Possession, Self-possession and Multiple Selves in the Writings of John Fowles

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Abstract

In his work, John Fowles (1926-2005) ponders questions of existential freedom. For him, the biggest obstacle to this freedom is the Cartesian paradigm of self-possession with its analytical and classifying obsessions. Fowles does not see freedom as emanating from an understanding of the self as a unity but rather as emanating from embracing the multiplicity of possible selves that each person has. In this paper, I trace these ideas through John Fowles's work, in particular *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Collector* and *The Aristos*. I also outline some of the intellectual influences such as Heraclitus, Sartre, Descartes and Linnaeus who he variously sympathizes with and reacts against in his writing.

Keywords: John Fowles, possession, the self, multiple selves

บทคัดย่อ

ในงานเขียนทั้งหมดของ จอห์น ฟาวล์ส (John Fowles) ช่วงปี ค.ศ. 1926-2005 เขาได้ตั้งคำถามเกี่ยวกับเสรีภาพตามแนวปรัชญาอัตถิภาวนิยม เราอาจมองว่าอุปสรรคสำคัญที่สุดต่อการได้มาซึ่งเสรีภาพนี้คือกระบวนทัศน์แบบคาร์ทีเซียนเรื่อง การควบคุมตนเองที่วิเคราะห์และแบ่งประเภทแบบครอบงำ ฟาวล์สมิได้มองว่าเสรีภาพเป็นสิ่งที่เกิดจากความคิดว่าตัวตนนั้นมีเอกภาพ แต่เกิดจากการยอมรับว่าบุคคลอาจมีตัวตนได้หลากหลายตัวตนในบทความนี้ ผู้เขียนวิเคราะห์แนวคิดดังกล่าวผ่านมุมมองจากงานเขียนของฟาวล์ส โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งจากเรื่อง *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Collector* และ *The Aristos* นอกจากนี้ ผู้เขียนยังได้เสนอแนวคิดของนักปรัชญาต่างๆ ซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อแนวคิดของ จอห์น ฟาวล์ส เช่น เฮราคลีตุส (Heraclitus), ชาร์ตร์ (Sartre), เดการ์ต (Descartes) และ ลินเนียส (Linnaeus) ซึ่งฟาลว์สได้แสดงทั้งความเห็นด้วยและไม่เห็นด้วย กับนักปรัชญาเหล่านี้ในงานของเขา

คำสำคัญ จอห์น ฟาวล์ส การครอบงำ ตัวตน ความหลากหลายแห่งตัวตน

Defying duty, defying determinism

John Fowles is an admirer of George Eliot. Her themes of how people are to be free and find an authentic self-actualizing life in a deterministic world resonates with his central preoccupation: "How you achieve freedom obsesses me. All my books are about that. The question is, is there really free will? Can we choose freely? Can we act freely?" (as cited in Halpern, 1971, p. 45). Like George Eliot, he wants to say yes to this question but he arrives at very different answers. These questions of freedom and identity are as pertinent to our own 21st century as they are to Eliot's Victorian age and Fowles' heyday as an icon of the 60s and 70s.

The French Lieutenant's Woman (1971), with all of its footnotes and epigraphs and allusions to great Victorians, only explicitly finds room for Eliot once; but it is in connection with a pivotal issue - duty, that "bone of contention between the two centuries" (p. 45) which preys upon Charles Smithson in his moments of existential crisis. The narrator illustrates the paradoxical identity between Victorian agnosticism and atheism, on the one hand, and what we might presume to be its opposite - faith - on the other, through George Eliot's maxim that "God is inconceivable, immortality is unbelievable, but duty is peremptory and absolute" (as cited in Fowles, 1971, pp. 45-46).

Duty initially provides for Charles an unproblematic and solid social persona. He fits his surroundings, even though in evolutionary terms those surroundings fit him less and less. As John Neary says, Fowles's proto-existentialist hero, Charles Smithson, "is initially a rather conventional rebel; in the solid Victorian tradition of Eliot, Arnold, Huxley and others, he has transferred his faith from a Christianity in which he cannot believe to Duty, Culture, and Science" (1982, p.163). When the image of Sarah Woodruff, with its timelessness, its libidinous energy, and its anarchic potential, breaks into and breaks apart this historically constructed and historically located consciousness, Charles becomes oppressed by his sense of a duty which demands conformity to remote teleological ideals and the suppression of instinct, libido and nature.

Duty demands the privileging of deterministic History over the random and singular moment. It prescribes one legitimate choice at each bifurcating path, one desirable outcome, a notion which the two endings of the novel, decided on a gambler's toss of the coin, undermine. In conversation with his mentor Dr Grogan, Charles laments that "he has no moral purpose, no real sense of duty to anything" (Fowles, 1971, p. 195). It is a lament that depends on a linear time-frame, conditioned by the sense of time running out and opportunities missed. As the thirty-two years old Charles tells Grogan regretfully: "It seems only a few months ago that I was twenty-one - full of hopes" (p. 195). The crisis that his sexual passion for Sarah brings about

amplifies this domineering inner clock. Duty for Charles enjoins a reverence and nostalgia for the past that suppresses the present.

Charles's submission to duty is an instance of Sartrean bad faith. Duty for Fowles is not, as Eliot would have it, an acceptance of responsibility; it is instead a refuge from the possibilities of freedom. Sarah's Sartrean "nothingness" brings Charles Smithson face to face with his own "nothingness" - his unarticulated potentialities - and causes the "anguish [that] is the reflective apprehension of freedom itself" (Sartre, as cited in Warnock, 1965, p. 55).

Later in the novel, after Charles has broken through the armour of repression - metaphorically portrayed in the absurdly cumbersome clothing he wears on his fossil-hunting expeditions - he realizes that the past is an oppressor whose victory need not be absolute and peremptory. The narrator quotes Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, that icon of Victorian reverence for death, and singles out this line "There must be wisdom with great death; the dead shall look me thro' and thro'" (as cited in Fowles, 1971, p. 316). The narrator goes on to examine Charles's epiphany in the church at Exeter: "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 one's unborn sons" (p. 316). With his growing awareness of time as a conditional phenomenon, Charles is able to envision alternative histories of the world and alternative versions of himself - he is able to re-imagine the crucifixion image as "Christ uncrucified"
(p. 316). This image is a reversal of history just as is Charles's avoidance of what his sense of duty had seemed to predestine - to marry Ernestina, to give in to the evolutionary tide that demands his adaptation to the Freemanite world of commerce and to forego the various potentialities of his whole self, to forego "whole sight".

Fowles begins *Daniel Martin* (1978) with this line: "Whole sight; or all the rest is desolation" (p. 7). "Whole sight" is a concept which is central to his work. It denotes a non-reductive, cross-temporal, intuitive mode of existential awareness, a continuous awareness of other possibilities. In Sartrean terms, it means that one is aware of the "in-itself" - the ground of all possibilities - as much as of the "for-itself" - a particular expression of being-in-itself. Charles's epiphany in the church is an instance of "whole sight". Christ is predestined for the cross. This is His duty, prescribed by the weight of the past and prophetic tradition. But as Sartre (1971) says:

> The For-itself can never be a future except problematically for it is separated from it by a nothingness which it is. In short the For-itself is free, and its Freedom is to itself its own limit. To be free is to be condemned to be free. Thus the Future qua Future does not have to be. It is not *in itself*, and neither is it in the mode of being of the For-itself since it is in the *meaning* of the For-itself. The Future is not, it is *possibilized*. (p. 105)

In imagining Christ uncrucified, Charles uncrucifies himself. Charles has to defy the dictates of evolution, to abandon the Darwinian strategy of "cryptic colouration" (Fowles, 1971, p. 127), and instead make the revolutionary - rather than evolutionary - leaps that the shift in consciousness that Sarah has enabled - and provoked - demands. Christ crucified implies Christ uncrucified, just as Charles and Sarah, in the twin endings of the novel, stay together and remain forever apart. In typically postmodernist, post-Laplacean and existentialist style, multiple endings flow from the same set of initial conditions.

Against possession: timelessness and nothingness

Fowles has said: "I have been called an existentialist but basically I am a pagan. I am here to enjoy life now and to help others enjoy it too" (1979, n.p.). In all his novels, there is a paganism and nature mysticism which Fowles sees as inaccessible to science or history. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* there is a powerful animistic force in nature which is present in Edenic groves such as the Undercliff, in the female goddess figure which Sarah Woodruff, outside her social role in the novel, plays, and in Charles Smithson's struggle for existential freedom.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is a romance. Charles is specifically associated with the heroes of chivalry: As a member of "a kind of self-questioning ethical elite" Charles figures in several historical roles: "the Charles of 1267 with all his newfangled French notions of chastity and chasing after Holy Grails, the Charles of 1867 with his loathing of trade and the Charles of today, a computer scientist deaf to the screams of the tender humanists who begin to discern their own redundancy" (p. 257). What all these Charleses have in common is a rejection of "*possession* as the purpose of life, whether it be of a woman's body, or of high profit at all costs, or of the right to dictate the speed of progress" (p. 257). Possession is essentially an attempt to fix time. To realize these personae Charles has to transcend the contingencies of history and hazard. Echoing the Einsteinian conception of matter, the narrator says that "what dies is the form. The matter is immortal" (p. 256), and "The scientist is but one more form; and will be superseded" (p. 257).

The narrator's comments about possession spin out of Charles's decision to reject Freeman's invitation to join the store, to participate fully, in effect, in the "real" work of history - empire-building and wealth creation. His decision engenders a feeling of "self-respect in his nothingness, a sense that choosing to be nothing … was the last saving grace of a gentleman" (p. 256). This nothingness is not mere negation or absence; it is, like Sartre's nothingness, the essential ground of existential freedom: "What I ceaselessly aim towards is myself, that which I am not, my own possibilities" (Sartre, as cited in Warnock, 1965, p. 44). Charles's

"nothingness" is a recognition of possibilities, a recognition that the self cannot be finally pinned down to a single identity, that the self is what it is not, as much as what it is.

Ironically, Charles, a committed Darwinist, refuses Mr Freeman's invitation to adapt, to join his business. Freeman recognizes and embodies the deterministic "certainties" inherent in Darwinian theory that Charles does not. These are the forces that are pushing forward well-adapted people such as the nouveau-riche Freeman and Charles's upwardly-mobile man-servant Sam Farrow. Charles is as "a man struggling to overcome history" (p. 257). This is not a futile struggle. The historical and the timeless exist side by side.

The enemy of the pagan enjoyment of life in the here and now is possession. "[T]he desire to hold and the desire to enjoy are mutually destructive," (p. 63) says the narrator, commenting on Charles's inability to fully enter the natural world. The desire to possess encompasses the desire for self-possession and self-control, for mastery over the forces of nature that threaten the cultured social persona. The social persona is precarious since the possessive instincts which constitute it are continually undermined by the transience of the forms which it tries to freeze. Holding onto this persona is a labour of Sisyphus in a world which is "a continuous flux" (p. 47). Fowles's narrator uses this phrase to characterize the twentieth-century; but if, the persona has as its basis a Sartrean nothingness - a set of always existing but unarticulated possibilities, then these artificial divisions of time hold no transcendent meaning. "Continuous flux" is the underlying condition of even the seeming stasis and solidity of Victorian society.

Both the narrator and Charles illustrate the principle of continuous flux and the transience of form. Nature's timelessness is asserted against its transient and timely historical manifestations. The narrator, as historical commentator, and as the "God" of the novel, illustrates the artifice of historical time by playing with his pocket-watch and altering the crucial moments which define what the historical outcome will be. These manipulations illustrate Fowles's Heraclitean principle that nature is in constant flux, undetermined, governed by chance The narrator appears to be in control, in possession of events, but the two endings of the novel are contingent upon his definition of himself as being "a very minor figure - as minimal, in fact, as a gamma-ray particle" (p. 394).

The narrator's self-characterization as a "gamma-ray particle" links to the Chapter 61 epigraph from Martin Gardner's *The Ambidextrous Universe* which spells out evolution in terms of quantum processes: "Evolution is simply the process by which chance … co-operates with natural law to create living forms better and better adapted to survive" (as cited in Fowles, 1971, p. 394). Duty demands Charles choose one destiny, to possess himself entirely, but the novel's two endings are not alternatives: they co-exist, in the same way as Schrödinger's famous cat exists in two contradictory states of being. The "natural radiation", the decay of atoms, creates

"split universes". The narrator accepts this paradox. He does not wish to "fix the fight" (p. 349) between the two endings by opening the box and committing himself to one or the other. The dilemma is a false one.

One aspect of Charles's social persona is that of scientist; this is an assertion of his "somethingness", his self-possession, and his own taxonomic self-representation. Charles tells Ernestina: "you forget that I'm a scientist. I have written a monograph, so I must be" (p. 11). The flippant tone reveals how thin this veneer is. He only half-believes in the solidity of this persona. In Sartrean terms, his scientific persona is the precarious "Being-for-itself" which involves the nihilation of other possibilities. But "Being-in-itself", pure being, lies just below the surface. Against his conscious, controlling will he loses this self-possession in the wilderness of the Undercliff, a wildness which like the wild Sarah Woodruff, he initially wants to conquer and possess but "wildness of growth and burgeoning fertility forced him into anti-science" (p. 62). These defining, epiphanic moments occur continually in the novel but not as once and for all revelations. They are intimations of his other possible selves which threaten his social persona with dissolution but which also seduce him with their possibilities. After the libidinous release from duty in Sarah's hotel room at Exeter, where natural forces break through the carapace of Charles social role, he says to her: "I am infinitely strange to myself" (p. 306). He is alienated from the character he has constructed and possessed and has a fascinated fear of his unpossessable possibilities.

This mystic "anti-science" is a psychological state in which one loses oneself, in which the possessive ego dissolves. It resembles Sartrean "being-in-itself", the realm of existence that is untouched by ego. In his book of *pensées, The Aristos* (1981), Fowles defines this psychological state, and he fuses the speculations of the new physics with Sartrean existentialism as a theoretical basis for his definition Extending Freudian terminology, Fowles coins the word "nemo" which means "not only 'nobody'" but also the state of being nobody – "nobodiness": "In short, just as physicists now postulate an anti-matter, so must we consider the possibility that there exists in the human psyche an anti-ego. This is the nemo" (p. 46).

Like Sartre's "nothingness", the nemo is the inspiration and ground of the ego. We create personae to avoid its chaotic potentiality: "The ego is certainty, what I am; the nemo potentiality, what I am not" (1981, p. 46). But what one is not might suggest what one might be or become. So the ego embodies the desire to hold on to the idea of self as a single entity against the threatening incursions of the nebulous nothingness of the nemo. This tension between nemo and ego is embodied not only in Charles but also in the various personae of the narrator.

***The Collector*: Fowles's critique of Cartesianism**

The desire to hold is figured in the motif of collecting, a theme that runs through Fowles's work and which is often an essential part of the make-up of his heroes (although significantly not of his heroines, who are more typically the objects of the collector). At the outset of his quest for existential freedom, the Fowlesian hero is typically a collector of one sort or another, a pursuit which ties him to a limited, time-serving, materialistic view of the world: Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus* (1977) collects sexual experiences; Miles Green of *Mantissa* (1982) is accused of being a collector "of a series of wretched imaginary women" (p. 94); the hero of *Daniel Martin* is collects orchids; in *The Ebony Tower* (1975), Breasley collects twentieth-century paintings; Charles Smithson in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1971) collects fossils.

This last activity seems a harmless enough occupation. Collecting is, however, always suspect for Fowles; and in his first novel, *The Collector* (1965), a more sinister aspect of collecting is revealed. Ferdinand Clegg is at first a simple butterfly collector. Through the workings of hazard – Fowles's preferred term for the mechanistic operations of chance - in the form of a big win on the football pools, he takes up the opportunity to broaden his field of interests and begins to collect girls.

So, both the intelligent proto-existentialist Charles Smithson, one of the *aristoi*, the moral and intellectual elite, and Ferdinand Clegg, one of the *hoi polloi*, the undifferentiated masses, are both members of this club, Charles with his fossils and Clegg with his formaldehyded butterflies and his kidnapped "guest".

Collecting lies at the heart of the Cartesian paradigm. Descartes' (1968) method is predicated on separating out the various qualities of existence and matter, distinguishing mind from body, subject from object. The first object in the Cartesian collection is the perception of the self. In his second meditation from the *Discourse* (1968) Descartes thinks of his body as a collection of discrete parts and actions:

> I considered myself, firstly, as having a face, hands, arms, and the whole machine made up of flesh and bones, such as it appears in a corpse and which I designated by the name of body. I thought, furthermore, that I ate, walked, had feelings and thought, and I referred all these actions to the soul. (p. 104)

Descartes' equation of the assemblage of presumably functional and integrated living body parts to those of a corpse is a striking one; and on the dissection table, science has reaped many rewards from his method. But the gut response to it of many would be to say that in order to cure the patient, Descartes first must kill him. But for Fowles, the "I", the controlling mind or soul

that Descartes refers everything back to, is not single or fixed and its hierarchical position is insecure.

The Cartesian ego is undermined and threatened by the Fowlesian nemo. In *The Aristos* (1981) Fowles exactly echoes Descartes but with the aim of refuting him. In the spirit of Descartes he says: "All parts of my body are objects external to me: my hands, my tongue, my digestive mechanism." He goes on to say, however, that he owns these things only in "the artificiality of the law, and in the illogicality (or biologicality) of emotion … Nothing, not even what I call my self, is mine" (p. 80). He refutes the Cartesian *cogito* by disclaiming the complete sufficiency and possession of the self. His formulation here is derived from Sartre's pre-reflective cogito, the consciousness of being conscious, the awareness of the activity of the ego as if from a distance:

> The description we habitually make is this: "I am aware of this disturbance that has happened in my brain." But it is more accurate to say: "This disturbance disturbed and the disturbing took place in the particular field of experience that the reflector of the disturbance, the stater of the statement, exists in." "I" is thus a convenient geographical description, not an absolute entity. (Fowles, 1981, p. 81)

In the Cartesian world-view self-possession is the ground of all possession, but it is very shaky ground in Fowles's work. His rejection of the separation of observer and observed, suggests, with Sartre, that self and self-description can never coincide and that therefore self-possession is impossible.

One of the impulses that lies behind collecting is the pursuit of material and intellectual power and the affirmation of significant order. As in the Cartesian method, the principal tools involved in building any collection are mathematical and geometrical: the object is enumerated within the group to which it now belongs, decontextualised from its anterior environment, and recontextualised so that it achieves the greatest possible separation, clarity and differentiation in this new context. The coin collection or the zoo, for instance, serve as a type of talismanic representation and metonymic reduction of, in the first instance, the whole economic system, and in the second, the natural world. The possession of such talismans symbolically enacts dominion and control. It is a route to becoming the Cartesian "master and possessor of Nature", knowing nature but definitively separating oneself from it.

The Cartesian method found one of its most elaborate and successful expressions in the taxonomic system of the great Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus whom Fowles calls "the great warehouse clerk and indexer of nature" (1979, n.p). Fowles sees the Linnaean system as life-denying. It abstracts nature from its context, objectifies it and kills it just as surely as Clegg

locates and names his butterflies, then puts them in his killing-jar and pins them to a board. The knowledge gained through this process is hardly worth the price. Nature becomes *natura morte*, dead nature, an attempt to fix a frozen moment in eternity. Fowles says:

> I am a heretic about Linnaeus, and find nothing less strange than that he should have gone mad at the end of his life. I do not dispute the value of the tool he gave to natural science - which was in itself no more than a shrewd extension of the Aristotelian system and which someone else would soon have elaborated, if he had not; but I have doubts about the lasting change it has effected in ordinary human consciousness. (1979, n.p.)

The process of collecting, classifying, naming and distinguishing is for Fowles "mentally the equivalent of the camera view-finder. Already it destroys or curtails certain possibilities of seeing, apprehending and experiencing" (1979, n.p.). Fowles's rationalist side prevents him from trying to explicitly define these possibilities in his non-fiction but his fiction privileges mystical epiphanies over scientific precision. The half-sham and half-shaman Conchis, the manipulator and mystic seer in *The Magus* (1977), explains his spiritual awakening, one which resembles Charles Smithson's great moments of intuition:

> [M]y whole approach was scientific, medical, classifying. I was conditioned by a kind of ornithological approach to man. I thought in terms of species, behaviours, observations. …. I knew the man out there on the point was having an experience beyond the scope of all my science and all my reason, and I knew that my science and reason would be defective until they could comprehend what was happening in Henrik's mind … in a flash as of lightning, all of our explanations, all our classifications and derivations, our aetiologies, suddenly appeared to me like a thin net. That great passive monster, reality, was no longer dead, easy to handle. It was full of a mysterious vigour, new forms and new possibilities. The net was nothing, reality burst through it. (pp. 308-309)

Under the classifying, ordering Linnaean system nature is anaesthetized and tamed - "a great passive monster" - but this passivity cannot hold and the monstrous will ultimately burst through this repression.

Linnaeus's madness resurfaces in the character of Clegg. Clegg is a camera, a recording-instrument, a caricature of the detached naturalist. We meet him through his diary which is only accidentally and incidentally a vehicle of self-expression – Clegg's self is so limited that there is little to express – but which is instead principally a collecting device with the promises of neutrality and objectivity that such devices entail. Like Fowles's Linnaeus, he is a clerk with all

the psychic repressions, the distancing from emotional and spiritual life, and the bureaucratic narrowness that the popular imagination ascribes to clerks. He first sees Miranda, the object of his collecting, when he has "a free moment from the files and ledgers" but rather than let himself be captivated, to surrender to her beauty and vivacity, his immediate response is to capture her by recording the event in his "observations diary" (1965, p. 5).

Allied to Clegg's recording, gathering and collecting mentality is a technological and instrumental capability. He skillfully fits out the dungeon that he has destined for Miranda, or the "guest-room" as his neutralizing bureaucratese would prefer to have it. He prides himself on his ability in carpentry and knows enough about electricity to safeguard himself against any hostile use that Miranda might make of it. Furthermore, Fowles associates him with the brutal technological and administrative efficiency of twentieth-century mass-murder. His first response to Miranda's questions as to why he has taken her prisoner is the standard response of the cogs in the Nazi death-machine. It is the response of the Adolf Eichmanns, the bureaucrats of death, and the servants of a particularly repugnant taxonomy: "I'm only obeying orders," (p. 32) Clegg says.

The culmination of these two "scientific" capacities - the ability to record and the technological and instrumental capacity derived from the record - comes when the physically impotent Clegg combines them and uses the camera as an instrument of rape, and again when he eventually kills Miranda. The killing is an act in which the scientific drives out the natural: "She is in the box I made, under the appletrees. It took me three days to dig the hole. I thought I would go mad the night I did it … I don't think many could have done it. *I did it scientific. I planned what had to be done and ignored my natural feelings*" (pp. 287-288; my emphasis). Clegg, as collector, has in fact collected, that is denatured, himself; he has turned himself into an incarnation of the Cartesian mind/body split. His notion of doing it "scientific", of ignoring his natural feelings, is for him what sets him apart; and his collecting strategy depends on this distancing, on continual self-objectification and self-alienation. In designating future objects for the collection he plans to avoid the unscientific mistake of emotional involvement that he made with Miranda. He wants to perfect and purify the process, just as the experimental scientist refines the experiment by removing the variables: "this time it won't be love, it would just be for the interest of the thing and to compare them" (p. 288).

Miranda views Clegg as a scientist, which for her lies at the root of his perversions: "I hate scientists … I hate people who collect things, and classify things and give them names, and then forget all about them. That's what people are always doing in art. They call a painter an impressionist or a cubist or something and then they put him in a drawer and don't see him as a living individual painter anymore" (p. 58).

Clegg, a Peeping Tom, embodies the most sadistic elements of the voyeuristic Apollonian eye, the eye of reason, intellect and science, as defined by Camille Paglia in her book *Sexual Personae* (1991). "Seeing her," says Clegg of Miranda, "always made me feel like I was catching a rarity" (Fowles, 1965, p. 5). The voyeuristic eye separates and defines objects in order to gain possession and power over them. Paglia says:

> Name and person are part of the west's quest for form. The west insists on the discrete identity of objects. To name is to know; to know is to control … Twentieth-century physics, going full circle back to Heracleitus, postulates that all matter is in motion. In other words, there is no thing, only energy. But this perception has not been absorbed, for it cancels the west's intellectual and moral assumptions. (p. 5)

Certainly Fowles and other writers and thinkers are at least trying to absorb this perception. The narrative persona of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and its principal protagonist embody a tension between the Cartesian need to name and control on one hand, for the possessive assertion of "somethingness", of *ego*, of their fixed, secure place in history, and, on the other hand, the desire for "nothingness", for the nemo, for Sartrean Being-in-itself, the integration into Nature which Sarah in her asocial role in the novel represents. Fowles is not seeking to abandon the Western tradition of naming and knowing - indeed his narrator revels in it. Instead, he sees it as merely one side of the picture. The Heraclitean tradition reveals the eternal flux behind solid form; Western mechanistic science sees temporal forms emerging from this flux. Both are ways to know the world. However, the attempt to portray this world of flux in the existential crises of Charles Smithson, the masks of Sarah, and the formlessness of nature, falters as it has to employ the very means of naming and knowing that it otherwise questions.

Science and anti-science

Fowles echoes Miranda's attitude to science in his autobiographical piece *The Tree (*1979). He notes a movement in his own attitude which parallels Charles's move away from Duty and possession. It is a movement away from Cartesian dualism:

> I spent all my younger life as a more or less orthodox amateur naturalist; as a pseudo-scientist, treating nature as some sort of intellectual puzzle, or game, in which being able to name names and explain behaviourism - to identify and to understand machinery - constituted all the pleasures and the prizes. I became slowly aware of the inadequacy of this approach: that it insidiously cast nature as a kind of opponent … I came to believe that this approach represented a major human alienation, affecting all of us both personally and

> socially; moreover, that such alienation had much more ancient roots behind the historical accident of its present scientific, or pseudo-scientific form. (n.p.)

This description of his approach to reality as "pseudo-scientific" holds out the hope for approaches that are perhaps more truly scientific. In *The Aristos* (1981) one such approach, that of existentialism, accords at least analogically with the great discovery of twentieth-century science: "Existentialism is a theory of relativity among theories of absolute truth" (p. 116). Fowles's work strives to elaborate theories of relativity against those of absolute truth.

Fowles's neo-romantic, ecologically oriented, holistic philosophy reviles the Cartesian desire for mastery; however, he is not so naive as to overlook the practical uses of science or the importance of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, there is a tension in his work between the mechanistically determined world and the desire for existential freedoms. For Fowles, these are not opposites or mutually exclusive.

Fowles devotes a section of *The Aristos* (1981) to a comparison of the methods and uses of art and science (pp. 142-150). Much of this section simply calls for the full development and education of the populace in both disciplines, an echo of C. P. Snow's "The Two Cultures" (2001) argument which laments the scientific illiteracy of humanists and the corresponding literary ignorance among scientists. But much of *The Aristos* reveals his disillusion with science. He admits the heuristic benefits of analytical method while warning that "its side effects, as in some medicines, may be extremely pernicious" (p. 143). He generally describes science as analytical, mechanistic and abstract. This is clearly a view of the scientific enterprise that sees it as modelled on Descartes' inherently incomplete method:

> The scientific mind, in being totally scientific, is being unscientific. … The scientist atomizes, someone must synthesize; the scientist withdraws, someone must universalize. The scientist dehumanizes, someone must humanize. The scientist turns his back on the as yet, and perhaps eternally, unverifiable; and someone must face it. (pp. 143-144)

Who is this someone? The artist? Yes and no. Art in Fowles's terms clearly plays roles that he has identified as absent in science. However, this division between the two needs some clarification. Ideally, the artist and the scientist are one, and, as one of Fowles's *aristoi,* someone such as Charles Smithson represents the potential unification of these roles: he is an observer but not the detached Cartesian observer; he is a scientist who lets non-science intrude into his mental universe; as a dilettante - which for Fowles is not a dirty word - he dabbles in both poetry and science. The narrator approvingly cites Darwin's *The Origin of Species* as "a triumph of generalization, not specialization" and maintains that the generalist approach "was better for Charles the human being" (1971, p. 47). Heraclitus's division between the *Aristoi* and the *hoi*

polloi that Fowles endorses in *The Aristos* (1981) is not simply a categorization of people into the elite and the proles. For Fowles, "the dividing line between the Few and the Many must run through each individual, not between individuals" (p. 8). In the same way, "The true scientist never dismisses, depreciates or condescends to art; I consider this an almost fundamental definition of him. And conversely, of the true artist" (p.147). Both artists and scientists aim "to approach a reality, to convey a reality, to symbolize a reality, to summarize a reality, to convince of a reality" (p. 146).

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Fowles proposes broader models for science than those operating under the Cartesian paradigm. He sees a margin of unpredictability as an inherent property of the natural world, just as the physicist sees this margin in the behaviour of sub-atomic particles: "Behaviourisms in birds, insects and plants have always fascinated me; and especially the components of hazard and mystery that any honest (and even fully scientific observer) must admit they possess. I enjoy most what I do not understand in nature" (as cited in in Huffaker, 1980, pp. 17-18).

Both Charles as hero of The French Lieutenant's Woman (1971) and Clegg as anti-hero represent aspects of the change in human consciousness that stems from treating nature as an alien reality that we do not fully participate in. Charles, however is not the schematic, simple monster that we see in *The Collector* (1965); he at least has the potential to achieve a full relationship with the world around him. In the world of *The Collector*, Clegg's divorce from reality is complete. He is one counterpole and Miranda is the other. Neither is fully human.

Multiple selves: Charles and the narrator

Charles's collecting is a response to the social demands of his age as well as a genuine interest: he needs to fill the vast spaces of time that nineteenth-century society provided for a wealthy young aristocrat and, as the epigraph from Leslie Stephen suggests, his scientific hobby is a ruse that allows him "to do nothing and be respectable" (p. 42). His science is essentially passive; it is not primarily instrumental and utilitarian. His dilettantism and amateurism in his scientific pursuits, with its implications of a rather random, unsystematic search for knowledge, gets the approval of the narrator. Amateurs, he says, "ought to dabble everywhere and damn the scientific prigs who try to shut them up in some narrow *oubliette*" (p. 47).

What the narrator himself does, however, is to try to shut Charles up in such an *oubliette*; the narrator is a collector too. In one of his many entries into the action of the novel he tells us that he has now acquired the Toby jug that Sarah buys in Exeter, and he speaks as a collector about its provenance and history. Charles is also one of the objects of his collection. Sarah is another, although she proves to be more elusive.

Ellen Pifer recognizes this quality in the narrative voice: "an author who is complacent about his authority over the text, or fictive universe, is in danger of acting as a 'collector' rather than a liberator" (1978, p. 5). But by using such a skillfully constructed narrator, who variously engages, infuriates, intrigues, entertains and annoys the reader, Fowles deftly side-steps this danger. The narrator plays out both roles; he is both collector and liberator.

As the impresario of the novel he has a possessive attitude to his characters: "Now could I use you? Now what could I do with you?" he says of Charles when he makes his appearance as a rather disreputable fellow-passenger on the train to London (p. 348). But against this is his loftier intention expressed in Chapter 13 to give the characters their freedom. His characters, the narrator claims, escape his possessive manipulations: "It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live" (p. 86). As objects in a collection they are dead.

Like Charles, the narrator is a schizoid personality; he claims to be both the God of the novel and a "minor gamma-ray particle", a mere chance happening (yet one, which as we have seen, is another type of god, "the pagan god of chance"). He continually shifts between these roles. When Charles is hovering on the edge of an existential breakthrough, the narrator undercuts the heaviness of such scenes by dragging him off to the club for champagne and milk-punch or by digging up some piece of Victorian social history. He punctures the pretensions of the mystic and the existentialist seeker after truth by slipping into the role of solid citizen and Cartesian observer. The narrator entertains the scientific, the rational and the historical on the one hand, and the mystical, the intuitive and the natural on the other.

Charles plays out this dual role too. When he is offered the chance, he tries to rationalize and tame his passionate sexual and emotional response to Sarah, and to transform her into a mere subject for the exercise of a detached, scientific curiosity. The pretence of scientific detachment is designed to conceal the real agenda which is to control Sarah's wildness through naming and categorization, an agenda in which he is aided and abetted by Dr Grogan's patriarchal medical discourses. In the masculine atmosphere of Dr Grogan's study, he introduces the worrying subject of Sarah by flippantly saying: "I was introduced the other day to a specimen of the local flora … A very strange case" (p. 134). Like Fowles's nemesis Linnaeus, he is reducing her to a taxonomical representation.

Grogan has already provided a precedent for Charles. His voyeuristic use of the telescope to spy on women is excused by the conspiratorial aside to Charles that it is "For astronomical purposes only" (p. 132). Charles and Grogan congratulate themselves on being moral and ethical paragons as men of science but here the science is used as a cover for a Peeping Tom in one case and as a preparation for seduction in the other. The scientific project legitimizes the possession and naming which Grogan attempts in Sarah's case by assigning her to that convenient category of hysteria, a category which was employed largely for women who attempted to evade the

strictures of Victorian society. Despite his role as chief male chauvinist, however, Grogan retains enough scientific humility to mock the German doctor's attempt at definitive categorization: Sarah's affliction is put into the category of "obscure melancholia" which means, according to Grogan, that the German doctor doesn't know "what the devil it is that causes it" (p. 134).

Nevertheless, the telescope - framing, constricting and possessing - is the instrument that serves as the authorial eye at the outset of the novel. Presumably "the local spy" referred to in the first chapter is Grogan, although the narrator, who knows and possesses Grogan, really seems to direct its operations. He first catches Charles and Ernestina in the lens and performs a careful taxonomy, intimating their social status through their fashionable plumage. They fit into their time and place. His next object, Sarah, is radically outside of time and place, "more like a living memorial to the drowned, a figure from myth, than any proper fragment of the petty provincial day" (p. 9). Sarah, as a mythic figure, is beyond possession yet she is characterized as the French lieutenant's whore and so, in a sense, is common property, available in different ways to ownership and dissection by the likes of Mrs Poulteney, Charles, Grogan, Ernestina and the dairyman who contemptuously gives her her title. The title of the novel conceals this paradox: she is *The French Lieutenant's Woman* but the story also reveals that she is not the French lieutenant's woman. The relationship implied in the title is one of possession; it is a relationship which we ultimately learn has never existed. If the title of a novel normally serves as an indication of what the novel is about, then in this case, it tells us that Sarah ultimately evades all attempts at categorization and possession.

The unpossessed

There is another, subtler homage paid to George Eliot in the novel. The narrator's theorizing on the novel in Chapter 13 has an antecedent in Chapter 17 of Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1878-1880) entitled "In Which the Story Pauses a Little". Eliot's narrator accepts and rejoices in the world as it is: "I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this" (p. 164). Fowles's narrator takes a contrary stance predicated on the postmodernist realization that there is never just one world to create. He wants instead to broaden the field of reality: the motivation of all novelists is the wish "to create worlds as real as, but other than the one that is" (1971, p. 86). Eliot's determinism frames the world in terms of order, of "universal regular sequence" predicated on essentially Newtonian postulates and attempts to define a proper social order as one which follows the unimpeachable patterns of natural law. Fowles recognizes this order but sees it as only one side of things. He says that "Christianity says that creation has a beginning, middle and end", whereas "The Greeks claimed that creation is a timeless *processus*". For Fowles, both propositions are correct (1981, p. 20). He writes: "We all live in two worlds: the old comfortable man-centred world of absolutes and the harsh world of relatives. The latter, the relativity reality, terrifies us; and isolates and dwarfs us all" (1981, p. 39). The terrifying choices that Charles has to make belong in this timeless

relativity reality which is figured in the novel as the anarchic world of sex and nature. Sarah's threatening sexuality, which is in the end a projection of Charles's consciousness, breaks through the barriers of time.

The question that leads to the narrator's self-conscious exploration of his own role is this: "Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?" to which the forthright reply that opens the door to the dimension of relativity is "I do not know" (p. 84-85). Sarah is made to preserve the aura of mystery that has enshrouded her from the start and which gives her the status not of an individuated woman but of archetypal Woman: Eve, nature-goddess, *femme fatale*, mysterious Other. The first thing that we are told about Sarah is that she is "a figure from myth", who has an "unforgettable face" with "no artifice … no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness" (p. 13). All the subsequent descriptions of Sarah's social position, life-history, her relationships with the world, are dominated by this initial description, even though we learn that in the social reality of the novel Sarah is certainly full of artifice and masks and is diagnosed as a hysteric by Grogan. Versions of Sarah become expressions of Charles's unconscious - in Jungian terms, his anima: Charles "became increasingly unsure of the frontier between the real Sarah and the Sarah he has created in so many such dreams" (p. 367). The narrative stance towards Sarah reflects this insecurity. As a model and amanuensis for the painter Rossetti at the end of the novel, she continues in the role of mythical figure, since Rossetti's fantastic females bear as tenuous a relationship to mundane reality as Sarah.

The figure of Sarah as myth, as *femme fatale*, as unknowable Woman, has provoked the ire of feminist critiques, yet at one level, the novel is sympathetic to feminist concerns. It is set in the year in which John Stuart Mill introduced a motion in Parliament for women's suffrage, a fact which is sign-posted for the reader as the beginning of a desirable social process (p. 101), and Fowles obviously intends the reader to see the fates of women such as Ernestina, Sarah, and Mary as predicated on the gender roles that Victorian society prescribed for them. Ernestina's passionate declamation to Charles demonstrates Fowles's sympathy for her predicament. Confronted by the pressing social and personal crisis of losing her fiancé, she reveals her awareness of her place in society as a woman who is expected to be little more than a decorative object for sale in the marriage market (p. 327). Sarah, in her social role, becomes a model of the Victorian New Woman, a harbinger of the political and social emancipation which the epigraph from Marx that serves as the novel's subtitle implies is a desirable outcome. Outwardly, then, Fowles is sympathetic to feminist ideals.

But it is the figure of Sarah - or in some ways the absence of Sarah - who invites the most criticism. To me there are two Sarahs: one is the poor, over-educated, intelligent woman for whom society prescribes a marginal and frustrating role, a governess who is governed. The other Sarah puts herself beyond the pale, puts herself outside the reach of normal social discourse and

is rendered as fantastic, mythical, and romantic. Feminist critiques object to this mythic persona and want instead a solid and completely knowable figure.

Bruce Woodcock typifies the criticism of Fowles's sexism. He sees the novel's male narrator as endorsing patriarchal assumptions and inviting a knowing complicity from a presumed male audience. Sarah is "a mystery woman who is both a male fantasy and the catalyst for male redemption" (1984, p. 92). Sarah is Charles's fantasy and redemption. The Eve myth is ascribed to other women. The narrator comments that "Modern women like Sarah exist, and I have never understood them" (Fowles, 1971, p. 85). This statement does present the Eve myth as a continuing reality that poses the question of whether women can ever be understood by men, but Fowles must be credited at least with honesty. The myth of Eve is presented openly, as either a fundamental human reality, or as a persistent patriarchal assumption. The novel exposes Charles's fantasies as a social and psychological fact and does not pass judgement on them. The myth of Woman as Eve, as *femme fatale,* as the embodiment of nature, is one that Fowles taps into because it is persistent, powerful, and pervasive. Accepting Sarah as a mythic figure demands that we cannot see her completely as the embodiment of female socialization. She *is* Charles, his anima, his alter ego, his repressed other - what he cannot be under patriarchal society with its demands for duty and conformity.

Sarah is an aspect of a figure that the narrator calls "the pagan god … of chance" (p. 35). Woodcock and others criticize Fowles for refusing to know Sarah, or rather, refusing to construct her as knowable; but Charles, in his most epiphanic, most intensely aware moments is equally unknown: "I am infinitely strange to myself" (1984, p. 306). The Marxian epigraph to the novel which declares that "[e]very emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself" does not rest for Fowles on entirely social and economic terms. In fact, Fowles's central criticism of Socialism is its scientistic absolutism which pretends to abolish "mystery" (1981, p. 110).

Sarah's mythic, erotic, dangerous qualities are defined by the archetypal misogynistic trope of the monstrous, devouring Woman, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, so prominent in Victorian art. This is a trope which Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the pre-Raphaelites draw very heavily on. Rossetti's portraits of mythical female monsters such as *The Lady Lilith* (1868) and *Astarte Syriaca* (1877) are prime examples of the type (See Paglia, 1991, pp. 489-494). It is a model which Charles falls back on in despair when he realizes that he cannot possess Sarah:

> She could give only to possess; and to possess him - whether because he was what he was, whether because possession was so imperative in her that it had to be constantly renewed, could never be satisfied by one conquest only, whether … but he could not, and would never know - to possess him was not enough. (p. 397; Fowles's ellipsis)

The narrator's intrusion into Charles's thoughts here negates the idea that Sarah is the possessive, smothering female monster. She serves as an example to him; the freedom that she achieves conforms to the narrator's statement that "[t]here is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (p. 86). As Charles leaves the Rossetti household he finds "himself reborn … with the baby's helplessness - all to be recommenced, all to be learnt again!" (p. 398). He neither possesses nor is possessed. His possibilities are multiplied. As a "baby", a blank slate, he is now as unknowable as Sarah.

Woodcock's analysis seems beset by a timid refusal to acknowledge that libido and sexuality are dangerous areas and that danger is crucial to their attraction. He presents the novel's one sexual act as being "little short of rape" (1984, p. 106) - violent, brutal, unrestrained. But what is the alternative - Charles and Ernestina's chaste sexless kiss under the mistletoe? Woodcock even criticizes Charles for his "betrayal" of Ernestina (1984, p. 102). Charles's humble, mumbled, abjectly apologetic suggestion that Ernestina might one day meet a man more worthy of her than him is presented as evidence of Charles's "complicity along with all other men in the social exploitation of women" (1984, p. 102). But this is not betrayal; Charles is giving up the chance to comfortably exploit Ernestina and her father's fortune. The fact that he jilts Ernestina is evidence of Charles's growing authenticity and a refusal of the complicity that Woodcock ascribes to him. After all, Charles does become a social pariah, albeit one cushioned by a handy private income. He meets Sarah in the sex act - which for all its violence and subterfuge is not rape but the culmination and expression of mutual desire - with all the contradictions of male sexual fantasy and all the never absolutely fulfilled promises of sex as a meeting of souls, bodies and psyches. Sarah's role in this scene is teasingly submissive, and she exploits the trope of the helpless, hapless female victim inviting either male protection or conquest. But Charles sees through this social pose: it was "as if all her mystery, this most intimate self, was exposed before him: proud and submissive, bound and unbound, his slave and his equal" (p. 301). In her he sees himself.

Dualism and Complementarity

Fowles employs basic cultural dichotomies: nature/society, male/female, science/art. The masculine, the social and the scientific embody the "world of absolutes" while the female, the artistic and natural embody the world of relativities. Charles Smithson stands as the perfect representative of the man with these two worlds pressing in on him and the potential to become engaged in both of them. Charles exists in the novel as a moment in evolutionary time, a living fossil who is becoming a relic in the face of the rising classes represented by Sam and Mr. Freeman but he is also a transcender of time.

Fowles sees the world as a Heraclitean flux where dichotomies become unities: "The cosmos is an infinite proliferation of fire, atoms, forms, collisions, attractions, sports, mutations, all happening in the space-time continuum; only thus can Law survive against Chaos, and only thus can Chaos survive against Law" (1981, p. 20). Fowles's conception of the universe as flux, as a place of alternating opposites, implies an acceptance of the relativity of all values. Where for George Eliot duty is absolute, for Fowles it is provisional and contingent, a social construction that further restricts a freedom which is already circumscribed by the deterministic operations of chance. The Victorian attitude is satirized when Grogan wants Charles to swear allegiance to the truths of science on his revered copy of Darwin's *Origin*: "Man, man," pleads Grogan, "are we not both believers in science?" (p. 194). Grogan's appeal asks Charles to defy social convention in the cause of truth. His injunction to Smithson is the command of the Delphic oracle: "Know thyself, Smithson, know thyself!" (p. 194). Charles does learn to know himself but with an existentialist's sense that the process of self-knowledge must be continuous. His identities are multiple, there are no set patterns to life, the problem is "not to inhabit one face alone" (p. 399). Charles must learn to know not merely his "self" but rather his "selves".

The narrator shares this schizophrenia or, to put it more mildly, this dualistic approach, with his characters: he is not fully part of the modern age. Like Charles, he has a foot planted in each century. The narrator of *Daniel Martin* (1978) says of himself: "My contemporaries were all brought up in some degree of the nineteenth century, since the twentieth did not begin till 1945" (p. 94). This statement also fits the narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The modern age and the timeless chaos that it represents against the solidities of the Victorian age is certainly not an unambiguously utopian realm for Fowles. Fowlesian nature is not completely benign. The age begins with that terrible expression of Heraclitean fire and flux, and the outcome of Einstein's equation of matter and energy, the atom bomb. However, these two worlds are never far apart. The intrusions of the narrator ostensibly illustrate the differences between the two ages. But they also collapse the distinctions between them because the time of history and progress is revealed as artificial and uncertain: "I have only pretended to slip back into 1867," (p. 348) says the narrator. Historical time, clock-time, is both a child's toy and something bigger. Complicating the picture further, the narrator tentatively identifies himself with Charles: "perhaps Charles is myself disguised" (p. 85).

The narrator adopts numerous guises in the novel. He pretends to be the omniscient nineteenth-century god of the novel; he is a social commentator and historian; he plays the role of an impresario; at other times he is a mere voyeur; at one point he converts himself into an owl at Sarah's window; finally he is an agent of chance, "a gamma-ray particle". In his Grogan-like persona of diagnostician, he describes the mind-set of the Victorian age as schizophrenic, a malaise that is induced by the "Victorian mania for categorization" - echoes of Fowles's distaste for Linnaeus here - which leads to the sharp division between soul and body: "Every Victorian had two minds; and Charles had at least that" (p. 319). This schizophrenia is figuratively

illustrated in the workings of Charles's sexual imagination. After Sarah tells him the false story of her seduction by Varguennes, he makes that story true through imagination; he thinks of both himself and Sarah as split personalities, embodiments of different potential selves: "He was at one and the same time Varguennes enjoying her and the man who sprang forward and struck her down; just as Sarah was to him both an innocent victim and a wild, abandoned woman" (pp. 153-154). Similarly in his encounter with the prostitute - another Sarah, who, like Sarah Woodruff, plays the twin roles of mother and whore - he becomes "two people: One who had drunk too much and one who was now sexually excited" (p. 272). This adoption of various personae is explained as an evolutionary move, an adaptation to the times. Charles behaves differently with Sam than he does with Ernestina than he does with Sarah: "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; and there will be others of him before we are finished" (p. 127). There will indeed: the potential in evolutionary adaptation is limitless and these potential changes can lie dormant or be activated. They thus cross time barriers since they represent always existing potentialities. This schizophrenic state is not simply a product of Charles's Victorianism: it seems to be more a constant throughout history. As I have said, the narrative intrusions accentuate some differences between the two ages but only within one framework: The Victorian age is an archetype of the "man-centred world of absolutes"; the modern world is an archetype of the word of relativism and flux. But this is merely a schematic, artificial distinction. These worlds coexist. On numerous occasions in the novel phrases such as "the whole Victorian age was lost" (p. 66) and "The moment overcame the age" (p. 217) and descriptions such as that of Charles's exterior as "a place without history" (p. 68) indicate that historical reality is a fragile and conditional phenomenon. This proposition is put most completely and emphatically in this passage:

> 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. (p. 179)

Another echo of Eliot resounds as Charles looks up at the fossil-rich lias strata in the cliffs of Lyme Bay and sees there "a kind of edificiality of time", which reveal the "inexorable laws" of evolution" (p. 47). Like Eliot with her faith in "the growing good of the world" (1994, p. 838), Charles sees the results of these laws in terms of progress. He believes in himself as a prime example of a teleological evolution which has designed him as one of the fittest. He has interpreted the theory of evolution in terms of the ladder of progress and he sees himself at the apex. This is part of the intellectual structure of the Victorian age as the narrator points out: "the Victorians were not a dialectically minded age … They were not the people for existential moments, but for chains of cause and effect; for positive all-explaining theories" (p. 215). Fowles, however, introduces a dialectic here. Whenever the narrator says something about the

Victorian Age he sets up the expectation of difference in the present age. Charles's success in establishing himself as a free individual consists in breaking through his web of duties, and destroying the illusory satisfactions produced by the empirical and rational "edificiality of time". The web of duties is like Eliot's web of societal interaction but it ultimately gives way to "a new reality, a new causality, a new creation" (p. 316). The dutiful Charles Smithson is the man who surrenders to lineal time, enshrined in Ernestina's banal pocket-watch (p. 291). This is the Charles of Chapter 44, the parodic "happy" ending. He is the proper Victorian patriarch who follows Duty which ultimately leads to a life that is hollow and shallow: "one lived by irony and sentiment, one observed convention, what one might have been was one more subject for detached and ironic observation; as was what might be. One surrendered, in other words; one learnt to be what one was" (p. 292). What might have been does not exist, what might be is inevitable and what one was is ineluctably what one is. To learn to be what one was, to undergo this surrender, presumes a fixed and solid identity which is acquired immutably through the operations of history. Fowles's work questions and undermines the dominance of lineal time that prescribes and underwrites this identity.

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