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A percept/concept/ual approach to stereotype reading in Fowles' *Lieutenant's Woman*

Elena Dominguez Romero[1]* and Victoria Martín de la Rosa[1]

Abstract: This paper aims to decipher the character of Sarah in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969, translated by Fowles into English in 1977 and revised in 1994). Our analysis draws on the Grammar of Visual Designs developed by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in 2006 linked to the concept of stereotyping as social arrangements which may vary from society to society as much as on the Theory of Blended Spaces defended by Fauconnier and Turner (1996, 2002, 2008), which allows readers to bring in their background knowledge to their personal readings in a highly interactive space. By applying these two theories, the present study suggests a new approach to Sarah from three different perspectives: that of (i) Charles as a reader inside the novel (ii) Readers outside the novel unable to activate elements other than Charles' views and/or Victorian conventions, (iii) Readers outside the novel.

Subjects: Arts; Humanities; Language & Literature

Keywords: visual grammar; blending; social stereotypes

1. Introduction

There is no uncontaminated or pure culture. Texts are not written or read in a cultural vacuum. Their ability to signify derives from and is defined by their relation to the whole corpus of preexisting literature (Morgan & Harrison, 2008, p. 18). Peter Stockwell explains that it is common to see how a text relies heavily on another single identifiable text, through direct citation or through the transposition of plot into a different world (2002, p. 126). Literary texts lift characters, plots, settings and themes

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

John Fowles conceived *The French Lieutenat's Woman* as a turning point in his career. By diverging from the form of the Victorian novel, particularly concerning the inclusion of an alternative ending, his third work attracted the attention of critics and readership soon after it was published in 1969. These were puzzled by the "enchanting mysteries" of a novel that had been born from the central image of the main character Sarah on the Cobb. This article explores three different reading paths that cross this prime image of Sarah towards the possible solution of the mysteries around her: the paths of (i) Charles, as a reader inside the novel; (ii) readers outside the novel who are unable to activate elements other than Charles' views and/or Victorian conventions; and (iii) readers outside the novel.

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out of their original environments and place them into new blended spaces where an emergent structure develops independently. Hence, the structure of the blend allows new insights to appear together with a new understanding of the elements of the input spaces. The resulting blended spaces thus reveal representations of absent characters, plots, settings or themes (2002, pp. 126–127).

The act of reading implies an open-ended invitation to the reader to join the author in the co-creation of the story by filling in the holes that the text leaves open. The reader's act of understanding is not always dependent on what is found in the actual text—or co-text—in so many words, but on the total context in which those words are found—and are found to make sense, through an active, pragmatic collaboration between author and reader (Mey, 2000, p. 255). This is especially not easy in the case of the novel, which has been admitted by some leading literary scholars—Bakhtin (1973) and Nussbaum (1997), among others—to extend the readers' all-too-limited experience and to intensify the encounters between conflicting voices or world-views that occur in ordinary language by intentionally and consciously intersecting various discourses, including ones that do not usually interrelate.

John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969, translated by Fowles into English in 1977 and revised in 1994) is a key example of a complex novel to be decoded by readers.[1] Each chapter in *The Lieutenant's Woman* begins with an epigraph, the first taken from Thomas Hardy's "The Riddle": "Stretching eyes west/Over the sea,/Wind foul or fair,/Always stood she/Prospect impressed;/Solely out there/Did her gaze rest,/Never elsewhere/Seemed charm to be". As the chapters progress, it becomes apparent that this quotation offers a fair description of Fowles' heroine, Sarah. The action begins in 1867 and the narrator opens the novel with background information on Lyme Regis, where the story is initially set. He then introduces Charles Smithson, a thirty-two-year-old gentleman, and his young *fiancée*, Ernestina Freeman, as they walk down the Cobb, made famous in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. Charles and Tina's walk is interrupted by the presence of a woman in a dark cape who is standing alone at the end of the Cobb while she stares out to the sea. Tina explains then to a curious Charles what she has heard about the woman, Sarah Woodruff, with regard to her status as a "social outcast" or "disgraced woman", supposedly abandoned by a French naval officer named Varguennes—married to another woman—with whom she supposedly had an affair before he had returned to France.

The degree of difficulty in Fowles' work comes probably given by the author's own conception of the novel and the role of readers who, as reflected in his essay "Hardy and the Hag" (1977), are expected to have an active participation in disentangling his authorial devices: "Beyond the specific myth of each novel, the novelist longs to be possessed by the continuous underlying myth he entertains of himself. The critic's proper function is to reveal his underlying myth" (1977, p. 32). Victorian women are defined according to the stereotypes of the time, options ranging from "angel in the house/wife" to "fallen woman/whore", with the only alternative of the "*femme fatale*/governess". Opposite to the "fallen woman", the figure of the "angel in the house" represents a wife who is expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. The "angel" is passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious and pure. The "*femme fatale*", meanwhile, refers to the sexy woman who manipulates men and offers mid-nineteenth-century women an alternative role.

Fowles begins chapter two of his novel with some revealing information: "In that year (1851) there were some 8,155,000 females of the age of ten upwards in the British population, as compared with 7,600,000 males". According to this information, if the accepted destiny of a Victorian girl was to become a wife and a mother, it was unlikely that there would be enough men to go round. As revealed by scholar Royston Pike in his work *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age* (1974), Victorian women who could not manage to get the status of a wife would end up being whores or governesses, an in-between role by which women were still not to be considered proper family members (Table 1).

Table 1. Continuum of possible roles for women in Victorian society		
Angel in the house/wife	⟵ *Femme fatale*/governess ⟶	Fallen woman/whore

Sarah decides to play the character of the *French Lieutenant's Woman* voluntarily at some point in her life. She pretends she is a fallen woman not to have to be a governess or to cope with the stand-ards of Victorian society. Some critics have seen her decision as a feminist step towards freedom. In the text, Sarah asserts her developing independence when she states that she has "married shame" because there was "no other way to break out of what she was". She now has freedom and "No insult, no blame can touch her" (2004, p. 176). In Richard P. Lynch's words, "It is the absence of a role that defines Charles as a character moving toward 'existential' freedom. Sarah has gone through a similar stage in her development, becoming a 'nothing' for a time as a way of rejecting what was available to her as an identity" (2002, pp. 50–58). For M.K. Booker, Sarah functions in the active role of the author: "The way in which Sarah spins invented tales and manipulates people and events is clearly parallel to the way in which authors manipulate characters and plots in their own tales" (1991, p. 115).

Far from considering Sarah to be the author of the events, Raaberg (2001) explains that the reader is positioned by the narrator to perceive Sarah from Charles' gaze, within the limits of the Victorian patriarchal society. She is text, riddle, object, rather than author according to Raaberg: "Sarah is the object of his fascination, whom he will attempt to interpret as 'a riddle'. The reader is positioned, then, like Charles, to attempt to read the mysterious woman" (2001, pp. 521–543). Also, Magali Cornier Michael calls into question the novel's feminism by referring to the notion of point of view: "Sarah remains objectified and never becomes a subject in her own right" (1987, p. 228): "Everything known about Sarah is mediated through the male perspectives of Charles, the narrator, and ulti-mately Fowles himself as orchestrator. Sarah's mind is left outside of the novel" (1987, p. 229). In the text of the novel, Sarah is depicted through male, external perspectives turning her into an "object, figure or symbol rather than into a whole female character" (1987, p. 231) with "no existence out-side of the male perspectives that depict her" (1987, p. 233).

According to Michael's words, it is to be noticed that Charles objectifies his very first sight of Sarah: "Again and again, afterwards, Charles thought of that look as a lance; and to think so is of course not merely to describe an object but the effect it has" (2004, p. 10). Also, women in the novel such Mrs. Poulteney and Ernestina, whose perspectives adhere to the dominant male ideology inherent in their society, contribute to create this image of Sarah in the mind of Charles and, by extension, in the mind of the readers. As pointed out by Michael: "Fowles seems to assume that readers will discover for themselves the critique of masculine ideology in the text, which neglects to take into account that many readers, even female readers included, are themselves caught within male ideology" (1987, p. 235). "Fowles's failure to prevent this 'straight' reading or misreading of Sarah and thus of the novel may suggest, however, that Fowles himself remains caught to a certain extent within the very ideological system he challenges" (1987, p. 226).

For Raaberg, however, it becomes necessary to read "otherwise" in order to activate Sarah's voice. According to the author, a text is not "a line of words releasing a single 'theological; meaning but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash" (2001, pp. 521–543). In line with the author, it is the aim of this paper to prove that Sarah needs to be approached as the verbal description of an object, as an *ekphrasis*—a rhetorical device by which one medium of art relates to another medium of art by defining and describing its essence and form, hence relating it more di-rectly to the audience, through its illuminative liveliness—beyond the boundaries of the Victorian stereotypes. To this end, the present paper aims at analyzing Sarah in relation to the gaze of the readers. It should come as no surprise that, by activating the readers' background knowledge and by leading them to decode the hidden images behind Sarah's stereotypical portrayal, the identity of the main character can be actually activated too.

The paper has been organized in the following manner: the first introductory section sets the topic and gives way to the theoretical framework, which includes Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design (2006) imperative to understand how images communicate meaning and

Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's Theory of Blended Spaces (1996, 2002, 2008). This is followed by a third section that deals with the analysis of the main character Sarah from three different perspectives: that of (i) Charles as a reader inside the novel, (ii) readers outside the novel who are unable to activate elements other than Charles' views and/or Victorian conventions and (iii) readers outside the novel. At the same time, this section has been divided into two further subsections: (1) perceptual approach to Sarah's re/reading and (2) conceptual dissection of stereotypes. Finally, some conclusions have been drawn in section number four.

2. Theoretical background

It is well known that a stereotype is a fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing, i.e. a way in which we view or represent a certain individual or a group of individuals. Accordingly, gender stereotypes are a representation of the way in which we structure society and, most concretely, the different genders. As Erving Goffman explains, these stereotypes are a "hyper-ritualization", an exaggeration and a generalization of the roles performed by any individual or group of individuals, in this case, women (1976, pp. 16–17). The fact that stereotypes are social constructions implies that they reflect the most basic social arrangements, constructions and interactions among the individuals that belong to that particular society.

Furthermore, they also put forward the different hierarchies and behaviours in which a society works, which may vary according to the context and the period in question. Images are both produced and understood in the context of a certain culture, history, ideology and society, always linked to the environment in which they have been produced. Thus, the best approach to images and communication starts from a social basis: "[...] Meanings expressed by speakers, writers, printmakers, photographers, [...] are first and foremost social meanings, even though we don't acknowledge the importance of individual differences. Given that societies are not homogeneous, but composed by groups with varying, and often contradictory, interests, the messages produced by individuals will reflect the differences, incongruities and clashes which characterize social life" (2006, p. 20).

We could claim, therefore, that depending on the society and the historical moment, images can be represented and read in different ways due to the fact that these provide particular meanings to the same image. This is to say that the same image can be interpreted or understood in various ways regarding the culture and the time, i.e. it is context-dependent. Moreover, even within the same society, the various and heterogeneous members can provide the same image with a different interpretation. Accordingly, the interpretation of the meaning of an image is not objective but subjective, providing the image with a variable value which can never be separated from each individual's beliefs. Images are not fixed concepts since they evolve and change over time.

Regarding the functions of images and their context—what Kress and Van Leeuwen call "landscape", it is first important to consider the three possible functions of images known as "metafunctions": ideational, interpersonal and textual. Firstly, the ideational metafunction means that "any semiotic mode has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans" (2006, p. 42). Secondly, the interpersonal metafunction means that "any semiotic mode has to be able to project the relations between the producer of a (complex) sign, and the receiver/reproducer of this sign" (2006, p. 42). And thirdly, the textual metafunction implies that "any semiotic mode has to have the capacity to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally with each other and externally with the contexts in and for which they were produced" (2006, p. 42). These functions are performed by five elements mentioned in Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory:

(1) **Participants:** they are classified as represented participants (the characters which are represented in the image) or interactive participants (which are both the producers and the receivers of this image). We should take into account that some participants are much more important than other participants, and this relevance is represented by different elements, such as shape, size and colour. The participants who are not relevant are named circumstances. Even if they are secondary characters, we would lose some part of the information if we

eliminated them. We should also distinguish between different types of represented participants according to their function in the image; the most important ones are, "actors", who have a "goal", this is, they perform an action, and "carriers", who hold some "attributes", this is, they may possess/wear/have something. When we have a carrier, as it is the case of the examples chosen, the viewers simply inspect the carrier's attributes.

(2) **Process:** it is the action related to the way in which the participants are depicted in the image; for instance, the participants of a concrete advertisement could be represented as performing some kind of action. Nevertheless, depending on the type of image and the action involved, sometimes the participants do not perform an action, as it is the case of carrier participants.

(3) **Gaze:** it helps to create an imaginary relationship between the represented participants and the viewer, as well as between the producer and the viewer. Sometimes the represented participants stare directly to the receiver of the image, which implies that the represented participant directly addresses the spectator (called a "demand"). That is the main reason why the function of an image is not merely representative but also interactive. As Kress and Van Leeuwen put it, "today, the personal and the informal enter increasingly many domains which formerly were characterized by impersonal and formal modes of address, verbally as well as visually" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 90).

(4) **Background:** there is some kind of relationship between the represented participants and the elements that surround them, such as landscapes and buildings, which is called background. Most of the times the background is not very relevant due to the fact that it does not transmit any kind of relevant information that could change the message transmitted by the image. This is to say that, in those cases, the background is plain.

(5) **Perspective:** it is the angle from which it is presented; the distance to the represented characters creates some social distance between the viewer and the represented participant, in the sense that the closer the represented participant is, the better relation is established between the represented and the interactive participants. For instance when we find a close-up (this is, we can only see the shoulders and the head) in an image, there is less social distance from the producer to the receiver.

Characters portrayed in images are strangers. Even if they address a visual "you", there is no visual "I" because this is objectified, hidden behind a he/she/the, since producers cannot refer to themselves directly. Accordingly, even when they address the viewer directly, it is not the represented participant who speaks, but the producer: "The image is only an image, a representation, detached from his or her actual body. And the 'real author' may also speak in the guise of someone else, of a 'character'" (2006, p. 116). As Kress and Vann Leeuwen explain, we are "imaginarily put in the position of the friend, the costumer […]" (2006, p. 116).

As previously mentioned, the application of this theory to the analysis of the different stereotypes resulting from the different readers' gaze benefits also from Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending as a basic mental operation that leads to new meaning, global insight and conceptual compressions useful for memory and manipulation of otherwise diffuse ranges of meaning. It plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, in the arts and sciences, and especially in the social and behavioural sciences. The essence of the operation is to construct a partial match between two input mental spaces, to project selectively from those inputs into a novel "blended" mental space, which then dynamically develops emergent structure. Mental spaces are small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action—they are very partial assemblies containing elements, structured by frames and cognitive models.

These premises made, it can be said that, in order to decode the images behind Sarah's stereotypical portrayal, it is necessary not only to re-read these images as the different readers would have perceived them originally, but also to dissect the process by which those visual, perceptual images would have turned into the mental, conceptual images which reached those readers' minds

contributing to the anchorage of the perpetuated stereotypes. To this end, the analysis in the following lines is twofold: Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory for reading images is applied to the re-reading of Sarah's images in the novel while Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending is used to dissect the visual/perceptual-mental/conceptual process undergoing each of the re-readings in an intention to dissect stereotype formation.

3. Sarah's re/reading—perceptual

M.K. Booker refers to Fowles' novel as a game in which readers are expected to run the risk to decode the myths implied in the different riddles posed by the author (1991, p. 109). In Raaberg's words "both novel and woman are texts to be deciphered" (2001, p. 524). It is always important to remember, though, that Fowles' work "resists the kind of reading that appropriates the text to a single, dominating perspective. Filled with fragments of other texts and multiple clashing perspectives, its intertextuality mitigates against an 'authoritative' reading" (2001, p. 531).

More specifically, Charles is the first reader who, biased by Victorian stereotypes inside the novel, resists the "authoritative" representation of Sarah as a fallen woman. His first sight of Sarah is extremely shocking for him: "She had taken off her bonnet and held it in her hand; her hair was pulled tight back inside the collar of the black coat—which was bizarre, more like a man's riding-coat than any woman's coat that had seen in fashion those past forty years. She too was a stranger to the crinoline; but it was equally plain that that was out of oblivion, not knowledge of the latest London taste" (2004, pp. 9–10). Nevertheless, what really takes him back is the fact that Sarah's image does not comply with the Victorian standards, neither physically nor psychically, as she was to represent chaos, irrationality, darkness, etc. (1976, p. 65). Contrary to expectations, though, when Sarah turned to look at him, "… all that was not like he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favored feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy. […]. It was not a pretty face, like Ernestina's. It was certainly not a beautiful face, by any period's standard or taste. […] There was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness" (2004, p. 10). Curiously enough, this made Charles remember Sarah as an object, as a riddle with a meaning that needs to be guessed.

Charles tries to decipher the meaning of Sarah's image as any reader would do. He is perfectly aware of the fact that his view of Sarah is biased by conventions when he rejects his external vision telling his Victorian girlfriend Ernestina: "I wish you hadn't told me the sordid facts. That's the trouble with provincial life. Everyone knows everyone and there is no mystery. No romance" (2004, p. 11). Nevertheless, he is not that well aware of his own stereotyped alternative view of Sarah. It is true that his initial knowledge of Sarah, shaped by the Victorian stereotypes, has gossiping foundations. Ernestina tells him that Sarah "is all gossip" (2004, p. 9); "They say she waits for him to return" (2004, p. 9). But it is equally true that "he repeatedly attempts to stabilize her identity with reference to the patriarchal center" (2001, p. 529), what explains his permanent intention to redeem Sarah by seeing her as an awaiting wife, an "angel in the house", in the shape of a Penelope faithfully waiting for her husband. As Booker remarks: "She may be a fallen woman, but he begins to see her as a noble one" (1991, p. 109).[2]

Nevertheless, Sarah breaks Charles' expectations when she presents herself as a voluntarily liberated *femme fatale* pretending to be a fallen woman in order to escape the restrictions of Victorian society: "Sometimes I almost pity them. I think I have a freedom they cannot understand. No insult, no blame can touch me. Because I have set myself beyond the pale. I am nothing, I am hardly human any more. I am the French Lieutenant's Whore" (2004, p. 176). This is a second reading by those external readers who approach the novel biased both by Charles's internal reading and the Victorian conventions and stereotypes.

Joly (2003) states that the absent fields activated by the elements which are actually present in the visual message need to be analyzed. The author points to the importance to consider the axis in the organization of the visual message in order to try to get its global meaning. However, Joly also explains that spectators tend to favour the stereotypes based on their own reception above the

signs conveyed by the image itself. Angel in the house or *femme fatale*, Sarah is an object to be decoded, a verbal image to be read by readers outside the novel too.

These preliminary issues considered, three possible levels of interpretation arise when it comes to the analysis of the perceptual images of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

(1) Charles, spectator inside the novel biased by the Victorian conventions and stereotypes:

Deep inside the novel, Charles can only identify Sarah with the image of Penelope, in line with the awaiting Victorian women, house space located and depending on their husbands.

Participants:
Represented participants: Sarah
Receiver of the image: Charles

Process:
Sarah depicted as a Penelope

Gaze:
Demand

Background:
Victorian setting

(2) Readers outside the novel biased both by Charles and the Victorian conventions and stereotypes:

Sarah can be also read as a liberated woman fighting for her freedom through the role of the female slave subject to the limitations of the *femme fatale*.

Participants:
Represented participants: Sarah
Receiver of the image: Victorian biased contemporary readers

Process:
Sarah depicted as a liberated *femme fatale*

Gaze:
Demand

Background:
Victorian setting

(3) Readers outside the novel who are able to activate absent elements beyond Victorian conventions and stereotypes:

Going beyond stereotyped conventions requires the activation of absent elements residing in the readers' background knowledge. While Charles takes the image of Sarah for the image of Penelope waiting for Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*, the intended twentieth/twenty-first century reader activates absent elements which are evoked by the initial description of Sarah as the description of an object or piece of art, an *ekphrasis* that could be based on the description of the Victory of Samothrace, nowadays in the Louvre in order to decode Thomas Hardy's "Riddle": "Stretching eyes west/Over the sea,/Wind foul or fair,/Always stood she/Prospect impressed;/Solely out there/Did her gaze rest,/

Never elsewhere/Seemed charm to be". The description of the Victory of Samothrace found on the webpage of the Louvre reads as follows:

> The monument of the Winged Victory of Samothrace in the Louvre consists of a statue of a winged female figure—the messenger goddess Victory—and a base in the shape of the prow of a ship, standing on a low pedestal. The Victory is wearing a long chiton, or tunic, of fine cloth, that falls in folds to her feet. To shorten the skirts, the cloth is gathered by a belt, hidden by the folds which hang over the hips. The chiton is held in place by a second belt beneath the breasts. The handling of the chiton is in striking contrast with the thick, deeply carved draped folds of the cloak or himation, which covers part of the chiton. The sophisticated form of the folds of the cloak becomes clear when the outside and inside are highlighted in blue and red, following the folds of the cloth. The himation, worn wrapped in a roll round the waist, has worked loose at the figure's left hip. A large gathering of folds have slipped between the figure's legs, leaving the left hip and leg uncovered. The right hip and leg are covered to half-way down the calf. The cloak has swept open, with a fold of cloth streaming out behind the figure, so that we see the inside of the cloth. The unfastened cloak is held against the Victory's body by the sheer force of the wind (http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/Victoiredesamothrace_acc_ en.html)

Participants:

   Represented participants: Sarah

   Receiver of the image: contemporary readers

Process:

   Sarah depicted as a Victory Statue

Gaze:

   Demand

Background:

   Plain Victorian setting

4. Stereotype dissection—conceptual

As previously explained, Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory for reading images has been applied to the re-reading of Sarah's images in the novel from three different perspectives. In the lines immediately following, Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending is used to dissect the visual/perceptual-mental/conceptual processes undergoing each of the preceding re-readings in an intention to dissect stereotype formation. Thus Sarah can be approached as a Penelope by Charles, while considered to be a *femme fatale* by biased intended external readers, or as an actual object, a statue of Victory, by non-intended external readers.

4.1. Penelope

The first chapter of the novel opens with the description of Lyme Bay and the cobb, "the most beautiful sea rampart on the south coast of England" that "lies well apart from the main town, a tiny Piraeus to a microscopic Athens" (2004, p. 3) and closes with the author's depiction of the image of Sarah standing in the cobb while staring out at the sea: "It stood right at the seaward most end, apparently leaning against an old cannon-barrel up-ended as a bollard. Its clothes were black. The wind moved them, but the figure stood motionless, staring, staring out to sea, more like a living

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memorial to the drowned, a figure from myth, than any proper fragment of the petty provincial day" (2004, p. 5). In a Victorian context, Sarah represents the official image of an ostracized woman with, rumour says, mental disorders who desperately waits for the French lieutenant to return to her rescue. Curiously enough, though, it has been mentioned in the preceding lines that this is the very same image that leads Charles to identify Sarah with Penelope, a classic character who, far from being an ostracized woman, represents the ideal of the virtuous wife: she remained faithful to her husband Ulysses despite the fact that he had been absent and taken for dead for more than 20 years. She also remained civil to the unwanted suitors who courted her during this absence. Her loyalty turns her into a model to be followed by Victorian women and has found its way into numerous poems, prose and paintings.

Following Fauconnier and Turner's model when trying to depict the cognitive scenario occupying Charles's mind, we can say that, at any moment in the construction of the conceptual network, the structure that inputs seem to share is captured in a generic space which, in turn, maps onto each of the inputs: Sarah and Penelope, and their shared condition of grieving abandoned women. A given element in the generic space maps onto paired counterparts in the two input spaces. This is to say, Sarah and her most defining characteristics according to the Victorian society on the one hand, and Penelope, on the other. In Blending Theory, the structure resulting from two input mental spaces is projected into a new space, the blend, here consisting of coincidental features characterizing both Sarah and Penelope. For Charles, they both are crying, grieving abandoned women and devoted awaiting lovers. Sarah is seen as a devoted Penelope (Figure 1).

4.2. Femme fatale

At some point in the novel, Sarah tells Charles that she is a "doubly dishonoured woman. By circumstances. And by choice" (2004, p. 175): "So I married shame. I do not mean that I knew what I did, that is was in cold blood that I let Varguennes have his will of me. It seemed to me then as if I threw myself off a precipice or plunged a knife into my heart. It was a kind of suicide. An act of despair... I know it was wicked... blasphemous, but I knew no other way to break out of what I was..." (2004, pp. 175–176). This means that she is free because, being an outcast; she is no longer subject to the repressing Victorian society. In her own words: "What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I am truly not like the other women. I shall never have children, a husband, and that innocent happiness they have. And they will never understand the reason of my crime" (2004, p. 176). Her revelation leads contemporary readers biased both by Charles and by the Victorian conventions and stereotypes to approach Sarah as a feminist fighting for her freedom while playing the role of the female slave within the boundaries of a *femme fatale*. As shown below, the blending of the *femme fatale*'s features consciously adopted by Sarah would lead to the generic space of a woman who takes her own decisions trying to challenge the social constrictions of her time (Figure 2):

Figure 1. Sarah's features on the left and Penelope's features on the right. Blended space for coincidental features.
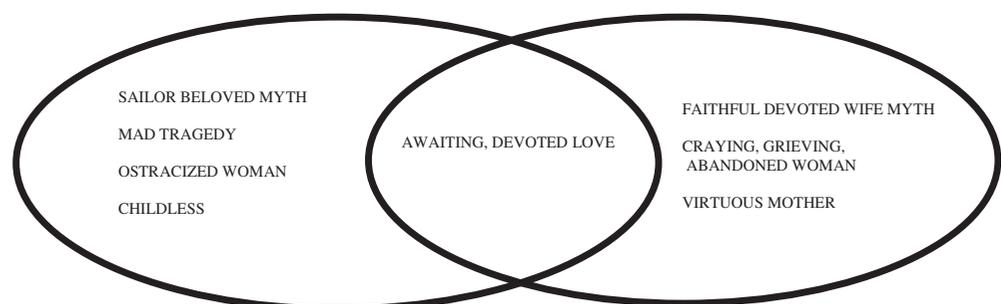

SAILOR BELOVED MYTH

MAD TRAGEDY

OSTRACIZED WOMAN

CHILDLESS

AWAITING, DEVOTED LOVE

FAITHFUL DEVOTED WIFE MYTH

CRAYING, GRIEVING, ABANDONED WOMAN

VIRTUOUS MOTHER

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Figure 2. Sarah's features on the left and *femme fatale*'s features on the right. Blend for coincidental features.

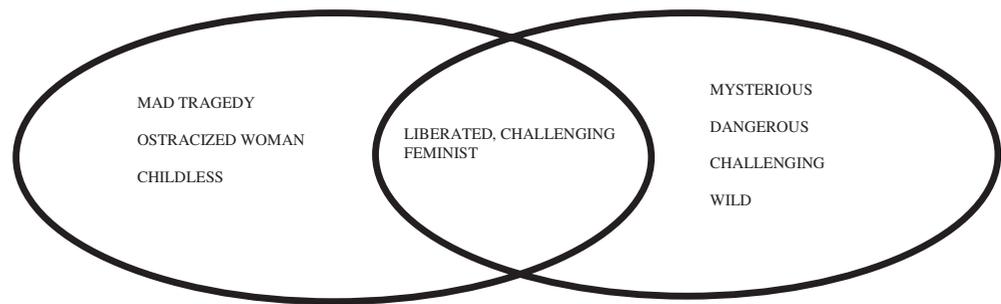**Figure 3. *Femme fatale*'s features on the left and Victory of Samothrace's features on the right. Blended space for coincidental features.**

4.3. Victory statue

It has been pointed above that Fauconnier and Turner suggest that a small set of partial and compositional processes operate in the creative construction of meaning in analogy, metaphor, counterfactuals, concept combination and even the comprehension of grammatical constructions. Blending processes depend centrally on projection mapping and dynamic simulation to develop emergent structures and to promote novel conceptualizations, involving the generation of inferences, emotional reactions and rhetorical forces. Contemporary readers outside the novel who are able to activate absent elements besides Charles' views or Victorian conventions and stereotypes can thus infer the description of the Winged Victory of Samothrace out of the description of Sarah as a *femme fatale* staring at the sea: "She had taken off her bonnet and held it in her hand; her hair was pulled tight back inside the collar of the black coat—which was bizarre, more like a man's riding-coat than any woman's coat that had seen in fashion those past forty years. She too was a stranger to the crinoline; but it was equally plain that that was out of oblivion, not knowledge of the latest London taste" (2004, pp. 9–10). The way had been previously paved by Hardy's riddle, used by Fowles to open the first chapter of the book: "Stretching eyes west/Over the sea,/Wind foul or fair,/Always stood she/Prospect impressed;/Solely out there/Did her gaze rest,/Never elsewhere/Seemed charm to be".

Intended readers are well aware of the fact that the Hellenistic period saw numerous naval battles between the kingdoms inherited by the successors of Alexander the Great as they fought for control of the Aegean Sea. Also, they know that the Greeks represented concepts such as Peace, Fortune, Vengeance and Justice as goddesses. Victory was one of the earliest of these incarnations. She is a female figure with large wings that enable her to fly over the earth spreading news of victory, whether in athletic competition or in battle. She is a messenger—*angelos* in Greek—who sometimes uses a trumpet to make her message better heard. As she flies, she brings the victor the insignia of victory—a crown, fillet, palm, trophy of arms or naval trophy. Back on earth, she takes part in the libation or sacrifice made by the victor to thank the Gods.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to decipher the mystery behind the character of Sarah by means of applying the Grammar of Visual Designs by Kress and Van Leeuwen and the theory of blended spaces

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by Fauconnier and Turner. This allows the approach to the novel from three different perspectives and to dissect the character of Sarah into three possible stereotypes.

The changing and varying points of view accepted by this text make the reader move in uncharted waters when entering the space of the novel, between the inside novel and the outside world. This shift allows readers to advance further in their pursuit to unveil Sarah's identity by changing perspectives in order to make sense of the plot, as if they were approaching the scene from cameras positioned in different places, with the changes in context that this implies. The advantage of readers is that, as they move between inside and outside the novel, eighteenth century stereotypes emerge to suddenly start vanishing as soon as the look is that of twentieth Victorian or non-Victorian biased readers.

The novel can be seen as a game or a many-layered mystery where readers taking the challenge should be aware that in order to decode the mystery unfolding in front of them they need not only to use the visual clues intended to guide them throughout the text but also to rely on their own background knowledge—this is what makes the novel particularly interactive, which means the need to go from inside to outside the text in order to reach for its full potential. This process takes readers through a path where getting to decipher both the present and the absent images of the enigmatic character of Sarah is equivalent to getting to understand the full detail of a sculpture—the Winged Victory of Samothrace. And this brings victory.

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Notes
1. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from The *French Lieutenant's woman* have been taken from *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. London: Vintage, 2004.
2. Propertius, in Book III.13 of his *Elegies* writes: "The present time [has an] untrustworthy race of/brides, now no girl will neither be faithful/Evadne nor pious Penelope". In *Heroides* I, Ovid writes a letter from Penelope to Odysseus. In the letter, Penelope tells Odysseus (though she does not know where he is or if he is still alive) of the suitors and the pressure she is under. At the same time, though, Penelope states that she will remain faithful although Odysseus is "disgracefully" absent.

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