophies. It is a theory of relatively among theories of absolute truth” (Fowles, 1969: 90). The idea of existential freedom can be clearly observed in the narrative process of the novel. The author thinks that, in order to confirm his own freedom, he must delegate part of his freedom to the narrator, the characters, and the reader. By employing a modern narrator to tell the story of a couple living in the Victorian era, the author grants the narrator freedom of choice, so that the latter can give freedom to the characters he is writing about. In the narrative process, the characters seem to be acting as they wish, enjoying their freedom in existential sense. However, the kind of freedom that the narrator gives to his characters is at best an illusory one. In line with the statement that “a planned world is a dead world”, the narrator emphasizes his conviction that in order for the characters to be alive, they must be granted freedom (FLW: 77). Viewed from a broader perspective, Fowles is concerned with the idea of existential freedom, which enables the individual to behave freely without being abused of what s/he does. In this context Hutcheon points out:

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. (Hutcheon, 1981: 61)

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