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**Conception of Victorianism in
The French Lieutenant s Woman
by John Fowles**

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Prague, April 2008

Čestné prohlášení

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V Praze, dne 1.4. 2008

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Abstract

This thesis deals with John Fowles's conception of Victorianism in the book *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The basis of the work is the analysis of various areas of Victorian life and their concordance with corresponding areas from the book. The areas encompass the conventional rules with regard to certain social classes and social situations, the power of religion and problems resulting from it. Another area are the relationships between men and women and the position of women in the society with respect to the importance of courtship and marriage. More attention is paid to the main three characters, Ernestina, Sarah and Charles, as they are the crucial means for developing the story. The attitude to the story and Victorianism of the author himself is analysed in the last part.



Tato práce se zabývá pojetím viktoriánství v knize Francouzova milenka od Johna Fowlese. Základem práce je analýza nejrůznějších oblastí viktoriánského života a jejich shoda s odpovídajícími oblastmi z knihy. Tyto oblasti zahrnují pravidla konvence se zřetelem na určité společenské třídy a společenské situace, sílu náboženství a z ní vyplývající problémy. Další oblastí jsou vztahy mužů a žen a pozice žen ve společnosti se ohledem na důležitost námluv a manželství. Dále je věnována pozornost třem hlavním postavám, Ernestině, Sarah a Charlesovi, protože jsou zásadním prostředkem k rozvíjení příběhu. Přístup samotného autora k příběhu a k viktoriánství je analyzován v poslední části.

Key words

Victorianism

convention

religion

puritanity and hypocrisy

relationships

marriage and courtship

class-awareness

dogma and desire for freedom

society

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Introduction

Before we deal with the conception of Victorianism in the book *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, we should focus on some general facts about the Victorian period as well as about the term Victorianism itself.

Victorianism gained its name after Queen Victoria who acceded to the English throne in 1837 and died in 1901. These dates also mark out the boundaries of the whole era called Victorianism.

Queen Victoria was quite young, only eighteen, when she acceded to the throne. She was the English Queen for 63 years and during these years the country developed into one of the world's leading industrial powers. The period of her reign is marked by general prosperity of the country. That was the reason for her popularity which caused that the people of this era decided to call themselves "Victorians".

During the second half of the nineteenth century the living conditions of the English people improved considerably, although they definitely do not seem good at all from our today's point of view. The change of the living conditions was closely related to the progress in other areas, such as the growth of science and especially the trade, which sparked off the economic prosperity. Now even the lower-class people could afford more and could live better lives than those in the preceding decades. The employers were also forced by the society to provide better conditions for their employees.

The expansion of Britain into many different parts of the world and their colonization is also significant for this period. It not only affirmed the strength and importance of the United Kingdom, but contributed to the already mentioned prosperity too, as many products and raw materials were imported from the colonies and vice versa, many products from England found their way to the markets of these colonies.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century British farmers could sell all they could produce. Agriculture began to lose its power from the second half of the nineteenth century, though. It was a result of the coincidence of more factors. There was a series of bad seasons with poor harvests which would normally have raised the price of grain and the Corn Laws would have prevented foreign farmers from underselling.

By the seventies the Corn Laws were no more in force and the American farmers, newly transporting their grain by train to the American ports could undersell.¹

Not only grain was imported, though. The overseas transport was speeded up by the development of steam engines and the food refrigeration was invented. This meant that even meat could be imported - from Argentina, Australia, New Zealand. Tinned meat was imported from Argentina, cheap substitute for butter from Netherlands. All this was imported untaxed, bringing no income to the state budget and ruining the British farmers.² Here is therefore no wonder that more and more people were gradually leaving the agricultural area and searched work in other branches. The Census figures show that in 1851, there were 1,200,000 men and 143,000 women working on farms, but in 1901 there were only 700,000 men and 12,000 women.³

The best and very often the only place where to find different work than agricultural was the town. The second half of the nineteenth century is marked by the immense migration of the country people to towns. According to the Census, in 1851 there were for the first time more people living in towns than in the country. Fifty years later, in 1901 there were 25,000,000 people living in towns and only 7,500,000 living outside.⁴

This, of course brought about another feature typical for the Victorian era: The growth of towns, especially by spreading the suburbs, and establishing new towns as well. All this would not have been possible had there not been the possibility for the people to transport themselves more or less easily over longer distances, which was facilitated by the spread of railways. Up till then, commuting was limited by the speed of the horse travel, but after the development and improvement of the railway system people could quite easily travel even thirty or forty miles to their work. Commuting thus became a regular pattern, especially of the middle-class life.⁵ It were not only the big industrial cities, though, that became the destination of more and more people who could reach them within one or two hours. The prosperous middle-classes also turned their attention to the seaside towns and other places WIMC thCJ COllld SpClttl \M\ ftOO time.

Apart from the "industrial revolution", there was also (perhaps we can use the term) a "social revolution" taking place in the nineteenth century, which was probably a result of the former one. With the growing importance and prosperity of the industry also the importance of the people who participated in its processes grew - the owners of shops, managers, clerks, lawyers, tradesmen etc. Of course, there were great differences

in the wages among these, depending greatly on the branch of their business and the location where they ran it. But generally speaking, the second half of the nineteenth century was a period of immense growth and prosperity of the middle-classes. They were so important that they were able to influence the attitudes, especially the morals, of the society and to bring about new patterns of behaviour.

The most important thing and the centre of the middle-class life was religion. There were more offshoots of the Church of England, but together they succeeded in bringing an essence of puritanity into the English society. Another important key words of the middle-classes were self-help and self-reliance which were the means that helped them establish and run their trades and businesses. Although the middle-classes differed from the gentry, especially in their piety, there was a strong tendency among the middle-classes to reach and imitate the upper-class lifestyle.⁶ The upper-classes and gentry could afford to live their life irrespective of the "mainstream" middle-class values, therefore often eccentrically and extravagantly. Their wealth originated in their immense property, usually land, mines, factories and world-wide trade. Another source of their strength was the general people's respect for them.⁷

On the opposite end of the social ladder were the lowest classes. The irony was that these people, same as the upper-classes did not have to care about anybody's opinion or good morals, simply because they were usually at the very bottom of the society. Their terrifying living conditions were concern of many contemporary writers and critics and they attract attention of many people, and not only scholars, even today. Because of the lack of money whole families lived squashed in only one room, parents and children together. Parents did not bother with concealing their sexual matters from the children, which often resulted in child prostitution and pregnancy. Child prostitution was also endorsed by the eternal lack of money. The bad hygienic habits and the omnipresent filth (as the water had to be brought from public wells or river) caused cholera outbreaks and also quite noticeably reduced the number of children, especially before the age of five. The census of 1851 reported that only forty-five percent of the babies born in Liverpool reached the age of twenty.⁸

Not only young people and children were in permanent danger of dying, though. This threat applied also to the adult and older people, often exhausted by the long working hours, hard work, hunger and in many cases also excessive alcohol consumption and venereal disease. The result of it was that the number of older people

was quite low. According to the Census from 1851 almost half of the population were under twenty and at the 1871 Census the average age was put at 26.4 years.⁹

To improve the family income, children were also sent to work, though they earned much less money for the same work than adults. Most children did not go to school, as education had to be paid and so in 1850, according to the Census, forty per cent of the population were illiterate and as late as 1881 there were still around twenty per cent of the population who could not sign their name. The situation improved a bit after the Act of 1870 which "made provision for a school within reach of every child in the land".¹⁰

Before the fifties, the working hours were quite long, usually as long as 12 hours a day, even on Saturday, only Sunday was free. The Act of 1850 introduced Saturday half-holiday, which meant that the Saturday afternoon was free and so even the lower classes had since then some free time. From 1870 there were also four statutory bank holidays in the year. In the nineties the working hours were reduced to nine hours a day or fifty four a week.¹¹

The life of the Victorian people was not easy, but still it was much better than in the previous periods, especially for the middle-classes and the lower classes. The new technologies and even the new laws introduced in the Victorian period improved the life of people generally and laid the foundation of today's modern society.

1. Convention

The key concept of the life of the Victorians was convention. Convention ruled the life of almost everybody who wanted to be an exemplary member of this exemplary society. This also implies that some people did not want, or to put it more precisely, did not need to be exemplary members. These were the lowest classes and those on the very opposite end of the social ladder, the rich aristocracy.

As the book *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is about the Victorian era it is also inevitably about convention. Convention is a certain way of behaviour, way of conduct and dealing with things, upon which the majority of society have agreed over some period of time. In every period of the world's history, in every society, there was a certain set of conventional principles, always a bit different, which set the basic rules of conduct. However, I think, the importance of convention reached its highest point in the nineteenth century. Convention was not only the prescribed way one should behave in the society, it was also the prescribed way one should think and feel and deal with their feelings according to their position in the society. Fowles explained this tendency clearly: "... in Charles's time private minds did not admit the desires banned by the public mind..." (p. 154)

Convention also included different aspects of the everyday life, though. The way one should dress on particular occasions and at particular times of the day, the size of the house one should have according to their income, the way one should speak according to their social position, even the way one should write books. The last thing mentioned was, in my opinion, the reason why Fowles wrote this book the way he wrote it. He decided to write a book about Victorian life, about the convention which presumed that he would write it in a conventional way. Fowles was of course, perfectly aware of what was the conventional way:

....I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and the 'voice' of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. (p. 85)

He is an omniscient narrator, as it was usual in the Victorian fiction, yet the tenor of his confession seems to hold a trace of sarcasm, it seems to imply that he is an omniscient

narrator unwillingly. Actually, if he was not the omniscient narrator, he would not be able to tell us "objectively" about the feelings of his characters and would have to spare us his very often sarcastic comments on Victorianism and on his characters.

He wrote this book about Victorianism from the today's, or more precisely, from the late 1960s point of view, and it very often seems as if he was trying to explain to us, "uninformed" readers, what life in the nineteenth century was really like, he seems to feel to be elected to enlighten us, to deprive us of naive and romantic notions, constructed in us after having read all the idealistically sounding traditional (conventional) Victorian books, which did not depict the real life, but only the desired ideal life showing just the problems permitted by the conventional puritan society.

To achieve his aim, he had to use different characters than those that would have been used in a traditional Victorian novel but, on the other hand, there had to be plenty of typical Victorian characters, because contrast is the best way to show a common rule. Thus his characters are chosen from all the traditional classes that would appear in any typical Victorian novel: A gentleman from an upper class (Charles) with his titled unmarried uncle, the gentleman's fiancé (Ernestina), a girl from a very rich middle-class family longing for a titled gentleman, her father, her aunt, who lives in a small seaside town and whom Ernestina visits because it is "in" to go to the seaside to have a rest. Of course there had to be a negative character, perhaps much more negative than it would have been in a real Victorian fiction and thus maybe more real, presented by the excessively pious Mrs Poulteney, supposedly also from the middle-class. And the last but not the least, the servants of the people mentioned, Sam, Mary and Mrs Fairley, though not all of them behave as the traditional Victorian novel writer would let them behave. Somewhere between them, there is a doctor, from a poor background, but a respectable man because of his knowledge, not only medical.

However, there is one more character, which would have been possible to appear in a Victorian novel, but either marginally or ending tragically: an outcast, Sarah. To underline her role in this novel, she is almost "classless" and thus "conventionless". She is there to show the real nature of the characters mentioned, she is there to bring about the contrast of convention versus its absence. She is the one who chose to be an unexemplary member of the society.

1.1 Classes

1.1.1 The Upper-classes, Aristocracy

At the top end of the social ladder stood the upper-classes and gentry. Their leading position was given by their property, which they inherited from the previous generations and therefore were spared the experience of hard work. That very often somehow twisted their view of life. They were simply born with the privilege to command people: "The respect which people had for the gentry was one source of their strength. Even more important was their property.... The landowner with a sufficient estate was beholden to no one for his social position or for his wealth; both were by his right.... Low people might have to consider the good opinion of customers or employers; the gentleman need care for neither. The careful constraints of middle-class respectability were not for him unless he chose." ¹² This gave the nobility the feeling that they could do what they wanted because lives of the others usually depended on their good will.

Charles was thus born privileged because he was born to rich aristocratic parents, which meant his position in the society was almost unshakable. His father and grandfather perhaps had not been "eccentric churls" (this is what many people tend to think about aristocrats), but lived up to the aristocratic, that means a bit eccentric, reputation anyway. As the gentlemen did not work, but had to spend their time doing something, because "One of the commonest symptoms of wealth today is destructive neurosis; in his century it was tranquil boredom" (p. 16), they took up various hobbies, some of them, perhaps I may use the term, "traditional" as hunting or horses, especially horse breeding and races, some of them more modern or unusual. To be honest, there were not many activities considered suitable for gentlemen, here again, one had to observe the conventional attitudes:

Hunting, shooting and field sports generally symbolized the outdoor life which the gentry as a class regarded as the only proper life for a man. It called for many virtues - essentially military virtues... which the gentry admired.¹³

Charles's ancestors were no exception, though hunting was not the only thing that interested them. Under the influence of the growing importance of science, while many

bored enthusiastic gentlemen devoted their life to liquor, his grandfather took up collecting things and archeology:

His grandfather the baronet had fallen into the second of the two great categories of English country squires: claret-swilling fox-hunters and scholarly collectors of everything under sun. He had collected books principally; but in his later years had devoted a deal of his money ... to the excavation of the harmless hummocks of earth that pimpled his three thousand Wiltshire acres. Cromlechs and menhirs, flint implements and neolithic graves... (p. 16)

Charles's father's life was a bit different. His wife and their second child died shortly after delivery, which ruined the life of Charles's father. But he had a son and the son had to be brought up, educated, so that he could one day be passed the torch down and run the estate himself: "He lavished if not great affection, at least a series of tutors and drill-sergeants on his son" (p. 16). Such kind of death was very common in those days. And it was also very common in those days that sudden deaths destroyed lives of many people. It is amazing that Fowles did not forget to mention even such minute details that help to evoke the atmosphere of the nineteenth century life.

Boys from aristocratic families at that time were commonly educated by private teachers, later they went to university, Oxford or Cambridge usually. Charles was no exception. The greatest part of their education consisted of classics and learning languages; at that time the importance still lay in Latin and Greek: "If a boy went to Oxford or Cambridge, he would find himself in an atmosphere that was partly a prolongation of public school life, partly heavily clerical. Games and rowing were important...the classics were still considered fundamental, though other subjects were thrust in as the century went on: even such things as science and engineering." ¹⁴ The next typical language taught was the language of the traditional rival and neighbour: French. As Charles was undoubtedly more or less a good scholar for his time (and so was John Fowles) we can encounter many Latin and French expressions incorporated in the text and speeches of the well educated characters, which means predominantly Charles, doctor Grogan and the author himself. Using Latin and French expressions in the text is another aspect in which Fowles showed his good knowledge of the Victorian style of writing.

There was one more aspect of the university life which perhaps sprung from the boredom of the rich young fellows, and we should not think only of the tedious

innumerable classics, but the dreariness of doing nothing and being well provided for at the same time, which is always the worst. It was common that the young gentlemen, either out of inexperience or, the worse, out of their effort to copy the tired generations of other aristocrats, drowned their boredom, indecision and problems in liquor ("Milk punch and champagne... had been perennially prescribed at Cambridge as a solution to all known problems..." (p.259) or in the arms of women, as Charles did:

At Cambridge, having duly crammed his classics and subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles, he had (unlike most young men of his time) actually begun to learn something. But in his second year there he had drifted into a bad set and ended up, one foggy night in London, in carnal possession of a naked girl. He rushed from her plump Cockney arms into those of Church; horrifying his father one day shortly afterwards by announcing that he wished to take Holy Orders. There was only one answer to a crisis of this magnitude: the wicked youth was dispatched to Paris, (p. 18)

As we can see, another kind of studies taken by the indecisive or pious young men was theology or joining the army.

Many young men were sent to Paris at that time, in most cases to gain experience in sexual matters. It was another part of gentleman's education, preparation for life. However, life was not always easy and the fact that one was a rich gentleman did not mean that one had to stay rich forever, which also very often happened: "The ruined gentleman was a fairly familiar figure." ¹⁵ Charles's life got also a bit complicated and as the only thing that a gentleman's well-being depended on was his property, the complication was of this kind:

(Charles's father) sold his portion of land, invested shrewdly in railway stock and unshrewdly at the gaming-tables.... In short, lived more as if he had been born in 1702 than in 1802, liver very largely for pleasure... and died very largely of it in 1856. Charles was thus his only heir; heir not only to his father's diminished fortune...but eventually to his uncle's very considerable one. It was true that in 1867 the uncle showed....no sign of dying, (pp. 16-17)

There were many gentlemen who became poor by their fathers' betting and frivolous life. And there were many gentlemen who waited for the death of some relatives which

would mean inheritance and ensuring of their life prospects. And because it was so typical, Fowles did not miss the chance to incorporate this phenomenon into his book.

Charles though, being a son of a typical gentleman, who lived up to the conventional and traditional aristocratic values, did not pursue doing the typical gentlemanly things as his ancestors did. Moreover, he did things that were not common and as far as the convention was concerned, not even suitable for a gentleman at all:

Though he conceded enough to sport to shoot partridge and pheasant when called upon to do so, Charles adamantly refused to hunt the fox....

There was worse: he had an unnatural fondness for walking instead of riding; and walking was not gentleman's pastime except in the Swiss Alps. (p. 17)

These were the first hints that Fowles made to let us know that Charles was not a typical gentleman who stuck to the convention at all cost. Yet he was perfectly aware of it and of the way of life he was expected to live. And he was well prepared for that, not only by his studies, but same as the other young gentlemen he had travelled the world, which was considered to be experience almost as good as university education. All he needed to live an exemplary life like the other average gentlemen of his time was to inherit his uncle's mansion, get married and beget children, preferably male heirs. Unfortunately, he succeeded in none of these. Perhaps his bad luck originated in his being a scientist, in his daring to use his intellect instead of accepting the main-stream Victorian dogma, in his thinking too much about his life, about himself and about the others.

The nineteenth century saw a kind of revival of science, new inventions and new theories which can remind us in its essence of the Renaissance period or of the Enlightenment. These novelties were not just the faster and better trains and other kinds of steam engine, or new technologies of processing raw materials; the greatest breakthrough in the area of science, and perhaps the greatest shock and threat to the Victorian society and its values, was *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, published in 1859. This book and its content shook the foundations of the pious Victorian society. For the highest values of the Victorians, the system of their society rested on Christianity, on the Bible and the Darwinian theory was more or less a denial of the Christian idea of creation of mankind. Moreover, it not only implied that God did not create humans, which was certainly a daring and blasphemous thought for that time, but it also meant that humans were not essentially sensitive beings gifted by the intelligence, feelings and soul, created as the highest forms of being for altruistic

purposes. It meant that people were basically animals and became the highest form of beings because they were the most rapacious and adaptable of all the other animals; which was a fact many Victorians were not ready to accept:

What is the question now placed before society with a glib assurance the most astounding? The question is that - Is man an ape or an angel? My Lord, I am on the side of angels. *Disraeli, 1864* ¹⁶

Thus the society was divided into two camps: Pro-Darwinists and Anti-Darwinists. Those who now believed in Darwin made a difficult and important step: overcoming the convention; and were very often despised for that. The reason for it was simple: "Darwin was resented not because what he said was untrue, but because he had dared to strip off rose-coloured spectacles."¹⁷ And Charles was one of those who made the important step, who started the progress. Moreover, he was not ashamed for that: "Charles called himself a Darwinist" (p. 47).

That was another proof that Charles refused to accept the mainstream ideas and decided to join the (from our point of view) more reasonable party, which makes him in the eyes of the modern reader look rather congenial, not in the eyes of Ernestina's father, though. For her father's heart was beating for the other party, the traditional, pious one, which should not be surprising, as he shared the Protestant middle-class ethics:

Your father ventured the opinion that Mr Darwin should be exhibited in a cage in the zoological gardens. In the monkey-house. I tried to explain some of the scientific arguments behind the Darwinian position. I was unsuccessful... (p. 11)

Reading Darwin meant at that time being "in" as well as being a scientist. Of course, this kind of fashion was usually only for people like Charles who could afford it. As I have already mentioned, the nineteenth century gave birth to many new sciences. The sciences were usually at their very start, just beginning to form and set their foundations. That is perhaps the reason why many men managed to be concerned with several areas at once; so did Charles.

This new fashion, of course, encouraged many gentlemen of intellect to contribute their share to the libraries and collections of many universities and museums. Charles, being an "enlightened" gentleman, could not miss this opportunity. But being a scientist in that time was not as difficult as today. It was perfectly sufficient to be able to read, write and have an original theory of one's own, because many areas of science

were utterly new-born, and so anybody who had some idea, was able to write a book about it and had means to publish it, could call themselves scientists. Fowles noticed this phenomenon and put it rather ironically in his own way: "And you forget that I'm a scientist. I have written a monograph, so I must be" (p.11).

These were the prerequisites for Charles's future disobedience, his clash with convention. It was sparked off by his encounter with an outcast, with a mysterious personification of the "anti-convention": Sarah. Seeing the contrast between the conventional world of duties and the world of Sarah where everything seemed possible made Charles reconsider the traditional values he had been brought up to accept.

An attentive reader might have noticed that there was something about his nature that perhaps also was not quite typical for an English gentleman of that time, and that was his high-spirited jolly nature. Many times the "eye of the narrator" caught Charles smiling, in a good, jocular mood; not only when he was with Ernestina, but also with his servant Sam or Mary (which drove Ernestina mad) and during his encounters with Sarah. The latter cases were really untypical ones, because people of the higher ranks were not expected to show their affections to their social superiors, to be open to them and to respect them, which Charles undoubtedly did. Thus again he went beyond the current conventional mode of conduct. Respected gentlemen were supposed to look respectably serious, almost frowning, definitely not smiling at everybody. Charles was also rather sympathetic and sensitive, towards the "lesser mortals" too, which was definitely another reason for his falling for the French Lieutenant's Woman. Since his encounter of Sarah he struggled hard to overcome this weakness, to stick to the convention of which he was aware: "This indeed was his plan: to be sympathetic to Sarah, but to establish a distance, to remind her of their difference..." (p. 144)

Distance indeed was one of the most important things a respectable person should have kept. Distance was the way of treating people according to the convention. The rule was not to show one's feelings. The rule was never to tell what one really thought, to pretend one was satisfied when one was not, to look grumpy when one was not. This view was presented by the then already unconventional Americans: "My impression of London was - forgive me, Mr Smithson - heaven help you if you *don't* say what you don't think" (p. 368). Fowles also did not miss his chance to make an ironic comment on this: "But pity the unfortunate rich; for whatever license was given them to be solitary before the evening hours, convention demanded that they must be bored in company." (p. 100)

The best way to show that one obeyed the rules and kept the distance, that they simply did not say exactly what they meant was the careful use of language. The language of the higher ranks was so elaborate that it seemed that the Victorians were specially trained to "beat about the bush"; actually, children in most "good" families were taught systematically when and what to say and how to treat servants as opposed to their social peers. Charles was no exception and we could see pretty well how much he tried to keep the distance, and yet show his sympathy, by using formal, polite language. To demonstrate it I have chosen several examples of that:

'If I can speak on your behalf to Mrs Tranter, I shall be most happy ... but it would be most improper of me to ...'

'Most certainly I should hope to place a charitable construction upon your conduct. But I must repeat that I find myself amazed that you should....'

'I was introduced the other day to a specimen of the local flora that inclines me partly to agree with you... A very strange case. No doubt you know more of it than I do.' Then sensing that his oblique approach might suggest something more than a casual interest, he added quickly, 'I think her name is Woodruff. She is employed by Mrs Poulteney.' (pp. 123, 126,134)

Formality of language was expected (and obeyed) even on such occasions as was writing a letter or telegram to the beloved person, as in Charles's case to Ernestina: "My immediate return has been commanded and will be most happily obeyed by your most affectionate Charles Smithson." (p.286)

And even in the end when his refusal of convention was absolutely clear and he wrote a love letter to Sarah, he could not help himself and slipped into the formal language again, although he was aware of that and sorry for that:

... I cannot excuse it; yet I must believe that there was one way in which it may be termed fortunate, since it prompted a searching of my conscience that was long overdue.... You will appreciate that to conclude its purpose is the predominant thought in my mind at this moment. But my duty in that respect done, my thoughts shall be only for you... Need I assure you, my dearest Sarah, that my intentions are henceforth of the most honourable?... But always with every regard to whatever propriety

your delicacy insists on... P.S. On re-reading what I have written I perceive a formality my heart does not intend. Forgive it... (pp. 320-321)

Another aspect of convention was that gentlemen were expected to act honourably almost at all cost. This was the general idea; of course not everyone obeyed it, but everyone knew they should, so did Charles, though in his own way. Having slept with Sarah and found out that he could not live with Ernestina, he decided to act honourably, according to convention, although it was against the convention at the same time. The conventional part of his decision was that after having intercourse with a woman, he decided to marry her: "'I know you cannot marry me.' - 'I must. I wish to. I could never look myself in the face again if I did not'" (p. 306). On the other hand, the unconventional part of it was that he decided to marry Sarah, a girl from a lower social class, and to top it off, a sinner, an outcast.

Servants played undoubtedly a great part in gentleman's life. A gentleman, to be honest, not just gentleman but any family who could afford it had to keep servants. There were many families, such as the one of Mary and Sam, which did not actually need any servants. But once a family reached a certain social status, having servants was a must, because they were an undisputable part of certain social standing. Families had to keep servants to show that they could afford keeping them, otherwise their social position would not seem trustworthy. As there were many families which succeeded in entering the higher ranks of society, there were also many servants. Even for us today, servants, as well as horses, represent the atmosphere of the "good old days". However, one had to observe the convention even in this servants-treating area. The tenor of one's speech towards them should have been reserved, not showing any affection or pity. "Domestic servants, the largest single category of labour in Victorian England, were entirely at the mercy of their employers."¹⁸ One could treat them as one wanted, as they were considered only inferior forms of people.

Charles's attitude to the servants was different, which Fowles let us know several times, perhaps to show us that Charles was really unconventional in some ways:

I must point out that his (Charles's) relationship with Sam did show a kind of affection, a human bond, that was a good deal better than the rigid barrier so many of the new rich in an age drenched in new riches were by that time erecting between themselves and their domestics.

To be sure, Charles had many generations of servant-handlers behind him; the new rich of his time had none - indeed, were very often the

children of servants. . . . Their servants they tried to turn into machines, while Charles knew very well that his was also partly a companion - his Sancho Panza, the low comedy that supported his spiritual worship of Ernestina-Dorothea. He kept Sam, in short, because he was frequently amused by him; not because there were no better 'machines' to be found, (pp. 41-42)

Of course even Charles occasionally lost his temper and some of his anger lit on Sam's head too, but the difference in Charles was that he did mind that and the fact that Sam was only a servant was not reason good enough to forget about his own rudeness: "He certainly faced Sam when he came in with the hot water, and made some sort of apology for his bad temper of the previous night." (p. 280)

Servants were not expected, usually not even tolerated to utter their opinions in front of their masters, as well as their masters were not expected to be bothered by their opinions if they did utter them. However, Charles did bother: "What would he do? If even his servants despised him!" (p. 334). It again proves in a way that Charles considered servants to be more or less his equals, not superiors, and could feel ashamed of his actions, although aristocrats were generally not used to searching their conscience.

Although Charles was rather an unconventional master and gentleman and all through the book struggled hard to overcome convention, there was in him always some remaining trace of that conventional "gentlemanhood" which rose up from somewhere in his deepest self and reminded him of his origin and made him feel a bit alarmed when somebody did not treat him according to his high social standing. And the feeling of alarm appeared even in the most absurd circumstances, such as hiring a prostitute: 'You like us wicked girls?' - He noted she had dropped the 'sir' (p. 272), or dealing with servants: "... his new American self had been swept away before the massive, ingrained past and he was embarrassedly conscious of being a gentleman about to call on a superior form of servant." (p. 377). Nothing was as true in the nineteenth century as the proverb 'The tailor makes a man'. Clothes labelled people according to their social class, so that everybody knew how to address the others - whether one had to be polite to them at all cost or whether one could be rude to them if one wanted. Fowles did not let this fact pass unnoticed and wittily incorporated it as we shall see in the following quotation: "The maid was... without its customary lace cap. In fact, had she not worn an apron, he would not have known how to address her... He noted the absence of the 'sir';

perhaps she was not a maid; her accent was far superior to a maid's... He was left to close the door for himself' (p. 377). The second part of the quotation is another proof that Charles, although unconventional enough for his age, still required a certain amount of convention, because conventional rules were exact and certain and set the pattern of one's actions. They defined things the higher ranks could do and things that were unthinkable for them to do. Those who were brought up to act according to these rules were lost and confused if they were deprived of them, as Charles was in this situation.

There were many principles a member of the upper-class should have obeyed. Apart from the conventional mode of conduct there was one thing more important than anything else, a thing which was the very essence of being a gentleman; the rule can be summarized by only one imperative sentence: Do not ever work! Of course the landed gentry had to run their estates which provided for their wealth, but the owners of the estates did not really work; their "work" meant usually to take a horse and ride round their several thousand acres and see how hard the people worked, to have a few words with the foremen or farmers and get back to their study for a glass of brandy and a cigar. I guess Charles also imagined something like that when he got the telegram from his uncle, supposing the time had come for his uncle to pass the estate onto his nephew. As it is apparent, it gave him a feeling of importance and respectability:

... Charles felt himself truly entering upon his inheritance. It seemed to him to explain all his previous idling through life, his dallying with religion, with science, with travel; he had been waiting for this moment... his call to the throne, so to speak. The absurd adventure in the Undercliff was forgotten. Immense duties, the preservation of this peace and order, lay ahead, as they had lain ahead of so many young men of his family in the past. (p. 171)

A young gentleman was expected to have property and it was rather common and became a topic in many novels that he was often obliged to wait till some elder member of his family dies or while still alive, signs the estate over to his heir, for property meant respect, it ensured a certain position in society: "His position depended on his estate, which he neglected at his peril. It was essentially a base for a style of life, not a commercial undertaking... But it yielded leisure, comfort, social position, very great personal liberty." ¹⁹ The estate was a source of not only respect the others had for him, but also the respect one had for himself. A gentleman without property, moreover, without hope to inherit it one day was lost. Without property one had to be careful about

money, one had no self-confidence. "He had lost not only Winsyatt that previous day, but all his self-respect" (p. 205). That was a serious problem, which in Charles's case resulted in his break up with Ernestina and convention generally.

However angry he might have been, an English gentleman, as convention demanded, could not, as already mentioned, show all his emotions. "But he had only one defence: to take it calmly, to show the stoic and hide the raging boy" (p. 185). He had to show the "stiff upper lip", as for example did Charles with his uncle: "They were both English gentlemen; and they carefully avoided further discussion of the subject uppermost in both their minds" (p. 188).

It was much harder with Ernestina, because she was raging and so Charles's speech sounded as if he was teaching her something which he really did not believe himself: "...we must accept the event with as good a grace as possible" (p. 174). This situation also revealed the origins of the two. An aristocrat used to controlling his emotions and a middle-class girl still trying, and not always successfully, to acquire the higher-class manners.

The greatest disgrace for a gentleman, next to the loss of property, was the necessity to work, the two things being usually connected one with another. It really did not matter that he did not have to work with his hands, what mattered was that he had to work at all. That is precisely what happened to Charles: "Trade. Commerce. And he flushed, remembering what had been offered. He saw now it was an insult, a contempt for his class, that had prompted the suggestion... He should have rejected the suggestion icily at its very first mention; but how could he, when all his wealth was to come from that very source?the real germ of Charles's discontent: this feeling that he was now the bought husband, his in-law's puppet" (p.255). He would have to live from a typically middle-class business. Though it was quite big and prosperous, it was still middle-class, and therefore inferior business, his future lay in being supervised by his middle-class father-in-law, which certainly must have been humiliating for a gentleman.

An indisputable privilege of gentlemen was their freedom, the possibility of doing what one wanted: "...a sense that choosing to be nothing... was the last saving grace of a gentleman; his last freedom, almost" (p.256). Freedom was something the loss of which Charles was not ready to accept yet; he was still too much of a gentleman with too much of the conventional pride in his mind to accept this.

1.1.2 The Middle-classes

Middle-classes is the key term for anyone trying to depict life of the nineteenth century. Therefore Fowles could not by any chance happen to omit integrating some middle-class characters into his story. Middle-classes were the symbol of the nineteenth century and their rise was a great phenomenon. First we should concentrate on the beginning and reasons for the growth of the middle-classes. That is well explained by Reader:

The industrial world was run by the middle-classes; as it grew, so did their opportunities. In the past the representative middle-class man - the shop-keeper, the merchant, the closely related banker - had been concerned with the sale of goods and the use of money, but not directly with manufacturing, which was the affair of craftsmen. There had been very little scope for middle-class technical or professional employment. There were the skilled artisans on the one hand, the lawyers on the other; that was about all. But as factories went up, factory owners began to appear alongside merchants and bankers at the top of the middle-class tree. The whole scale and scope of commercial activity expanded; clerks, commercial travellers and technicians multiplied. New professions came into being.²⁰

All the new professions that were needed in the new industry had to be practised by somebody. And because such people could not belong to the highest classes (because they made money by work), nor to the lowest (because they had a higher qualification and earned more money), they were classified as members of the middle-classes. Thus beside the older professions as shop-keepers, there were many new ones like various kinds of engineers or professions evolved from the older ones, but having a new air about them, such as lawyers, doctors (now obliged to pass more complicated examination), clerks (still increasing in number as the companies grew), businessmen of a new, more distinguished kind. But there were differences even between these professions: "Escott, in his survey of England.... concluded that professions like the bar, where fees did not pass directly from client to practitioner, ranked higher than professions like medicine, where they did. It was also, in his view, a slight mark of inferiority if a professional man had the right to recover his fees by legal process."²¹

To be able to do a specialized profession one had to get qualification which was the essence of every profession. This was a bit of problem, because the former

educational system had been adjusted to the needs of the former society. One had either been from an upper-class family and needed grammar school as a prerequisite for university, or they were from the lower classes and needed only the basic education. The middle-classes though did not need university, but something more than basic education. Thus the system of education, especially the content of the curriculum, had to change in favour of the middle-classes growing in number every day. Of course the change was rather a slow process. In the meantime the middle-class boys (for girls usually did not need to get qualification) managed to cope with the content of grammar school or boarding school education, most often for the sake of the distinction of it, which lay in their contact with the boys from "better" families:

The classics, useless intellectual lumber as they were for most boys, made small appeal to the practical middle-class mind, but the middle-classes put up with them as long as the process of learning them brought their sons in contact with the gentry and hence with the source of patronage and profitable employment.²²

All this was possible because the society still worshipped the gentry. But as the opportunities and abilities of the middle-classes widened, the middle-classes found out that if they wanted to achieve more, they had to bring the concern of the society to the middle-class issues, not the issues of the gentry. The middle-classes, as it is apparent from the following quotation, saw the traditional society too unjust, too much playing in favour of the gentry:

They found a society in which most of the best things in life - wealth, property, social position - were conventionally regarded as belonging to those who were 'born to them'. They wanted to substitute for it a society in which those who had the ability might seize the prizes.²³

And as there were more people who did not belong to gentry, they succeeded. One of the beliefs of the middle-classes which appealed also to people from lower classes was that one could achieve what one wanted by self-help and self-reliance, by determination and strong will. Actually, as Fowles put it very aptly through the middle-class character Mr Freeman, it corresponded with the Darwinian theory, which the middle-classes otherwise quite firmly refused:

(Mr Freeman:) 'I would have you repeat what you said, what was it, about the purpose of this theory of evolution. A species must change...?'

(Charles:) 'In order to survive. It must adapt itself to changes in the environment.' (p. 250)

That was exactly what the new developing species, the middle-classes, did. They adapted themselves as long as the environment set the direction and pace. And they did not count on someone else's help, but on their own inner strength, as they were advised by their own creed: "... their happiness and well-being as individuals in after life, must necessarily depend mainly upon themselves - upon their own diligent self-culture, self-discipline, and self-control - and, above all, on that honest and upright performance of individual duty, which is the glory of manly character." Once they achieved a certain strength and assuredness in the society, it was them who started to set the pace.

Gentry made money by doing nothing, by giving orders and letting other people work for and serve them. The middle-classes scorned this attitude and made money by work. It seems sometimes that their effort was powered by their hatred against the aristocratic idlers, by the desire to spite them that one could earn as much and live as posh a life as them. Of course, it usually took many years, very often more than one generation, before one could compare in their wealth to nobility, as in the case of Ernestina's family: "Ernestina's grandfather may have been no more than a well-to-do draper in Stoke Newington when he was young; but he died a very rich draper - much more than that, since he had moved commercially into central London, founded one of the West End's great stores..." (p. 72).

Another thing which was often hated and despised (and often perhaps also envied) was the extravagant life and lax morals of the gentry, their carelessness about other people's lives and misfortunes. Therefore, as if to contradict them, the middle-classes threw themselves to the arms of church:

Religion, especially nonconformity ... lay at the heart of middle-class life, as it had since the seventeenth century. Indeed the generally puritan and serious tone which the Victorians took pride in having reintroduced into English life was perhaps the greatest part of the middle-class triumph. It owed little to the upper-classes, who for the most part were converted to that kind of Christianity unwillingly and late. It owed nothing to the poor who...were mostly never converted to any kind of Christianity at all.²⁴

Religion became necessity, obsession. Who wanted to be respected by other people had to go to church, had to play the role of a good Christian; no doubt there were really

some good Christians among them. Fowles knew that his middle-class character Mr Freeman also had to correspond with this notion: "He (Mr Freeman) had become excessively earnest and Christian in his private life...Mr Freeman contributed handsomely to the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge and similar militant charities" (p.245). The rule was that those who were not respected, as for example those who were not seen in church on Sundays, lost their customers, which could be fatal for their business - that was what businessmen like Mr Freeman tried to avoid.

Duty, as already mentioned, became another key word of the middle-class life. It was a result of Christian influence - to do what one was expected to do. That meant to stick to conventions. Convention under the influence of middle-classes evolved into a monstrous system of dos and don'ts and this system was based on purity dictated by religion. A vast majority of things which one could encounter in life were viewed as improper, while only a few things were proper of respectable, pious people. They were not only things one could not do or say, but also matters one was forbidden to think of, the worst of these being sex or anything which reminded people of it or hinted at it. People were encouraged to control themselves according to the principles. Ernestina was a perfect example of this tendency: "Thus she had evolved a kind of a private commandment - those inaudible words were simply 'I must not' - whenever the physical female implications of her body, sexual, menstrual, parturitional, tried to force an entry into her consciousness" (p.30). One was, and ladies especially, obliged to be shocked at everything that did not completely correspond with the strict and rigid middle-class convention. That meant some indecent issues concerning immoral behaviour, such as was Sarah for many people in Lyme and for Ernestina as well "...for Ernestina had now twice made it clear that the subject of the French Lieutenant's Woman was distasteful to her" (p.79).

Improper language was another cause to be alarmed at as well as too humane or friendly approach to servants. In this aspect again, Fowles elaborated the narration and dialogues into slightest detail, thus showing the narrowness of the Victorian middle-class life - it is apparent from the following extracts:

...the doctor... permitted himself little freedoms of language... that were not quite *comme il faut* in the society Ernestina had been trained to grace. Charles saw she was faintly shocked once or twice.

(Charles):'...There is no surer sign of a happy house than a happy maidservant at its door.' Ernestina looked down at that, with a telltale little tightening of her lips, (pp.130, 93)

A different kind of behaviour of different nationalities, especially those connected with a carefree lifestyle, such as Gypsies, was also shocking. Fowles probably could not help himself to demonstrate the Victorian foolishness on this example, expressing it in his own sarcastic way: "...horror of horrors, that a gang of gipsies had been living there....These outcasts were promptly cast out...Gipsies were not English; and therefore almost certain to be cannibals" (p.80). Gypsies did not comply with the middle-class values and were therefore a threat to the middle-class decency. The religious Victorians were surprisingly not ready to apply the Christian notions, like help and mercy, in such cases.

Another interesting aspect of Victorian life is the attitude to education. Education was certainly important, as it was already proved before, but it was important for boys, who needed to get qualification for their future occupation. A middle-class girl, on the other hand, had only two tasks: to get married and to be a good wife, which meant to have many children, preferably boys and not to contradict her husband. That is why the girls' education was not as stressed as the boys'. It meant that girls from well off families were educated either at home by an army of lecturers or sent to some grammar school or boarding school, the former being perhaps the case of Ernestina when she "got the best education money could buy" . They definitely did not need any qualification, no higher education, therefore were not sent to universities. This fact was connected to contemporary perception of the woman's position in the society:

Girls were generally supposed to be less in need of 'mental cultivation' than boys, and less capable of it, and too much education was thought to ruin their prospects in the marriage market. On the other hand they were expected to have certain 'accomplishments', particularly music and drawing, and a smattering of ill-assorted, undigested knowledge... The ideal presented to a young girl is to be amiable, inoffensive, always ready to give pleasure and to be pleased. There was no real tradition of girls' schooling, as there was of boys', because girls of the higher classes had always been educated at home - as, during the greater part of Victoria's reign, most of them continued to be. ²⁵

This perception of woman's role in the society was typically accepted by the middle-classes. Women did not need real universal education. Ernestina is a good proof of that. We always see her reading poetry or working on embroidery. She never talks about any other hobbies, work or other serious, scientific matters. She is either happy or angry, never thinking about world, society, contemporary theories.. .Women were not expected to do that. They could not be expected to do that because they had no deeper insight into problems, which was a result of the kind of education they had got. Therefore they were not supposed to develop their own opinions on certain serious problems. They were expected to adopt the opinions presented to them usually by the media, as it happened for example with Ernestina reading about the emancipated women requesting vote:

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"March 30 ,1867, is the point from which we can date the beginning of the feminine emancipation in England; and Ernestina, who had giggled at the previous week's *Punch* (ridiculing the women's right to vote) when Charles showed it to her, cannot be completely exonerated" (p. 101). This situation aptly depicts the contemporary opinions of women's emancipation. All women were not ready to fight for their rights because they had been taught to accept their inferior role. With respect to the preceding extract I have to stress the author's mentioning the *Punch*, which is a perfect example of Fowles's sense for detail.

Having nothing to do, no specialized education which could provide some hobbies, girls were left with conventional activities generally accepted as suitable and harmless for girls from good families: embroidery, reading (harmless) books, writing a diary and being fussy about furniture or clothes, like Ernestina: "Like so many daughters of rich parents, before and since, she had been given no talent except that of conventional taste.. .that is, she knew how to spend a great deal of money in dressmakers', milliners' and furniture shops" (p. 166). In the middle-class families there was no place for extremities, everything was rather "middle", average.

What was the most typical for the middle-classes was their attitude to everything that was associated with gentry:

Middle-class life, therefore, was very largely an attempt to reach out towards gentility and to imprint the notions of the rural gentry upon the instincts of town-bred business men. But to say that the middle-classes set out to imitate their betters is to over-simplify. There were many aspects of upper-class life which they could not approve of, and they were far too strong-minded to give up firmly held convictions. As they

penetrated the upper levels of society they carried a good deal of luggage, and if upper-class ideas began to modify their own, so also their habits

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of thought impinged on those above them.

Typical for the middle-classes was scorning the aristocratic way of life but, at the same time, trying to copy it and join it: "Instead of seeing its (middle-class') failings as a reason to reject the entire class system, she saw them as a reason to seek a higher....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" (p.219). This fact is therefore one of the main conflicts presented in this book: the relationship between the middle-class and upper-class and marriage of their members. Fowles was again perfectly aware of the apparent and absurd contradiction in the middle-class opinions and did not forget to incorporate it in his book: "...but she (Ernestina) had a very sound bourgeois sense of proportion. Thirty rooms when fifteen were sufficient was to her a folly. Perhaps she got this comparative thrift from her father, who secretly believed that 'aristocrat' was a synonym of 'vain ostentation', though this did not stop him basing a not inconsiderable part of his business on that fault, or running a London house many a nobleman would have been glad of..." (p.218).

The best and easiest way to become a member of the upper-class was to marry its member. Although it was perhaps not the case of Ernestina, some people were ready to do anything to achieve it. "... professional status was a marriage between gentility and trade which the middle-class mind found highly congenial. Middle-classes were built on trade and were loth to sacrifice its profits, but trade had a dubious social standing." ²⁷ We must bear in mind that in those days love meant a lot, but in spite of that marriage was still a big deal of business, for both parties. But property also meant a lot, especially for the middle classes, struggling to gain importance and respect at least by their money.

The obsession with "title" and class consciousness is only too obvious in the book, especially in Ernestina's behaviour, as it is the only thing she is really worried about and the only thing she supposes to be the real cause of the break-up of her relationship with Charles. I will demonstrate this aspect on several examples from the book:

'... But I think on reflection he will recall that in my case it was a titled ape.' She looked at him then as they walked and moved her head in a curious sliding sideways turn away; a characteristic gesture when she

wanted to show concern - in this case over what had been really the greatest obstacle in her view to their having become betrothed. Her father was a rich man; but her grandfather had been a draper, and Charles's had been a baronet.

Ernestina uttered a discreet curse against rich uncles. But a vision of herself, Lady Smithson in a Winsyatt appointed to her taste...After all, a title needs a setting...

'...I suppose she is titled-has pretensions to birth. Oh...if I only listened to my poor, dear father! He knows the nobility. He has a phrase for them... ' (pp.11, 167,330)

The last statement of Ernestina perfectly expresses the ambiguous attitude of the middle-classes towards gentry: the respect for the titles and the hatred against the class as such.

1.1.3 The servants (lower-classes)

Domestic servants usually rose from the lower classes. The lower classes always struggled very hard, especially in the times of economic depression, to find some work, preferably a well-paid one. They typically worked as labourers in various factories and manufactures, dustmen, workmen at building sites, docks, mines; in the country it was work in the fields. Such work was very hard, the working hours long, the pay was usually quite low and there was still a possibility that one may lose the job at once.

Homes of the lower classes were usually very shabby and dirty, as the water supply and drainage system were out of their reach. A lot of them did not have money for heating in winter and had hardly any for food or clothing. Families were big and so also the children usually had to work already from a young age. In Victorian era women were supposed to stay at home and look after children, but women from the poorest families tried to find at least some work, such as sewing; in the mine districts, though, a lot of women worked in mines, too. The lower classes had so little money all the time that when they got a better pay, they felt they needed to indulge themselves and so the money usually ended up in the cashbox of the nearest pub. The lower classes did not bother to make fuss about morals at all. Drunkenness and sex were perhaps the only things to spice up the dreary life.

One cannot be therefore surprised that whoever had the opportunity to flee from this way of life, they made use of it. Becoming a servant was one of the best ways of

doing it. Although being a servant had its disadvantages, as these servants were fully at the mercy of their masters, there were more advantages, as Reader explains: "But in a good household the maid's job had solid advantages. A girl was well fed, clothed and housed. She would see something of a wider world and she would get some idea of how to run a house." ²⁸

Many servants recruited themselves from country people. Living in the country was very hard and around the half of the century the opportunities for work in agriculture decreased. One of the reasons might have been the fact that some work was already being done by the newly invented machines powered by the greatest invention of the century - the steam engine. Another, certainly the more probable reason was that the agriculture was losing its power. There were several bad seasons and the newly imported products cut down the prices and along with it also the profits from the agriculture. Farmers could not pay their workers, sometimes could not earn a living for themselves. And so many people decided to try their luck in the town. There were more opportunities to find a job in towns. It must also be mentioned that it were mostly women who went town to become servants as this occupation was almost the only suitable one for them; this tendency is again described by Reader:

The best thing a cottager's daughter could hope for was to go into service in a good family, and when she was between ten and fifteen years old her parents would try to place her. The Census Report of 1891 remarked on the fewness of women, in country districts, at all ages from ten upwards. It also said that almost one-third of all girls in the country, between the ages of fifteen and twenty, were in service, and about one in every eight over the age of ten. These figures indicate the immense pressure to get away from the villages, the demand for servants, and the very limited openings for women outside domestic service.²⁹

People from the country usually could not afford to risk not getting a job, and so they often contacted some friends or relatives in towns and asked for help. That was a common practise, not unknown even today. Fowles did not forget even about this detail for that was exactly the case of Mary: "Mary was the niece of a cousin of Mrs Fairley, who had wheeled Mrs Poulteney into taking the novice into the unkind kitchen" (p.69).

Servants were supposed to be inferior beings and could therefore be treated as the whims of their masters urged them. They usually acted on the presumption that their inferiors depended on their pay and that they were so silly that they could stand any

humiliation; unfortunately, it was very often the case. Most of their misery was due to the lack of education: "... Millie was a child in all but her years; unable to read or write and as little able to judge the other humans around her as a dog; if you patted her, she understood - if you kicked her, then that was life" (p. 138). For this reason perhaps, the lack of education and consequently lack of self-respect, there were always servants willing to stay at such houses as Mrs Poulteney's.

Not only the masters could make the servant's life dreadful, though. As there was usually a very strong hierarchy among the servants, the higher "ranks" often played at a would-be-master and could be crueller than the masters themselves. The rivalry could also be traced in Mrs Poulteney's household:

Though she (Mrs Fairley) had found no pleasure in reading, it offended her that she had been demoted... It did not please Mrs Fairley that she had a little less work, since that meant also a little less influence. Sarah's saving of Millie - and other more discreet interventions - made her popular and respected downstairs; and perhaps Mrs Fairley's deepest rage was that she could not speak ill of the secretary-companion to her underlings.

As far as education is concerned, one almost feels like understanding why it seemed better at that time that the lower classes did not need any education. For all through the history we can find proofs that education brought about thinking and too much thinking about certain topics brought about too much progress, namely various revolutions. Revolution in any sense of the word was a real threat to the higher classes of the nineteenth century, especially around the half of the century. A certain kind of revolution had already been the growth of the middle-classes as well as the beginning emancipation of women; but the slowly but certainly evolving "emancipation" of the lower classes aroused alarm among the rich. As the law of 1870 provided education for every child, the lower classes gained a certain amount of self-consciousness:

In a few minds schooling, even of a meagre kind, worked upon lively intelligence, provoking discontent with the limitations of... life, opening up prospects hitherto unglimped, suggesting even, perhaps, questioning of the unquestionable - was the social order... divinely ordained, immutable, inescapable? ³⁰

Fowles aptly described the progress of the servant's attitudes: "But the difference between Sam Weller (Pickwick Papers) and Sam Farrow (that is, between 1836 and

1867) was this: the first was happy with his role, the second suffered it" (p.41-^2). Charles's servant Sam was a person of that new trend, a prototype of modern servant. One who used his intellect instead of only obeying his master.

No doubt Sam was a new kind of servant who dared to challenge the old, set social order. He was one of those who decided not to be the dumb sheep most masters were used to seeing in their servants. Even Charles did, though he liked Sam. Sam realized that fine feathers make fine birds: "He had always aped the gentleman in his clothes and manners..." (p.1 15). If one looked and behaved like a gentleman, one was halfway to success, halfway to become favoured by gentlemen, which was the thing he definitely achieved with Charles, for Charles really admired him for his care for his clothes and good looks. Sam was very ambitious: "There was a timid and uncertain person (Sam) - not uncertain about what he wanted to be (which was far removed from what he was) but about whether he had the ability to be it" (p.1 15). Most servants thought that service was the best thing that could happen to them in their lives, like Mary and her kind, but Sam took service only as a platform to transfer to higher spheres.

Sam in fact represents the great and constant struggle of Victorian people to move to another social class. From a lower class he wanted to become a member of the middle-class. He wanted to be a shop-keeper, a haberdasher and was ready to sacrifice a lot. He adjusted all his actions just to this dream. And Mary was no obstacle to it. On the contrary, he was ready to take her with him and to involve her in his business: "...but he (Sam) also loved her (Mary) for the part she played in his dreams... Most often he saw her prettily caged behind the counter of a gentleman's shop" (p. 182). And although his simple little vision of their future might seem really funny to us, in his time it was rather a serious matter. "His profound admiration for Mr Freeman..." (p.1 16) perfectly explains his desire to copy what many men before him had managed to achieve: to become somebody important from somebody ignored.

Mary, on the contrary, had no ambition. She seemed perfectly satisfied with her role in Mrs Tranter's household. But she respected Sam's ambition, as if he had already achieved something; because a servant with ambitions in those days was to a simple peasant girl like Mary almost as admirable as for example Mr Freeman: "She was certainly dazzled by Sam to begin with: he was very much a superior being, and her teasing of him had been pure self-defence before such obvious cultural superiority: that eternal city ability to leap the gap, find short cuts, force the pace" (p.1 15).

On his way to his dream Sam did not hesitate to rebel against Charles and to deceive him, which was rewarded by Mr Freeman at last. Sam did not even have the opportunity to start his new shop, which certainly would not have been easy as the competition was already quite strong and breaking into a branch as a novice was usually complicated and often impossible: "Outsiders did from time to time force their way into the closest rings and there were always new occupations coming up in which rings had not had time to form, but nevertheless it was extremely difficult for the boy without connections.... Nepotism was all, or nearly all. The idea of throwing good opportunities open to all comers and letting the best man win was not born in the working class. It was the conception of the Victorian middle-class..."³¹ And so Mr Freeman, a true representative of the middle-class, showed an appreciative approach, perhaps remembering the beginning of his own business, and gave Sam an opportunity to work his way up which he made use of, helping thus Sam to fulfil the middle-class rule of self-help.

Fowles incorporated in his book a new phenomenon of those days in two specimens: Mr Freeman who was already rich and respected after having inherited the business developed by his father, and Sam, a self-made man in progress, who represented in the book the beginning gradual rise of the lower classes: "Even if it hardly yet reflected in their accents and use of the language, these two (Sam and Mary) were rising in the world; and knew it" (p.363). By this Fowles managed to depict how the nineteenth century lay the foundations of modern democratic society.

2.1.4 Sarah

By involving the character of Sarah Fowles achieved more things at the same time. First thing was that he presented an unconventional behaviour in the conventional society of his book, secondly, he broke the conventional Victorian rules, which he partly pretended to obey in his writing. The most severe misdemeanour was, as I have already mentioned before, to make an outcast the most important character which was really unacceptable in a real respectable Victorian fiction. Yet he was not the first one to make such a mistake: "Miss Bronte had committed 'the highest moral offence a writer can commit... that of making an unworthy character interesting in the eyes of the reader'." ³² But since Fowles represented our modern age, he used a modern character to stress the difference, to make us see the difference of the modern world and the world of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Sarah was a modern woman.

The first striking thing about Sarah was that she looked different. Her dress was different from the other women, though perhaps not surprising for a woman of a governess-like kind, and her whole appearance was different: "It was certainly not a beautiful face, by any period's standard or taste. But it was an unforgettable face, and a tragic face. Its sorrow welled out of it as purely, naturally unstopably as water out of a woodland spring. There was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness" (p. 13). She showed her real feelings, her sadness and did not care about the other people.

Another unusual thing about Sarah, apart from her behaviour, was the fact that she actually did not belong to any class. "Her father had forced her out of her own class, but could not raise her to the next. To the young men of the one she had left she had become too select to marry; to those of the one she aspired to, she remained too banal" (pp.50-51). This, according to Victorian standards, was rather strange and only underlined her role in the story. Her father, on the other hand, seemed to be a typical Victorian, at least in one aspect: "For several years he struggled to keep up both the mortgage and a ridiculous façade of gentility" (p.51). It was typical for Victorians to struggle to become members of a higher class, or at least to pretend they were its members.

However, the way her father had chosen to raise Sarah from their class was rather progressive for just a farmer. It was education. The story takes place in 1867 and Sarah must have got her education at least a decade before. But it was first in 1870 that the law required "a school within the reach of every child" and "until the Act of 1870... it was a matter of chance whether a country child could get to school or not."³³ Before this year the farmers usually did not care about their children's education, because children were needed at the farm to help with the work and if they had gone to school, there would have been fees to be paid, which most farmers were reluctant to pay. Sarah was an exception though and her education was not without consequences:

"....Thus it had come about that she had read far more fiction, and far more poetry, those two sanctuaries of the lonely, than most of her kind. They served as a substitute for experience. Without realizing it she judged people as much by the standards of Walter Scott and Jane Austen ...She was too striking a girl not to have had suitors....But...she saw through the too confident prétendants. She saw their meannesses, their condescensions, their charities, their stupidities. Thus she appeared

inescapably doomed to the one fate nature had so clearly spent many millions of years in evolving her to avoid: spinsterhood." (pp.50-51)

Her further fate, same as her previous, was rather unconventional, probably thanks to her features: "...she had two qualities... passion and imagination... those two qualities of Sarah's were banned by the epoch..." (p. 165). She was perfectly aware of the convention and strongly detested it, which she probably shared with Charles, but unlike him, she had the courage to live up to her opinion. Everything about her was unconventional. "She seemed totally indifferent to fashion; and survived in spite of it" (p. 146). She wore no gloves, she often did not wear her bonnet, moreover, she often wore her hair loose, which was considered sinful.

Another impertinent thing about her was the way she thought and especially the fact that she spoke her mind. At Mrs Poulteney's she managed to conceal her thoughts, mainly because she needed an income, but even there at some occasions she could not help herself:

"She now asked a question; and the effect was remarkable. It was, to begin with, the first question she had asked in Mrs. Poulteney's presence that was not connected with her duties. Secondly, it tacitly contradicted the old lady's judgement. Thirdly, it was spoken not to Mrs. Poulteney, but to the girl." (p.52)

The shocking thing about Sarah was not only the fact that she spoke her mind, but the fact that she dared not to be grateful for the "charity" of Mrs Poulteney and that she dared to say it clearly:

(Mrs Poulteney): 'I command you to leave this room at once.'

(Sarah): '....Since all I have ever experienced in it is hypocrisy, I shall do so with the greatest pleasure.' (p.212)

With Charles it was a different case. She dared to be impolite to him, although he was trying to be polite, obviously doing his best to show his sympathy and desire to help her: 'May I not accompany you?...' - 'I prefer to walk alone' (p.78). It was very rude, and unexpected of a lower-class woman to rebuff a gentleman.

She also dared to be sincere to him, to tell him things a decent woman would not tell anyone, not at all to a gentleman, and would not even think about such things. Here I will list several examples of her unconventional sincerity, be it a direct hint to prostitution (a prohibited topic), a declaration of love (not supposed to be uttered by a woman) or criticism of their age:

'If I went to London, I know what I should become.' He stiffened inwardly. 'I should become what so many women who have lost their honour become in great cities.'

'Though seeing you is all I live for.'

'You have given me the consolation of believing that in another world, another age, another life, I might have been your wife. You have given me the strength to go on living...in the here and now.' (pp.123, 223, 308)

Even her showing that she was aware of convention was unconventional. She was ready to face the consequences of her behaviour, to stay a single woman ('I know you cannot marry me.' p.306) and not to beg for the help of man, who, according to convention, proposed marriage after their intercourse.

2. Religion

Religion was the ruler of the nineteenth century England and it must be said that this ruler was quite absolutistic. Its reign was imposed on the English by the "dominating" classes, the middle-classes. It almost seems that the middle classes liked setting and observing rules, perhaps because observing rules helped them achieve their position in the society same as it helped them in business. As the middle-classes were quite fastidious about observing the rules of business, they also took the religious rules to heart and many of them became utterly obsessed with them. Those who wanted to be respectable members of society had to observe the rules; those who did not were outcasts. The Bible became essence of everything and applying its message was believed to be universally the best thing for making the world better. That did not mean just that the conquered regions were Christianized, the English society itself was to be "reformed", civilized again. However, same as a few centuries before, there was a difference between Christianity and Christianity: "...the middle-classes lay across the line that separated the Church from Dissent. Most of their weight and all their tradition lay on the dissenting side, which gave them a set of principles high, rigid and narrow."

³⁴ Almost the only acceptable form was the Protestantism and the heritage of puritans, including the fanatic obsession and hatred against Catholics, which Fowles put rather aptly: "(the vicar of Lyme) kept his church free of crucifixes, images, ornaments, and all other signs of the Romish cancer" (p. 23). The previously mentioned obsession is personalized in the character of Mrs Poulteney.

The Victorian middle-classes felt themselves to be promoters of religion, the modern crusaders. They started the "campaign" at the very beginning of one's life. Once being born, most children were already determined Christians. The Christian notions were imprinted first at home, later at school ("The highest purpose of education, at any rate in theory, was religious, and there were schools to suit every variety of English Christianity.")³⁵ and in church all life throughout. Of course, every true Christian was expected, apart from living up to their values, to convince also the other people to do so and to fortify their belief. That was the duty of every Christian, Mrs Poulteney being a true example:

...she took exceedingly good care of their (the servants') spiritual welfare. There was the mandatory double visit to church on Sundays; and there was also a daily morning service - a hymn, a lesson and prayers - over which the old lady pompously presided, (p.53)

Such religion, originally meant to help people live better lives, brought about many duties and principles which sometimes developed into unbelievable dimensions, such as despising pleasure:

They brought them (principles) to public notice especially on Sunday, when many normally unexceptionable or even praiseworthy activities became sinful and religious observances were obligatory. In a respectable household there would be church or chapel twice in the day. No work would be done. There would be precious little play, for only solemnest literature would be permitted and only the most decorous games, amongst which some families would include Noah's Ark for the sake of its indubitable religious associations. The Sunday frame of mind, for many people, was merely an accentuation of the suspicion which they normally felt towards any kind of activity which was neither 'work' nor 'religion': in other words, towards any kind of pleasure indulged in for its own sake. Thus many middle-class households, particularly in the earlier part of Victoria's reign, cards, dancing and the theatre, besides being unthinkable on Sunday, were forbidden during the rest of the week also: a direct legacy from seventeenth-century Puritanism.³⁶

This aspect of the middle-class religiosity can also be traced in the book, represented in the character of Mrs Poulteney: "The place (Assembly Rooms) provoked whist, and gentlemen with cigars in their mouths, and balls, and concerts. In short, it encouraged

pleasure; and Mrs Poulteney and her kind knew very well that the only building a decent town could allow people to congregate in was a church" (p. 111). Moreover, her hate towards any form of entertainment was aggravated by her malicious need to command and criticize everybody.

Not only pleasure itself, or the entertaining activities were to be denounced, though. It also included things only associated with pleasure and careless, non-puritan behaviour. A good example of this is France, although it must be said that France was traditionally associated especially with sin, which was even worse. As Fowles did not forget to imply, English men, usually from better families like Charles, often went to France, less inhibited by religious beliefs, to indulge themselves, especially in the French brothels. France, being the cradle of the European revolt did not disappoint even in the aspect of literature. Among the most despised rebels were Zola and Flaubert who really drove the chaste English mad. Such people as Mrs Poulteney did perhaps not even think of reading or ever touching their books, but they certainly knew they were full of sin and moral filth and the bad habit of their time being that everything was generalized too much, they lived up to this tradition also in this aspect and transferred their antipathy on everything connected to the "country of sin": "'I do not like French She speaks French?' Mrs. Poulteney's alarm at this appalling disclosure was nearly enough to sink the vicar... 'I will not have French books in my house. . . . I am told you are constant in your attendance at divine service'" (pp. 34-37). It is obvious that sin and religion were most probably Mrs Poulteney's only obsession.

Here we have come to the most delicate and touchy issue of the Victorian life, an issue which everybody knew about but tried their best to avoid it, in conversation as well as in mind: it was the subject of sex and everything connected or only vaguely associated with it. The reasons for this were originally grounded in religion, but over some time the interest in them escalated into a monstrous extent. "The close relation between sex and religion was explored extensively during the nineteenth century, and often obsessively."³⁷

We could see a proof of this obsession in Mrs Poulteney's observation of her servant's behaviour: "When one day Mrs Poulteneysaw from her window the sight of her stable-boy soliciting a kiss, and not being very successfully resisted, the goldfinch was given an instant liberty..." (p.69). But even the most innocently looking things were rigorously persecuted. The following example is a good demonstration of the attitudes of the individual speakers: Mrs Poulteney and Ernestina, being the

representatives of the traditional, middle-class, puritan view, while Charles, as opposed to them, was on the tolerant side:

(Mrs Poulteney): 'Mrs Fairley informs me that she saw her only this morning talking with a person... A young person. Mrs Fairley did not know him.'

(Ernestina): '....I too saw them talking together yesterday.'

(Charles): 'But surely... we are not going to forbid them to speak together if they meet?'

(Mrs Poulteney): 'There is a word of difference between what may be accepted in London and what is proper here...' (pp.92-93)

The grounding of hypocrisy lay in pretending that certain things did not exist at all and therefore even the hints, like for example a kiss, which might have implied the existence of "the forbidden" were suppressed. Thus it happened that even the legs of pianos and furniture were covered not to imply that there were legs under skirts and moreover, not to raise questions and fantasies of what was there where they ended. Some children even thought that their mothers did not have any legs because they had never seen any. In order to eliminate the unwanted and inappropriate implications it was necessary to stay alert, to watch the other people, the Christian fellows and in case the common moral values should be broken, to intervene briskly and mercilessly: "... Mrs Poulteney was concerned - of course for the best and most Christian of reasons - to be informed of Miss Woodruff's behaviour" (p.57). Wherever the people were, they were watched whether they did not misbehave. To ensure their safety the girls from the better families usually were not allowed to leave the house without a chaperone. That is why Mrs Poulteney was so shocked when Sarah went out alone. Charles was aware of the rule as well when he visited Sarah at the hotel and did not want to go to her room: "'Then you must go up, sir.' - 'I think... would you please send to ask if my visit were not better put off till she is recovered?' ... He remembered Varguennes; sin was to meet in privacy" (p.300). There was a presumption that if people were not watched over they would sin.

The duty of every good Christian was to be a guardian of good morals, decency and chastity. All these terms meant practically the same: being completely ignorant of all sexual matters and to pretend that nothing like that had ever existed and that one had never done anything which could in any way remind of that. Chastity was a highly praised virtue, because "the essence of chastity was that it could be triumphant amidst

temptation." ³⁸ Temptation was one thing one was particularly afraid of, because if one was tempted there was the possibility that one could sin. The age was very pious and puritan, the clothes covered almost all the body and there could be therefore from our point of view really only tiny details which could awaken imagination and consequently also temptation. Although it may seem strange, it were not predominantly women's breasts, that were considered exciting. The necklines of the dresses, especially the evening dresses did not cover much, but what was considered most exciting were the ankles:

Attention on the breasts was permitted, provided that they were not called that.... But they were not the primary sex organs, as might be believed from the evidence of mild porn. They served to draw interest from more fundamental parts; a partly exposed breast was allowable, ³⁹ even respectable, a partly exposed leg, never."

Among the rules of appropriate appearance was, apart from the impossibility of showing legs, also the need to have one's hair properly done and wearing gloves. None of these rules were observed by Sarah. "Both feet were bare" (p.303) when Charles visited her at the hotel and as we know, the effect was rather seductive. Sarah also wore no gloves and so it happened that her and Charles's hands touched; and touch meant a lot in that "muffled-up-from-tip-to-toe" century. Also hair was prescribed to be done tightly, usually into some kind of bun. Not even this rule was observed by Sarah: "Her hair, he noticed, was loose...It gave her a kind of wildness" (p.116). A headgear was another inseparable part of a lady's wardrobe and not wearing some kind of hat or bonnet when one went out was unacceptable. Here again, Sarah was different: "He wondered whether it was not a vanity that made her so often carry her bonnet in her hand" (p.145). As we can see, Charles, being aware of the convention, noticed even such details; and a contemporary puritan prejudice pronounced by the pious people immediately entered his mind. Vanity was one of the terms which one used when they wanted to refer to something that did not completely comply with the dogma; and religious terms were among the most popular and forcible. Any divergence from the mainstream could cause shock, but also excitement. Charles achieved both.

Modest and chaste women would have certainly never broken any of the rules, even the most absurd. The notions sometimes contradicted each other, but that was not seen as an obstruction in sticking to them. Women on the one hand knew they dressed in a way that would make them appealing to men, on the other hand they pretended not

to be trying to attract the men's attention, the same stood for the conversation as well. They were required to play this game, if they had not, they could not be considered respectable:

It was a no meaning yes, a token that the woman expressing it by blush or downward eye was a creature of sensibility and a worthy love object. Shame struggling with desire was sexually stimulating, and extremely flattering to the man.⁴⁰

There are many occasions in the book involving both Ernestina and Sarah when Charles noticed that 'she was charming when she blushed'. Blushing was the proof that even though somebody was pretending they were not thinking about anything inappropriate, they actually were. Because blushing was generally considered as appealing, many women learnt to blush intentionally. "They blushed so often that they resembled human traffic signals."⁴¹ On some occasions, as in the society, especially in the company of men, blushing was desirable, otherwise it was preferable to be as pale as snow and as cold as fish. Ernestina was one of those who did their best to observe the custom: "...her right hand holding her fireshield....to prevent the heat from the cracking coals daring to redden that chastely pale complexion..." (p. 100).

So far we have given evidence to prove that sex in the nineteenth century as well as in the book was a touchy subject. However, we still have not explained why it was so. Of course, there were religious reasons, but these reasons more or less forbade the extra-marital sex. This did not include only adultery, but the pre-marital intercourse as well. The religion had established a rigid cult of abstinence and virginity which was meant to last till the individual got married. The ideal was certainly very impressive, but, as all ideals, hard to achieve, for men as well as for women. "The identification of chastity with physical virginity was inevitable... During the eighteenth and nineteenth century chastity became more and more associated with women."⁴² Men have the advantage that one can hardly prove whether they have any sexual experience or not, in women on the other hand one can unmistakably state whether they are virgin or not. That is perhaps why the attention concerning sexual experience turned predominantly to women.

Many men went to prostitutes, before and also after wedding, everybody knew it, but everybody pretended to ignore it. Anyway, the ideal was that one should gain the first sexual experience in the marriage. But again, it was not crucial as far as men were

concerned. Charles was one of those who had sexual experience before wedding, of course, in France:

His answers to her discreetly playful interrogations about his past conquests were always discreetly playful in return; and that was the rub. She felt he must be hiding something - a tragic French countess, a passionate Portuguese marquesa. Her mind did not allow itself to run to a Parisian grisette or an almond-eyed inn-girl at Cintra, which would have been rather nearer the truth Of course Ernestina uttered her autocratic 'I must not' just as soon as any such sinful speculation crossed her mind..." (p.68)

We can see Ernestina's middle-class attitudes: she supposed a man like Charles, a gentleman, to have, if any, a relationship with a woman from the same class as his. The last part of the extract demonstrates the conventional negative approach to the forbidden topic.

There were not many ways to overcome the urge of lust. To be honest, there were altogether three ways of doing it. Going to prostitutes, as we have already mentioned, was quite common, although not socially acceptable, but perhaps still the lesser of two evils. The grossest evil being "self-satisfaction" which was absolutely intolerable and to discourage people from practising it, it was said to harm the physical as well as the mental health.

There is one thing, however, which may most seriously hurt a girl's body, and that is touching the private parts in any way... Sometimes girls do this out of ignorance or curiosity, but they run the risk of hurting themselves for life through it... even nerve affections may be started which injure the brain." ⁴³

The third way was one's strong will. Sexual desire and the duty to resist it tortured many Victorians, so much that some even asked various newspapers for help and got useful advice: "We fear we cannot help you, save to advise the use of plenty of exercise and cold water." ⁴⁴ It is most surprising that the sarcastic Fowles did not take advantage of this information and did not make any allusion to it. Anyway, it was far "easier to avoid rousing the sexual impulses than to silence them when they are once aroused" ⁴⁵, which is why it was forbidden to talk about delicate matters in the public. To forget all about the sexual matters one should work hard all life long. Here we have come back again to the middle-class obsession with work and hate towards entertaining activities.

The religious reasons, although predominant, were not the only to reprobate sex. When reading all the accounts of what and why was indecent, one feels there was something more in it. The human race was believed to occupy the very top on the imaginary ladder of the species. Moreover, people were believed to be more and quite different than animals, definitely not a bit better developed animals than the others, as Darwin said. People were believed to be sensitive beings, possessing soul and intellect and acting according to this unusual possession:

'Creatures of the inferior races eat and drink; only man dines... The rank which people occupy in the grand scale may be measured by their way of taking their meals, as well as by their way of treating their women... It implies both the will and the skill to reduce to order, and surround with idealisms and graces the more material conditions of human existence; and wherever that will and that skill exist, life cannot be wholly ignoble.'⁴⁶

Although people were such noble and graceful beings, there were still some negative aspects which cast a shadow over them. It was another material condition, same as the need to eat and drink, the need to copulate. As well as the former two, it was also an instinct, a reminder of our animal part and animal past, which most Victorians were not ready to accept. To make matters worse, this need could not be uplifted into something refined and noble, as for example eating. Whether it was performed by animals, the primitive tribes, lower classes, middle-classes or the aristocracy, it was always the same and that was the rub. Fowles explained this attitude perfectly by Ernestina's reflection: "It was not only her profound ignorance of the reality of copulation that frightened her; it was the aura of pain and brutality that the act seemed to require, and which seemed to deny all that gentleness of gesture and discreetness of permitted caress that so attracted her in Charles. She had once or twice seen animals couple; the violence haunted her mind" (p.30). Therefore the matter had to be accepted as it was, mentioned as little as possible and the act of it got over with so perfunctorily as to satisfy the need. Perhaps that is why the pleasure in having sex was generally denounced and scorned. No matter whether the intercourse was marital or extra-marital, it was definitely disgusting and sinful.

As all propaganda, also the Victorian one was done properly, remembering every detail. At that time, the fundamental bearer of knowledge and culture were books

and they had to be rid of all indecent expressions which might stimulate the reader's imagination.

It was rarely necessary to tell editors what exactly needed to be omitted. Brutality and savagery could safely be left in, and so, if it was not too strong, could blasphemy and irreligion. The indecent and the obscene meant, to the Victorians, sex. Sex could mean anything, and from the 1860s the smut-hunters, or, as one writer calls them, the censor-perverts, were seeing sex in everything, from the shape of grand pianos to the Elgin marbles.⁴⁷

Of course those who were the least wanted to be affected were the daughters from the respectable families who represented rather a great part of the readership. Reading was one of the few activities considered to be suitable for the chaste and fragile daughters, but on the presumption that they would stay chaste and fragile after the reading as well. There were several collections of poetry and prose published in order to strengthen the virtues of the readers: "The poems selected by Goldsmith 'were not only such pieces as innocence may read without the blush, but such as will even tend to strengthen that innocence'"⁴⁸

A popular family entertainment, almost the only family entertainment actually, was the family reading. A family gathered together, the young and the old and somebody read a book for the others. The books for these occasions had to be "clean" too. Everything was thus censored, the contemporary literature as well as the classics: "The classics were to be made respectable, not revered; it was more important to have literature that could be read aloud after dinner than everything in its awful and shame-making completeness."⁴⁹ Not only the classics like Shakespeare were obscene, though. There were some distasteful passages even in the book of the books, the very foundation of the Victorian principles - the Bible:

'So many men and women gain sexual ideas in childhood from reading the Old Testament, that the Bible may be called an erotic text-book. Most persons of either sex with whom I have conversed on the subject, say that the Books of Moses, and the stories of Amnon and Tamar... caused speculation and curiosity, and gave them information of the sexual relationship...'⁵⁰

And so the Bible was subject to examination and expurgation too, although the more reasonable minds prevailed: "Oddly enough, except in America with Noah Webster's

version, the Bible ceased to be a target for expurgation after Boothroyd and Alexander."

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This issue was so important that it could not be omitted by Fowles, because through this he could show one of the most striking aspects of Victorian hypocrisy and obsession with the obscene. Here he did not limit himself only to the representation of this feature in his characters, but truly delivered a lecture on the censored Hardy and other peculiarities of Victorian literature. But of course, the personalisation of this phenomenon was Mrs Poulteney, who certainly cared for the morals of the others not only by watching them, but also by choosing appropriate literature, which was the "clean" version of the Bible, and denouncing everything else: "...the large family Bible - not what you may think of as a family Bible, but one from which certain inexplicable errors of taste in the Holy Writ (such as the song of the Solomon) had been piously excised..." (p. 82).

If the matters concerning sex and sexuality and not only the matters themselves but even the things which might have only hinted that there were some matters of that kind were strictly and rigorously suppressed in literature, conversation and other kinds of cultural life, then it cannot be surprising that people really had the previously intended feeling of guilt and shame at encountering any reference to these matters. And the less people encountered such hints, the more cautiously they read for spotting any and the more had to be expurgated. Generally speaking, what people read in books and see in the world around themselves is usually taken as an example to follow, which works today and worked in Victorian times even more. People thus tried, or at least pretended to try to expel everything connected with sex from their lives and if, by chance, there appeared something of the "forbidden", the pattern of chaste behaviour that had been imposed on them made them feel guilty. Of course, the greatest guilt was felt after experiencing something which had to do with sex itself, either marital or extramarital:

What struck Taine most forcibly, however, was not so much irregular behaviour, either with prostitutes or in genuine love affairs, as the extreme guiltiness which an Englishman felt at indulging in it. 'An Englishman in a state of adultery', he noted, 'is miserable: even at the supreme moment his conscience torments him.'

Also in this aspect, Charles lived up to the contemporary principles: "Congealed in sin, frozen with delight. Charles... was like a city struck out of a quiet sky by an atom

bomb. All lay razed; all principle, all future, all faith, all honourable intent... but already the radio-activity of guilt crept... in the distant shadows Ernestina stood and stared at him. Mr Freeman struck him across the face..." (p. 305).

However, not only the sinful acts were considered sinful, but sinful were already the thoughts of such actions or things associated with them, as we can in Ernestina's case: "...she raised her arms and unloosed her hair, a thing she knew to be vaguely sinful... She imagined herself for a truly sinful moment as someone wicked - a dancer, an actress" (p.29). Such things should never enter anybody's mind, which Ernestina knew and "thus she had evolved a kind of a private commandment - those inaudible words were simply 'I must not' - whenever the physical female implications of her body, sexual, menstrual, parturitional, tried to force an entry into her consciousness" (p. 30).

Women were expected to be much more chaste than men, which resulted in their blushing at everything and their being shocked to hear or see anything that did not correspond with what they had read in the expurgated books; and last but not least, in their being cold, especially to men. As we have already mentioned before, women were not expected to act provocatively to attract men, moreover, they were not expected to feel any sexual desire or to enjoy sex. Their task was to be pretty and quiet puppets and good mothers. That was the ideal, but one has to admit that such ideal must have felt too boring even for the Victorian men and led to their "disobedience": "... men, even happily married men, had recourse to prostitutes simply because wives were obedient but cold, were unwilling when they were willing, were pregnant, or were averse to indulging in prohibited sexual pursuits..."⁵³ That is most probably the reason for one of the most striking paradoxes of the nineteenth century and at the same time the best example of the narrow-minded Victorian hypocrisy. The point is that although everybody was, or more precisely pretended to be, so chaste and virtuous, the prostitution flourished more than ever. Thus the beloved husbands left their beloved virtuous wives at home and went to wicked girls who certainly did not blush at everything and tried their best to attract the "sexually neglected" men.

A husband could venture into this attractive world without any strong convictions, not desirous of breaking up his marriage, not wishing to cause distress to his wife, but drifting in a trance, instinctively trying to find something that he could not find at home, but also insuring himself against a permanent liaison. Paying for services was a guarantee; a

prostitute, it was reasoned, would not laugh at a customer on account of an innocent fetishistic whim. Brothels were well equipped with black dresses and nuns' outfits to answer obscure and harmless demands, not to mention riding boots and frilly knickers.⁵⁴

Our Charles was nothing of that kind, he belonged to the part of men who only needed intercourse and did not have any other opportunity. He could not have an intercourse with the chaste and decent Ernestina, nor could he find a mistress, for that could have harmed his prospects of marriage with Ernestina. Moreover, he was driven by the desire to rebel against the middle-class Mr Freeman.

The demand (which always creates the offer) was only one aspect that contributed to the bloom of prostitution. But why was the offer so enormous when the principles of the age forbade such behaviour? The general idea has always been that prostitutes are "fallen" and disappointed women who once fell to the bottom of the society and were not able or willing to get back. That certainly was also the case of many Victorian prostitutes, including the one picked up by Charles; she explained her reasons very clearly: 'There's work. But it's all day work. And then when I paid to look after little Mary... Once you been done wrong to, you been done wrong to. Can't be mended, so you 'ave to make out as best you can....I don't know no other (way) no more, sir'" (p. 271). There were other reasons too; and these were far less flattering to the Victorian society. Not many perhaps realized them and if they did, they seemed so inconvenient to them that they rather forgot about them at once. These reasons were so to say the proof of the ill social system.

"Why did women become prostitutes? There were almost as many reasons as there were prostitutes, but the three main ones were poverty, inclination and seduction. It was often asserted that economic conditions lay at the root of prostitution, and that morals fluctuated with trade. A girl had a much better life on the streets, in terms of variety, and money, than in a factory, a sweat-shop, as an outworker, or in service. A Royal Commission found "that as many as sixty per cent of prostitutes had been servants; laundresses, dressmakers, and milliners were also well represented in the profession. It was popularly supposed that the girls soon regretted leaving their respectable occupations, but Charles Booth in his monumental *Life and Labour of the People* found out differently... One prostitute summed up the sentiments of thousands: 'I am taken out

to dinner and to some place of amusement every night; why should I give up?'... Middle-class employers did much to contribute their servants to the cause... mistresses exercised a misplaced ingenuity in 'obtaining the largest possible amount of labour out of the domestic machine'... Another feature of domestic life was the traditional habit of young men of the family trying out their sex appeal on the servants, and the equally time-honoured ceremony of servants seducing sons. Either could persuade a girl that what she did for pleasure could be done for money.⁵⁵

Such servants were according to these accounts quite common and Fowles, using the term "dollymob", did not miss the chance and mentioned them as the previous partners of Sam.

The existence of prostitutes was not only the proof that the generally accepted and valued ideal morals were not generally practised, but also that this social system had its faults. The gravest fault being that although the society required all its members to be well conducted, it at the same time unintentionally encouraged such cases of misconduct as prostitution. It was not only the case of money, which meant that women of the lower social ranks were paid so little for their "harmless" occupations that it consequently paid better for them to become street-walkers. Surprisingly, at the same time they gained a greater amount of freedom and entertainment (such as dinners and dancing with clients) which they would have never gained in service. Another thing was that there were so few opportunities for women to find a suitable job, that the only other possibility was only prostitution. It is obvious that a society which boasted of living according to the Christian principles usually failed in fulfilling this claim, because when their turn came to show their mercy and help the fallen Christian fellows, they turned their backs, leaving the women to do the only occupation where they did not need any letters of reference and which certainly did not correspond with the Christian views.

However, there was another thing which was even less acceptable than having extra-marital intercourse with mistresses or prostitutes: having intercourse with members of the same sex. Men, long proved lechers, were known to practice such things and were strictly persecuted for such conduct, a true example being Oscar Wilde. The greatest paradox of this issue is that as the Victorians did not expect women to feel sexual pleasure, they did not expect women to have intercourse with women. The reason for this double standard was a proof of hypocrisy at its utmost: "Lesbianism was not a crime, and was not incorporated into the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act

because no one had thought of a way female homosexuality could be explained to Queen Victoria." ⁵⁶

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the hypocrisy is represented by the character of Mrs Poulteney. She was a typical Victorian elderly widow, obsessed by religion but not acting like a true Christian at all. The traditional idea of a true Christian is to be chaste, modest, unselfish, to help the others selflessly irrespective of the costs, to be self-sacrificing, not to be malicious, to pass the Christian ideas on. However, Mrs Poulteney met only some of them. She certainly believed in God and tried to pass on the ideas of the Holy Script: "...she took exceedingly good care of their (the servants') spiritual welfare. There was the mandatory double visit to church on Sundays; and there was also a daily morning service - a hymn, a lesson and prayers - over which the old lady pompously presided" (p. 53). Or, to put it more precisely, she tried to force the other people mercilessly to accept the dogma blindly: "Failure to be seen at church, both at matins and at evensong, on Sunday was tantamount to proof of the worst moral laxity. Heaven help the maid seen out walking, on one of her rare free afternoons - one a month was the reluctant allowance - with a young man..." (p.22). She belonged to that kind of people who think that one is a good Christian when they go to church and read the Bible. Actually, reading the Bible and going to church were the only really Christian activities which Mrs Poulteney practiced.

Mrs Poulteney was quite a rich widow. This fact ensured her a certain strong position in the society, especially in a small town. Having a lot of money and a strong position gave one a feeling that they could possess the others and command them which was exactly what Mrs Poulteney felt and she surely liked the feeling. She certainly was not a modest and selfless person. She liked being a mistress, a general of the house and town, she liked being important. In the Victorian times people laid a great emphasis on charity, perhaps because it was a manifestation of the widely accepted and promoted Christian ideas - to help the others. At the same time this way of helping the others was quite easy for those who wanted to help. They only sent the money somewhere and did not have to meet the ill and dirty Christian fellows, for whom the money was destined. This, on the other hand, gave an opportunity to the rich to show off. Charity was a demonstration of Christianity and Christianity was the key concept of Victorianism. Who wanted to be respected by the customers, business partners and other members of the society, they had to be good Christians. It was good to go to Church, but it was much better to give money to charity. Somebody could give more, somebody could

afford only smaller contributions. But people soon started to think that the more one gave, the better Christians they were. And so some started to compete in order to display their charity and to look like better Christians. That was exactly the case of Mrs Poulteney: "Mrs Poulteney most certainly wanted her charity to be seen, which meant that Sarah had to be seen" (p. 56).

There was the Lady Cotton who helped with charity and personally helped "fallen women" and who most probably meant her good deeds really heartily. Mrs Poulteney, on the contrary, did only as much as she needed to feel respected and she considered Lady Cotton a rival who had to be defeated, no matter how honourable the purpose of her deeds was: "Mrs Poulteney was to dine at Lady Cotton's.... a thunderous clash of two brontosauri; with black velvet taking place of iron cartilage, and quotations from the Bible the angry raging teeth..." (p. 88). That was a great example of hypocrisy: to do charity not for charity itself, but in order to compete with the other rich and to be able to boast about the fact that one contributed, especially how much, which was actually not a very good example of modesty.

Money was the real ruler of that age, although most people pretended that it was the Bible. It was money that predicted and ensured one's position. The more greedy the people were and the less willingly they gave the money to the others. But if they wanted to be good Christians and had the money, they were supposed to contribute to charity, which lay at the root of the old dilemma, which was well known to Mrs Poulteney, too: How much to give?

"...doubt that increasingly haunted her: whether the Lord calculated charity by what one had given or by what one could have afforded to give. . . . She had given considerable sums to the church; but she knew they fell far short of the prescribed one-tenth ..." (p. 24)

Mrs Poulteney was certainly not selfless and certainly not sincere, generous, helpful or amiable. The only thing about her which may be considered positive was that she believed in God, feared God and wanted to go to Heaven. She subordinated everything to this idea. She was willing to endure much to achieve this, rather selfish, ideal, even to pretend that she was kind. That was why she helped the others - not because they needed it, but because *she* needed it: "...but each time Sarah departed with a batch to deliver, Mrs. Poulteney saw an equivalent number of saved souls chalked up to her account in Heaven..." (p. 55). For the very same reason she decided to employ Sarah and to help the poor from Lyme. Mrs Poulteney reasoned by inverse proportion:

the worse the sinner or the condition of the poor whom she helped, the better her future life in Heaven: "She secretly pleased Mrs. Poulteney from the start, by seeming so cast down, so annihilated by circumstance....there was her only too visible sorrow, which showed she was a sinner, and Mrs Poulteney wanted nothing to do with anyone who did not look very clearly to be in that category" (p. 36). Here again, she did not wish the best for the people, she wished the best for herself only.

Another example of hypocrisy represented by Mrs Poulteney was her attitude to the vicar. It was again a clash of two powers: "With the vicar Mrs. Poulteney felt herself with two people. One was her social inferior, and an inferior who depended on her for many of the pleasures of his table... and the other was the representative of God, before whom she had metaphorically to kneel" (p. 24). The vicar's power lay in his being a representative of God, her power lay in her middle-class membership and her wealth. As she was rather selfish and self-confident, aware of her social position, she could not stand anybody contradicting her and supposed everybody had to obey her commands. Although the position of the vicar was not as high as hers, she listened to him and basically accepted all he said, not because she was humble, but because she wanted to go to Heaven and nothing else.

Mrs Poulteney, though she was a perfect hypocrite, was not the only one in the book. Ernestina played her part too. She regularly made records in her diary. Diaries were very common among women from better families - they had plenty of time, had nothing else to do and usually had no one to talk to about their feelings, because the real feelings usually ran counter to the convention and could not be uttered. Their innermost feelings and opinions were revealed to the pages of their diaries. Today they are the best source of objective information about the everyday and private life of those days, for all the books and chronicles were written in compliance with the contemporary principles. But Ernestina, being aware of the convention even in this situation, adjusted even her diary confessions to the Victorian doctrine: "...she did envisage a day when he might coax her into sharing this intimate record of her pre-nuptial soul. She wrote partly for his eyes - as, like every other Victorian woman, she wrote partly for *His* eyes" (p.220).

3. Gender stereotypes

There are certain prejudices and generally accepted myths in every age. The gender stereotypes were much stronger and more varied in the past, but in the Victorian era was perhaps the first time they were scientifically backed up. As I have already mentioned before, the nineteenth century, especially its second half, saw an immense growth of science. Science became more diversified and with the introduction of new methods and technologies also more accurate and consequently more respected, too. The key area for studying and analysing people and consequently for justifying the gender stereotypes was anthropology, led by Darwin. The anthropologists made some interesting discoveries and together with the contemporary views created a monstrous theory. The theory only confirmed, elaborated and improved the common belief that women were inferior to men.

3.1 Women

Unfortunately, the most forcible reasons and evidence were based on the most obvious and superficial facts: the anatomy of both sexes. The most powerful argument was that women had smaller brain than men. From this fact they logically deduced, having on their minds the traditional silly presumption that quantity means quality, that having a smaller brain meant being less intelligent.

Just, therefore, as higher civilization is heralded, or at least evidenced, by increasing bulk of brain; just as the most intelligent and the dominant races surpass their rivals in cranial capacity; and just as in those races the leaders, whether in the sphere of thought or of action, are eminently large-brained - so we must naturally expect that man, surpassing woman in volume of brain, must surpass her in at least a proportionate degree in intellectual power. - Popular Science Monthly (1878 - 1879) ⁵⁷

This find only confirmed the previously acquired belief of the female inferiority and certainly pleased the male part of the population, already beginning to struggle with the first hints of women's emancipation.

Although the smaller size of brain was an argument good enough to convince everybody of the inferiority of women, there were more facts, quite shocking actually for us today, which were to prove the already uttered judgement. Every part and state of

the woman's body was scrutinized, suspected and convicted of causing the inferiority of women:

During menses women 'suffer under a languour and depression which disqualify them for thought or action, and render it extremely doubtful how far they can be considered responsible beings while the crisis lasts.... Even if woman possessed a brain equal to man's - if her intellectual powers were equal to his - the eternal distinction in the physical organisation of the sexes would make the average man in the long run, the mental superior of the average woman. In intellectual labour, man has surpassed, does now, and always will surpass woman, for the obvious reason that nature does not periodically interrupt his thought and application'⁵⁸

Some thinkers used their immense ability of abstract reasoning and went even farther. Now it was certain that women were not as intelligent and capable as men, but if one used his imagination, one could find out that they were something less even with respect to development and evolution. Anthropologists spent a lot of time comparing and evaluating bones of women and men and again found a surprising reason why women's bodies were of smaller size than men's bodies and why they were "intermediate between those of the child and the adult man... softer, more graceful and delicate..." The answer was simple and astonishing: Women were in terms of development somewhere between a child and an adult man. They were a bit more than a child but not regular adult human beings equal to man, and so indisputably inferior, doomed to be commanded and supervised by men.⁵⁹ Another shocking result was brought by comparison of the skulls of European people and savages. Here again, because the female skull had different features than a male skull and at the same time resembled the skulls of "Negroes", it became as clear as day that women were half-savages. "Paul Albrecht pointed out that as the black man, grinning, chattering, shambling, preserved primate characteristics, so too did women."⁶⁰

Most surprising in the incapable and fragile women was their ability to endure physical pain, which, as we know today, is a present, a poor remedy from the nature, in the process of bearing children. But even to this subject a clue was found: "In this once again women resembled primitive peoples. Everyone knew about the insensibility of savages to pain... Courage being an attribute of men of higher race, it was unthinkable that it might be found in women or savages. Their courage must be indifference; their

endurance, insensibility. They did not - could not - suffer. Savages, women, and children might no longer regenerate limbs as the newt does, but their tolerance of discomfort linked them securely with their amphibian ancestry." ⁶¹

It was clear: women were primitive, incapable and intellectually inferior, led only by their feelings. But why then would God create such a useless creature and, moreover, make this creature live side by side with the great, sensible and ingenious man? The answer was simple: "Nature had created in woman 'a being whose principal functions are evidently intended to be love, leading to generation, parturition, and nutrition... She is the sex sacrificed to reproductive necessities.'" ⁶² For this very reason women, their life, their issues were separated from the life of men. As they were considered to be rather silly, they were not supposed to interfere in the "men's matters" and vice versa. Women were too silly to understand the men's issues and men were too intelligent and busy with lofty matters that they simply could not bother with the women's issues. This tendency is also well depicted in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, as we can see from the following extracts:

He could not be angry with her (Ernestina). After all, she was only a woman. There were so many things she must never understand: the richness of male life, the enormous difficulty of being one to whom the world was rather more than dress and home and children...

...they said nothing, sinking back gratefully into that masculine, more serious world the ladies and the occasion had obliged them to leave...

You must not think she (Sarah) is like us men, able to reason clearly, examine her motives, understand why she behaves as she does. (pp. 114, 132, 137)

Because the only activity considered suitable for women was to bear children and to look after them, and because they were officially declared incapable and silly, they were not expected to exert any intellectual activity at all. Moreover, such activity, including education could be even harmful for them, as it could distract them from their prescribed role. That is why the education of girls was not stressed so much, definitely not the education leading to some qualification. The focus was on the future role of a good mother and housewife. Even girls from the "better" families were educated with this aim, the usual subjects being literature, especially poetry (expurgated, of course) and arts as drawing, playing musical instruments and embroidery, to develop the desirable delicate sensitivity: "There was a conspiracy to keep them from finding out

what life was really like, and until they were given away in ritual marriage they lived as if drugged, passing the time in needlework, drawing, piano playing, and in reading 'nice' novels from Mr Mudie's circulating library." ⁶³ As far as the book *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is concerned, Ernestina was a true example of this tendency; the only activities the reader might find her doing were reading, writing a diary and embroidering.

Education, apart from being more or less useless and unnecessary for girls, was even harmful both for the girl and the society, for, as mentioned before, it might distract her from the role of wife and mother, which the Victorians considered the most dreaded thing that could happen to a woman. Most women accepted their role and sacrificed everything to the ideal of being a good mother and wife. But there were still women, a scant minority, who yearned for higher education. Such women were warned of the danger they might encounter or cause:

... some women persisted in training their minds to the detriment of their bodies, especially in America. These were the "mannish maidens" who, in the words of Edward Clarke, 'graduated from school or college excellent scholars, but with undeveloped ovaries. Later they married, and were sterile.' Worse, they might become so enamored of self-development that they refused to marry at all.

Failing to respect herself as a productive organism, she gives vent to personal ambitions; seeks independence; comes to know very plainly what she wants; perhaps becomes intellectually emancipated, and substitutes science for religion, or the doctor for the priest... Such a woman, living her own life rather than living for others, might be a splendid friend, intellectually stimulating, 'at home with the racket and on the golf links,' but she was not a mother.⁶⁴

These statements also contain the issues I hinted before: The threat that the foundations of religious beliefs of anybody should be shaken and the generally worshipped role of woman as mother. Because the majority of Victorians were concerned with these issues, the authors of the statements used them to threaten and psychologically blackmail the "disobedient" women. Every such statement was weighty enough, but a concrete example of the statistics by Hall was much weightier and much more terrifying:

Of the 323 women who had graduated from Vassar between 1867 and 1876, only 179, or 55.4 percent, had married by 1903. Nor were those

who did marry keeping up to the mark reproductively: 58 of the 179 had no children at all, and the total number of children was only 365, an average of 2.03 per married woman. The comparable figures for Smith and Wellesley graduates were 1.99 and 1.81 children per married member. Herbert Spencer's dictum that 'absolute or relative infertility is generally produced in women by mental labor carried to excess' appeared, thought Hall, to be confirmed." ⁶⁵

Now it was indisputable. Women should not have been educated even if they wanted, and they were systematically persuaded not to want. But then they could not have any job, or at least a well paid job. Here again the society played its part: having a job was totally unsuitable for women. "It became a commonplace of social history that the treatment of women in any society was a prime indicator... of the society's place in the evolutionary hierarchy. At the apex of the social order stood the societies of contemporary western Europe and America - whose distinguishing sexual characteristics... was the exemption of women from productive labor, that they might better devote themselves to the bearing and rearing of children." ⁶⁶ If women had worked they would not have been able to care for their children and husbands. And husbands, being the superior and intelligent sex, were to care for the whole family, which was a reason good enough for their wives to care for them and obey them; men were thus the masters of the Victorian world. This division of labour was again backed up by the contemporary thinkers.

Not to say directly that the only capable sex were men and women were only wombs able to speak and walk, a special expression was used, in order to avoid the terms "inferior" or "superior", and the expression was "complementary". The two sexes were complementary, one being important for one thing, the other one for another: "Because of that love, a man labored for a lifetime not out of self-interest but for his mate, and she in turn labored at home for him and for her little ones... Sex complementarity marked the triumph of evolution." ⁶⁷ The sexes depended on each other, but not to the same extent. Men earned money and needed women to have children, or to put it more precisely, male heirs, because daughters, as it is clear from their position in society, could not carry on running the family business and other affairs. Women were in a different situation. They needed a husband to keep them, to feed them, to dress them, to impregnate them and altogether to save them from becoming spinsters, which was the most shameful condition of a woman, perhaps even

more than being single and pregnant, because as a spinster the woman obviously failed in carrying out her only task in the world: to be a mother and wife. Women almost fully depended on men, their husbands. That is why all girls were so eager to get married ("The girl must marry: else how live?"⁶⁸) and so were their parents. Being a good parent meant to marry the daughters off well.

That was the case of Ernestina, who was well aware of the role she was to play and did not mind it. She was a perfect example of a middle-class girl: superficial, ready to marry, ready to bear children, ready to obey the rules. Marriage was very important and it was even more important when it meant that the girl could move up on the imaginary social ladder: "...she (Ernestina) had perhaps been more in love with marriage than with her husband-to-be" (p. 100). In such cases the parents were able to work miracles. First it was, of course, necessary to draw the attention of the potential suitor to the beloved daughter. The ways of doing it were rather superficial, as the whole age, perhaps so that they could be easily understood: "...sly hints from the mother of how much the sweet darling loved children or 'secretly longed for the end of the season'... or less sly ones from the father on the size of the fortune 'my dearest girl' would bring to her husband" (p. 73). That perfectly depicts the extreme desire for marriage and the things which were considered to be important features of a good bride. In this only aspect Ernestina played her cards a bit differently than the majority of girls who directly exposed and mentioned all their virtues. However, Ernestina achieved the same desirable result.

Courtship was a very complicated thing in those days. Everybody was expected to be chaste and decent, which meant women could not want men, they should have been shy in the presence of men and men were expected to court the woman's favour, discreetly and inconspicuously, but at the same time noticeably enough to be understood. It was a game of cat and mouse: "... the woman had to pretend that she was not being pursued, and was therefore obliged to repel or ignore the male on certain occasions. Though were he selected as a possible mate, there had to be certain amount of encouragement, which should come as a surprise to the man and often came as a surprise to the woman. The favour should be gained by sudden surprise, not by mutual agreement."⁶⁹ The courtship of Charles and Ernestina satisfied all these requirements, as it is apparent from the following extract:

...Ernestina showed a gently acid little determination not to take him very seriously... Nor did Ernestina, although she was very soon wildly

determined, as only a spoilt daughter can be, to have Charles, overplay her hand. She made sure other attractive young men were always present; and did not single the real prey out for any special favours or attention. She was, on principle, never serious with him; without exactly saying so she gave him the impression that she liked him because he was fun - but of course she knew he would never marry. Then came an evening in January when she decided to plant the fatal seed. (pp. 72-73)

As the Victorian world with all its aspects and areas was governed by the conventional rules, the male and female ideals were no exception. Women were primarily expected to be decent and delicate. These were the key terms and from these evolved a whole range of related aspects. Delicate women were easily shocked at everything, easily made cry and faint. "It was considered a good thing to be shrinking, easily wounded by coarse behaviour. Delicate people broke into tears at the slightest provocation... The appearance of a toad, or the jolting of a carriage will cause a

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paroxysm of fear..." All this should have been a cause of a far deeper virtue: being innocent and chaste, not knowing the real truth about the world, about relationships and sex, being a virgin.

These were certainly the desired features, generally accepted as feminine. Middle-class parents did their best to imprint them in their beloved daughters in order to marry them off well. However, it was not easy to achieve. Sin was present everywhere and daughters had to be prevented from encountering it at all cost. And if everyone was watched cautiously whether they behaved according to the rules, then daughters were among the most closely observed objects, under constant surveillance like the greatest treasures. As I have already mentioned before, there were more ways of doing it, basically it meant that their whole life was censored:

Chastity was essential, and chastity meant physical virginity; suitors did not want a damaged packet. Daughters could not be put under glass domes like wax flowers, but the next best thing was to keep them in a state of suspended antisepsis. Books were censored so that daughters would not be contaminated; opera had to be vetted in case there was a ballet (in which people showed their legs); going out was strictly prohibited; a staunch etiquette was rigorously enforced. They had to be fresh for their sacrificial rites, modest and decent.⁷¹

With these mainly psychological features were also connected features concerning physical appearance. That meant principally to look delicate and fragile - these qualities were again connected to the presupposed mental and intellectual incapability. The ideal woman was small, thin, with pale skin, weak, dependant, looking shy and innocent. Fowles hinted even this detail and demonstrated it on his most main-stream character, Ernestina:

Ernestina had exactly the right face for her age; that is small-chinned, oval, delicate as a violet....Her gray eyes and the paleness of her skin...she could cast down her eyes very prettily, as if she might faint should any gentleman dare to address her... theirs was an age when the favoured feminine look was demure, the obedient, the shy." (pp. 13, 27)

Much of the appearance was achieved and often appreciably improved by clothes. Fragility was stressed by light, pastel colours: "...she wore a rosepink 'breakfast' dress....It set off her fragility very prettily... She was a sugar Aphrodite..." (p.226). Feminine shapes were brought to perfection by tight-lacing and the lower parts of the body by crinoline or later the bustle.

Chaste and delicate girls were certainly thought to be sensitive which has already been proven before. In our today's terms they would be called rather oversensitive and touchy. Again, if we consider that women could not be sophisticated and intellectual, nor too ordinary and normal, then sensitivity, particularly oversensitivity was only the next possible choice. Women, not acknowledged intellectual equals of men even by themselves, were not used to reasoning logically, to giving objective arguments when dealing with problems and stressful situations: "She (Ernestina) faltered and then abruptly slumped to the floor by her chair. His first instinctive move was to go to her.... The rather too careful way her knees had crumpled and her body slipped sideways on to the carpet, stopped him. He stared a moment down at the collapsed figure, and recognized the catatonia of convention" (p. 331). The typically feminine approach was histrionic behaviour, usually accompanied by tears, which was found to be rather effective when dealing with men. A crying woman in difficulties was known to soften the men's heart. Another cliché was the "broken heart" ('Poor darling, she will die of a broken heart.' p. 335) which sometimes occurred even in men. In short, psychological blackmailing was quite common and conventional.

3.2 Men

Men, as opposed to women, were the great gods of the Victorian world. They were the intellectual superiors, political and business leaders, scientists, artists, thinkers, inventors, employers, employees, breadwinners. They were the gods of the society and gods of each family. As such they had to have certain air of respectability around them. They were supposed to be serious, always relying only on their intellectual power, definitely not influenced by their emotions. Emotions were the domain of women, their domain was reason, and reason has always been a greater potential than feeling. But the two sexes were described as complementary which prevented the women from being scorned:

What earlier ages would have found surprising was the Victorian insistence that women, because they were weaker, should be protected rather than exploited and also that, however inconsiderable their intellectual powers might be, they nevertheless had a purity and spirituality of mind which should be shielded from male coarseness." ⁷²

The idea of the reciprocal approach of the two sexes was rather noble and surprisingly, it was followed by the majority of Victorians, who were so much used to respecting rules. The role of every well-bred man was thus clear. If we consider the traditional roles of males and females in the nature, then the nineteenth century was nothing else than the world of the wild. Females' role was to bear and breed children, males were strong and brave, fighting each other, to get hold of the female, the timid doe, and they protected them, caressed them in order to persuade them to copulate and beget the desired offspring. The motives were very simple and animal, but the respectable society made their circumstances respectable by introducing a set of certain rules. By making the participants behave gently the whole process gained a gentle and sometimes rather playful character. Men were sensitive and gentle, women even more. Charles was a prototype of such a man: Forever gentle, polite, considerate, ready to help and protect a lady, a real gentleman. Here I will list several examples to show these features:

There came a stronger gust of wind, one that obliged Charles to put his arm round Ernestina's waist to support her...

Of course he had duty to back her up; husbands were expected to do such things, therefore he must do them...

...Yet there rose in him...a desire to protect...his instinct was to kneel beside her and comfort her... (pp. 13, 100,214)

However, the men's role developed in men a certain amount of self-conceit, a need to be admired, looked up at for their strength and bravery, the need to be needed. Women were expected to show and know they needed men. Woe betide those women who did not. Such kind of woman was Sarah: "He had come to raise her (Sarah) from penury, from some crabbed post in a crabbed house. In full armour, ready to slay the dragon - and now the damsel had broken all the rules. No chains, no sobs, no beseeching hands" (p.381).

4. Marriage

Marriage was officially the only way a man and a woman could live together. Any other way was declared immoral. Before marriage, the courtship took place and was governed by strict rules of convention. The idea was that during the courtship the man wooed the woman and thus the reciprocal love evolved. Love was an absolute must, without love, no good marriage could arise: "Men and women believed in the institution of marriage because it did not occur to them not to. Love was the essence of it, and the British looked askance at arranged marriages as practised on the continent. Marriage not based on love was a degradation of romantic ideals." ⁷³ Charles was also aware of this aspect, and it must be said that it served as a welcomed excuse why not to marry Ernestina: "What haunts me is the injustice I should be doing you - and to your father - by marrying you without that love you deserve" (p.327).

Courtship was a game, usually mutually enjoyed, full of entertainment at balls and dinners and full of anticipation of the marriage, which was thought to be highly exciting, mysterious and desirable; a splendid thing in short. However, once it was achieved, a lot of the excitement, zeal and passion evaporated. The point was that in most cases none of the participants had experience with relationships and marriage and the reality simply did not come up to expectations. The rub of the marriage of those days was that it was based on previous inexperience and both parties often felt deceived afterwards.⁷⁴

As far as women, the chaste virgins, are concerned, the unpleasant surprise lay often on their side. The greatest surprise was usually the wedding night. As nobody talked about sex openly, there were many myths concerning this subject, including the

wedding night: "Sexual ignorance ranged from complete unawareness that any bodily relationship occurred, to utter confusion. Some girls thought that the wife and husband lay side by side without doing anything, others that somehow the navel was the centre of sex life, while others were under the misapprehension, shared by writers of pornography, that the act occupied the whole night."⁷⁵ Thanks to these myths the wedding night often resembled a rape rather than anything else.⁷⁶ "Women were confused; often totally uninformed, they found their wedding night a frightening experience, an experience that some of them never forgot, or forgave." The unpleasant surprise of the wedding night sometimes destroyed the whole marriage, as it often sparked off a feeling of alienation of both partners. Women were definitely not expected to enjoy the act; that was the privilege of man. "It was woman's place to accept it uncomplainingly without a great show of enthusiasm."⁷⁷ Women who enjoyed such an indecent an animal-like thing were considered immoral. This idea is also incorporated in the book and it serves as another detail which helps to depict the age: "Charles was like many Victorian men. He could not really believe that any woman of refined sensibilities could enjoy being a receptacle for male lust" (p. 307). According to this notion, women were also not expected to participate actively on the act, because an active participation would prove their positive approach towards the matter.

Sex was one reason which flattened the mutual passion and respect of the pairs. Another reason was boredom. Once they were married, some of the couples stopped flattering each other, stopped looking forward to seeing each other, the sport, the excitement of the courtship vanished and what remained was dullness. "Many women, once they had married, did not feel inclined to carry on their coquetry now that it had served its purpose, and accepted their menfolk as their duty, phlegmatically and with no great enthusiasm."⁷⁸ The people also often found out that some of the features of their partner which they had found exciting and attractive before, were actually boring or even annoying. Since divorce was usually unacceptable, they withdrew into the areas of their own interests, for women it was family, for men usually clubs and money, and maintained the appearance of a perfect marriage only for effect.

Intimacy between the men and women, husbands and wives either in sexual issues, emotional or pragmatic ones was not common. The two sexes were not expected to understand each other's desires much. It almost seems to us that the members of each of the sexes lived separated from each other, in two different worlds, only occasionally meeting to get married and beget children. That was perhaps the very cause of the weird

relationships and marriages and dull lives of many couples. Charles was also aware of that: "...He could not tell the doctor his real conviction about Ernestina: that she would never understand him. He felt totally disabused of his own intelligence. It had let him down in his choice of a life-partner; for like so many Victorian, and perhaps more recent, men Charles was to live all his life under the influence of the ideal" (pp. 195-6).

Love played a great part in planning of the marriage, but so did the money. The only acceptable marriages were among the members of the same or similar social status. Women were expected to bring some money to improve the family account in the form of dowry. The most important about a bride-to-be were her social status, her virginity and her dowry. On the other hand, the parents of such a girl also had to be sure that the suitor was no second class swell. Both sides were usually carefully vetted, for marriage, especially the middle-class one was based besides on the obligatory love also on money as money was considered the key to the social standing, money was the thing which had made the middle-classes what they were. Friedrich Engels' explanation says all:

'...they really believe that all human beings (themselves excluded) and indeed all living things and inanimate objects have a real existence only if they make money or help to make it. Their sole happiness is derived from gaining a quick profit. They feel pain only if they suffer a financial loss.'⁷⁹

There is therefore no wonder that if a marriage of two respectable people was to be respectable, the financial matters had to be well arranged as in every business agreement. Everyone accepted that fact, including the characters from the book, Charles and Mr Freeman, as the following extracts will show:

'...Of course our private affections are the paramount consideration. However, there is a ...well, a legal and contractual side to matrimony...'
Mr Freeman's private reaction had in fact been more that of a businessman than of a gentleman, for the thought which had flashed immediately through his mind was that Charles had come to ask for an increase in the marriage portion....The one thing he loathed was to be worsted in an important business deal - and this, after all, was one that concerned the objects he most cherished. '...My principal consideration is my daughter's happiness. But I do not need to tell you of the prize she represents in financial terms.' (pp. 227, 245-246)

But although the money belonged to the brides, they could not use it nor did they have any substantial influence on the way it was spent. Officially, until 1870, women could not own any property, which meant that after the wedding, the dowry automatically became the property of her husband as well as any future earnings of his wife and she had no right to influence it. Thus the wives were fully dependant on their husbands and were legally their property. Once married they were trapped and had to obey the husband. However, they did not have to obey him only because of the financial reasons, it was a part of their role imposed on them by the society which preferred the humble, loving and tolerant women. This tendency partly arose from the religious values and Fowles gave us opportunity to find evidence of it in his book in the character of Ernestina: "Let this be a lesson to me to take the beautiful words of the Marriage Service to my conscience, to honour and obey my dearest Charles even when my feelings would drive me to contradict him. Let me earnestly and humbly learn to bend my horrid, spiteful wilfulness to his much greater wisdom, let me cherish his judgment and chain myself to his heart..." (p. 219). The sense of obedience was nevertheless not only in the act of following the husband's orders. Women, because of their full dependency on him, were supposed to honour him, to support him, not to contradict him, trust him and always to be on his side. "'He', said Spurgeon (a Baptist preacher), referring to the husband, 'has many objects in life which she does not quite understand; but she believes in them all, and anything which she can do to promote them, she delights to perform.'" This idea was propagated everywhere and so even Ernestina knew her part:

'Perhaps I am just a child. But under your love and protection... and your education... I believed I should become better. I should learn to please you, I should learn to make you love me for what I have become. . . . I will fetch my diary if you do not believe me... It is true, I am ignorant, I do not know what you want of me... if you would tell me where I have failed... how you would wish me to be ... I will do anything, anything, because I would abandon anything to make you happy.' (pp. 327-328)

This monologue of Ernestina is also a clear demonstration of the unbelievable desire of women to please men, to do what the men wanted. It again is a proof that Fowles did his best to depict the nineteenth century notions in detail. In this extract he also achieved to present the fact that women themselves were aware that they were inferior to men.

Not all husbands, even from the "good" families, were gentle, loving and respecting all the prescribed and desirable features which a husband and a good Christian should have, though. Some of them treated their wives badly. But the man was the great master of the society, the inventor, the producer, the breadwinner; and woman was only an inferior being, fully dependant on him, his property. And everyone could treat his property as he wanted, that was the great capitalistic rule. There were no terms such as sexual or domestic abuse. These were the rights of the husband. And women? They were second-class citizens, with no right to vote, no right to own property, no rights at all. Thus they could not complain and they actually did not want to complain, because the rule was not to discuss private matters in public. The same was applied to adultery. "Extra-marital sex was all right for a man, disgraceful for a woman; a woman could not divorce a husband for adultery, but a man could divorce a wife. Most often he did not; he was allowed by law to chastise her, which could mean a legal thrashing. A man could take a mistress - if he did it quietly and kept up the pretence of living a respectable married life. The cardinal sin was to be found out." ⁸¹ Men could be unfaithful, because they were the masters, women could not, they belonged to their husbands. Men were in a favourable position in all matters. "Sir W. Nevill Geary in *Law of marriage* presented even much more unbelievable idea: 'A husband knowingly and wilfully infecting his wife with the venereal disease cannot be convicted criminally either under a charge of assault or of inflicting grievous bodily harm.'" ⁸²

Even if a woman should want to divorce, she would not be able to do it. The Divorce Act was passed in 1857, but it was incredibly expensive to get divorced. As women had no property, they could not pay for it, only men could. If, by chance, a woman would somehow manage to get the money for the divorce, she would have no income afterwards, there would be no savings (all belonged to the husband) and she would have to find some kind of job which definitely was not easy at that time, there were jobs only for the poor women, low-paid in dirty factories, there were no respectable jobs for women from respectable families. There was another aspect, though: a woman from such a family would have never thought of working. Another thing was that a divorce was a shame, because it was a proof that she had completely failed in the only thing she had been destined to: being a good mother and wife. The effort to keep and continue the marriage was extraordinary and quite obvious. But why?

"The middle-classes were the firm base on which Victorian prosperity rested, and the middle-class family was the microcosm of the state, with

a settled hierarchy, a code of conduct that must seem to be above reproach, and a head that seemed to know what he was doing. If the family was tainted then so was the society." ⁸³

We can see that the importance and status of marriage was undeniable which was a reason good enough to preserve it at all cost, even if it meant unhappiness of the partners. Although marriage itself is not depicted in the book, Fowles managed to depict the extreme desire to get married, because without marriage there would be no family and without family there would be no prosperous society.

5. The development of Charles and his relationship with Ernestina and Sarah

Charles is the most important character in the book. Along with the development of him develops also the plot. He is also the author's instrument used to show us how the values of the society changed, the way from convention to freedom, the progress which was started by people like Charles (and Sarah) and carried on up to the twentieth century when Fowles wrote the book.

At the beginning of the story Charles was a typical Victorian young gentleman who lived according to the convention. He had a lovely fiancé, he was happy, had great prospects of his future life. However, there were already first hints that he would perhaps not be a total slave of the conventional rules: He did not indulge in hunting and horse riding as it was common and expected of a gentleman, he was a great supporter and devotee of the then often despised Darwin and he hated hypocrisy. The first stone which was to start the avalanche was when he and Ernestina encountered Sarah as they were light-heartedly walking on the beach. This occasion displayed the basic difference between Charles and Ernestina. While Ernestina was led by the convention which told her not to care about any outcasts and poor, probably also crazy "fallen" women in shabby clothes, Charles cared about Sarah. Ernestina perceived her as a troublesome dirty object reminding everyone of the existing sin which nobody wanted to see and she was almost ashamed to look at her. Charles, on the other hand, saw Sarah as an unhappy human being who needed help and he certainly was not willing to be indifferent to her

misfortune. Her condition did not repel him, on the contrary, it attracted his attention, actually. Sarah was different from anything he had seen before:

She turned to look at him - or as it seemed to Charles, through him. It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favoured feminine look was demure, the obedient, the shy." (p. 13)

Sarah left an impression on him, he could not forget about her. Charles's "problem" was that he was not indifferent, did not scorn her, was sensitive and wanted to help her. The more times he met her, the more he had to think about her and the more he was attracted to her. He saw that Sarah was rather extraordinary and unconventional and made a sharp contrast to the perfect and decent Ernestina. And the visit with her at the pious Mrs Poulteney's made him resolve definitely to help Sarah actively, it made him an ally of Sarah: "...It was thus that a look unseen by these ladies did at last pass between Sarah and Charles. It was very brief, but it spoke worlds; two strangers had recognized they shared a common enemy... Bigotry was only too prevalent in the country; and he would not tolerate it in the girl he was to marry" (pp. 93-94). It also made him even more aware of the monstrous strength of convention and hypocrisy which was present in the society and, unfortunately, in Ernestina too.

Ernestina was a perfect example of a well-bred Victorian girl. She was pretty, delicate, chaste... "She (Ernestina) was very pretty, charming...but was not that face a little characterless, a little monotonous with its one set paradox of demureness and dryness? If you took away these two qualities, what remained? A vapid selfishness" (pp. 113-114). She observed the rules, was rich and desiring to be even richer, she wanted to marry and obey her husband. She had the typical character women were expected to have in that age: she was hypocritical, rather simple and touchy. "And yet once again it bore in upon him, as at the concert, that there was something shallow in her - that her acuteness was largely constituted, intellectually as alphabetically, by a mere cuteness" (p. 131). In short, she was an epitome of a Victorian woman. That also meant that she was rather ordinary: she was the same as all the main-stream girls and therefore it was easy to predict what she would do, what she would be like after the wedding, after twenty years. We could see clearly how Charles started to doubt, to reason and compare. Sarah, on the other hand, was the opposite. She was a rare example and therefore unpredictable, exciting, mysterious and that is what men like. Fowles stressed

these qualities many times as well as Charles's awareness of the reasons for his attraction towards Sarah:

It seemed clear to him that it was not Sarah herself who attracted him - how could she, he was betrothed - but some emotion, some possibility she symbolized. She made him aware of a deprivation. His future had always seemed to him of vast potential; and now suddenly it was a fixed voyage to a known place. She had reminded him of that...

In simple truth he had become a little obsessed with Sarah ... or at least with the enigma she presented...

He decided that that was - had been rather - her attraction: her unpredictability, (pp. 114, 112, 165)

Sarah was different in all kinds of aspects that one could imagine. The most shocking for the society was of course her situation - a woman exploited by a man. Although nobody had any evidence of her guilt, everybody believed a sin had been committed. However, there were also other aspects, which most people considered shocking, crazy or impolite, but only Charles saw them as they were. Sarah was intelligent and emancipated. In the time when women were supposed and required to be submissive, emancipation of women was scorned, laughed at. Nonetheless, it appealed to Charles in a way. She was sincere, not observing the rules of convention, she told him what she really thought, although it was impolite or inconvenient. Fowles provided plenty of situation in which he could demonstrate the uniqueness of Sarah's character which was intentionally in sharp contrast with Ernestina. What was most striking in Sarah with respect to the Victorian standards was that she was sincere and outspoken and treated the others as her equals even if they were not, like Charles, for example, which was quite shocking for that age:

'It is beyond my powers...'

'I do not - I will not believe that.'

Charles had known women - frequently Ernestina herself - contradict him playfully.... A woman did not contradict a man's opinion when he was being serious unless it were in carefully measured terms. Sarah seemed almost to assume some sort of equality of intellect with him...He felt insulted..."(p. 124)

The following example is another demonstration of Sarah's unusual behaviour, a proof of her emancipation and feeling of equality and denial of the conventional female status:

"She led the way....a lady would have mounted behind, not ahead of him"(p.145). Another threat to the Victorian female stereotype was masculine appearance. As I have already explained before, there were exact requirements about what a respectable woman should look like: delicate, fragile, shy. These were the feminine attributes. Women who did not comply with them were looked down at, perhaps because the different features could be signs of the despised emancipation. Sarah was totally indifferent to such rules: "Something about her coat's high collar and cut, especially from the back, was masculine" (p. 146). She even confessed her love to Charles ('Though seeing you is all I live for' p.223) although that was traditionally the man's task. Women were not expected to do such things.

Sarah was open-minded and embodied the freedom which Charles would like to have but did not dare to try to achieve it. She opened his eyes and that somewhat fascinated him. As he was gradually starting to like Sarah more and more, he found more and more mistakes in Ernestina: "He perceived that her (Sarah's) directness of look was matched by a directness of thought and language - that what had on occasion struck him before as a presumption of intellectual equality (therefore a suspect resentment against man) was less an equality than a proximity like a nakedness, an intimacy of thought and feeling hitherto unimaginable to him in the context of a relationship with a woman" (p. 159). Ernestina seemed to him too superficial, her values and desires being too different from his. At the same time he realized that Sarah's opinions and feelings were quite similar to his.

But there came another shock for Charles. His prospects of inheritance of Winsyatt turned out to be completely ruined. This crisis revealed several facts. Ernestina was raging about the lost property, which again proved her shallowness and greed, an expression of her middle-class origin. Charles was disappointed and angry mainly because it meant that he would bring to the marriage much less money than Ernestina and would have to depend on her money and after some time would have to join the business of her father. This really annoyed him and it caused that the whole vision of marriage with Ernestina started to annoy him: "...the real germ of Charles's discontent: this feeling that he was now the bought husband, his in-law's puppet" (p. 255). He felt humiliated and decided to revenge on the middle-class convention represented by Mr Freeman by going to a prostitute. Here the reader might have caught him riding in a carriage through the streets near Haymarket looking for a prostitute that might resemble Sarah. That was a clear proof of his obsession with Sarah and his

subconscious love for her which he still was not ready to admit. But the more he realized how much convention and hypocrisy was all around him, the more he liked Sarah. Because the existence of Sarah proved that Charles was not the only one who saw the pretensions. When he was with her he was in a world where one could say, feel and do what one wanted. However, he was still conventional enough not to ever think of marrying her: "He thought of her (Sarah) not, of course, as an alternative to Ernestina; nor as someone he might, had he chosen, have married instead. That would never have been possible. Indeed it was hardly Sarah he now thought of- she was merely the symbol around which had accreted all his lost possibilities, his extinct freedoms, his never-to-be-taken journeys" (p.288).

Although it was convention that caused that the idea of marrying Sarah had never occurred to him, it was convention again which made him, after he had had an intercourse with her, to break the engagement with Ernestina and try to ask Sarah for her hand. And it was nothing else than the conventional notion of female weakness and fragility which made him end up in bed with Sarah, I will list two clear examples of that:

...she was in a long-sleeved nightgown. Her hair was loose... she seemed to him much smaller - and agonizingly shy... He could not take his eyes from her - to see her so pinioned, so invalid (though her cheeks were a deep pink), helpless.

And it was while she made little dabbling motions with a handkerchief that he was overcome with a violent sexual desire; a lust a thousand times greater than anything he had felt in the prostitute's room. Her defenceless weeping... (pp. 300, 302)

That was the crucial moment for Charles. After that he almost completely broke free from convention. Convention in his case meant predominately his pretending that he was happy with a woman whom he did not love. Relationships of men and women were one of the greatest sources of hypocrisy. But there was also a different source and that was religion. From the beginning of the book we never found Charles talking about his religious beliefs, or praying, so one more or less got the feeling that Charles was a specimen of a new man, beginning to appear more and more frequently since the second half of the nineteenth century: a scientist - atheist. However, after he had had an intercourse with Sarah, which was certainly a proof of his denial of convention, he did not know what to do and most surprisingly grasped to a conventional consolation and

refuge: church. But it would not be Charles, a man of intellect, if he did not reflect most seriously and thoroughly, "...a strange sense he had had... upon entering empty churches - that he was not alone. A whole dense congregation of others stood behind him....Charles thought: if they were truly dead, if there were no after-life, what should I care of their view of me? They would not know, they could not judge. Then he made a great leap: *They do not know, they cannot judge*. Now what he was throwing off haunted, and profoundly damaged, his age" (p. 316). Here we could see that although he went to church, he realized that he did not believe in God, which was quite a rare and despised phenomenon in his age. Therefore the readers should understand it as progress which had been forming for several decades and now happened at once in the character of Charles, the way from strong religiousness to atheism and free thinking, that Charles should symbolize and that is most probably also the author's personal opinion about religion.

Another demonstration of his disengagement from convention, apart from breaking up with Ernestina, was his unwillingness to rush to her help when she dramatically fainted, most probably expecting he would, as every gentleman, be alarmed at her collapsing. But this time he would not play the game at psychological blackmail: "She faltered and then abruptly slumped to the floor by her chair. His first instinctive move was to go to her.... The rather too careful way her knees had crumpled and her body slipped sideways on to the carpet, stopped him. He stared a moment down at the collapsed figure, and recognized the catatonia of convention" (p.331).

Although we could see that some traces of conventional behaviour were still apparent in him, he was afterwards no slave of it. He had overcome the convention unlike many from his age. First there are always only a few people, pioneers of some new phenomenon, and gradually more and more people join them till the minority becomes a majority, till the marginal opinion becomes the main-stream. Charles was such a pioneer and he was among the very first ones who realized the mistakes of the Victorian society and who were amazed for example by emancipated women like Sarah, although their life was still based on the conventional notions: "See him for what he is: a man struggling to overcome history" (p.257). We must still bear in mind that it was the author, John Fowles, who rendered Charles the character he was. Therefore we could perceive Charles as if he was Fowles himself, in the Victorian world, with the twentieth century knowledge, looking around himself, assessing and deciding which of the ages was better and finally arriving at the decision which Charles arrived at: life

without conventional rules may be unpredictable, because of the absence of the rules which guide us only in certain and prescribed ways, but also much more enjoyable.

6. The author's attitude

The story of the book is set in the Victorian England of 1867. The author had certainly studied the Victorian period most thoroughly, as he managed to depict utterly almost all aspects of the life at that time. He incorporated in his story representatives of all the main social classes, not forgetting about such characters as the doctor or vicar who somehow stood between all of them, thus constituting a connecting link between them. What is also important is the fact that there are no absolutely black or white characters; the only completely negative character is Mrs Poulteney and her servant Mrs Fairley, the other characters are neither entirely good nor entirely bad.

Of course the main features of the Victorian period were also the main features of the story - that was the convention, hypocrisy, religion, gender stereotypes, marriage and courtship and class-awareness.

However, the complexity of this work was achieved by employing even some minor facts and details. He did not forget about the contemporary issues that arouse immense debate and also shock such as the Darwin's theory, emancipation of women, or the growing importance of the USA. The atmosphere of the period was made up by integrating details and trivialities which one almost does not perceive as important. But this very fact actually makes them important, because they make the whole work look natural and complex, a real picture of the age. Thus Charles goes with his uncle to the stables to see a new mare, we can sense the contemporary hate towards everything connected to France. Ernestina, as every well-bred girl of that time spends her days reading, making records in her diary, choosing clothes and spoiling her eyes with embroidery. Another nice demonstration of Fowles's sense of detail along with his sense of humour is the description of Mr Freeman's study: "... a bust of Marcus Aurelius (or was it Lord Palmerston in his bath?); one or two large but indeterminate engravings, whether of carnivals or battles it was hard to establish..." (p. 245).

The contemporary fashion of clothes is mentioned as well as the criterion of the beauty. In this aspect Fowles makes the servant, Mary, the prettiest of all the girls in the book, perhaps out of spite to the Victorian writers: it is not the mistress, not the mysterious woman who is the prettiest. As symptoms of emancipation and "revolution"

he mentions the new women's fashion, the new agencies which employ women, the servant Sam who is not the submissive servant who admires his master and would die for him, but who is one of the pioneers of the "emancipation" of the working classes that gained more and more importance in the nineteenth century. The contemporary artists are mentioned too. There are quotations from literature, not only at the beginning of the chapters, but also in the story itself - the works read by Ernestina and Charles. Mr Rosetti, the controversial artist is a part of the story too, as another proof of the changing values and attitudes of the society. The language used by the author is also carefully chosen, to evoke the way of writing of those days. The use of French and Latin quotations and allusions is rather striking for the modern reader. However, Fowles also uses allusions to modern history and issues which make us aware when the book was really written. Thus he compares Mrs Poulteney to a Nazi, tells us that Ernestina died shortly before Hitler invaded Poland, mentions a prisoner arriving at Siberia, tells us what Lyme looked like in the time the book was written.

The story is based and driven forward by contrasting various characters and ideas. Contrast is the best way to depict a certain phenomenon. Sarah represents the modern, up to date notions, Ernestina and Mrs Poulteney are the representatives of the old ideals and Charles represents progress, the way from the old to the new. He is also the instrument which is used to present the ideas and opinions of the author because the author, as well as Charles, seems a bit indecisive about what to think about Victorianism. He sees some positive aspects of it as well as some darker sides. In some parts of the story Fowles truly explains his affection towards the foregone age. And what is really charming is the humorous, slightly sarcastic way he puts it, as we can see in the following extracts:

The supposed great misery of our century is the lack of time; our sense of that, *not* a disinterested love of science, and certainly not wisdom, is why we devote such a huge proportion of the ingenuity and income of our societies to finding faster ways of doing things - as if the final aim of mankind was to grow closer not to a perfect humanity, but to a perfect lightning-flash. But for Charles, and for almost all his contemporaries and social peers the time signature over existence was firmly *adagio*.

So it seems very far from sure that the Victorians did not experience a much keener, because less frequent, sexual pleasure than we do; and that they were not dimly aware of this, and so chose a convention of

suppression, repression and silence to maintain the keenness of the pleasure. In a way, by transferring to the public imagination what they left to the private, we are the more Victorian...century, since we have, in destroying so much of the mystery, the difficulty, the aura of the forbidden, destroyed also a great deal of the pleasure, (pp. 15,233-234)

On the other hand, there are many more examples on which he demonstrates the foolishness of the Victorian values. Thus he delivers a detailed lecture on the issue of prostitution and contraceptive devices in the Victorian era, which again subconsciously makes the reader feel like laughing and swearing at this period. Another aspect of the Victorianism which makes the reader wonder at its dullness and narrow-mindedness is the obsession with religious dogma and the determination to carry it out, which usually caused more harm than benefit. Still, the Victorians did not see it and did not want to give up the "opium of the mankind": "Between the cruelties of our own age and our guilt we have erected a vast edifice of government-administrated welfare and aid; charity is fully organized. But the Victorians lived much closer to that cruelty; the intelligent and sensitive felt far more personally responsible; and it was thus all the harder, in hard times, to reject the universal symbol of compassion" (p. 312). The "universal symbol of compassion" is, of course, a metaphor for religion and this quotation is again a proof that Fowles is trying to enlighten us, to inform us about the reasons why religion was so rigorously worshipped although we, modern readers find this aspect of Victorian life rather exaggerated. Here Fowles lets Charles do what many people had done by the time the book was written: reject religion. There is a clear proof of that: "... a strange sense he had had... upon entering empty churches - that he was not alone. A whole dense congregation of others stood behind him.... Charles thought: if they were truly dead, if there were no after-life, what should I care of their view of me? They would not know, they could not judge. Then he made a great leap: *They do not know, they cannot judge*. Now what he was throwing off haunted, and profoundly damaged, his age" (p. 316). He comes to the conclusion that there is no God, no Heaven.

In his description and explanation of the Victorian life Fowles makes rather long digressions from the story itself by giving us thorough lectures on some aspects of it, although they sometimes seem as if the author was pouring his heart out over all kinds of injustice of the age, as is well apparent in the passage where he tells us how much was expurgated from Mill and Hardy. There is one more part dedicated to Hardy,

though. It is again a kind of a lecture on Hardy's private life (pp. 235-236) and it is, together with other contemporary information about the real life (not the one we know from the conventional Victorian fiction), what Fowles seems to feel destined to tell us about. This very part which describes the real life of the great artist works as a kind of "deromantisation" of the whole story. As if he was trying to say: I know you have read many books, usually the crucial works, by Victorian authors and you may think that these books really depict the real life of the Victorian England. You may even think that my story depicts the real life of the Victorian England, and you may think that the lives of the authors who wrote the famous Victorian books resembled their own romantic stories, but here I am to tell you it is not true, which is more than clear from the following quotation: "The prudish puritanity we lend to the Victorians, and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorian society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos. Dickens's working-class characters are all very funny (or very pathetic) and an incomparable range of grotesques, but for the cold reality we need to go elsewhere - to Mayhew, the great Commission Reports and the rest..." (p.234). That is a mere elaboration on his previous idea in which he already hinted the vague connection of the (not only) Victorian art and reality: "...Those visions of the contented country labourer and his brood made so fashionable by George Morland and his kind were as stupid and pernicious a sentimentalization, therefore a suppression of reality... Each age, each guilty age, builds high walls round its Versailles; and personally I hate those walls most when they are made by literature and art" (p. 138). Here he expressed clearly that he had firmly resolved that he would not suppress reality. That is why we have to perceive his book as an explanation of the Victorian life, a lecture on it. The main story of the book, or more precisely, of the first part of the book till the first "ending" is a typical Victorian story corresponding with the Victorian convention. What follows is a modern story which would have been unacceptable in the Victorian age. This is to show us the difference between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century life. However, not to make us believe that life in the past looked only like the one depicted in his book, Fowles makes the digressions in which he explains certain aspects in detail, as I demonstrated before.

Fowles even laughs at the way, the often rather too dramatic way, the Victorian novels were written and is aware that the knowledge of the way is rooted deep in us so that we anticipate certain scenes and he makes us aware of this quality in us by telling us it will not be so: "I will not make her teeter on the window-sill; or sway forward, and

then collapse sobbing back on to the worn carpet of her room . . . Nor were hers the sobbing, hysterical sort of tears that presage violent action..." (p. 84).

Fowles says he has chosen to be an omniscient narrator, because it was the typical style the Victorian fiction was written in. But had he not been the omniscient narrator, he would not have been able to tell us what each of the characters thought and he definitely would not have been able to incorporate his lectures on the Victorian issues from the 1960s' point of view along with his sarcastic remarks. Had he not been an omniscient narrator, he would not have been able to make the digressions, which I explained before, and he would not have been able to discuss the problems of him, as the author. Sometimes it seems that he plays with the readers. He complains that his characters do not obey him and that he does not know where and how to end the book. There is a passage in the book where his deliberate play with the reader is absolutely obvious: "... Not a man. A girl of nineteen or so, also asleep, her back to Sarah, yet very close to her, since the bed, though large, is not meant for two people. A thought has swept through your mind; but you forget we are in the year 1867" (p. 137). Fowles did not have to mention anything like this scene, it is totally useless for the plot. Yet he mentioned it in order to provoke us to think of something of which we actually really thought, in order to tell us that what we thought was wrong. Without this he would not have been able to inform us about the Victorian attitude to lesbianism in such a shrewd and light, humorous way.

Although Fowles pretends that he is an omniscient narrator only out of necessity in order to evoke the Victorian way of writing books, sometimes it seems that he actually enjoys being an omniscient narrator: "The Toby (cup) was cracked, and was to be re-cracked in the course of time, as I can testify, having bought it myself a year or two ago for a good deal more than the three pennies Sarah was charged" (p. 241). This passage convicts Fowles of being even a bit more than an omniscient narrator, in this part he is rather too omniscient. But there is also another aspect of this statement. Choosing to be an omniscient narrator is usually a way of showing that the author does not participate in the story, it is a way to keep distance from the plot. But such statements as the one cited above prove the opposite, they destroy the distance of the author and link him with the story.

Another striking thing about the book are the two false endings and the final double ending. The first false ending comes after three quarters of the book and it is a traditional happy ending: everybody lived happily ever after. It seems as if Fowles was

trying to show what the traditional ending should look like and that he had written it only to serve this purpose, because the sentence which follows the first ending ("And now, having brought this fiction to a thoroughly traditional ending, I had better explain that although all I have described in the last two chapters happened, it did not happen quite in the way you might have been led to believe." p. 195) sounds as if he was glad he got it over with and was ready to carry on writing what he really intended to write. However, there comes another surprise after some fifty pages, also a proof of his playing with readers, where he lets the readers know: "I have already thought of ending Charles's career here and now; of leaving him for eternity on his way to London. But the conventions of Victorian fiction allow, allowed no place for the open, the inconclusive ending" (p.348). Here the reader wonders why Fowles wrote this sentence, because the first, really Victorian ending had already been written. This passage sounds almost like a warning: Well, I could finish the story here, but I will not, I will kindly let you enjoy more of my reading. Fowles is apparently teasing the reader.

Finally, Fowles arrives at the decision to write two endings: "The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. ... I cannot give both versions at once, yet whichever is the second will seem, so strong is the tyranny of the last chapter, the final, the 'real' version" (p. 349). The two endings follow. One of them is a happy ending, and so partly traditional, the other one is a modern ending, not achieving the expected reconciliation of Charles and Sarah. But none of them is the typical open ending. And as Fowles pretends that he could not write an open ending, and this fact probably "annoys" him, he decides to introduce at least two endings, which is after all basically the same as an open ending. Moreover, he is trying to make us think that both endings are equal, interchangeable, although the last one always seems to be the real one. But as he admits that he is aware of the fact that the last ending will seem to be the real one, it means that he deliberately chose to make the "unhappy" ending, and thus the unexpected one, surprising, untraditional, the final, the real version. This again seems to be done to spite the devotees of the traditional fiction based on the Victorian principles.

Conclusion

Fowles uses every detail we can think of to depict life in the Victorian period as accurately as possible and I think he is successful. In the book, we can sense the great changes that occurred in the nineteenth century, such as the rising status of the middle-classes and also lower-classes and the already starting decrease in the power of aristocracy, very well. Even such aspects as the rough life of the country people and the sad endings of some farmers, the examples being Sarah's father and the allusion to the background of the servants Millie and Mary, are hinted. These servants also represent examples of country people who moved to town to find better work, which was another striking phenomenon of the nineteenth century. This phenomenon is further developed in the career of the servant Sam who is used by Fowles to portray the middle-class rule which said that one could achieve something more, one could get to a higher social class by self-help.

His story encompasses such subjects as the various sets of conventional rules applied to various situations, the most significant of them being courtship, relationships of men and women, of masters and servants or paying visits. He manages to depict mentality of the religious and hypocritical Victorians - to achieve this he uses the character of Mrs Poulteney, Ernestina and her family. He hints issues, namely emancipation of women or the Darwinian theory, which aroused great discussion in those days. Fowles employs characters from all the main social classes and shows how they usually behaved to each other. The position of women and men in the society is also perfectly clear from the book as well as the status of marriage and the importance of property and courtship. Fowles also inserts several passages explaining some aspects of Victorian life in detail in order to free us of some too romantic ideas about that age. That is why the "forbidden" issue of prostitution is described in detail as well as the matters of sex and contraception. He thus manages to give a complex picture of life in the Victorian England.

The means used to develop the story is the contrast between the two main female characters Ernestina and Sarah, the former being a representative of the Victorian convention, the latter being the very opposite, a representative of freedom, life without prejudice and hypocrisy. Charles stands between them and tries to decide for one of them. The story reaches its climax by showing his change of values and opinions

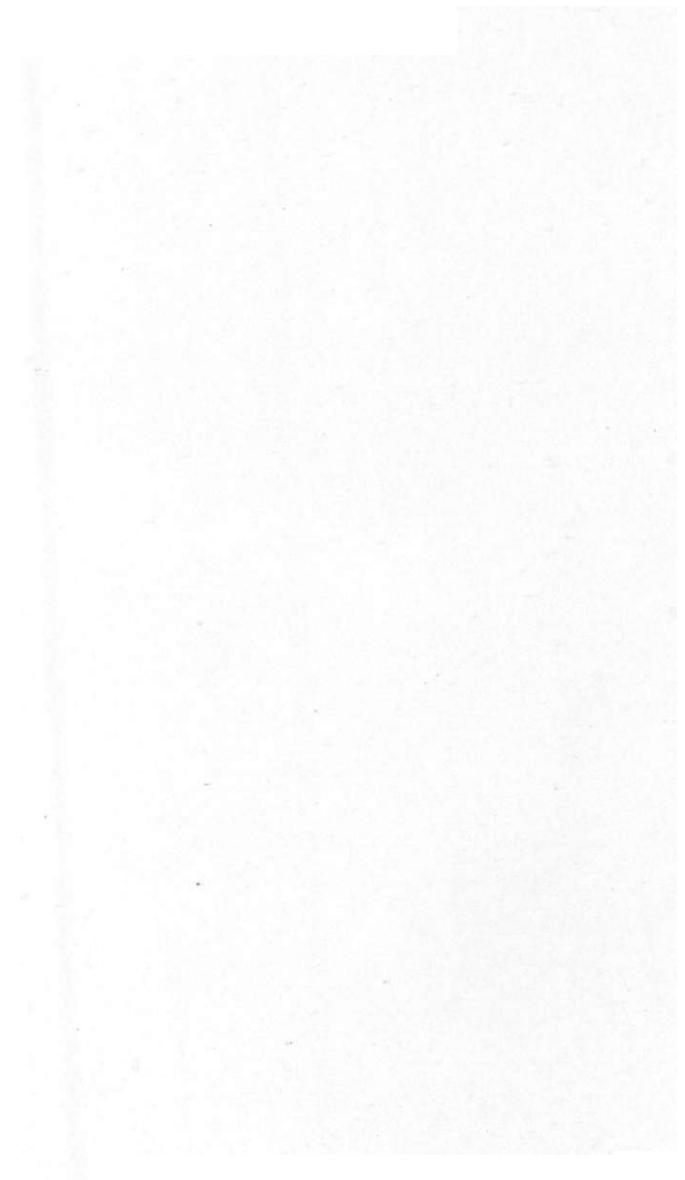
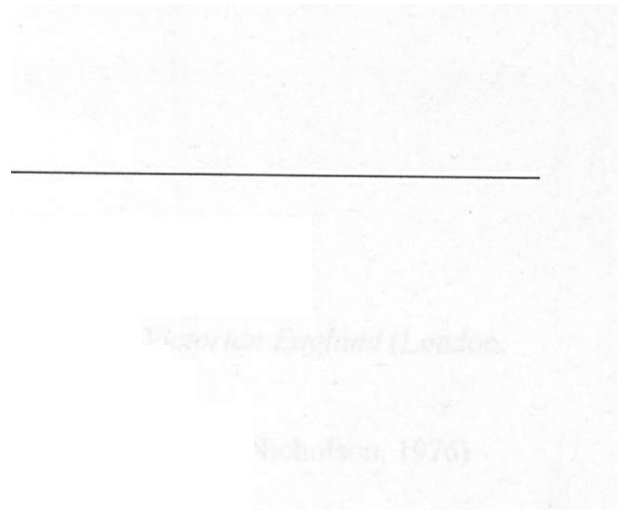
and by his deciding between the two women and two ways of life. Charles most probably represents the opinions and indecision of the author himself. This tendency is well apparent in the author's comments on the age which are usually presented as Charles's thoughts or in the passages where the author himself comments on certain issues. Charles's thoughts in most cases correspond with the author's comments. The reader often gets the feeling that when it is technically impossible that the author should comment on something himself, such as in the individual scenes of the story as such, he records his perceptions and opinions through the eyes, mouth and thoughts of Charles. He sees certain positive aspects in the Victorianism, but nonetheless decides for the modern, free and less hypocritical way of life of the twentieth century.

Notes

- ¹ Reader, W.H., *Victorian England*, (London: William Clowes and Sond Ltd., 1973). p. 59
- ² Ibid., p. 45
- ³ Ibid., p. 72
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 78
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 86
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 171, 173
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 32
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 81,82
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 82
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 115,67
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 136, 139
- ¹² Ibid., p. 32
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 47
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 37
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 47
- ¹⁶ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976). p. 137
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 138
- ¹⁸ Hibbert, C., *The Illustrated London News - Social History of Victorian England*, (London: Angus & Robertson Ltd., 1975), p. 53
- ¹⁹ Reader, W.H., *Victorian England*, (London: William Clowes and Sond Ltd., 1973), p. 50
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 147-149
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 166
- ²² Ibid., p. 151
- ²³ Ibid., p. 146
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 172
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 156
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 172
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 164
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 69
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 69
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 78
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 135
- ³² Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 114
- ³³ Reader, W.H., *Victorian England*, (London: William Clowes and Sond Ltd., 1973),p. 67
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 176
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 158
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 176-177
- ³⁷ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 32
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 25-26
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 63
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 45

- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 56
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 26
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 23
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 19
- ⁴⁶ Reader, W.H., *Victorian England*, (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1973), p. 171
- ⁴⁷ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 111
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 97
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 98
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 103
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 103
- ⁵² Reader, W.H., *Victorian England*, (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1973), p. 180-181
- ⁵³ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 76
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 77
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 74
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 182
- ⁵⁷ Russett, C. E., *Sexual Science*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 16
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 30
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 54
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 55-56
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 56-57
- ⁶² Ibid., p. 43
- ⁶³ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 55
- ⁶⁴ Russett, C. E., *Sexual Science*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 120
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 123
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 131
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 136
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 85
- ⁶⁹ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 46
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 56
- ⁷¹ Ibid., p. 10
- ⁷² Reader, W.H., *Victorian England*, (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1973), p. 23
- ⁷³ Pearsall, Donald., *Public Purity, Private Shame*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 157
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 157
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 35
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 35
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 8
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 48
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 166
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 22
- ⁸¹ Ibid., p. 9

⁸² Ibid., p. 83
⁸³ Ibid., p. 164



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