



Thinking Out of the Box in Literary and Cultural Studies

Proceedings of the XXIX AIA Conference

edited by
Rocco Coronato, Marilena Parlati and Alessandra Petrina

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UP

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EXPLORING FEMINIZED LANDSCAPES IN VICTORIAN EROTICA: ECOCRITICISM MEETS SOCIOLOGY

Daniela Francesca Viridis and Gabriella Milia

This chapter provides the theoretical tools to explore the primary themes in *Sub-Umbra*, one of the six serialised novels published in the Victorian erotic magazine *The Pearl* (1879-81). Firstly, it covers the strategy of feminizing and sexualizing landscapes and natural scenery. Secondly, it treats the sociological model of gentry masculinity and compares it with the representation of the main character and first-person narrator in the novel, a figure interacting with the gendered physical environment. Ideas for further research on *Sub-Umbra* and Victorian erotica are also offered.

Feminised and Sexualised Landscapes; Gentry Masculinity; The Pearl (1879-81); Victorian Pornographic Fictional Prose

1. Introduction: The Victorian pornographic novel *Sub-Umbra*

Of the various licentious magazines flourishing in Victorian Britain, *The Pearl, A Journal of Facetiae and Voluptuous Reading* was probably the most famous.¹ It was published in London from July 1879 to January 1881 in eighteen monthly issues and two Christmas supplements, which contained novels, short stories, poems and parodies of diverse genres. It was printed by William Lazenby (1825?-88?), one of the main British pornographers during the 1870s and 1880s; he may also have been its editor and one of its authors, all of whom were anonymous. As Sigel claims, the readership of erotica was restricted due to their distribution, accessibility and price.² In fact, the target audience of *The Pearl* and of all Lazenby's publications consisted of rich, upper-class men. Lazenby and his fellow publishers used to send their catalogues and notices to the members of the upper and wealthy classes (listed in the social register and on the society pages), to officers in the army and to students of exclusive schools.

¹ While both authors are responsible for the chapter's design and have co-revised it, Daniela Francesca Viridis is responsible for Sections 2 and 3, and Gabriella Milia for Sections 1 and 4.

² Lisa Z. Sigel, 'The Rise of the Overtly Affectionate Family: Incestuous Pornography and Displaced Desire among the Edwardian Middle Class,' in *International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000*, ed. Lisa Z. Sigel (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 114.

This is because the men in these social groups were the only customers who could afford such an expensive type of publication.³

Sub-Umbra, or Sport among the She-Noodles is one of the six serialised novels printed in *The Pearl*, to be more exact in its first eight issues. Since its first seven instalments were printed as the opening text of the magazine, it has a foregrounded position, drawing the readers' attention to it. The very first sentence and paragraph of the text presents the erotic topic and typifies the genre as pornography: 'The merry month of May has always been famous for its propitious influence over the voluptuous senses of the fairer sex'.⁴ In the novel, the main character and first-person narrator, nineteen-year-old Walter, tells his story: he visits his uncle's family in the Sussex countryside and seduces his male cousin Frank, his three female cousins (the 'she-noodles' of the title), their three guests and their family friend, and in the end comes back home.

Sub-Umbra, the Latin title of the novel, meaning 'under the shade (of trees)', hints at the countryside setting and the relevant role it will acquire in the plot. This is unusual in the pornographic texts of the period, where the only focal point is predictably realised by information of a licentious type. For instance, the anonymous *Randiana, or Excitable Tales* (1884), also published by Lazenby, does not feature any sizeable landscape descriptions. The equally anonymous *The Romance of Lust* (Lazenby, 1873-76) includes very few essential sketches of natural scenery unrelated to sexual intercourse, and only one longer depiction of the surroundings of a summer house where the protagonist and his lovers often have sex.⁵ *Sub-Umbra* apart, several narratives from *The Pearl* are set in a country-house; nevertheless, only two 'rural fuck[s]', whose locations are not portrayed, take place in the magazine (pp. 576, 633).

The emphasis the novel lays on natural scenery is accordingly uncommon in Victorian erotic literature; moreover, such natural scenery is

³ This introductory paragraph is based on Daniela Francesca Viridis, 'Eroticising Female and Male Bodies: A Linguistic Investigation of a Pornographic Novel from the Victorian Magazine *The Pearl*,' *Porn Studies* 2, 1 (2015): pp. 19-34. See also Gaëtan Brulotte and John Phillips, *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 362, and Daniela Francesca Viridis, 'Sexuality, Masculinities & Co. in the Limericks from the Victorian Erotic Magazine *The Pearl*,' *Textus: English Studies in Italy* 23, 1 (2010): pp. 209-34.

⁴ Anonymous authors [William Lazenby, N. Douglas et al.], *The Pearl: A Journal of Facetiae and Voluptuous Reading* (reprint New York: Ballantine, 1996; first edition London: Lazenby, 1879-81), p. 2. Further references in brackets in the text.

⁵ [William Simpson Potter (ed.)? Edward Sellon?], *The Romance of Lust* (reprint Ryde: Olympia Press, 2004; first edition London: Lazenby, 1873-76), pp. 39-40.

explicitly described and conceptualised by applying the strategy of feminization and sexualization. What is also highlighted in the text is the main character's cultural and socioeconomic status as a representative of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European and North-American sociological category of gentry masculinity. The combination of these naturalistic and sociological themes in the novel results in the need for the analyst to count on a theoretical framework within which the scrutiny of the narrative can be adequately read. Given that the relation of the text with erotica from a literary and cultural history viewpoint has been recently treated elsewhere, additional frameworks are offered here.⁶ Therefore, the research purpose of this chapter is to consider two theoretical tools to explore the themes and the text of *Sub-Umbra*: (a) the practice of feminization and sexualization of the physical environment, together with an ecocritical model provided by a study by Kolodny and a literary model furnished by an imperial novel by Haggard (treated in Section 2);⁷ (b) the sociological category of gentry masculinity developed by Connell (covered in Section 3).⁸ Section 4 supplies the concluding remarks and ideas for further research on both this novel and Victorian erotica.

2. The metaphor of the land-as-woman

Such naturalistic themes as those found in *Sub-Umbra* are among the primary interests of feminist cultural geography: the association of the natural with the female and sexual pleasure, the metaphors of feminine nature as opposed to masculine culture, the visual and written encodings of feminine nature.⁹ From their disciplinary standpoint, human geographers and cultural geographers have also often examined landscapes, broadly conceived, and related ideas in literary and non-literary texts.¹⁰

⁶ See Viridis, 'Eroticising Female and Male Bodies,' see also Daniela Francesca Viridis, 'Sexualised Landscapes and Gentry Masculinity in Victorian Scenery: An Ecostylistic Examination of a Pornographic Novel from the Magazine *The Pearl*,' *Journal of Literary Semantics* 48, 2 (2019): pp. 109-28.

⁷ Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), Chapter 1; H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (London: Cassell, 1885).

⁸ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 189-92.

⁹ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), Chapter 5.

¹⁰ To mention just a few, see Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (eds), *Writing Worlds: Discour-*

The *Sub-Umbra* themes are also among the objects of inquiry of the academic field of ecocriticism, that is to say, its countryside setting, the representation of the landscape as a human, primarily female, body, and particularly the metaphor of nature as a sexualised woman. In this discipline, more precisely,

nature [is] conceived as spatial territory, as the land or earth which is tamed and tilled in agriculture (and with this we may associate a tendency to feminize nature viewed simply as landscape – trees, woodland, hills, rivers, streams, etc. are frequently personified as female or figure in similes comparing them to parts of the female body).¹¹

These issues are further scrutinised by Kolodny in her historical, psychological and ecologically-aware investigation of the American androcentric pastoral impulse in art and literature. This investigation is based on the metaphor of the land represented as a woman. As this scholar writes, this model is a gratifying metaphor of ‘regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape’.¹²

Kolodny’s study can be held up as a model to read the themes in *Sub-Umbra*, since its plot represents and celebrates a natural feminine realm. In the narrative, nature and the land are gendered as female and metaphorically conceptualised as being especially in harmony with the male figures. Actually, it is Walter’s family who owns that land and manages that estate and its resources, and it is the young man who seduces almost all the female characters on it. However, the physical environment is described less as an object of domination or exploitation than as a sexual accomplice and partner ready to encourage and offer gratification. In addition, as in Kolodny’s study, in order to give such gratification, the female environment is depicted by indirectly alluding to the archetypal figure of the nurturing mother (although the topic of parent-child incest is absent from the plot). In other words, the sexualised setting is portrayed as a loving and kind host, amenable and friendly, safe and comfortable, as exemplified in the following sequences:

se, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape (London: Routledge, 1992), and Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (eds), *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994).

¹¹ Kate Soper, ‘Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature,’ in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 141.

¹² Kolodny, p. 6.

passing rapidly down a shady walk [...], we soon arrived at a very convenient spot, and the instinct of love allowed me to guide the willing girls into a rather dark arbour without the least demur on their part. (p. 108)
we at once set off for the scene of our anticipated fun, which was a rough bower covered with flowering honeysuckle and clematis, at the end of a long, shady, private walk, more than half-a-mile from the house. (pp. 213-14)
we soon managed to give the others the slip, and lost ourselves in a dense copse. Sitting down on the soft mossy turf, under a shady little yew tree, we were quite hidden from observation. (p. 276)

In Victorian culture and science, 'nature' was identified as female (by means of the personal pronoun 'she'), whereas the scientist was depicted as male ('he'). A notable example is represented by Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), where the natural world is consistently personified as a feminine, nurturing being. As for poetry, women and nature were usually associated in the nineteenth century: examples range from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) to Browning's 'Women and Roses' (1855).¹³ The late Victorian literary and cultural trend of feminising and sexualising the landscape in a pronounced and unequivocal way is especially salient in imperial romances.¹⁴ Among them, Haggard's well-known novel *King Solomon's Mines* has been scrutinised by several literary and cultural studies critics, whose attention was attracted primarily by the conspicuous strategy of the feminization of natural scenery and by the device of the treasure map.¹⁵ This imperial romance is here briefly compared with *Sub-Umbra* and two of the main issues in this chapter are explored by contrast with this popular and extensively-analysed model: (a) the repre-

¹³ James Eli Adams, 'Woman Red in Tooth and Claw: Nature and the Feminine in Tennyson and Darwin,' *Victorian Studies* 33, 1 (1989): pp. 7-27. See also Patricia Murphy, 'Ecofeminist Whispers: The Interrogation of "Feminine Nature" in Mathilde Blind's Short Poetry,' *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 11, 1 (2015), <http://ncgsjournal.com/issue111/murphy.htm>.

¹⁴ For Western European landscape painting as a seventeenth-to-nineteenth-century new visual medium associated with European imperialism, see William John Thomas Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape,' in *Landscape and Power*, ed. William John Thomas Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 5-34.

¹⁵ Martin Hall, 'The Legend of the Lost City; Or, the Man with Golden Balls,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, 2 (1995): pp. 179-99; Paul Rich, 'Tradition and Revolt in South African Fiction: The Novels of Andre Brink, Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9, 1 (1982): pp. 54-73; Lindy Stiebel, 'Imagining Empire's Margins: Land in Rider Haggard's African Romances,' in *Being/s in Transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation: ASNEL Papers* 5, ed. Liselotte Glage (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 125-40. For a psychosexual interpretation of the treasure map, see Anne McClintock, 'Maidens, Maps and Mines: *King Solomon's Mines* and the Reinvention of Patriarchy in Colonial South Africa,' in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Cheryl Walker (Claremont: David Philip, 1990), pp. 113-15.

sentation of two distinct types of masculinity; (b) the resulting distinct gendering and conquering of the physical environment.

The differences between *King Solomon's Mines* and *Sub-Umbra* are mainly due to the fact that their main characters belong to two diverse categories of European-American masculinity. The protagonists of *King Solomon's Mines*, three British adventurers seeking the eponymous diamond mines in southern Africa, personify white military masculinity, the hegemonic category of manliness in the colonial nineteenth century, especially in the late Victorian age. This had its model in the Spanish *conquistadores*: its members did not have any close or stable social connections, habitually used physical force and violence in their search for gold and land, and it was problematic for the imperial state to control them. This category of masculinity, hence, was the most active in the process of imperial frontier expansion, and was intrinsically entangled with war, violence and colonialism: in Connell's terms, 'Empire was a gendered enterprise from the start'.¹⁶ The protagonist of *Sub-Umbra* is, in contrast, an embodiment of gentry masculinity, whose attributes and links with the setting and femininity are considered in Section 3.

King Solomon's Mines has also been defined as a 'famous tale of colonial copulation' and an 'account of sexual conquest and denigration'.¹⁷ The main characters in the narrative employ a treasure map featuring natural scenery with mountains, rivers and their distinctive names in order to travel through southern Africa and seek the eponymous diamond mines; when reversed, the map discloses the shape of a female body. As a result, the drawing 'has been read by some critics as a graphically sexualized map of a woman's body leading the male gazer/imperialist to a kind of Promised Land';¹⁸ the female body is consequently ready to be possessed by the colonial male adventurers.

The narrator's frequent mention of the 'laps' of mountains, the mountains called 'Sheba's Breasts', the triangle of three hills covered in dark heather named 'Three Witches', and the entrances to the two forbidden passages leading to the treasure constitute the most straightforward cases of landscape feminization in the plot. The descriptions of the physical environment in the entire novel represent such feminised landscapes in

¹⁶ Connell, p. 187; see also pp. 185-99.

¹⁷ Sanya Osha, 'Unravelling the Silences of Black Sexualities,' *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 62 (2004): p. 93.

¹⁸ Stiebel, p. 135.

erotic terms, as wild and unsubdued, as expressing sexual passion and fulfilment. Rich clarifies that 'In this world, the imagery of the untamed landscape that has not yet been subjected to European penetration becomes richly laced with a conception of primitive licentiousness'.¹⁹ That is to say, although beautiful local women often furnish the three protagonists with non-figurative occasion for dalliance and sexual licence, Haggard's most erotic descriptions concern the landscape of the African colonial paradise.²⁰

As mentioned above, the narrative is written in accordance with the conventions of British imperial romance and the male adventure or quest genre. The thrill of risk and danger arising from the unknown and exotic setting is not eliminated but, after dangerous travel and hazardous adventures, the male heroes, through exploration, eventually master this feminised land and its people and animals, thereby defining their masculinity.²¹

Adapting Osha's definitions of *King Solomon's Mines* cited above to *Sub-Umbra*, the pornographic novel can merely be regarded and interpreted as a 'tale of copulation' and an 'account of sexual conquest'.²² In fact, the elements of colonialism and denigration contained in the definitions are not present in *Sub-Umbra*: Walter's family already owns the countryside he explores, and his female partners also belong to the gentry and are never reluctant or humiliated (see Section 3). Furthermore, the landscape is not left uncultivated or free of human intervention, that is metaphorically dissolute and explicitly yielding to erotic desire. The natural environment has already been controlled and tamed by the people working for its gentry landowners exactly for those landowners' own employment and leisure, here Walter's erotic activities; the unwelcome possibility of hazard and vulnerability has been eradicated and replaced by a pleasant sensation of comfort and safety.

On the one hand, in *King Solomon's Mines* sexual issues and tensions are transferred onto the feminised physical environment, and the quest is for adventure, wealth and, ultimately, an improved social and economic position in the empire. On the other hand, in *Sub-Umbra* the male figure openly addresses and relieves these sexual issues and tensions firstly

¹⁹ Rich, p. 59.

²⁰ Hall, p. 186.

²¹ Stiebel, p. 131.

²² Osha, p. 93.

by explicitly depicting his own and his friends' bodies as eroticised; secondly, by seducing and sometimes being seduced by the female figures. His quest is, accordingly, for such more prosaic and everyday tenets as erotic fulfilment.

In *Sub-Umbra*, the three main sequences on natural scenery represent the following landscapes: Walter's uncle's grounds (Sequence 1; p. 2); a pond and a summer-house nearby (Sequence 2; pp. 73-4); an old sand pit (Sequence 3; p. 215). Several noun phrases and clauses from these sequences offer an instance of the metaphor of the land-as-woman as presented in Kolodny's model and in *King Solomon's Mines*, that is to say, they relate sexuality to the representation of the physical environment. Actually, a number of phrases and clauses literally describing the natural landscape also seem to figuratively allude to human, mainly female, erotic landscapes and to penetration and intercourse:

Female genitalia:

Sequence 1: 'arable and pasture land'; 'numerous interesting copses'; 'through which run footpaths and shady walks' (p. 2).

Sequence 2: 'This lake [...] every side thickly wooded to the very margin, so that even anglers could not get access to the bank, except at the little sloping green sward'; 'The bottom of the pond being gradually shelving, and covered with fine sand at this spot, and a circular space, enclosed with rails, to prevent them getting out of their depth'; 'a very narrow footpath, leading to the house through the dense thicket' (pp. 73-4).

Sequence 3: 'a Robinson Crusoe's cave'; 'bushes in front of it, so that the entrance was perfectly out of sight'; 'a heap of fine soft sand at the further end' (p. 215).

Penetration and intercourse:

Sequence 1: 'they may go pleasure hunting for themselves' (p. 2).

Sequence 2: 'the bathers could undress, and then trip across the lawn to the water'; 'the bathing season' (pp. 73-4).

Sequence 3: 'Gliding into the cave'; 'we were at once in the dark' (p. 215).

Following the strategy of natural scenery gendering, in this list of literal-metaphorical noun phrases and clauses, sexuality is figuratively connected to the physical environment. This helps to bring to the fore the metaphorical meaning of these apparently non-erotic phrases and clauses, which figuratively provide a representation of female genitalia, and to emphasise the erotic role of the setting in the narrative. Moreover, by means of such a metaphorical interpretation, the descriptive phrases and clauses in the list not only seem to perform the function of anticipating

the sexual actions to come, like other examples from the text; some of them also seem to depict the main stages of those sexual actions, namely penetration and intercourse.

In this metaphorically feminised natural scenery, 'As in the intensely sexualised landscape of *King Solomon's Mines*, desire is projected onto the landscape, which frequently assumes a female form'.²³ The same metaphorical practice of sexualising natural scenery can hence be found in *Sub-Umbra*: Walter transfers his sexual emotions, fantasies and appetite to the physical environment. Nevertheless, in the imperial adventure of white military masculinity, desire is only projected onto the setting and thereby quenched; in the pornographic novel, the sexual appetite of a representative of gentry masculinity is also repeatedly and variously gratified.

3. Gentry masculinity

Because Walter's licentious usage of natural scenery is highlighted in the narrative of *Sub-Umbra*, his gender, social and cultural position as a member of the sociological category of gentry masculinity is explored here. Scrutinising Walter's fictional figure as a member of the landed gentry and as a personification and parody of this male model can be helpful for at least two reasons: (a) to socially and historically contextualise the setting of the novel and its focus on the countryside; (b) to understand the protagonist's masculinity and connections with the other female and male characters. Moreover, given that gentry masculinity belonged to the social elite composing the limited readership of Victorian pornography (see Section 1), this scrutiny can also furnish further information on part of that readership.²⁴

Gentry masculinity, Connell writes, was founded on the notion of kinship, and blood relationships formed the basis of social, cultural and even political organization.²⁵ Those belonging to this category of masculinity were the 'natural' members of such organizations as the govern-

²³ Stiebel, p. 135.

²⁴ For models which are more specifically Victorian but less adequate to the protagonist, see Martin A. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Graeme Smart and Amelia Yeates (eds), *Critical Survey* 20, 3 (2008), special issue *Victorian Masculinities*; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Connell, pp. 189-92.

ment, the local administration, the law, the army and the navy. In fact, Britain's domestic politics and its colonial rule in India and North America in the eighteenth century were dominated by only a few powerful families by means of patronage. The institution of the duel was the link between the two values of military aggressiveness on the one hand and the family ethic and honour on the other; the duel also emphasised the force and violence characteristic of this social and cultural group²⁶. With regard to class relations, this group's treatment of and authority over the agricultural workforce was normally cruel and merciless, and power and punishment were exercised by brutal means.

As observed by cultural geographers, the strong relation between the physical environment and gentry masculinity is visually represented in Thomas Gainsborough's double portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews (about 1750).²⁷ Marxist cultural geographers point out that, as in English landscape painting, the people working Mr Andrews' fields are absent from the portrait's content. Landscape painting is actually a visual manifestation of ideology celebrating gentry capitalist property and the status quo, and suppressing evidence of labour, social conflict and rural transformation in natural scenery.²⁸ These features of gentry masculinity are underlined in *Sub-Umbra*. Here Walter is a member of the gentry and a landowner or future landowner; his social group and family, by definition, are so wealthy as to have the leisure to spend their spare time in the woods and to own an environment which has been domesticated by the family labourers for the family's own use, profit and enjoyment.

The figure of gentry masculinity depicted by Connell is socially, economically and culturally hegemonic and authoritative; in the novel, how-

²⁶ See also Bret E. Carroll and Calinda N. Lee, 'Chivalry,' in *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Bret E. Carroll (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004), paragraph 2, <https://sk.sagepub.com/reference/masculinities/n43.xml>: 'In colonial America, ideals of chivalry were most clearly evident among the southern gentry, who by the early eighteenth century began aspiring to the lifestyle of England's landed aristocracy. Their notions of chivalric guardianship were grounded in their property (land and slaves) and in the racial and gender hierarchies that defined the southern social structure. The ideal southern gentleman and his sons were to protect the honor of their family; the virtue of their mothers, wives, and daughters; and the welfare of their slaves. Sometimes this required the ritualized violent confrontation of the duel.'

²⁷ Rose, Chapter 5 and Denis Cosgrove, 'Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 10, 1 (1985): p. 45. See the same article for the historical relation, since the Italian Renaissance, between land survey and physical appropriation of space as property on the one hand, and geometry and the measurement of distance, surface and volume on the other hand.

²⁸ Mitchell, p. 15.

ever, it is parodied by the representation of the protagonist. He has power over the family land, but that power is humorously reduced to skilfully taking advantage of that land and picking out the most appropriate places to have sex. Furthermore, like Connell's model, Walter appears to have strong family ties with his male and female cousins and to capitalise on them; nevertheless, unlike the model, he does not employ them or their acquaintances to advance his political or military career but his erotic interests. His highly sexualised and gendered manliness, founded on gentry masculinity, is built up by making the most of his uncle's family and the natural environment surrounding his uncle's residence. Comically, though, he has a sole aim in mind: the satisfaction of his erotic needs.

One of the privileges of gentry masculinity was sexual freedom and licentiousness, a privilege which was epitomised by the philosophical and anthropological upper-class model of the libertine.²⁹ Like this figure, Walter's masculinity is focused on the bodily vigour and stamina typical of a healthy young man: this is repeatedly highlighted by his ability to have intercourse with several partners at the same time, or with one immediately after another, and to have multiple orgasms. Moreover, libertine-like, he is portrayed as being familiar with the knacks of a clever sexual partner, such as preserving the knees of his trousers from the green stain of grass during intercourse in the fields and not appearing too late and tired at his relatives' breakfast table after having had sex with one of their guests and their son all night long, tips that he is eager to pass on to his narratee and friends (pp. 5, 38, 143).

In *Sub-Umbra*, however, a few aspects of the libertine and of gender and class relations do not adhere to the model of gentry masculinity; these non-typical behaviours are confirmed by Nelson in a contribution on *The Pearl* discussing

unfettered sexual expression as a privilege of the upper classes. To associate seduction with 'servant-girls of the lower classes' is to stamp it vulgar and degrading, an activity that the civilized have risen above. To link it, as happens in *The Pearl*, with wealth and power (although not necessarily with masculinity or maturity) makes it an ideal to be emulated. Tellingly, sexual encounters in these narratives are typically consensual and based on mutual desire.³⁰

²⁹ Marcel Hénaff, *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, trans. Xavier Callahan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999 [Kindle Edition]).

³⁰ Claudia Nelson, 'That Other Eden: Adult Education and Youthful Sexuality in *The Pearl*, 1879-1880,' in *Sexual Pedagogies: Sex Education in Britain, Australia, and America, 1879-2000*, eds Claudia Nelson and Michelle H. Martin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 24.

Firstly, in the gentry masculinity model, same-class women were the object of domestic domination: their men had legal supremacy over them and the power and right to enforce their obedience. Instead, gentry women in the novel enjoy the same freedom of action and movement as their cousin, brother or hosts and share their pastimes in the countryside; once initiated into the erotic art, they turn out to be nearly as ready and willing as Walter and Frank to appreciate and master it. Secondly, whereas the libertine enjoyed his sexual licence primarily with women of the lower classes, the protagonist does so with his social, economic and cultural peers, particularly with members of his family and closed circle of 'suitable' friends. The depiction of gentry masculinity in the plot therefore consciously lacks the gender and social conflicts inherent in and constitutive of the model. Moreover, if sex with servants is 'vulgar and degrading', the male figures are portrayed as 'civilized', wealthy and powerful young men with refined and sophisticated taste.

4. *Conclusions and further research*

This chapter on the Victorian erotic novel *Sub-Umbra* has explored its primary naturalistic and sociological topics and the theories to explore them. Firstly, it has treated the strategy of feminising and sexualising the landscape by applying the theoretical model developed by Kolodny and the literary model elaborated by Haggard to *Sub-Umbra* and its narrative. Secondly, the chapter has covered the sociological model of gentry masculinity by comparing the figure of the male gentry member in the novel with the model. Moving from these theoretical models and comparisons, further research on *Sub-Umbra* in particular and Victorian erotica in general may include a closer analysis of the phrases and clauses referring to female genitalia and penetration and intercourse mentioned in Section 2 by means of conceptual metaphor theory.³¹ In light of the gentry masculinity model, further research may discuss domestic spaces and landscapes, like homes and gardens, by also utilising Tosh's model of masculinity in the middle-class home in Victorian England.³²

³¹ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

³² We would like to thank Ernestine Lahey, Feona Attwood, Clarissa Smith and the two anonymous reviewers of this chapter for their invaluable comments and advice on previous drafts of this work.

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