

* Perspective of Sarah from The French Lieutenant's Woman.

Who says your way is right? The phrase had echoed in my mind all day. I had no idea where it had come from, or what it meant. Who was it addressed to? I knew not the answer, and far once it was not because of my post modern motiveless unorthodoxy.

I tried to focus on the task at hand which was lying nude in the arms of Charles Smithson for the 9 millionth and twenty third time in my life (yes, I counted) on page 338 of The French Lieutenant's Woman and delivering my lines robotically.

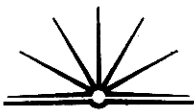
I could not refrain from mouthing Charles' next words, words which had

became branded to my mind through 33 years of repetition:

"What is to be done of us?"

I looked into the face of the man I had made love to for 33 years, and tried to muster up love or even fondness. But I recoiled in disgust as my eyes collided with the sweat-soaked hair, the too long sideburns and the coward's eyes to which I had lost my virginity in excess of 9 million times. I tried to muster up as much enthusiasm as I could in delivering my next lines:

"What an ugly spineless dickhead you are. I cannot believe I've slept with you for 3 decades!"



Literary thunder cracked, and lightning forked across the left margin of page 339 perilously close to where I lay

There was a puff of smoke - abra-cad-
a style, and I found myself standing
on a bandless stage with no eaves, no
audience and trimmed by a single
set of iridescent red curtains.

~~WHAT~~ A loud voice boomed from
behind the curtains, reverberating with
the sinister stillness of the stage.

WHAT DID I THINK YOU WERE DOING
... OH, SHIT, I RUINED MY
POWERFUL AUTHORITATIVE OPENER
I MEAN, WHAT DID YOU THINK
YOU WERE DOING?

I stared suspiciously at the red

curtains. The voice was very familiar.

"Come off it Fowles," I snapped impatiently. "I know it's you. Since you've taken the liberty to extract me from my narrative there is no longer need to play God. Come out from behind those highly stylised yet metaphorically empty curtains!"

John Fowles walked out from behind the red velvet, which immediately disappeared in a puff of postmodern mystery. I watched in part fascination, part distaste as my Creator crawled his neck to meet my eyes. He stood a full head shorter than me.

I NEVER SHOULD HAVE MADE SO TALL! He boomed, then cast a sheepish glance out of the page

of the HSC marker who was his audience.
YOU'RE STEALING MY LIMELIGHT.

I could ~~almost~~ feel the triumphant gleam light up my eyes - literally, for this ~~is~~ was the realm of the narrative.

"Now you know how I felt in Chap 13. And may I ask that you show the good grace to use quotation marks when you address me. Post-modern originality does not strike a chord with me, not that poor syntax is original. And drop the booming voice and the all caps. Using all caps to give the illusion of power is so September 10, and a loud voice has never been a signifier of authority".

Completely deflated, Fowles switched opened his mouth to retaliate ... but no sound came out.



Literary minutes ticked past, and when it became clear that my Creator wasn't about to snap out of his writer's bl- any time soon, I asked impatiently, "Are you going to tell me why you extricated me from the narrative, is this another postmodern trick of yours to challenge your responder's dominant ways of thinking".

Fowles puffed himself up to his full height (pitiful really, if you could see us side by side you'd know what I mean) and mustered up his most dignified voice:

"I want to know why you missew your lines. Do you have any idea what you just said to poor Charles?"

Fowles repeated my words verbatim an

I gasped, nonplussed. "I - I - I don't know how I could have said that... I mean, that was what I was thinking, but to have said it out loud! Oh, how many people were reading that page at the time?"

Fowles bristled. "Quite a few HSC English students. And now they'll quote you in their exams! I'll be ruined. They'll think I wrote it - me, who saw to the dismissal of the dairy man because he called you "whore". My sales figures will plummet... I'll be poor. * And it's all your fault!"

I was getting angrier and angrier. "Is this what it's all about... sales figures?"

Fowles smirked. "Commerce is our g

"Oh, so I'm not in the business, I am the business"

Fowles stared at me for a moment long enough to constitute a literary hiatus, then asked "Why are we speaking in intertextual dialogue?"

"Because the HSC student who created us is attempting to demonstrate his extensive knowledge of texts. But that's beside the point. ~~Am~~ Is that all I am to you - a vehicle for increasing sales figures

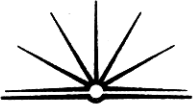
Fowles used the tried-and-true narrative convention of answering a question with a question:

"How did you acquire such crude language anyway? The word 'dickhead' was not even a mean

of the Victorian Lexicon"

I smirked. ^{"We} Characters are not static. ~~You of~~ We ~~also~~ evolve with the age and the interpretations that different readers bring to us. An unchanging character is a dead character, you of all people should know that. Besides, during the lapses in the ~~early 1990s when no-one read your book,~~ I ~~periods~~ when no-one is reading your novel, I sneak out and give myself a taste of popular culture ... watch movies, read newspapers. I may be a character, but I too have my thirst for knowledge and spiritual and emotional fulfillment. You of all people should know that!"

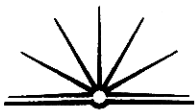
Fowles had by this stage turned



a deep shade of mahogany, although according to the postmodern notion of relative truths one might call it cadmium red.

"Don't you harangue me on the finer points of characterisation! You have ruined my novel and my status as an upstanding post modern author. I created you and can grind you into the dust ... just you remember that. You are -"

As I listened to this tyrannous filth, something in me snapped, and I launched into a tirade that broke the first tenet of character convention as dictated in section 3) (xi) 2 (vi) of ~~a~~ the protagonist's act: I interrupted my author.



"Shot up Faulkes. You talk of your reputation and your life, but have you any idea how boring and repetitive my life has been for the past 3 decades. You dropped me like a stone the minute you put down your pen, and I was left to act out the same plot and orate the same lines for 33 years. 33 years, Faulkes! In 33 years you have travelled, lived, experienced life and written more novels. In the same time I have been trapped in the private dungeon you created for me, predictably contemplating suicide any time a reader turns to Chapter twelve, robotically making love any time some lecherous clod turns to Chapter 42. I have lost my virginity and consequently give birth a million times, and alternatively reunited with and

left my lover 18 ambiguous million times! Have you any idea how odio life has become for me? If odio could kill, I would have been dead for 30 years. Unfortunately, I am governed by the odious narrative convention that states characters are immortal. I would give all of my 1960's New woman attributes just to see you live the sadistic ritual that you put your characters through for the sake of a few lousy sales figures."

~~By~~ I paused, then looked up at the passage above me, embarrassed that I had:

- ① interrupted my author, and
- ② Shown such bad syntax, ~~it~~ not splitting the passage into two shorter paragraphs. But boy did



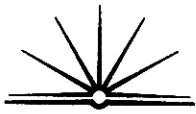
it feel good. For the first time in 33 years I was tasting the intoxicating elixir of autonomous thought. So what if my sentences were verbas my ~~a~~ gannier atrocious? Oh, the sweet taste of autonomy.

Fowles, meanwhile had turned quite an unbecoming shade of purple (lilac?).

"You will not speak to me like that I created you, I am your master."

I shook my head condescendingly.

"That is only your truth Fowles. The postmodern paradigm that you so clearly ascribe to states that truth is relative and infinitely malleable, and it just so happens that I subscribe to the truth that readers, not novelists, bring characters to life. It's a theory that you've



probably heard of: Barthes' Death of the Author"

Fowles was spluttering, literally, in a most uncharacteristic way. "You ... you you ... I ... you are the most ungrateful disobedient wench I have ever had the misfortune of creating. Your version of the truth is absolute rubbish."

"You can't handle the truth!" I shouted. "One more insult from you and I'm out of here!"

The phrase popped back into my mind: Who says your way is right? ... I'm out of here ...

"I'm out of here", I said, toting the words around in my mouth and



fasting from like a wine connoisseur
sipping a glass of vintage chardonnay

"I'm out of here..."

Eowles looked at me with wary eyes.

"Sarah... you know that's nonsense.
You can't possibly..."

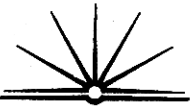
"I'm out of here..."

"Sarah, get back into your narrative
at once!"

"I'm out of here..."

Was it possible? Plausible? Consistent
with the tenets of narrative
convention? I looked out of the
page at my audience - my true
Creator - and find you smiling
encouragingly at me.

"I'm out of here!" I said with



emphatic finality, and tore through the original copy of the very paper you are reading now. Behind me, Fowler screamed blue murder.

"Get back at once! Without a narrator you have no purpose in life, no plot direction. You will wither and die in the world of authors. Come back...!"

I looked at the author tapped pitifully on his own printed page and grinned wryly. "No, without me you have no vehicle with which to convey plot direction. It is your ~~or~~ novel that will die. From now on, I ~~am~~ ^{become} my own author." And that did. And with that I walked away from the paper. Earlier this year I wrote an autobiography detailing

the events of my life after that wonderful day when I emancipated myself from the constrictive realms of narrative structure.

You may have unintentionally picked it up and enjoyed the first few chapters without knowing what you were reading. It begins ... "Who says your way is right?" the phrase had echoed in my mind all day...."