The French Lieutenant's Woman

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN FOWLES

Fowles was born into a conventional family of middle-class tobacco importers. At thirteen, he began attending boarding school, where he was successful in athletic pursuits. After spending two years in the Royal Marines, Fowles earned his bachelor's degree at New College, Oxford, in French and German. During this time he was influenced by existentialist writings. He then taught English for two years at a school in Greece. While there, he fell in love with Elizabeth Christy, who was married to one of his colleagues. Soon after returning to England, Elizabeth separated from her husband and married Fowles. Fowles spent the next ten years teaching English to foreign students at a girls' school in London. He published his first book, *The Collector*, in 1963. Its success made it possible for Fowles to quit teaching and focus entirely on his writing. In 1965, Fowles and his wife moved to a farm in Dorset, though they found it too isolated and soon moved to Lyme Regis instead, where Fowles would live for the rest of his life. He worked for a decade as the curator of the Lyme Regis Museum. *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, along with *The Collector*, became his most popular works, though he published a number of others, as well.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles explores many of the new ideas that transformed British society during the Victorian Era. Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection were increasingly coming to the public attention during this time, which led to major conflicts between science and religion, as well as a general reappraisal of the meaning of being human. The Victorian Era was also a time of political reform movements. In 1867 (the year in which most of the novel is set) the right to vote was significantly expanded to British working class men, which began to spell the decline in the power of the aristocracy. Women's rights were also becoming a political issue around this time. Victorian women were expected to adhere to the "cult of domesticity," which envisioned them as the pure and pious centers of the home, obedient to their husbands and dedicated to nurturing their children. However, women were fighting for increased rights in marriage as well as the right to vote. In 1867, John Stuart Mill proposed in Parliament that the Second Reform Act should give women the right to vote, but he was laughed down and the motion defeated. His famous essay "The Subjection of Women" argued for women's equality with men.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The French Lieutenant's Woman contains references to a number of literary and scientific books, including *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin's 1859 book proposing evolutionary theory), and the poetry of Tennyson (particularly *In Memoriam* and *Maud*) and Matthew Arnold (particularly "To Marguerite"). Fowles consciously writes in the shadow of Thomas Hardy, who is famous for writing about Dorset, where *The French Lieutenant's Woman* takes place. Fowles also follows Hardy in dealing directly with issues of gender and sexuality and employing evocative descriptions of nature.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The French Lieutenant's Woman
- **When Written:** 1967
- **Where Written:** Lyme Regis, Dorset, England
- **When Published:** 1969
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** historiographic metafiction
- **Setting:** Lyme Regis, Exeter, and London, England between 1867 and 1869
- **Climax:** Charles and Sarah having sex in Endicott's Family Hotel
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Poulteney, Sam, Mr. Freeman, Victorian society
- **Point of View:** third person, with interjections from a first person narrator

EXTRA CREDIT

Setting records. When Fowles sold his book *The Collector* to a publisher, the publisher believed he was paying Fowles more than had ever been paid for a first novel.

Sources of inspiration. When Fowles and his wife first moved to Dorset, they lived in a farmhouse that became the basis for the Dairy in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

PLOT SUMMARY

It's 1867, and Charles Smithson and Ernestina Freeman are engaged to be married. Charles is an upper-class amateur paleontologist, and Ernestina is the daughter of a rich draper. They're walking on the shore of Lyme Regis one day when they see a strange woman staring out at the sea. Supposedly she fell in love with a French lieutenant, and she's waiting for him to

return.

The wealthy and religious Mrs. Poulteney hired the French Lieutenant's Woman, Sarah Woodruff, as a companion a year before. Mrs. Poulteney is an awful woman who's afraid of hell, so she hopes that her charity towards Sarah will save her own soul. She knows that Sarah helped nurse a French lieutenant back to health when he was shipwrecked, and though Sarah thought he would marry her, he disappeared. Sarah has been an outcast ever since.

Soon after he sees Sarah by the shore, Charles goes out to look for **fossils**. He ends up in a strange wilderness called the Undercliff, and he comes upon Sarah sleeping in the grass. She wakes and sees him watching her. Sarah often walks in the Undercliff, even though Mrs. Poulteney forbade it because the area is associated with immoral activities. Sarah has continued to walk there, but now she takes extra precautions not to be seen.

The next day, Charles, Ernestina, and Ernestina's aunt, Mrs. Tranter, visit Mrs. Poulteney and see Sarah at her house. Meanwhile, Charles's manservant, Sam, is falling in love with Mrs. Tranter's maid, Mary.

A few days later, Charles goes fossil hunting in the Undercliff again and runs into Sarah. He tells her that he thinks she's a good person, and Mrs. Tranter would like to help her. Sarah reveals that the French lieutenant has married someone else and he will not be returning for her. Charles doesn't tell Ernestina or Mrs. Tranter that he's seen Sarah, and he realizes that he's attracted to her.

The next time that Charles goes to the Undercliff, Sarah takes him by surprise and says she wants to tell him the story of what happened with the French lieutenant. She feels like she'll go mad if she can't talk to someone sympathetic. Charles insists they should stop meeting because it's not proper, but he eventually agrees that to meet her soon to hear her story.

That evening, Charles, Ernestina, and Mrs. Tranter eat dinner with Dr. Grogan. Afterwards, Charles and the doctor have a drink and begin discussing Sarah. Grogan says she has a bad case of melancholia, and can only be cured if she tells someone her story. They discover that they both believe in the theories of Charles Darwin.

Charles meets Sarah again, and she tells him that she fell in love with the Frenchman, Varguennes, and she slept with him in an inn even though she could tell that he would never keep his promise to marry her. She did it because she feels that the circumstances of her life will never allow her to be happy, and she wanted to be an outcast so that people would recognize her suffering. Later, she and Charles come upon Sam and Mary kissing. As Sarah walks back to Lyme alone, she makes sure that Mrs. Poulteney's cruel housekeeper, Mrs. Fairley, sees her.

That same day, Charles's bachelor uncle, Sir Robert, summons him to his estate, Winsyatt. Charles believes that Sir Robert is going to give him the estate, but Sir Robert actually announces that he's getting married. If he has a son, Charles will no longer inherit Winsyatt or his uncle's title of baronet.

When Charles returns to Lyme with the bad news, Ernestina is outraged. Charles then learns that Mrs. Poulteney has fired Sarah for walking in the Undercliff and Sarah has disappeared, though Charles finds that she's sent him a note asking him to meet her once again. Meanwhile, Sam is beginning to realize that something's amiss, and he's considering blackmailing Charles so that he can fulfill his dream of starting a shop with Mary.

Charles goes to see Dr. Grogan and tells him about his meetings with Sarah and the note she's sent him. They're both worried she might try to commit suicide. Grogan believes Sarah wanted to get fired, and he thinks that she's so desperate to manipulate people that she might hurt herself in the process. Grogan says he'll meet Sarah in Charles's place and take her to an asylum where she can recover.

Grogan gives Charles an account of a strange trial in which a man was convicted for threatening a family and attempting to rape a girl, when in truth the girl just made it seem as though he had committed the crimes. There are also cases of women wounding themselves in gruesome ways in order to manipulate those around them. Though Charles is horrified, he decides that Grogan's view of Sarah is wrong.

Charles meets Sarah at a barn in the Undercliff. She admits that she let Mrs. Fairley see her walking in the Undercliff so she would get fired, and she says she loves Charles. They kiss, but then Charles rushes out of the barn and finds Sam and Mary outside. Charles makes them promise not to say anything and makes Sarah agree to leave Lyme and go to Exeter.

That day, Charles goes to London against Ernestina's wishes to inform her father that he may no longer be his uncle's heir. Mr. Freeman ultimately agrees to let the marriage happen anyway, and he suggests that Charles might one day take over his business, even though gentlemen don't usually work in trade. Charles feels he can't refuse, but he begins to loathe his future.

Charles goes to his club and runs into some wild friends he had at Cambridge. They all get drunk and then go to a brothel. Though Charles leaves rather than engage a prostitute, he sees a prostitute on his way home who vaguely reminds him of Sarah, and he hires her. However, he begins to feel ill in her flat. As they're about to have sex, he discovers that her name is Sarah, and he vomits. She's very kind to him, and when she goes to get him a cab, he comforts her crying baby.

The next morning, Charles receives a note from Sarah that contains only the name of the hotel where she's staying in Exeter. Sam reveals his dream to start a shop and makes it clear that he'd like Charles to give him the money. Charles eventually says he'd be willing to do so after his marriage.

Charles and Sam take the train to Exeter, then return to Lyme.

Charles and Ernestina live happily ever after, and Mrs. Poulteney dies and goes to hell. However, the narrator admits that this ending is false; it's only what Charles wanted to happen.

In reality, when Charles arrives in Exeter, he goes to Sarah's hotel. She's hurt her ankle, so he goes up to her room. After initial awkwardness, they're both filled with desire and have sex with each other. Charles says he'll marry her, but she protests. When Charles is dressing, he sees blood on his shirt and realizes that Sarah was a virgin—she has lied about Varguennes. He's shocked and confused, and she makes him leave.

Charles goes to a church, where he realizes that he doesn't need to worry about the judgment of the dead, and that the purpose of Christianity should be to create a world in which Christ can be uncrucified. He decides to marry Sarah instead of Ernestina.

The next morning, Charles sends Sam to Sarah with a letter telling her that he's breaking off his engagement to Ernestina. If she's willing to marry him, she should keep **the brooch** he's enclosing, and if not, she should send it back with Sam. Sam brings nothing back. Charles goes to Lyme and tells Ernestina first that he was going to marry her for the wrong reasons, then that he's in love with someone else. She pleads with him and finally collapses.

Charles fetches Dr. Grogan. When Sam finds out what Charles has done, he quits. After Dr. Grogan tends to Ernestina, he visits Charles and tells him how morally despicable his actions are. He'll have to spend the rest of his life proving that he made his choice for the right reasons.

Charles returns to Exeter, but when he gets to Sarah's hotel he finds that she's gone to London and left no way to contact her. Charles discovers that Sam never delivered his letter. On the train to London the next morning, the narrator sits in Charles's compartment and tries to figure out what to do with him. The narrator decides that he must show two possible endings.

Charles begins to scour London for Sarah, to no avail. Mr. Freeman and his lawyers force Charles to sign a confession of guilt saying that he had an affair and broke his promise to Ernestina without cause. He becomes depressed and travels Europe for a year and a half, finding joy in nothing. Meanwhile, Sam works in Mr. Freeman's store and begins to be successful. One day Mary sees Sarah going into a house in Chelsea.

Charles goes to the United States and travels extensively until he receives a telegram that his lawyer has found Sarah. He returns to London and goes to the house where Sarah is living, which is owned by the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Sarah is working as his assistant, and she feels like she belongs for the first time. Charles has come to save her, but she doesn't want to be saved. To his fury, she tells him they can't be together, and they argue. Just as Charles is about to leave, Sarah reveals that she's had his child. There seems to be hope that they'll be together as a family after all.

However, the narrator also presents a second possible ending. After Charles and Sarah argue, Charles perceives that Sarah is offering the opportunity for them to have a platonic relationship. He refuses, and leaves the house without seeing the child. He begins to realize that life cannot be solved, but is meant to be endured.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The narrator – The narrator of the book appears sporadically as a disembodied narrative "I," and also, twice, as an actual character who inserts himself into the scene of Victorian England. The narrator suggests that he is also the writer of the story, commenting on his process of writing, while making it clear that he isn't entirely in control of what his characters do and that he doesn't know everything about them. Despite that the narrator claims to be the writer, he should not be conflated with Fowles, since Fowles is writing in 1967, and the narrator appears in the text as a grown man in Victorian England. The story's narrator portrays himself as a pretentious and judgmental, and he seems to think the entire world exists for his own use. Fowles uses this narrator figure to satirize himself and writers in general, as well as to provide a reminder that fiction is a construction of the author's mind, rather than a natural or somehow inherently true occurrence.

Charles Smithson – Charles is an upper-class amateur paleontologist who believes wholeheartedly in Darwin's theory of evolution. In fact, he shares his first name with Darwin, gesturing to the importance of evolution to his life. Though Charles believes himself to be one of the "fittest" (in a Darwinian sense) who will advance the evolution of humans, he also struggles with a lack of faith in himself and a laziness about putting his passions and ideas into practice. He lacks motivation in paleontology because he knows he'll never be one of the great figures of his era, and, though he doesn't hesitate to critique Victorian society in theory, for a long time he lacks the courage to put his theories into practice for fear of social ostracism. Eventually, however, he decides that he must break off his engagement to Ernestina in order to marry Sarah, because he believes this is the morally correct thing to do, despite the fact that he knows his society will judge him harshly for this decision. Throughout the book, Charles labors to understand Sarah, whose actions become the consuming and destroying puzzle of his life.

Sarah Woodruff – Sarah, the titular French Lieutenant's Woman, is modeled after the trope of the mysteriously alluring woman who often tempts the male protagonists of Victorian novels. Her motives are always murky, and her actions are

unexpected. Her father was a farmer who gave her an education above her station, which means that she doesn't fully belong to either the lower class or the middle class. She's chiefly characterized by her loneliness and her status as an outcast, which ostensibly came from her improper liaison with a French lieutenant. However, it becomes clear that she has manipulated people's perception of her precisely in order to be an outcast, because having already broken all the rules of society gives her a sense of freedom. Sarah is always deceiving Charles, and her web of lies pulls him in and tangles him up. Though her motivations never become entirely clear, it seems that she craves, above all, the freedom to be her authentic self and control her own destiny without any interference from society. She can certainly be read as a feminist character, considering that she denies the sexual and moral restraints put upon women at this time and refuses to let Charles act out his savior fantasies upon her. Furthermore, she asserts her ability to live as a single woman, even with an illegitimate child.

Ernestina Freeman – Ernestina, modeled after the conventional love interest of a Victorian novel, is Charles's fiancée. She comes from an upper-middle-class family, and even though her family is actually wealthier than Charles's, she feels very anxious about their status difference, since Charles's family are aristocrats. She's prone to be jealous in her relationship with Charles, partly because she truly loves him. She's also an only child, which makes her rather spoiled and selfish, but her sense of irony keeps her from seeming so too often. Ernestina acts as the safe, conventional choice of a wife, as she never questions Victorian society. However, after meeting Sarah, Charles begins to realize that Ernestina is too innocent and shallow to really make him happy. It's precisely her failure to question Victorian society that makes her too dull to keep his interest.

Dr. Grogan – Dr. Grogan is an Irish doctor who lives in Lyme. He and Charles find common ground in their intellectual pursuits, particularly their dedication to Darwin's theory of evolution. Grogan believes that Sarah is not only melancholic, but also psychologically twisted. According to him, she is making herself miserable on purpose in order to manipulate the people around her, particularly Charles. Grogan wants to put Sarah in an asylum, and despite Charles's great respect for Dr. Grogan, he struggles to believe that Sarah is wicked or crazy. Later, Grogan harshly reprimands Charles for choosing Sarah over Ernestina, telling Charles that he must live the rest of his life in a way that will prove he's made his choice with the right motives. Overall, Grogan acts as a moral counterweight to Charles; his arguments differ from Charles's, but make just as much sense—perhaps more.

Sam Farrow – Sam is Charles's manservant. He's a London Cockney, but he has dreams of moving up the social ladder by opening a haberdashery. Although he's not portrayed as a fundamentally bad person, Sam willingly takes opportunities for personal advancement, even at the cost of others' happiness. He doesn't hesitate to blackmail Charles into giving him the money he needs to start his shop, and he sabotages Charles's relationship with Sarah so that Charles will marry Ernestina, thus guaranteeing that Charles will have enough money to fund the haberdashery. Eventually, when Sam becomes successful in Mr. Freeman's store, he feels guilty enough about how he gained his good fortune that he sends Sarah's address to Charles. Overall, Sam acts as a figure disadvantaged by the British class system and often belittled by the wealthy Charles. His example shows how difficult it is for working-class Englishmen to better their situations by honest means.

Mary – Mary is a maid at Mrs. Tranter's house. She comes from an impoverished country family. She knows she's pretty, and she's not above making Ernestina jealous of her looks. She falls in love with Sam and marries him. Fowles uses Mary to point out that the stereotype of the sexually repressed Victorian doesn't take into account the frequent sexual activity of the lower classes.

Mrs. Poulteney – One of the upper-class women of Lyme. Mrs. Poulteney is generally known to be a horrible person who mistreats her servants and judges those around her by skewed religious standards. Her secret is that she believes in hell and fears she'll go there when she dies. She hires Sarah as her companion as an act of charity that she hopes will help her get to heaven, but she's cruel to Sarah. Mrs. Poulteney makes quite a show of her religious faith, but in truth her charity is largely an attempt to one-up Lady Cotton, who's known for her good deeds. Mrs. Poulteney exemplifies the rotten hypocrisy of the Anglican Church, and the narrator seems to revel in depicting her descent to hell when she dies.

Mr. Freeman – Ernestina's father. Mr. Freeman has made his fortune through his draper's store on Oxford Street. He exemplifies the upper-middle-class nouveau riche of the Victorian Era. Though he strives to be a gentleman and wants his daughter to gain an aristocratic title by marriage, he also disdains the aristocracy as lazy and snobbish. He and Charles don't get along terribly well. They've argued about Darwin's theory of evolution, and Mr. Freeman wants Charles to take over his business one day, which makes Charles feel trapped. After Charles breaks off his engagement to Ernestina, Mr. Freeman treats him harshly, making him sign a confession of guilt.

The prostitute When Charles is in London, feeling trapped by his future, he picks up a prostitute on the street because she looks vaguely like Sarah. This woman has a young daughter and goes about her work in a professional, almost dispassionate manner. When Charles finds out that her name is also Sarah, he vomits. Symbolically, the prostitute stands in for Sarah in terms of Charles's lust—she's a form of Sarah that Charles can possess in a way he never can possess the real Sarah—but she

also demonstrates what Sarah's life could easily be like, as Sarah herself says she's likely to become a prostitute if she goes to London. Furthermore, both Sarahs end up having daughters whom Charles plays with.

Mrs. Tranter Mrs. Tranter is Ernestina's aunt, with whom she stays in Lyme. She's one of the most truly kind characters, and in her treatment of her servants, she acts as a counterexample to Mrs. Poulteney and Charles. She sees her servant Mary as a whole person who experiences pain and passion, and she does whatever she can to help Mary, Sam, and even Sarah. Ernestina often tries to rebel against her aunt, but Charles likes Mrs. Tranter.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sir Robert – Charles's uncle, a baronet. He only cares about fox hunting and he doesn't understand Charles's intellectual pursuits. Though he's been a bachelor his whole life, he finally decides to marry, endangering Charles's inheritance.

Mrs. Fairley – Mrs. Poulteney's cruel housekeeper. She delights in having Sarah's activities spied on and then reporting her wrongdoing to Mrs. Poulteney, which eventually gets Sarah fired.

The vicar – The clergyman who serves Mrs. Poulteney. He suggests that she take Sarah in to pave her way to heaven. He doesn't particularly like Mrs. Poulteney, but he humors her because she donates freely to his church.

The curate – A clergyman who lets Charles pray in his church in Exeter. His religion leans towards Catholicism.

Millie – A servant of Mrs. Poulteney's whom Sarah saves from being fired. She has a breakdown and begins to sleep in Sarah's bed for comfort.

Mrs. Hawkins – A servant at Winsyatt. She acted as a mother figure to Charles when he was little.

Mrs. Endicott – The owner of Endicott's Family Hotel, where Sarah stays in Exeter. She cares only about how much money her guests will pay for a room.

Sir Thomas Burgh – A man Charles knows from his time at Cambridge. He has a reputation of living entirely for pleasure, and he takes Charles to a brothel in London.

Harry Montague – Charles's lawyer.

Mr. Aubrey – Mr. Freeman's lawyer.

Serjeant Murphy – An official of the law who presides at the meeting that Charles has with Mr. Freeman and his lawyers. He has a frightening reputation.

Lalage – Charles and Sarah's daughter.

Mrs. Talbot Sarah's former employer, who wants to help her after her affair with Varguennes. Mrs. Talbot's loving relationship with her family constantly reminds Sarah of what she believes she can never have.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FICTION AND HISTORY VS. REALITY

The French Lieutenant's Woman is a work of historiographical metafiction, which is a term that refers to a work of fiction based on history that draws attention to its own quality of being imagined, rather than real. In this novel, for example, the narrator often comments on the process of inventing plot or character, which reminds the reader that the described events have not been "found" in the past, but rather they have been actively invented by a person. Fowles uses this technique to comment on the nature of the past and the present, as well as on the parallels between fiction and history.

The parallel between fiction and history is clearest in Fowles' choice to model *The French Lieutenant's Woman* on the genre of the Victorian novel, which has many stylistic and formal similarities to history books. For example, the Victorian novel—like most history books—has a godlike omniscient narrator and a commitment to absolute realism (presenting events as though they were objective or natural, instead of invented). By adding into the Victorian novel a narrator who interjects with uncertainty, biased opinion, and blatant admissions of his own role in inventing and shaping the story, Fowles suggests the extent to which stories, whether or not they're "true," are always fictions, in that they must be reimagined and retold by people. Thus, Fowles asks readers to consider how their perceptions of reality and history are shaped by partially-imagined narratives that are presented as truth.

In drawing a parallel between fiction and history, Fowles also explores the ways in which conventional ideas about the past and present shift over time. While the novel is largely set in 1867, it was published in 1969, and the narrator consistently interjects with insight and observation from the perspective of the future. Often, this is meant either to subvert a present-day misconception about the Victorians, or to illustrate an idea that the Victorians had about themselves that no longer exists in the present day. For example, Fowles depicts Charles as typical of his age in being driven by his sense of duty, which Fowles sees as a major difference between the Victorians and his modern readers. This duty is in part to his ancestors, and it is only when Charles can free himself of the past, deciding to believe that his dead ancestors don't know or judge his life, that he finds himself able to make his own decisions. Although Fowles

characterizes this duty to the past as a particularly Victorian drive, he's undoubtedly arguing for modern people to also guard against revering and idealizing the past in this way.

Fowles constantly shows the reader that the Victorians' choices and self-knowledge were shaped and limited by the ideology of their era. Of course, since the narrator uses the Victorian story to draw an explicit parallel with the present, readers are invited to also consider how contemporary ideas and conventions limit their own lives and shape their assumptions about the past. This goes hand-in-hand with Fowles's commentary on changing interpretive conventions. In the Victorian era, novels were generally read through the lens of morality. Today, however, literary criticism often involves reading a text through theories and insights from other contemporary fields of study. For example, to Victorians the literary stock character of the fallen woman was generally used to illustrate the perils of breaking convention—her dangerous and tempting presence testified to the moral importance of Victorian social and sexual norms. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, however, Sarah (who is modeled on the trope of the fallen woman) shows readers how Victorian norms oppressed women. By superimposing modern interpretive frames—such as sociology, psychology, or gender studies—onto a Victorian story, Fowles emphasizes another way in which stories can never be objective: the same story will always mean something different in the context of a different era.

In light of Fowles' questioning of the authority of history, it makes sense that part of Charles's storyline is his evolving relationship with the past. The moment in the church in which Charles frees himself from social conventions to follow his heart is framed not as a revelation about love, but rather as a revelation about history. Charles decides to no longer live as though his ancestors are judging his behavior—in other words, to live as though the past is not bound up with the present. While this passage certainly suggests that the rigid and stifling social conventions of the Victorian era were the result of an unnecessarily intense belief in the importance of the past, Charles's decision to divorce the past from the present does not prove a sound one, either. Just as marrying Ernestina for the sake of convention would have made him miserable, choosing to pursue Sarah breaks his heart and shatters the structure of his life. The combination of Charles's story and Fowles' treatment of fiction and history suggests that history must not be treated as though it is objectively true and of paramount importance—after all, history is a subjective construct whose importance and interpretation shifts in relation to the present. However, the novel also suggests that the force of the past on the present cannot be escaped by mere denial. Instead, the past must be grappled with on its own terms, rather than through broad and rigid categories.

STORYTELLING AND MORALITY

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles applies metafiction (writing that is self-conscious about the fact that it is written and imagined) to the conventions of a Victorian love story in order to draw attention to the act of storytelling itself. The metafictional elements of the story—such as its multiple endings, and the narrator's commentary on having made up the plot and characters—pull readers out of the Victorian plotline and ask them to consider that storytelling is not simply a way of representing the world. Instead, it's a powerful tool used to manipulate the ways in which the world is understood.

In a way, Sarah's story runs parallel to the aims of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Sarah invents a fictional past in order to gain freedom in the present. In other words, she "authors" the story about Varguennes in order to control how she is understood by others. Since Sarah's true suffering—her sense of being an outsider who cannot live the life for which she was meant—is incomprehensible to conventional Victorians, Sarah invents a more traditional story of female suffering to make her emotions legible to those around her. In this way, Fowles suggests that fiction is a tool to make legible what might otherwise go unnoticed or be misunderstood. Sarah's story, then, can be seen as a metaphor for the book's overall project. Just as Sarah uses storytelling to make clear an aspect of her life that was hidden, Fowles uses metafictional storytelling to lay bare elements of fiction writing that are not often examined.

The main power of storytelling to which Fowles draws the reader's attention is a story's ability to make moralistic judgments seem natural. Many novels, particularly from the Victorian period, use a character's ultimate fate as a judgment on the morality of that character's actions. For example, ending a novel with a character's death could allow an author to show that the character's behavior was improper, while a happy ending often gives the message that the character's behavior has earned a reward. Since the convention of interpreting a story's ending as a moral judgment is so prevalent, Fowles makes clear that his is not a moralistic novel by giving *The French Lieutenant's Woman* three different endings.

Each of Fowles's endings implies a different judgment. The first ending—the conventional Victorian ending in which Charles resists Sarah, honors his commitment to Ernestina, and is rewarded with a happy life—would suggest that adhering to social convention over personal desire is noble and advisable (however, Fowles expresses no real faith in this ending, implying that it is false). The second ending—in which Charles, Sarah, and Lalage seem destined for happy family life—suggests that transgressing society in favor of one's own principles is right and will eventually pay off. The third ending—in which Charles seems destined for a life of lonely bitterness and exile—suggests that his societal rebellion, combined with his disregard for Sarah's desires, has been fatally misguided. Each

ending inflects the preceding events with different meanings, but if none of these endings is the "true" ending, then the reader is left unsure of the moral frame through which to view the book. In other words, shifting between these three endings shows that storytelling makes arbitrary moral judgments seem natural. Morality, then, is not naturally found in events—people put it there through stories.

CONVENTION VS. FREEDOM

The Victorian era was a particularly socially restrictive period, and one of the main conflicts of this novel involves the characters struggling against the social conventions that keep them bound to certain pathways in life. Charles and Sarah share the goal of finding a way to live as they wish in their society, and they constantly fight against the restrictions they find imposed on their free will.

Fowles frequently discusses the sense of duty that ruled the Victorians. Duty implies a drive from within oneself; a sense of moral obligation to act in a certain way. However, society dictates what those moral obligations are, and the fact that duty involves one's own conscience suggests that society's values have become so engrained that it's often impossible to tell what one feels compelled to do because of societal conditioning, as opposed to because it's truly the right thing. Only when he begins to transgress society's conventions does Charles begin to recognize how much they constrict him. In attempting to converse with Sarah he has to be constantly aware of how someone watching would interpret their meeting. He finds himself engaging in more and more elaborate precautions and deceptions to avoid the judgment of society. As he becomes increasingly aware of the conventions that guide his actions, he also becomes increasingly concerned about the idea of free will. If his entire life is governed by a desire to act in the way that society wants him to act, does he really have free will? He begins to fight convention simply to prove his sovereignty over his own life.

Sarah interacts with convention in a particularly unexpected way that makes her unintelligible to the other characters, and likely to the reader, as well. At first she seems like a victim of convention; she has flouted society's rules by becoming involved with Varguennes without marrying him, and the gender expectations of the time have led her to be labeled as a whore who isn't fit for polite company. However, it becomes clear that Sarah is actually manipulating convention for her own gain—even if she doesn't seem to be gaining anything by most conventional standards of happiness or success. She lets it be believed (in fact, she encourages the belief) that she slept with Varguennes before he deserted her. She knows that this belief will make her an outcast, and ironically, this is precisely what she wants. She wants to be different, to be recognized for the suffering she feels due to her inability to fulfill herself within the constraints of Victorian womanhood.

By breaking convention so blatantly, Sarah feels herself freed from it forever. Shame is supposed to punish those who break convention in this way, but Sarah feeds off of her shame because it sets her apart. If society's punishment is no punishment, then convention no longer has any power over her—Sarah has conquered society. Charles, on the other hand, never quite reaches this degree of freedom. Though he does flout convention by breaking off his engagement and pursuing Sarah, he remains mired in the shame society throws at him as a result. Therefore, Sarah deliberately remains in Lyme Regis because it's the place where people know her shame, while Charles escapes to America, where he can be more anonymous and pretend that he adheres to society's expectations. Charles and Sarah's struggles against convention suggest that only by shedding loyalty to society's conventions can one really take control over one's life and exercise free will. There's inevitably a price to pay for going against society, and it might create misery, but Fowles suggests that misery in freedom is ultimately superior to blind happiness in chains.

Charles and Sarah's struggle against convention also serves as a microcosm of the book's overall concern with how certain narrative structures handle convention. The novel itself flouts convention at every turn, both by its metafictional qualities and by offering multiple endings. The novel also deals with the idea of freedom not only for the characters, but also for the reader and the writer. A writer is generally believed to have complete freedom and control over the arc of a story, yet the narrator of this book claims that he isn't entirely in control—the characters seem to do what they want, and he can only follow their actions. Additionally, the multiple endings may seem to give the reader freedom by allowing them to choose which one they find most plausible or satisfying. However, this narrative twist is really a false choice. The reader may feel tempted to choose one ending to believe in, but the narrator makes it clear that no ending can be truer than another, that all three—or at least the final two—must exist simultaneously. It may seem that the reader is offered the freedom of choice, but in fact making that choice means that the reader is losing the full force of the narrative.

CLASS

In this novel, Fowles portrays characters belonging to three distinct levels of the Victorian class system. Sam and Mary represent the working class; Ernestina and her father represent the bourgeois, *nouveau riche*, or middle class; and Charles and his uncle, Sir Robert, represent the upper class, or aristocracy. Many Victorian authors, such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, were attentive to issues of class in their novels, and Fowles imitates them in this respect. However, this fine-tuned attention to class is not only meant to illuminate the social norms and values of

Victorian society; Fowles's treatment of class is meant to draw a line between Victorian class consciousness and the major upheavals of the twentieth century. The narrator's interjections make the reader constantly aware of the global class conflicts that occurred after the events of this book, particularly the rise of communism and the influence of Karl Marx in the early twentieth century.

Between 1867 and 1868, acts of the British Parliament greatly increased the political power of the working class by extending voting rights to all male heads of household. The novel, then, is set in a time of immense political change, which Fowles discusses, despite the fact that his characters don't directly engage with these politics. Fowles focuses most closely on the issue of class mobility, suggesting that the British social structure never allows mobility to happen naturally or peacefully. Sam and Mary present the most hopeful picture of class mobility, since they begin as solidly lower-class characters, but by the end of the book they're well on their way to becoming bourgeois. Moreover, they seem quite happy with their increasing fortunes and new identity. In one sense, their story shows that upward mobility is possible and can be as positive as people imagine it to be. However, Sam and Mary only attain their good fortune through deception and betrayal, contributing to Charles's ruin after he leaves Ernestina. Thus, Fowles implies that only through selling one's soul to the devil—a reference he himself makes—can one clamber up the social ladder.

Charles, on the other hand, finds himself in danger of falling down the social ladder, even as Sam and Mary are reaching for the next rung. Sir Robert's decision to marry means that Charles may not become the rich and titled aristocrat he always expected to be. Although Mr. Freeman's offer to bring Charles into the family business might bring Charles wealth, it would also lessen his status, as working for a living almost automatically makes one bourgeois instead of aristocratic. Charles panics at the prospect of losing status in this way. Thus, he's caught in the dictates of the class structure as much as anyone, even though he's objectively privileged by it. Charles's disgust at the idea of becoming bourgeois may seem foolish, and Fowles is probably satirizing the aristocracy to some extent. However, Fowles also points out the absurd dissatisfaction of the bourgeoisie. By definition, the bourgeoisie have escaped the oppressed lives of the working class in pursuit of something greater, but the novel's bourgeois characters seem to despise their own origins and seek always to move further up the social ladder, propelled by a constant dissatisfaction with their present wealth and status. Thus, the bourgeoisie are an ideal example of the irony of social mobility: as soon as one's status begins to improve, he or she can never be entirely content with their position.

Sarah, perpetually an outcast, is the one character who doesn't clearly belong to any class. Born into the agricultural working class, her education raised her up out of her origins, but not quite to the level of the bourgeoisie. This in-between status, however, does not give Sarah freedom from the tyranny of the class system. Instead, it means she has no clear path to follow and no prescribed way to find love. She's too good for lower-class men, but her low birth means that a bourgeois man is unlikely to marry her. Sarah's class-based loneliness leads her to transgress society's conventions, making her further an outcast. Essentially, once she realizes that the class system has estranged her from others, she stops adhering to society's structures altogether. This shows the paradox of the British class system; it's torturing everyone, both those who opt in and those who opt out. This dilemma suggests that Victorian England was ripe to receive the economic ideas of Karl Marx, whose shadow hangs over the novel.

Marx advocated a revolution of the working class in order to gain freedom from the oppressive class system created by capitalism. In his view, in order to improve one's life, a working-class person must join with others to revolt against the bourgeoisie. In Fowles's novel, Sam and Mary are the discontented, poor characters who resent their wealthy employers and want to make better lives for themselves. But rather than do so by revolting in the service of their fellow members of the lower class, Sam and Mary are co-opted into the very capitalist system that has oppressed them their entire lives. Mr. Freeman is exactly the wealthy bourgeois character against whom Marx would have them revolt, but Fowles shows Sam and Mary instead entrusting their livelihood to Mr. Freeman in the hopes of one day becoming more like him.

This shows Fowles' complicated relationship to Marx. While Fowles clearly shows the oppressive nature of the Victorian class structure, he seems to believe that Marx's ideas are incapable of mobilizing the lower classes, and also insufficiently complex to fully grapple with history. While Marx believed that history was best understood through the lens of class struggle, Fowles rejects any attempt to view history through a single interpretive frame. Instead, he points out in Marx's own words that "history is nothing but the actions of men in pursuit of their ends." In other words, history has no motivation or theme in itself; it's only the chaos of individual people struggling to achieve their own desires.

Each chapter of the novel has at least one epigraph (many are quotes from Marx), and the book as a whole also has a Marx epigraph, which one can see as an interpretive frame for the book: "Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself." Thus, even if *The French Lieutenant's Woman* seems, on the surface, to be a story of class struggle, Fowles finds in it something more complicated. Each of the characters struggles with a personal sense of their own class and status, rather than joining together to rail against the oppressive class system overall (as Marx would have them do). In essence, Fowles argues against any

structural framework that attempts to impose a narrative on people, which includes the leftist narrative of Marxism.

SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Although the main plot and writing style of this novel seem very much like those of a Victorian novel, this story could never have been produced in the nineteenth century. Above all, its treatment of sexuality is uniquely modern, even if the sexuality it portrays is accurate to the Victorian era. As Fowles points out, the Victorians are often defined in the public imagination by their sexual prudishness. This aspect of their society has come to be overemphasized, however, in large part because the middle and upper classes repressed expression of sexuality in art and literature. However, Fowles argues that Victorians were just as obsessed with sex as any modern culture, and by forbidding discussion of it and limiting practice of it, they in fact increased the pleasure that they gained when they actually did engage in sexual actions. This novel, then, portrays what a Victorian novel could not: the reality of Victorians' sexual life, including graphic images of prostitution and intercourse.

Despite Fowles's argument that Victorian sexuality is not categorically different from contemporary sexuality, he acknowledges that sexual norms were much different, which had profound effects on women, in particular. Victorian women were coerced into limiting expressions of sexuality in part through the specter of becoming a fallen woman. A fallen woman is one who has lost her virginity before marriage, become a prostitute, or otherwise sexually compromised herself. Fallen women were usually ostracized by society and often were unable to find a husband or have a proper family in a time when these were supposed to be women's sole markers of success. Tess Durbeyfield in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is probably the most famous fallen woman in Victorian fiction, but it was a standard trope used to frighten women into chastity until marriage. Fowles means Sarah to also evoke this trope, though her embodiment of it is shown to be far more complex than the confines of Victorian society would ever allow a novel to portray.

Sarah upends the idea that estrangement is necessarily a punishment for fallen women and a deterrent to other women who might stray from norms. By inviting the label of "fallen woman"—and relishing the ostracism that results—Sarah uses a clichéd archetype to subvert society's power over her sexuality. Sarah's fluency with this trope and its effects—as well as the fact that, in her case, it isn't accurate—encourages readers to see the fallen woman trope as a story that gained power through its constant retelling in real life and in fiction. While exposing the trope as a fabricated story might seem to expose it as weak, Fowles instead shows how much real-life power a cultural narrative such as this one can have. Even as Sarah explodes the implications of the fallen woman trope, she's still trapped within the confines of its narrative, as it shapes her life and her actions in every possible way.

Near the end of the book, Fowles calls Sarah a "New Woman," which was a term the Victorians used to denote a more independent and progressive type of woman, who often transgressed sexual norms in the name of social change. In this transgression of sexual norms, New Women and fallen women were not so different. By calling her a New Woman, however, Fowles begins to shift Sarah into a narrative of purposeful rebellion and out of the narrative of the woman who has fallen by fate or moral laxity. He also implicitly politicizes Sarah's actions, implying that she's part of a broader social movement away from the Victorian repression of women and their sexuality. Overall, then, Fowles is arguing not only for gender equality and sexual freedom, but also to change the modern view of the Victorians' relationship to sex. By showing his characters engaging in sexual activities that fall outside of the modern conception of Victorian life, Fowles makes the Victorians seem more real and more fallible. Humanity, he argues, always has the same desires and the same weaknesses, and it's only the way of discussing and representing them that changes.

Fowles meant for *The French Lieutenant's Woman* to be a feminist novel, and his critique of female oppression and his re-imagination of a simplistic Victorian trope are feminist in nature. However, many critics take issue with some aspects of Fowles's treatment of gender. For example, some feminists criticize the fact that all of the significant relationships that Fowles depicts exist between men and women or men and men (female relationships, Fowles seems to imply, are not important). Furthermore, Sarah is constantly defined by the men with whom she associates, be they Varguennes, Charles, or Dante Gabriel Rossetti; she has little identity outside of her relationships with them. Fowles's attempts to write a feminist book situate him in his own time period, as they show the powerful force of feminism in the 1960s. Because feminism was one of the strongest currents of political thought in his time, Fowles felt it important to include in literature, while the Victorians did not have this compulsion. However, just as culture changed between the Victorian era and the 1960s, so too has it shifted between the 1960s and today. Twenty-first-century readers often have different criteria for what constitutes a feminist viewpoint than readers of the 1960s had. Fowles would likely delight in this confusion over whether his text is feminist; after all, the debate is itself an example of the shifting of interpretive frames over time, which is one of the central concerns of his book.

RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND EVOLUTION

While Victorian morality was based on deeply religious elements, science made leaps forward during this time that challenged the worldview of

traditional Christianity. Most important was Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as presented in *On the Origin of Species*, which proposed that life evolves through natural selection, meaning that humans are descended from apes and were not created by God in one fell swoop, as depicted in the Bible.

Mrs. Poulteney represents the way in which many traditional Victorians used religion to support their self-serving, close-minded hypocrisy. Mrs. Poulteney believes in an exchange-based form of religion that the Anglican Church seems to support. Though she pretends that her piety sets her high above her fellow residents of Lyme Regis, her way of practicing her religion actually makes her the cruelest character in the book. She also exemplifies a form of religiosity that helped give the Victorian era its reputation for sexual repression and worship of social conventions. However, Charles eventually realizes that this is not the point of Christianity—instead, he believes, Christianity should bring about a freer world.

In contrast to Mrs. Poulteney, Dr. Grogan represents science and the theories of evolution that permeate the book. Grogan attends church only to keep up appearances, and his faith in science has replaced any faith he ever had in God—at one point, he swears on *On the Origin of Species* as one would swear on the Bible. Whereas Mrs. Poulteney judges Sarah as a sinner based on religious principles, Grogan judges her mentally unsound based on earlier medical cases and his own scientific appraisal of her. Even though these two characters seem ideologically opposed, it's noteworthy that they essentially come to a similar conclusion, that there's something fundamentally wrong with Sarah that makes her unfit for general society.

Charles, on the other hand, can't entirely accept either of these frames for Sarah. He has little difficulty rejecting Mrs. Poulteney's moralistic view, and although Dr. Grogan's medical literature temporarily convinces him, he ultimately can't reconcile his experience of Sarah with the scientific view that she is insane. Similarly, Charles vacillates between religion and science in his own life. He once wanted to become a priest, and he's now become an amateur paleontologist. Despite that he seems more aligned with science than religion, he still finds some spiritual comfort in the church in Exeter after he has sex with Sarah. However, Charles does subscribe wholeheartedly to the idea of evolution. In fact, he shares a first name with Darwin, and he studies **fossils**, which present the clearest evidence of Darwin's theories. He often applies principles of evolution to his daily life and that of other characters, thinking of himself, for example, as either "the fittest" or, in moments of fear, as "a fossil." But in spite of his supposedly scientific viewpoint, Charles can't help but cling to convention, and he often fails to evaluate his behavior or choices in strictly secular or scientific terms. For example, when he thinks of himself as "the fittest," he applies a scientific concept to his life, but his application of it rests on aristocratic assumptions that fitness is determined by birth rather than by ability or effort. Even as Fowles rejects religion, he points out that science can be just as ideological as religion if not applied critically—a trap into which Charles often falls.

The idea of evolution, and Charles's belief in it as a guiding principle, shapes his development as a character. At first, Charles believes that he's one of "the fittest" because of his aristocratic birth, a position that makes him part of the future, evolutionarily. However, his interactions with Sarah lead him to realize that his adherence to convention is actually making him a "fossil"—a relic of the past, not a harbinger of the future at all. This belief leads him to reject convention and attempt to become one of the fittest by pursuing Sarah, but it doesn't work out the way he expected. Fowles suggests that only by acting in ways different from the rest of the population can humanity make evolutionary advances, and thus Sarah's position as an outlier from society makes her one of the fittest who will contribute to the survival of the human race. Sarah, who all along sees society and people more clearly than anyone else, figures out how to create the life she desires. Charles, however, lacks this vision for himself, and when Sarah ultimately rejects him, the reader realizes that he has not sufficiently evolved to thrive in the way she does. He's too rigid, and too blinded by generalization. He has a hard time fundamentally questioning the structures of his life, such as marriage and the class system; he thinks that he must either live by them or abandon them entirely, rather than taking what is useful and abandoning the rest.

Sarah, on the other hand, understands these societal structures so intimately that she can choose to what extent she adheres to them, thus making her able to use them to her advantage. For example, rather than entirely rejecting the gender expectations of her time, Sarah appropriates the narrative of the fallen woman and uses it to her own ends. She's flexible about how she achieves her goals, but she's always working towards them. Charles, by contrast, has trouble knowing what he wants, so he relies on ideology to tell him what his goals should be—such as marrying Sarah, even though she doesn't want to marry him. Sarah has tools that allow her to thrive even in conditions that would break someone else, while Charles's inability to imagine new ways of being make him more fragile. In terms of evolution, then, Sarah certainly seems "fitter" than Charles in the struggle for survival.

Perhaps, then, it's ideology that Fowles condemns—ideology of any sort, whether embodied in religion or science. Belief systems trap and confuse Charles, whereas Sarah rejects and manipulates them in order to attain the life she wants. Just as Fowles argues that history must exist outside of the ideology of any particular moment, he argues that history is governed by change—by evolution—and those who reject the backwardness of any age herald the future. With any luck, Sarah's characteristics will pass to the future through her daughter Lalage.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FOSSILS

As an amateur paleontologist, Charles spends much of his free time in Lyme searching for fossils. On a basic level, fossils represent the past and the experiences of living creatures throughout time. They act as a record of every being's struggle to survive and thrive in spite of the forces stacked against them, which is just what Charles deals with in this story. Fossils also constitute much of the proof for Darwin's theory of evolution, which Charles often applies to his own life, feeling that he is part of a select, "fit" group that contributes positively to the evolution of the human race. In some sense, he sees himself as a superior, almost ideal product of the fossils he seeks out. However, as the story goes on, Charles begins to identify more with the fossils themselves, feeling that he's a victim of the machine of society and history, a helpless being who might as well already be dead considering how little control he has over his destiny.

THE BROOCH

When Charles goes to London to speak to Mr. Freeman, he buys a brooch that he intends to give to Ernestina. In the first ending, he does just this, and the brooch acts as a symbol of their enduring relationship. However, this ending is false. In reality, Charles sends the brooch to Sarah with his letter telling her he's going to break off his engagement to Ernestina. Thus, it symbolizes his infidelity to Ernestina, as he's giving a gift meant for her to someone else. However, Sarah never receives the brooch. Instead, Sam keeps it and gives it to Mary. In this context, the brooch represents the fact that their prosperity is based on deception that has hurt others. In all of its appearances, then, the brooch acts as a symbol of deceit: Charles's deceit of himself, his deceit of Ernestina, and Sam's deceit of Charles.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Back Bay Books edition of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* published in 1998.

Chapter 5 Quotes

For what had crossed her mind... was a sexual thought.... It was not only her profound ignorance of the reality of copulation that frightened her; it was the aura of pain and brutality that the act seemed to require....

Thus she had evolved a kind of private commandment—those inaudible words were simply "I must not"—whenever the physical female implications of her body, sexual, menstrual, parturitional, tried to force and entry into her consciousness. But though one may keep the wolves from one's door, they still howl out there in the darkness. Ernestina wanted a husband, wanted Charles to be that husband, wanted children; but the payment she vaguely divined she would have to make for them seemed excessive.

Related Characters: Charles Smithson, Ernestina Freeman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28-29

Explanation and Analysis

One afternoon, after Charles returns to his rooms, Ernestina takes off her dress and admires herself in the mirror wearing only her underclothes. When she has a sexual thought, she immediately puts on a dressing gown. In this passage, Fowles explains Ernestina's state of mind in relation to anything sexual or bodily. Because Ernestina represents the conventional Victorian woman, in contrast to Sarah, this description of Ernestina's attitude also provides a general idea of how Victorian society regards sexuality.

Ernestina does everything she can to completely ignore the existence of and necessity for sex. This is more or less what Victorian society sanctions; as an innocent young virgin, she isn't supposed to think about her body. Part of the reason that Sarah is an outcast is because her past requires people to think about things that society tells them not to.

However, Ernestina's thoughts also demonstrate the effect of repression on young women. Her fear of sex is essentially a fear of the unknown and the forbidden. Ironically, the main goal of Victorian women is supposed to be marrying and having children, both of which directly require sex. Thus, Ernestina's dilemma is that in order to fulfill Victorian womanhood, she must endure this society-induced fear.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ [H]e saw in the strata an immensely reassuring orderliness in existence. He might perhaps have seen a very contemporary social symbolism in the way these gray-blue ledges were crumbling; but what he did see was a kind of edificiality of time, in which inexorable laws... very conveniently arranged themselves for the survival of the fittest and best, *exemplia gratia* Charles Smithson, this fine spring day, alone, eager and inquiring, understanding, accepting, noting and grateful. What was lacking, of course, was the corollary of the collapse of the ladder of nature: that if new species *can* come into being, old species very often have to make way for them.

Related Characters: Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Charles is looking for fossils on the shore near Lyme, with great layered cliffs rising above him, which have fossils embedded in them. Charles sees himself as a scientist, and he's devoted to Darwin's theories. This passage explains how he sees science and evolution applying to his own life at the beginning of the book, because his view changes drastically as he gains experience throughout the course of the story.

Charles believes that science provides laws to explain the world, and that the world is organized so that the best people get the best lots in life, triumph in the Darwinian struggle for existence, and pass on their traits to their offspring, thereby improving humanity. Of course, he thinks that he is one of these people. Because he's male and upper-class, he's never had reason to doubt the fairness of life.

Fowles points out that Charles doesn't consider those who are left behind by evolution; those who have to go extinct. He's positive he's not one of these. Later, however, he'll begin to feel more of a kinship with the fossils encased in these cliffs, relics of a species that didn't survive.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Charles did not know it, but in those brief poised seconds above the waiting sea, in that luminous evening silence broken only by the waves' quiet wash, the whole Victorian Age was lost. And I do not mean that he had taken the wrong path.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Charles comes upon Sarah sleeping in the Undercliff, and he's examining her face when she wakens. They stare at each other until Charles apologizes and hurries away, wishing too late that he had asked which path to take. In this passage, Fowles makes the very bold claim that those moments in which Charles and Sarah stare at each other and feel attracted to each other, despite their society forbidding it, essentially undermine the ethos of an entire era; or at least that in those moments, Victorian morality forever loses its grip on these two characters.

This meeting between Charles and Sarah is undoubtedly the origin of their love affair, and it is this to which Fowles seems to be referring. The interactions that stem from this meeting, Fowles argues, will systematically work against everything that the Victorian Age stands for: sexual morality, conformity, convention, obedience to the rules of society. This passage essentially sets up the process of breaking away from society that will take place throughout the rest of the book. And yet, if "those brief poised seconds" are all it takes to tear down an entire era, how strong can it really be to begin with?

Finally, the narrator says that Charles hasn't taken the wrong path. Although he's ostensibly referring to the physical path back to Lyme, this sentence can also be interpreted to indicate the narrator's support for Charles and Sarah's impending destruction of the Victorian Age.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ 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 (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and the "voice" of) 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Just before this passage, the narrator hypothetically asks who Sarah is and where she comes from, and then admits that he doesn't know the answers to these questions. This is the first moment when the novel becomes truly metafictional, meaning that it is aware of itself as a construction of a person's mind, and thus also becomes distinctly postmodern. The narrator essentially "comes clean," admitting that the story he's telling isn't actually true, even though he's writing as though it is. Furthermore, he acknowledges that he's imitating the Victorian writing style, though he himself isn't a Victorian. Ironically, this passage—in fact, this entire chapter—is not at all something that would exist in a Victorian novel, so precisely by admitting that he's imitating the Victorian novel, the narrator actually departs from it drastically.

The narrator also gives the reader a glimpse into his own considerations about how to write the story and admits that he's fallible. He doesn't know everything about his own story and characters. The reader gets the impression of being spoken to directly and frankly, and might begin to trust this narrator, even if he's unconventional. However, the narrator will not always be so transparent about the workings of his story, and will not hesitate to trick his reader.

> In other words, to be free myself, I must give him [Charles], and Tina, and Sarah, even the abominable Mrs. Poulteney, their freedoms as well. There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to that definition.
>
> 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Mrs. Poulteney, Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator claims that his characters aren't obeying him, and that he has to respect their freedom to act as they will if they are to be real. Although he is an omniscient narrator, which means he's god-like and all-powerful within the world of his novel, he is operating under a distinctly twentieth-century vision of God: ultimate freedom. He contrasts this with the Victorian God, who commands the faithful to obey him rather than letting them act as they will.

Fowles is writing with multiple implications here. First of all, he's analyzing the difference between Victorian religion and society and his own religion and society. He's also reflecting on the difference between the Victorian author, who maintains at all times the sense that she or he is in complete charge of the story's world and characters, and the modern author, who is more likely to approach writing with the sense that the text has a power of its own. Finally, this passage speaks to Charles's later revelation in the church, in which he realizes that the purpose of Christianity is not to celebrate the crucifixion, but instead the freedom from this type of punishment. He abandons the Victorian image of a controlling God and embraces the idea that he can find freedom only outside society. Although Fowles himself was an atheist, he argues for freedom throughout the book, and this passage suggests that he sees freedom as the highest divinity.

> But this is preposterous? A character is either "real" or "imaginary"? If you think that, *hypocrite lecteur*, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it... fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf—your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is discussing the fact that his characters are not entirely under his control, and they seem to be directing their own actions even though they are products of his own mind. He anticipates the reader's irritation at this idea, but he insists that nothing that passes through the human mind is completely real.

Fowles constantly plays with the boundary between "real" and "imaginary" in this novel. For example, the narrator will claim to possess objects that belonged to the characters,

but he also admits that they are only figments of his imagination. As a postmodern author, Fowles advances the idea that humans cannot access any objective truth or reality, but only individuals' perceptions of the world.

In this passage, the narrator argues that the reader's own life is, to some extent, a figment of their imagination; that the very act of remembering alters the past. He is the first to admit that the story he's telling about the past isn't true, but it's somehow truer because he acknowledges this, and because he actively recognizes the influence of the present on his perception of the past.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ Darwinism, as its shrewder opponents realized, let open the floodgates to something far more serious than the undermining of the Biblical account of the origins of man; its deepest implications lay in the direction of determinism and behaviorism, that is, towards philosophies that reduce morality to a hypocrisy and duty to a straw hut in a hurricane.

Related Characters: Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

The second time that Charles runs into Sarah in the Undercliff, he senses a sensuality inherent in her that isn't typical of Victorian women. Due to his belief in Darwinism, however, he doesn't blame her for this as other men might. In this passage, Fowles points out that Darwinism questions the very foundations of Victorian society.

Taken to its logical conclusion, evolution means that human life is nothing more than the result of a series of changes in the biological composition of other life forms, and that humans essentially act as they do for biological reasons, in order to survive to pass on their traits to their offspring. Human actions, then, are determined by the species' drive to survive, rather than by free will or moral consideration.

Victorian society is based on duty and morality, but duty and morality have no role in evolution. Thus, Charles's dedication to Darwinism helps prepare him for the ways in which Sarah will force him to question the society around him.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Charles, as you will have noticed, had more than one vocabulary. With Sam in the morning, with Ernestina across a gay lunch, and here in the role of Alarmed Propriety... he was almost three different men.... We may explain it biologically by Darwin's phrase: *cryptic coloration*, survival by learning to blend with one's surroundings—with the unquestioned assumptions of one's age or social caste. Or we can explain this flight to formality sociologically. When one was skating over so much thin ice—ubiquitous economic oppression, terror of sexuality, the flood of mechanistic science—the ability to close one's eyes to one's own absurd stiffness was essential. Very few Victorians chose to question the virtues of such cryptic coloration, but there was that in Sarah's look which did.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah comes upon Charles in the Undercliff and begs him to let her tell him her story. He objects that he must not meet her in secret as she suggests, as it would be most improper. In this passage, Fowles suggests that in order to survive in his society, Charles unconsciously adjusts his behavior to fit in with whatever society demands of him at any given moment.

By using Charles's beloved Darwin to explain his actions, Fowles reduces Charles to an object of science, an animal struggling for survival, which makes Charles seem more fallible, though he likes to think of himself as one of "the fittest" in the process of evolution. Alternately, Fowles points out that as one of the most privileged people in society, Charles has to be able to unconsciously take on different roles in order to consistently justify his own privilege to himself and continue to ignore everything that Victorian society demands he ignore—and that it's far easier to ignore than to deal with.

Sarah, however, is not a typical Victorian, and so she doesn't sanction this "cryptic coloration" that Charles practices. As a more modern character, she wants Charles to find some authenticity within himself and act as he feels is right, rather than acting in a way that guarantees society will always back him up. Sarah's mission throughout the book is to not blend in with her surroundings as Charles is trying to do, but instead to make a statement on freedom.

Chapter 19 Quotes

It was as if the woman had become addicted to melancholia as one becomes addicted to opium. Now do you see how it is? Her sadness becomes her happiness. She wants to be a sacrificial victim, Smithson. Where you and I flinch back, she leaps forward. She is possessed, you see.... Dark indeed. Very dark.

Related Characters: Dr. Grogan (speaker), Charles Smithson, Sarah Woodruff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

The first time they meet, Dr. Grogan discusses Sarah's case with Charles and tells him that Sarah is a victim of melancholia, which is equivalent to today's diagnosis of depression. He draws parallels between Sarah and a female patient who refused to ever come out of mourning after her husband died.

Throughout this novel, the characters—and likely the reader, as well—are constantly trying to make sense of Sarah's actions and motivations. In this passage, Grogan crafts one story to explain Sarah's apparent refusal to seek happiness: she finds masochistic pleasure in her tragedy and sadness and doesn't know how to live otherwise. This hypothesis makes Sarah an object of pity, trapped in her own melancholia and believing it the best way to exist. Charles, with a sort of masculine savior complex, is drawn to save Sarah from her own twisted mind as presented here by Grogan. In Grogan's take on Sarah's story, she's trapped by her melancholia, but Sarah herself will claim to find freedom in her way of life.

[T]hose visions of the contented country laborer and his brood made so fashionable by George Morland and his kind... were as stupid and pernicious a sentimentalization, therefore a suppression of reality, as that in our own Hollywood films of "real" life. One look at Millie and her ten miserable siblings should have scorched the myth of the Happy Swain into ashes; but so few gave that look. Each age, each guilty age, builds high walls round its Versailles; and personally I hate those walls most when they are made by literature and art.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Millie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Poulteney's servant Millie is sleeping in the same bed with Sarah, but the narrator makes it clear that they aren't lovers. Millie has simply had such a miserable life of poverty in the countryside that Sarah's kindness draws her. In this passage, Fowles attacks the romanticization of the poor. George Morland was a painter of rural scenes who is guilty of this in his art.

Fowles argues that telling sentimentalized stories about the lives of the poor, artists minimize the true misery of their situations and prevent wealthier people from recognizing the need for reform and generosity in order to improve the lives of their fellow humans. His anger also makes clear what his own attitude towards his poor characters is—he wants to provide an accurate representation of the trials of lower-class life.

Additionally, this passage collapses the distance between the Victorian Era and Fowles's own time, as he argues that artists in both ages (and in fact in every age) are guilty of the exact same fault. This idea contributes to the theme that history is not a vertical progression, with improvement inevitable, but instead a horizontal one.

Chapter 20 Quotes

"I understand."

..."You cannot, Mr. Smithson. Because you are not a woman. Because you are not a woman who was born to be a farmer's wife but educated to be something... better.... You were not born a woman with a natural respect, a love of intelligence, beauty, learning... I don't know how to say it, I have no right to desire these things, but my heart craves them and I cannot believe it is all vanity."

Related Characters: Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

Charles and Sarah meet in the Undercliff at Sarah's request, so that she can tell him her story. Charles tries to show his sympathy for her situation with Varguennes, but Sarah insists that their positions in life are entirely different, and it's impossible for him to understand her. Charles is constantly trying to understand her throughout the book,

and this is the closest she comes to explaining why he really can never comprehend her actions.

Sarah confidently grounds her difficulties in her experience of gender and class. She doesn't fit into any category that society provides; she was born into the lower class but educated for a higher class, and she wants the intellectual advantages that her society withholds from women. Thus, she's already outside of society, even before the sexual experiences that make her more recognized as an outcast: not fully lower class nor middle class, not fully woman nor man. Perhaps she could find a place if she denied her desires, but she refuses to believe it when society tells her she doesn't deserve the things she wants, and this is what drives her rebellion against society.

❝ I did it so that people *should* point at me, *should* say, there walks the French Lieutenant's Whore.... So that they should know I have suffered, and suffer, as others suffer in every town and village in this land. I could not marry that man. So I married shame.... It seemed to me then as if I threw myself off a precipice or plunged a knife into my heart. It was a kind of suicide. An act of despair, Mr. Smithson. I know it was wicked... blasphemous, but I knew no other way to break out of what I was.... What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I am truly not like other women.... Sometimes I almost pity them. 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 nothing, I am hardly human any more. I am the French Lieutenant's Whore.

Related Characters: Sarah Woodruff (speaker), Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah and Charles are in the Undercliff, and Sarah is explaining her story to Charles. She wants him, above all, to understand why she slept with Varguennes despite seeing that he was a fraud and knowing the consequences.

Sarah already felt like an outsider to society even before she slept with Varguennes, and this status gave her considerable pain, but her pain went unrecognized. By sleeping with Varguennes and becoming known as a "fallen woman," she became more visibly an outsider, and others began to recognize the way that she had always felt. Furthermore, she has taken ownership of her outsider status by pushing herself out of society rather than letting it push her out. She has reclaimed the label of "whore," and this has given her an odd sort of power. Now that she's already committed what Victorian society sees as one of the worst acts an unmarried woman can commit, there's little left that society can do to hurt her. Being "hardly human," she is free, but it's a bitter, lonely sort of freedom.

In Victorian literature, the stories of fallen women often end in death, many times by suicide, which encourages the readers to make a moral judgment on them. Sarah frames her night with Varguennes as a sort of suicide, and so it's as though her parallel with the traditional Victorian storyline has already ended before this novel even begins—she's gotten all of that out of the way, and now she's free to forge a new path for a new, more emancipated kind of woman.

Of course, Charles will later discover that the story Sarah tells here isn't entirely true. She did not, in truth, sleep with Varguennes. Thus, the fact that she has purposefully spread the false idea that she's committed a shameful act shows just how determined she is to have the pain of her social position recognized, as well has how committed she is to the idea of freedom at all costs.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ A remarkable young woman, a remarkable young woman. And baffling. He decided that that was—had been, rather—her attraction: her unpredictability. He did not realize that she had two qualities as typical of the English as his own admixture of irony and convention. I speak of passion and imagination. The first quality Charles perhaps began dimly to perceive; the second he did not. He could not, for those two qualities of Sarah's were banned by the epoch, equated in the first case with sensuality and in the second with the merely fanciful. This dismissive double equation was Charles's greatest defect—and here he stands truly for his age.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

After Sarah tells Charles her story, Charles returns to Lyme thinking that he has handled the situation well, has helped Sarah, and is now finished associating with her. In this passage, the narrator explains that Charles's failure to understand Sarah stems in part from the fact that she is too

modern for the Victorian Age, and so she doesn't fit in with Victorian currents of thought.

Sarah is characterized throughout the book by her baffling and seemingly irrational actions, so any insight that the narrator provides into the workings of her mind is significant. Here, he suggests that Sarah's unpredictability stems from her passion and imagination. It's important to note that these qualities are especially censored in Victorian women, who are supposed to be passive and subdued. Because Charles doesn't expect to find passion or imagination in a woman, he fails to perceive them in Sarah. Though he thinks that his relationship with her is over, it is just the mysteriousness that he remarks on here that will eventually bind him to her forever, and the persistence of that mysteriousness depends on Charles's inability to recognize the elements of Sarah that make her an emblem of the future.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ The master went back into his room; and there entered his mind a brief image of that ancient disaster he had found recorded in the blue lias and brought back to Ernestina—the ammonites caught in some recession of water, a micro-catastrophe of ninety million years ago. In a vivid insight, a flash of black lightning, he saw that all life was parallel: that evolution was not vertical, ascending to a perfection, but horizontal. Time was the great fallacy; existence was without history, was always now, was always this being caught in the same fiendish machine. All those painted screens erected by man to shut out reality—history, religion, duty, social position, all were illusions, mere opium fantasies.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Ernestina Freeman, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

Charles returns from Winsyatt to Lyme to find that Sarah has disappeared. When he gets back to his room, he discovers that she's sent him a note asking him to meet her again, and Charles fears she might commit suicide if he refuses. In this passage, Charles has a revelation about the nature of history and society.

Charles is an ardent believer in evolution, and throughout much of the story, he has believed that he is one of the "fittest" of his time, privileged to survive and improve humanity when he passes on his traits. He has also believed that evolution does inevitably improve life forms as time goes on. However, his personal outlook on life has been growing more pessimistic and less self-satisfied, and now he sees that evolution hasn't improved life on Earth as much as he thought. Evolution simply means change, not necessarily improvement. He's not so different from the ammonites caught in their personal disaster.

Furthermore, Fowles argues here that time and history are illusions, and everyone has always struggled with essentially the same issues. Thus, although he has set his story a century before his own time, he is writing about his own time as much as about the Victorians'. Most of all, Charles is finally able to separate himself from society and see it as the construction that it is, rather than as a natural and irrevocable truth.

Chapter 35 Quotes

❝ [The Victorians] were quite as highly sexed as our own century—and, in spite of the fact that *we* have sex thrown at us night and day (as the Victorians had religion), far more preoccupied with it than we really are. They were certainly preoccupied by love, and devoted far more of their arts to it than we do ours. Nor can Malthus and the lack of birth-control appliances quite account for the fact that they bred like rabbits and worshiped fertility far more ardently than we do.... I have seen the Naughty Nineties represented as a reaction to many decades of abstinence; I believe it was merely the publication of what had hitherto been private, and I suspect we are in reality dealing with a human constant: the difference is a vocabulary, a degree of metaphor.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267-68

Explanation and Analysis

When Charles leaves for London to speak to Mr. Freeman, the narrator takes a chapter to discuss the paradoxes of Victorian sexuality. The Victorians are known today for the sexual repression of their culture perhaps more than for anything else. However, Fowles argues that the Victorians didn't actually have less sex or worse sex than modern people do; it was only talked about less. In referencing the Naughty Nineties, he means the 1890s, which were a period of comparative sexual openness.

In fact, it's necessary to think about sex quite a bit in order to prevent oneself from thinking about it. When sex is an everyday part of the culture, it might not be necessary to consciously think about it quite so much. Fowles points out that the Victorians had many children, and thus had to be having sex frequently. In his view, humans have always had more or less the same amount of sex, but it has been discussed in different ways. This contributes to his larger argument that history is not such a clear progression as people like to think, but instead full of constancies.

Many of the problems of this book hinge on the conservative sexual mores of Victorian society, so it's important to understand that Fowles views the Victorians as more obsessed with sex than repulsed by it.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ To be sure there was something base in his rejection—a mere snobbism, a letting himself be judged and swayed by an audience of ancestors....

But there was one noble element in his rejection: a sense that the pursuit of money was an insufficient purpose in life. He would never be a Darwin or a Dickens, a great artist or scientist; he would at worst be a dilettante, a drone, a what-you-will that lets others work and contributes nothing. But he gained a queer sort of momentary self-respect in his nothingness, a sense that choosing to be nothing... was the last saving grace of a gentleman; his last freedom, almost.

Related Characters: Mr. Freeman, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Freeman proposes that Charles help him run his business, Charles reacts vehemently against the idea, feeling that to do such a thing would be to lower himself in society—gentlemen aren't supposed to engage in business. In this passage, Fowles suggests that Charles's reaction can't be wholly discarded as ridiculous arrogance and classism. It stems also from idealism, from a worthy belief that there must be more to life than wealth.

Of course, it's easy for Charles, who has never had to worry about money, to believe that wealth is a paltry goal. For people like Sam and Mary, money seems far more important, because they've always felt the lack of it. But in a world where everyone is striving to be better than they've been, Charles choosing to remove himself from that struggle is a sort of statement, a sort of freedom from society.

In fact, by finding freedom in "choosing to be nothing," Charles echoes Sarah's claim to freedom in choosing to be an outcast. Sarah herself said previously that, in placing herself outside of society, she has become "nothing," and as a result she's free of the pressures experienced by those still respected by society. Perhaps "choosing to be nothing" in this moment, then, is a precursor to Charles's later decision to cast off convention entirely and become an outcast with Sarah.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ In looking down as he dressed he perceived a red stain on the front tails of his shirt.

He had forced a virgin.

...She had not given herself to Varguennes. She had lied. All her conduct, all her motives in Lyme Regis had been based on a lie. But for what purpose. Why? Why? Why?

Blackmail!

To put him totally in her power!

And all those loathsome succubi of the male mind, their fat fears of a great feminine conspiracy to suck the virility from their veins, to prey upon their idealism, melt them into wax and mold them to their evil fancies... filled Charles's mind with an apocalyptic horror.

...She was mad, evil, enlacing him in the strangest of nets... but *why?*

Related Characters: Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 354

Explanation and Analysis

After Charles and Sarah have sex in Endicott's Family Hotel, Charles goes to put his clothes back on and realizes that he has just taken Sarah's virginity. This comes as quite a shock, because Sarah earlier took great pains to confess to him that Varguennes took her virginity in a hotel in Weymouth. The revelation that this story was false explodes everything that Charles (and likely the reader) thought he knew about

Sarah and her motivations. She has essentially become a fallen woman—and thus an outcast from society—on purpose, not by having sex outside of marriage, but by spreading the idea that she has.

Furthermore, Sarah has now more or less manipulated Charles into taking her virginity—though of course, he must take responsibility for his own lust. She has made him play the role of Varguennes in her own story. In this culture, a woman's virginity is her biggest asset, and the man who takes it becomes responsible for her well-being if he has any honor. Charles, then, believes that Sarah is trying to trap him into marrying her or at least taking care of her. If he refuses, she can tell everyone that he slept with her, and he'll be publicly shamed.

In this passage, Fowles focuses on Charles's insecurities as typical of men. He suggests that men are supremely afraid of women having power over them, and this fear makes Charles swivel within a moment from being passionately in love with Sarah to believing that she's evil.

Chapter 48 Quotes

❝ To uncrucify!

In a sudden flash of illumination Charles saw the right purpose of Christianity; it was not to celebrate this barbarous image, not to maintain it on high because there was a useful profit—the redemption of sins—to be derived from so doing, but to bring about a world in which the hanging man could be descended, could be seen not with the rictus of agony on his face, but the smiling peace of a victory brought about by, and in, living men and women.

He seemed as he stood there to see all his age... as the great hidden enemy of all his deepest yearnings. That was what had deceived him... the deception was in its very nature; and it was not human, but a machine.

Related Characters: Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 363

Explanation and Analysis

After Charles has sex with Sarah, he goes to a church to figure out what course to take from here. He tries to pray and contemplates the cross, and he has a flash of religious understanding, which is described in this passage. He realizes that Christianity is not meant to bolster control and repression in the world, but instead to free people from the pain of these social pressures. This essentially embodies Fowles's critique of Christianity. Victorian Christianity, as exemplified by Mrs. Poulteney, is above all a negative, punishing force, but Charles chooses to follow a faith that advances freedom and happiness, that focuses on the living rather than the dead, and most of all, that can embrace his choice to find freedom by loving Sarah.

Furthermore, Charles finally sees clearly that his greatest enemy throughout the novel has been society as a whole, rather than any one person within it. By beginning to step outside of society, he gains a perspective that's difficult to see when one is entirely within its confines. Fowles specifies that it is the moral and religious structures of this particular time period that are holding Charles back. This insight also allows Charles to forgive Sarah, because he begins to feel that she has not fooled him, but the entire structure of the world around him has in leading himself and others to think and act in the faulty ways they do.

❝ And Charles thought: if they were truly dead, if there were no afterlife, what should I care of their view of me? They would not know, they could not judge.

Then he made the great leap: *They do not know, they cannot judge.*

Now what he was throwing off haunted, and profoundly damaged, his age. It is stated very clearly by Tennyson in *In Memoriam.... There must be wisdom with great Death; the dead shall look me thro' and thro'*. Charles's whole being rose up against those two foul propositions; against this macabre desire to go backwards into the future, mesmerized eyes on one's dead fathers instead of on one's unborn sons. It was as if his previous belief in the ghostly presence of the past had condemned him, without his ever realizing it, to a life in the grave.

Related Characters: Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 365

Explanation and Analysis

In the church after having sex with Sarah, Charles feels that there's a congregation at his back, but he turns and sees no one. He proceeds to deny one of the fundamental tenets of Christianity: that the faithful will go to heaven and be saved.

If there is no afterlife, there's no reason to live one's life according to the arbitrary rules of the church, which are also the rules of Victorian society.

Additionally, the Victorians are obsessed with the idea of death, as well as with the presence of the dead and the past in the everyday lives of the living. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is a famous collection of poems reflecting on the mourning process and the relationship between the living and the dead, and Fowles uses it to demonstrate the Victorians' belief that they're constantly being judged by their dead friends and relatives. He further positions it as an obsession with the past to the detriment of the future. It may seem that Charles hasn't been unduly obsessed with the past or the dead, but the fact is that he's a paleontologist—he seeks out, digs up, and analyzes the literal bones of the dead.

Ultimately, Charles makes a definitive break with his culture in this passage and claims his freedom by denying the ascendancy of the past. It's a bit ironic that Fowles himself is clearly looking to the past in writing this book, but Fowles is more focused on critiquing the divisions between past, present, and future, and certainly not with revering the past as an example for his present.

Chapter 49 Quotes

❝ This—the fact that every Victorian had two minds—is the one piece of equipment we must always take with us on our travels back to the nineteenth century. It is a schizophrenia seen at its clearest, its most notorious, in the poets I have quoted from so often—in Tennyson, Clough, Arnold, Hardy... transparent also in the mania for editing and revising, so that if we want to know the real Mill or the real Hardy we can learn far more from the deletions and alterations of their autobiographies than from the published versions... more from correspondence that somehow escaped burning, from private diaries, from the petty detritus of the concealment operation. Never was the record so completely confused, never a public façade so successfully passed off as the truth on a gullible posterity....

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

After Charles leaves the church in Exeter, he decides that Sarah has only lied to him in order to help him understand that he loved her. Fowles adds that Charles's difficulty lay in his double mind. In this passage, Fowles explains how the reader should think about Victorians, which is to say, how the reader should think about his characters.

Fowles suggests that Victorians have a private mind that is visible, for example, in the first drafts of their writings; but also a public mind, which censors their private thoughts in order to make them presentable to the moralistic society in which they live. Perhaps, in fact, this is the sort of novel that Hardy would have written had he been able to give free reign to the mind that he was forced to keep private. As it was, he had to censor himself in order to get his books published—for example, he certainly couldn't write the sorts of sex scenes that Fowles includes in this book.

This dualism is certainly visible in Charles throughout the book. The narrator allows the reader into Charles's private mind and shows that he lives a life of deceit to prevent those around him from perceiving his secret thoughts and desires.

This passage also has significance in terms of historical study, as Fowles suggests that the official documents that famous Victorians left behind are partly falsehoods, and so the modern impression of the Victorian Era is similarly false. This idea adds to his overall attempt to destabilize truth and reality and force the reader to question their relationship with the past.

Chapter 55 Quotes

❝ Fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight—but in fact fixes the fight, letting that want he himself favors win. And we judge writers of fiction both by the skill they show in fixing the fights (in other words, in persuading us that they were not fixed) and by the kind of fighter they fix in favor of: the good one, the tragic one, the evil one, the funny one, and so on.

But the chief argument for fight-fixing is to show one's readers what one thinks of the world around one—whether one is a pessimist, an optimist, what you will. I have pretended to slip back into 1867; but of course that year is in reality a century past. It is futile to show optimism, or pessimism, or anything else about it, because we know what has happened since.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 406

Explanation and Analysis

As Charles travels to London on the train, the narrator sits down opposite him and contemplates where to take the story from here, and what the ending should be. In this passage, he discusses the literary practice of using the plot of a story to make moral judgments on the world or on the characters. This is a common feature of Victorian literature; for example, fallen women will often be punished in the end. Although the narrator takes pains to imitate Victorian literature in many respects, here he declares that his purpose is not to make a judgment on the world he's describing, because nothing can be done about it now. This suggests that the entire story is meant to reflect more on the time from which he's writing than on the world a century before.

The narrator has discussed at other moments the reality of the world within the novel; he has labored both to provide the illusion that the events of the story are real, and to be honest about the fact that the story is coming from his own mind. Now he reminds the reader that the story isn't real, but at the same time he explains that he's attempting to make his story imitate reality more truly than other writing does. Because in reality, the fight isn't fixed, and the winner doesn't necessarily have the moral approval of others. Fowles is rejecting ideas of absolute truth and moral sermonizing in literature in general. Instead of showing readers what he thinks of the world, he wants to show readers what the world is like.

Chapter 58 Quotes

❝❝ When he had had his great vision of himself freed from his age, his ancestry and class and country, he had not realized how much the freedom was embodied in Sarah; in the assumption of a shared exile. He no longer much believed in that freedom; he felt he had merely changed traps, or prisons. But yet there was something in his isolation that he could cling to; he was the outcast, the not like other men, the result of a decision few could have taken, no matter whether it was ultimately foolish or wise.

Related Characters: Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 427-28

Explanation and Analysis

Unable to find Sarah, Charles travels restlessly around the world, trying to fight off depression. His plan to claim his freedom has not worked out the way he wanted, because he did not bargain for this kind of loneliness. He thought that he and Sarah would be outcasts together, and brought together all the more for that. He made an idealistic moral choice that distanced him from the rest of his society, and now, in practice, that choice isn't working out the way he wanted. His goal was freedom, but his life is now more constrained than it's ever been.

Even so, this passage shows that Charles is experiencing some of the comfort and power in being an outcast that Sarah herself sought. When Sarah tried to explain this to him, Charles thought her a fool, but now he has taken her place in the world and sees from a different perspective. He has truly claimed his free will, and there's something heartening in that knowledge.

True to his own philosophy, Fowles doesn't use the plot to make moral judgments on the characters. After pushing Charles towards his decision throughout the novel, Fowles now shows the full extent of the negative consequences—he doesn't sugarcoat the results of revolting against a society that's much stronger than any individual person. The narrator is neither punishing nor rewarding Charles for his morals, but simply relating what happens to him.

Chapter 60 Quotes

❝❝ "You do not understand. It is not your fault. You are very kind. But I am not to be understood."

"You forget you have said that to me before. I think you make it a matter of pride."

"I meant that I am not to be understood even by myself. And I can't tell you why, but I believe my happiness depends on my not understanding."

Charles smiled, in spite of himself. "This is absurdity. You refuse to entertain my proposal because I might bring you to understand yourself."

"I refuse, as I refused the other gentleman, because you cannot understand that to me it is not an absurdity."

Related Characters: Charles Smithson, Sarah Woodruff (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 452

Explanation and Analysis

Charles has finally found Sarah, and he has asked her to marry him. Much to Charles's chagrin, she is refusing. Charles has always tried to understand Sarah and been baffled by her. In this passage, she tries to explain that she can't marry him because she doesn't want him to try to understand her, and because he can't see that she doesn't want to understand herself.

This passage is particularly significant because one of Sarah's defining features is her mysteriousness, which leads the reader to endeavor throughout the book to understand her. Though Sarah's intelligence is clear, her actions often seem incredibly irrational. Here, Fowles suggests that there is no key to Sarah's psyche; that instead, the whole point of her character is to force Charles and the reader to come to terms with a state of confusion. Sarah, as a character, is not meant to be understood.

As usual, Sarah is beyond her time, since the Victorians are usually determined to find clear and reasonable explanations for everything, and clearly categorize the world in order to understand it. In contrast, existentialism and postmodernism, both of which influence Fowles, support Sarah's idea of not understanding or necessarily seeking to understand, but instead accepting the absurdity of the world.

❝ And perhaps he did at last begin to grasp her mystery. Some terrible perversion of human sexual destiny had begun; he was no more than a footsoldier, a pawn in a far vaster battle; and like all battles it was not about love, but about possession and territory. He saw deeper: it was not that she hated man, not that she materially despised him more than other men, but that her maneuvers were simply a part of her armory, mere instruments to a greater end.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 453

Explanation and Analysis

When Charles finally finds Sarah, he asks her to marry him, and she refuses. She has denied knowing that he didn't marry Ernestina, but now she reveals that she did, in fact, know, and she hid from him on purpose. In this passage, Fowles makes it clear that Sarah acts as she does because she's a forerunner of the feminist movement.

Though Charles feels that everything Sarah has done to him is extremely personal, he begins to see that her goals go far above his head and do not reflect on him personally. Although it's impossible for him to foresee the future of women's place in society, he senses that Sarah is part of a major change. She is, and has always been, fighting to change the way society treats people like her, because society has done its best to crush her for her way of being a woman. The power that Sarah has gained and Charles has lost has been in the name of women's rights.

Chapter 61 Quotes

❝ He... has already begun... to realize that life, however advantageously Sarah may in some way seem to fit the role of Sphinx, is not a symbol, is not one riddle and one failure to guess it, is not to inhabit one face alone or to be given up after one losing throw of the dice; but is to be, however inadequately, emptily, hopelessly into the city's iron heart, endured. And out again, upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.

Related Characters: Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 467

Explanation and Analysis

This is the final passage of the novel, which concludes the second, more pessimistic ending in which Charles and Sarah do not come to terms. Charles is cast out from society and from Sarah. Though he despairs, this passage indicates that he has learned from his experiences how to approach life more wisely than he used to.

Charles has been endlessly frustrated by his inability to understand Sarah, but he's beginning to realize that like Sarah, life can't be figured out because it doesn't have an answer. Similarly, the book itself doesn't have one unified answer or message. The vision of life that Fowles presents here is not a cheerful one, but it seems more realistic for that. He argues that life is meant to be put up with, not enjoyed. Perhaps it's significant that despite their woes and threats of suicide, none of the characters do end up killing themselves—they decide to endure life instead.

The final line is a reference to a poem that Fowles quoted in full earlier: Matthew Arnold's "To Marguerite." The poem is about the solitary nature of human life, and so it reinforces the sense that Charles is setting out into a lonely future, but that his loneliness is not unique—it's only the human condition.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

One windy morning in March 1867, a couple is walking down the quay at Lyme Regis, in the southwest of England. Though the inhabitants of Lyme don't particularly like this quay, known as the Cobb, others find it beautiful. It's also an important piece of naval history, and it's changed very little since 1867. Lyme itself is a picturesque place, with a few houses and a boatyard at the land end of the Cobb, and the main town half a mile away. In the other direction lie huge cliffs and wild countryside.

Even before introducing the characters, Fowles immediately locates his book in a precise time and place. He also makes it clear that he's writing from a date later than 1867, since he knows how the Cobb has or hasn't changed. Finally, he presents a contrast between the civilized town and the wild, lawless countryside right next to it.

Someone watching the couple on the quay might guess that these people aren't from Lyme, or else that they're looking for somewhere to be alone. Their clothing makes it clear that they're well-off. The lady is wearing a rather short magenta skirt, and her hat is so fashionable that the ladies of Lyme won't be wearing the style for at least a year. Though the colors of her clothes might seem too strong in the present, the Victorians are still thrilled with their discovery of these dyes. There's another figure at the end of the quay, standing motionless in black and staring out to sea, that seems almost mythical.

The narrator's attitude towards the characters here suggests what he will later state—he's not controlling them, but instead watching them and documenting their actions. Fowles reinforces his retrospective viewpoint, bringing a "present" time into the narrative to contrast with the Victorian Era. Sarah's position alone at the end of the quay is perfectly symbolic of her place in society as an outcast. Already she seems not quite real or able to be understood.

CHAPTER 2

Charles suggests that Neptune won't mind if they leave now, but Ernestina is surprised that he doesn't want to take his chance of holding her arm without impropriety. She wants to walk to the end of the quay, so they continue on. Ernestina asks what happened when Charles saw her father the week before, because her mother sent her a letter about it. Charles admits that he and Mr. Freeman had a disagreement about Darwin's ideas. Mr. Freeman said he didn't want Ernestina to marry a man who thought his grandfather was an ape, but Charles believes that his grandfather's title makes a difference to Mr. Freeman. Ernestina has always been concerned about the fact that, in spite of her father's wealth, her grandfather was a draper, and Charles's a baronet.

The first words the reader hears between Charles and Ernestina foreshadow the eventual fate of their relationship: Charles wants to leave, and Ernestina wants to continue (when Charles references Neptune, he means the god of the sea). Fowles also introduces the thematic struggles with class and evolution. Mr. Freeman, the ultimate bourgeois man, wants his daughter to move up the class ladder by becoming a titled aristocrat through marriage. Also, Charles supports the theory of evolution even though it's a contentious topic.

Charles reassures Ernestina that his scientific disagreement with Mr. Freeman doesn't matter. She points out that he hasn't even noticed the **fossils** they've been walking over. He kneels to exclaim over them, but Ernestina commands him to get to his feet. She points out the steps on the quay that Jane Austen mentions in *Persuasion*, remarking that gentlemen used to be romantic.

Both Charles and Ernestina reveal their allegiance to the past in this scene. Charles literally kneels to the relics of past ages, while Ernestina wishes that he would act more like the romantic gentlemen of fifty years earlier. Fowles will characterize this tendency to look to the past as particularly Victorian.

Charles suddenly realizes that the figure at the end of the quay is a woman. Ernestina guesses that she must be the woman nicknamed Tragedy. The fishermen call her the French Lieutenant's Woman. Ernestina wants to go back, because the woman is a bit mad, but Charles is interested now and asks for more details. Ernestina explains that the woman fell in love with, and slept with, a French lieutenant, who then abandoned her. She's waiting on the quay for him to return. She works for Mrs. Poulteney. Charles insists that they continue on towards her.

The first story the reader hears about Sarah is also the most widely circulated one, and it sounds almost like a legend, as though Sarah is a ghost rather than a real person. This suggests that there must be more to the story and that the townspeople have made Sarah into a trope or a symbol of some kind, rather than recognizing her full humanity. From the beginning, Charles is drawn to her.

The woman is holding her bonnet and wearing something that looks like a man's riding coat. Charles speaks loudly to warn her of their presence, but she doesn't react. When the wind gusts, she holds onto the post in front of her. Charles steps towards her and expresses concern for her safety. She looks at him, and he immediately feels like he's trespassing. Her look is not demure in the way of most women of this time. Her face isn't beautiful, nor is it mad, but it's tragic and authentic. The only thing that seems mad is the lack of reason that the surrounding landscape provides for sorrow. Charles feels pierced by her gaze until she turns away. Ernestina pulls him away, and he says he wishes she hadn't told him the woman's story, since it took away her mystery and romance.

Sarah's coat suggests that she doesn't abide by conventions of gender. Charles exhibits the conventional concern of a man for a woman's safety, and Sarah's rebuff seems to speak volumes about her place outside of society's structures. Furthermore, Charles feels from this first moment that Sarah makes him see the surrounding world in a different light—whereas others might think her sorrow to be insanity, he sees her as the only sane one in a mad world. Though he will falter on this point in the future, his initial reaction to her will also be his most enduring one.

CHAPTER 3

Back in his rooms at the White Lion, Charles stares into the mirror. He feels vaguely defeated due to the lunch conversation at Aunt Tranter's and uncertainty whether paleontology is a good vocation for him or Ernestina will ever really understand him. He puts his dissatisfaction down to the wet afternoon. Charles probably wouldn't have been too surprised if he learned of the inventions of the future, but he would have been surprised by the different attitude towards time. The twentieth century is marked by a lack of time, and everyone tries to find ways to do things faster. But people like Charles have the opposite problem; they have to find enough to do to occupy their vast amounts of free time. Nineteenth-century wealth is marked by boredom.

In spite of Charles's outward good humor so far, the reader now learns that he's inwardly struggling with his life, which is somewhat aimless. From the beginning, he's unsure whether he and Ernestina are really a good match, which doesn't bode well for their relationship. Meanwhile, Fowles' mentions of the future suggest that he's writing of 1867 not in isolation, but with full understanding of 1867 in relation to the twentieth century. He also makes the reader aware that the characters have a different attitude towards life because of the time in which they live.

Though the revolutions of 1848 are important to the era, they failed to really make a change. The 1860s were prosperous enough to make revolution seem unlikely. Although *Das Kapital* is about to be published, Charles is entirely unaware of Karl Marx and wouldn't have believed it if someone told him what effect this man would have.

A number of democratic revolutions took place across Europe in 1848, but in Fowles's 1867, the old established order reigns once again. Despite that Marx has not yet written the foundational texts of communism in 1867, Fowles writes in conversation with him on issues of class.

Charles's grandfather, a baronet, was a foxhunter and a collector. In his old age he excavated his land in search of ancient relics. His older son never married, meaning that his younger son, Charles's father, was left plenty of money. Charles's mother died in childbirth when Charles was one, and his father lived for pleasure, never paying Charles too much attention. When his father died, Charles was heir to both his father's money and his uncle's. Charles and his uncle, Sir Robert, like each other, even though Charles refuses to foxhunt and likes walking too much for a gentleman. Once, Charles accidentally shot one of the last Great Bustards of Salisbury Plain on his uncle's land, and his uncle was thrilled to be able to stuff and display the bird. Whenever his uncle is inclined to disinherit Charles for not writing to him or for spending too much time in the library, he convinces himself against it by staring at the stuffed bird.

Fowles gently satirizes the aristocracy, describing a family obsessed with the gentlemanly sport of foxhunting and an uncle who disparages learning and finds comfort in a stuffed bird. Charles's story will somewhat mirror that of his ancestors, as he pursues paleontology, like his grandfather, and briefly pursues pleasure through drinking and prostitutes, like his father. This pattern suggests that he's living with an unhealthy connection to the past that prevents him from being independent. Perhaps his shooting of the Great Bustard (itself belonging to the past) foreshadows his eventual break with this past that holds him to convention.

At Cambridge, Charles was actually learning until he fell in with a bad crowd and found himself sleeping with a girl in London. Soon after, he told his father that he wanted to become a priest, so his father sent him off to Paris to dissuade him of this wickedness. Charles slept with many women and decided against joining the Church. When he returned to England, he read a number of religious theories and became an agnostic, though the term didn't yet exist. His father died soon after, and Charles moved into a small house in Kensington, where he had a modest staff. He traveled frequently and did a bit of travel writing, never setting himself to any particular occupation.

Fowles continues to satirize Charles's family. Though joining the church would seem to be an honorable pursuit, Charles's father strongly preferred that he indulge in the sins of the flesh. This adventure in Paris means that Charles has lots of sexual experience, contrasting with Ernestina's innocence and ignorance in this area. If religion and science are often at odds in this book, it's significant that Charles dabbled in religion before turning to science, suggesting that they might have more in common than it seems.

Charles eventually realized that only his family thought his grandfather's archaeological pursuits a joke—other people truly respected his work. Charles himself began to pursue paleontology, though his uncle didn't entirely approve. Sir Robert was also frustrated by Charles's refusal to run for Parliament as a Tory. Charles secretly admires Gladstone, a Whig, but he could never have admitted this to his family. He's essentially lazy. He sees that England now wants only to seem respectable, rather than to do good. But he feels there are many pursuits he can't follow because he can never measure up to the distinguished people already doing the work. He sets his sights high in order to justify doing nothing.

Charles is painted as not quite an outcast, but somewhat different from the rest of his family in terms of pursuits and politics—the Tories are the party of the aristocracy, while the Whigs are more sympathetic to the lower classes. Charles's liberal viewpoint sets up his sympathy for Sarah and makes his sometimes cruel attitude towards Sam even less acceptable. Charles has the best intentions of authenticity, but he doesn't always manage to live up to them. In fact, Fowles portrays him as an almost painfully average man.

Even though Charles's cynicism indicated moral deficiencies, he's been much sought after by marriageable girls and their families, and he became known for leading them on. Sir Robert would chide him for this, but Charles pointed out that he himself never married, accusing him of never even trying. His uncle regrets his lack of a family, if not his lack of a wife. Charles would say that he hadn't yet found the right girl.

This background seems to indicate that Charles's decision to marry Ernestina was not a light one. Also, Sir Robert's lack of a wife means that Charles is his heir. Marriage, in both his own life and his uncle's, will only bring Charles misery throughout the course of the story.

CHAPTER 4

Mrs. Poulteney's house stands on a hill above Lyme Regis. Today, no one would put up with the huge kitchen range in the basement, which requires three fires to be burning constantly, no matter the weather. The walls are a hideous green rich in arsenic, though no one knows it. Mrs. Fairley runs the kitchen and always wears black, in fitting with her temperament. Because Mrs. Poulteney maintains ridiculously high standards and bad working conditions, servants never last very long here. One butler, upon quitting, supposedly told Mrs. Poulteney that he would rather spend his life in the poorhouse than work here. It's a wonder that Mrs. Fairley has lasted so long, but it's probably because she's not so different from Mrs. Poulteney.

The unbearable heat of the kitchen fires, along with the personalities of Mrs. Poulteney and Mrs. Fairley, make this house a vision of hell. This hellscape is most prominent for the lower class workers who are mistreated by the wealthy Mrs. Poulteney. The detail about the arsenic reminds readers that in hindsight, people can detect certain physical and societal aspects of a historical period that might have been harmful (such as the treatment of workers), but that were invisible to those living at the time.

Mrs. Poulteney is obsessed with dirt and immorality, and she keeps a close watch over both in her house. In fact, she believes she has a right to punish wrongdoers even outside her house, for instance if any servants fail to go to church or are seen with lovers. One young man tried to approach the house to meet his lover and was caught in one of the man-traps scattered through the gardens. Mrs. Poulteney's interrogation techniques could have qualified her for the Gestapo. In a way, she exemplifies the arrogance of the British Empire. However, among her class, she's renowned for her charity because she took in the French Lieutenant's Woman.

Fowles's comment about the Gestapo is one of a number of anachronistic comparisons he makes—no matter how much Mrs. Poulteney might fit in with the Nazi secret police, it's historically jarring to compare her to an institution that won't exist for another sixty-five years. Fowles constantly reminds the reader that his way of narrating the nineteenth century is influenced by his knowledge of the twentieth, just as the reader's interpretation of it is.

Mrs. Poulteney made this shocking decision a year earlier. The main secret of her life is that she believes in hell. The vicar of Lyme is very well suited to his congregation and keeps all hints of Catholicism out of his church. He never argues with Mrs. Poulteney about her belief in hell, because she gives so much money to the church. When she got ill one winter, the vicar came to her as frequently as the doctors did. Mrs. Poulteney is very practical about her future, and she's worried that she might not get into heaven because she hasn't given nearly one-tenth of her wealth. Besides, while she was sick, Mrs. Fairley read her the parable of the widow's mite, which bothered her constantly.

Fowles portrays the church as a generally corrupt institution that seeks money more than it seeks the betterment of its congregants. The vicar lets Mrs. Poulteney do what she wants as long as she pays well enough, even though she acts in a distinctly cruel and unchristian way towards her servants under the guise of making them better Christians. The parable of the widow's mite teaches that poor people's small sacrifices are more important than rich people's larger ones.

One day when the vicar is visiting, he tries to reassure Mrs. Poulteney about her security after death, telling her that she mustn't question God's understanding of her conscience. Mrs. Poulteney always acts strangely towards the vicar, since he's both her social inferior, dependent on her wealth, and her spiritual superior. She believes that her husband's early death was God's warning to her, and it remains a mystery in her life. She expresses her worry that though she has given money, she has not done good deeds like Lady Cotton has. Lady Cotton has set up a home for fallen women, though Mrs. Poulteney doesn't know that the home is so strict that most of the women hurry back to their old, sinful lives. The vicar says Lady Cotton is an example to everyone. Mrs. Poulteney knows she should visit the home, but it always distresses her.

Fowles loves to make fun of Mrs. Poulteney. She takes a strangely quantitative approach to faith and status, constantly trying to calculate how she stands in relation to the people around her. She believes herself superior to just about everyone, but also doesn't want to act in a way that might send her to hell. Lady Cotton is held up as a Victorian ideal of piety and charity, but Fowles points out that this ideal actually harms the people it's meant to help. Mrs. Poulteney reenacts Lady Cotton's charity on a small scale by taking in one fallen woman, Sarah, and treating her far too strictly as well.

After a silence, Mrs. Poulteney decides that she will take a companion, someone who has fallen on hard times. She asks the vicar to find someone for her, but demands that the woman be a perfect Christian, not have any relations, and not be too young. The vicar agrees to do so. He heads out of the house, but he stops on the stairs with an idea. Perhaps something like malice makes him return to the drawing room, where he suggests Sarah Woodruff.

Mrs. Poulteney wants to ensure she goes to heaven, but she refuses to sacrifice her personal comforts in any way. She wants to feel charitable without actually putting in any effort to reform someone unchristian. Though the vicar puts up with her hypocrisy, it seems that he wants to see her meet her match in Sarah.

CHAPTER 5

Ernestina has the kind of delicate face that's considered most beautiful in her time. Though she can look very demure, there's something about the tilt of her eyelids and her lips that suggests she's not entirely obedient to men. This makes her irresistible to Charles. When Charles leaves Aunt Tranter's house, Ernestina goes to her room. Through the window she admires Charles as he walks down the street, and she resents the way he raises his hat to Aunt Tranter's pretty maid. Then she turns back to her room, which has been decorated to her taste in a French fashion. The rest of the house is full of heavy furniture belonging to an old style.

Charles is most attracted to the part of Ernestina that's rebellious, so it makes sense that he'll be even more attracted to Sarah's stronger and more open rebellion. It's clear that Ernestina is prone to jealousy, and this characteristic suggests that she already doesn't feel entirely secure in Charles's love for her. The way she's decorated her room indicates that she's modern and fashionable, and she has the leisure and the money to decorate well.

Aunt Tranter is persistently likable and optimistic. Even so, Ernestina tries to be angry with her about the furniture, her concern for Ernestina's reputation, and having Ernestina in Lyme at all. Because Ernestina is an only child, her parents have always worried about her too much. They've indulged her every whim, but they're also convinced that she's consumptive, though no doctor has ever found anything wrong with her. Her parents never allow her to stay in damp places or overexert herself. Little do they know that she'll live until the beginning of World War II.

Ernestina is essentially spoiled, and her upbringing contrasts sharply with that of Sarah, whose father went mad and died. Only a wealthy family could afford to constantly invent illnesses for their daughter. Fowles again reminds his reader that he's writing from the future and knows his characters' futures—although the narrator's knowledge of Ernestina's death contrasts with his later uncertainty about the futures of Charles and Sarah.

Ernestina's parents always send her to Aunt Tranter's house to recover from the social season in London. She hates going to Lyme, because it's so behind the times and there's nothing to do, so she feels very mutinous towards her aunt. Luckily, Charles agreed to share her exile. Though Ernestina is more strong-willed than people realize, she respects convention. She and Charles share a sense of self-irony, and it prevents her from coming across as spoiled.

Although Ernestina is engaged, she acts rather like a child, going where her parents send her and then rebelling in small ways against their power over her. At the same time, she's established here as a conventional Victorian woman who feels no need to question society because it more or less caters to her, although it does make her subservient to both her parents and her fiancé.

Ernestina takes off her dress and admires her looks. She loosens her hair, feeling vaguely sinful. Then suddenly she looks at the ceiling, moves her lips, and puts on a dressing gown. She has had a sexual thought, and she feels frightened by her ignorance in this area and the feeling that sex requires brutality. She's haunted by the violence of animals mating. As a result, whenever she finds herself thinking about sexuality or childbirth, she thinks, "I must not." She wants a husband and children, but she doesn't want to endure this ordeal. She can't understand why her innocent desire requires such a harsh duty. Most Victorians feel the same way, and duty is key in the way modern people understand the Victorians.

Ernestina's attitude towards sex exemplifies that of most middle- and upper-class Victorian women. Though she's eager to be married and wants a conventional family, she knows little about what the sexual part of marriage involves. Her ignorance breeds fear, and so she tries to avoid even the thought of sex. Ironically, Victorian women are expected, even required, to have families; yet they're also required to pretend sex doesn't exist. Charles, on the other hand, already has plenty of sexual experience.

Ernestina takes out a diary and turns to the back, where she has written out all of the dates leading up to her marriage. She's drawn lines through the first two months, and about ninety days remain. She crosses out today, even though it's not over yet. Then she turns towards the front and finds a piece of pressed jasmine. She smells it, remembering the most joyful day of her life. When she hears Aunt Tranter's footsteps, she quickly puts the diary away.

Even though Ernestina fears sex, she's counting down the days until her marriage, when she'll also be required to sleep with Charles. Her state of mind involves a great deal of cognitive dissonance. Her desperate excitement emphasizes the fact that marriage is perhaps the most important event for a Victorian woman.

CHAPTER 6

Mrs. Poulteney's face is very good at expressing disapproval. She looks rather like a Pekinese, and she always smells a bit like mothballs. After the vicar suggested that she take in Sarah Woodruff, she said she didn't know her. The vicar wondered what would have happened if the Good Samaritan came upon Mrs. Poulteney. He explained that she was from Charmouth, about thirty years old, and very much in need of charity. She used to be a governess. Mrs. Poulteney demanded to hear her story.

Fowles continues to mock Mrs. Poulteney; he clearly wants the reader to take a critical attitude towards her, too. The vicar, too, is critical of her; he knows full well that she's not actually a charitable person. The first complete story that the reader hears to explain Sarah is that of a charity case. However, this impression will soon be complicated by other stories about her.

The vicar explained that Sarah's father was a respected farmer who gave her a good education. When he died, she became governess to the Talbots. Mrs. Poulteney wanted a letter of reference, but the vicar reminded her that this was a case of charity, not employment. When a French ship had been wrecked the winter before, three men were saved, and Captain Talbot took in an officer who spoke no English. Sarah helped interpret for him. Mrs. Poulteney was horrified that she spoke French, but the vicar said that governesses must do so. In any case, the Frenchman hadn't ended up being very gentlemanly. Nothing improper happened between Sarah and the man, but she did fall in love with him.

Mrs. Poulteney is hostile towards Sarah even before she knows of her supposed improprieties with the French lieutenant. If she's taking Sarah on as a charitable case, she should accept her deficiencies, not expect her to be perfect. With her suspicion of everything French, which is implied to have a taint of Catholicism and sexuality, Fowles makes Mrs. Poulteney almost a caricature of the close-minded, prejudiced Victorian.

The vicar explained that when the French lieutenant recovered, he went to Weymouth to find passage back to France. Soon after, Sarah quit her position. Mrs. Talbot couldn't find out why. Sarah joined the Frenchman in Weymouth, though she stayed with a female cousin. Mrs. Poulteney still couldn't excuse her actions, but the vicar reminded her that the lower classes are not as careful about appearances, and besides, Sarah thought the Frenchman was going to marry her. Eventually he had returned to France, telling Sarah that he would return and marry her. She was still waiting for him. The vicar was of the opinion that the man deserted her when he realized she wouldn't let him violate her.

In claiming that Sarah stayed with a cousin in Weymouth, the vicar tells a somewhat censored version of the more popular story about Sarah, which contends that she certainly slept with the French lieutenant. Mrs. Poulteney's dislike even of Sarah staying with a cousin shows just how prudish she is. This version of Sarah's story also makes her out as a tragic figure who has preserved her virtue and honor at the price of her happiness with the Frenchman.

The vicar went on to say that Sarah was entirely sane and able to work, but she was subject to melancholia in part because she still thought the Frenchman would return, and she haunted the shore waiting for him. She was a bit crazed. When he finished, there was a silence while Mrs. Poulteney calculated her position. She asked how Sarah has supported herself, and the vicar explained that she'd been doing a little needlework and living off her savings. He said that if Mrs. Poulteney took her in, Sarah would surely be saved, and might also save Mrs. Poulteney. Mrs. Poulteney imagined Lady Cotton thwarted.

Victorians used the term "melancholia" to describe what would be called "depression" today. The vicar portrays Sarah as a fundamentally sane person who simply struggles with an obsession; this assessment will later be contested by Dr. Grogan. In any case, the reader can so far see Sarah only through the eyes of other characters. Mrs. Poulteney clearly doesn't want to help her, but wants to win charity points.

Mrs. Poulteney obtained a letter of reference from Mrs. Talbot, though she disapproved of Mrs. Talbot's lenient attitude towards Sarah. The vicar brought Sarah for an interview, and Mrs. Poulteney was pleased to see how downcast she was. She was actually only twenty-five, but her sorrow clearly marked her out as a sinner, and Mrs. Poulteney liked her reserved attitude. Mrs. Poulteney dictated a letter and had Sarah read from the Bible, choosing a passage from which she thought Sarah could learn. She was charmed by Sarah's deep voice and her demeanor as she read.

Mrs. Poulteney unashamedly delights in Sarah's pain because she feels she'll get maximum credit for helping a penitent sinner who everyone can see is miserable. Even at the interview, Mrs. Poulteney already tries to moralize to Sarah using a Bible story—stories are often imbued with moral implications in this book. At the same time, Sarah's ability to charm this monster of a woman suggests that she has some charisma that draws people to her.

When Mrs. Poulteney asked Sarah about the French lieutenant, she refused to talk about him. She owned no books, not even a Bible, though the vicar said he'd give her one. Sarah was already going to church services, and Mrs. Poulteney required her to continue to do so. Although the vicar had asked her not to, Mrs. Poulteney asked what Sarah would do if the Frenchman returned. Sarah simply shook her head, which Mrs. Poulteney took as repentance, so she took Sarah on. She didn't think to ask why Sarah was agreeing to work for her after refusing to work for anyone else. In fact, it was because the house looked over the bay, and she was almost out of money.

Thus far in the story, Sarah has given no voice to her own story, choosing silence more often than speech and letting others narrate for her. Ironically, it will later become apparent that she's speaking through all of the people who tell her story, because she's purposely created the story they tell. By being silent, she lets those around her believe that they understand her truth, when in fact they're quite far from it. The narrator finally lets the reader into Sarah's mind for a brief moment at the end of the chapter, and it seems surprisingly practical.

CHAPTER 7

Sam draws the curtains to let in an unseasonably beautiful morning, one of those days when nature goes wild. Charles sits up and stares at the sunlight, no longer feeling gloomy. Sam prepares to shave him, and the surroundings seem to indicate that the world is happy and calm. Looking out the window, Charles sees a shepherd with a number of sheep in the street and is struck by the charm of the country. He tells Sam he could almost consider never returning to London.

Presenting a contrast to where the last chapter left off, with Sarah entering the hell of Mrs. Poulteney's house, the weather in this scene seems to predict great things for the day ahead and separate Charles's cheerful state of mind from Sarah's depressed one. Charles is very much the upper-class visitor, seeing charm rather than work in a flock of sheep.

Sam has worked for Charles for four years, and the two men know each other well. Charles accuses Sam of drinking, because it seems the only explanation for being grumpy on such a nice day. Sam tests the razor on his finger, looking like he might cut someone's throat. He complains that Mrs. Tranter's kitchen girl has called to him across the street to ask whether he had a bag of soot. Charles says he knows the girl, and calls her ugly. Sam retorts that she's not ugly, and Charles teases that he's attracted to her. Sam is humiliated that the hostlers heard her, but Charles isn't sympathetic. He asks for his breakfast, but as Sam is going, Charles says he suspects that Sam's been flirting.

Sam is humiliated by the kitchen girl's boldness in asking him for soot as though he's a lower type of servant than he is, showing his sensitivity to the nuances of class and his desire to seem as elite as possible in his position. Charles clearly treats Sam as an inferior, teasing him constantly and trying to keep him off-balance. Sam helps Charles feel superior in terms of class and intellect, which certainly benefits Charles, but debases Sam.

Charles winks at himself in the mirror, then puts on a serious look, then smiles again. He has a wide forehead and a black moustache. His skin is pale; a tan is a mark of low rank at this time. His face is really too innocent. He begins to shave.

Fowles doesn't hesitate to explain the significance of a tan because he's not trying to pretend his readers are Victorians. Though Charles considers himself experienced in the world, Fowles suggests he isn't really.

Sam is ten years younger than Charles and is too absentminded and vain to be a good manservant. Now it's impossible to think of a Cockney servant named Sam without thinking of Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*. Sam likes to show off his social progress, and he knows that his generation is better than Sam Weller's. The traditional upper-class dandies are known as "swells," but artisans and certain servants are beginning to copy them and are known as "snobs." Sam is one of these, and spends most of his money on fashionable clothes.

Sam Weller, a Cockney (working-class Londoner) valet, was the character who first made Charles Dickens popular, and Fowles directly acknowledges that his character Sam is a reference to Sam Weller. Sam is trying to change his outward appearance to copy men of higher classes. He entirely subscribes to the class system and wants to climb upwards from his lower-class position.

Sam is trying to change his accent. Cockneys have long been derided for their accent, and snobs' attempts to rid themselves of it are a sign of social revolution. To Charles, Sam provides an opportunity to express bad humor based on educational privilege. Though this might seem cruel, Charles and Sam do have an affectionate bond much better than the coldness that exists between many wealthy people and their servants at this time. The new rich are often the children of servants, and so they're careful to mark the distance between themselves and their servants. Charles, on the other hand, sees Sam as an amusing companion more than an excellent servant. But the difference between Sam Weller and Sam Farrow, between 1836 and 1867, is that the first is happy with his job, and the second feels it something to be endured.

Sam isn't happy with his class and he is trying to shed all traces of his origins—the Cockney accent immediately marks someone as lower-class. The narrator argues that Charles can see Sam as a companion because Charles is confident enough in his social position that he doesn't have to be afraid that consorting with Sam will make him seem lesser. However, Charles's sense of distance from Sam's position also makes him think of Sam as a less valuable person and makes him unsympathetic at times. The lower classes are changing and becoming dissatisfied, suggesting that revolution might be in the cards.

CHAPTER 8

That same morning, Ernestina wakes in a bad mood. When Charles calls at ten, he learns that she's unwell and wants to rest. He can return for tea that afternoon. He tells Sam to bring Ernestina some flowers and take the day off. Charles has no trouble filling his free time, as Lyme is in an area of stone called blue lias, which, despite its unattractiveness, holds many **fossils**. Charles has already visited the Old Fossil Shop in Lyme, which was founded by a woman who has found many excellent fossils but has never gotten due credit for it.

The presence of fossils around Lyme gives it a sense of being haunted by` the past, or even living on the basis of what has come before rather than what might make the most sense in the present. In mentioning the proprietress of the Old Fossil Shop, Fowles acknowledges a common trend in science—women have often made important discoveries for which they get no credit.

However, Charles specializes in petrified sea urchins, of which the shop has few specimens. These **fossils** are called tests or sand dollars. They helped to confirm the theory of evolution, but they're also beautiful and hard to find. Perhaps Charles is attracted to them because he has so much time to fill, but he also says that they've been scientifically neglected. He's heard that he'll find tests west of Lyme, so he goes again to the Cobb. There are fishermen and visitors strolling by the ocean, but Charles doesn't see the woman who was there the day before. He sets off along the beach.

Charles is closely associated with Darwin's theory of evolution not only because he believes in it, but also because the fossils he collects give evidence for its truth. He's actively looking for proof of the past's influence on the present, though he won't realize until later how powerful the past's influence on his own life is. The fact that Charles even looks for Sarah on the Cobb suggests that he's already more interested in her than he wants to admit.

Charles is wearing nailed boots, canvas gaiters, a long coat, a canvas hat, and a large rucksack containing numerous supplies. Modern people can't understand the Victorians' methodical nature, or why Charles doesn't understand that he's ridiculously overprepared. The difference between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the commitment to duty. People as overequipped as Charles set the foundations of modern science. They can tell that convention and religion aren't adequately explaining the world, and that they must discover more about it. Modern humans think there's nothing left to discover.

Here Fowles gestures to the common tendency to laugh at or dismiss people of previous centuries for their odd or erroneous beliefs and ways of life. He points out that no matter how strange the Victorians may seem, they made important contributions to the modern world. He again characterizes the Victorians as dedicated to duty above all, and though he may condemn this impulse later, it has undeniably produced positive results as well negative ones.

One shouldn't laugh at Charles, even as he slips on the boulders. Birds fly ahead of him, and he comes upon rock pools that make him wonder momentarily whether he should take up marine biology instead. In a very human moment, he makes sure he's alone, takes off his shoes and socks, and catches a little crab. The modern reader might despise Charles for not having a specialization, but in his time, natural history isn't associated with fantasy and sentimentality. In fact, Darwin's works are successful because they're the product of generalization. Amateurs like Charles should be generalists and ignore anyone who tries to confine them.

Though Charles has scientific goals for this expedition, he also allows himself to enjoy the beauty of the world around him in a more emotional than scientific way. Fowles points out various ways in which Victorian science is different from modern science, and he emphasizes the fact that the differences are productive ones—generalization would make modern scientists scoff, but Darwin couldn't have created one of the most important theories of science without it.

Charles calls himself a Darwinist even though he doesn't entirely understand Darwin. Darwin upset the Linnaean ladder of nature, which was based on the idea that new species are never created. Instead, Linnaeus was obsessed with classifying everything that exists, and he eventually went mad since he couldn't accept that life was constantly changing. Even though Charles knows that the Linnaean mindset is rubbish, he sees in the layers of rock a comforting orderliness of life, in which divine laws ensure the survival of the fittest. He thinks of himself as one of the fittest. However, he fails to realize that the creation of new species means that old ones must go extinct. Though he's very aware of death on a small scale, he can't fathom extinction.

Linnaeus's fate seems to be invoked as a warning to the Victorians not to be obsessed with maintaining the status quo and the conventions that go with it. The fact that the Linnaean mindset tempts Charles shows that Victorians find reassurance in social order and hierarchy. Charles seems quite pretentious in his assumption that he's one of the fittest humans, whose offspring will help dictate the biological future of the species. Undoubtedly his confidence comes from his class status, which has also resulted in a good education.

Charles finds a large piece of rock with clear **fossil** impressions on it. He decides to give it to Ernestina that afternoon, feeling that he'll be doing his duty by carrying this heavy stone back to her. He suddenly realizes that it's already two o'clock, and he'll have to return by way of the cliff because the tide has cut off the way he came. He takes the path up the cliff too fast to punish himself for dawdling, and when he reaches the top he cools himself at a stream.

Notably, Charles brings a fossil back to Ernestina not because he wants to make her happy by doing so, but because he thinks it's the right thing to do. He tries to be a very disciplined person, as seen when he tries to punish himself for taking too much time enjoying the beach.

CHAPTER 9

Sarah is the last person to list reasons for her actions. At first she couldn't decide whether to interview with Mrs. Poulteney, so she went to see her former employer, Mrs. Talbot. Mrs. Talbot was kind and had offered to have Sarah back, and she wanted to help her. She was haunted by an image from the romantic literature of her youth in which a pursued woman jumped off a cliff in terror, lit by lightning. Thus, she advised Sarah to take the job, and though Sarah is intelligent, she trusted the stupid Mrs. Talbot.

Throughout the novel, Sarah often seems impossible to understand, so it's significant that the narrator suggests that she herself doesn't always quite know why she acts the way she does. Mrs. Talbot tells herself another story about Sarah, conflating her with a character in an overblown, romantic novel. This imagined story indirectly influences Sarah's decision, showing the way that stories act in the world.

Sarah's intelligence would not show up in modern tests, as it is not analytical. Instead, it allows her to fully understand people. It's as though she has a computer in her heart that allows her to see the truth of people instead of seeing how they present themselves. This ability is not based on morality, seeing as she did not, in fact, stay with a female cousin at Weymouth.

Even though no one seems able to understand Sarah, she understands everyone else, giving her some private power over them. Fowles uses another anachronism here, comparing Sarah to a computer even though they don't exist in her time. He also suggests that she did sleep with the French lieutenant.

Sarah's insight, along with her education, have cursed her life. She went to a female seminary in Exeter, which she paid for by working in the evenings. Her fellow students looked down on her, so she read much more in her loneliness than they did. As a result, she sees and judges those around her as fictional characters. Unfortunately, her education made her a victim of the class system; she no longer belongs to her own class, but neither does she belong to a higher one. This makes it difficult to find a husband.

Sarah has never belonged and has always been an outcast. Though education is supposed to improve people's lives, hers has made her too intelligent to fit in with the lower class, but neither has it raised her up to the middle class. If she sees her fellow humans as characters, then she also sees her life as a story that she can rewrite and manipulate.

Sarah's father sent her to school because he was obsessed with his ancestry. Many generations ago, the family had perhaps been related to Sir Frances Drake, and definitely owned a manor. When Sarah returned home at eighteen, she quietly watched as he boasted of this ancestry, and her silence irritated him. He made a terrible bargain in buying a farm, and eventually went mad from trying to seem gentlemanly while going bankrupt. He died in an insane asylum, and Sarah went to work for the Talbots. Whenever she's had suitors, she's seen all of their faults too clearly, and so she seems doomed to spinsterhood.

Sarah's family background is reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles. *Both Sarah and Tess experience adverse effects when their fathers become obsessed with their supposed noble heritage, just as both become outcasts because they're seen as fallen women. In any case, Sarah's father was ruined by the desire to ascend in social status, a pursuit that generally causes strife in this novel.*

Let's imagine that on the afternoon that Charles is walking down the shore, Mrs. Poulteney makes a list of pros and cons about Sarah. First, Sarah has created a happier atmosphere among the servants, as none have been fired since Sarah came to work at Marlborough House a year before. A few weeks after Sarah began, Mrs. Poulteney discovered that a maid had failed to water some ferns, and she tried to fire the girl, who began to weep. Sarah was in the room and, remarkably, asked a question that contradicted Mrs. Poulteney—she asked Millie whether she was all right. She discovered that in fact Millie had been fainting. After Sarah put her to bed, Mrs. Poulteney asked what she should do about Millie, and Sarah gave in to convention by saying she should do what she thought best. Mrs. Poulteney pretended to be kind in the matter, and Sarah began to learn how to handle her.

The narrator steps outside the story here to speculate with the reader about what kind of list Mrs. Poulteney might make about Sarah. This technique helps make the novel feel more like a conscious construction on the part of the writer. Sarah has introduced compassion into Mrs. Poulteney's house. This is the first time the reader really sees Sarah's capacity for boldness; while everyone else is completely cowed by Mrs. Poulteney, Sarah, in spite of being dependent on her charity, doesn't hesitate to stand up to her cruelty. This incident, and Mrs. Poulteney's submission to Sarah's opinion, also shows Sarah's talent for manipulating people.

The second item on the list would be Sarah's voice. Mrs. Poulteney demands that her servants attend frequent religious services, some of which she presides over. They usually seem frightened and meek in the face of her readings, but Sarah's beautiful and sincere voice makes the servants actually religious. In the evenings, Sarah reads the Bible to Mrs. Poulteney alone, and her voice has even managed to make the lady cry. The difference between the two women is that Mrs. Poulteney believes in a God that never existed, and Sarah believes in one who does. Sarah speaks very directly of the biblical stories, as though she sees them happening. Once she stopped reading because she was crying, which Mrs. Poulteney feel much more sympathetic towards her. Sarah sees through the trappings of religion as she sees through people. Her essence is understanding and emotion.

Sarah's voice is one indication of her rather mystic power that was perhaps first glimpsed in that initial scene on the Cobb. Her genuine spiritual feeling counters Mrs. Poulteney's superficial, self-serving religiosity. The narrator suggests that Mrs. Poulteney's vision of a strict and calculating God is entirely wrong, while Sarah's is more accurate. However, it's difficult to know exactly how Sarah does imagine God. Again, Sarah's power comes in part from her ability to tell a good story—her readings deeply affect people who haven't been affected by Mrs. Poulteney's readings of the same texts.

Sarah is very good at taking on small household responsibilities, and on Mrs. Poulteney's birthday Sarah gave her a chair covering that she embroidered. Whenever Mrs. Poulteney sees it, she is reminded of Sarah's good qualities. Finally, Mrs. Poulteney makes Sarah give out religious pamphlets to the poor. Sarah hates doing it, but Mrs. Poulteney believes in the power of the tracts even though most of their recipients can't read them, and she thinks giving them out will help her get into heaven. As Sarah gives out the pamphlets, she looks in people's eyes, and they learn more from her gaze than from the tracts.

Mrs. Poulteney's ridiculous sense of religion shows again—she tries to collect good deeds not for the good they do for others, but for her own good in the afterlife. Besides, she can't put herself in anyone else's shoes enough to even consider that the illiterate poor might benefit far more from other forms of charity. The narrator adds to the sense of Sarah as almost saintly or legendary by imbuing her very gaze with spiritual power.

On the other side of things, Mrs. Poulteney is irritated that Sarah goes out alone. She originally had one afternoon free every week, but after she was found crying in bed one morning, the doctor gave Mrs. Poulteney a lecture on melancholia. Doctor Grogan doesn't like Mrs. Poulteney, and he managed to make her give Sarah every afternoon off while the lady naps.

On one hand, Mrs. Poulteney's desire to keep Sarah almost as a prisoner demonstrates her cruelty. On the other, it's important to remember that Victorian women walking alone were often suspect and could even be arrested in certain areas if they were suspected to be prostitutes.

Furthermore, Sarah can't always be present when there are visitors. Mrs. Poulteney wants everyone to see how charitable she's being, but Sarah's sadness and silence make guests uncomfortable. She always forces common sense into conversation that doesn't want it. When the most important visitors come, Sarah will remain, but with certain visitors she'll simply slip away. This allows Mrs. Poulteney to talk about her charitable burden, but it also implies some failure on her part, since Sarah isn't there.

This complaint of Mrs. Poulteney's emphasizes her self-serving, performative sense of charity. She doesn't help Sarah because she wants to help her, but because she wants other people to admire her good deeds. Though Sarah has been portrayed at times as overly idealistic or romantic, she's more down-to-earth than the wealthy visitors who converse according to custom rather than common sense.

The worst thing about Sarah is that she still seems attached to the French lieutenant. Mrs. Poulteney has repeatedly tried to get her to talk about the situation, but Sarah refuses to talk about it. Mrs. Poulteney rarely goes out, so she depends on Mrs. Fairley to bring her reports on Sarah's outings. Mrs. Fairley resents the fact that Sarah has taken over her duty of reading to Mrs. Poulteney. Sarah has become popular with the servants, and Mrs. Fairley can't stand not being able to complain to them about her. She begins to hate Sarah, but she pretends to Mrs. Poulteney that she feels sorry for her. She employs her friends and family in helping her keep watch over Sarah, so that before long her every movement is related to Mrs. Fairley in exaggerated terms.

Sarah could minimize her attachment to the French lieutenant, as well as his damage to her reputation, if only she would talk about the situation—but those aren't necessarily her goals. Since Sarah is seen at this point as a pitiful figure in need of charity, it's rather ironic that Mrs. Fairley is jealous of her. In fact, it suggests that playing the fallen woman is working somewhat to Sarah's advantage. Mrs. Fairley becomes another storyteller in this novel of storytelling, fabricating a new narrative for Sarah.

Sarah always used to take the same walk to a terrace overlooking the sea, then go either to the Cobb or to the parish church, then up through grassy fields and back on the road. But she went to the Cobb whenever it wasn't crowded. It's assumed that she feels closest to France there. When Mrs. Poulteney heard of this routine, she challenged Sarah, saying that the fact that she looks out to sea suggests that she isn't repentant. People think that she's still pursuing sin, and waiting for Satan's sails. Sarah asked plainly whether Mrs. Poulteney wanted her to leave, which shocked her. She said that she simply wanted Sarah to show that she's forgotten the Frenchman by walking elsewhere. Sarah agreed with a small smile, the first she'd given Mrs. Poulteney.

Although the narrator relates the thoughts of almost every other character, he doesn't let the reader into Sarah's mind nearly so easily. The reason he gives for her walks to the Cobb is only the reason others ascribe to her, part of a story they tell about her, and it's impossible to know at this point whether it's Sarah's real reason. Mrs. Poulteney expects Sarah to be so grateful for her charity that she'll do anything to keep her place in the house, but Sarah makes it clear that she would be fine without Mrs. Poulteney. Mrs. Poulteney, meanwhile, only cares about appearances.

Mrs. Poulteney allowed Sarah to walk by the sea sometimes, but not always, and not to stare. Sarah generally kept to Mrs. Poulteney's instructions, though she still occasionally stood at the end of the Cobb. Mrs. Fairley had little to report for months, and Sarah was saved from severe criticism, particularly since Mrs. Fairley and Mrs. Poulteney thought her mad. In fact, Sarah isn't mad. She was exhibiting her shame for a reason, and she knew she had sufficiently achieved her purpose.

Mrs. Poulteney tries to control Sarah even down to what aspects of the landscape she can look at. Sarah manages to keep the peace even while asserting her freedom by standing on the Cobb. The narrator reveals just enough about Sarah to make her even more of an enigma, suggesting that she's completely in control even when she seems oppressed by those around her.

But one day soon before the beginning of this story, Mrs. Fairley came to Mrs. Poulteney, saying that she had to tell her something about Sarah because it was her duty. It seemed there was something truly awful to relate. Then she said that Sarah had begun walking on Ware Commons. Though this may seem anticlimactic, Mrs. Poulteney's mouth fell open at the news.

Fowles again draws attention to the constructed nature of the story, giving it a defined time of beginning before which other events occurred and acknowledging that he's withholding the information that the reader needs to understand why Mrs. Poulteney is so shocked.

CHAPTER 10

For the six miles west of Lyme Regis, the coastal landscape is very strange. From the air, one can only see that the fields stop about a mile before the cliffs, turning into wild forest. Flying low, one can see that there are many chasms and towers of stone. The area feels very isolated, and people have often become lost in it. This land, called the Undercliff, is very steep and tilts towards the sun, making rare plants grow there, large and early in the year. There are many places a person can fall and not be heard shouting. In 1867 there were several cottages, but at the time of writing no one lives there, and it's an entirely wild nature reserve. This is where Charles goes when he climbs up from the beach, and the eastern half of it is called Ware Commons.

The Undercliff is wild, frightening, and dangerous, yet also fertile and beautiful. These characteristics make it the perfect location for the impending meetings between Charles and Sarah—it's a place which the tame conventions of society can't penetrate, a place where anything goes. And outside of society, dangerous things can happen, but new and beautiful things can happen too (represented by the large, rare plants growing there). Fowles reminds his reader that he knows what the characters would see as the future, and the Undercliff will always defy domestication.

After Charles cools himself in the stream, he tries to look around seriously but is distracted by the beauty of his surroundings. There are flowers everywhere, of all different kinds. He can hear many types of birdsong. Turning, he sees all of Lyme Bay spread below him. Only the Renaissance had art that could capture such a scene. The Renaissance was the end of a cultural winter, and it spelled an end to confinement, praising everything good. It was everything the Victorian age wasn't. Charles feels dissatisfied with his own era's approach to nature, but he explains it with Rousseau's philosophies and believes that he's become too civilized to truly connect with nature. As a typical Victorian, he thinks he must be sad because he can't possess nature forever. He doesn't have the existentialist knowledge to think instead that he is happy to have it for a moment.

Fowles contrasts a number of philosophical ideologies in this scene. Charles feels a Renaissance love of nature in that he appreciates the freedom and beauty of it, whereas Victorian society's strict moralism discourages people from basking in beauty or pleasure. Charles believes, as Rousseau taught, that people have strayed dangerously from their natural state by becoming too cultured and disciplined. Fowles suggests that Victorians want to control nature rather than appreciate it, and that Charles would be better off with insight from a philosophy that doesn't even exist in his time—existentialism.

Charles begins to look for tests along the stream and in the woods, but he doesn't find any. Eventually he realizes how late it is and sets off on a path towards Lyme. When he comes to a fork, he takes a lower path and luckily finds a grassy plateau from which he can orient himself. Moving to the edge of it, he sees a figure below. It's a woman sleeping on a ledge of grass about five feet below the plateau. The rock walls around it trap the sun, but one edge drops about forty feet into brambles.

This pivotal meeting between Charles and Sarah occurs when Charles is lost, but just about to find his way. Sarah will make Charles far more lost in his life, but she'll also illuminate the societal landscape around him. By taking a nap in this location, Sarah demonstrates her comfort with the space outside society, as well as her willingness to live on the edge of disaster.

Charles steps back out of sight, unsure what to do. Then he steps forward again, curious. The woman is deeply asleep, her coat open over a blue dress. A handful of flowers lie around her arm. Her position reminds Charles of a girl he slept with in Paris. Moving to see her face better, he realizes it's the French Lieutenant's Woman. Her hair is loose, and he sees that it's richly reddish. Her skin is tan. He wishes he didn't have to look at her upside down. He's overcome by a strange feeling that she is innocent, outcast unfairly, and he can't imagine why she's here. Coming to the very edge of the plateau, he realizes that the sadness has gone from her face. Just then she wakes.

In this second meeting, Charles immediately sexualizes Sarah by conflating her with a woman—quite likely a prostitute—he once slept with. Fowles does present her in a way that, in a Victorian novel, would be quite sexual; she's asleep and unguarded, with her hair freed from its proper confines. It's rather ironic, then, that Charles decides Sarah doesn't deserve to be an outcast just as he sees her in this situation that people like Mrs. Poulteney would use as proof of her sinfulness.

Though Charles tries to step back, Sarah sees him and scrambles up. He bows to her, and she looks shocked and slightly ashamed. They stare at each other until Charles apologizes quickly and walks away, not looking back. He returns to the fork in the path and only then wishes he had asked which way to go. Though he waits briefly, she doesn't appear. Charles doesn't realize that in those moments of waiting, the whole Victorian Age is lost. And this doesn't mean that he took the wrong path.

Fowles presents this scene as a turning point not only for the characters, but for the Victorian Age itself, whose values depend on people adhering to them. As Charles waits for Sarah, he puts himself in her power and unconsciously begins a journey to rejecting Victorian values. Charles wants Sarah to show him the path back to civilization, but she will instead lead him far away from it.

CHAPTER 11

At about the same time of Charles and Sarah's meeting, Ernestina takes out her diary and turns to her bland entry from that morning. She stayed in and didn't feel happy. Even the flowers Charles sent had irritated her. She had heard Mary flirting with Sam at the front door, and she worried it had been Charles there instead of Sam. Ernestina knows that Charles has traveled and is older than she, and attractive. She believes he's hiding some woman in his past. However, she's more jealous of his love than worried that he might have slept with other women. His calmness seems to her to prove that he was once passionately in love, rather than the truth, which is that he never has been.

Ernestina almost seems to sense that this is a dark day for her, though she doesn't know about Charles and Sarah's meeting. Though her jealousy of Charles's past and of Mary is unfounded, her general sense of jealousy is not. Charles has slept with many women in the past, and the fact that he can't properly tell Ernestina about these encounters, and that their levels of worldly experience are so different, shows one of the sexist weaknesses of Victorian marriage. Finally, Fowles implies that Charles is not in love with Ernestina.

Soon after Sam left, Ernestina rang for Mary, who came in smiling with the flowers. Ernestina frowned at her. The narrator thinks that Mary is the prettiest woman in this story. She's the liveliest and the least selfish. She has a pure complexion, blonde hair, and flirtatious eyes. Her figure is seductively plump. Mary's great-great-granddaughter, who is twenty-two at the time of writing, is a movie star and looks rather like Mary.

For the first time, the narrator becomes almost a character in the story, present enough and human enough to have an opinion on the physical appearances of other characters. He demonstrates an almost eerie knowledge of the characters' future—his present—that makes the story seem real. The reader might wonder which movie star he's talking about before remembering that this is fiction.

Mary got a job with Mrs. Poulteney because she's related to Mrs. Fairley, but Mrs. Poulteney fired her when she caught her kissing a stable boy. She then began to work for Mrs. Tranter, where she is happy and Mrs. Tranter likes her. Sometimes Mrs. Tranter even eats with Mary in the kitchen when no one was around, and they get on quite well. However, Mary is jealous of Ernestina, in part because her London fashions make Mary's clothing seem so inadequate. She also thinks Charles is too good for Ernestina, so she often runs into him on purpose so she can feel triumphant when he tips his hat to her. She knows Ernestina watches from her window.

Mary is the female character least ashamed of, or even self-conscious of, her sexuality. Because she's lower-class, her expression of sexuality has fewer repercussions—though she did lose her job over a kiss. Mrs. Tranter's kindness is directly contrasted with Mrs. Poulteney's harshness, as it often will be. Mary seems to have some aspirations above her class, as shown by her jealousy of Ernestina's clothes and fiancé. She's bold and doesn't mind making her mistress jealous in return.

Mary put the flowers on Ernestina's bedside table, but Ernestina made her move them farther away. She asked where Charles was, but Mary didn't know, and she interrogated her about her interaction with Sam. Sam acted very differently than he had that morning with Charles. After handing over the flowers for Ernestina, he whipped out a small bouquet for Mary, with a compliment for her looks. Mary smelled them. Sam said that he would deliver her bag of soot as long as it was paid for immediately. When she asked how much it would cost, he winked at her. She laughed and slammed the door.

Even as Ernestina is feeling distant from Charles—and in fact growing distant from him, though she doesn't know it yet—Sam and Mary are just beginning to come together. Charles accused Sam of flirting earlier, and it becomes clear that he was right. Sam and Mary's interactions here focus around their duties as servants, highlighting the ways in which the rituals of love are different for the working class as opposed to wealthier couples like Charles and Ernestina.

Ernestina warned Mary that Sam is a womanizer and demanded that she report it if he made advances to her. Ernestina asked for barley water, and Mary left, though there was a small light of defiance in her eyes. This interaction reminded Ernestina that she'll soon have to be a real mistress to servants. It will be wonderful to be independent, but servants are so troublesome. Life clearly must be seen as good, but it's also difficult in the moment. Now, in the afternoon, she takes out her diary and turns to the page where she's pressed the jasmine.

Ernestina, whose sexuality has always been so regulated and repressed, now tries to exercise her class power by doing the same to Mary's. Ernestina seems somehow discontented with her life, not truly feeling that life is good but only that she has some obligation to see it as such. She pins all her hopes on her marriage, just as any Victorian woman must, as that's the major event of her life.

In London, wealth has begun to take precedence over good breeding. Ernestina's grandfather grew up a modest draper, but he died very rich after founding a large store in the West End. Her father is a gentleman in all ways except by birth, and he gave Ernestina an excellent education. She really has no reason for her worries about her social status, and Charles isn't concerned about it.

Class in England has long depended on more than just wealth—people could only be aristocrats if they came from old, propertied families. It makes Ernestina anxious that she doesn't have the heritage that Charles does. Even though she's wealthier than he is, she's only bourgeois because her family is "new money."

Charles met Ernestina the previous November at the house of a woman who wanted him to marry one of her daughters. They all pretended that they were interested in paleontology, but Ernestina simply teased him about his vocation. They liked each other's intelligence and sense of humor. Ernestina's parents made inquiries about Charles and were satisfied with what they found. Ernestina had realized that Charles would never fall in love with anyone who threw herself on him. When he began to attend social events at her house, her parents never made any sly suggestions of marriage, and Ernestina carefully ignored and teased him, making it clear that she knew he would never marry.

In some sense, Ernestina woos Charles by going against convention, even though she's a very conventional character. When everyone else makes every effort to make him like them, she remains aloof. Charles's attraction to this quality of difference undoubtedly contributes also to his attraction to Sarah. Nonetheless, Charles and Ernestina do come together under pretty conventional circumstances, in the drawing rooms of high society Londoners.

Then one January evening, Ernestina saw an old lady across the room. She went up to Charles and suggested that she could introduce him to the lady so that he could learn from her about the Early Cretaceous era. As they crossed the room, she stopped him and said that if he was going to be an old bachelor, he would have to practice. Her eyes showed an offer as clear as that of the prostitutes in the Haymarket.

Ernestina makes Charles face his options: be an old bachelor and spend his time with boring people, or marry her and have a more enjoyable life. Among the young female characters, Ernestina is the model of Victorian sexual purity. Thus, in likening her offer of marriage to a prostitute's offer of sex, Fowles smashes conventional ideas about sexual morality.

Charles had, in fact, been growing worried that he would waste his life like his uncle did. Traveling had long substituted for a wife, letting him sleep with women sometimes, but he no longer wants to travel. He feels sexually frustrated and is too moral to travel just for the sake of sleeping with women. One morning everything seemed very simple; he wanted to wake up with Ernestina.

Charles's reasons for marrying Ernestina are overwhelmingly focused on sex, rather than on some deep love for her. This doesn't bode well for their marriage, and it can partly be blamed on a society that heavily shames people who have sex before marriage (though it's far more acceptable for men than for women).

Soon after, Charles spoke with Ernestina's father, and then went to find Ernestina in the conservatory, where she was pretending to cut flowers. He said he had decided to leave England forever, but when he saw that she was too distressed to realize he was teasing, he said he would stay if someone cared about him. She turned with tearful eyes and they drew together. They didn't kiss, because they had been too sexually repressed for too long. On the way out of the conservatory, Charles picked a sprig of jasmine and pretended it was mistletoe, and they finally did kiss. Charles led her back to her parents, and Ernestina cried in her mother's arms while Charles and Mr. Freeman smiled at each other.

The fact that Charles can joke about never seeing Ernestina again while actually proposing to marry her suggests that he isn't nearly as invested in the relationship as she is. Even once they're engaged and it's acceptable for them to kiss, convention keeps them from it. While a Victorian novel might romantically attribute their hesitation to a proper female meekness, Fowles makes no excuses, calling out their denial of natural impulse and blaming it on societal conditioning.

CHAPTER 12

Charles walks to a cottage surrounded by meadows, where a man is herding cows. He realizes he wants a bowl of milk, so he knocks on the cottage door. A woman lets him into the Dairy, and as she ladles him milk, he realizes he's heard of the place and mentions Aunt Tranter's name. The woman knows of her and gives him a welcoming smile. When the woman's husband returns to the house, the woman disappears and Charles pays him for the milk.

This is really the only scene in which Fowles presents a vision of lower-class country life, though Sarah and Mary both have their origins here. Charles makes some effort to connect with the farmers, but the barrier of money remains between them.

Charles is about to return to the path when Sarah appears out of the woods and goes on her way towards Lyme. Charles asks whether the man knows her, and he says she comes this way often. He calls her the French Lieutenant's Whore. The word makes Charles angry, and he can't believe that she's a whore. He returns to the path and catches up to Sarah. Though she must hear his footsteps, she doesn't turn. He wants to prove to her that he's kinder than the other people around her.

The farmer's name for Sarah suggests that calling her "the French Lieutenant's Woman" has always been a euphemism for calling her a whore, which is how she's talked about by people who aren't so sensitive to conventions of politeness. Charles knows very little about Sarah, and he bases his judgment on the way she has moved him in their two brief encounters.

Charles hails Sarah and she turns, surprised. Again, her face strikes Charles and draws him in. He apologizes for the manner in which he addressed her the day before, and for watching her in her sleep. She accepts these apologies and moves to continue on. He asks whether they might walk together, but she says she prefers to walk alone. He thinks she doesn't know who he is, but she does. She insists that she wants to walk alone, and she requests that he doesn't tell anyone he's seen her here. She continues on her way as though she thinks her request is in vain. Charles is left with the image of her large, direct eyes, which seem to reject him. He wonders if she meets someone illicitly in this forest, but then he remembers her story.

Charles seems to expect Sarah to welcome his company, probably both because he's always been pursued by many women and because he sees her as lonely and desperate. However, as she often does, Sarah defies expectation, and her rejection of Charles likely whets his desire for her. Her mystery is increased by her desire to keep her presence in the Undercliff a secret. To Charles's credit, he doesn't assume that just because she's supposedly a "whore" she'll have many lovers; he credits the fact that she's loyally pining for her lost lover.

Back in town, Charles stops at Aunt Tranter's house to say that he'll return for tea as soon as he's changed. However, Aunt Tranter insists that he should remain as he is, and she shows him into the drawing room where Ernestina is lying. He tells her all about his day, omitting his encounter with Sarah, since Ernestina has made it clear that she doesn't like talking about her, both on the Cobb and at lunch with Aunt Tranter, when the woman told Charles Sarah's story. Charles gives Ernestina the rock full of **fossils** that he found, and she forgives him everything because it's so heavy. He remarks on how strange the Undercliff is, and she teases that he's been associating with wood nymphs. He almost tells her about his meeting with Sarah, but it seems like it would be a betrayal.

It's not clear exactly why Ernestina doesn't like talking about Sarah, but it can be assumed that Ernestina, a proper and conventional woman, is uncomfortable with the immorality of Sarah's story and the hold that it has over the people of Lyme. Charles and Sarah have hardly even spoken, but their interaction has already begun a cycle of deception between Charles and Ernestina. Charles's loyalty to Sarah's secret over the trust of his fiancée also seems to bode ill. Finally, Ernestina's unconscious comparison of Sarah to a wood nymph adds to the sense of her as legendary and not quite human.

It still must be explained why Mrs. Poulteney was so horrified to hear that Sarah was walking in Ware Commons. In short, this is where people go to be in private. The area had been public land until the enclosure acts, when a gentleman living nearby claimed it as his own. In the end, a right of way was granted through the area, but there's still a general feeling that Ware Commons is public property. Poachers feel less guilty there, and a group of gypsies once lived there undetected for months.

Unlike Charles, Mrs. Poulteney thinks that Sarah's history undoubtedly means she's promiscuous. This description of Ware Commons adds to the impression of the Undercliff as a lawless area outside of civilization, where things undreamt of in town might go on undetected.

Furthermore, the road to the Dairy is frequented by couples who will hide in the bushes to carry on. Even worse, there's a tradition that on Midsummer's Night young people have a dance in the woods, and some people claim that it's not only dancing that goes on. Over time, the custom will disappear as sexual mores become more lenient. Mrs. Poulteney has led a committee of ladies in the fight to close off the path through Ware Commons, but they were defeated. Still, to the respectable people in town, associating someone with Ware Commons ruins their reputation.

Ware Commons is already strongly associated with sexual immorality, and the last thing Mrs. Poulteney wants is for people to think Sarah is being promiscuous while living under her roof. The narrator's foresight that the Midsummer's Night dance will end suggests that it's thrilling because sex is so forbidden in this time period. When other outlets for desire become acceptable, this debauchery in the woods will become obsolete.

On the evening that Mrs. Fairley reported Sarah's movements to Mrs. Poulteney, the lady was waiting for Sarah when she returned. It was clear that she was furious. Sarah went towards the Bible, but then noticed Mrs. Poulteney's attitude. Mrs. Poulteney said that she had realized she should never have listened to the doctor's orders about Sarah. Sarah asked what she has done, but Mrs. Poulteney only called her wicked. Sarah demanded to know, and Mrs. Poulteney told her. Sarah showed no shame, asking what was wrong with walking on Ware Commons. Mrs. Poulteney said she knows what happens there, but Sarah said she only goes there to be alone.

Sarah refuses to subscribe to the narrative that Mrs. Poulteney is trying to force her into; one in which Sarah has committed a crime of which she should be ashamed, and Mrs. Poulteney can be righteously angry in the name of religion. Instead, Sarah denies not that she went to Ware Commons, but that going there makes her a bad person. Ware Commons is so deeply inscribed as an immoral place in the public imagination that this is tantamount to questioning the Victorian moral code.

In truth, Mrs. Poulteney has never even seen Ware Commons. Furthermore, she's an opium addict, though she's unaware of this. Many Victorian ladies are addicted to laudanum, which doctors prescribe for all kinds of things. Laudanum creates vivid dreams, and Mrs. Poulteney has built up a fantastical picture of Ware Commons as the site of countless sexual abominations. Sarah said that she simply sought solitude since she couldn't go to the shore anymore, and she denied ever hearing that Ware Commons was an improper place to go. Mrs. Poulteney realized that Sarah hadn't lived in Lyme very long, and she restrained her anger. She forbade Sarah to go there anymore, and Sarah agreed.

Fowles completely tears down Mrs. Poulteney's moralizing about Ware Commons. Not only has she based her conceptions of it on hearsay, but she's also on drugs. Fowles suggests that her narrative about Ware Commons is nothing more than an opium dream, which contributes to the image of Mrs. Poulteney as an awful hypocrite. Moreover, the widespread addiction of Victorian ladies undercuts Victorian moralizing in general, as they're supposed to be such examples of propriety.

Sarah dispassionately read the Bible passage that Mrs. Poulteney had marked for her, about the undefiled being blessed. Long after everyone was asleep that night, Sarah stood at the window of her room and stared out to sea. She saw a light far away, but gave it no thought. She was crying silently and considering jumping out the window. The narrator won't make her melodramatically fail to jump, as he's already shown her alive two weeks later. Her tears come from an uncontrollable misery based on the conditions of her life. Who is Sarah, and where does she come from?

Mrs. Poulteney clearly chooses Bible passages for Sarah to read with the purpose of shaming her into submission. The fact that Sarah doesn't react to the light at sea suggests that she isn't actually waiting for the French lieutenant to return. The narrator makes it clear that he's not impartially reporting some truth of Sarah's actions; he's in charge of what she does or doesn't do in the story. It seems that he's finally going to let the reader into Sarah's mind.

CHAPTER 13

The narrator doesn't know who Sarah is, or where she comes from. His characters have never existed outside of his mind. He's only pretending to know their thoughts because he's using the Victorian convention of an omniscient narrator, by which the novelist pretends to know everything. However, the narrator lives in the 1960s, and even if this is a novel, it's not a modern one. Perhaps the novel is only a game, and the narrator is disguising himself in Charles or discussing his confusion about modern women like Sarah. Perhaps this is really a book of essays.

Just when it seems the narrator will reveal Sarah's story, he drops completely out of the conventional narrative and instead comments on the writing process. This self-reflection, which makes the story seem conscious of itself as a construction, is a technique of metafiction. Though the book has seemed more or less like a conventional Victorian novel up to this point, the narrator now explodes all expectations for the future of this story.

The narrator meant to reveal everything about Sarah at this point, but now that he's watching her stand at her window, he realizes that Sarah would never have explained herself if she saw him on the lawn; she would have disappeared. It may seem that novelists always follow their plans for a book. However, novelists have countless different reasons for writing, and the only one they share is the desire to create worlds as real as, but different from, the actual world. A real world can't be controlled by its creator; the fictional world only becomes real when it disobeys its creator.

Though writers undoubtedly ask themselves these questions about their works, they usually maintain the illusion of being entirely in charge of the story. The storylines of Victorian novels often obey prescribed rules, and in letting this fictional world operate outside of his control, and thus outside of any rules, the narrator seems to suggest that his fictional world is more real than those of Victorian novels. Ironically, he acknowledges that his world is constructed, whereas Victorian novels often pretend to report true events.

The narrator told Charles to return immediately to Lyme Regis when he left Sarah on the cliff, but instead he went to the Dairy. The reader might protest that the narrator simply decided it would be better to have Charles stop at the Dairy, but the narrator reports that the idea seemed to come from Charles. He must respect Charles's independence. God is "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist," and so an author must give his characters freedom in order to be free himself. The modern novelist is still a god, but freedom is now most important, as opposed to authority, which was most important to the Victorians.

The narrator denies his power over the characters, giving the story a life of its own precisely by admitting that it is a story. He suggests that modern people venerate God as freedom, whereas the Victorians venerated God as authority. This is also, by extension, why the Victorians placed so much emphasis on duty and convention, whereas Fowles's contemporaries were more likely to scoff at these principles. Perhaps it's the narrator's willingness to let his characters be free that makes Charles and Sarah so concerned with being free from their society.

The narrator insists that he has broken no illusion; his characters are just as real as they ever were. He wants the reader to share his sense that he doesn't control his characters any more than the reader controls the people around them. The reader might protest that a character can only be either real or imaginary, but in fact, everyone slightly fictionalizes their own pasts. The definition of humanity is to be fleeing reality. The reader might think this digression has nothing to do with the themes of the book, but the narrator will suspect them.

This is a moment in which Fowles particularly blurs the line between fiction and reality, suggesting that these two concepts actually can't be separated. Though the characters aren't real, they're real enough to influence the narration; and though people think their lives are real, reality is subject to differences in individual perspectives. Fowles is participating in a questioning of objective reality typical to postmodernism.

Sarah cried but didn't kill herself, and she continued to frequent Ware Commons. It was clear that sooner or later, Mrs. Poulteney would find out. Sarah did go less often, and she's begun to take a different path to Ware Commons to avoid detection. She keeps out of sight of the Dairy by taking a path through the bracken, and the afternoon when Charles sees her from the Dairy, it's because she's late in returning to Mrs. Poulteney's. Mrs. Poulteney is going to dine at Lady Cotton's, and she must prepare for battle. Besides, Charles has shocked Sarah, and it seems that no precautions can prevent her from falling.

Returning to the story, the reader has little better understanding of Sarah than before. However, her determination to continue going to Ware Commons shows her dedication to the kind of freedom that the narrator defined as a twentieth-century trait. Sarah's sense of falling gestures to the trope of the fallen woman, one who is sexually compromised by Victorian standards. It suggests that she isn't actually a fallen woman yet, but Charles will make her one.

CHAPTER 14

Ernestina has warned Charles that visitors to Lyme are expected to allow the residents to examine them. He goes visiting with her and Aunt Tranter a few times a week, and the boredom is only remedied by Ernestina's gratitude when they return to Aunt Tranter's. It just so happens that the morning after Charles's adventure in the Undercliff, they go to visit Mrs. Poulteney. Neither Mrs. Poulteney nor Charles have any interest in each other, but due to convention, Mrs. Poulteney would be very offended if he didn't come to see her. The visits are really more important as social power that people can use against each other by rubbing it in that a visitor has come to one person's house but not another's.

The narrator carefully explains the Victorian social customs that rule the characters' lives, which marks the book as modern—a Victorian author wouldn't see a need to explain the conventions of their own society. At the same time, the narrator sees through these conventions and denotes them as such, because the characters wouldn't act the way they do if they didn't feel like they had to.

When Mrs. Tranter, Ernestina, and Charles are announced, Sarah makes to leave, but Mrs. Poulteney makes her stay. She wants to embarrass Ernestina and Charles. Mrs. Tranter and Mrs. Poulteney have known each other many years and greet with an embrace. Ernestina greets Mrs. Poulteney and asks after her health, then introduces Charles, who compliments her house. Mrs. Poulteney says she only keeps it because her husband would have wanted her to. She points out a painting of him, which makes him look far more important than he actually was. She says that the wishes of the dead must be obeyed.

Mrs. Poulteney's attitude toward the dead hints at a theme that will become more important later—the Victorians' reverence for the past. Charles will realize that his actions are restricted because he's living as though his ancestors are judging him. Mrs. Poulteney's religious moralism, then, seems to come in part from this same sense that the dead (and the divine) are judging her.

Mrs. Tranter greets Sarah and quietly asks her to come see her after Ernestina has left. Sarah's reserve and defiance momentarily dissolve, and she smiles and nods. Charles is interested to see how Sarah will deal with his presence, but she entirely avoids him and acts deferentially. Mrs. Poulteney and Ernestina ignore her. Though Charles and Aunt Tranter try to include her in conversation, she will not be drawn out. Eventually Charles realizes that her silence isn't natural to her character, and she's only playing a part to disassociate herself from Mrs. Poulteney. As Mrs. Poulteney and Mrs. Tranter make their way through all the normal subjects of conversation, Charles decides that Sarah feels unjustly treated and isn't trying to hide it.

Mrs. Tranter is one of the only people who is kind to Sarah with no ulterior motives, and it's clear that Sarah needs this kind of attention. Notably, Charles seems fascinated with Sarah and can't stop analyzing her character. He wants to see through her inscrutable façade to the real person he senses underneath. The fact that Ernestina aligns with Mrs. Poulteney in her attitude towards Sarah puts her on the side of moralism and convention, more or less opposed to Charles's open-mindedness.

Mrs. Poulteney asks whether Mary is being troublesome to Mrs. Tranter, but Mrs. Tranter says she's a wonderful servant. Mrs. Poulteney says that Mrs. Fairley saw Mary talking to a man that morning. Charles points out that it was probably Sam. Ernestina suggests that the two servants shouldn't be speaking, though Charles and Mrs. Tranter object to this view. Charles speaks in defense of Mrs. Tranter's kindness to Mary, which displeases Ernestina. Mrs. Poulteney supports Ernestina's opinion, closing the matter. The ladies all avert their eyes, and they miss the look that Sarah and Charles exchange which indicates that they have a common enemy. Charles decides that he can't stand bigotry in Ernestina, and he'll certainly speak to Sam, though not in the way she wants.

The divisions become clear here between Mrs. Poulteney and Ernestina (who crave power through enforcement of convention) and Charles and Mrs. Tranter (who think freedom and happiness are more important). Mrs. Poulteney and Ernestina want to police the private lives of their servants—and indeed of most people around them. Though the conversation centers on Sam and Mary, Sarah is the unspoken secondary subject. Through this argument, Charles moves one step closer to Sarah while disapproving of Ernestina's attitude.

Sam is sitting in Mrs. Tranter's kitchen. When he met Mary that morning, he asked if he could deliver the soot in an hour. Now they're having a very serious conversation. Whenever their eyes meet, they look away shyly.

As Charles and Ernestina grow farther apart, their servants begin to come together. Sam and Mary's attitude seems far more earnest than any of the interactions thus far between Charles and Ernestina.

CHAPTER 15

Once Charles and Ernestina return to Aunt Tranter's and are left alone, Ernestina bursts into tears and throws herself into Charles's arms. They've never had a disagreement before, and she can't stand that it's her fault. Charles easily forgives her and points out that since they themselves have fallen in love, they can't be angry with Sam and Mary for doing the same. She says she can't bear to wait until their wedding, and Charles jokes that they could elope. He kisses her, and she blushes, her heart pounding. They imagine Mrs. Poulteney's reaction if she could see them, and Ernestina has a fit of giggles. They think of how wonderful it is to be modern and living in this time.

Under Charles's influence, Ernestina easily sheds the judgmental, power-hungry side of her character that Mrs. Poulteney brought out. Though Ernestina is more eager to be married than Charles is, she would never actually consider eloping because it would be far too rebellious. A modern reader will probably find it ironic that Charles and Ernestina are so thrilled with the daring of their intimacy and the progressiveness of their time, considering how repressed they really are—it all depends on perspective.

Mrs. Tranter has been waiting outside, fearing that they're quarrelling, but when she enters the room Ernestina is laughing and asks whether she can give one of her dresses to Mary. After Mary includes Ernestina in her prayers that night, she tries on the dress again. Her reflection, lit by candlelight, could tempt God himself.

Ernestina uses her wealth to assuage her conscience, and Mary has no qualms about accepting gifts from her oppressor. Fowles doesn't just scoff at repressive Victorian interpretations of religion; he even suggests that God himself has sexual urges, which is undoubtedly blasphemous.

The next morning while Sam shaves Charles, Charles says that he doesn't need Sam here, so he can return to London. Sam is silent, then says he'd rather stay. Charles retorts that Sam is up to no good here, which Sam denies. Charles says he doesn't want Sam to have to interact with Mary anymore. Sam explains that he's reconciled with her. When Charles insists that he should leave, Sam begins to sulk. Charles teases him about the complete change of heart he has had in the last twenty-four hours, and Sam trembles with indignation, saying that he and Mary are humans, not horses. Charles apologizes and says that he doesn't want Sam to break Mary's heart, and he must not see her again until Charles has discovered whether Mary and Mrs. Tranter are all right with it. Sam grins and says he's a Derby duck, which is one that's already cooked.

Charles again acts in a very teasing and condescending manner towards Sam, which is clearly a direct result of their class difference—Charles doesn't really take Sam's life seriously or believe that's it's of consequence in any way. Sam's insistence that he and Mary are humans shows the entire problem of the Victorian class system. The lower class gets treated as less than human, often as property, and even if Charles generally treats his servants well, he needs this reminder that Sam can love or be hurt as much as Charles himself can. The fact that Sam needs Mrs. Tranter's permission to pursue Mary reinforces the idea that servants are property.

CHAPTER 16

For the next five days, Charles is occupied with social visits and archery, which is a popular pastime with the ladies. In the afternoons he and Ernestina discuss where they'll live once they're married. Ernestina is acting very deferentially to Charles now. He realizes that their small disagreement has made her more aware of the man whom she's marrying, rather than just the fact that she's marrying. He finds her new attitude a little confining; he doesn't like having to plan his days entirely around her. However, he knows that he must do so because it is a husband's duty.

This change in the relations between Charles and Ernestina gives some reason for concern. First of all, it reveals that Ernestina has been more in love with the idea of marriage than with Charles himself, and second, Charles doesn't really like the way Ernestina is acting now that she's more aware of him as a person. But, as Victorians do, Charles bows to duty, which allows him not to think too much and come to inconvenient conclusions.

The evenings are long, and it's easy for wealthy people to get bored after supper, when convention demands that they spend time with each other. One evening, Aunt Tranter has gone out and Charles is lying on the sofa, watching Ernestina read a poem aloud. The poem is *The Lady of La Garaye*, which is a very typical sort of poem for Victorians to praise. The author, Caroline Norton, was rumored to have an affair, and was a feminist. The main character of the poem is a noblewoman who has an accident while hunting and founds a hospital. The poem is clearly an homage to Florence Nightingale, which makes the women of the time love it more. Ernestina practically knows it by heart, and she feels morally better for it, even though she's never even considered nursing anyone in her life.

Fowles continues to poke fun at the upper class, suggesting that they don't really like spending their free time together but are forced to by the rules of politeness. Besides, Charles and Ernestina's reluctance to spend time together contrasts sharply with Sam and Mary's eagerness to do so. Fowles suggests that the Victorians enjoy the idea of tragedy and grand good deeds, as represented in the poem, but they shy away from actually participating in them. Ernestina, at least, seems ridiculous for feeling so improved by someone else's imagined good deeds.

The modern reader might think that women were stuck in prescribed gender roles at that time. But only a week before, John Stuart Mill argued in Parliament for women's suffrage. The motion was voted down, and both men and women disapproved of it. But this is the beginning of women's freedom in England, and as Ernestina herself has giggled at anti-suffrage cartoons, she can't be seen as blameless.

Fowles doesn't want the reader to excuse Ernestina's complacency in her society's systems of oppression. Writing from the future, he knows as she can't how significant Mill's motion in Parliament will be. Fowles wants this to be a feminist book, yet he gives a man credit for beginning the women's movement (when in fact certain women had been fighting for their rights for years).

Charles encourages Ernestina to continue reading, and she reads about the Lord of La Garaye coming to his lady after her accident. Charles's eyes are shut, but he nods. Ernestina continues reading about the lord's love for his wife as she's in mortal danger. Charles's eyes are still shut, and he's too moved to nod. Ernestina finishes the next stanza with an accusation, in meter, that Charles is asleep. He doesn't react. Finally Ernestina shouts his name and throws the book at him. He awakens and Ernestina points out that she's caught him.

Charles's boredom with the poem serves two purposes. First, it acts as Fowles's criticism of the overblown, romantic Victorian verse that's made ridiculous by the contrast between Ernestina's rapture and Charles's indifference. Second, it suggests that the feelings between Charles and Ernestina are far from matching the passion and loyalty of the lord and lady of the poem.

The next day at lunch, Charles complains when Ernestina tries to discuss furnishings for their imagined future house. He doesn't really want to leave his current house in London. Finally Ernestina lets him go **fossil** hunting for the afternoon. He returns to the bluff where he saw Sarah, because he'd noticed piles of flint where he might find fossils. The newly intense love between himself and Ernestina has made him forget about Sarah. He does check the ledge where he saw her before, but she's not there. Before long he finds an excellent test at the foot of the bluff.

Charles seems to dread many of the changes in his life that his marriage will bring about. Though he believes he's forgotten about Sarah, it's significant that, given his freedom, he immediately goes back to the last place he saw her alone. And even though he thinks that the feeling between himself and Ernestina is growing, there have been a number of signs that all is not as well as he wants to believe.

Eventually Charles climbs the bluff again to rejoin the path, and he sees Sarah coming towards him. They stand and look at each other, Charles smiling, Sarah looking suspicious. As she tries to pass him, she slips. He helps her up and she trembles, not looking at him. He leads her up the bluff. Her skin is pinkish, and the wind has blown her hair loose. She seems rather guilty. When she looks at Charles swiftly, he drops her arm. He says he worries what would happen if she twisted her ankle here. Since she doesn't want Mrs. Poulteney to know she comes here, he'd be the only person who would know where to find her. Sarah says Mrs. Poulteney would guess where she was.

Even if Charles didn't purposely seek Sarah out, he certainly doesn't avoid speaking to her, either. Furthermore, he notices certain intimate physical details about her. In bringing up the possibility that she might twist an ankle, Charles seems to vaguely emphasize his particularly masculine power over her, a supposedly weak female. He has the ability to save her from a twisted ankle or to condemn her, if he revealed her secret. Sarah, however, denies this power.

Charles can tell that Sarah wants him to leave, but he's determined not to. Her eyes show independence, a dislike for sympathy, and determination to be herself. Her eyebrows are strong, but her face is very feminine. Her mouth is sensual. Overall, her face doesn't go with the fashion of the time. It reminds Charles of foreign women whom he's slept with. He's beginning to guess at a darker side of Sarah. He's slightly repelled by this, as most men of his time would be. However, most men would blame Sarah for this part of her nature, but Charles doesn't, because Darwinism implies that morality is hypocrisy and duty completely unimportant. Furthermore, Charles has read *Madame Bovary*. He stays because Sarah suddenly reminds him of Emma Bovary.

Sarah's eyes, often cited as a cause for Charles's attraction to her, express a feminist sensibility that clashes with the conventions of the Victorian Age. Sarah's differences suggest that she's more evolutionary advanced than the people around her, a harbinger of a more modern time. Charles's reaction to her is based in his belief in science, which overrules the religious morality of his society; in this way science and religion are put at odds in this scene. Emma Bovary is a scandalous character who has multiple affairs and eventually kills herself.

Sarah says she didn't know Charles was here, and she turns to go. Charles asks if he can say something he has no right to say. She doesn't object, so he says that Mrs. Tranter has discussed her story with great sympathy and has told him that Sarah isn't happy in her current position. Just then Sarah hears something in the trees, and even before Charles hears voices, she's walking across the meadow to hide behind some gorse. As the voices approach, Charles goes to the path, and two men appear. They're surprised to see him and run away, whistling for their dog. Charles finds Sarah behind the gorse and says that they were only poachers.

Charles is already taking a deeper interest in Sarah's affairs than would necessarily be considered normal or proper. Sarah's acute awareness of her surroundings and her reaction to the sound of voices suggests that she's used to concealment and secrecy. Charles, on the other hand, walks right out to face the men, indicating that he's far more used to openness. The presence of poachers adds to the sense of Ware Commons as a lawless place where everyone is hiding something.

Charles doesn't think it was necessary for Sarah to hide, but she says bitterly that being seen with her could ruin his good name. He says he doesn't believe she's truly disreputable, and he doesn't care what Mrs. Poulteney thinks of him. He feels that his experience of the world is superior to hers, and he says they don't need to hide when they simply met by chance. They walk out of the gorse, and Charles says that Mrs. Tranter would like to help her, but Sarah only shakes her head. Charles has indeed discussed her with Mrs. Tranter and Ernestina, and he's decided to tell her what they concluded. He says that she should leave the area, and Ernestina could even help her find a position in London.

Sarah is ironically more concerned about Charles's reputation than he is himself, probably because she's been living in the shadow of her own ruined reputation long enough to know the consequences. In a typically masculine way, Charles assumes he's more worldly than she is, not understanding how much her suffering has taught her. He even presumes to know what's best for her, though he's only heard her story secondhand. He thinks she would be better off starting over where people don't know her as a fallen woman.

Sarah walks to the edge of the cliff. When she turns she looks at Charles very directly, and he smiles. She says she can't leave Lyme. He feels slightly offended and makes to leave. Sarah says that Mrs. Tranter wants to be kind, but kindness is more difficult for her to deal with than cruelty. Charles wants to shake her; he tells her that tragedy is better suited to the stage than to daily life. She insists that her only comfort is her own stubbornness.

Charles continues to assume that he knows everything about Sarah, and thus he assumes that he knows better than she does what's best for her. He in part blames her for her circumstances, not because she transgressed sexual norms, but because she seems to want to wallow in her misery. Sarah's desires appear to be the opposite of everyone else's.

Charles admits that he's heard Sarah is mad, but he believes only that she's punishing herself for her past, and that this is unnecessary. He insists that even if her Frenchman returns, he'll surely seek her out if she's left Lyme Regis. There's a long silence, and Sarah looks very calm. Eventually she says that the French lieutenant will never return. Charles doesn't understand, and she seems to enjoy his confusion. She says that she's gotten a letter. Then she hurries towards the path. Charles calls out to her and she turns, exclaiming that the man is married. Left alone, Charles is amazed. He also feels strangely guilty, even though he knows he did his best to help her.

Charles has been basing his interactions with Sarah on the story of the French lieutenant that everyone tells as the basis for her situation. However, Sarah now explodes his assumptions by revealing that she isn't pining for her lost lover, or at least she doesn't expect him to come back to marry her. This truth raises more questions than it answers: Why does Sarah remain in Lyme? Why does she look out to sea? And what was the true nature of their relations?

CHAPTER 17

That evening, Charles, Ernestina, and Mrs. Tranter go to the Assembly Rooms. The Assembly Rooms are pleasant, and will one day be replaced with a public bathroom. Mrs. Poulteney and her kind object to the place because people have a good time there, and people should only congregate in churches. When the Assembly Rooms are torn down, the heart of Lyme is torn out.

Fowles often criticizes the Victorian Age, but in the instance of the Assembly Rooms, he criticizes the so-called "progress" that allows them to be destroyed in a more modern time. At the same time, however, he criticizes the Victorian backwardness that finds all sources of pleasure reprehensible.

Charles is there for a religious concert, though some of the more conservative residents are shocked even by this, because it's Lent. Concertgoers come as much for the company as for the music; it provides an opportunity for the ladies to show off their dresses. Ernestina enjoys the glances at her fashionable clothing. While Mrs. Tranter explains who everyone is, Ernestina makes snide comments about them, calling many of them "gooseberries." This word correlates to "square" in 1969—boring and old-fashioned.

The most religious citizens of Lyme have quite extreme views, disapproving even of an explicitly religious concert because it might provide too much pleasure. The narrator's translation of "gooseberry" into "square" suggests that the same pretentiousness of the young exists in both time periods, and again reminds the reader that the narrator is telling the story from a time in the characters' future.

Eventually the concert begins, and Charles can examine his conscience. He's become rather obsessed with the mystery of Sarah. He meant to tell Ernestina and Aunt Tranter, in strict secrecy, about his meeting with Sarah, but he never found the right moment. He's beginning to feel that he shouldn't have spoken at such length with her, and now it's very hard to explain the situation to the jealous Ernestina. Mrs. Tranter would be more understanding, but he couldn't ask her not to tell Ernestina about it.

Charles is beginning to regard his relationship with Sarah as improper, or at least, he's beginning to see that other people could easily see it as such. He's becoming trapped in secrecy, and the very fact of concealing his meeting with Sarah from his fiancée automatically gives it an air of impropriety and betrayal. Charles feels that Ernestina's natural jealousy would make her jump to conclusions.

Ernestina's humor seems rather artificial tonight, and Charles's smiles in response are equally fake. He keeps glancing at her as though he's never seen her before and finding something lacking in the monotony of her face. For a moment he thinks that she's essentially just selfish, but he dismisses the thought. Ernestina compares well in character to the other women of London society, but what if one might find a bride elsewhere? Charles prides himself on being different from his peers, and he thinks English society is too constraining. He realizes he's done the conventional thing in proposing to Ernestina, and perhaps he should have waited.

Notably, Charles is beginning to be aware of Ernestina's faults at the same time that he's becoming more obsessed with Sarah's mysteriousness. He's beginning to compare the two women and find his fiancée lacking. In her adherence to society's norms, Ernestina takes on a falsity that Sarah, in her position outside of society, doesn't have. Charles begins to doubt that he really wants to marry Ernestina. The fact that he prides himself on being unconventional makes Sarah's unconventionality more interesting to him.

Charles begins to feel sorry for himself, and his mind conjures up images of Sarah. He realizes that he's attracted to her, specifically to some emotion or possibility that she symbolizes. She has reminded him that his future is now set. Ernestina elbows him to get him to applaud. She pouts at him, and he thinks that she's very young, and only a woman. She can't understand how complicated life is for men. Everything will be all right when they're married.

Here in the Assembly Rooms, the center of Lyme society, Charles recognizes an attraction that breaks all the rules of this society—and in fact, his attraction is in part an attraction to breaking the rules of society. At the same time, however, he puts faith in one of the most fundamental institutions of this society, marriage, to make him happy.

At that moment, Sam is marveling at how much Mary does understand. Their backgrounds are incredibly different, one coming from London and one from a remote village. But in this age before technology, people are able to be more individual, as they can't access the entire world, and strangers are more exciting. The narrator thinks that the isolation of the past is enviable. Sam often pretends to know everything about London, but he's actually much less confident than he seems. Mary admires his cultural knowledge, but she has the basic self-confidence that he lacks. She can also judge people's values better than those in society can.

Fowles again contrasts the superficiality of Charles and Ernestina's relationship with the deep feeling of Sam and Mary's. In looking back, modern readers can appreciate aspects of the past that those who lived them couldn't, because they didn't know anything different. The narrator argues that Sam and Mary have some individuality that modern people lack, though the lower class is often seen as a faceless mass. Mary's ability to judge people is similar to Sarah's.

Sam has fallen for Mary because she's so different from the prostitutes he's slept with before. He's physically attractive, though he sometimes tries to imitate Charles's gentlemanly gestures. He's drawn to Mary's innocence, and he wants to be entirely himself with her, and find out who she is. On the morning that Charles and Ernestina visited Mrs. Poulteney, Sam and Mary discussed the jobs they've had, and Sam confessed what he'd never told anyone—that he wants to be a haberdasher. He thinks he has a talent for fashion. However, he needs money and education. Mary listened closely and understood him.

Like Charles, Sam has plenty of sexual experience already. However, unlike Charles and Ernestina, Sam and Mary bring out each other's true selves. This is what love should do, but Charles and Ernestina continue to play parts in their relationship that society has assigned them. Sam's attempts to imitate Charles show his desire to rise in the class system, as does his ambition of being a haberdasher (someone who sells men's clothes). Owning a shop would be a big step up from being a servant.

When Sam had to leave, he felt that he had never told anyone such personal things before. He asked whether Mary had a suitor, but she said she didn't. He said he'd never known anyone like her before, and he'll show her around London when Charles and Ernestina get married. Mary was thrilled. Sam bowed to her and said to meet him the next morning. He kissed her hand and left.

Whereas Charles and Ernestina got engaged through a combination of Ernestina's scheming and Charles's lust, Sam and Mary have a real connection. Charles and Ernestina are never quite satisfied with each other, but Sam can make Mary happy just by showing her around London. This is partly a difference of class as well.

The narrator doesn't know whether Sam and Mary met the next morning. But when Charles came out of Mrs. Tranter's house that day after talking to her about the servants' romance, he made a sign of mercy at Sam, who was waiting across the street, and Sam grinned. On the evening of the concert, Sam is in the kitchen with Mary again. Mrs. Tranter's cook is asleep by the fire, and Sam and Mary sit in a corner, holding hands silently. Nonetheless, Sam feels that Mary understands everything.

The narrator again claims that he isn't completely in charge of the story; although he's technically omniscient in that he can see into the minds of all the characters, his occasional ignorance makes the story seem more like real life. Sam and Mary's romance proceeds with the approval of their masters, something only the working class could need.

CHAPTER 18

Over the next two days, Charles avoids thinking about paleontology or Sarah. But then Ernestina gets a migraine, so he has a free afternoon. It's a dull, gray day, and he doesn't feel like doing anything except perhaps traveling, which would provide a delicious sense of freedom. He walks to Ware Commons, though he's determined not to talk to Sarah if he comes upon her, which he doesn't think he will. Charles enters a grove of gigantic ash trees, which make him feel small. Soon he finds a worn test, and he searches along the foot of the bluffs for more. He pushes through a tunnel of ivy and begins to scrutinize the flint in a clearing. After a while he hears a stone drop, but he sees nothing. Then he senses someone's presence and turns around.

Charles is beginning to crave freedom, which also means he feels confined in his present life with Ernestina. Ware Commons is beginning to mean freedom for him, just as it does for Sarah. Furthermore, paleontology is beginning to be associated with Sarah, and so both cause him complicated feelings. The presence of fossils in Ware Commons both makes the past feel immediate and suggests that it's a place where change can be traced; indeed, it's the location of many of the change-inducing moments for Charles and Sarah.

Sarah is standing by the tunnel of ivy. Charles almost feels frightened that she appeared so silently. It seems she has followed him on purpose. He greets her, and she says that she saw him passing by. She looks slightly wild, and he wonders whether she is rather mad. He asks if she has something to tell him, but she just stares at him. A shaft of sunlight is lighting her face and making her look very beautiful. Charles remembers hearing that a peasant in the Pyrenees claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary looking just like this.

Once again, Sarah is portrayed as bordering on supernatural. In fact, in this case Charles seems to see her as almost holy in her beauty, a comparison that demonstrates Fowles's—and Charles's—willingness to blaspheme. Comparing Sarah, the "fallen woman," to the Virgin Mary erases the sexual aspect of both of their identities, even though both are defined in large part by their sexual experience, or lack thereof.

To Charles's surprise, Sarah takes two excellent tests out of her pockets. She offers them to him, and when he takes them, their hands touch. He thanks her. She asks whether they used to be marine shells, and he explains their features to her. He realizes that she's sane after all. He says he's about to head back to Lyme, but Sarah says she wants to thank him for offering her help the other day. He makes to leave, and she says she shouldn't have followed him. Charles moves to leave again, but he glances back at her, and she's looking at him with an intense anguish. She says she has no one to help her. He mentions Mrs. Tranter, but Sarah says she doesn't need kindness. Charles says it would not be proper for him to take a further interest in her.

In courting Charles, Ernestina set herself apart from other women by not even pretending to be interested in paleontology. Sarah, however, really does seem interested in the fossils. The fact that Charles continuously wavers on the subject of whether or not Sarah is sane emphasizes just how different she is from everyone around her; her way of being in the world is somehow off. This is the first time Sarah has willingly spoken to Charles, even pursued him. But now that he has recognized his feelings for her, he's trying to keep his distance.

Charles asks whether Sarah has considered his suggestion to leave Lyme. She implies that she would become a prostitute if she went to London. Charles blushes. Sarah says she's weak and has sinned. This admission makes him judge her more harshly again, but he also feels strangely flattered. He asks whether anyone else knows that the Frenchman is married, and she says they don't. As Charles stares at Sarah, their relationship becomes less objective and more personal in his mind. It makes him uncomfortable, and he says he doesn't understand why she's confided in him.

In Victorian England, many women who have been sexually compromised or are without resources are forced to resort to prostitution to survive. Even though Charles prides himself on being open-minded, he nonetheless is scandalized by Sarah's relatively frank—though not actually that frank—talk about her own sexuality. Charles feels himself getting drawn into a closer connection with Sarah, which he was trying to avoid.

Sarah says that Charles is an educated and well-traveled gentleman, whereas the other people around her are supposedly good Christians but seem very cruel and stupid. She believes that there must be people who can understand that she doesn't deserve her suffering. Charles feels she is proving that her intelligence goes beyond convention. She says her life is a nightmare, and she can't understand her crime. Charles wants to escape but can't. She asks why she wasn't born as Ernestina instead. Charles feels she has gone too far. He says he can't help her, but she refuses to believe it.

Sarah vocalizes something that Fowles emphasizes throughout the book—the hypocrisy of people whose religion is supposed to make them good. She has sensed that Charles is more open-minded than his peers. Sarah slightly shifts the story that is told about her; she's miserable not because she's pining for a lost love, but because she has encountered so much animosity from a society that she doesn't fit into. Charles sees this as an unconventional woe.

Women do not contradict men's opinions the way that Sarah has just done. She seems to be assuming that she's equal to Charles. He feels insulted, but for some reason he doesn't leave. He fails to recognize her as a siren because she doesn't look like one. She worries she's offended him, and he says again that they can't continue to meet. Sarah says that she wouldn't have come to him if she wasn't desperate. He understands, but says he doesn't even know what she wants from him.

Sarah naturally acts in a way that a more modern woman would, and Charles's reaction shows how much he does belong to his age. A siren is a Greek monster in the shape of a woman who lures sailors to their death. Thus, comparing Sarah to a siren implies that she's purposefully trying to seduce and ruin Charles. Whether this is true will be a question throughout the book.

Sarah says she wants to tell Charles what happened to her the previous year. He falls back into convention and seems disapproving. He's about to leave, but Sarah falls to her knees. Charles can only imagine with horror what anyone watching might think, but Sarah seems calm. She says she'll go mad if no one helps her, and she has no one but him. Charles makes her stand up and leads her into the ivy. He says he has no choice—he can't help her. Sarah asks only that he meet her once more. She'll come to this place every afternoon. She feels that he understands more than anyone else in Lyme. Recently she was almost overcome by madness, and she almost came to his lodging to find him.

Up until now, Sarah's story has only been told by other people, and her desire to tell her own story signals a desire for increased control. The simple idea of telling her story becomes an almost irrationally weighted situation—Sarah acts so desperate that Charles also becomes overwrought. Just as characters debate throughout the book whether Sarah is mad or not, she herself suggests here that she's on the edge of madness, adding to her outsider status. Meanwhile, Charles acts like quite the conservative Victorian man.

Charles thinks Sarah is threatening him with scandal, but she denies it. She is filled with despair and has no one to talk to. Charles wants only to escape, and he says he has to leave and can't return to meet her. He wishes she would talk to Mrs. Tranter instead. She's very insistent, but Charles continues to refuse to meet her. However, Charles almost becomes different people depending on whom he's talking to. This can be seen as Darwin's cryptic coloration, meaning that Charles changes to blend with his surroundings. It can also be seen as a way of ignoring one's own repression. Women like Ernestina encourage this distance from reality, but Sarah seems to urge a deeper kind of honesty.

Charles was eager enough to talk to Sarah when she didn't demand anything from him, but now he's overwhelmed with a sense of propriety. The mention of cryptic coloration is one example of how Fowles applies Darwin's theories of evolution to the characters' lives in ways that remind the reader that humans are animals too, and subject to the same laws of nature as Charles's fossils. From this perspective, both Charles and Sarah act as they do only because they're fighting to survive in their society.

Sarah asks that Charles meet her for just an hour. She says that she would do whatever he advised after that. She understands that they would have to stop meeting. The day is getting colder, and Charles feels like he's on the edge of a cliff and he can't figure out how he got here, but he agrees. Sarah thanks him. Charles bows and then stumbles away through the ivy like a startled deer. He heads back to Lyme, thinking that he made many mistakes in the interaction. He knows he's moving into forbidden social territory. It seems like when he's with Sarah, he's blind to her danger. He knows he won't tell Ernestina anything, and he feels ashamed.

Sarah is either so desperate for a chance to tell her story to a sympathetic ear that she'll agree to anything, or she knows that telling Charles her story will make it harder for him to let her go. Until this point, the two of them have never arranged to meet; this forthcoming meeting, particularly as it will take place on Ware Commons, gives their relationship a much more illicit flavor. Sarah is already succeeding in making Charles abandon the rules he has known.

CHAPTER 19

Charles and Ernestina have planned a surprise party for Aunt Tranter that evening. They're all going to dine in Charles's rooms, and Dr. Grogan is going to join them. The doctor is considered a good catch for marriage, and Ernestina teases her aunt about him. However, he's a confirmed bachelor. He's also Irish. He doesn't put up with any foolishness, but he's witty and doesn't meddle. There's something dark about him because he was born a Catholic, though he's converted to Anglicanism. No one in Lyme can imagine that someone would go to church without caring about it. He's also an excellent doctor. Grogan is so satisfied with the food Charles provides that he takes over the role of host. He's very worldly and has lots of good stories, even if they're not entirely true. Aunt Tranter laughs at them more than anyone.

Dr. Grogan is presented in part as a foil, or character opposite, to Mrs. Poulteney. He's not religious, though he puts on enough of a show of religion to keep from scandalizing the town. Instead, his very profession automatically connects him to science. As an Irishman and a former Catholic in a country that dislikes Irish people and Catholics, Grogan is a bit of an outsider to society himself, though he navigates his position so well that everyone seems to like him. He's also one of the few characters who's considered to have broad experience of the world.

Normally, Charles would have enjoyed the evening very much, particularly since Dr. Grogan makes some comments that aren't quiet proper. Though Ernestina seems a little shocked, Aunt Tranter doesn't, and Charles thinks that the older generation was less repressed and ruled by society in its youth than his is. He's aware that this sentiment is inconsistent with his own conventionality towards Sarah earlier. He tells himself that he's taken her too seriously. He's particularly attentive to Ernestina, but he notices again that she's rather shallow and robotic. He reminds himself that she's just a child.

After visiting Mrs. Poulteney, Charles and Ernestina thought how glad they were to be living in their modern, relatively liberal time, but now Charles thinks of the past as less restrained than the present. This gives a sense that history is not objective, but based on individual interpretation and the state of the present. Charles continues to excuse Ernestina's attitude as being due to her youth, but he doesn't consider that if this is true, perhaps her age makes them ill-matched.

Charles and Dr. Grogan escort the ladies back home, and the doctor invites Charles to his house for a drink. They sit in Dr. Grogan's study, which looks out over a bay. Grogan likes to watch the ladies swimming, and he even has a telescope at the window. Charles looks out and hears the waves and the gulls. Behind him, Grogan pours them drinks, and Charles feels caught between civilization in the room and mystery outside.

Since Grogan will later be one of the most impartial judges of Charles's actions towards Sarah, it's important to note that his own sense of sexual morality allows him to observe women swimming without their knowledge. In his life, Charles is caught between civilization in the form of Ernestina and mystery in the form of Sarah.

In this age, even though Charles and Dr. Grogan have different occupations, everyone who's educated still knows enough to converse about common intellectual subjects. No one is too specialized. Charles is curious about the doctor's political views, and he asks about two busts on the bookshelf. They prove to be Bentham and Voltaire, from which Charles understands that he and Dr. Grogan are both Liberals. Charles says that Gladstone recognizes something bad in their society's ethics. Grogan teases him about practically being a socialist.

Used to being the odd one out in terms of his politics, Charles wants to know what he's facing before he starts a political discussion. Jeremy Bentham founded utilitarianism, arguing that creating happiness for the greatest number of people should be the guide of right and wrong. Voltaire fought for freedom of speech and of religion. These, then, can be regarded as Grogan's guiding principles in the struggle ahead.

Grogan says that Voltaire made him leave the Catholic Church, and Bentham made him leave the Tories. But he doesn't agree with the current fight for extending the right to vote. If the government fears its people, it fears itself. He tells a joke, pointing out that everyone thinks they're better than everyone else, and it will ruin the country. Charles points out that Bentham argued for making the most people happy as possible, but Grogan says no one will be happy if made to run before they can walk.

Grogan's arguments don't entirely make sense—he thinks that the government is made up of the people, but he doesn't want lower-class people to be able to vote. Besides, he thinks people's self-importance will ruin the country, but he clearly thinks he's better than those people who he doesn't think should vote. Perhaps in many situations he's not as liberal as he seems.

Charles has had a similar argument with his uncle. Many people who fought for the Reform Bills of the 1930s do not agree with the current one, because they think people are too jealous and rebellious now. Maybe Grogan depends too much on order and sameness. However, people of his opinion are not entirely wrong to be suspicious of the politicians of this time, since Disraeli and Gladstone aren't entirely honest or straightforward.

People who supported earlier laws giving poorer people the vote now seem to think that the lower classes have become too confident that they deserve more—even liberal middle- and upper-class people want to preserve their power over the masses. Fowles generally disapproves of Grogan's underlying conventionality.

Charles asks whether Dr. Grogan is interested in paleontology, and he admits that he thinks it's more important to study the living than the dead. Charles brings up Sarah, saying that Dr. Grogan must know more about her than he does. Dr. Grogan says he can't let anything bad be said about Mrs. Poulteney, who is his patient. No one can fathom what goes on in Sarah's mind, but he brings up a German doctor who has studied melancholia. Melancholia can occur naturally or in reaction to an event, or it can occur for entirely unexplained reasons. Charles says there was an event that caused Sarah's melancholia, but Grogan argues that plenty of jilted women recover just fine.

Dr. Grogan's perspective on paleontology adds to the sense, more important later, that Charles is too dedicated to the past. At the same time, it suggests that Fowles wants his book to be seen as a study of his twentieth-century present, not just the past. While other characters interpret Sarah in terms of society, religion, or emotion, Grogan interprets her in terms of science. The modern-day term for melancholia is depression.

Grogan says he went to see Sarah ten months earlier. He could easily tell that she had melancholia, and he believed it was from living with Mrs. Poulteney. He wants to burn her house to the ground with her in it, and the whole town would join him. He thought the only cure for Sarah was to get her away. He tried to convince her to leave and even told her about an opening for a governess, but she refused. Mrs. Talbot would have had her back, but Sarah instead took the awful job with Mrs. Poulteney. Grogan believes she would refuse anything good offered her.

Once again, both Charles's and the reader's perception of Sarah is shaped by stories that other characters tell about her. In urging Sarah to leave Lyme, Charles has unconsciously echoed Grogan's advice, and it's clear that Sarah must have some reason she insists on staying. Grogan suggests that she's masochistic, purposely staying because Mrs. Poulteney makes her miserable.

Dr. Grogan brings up the case of a woman whose husband died. She went into deep mourning for years and wouldn't allow anything belonging to her husband to be touched. It was as though she was addicted to melancholia and found satisfaction in it. Grogan thinks that Sarah similarly wants to be a victim. Charles asks whether Sarah has confided in anyone, but Grogan says she hasn't. He confirms that she would be cured if she did so, but she doesn't want to be cured. He can't force her, and medicine can't help her. He says she can't reason clearly and examine herself like a man could. They can only wait.

Dr. Grogan essentially blames Sarah's melancholia on herself, a hypothesis that slips easily into a trend of male doctors dismissing women's ailments. However, Sarah has begged Charles to let her confide in him, contradicting Grogan's argument that she doesn't want to be cured. Interestingly, Grogan positions storytelling as a healing ritual—if Sarah would only tell her story, she would almost magically be cured.

At this moment, Sarah is asleep in bed. Her face looks peaceful, and her arm is resting over the body of a nineteen-year-old girl. They're lying close together, as the bed is small. The reader might make an assumption about this pair, but it must be remembered that it's 1867. If Mrs. Poulteney had seen them lying there, the reader might imagine that she would be enraged and throw them out. In fact, she probably would have simply walked away and not even woken them. At this time, some vices aren't even believed to exist. The idea of a lesbian would be incomprehensible to Mrs. Poulteney, particularly because she believes women don't feel sexual pleasure. Prostitutes are so greedy for money that they conquer their disgust of sex in order to get it. After she saw a stableboy kiss Mary and Mary seem to enjoy it, Mrs. Poulteney thought Mary would become a prostitute.

This is not the only time that Fowles raises the specter of lesbianism in relation to Sarah. The effect is to place her even farther outside t of society, as well as to suggest that Sarah is an inherently sexual character. At the same time, the narrator's commentary reminds the reader that the Victorian mindset was in many ways entirely different from the modern one. Mrs. Poulteney is scandalized by many things that readers in 1969 wouldn't blink an eye at; but Fowles's readers might be scandalized by women sleeping together, whereas Mrs. Poulteney wouldn't. It's often inaccurate to interpret history using modern frames of reference.

Sarah knows nothing about lesbianism, either, but she believes sex can bring pleasure. She began sleeping with Millie after the girl had her breakdown. Millie was moved to a room near Sarah's on Dr. Grogan's orders. Millie grew up in poverty as a plowman's daughter. In the twentieth century, a famous architect now owns the cottage where she grew up and goes there for its wildness. Victorian artists have romanticized visions of country laborers; if they had seen Millie's family, they couldn't have done what they did. The narrator hates it when literature and art are used to conceal grim realities.

Whereas Ernestina is terrified of the cruelty of sex, Sarah sees it as something that can be enjoyed. Fowles comments here on how the stories portrayed in art and literature can obscure or falsely ornament the truth of history. Furthermore, the work of Victorian artists seems to share Charles's tendency to trivialize the lives of working class people, or at least to ignore their pain and use their lives for the pleasure of the wealthy.

One night, Sarah heard Millie weeping and went to comfort her. It was cold, and Sarah got into bed and held Millie, who was like one of the sickly lambs on her father's farm. After that, Millie would come sleep in Sarah's bed a few times a week. They rarely talk. The reader might think there must have been something sexual in their relationship, but they never did anything that sisters wouldn't do. Surely among the urban poor and the emancipated aristocracy lesbianism does exist at this time, but many Victorian women sleep together completely innocently, and this union in loneliness can only be seen as humanity.

Sarah's comforting of Millie is probably the most compassionate and selfless image of her presented throughout the book. The narrator anticipates the reader's sexual interpretation and heads it off, though his very insistence might make his claim seem a little more questionable. He also argues that lesbianism is a result of social and intellectual circumstances, which shows that he's a product of 1969 as much as the characters are a product of 1867.

Meanwhile, Charles and Dr. Grogan have begun talking about paleontology. Charles says that the clergy have a battle on their hands with Lyell's findings. Lyell is the father of modern geology. Other scientists have already argued that the earth is at least 75,000 years old, as opposed to what the church says. But Lyell argued that the earth was millions of years old. However, at this time few people know about him or believe what he wrote. Charles is curious whether Dr. Grogan is on the side of the clergy, but he doesn't take up the argument.

Here, Charles and Grogan directly face the issue of the clash between science and religion. If Lyell's findings are true, they contradict the age of the Earth as given in the Bible, and people who believe in both science and God will have to find some way to reconcile the two. Also, the past is often a tangible presence in this book, and Lyell's theory of such an ancient Earth makes that past seem much larger and more unknown.

Charles casually asks whether Dr. Grogan has read Darwin. Grogan goes to his bookshelf and brings *On the Origin of Species* back to Charles. He says that if Charles has read it, he should know not to speak of Darwin so flippantly; the book is about the living, not the dead. Charles apologizes. Dr. Grogan says that Gosse came to Lyme a few years ago and asks whether Charles has read his book, which argues that God created all **fossils** at the same time he created man. Charles calls it absurd, and Dr. Grogan says he told Gosse the same thing. Upon confirming that they're both Darwinians, Grogan grasps Charles's hand and they feel that they're different from everyone around them. They enter into a long discussion of Darwin, feeling superior to all other people. Walking home, Charles feels naturally selected to understand the common mass of people—except for Sarah.

On the Origin of Species *was published only eight years before this conversation, so Darwin's theories aren't yet generally accepted, and Charles and Grogan clearly feel that it's something special to find a fellow Darwinist. Grogan's argument that evolution is about the present highlights the fact that Charles often gets too bogged down in the past. Grogan's words also act as a reminder that all history, and this very novel, should be studied as a commentary on the present. Charles foolishly believes that just because he's intelligent, he's one of the "fittest" of the human race, though he has no conception of how the species is evolving.*

CHAPTER 20

Sarah doesn't look around as Charles approaches through the tunnel of ivy. It's a beautiful day, and there are butterflies everywhere that will later almost be driven to extinction by humans. Charles looks around to be sure that no one sees him, but the forest is deserted. When he reaches Sarah, she doesn't look at him, but gives him another test. He says he should pay her what he would pay at the **fossil** shop. She's offended, and Charles feels he has failed her, but it prompts him to take on the attitude he decided to have during the last two days. His discussion with Dr. Grogan is helping him see scientific and charitable aspects in this meeting. He feels that it's his duty as one of the fittest. Charles considered telling Ernestina about his conversations with Sarah, but he feared her questions. He didn't think she could understand that he was acting as he was to help Sarah.

At the end of the last chapter, Charles was feeling like one of the humans meant to survive in a Darwinian sense, and now the mention of the butterflies' near-extinction serves as a dark reminder that he can't know how fit he is for survival. Furthermore, as he does here, Charles often unconsciously equates being wealthy and educated with being one of the "fittest," not stopping to think that those aren't biological traits (but rather social traits). Charles has convinced himself that he only wants to help Sarah, but his reluctance to tell Ernestina about their meetings suggests this isn't the whole truth.

Charles says it is only luck that he is rich and Sarah poor. He plans to be sympathetic to her, but to maintain a distance between them. She says they're all she has to give him in return for coming. He replies that he's come because he's decided that she does need help, and he's prepared to listen to her. Sarah leads them across the clearing, and Charles notices how worn her shoes and stockings are and how beautiful her hair is. She leads them out onto a green slope and climbs to the top. Behind her, Charles can see the bottoms of her pantalettes above her ankles. They walk along the top of the bluff and across a dangerously steep slope, then emerge in a small, flat valley shaped like an amphitheater. A block of stone has been set against a tree trunk, making a seat. The edges of the dell are filled with flowers.

In fact, Charles does acknowledge that he can't thank himself for his wealth, but he fails to connect this to his attitude about being one of the fittest. This attitude leads him to be rather condescending to Sarah, feeling that he has the situation under control. The aspects of her physical appearance that he notes demonstrate her poverty and her sexuality, as well as his attraction to her—Victorian women aren't supposed to let men see their pantalettes, which are undergarments. The vividly described natural setting shows echoes of Thomas Hardy's novels.

Sarah says she's good at finding solitude, and she offers Charles the seat against the tree. She sits facing the ocean, so that her face is half hidden from him. As she adjusts her bonnet, Charles can tell that she doesn't know how to begin. She sits quietly with her hands folded, and her coat looks slightly masculine. Charles realizes that her shabby clothes look better on her than nice ones would. She doesn't make any attempt to enhance her appearance and doesn't care about fashion. As her silence continues, Charles realizes he's supposed to seek out answers.

Sarah continues to be enigmatic, perhaps on purpose, by sitting so Charles can't read her expressions and making him initiate the story after she begged him to hear it. Charles's observations on her clothing emphasize her differences from the typically feminine Victorian woman—she's an outsider not only in terms of her expression of sexuality, but also her expression of gender.

Charles says he won't judge Sarah too harshly. She hesitates, then begins her confession. She says the Frenchman's name was Varguennes. He came to Captain Talbot's house after his ship wrecked. She admired his courage; he had an awful wound but he never complained. He spoke almost no English. Supposedly his father was a rich lawyer who had cheated him of his inheritance. He said he was first officer on the ship, but none of it was true, and Sarah doesn't know who he really was. She speaks with strange pauses between sentences.

Like Sarah, Varguennes is a master of using stories to manipulate people—although in fact, it's hard to know how accurate Sarah's portrayal of him is. Varguennes seem to be (or at least Sarah presents him as) a tragic romantic figure, the classic foreign hero who sweeps the heroine off her feet. Using almost clichéd heroic tropes helps elicit sympathy for Sarah from both the reader and Charles.

Sarah says Varguennes was handsome, and no one had ever flirted with her the way he did while he was recovering. They always spoke in French, which may have contributed to the sense of unreality she felt, and she didn't always understand him. She can't entirely blame him, as she liked his attention. He accused her of being cruel when she refused to let him touch her, so she eventually did let him.

Just as Charles is attracted to Sarah's mysteriousness, Sarah was drawn in by something similar in Varguennes. The fact that they conversed in French takes their relationship out of the norm of Britain, associating it instead with the more salacious reputation of France at this time.

Charles says he understands, but Sarah says he can't, because he's not a woman who was educated to move up in the world. He's not a woman who desires things she has no right to—intelligence, beauty, learning. He's never been paid to look after children when he has none. Sarah loved the Talbot children, but it was painful to live so close to a happy family but not have one herself. Charles suggests that social privilege doesn't necessarily bring happiness, but she insists that she has no chance of happiness, that no one in her position can marry.

Sarah blames her unhappiness, and her vulnerability to Varguennes, on her position in society. She has the unusual background of being lower-class but well educated, meaning she knows what she's missing and can never quite fit in anywhere. Despite being an unconventional woman in many ways, her desire for a husband and children is solidly conventional for a Victorian woman, and this is supposedly what causes her the most pain.

Charles urges Sarah to continue her story. Varguennes recovered, and he declared his love for her. They talked about marrying, and he said he would be promoted to captain when he returned to France. He wanted her to go with him. Sarah didn't tell Mrs. Talbot because she was ashamed. Varguennes made her believe that neither of them could be happy unless she went with him. He had found out about her background and her loneliness. She has always been lonely and outcast. Ever since her father had to sell their possessions, it seems that even furniture makes her feel lonely because it will always belong to someone else. She feels powerless to change her situation.

Varguennes set out a relatively proper future for himself and Sarah in which they would formalize their love with marriage, and Sarah would be a respectable captain's wife. Even so, Sarah felt ashamed, presumably because they had become intimate without others' knowledge. She again emphasizes the role that her class status has played in her unhappiness; she has very little to call her own, and as a woman, very little power to change her class status except through marriage, which she feels is closed to her.

Sarah says that Varguennes left to take a ship from Weymouth, but he told her he would wait there for a week for her to join him, though she swore she wouldn't do so. But her sense of loneliness returned once he was gone, and she was plunged into despair. Charles asks whether she didn't become suspicious because Varguennes hid everything from Mrs. Talbot. Sarah says her blindness was in part due to a desire to be blind, and a path of deception is hard to leave. Charles doesn't think to take this as a warning.

With Varguennes, Sarah tried to stick to the conventional, virtuous path, but her desolation overruled her loyalty to a society where she already didn't fit. The very fact that the narrator points out that Charles doesn't take Sarah's words about blindness as a warning proves that he will fall victim to a similar willful blindness—or in fact already is, as he's hiding their meetings from Ernestina.

Sarah says she made excuses to Mrs. Talbot and went to Weymouth. She doesn't know how to speak of what happened next. Eventually she says she tracked Varguennes down at an inn, which she could tell was not a respectable place. He was very happy to see her and apologized for the inn. He soothed her fear, and they went to a sitting room. Sarah could tell that he was different, that he wouldn't have cared much if she hadn't come. She realized that he was a liar and she could never marry him. She thinks she saw this before, but refused to acknowledge it. Seeing him in the surroundings of the inn, she could no longer deny it.

Outside the controlled context of the Talbots' house, Varguennes begins to show his true colors. Sarah has been described as being an excellent judge of people's characters, so it's surprising that she didn't see him truthfully before this—it must be put down to the willful blindness she's spoken of. Varguennes' indifference towards her, along with the sketchy inn, indicates that he's probably only wanted to sleep with her this whole time, or he has just enjoyed manipulating her.

Sarah knows she should have left immediately, and she can't really explain why she didn't. She continued trying to see good in Varguennes, but she was also angry at being deceived. She had never been in a place so given to sin as this inn. She was confused about her situation, and in any case, she stayed. She drank the wine Varguennes gave her, and it seemed to help her see more clearly. She wasn't surprised when he made his real intentions clear. She's not trying to defend herself; she knows she could have left, and he didn't rape her. Sarah finally turns to look at Charles, and she seems angry and defiant. She says she gave herself to Varguennes, so she is dishonored both by circumstances and by choice.

In this night at the inn, Sarah portrays herself as having left reason and convention behind entirely, instead being driven by some sense of desperation and perhaps even revenge. She no longer wanted Varguennes, and she saw through him, but she went along with him by her own choice despite being aware of the societal repercussions she would face. She takes some power in claiming her own destruction; she has spelled her fate rather than letting someone else do it for her. Of course, this part of the story will end up to be false.

Charles reminds Sarah that he didn't ask for this confession. She says she wants him to understand why she gave her virginity to someone she didn't love. She did it precisely so that people would talk about her as the French Lieutenant's Whore, so that they would know she suffers. She's married shame instead Varguennes. Sleeping with him was a kind of suicide that she committed out of despair, because she didn't know how else to change her life. If she had simply returned to Mrs. Talbot's house, she would have killed herself. She stays alive because she knows she's marked out as different. She'll never be happy the way other people are, and no one will understand why she slept with Varguennes. She feels that she's freer than other people, because she's beyond insult; she's hardly human.

Most people try to remain free by following society's standards, thus escaping censure. However, Sarah suggests that this brings only a false sense of freedom, and that true freedom emerges only when one has already broken all the rules and been thrust outside the circle of society. But this freedom isn't happy; it's a freedom for Sarah to be recognized in her suffering. She has always suffered, but before it was in ways that people didn't recognize because they were so built into the fabric of society. She's essentially revolting against the normalized everyday suffering of women and the lower class.

Charles only somewhat understands what Sarah means. He can sympathize with the pain of being a governess and letting Varguennes dupe her, but he can't understand her desire for shame. She's begun to weep, and she turned her face away so Charles wouldn't see. But now he steps towards her and sees her tears. He imagines her sleeping with Varguennes, and he is both Varguennes and a man who strikes him down. Some part of him forgives Sarah and recognizes that he himself might have taken her virginity if given the chance.

In some ways, Charles can be said to take Varguennes's place over the course of the story, and this moment is the closest he comes to sensing it. In fact, it's almost as though in telling Charles this partly false story, Sarah is writing Charles's own role in her life, making him a character she can control. Perhaps in recognizing, through this story, his own temptation to sleep with Sarah, it becomes only a matter of time until he does so.

It's impossible for this kind of shift to take place in the twentieth century, because men and women immediately imagine being together sexually. However, the Victorians close their minds off from such things. The Victorians are like the Egyptians in wanting to wrap everything up and hide reality. The Pre-Raphaelites, at least, try to access nature and sexuality, but they idealize it. Because of this, Sarah's openness seems idealized to Charles; it's strange because it seems unrealistic.

Fowles emphasizes the fact that his contemporaries literally have different thought impulses than the Victorians due to the influence of their respective societies. The Pre-Raphaelites were a group of artists and writers prominent in the mid-nineteenth century who sought to imitate the principles of fifteenth century Italian art. Clearly they have influenced Charles, and they will gain more importance at the end of the novel.

Charles stares at Sarah, then sits again, feeling as though he's just stepped back from a cliff edge. Clouds are gathering out to sea that look like a far-off fantasy world of pleasure. They remind Charles of his desire to travel and his dissatisfaction with his life. But the figure of his dead sister moves up into the mysterious world.

These clouds symbolize some ideal other society in which Charles and Sarah could both be happy—yet it doesn't exist. Charles's dead sister is hardly ever mentioned in the book, but here she represents the past and the dead, to whom Charles feels some strange allegiance that prevents him from breaking with convention.

CHAPTER 21

After a minute Sarah seems recovered. She asks if she can finish her story. Varguennes left the next day, saying he would return, but she knew he was lying. She couldn't lie to Mrs. Talbot about where she had been, and she couldn't hide her despair. She told Mrs. Talbot that Varguennes was going to return to marry her. A month later he wrote to tell Sarah that he was married unhappily, and was still in love with her, but she told him she never wanted to see him again. She has hidden his marriage from everyone in order to be an outcast, as she must. Charles objects that if every woman who had been deceived were to act as she does, there would be outcasts everywhere. Sarah says there are, but the women are afraid to seem like outcasts.

Sarah admits that she has lied about her situation, which suggests she could lie again. Despite her despair and loneliness, she had the self-respect to refuse to accept a life as Varguennes's second choice. Sarah argues that many women feel oppressed in similar ways to how she does, and many women are "fallen" but hide it in a way that she doesn't. This idea of a common female experience of oppression is somewhat forward-thinking for a Victorian, belonging more to twentieth-century feminism. Sarah knows she can never fit in, so she's decided to embrace being an outcast.

Charles remembers Dr. Grogan's comment about patients who refuse to take medicine. He says that Sarah's intelligence should allow her to overcome her circumstances. But before he can finish, she stands and goes to the edge of the bluff. Charles follows her, afraid she might jump. Her expression makes him think she regrets telling her story to someone so conventional. He apologizes and asks her to step back. She can tell he's worried they'll be seen, but she does step back.

Charles doesn't realize that Sarah's intelligence is, in fact, allowing her to overcome her circumstances—she just isn't doing it in a way that he can recognize. She's less of a victim than he thinks. This moment on the cliff edge initiates Charles's continuous fear that Sarah will commit suicide, a fear that helps her bring him under her power.

Charles says that Sarah must leave Lyme. She replies that she would be leaving her shame behind, which she can't do. She presses her finger on the thorn of a tree so that it bleeds. Charles asks why she refused to let Dr. Grogan help her, admitting that they talked about her. She says she didn't choose to ask him for help. Charles points out that he and Dr. Grogan gave the same advice, and she has promised to follow it. She asks whether he still has the same advice, now he knows her story. He does. She asks whether he forgives her sin, but he says that it's more important that she forgives herself. He thinks she's done enough penance, and he forgives her. She replies that this means she can be forgotten.

Sarah defies all expectations, drawing comfort and strength from her shame rather than trying to get rid of it. Her self-mutilation on the thorn tree creates a visual image of this desire for others to recognize her pain. She seems to want to be seen in opposite ways to how others want to be seen; she doesn't necessarily want anyone to forgive her because she needs some reason to be a known entity in society. If she's not a tragic, fallen woman, she's simply another unmarried governess who will easily fade to obscurity.

Sarah compares herself to the hawthorn tree, saying that it only offends people if it's in the town, not here. Charles says that she can't mean it's her duty to offend society. Sarah replies that society wants her to go be lonely in another way, in another place. Charles says it will get her nowhere to question the justice of existence. He realizes that Sarah's thoughts and feelings are so intimate with his own that they seem naked; he's never been able to fathom such a thing in a relationship with a woman. He feels like it's a waste that no man has seen how amazing she is.

Sarah doesn't really believe that she's done anything wrong; she knows that society is faulty, not her. Thus, she does seem, in some sense, to feel it's her duty to offend society—only by making people uncomfortable can she help them see the problems with the conventions that have brought her down. Charles begins to feel about Sarah similarly to how Sam has recently felt about Mary: that they understand each other on some deeper level.

Sarah asks again whether Charles thinks she should leave. He says she must, and her friends will help her financially. She asks for a couple days to think about it. He concedes, saying that Mrs. Tranter must take charge now. Sarah seems about to cry, insisting she doesn't deserve their kindness. Charles feels like he has succeeded. Sarah says she'll go to Mrs. Tranter's, and she won't mention their meetings. Charles imagines how he'll act in a detached way when he hears about Sarah's visit. He tells Sarah that now that she's shared her secret, her life will improve greatly. She seems slightly hopeful, and he suggests that they leave.

Though Charles has heard Sarah's justifications for her actions, he hasn't really understood them, because he's unable to imagine himself into her situation. Thus, he's still operating within his old conventional frame of reference, and he still thinks she should leave Lyme, despite the fact that her life revolves around staying there. Charles thinks of himself as a hero, Sarah's savior, the wise and rational male. Sarah plays along, but her later actions suggest that she isn't acting genuinely here.

Sarah leads the way down the bluff. Charles feels slight regret at the idea of not seeing her again, but he knows he'll hear about her through Aunt Tranter. Suddenly, in the tunnel of ivy, they hear a woman's laughter from the main path below. They stop. Charles is alarmed, but he can't imagine they've been seen. Sarah creeps to the end of the tunnel and then beckons him on. They hear the laugh again, and it's getting closer. Charles is blushing, realizing that they can give no good excuse for their meeting.

At this point, Charles truly believes that he and Sarah are parting for good—their story is over—and he's not terribly affected by it. But he's struck by the terrible irony of the idea that in this moment when he's entirely ready to give her up, they could be caught together and the shame he feels he's saved her from could be brought down on his own head.

Sarah stands against a tree, and Charles looks through the leaves to see Sam and Mary coming towards them, Sam's arm around Mary. They're clearly young lovers. Sam kisses Mary and they hold hands. They sit on a bank of grass, and Sam kisses her eyelids. Charles is embarrassed, but Sarah is looking at the ground. After a few minutes, Charles is relieved to realize that Sam and Mary aren't paying attention to their surroundings. Sarah is watching them now, and she looks at Charles and does something terribly shocking—she smiles.

It's sexuality that interrupts the neat ending that Charles imagines to his story of saving Sarah—the freer sexuality and more genuine love of the lower class characters. Though Charles is afraid of being seen with Sarah, he in fact becomes the voyeur, and it's the gaze of Sarah herself that is turned on him and causes him embarrassment. It's impossible not to imagine Sarah and Charles in Sam and Mary's situation.

Sarah's smile is incredibly complex; it seems like she's been waiting for the right moment to throw it at Charles. It shows that she's not completely miserable, and there's irony in her eyes. They seem to ask, where are all the trappings of society now? The smile excuses Sam and Mary and undermines everything that's happened between Sarah and Charles. It shows a much deeper understanding of their connection. Charles unconsciously smiles back, feeling strangely excited, as though he's found a locked door.

Sarah's smile in this moment suggests an unladylike comfort with sexuality. It also seems to reveal and strip away the pretenses of her interactions with Charles up until now, perhaps even retrospectively changing everything that's happened between them and making it more sexual, less proper, though Charles has been so careful to tell himself it's proper. This smile suggests that she wants them to be kissing like Sam and Mary.

After several moments, Sarah lowers her eyes, and Charles sees that he's about to fall over a cliff. He knows that Sarah would reciprocate any embrace he initiated. He whispers that they must never meet alone again. She nods and turns away. Charles watches Sam bent over Mary, filled more and more with feelings he tries to reject. Suddenly Mary pushes Sam away and runs laughing down the hill. Sam runs after her, and they disappear into the forest. Five minutes of silence pass, with Charles avoiding looking at Sarah. He says she should leave, and he'll wait half an hour. Only when she's in the forest does she turn and look back with that same look that pierces Charles.

The oft-repeated metaphor of the cliff shows that Charles won't be able to turn back once he's given in to his desire for Sarah; not only will he have betrayed Ernestina, but he will have turned his back on the society that structures his life. Even by saying they must never meet again, Charles acknowledges the sexual tension between himself and Sarah. Watching Sam and Mary seems to show Charles what his love life could be like. For now, he resists temptation.

CHAPTER 22

As Charles walks back to Lyme, he feels that he's been very foolish, but he's escaped the consequences, which makes him feel exhilarated. He's confident that his motives have been good, and he's managed to help Sarah. Now, of course, he must remove himself from her situation. If he hadn't been sure of his own intelligence and free will, he never would have risked acting as he did. His free will will allow him to suppress his attraction to Sarah and deny her any more private meetings. Aunt Tranter will handle everything, and Charles won't tell Ernestina what happened. He decides that Sarah's unpredictability made her attractive. He doesn't realize that she has passion and imagination, because the Victorian age doesn't allow them. Charles's greatest weakness is not to recognize these qualities.

Charles refuses to acknowledge that his actions in regard to Sarah have been at all due to his attraction to her; he instead takes the view that he has been in rational control of his actions at all times. At this point, he equates free will to having the self control that allows him to obey society's demands, but his understanding of free will will shift as he begins to rebel against society. If Charles could understand that Sarah has passion and imagination, he might understand her motives better—she wants to seduce him, and she can tell lies to do so. Sarah is once again positioned as an anomaly in her time period.

When Charles arrives at his rooms, he has a telegram from his uncle, Sir Robert, summoning him to his estate, Winsyatt. Charles is thrilled not to have to lie to Ernestina about his whereabouts. He'll have to leave immediately and take a train from Exeter the next morning. He orders a carriage and walks to Aunt Tranter's house. Ernestina is irritated that he's being called away so abruptly.

Charles is essentially feeling glad that he gets to escape from his fiancée, further demonstrating the weakness of their relationship. He thinks that his departure will distract Ernestina from any topics that could somehow lead to his meetings with Sarah.

Ernestina has visited Winsyatt and didn't much like Sir Robert, because she was being inspected, Sir Robert has bad manners, the house is old-fashioned, she was jealous of Charles's relationship with his uncle, and she was scared. She felt looked down on by the neighboring ladies who came to meet her. She imagined all the ways that she would change the decorations when Winsyatt belonged to her and Charles. She hid the extent of her dislike for the house and the uncle. As a child of wealthy parents, her only talent is spending money.

Ernestina seems to have particularly felt her class difference from Charles at Winsyatt; she felt that Charles's aristocratic uncle and his friends saw her as lesser for being "new money." Perhaps it was part of her defense mechanism to dislike Sir Robert and his house, as it allowed her to preserve her sense of superiority in the face of those who felt superior to her.

Charles assures Ernestina that he'll be back soon. Sir Robert has hinted that they might move into Winsyatt after their marriage and live in the east wing. Charles knows that Ernestina wouldn't like this very much. But Sir Robert has also hinted that he might find a smaller home for his old age. Charles guesses that his uncle is either going to offer him a manor house in the village, or Winsyatt itself. He'll be happy with either, as long as he doesn't have to live with Sir Robert.

At this point in the book, Charles still has every confidence in himself, not only in his dealings with Sarah, but also in his future and his class status. He'll inherit his uncle's estate and continue in the aristocratic tradition of his family while advancing Ernestina's place in the world.

Charles tells Ernestina his suspicions and asks how he should respond. He'll take whichever house Ernestina wants, or neither, if she doesn't want them. Ernestina imagines herself a lady in Winsyatt. She questions Charles about the manor house and implies that it's probably old and cramped. Charles confirms that she wants Winsyatt, and agrees that she can redo it however she wants. When he leaves, Ernestina pulls out her catalogs.

Charles and Ernestina are so privileged that they think nothing of the gift of a house—they can take it or leave it without feeling they've gained or lost anything major. This is an exaggerated case of counting chickens before they hatch. Charles is overconfident in his place in the world and Ernestina is already living in her imagined future.

CHAPTER 23

As Charles's carriage passes the gatehouse of Winsyatt, he calls for it to stop so that he can greet Mrs. Hawkins. When he was little, she was second-in-command to the housekeeper, and acted as a substitute mother for him whenever he visited. She asks him all about his marriage, and he about her children. She seems concerned for him in a way she used to when she had heard rumors of his father's wickedness. It amuses Charles now. That, along with everything he sees here today, seems to come from love of him. Eventually he says he must be getting on, and the carriage continues up the drive. Confident that this property will soon be his, Charles feels that everything is right with the world.

Charles is driving blindly into disaster, too overconfident to perceive that everything might not be as he imagines it. His condescension to Mrs. Hawkins undoubtedly stems from the fact that she's a woman and a servant, but in fact she's much more aware of what he's approaching than he is himself. He already feels that he has the right of proprietorship over this estate, and he can feel that it loves him and he loves it because he will own it. Charles will struggle with wanting to own things, such as Sarah.

The carriage passes some workers, including an old man who acts as a living history of Winsyatt. They turn and wave to Charles. One of them is hammering an iron rail straight, and Charles knows that it was bent when Sir Robert's bull charged Mrs. Tomkins's carriage. Charles teased his uncle about why this widow would be calling on him. The peace of the countryside is wonderful as the house and stables come into view. Nothing is hurried at Winsyatt, and the sense of order seems permanent. Though rural life is not happy everywhere, the rich houses keep their peasants happy, perhaps only to keep the landscape beautiful.

Fowles's introduction of Mrs. Tomkins has her already leaving her mark on Winsyatt in a physical way. Ironically, Charles has reason to think of her as he approaches the house, but he thinks of her more as a joke than as any sort of personal threat. The sense of order at Winsyatt is associated with the class order. There's no complicating middle class here, but only the aristocrats and the peasants who know their respective places. It's a relic of the past, like the man who embodies its history.

As the carriage drives up to the house, Charles feels that he is approaching an inheritance that explains his lack of focus up to this point. His duty will be to preserve the order of this place as his ancestors have. Duty will be his wife, and he is eager to greet her. However, he doesn't find Sir Robert in the hall or the drawing room. He realizes there are new curtains and carpets, and he thinks this is an indication that his uncle is indeed going to give him the house. Then he realizes that the bustard he shot is gone, but he still doesn't guess what's happened.

At this point, Charles feels prepared to live a conventional life, not only obeying Victorian standards, but also obeying the traditions of the long line of ancestors who have run Winsyatt before him. If this house embodies happy duty for him, it makes sense that he will abandon duty when he loses the house. The bustard has represented his uncle's fondness for Charles, and the fact that it's gone bodes ill.

Charles also doesn't guess what happened to Sarah when they parted the afternoon before. She hesitated at the fork where she usually took a high path to avoid being seen from the Dairy. She could hear voices from the Dairy. She peered down through the leaves at the cottage. Eventually she walked down the path that passed the Dairy and came out in view of the women at the door. She didn't look at them, but walked on past. The women were the dairyman's wife and Mrs. Fairley.

With these actions, Sarah reveals her duplicity and makes herself more mysterious than ever. She clearly wants Mrs. Fairley to report her disobedience to Mrs. Poulteney, but she's also putting Charles in danger of being found out. It seems that nothing Charles has said has convinced her; she still wants to flaunt her shame and be known as a transgressive outcast who walks in the scandalous Ware Commons.

CHAPTER 24

Ernestina exclaims over the horribleness of what has happened. Charles says that Cupid doesn't care about convenience, and old people are most susceptible to him. Ernestina says it's her fault, because Sir Robert thinks she's just a draper's daughter. Charles tries to calm her. They're in Aunt Tranter's parlor; Ernestina has been crying. Aunt Tranter appears, smiling, and remarks that Charles returned quickly. It's the evening of the day that he went to Winsyatt. Aunt Tranter realizes that something awful has happened, and Ernestina says that Charles has been disinherited.

The discussion at Winsyatt is one of the turning points of the book, and by skipping over it for now, Fowles helps it take on the dread importance of what goes unseen. Although Ernestina previously had reservations about inheriting the house, now that she's been deprived of it, she feels it as a great loss. Admittedly, she's also losing the aristocratic title that would go along with it, and class concerns do seem to be the basis of her distress.

Charles clarifies that Sir Robert has decided to marry, and if he has a son, Charles will no longer be his uncle's heir. He's marrying the widow Mrs. Tomkins, who Ernestina points out is plenty young enough to bear sons. She says it's particularly bad because Sir Robert made fun of the woman to Charles only months ago. Charles explains that Mrs. Tomkins is rich, so she can't be marrying for the money. Aunt Tranter sits and asks whether Sir Robert might be too old to have children, but Charles says he's only sixty-seven. Ernestina points out that Mrs. Tomkins could be his granddaughter. Charles asks her to help them maintain dignity and not be bitter.

Having been left out of the formal narrative, the events at Winsyatt become another internal story, told this time by Charles. Stories have power in this book, and he's forced to tell the story of the ruin of his own prospects, making him seem a far less powerful character. Charles has been his uncle's heir up until now, and he technically still is—but if Sir Robert and Mrs. Tomkins have a child, the child will become the heir. Love is Charles's downfall in multiple ways, and right now it's someone else's love that hurts him.

Ernestina realizes that she needs to act differently. She runs to Charles and kisses his hand, but Charles isn't fooled. She has received his news in a very unladylike manner. He came here immediately upon returning to Lyme and had not expected her rage. Perhaps she hasn't realized that a gentleman can never reveal anger. She seems more than ever like a draper's daughter, lacking aristocratic calm.

The bourgeoisie (who by definition work for their money) are more likely to be attached to matters of money and its loss, whereas aristocrats inherit their money and treat it with more distance. This is the first moment when Charles feels that the class difference between himself and Ernestina might matter.

Charles decides to change the subject, and asks what's happened while he was gone. Ernestina reveals that Mrs. Poulteney has fired Sarah. Charles is shocked. Aunt Tranter explains that it happened the previous night, and this morning a porter was told to take her box to the White Lion, where Charles is staying. Charles goes white, but Aunt Tranter says that's where coaches arrive. However, Sarah left at dawn, and no one has seen her since. The vicar went to see Mrs. Poulteney and was told she was ill. Mrs. Fairley told him that Mrs. Poulteney had learned something disgraceful about Sarah. Mrs. Tranter is distressed.

Charles is most worried not about Sarah's fate, but about the possibility that they were seen together, and that by sending her possessions to Charles's inn, she might be trying to seek his assistance and shelter. Although there's a rumor that Sarah has done something improper, it seems that Charles is safe so far. Besides, knowing how ridiculously strict Mrs. Poulteney is, it's difficult to know what she thinks is disgraceful enough to fire Sarah over.

Ernestina says that Sarah should never have been employed by such an awful woman as Mrs. Poulteney. Charles asks whether there's any danger that Sarah might have committed suicide. Aunt Tranter says that men are searching the cliffs, but they haven't found anything. There's no word of her at Mrs. Talbot's. Charles asks whether Grogan has been called to Mrs. Poulteney's. Mrs. Tranter says he was seen talking to the vicar, and he looked angry. She refuses to call on Mrs. Poulteney, no matter how ill she is. Charles suggests that he should go see Grogan. He suspects that Sarah's dismissal has to do with the Undercliff, and he's worried that they might have been seen there. He needs to be alone to figure out what to do. If she's still alive, he's the only person who can guess where she is, but he doesn't dare tell. As he returns to the White Lion, it begins to thunder.

Charles begins to fear that just when he thought he'd saved Sarah, Mrs. Poulteney has driven her to suicide. Ironically, if Sarah were dead, Charles's secrets would be safe. To his credit, he's genuinely worried for her safety, but he's also worried that if the situation gets out of hand, his association with her might be revealed. There's been so much cliff imagery up until now that it seems like Sarah's almost destined to fall from a cliff; besides, fallen women are often punished in conventional Victorian literature by death or suicide to make a moral point. Fowles dangles this storyline, but it would defeat his purpose of reframing conventions.

CHAPTER 25

As Charles walks back to his rooms, he thinks of how to phrase a note to Dr. Grogan offering his help in finding Sarah. When he gets to his sitting room, he finds a note from her, asking him to see her that afternoon or the next morning. It says that if he doesn't come, she'll never trouble him again. Charles is angry that she's threatening him, but relieved she's still alive. When Sam comes in, Charles orders him to find out who left the note and have them come up. Charles thinks of the catastrophe that caused his **fossils** to form. He realizes that life is parallel. Time is false, and existence is always in the present. Everything is caught in the same machine. Society is only a way of shutting out reality.

Charles believes that Sarah is threatening to kill herself if he doesn't meet her. He seems to feel that he is experiencing a personal catastrophe that mirrors catastrophes all throughout time; this is the first time he positions himself as a fossil, dead and left behind, rather than as one of the fittest, destined to survive. He begins to deny the idea of progress. Evolution depends on time and can't improve anything if time is false. Furthermore, Fowles here collapses the differences between the Victorians and his own age, suggesting that fundamental existence never changes.

Sam appears with a hostler, who says that a boy brought the note that morning and hadn't said who sent it. Charles has Sam lay out his night things. Standing at the window, Charles sees a boy running down the street and into the inn. He senses that this is the boy who brought the note and almost calls out to him. Soon the hostler knocks on the door, bringing a note from the boy, who said the French Lieutenant's Woman sent it. Sam winks at the hostler as he leaves. Charles says that he's trying to help an unfortunate woman and is going to surprise Mrs. Tranter with what he's done. He asks that Sam keep it a secret, and Sam agrees, acting perfectly obedient. As Charles turns away, Sam gives him a strange look.

In this scene, the relationship between Sam and Charles grows tense and weighted. Charles has often dismissed Sam because he's just a servant, but the relationship between a servant and an aristocrat is so intimate that Charles begins to have to recognize the power Sam has over him. Sam is perceptive and has access to parts of Charles's life that no one else does, allowing him to begin to guess that something's up between Charles and Sarah. Though Sam agrees to keep the secret, the reader isn't convinced that he will.

When Sam leaves, Charles opens the note. Sarah begs him to help her, saying she will be praying all night that he will come. She tells him how to get to the barn where she's hiding. The note is in French because it's unsealed, as she must have written it in the Undercliff. Charles can't believe the risk she's taking, and the French reminds him of Varguennes. He sees lightning outside, and it's beginning to rain. He imagines Sarah out in the storm.

Even Sarah's use of French is a mark of class—she knows Charles will be able to read it because he's educated, but the lower-class messenger boy won't. Communicating in French also furthers the likeness between Charles and Varguennes, suggesting that Charles will mirror Varguennes' actions. The storm is a metaphor for Charles's own emotions.

Charles paces angrily, and when he stops at the window he remembers what Sarah said about thorn trees walking down the street. He goes to look at his face in the mirror. He feels he must do something, he must prove that he's strong, not just an ammonite trapped in a disaster. He summons a waiter and orders a drink. When Sam comes up with supper, he finds Charles leaving. He tells Sam to eat the food himself.

Sarah's metaphor about thorn trees made her point that she needed to stay where people would be bothered by her shame. Charles wants to uphold his self-image as one of the fittest, but he's beginning to feel like a helpless fossil, and Sarah has brought about this change in him.

CHAPTER 26

Sam loves Mary both because of who she is and because of her role in his dreams. He imagines her behind the counter of a gentleman's shop, where customers come from all over London to buy clothes. He's particularly fixated on collars. Mary emphasizes the fact that Sam doesn't have nearly enough money to make this a reality. He's thinking about it while eating Charles's dinner in the sitting room after Charles has left.

Though Charles underestimates Sam, Sam actually is a full person with dreams that are more fleshed-out than Charles's own. His lower-class status doesn't mean that he doesn't have ambition, but only that he doesn't have the money to make his dreams come true. Charles, however, does.

Mal is an Old English word that came from the Vikings. It originally meant "speech," but came to mean "tax." By the time the Vikings were attacking Scotland, it was spelled *mail*, and because people had much to fear if they didn't pay mail, it came to be called black mail. Sam is thinking about the word because he has guessed who Charles is supposedly trying to help. Mary has mentioned Sarah to him, and Charles is acting strangely. Sam taps his nose. He's like a rat who senses a sinking ship.

Though Sam doesn't think about it, his impulse to blackmail Charles gestures to a long and bloody history of extortion. Though the word has evolved, the fundamental action behind it hasn't changed much, contributing to Fowles's argument that progress is a false construction of a vain society. Rats flee a sinking ship, and Sam is ready to abandon Charles.

The Winsyatt servants know that Sir Robert is ruining Charles. They think Charles should have worked harder to stay in his uncle's good graces. They've overheard plenty of heated discussions between the two men, and they think Charles is being punished for laziness. Mrs. Tomkins has been sure to get the servants on her side. The housekeeper knows she means to get pregnant again. Sam heard about all this while Charles was with his uncle. Sam has had another dream of being the butler of Winsyatt, and he's unhappy to see it crushed. Charles hasn't officially told Sam what happened. Sam eats his dinner and looks ahead.

The servants are used to having to work for personal and financial gain, so it seems to them like Charles has unwisely taken the security of his future for granted—which he clearly has. Unlike Charles, Mrs. Tomkins appreciates the power of servants within an upper-class household, and because of this power, Sam knows more about Charles's prospects for inheriting Winsyatt than even Charles does. If Mrs. Tomkins gets pregnant, her child will inherit instead of Charles.

Charles and his uncle had been polite to each other because both felt guilty. Charles stiffly congratulated Sir Robert, who briefly told him the story of his engagement. Mrs. Tomkins rejected him at first, but when he asked her again, she eventually relented. Sir Robert said that Charles was the first to know, but Charles could tell that all of Winsyatt knew. He felt humiliated but had to act calm. His uncle praised Mrs. Tomkins's straightforwardness, and Charles played the part of a respectful nephew.

Fowles now returns to the conversation that he skipped over before, allowing the reader to compare Charles's account of it to the more detailed truth. After having felt so superior to all the servants he passed on his way to the house, Charles now realizes that they all must have known he wasn't going to get his inheritance.

Sir Robert finally said they must acknowledge that the marriage would change Charles's prospects for the future, but no matter what happened, his uncle would help him. He wanted Charles and Ernestina to live in the Little House. Charles said they had decided to live in the Belgravia house. Sir Robert insisted he didn't want the marriage to come between them, and Charles insisted it wouldn't. Charles felt foolish for feeling that he already owned Winsyatt as he drove up. Sir Robert said that he gets terribly lonely and bored. He secretly blamed Charles for not being as dutiful to him as he imagined a son would be.

Though Charles and Ernestina were just discussing whether they'd prefer the Little House to Winsyatt itself, Charles feels he has to save face by acting as though he had no expectations for this visit, so he pretends they already had other plans anyway. It seems the servants' perspective on Charles's failings is, in part, right—if he had devoted more time to his uncle, Sir Robert might not have felt the need to seek companionship with a wife.

Sir Robert said that a woman changes one's view of the world; Mrs. Tomkins has already made him see how gloomy his decorations were. Charles found it funny to hear his uncle worrying about such things. He asked when he would meet Mrs. Tomkins, and his uncle said she's eager to know Charles and very understanding of her effect on his life. In fact, she refused Sir Robert at first precisely because of it. Finally he explained that she was in Yorkshire at the moment. Shyly, he brought out a locket that Mrs. Tomkins gave him. Charles looked at the picture of her and saw a slight resemblance to Sarah. Both Sarah and Mrs. Tomkins are separate from general womankind. Charles could tell that Mrs. Tomkins would easily overshadow Ernestina. He congratulated his uncle, who said Charles would be jealous and made him come see his new brood mare.

Sir Robert's infatuation with Mrs. Tomkins and his apologetic approach to Charles make it difficult for Charles or the reader to be angry with him. However, there's a slight whiff of disingenuousness about Mrs. Tomkins that suggests that she might not be quite the angel that Sir Robert thinks her to be. Charles thinks Sarah and Mrs. Tomkins look alike, and both women lead him to ruin in different ways. Furthermore, if Charles thinks Mrs. Tomkins would triumph over Ernestina, it suggests he might think the same of Sarah. A brood mare is one meant to have foals, and this one seems to stand in for Mrs. Tomkins in her absence.

Because they were English gentlemen, they avoided discussing the marriage further. But when Charles insisted on returning to Lyme that night, Sir Robert didn't make a fuss. Charles could tell that his uncle was glad to see him go. Driving away, Charles felt like he never wanted to return. The first clouds of the thunderstorm were coming in.

The British aristocracy is known for simply avoiding unpleasant topics. The presence of the storm that's already been mentioned in relation to Sarah connects Charles's disinheritance with Sarah's dramatic actions, since their combination will shatter Charles's life.

Charles knew that Sir Robert didn't like Ernestina's London habits or her family origins. Perhaps Sir Robert got the idea of marrying because Charles was doing it, and he felt that he could excuse the effect on Charles because Ernestina was so wealthy. Now Charles felt inferior to her. He was equal to her as long as he was going to inherit Winsyatt, but now he would be dependent on her money. Many young men around him shamelessly sought out wealthy wives, so Charles knew that people wouldn't sympathize with him. He almost wishes his uncle had been even less fair to him.

Particularly in this time, marriage is a financial union as much as a personal one. Before this change in Charles's prospects, he was bringing an aristocratic title to the marriage, and Ernestina was bringing the bulk of the money. Now, though, Charles has little to offer but himself. He's almost like Sarah in wanting people to recognize his misery and understand how he's been cheated by circumstance.

CHAPTER 27

Dr. Grogan's housekeeper shows Charles up to the same room where they spoke before. Before long Grogan appears and welcomes him with a glass of brandy. Charles says he needs advice. Dr. Grogan has often had men come to him before their marriages, either because of sexually transmitted diseases or ignorance about how intercourse works. He says he's already given a lot of advice that day about what to do to Mrs. Poulteney as punishment. When Charles says that's what he wants to talk about, Dr. Grogan assumes Mrs. Tranter is worried and says that he's sent out a search party.

Dr. Grogan clearly doesn't suspect that anything untoward has happened between Charles and Sarah, though Charles has spoken more about her to him than to anyone. The contrast between Charles's reason for coming to Grogan and other men's reasons for coming before their marriages suggests how far Charles has already strayed from the path laid out for him with Ernestina. Grogan's dislike of Mrs. Poulteney represents the clash between science and religion.

Charles reveals that he's received a note from Sarah. He tells Dr. Grogan the truth about his meetings with her, leaving out his attraction to her. He tries to act like he had a scientific interest in her, but Dr. Grogan can tell he's stretching the truth. He lets Charles finish without revealing his suspicion. The thunderstorm is approaching, and Dr. Grogan says they need to get the search party back. He writes a note and reads it aloud. It says that Sarah is safe, but doesn't want her location known. Charles gives him some coins to enclose as payment.

Charles becomes one of the many storytellers of this novel, trying to reshape his own actions to make them seem less reprehensible. The way he tells Grogan this story is actually the same way he's also tried to tell himself this story—he originally convinced himself that he was only interested in Sarah for scientific reasons and for the good he could do her. However, the fact that he's lying ultimately makes him seem less moral.

Dr. Grogan goes to send the letter, then asks whether Charles has any idea where Sarah is now. He doesn't, and Dr. Grogan says Charles can't risk meeting her the next morning. Charles says he'll do whatever the doctor advises. He doesn't know this has been a test, and it has confirmed Dr. Grogan's suspicions. Dr. Grogan brings over *The Origin of Species* and lays his hand on it as though swearing on a Bible. He says that he won't repeat anything that Charles tells him. Charles says swearing isn't necessary. Dr. Grogan begins to pace, seeming ready to fight.

Dr. Grogan has a very perceptive mind, and his success at seeing through Charles might make his perspective on Sarah's inner workings seem more believable. Also, Grogan replaces the Bible with Darwin's book, a symbolic act that represents the displacement of religion with science in the Victorian era. Swearing on the book also implies that science has just as many moral implications as religion does.

Dr. Grogan imagines himself in Sarah's shoes and reviews her case, saying she's a smart, emotional woman who resents the world and acts foolishly. She likes being a victim and acts very melancholy. When she meets Charles, she admires him and acts sadder to make him more interested in her. He treats her well, and she uses his pity for her to lure him in. She has to make him pity not only her past, but also her present, so she gets herself fired on purpose and then disappears so that everyone assumes she's going to kill herself. Finally, she begs Charles for help.

Grogan tackles one of the main questions of the book: What motivates Sarah? His hypothesis grows out of sexist assumptions that women are irrational and manipulative and seek little other than the attention of men. Although certain parts of his story about her may seem true, he fails to consider that Sarah could have any logical reasons for acting as she does, and assumes that she's just emotionally imbalanced.


Charles asks about Dr. Grogan's accusation that Sarah meant to be fired. The doctor says that he was called to Mrs. Poulteney's house that morning, and Mrs. Fairley told him what had happened. Sarah clearly walked out of the woods into Mrs. Fairley's view. He believes that Sarah wanted Mrs. Fairley to report her. At first, Charles refuses to believe it, thinking that only someone insane would do that. He goes to the window, then says he has been fooled. Dr. Grogan says he must understand that Sarah's despair is a disease; she's not cruel. Charles asks what her goal could be, but Dr. Grogan doesn't think she knows. He says many prostitutes sleep with husbands and fathers as a sort of revenge for being outcasts.

Sarah's purposeful revelation to Mrs. Fairley of her disobedience changes Charles's interpretation of everything that has happened up until now. He's been operating under the assumption that Sarah is honest and doesn't want to hurt him, but now her actions seem calculated to hurt both herself and him. Dr. Grogan's comparison of her to a prostitute hits upon more truth than perhaps he realizes—she's using society's perceptions of sexuality to claim unconventional power.


Charles can't believe Sarah would act this way. Dr. Grogan says that's because he's almost in love with her. Charles gets angry that he would insult Ernestina that way, but Dr. Grogan points out that Charles is the one insulting her. Charles tries to leave, but Grogan grabs him. He points out that as they both live by science, they believe that truth is the most important thing, and Charles is hiding the truth from himself. Charles returns to the fire and is silent. Finally he says that he has realized too late that he isn't meant to marry. Dr. Grogan points out that Malthus says the least fit humans reproduce the most. Furthermore, Charles shouldn't blame himself for falling in love with Sarah.

Grogan again uses science as an argument in a moment when most of his contemporaries would use religion. Rather than hitting Charles with some religious maxim about faith to his betrothed, Grogan insists on the importance of truth. Charles in a sense questions the entire institution of marriage, which is supposed to be universally applicable, by doubting that he can fit into it. Grogan reinforces Charles's assumption that he's one of the fittest, apparently not fazed by the fact of his infidelity.

Charles swears that nothing improper has happened between himself and Sarah. Dr. Grogan believes him, but asks whether he wants to hear, see, or touch her. Charles buries his head in his hands. He laments that his life is a waste because he has no purpose. Ernestina doesn't really understand him. Grogan points out that she's much younger and has hardly known him for six months. Charles can't tell him that he believes Ernestina will never understand him. He feels his intelligence has betrayed him in letting him choose her. He can tell he'll always be bothered by the fact that there are better women than Ernestina. He says nothing is her fault, and he'll marry her as he's promised.

It hardly matters that Charles hasn't acted on his feelings, because this fact doesn't make his desire any less real. More importantly, desiring Sarah has made him see Ernestina more clearly, where he had previously been blinding himself to the problems in their relationship. Perhaps this is the beginning of his doubt in his status as one of the fittest; if he can fail so badly in his choice of a partner, how worthy is he really to pass on his traits to successive generations?

Charles asks Grogan to tell him what to do, and Grogan says he needs to hear his real feelings about Sarah. Charles says he can't understand them. He doesn't love her, but he feels possessed by her. Grogan tells Charles to let him deal with everything; he'll meet Sarah and tell her Charles has gone away. Charles says he has business in London, and Grogan advises him to go once he has told Ernestina everything. Charles agrees. Grogan says that his nonappearance might make Sarah's melancholia worse, but it's not Charles's fault. He will arrange for her to go to an asylum. Charles is willing to pay for it, as long as she isn't hurt. Grogan says he knows of a well-run place in Exeter. Charles feels guilty, but Grogan assures him that it will help her heal in peace.

Sarah is once again envisioned as almost a supernatural being, as Charles says he's possessed by her. The relationship between Sarah and Charles thus seems more unnatural, though perhaps Charles just can't admit that he loves her. And suddenly these men are arranging for the institutionalization of a woman to whom neither of them is related, and who knows nothing of their plans. Women of this period were often judged mad as a result of sexist medical practices, and besides, putting Sarah away in an asylum would make Charles's life much easier.

Charles shakes Grogan's hand, feeling better now that he's been told what to do. He says he'll always be in debt to Grogan, but Grogan only wants him to treat Ernestina well. Charles promises to do. Grogan says she'll improve over time. He marks a passage in a French book and gives it to Charles to read. It's medical evidence in a trial.

Despite his supposedly radical outlook in certain areas, Grogan ultimately just wants to protect those around him by bolstering conventional institutions such as marriage. He doesn't care that Charles doesn't love Ernestina, but only that Charles goes through with the marriage.

CHAPTER 28

The trial of Lieutenant Emile de La Roncière in 1835 is very psychologically interesting. La Roncière was rather frivolous. His commanding officer, the Baron de Morell, had a sixteen-year-old daughter named Marie. One evening the Baron ordered him to leave the house, and the next day he produced a number of letters threatening the Morells, all signed with the lieutenant's initials. Later, Marie woke her governess, crying, to tell her that La Roncière had forced his way into her bedroom and injured her. The next morning, another lieutenant received a letter supposedly from La Roncière, and they fought a duel. However, the other lieutenant forced La Roncière to sign a confession of guilt. La Roncière went to Paris, believing that everything would be forgotten, but the Morells continued to receive threatening letters. The Baron had La Roncière arrested.

In bringing this trial into the novel, Fowles goes farther back in history. By implying that events of 1835 can directly influence characters' decisions in 1867, he also suggests that a story set in 1867 can impact his readers more than a century later. No matter Grogan's purpose in giving Charles this account, the story of La Roncière parallels the novel in its sense of confusion—things happen seemingly without explanation, much to the consternation of those whom they affect. In the broader novel, Sarah's actions often seem unexplainable.

It seems incredible that La Roncière was convicted. First, many people knew that Marie was jealous of La Roncière's attention to her mother. There were sentries surrounding the Morell house on the night La Roncière supposedly forced his way in, and no one saw him. Besides, he would have had to use a ladder to reach Marie's room, and there were no marks of one. The broken glass of her window fell outside. Marie never screamed for help, and her wounds weren't examined until months later. She lived perfectly normally until the arrest, when she had a nervous breakdown. The letters continued to arrive even when La Roncière was in jail, and it doesn't make sense that he would sign his name to them—sometimes spelled wrong. Besides, the paper matched that in Marie's desk.

It becomes clear that Grogan wants Charles to draw parallels between Marie's destructive actions and those of Sarah. No matter what, it's true that Marie constructed a story around her, leaving evidence to make people believe a certain false narrative. Sarah works in a similar way, manipulating the story people believe about her. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that Sarah has the same intent to harm. The other astonishing part of this story is the innocence that people automatically assigned to Marie just because she was female and young—she was believed incapable of such duplicity.

No cross-examination of Marie was allowed at the trial because of her modesty and weakness. La Roncière was sentenced to ten years in prison, though many people protested. In fact, the verdict was the result of social differences, the desire to preserve the purity of virgins, and a lack of psychological knowledge. Dr. Grogan gave Charles a book by Dr. Karl Matthaei, a German doctor, which he wrote to support an appeal for La Roncière. He notes that the letters were written in a pattern that would coincide with a menstrual cycle, and he explains the illness of hysteria, which is now known to be caused by sexual repression.

This case is permeated by gender-based assumptions. Marie essentially avoided justice because she was female and acted publicly in a way that fit people's standards of how young women should act. These stereotypes were so strong that those around her couldn't imagine, despite the clear evidence, that Marie could herself come up with the kinds of improprieties assigned to La Roncière. Matthaei, however, swings the other direction, blaming Marie's actions on her femaleness in a typically sexist interpretation.

In the passage Dr. Grogan marked, Matthaei recalls the family of a lieutenant-general who lived six miles out of a town. His sixteen-year-old daughter wanted them to live in the town, probably for the society that could be had there. In order to make this happen, she set fire to their house. The damaged part was rebuilt, but she attempted arson thirty more times. The culprit wasn't discovered for several years, but she was eventually sentenced to life in prison. Another girl in a German city sent anonymous letters to try to break up a marriage and spread cruel rumors about an admired young lady. This went on for several years before she was caught.

These cases prove little more than that women and girls can be scheming and cruel. The fact that Matthaei and Grogan think this is remarkable enough to make specific scientific note of it demonstrates the degree to which women were seen as pure and innocent in the nineteenth century, incapable of crimes such as these. Grogan apparently wants Charles to recognize, in part, that Sarah might be as cruel as these women, and that she's not to be trusted.

Matthaei points out that, though it may seem that Marie de Morell wouldn't have hurt herself in order to achieve her goal, there are other examples of women doing so. One woman in Copenhagen stuck herself with needles and had parts of her body removed when they became swollen as a result. She had her urine removed with a catheter every morning after injecting air into her bladder. She pretended to faint and have seizures. Everyone pitied her suffering. Finally, it was discovered that she only acted so to attract men's attention and make a fool of them.

Although Sarah hasn't physically damaged herself as this woman did, she has, it seems, purposefully damaged herself socially and perhaps emotionally. However, Matthaei considers only the male viewpoint on this case—it's possible that this woman's actions proceeded from a sense of uselessness or a desire to make the pain of her social oppression recognizable by others.

Another girl and her mother schemed to create sympathy for themselves. The girl pretended to have an awful pain in one breast that continued no matter what the doctors tried. She decided to have the breast removed, and no cancer was found. Years later, she did the same thing with the other breast. Later, she pretended her hand hurt, and she wanted it removed, but she was found out and sent to prison. In another instance, a girl put over a hundred stones in her own bladder over ten months, even though the operations to remove them were very painful. These examples show that girls can quite feasibly hurt themselves in order to achieve their goals.

Both of these cases involve girls causing pain to be inflicted on them in areas of their bodies that distinctly mark them as female, symbolically linking their psychological issues and their self-destruction to their femaleness and the way in which society treats them as a result of it. Though Matthaei clearly proves that girls can hurt themselves, he doesn't seem to address the issue of what their goals are in doing so, leaving Sarah's motivations to remain mysterious.

Charles is shocked by what he has read. He can't recognize hysteria as a desire for love. He sympathizes with La Roncière, and he's disturbed to find that he himself was born on the day that La Roncière was convicted. Reason and science seem to disappear, and Charles feels a lack of freedom.

Although Fowles doesn't agree with Charles's nineteenth-century understanding of hysteria, he also fails to recognize it as a result of women's oppression. Charles feels an almost supernatural kinship to La Roncière that implies that fate is, and has always been, set for him.

Though it's almost four in the morning, Charles is wide awake. He opens a window and wonders where Sarah is. He feels very guilty and begins to suspect that Dr. Grogan will tell everyone his secrets. He feels he's lost respect for himself and everything around him. He rereads some of the passages about hysteria and begins to see the malady in Sarah less than he had. He struggles to remember her clearly, but he realizes that he probably knows her better than anyone does. He feels he has warped her character in his account to Grogan in order to exonerate himself.

In the Victorian era, women who acted in any socially unusual way were frequently diagnosed with hysteria, making it an implicitly oppressive diagnosis that no longer exists. Grogan's attempt to paint the unconventional Sarah as hysterical, then, follows a common trend. Charles, however, is taken in only temporarily. Perhaps this is a turning point where he begins to think more for himself.

Charles paces his room, wondering if Sarah is, after all, brave for facing up to her sin and now in need of help. He feels he's allowed Grogan to mislead him because he wanted to save his reputation and because he had no free will. He thinks everything has happened as it has because he forced her to discuss her situation when they met for the second time. Dawn is about to break, and he makes a decision for the sake of his conscience. He begins to change clothes.

At this point, accepting Grogan's interpretation of Sarah's actions would be an easy way out for Charles that would absolve him of at least some of his guilt. He finally demonstrates his free will by deciding for himself that Grogan is wrong about Sarah. Admittedly, this path also allows him to pursue the woman he's attracted to.

CHAPTER 29

The sun is rising when Charles leaves the White Lion. The sky is clear, the air sharp. The people whom he passes seem to feel classless at this hour, and a few greet him. He doesn't want to see them. He heads towards the Undercliff. He's worried that he's more desperate than noble, but the warmth caused by walking makes it hard to be gloomy. The sun seems to smell like warm stone, and the trees seem religious in an ancient way. Charles sees a fox and a deer, who seem to feel he's intruding. There's a painting by Pisanello of St. Hubert in a forest, surrounded by animals. He seems shocked by the equality of all existence on Earth.

The idea that people's sense of their own class can change according to the time of day reveals class as a social construct, rather than something inherent and immutable. The allusion to the Pisanello painting reinforces this sense of an essential, almost primeval equality. Meanwhile, Charles himself is increasingly being torn down from his upper-class pedestal, first by his uncle's marriage and now by his decreasing sense of intellectual and moral superiority.

Birds sing throughout the woods, and Charles feels like he's in a perfect world where everything is unique. He watches a wren singing like an angel of evolution that thinks nothing can surpass it. Charles is amazed that this world exists alongside everyday life. Everything ordinary seems horrible and boring now. The wren's song seems to suggest that life is more important than death and the individual more important than the species. Everyone thinks this way in the twentieth century, but Charles sees it as the chaos that comes when order is torn away. He's like Sarah; he can only envy the wren's happiness in this perfect world, but he can't feel it himself.

Fowles attempts to give the twentieth-century reader a window into Charles's distinctly Victorian mindset that places the species—in other words, society—in such primacy over the individual person. In some sense, Fowles is implying that the twentieth century takes a more natural view of life and societal order, as Charles's glimpse of the twentieth-century perspective is inspired by the natural world around him. Charles finally begins to empathize with Sarah in a small way.

Charles takes the path that's out of sight of the Dairy. He feels like everything in the forest is watching him. He heads towards the ocean and the land levels out into meadows. He sees a tumbledown barn where the dairyman stores hay; a hundred years later, it will be gone. It seems deserted, and Charles approaches nervously. The door is closed, and he looks through a window but doesn't see Sarah. He waits a few minutes, then finally opens the door. Hay fills three stalls, and light is slanting through the window. He sees a bonnet hanging from a nail, and he's terrified that something awful lies below it. He almost runs away, but he hears a sound and moves forward.

Though this meeting feels intensely important for Charles and for the plot of the novel, Fowles marks its importance as fleeting by mentioning that the barn will no longer exist by the time of his writing, contributing to the presence of change throughout the story. For a moment in the barn, Sarah could very well be either alive or dead; this is a moment of crisis that might shade Charles's subsequent actions with desperation and/or relief.

CHAPTER 30

Sarah had gotten home before Mrs. Fairley. When she went to her room for a few minutes, Mrs. Fairley took her chance. She came to Sarah's room and triumphantly told her Mrs. Poulteney was waiting for her. When Sarah went into the drawing room, Mrs. Fairley listened at the door. Mrs. Poulteney was standing at the window and refused to acknowledge Sarah. Sarah saw an envelope on a table, but she hardly reacted. Mrs. Poulteney wasn't quite sure how to best ruin her. Finally she said that the envelope held a month's wages, and Sarah would leave the next morning. Sarah didn't reply, and Mrs. Poulteney had to prompt her angrily.

Both Mrs. Fairley and Mrs. Poulteney are clearly ecstatic at this chance to hurt and humiliate Sarah, demonstrating what reprehensible people they are. For her part, Sarah clearly knows what's coming and has purposefully orchestrated it, which actually gives her the upper hand in this situation, making it possible for her to foil the other women's satisfaction at her firing. Thus, Sarah's supposed self-sabotage is in fact giving her power.

Sarah demanded to know why she was being dismissed. Mrs. Poulteney said she would have her locked away, and commanded her to leave. Sarah said it would be a pleasure, and turned to go, but Mrs. Poulteney told her to take her wages. Sarah suggested she use them to buy a torture machine to use on her servants. Mrs. Poulteney gasped that she would pay for those words, and Sarah implied that God might not listen to Mrs. Poulteney in the next life. She smiled at her knowingly. Mrs. Poulteney stared, then collapsed in her chair.

Counting Grogan's plan to put Sarah in an asylum, this is the second time people have threatened her with institutionalization for her unconventional behavior. This was not an uncommon reaction to rebellious women in this time. Sarah turns this scene completely against Mrs. Poulteney, using her power of perception to throw a dart that hits Mrs. Poulteney where it hurts—her fear of going to hell.

Sarah opened the door quickly and motioned Mrs. Fairley inside, who accused Sarah of murder. After a few moments Sarah went to her room. She covered her face, then lifted her fingers and looked in the mirror. Then she wept into her bed, believing she was praying.

Although Sarah's self-sabotage does give her a certain power, it is also, in the end, sabotage, and its consequences hurt her too. If her goal was to manipulate other people, as Grogan thinks, she doesn't seem very happy about doing so.

CHAPTER 31

Charles finds Sarah sleeping in the barn, curled up with her head on a scarf. For a moment this seems like a crime to Charles, but he feels an urge to protect her. This desire confirms Dr. Grogan's argument that he loves her, and it's worse because the scene is reminiscent of a bedroom. He moves to leave, but he accidentally says her name. She sits up, seeming dismayed. Charles goes outside, worried that the dairyman might appear. Sarah calls his name and he finds her in the doorway. She seems wild in an innocent and eager way. Seeing her face makes him feel both more and less worried by the medical accounts he's been reading. The Victorians don't like paradoxes, but rather theories that explain things; they spent their time building, and modern people spend their time destroying. Thus, Charles can't understand himself.

Charles is overcome by paradoxes in this scene: Sarah's peacefulness seems like a crime, but he wants to protect her; he leaves and calls to her simultaneously; the sight of her face makes him both more and less convinced of her insanity. Fowles positions paradoxes as something only the modern mind can really accept because of the prevalence of existentialism in the twentieth century. The Victorian mindset can't handle paradoxes because they seem to destroy themselves rather than building to a sound and logical conclusion. However, this doesn't mean the characters don't experience paradox, but only that they struggle to understand it.

Charles is worried they might be seen, so they go into the barn. Sarah confirms that she spent the night here. Charles tells her that Mrs. Poulteney is better, and comments that Sarah shouldn't have been working for her in the first place. Sarah says she'll never belong anywhere. Charles tells her about the search party, and, surprised, she says she didn't mean to cause trouble. Charles says she must leave Lyme now, and he will help her. He puts a hand on her shoulder.

Although Sarah has pretty much burnt all of her bridges by now, Charles is still worried about his reputation. Sarah is so used to being an outcast that she doesn't seem to have considered that people might actually worry about her. Though leaving Lyme would be for Sarah's own good, it would also undeniably help Charles control himself and his reputation.

Sarah looks at Charles passionately, and she kisses his hand. He snatches it back, telling her to control herself, but she says she can't. Charles tries to believe she's just grateful for his help, but he thinks of a description of passion by Sappho. He and Sarah are feeling the same emotions, but Charles won't admit it. Finally Sarah falls to her knees and confesses that she deliberately let Mrs. Fairley see her. Charles feels lost; none of the girls in the medical accounts confessed. Sarah begins to cry, and Charles feels like a dam is breaking on him. He asks why, and she gives a clear declaration of love. Charles helps her up, their eyes locked. Her eyes are beautiful, and the moment triumphs over the era. Charles kisses her and then, feeling her body, pushes her away. He rushes out the door and right into something equally awful.

This is the first time that Sarah and Charles have actually expressed their desire for each other, and Charles's sense of a dam breaking comes from both this explosion of feeling and from the fact that, by confessing to her self-sabotaging wrongdoing, Sarah seems to burst outside of the insanity narrative that Grogan has constructed around her. She no longer fits in with the stories of the girls Charles has been reading about, and so she becomes once again unknowable. The society of this era dictates that Charles and Sarah must not be together, so in kissing her, Charles escapes his own time period.

CHAPTER 32

Ernestina wasn't able to sleep that night. She saw the light on in Charles's window late into the night, and she took it to mean that he was disappointed in her. When Charles left for his uncle's, she had begun to prepare herself for running a great house. She likes luxury, but Winsyatt seemed too big. Perhaps she imitated her father, who thinks that aristocrats are too extravagant, though this quality makes his business work, and he is very happy for his daughter to be gaining a title by marriage. In the twentieth century, the middle class is seen as conservative and conventional, but in the past it has been the revolutionary class. Its saving grace is that it hates itself. Ernestina certainly hates her class, but this hatred makes her seek a higher class rather than reject the class system.

Ernestina certainly isn't oppressed by her class status, since she's so wealthy, but she's one of the characters most consistently preoccupied with class. This is in part because of the nature of the middle class—as the narrator says, the middle class hates itself because it's in its very nature to try to become upper class. At the same time, the middle class wants to be seen as somehow superior to the aristocratic class, so people like Ernestina and her father put on a show of disliking aristocrats even as they seek to become them, creating a mental incongruity that is difficult to navigate.

Ernestina felt that she had reacted in a very middle-class way to Sir Robert's news. She eventually gave up trying to sleep and took out her diary. She wrote that she regretted being so angry in front of Charles, and she cried a lot when he left. She resolved to obey him even when she doesn't want to and to trust his judgment. She wrote much more sincerely than she usually speaks, because she hopes that Charles may one day want to read her diary. She writes partly for him and partly for God. She went to sleep feeling such a perfect bride that the narrator can only assume that Charles will eventually be faithful to her.

Charles, too, felt that Ernestina reacted in a very middle-class, volatile way, rather than with the aristocratic calm expected of his own class. While Sarah attracts Charles with her independence and mystery, Ernestina wants to satisfy him by being ever more the proper, obedient Victorian woman. Fowles almost seems to be making fun of her here, as her sincerity and dedication to Charles is typical of the idealized bride of Victorian literature.

When Sam got up that morning, he learned that Charles had gone out and Sam was supposed to be ready to leave by noon. He was shocked. He went to Aunt Tranter's house. When Aunt Tranter came down to the kitchen, she found Mary weeping and soon found out the reason. She gave Mary the morning off until Ernestina woke up. Five minutes later, Sam fell in the street because he was running to meet Mary.

This scene exposes Charles's lack of compassion for the lower class; he forgets that his actions will affect the lives of servants who are just as human as he is, and Sam won't want to leave Mary. Aunt Tranter, on the other hand, treats Mary as a whole person with a meaningful life outside of her service in the house.

CHAPTER 33

Sam and Mary are as astonished to see Charles as he is to see them. They're all frozen until Sarah appears briefly in the doorway, and Sam's mouth falls open. Charles demands to know what Sam is doing here. He says he's just walking, and everything is ready for them to leave already. He promises they didn't know Charles was here. Charles asks Mary to leave them alone, which she does. Sam acts humble. Charles tells him that he's here to help the doctor who's treating Sarah, and Sam and Mary must say nothing about seeing him here. Sam promises, and Charles tries to pay him off, but Sam refuses to take money. He goes to find Mary. It's unclear why they were heading for the barn, and it may seem odd that Mary was so upset about Sam being gone for only a few days. They walk into the woods and then collapse into silent laughter.

This situation upends the class hierarchy in which Charles is comfortable—Sam has the power here, as he's just caught Charles illicitly meeting a woman who not only isn't his fiancée, but who also has a reputation for promiscuity. Charles knows this and scrambles for his power back by commanding Mary and making excuses, which Sam easily sees through. Though Sam pretends to be honorable in refusing to take Charles's bribe money, he's also preventing himself from being financially bound to his promise. The narrator remarks on the circumstances from the reader's point of view, but declines to elucidate them.

Charles decides that he has acted in a way that could be hurting Sarah, so he returns to the barn. She's standing by the window. Charles asks her forgiveness for taking advantage of her. He blames himself for everything. He says he's going to London, and he thinks she should go to Exeter. He offers her money. He knows this speech sounds awful. Sarah says she'll never see him again, but she lives for seeing him. Charles feels trapped in the implicit threat, but she says she would have killed herself before now if she meant to. She thanks him for the money and agrees to go to Exeter.

Charles's ability to blame himself entirely for the situation results in part from the assumption of his time that women don't experience sexual desire. His offer of money could be seen as a bribe for Sarah to leave the area and not publicly expose their relationship. Although Sarah continues to seem to be on the edge of suicide, she also seems more rational—according to Charles's conventional viewpoint—than she has for a while.

Charles tells Sarah that certain people want to put her in an asylum, so she shouldn't return to Lyme. He'll send her box to Exeter. He suggests she walk to Axmouth Cross to avoid possible scandal, though this is a walk of nine miles. Sarah agrees. She points out that she doesn't have any references, but Charles says she can use Mrs. Talbot and Mrs. Tranter. Mrs. Tranter will also be willing to give her financial assistance. Sarah thanks him, and he thanks her, saying that she's remarkable. She repeats the compliment simply. A silence stretches out until Charles makes to leave, feeling clumsy.

Though Charles himself sought out Dr. Grogan's help, he's ironically now telling Sarah how to avoid Dr. Grogan's plan to help her. Charles continues to prioritize avoiding scandal, the burden of which always seems to fall on Sarah. However, Charles also seems to realize that Sarah has affected him in some positive ways as well, despite all of the anguish that has resulted from their relationship.

Charles doesn't want to seem ashamed, so he invites Sarah to walk back to the path with him, which she does. When they reach it, they shake hands. Charles says he'll never forget her. She looks at him as though there's some knowledge he must perceive there. After a moment, he leaves. When he looks back, she's still there. Ten minutes later, he stops at a view towards the Cobb and sees Sarah far away, coming towards him. He hesitates, then goes on his way.

Charles believes this is the last time he'll ever see Sarah; it's impossible to say whether Sarah thinks the same thing. Her mysterious look suggests she might not think so. The fact that Charles considers returning to speak to Sarah again indicates that he's not actually ready to part with her for good.

CHAPTER 34

Ernestina can tell that Charles has been walking. He says he slept badly, and she says she did too. She points out that he said he was tired, but he stayed up very late. Ernestina clearly isn't keeping the goal that she made of deferring to Charles in every way. But she's heard through Sam, Mary, and Mrs. Tranter that Charles is leaving Lyme that day, and he hasn't told her yet. When he finally came to the house, he spoke quietly to Aunt Tranter before seeing her. Besides, she took special care with her appearance that morning, and Charles hasn't noticed.

Ernestina feels some tension in her relationship with Charles, but she has no inkling that it's related to Sarah. She doesn't even seem to consider that there could be another woman in his life, but rather she blames herself for his strange behavior. This is somewhat typical of the era, as women were seen as largely responsible for the happiness of domestic relationships.

Finally, Charles sits and takes Ernestina's hand, asking forgiveness and saying that he's going to London to see his lawyer. She protests, but he says he also needs to tell her father what's happened with Sir Robert. Ernestina says it's irrelevant, but Charles insists that he must know, particularly since he might not be inheriting a title anymore. Though their love is most important, marriage is also a legal agreement. Ernestina continues to protest, saying that her parents will let her do whatever she wants. She begins to total up how much money they'll have, but he says that's not the issue. She asks what would happen if her father refused to let her marry him. Charles says he's only doing his duty. Ernestina complains that she sees him less in Lyme than in London.

On the surface, at least, Charles is trying to do the honorable thing by being honest with Ernestina's father about her prospects in marriage. In this time, marriage was a financial contract as much as a personal one. However, Charles is also—mostly subconsciously—taking this course of action because he doesn't really want to marry Ernestina, and having her father forbid their marriage for financial reasons would be a much easier way to get out of it than breaking it off himself. Even better, he can justify his actions as his duty.

Charles stands and pastes a fake smile to his face. He doesn't like it when Ernestina is obstinate, because it contrasts too much with her beautiful but ridiculous clothes. Mrs. Bloomer offered the Victorians practical clothing in the form of trousers, but they rejected it for hoop skirts. Charles tries to figure out how to make his exit, while Ernestina realizes that she's made too much of a fuss about his trip. Female power comes from obedience, so she smiles at him and makes him promise to write every day and return as soon as possible.

Fowles points to fashion as evidence of the Victorians' more general worship of form over practicality. Ernestina takes a very different, and more conventional, approach to female power. She doesn't want it any less than Sarah does, but she thinks she can get it by working within the social system that's already in place, whereas Sarah believes she has to work against society to have power.

Ernestina stands to be kissed, but Charles can't make himself kiss her mouth, so he kisses her temples. He finds he can't get away, because Ernestina is holding on to his pockets. He kisses her properly, and nothing awful happens. She looks very pretty, and Charles has a vision of a body. As she cuddles into him, he begins to get an erection. Ernestina has always had a hint of hidden wildness and perversity about her, and perhaps Charles unconsciously hopes to make her what he wants. But he feels terribly guilty for desiring her now, after kissing Sarah. He frees himself and leaves.

It seems Charles doesn't want to kiss Ernestina in part because he's just kissed Sarah, and it feels wrong, and in part because he's experiencing a revulsion to Ernestina now that he's come to understand his true feelings towards her. This scene becomes much more explicit than any Victorian novel would be, acting as a reminder of the self-censorship of Victorian society and the contrasting modernity of this novel.

Mary is standing at the door with red cheeks. Charles makes sure she understands about what happened that morning. He pays her, though she tries to refuse the money. Once he's gone, she bites the coin like her father does. Biting it seems to prove it's gold, just like being on the Undercliff proves that whatever Charles and Sarah were doing was sinful. But what could a country virgin know about sin?

It's somehow particularly immoral for Charles to bribe Mary into silence in the very house of his fiancée. Charles and Sarah, neither of them natives of Lyme, haven't internalized the inherent sexuality of the Undercliff the way Mary and Mrs. Poulteney have.

CHAPTER 35

In the nineteenth century, women are sacred, but young girls can be bought cheaply. More churches are built than ever before, but one in sixty London houses is a brothel. The sanctity of marriage is proclaimed everywhere, but many public figures act scandalously in private. The female body is hidden, but sculptors must be able to carve naked women. Literature is very chaste, but an incredible amount of pornography is produced. No one talks about urinating or pooping, but practically no one has flushing toilets. Women supposedly don't have orgasms, but all prostitutes learn to pretend they have them. There's great progress in every area except for personal life.

Fowles comes down hard on the ironies inherent in Victorian society. It's important to note that only with a retrospective view is it possible to see the era in this way; one must be removed from it. These ironies show that many Victorians lived with cognitive dissonances and didn't question them. Fowles's observations also show that despite the surface condemnation of sexuality, sex was actually present everywhere in this period.

The easiest answer is that the Victorians divert their sexual impulses into other areas. However, this makes it seem that the Victorians are not highly sexed, when in fact, they are just as highly sexed as people in the twentieth century. They're actually more preoccupied with sex and love, and the comparative sexual freedom of the 1890s probably just resulted from the private being publicized. The same amount of sex happens no matter the age; the difference is how it's discussed. The Victorians are just more serious and secretive about sex than more modern people are.

The most dominant modern stereotype of the Victorians is that they were sexually repressed. While Fowles illustrates this idea in numerous ways throughout the novel, he also argues here that societal repression didn't necessarily equal an erasure of sexuality from daily life. In fact, making such an effort not to talk about sex or have unacceptable sex requires one to think about sex rather a lot.

People often think that being ignorant about sex means that it's less enjoyable, but this isn't necessarily true. Modern people might think they're more often able to have sex when they want it than the Victorians were. However, modern society pushes sexual desire much more than it fulfills it. Though the Victorians might be more sexually frustrated, they also might enjoy sex more because it's rarer. In fact, maybe they unconsciously choose to be silent about sex in order to heighten the degree of pleasure it brings. By tearing down the mystery around sex, the twentieth century has also lessened its pleasure. Besides, the Victorians' sense of secrecy between men and women creates energy in other areas.

Here, Fowles turns the stereotype of the repressed Victorian on its head, suggesting that Victorians might have had better sex than modern, supposedly less repressed, people. Going even further, he argues that repression actually creates sexual pleasure because there's an added thrill of partaking in the forbidden. Although the novel generally exposes the destructive force of sexual repression in social life, it ironically argues here that sexual repression is a source of pleasure.

Mary is not in fact an innocent country virgin, because peasants are rarely innocent. The view of Victorians as prudish really comes from the middle class, and a true view of country life must be found in the reports of those who have studied it factually. In the country, almost everyone has premarital sex, and gets married once the woman is pregnant, so that the couple knows they'll have children to help earn money. Besides, families sleep crammed together and no one has any privacy, making incest common.

Fowles points out that history tells the story of the privileged, in this case meaning that modern people imagine that the lives of the middle and upper classes were typical of all Victorians, which is false. With further irony, the life of the lower class entirely contradicts that stereotype of the repressed Victorian. Premarital sex is actually an acceptable part of the culture.

Thomas Hardy was the first author to try to write about sex in the Victorian age. Ironically, he hid his own sex life—the truth of it wasn't discovered until the 1950s. At twenty-seven, he fell in love with his cousin, Tryphena, and they got engaged. Their engagement was broken five years later, apparently because Hardy learned that Tryphena was actually his half-sister's daughter. Some people claim that he broke the engagement because of class differences, but Tryphena was remarkable and intelligent. His love for her inspired poems and important characters in his novels. Paradoxes of repression and desire shape both Hardy and the Victorian Age.

This entire novel is written in the tradition of Hardy in both subject matter and setting, and it's typical of Fowles's metafictional style that he directly acknowledges the link here. This chapter focuses on the paradoxes of Victorian sex, and Hardy himself embodies paradox in that he can advocate in fiction for open discussion of sex and a loosening of society's censures around sexuality, but he buried his own sex life deep in secrecy.

The reader can probably guess now why Sam and Mary were heading to the barn, and Mary was crying because they had been there before. She knows more about sex than one might have suspected had one seen Tryphena, who helped make Hardy a symbol of the mysteries of the Victorians.

As a lower-class rural woman, Mary is already sexually experienced. Fowles implies that Mary is pregnant, and the news of Sam's departure hits her all the harder because she's afraid of being abandoned in this socially vulnerable condition.

CHAPTER 36

Exeter has a disreputable area on the slope down to the river. There are brothels, dance halls, and gin palaces, but also ruined women of all sorts who hide in inns and lodging houses from the moralism of the rest of the country. On one edge of this area is a row of run-down Georgian houses. A central block of five of these houses makes up Endicott's Family Hotel, owned by Martha Endicott, who is distinguished by her lack of interest in her visitors. She charges people according to how much she figures they're used to paying for a hotel, and doesn't care about them beyond what they'll pay her. Simply by maintaining high rates, she keeps her hotel on the upper end of what's available.

Fowles positions Endicott's Family Hotel in an area socially removed from mainstream Victorian culture; a place that defies the expectations of the era. Mrs. Endicott sees people as their class status—as how much money she can get out of them—which specifically functions here to obscure their sexuality. If she's paid enough, she ignores what might be happening in her hotel. Fowles also points out the ridiculousness of capitalism: the hotel gains respect just because it's expensive, not because it's pleasant.

It's almost night, and there are lights on inside the hotel. Mrs. Endicott is looking through her accounts. Through a dark window on the top floor lie a sitting room and a bedroom badly decorated with a worn carpet, a table, two armchairs, a chest of drawers, and a couple paintings. The only nice part about the room is the white marble around the fireplace, carved with nymphs. They seem surprised at the way the room has changed for the worse.

Though most of the characters in this novel are complicated, Mrs. Endicott is almost Dickensian, a caricature of the money-obsessed business owner. This scene gives the impression of change over time in the hotel room just as the book emphasizes historical change; the marble figures are a relic of a better time.

The door opens, and Sarah enters. She arrived several days before. The name of the hotel was joked about at the school in Exeter where she'd studied. When she arrived in Exeter, a porter asked her where to take her box, and Endicott's Family Hotel was the only name she could think of. When she arrived, she wasn't terribly pleased with its appearance, but she was glad no one questioned her staying there alone. She paid to stay for a week.

The name of the hotel is rather ironic considering that it will become a location for sex that spurs the final break between Charles and Ernestina—not very family-friendly. In this time, a woman alone is automatically suspicious, perhaps even assumed to be a prostitute. The fact that Sarah isn't questioned suggests that the hotel isn't so respectable after all.

Sarah lights a lamp and loosens her hair. She lifts her bag onto the table, removes a number of wrapped objects, and unwraps them, revealing a teapot and a jug. The jug is cracked and will crack again, which the narrator knows because he bought it recently. Sarah doesn't know that it's valuable, but she has the sense that many people have used it before her. She puts it on the mantelpiece and stares at it, thrilled that it belongs to her. There are footsteps in the hall, but they pass by. Sarah unwraps some tea, sugar, and milk. She brings the rest of the packages into the bedroom. One is a nightgown, the other a shawl. She seems hypnotized by the shawl, probably because it was so expensive. In her first really feminine act, she lays a piece of her hair against the fabric, then tries it on. Finally, she unwraps a roll of bandage, which she puts in a drawer.

The narrator inserts himself into the story here by revealing that he owns the jug that Sarah is holding, making it a physical connection between her time and his and paradoxically suggesting that her story is real, even though he has previously discussed his own process of fabricating it. The narrator allows the reader to intimately observe Sarah here, but doesn't penetrate her thoughts, preserving the air of mystery around her. This is a rare tender moment in which Fowles portrays how bereft Sarah has been in her life by showing the great pleasure she takes in these simple objects she's bought, and in having bought them herself.

Charles has given Sarah ten pounds, and it has changed her attitude towards the world. She counts the money every night just for the pleasure of it. Initially she didn't spend anything, but only looked at everything for sale that used to seem to taunt her. She has waited to buy because she couldn't live luxuriously after being poor for so long. She's been enjoying her first vacation as an adult. Now she makes tea. She hasn't heard from Charles, but she seems quite happy. The narrator refuses to find out what's happening in her head. Eventually she pours her tea, unwraps a meat pie, and begins to eat indelicately.

Though Sarah has tried to claim power in the world however she could, she has never been able to claim the power of money, which is more potent than almost anything. Now that she's happy for the first time in the novel, the narrator seems to want to respect her privacy, furthering the illusion that she's more than just a product of his own mind and can have thoughts that exist outside of his own thoughts.

CHAPTER 37

Though Ernestina's father, Mr. Freeman, secretly despises the aristocracy, he's so careful to act like a gentleman that it might seem to reveal some lack of confidence. The Freemans are socially new to the upper middle class, but they're powerful in the business world. Some in their place try to imitate country gentlemen, but Mr. Freeman tries to be a new kind of gentleman. He only spends weekends in the country. He's dedicated to profit and earnestness. He's benefited from the economic change of the last couple of decades, and to make up for his prosperity he has contributed much to Christian charities. By the standards of his time, he treats his workers well.

Mr. Freeman is the ultimate bourgeois figure of this book. The bourgeoisie, or middle class, are characterized by their recent rise to wealth through business or trade, and they usually strive to rise even higher in the world. Mr. Freeman, however, tries to maintain an illusion that he's perfectly happy in his social position and doesn't want to be an aristocrat. Marx positioned the bourgeoisie as the enemies of the lower class, but Fowles portrays Mr. Freeman as a generally good person.

Mr. Freeman listens to Charles solemnly and is silent when he finishes. They're in Mr. Freeman's study filled with books, a bust, and a few vague engravings. Finally he says that this news is very surprising. In the following silence, Charles is somewhat annoyed, but also amused. Mr. Freeman is thinking that Charles might want in increase in Ernestina's dowry, which isn't so bad, but he's worried that Charles might have known all along that his uncle would marry. He treats Ernestina's marriage much like a business deal. Charles says he's very surprised by his uncle's decision, and felt that Mr. Freeman should know. He says he's already told Ernestina, and gives Mr. Freeman a letter from her.

Mr. Freeman doesn't really trust Charles, and he examines the news of Charles's changed fortunes under the assumption that Charles is probably trying to take financial advantage of him in some way. This also shows how much Mr. Freeman's own life is centered around money, which is a typically bourgeois characteristic. Fowles's willingness to let the reader hear the thoughts of characters like Mr. Freeman makes his frequent refusal to narrate Sarah's thoughts even more striking.

Mr. Freeman confirms that Charles still has a decent income of his own, and points out that Sir Robert might not have an heir. Besides, Ernestina is bringing a large dowry, and one day Mr. Freeman himself will die. He admits that he partly allowed Ernestina to become engaged to Charles because they would be bringing equal value to the marriage, but he believes that Charles has been honest all along about his prospects. Charles knows he really means that people will gossip that Charles fooled Ernestina into marriage with the false prospect of a title.

Mr. Freeman engages in the kind of veiled conversation that is quite typical of polite Victorians—although he seems to be setting out all the reasons that it doesn't really matter that Charles has lost his inheritance, Charles knows that he's really pointing out that Charles could be seen as a fortune-hunter. Even though the aristocracy is socially superior to the bourgeoisie, these dynamics show that money is still power.

Mr. Freeman opens Ernestina's letter. Charles stares out a window into Hyde Park. He sees a girl sitting on a bench. A soldier comes up to her, and it's clear that they're lovers. They walk off. Mr. Freeman reads Ernestina's postscript, where she threatens to elope to Paris if Mr. Freeman tries to stop their marriage. He's convinced to let it go on, but Charles offers him more time to think about it. Mr. Freeman says he's impressed with Charles, and he should go back to Lyme. Ernestina is clearly in love. He'll help them out financially if necessary.

The scene in Hyde Park presents such a simple vision of love, which contrasts with Charles's anguished and conflicted love life, seeming to taunt him. His emotions also conflict with Ernestina's love, which is determined to leap any barriers. Charles's true intentions in coming here become clearer when he urges Mr. Freeman to reconsider letting Ernestina marry him—he wants the marriage to be stopped.

Charles suddenly feels like he's become an employee. Mr. Freeman asks for permission to discuss another matter, though he seems unsure how to begin. Finally, he points out that he doesn't have a son. He knows that Charles must hate commerce, as it isn't meant for gentlemen. Charles protests that Mr. Freeman shows that there's nothing wrong with commerce, and it's very useful to the country. But Mr. Freeman asks how Charles would feel if people said he was in trade. Eventually Charles realizes what he means, and is shocked. Mr. Freeman clarifies that Charles certainly wouldn't deal with day-to-day matters, but he's likely to inherit a business empire. Now that Charles might not be occupied with Winsyatt, he can put his energy elsewhere.

Now that Charles is essentially dependent on Mr. Freeman's money and goodwill, he is no longer entirely free—in contrast to Mr. Freeman, whose name suggests the freedom his money has enabled. Mr. Freeman wants Charles to join his business, even though he knows that someone of Charles's social status isn't supposed to work in business, as it would be a step down the class ladder. By making this offer, Mr. Freeman gets some strange revenge on the upper class that excludes him, asserting instead the nobility of his own role in society.

Charles protests that he doesn't know anything about business, but Mr. Freeman says he has the necessary qualities. He isn't suggesting any immediate changes, but eventually he could teach Charles about running the business. Charles feels that it wouldn't be a good fit for his natural talents. Mr. Freeman says he would only need to observe, at first, and the men who work for him are very respectable. Charles assures him that he's not worried about the social aspect. Mr. Freeman says that when he dies, his business will need a strong leader to succeed. Charles feels like he's being tempted by Satan—gentleman can't work in trade. But he can't tell Mr. Freeman this.

Charles is automatically repulsed by Mr. Freeman's offer because of its class implications, but he denies that this is the reason because admitting it would clearly be an insult to Mr. Freeman, even though Mr. Freeman is just as aware of the class implications as Charles is. But Mr. Freeman has him in a corner; he's just offered to provide money that Charles doesn't have, and Charles more or less owes him now. Class awareness is so inherent in Charles that his reaction is quite visceral.

Mr. Freeman says he will never believe that humans are descended from monkeys, but he can understand that a species must change in order to survive. He's always had to change with the times. There's certainly nothing wrong with being a gentleman, but this is a time of action, and Charles should consider whether perhaps he should take an interest in commerce. He just wants him to think about it. Now Charles feels useless, and guesses that Mr. Freeman thinks he's lazy. He essentially wants Charles to earn Ernestina's dowry. Charles feels like he's emerged onto a view of the rest of his boring life and sees only duty and humiliation. He says he's overwhelmed, but agrees to think about it. They go to see Mrs. Freeman, and Charles feels trapped. Though this house is all in the most current fashion, he suddenly misses Winsyatt's old shabbiness. Evolution in practice seems vulgar.

Charles and Mr. Freeman have quarreled before about evolution, and now Mr. Freeman is using Charles's own ideologies against him. His implication that the aristocracy will have to turn more to the occupations of the bourgeoisie is prescient of the aristocracy's twentieth-century demise. The fashionableness of the Freemans' house in contrast to Winsyatt suggests that Mr. Freeman's way of life is the future, and the aristocratic way of life belongs to a dying past. Once again, Charles struggles to maintain his vision of himself as one of the "fittest," as Mr. Freeman is essentially suggesting that in his natural state, he isn't.

CHAPTER 38

When Charles leaves the Freemans' house, it's dusk. He walks towards his club. When he runs into a traffic jam, he tries to take a shortcut and heads into Mayfair. Thick mist makes everything seem dreamlike. Charles feels like he's lost his sense of irony and is naked. It now seems absurd that he went to visit Mr. Freeman rather than just sending a letter. The thought of having to be careful with money seems equally ridiculous. Wealthy people travel by carriage, so everyone walking around Charles is poor. He knows his income is unimaginable to them, but it doesn't seem enough to him. He doesn't understand the moral implications of his wealth because he feels so unlucky in other respects. He's unhappy. He feels like his rank is weighing him down. He stops, a living **fossil**, as fitter humans bustle around him.

With Mr. Freeman just having questioned the efficacy of Charles's most ingrained identities, Charles is heading for a personal crisis. The fog symbolizes his sense of being lost, and his choice to walk among the poor on the street gestures to his loss of his upper-class identity. Fowles portrays Charles as somewhat pathetic here by contrasting him with the poor; he's still extremely privileged, so his reduced wealth is hardly a good reason for depression. His inability to deal with the situation proves him unfit for his era and exposes his former sense of evolutionary fitness as only a product of his wealth.

Charles sees people of various lower-class professions in front of him. A boy runs up to try to sell him a picture, and he turns towards a darker street. The boy chases him, singing a vulgar song. It reminds Charles of the presence of sin in London. The city offers anonymity. No one looks at him as he passes, and he feels a frightening sense of freedom stemming from invisibility. He hears a couple speaking French and wishes that he were traveling, that he could escape. He passes a mews where coachmen are preparing their horses. He suddenly wonders whether the lower classes are actually happier than the upper. Perhaps they're like happy parasites on the rich. He feels like a hedgehog with fleas between its spines, rolling up and playing dead, with his only defense his aristocratic prickles.

In his emotional turmoil, Charles is becoming detached from the conventional paths and beliefs of society. Adherence to society's rules becomes irrelevant when there's no one around to notice or initiate punishment for straying from the norm. The expectations of Charles's own class are what's really making him unhappy, but he blames it on the lower classes instead because it's so much easier to create an external threat than face an internal one. The experiences of characters like Sam, Mary, and Sarah make Charles's attitude seem particularly cruel.

Charles sees a girl buying candles and begins to think about commerce. He sees Mr. Freeman's offer as an insult to his class. He should have rejected it immediately. But really he's distressed because his money will now come from Mr. Freeman, and Charles will be under his influence. The tradition of this kind of marriage comes from a time when marriage was only a business contract, but now there's more emphasis on the sanctity of a marriage for love. Ernestina will constantly demand that Charles love her, which will also require him to be grateful for her money.

Charles is really struggling with his class pride. A gentleman can't take Mr. Freeman's money or his offer of a job and retain his full dignity. Although Charles and Ernestina are supposedly marrying for love, their marriage clearly still is a financial contract, and it's going to be difficult for those two priorities to exist simultaneously and not cause conflicts, particularly in an age when men are supposed to be ascendant over their wives.

Charles finds himself on Oxford Street, by Mr. Freeman's store. He walks into the street to take in the whole store. People are going in and out, but Charles can't imagine himself doing so. He hasn't really thought of the store as real, but now he sees how powerful it is. Many men would savor that power, but Charles doesn't want it. In part, he's being snobbish; in part, lazy. He's also frightened of dealing with so many people below his class. However, he does feel that earning money isn't enough to fulfill him. He knows he'll never be a great intellectual, but he feels that choosing to be nothing is the virtue of a gentleman and preserves his freedom. The store would ruin him.

In this time, people of the upper class don't generally shop at large stores like Mr. Freeman's, which appeal to a broader public. As a gentleman, Charles hasn't been raised, as men of other classes have, with the idea that earning money will be the purpose and fulfillment of his life. By having no real occupation, he remains above the concerns of success and failure. If he can't be great, at least he can't be a disaster either. He finds safety in being noncommittal.

Charles can't imagine how little of the ethos of the gentleman will be left by 1969, but every form that seems to disappear actually only transforms into something else. The qualities of a Victorian gentleman come from the knights of the Middle Ages and turn into those of modern-day scientists. Every culture needs an elite class ruled by certain conventions. Some of those conventions might eventually cause the death of the class, but they give structure to their good contributions to society. Across time, the type to which gentleman belong are connected by their rejection of possession as a goal. Scientists, too, will one day become irrelevant.

Fowles is essentially examining the evolution of the gentleman, which he sees essentially as a species that passes its traits on through the years to various forms. The elite must change depending on the society over which it reigns. Ironically, though, Fowles defines the gentleman as ruled by convention, yet ultimately destroyed by those very same conventions he covets. Also, if gentlemen reject possession, they must already be wealthy enough to not feel the lack of basic provisions.

The Bible tells a story of temptation in the wilderness. Everyone who's educated has a wilderness, and will one day be tempted. Their rejection is never bad. If one has ever made a decision that rejects personal benefit, one cannot judge Charles as a snob. In fact, he's struggling to overcome history. He feels he's being asked to sacrifice his own identity, and he can't believe that his old dreams were useless. He was seeking the meaning of life, though he couldn't articulate his search to others. In any case, he knows that Mr. Freeman's store does not hold the meaning of life.

Fowles interprets this situation as Charles being tempted to live for profit rather than for ideals, as taking Mr. Freeman's offer would not only erase all his financial worries, but also give him a clear path in life. However, this would mean abandoning his intellectual and spiritual search, which could yield nobler results. History and progress, in this interpretation, are pushing him on to a more practical, less creative life.

At the base of everything is the fact that a person's ability to analyze the self provides an advantage in the evolutionary struggle for survival. The ability to choose how to change in order to survive means that people have free will. But in reality, Charles feels trapped. He feels chilled with rage against everything Mr. Freeman stands for. He gets into a cab, and when he closes his eyes, he sees a comforting image of milk punch and champagne.

Fowles positions Charles's personal crisis within the larger matrix of human evolution. Charles thinks he's willing to change, but only if he makes a conscious choice of how to change, and in this situation, Mr. Freeman is making the choice for him. Fowles grounds the intellectualism of his character analysis in Charles's simple human desire for alcohol.

CHAPTER 39

Though Charles has learned much since he was at Cambridge, he still finds milk punch and champagne as good a solution to his problems as they were there. His club exists on the assumption that men want to be reminded of their student days. When he enters, Charles sees two men he was at Cambridge with; one the son of a bishop, the other a baronet. Sir Thomas Burgh imitates his ancestors' pursuit of pleasure. He was the leader of a debauched group at Cambridge, and people have tried to kick him out of club. He's never ashamed of his sins. He's also very generous with his money and reminds everyone of their freer days.

The club is a distinctly male, aristocratic environment, and as such, it can get away with endorsing activities that people like Mrs. Poulteney would strongly condemn. Charles is feeling a lack of freedom in his personal life right now, and the club is a place of freedom where he can associate with people like Sir Tom, who don't respect rules, and remember the days when he wasn't tied down. The upper class can get away with these sorts of unconventionalities because of their broader power in society.

Sir Tom asks what Charles is doing out of Ernestina's prison, and Charles jokes that he's on parole. Sir Tom says Nathaniel, the bishop's son, is jealous of Charles, and Charles knows it's because of Ernestina's money. He usually would have moved on, but tonight he sits down with them. Sir Tom asks after Sir Robert and offers him some hounds descended from a mischievous dog he had at Cambridge. They spend two hours joking and drinking. While Sir Tom and Nathaniel pretend to be drunker than they are, Charles tries to seem sober when he's actually very drunk. When they head out to take a drive, Charles feels embarrassed, sensing Mr. Freeman's judgment.

Ironically, Charles is only beginning to realize how much his marriage to Ernestina will, in fact, feel like a prison. Associating with Sir Tom and Nathaniel is Charles's rebellion against that prison of the Freemans' conventional bourgeois attitude. Even the fact that Charles is thinking about how Mr. Freeman would judge his drunkenness shows that Charles is losing his free will to the pressure to please his fiancée's father.

Quite tipsy, Charles is helped into a cab with Sir Tom and Nathaniel. He sees them wink, but doesn't ask why. He's glad that nothing seems important, and he almost tells them about Sir Robert's marriage, but he's still a gentleman. He asks where they're going, and Sir Tom says they're going where lucky men go for a good time. Charles finally comes to understand that they're going to a brothel. He says this is a good idea, but he thinks he should get out of the carriage. Suddenly he sees Sarah's face, and he realizes that he needs to sleep with a woman. He looks at Sir Tom and Nathaniel and they all wink at each other.

Clearly, Charles isn't making great decisions tonight, but he's rebelling against the society around him in the most convenient way presented to him. He's heading for the underside of Victorian society, which is the flip side of the sexual repression that Fowles listed earlier. He hopes that sex will help him get Sarah out of his system so that he can feel what he's supposed to towards Ernestina. His ability to pursue this solution is due entirely to his male privilege.

The carriage heads for the part of Victorian London that everyone seems to forget existed. This area is filled with casinos, cafes, and brothels. They pass famous oyster and potato restaurants, as well as many prostitutes dressed in all sorts of costumes. Their customers, on the other hand, all look the same. Charles enjoys the scene, particularly because it seems so far removed from the Freemans.

This vision of London belies the popular narrative of a repressed Victorian culture focused on morals and religion. Tight-laced bourgeois morality is nowhere to be found in this landscape of pleasure and sin, and Charles finds freedom in it.

Charles and his companions sit with a number of other men in the luscious salon in an alley near the Haymarket. At one end of the room is a stage decorated with nymphs and satyrs making love. A girl is serving champagne, and an older woman assesses the worth of her customers. The things that happen in this house are probably very similar to things that happened in ancient history and in the twentieth century. The narrator recently found a book detailing an eighteenth-century brothel.

This is a very high-end brothel, and its existence proves that the upper class does not always adhere to Victorian practices of sexual repression. Then again, perhaps it is repression that pushes men here, if they can't find satisfaction in their socially sanctioned relationships.

The author of this old book writes of his characters entering a brothel. A number of beautiful women strip naked and climb onto a table. A man named Camillo is drawn by a woman's genitals, which she artfully displays. The women place full glasses of wine on their pubic bones and the men drink them. They go through a number of tricks to raise the men's lust, and Camillo is initiated into the group with a dirty ritual. He starts to feel disgusted with the women, but the other men insist that they continue. Finally the men want to be allowed to have sex with the women, but the women refuse to ever let that happen. Their refusal makes Camillo lustful again.

Fowles uses prostitution to show that history isn't a linear narrative of change—this practice connects eras. He essentially inserts a selection of eighteenth-century pornography into this novel, making these pages the product of three centuries: the text was written in the eighteenth, Fowles uses it to describe what's happening in the nineteenth century of the story, and the fact that he can include it in this novel and still get published is the result of the twentieth century.

This is more or less what happens at the brothel where Charles is, but the girls do indeed have sex with their customers. Charles enjoys the show at first, but as the alcohol wears off, he begins to detect despair in the girls' faces and to loathe the performance. However, he still feels aroused. He leaves the room, gets his things, and goes into the street. He takes a cab and heads for home. Nonetheless, he still feels like he has failed in some way. When he thinks of Ernestina, it's as though he's pulled back into prison. The streets are crowded, and Charles watches the prostitutes as the cab passes them. He feels the need for some release or punishment.

The prostitutes put on another story in this book of stories—theirs is one of sexual enjoyment and allure, but Charles can tell that it is false. Again, Fowles likens Charles's impending marriage to Ernestina to a loss of freedom, an imprisonment from which his debauchery has temporarily relieved him. Charles seeks sexual release, but that same release ironically doubles as a punishment for his own wrongdoing. He's essentially feeling self-destructive, much like Sarah often has.

On a quieter street, the cab passes a girl who seems less bold than the other prostitutes. Something about her appearance makes Charles stare, and finally he knocks for the cab to stop. The prostitute appears at the door. Charles realizes that she doesn't actually look like Sarah, but there's something vaguely similar in her face. He instructs her to tell the driver where to go, and then she gets into the cab next to Charles.

Charles agreed to go to the brothel because he thought it would cure him of his attraction to Sarah, but now he's seeking out a sexual stand-in for her. It's significant that both of these women are regarded by society as "fallen" for their real or perceived extramarital sexual experience.

They're silent until the prostitute asks whether Charles wants her for the whole night, and he says he does. Later she remarks on the weather, and in response to his question, says she's been working for almost two years. Charles begins to worry that she might have a disease. He feels foolish for picking up someone so common, but he wants this sort of danger. He asks if he should pay her now, and she says she charges a pound for a normal night. He gives it to her. She assures him that she doesn't have any diseases.

Far from being overwhelmed by his desire for this woman, Charles begins to think more rationally, with rather unfortunate timing. Prostitutes are often seen as nothing more than sexual objects, but Fowles makes it clear from this initial interaction that this woman is a real person with a story and a past. Charles continues to seek self-destruction in the form of a disease, which would also ruin his marriage.

CHAPTER 40

When the cab stops, the prostitute runs up to a house and goes inside. Charles pays the driver, an old man who seems unable to look at him now. Charles feels just as humiliated as the driver wants him to be, and momentarily considers leaving, but is too stubborn to do so. The girl leads Charles up two flights of stairs and lets him into a room. It's shabby, but clean. Its plainness does not suggest debauchery. She goes to check on her daughter in another room. When she returns, she says there's a restaurant close by. Charles isn't hungry, and he no longer feels aroused. He tells her to order what she wants, and he'll have some wine. She goes and sends someone for the food.

Now that Charles has gone this far into forbidden social territory, he's determined to see the thing through, thus consciously deciding to act in a way that he knows he'll despise himself for. The prostitute does not fit the stereotype of a prostitute, nor is she portrayed in the judgmental way that a Victorian novel would portray a prostitute. The fact that she has a daughter humanizes her further and suggests the hardships that come along with her occupation.

When the prostitute returns, Charles sits by the fire while she tends to it. Her delicate hands and her hair make him desire her again. Eventually she looks at him, and he feels a momentary peace. He feels strange without convention to guide him through their silence. Finally he asks about the child's father and learns that he's a soldier in India. He asks whether the man refused to marry her, which makes her smile. He gave her financial help for the birth, which seems good enough to her. If she could find work during the day, she couldn't pay for someone to take care of her daughter. This is her way of life now, and she's resigned to it.

Charles is entirely outside of society's guidance now, and it allows this interaction to happen—one which could never happen in a societally sanctioned environment. Charles often forgets that lower-class people, like Sam, are complete people, but now he finds himself asking for the life story of a prostitute. Despite their incredibly different circumstances, Charles and the woman manage to connect in a meaningful way.

A boy brings the food up. The prostitute gives Charles a glass of bad wine, and she eats her dinner. He can't imagine they'll ever have sex. When she finishes, she changes into a dressing gown, with nothing underneath. Charles gets up, but she tells him to finish his wine. She kneels before the fire and her robe falls open. She asks if she should sit on his knees, and he assents. She curls up against him and says he's handsome. She puts his hand on her breast, and they kiss. She tastes a little like onions.

This interaction has become more like a normal visit than a transaction of sex. The prostitute approaches sexuality with a rather more modern, casual attitude than any other character can do; she has accepted her lowly status in society, and though she'll never be respected, her work provides her with a necessary livelihood. She doesn't have much to lose anymore, unlike the other women.

Charles is suddenly nauseous, but he's also aroused. He continues to touch the prostitute, who sits passively. When he feels sick again, she senses it and asks if she's too heavy. She goes to the bed, takes off her robe, and gets under the blanket. Charles knows he's drunk too much. She reaches for him, and he undresses, only keeping his shirt on. Another wave of nausea comes, and he holds onto the mantelpiece. Finally he goes to the bed and looks at her, thinking only of how sick he feels. He asks the girl her name, and she says it's Sarah. Charles vomits into her pillow.

Charles has a physical reaction to his current situation, both his personal turmoil and witnessing how tragic the prostitute's life is. Charles has been using her as a stand-in for Sarah, so the fact that her name is actually Sarah is a particular shock that makes the fantasy seem too real. Furthermore, Sarah has implied that she would probably become a prostitute if she went to London, so this woman seems almost like an omen of Sarah's future.

CHAPTER 41

It's noon, and Sam is waiting impatiently in the kitchen. The cook says that Charles isn't himself. She's irritated with Sam, who keeps hinting at bad news but refuses to say what it is. Sam is irritated because Charles forgot to dismiss him the night before, so he waited up until Charles got home after midnight and spoke to him angrily. Charles threw his clothes at Sam and went upstairs. Sam tells the cook that Charles was drunk. He again suggests that many unimaginable things have happened. The bell finally rings, and Sam heads up to Charles.

In spite of his sympathy for a lower-class woman in the previous chapter, Charles again displays his disregard for the welfare of his servant. Sam might not know exactly where Charles was the night before, but he can tell that Charles is unraveling—first there was his meeting with Sarah in the barn, and now his strange attitude. Sam also knows that Charles acting erratically can only be bad for Sam himself.

Charles has a hangover, but he remembers everything. After he vomited, the prostitute got him into a chair, where he threw up again, apologizing at the same time. She was very understanding. Eventually he said he needed to go home, and she went to get him a cab. He felt relieved that he hadn't slept with her, and he smiled.

Strangely, the prostitute becomes almost a mother-figure here, taking care of Charles in his illness. Charles seems to feel some sort of moral victory in not having slept with her, which suggests that his illness was also a way to avoid doing so.

Then the little girl began crying loudly. Charles looked out the window, but the prostitute must have gone far to find a cab. Someone shouted through the wall, so Charles went into the other room, where there was a small bed in the corner. He told the child to hush, but his voice only frightened her. Finally he patted her head, and she grabbed his fingers. She continued to scream, so he dangled his watch over her. She quieted and grabbed it. When the watch got lost in the sheets, the child began to cry again, so Charles picked her up and sat down, dangling the watch in front of her. She became happy.

This is one of the most tender moments of the book, as Charles comforts a child born into a life that can only be hard, a life that he himself has just taken advantage of. The child's complete innocence contrasts with the lewdness of what goes on in the other room. The fact that she plays with Charles's watch seems to reference Fowles's own way of toying with the linearity of time and history in the novel. This scene also anticipates the later one with Lalage.

Charles thought how strange it was that this was how his wild night ended. He smiled, regaining his faith in himself. Earlier, with Sir Tom, he had felt like he was living in the present. Now, he saw that time isn't like a road, as people think, with everything visible; but instead a room, with the present too close to perceive. His surroundings and the baby all felt friendly, keeping away the nightmare of empty space. He felt that he could face the emptiness of his future, because he would always be able to find moments of peace like this.

As the child plays with his watch, Charles is freed from his sense of linear time marching on to some inevitable, grim future. It's impossible to understand the moment that one is in until later, and it's impossible to see the future. Charles's reflections on time also reflect on the project of the novel to use the present to understand the past and the past to understand the present.

The prostitute returned and was frightened, then relieved, to find Charles with her daughter. He gave her the child and left five pounds on the table while she put her daughter back to bed. She ran out to him in the cab, looking confused, then thanked him with tears in her eyes. He said she was brave and kind, then left.

Charles ends up respecting the prostitute more than he respects many people, even though his culture makes a show of despising women who sell their bodies. What could have been routine debauchery ends up leaving a positive mark on both of them.

CHAPTER 42

Charles felt physically and mentally sick on the way home, but he woke up feeling better. He apologizes to Sam for being short with him the night before, and asks for some tea. Charles thinks about his life and concludes that things could change in the two years Mr. Freeman gave him to consider his future—his uncle could die. He remembers that he'll soon be allowed sexual pleasure sanctioned by marriage, and children will make everything better.

Charles is grasping at straws for his happiness, trying to find the positives in an overall bad situation. Though this is often a good approach, it isn't necessarily so wise when his potential unhappiness will affect his entire life as well as affecting Ernestina's happiness. His reasons for marrying don't include her.

Sam returns with two letters, one from Exeter and one from Lyme. He opens a letter from Grogan. When Charles returned after meeting Sarah, he sent Grogan a letter in which he pretended to still be in complete agreement about the best course of action to take. He asked Grogan to tell him what happened when he met Sarah, and admitted that he hadn't yet come clean to Ernestina, but that he would do so. Grogan now replies that Sarah never turned up when he went to meet her. He learned the next morning that someone ordered her box sent to Exeter, and he thinks that she has left Lyme. However, he's worried that she might follow Charles to London. He includes the address of someone who can help Charles if this happens. He again urges Charles to tell Ernestina everything. Charles is relieved that his secret is safe.

Charles is falling further out of the social contract that society embodies—he seems to feel less and less guilty about deceiving his friends, and he's becoming more focused on what will allow him to preserve the façade he's built. Grogan may seem a bit of a fool to the reader who knows what Charles has really been doing, but Charles seems almost pitiful for the web of lies he's wound around himself. Grogan himself is not generally an adherent to mainstream society, so the fact that Charles now seems so far beyond Grogan's quiet unconventionality is significant.

Charles then opens the other letter, which contains only an address. He throws it into the fire and takes a cup of tea from Sam. He says they'll return to Lyme the next day. Once Sam has made arrangements, he can have the afternoon off. Sam announces that he's going to propose to Mary, or he would if he didn't have such a good job with Charles. Charles demands he speak clearly, and Sam says he wouldn't be able to live with Charles anymore. Charles objects to Sam's desertion, and says that once he's married, Sam and Mary can both live with them.

This letter is clearly from Sarah. The fact that she's sent Charles her address means that she hasn't accepted their goodbye as absolutely final. Charles, however, doesn't hesitate to destroy it, suggesting that he might be able to control any urge to see her again. Unlike Charles, Sam is free to marry the woman whom he really loves. Only when faced with losing him does Charles think of how much he needs Sam.

Sam says he wants to start a shop. Charles asks whether he has the money, and Sam says he's saved some. To Charles's astonishment, he says he wants to have a draper's and haberdasher's shop, but he and Mary still need to save a lot more money. Charles drinks his tea and eventually asks how much. The shop Sam wants would be 250 pounds, and he only has thirty, which it's taken him three years to save. This is a third of his wages. Charles makes the mistake of giving Sam his true opinion, largely because he feels superior to him. He tells Sam he'll be miserable if he tries to climb the class hierarchy like this, and he doesn't want to lose him. They should continue in their currently satisfying relationship.

Sam's financial difficulties really put Charles's into perspective. Charles has plenty of money to live comfortably and no ambition to do much of anything with his life. Sam, on the other hand, has plenty of ambition but no money to make it reality, yet Charles is the one acting out because he feels so trapped. Charles again acts condescendingly towards Sam, assuming that he knows more about the class system, though people in oppressed positions inevitably know the most about the workings of the oppressive system.

Sam is terribly disappointed. Charles assures him that he'll pay him more if he marries Mary, but Sam isn't cheered. Charles realizes that Sam knows something of his wealth, and probably wants Charles to give him the money for the shop. He finally tells Sam that Sir Robert is going to be married. Sam pretends to be surprised. Charles says he doesn't have much money to spare, as a result, but Sam must keep this a secret. Sam says he knows how to do that, and Charles looks at him sharply. Sam's despair has largely come from believing that Charles doesn't have a secret that he could use for blackmail, so Charles's next words are a mistake. He says he might be able to offer the money once he's married, and Sam realizes there is a secret. Charles says he'll ask Mr. Freeman's advice for Sam. When Sam leaves, Charles worries that Sam is becoming deceitful. He begins to think he can afford the gift, after all.

Charles comes out of this situation looking quite the fool. He's actually hindered most by his adherence to convention in his relationship with Sam: He believes that Sam doesn't know that he might be losing his inheritance because he hasn't personally told Sam, rather than realizing that Sam hears things too. He also thinks that the wisest course of action is to subtly pay Sam off to not reveal that he saw Charles and Sarah together at the barn, but the very fact that he thinks this way is what makes Sam realize that there's really something going on between them. It's ironic that Charles is worried about Sam's deceitfulness, when he himself is one of the most deceitful characters.


Downstairs, Sam reads Charles's telegraph to Ernestina, announcing his return to Lyme. Earlier that morning, Sam used steam to open the letter that contained the address. It's becoming clear that he isn't entirely honest, but impending marriage makes people more concerned with their ability to provide for their partner. It makes it easier to be dishonest. Sam needs Charles to marry Ernestina so that he'll have enough money to give Sam. If Charles gets too involved with Sarah, it might ruin Sam's prospects.

Sam's motivations in interfering with Charles's life are entirely selfish; he doesn't care about Charles's relationship with Sarah for any moral reasons. This makes it rather ironic that Sam will be the one whose actions impart moral consequences on Charles, and it adds to the theme that unlike Victorian novels, this novel is not trying to make a moral statement on its characters actions.


CHAPTER 43

After his night with the prostitute, Charles has decided that he'll go through with his marriage to Ernestina, though he never really doubted he would. The prostitute Sarah has stood in for Sarah Woodruff, and so ended his relationship with her. Even so, Charles wishes her letter had shown some clearer emotions. But sending her address is certainly a rebellion. Clearly he must ignore it. However, his night with the prostitute has reminded him of some of Sarah's more remarkable qualities. As he travels towards Lyme, Charles thinks that sending Sarah to an asylum would have been a mistake. She comes to him in images, though he tells himself he's simply concerned for her welfare.

Charles had such a viscerally negative reaction to his own defiance of conventional morality that it helped him decide to return to the straight and narrow Victorian path of marriage. Besides, he thinks he's had symbolic closure, even though he acknowledges that the prostitute Sarah only made him think about how amazing Sarah Woodruff is. It's pretty clear that Charles is lying to himself about being over Sarah, as he continues to think about her and wonder what her attitude is towards him.

When the train gets to Exeter, Sam asks whether they're staying the night there, and Charles says they'll continue on. Sam was sure they were going to stay, but when Charles saw his face he decided they must go on. As they're leaving the city, Charles feels that this one decision has fixed his future. He's done the right thing, but it seems to show a despicable willingness to accept fate. He knows he'll eventually go into commerce to make Ernestina happy. It's drizzling, and Charles would usually let Sam sit inside the carriage with him, but he feels like he needs to relish the last of his solitude. He thinks of Sarah as a symbol of all of his lost freedoms. He knows he's just a **fossil** caught in the drift of history. Finally he falls asleep.

Sam actually unconsciously influences the course of Charles's life here, although it could be said that Charles's own fear of judgment is what forces him to make the decision he does. This decision spells the end of Charles's sense of his own free will, and he once again thinks of himself in terms of evolution—no longer one of the fittest, but a fossil that will have no impact on the world. However, the narrator will soon reveal that none of this actually happens. The rest of the novel really does hinge on this one decision of whether to stop in Exeter.

CHAPTER 44

When Charles and Sam arrive in Lyme, Charles goes to Aunt Tranter's house. Everyone is thrilled to see him, and he finds Ernestina in the back drawing room. She gives him a reproachful look, and he apologizes for not getting her flowers, but he was in such a hurry to get there. She doesn't let him see her embroidery, and he jokes that he has a rival. He kisses her hand. She says she hasn't slept since he left, but he teases that insomnia makes her look beautiful. He kisses her mouth, and she lets him see that she's embroidering a pouch for Charles's watch. The first line of a rhyme is already on it, and Ernestina makes him guess what the second will be. They tease each other. Finally Charles asks if they can walk together the next morning, and Ernestina finally reveals that her rhyme implores him to remember their love every time he winds his watch.

This scene shows Charles trying to make amends for his wrongs without acknowledging them. His own sense of guilt shows itself when he teases Ernestina about embroidering for someone other than him. Before he left, he resisted her desire for him to kiss her mouth, so now he does it as a kind of proof to himself that he's over Sarah. The fact that Ernestina is making a pouch for a watch acts as a subtle reminder that Charles's watch has recently been in the hands of a prostitute's daughter—the specter of Charles's unfaithfulness will never leave.

Charles gives Ernestina a small box. When she opens it she finds a **brooch**, and she kisses him, then it. He says he wishes they could get married the next day. It's easy to just follow conventions and surrender to one's fate. Charles admits he has to make a confession about Sarah, saying that "the French Lieutenant's Woman" is a better name for her than "Tragedy." He says it's stupid, but he begins to tell his story.

This brooch will come up again in the true version of the story, but in this clean and conventional Victorian ending, it acts as a symbol of marital peace and harmony. Charles finally comes clean to Ernestina, seeming to place some blame on Sarah for his own infidelity.

The story ends here. The narrator doesn't know what happens to Sarah, but Charles never sees her again. He and Ernestina have, perhaps, seven children. Sir Robert has two sons, so Charles goes into business and eventually doesn't mind it. His sons and grandsons take it on after him. No one cares about Sam and Mary; they do what people of their class do. Dr. Grogan and Aunt Tranter live into their nineties.

This is the easy "happily ever after" that many Victorian novels employ. Social conventions are reinforced and the family structure remains sacred. Fowles offers an implicit criticism of this sort of clean ending, as well as of Victorian treatment of lower-class characters. He also simultaneously expands the illusion that these characters are real and makes it clear that he's in control of their story.

However, Mrs. Poulteney dies soon after Charles returns to Lyme. When she arrives at the gates of heaven with all of her servants, she thinks she'll need to tell God that his servants should keep better watch for guests. When the butler finally appears, she tells him that she's come to live there. He says that God's angels have already sung in celebration of her death. Mrs. Poulteney tries to sweep past him into heaven, but he won't let her through. He says she's going somewhere more tropical and slams the door in her face. Everything around her disappears, and she's standing on nothing. She blames Lady Cotton and falls down to hell.

This conclusion of Mrs. Poulteney's story is conventionally Victorian in that the evil character gets her just desserts, but distinctly modern in breaking from the narrative form of the rest of the novel by veering into a comedic fantasy scene. Fowles also satirizes traditional visions of heaven and hell; he clearly doesn't believe that either one exists. Mrs. Poulteney never changes as a character—even in death, facing her greatest fear, she thinks she can do no wrong.

CHAPTER 45

Now that he has created a traditional ending, the narrator has to admit that everything in the last two chapters didn't happen quite the way it seems. Everyone writes fictional futures for themselves that often have an effect on how they actually act, and the last two chapters have been what Charles imagines will happen as he takes the train from London to Exeter. Perhaps the reader has noticed a deterioration of character and writing in the last two chapters, but this is only because Charles feels his story is ending in a disappointing way. Some hostile, indifferent power has lent its weight to Ernestina, and Charles feels he can't escape it.

Even though a reader holding a physical book can tell that they aren't at the end, the narrator's revelation here probably comes as a shock. Though the narrator has been exceptionally transparent about his work up until now, it becomes clear here that he's not necessarily reliable. This major structural break in the narrative signals that Fowles is trying less to imitate Victorian writing now, and instead using distinctly postmodern techniques of metafiction.

Charles has in fact decided to go through with his marriage. However, he's also obsessed with the letter Sarah sent. Sending only her address seems so completely her. It also makes Charles choose, and though he partly hates this, it also excites him. In existentialist terms, he's feeling "the anxiety of freedom"—understanding that being free is terrifying. When Sam asks if they're staying the night in Exeter, Charles says it's going to rain, so they'll stay. After the luggage is loaded onto a carriage, Charles says he'll walk to the Ship Inn. Sam urges him not to get caught in the rain, but Charles says he'll be fine and might go to a service at the Cathedral.

Fowles again anachronistically applies twentieth-century philosophy to Charles's nineteenth-century situation—and yet modern people do undeniably look back at history through modern terms, so perhaps this is more truthful than pretending to write about history in a vacuum. The narrative returns to that one essential decision and will now proceed from that point with Charles having chosen differently than the reader was led to believe.

Once Charles leaves, Sam asks the cab driver if he knows where Endicott's Family Hotel is, which he does. When they arrive at the Ship Inn, Sam unpacks everything in seven minutes, and then the cabby brings him to another location. Sam tips him badly and hides behind the column of a church. It's almost night. Before long, Charles appears and asks a boy for directions. Charles seems to hesitate, then finally goes into a house. Sam waits across from Endicott's Family, but Charles doesn't come out. After a while he walks away quickly.

Sam secretly looked at the address that Sarah sent Charles, and he guesses correctly that this address is the reason they're staying the night. Sam is beginning to entirely overstep the propriety of his position as Charles's servant, which suggests that Sam is already abandoning his lower-class status. Seeing this scene from a spy's point of view, rather than from Charles's, makes it seem more illicit.

CHAPTER 46

In the hotel, Charles knocks on an open door and finds Mrs. Endicott. He asks after Sarah, and Mrs. Endicott says she twisted her ankle on the stairs but won't see a doctor. She says he can go up to see her, assuming he's a relative. He says he's come on business, and lets her believe he's a lawyer. He asks her to find out if Sarah would rather he come back when she's better. Remembering Varguennes, Charles feels like it's improper to meet in private. Mrs. Endicott sends a maid up to Sarah, who sends her back bidding Charles to come up.

Charles thinks of Varguennes in this situation, and the truth is that he's playing the role of Varguennes in the story that she has told him. He's seeking Sarah in a hotel as she sought Varguennes, and he's about to sleep with her as Varguennes (supposedly) did. The narrator hasn't let the reader see Sarah's point of view in a while, so the only clue that she might not have twisted her ankle is the bandage she already had in the earlier scene in the hotel.

Charles follows the maid to Sarah's room and finds her sitting by the fire with her feet up, her legs covered with a blanket. She's wearing a shawl over a nightgown, and her hair is loose. She looks up at him once and then bows her head. He says he was just passing through, and asks whether he should get a doctor. She says a doctor wouldn't do anything different than what she's doing. He can't stop looking at her in her helplessness. She says she was very foolish to twist her ankle, and he says at least it didn't happen in the Undercliff. The shabbiness of the room seems embarrassing.

Charles intended to never see Sarah again, and yet here they are. Sarah seems more helpless and innocent than she had at perhaps any other meeting between her and Charles, and yet it will soon become clear that she actually has complete power over the situation. After all, she's already gotten Charles to return to her. He once reminded her that he would be the only one to know where she was if she got hurt in the Undercliff.

Sarah invites Charles to sit down, which he does. He asks if she's given Mrs. Tranter her address, but she says she's only given it to him. After a silence, he says he's come to discuss that. He examines her again. The firelight makes her look particularly beautiful, and it seems like her mystery is out in the open. He realizes he came because he needed to see her again. He tries to look at the nymphs above the fireplace instead, but when Sarah moves, he looks back at her. She's crying, and Charles says he shouldn't have come, but she shakes her head.

Charles tries to advance his old illusion that he wants Sarah to go to Mrs. Tranter for help rather than to him, but Sarah refuses to join him in this narrative. Charles believes that he's finally seeing the real Sarah after seeking that phantom for so long. Even though he told himself that he had gotten over his feelings for Sarah, he's beginning to realize that this isn't true.

As Sarah wipes away tears, Charles feels an extreme sexual lust. He suddenly realizes that he feels the need to see her because he wants to possess her and turn to ashes on her body. He can wait for that satisfaction, but he can't wait forever. Finally she says she thought she would never see him again. His heart pounds and his hands tremble. He closes his eyes to keep from looking into hers. The silence is awful until the fire sends some coals onto Sarah's blanket. Charles stamps them out and replaces the blanket over her legs. She puts his hand on hers, and he finally looks into her eyes.

Charles's desire to metaphorically burn on Sarah's body suggests that this whole time, he's sought her out precisely because he wanted her to destroy him, perhaps just as she destroyed her own position in society. This is also the first time that Charles has really acknowledged the degree of sexual desire he has for Sarah. Ironically, even as Charles stamps out the physical coals, they only feed the fire within him.

Sarah's eyes look grateful and worried and make it clear that she's waiting. She seems lost. It feels like they look into each other's eyes forever. Finally their fingers intertwine and Charles kisses her passionately, violently, all over her face. He touches her hair. Then he buries his head in her neck and says they mustn't do this. She hugs him to her, and he feels like he's flying. They kiss again, and her foot falls off the stool. She simultaneously turns away from him and strains towards him. He goes to the door to the bedroom and looks into it. Sarah stands and falls towards him. He catches her and her shawl falls away. He presses her against him with a hunger created by everything banned to him.

Although Sarah has orchestrated this situation, Charles is the one who actually initiates their sexual contact. This, along with the fact that he's a man and thus supposedly more sexual, will make him feel responsible for what happens next. The very fact that society wants to prevent him from having sex with Sarah makes it the one thing he wants more than anything; this is what Fowles meant when he said that the Victorians might have had better sex because they were repressed.

Sarah seems almost to have fainted. Charles carries her into the bedroom and throws her on the bed. He kisses her hand and she touches his face. He runs into the other room and tears off his clothes frantically. He locks the door to the hallway and returns to the bedroom. Her face is hidden by her hair. He falls on top her and kisses her all over while she remains passive. He lifts her nightgown and her legs part; she flinches as he enters her, and then she throws her arms around him. When he lies still, only ninety seconds have passed since he looked into the bedroom.

Even in the throes of passion, Charles is so conditioned by society that he remembers to lock the door so they won't be found together. This situation wouldn't even occur in most Victorian novels, but if it did, it certainly wouldn't be described in the graphic way that Fowles describes it, making this one of the most distinctly modern moments of the book. This climax of the book is also Charles's sexual climax, showing how intimately connected to sexuality this book is.

CHAPTER 47

Charles and Sarah lie silently. Charles feels horrified; everything he knows has been destroyed. He's vaguely aware of the judgment of Ernestina and Mr. Freeman. He stares at the ceiling and pulls Sarah closer, and she takes his hand. They hear footsteps in the street, perhaps of a police officer. Charles says he's worse than Varguennes. They can't imagine what will happen to them. Charles comforts Sarah and says he has to break his engagement, but she says he doesn't have to because it's all her fault. He says he knew what to expect and ignored it, but Sarah says he wanted it to be like that. He strokes her hair.

As someone who has, up until now, lived more or less by society's code, Charles has now acted in direct contradiction to everything that guides his world. He realizes that he's acted like Varguennes, whom he has despised ever since hearing Sarah's story. The police officer passing outside is a reminder of the social laws they've broken, and the punishment that's sure to come.

Sarah says that Charles can't marry her, but he says he must in order to preserve his self-respect. She retorts that her wickedness makes her unfit to be his wife. He would lose everything. But Charles says he doesn't love Ernestina. Sarah says that she herself isn't worthy of him. Charles starts to take her seriously and asks whether she really wants him to leave as though nothing happened. He can't believe she would demand so little, but she says she can if she loves him. Charles is moved by her sacrifice. He despises male skepticism and selfishness, but he can't help wondering if this could just be his last escapade before marriage. However, he knows he would feel horribly guilty if he deserted Sarah now.

Charles is still trying to obey social norms as much as he can, but duty could mean either following through with his engagement or marrying the woman whom he's dishonored. He expects Sarah to want him to marry her, because that's what women are supposed to want. He believes marriage would be her salvation because she's "fallen." Sarah, however, is driven by deeper desires. It's unclear what her true motivations are, but her replies seem molded to appeal to Charles.

Sarah says she only wants Charles to be happy, and now she knows he has loved her, she can stand anything. Charles feels more connected to her than he's ever felt to a woman. He kisses her and begins to feel aroused again, but he doesn't believe that women can feel sexual pleasure, and he doesn't want to take advantage of her any further. He sits up, saying he needs to think for a couple of days. She says again that she's not worthy of him.

The fact that Fowles explicitly says that Charles doesn't think women feel sexual pleasure sets the book apart from a Victorian novel, where this would be assumed factual knowledge. Now, when Charles is at the height of his trust in and connection to Sarah, he will discover that she's not to be trusted after all.

Charles goes into the other room to dress and sees a red stain on his shirt. He suddenly realizes that he has just taken Sarah's virginity. She lied about sleeping with Varguennes, and everything she did in Lyme was based in that lie. The only possible motivation is that she means to blackmail him. Charles is filled with horror as he imagines the female desire to take advantage of men and remembers the La Roncière case. He realizes Sarah is mad and evil, but he still can't understand her. She appears in the doorway, and she can tell that he knows the truth.

Charles's emotions reverse extremely quickly, and the reader is also surely astonished—this makes Sarah more mysterious than ever. In a culture where sex spells ruin for women, why would she choose to be seen as a fallen woman when it wasn't even necessary—when she's actually a virgin? And now she has made Charles into Varguennes by leading him to sleep with her. She has plotted to lose her virginity.

This time, Charles believes Sarah when she says she's not worthy of him. She admits that when she went to the inn in Weymouth, she saw Varguennes with a prostitute, and she left before he saw her. Charles asks why she lied. She walks to the window and he realizes her ankle isn't injured. She says she has deceived him, but she won't bother him anymore. She seems defiant and says he has given her the strength to continue living because she can believe that if circumstances were different, they might have married. It's true that she's always loved him, but her loneliness fooled him. She can't explain what she's done. Charles refuses to accept this.

Like Varguennes, Charles, too, has tried to replace Sarah with a prostitute, though she doesn't know it. The fact that Sarah has faked her ankle injury in order to make it necessary for Charles to come up to her room seems perhaps the most incriminating detail, because it proves such a high degree of premeditated manipulation. It's possible that Sarah is truly a mystery even to herself. What's clear is that she doesn't need Charles, but only the knowledge of her own worth that he gives her.

Sarah tells Charles to leave, but he doesn't. She sees his worry in his face and says that she's very strong, and will only die by natural causes. Charles moves to go, saying bitterly that his reward for all the risks he's taken is to learn that he's been fooled. Sarah says he could never be happy with her. He insists that he just wants to understand, but she orders him to leave. Finally, he does.

In a way, Charles becomes a proxy for the reader here, begging to understand the story that is Sarah. Besides, the reader schooled in Victorian literature will know that fallen women often kill themselves in a sort of narrative punishment, so the reader, too, might think Sarah will end in suicide.

CHAPTER 48

Charles hurries past Mrs. Endicott before she can ask him anything. It's raining, and he only wants darkness. He accidentally heads into the bad part of Exeter and down towards the river. When he comes upon a church, he goes inside. A curate is closing up, but Charles asks if he can pray, and the man asks him to lock up when he's done so that no one steals from the church. Charles is left alone. He sits halfway down the aisle and looks at the altar. Then he kneels and whispers the Lord's Prayer. He prays for God to forgive him for his selfishness, his dishonor, his lack of faith. But as he speaks he sees Sarah's face as the Virgin Mary in her sorrow. He sits up and stares at the crucifix, but Sarah's face seems to replace Christ's. He feels that his prayers aren't heard, and he begins to cry.

Though Charles went through a religious phase earlier in his life, he has since abandoned religion. In this moment of confusion and betrayal, however, Charles feels a deep need for a higher power and a higher judgment, perhaps even a cleansing of his soul. But Sarah, like some devil, seems to prevent him from reaching God. This could be read as positioning women as the descendants of Eve, temptresses who are the source of sin—and this might be the implication were this a Victorian novel. But instead of simply blocking Mary and Jesus, Sarah is becoming them, becoming an object of worship.

Most atheist and agnostic Victorians feel excluded. With people who think as they do, they can make fun of the trappings of the church, but Christ confounds them. They can't see him as a secular figure, as people do in the twentieth century, because everyone around them believes he's divine. By 1969, government welfare separates well-off people from the poor, but the Victorians feel more personally responsible for the suffering of their fellow humans, which makes it more difficult to reject Christ, who represents compassion. Charles doesn't really want to be an agnostic; his belief in science tells him he doesn't need religion. But now he's weeping because he can't communicate with God.

Fowles himself was an outspoken atheist, so he's speaking of his own intellectual and spiritual forbears here. He suggests that nineteenth-century questioners of religion had to either accept Christ as the son of God, or completely reject his existence—there was no middle ground. Fowles also positions religious belief as a product of the state of society, rather than the other way around. Charles thinks of religion and science as existing in opposition, which makes his current despair irrational.

Someone tries to enter the church, but the door is locked. Charles begins to pace the aisle, looking down at the worn gravestones in the floor. Eventually he feels calmer, and he has a mental conversation between his better and worse selves, or maybe between himself and Christ. Charles has been deceived, and he doesn't know why. He doubts Sarah's love. He thinks he must keep his vow to Ernestina, though he's already broken it in some sense. His duty is clear, yet duty can mean whatever people want it to mean. Sarah wanted him to go, but she's now lamenting his departure. Charles admits he has made many mistakes, but they were partly her fault. When the voice asks Charles why he's free of Sarah now, he has no answer.

The gravestones in the floor represent the presence of the past, and particularly the judgment of the dead, that Charles will soon reject. Up until now, Charles has believed that duty is always the most moral guide, but he's finally realizing that duty is a social construct. He has to actually grapple with moral questions now, rather than being able to know what's right simply because convention dictates it. Victorian morality is black and white, and through Charles, Fowles questions the reality of this view.

The dialogue continues. Sarah loves only one thing more than Charles, and she has given it to him, but he's not brave enough to give it back. He feels mistreated by her, but he has no right to be alive and rich. Ernestina will not be happy in a marriage based on deceit. Charles feels that his indecision will choose his future, rather than he himself. The wise voice says that Charles wanted to escape his future, but escaping must be done at every moment, not just once. He can either be safe and follow convention, or he can be free and crucified, with everyone hating him. Charles says he's weak, and his strength would do no good.

The text is unclear concerning what it is that Sarah loves more than Charles, but it seems likely that it's her independence, which is a radical thing for a Victorian woman to love more than a man. Charles wrestles again with the related idea of free will, and he begins to realize that in order to truly be free, he has to live a live outside of society, just as Sarah has chosen to do. It's impossible to be free within society's conventional confines.

Charles approaches the altar and looks at the cross. He goes right up to it, and it's dark. He sees himself crucified, but not on the cross. In the past, he's almost thought of himself as crucified on Sarah, but now she seems to be next to him. Suddenly he realizes their purpose is to uncrucify. He understands that Christianity is not meant to celebrate the crucifixion, but instead to create a world in which Christ is no longer crucified and can smile at the victory of living people. Charles sees all the trappings of the Victorian Age as keeping him from what he desires. They have deceived him, but they only make up a machine, which can have no intentions. This machine has made him seem dead while he's still alive.

Charles's thinking suggests terrible blasphemy, as he's positioning himself as Christ and Sarah, a fallen woman, as a holy object of his torture. But then Charles essentially realizes that Victorian society is telling the wrong story about Christianity—it's not meant to be dark, punishing, and moralistic, but instead to do away with those elements in the world. It's not supposed to focus on the dead, but on the living. Charles finally sees Victorian society as his true enemy, and seeing it as a machine is the first step to removing himself from it.

Since he entered the church, Charles has felt that there's a crowd behind him. He turns, but it's empty. He thinks that if there weren't an afterlife, the dead couldn't judge him. He decides to believe that they can't judge him. He's shedding something that really bothers the Victorians. The fiftieth poem of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* questions whether people actually want their lost loved ones to be near them, or whether they fear that the dead will perceive their faults and love them less. Charles now revolts against the idea that the past, more important than the future, exists in the present. It has made him live as though dead.

This crowd Charles senses seems to be the ghosts of the past, watching and judging him. Fowles suggests that the Victorians live in fear of the judgment of the dead. Tennyson's In Memoriam *is a collection of poems expounding on the mourning process, and Victorian society had elaborate mourning rituals that made death a presence that it isn't today. Charles finally approaches a proposition that winds through this entire novel: that the future, rather than just the past, exists in the present—an idea embodied in the theory of evolution.*

Christ seems to come alive with these revelations, which partly uncrucify him. Charles begins to pace again, seeing a new world. In a similar moment, Mrs. Poulteney went from thinking of going to heaven to thinking of Lady Cotton. Now, Charles thinks of Sir Robert. He knows that his uncle would blame himself if Charles married Sarah. He imagines Sarah triumphing over his uncle's wife. He imagines traveling Europe with Sarah. This is a bad time to compare Charles to St. Paul on the road to Damascus, but his face looks radiant, and his vision of Sarah symbolizes awful but necessary freedom. Irrationally, Charles kneels and prays, then leaves the church.

Although Charles's ideas may seem blasphemous to a Victorian Christian, they allow Charles to feel religious faith again, with Christ given a new role in his mind. But religious feeling is often accompanied by earthly jealousy, as even the faithful are only human. Fowles hesitantly compares Charles to St. Paul because it's as though he's had a conversion experience similar to that of Paul on his way to Damascus. Charles is claiming freedom from Victorian religion through his own vision of religion.

CHAPTER 49

Charles returns the key to the curate at his house. When the man insists he wants to help Charles further, Charles realizes he's inviting him to confession, and his religion leans towards Catholicism. Charles decides his own new vision of religion isn't any more foolish than the curate's. He'll never go back to organized religion.

Anglican Victorians feel very suspicious of, and even hostile to, Catholics, so in some sense this curate is a fellow rebel. Charles may have just created his own unique vision of religion, but not everyone in this country is a conventional Anglican.

A modern man would have returned immediately to Sarah, but Charles feels he must end his other obligations first. He begins to see why Sarah has deceived him. She knew that he didn't understand how much he loved her, and she acted as she did in order to make him see clearly. Once he did, she tested him, and he failed. He admires her self-sacrifice and wishes he had refused to let her go. Modern people must always remember that the Victorians see the soul as more real than the body, so they essentially have two minds. This is clear in numerous trends of literature, politics, and science, which often swing between extremes. Much more can be learned from the edits to Mill or Hardy's autobiographies than from the published versions. The Victorians are masters of concealment and make their false public lives seem like the only truth.

Charles reasons himself out of believing that Sarah is a manipulative liar, and into believing that she's infinitely wise and perceptive, particularly when it comes to him. It's not entirely clear which of these views is correct, and perhaps the truth is somewhere in between. In fact, perhaps the point of Sarah as a character is that she's to be constantly analyzed but never completely understood. Charles is evidence of the dualistic Victorian personality that Fowles proposes here; he presents a different self in public than that which roils inside him. Sarah, however, not belonging to her time, is far more complicated.

Charles has at least two minds. Walking back to his hotel, he thinks about what he'll tell Sarah to make her confess that she needs him. Sam is standing at the door of the inn, and Charles tells him he got lost. He asks for a bath, then uses it to try to rub the blood out of his clothes. He makes them look like he carelessly tossed them over the edge of the tub, and Sam takes them.

The mistake that Charles begins to make here, and will make throughout the rest of the book, is in believing that Sarah does need him. This is a classic male mistake to make about a woman. This scene employs dramatic irony, as the reader knows that Sam already knows where Charles was.

Charles now writes a letter to Sarah. He says he feels both that he knows her intimately and that he doesn't know her at all, which is why he acted as he did that evening. He intends to break his engagement, but it's not her fault. He's been doubting its wisdom for a while, and he can't marry Ernestina because he doesn't agree with the state of society. Once he goes to Lyme and speaks to her tomorrow, he will think only of Sarah. He doesn't believe she'll try to resist him. His intentions are entirely honorable now, and he can think only of her. It takes Charles a while to write this, and he decides to wait until morning to send it.

After trying to distance himself from Sarah for the entirety of the book, Charles is finally actively pursuing her. In steering him into this position, Sarah has gained power over him, but now Charles frames his love for her in a way that assumes, in his male way, that he has the power in the situation. He fails to acknowledge that the change in his point of view on society is entirely due to Sarah, and he seems to feel that he's claiming her as his rightful property.

Charles feels like a stranger to himself, but he feels that he's done something brave and unique. Furthermore, he feels like he's traveling as he wanted to, and he imagines Sarah being happy. He's worried about Sam, but he can always fire him. The next morning, Charles tells him to take the letter to Sarah, and if there's no answer within ten minutes, he can return to the hotel. They're going to go to Lyme that day, but return that night. Sam is surprised to hear this, but Charles won't explain. Going downstairs, Sam decides he needs information. He's worried that they're only staying the day in Lyme. He examines the seal on the envelope and is disappointed to find that it's wax.

This letter is Charles's declaration of independence from the conventions of a society that has trapped him all his life. He again carelessly assumes that his life is of far more value than Sam's, and he fails to account for Sam's impulses of self-preservation. Sam has guessed most of the truth—he suspects that Charles is abandoning Ernestina for Sarah, and this only spells disaster for Sam himself, as he'll have to leave Charles's employ to be with Mary, and Charles won't give him the money to start a shop.

When Sam returns, he tells Charles that there was no answer to his letter. The carriage is ready for them. When Sam leaves, Charles makes a gesture of triumph. Last night he eventually added a postscript to the letter, saying that he's including a **brooch** (which he intended to give to Ernestina). If she accepts his apologies, she should keep the brooch. If she refuses, she should send it back to him.

Sam incorrectly assumes that receiving no answer to his letter will make Charles give Sarah up, so he hasn't delivered it. Ironically, receiving no answer actually confirms Charles's decision to break his engagement. The brooch, which in the first ending he gave to Ernestina, symbolizes his choice between two fates.

Sam is outside the door of Aunt Tranter's kitchen, talking to Mary, who's flabbergasted by what he's telling her. She asks what Ernestina will do, and Sam asks what they'll do, because he loves her. Mary begins to despair, but Sam says he doesn't care about their employers anymore. He'll leave Charles to be with Mary and take whatever job he can get. Mary points out that Charles won't give him the money he needs. Sam says Charles doesn't have it anyway, but he knows someone who does.

Charles's decision to claim his freedom is forcing Sam to embrace the dangers of freedom as well, by striking out for himself. In some sense, Charles is getting his just deserts: he's never cared about Sam's fate for more than a few minutes at a time, and now Sam is giving him the same treatment in return. In fact, Sam is setting out to ruin Charles in order to get the money he needs.

CHAPTER 50

When Charles arrives in Lyme, he goes to his room and paces, preparing to talk to Ernestina. He's terrified, but he can't turn back now that he's sent his letter to Sarah. Mary answers the door for him, and Ernestina appears behind her. Charles follows her into the sitting room, wishing he were dead while Ernestina is cheerful. She quickly realizes that something is wrong, and he can't look at her at first. He asks her to sit down so he can say what he has to say. Confused, she sits. She has a letter from Mr. Freeman, and Charles says that he didn't tell her father the truth, which is that he's not worthy of her. She blanches, unable to believe he's serious. She protests that his telegram to her was entirely normal, but he says he sent it before he made this decision.

This scene is initially based on falsehoods. Charles believes he's made an irrevocable decision by sending the letter to Sarah, but he doesn't know that she hasn't actually received it. Furthermore, Charles means to make a new beginning outside the confines of society by breaking off this engagement, but he goes about it dishonestly, which dulls the power of the act. He tries to preserve some semblance of honor by saying that she's too good for him, rather than admitting that he's in love with someone else. In doing so, he actually dishonors them all further.

Ernestina begins to accept Charles's words. Charles fears that she'll faint or become hysterical, but she seems only to shiver. She demands that he explain himself. Charles says he has always known Ernestina would make a wonderful wife, but his attraction to her has always been somewhat due to her money. He's always doubted his own abilities, and he felt that he could regain his self-respect by marrying her. Ernestina can't believe her ears. She's angry that he can say he never loved her. He insists that he didn't plot anything, he only deceived himself.

The reasons Charles gives Ernestina here are mostly true, but he's only realized them as a result of falling in love with Sarah, and they aren't the main reason that he's breaking the engagement, so he's still being dishonest. These are actually rather conventional reasons for wanting to marry someone at this time, even if they aren't the reasons that Ernestina wanted him to have.

Ernestina asks why Charles has suddenly come to this conclusion, and he replies that he was disappointed that Mr. Freeman didn't break off their engagement. He mentions that Mr. Freeman wanted him to join the business, which Ernestina takes to mean that Charles is ashamed of marrying into the middle class. Charles denies this, saying that he realized how bad he would be at business. He insists that he couldn't bear to marry her if he couldn't give her the love she deserves. He believes that she has already doubted his love, but refused to acknowledge her doubt.

Ernestina has always been worried that her bourgeois background influences Charles's view of her, and so Charles's actions now seem like confirmation of this. Charles isn't exactly ashamed to marry her for this reason, but he doesn't admit that he would be ashamed to work in the line of business her father does. It seems likely that Ernestina has, in fact, already doubted Charles's love, as she's been jealous throughout the whole book.

Ernestina covers her ears, then says she realizes she has many faults, but she thought she would improve with his help. In fact, she had her pick of men, but she chose him because she thought he could help make her better. She says he thinks badly of himself, and she wanted to make him see his own value. Charles replies that her words mean a lot, but they can't change anything. She pleads with him to reconsider, and he feels awful for hurting her. She asks him to just tell her how to act so that she can please him. She insists that her feelings are deeper than she usually lets on. But finally she realizes that something must have happened since Charles sent her the telegram.

Victorian women are trained to believe that they're to blame for any collapse of the conventional family structure, and so Ernestina blames herself for what is really mostly Charles's fault, or the fault of society. Her desire to be improved by him and help raise him up is also a conventional relationship between husband and wife in this society. Thus, she's essentially trying to fight back with the one weapon whose power Charles has specifically denounced—convention.

Ernestina begins to weep but continues to look straight at Charles. She falls to her knees, and he feels disgusted by his way of twisting the truth. He decides to be more honest. Ernestina gets to her feet, and Charles says there's a woman whom she doesn't know, someone he's known a long time. In London he realizes that his old feelings for her were still alive. Ernestina wants to know why he didn't say this from the start. Though he says he wanted to spare her pain, she perceives that he wanted to spare himself shame. She weeps while Charles stares at a china sheep. Finally she says she'll die of shame if she doesn't kill herself first. Charles tells her never to say that again.

Incredibly, Charles's attempt to be more honest only results in him lying even further. Maybe he thinks he's protecting Sarah with his dishonesty, or maybe he thinks he's protecting Ernestina's own feelings, but the story he tells is still more acceptable to society than the truth that he's in love with a fallen woman. In the end, he's protecting himself from the shame that Sarah has already embraced. Unlike Sarah, Ernestina can't stand shame, and threatens unwittingly to take on the death that Sarah has refused.

Ernestina asks what she's supposed to tell other people. She rips her father's letter in half. After a silence, she says coldly that there's a course of action she can take, since Charles has broken his vow. Charles agrees she has this right. She wants everyone to know how awful he is. Charles points out that everyone will find out anyway, and having to act in this way has been punishment enough. He stands and sees himself in a mirror, and it feels like he's always been false to her. He asks that she understand that he hates what he has done, but he can't deceive her anymore.

Ernestina still cares, as she always has, about society's view of her. Furthermore, she assumes that Charles cares about society's view of him, and she's threatening to take him to court over the broken contract of their engagement in order to publicly shame him. Even though Charles is trying not to care what others think of him, he hasn't been able to shed all fear of judgment just yet. As usual, Ernestina is grasping at power that society can give her.

Ernestina guesses that this unknown woman is an aristocrat. She says aristocrats like Charles are no good and think their rank gives them an excuse to do whatever they want. She tries to find out more about this woman, but Charles refuses to say anything. She says that her father will destroy his reputation. As he opens the door to leave, Ernestina gropes for words, then says his name as though she wants his comfort. She falls to the floor, but her faint doesn't seem quite real. He says he'll write to Mr. Freeman, and he rings for Mary. Charles meets her in the hall, saying he's going to get Dr. Grogan and she must not leave Ernestina. Mary goes into the room and Charles briefly watches her comfort Ernestina, but Mary's expression orders him out.

Ernestina's deep-seated insecurities about her class emerge again here, but ironically, Sarah is far below her in terms of class status. Ernestina insults aristocrats with good reason, but her own desire to be one still drives her insecurity, demonstrating the dilemma of the bourgeoisie in this period. She makes a last-ditch effort to use the stereotypical helplessness assigned to her gender to elicit Charles's sympathy, but he is beyond these sorts of tricks now. Unlike Ernestina's fiancé, Mary's fiancé cares about her more than anything.

CHAPTER 51

Dr. Grogan meets Charles on his doorstep. Charles tells him that he has broken off his engagement and Ernestina needs him. Grogan is astonished, but he gets his medical bag and they start walking. He perceives with shock that Sarah is the cause. Charles insists that Sarah is better than Grogan thinks. He says Ernestina knows there's another woman, but Grogan must not tell her who. Though Grogan asks about that morning he was supposed to meet Sarah, Charles urges him on to Ernestina. Grogan is angry, but they part ways.

Grogan has more or less trusted Charles, but now he begins to see the depth of the deception that Charles has practiced on both him and Ernestina. Grogan has also been Charles's only real friend in the novel, and his reaction begins to show just how big of an impact this decision is going to have on Charles's life. Grogan is somewhat less bound to convention than many people are, but he won't sanction Charles's actions.

Charles returns to his rooms feeling like a traitor. Sam enters, looking shocked. Charles has him bring brandy, and then Sam asks if it's true. Charles admits that it is. Sam asks what will happen to him and Mary, but Charles brushes him off. He gets out a sheet of paper, but Sam remains, getting angry. He says he has to take care of himself. He asks whether Charles will live in London, and Charles says he'll go abroad. Sam says he won't go with him, and Charles shouts at him. Sam insists he's quitting. Charles curses at him. Sam wants to punch him, but instead he says he won't go anywhere he might meet one of Charles's friends, and he leaves. Charles yells for him to come back, but Sam says he'll have to get a hotel servant.

Sam realizes that his attempt to thwart Charles has failed. He demands that Charles think about Sam's life for once, and Charles irrationally feels that this is a lot to ask—he knows that Sam is in love with Mary, but seems to think so little of Sam's ability to love that he doesn't think Sam should mind leaving Mary behind to continue in his employ. Charles is also angry, however, because Sam is taking the moral high ground, and Charles doesn't like feeling that his servant is judging his actions, with all of society to back him up.

Sam grins when he hears Charles slam the door, but he soon feels deserted and knows that he deserves it, as he's done something else bad. Charles smashes a glass in the fireplace. He doesn't like being an outcast. He doubts his decision; he almost wants to beg for Ernestina's forgiveness. But then he thinks that he'll see Sarah that night, and the vision of her helps him begin writing to Ernestina's father. Then Dr. Grogan comes to the door.

Even though Sam knows that his judgment of Charles is fair, he knows that he himself isn't innocent, either, because he stole the letter to Sarah. Charles is having trouble taking the consequences of his actions; he's beginning to understand what it feels like to be Sarah, and he doesn't really like it. Sarah is his only hope for happiness now.

CHAPTER 52

Aunt Tranter comes home to disaster. Mary greets her with distress, and Aunt Tranter runs upstairs, where she finds Dr. Grogan. He tells her what has happened. She can't believe Charles would do such a thing. Ernestina refuses to say what he told her. Aunt Tranter begins to cry, and Dr. Grogan comforts her. Aunt Tranter thinks she'll be blamed, but Dr. Grogan says he'll telegraph Ernestina's mother. He tells her to keep watch over Ernestina, but let her do as she likes. Aunt Tranter can't imagine she'll ever recover, but Grogan assures her she will. Aunt Tranter guesses there's another woman involved. Dr. Grogan neither confirms nor denies this. Aunt Tranter wants to go talk to Charles, but Grogan promises to rake him over the coals for her.

This is a scene of domestic disaster, the Victorian home torn apart. Grogan is in an awkward position here, as he knows more than Ernestina and Aunt Tranter do about the truth of the situation, and he doesn't support it, but he can't reveal it. Ernestina's refusal to speak about her interaction with Charles indicates the depth of her shame. Furthermore, Aunt Tranter's sense that Ernestina will never get over this suggests how bound up in marriage and propriety the Victorian woman's life is.

When Grogan leaves, Mrs. Tranter goes up to Ernestina's room, where Mary is sitting with her. Ernestina is asleep, looking very peaceful. Mrs. Tranter notices that Mary looks miserable, and she beckons her outside and asks what happened. Mary says that Ernestina fainted when Charles was there and when she came to she wouldn't speak. When Mary got her up to her room she became hysterical until Grogan calmed her down. She only spoke to ask where Charles was. Mrs. Tranter hugs Mary to comfort her, which isn't conventional, but the butler of heaven certainly wouldn't shut her out.

Once again, Mrs. Tranter's treatment of Mary contrasts with Charles's treatment of Sam. Though she's unconventional in just how much compassion she shows towards Mary, Fowles points out that this attitude is far better than Mrs. Poulteney's cruelty. Fowles doesn't glorify Charles's departure from society; instead he shows just how much pain it causes to the people around him, and the reader must ask whether it's worth it.

When Mary stops crying, she says that Sam has quit and they don't know what they'll do. She explains that Sam knew Charles was going to break his engagement, but they were too scared to tell Mrs. Tranter. Mrs. Tranter checks on Ernestina. She asks whether Sam and Mary love each other, and Mary confirms that they do. Mrs. Tranter promises she'll find Sam a job and Mary won't have to leave her until she marries. She kisses Mary's forehead. Mary goes downstairs and runs into Sam's arms.

Whereas Charles has driven Sam away with his self-centeredness, Mrs. Tranter earns the trust and love of Sam and Mary with her generosity, and they will simultaneously pay her back and punish Charles. In fact, Mrs. Tranter treats Mary almost as one of the family, caring nothing for the difference of status between them and valuing her love of Sam.

CHAPTER 53

Dr. Grogan tells Charles that Ernestina is sleeping. He demands that Charles explain himself, and he does. He says he deceived Grogan because he couldn't see Sarah put in an asylum. Grogan listens silently, then turns to the window. He says he wants to find some terrible punishment for Charles. Charles says he thought much before going against Grogan's advice, but Grogan says lying is unacceptable. He thinks Charles just wanted to satisfy his lust, which is also what everyone else will think. Charles asks whether Grogan would prefer he live a life of falsity, but Grogan can't forgive the hurt he's done to Ernestina. Charles asks whether it's possible to ignore self-knowledge once it's gained.

Charles continues to tell half-truths; it's honorable for him not to want Sarah to be put in an asylum, but he omits the fact that his attraction to her also influenced his decision to deceive Grogan. However, Grogan is schooled in the ways of men and sees right through him. This discussion sets out the central moral conflict that the story now focuses on: Is it better to live disingenuously for the sake of convention or hurt those around you in the name of freedom?

Grogan can't figure out how to deal with Charles's breach of convention. He's an experienced man, but he's lived in Lyme for a long time now. He likes Charles and thinks Ernestina shallow, and he, too, has been lustful in the past. He says that suffering is always evil. Charles replies that good must come out of evil. It's better for Ernestina to suffer now than marry him. Grogan says he will live with his guilt and only be forgiven in death.

Grogan can sympathize with Charles, but he still thinks he's done wrong by hurting those around him. This is the judgment of a moderate—someone who doesn't love convention but still respects society. He's also not a religious man, so he thinks that Charles's punishment will occur in his life, rather than after his death.

Grogan asks if Charles will marry Sarah. Charles is glad to hear his tone change, because he actually cares a lot about Grogan's opinion of him. He confirms that he intends to marry her, and he believes she's accepted his proposal. Grogan urges him to doubt Sarah's honesty. Charles retorts that men expect women to act like objects to be evaluated and claimed, and they're judged immoral if they refuse to do this. He points out that plenty of upper-class women are allowed to have affairs. Besides, he was the one who chose to go to Sarah's hotel.

Charles makes a pretty modern, feminist analysis (which probably wouldn't exist in an actual Victorian novel) of Sarah's situation, but he fails to see that he himself is perpetuating the exact treatment of women that he seems to be condemning. He's trying to claim Sarah as his own by marrying her even when she has said she doesn't want to marry him.

Grogan says he won't judge Charles based on law or religion, but Charles wants to be admirably rational and scientific, as Grogan himself does. People have always wanted to be more special than others, but in the end, the elect group are those who have improved the morality of the world. If they don't do that, they're only power-grabbers. Only if Charles becomes morally improved, rather than selfish, can he be forgiven. Charles says he has already realized this. Grogan makes to go, wishing him luck. They shake hands. As Grogan leaves, he says he'll return to whip Charles if he doesn't leave in an hour. Charles can only agree to this.

Charles and Grogan first came together over issues of science and evolution, and it is on this level that Grogan now tries to reason with Charles. He says that moral people are the "fittest," yet he doesn't grapple with the fact that morality is entirely based on perspective, especially if law and religion are taken out of the equation. He sets Charles the task to make the rest of his life justify this morally questionable decision he's made.

CHAPTER 54

Charles tries to find Sam before he leaves Lyme, but he can't. As his carriage draws further away, he begins to feel better. He accepts that he must prove that his decision was the right one, but he feels hopeful. He thinks of a statue in the British Museum of a pharaoh and his wife standing in an embrace, and he feels that he and Sarah are similarly carved from one stone. He plans for them to go abroad as soon as possible, and he imagines the places they'll go. They'll be exiled, but they'll be brought together by their outcast state.

Charles is finally able to look forward to a new life. He has taken a moral and philosophical stand, and now he needs everything to play out in practice the way he imagines it in theory. He's pinning all his hopes for the future on Sarah. However, he's taking a different approach to being an outcast than she has—she insisted on staying in the place of her shame, whereas he wants to escape.

In Exeter, Charles goes straight to Endicott's Family Hotel, imagining the purity of his reunion with Sarah. He knocks on Mrs. Endicott's door and says he's going to Sarah's room, but she says that Sarah has left. He doesn't understand at first, and she says Sarah took the train to London. Charles asks if she left an address, but Mrs. Endicott says Sarah didn't even speak to her. She thought maybe she was going to meet Charles. He tells her to let him know if she hears anything from Sarah. He leaves, but returns to ask if a servant came with a letter for Sarah that morning. He did not.

Charles is thwarted at the very first moment of what's supposed to be his new happiness. But Sarah has always fiercely guarded control over her own story, so it's unsurprising that the plot Charles is trying to write for her isn't working. The most ironic part of this situation is that Charles has no idea where in London Sarah is, and thus she might be lost to him forever just when he was finally going to be with her.


Charles collapses in his carriage. He wonders why Sam didn't deliver the letter. He realizes Sam must have read it and quit because his disobedience would be discovered when they returned to Exeter. Charles wants to kill him. His only hope is that Sarah might have gone to London to find him, but if she was looking for him, surely she would have gone to Lyme. And besides, she probably thought he was lost to her. That night, Charles prays that he will find Sarah.

Even now, Charles continues to think that Sam's life revolves around him, failing to realize that Sam quit to throw in his lot with Mary. Ironically, Sam didn't get what he wanted by stealing the letter, because Charles still broke up with Ernestina, and now he's ruined Charles's chance with Sarah mostly by accident. Although Charles has scorned organized religion, his desperation drives him to prayer.

CHAPTER 55

On the train the next morning, Charles sits in a first-class compartment, giving people looks to keep them from joining him. Just before the train leaves, a bearded man enters and sits down. He doesn't quite seem to be a gentleman, but perhaps a preacher who threatens damnation. Charles doesn't like him and decides not to talk to him because he seems so typical of the times. The man catches Charles looking at him and glares. Soon Charles begins to think about how he will surely find Sarah before long, and he falls asleep.

This man is the narrator, though he introduces himself as he would any other character, in the third person. It's ironic that Charles thinks he looks like a typically Victorian preacher, as the narrator actually belongs to the future and has been extremely critical of Victorian religion. The narrator's presence defies normal logic, since he's made it clear that he's writing from a century after the story is set.



When Charles has been asleep for a while, the other man begins to stare at him. He seems to know what Charles is like and to disapprove. The man seems overly confident in his judgment of others. He continues to stare for much longer than is acceptable. The reader might someday be stared at in this way, and should be wary. This stare implies a desire to know a person in some improper way. Only one profession has this look of wondering how they could use a person. It's the look of a god, though gods are not usually portrayed this way, with this immoral look. The narrator is very familiar with the face of the man in the train, and he'll stop pretending now.

The narrator makes fun of himself and of writers in general, suggesting that they take an inappropriate interest in the people around them because they want to make them into characters in their stories. Almost any narrator has some particular attitude towards the characters whose lives they're relating, and this scene brings that judgment to life. The reader doesn't only hear the subtle—or not so subtle—judgments in the narration, but actually sees that the narrator disapproves of Charles.

As the narrator stares at Charles, he wonders what he's going to do with him. He could end the story here, but Victorian fiction doesn't have open endings like this. Though it's clear what Charles wants, it's not clear what Sarah wants. If this were real life, one person's desire would win over the other. Fiction usually pretends to be reality, but in fact the writer rigs the fight between conflicting desires so that the one he wants to win will do so. Writers are judged by whom they let win, and this shows some message about the world.

The narrator again admits to his own fallibility, suggesting that the world of the novel is no more set or predictable than real life is. He acknowledges the fact that he's trying to imitate Victorian fiction, but at the same time he resists the Victorian practice of letting characters' fates at the end of a novel show the writer's attitude towards their actions. Instead, he's trying to simulate real life, which is never so straightforward.

However, since 1867 is a century gone, there's no reason to show an opinion about it, since the reader knows what's happened since then. The narrator doesn't want to fix Charles's fight. He decides that the only way he can remain neutral is to show two ways it could turn out. But whichever version he shows second will be assumed to be more real. He takes out a coin and flips it. Charles is looking at him disapprovingly. They arrive at Paddington Station and Charles speaks to a porter. When he turns, the narrator has disappeared.

By pointing out that it's pointless to have opinions about 1867, the narrator suggests that any judgments he's made about the Victorians are meant to have some bearing on the present, rather than only on the past. He portrays his own decision-making process in order to prove that both endings are equally possible and true. This decision rejects the idea of absolute truth, and thus the double ending is one of the most clearly postmodern aspects of this book.

CHAPTER 56

Three weeks pass, and Charles hasn't found Sarah, though he's hired four detectives to look for her. They've checked governess agencies and church schools, and Charles himself constantly drives through London watching for her. They also check the new female clerical agencies, which become important in the movement for women's rights. Charles begins to understand Sarah's feeling that society treats her unfairly. One day he becomes certain that she's working as a prostitute, and he drives up and down Haymarket to no avail.

The question becomes, what happens to a Victorian woman alone in the world? Clearly Sarah needs a way to make money, but the job opportunities in this time are limited for a woman. The places Charles searches offer some of the only jobs for educated women, and women who ran out of options often became prostitutes, which Sarah has suggested she might do. Fowles acknowledges that this is all really a question of female oppression, and even Charles starts to understand it.

Before long, Charles receives a letter from Mr. Freeman's lawyers telling him to go to their offices at an appointed time. Charles brings it to his lawyer, Harry Montague, whom he likes. Montague thinks they want him to make a statement confessing to his guilt, which he advises Charles to sign. At the appointed time, they meet Mr. Freeman and his lawyers. Mr. Freeman stares at Charles coldly and refuses to acknowledge him. Also present is Mr. Serjeant Murphy, who has a fearful reputation. They sit, and Charles feels intimidated by his surroundings.

It would seem that Ernestina is making good on her threat to take legal recourse for Charles's despicable actions. The fact that Charles can be punished in court under the law for his private moral decisions shows how entrenched conventional morals are in Victorian society. Charles's decision to choose freedom over convention is not working out very well so far —he's getting all of the punishment and none of the reward.

Mr. Aubrey, one of Mr. Freeman's lawyers, says that Charles's letter to Mr. Freeman is evidence of his guilt. Mr. Montague protests his language, and Serjeant Murphy asks whether he'd rather hear the language he'd use in court. Aubrey expresses his disgust that Montague has even agreed to act on behalf of someone as awful as Charles. He says that he's disgusted by Charles's letter, because it doesn't mention the worst part of what he's done—his infidelity. He reveals that they know who Charles had an affair with, and a witness. Charles blushes and silently curses Sam. Montague says that Charles isn't here to defend himself.

The letter being discussed is the one Charles wrote to explain the broken engagement to Mr. Freeman. Aubrey's censure of Charles is harsh, as he condemns not only Charles himself, but also anyone who chooses to associate with such an immoral person as he. This makes Charles seem somehow tainted or contagious. Now all the lies that Charles has told throughout the course of the book are finally blasted apart, as the Freemans know that Charles has been having an affair with Sarah.

Mr. Aubrey says that he's never had to deal with such awful behavior as Charles has exhibited, and he thinks he should be made an example of. Charles is red, and Serjeant Murphy glares at him. However, Mr. Aubrey says that Mr. Freeman wants to be merciful and not bring Charles to court, as long as he'll sign the admission of guilt. He gives it to Montague, who requires that he be allowed to speak with Charles in private.

If, from a modern viewpoint, the reader might not have thought Charles's actions so totally reprehensible, Mr. Aubrey's reaction to them demonstrates the severity of the Victorian viewpoint on them. After all, it's only by Mr. Freeman's mercy that Charles isn't literally going to court for his private moral decisions.

Charles and Montague go out to the waiting room and read the document. It says that he broke his contract with Ernestina without reason; she was entirely truthful about her wealth and social position. He had a relationship with Sarah Woodruff and his dishonorable conduct means he can no longer claim to be a gentleman. The document says Ernestina can use it however she chooses, and Charles is signing it of his own free will. Montague says the clause about being considered a gentleman could work to his advantage in court, because no gentleman would sign the document without being forced. Charles is disgusted, and asks what use Ernestina can put it to. Montague says she could put it in the newspaper, but he thinks Mr. Freeman wants to keep everything quiet.

The Freemans seem most concerned that Ernestina emerge from this ordeal with her reputation entirely intact; they don't want anyone to think that she somehow contributed to Charles's immorality or was lacking in any way as a potential wife. When Mr. Freeman invited Charles to join his business, Charles felt that he couldn't because he was a gentleman, but now Mr. Freeman has found another, even more shameful way to strip him of that title. The fact that he's being asked to legally give it up shows just how much currency it has in this society.

Montague advises that Charles sign the document as is, and they can later argue it was too harsh, if necessary. Charles agrees, but he wants to know how Ernestina is. They return to Mr. Freeman's party and sign the document. Mr. Freeman starts to threaten Charles, but Aubrey stops him. Charles goes out to the carriage while Montague talks to Aubrey. When he joins Charles he says that Ernestina is as well as can be expected, and Mr. Freeman intends to show the admission of guilt to the father of anyone Charles might try to marry. Furthermore, Ernestina convinced her father not to bring Charles to court. Charles feels that he's forever marked as despicable, but Montague says it's only fair. Charles wishes he were dead.

Mr. Freeman is making Charles's decision to choose freedom even more irrevocable than he thought it was—Charles can hardly try to court anyone now, knowing that Mr. Freeman has the power to ruin any marriage prospects. Sarah really is his only chance. Montague takes a view similar to Grogan's; he's sympathetic to Charles to a point, but in the end, he thinks he deserves what he gets for so consciously causing people pain. Charles is increasingly taking on Sarah's outcast role, though his gender and class make the consequences different.

Charles falls into a depression after this and refuses to see anyone. One day his detectives think they might have found Sarah working at a school, and Charles goes there to see the woman, but it's not her. He sends people to search Exeter, Lyme, and Charmouth, but to no avail. Eventually he begins to give up. One night he has dinner with Montague and asks his advice. Montague tells him to go abroad. Charles can't understand why Sarah has acted as she has, and Montague suggests that perhaps she wanted to ruin him. Charles struggles to believe this and thinks she might have died. But he checks the Register of Deaths and finds nothing. After a week he decides to go abroad.

Montague's advice to Charles is essentially the same that Charles gave to Sarah when he saw her living as an outcast—go somewhere where no one knows you, and you no longer have to be an outcast. Whereas Sarah embraced her outcast status, Charles cannot. Montague also echoes Grogan again in suggesting that Sarah had cruel, manipulative intentions all along. However, it's rather unfair to blame Sarah for Charles's current circumstances, since she never asked Charles to break up with Ernestina, and never knew he had done so.

CHAPTER 57

Twenty months later, Gladstone is prime minister, Mill's *Subjection of Women* is about to be published, and Girton College is about to open. Spring is just barely beginning. There's a young woman walking through Chelsea with a baby at home and another on the way, which makes her almost arrogant. She looks into the Thames. Her pure appearance proves that she's not from London, but as she turns and examines the brick houses it's clear that she likes them. She watches a cab approach and stop outside a large house. A woman gets down, and the girl seems astonished. She watches the woman enter the house.

The events that Fowles mentions gesture to the expanding of women's rights; Mill's essay was radical at the time for arguing that men and women are equal, and Girton College, Oxford, was one of the first women's colleges in England. The woman in this scene is Mary, and the fact that the narrator pretends at first that she's a stranger suggests how much her life has changed since the reader saw her last.

Sam says he can hardly believe what Mary saw, but part of him almost expected it to happen. He knows what Charles did after he quit, and he feels slightly bad. Sam and Mary are in a small but nice parlor. A young maid comes in with their baby. It screams when Sam takes it, so Mary picks it up, and they all smile. Sam goes off for a drink.

In less than two years, Sam and Mary have made great strides up the class ladder. They have not only a parlor of their own, but their own servant, when they used to be servants themselves. Moreover, they're the picture of an ideal Victorian family.

Sam has every reason to be happy, but sitting in a pub, he doesn't look so happy. Back in Lyme, he threw himself on Aunt Tranter's mercy, making it seem like Charles had promised him a loan of four hundred pounds and he was very brave to quit. At first he pretended to be loyal in not giving Sarah's name, but once Mrs. Tranter had found him a job and paid for his marriage, he gave her information. Mrs. Tranter likes helping people, so she convinced Mr. Freeman to give Sam a job in his store.

Sam thought that marrying Mary and becoming bourgeois were his ultimate goals in life, but now that he's achieved them, there's something missing, and it all has to do with how he achieved these goals. Though he judged Charles's morality, he's come to see that his own success resulted only from his own morally questionable acts and deceitfulness.

Sam learned quickly in his new job. One day Mr. Freeman walked to work, but as soon as he entered the store he went back out. The floor superintendent found him staring at a display window. He said it was just an experiment and he would have it removed. Mr. Freeman instructed him to watch as people kept stopping at that particular window. The other windows were cluttered; the Victorians didn't believe in publicity. But this window had a purple background with collars suspended on wires spelling out "Freeman's For Choice."

Fowles suggests that Sam actually has some forward-thinking commercial skills, as he creates a display that isn't typical of the Victorian Age, but of the twentieth century. In fact, just how atypical it is can be seen in the reactions of the superintendent and Mr. Freeman. The slogan is ironic, because Charles felt that the Freemans were keeping him from having any choice in what he did with his own life.

Mr. Freeman said this was the best window display all year and instructed that the slogan be used in all of their advertising. The superintendent told him that Sam had designed the window, and Mr. Freeman sent for him to give his congratulations. He immediately gave him a raise, and later a bonus. Now Sam's salary is even higher, and he's essential to the window displays of the store.

Although Sam began his rise in class through deception of others, he manages to continue it on the basis of his own skills. Now, he's becoming bourgeois through the most conventional means—letting a wealthier bourgeois man usher him into the class, rather than rebelling against the system that has oppressed him.

Sam does have a conscience, and he's not sure he deserves his happiness. He doesn't know about Faust, but he's heard of pacts with the devil and fears that he'll soon pay for what he's done. Furthermore, the only secret between him and Mary is what he did with Charles's letter. He still wants to start a shop of his own, but Mary insists that he continue at Mr. Freeman's store. They're becoming wealthier, and Mary has recently interviewed eleven girls to find a maid. She thinks mistresses should be hard to please, and she wanted someone Sam would never be attracted to. When he returns home that night, he kisses Mary and they look at the **brooch** she wears as a symbol of their good luck.

Faust is a character in German literature who sells his soul to the devil for personal gain, and the moral implications of what Sam has done are similar. The fact that he hasn't told Mary about stealing Charles's letter to Sarah shows just how guilty he feels about it. The brooch Mary wears is the one that Sarah was supposed to keep if she agreed to marry Charles, so it acts now as a symbol of the deceit and pain on which Sam and Mary's happiness is based. In order to feel she has power, Mary tries to imitate the mistresses who have had power over her.

CHAPTER 58

Charles has been traveling during these twenty months. He's gone all over Europe and even reached the Middle East, but he sees the sights as only something to keep out the emptiness of his life. If he stops traveling he becomes melancholic. He's usually alone, and completely avoids Englishmen. He's lost his interest in paleontology, given away his **fossil** collection, and rented out his house. He keeps a journal in which he records only events.

Charles has followed Sarah into the life of an outcast, but he hasn't followed her example all the way through. Whereas Sarah felt that she had to stay in the place of her shame, Charles has escaped from the society that censured him, which seems somehow more cowardly. His freedom is bitter. His abandonment of paleontology gestures to his decision not to live according to the judgment of the past, but it also confirms his lack of any passion.

Charles turns to poetry for expression of emotions. He especially likes Tennyson, comparing him to Darwin, and his favorite poem is *Maud*, though everyone else hates it. He starts to write bad poetry. One of his poems talks about his mindless travels as a way of fleeing his shame. He memorizes a poem the narrator likes much better, Matthew Arnold's "To Marguerite," which laments the human condition of isolation. Surprisingly, Charles never considers suicide. His vision of freedom had depended on an exile shared with Sarah, and now he feels that he's only in a different kind of prison than before. But he's comforted by the fact that he's proven his uniqueness and become an outcast. He doesn't really regret not marrying Ernestina.

Charles's turn from science to poetry indicates a turn from a more concrete understanding of the world to uncertainty and emotion. The poem Maud *focuses on forbidden love and loss, and the ending is unsatisfying, so there are clear parallels with Charles's own story. Charles's poetry admits that he's fleeing his shame, rather than facing it, like Sarah did. He's extremely alone now, having rejected his society and lost the person for whom he rejected it. However, he does seem to find some power in being an outcast, just as Sarah did.*

Charles writes only to Montague, who puts advertisements in the London papers to try to find Sarah, but to no avail. Sir Robert was initially upset when Charles broke off his engagement, but he soon decided Charles would find someone better. Charles visited him once before leaving. He didn't like Sir Robert's fiancée, and he pretended to get sick so he didn't have to go to the wedding. When they had a son, Charles decided never to return to Winsyatt. Charles sleeps with women abroad, but he feels no affection. Sometimes he imagines Sarah is with him, but he tries to stop himself; he's no longer sure what's real about her and what he's made up. It's possible that if he found her, he would see in her only his own foolishness. He begins to think it's best that he can't find her.

Although Charles has ostensibly rejected his society and his old way of life, he's clearly still invested in the same concerns of wealth and status that caused him distress earlier in the novel—he doesn't really manage to forgive Sir Robert for disinheriting him, even though Robert was only fulfilling his desire, and Charles has done much worse things to fulfill his own desire. He partly regrets his decision to choose Sarah above everything else; he doubts that she was worth it, even if he had been able to marry her. He seems to lack moral conviction for his actions.

Finally Charles gets so bored that he decides to make a change. He's traveled with two Americans whose company he really enjoyed; they seem less hypocritical than the British. One evening they talked about whether England or America was superior, and Charles agreed with the Americans' criticisms of England. He wonders if America might one day grow more powerful than England. He doesn't want to emigrate there like many lower-class Europeans are doing, but he imagines he can find a simpler and more honest society in the United States. He returns to London and asks for Montague's opinion. Montague doesn't think America can be very civilized, but he suggests that Sarah might be there. Charles says he hasn't though of her much lately, and Montague urges him to find someone new in America. Charles has already booked his passage.

As an outcast from British society, Charles begins to think that he might still be able to find a place in American society. As a much newer country, America isn't quite so entrenched in the past as England is, and it's known for its idealization of freedom, which undoubtedly resonates with Charles. Montague's criticism of America as uncivilized actually argues in favor of Charles going there, as Charles has essentially rebelled against everything that the British like to think is civilized about themselves. It seems that he might be able to start a new life and shed his own burdened past.

CHAPTER 59

Charles is seasick on his trip across the Atlantic, and he begins to regret going. But he's pleasantly surprised when he gets to Boston, and before long he's welcomed into society. Some people are inclined to be hostile to an Englishman because of their stereotype of the British, but Charles assures them that he approves of American independence and culture. He enjoys the new plants and animals he sees as well as the people. They don't always understand his humor, but he likes their honesty and charm. He's attracted to the boldness of American women, but he's afraid to get attached to any of them because of the document he signed for Mr. Freeman.

Charles continues to distance himself from British society, and he finds that he no longer has to be an outcast. He's clearly happier being accepted into the fold of society, and he feels that American society has made an improvement on the duplicities of British society. However, even here Charles continues to feel the consequences of his decision to renounce the comforts of British society—he can't seek romantic happiness because Mr. Freeman is sure to ruin any marriage prospects.

Charles sees Sarah's directness in the Americans he meets, and he begins to think well of her again. He wonders whether she could be here, and he often sees women who look like her. Once he's sure she's walking ahead of him, and is disturbed to find that it's not her. After that, he advertises for her in newspapers wherever he goes. He goes south and visits the friends he met in France, then continues on through the major cities. In the South, he sees the effects of the Civil War, and he changes to fit in with the different cultures he finds there.

Even though Charles has found a place where he can live as normal, he's still searching almost obsessively for the one for whom he became an outcast. He continues to practice the "cryptic coloration" that Fowles mentioned earlier, as he modifies his own behavior to make him acceptable in the various situations he finds himself in throughout the United States.

Charles finds much both good and bad in the United States. He spends a month in Charleston and finds he's beginning to speak like an American. Though he thinks slavery is wrong, he also understands the Southerners' anger. He eventually decides he likes Boston best, but he continues traveling south. America gives him a sense of faith in freedom. Though the South seems prone to anarchy in their freedom, Charles thinks this is better than the rigidness of England. One evening he stands on a beach facing Europe and writes a poem predicting that America will one day create a better society than England.

For Charles, America grows increasingly to represent a freedom that England doesn't have, as well as proof that freedom can work as a defining cultural ideal. In England, the defining cultural ideal is more like conformity. The American Civil War is only a few years in the past, and it acts as a symbol of the triumph and enduring power of freedom. By becoming so intimate with another culture, Charles is able to gain a better perspective on his own.

In the three months since Mary saw Sarah, she's given birth to a son. One peaceful evening, Sam is playing with his children when he realizes he must do something for his conscience. Two days later, Charles receives a telegram in New Orleans. Montague writes that he has found Sarah in London. Tears come to his eyes, and after a few minutes he asks the hotel desk when the next ship to Europe sails.

Sam essentially has a perfect Victorian family, but he's always aware that he's gotten it through duplicity, and he thinks he can still undo the damage that he's done. Charles is clearly still deeply enough in love with Sarah that he will literally cross an ocean for her, though he can't know what to expect.

CHAPTER 60

It's a beautiful day at the end of May when Charles arrives in Chelsea. Montague had received a name and address in the mail, and Charles told him not to give Sarah any reason to flee. A clerk investigated and found that the woman living there looked like Sarah and went by Mrs. Roughwood, a name similar enough to Woodruff that it had to be her. She was clearly only pretending to be married. Montague suspected that she had sent the address herself, but Charles didn't think so. He suspects that Sarah must be a governess at the fine house where she lives. He doesn't realize that Montague is withholding something. Charles couldn't figure out how he felt, but he knew he must speak to her, though Montague warned him to be careful.

The fact that Charles thinks Sarah might try to flee from him, and wants to keep her from doing so, doesn't indicate that he's necessarily going into this interaction with her with her freedom foremost in his mind. He assumes that she's trying to live a conventional lifestyle for her station, working as a governess and pretending to be a widow. These assumptions prove that Charles still doesn't really know Sarah as well as he thinks he does—when has she ever taken the conventional route?

Charles approaches Sarah's house. He doesn't know much about this area. The Thames is disgusting and smelly, so it's not so wonderful to live right next to it, but Charles can tell that the houses are good. He feels embarrassed that he's essentially about to call on a servant, but he goes up the path to the house and knocks. Eventually a maid opens the door and he asks for Mrs. Roughwood. The maid isn't wearing the usual cap of her kind, and she doesn't address him as "sir." He realizes she's not a maid after all. He gives him her card. A man appears at the end of the hall, and the girl tells him why Charles is there. The man seems slightly haughty, but he tells her to take Charles up to Sarah.

Even now, Charles clearly clings to many of the cultural niceties that confine Victorian England—he's about to see the woman he's been seeking for years, and he still manages to worry that calling on her will lower him in the eyes of whoever else is in the house. Furthermore, he expects to find a conventional Victorian household here, and so he tries to fit the people he meets into his idea of what that looks like, even though they don't fit. Even as Charles goes to meet the one for whom he denounced convention, his denunciation is questioned.

Charles follows the girl up the stairs, noting the walls crowded with painting of a modern style, many signed with the name of an artist who had caused an uproar about twenty years before. Charles assumes the man he saw must collect art. He asks whether Mrs. Roughwood is working as a governess there, and the girl, amused, says she is not. She goes into a room. Charles sees two men standing in front of a painting on an easel. One of them glances at him, and Charles is stunned to find that he recognizes him from a lecture he once gave. He forms hypotheses about who lives here and realizes that he's been wrong to assume that fallen women can only descend further.

Charles's "cryptic coloration"—his ability to change his demeanor according to the situation—fails to work here, because he's so unaccustomed to the kind of social group that he's finding in this house. He finally begins to realize that Sarah might not be living any life he's imagined for her, and she might not actually be suffering as much as he figured she was. In fact, Sarah might be doing pretty well for herself and not need him to save her.

Sarah appears at the door. Her clothing makes her seem like a stranger; she's dressed like a New Woman, wearing a blue skirt, a belt, and a striped blouse. Her hair is tied with a bright ribbon. Charles thinks she looks younger than before, and he feels like he's back in America, because many women there dress in this sensible way that hints of freedom. Charles liked it there, but now he flushes, suspecting much. However, he's relieved to find that she still has the air of defiance that attracted him to her.

The Victorian New Woman was someone who defied gender conventions, was usually educated, and often supported freer sexuality. She's essentially a forerunner of the modern-day feminist. Just from her dress, Charles begins to suspect that she's having sex with at least one person in this house. He's already tempted to try to restrict her freedom.

Eventually, Sarah asks how Charles found her, and he realizes that she didn't send the address, and she's not grateful to see him. He says someone told his lawyer where she was, and he reveals that he never married Ernestina. She clearly didn't know. He says he's searched for her everywhere. She says she has had good fortune and confirms who the man Charles saw is. Charles asks who owns the house. He's heard gossip about the man he saw downstairs. Sarah leads him upstairs, into a studio filled with unfinished canvases and painting supplies. Sarah says she's the artist's assistant, and sometimes his model. Charles sees a sketch of a partly nude woman and wonders if it's her.

In all the time that Charles has searched for Sarah, he has clearly expected her to be overjoyed to have the opportunity to marry him. This is rather foolish, though, since she clearly told him after they had sex that she didn't want to marry him. Sarah has fared much better than Charles has since they last met, and perhaps it's because she hasn't been obsessed with finding him and has instead continued living her life. The artist they're discussing is Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a famous Pre-Raphaelite artist.

Charles learns that Sarah has lived here for a year. He wants to ask what her arrangement is. He watches her and hears sounds from below. They are divided. He's come to save her, but she's showing no despair from which to do so. He asks whether the artist knows Sarah isn't married, and she says she pretends to be a widow. Charles asks about the artist's wife, and she says the woman died. The artist's brother and another man also live there, but Charles knows this other man is a poet whom respectable people disapprove of for the sexual nature of his writing. And Charles has heard that the artist takes opium. He imagines them all having an orgy, but Sarah's attitude makes this seem unlikely. Part of Charles tries to stop being so suspicious.

Charles feels strongly suspicious that Sarah must be sleeping with at least one of the men in this house, which suggests that he believes that a woman, once fallen, just keeps having sex with everyone. He doesn't consider that Sarah might have other qualities that would make her useful to the artist. He wants her to be his damsel in distress, but she's not cooperating. The social circle described here is the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists and poets who attempted to imitate the classical art of Raphael and were known for being socially unconventional.

Charles explains what has happened to him since he last saw Sarah, but she only stares out the window. Finally she says she's so moved that she doesn't know what to say. However, she still shows no gratitude. Charles points out that she said she loved him. She acknowledges this, but she never thought she'd see him again, and she doesn't let herself regret what she thought could never happen. Finally she insists that she's not the artist's mistress. Charles doesn't understand why she seems so embarrassed to see him, but she must have more interesting friends now. He realizes he has become the one who hates people now.

Charles is essentially telling Sarah how she has ruined his life, and he clearly wants some appreciation for sacrificing everything for her. But she never asked him to do any of this for her. She seems to have truly moved on from their love affair, unlike Charles. Charles has essentially become Sarah as she was at the beginning of the book: a social outcast for flouting sexual mores, hating the society that refuses to allow him happiness.

Sarah says that she wanted to do what was best after deceiving and hurting Charles. She didn't realize until their meeting in Exeter that she had been mad the whole time he knew her. She has learned that artists must judge their work harshly, and she's glad she destroyed their relationship. She thinks that her impurity ruined Charles's purity. Charles realizes that his formality has always grated against her directness. He thinks he's been the artificial one, while she's been straightforward. He asks whether they can take up the pure part of their relationship again, but she says they can't. He says her words are insufficient when he's traveled four thousand miles to find her.

Ironically, Charles has more than once had to convince himself that Sarah was sane, and now she says that she was, in fact, insane when he knew her before. However, this doesn't seem to be a definitive judgment that can be used to understand her earlier actions. Sarah regards their affair like a work of her art, suggesting the degree to which she planned and plotted it. Charles's artificiality, which he feels comes between them, is a direct result of living unquestioningly in Victorian culture for so long.

Sarah denies she's saying that she never loved Charles, but he insists that she's saying she never saw him as anything more than something to use and she doesn't care what he's gone through. He touches her shoulder, but she stiffens. He takes this to mean she loves someone else, and she confirms this. Charles is angry and moves to leave, but Sarah insists that the person isn't whom he thinks, and he stops. She says an artist wants to marry her, but she won't do it. If she had to choose between them, she'd choose Charles, but she doesn't want to marry at all. She's discovered that she likes being alone and wants to be free to be herself. Furthermore, she's happy here, with this work, among these people. She feels like she belongs, and she can't turn her back on this good fortune.

Sarah's declarations of freedom are very feminist, particularly for her time. It's unusual for a Victorian woman, particularly one who's sexually compromised, to be offered the chance to marry and refuse it. In an era when marriage essentially means that a wife must answer to her husband in everything and has no rights of her own, Sarah will certainly be more free alone than if she married. After being the quintessential outcast for the entirety of the book, Sarah finally belongs somewhere, while Charles no longer does.

Some part of Charles admires Sarah for this speech. He can tell that her time in London has anchored her more securely to the philosophy that she's always had. He insists that he can't let her work get in the way of a woman's purpose in the world. He doesn't want to change her, but only to make her happier. She says she isn't meant to be understood, even by herself, and she can only be happy as long as she doesn't understand. Charles finds this ridiculous, but Sarah says she's refusing him because he can't understand that this state is not ridiculous to her. Charles says she can be as mysterious as she wants, but she says his love interferes with everything.

Though Charles has changed over the course of the book, Sarah has remained essentially the same person, though her circumstances have changed. In spite of the changes in Charles, he starts to spout sexist Victorian beliefs about a woman's role as a wife and mother that are directly in opposition to Sarah's way of life. Finally, Sarah declares that it's actually fruitless to try to understand her, which the reader might be feeling, too. Her fundamental unintelligibility adds to the refusal of absolute truth in this book.

Charles decides to be more sentimental, so he asks whether Sarah has thought about him. She says she did at first, and she did when she saw his notices in the newspaper and had to hide from him. She found out that he hadn't married Ernestina. She seems rather smug at keeping this information from him. Charles is frightened by her indifference, and perhaps begins to understand her mystery. A change in sexual relations has begun, and he's only a pawn in a battle over territory. Sarah doesn't hate men, but she acts as she does to achieve some larger purpose. Charles sees that she's not as happy as she says, but she doesn't want him to know that she still suffers.

Sarah now reveals that she actually did know that Charles hadn't married Ernestina, though she denied it before. This falsehood shows that she's still acting towards Charles as she did before, when she lied outright about having slept with Varguennes. Fowles positions Sarah here as a forerunner of the feminist movement, acting as she does to tip the balance of power in the world away from men and towards women. She's driven more by ideals than by personal happiness.

Charles remarks that Sarah has enjoyed ruining his life. He accuses her of sending her address to his lawyer just to torture him one last time before turning to a new victim. She calmly denies this, but he insists it's true and that she'll one day be punished. Charles is despairing, but Sarah is outraged. He turns to leave and she runs after him, so he stops. She blocks the door, saying she can't let him believe what he's said. She wants him to see a woman in this house who understands her better than anyone and will explain much. Charles manages to control his anger and refuses to see the woman. They engage in a battle of wills, and Sarah seems curious to see what Charles will do. He knows he still loves her.

Although Sarah clearly isn't above telling lies, the reader knows that Charles's rage in this instance is unjustified, since Sam actually sent Montague her address. It's rather ironic that he has never recognized her other lies, but thinks he's caught her out in this one, when he's actually wrong. It makes sense that another female would be the only person who could really understand Sarah, as her experiences of the world are based on gender even more than the average woman's are.

Finally Charles asks what he's supposed to understand from Sarah's request, and she says someone less honorable would already have guessed. He wonders if there's a faint smile in her eyes. She moves to a bellpull. He wonders at what she's said about a woman who understands her, at her hatred of men, but he can't admit what he's thinking. Sarah rings the bell and asks him to respect the woman given her age, then leaves. Charles realizes he's about to meet the artist's sister, Christina Rossetti. He's always found her poetry confused and mystical. He opens the door and sees Sarah enter another room as someone comes up the stairs.

It seems that Charles begins to suspect, though he can't admit it to himself, that Sarah is in a lesbian relationship with Christina Rossetti, who is a well-known Victorian poet who wrote at least one poem with definite lesbian overtones. However, it's difficult to imagine, as Fowles has said earlier, that a Victorian would even imagine a woman in a relationship with another woman. Thus, perhaps Fowles is playing with his modern readers, knowing that they will jump to this conclusion from the details he provides.

Charles returns to the studio. He now understands that Christina Rossetti has formed Sarah's way of looking at the world. He wishes he hadn't come to find her, but since he's here, he won't let Rossetti triumph. He hears a sound and turns to find the girl from before carrying a small child. He assumes she was on her way to the nursery. Charles tells her a lady is coming to speak to him. The girl sets the child down on a carpet and gives her a doll. Then she moves to leave. Charles asks whether the lady is coming, and the girl says she's already there.

Just as Charles has begun to think of Christina Rossetti as his rival, each of them trying control Sarah (though Sarah is really in control of herself), he finds that the lady Sarah has spoken of is actually just a child. This is Charles's own daughter, so the fact that he practically ignores her at first makes him seem particularly clueless. Apparently only a product of Sarah's own body can even hope to understand her.

Charles stares at the little girl. She tries to give him her doll, and he kneels and helps her stand, examining her face. She seems unhappy with him, so he takes out his watch to cheer her up. He carries her to a chair and she sits on his knees. Watching her, he begins to think again about his conversation with Sarah. He hears the door open and someone put a hand on the back of his chair. In another house, someone starts to play the piano, and only that sound indicates the passage of time; in every other sense, history has halted. When the girl gets bored, Sarah picks her up. Charles rises and sees that she's smiling, taunting him. She picks up the doll and stares at Charles's feet.

Charles's interaction with his daughter is strongly reminiscent of his interaction with the prostitute Sarah's daughter, as he lets both of these children play with his watch. Furthermore, the watch acts as a symbol of how Charles's interactions with children seem to reshape time, perhaps because children are not yet aware of how society envisions the passage of time, or because the interaction of a parent with a child somehow transcends questions of history.

Charles asks the girl's name, and Sarah says it's Lalage. She explains that Mr. Rossetti saw her in the street and asked to draw her, all before Lalage was born. He's her godfather. She knows it's a strange name. Charles can't believe she's asking his opinion on this matter, but he says the name is Greek. He feels like he'll never forgive Sarah. She asks whether he doesn't like the name, but he says he does. Charles stares at Sarah and Lalage as though they're the embodiment of some escaped danger. Finally he asks Sarah why she didn't tell him about Lalage, and she says things had to be this way. He understands that their fate depended on God forgiving their sins. He asks about their earlier confrontation, and Sarah says it had to happen.

Sarah and Charles are finally communicating in a straightforward and peaceful way. Charles seems to think that he and Sarah had to go through trials before God would let them be together again; they had to pay in this way for the pain they caused. This is a rather conventional, religious view of things. Furthermore, Sarah almost implies that their conflicts were predestined, that they were necessary in order to reach the inevitable understanding that they now have.

Finally Sarah looks at Charles, and she's crying. Her look is naked, the kind of look that changes lives and shows that love holds everything together. Charles asks whether he'll ever understand her. She shakes her head, and he kisses her hair. The piano music stops. Lalage bangs her doll on Charles's cheek.

This is essentially a happy ending. It's unclear whether Charles and Sarah will get married, but they and Lalage have nevertheless come together in a traditional family structure, which makes this ending the less subversive of the two. Charles accepts a state of bewilderment.

CHAPTER 61

Novelists aren't supposed to introduce new characters at the end of a book, and the person who's been standing across from Sarah's house during the last scene seems like a violation of this rule. However, he's forced his way into the story because he can't stand to not be important. It's possible that he was somewhat falsely portrayed earlier in the story. His true nature is unpleasant. He's changed his appearance since he was in the train compartment, and now he looks like an opera manager. He seems amused, and is watching Mr. Rossetti's house as though he owns it. In general he seems to think he can do what he wants with the world. He takes out his watch and sets it back by fifteen minutes. Surely he's giving himself an excuse for lateness. He beckons to a carriage and gets in. It drives away.

Fowles again satirizes himself in the form of the narrator. This narrator is a slightly different incarnation than the one earlier in the book, perhaps an incarnation that is more inclined towards making his characters miserable than towards giving them happy endings. He gives the sense that he's in control of this world because he is, more or less; it's as though a god is controlling life from the ground. There's an illusion here that the narrator on the street isn't actually the narrator writing, since the narrator writing pretends not to understand that setting the watch back will actually set the characters' timeline back.

Charles says Sarah has gained pleasure from hurting him, and she will go to hell for it. He makes to leave the room, but she calls to him. He looks back over his shoulder. She says this proves that they should never have met again. Charles says he didn't understand her true selfish nature, and that she's far worse than Mrs. Poulteney. Sarah asks whether she wouldn't be selfish if she let him marry her though she can't love him. Charles says their positions are reversed from the time when he was her only hope. This is his most powerful but cruel argument, and now he opens the door.

This is the second possible ending of the story (third, if you count the conventional Victorian one that Fowles proclaims to be false), which the narrator promised earlier. As it comes second, the reader is clearly expected to compare it to the first ending, though not to judge either one as being truer. Here, Charles recognizes that he and Sarah have switched places in the world, and saying so means that Sarah has to grapple with having made someone as miserable as she used to be.

Sarah says Charles's name again, and puts her hand on his arm. He stops. It seems like her gesture is meant to tell him something. He looks at her slowly and sees that her eyes are smiling at him. He wonders if she's telling him to lighten up or if she's gloating. Her hand on his arm seems to say that there's a solution. He realizes what it is, and her hand drops. It seems like they can suddenly see all each other's faults. Charles can tell that Sarah is willing to sacrifice everything to save the integrity of her spirit. Sarah realizes she's made a mistake, and if he accepts her offer of friendship it will hurt her more than anything. Charles sees how he would be teased by everyone in this house, and he sees that he's superior to her in his ability to compromise, whereas she can only possess and must always be possessing.

Charles seems to believe that in this gesture, Sarah is offering that they could be friends, that they don't have to choose between marriage and complete estrangement. But friendship of this sort isn't possible in this society, particularly when Charles and Sarah have slept together and have endured so much censure for their relationship. Furthermore, being friends would emasculate Charles. In this iteration of the story, Charles can find nothing redeeming in Sarah; he sees her only as a morally corrupt and voracious woman who will stop at nothing to gain power over other people.


Sarah has always manipulated Charles, and she knew that he would reject her offer. He leaves the room. He wants to cry but refuses to do it in this house. The girl who greeted him appears, carrying a child, but Charles leaves before she can speak. He doesn't know where to go. He feels he has to start everything over. In the distance, he sees a carriage going out of sight. Looking at the river, he sees all of his life has been for nothing, and he will never love again. He turns back to the house and thinks he sees a curtain fall. But in reality, Sarah is still in the studio, looking into the garden, where a child and a young woman sit.

Because Fowles put the other ending first, the reader knows that this moment in which Charles sees the child is an essential moment of loss, as he'll never know that she is his daughter. However, it's actually unclear whether the child is his daughter in this iteration, or if she belongs to the woman who's holding her. In any case, his relationship with Sarah is over, and it seems to have ruined his life and all been for nothing, though it took up an entire book.

It may seem that Charles was foolish not to accept Sarah's offer of friendship, and that the offer showed some weakness in Sarah. It may seem that Sarah's battle was a righteous one against an invader. But the reader must believe that this ending is just as realistic as the former one. The narrator has returned to the principle that evolution is the only god that influences human life, and so humans have made their own lives by acting to reach their goals. Humans are guided by acting what they know, as Matthew Arnold put it, and this has guided Sarah. Charles paces along the river, and it may seem that he's about to kill himself, but he has in fact finally found faith in himself. He's beginning to realize that life isn't a single symbol or riddle, but something to be endured.

The narrator is careful not to make any moral judgments in reflecting on this ending, and he insists again that either ending is possible. Evolution, the everyday struggle for survival, the struggle to get what one wants, rules human actions, and there is no overarching moral or divine reason for the way that history proceeds. The narrator implies that Sarah has been the most authentic character, because she never pretended that she was guided by anything other than her personal experiences and desires. Charles, for his part, now understands in a rather existentialist way that he must accept his lack of understanding and move on into his loneliness.



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