

**EXISTENTIAL INSIGHTS AND PHILOSOPHICAL WISDOM IN JOHN FOWLES'S
THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE
SEARCH FOR MEANING IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE**

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Abstract: *The paper combines the “other” concept and existentialism in examining John Fowles’s wisdom for existence in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, a famous novel that has attracted a great deal of research interest at home and abroad. The paper begins by examining the cognitive function of the “other” in Sarah’s and Charles’s (self-)identity construction to answer the question of who Sarah and Charles are. Then, the paper touches upon the torments of the “self” inflicted by the “other” because the “other” holds expectations for the “self”, concerning what he/she should do. The paper then proposes a way of existence: being-for-itself, manifested in Sarah and Charles, who refuse to live aimlessly and choose to live as their hearts desire.*

Key words: *John Fowles; The French Lieutenant’s Woman; the “other”; being-for-itself.*

1. Introduction

The French Lieutenant’s Woman (FLW) is a famous work of art written by John Fowles, an English novelist, whose allusive and descriptive works combine psychological probings chiefly of sex and love with interest in social and philosophical issues. In an interview, Fowles acknowledges his interest in existentialism, especially freedom of choice, which influences his art creation (Campell and Fowles 1976:466). In FLW, the two protagonists, Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson have the freedom and free will to change their life and choose for themselves. Sarah is condemned by the town’s people for her “affair” with a French naval officer, Varguennes. She encounters Charles Smithson, a gentleman engaged to Ernestina Freeman, the shallow-minded daughter of a wealthy tradesman. She falls in love with this gentleman and tells her “past” to him, which arouses his sympathy and love toward her. Charles helps Sarah to go to Exeter to escape the town for a new life. From now on, the two protagonists start their journey of finding the truth of life, breaking away from convention, and seeking freedom in life.

The concept of the “other” has a long history in Western philosophy. Scholars like Plato, Hegel, De Beauvoir, Said, and Lacan have examined the relationship between the self and the other. Jacques Lacan employs “other” to examine its significance in infants’ achieving their subjectivity (qtd. in Yan Yan 2007: 22). Simone de Beauvoir protests against women’s status as the “Other” and “Second Sex” to men (De Beauvoir 1997:18). Edward Said criticizes the West’s biased stereotyping of the East as the “other” in Orientalism, because the West needs an inferior “other” to manifest its superiority (Said 1979:113-166). All in all, the concept of the “other” is important for the “self” to know who he is. For instance, Sarah’s identity as a daughter and lover relies on the presence of her father and Charles. Who is Sarah? She is a daughter to her

father (the “other”) and a lover to Charles (the “other”). She is automatically endowed with these entities in the presence of different “other” figures.

Besides the cognitive function of the “other”, the “other” can be harmful too. Like what Jean-Paul Sartre presents in his play *Confinement*, “Hell is the other people” (Sartre 2000:149). The “other” can be harmful and stifling for the “self’s” existence in the world because of the “other’s” expectations and requirements, which fetter the “self’s” freedom in choosing his/her way of living. For instance, Sarah is influenced by her father, who wants her to marry a nobleman, which is a form of confinement the “other” imposes on the “self”. The paper does not take a negative view of people’s relationships with others. The paper proposes a different way of life from an existentialist perspective: the concept of the be-for-itself, a term Sartre also used. Be-for-itself requires people to live with their free will, refusing to be confined and influenced by others. In his characterization of Sarah and Charles, Fowles hints at this way of life: choosing freedom and living freely.

2. Literature Review

John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is a significant text for exploring existential and philosophical themes, particularly the complexities of identity, freedom, and the human condition. The novel blends Victorian societal constraints with modern existential thought, providing a rich ground for analysis. Fowles critiques the rigid gender roles of Victorian society, especially through the character of Sarah Woodruff. Golestani Narjes Tashakor examines how Sarah’s defiance against societal norms reflects the novel’s interest in the construction of female identity. Sarah challenges both societal expectations and her own self-perception, highlighting the existential struggle for authenticity and self-determination. Mike Marais’s analysis of existential themes in the novel notes that Charles Smithson’s personal conflict mirrors existential philosophy, particularly the works of Sartre and Camus. Charles grapples with the freedom and responsibility that come with existential choice, leading to a deeper reflection on the absurdity and isolation of existence. The multiple endings in the novel reinforce the existential notion that meaning is not predetermined but shaped by individual choices. The novel’s postmodern elements, including the author’s direct involvement in the narrative, play with the boundaries between fiction and reality. Fowles’s manipulation of narrative time and character development challenges conventional storytelling and invites the reader to question the nature of fiction itself. This metafictional approach is a key feature of postmodernism, emphasizing the constructedness of reality and narrative. Drozdova Maria Sergeevna highlights how Fowles mythologizes time in the novel, making it a vehicle for exploring characters’ subjective experiences.

Rather than following a linear progression, the novel’s treatment of time reflects the fragmented nature of identity and the uncertainty of human knowledge. This use of time reinforces the existential themes of choice, freedom, and the randomness of life. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* remains a powerful exploration of existential and postmodern themes. Fowles’s innovative narrative structure and his engagement with the philosophical concerns of identity, freedom, and choice make the novel an enduring subject of scholarly interest. Through its complex characters and experimental narrative techniques, the novel challenges readers to reflect on the nature of existence itself. Building on these studies, the following analysis explores how existentialism and the ‘other’ illuminate the characters’ search for meaning.

3. Existential Insights and Philosophical Wisdom in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: A Critical Examination of the Search for Meaning in Postmodern Literature

3.1 The Other as the Cognitive Tool for the Self's Identity Construction

According to Lacan, the "other" is contrary to the subject, which helps the infants' cognition of who he/she is (qtd. in Yan Yan 2007:22). In the Mirror Stage/preverbal stage, infants (subject) look into the mirror, thinking that the image in the mirror is the "other" (object). Later, when infants start to speak and enter the Symbolic Order, the "other" is shifted to the father figure or social disciplines. The other is talking from the perspective of the subject (infants) who needs an "other" to achieve his subjectivity by finding the difference between the "self" and the "other", and therefore, to achieve the subject's self-identity construction. In a word, the "other" is a tool for the subject to achieve his/her self-awareness. Without the "other", there will be no self.

In *FLW*, Fowles puts forward the question: "Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?" (Fowles 1996:96). Fowles does not give a definite answer to the question, for it is too complicated to give a clear answer. As mentioned above, the cognitive process of the subject requires the presence of the "other". If the "other" changes, the subject's identity changes accordingly. For instance, a mother is a mother because she has a son; the mother is a daughter in the presence of her father and a wife in the presence of her husband, which reveals the mechanism of one's identity construction. In other words, I am myself because I am neither you nor him. The "other" is of paramount significance and indispensable in one's cognition of the world as well as themselves. This chapter aims at discussing the identity construction of Sarah and Charles in their relationship with different "others" from three levels: social level, family level, and personal level.

Identity construction is an important process for one's existence in society. Human beings are gregarious animals, living in different communities. In ancient times, ancestors have to form groups to hunt for food and fight against the harsh environment together, which is called primitive society (Song Hongbing 2020:102). With the gradual development of society, human beings have experienced different social forms, from primitive society, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society, to socialist society (Pang Yanbin 2022:67). No matter how the social forms have changed with time, human beings still exist in groups, but different social forms have different modes of production, which result in different social relations among groups, including cooperation, exploitation, symbiosis, and so on. In society, no one is isolated because they have to socialize to survive. In this process of socialization, people have different relationships with others, which vest people with different identities, which in turn influence one's worldview. To a certain extent, social relationships decide who he is and what he can do. In a relationship, there is a "self" and an "other". By socializing with the "other", the "self" gets a relationship that may help the "self's" existence in society, but this relationship also decides who the "self" is.

The novel is set in the nineteenth century, when Britain entered the capitalist society, still with remnants of feudalism. In a capitalist society, money talks; while in a feudal society, blood talks, but neither of them relieves the repression of women. In such a society, women can hardly achieve upward mobility through education. Men of noble birth are despised by new money as parasites of society, but, at the same time, are worshiped and pursued by the same group of people who despise their laziness. Sarah is such a woman who tries to melt into the upper class through education and marriage. While Charles is a man of noble birth who is mentally weak and lazy and is disdained, but at the same time, pursued by Mr. Freeman, a successful businessman. The gist of the paper is the relationship between the "self" and the "other", and the cognitive function of the "other", answering two questions: who is Sarah, and

who is Charles? Throughout the paper, Charles and Sarah are set as the “self”, and the people they have relationships with are set as the “other”. Besides, the identity construction can never avoid the influence of power relation between the “self” and the “other”. In simpler words, it can be explained as such: “Who am I?” and therefore “What can I get or control?”

Sarah is born into a peasant family, and her father, who believes that knowledge could change one’s life, sends Sarah to a boarding school when she is a child. Her education renders her a governess working in Captain Talbot’s and later in Mrs. Poulteney’s. The paper only analyzes Sarah during her work in Mrs. Poulteney’s for the story takes place in this period. In terms of social level, Sarah is a governess, who is above her father’s position of a farmer, representative of the lower class, yet beneath her employer’s status of a lady, representative of the upper class. But still, her status in the family for which she works is higher than that of the maid, the servant, and the housekeeper. In this case, Sarah’s identity as a governess is gained from the presence of her employer, Mrs. Poulteney, the maid, and the servant in the house, as well as the housekeeper, Mrs. Fairley. That she is a governess is because of the “employment contract” she has signed with Mrs. Poulteney for working as a governess in the house, a position second only to the master of the house. The “others” consist of Mrs. Poulteney (the master), the housekeeper, and the maids and servants (lower class), which construct Sarah’s identity of a governess, sandwiched between the upper class and lower class. This middle position gives Sarah the illusion of getting into the upper class by attracting a man of the upper class like Monsieur Varguennes and Charles, and she can’t accept the idea of marrying a normal man whose power is weaker than hers.

Charles is of noble birth with the prospect of inheriting an estate and a noble title. He is a gentleman to the core. At the same time, the notion of the gentleman is constructed on those who are not gentlemen. In Victorian society, there are still remnants of feudalism with the royal family, the lords, and gentlemen as the upper class, whose status is above the capitalists like Mr. Freeman in terms of social strata. Charles, as a gentleman, relies on the “others” who are not gentlemen and are inferior to him. Charles’s identity as a gentleman gives him the impression that Miss Freeman is inferior to him, so that he can despise her for her vanity, which is a trigger for his breaking the engagement with Miss Freeman. The power relation of the superior “self” and the inferior “other” produces an unsatisfied “gap” in the “self” and therefore leads to the breakdown of the unbalanced relationship between Charles and Miss Freeman.

Family is another important factor in one’s identity construction. To a certain extent, one’s identity is decided by one’s family, one’s father’s status, or one’s relatives’ status. Within the family, Sarah is the daughter of her father, a farmer; Charles, the son and grandson of his father and his grandfather, nobles; therefore, Sarah’s family background limits her upward mobility to a governess, while Charles is born to be a gentleman looked up to by others. Besides, the presence of “other” figures, such as father and grandfather, renders Sarah and Charles the daughter and the son. As a farmer’s daughter, Sarah has the responsibility to fulfill her father’s wish of picking up a wealthy husband. As an offspring of a noble family, Charles has the responsibility to marry a woman equal to his social status and to maintain the dignity of his family.

In another aspect, a family consists of a man and a wife. In a hypothetical situation, if Charles marries Sarah, the institution of marriage will render Charles the husband and Sarah the wife. If such a case happens, Charles’s identity as a husband is contrary to Sarah’s role as a wife. In this sense, they contribute to each other’s identity construction. So, they are both the “other” to each other, who helps the “self’s” identity construction. But, is there any power relation between Sarah and Charles as man and wife? This will be elaborated on in chapter two.

As an individual struggling for existence in the world, one can have multiple identities contrary to the “other”. Sarah is a woman because of men’s existence in the world like Charles and the French lieutenant. Verse versa, Charles is a man because of the presence of women.

Sarah is said to be a “damaged good” and a prostitute because of the existence of pure women in the world. A man will never be called a “damaged good”, and the pureness of women is a notion constructed by the patriarchal ideology in order to confine women to be the “Angel in the House”. If there is no notion of the pure woman that Miss Freedom desires to be, then there will be no woman who will be called a prostitute. The paper questions the contradictory standards of pureness and impureness of Victorian society for the fact that “when Sarah is still a virgin, she is seen as a slut, but when she gets her to wish and has sex relation with Charles, she is seen as a virgin” (Chen Jing 2008:78). Besides, Sarah is a lover to Charles because Charles is a lover to her. And Charles is a fiance because Miss Freeman is his fiancée to him.

All in all, human beings can't avoid having relations with “others” because men have to live in groups. This chapter analyzes the identity construction of the “self” from three levels in the case of Sarah and Charles, and in each of these three levels: social, family, and individual level, the “other” plays an important role in the “self” identity construction and cognition of the world.

3.2. The Other as a Harmful Factor for the Self's Existence in the World

The first chapter has analyzed the cognitive function of the “other” in the identity construction and cognition development of the “self”, which is indispensable in one's mental development. This chapter tries to analyze the harmful effect of the “other” on the “self”, which is inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre, a master of existentialism. In his play *Confinement*, Sartre puts forward an important motif: “Hell is the Other People”, which is a line of Galson, the hero of the play: “we have the impression that hell has brimstone, blazing fires, and iron bars with which to burn people! What a joke! Without fire and iron bars, Hell is the other people” (Sartre 2000:149). In *Confinement*, the “other” is a hell-like existence because of the attachment relationship between the “self” and the “other” (Wu Congju 2007:99), for the “self” intends to objectify the “other”, wishing the “other” will view “me” the way “I” expects them to view “me”, which ignores the fact that the “other” as a human being is also a subject free in thinking, and that the “other” is free and has the initiative not to view the “self” the way the “self” expects. In other words, the presence of the “other” is itself a hell-like existence harmful to the “self”, because the “other” often fails the “self's” expectation. Verse versa, the “other” as a human has his expectations for the “self” which fetter the “self”. Thereupon, this chapter examines the fetters that the “other” imposes upon the “self” from three levels: social, family, and individual.

Chapter one has illustrated Sarah's social position as a governess in the house of Mrs. Poulteney. The “other” figures, in this case, are Mrs. Poulteney as the master, and Mrs. Fairley, possessing a lower position than Sarah. Mrs. Poulteney as the superior “other” has power over Sarah's existence in the world, and thus requires Sarah's absolute obedience to fulfill her expectations for Sarah. She requires Sarah to read the Holy Bible to her and forbids her to go to the Undercliff, a blasphemous place where young boys and girls date and conduct obscene actions. On a deeper level, she requires Sarah to be pure and an “angel”, and to farewell her unbearable past. This is the superior “other's” expectations and requirements that the inferior “self” has to obey. Things are different for Mrs. Fairley, the inferior “other”, who desires to replace Sarah's superior position and wants to be the superior one herself. She envies Sarah for Mrs. Poulteney's affection for Sarah, even though Sarah is a damaged good. The inferior status of the “other” is rendered by the presence of the superior “self”. Therefore, Mrs. Fairley never misses an opportunity to drag Sarah off her perch. Thus, the envy of the inferior “other” can also be a fetter or harmful for the “self”.

There is an interesting mentality among most people that I want the best for you, but I don't want your life to be better than mine, which can be demonstrated by the relationship between Charles and his father-in-law-to-be. Mr. Freeman's attitude toward Charles is

complicatedly contradictory. Mr. Freeman hopes to be connected with the aristocracy through his daughter's marriage; however, at the bottom of his heart, he despises the laziness of the noblemen. His contradictory mentality stems from the composition of Victorian society where noble blood is superior to money. Therefore, the power relation between Charles and Mr. Freeman is a superior "self" with an inferior "other". Charles despises Mr. Freeman for being a money servant, loathing Mr. Freeman's banal life. While to Mr. Freeman, Charles is indeed a gentleman but should be condemned as a parasite of society. Therefore, after Charles is divested of the right of inheriting the title of Baronet, Mr. Freedom is sad for a while but rejoices at the fact that he can control Charles and force Charles to do business to prove that Charles is no more than him. Mr. Freedom's attitude toward Charles is more complicated than Mrs. Fairley's toward Sarah. Sarah and Mrs. Fairley are only competitors for interest, while Charles and Mr. Freeman are both cooperators and competitors at the same time. They are cooperators because Charles can get money from Mr. Freedom, and Mr. Freeman can get a reputation from Charles, a win-win situation. They are competitors because Charles is a nobleman who is superior than Mr. Freeman. The unbalanced power relation harms Mr. Freeman's self-esteem as a man, similar to the phenomenon of "male-male competition" (Zhu, Bicheng, et al. 2017:15) among animals in nature. In this case, Mr. Freeman, as the inferior "other," wants to dethrone Charles's superiority over him. Therefore, Charles's existence in the world is challenged and threatened by Mr. Freeman's presence, the inferior "other".

Sarah is first a daughter to her father and then a wife to her husband at the family level. Father, as the elder and breadwinner of the family, holds his superiority over his daughter, and the power relation is between the inferior "self" and the superior "other". In the case of Sarah and Mrs. Poulteney, it has been mentioned that the person who holds power in a power relation will inevitably expect obedience from the inferior, expecting them to perform certain actions. It is the same between Sarah and her father. Sarah is expected by her father to marry into the Purple, which limits her spouse criterion. She is sent to boarding school to receive an education in order to achieve that end. She tries to live as her father expects of her, which is proven to be an vain attempt because of the unbridgeable divide of class; therefore, her father's expectations are only fetters that fetter her freedom.

In another aspect, Sarah will be a wife to Charles, provided that the first ending is true. However, it is the same that the superior "other" holds expectations for Sarah: being obedient to her husband. As Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest* suggests, "divorces are made in heaven" (Wilde 2010:6), contrary to the Victorian conventional point of view of "marriages are made in heaven". This remark may seem like a joke, but it is a truth told in the manner of humor. According to Li Xiaoyun, Victorian society was a highly hierarchical and patriarchal society, where women have no voice and must submit to men (Li 2014:108). As a man living in and receiving education in a patriarchal society, Charles views women as inferior to him and unconsciously regards women as his possession; therefore, absolute obedience is required of Sarah, which will inevitably confine her freedom.

Charles is an offspring of a noble family, shouldering the responsibility of maintaining the dignity of his family. He is expected to marry a woman of equal stature. Even rich Miss Freeman is a disgrace to Charles's family because she is not a lady, let alone Sarah, who is the daughter of a poor farmer. Therefore, Charles is confined by these expectations of the "other" in his choice of spouse. In another case, Charles is a husband to his wife. Charles has two intended wives, Miss Freeman and Sarah, both of whom expect their husbands to be rich and noble-born. Provided that Charles is an average man, they will show no interest in him from the start.

At the individual level, Sarah is a woman and a lover to Monsieur Varguennes and Charles. Monsieur Varguennes falls in love with Sarah for her beauty and her kindness in taking

care of him; Charles falls in love with Sarah for her wild beauty and her uniqueness, which is different from women in the 19th century, as well as for her virginity which strengthens his love for her; all these features of Sarah's are signs of her strength, but are also expectations that men hold for Sarah, which fetter Sarah's freedom.

Most people, especially girls, have the mentality of strength worshiping, which influences their spouse choice. Charles is a man and a lover of Miss Freeman and Sarah. Miss Freeman loves Charles for his outstanding appearance and noble parentage, which are signs of Charles's strength. She willingly subjects herself to an inferior position, which entails an always "stronger" Charles. In this relationship, Charles has to keep stronger and should show no signs of weakness, which is undoubtedly a burden for Charles. Therefore, the presence of an inferior "other" can be tiring for the "self" because, as long as the inferior one is present, the "self" has to be physically and mentally strong to maintain his place, which may be the trigger of the breakdown of relationships between Charles and Miss Freeman.

Sarah also holds expectations for Charles. She loves Charles for his mindlessness of class issues, who is kind to her all the way, even though she is from the lower class, and for his kindness, treating her well even when he knows that she is a deserted woman. However, unlike Miss Freeman, Sarah is sometimes mentally stronger than Charles, which is one of the reasons Charles falls in love with her. She is the one who seduces Charles deliberately. She is the one who controls things. She decides whether to accept Charles or not. She also guides Charles in his mental growth. While she is also the one who denies Charles in the name of "freedom". Whether "freedom" is used as an excuse to refuse Charles for his declined status can't be known from Fowles's writing, but the paper remains skeptical about this. If being true that Sarah detests Charles's lowered status, then the "others'" expectations of Charles to be "stronger" burdens Charles as well.

All in all, the chapter proves the presence of the "other" to have hell-like and harmful effects on the "self's" free existence in the world. The "other" holds expectations for the "self" (Sarah and Charles) and requires the "self" to fulfill these expectations, a form of requirements presented in a different manner, which confines the "self's" freedom of choice. Besides, on certain occasions when interest disputes exist, the "other," like Mrs. Fairley and Mr. Freeman, holds a hostile attitude toward the "self" (Sarah and Charles), which harms the "self's" existence in the world.

3.3. The Wisdom for Existence of Sarah and Charles: Existing as the Being-for-itself

Chapters one and two have respectively examined the significance of the "other" in the "self's" cognition development and identity construction, as well as the hell-like existence of the "other" that fetters and harms the "self". This chapter analyzes the wisdom of struggling for existence in the world from the perspective of Sarah and Charles, both of whom endeavor to grasp freedom to achieve their "being-for-itself". Sartre believes that there are two modes of existence, "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself" in the sense of phenomenological ontology (qtd. in Qu Mingzhen 2015:91). Liu Yuan and Cao Yajuan interpret the connotation and operation mechanism of the "being-in-itself" and the "being-for-itself" (2011:75); the being-in-itself exists before it is intended by the conscious mind, and is a fixed existence, not subject to human will; being-for-itself is the existence intended by the human consciousness which constantly denies their own deficiencies and transcends the previous "self", striving to be a better self. In other words, human beings are higher animals with subjective initiative, and can transform the objective world and the subjective world by their own will (Zhao Shifa and Li

Chunxiao 2019:25); therefore, with subjective initiative, men can jump out of their status quo and refuse to be confined by the “other” in order to exist as the “being-for-itself”.

In previous chapters, the paper has elaborated on Sarah’s identity in the presence of the “other” and the fetters the “other” imposes upon Sarah. Every identity construction is followed by the expectations and responsibilities attached to it, which is a confinement to the freedom of the “self”. At the social level, Sarah works as a governess for Mrs. Poulteney, who forbids her to go to the Undercliff and limits Sarah’s right to make her own choices. Sarah is not happy about being like this. She deliberately lets the housekeeper discover her going to the forbidden place, and quits the job she dislikes after quarreling with her master. At the family level, she denies Charles’s proposal for marriage as a cage for her freedom, even though Charles is of noble birth and meets her father’s demands as a son-in-law. At the individual level, she refuses to be confined by the notion that society imposes on women that they should get married and give their child a father. She is a new woman figure, who is misplaced in time and space, struggles to transcend the traditional and outdated way of life, and considers living singly, enjoying herself in art.

Charles is mentally weaker than Sarah, who struggles with a lack of faith in himself and laziness about putting his passions and ideas into practice. He lacks motivation in paleontology because he knows he’ll never be one of the significant figures of his era, and, though he doesn’t hesitate to critique Victorian society in theory. For a long time, he lacked the courage to put his theories into practice, fearing social ostracism. It is Sarah who “guides” him to find faith in reality. He is deeply attracted by Sarah’s “deviant” behaviors, which encourage him to live a different but meaningful life, rather than degrading in a planned life that he can see stretching straight out before him to the skyline—endless monotony. He jumps out of the control of Mr. Freeman and breaks his engagement with Miss Freeman, abdicating his rights as a gentleman by signing the commission of guilty. He spares no effort in loving Sarah at the cost of losing everything he possessed before: the prospect of marrying a rich woman and the right of being a gentleman. Fowles has hinted at Charles’s self-awakening after Sarah’s denial: “He walks towards an imminent, self-given death? I think not; for he has, at last, found an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness, on which to build; has already begun, though he would still bitterly deny it, though there are tears in his eyes to support his denial, to realize that life” (Fowles 1996:445). Although Charles has failed in his relation with Sarah, he has achieved his “being-for-itself” by denying his past and embracing an uncertain future which is a challenge, but also a chance to temper his willpower.

To sum up, the two protagonists’ wielding their willpower guarantees their freedom in choosing the modes of existence for themselves, or, so to speak, how to exist in the world. Instead of existing as the “being-in-itself”, they refuse to sink into the ordinary and struggle for a different and better “self” which subverts the “other’s” expectations, truly realizing their existence as “being-for-itself”.

4. Conclusion

The paper draws on the concept of “other” combined with existential wisdom for living in the analyses of Sarah and Charles. Chapter one focuses on the cognitive function of the “other” figures in Sarah and Charles’s identity construction and cognition of the world. Chapter two explores the harmful effect of the “other” on Sarah and Charles’s existence in the world. Chapter three proposes a wisdom of living embodied in FLW from Sarah and Charles’s freedom of choice for their way of life. The paper acknowledges the positive aspect of the “other” for self-identity construction, but also points to the torturous sufferings inflicted by the “other”. The paper ends with the being-for-itself of Sarah and Charles to enlighten our lives.

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