



## MULTI-ENDINGS IN JOHN FOWLES'S *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*

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### ABSTRACT

*The present research paper attempts to study the Multi-endings with special reference with John Fowles's 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'. John Fowles is a prolific and prominent novelist of postmodern era. He is a brilliant essayist and a keen observer of nature. He is not only a novelist but also poet and short story writer. In his childhood, Fowles had experiences of evil, cruelty, and pain which are reflected in his fiction and nonfiction. Fowles won several awards for his unique contribution in the field of the literature. John Fowles, the British writer who's, multilayered fiction explored the tensions between free will and a restriction of society, even as it played with traditional novelistic conventions and challenged readers to find their own interpretations. Usually each novel has one ending but in John Fowles's 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' he has given three endings. He has used techniques of multiple endings. The novels of John Fowles are multidimensional, experimental as well as full with postmodern techniques. His novel 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' reflects various aspects of human life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *multi- ending, novel, technique, explore, Fowles etc.*

Before dealing with story it is necessary to understand concept 'Multi-ending'. Sometime 'ending' and 'closure' are used for same meaning but these two concepts are different from each other. According to Marianna Torgovnick:

*Ending, in narrative' is narrative as 'the last definable unite of work, section, scene, chapter, page, paragraph, sentence whatever seems most appropriate for a given text and 'closure' as the process by which a novel reaches an adequate and appropriate conclusion. (Torgovnick: 1981, 6)*

The quote indicates that there is difference between ending and closure. Postmodern novelist has used various devices in their writing as: Minimalism, intertextuality, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, magic realism, metafiction etc. Multi-ending is device of Metafiction. Metafiction is the kind of fiction which attracts attention to itself being fictional. It has self-referential elements. It is related with meta-narrative. Meta-narrative is used to refer to narrative about narratives. Some Metafictional works have multiple ending. These works do not have one unified ending; reader is offered more than one ending to choose between them. John Fowles has used this device in his famous novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. This technique reacts against the realistic technique of traditional ending in which problems are solved and mystery is revealed. It helps to assure the existential concept of uncertainty 'nothing is sure'.

*The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a tragedy set in the mid-nineteenth century Victorian England, between late March 1867 to May 1869. It is a love story of Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson, who wants to escape from the tyranny of Victorian age. The novel narrates torments of enigmatic governess Sarah Woodruff, who is referred as "poor tragedy" or *The French Lieutenant's* whore. She is exiled from the society. Sarah is an only daughter, not of wealthy merchant, but rather of a tenant-farmer of very modest means. She is utterly alone. The local says that Sarah is pining for her lost lover.

In the opening of the novel, a couple was walking down the quay. The girl was wearing "a magenta skirt of an almost daring narrowness". Her dress style is too advanced or laughable of their



time. Ernestina and Charles saw a motionless figure dressed in black and looking fixedly at the horizon. Ernestina tells Charles something Sarah's story and Charles develops strong curiosity about her. Ernestina being romantic, wants to "walk to the end" of the world with him. Ernestina is a pretty, coy and intelligent young woman of twenty- one. She is fiancée of Charles Smithson. She is only pampered daughter of rich parents. She is representative of typical Victorian female who is sexually repressed:

*'Sexual taboo is a taboo not easily broken by either men or women, although men could, and did enjoy, the company of prostitutes; it is more a gratification of the urge to copulate than a real involvement of two persons loving each other physically'. Respectable women can never dream of indulging themselves in so profane a pastime as sexual pleasure. Ernestina is a product of Victorian age' (Batra: 2008, 231).*

It reflects that the condition of Victorian men and women. Men could enjoy the company of prostitute which is rampant in urban as well as rural areas. Charles meets to Ernestina's father who is very rich man. Her grandfather is a retailer of cloth, while Charles grandfather is a baronet. Charles is a scientist; he has already written a monograph on the fossil. Though Ernestina loves Charles, he is not happy with Ernestina. He is "dry as a stick". Charles and Ernestina saw a dark figure standing near a bollard and gazing into the distance. Ernestina says that she must be "poor Tragedy". For her:

*'She is ...a little mad. Let us turn. I don't like to go near her'.*

*They stopped. He started at the black figure.*

*'But I'm intrigued. Who is this French lieutenant?'*

*'A man she is said to have .....*

*'Fallen in the love with?'*

*'Worse than that'.*

*'And he abandoned her? There is a child?'*

*'No. I think no child. It is all gossip' (FLW 9).*

The narrative reflects that Sarah is tragic woman. She is in love with the French lieutenant. She is abandoned by the French lieutenant. She keeps waiting for him with her gaze fixed on the horizon. Charles turns away and he blames to the mentality of small town people for paying attention into others affair and gossiping about them. Charles is only heir of the family. He is student of Oxford University. Though he is of thirty-two he has no clear goal in his life. Charles's father spent most of his fortune in gambling. He likes girls. He used to spend most of time in the company of women. He has learnt the art of moving away quickly before falling into "the marriage Trap". Mrs. Poulteney is an important character in the novel. She is rich woman. She is strict by nature, and has strict rules for her servants. She has her spies everywhere; they report her about each and every thing. She fears hell. She is religious as well as superstitious woman. She wants reserved place for her in the heaven. But Mrs. Poulteney has not done enough charity in her life. By showing compassion for Sarah, she feels that she could reserve her place in paradise. She keeps Sarah as servant in her house.

Sam Farrow is another Character in the novel who is Charles's servant. Sam Farrow is xerox copy of the famous Sam Weller in Dickens's *Pickwick paper*. He is cockney servant in the mid-nineteenth century. He knows all masters' secrets. Sam and Mary represent typical Victorian servant in upper-class household. They are very close to their master. Sam knows all the secret of his master. He blackmails Charles.

Charles is attracted to Sarah, but decided to give her money and send her away to Exeter, soon passion overcome his desire, he pursues her and they make love for the first time in a hotel room discovers that Sarah was a virgin, and that although vagueness existed, the story of her love for him was a lie, Charles wanted to marry with Sarah but she run away. Charles wants to go London in search of Sarah where he meets Sarah's father who makes him an offer of joining business which in any case, he is going to inherit after his marriage. Charles is disgusted by the offer. He feels anger,



humiliation, frustration and fear as he realizes his own value in the eyes in the working class which have risen after the Industrial Revolution in England. Charles go to London where he meets to Ernestina. He presents Ernestina a plant of jasmine as a token of love. Ernestina's eyes were full of tears.

*He could not go on, for she had turned, her eyes full of tears. Their hands met, and he drew her to him. They did not kiss. They could not. How can you merciless imprison all natural sexual instinct for twenty years and then not expect the prisoner to be racked by sods when the doors are thrown open? (FLW 83).*

Charles finds Sarah in London where she is working with the pre- Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. At the same time, Charles learns his projected inheritance from an old uncle who is in jeopardy, as the uncle is now engaged to a woman young enough to bear him an heir. When Charles comes to meet Sarah at London, she was living with an artist. As soon as she sees him, she is surprised by seeing him in London. She tries to tell him she is not mistress of an artist. Charles wants to know about her decision, at that time Sarah says:

*"I did not mean to make you so. I mean to do what was best. I had abused your trust, your generosity, I, yes, I had thrown myself at you, forced myself upon you, knowing very well that you had other obligations. Madness was in me at that time. I did not see it clearly till that day in Exeter. The worst you thought of me then was nothing but the truth'. She paused, he waited. 'I have since seen artists destroy work that might to the amateur seem perfectly good. I remonstrated once. I was told that if an artist is not his own sternest judge he is not fit to be an artist. I believe that is right. I believe I was right to destroy what had begun between us (FLW 451).*

The citation indicates that Sarah doesn't want to go with Charles back to Lyme Regis. She says that she is happy in London. She doesn't want to come back. She says that she was mad, when she was in love with Charles. According to Sarah, there is no love between them. In chapter number forty-four he has given first ending. In the first ending, Sarah woodruff is widely known as "poor Tragedy" in the town of Lyme Regis, as disgraced woman. She tells Charles about her past life. Sarah says:

*'Mr. Smithson, what I beg you to understand is not that I did this shameful thing, but why I did it. Why I sacrificed a women's most precious possession for the transient gratification of a man I did not love'. She raised her hands to her cheeks. 'I did it so that I should never be the same again. I did it so that people should point at me, should say, there walk the French Lieutenant's Whore –oh yes, let the word be said. So that they should know I have suffered, and suffer, as other suffer in every town and village in this land. I could not marry that man. So married shame (FLW 175).*

The dialogue indicates that she is suffering. She tells Charles that I couldn't marry with any other man so I married with shame. Let the people call me the French Lieutenant's Whore. It is supposed that she is exploited by a French sailor who returned to France and married another woman. She spends her some time off her domestic work on the Cobb at Lyme Regis, staring at the sea. One day she is seen by the "gentleman" Charles Smithson and his fiancée Ernestina Freeman. Ernestina tells Charles something of Sarah's story and he developed strong curiosity about her. Charles meets Sarah. During several meeting Sarah tells Charles her story and asks about emotional support. Sarah says:

*I do not mean that I knew what I did, that it was in cold blood that I let Varguennes have his will of me. 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 know no other way to break out of what I was. If I had left that room, and returned to Mr. Talbot's and resumed my former existence, I know that by now I should be truly dead.....and by my own hand. What has kept me alive is shame, my knowing that I am truly not like other women. I shall never have children, husband, and that innocent happiness they have. And they will never understand reason of my 'crime' (FLW 176).*

The citation indicates the condition of Sarah's mind. According to Sarah woman like Sarah should commit suicide. She can't lead the life of common people. She can't have her own children. Charles feels sorry for her condition but keeps distance from Sarah. He sends Sarah to Exeter. At this point Fowles adopts a godlike stance of nineteenth-century novelist that he both assumes and gently mocks, and offers three different endings. In the first "happy" ending in which he kept in mind Victorian morals and values. Charles forgets Sarah and marries Ernestina. Evidently their marriage is not happy one, and Sarah's fate is unknown. After that Charles encounters with Sarah, at Exeter.

*She did not rise when Charles entered, but gave him a long reproachful look from her eyelashes.*

*He smiled. 'I forgot to buy flowers in Exeter'.*

*'So I see, sir'.*

*'I was in such haste to be here before you went to bed' (FLW 337).*

The given quote indicates that Charles and Ernestina are happy in their married life. He meets to Ernestina. She becomes glade to see him and this story ends. Although they do not live happily ever after; but they lived together. They have seven children, and Sir Robert has twins through his marriage with widow, Mrs. Bells Tomkins. Aunt Tranter and Dr. Grogen lives in their nineties. Mrs. Poulteney doesn't get entry in heaven. But it is obviously a "fake" ending. The second ending occurs in chapter no sixty. We came to know that Charles becomes intimate with Sarah. He breaks his engagement with Ernestina. Sam blackmails Charles by passing on the letter which he has given to deliver to Sarah. Charles is disgraced and humiliated. His uncle gets married and has an heir of his own.

Sarah flees to London without telling anything to Charles. Who was in love with her, he tried to search Sarah for many years everywhere. He became successful to find her. she is living with several artists like the Rossettis, and enjoys an artistic and creative life. He tries to talk with Sarah about their love but Sarah is not ready to leave artist. Charles comes to know that Sarah has a daughter from artist. Her name is Lalage. Sarah's daughter tried to reunite Sarah and her husband. When Charles was searching to Sarah, she meets Charles suddenly. She looked at him and says: 'How came here, Mr. Smithson?' (FLW 447). She had not sent the address. Even she is not grateful. He was very happy by meeting her."Did you not know I broke my engagement to Miss Freeman?"(FLW 447).Sarah is in shock by listening it. Charles tells her that he searched her every corner of the city. He had given the advertisement in newspaper also. When he enters in the house, Sarah says: 'I am his amanuensis. His assistant' (FLW 448). Charles asks her whether he know about her background. There is dialogue between Charles and Sarah. Charles says:

*'He knows you are not married?'*

‘I pass as a widow’.

His last question was clumsy; but he lost all tact.

‘I believe his wife is dead?’

‘She is dead. But not in his heart’.

‘He is not remarried?’

‘He shares this house with his brother’ (FLW 449).

The quote indicates that Charles was in search of Sarah. Sarah tells him that she is living with an artist. Sarah is living in same house. Tells him that she is living as widow, this is second ending of the novel.

*‘Mr. Smithson, I am not his mistress. If you know him, if you knew the tragedy of his private life..... you could not for a moment be so.....’But she fell silent. He had gone too far; and now he stood with rapped knuckles and red cheeks. Silence again; and then she said evenly, ‘I have found new affections. But they are not of the kind you suggest’ (FLW 450).*

It reflects that Sarah told Charles, though she is living with an artist, she is not his mistress. She is leading life as widow. In third ending Fowles appears as a minor character who, turns the clock back by about fifteen minutes “to see how events could have or should have been”. The events are same as in second ending but when Charles finds Sarah in London again; their reunion is a sour one. He feels that he has been used by Sarah. He sees some benefit in the journey toward self-knowledge. Sarah hide information about her life. She does not tell him about the child, and expresses no interest in furthering their relationship. She speaks lie to Charles. One of the most impressive aspects of the novel is Fowles’s ability to shift the characters and the reader back and forth between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Fowles himself appears at times and forces us with him, to participate in the action, inviting us to comment, to observe, to judge and to reflect on what happens. The novel is written in familiar style as though the narrator is conversing with reader. In historical terms, The French Lieutenant’s Woman is the fictional history of Charles and Sarah.

The most impressive aspect of the novel is Fowles’s ability to shift the characters and reader back fourth between centuries. Fowles keeps his reader guessing as he himself is guessing, so he tells us. We are deliberately told by Fowles that he has ‘cheated’ by creating three different endings and he even appears in the novel as one character, who turn back his watch and gives us the last, existential endings. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* dramatizes many of the social concerns of Victorian England, especially the great changes in social structure involved in the emergence of a wealthy and powerful commercial class, the demise of the aristocracy and the beginnings of female emancipation. This is the age the historian G. M. Young has called “The most striking example” in British history “of pacific creative unsubversive revolution.” (1953, 181). The novel is written in familiar style as through the narrator is conversing with the reader. It is a mixture of straightforward prose narrative. The dialogue does capture the town of the Victorian period. 'The French Lieutenant’s woman' is historical novel. It is presentation of Victorian norms politics, customs, rituals; it depicts rural as well as urban life.

Fowles keeps his reader guessing as if he himself is guessing. This technique gives chance to participate in shaping the work. As long as readers are different from each other, each one chooses the ending he likes. Fowles tried to focus on principle of uncertainties. The technique creates the suspense and tension in the mind of reader. There are several narrative presents in the novel. The identity is always ambiguous in the novel. Fowles cleverly used number of ‘voices’ throughout the novel.



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