

*Sarah Woodruff Mystique in John Fowles's The  
French Lieutenant's Woman*

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**Abstract:**

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a metafictional neo-Victorian novel concerned with a retrospective analysis of Victorian society with the aid of a modern, highly manipulative, narrator. The novel's protagonist, Sarah Woodruff, is the most enigmatic character due to her manipulative nature and an accomplice narrator who sustains her mystery. This paper analyzes the aura of mystique surrounding Sarah as a revolutionary Victorian and as a narrator-like presence located outside the period to unearth unrepresented tendencies of Victorian society.

**لغز "سارة وودراف" في رواية عشيقة الملازم الفرنسي لـ "جون فاولز"****الباحثة****مي حسام حسن****الاستاذ الدكتور****نايف الياسين****جامعة دمشق / كلية الآداب****المخلص:-**

عشيقة الملازم الفرنسي للكاتب "جون فاولز" هي رواية فيكتورية جديدة تعتمد تقنية القص الماورائي. تعنى الرواية بتحليل المجتمع الفيكتوري عبر إلقاء نظرة استرجاعية عليه بالاستعانة براوٍ شديد التلاعب من العصر الحديث. تعد "سارة وودراف"، وهي بطلة الرواية، من أكثر الشخصيات غموضاً، ويعزى ذلك إلى طبيعتها المتلاعبية وإلى تواطؤ الراوي في حفظ سرها. تحلل هذه الدراسة هالة الغموض المحيطة بسارة كشخصية فيكتورية ثورية وككيان مشابه للرواي يقع خارج الحقبة الزمنية بهدف كشف نزعات خفية في المجتمع الفيكتوري لم تكن لتمثل آنذاك

### John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: The Sarah Woodruff Mystique

*The French Lieutenant's Woman* depicts a slice of Victorian society in which Charles, an idle aristocrat, is torn between his commitment to his traditional wealthy middle class fiancé, Ernestina, and his attraction to a mysterious disgraced woman of unique intelligence, Sarah Woodruff. The novel was written in 1969, while the events are set a hundred years earlier. It is thus considered a neo-Victorian novel, which re-examines the era to reveal "specific gaps in the Victorian novel's representation," as Ann Humphreys specifies in "The Afterlife of the Victorian Novel: Novels about Novels" (Bratlinger and Thesing 447). The novel also incorporates metafictional elements. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" (2). This is especially relevant to the narrator who is a visitor from the author's present commenting freely on the events from his temporal advantage. Linda Hutcheon elaborates on *FLW*'s double temporal structure in her book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*:

Here we are dealing with a number of worlds within worlds. The core or most traditional novelistic universe is that of the characters. Outside and including that is a world in which exist the man in the train, the impresario - in other words, the narrator's personae who enter, at times, the core world. Outside that is the diegetic world of the narrator's voice. But beyond even that stands John Fowles - the man who masterminds both

the creation of the Chinese-box structure and the tensions which exist between these worlds and which are functional within the novel as a whole. (57-58)

This article builds on the metafictional structure depicted by Hutcheon to analyze the role which the mysterious Sarah Woodruff plays in the novel.

The line separating Hutcheon's 'worlds within worlds' is fairly distinct. The modern world of the narrator and the piece of Victorian society he traces are separate, even when the narrator makes his clumsy visit to that world. Sarah, on the other hand, poses a dilemma in this regard due to the aura of mystique surrounding her character. Sarah's public identity is that of a fallen, possibly insane, woman. This identity is later revealed to be false, yet the motives and true identity of the titular protagonist remain hidden. "Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?" asks a mischievous narrator as if an answer follows (Fowles 96).<sup>1</sup> The infamous chapter thirteen soon shatters the illusion of revealing the mystery. Since the publication of the novel, critics have analyzed and reanalyzed her character in language laden with uncertainties. Sarah seems to habituate the grey border between all the other characters on the one hand and the narrator, a character of a different kind, on the other. The main question this article aims to study whether Sarah should be considered an evolved Victorian character which would not have been represented in that era or a modern narrator-like presence which unearths those unrepresented tendencies.

The novel depicts a morphing Victorian society as Charles Scruggs affirms in “The Two Endings of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*,” “In 1867, the Victorian world is at high tide but contains within it new energies and ideas that will tear it apart” (Scruggs 98). The affluence of middle class as a result of the industrial revolution contributed to narrowing the gap between classes. This was reinforced by scientific discoveries which shook the traditional notions. In *Modern Novelists: John Fowles*, James Acheson highlights the significance of Fowles’ choice of the event’s date which coincides with John Stuart Mill’s failed attempt to grant women suffrage as well as the publication of Marx’s *Das Kapital*, which examines the question social class influenced by Darwin’s survival of the fittest (Acheson 33).

Before the events of the novel, Sarah, like the rest of the major characters, seems to fall neatly within the social classification and its inevitable stereotypes in Victorian society. The instability of the Victorian society is evident in the status of most of the major characters and their dissatisfaction with their social status. Ernestina’s inferiority complex which is evident in the phrase “draper’s daughter” resurfaces at many intervals (*FLW* 194), reflecting the anxieties experienced by the middle class. Sam is also dissatisfied with his status seeing the opportunity of change which looms in the air. The narrator states that “the difference between Sam Weller<sup>2</sup> and Sam Farrow (that is, between 1836 and 1867) was this: the first was happy with his role, the second suffered it” (*FLW* 194). Stating the temporal position of each Sam affirms that this is not an

individual state but rather a result of social change. Charles at the beginning of the novel refuses to acknowledge this change and the potential demise of his own class eventually. However, his triumphant assertion that “He himself belonged undoubtedly to the fittest” at the beginning of the novel wavers gradually into a sense of utter loss (*FLW* 161), especially after the potential loss of his inheritance, which “impresses upon Charles the fact that the Victorian gentleman is indeed a dying breed” (Rankin 201).

Likewise, prior to her residence in Lyme Regis, Sarah occupied the traditional role of a governess, which was, as asserted by James Eli Adams, “one of the very few forms of independent economic agency available to middle-class women” (O’Gorman 58). Although Sarah is not considered middle class, her education allowed her to rise closer to the next class without crossing over completely. Sarah’s vehement response to Charles illustrates her dilemma:

“You cannot [understand], 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. [...] “And you were not ever a governess, Mr. Smithson, a young woman without children paid to look after children.” (*FLW* 165-166)

Thus, Sarah is trapped between her innermost desires and the limited roles available to women, which is a legitimate motive to revolt.

Sarah’s invented identity as the French lieutenant’s whore liberates her from being conditioned by the traditional classification of women. According to Lynch, Sarah “relies on a

kind of narrative freedom” utilizing fiction to achieve social freedom because “[t]he conditions necessary for Sarah’s social freedom are not available earlier in the novel” (60). Against “polarizing female identity into two neat categories – virgin and whore, angel and demon, victim and queen – novelists associate goodness with asexuality; badness with hypersexuality” (O’Gorman 164-165), Sarah’s own sexual identity does not fall in either category. While it initially appears to be on the negative extreme of this duality, the complexity of her sexual identity is revealed in Exeter. After their intercourse, it becomes clear that she was a virgin assuming the identity of a sexually experienced woman. However, this is only revealed after the loss of her virginity which replaces her in the second category, but not quite so. In *Text to Reader*, D’haen explores the implications. He elaborates that after the loss of her virginity Sarah can no longer return to her work as a governess nor get married. She also rejects prostitution since she did it without requiring compensation (D’haen 28). “Seen in this light, Sarah’s gratuitous act becomes a supreme prise de conscience of her position in Victorian society. It is an open act of defiance, the only one possible to her” (D’haen 28). The conventional poles are represented by Ernestina, the angel in the house, and Sarah, the prostitute. Sarah, the protagonist, is neither, however. Even before Sarah lost her virginity, she did not share Ernestina’s fear of sexuality: “It was not only her profound ignorance of the reality of copulation that frightened her [Ernestina]; it was the aura of pain and brutality that the act seemed to require” (FLW 34). Sarah also does not share the prostitute’s social

conditioning since she loses her virginity by choice and not by circumstances. Therefore, by analogy to Sarah, the extreme polarization which the Victorian society imposes on women is questioned.

Lenz concludes that “Sarah represents a prototype for the ‘New Woman’ whose unconventional attitudes and actions expose the oppressive machinations of both social and narrative authority” (Lenz 102). Sarah, as an image of the new woman, is highlighted by Charles’s feeling that she “seemed almost to assume some sort of equality of intellect with him” (*FLW* 140), and even the sense of gender role reversal he experiences following an all-too Victorian remark he made: “There was something male about her there. Charles felt himself an old woman” (*FLW* 175). Notably, Charles felt like an ‘old woman’ and not simply a woman. This highlights not only the liberation of women but also the failure of the whole Victorian ideal which is becoming archaic and not up to par with the changes around.

Starting from this premise, it is simple enough to present Sarah as “a more genuine rebel against social constraints” in comparison to the Charles the “conventional rebel,” as Lynch explains (52). However, her rebellion is too perfect to be plausible. Sarah’s disassociation with society is a clean break. As Jackson asserts, she “is a *suddenly* occurring new kind of self” (277, emphasis added), which is problematic. Sarah’s position as a governess is the only ‘Victorian’ image we have of her. The other particulars of her emotional state then are omitted. When we meet Sarah she is already established as a



non-Victorian and none of her actions reveal any remnant Victorianism. This is, in itself, dubious since it is almost impossible to extricate oneself completely from the mentality of society, especially since the reader is not offered enough insight to make this connection. In “‘The French Lieutenant's Woman’: A Discussion,” Ian Adam states that:

perhaps my misgivings about Sarah lie in this fact that so much may be said about her in theoretical terms and not enough in more ordinary ways, about say, her tastes, habits, history, antipathies or desires. The possibility of such ordinary discussions, certainly in realistic fiction and perhaps in all fiction, provides us with much of our sense of a character's reality, but the material for Sarah is given sparsely and usually equivocally, and the results are predictable. The quarrel becomes not one with an existentialist heroine but with her existence. (Bratlinger et al 347)

Thus, on one level, we would like to believe that Sarah is this perfect specimen of social evolution, yet we are not given enough background to back this claim.

In Charles, who is the second possible specimen of modern evolution, we can trace this transformation. His imperfect rebellion against social convention is justified by his extensive travelling, his interest in Darwin, and so on. Even then, the change in Charles is gradual and the Victorian ideal of “duty” retains a consistent presence throughout his journey even after his decision to break his engagement to Tina and “forfeited the right to be considered a gentleman” (*FLW* 396). Sarah, on the other hand, does not seem to suffer from any conflict to the

extent that Ian Adam describes her as “an anti-character [...] in the sense of being liberated from the past conditioning which defines the identity and destiny of others” (Brantlinger et al 347). Till the very end, Sarah insists “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” (FLW 431).

In fact, Sarah’s connections to the modern world of the narrator are much more abundant than her ties to her own society. The narrator makes a direct remark to that effect: “She turned and looked at him then. There was once again a kind of penetration of his real motive that was disconcertingly naked. We can sometimes recognize the looks of a century ago on a modern face; but never those of a century to come” (FLW 176). If people cannot even recognize a look from the future, how did Sarah, a supposedly Victorian woman, acquire it? The emphatic ‘never’ thus casts many doubts regarding Sarah’s temporal reality.

Sarah’s accomplished modernity is most evident in her pattern of evolution. All the aforementioned characters, in the spirit of evolution dominant in that era and the novel alike, seek some form of evolution consistent with their own frame of mind. Sarah stands in stark opposition to the rest of the characters by adopting the evolutionary stance of the modern age rather than the Victorian evolutionary concept. In “Charles and the Hopeful Monster: Postmodern Evolutionary Theory in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*,” Tony E. Jackson highlights the distinction as follows:

perhaps the most distinguishing difference between the late twentieth-century and nineteenth-century Darwinists involves a

strict avoidance of an anthropocentric evolutionary story-that is, the version of natural selection in which *Homo sapiens* always becomes the *telos* or goal of the evolutionary path, the version in which, as Stephen Jay Gould has said, ‘the word itself [evolution] becomes a synonym for progress.’ (223)

While a more modern stance acknowledges that ‘Natural selection ... worked toward adaptation, not progress; it was opportunistic and ungoverned.... [There is a] possibility that evolution can move backwards as indifferently as forwards: life is in flux’ (O’Gorman 212).

Indeed, the actions of Sam, Ernestina, Freeman, and one of the paths Charles chooses reflect this evolution-as-progress mentality. Sam blackmails Charles to secure higher social and financial status. Charles and Tina’s marriage is a typical example of the Victorian marriage of convenience in which ‘a ‘hard middle class’ that tended toward machinery (work and money) and fanaticism (‘the one thing needful’) needed the complementary aesthetic virtues of the aristocracy – ‘beautiful’ ease, serenity, and politeness and their more ‘sublime’ ‘high spirits, defiant courage, and pride of resistance’” (Bratlinger and Thesing 58). The narrator clearly states Tina’s inclination to follow this mentality:

Instead of seeing its failings as a reason to reject the entire class system, she saw them as a reason to seek a higher. She cannot be blamed, of course; she had been hopelessly well trained to view society as so many rungs on a ladder; thus reducing her own to a mere step to something supposedly better. (*FLW* 245)

It is obvious that Sarah is portraying a rejection of the whole system to the extent that her social identity cannot be pinpointed. Sarah undeniably evolves throughout the novel. However, contrary to the evolution through progress adopted by the other characters, Sarah follows what Eva Mokry Pohler characterizes as “horizontal change” (59). Indeed, starting from the traditional position as a governess, Sarah chooses to retreat to the edges of society: “To be what I must be. An outcast” (*FLW* 175). The necessity implied in the use of the word ‘must’ indicates that it was a willful evolutionary choice and not mere conditioning.

The other side of Sarah’s aura of mystique is an equally manipulative narrator who sustains it. When it comes to Sarah, the narrator intentionally deepens the mystery by refusing to reveal her thoughts and misleading the reader with regards to the truth about her actions. Simon Loveday highlights this issue in *The Romances of John Fowles*:

When Fowles, at the beginning of the chapter [thirteen], pleads ignorance about Sarah, he thereby avoids having to reveal to us (either then or later) what she is thinking - a revelation which would completely destroy, on the one hand the suspense which keeps the plot going, and on the other hand the aura of mystery which hangs intriguingly round Sarah right to the end of the book. (57)

Apart from the confessed refusal to divulge her secret, the narrator manipulates the reader, in the same way she manipulates Charles, into believing her story. The narrator affirms that “the simple *fact* of the matter being that she had not

lodged with a female cousin at Weymouth” (*FLW* 57, emphasis added). Later on, however, commenting on Sarah’s view of sex, the narrator states that “She knew, or at least suspected, that there was a physical pleasure in love” (*FLW* 155). When read chronologically for the first time, the comment may pass unnoticed with regards to Sarah’s virginity. However, reading it retrospectively after Sarah’s sexual encounter with Charles in Exeter, an element of concealed confession is present. The fact that Sarah ‘suspects’ as opposed to ‘knowing’ reveals that she may not have engaged in a sexual activity with Varguennes. Thus, the narrator thickens the shroud of mystique which she creates around herself.

Rankin notes that “the narrator bears a curious resemblance to Sarah herself. Like the narrator, Sarah ‘confesses’ information when she has reason to confess, and refuses to explain herself when an explanation would allow a ‘violation of her territory’” (197). In fact, McSweeney takes this further by suggesting that Sarah can be considered the narrator’s surrogate due to this affinity and shared techniques: “The quality of Sarah’s mysteriousness is enhanced by suggestions of a certain intimacy, a special bond, between her and the narrator. They are, for example, the only central characters in the novel who possess imagination, and in the deception she practises on Charles it is hard not to regard her as the narrator’s surrogate” (140). Such a claim is indeed plausible taking the following factors into consideration: Sarah’s ambiguity, her modernity and complete detachment from the Victorian society, which indeed bring her closer to the narrator’s world. The narrator’s

physical and temporal intrusion into the world of the characters makes the more thorough, and concealed, plantation of a narrator-like character permissible in the experimental world of the novel.

At this point it is important to assert that the narrator, or the man on the train, is not Fowles. Calvino highlights this distinction stating that the narrator is considered a character in the novel, the first character to be invented, and should not be confused with the author himself (Calvino 69-70). Following this thread, the novel would contain two narrator presences: a manipulative, partially omniscient narrator following and commenting on the events, and a mysterious, equally manipulative, aspect of the narrator interacting with the characters and masquerading as one to drive the plot and unearth hidden tendencies.

Sarah's uneven relationship with Charles, in fact, justifies such a reading. Seen strictly from Sarah's point of view, this relationship is meaningless. If we omit Charles completely from Sarah's life, we can safely assume that she would have ended up in the artist's residence fully accomplished. First, Sarah arrived at Lyme Regis before Charles's visit. Judging from Aunt Tranter's sympathy towards Sarah, it is apparent that she was willing to help her move if Sarah had asked, a fact which Charles, and the narrator, confirm: "Mrs. Tranter would like - is most anxious to help you, if you wish to change your situation" (*FLW* 121). Likewise, the impulse, and desired outcome, that made her engage in a sexual relationship with Charles is obscure. McSweeney observes that: "Through a

careful rereading one can deduce *what* Sarah did to Charles in the hotel at Exeter - for in addition to the Toby jug she had bought a nightgown and dark-green shawl to make her look seductive, and a roll of bandage to help her simulate a swollen ankle. But no amount of rereading will shed any light on *why* she has done so” (McSweeney 141). Sarah disappears again after this encounter unperturbed, unconflicted, and asking for nothing. There are no indications that Charles plays any role in Sarah’s intellectual, emotional, or financial state.

Thus, the effects of these seemingly random behaviors are observed on Charles. After each encounter with Sarah, Charles questions his whole system of beliefs. As Glendening points out, “Up to the point Sarah Woodruff disorders his existence, causing him to recognize his festering dissatisfaction with his life and doubts about his future with Ernestina, Smithson can understand himself as an evolutionary triumph” (Glendening 120). Indeed, it is Sarah that “made him aware of a deprivation” (*FLW* 129). This culminates in their sexual encounter after which he breaks off his engagement and follows Sarah’s modern evolutionary route.

Hutcheon cleverly remarks that “After the seduction, Charles believes that the ‘false version of her betrayal by Varguennes, her other devices, were but stratagems to unblind him’ (p. 368), but he does not recall that Sarah's fictional identity was created before his arrival in Lyme and therefore had another function for Sarah herself, as free woman and as fiction-maker” (Hutcheon 62). Still, this association is justified for the lack of any other logical explanation to account for her behavior. Even

critically speaking, Sarah's behavior is mostly analyzed through Charles. Glendening's remark is one example of many. He states that "her motives ... evidently include awareness that the damaged ankle and apparent helplessness would appeal to his sense of chivalry, and her supposed non-virginity to both his pity about her past and his desire for her as a sexually experienced female..." (Glendening 125).

Furthermore, Sarah pops into existence when Charles meets her "staring out to sea," an act interpreted as "looking for Satan's sails," as Mrs. Poulteney prudishly puts it (*FLW* 11, 67). We later learn that this iconic gesture itself is meaningless after she confesses that she already knows that he is married (and later the fact that the whole story is fictional). The exaggerated tableau only serves to attract Charles's attention and indeed foreshadows Charles's own emancipation in the final ending: "out again, upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" (*FLW* 445). In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh states that: "[Sarah] is, even in her introduction, presented more like 'a figure from myth, than any proper fragment of the petty provincial day' (p. 9). [...] She is 'mythical': she stands outside 'history' and outside fiction" (125-126). Indeed, Sarah seems mainly present to drive the plot, especially regarding Charles. In the first ending, in which Charles chooses Ernestina, Sarah returns to the shadows whence she came. For the narrator, the only aspect worth mentioning about Sarah's fate is in relation to Charles: "What happened to Sarah, I do not know - whatever it was, she never troubled Charles again in person" (*FLW* 324). The



narrator then briefly talks about the fates of all the other characters, including an unproportionately long and comic depiction of Mrs. Poulteney's in the afterlife. Counter to the claim that this ending represents "what [Charles] spent the hours between London and Exeter imagining might happen" (*FLW* 327), the omniscient extrapolations on the fates of Grogan, Mrs. Poulteney, Sam, and Mary suggest that this ending is the narrator's meticulous creation.

Likewise, in Exeter, when we see Sarah again after her dramatic escape, we do not receive any insightful depiction of her state. We only see her planning her next tableau for Charles, namely buying her seduction clothes and bandage. The same thing can be said of her residence at the artist's house. The two-year journey she took to become the "blossomed, realized, winged" butterfly is never delineated. Sarah only reappears when Charles finds her (presenting her final tableau of the accomplished 'New Woman'). Sarah is supposed to be the titular protagonist of the novel, but her whole existence is justified by Charles's. Seen from this angle, it is difficult to accept a feminist reading of the novel. Sarah is a female character whose whole existence is justified by attaching it, albeit mysteriously, to the identity of a male character. In fact, her fictional identity, the tool of her emancipation which became the title of the novel, is also an identity acquired through annexation to a male identity, the French lieutenant's woman.

In addition to this external reading of Sarah's position in the novel, Charles mostly treats Sarah as a symbolic embodiment

of some lack within himself rather than a social being. This is clear in statements such as “It seemed clear to him that it was not Sarah in herself who attracted him - how could she, he was betrothed—but some emotion, some possibility she symbolized” (*FLW* 129). It is also less clear, but more resonant, in his interpretation of her deceptions and masks.

The narrator defines cryptic coloration as follows: “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” (*FLW* 143). Indeed, patterns of cryptic coloration are indeed practiced by the characters. As is the case with evolution by progress against ‘horizontal evolution,’ only Sarah seems to adopt an asocial form of cryptic coloration. “Charles,” the narrator calls to our attention, “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; and there will be others of him before we are finished” (*FLW* 142-143). He is characterized by a “formality of [...] language,” which, although shifts according to the requirements of the situation and the class of the addressee, is always under the directive of aristocracy. Similarly, though under a different impulse, Ernestina practices cryptic coloration to compensate for her fear of class inferiority. Charles’s disapproval of Ernestina’s reaction to his possible disinheritance brought about a change of mask: “She looked up and saw how nervously stern he was; that she must play a different role. She ran to him, and

catching his hand, raised it to her lips. He drew her to him and kissed the top of her head, but he was not deceived” (*FLW* 196). This is also apparent in Sam’s adoption of two distinct masks: the obedient servant and the gentleman to be. This highlights the disparity between his aspirations and his awareness of his position which he “suffered” (*FLW* 48). In all these forms of cryptic coloration are alterations between prescribed social stances.

Charles observes a similar behavior in Sarah. For example, at Mrs. Poutleney’s house, he notices the subservient Sam-like position she assumes: “It became clear to him [Charles] that the girl’s silent meekness ran contrary to her nature; that she was therefore playing a part” (*FLW* 104). He also discovers her deceitful behavior with him. Despite the fact that she is arguably the most dishonest character in the novel, she is considered the most direct. The narrator, navigating through Charles’s thoughts, comments that “Very few Victorians chose to question the virtues of such cryptic coloration; but there was that in Sarah’s look which did” (*FLW* 143). Till the very end, knowing how manipulative she was, Charles still considers Sarah’s demeanor to be direct (*FLW* 415). He even classifies her deceptions as “parables” (*FLW* 415). This is due to the fact that Charles judges Sarah in an asocial manner.

Thus, Sarah’s unique revelatory fictionality is reminiscent of the role of the unreliable narrator, which is, according to David Lodge, “to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter” (155). As Lynch points out: “In calling her actions ‘parables’ [...], Charles *recognizes* the fictionality

of her existence and the ultimate purpose of her being - to be a 'truth' and not an appendage to some other being (a Victorian wife)" (62). Although I agree with the first part of his remark, I disagree with the second since we are discussing the idea from different angles. Lynch is analyzing the idea from within the social world of the character, while I am viewing it from an asocial inter-worldly angle.

**Conclusion:**

This study analyzed the mysterious Sarah Woodruff in an attempt to define her possible role/roles in what Hutcheon describes as the Chinese-box structure of the novel:

1- As a Victorian character, Sarah appears too detached from the conventions of her period although not enough background is offered to justify this detachment. Indeed, the lack of background questions her status as a character in the conventional sense.

2- As a modern narrator-like presence, Sarah shares many of the qualities attributed to the narrator himself such as revelatory deception and fictionality. She also shares many of the characteristics of modernity especially in terms of her decidedly un-Victorian evolution. Her presence solely as a catalyst for Charles's evolution consolidates this reading.

Sarah's mystique precludes any definite conclusion. However, in light of the previous analysis, the scale seems to tip in favor of the latter. Sarah appears to be a modern insertion into the Victorian slice of society revealing hidden tendencies and heralding evolution. Such an insertion was only possible through the highly experimental nature of the novel, the metafictional element, and the mystique of the character.

**Notes:**

- 1- The abbreviation *FLW* will be used for all subsequent quotes from the novel.
- 2- Dickens's character in *The Picwick Papers* (1836).

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