

HENRIETTA KENT AND THE FEMINISED NORTH

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Some time around 1876, S. H. Kent, Susanna Sarah Henrietta Kent or Henrietta Kent as she probably called herself, travelled through the northern parts of Norway and Sweden with her elderly mother.¹ Her impressions from the northern trip were published in two volumes entitled *Within the Arctic Circle: Experiences of Travel through Norway, to the North Cape, Sweden and Lapland*, advertised in *The Times* 6 February 1877.² There was a great deal of public interest in the Arctic at the time due to the scientific and cultural activity leading up to the first International Polar Year 1882-83. Kent, however, does not foreground the adventure and excitement associated with the Polar expeditions in her narrative. Instead, she concentrates on the kind people and pleasant aspects of northern Scandinavia, asserting that the difficulties of northern travel have been exaggerated and that nothing should “deter even lady travellers” from going North.³ At least as she presents the exercise in her preface, travelling in Norway and Sweden requires no particular strength or stamina. The dangers of the wild as well as the romance of the Arctic are absent from her book, making northern Scandinavia seem quite woman-friendly. Kent’s travelogue demonstrates in many ways the interaction between the construction of a gendered narrative self and the gendering of place.

S. H. Kent was by no means a timid traveller. A few years before the northern excursion she had travelled in Palestine, recounting her experiences in *Gath to the Cedars: Experiences of Travel in the Holy Land and Palmyra, during 1872* (1874). She had visited Russia (vol. 2, p. 198) and had been to Norway before (vol. 1, p. 3, 17, 55). There are occasional references to Ireland when hills remind her of “the Wicklow Mountains or the Hills of Howth” (vol. 2, p. 47) or a bog is

¹ The date of S. H. Kent’s journey follows Eiler H. Schiötz, *Utlendingers reiser i Norge. En bibliografi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970), p. 238, entry 526

² “The Times Column of New Books and New Editions,” *The Times* 6 Feb. 1877, p. 12, col C

³ S[usanna Sarah] H[enrietta] Kent, *Within the Arctic Circle: Experiences of Travel through Norway, to the North Cape, Sweden and Lapland*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1877), vol. 1, p. ix. Further references to this work are given parenthetically in the text.

described as looking “very much like an Irish one” (vol. 1, p. 41) but unusually enough, England is not used as a yardstick.⁴ When describing various features of northern Scandinavia, Kent refers to the Lebanon, Mount Hermon and the Alps (vol. 2, p. 47), the Nile (vol. 2, p. 63), Vesuvius (vol. 1, p. 115), Pompei (vol. 2, p. 75) and Venice (vol. 2, p. 204) and she favourably compares Norwegian hospitality with the insincere hospitality of Spaniards (vol. 1, p. 88). Especially Stockholm was routinely juxtaposed with Venice, and these allusions obviously cannot be taken as proof of actual visits to all the locations mentioned. The Biblical and sometimes the classical worlds were often invoked by writers attempting to define the North. But although Kent simply follows convention in many respects, most of the comparisons that appear in the text suggest that she made use of observations from previous journeys. Her frame of reference was not as insular as that of many of her contemporaries.

Possibly her earlier travel experiences taught her some of the self-reliance demonstrated in *Within the Arctic Circle*. When the party find themselves without a driver one of their first days in Sweden, Kent takes the reins herself (vol. 2, p. 17), and when they are close to Lapland and there is no guide available, she decides that they will go on without anyone to lead them (vol. 2, pp. 55-56). The fact that there are no roads in the inner of Lapland initially makes her fear that her mother will not manage, “but the beauty of difficulties is that it excites ingenuity to surmount them,” and a rude barrow is put together for the old lady (vol. 2, p. 90). Comments like “all misgivings as to the difficulties we might encounter in the course of our journey were laid aside, for we had now fairly entered on it” express confidence and a belief that problems can be solved (vol. 2, pp. 59-60). Reporting on a solitary walk in the forest Kent emphasises that she was determined not to be daunted by obstacles or feel nervous or uneasy (vol. 2, p. 134). When some bearers try to take advantage of the travellers, she assumes a superior attitude similar to the arrogant stance associated with the colonial British, and resolves to teach them manners (vol. 2, pp. 161-169). But despite these examples of resourcefulness, Kent does not represent herself as a seasoned and knowledgeable traveller. On

⁴ In the notice of S. H. Kent’s *Gath to the Cedars* in *The Times*, she is described as “an English lady,” but internal evidence in *Within the Arctic Circle* suggests that she might be Irish or at least that she had considerable knowledge of Ireland. “Christmas Books,” *The Times* 19 Dec. 1878, p. 3 col. D

the contrary, her primary concern is to describe the northern part of Scandinavia as safe, easy to traverse and on the whole comfortable. To the extent that masculinity is connected with physical strength and an ability to overcome difficulties, this relative easiness of the journey, underscored by the circumstance that Kent was accompanied by her elderly mother, works to further emphasise the accessibility and feminine character of the North.

The combination of Kent's alleged purpose to make women tourists interested in the North and her competence as a traveller results in a contradictory text as far as gender constructions are concerned. Although her capabilities become increasingly obvious throughout the narrative, Kent seems anxious to downplay her proficiency in various ways and instead draws attention to her conventionally feminine tastes and qualities. Her textual persona is well aligned with the separate spheres ideology as expressed by, among many others, John Ruskin in the influential lecture and essay "Of Queens' Gardens":

We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the "superiority" of one sex to another, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give.

Now their separate characters are briefly these: The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention: his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision.⁵

Sesame and Lilies, the book where "Of Queens' Gardens" appeared, was published in 1865 and came out in new editions even into the twentieth century. Obviously Ruskin expressed a view that many

⁵ John Ruskin, "Of Queens' Gardens", as quoted in *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883, Volume 1: Defining Voices*, ed. Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets, William Veeder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 81.

people in Victorian England already embraced and that Henrietta Kent seems to comply with at least on a textual level.

It was a very common strategy among nineteenth-century women travel writers to ostensibly leave the roles of “doer, creator and discoverer” to men. Yet, the image circulated in travel criticism seems frequently to be based on the idea that travelling women are automatically feminists or proto-feminists. It has become a commonplace in discussions of nineteenth-century women travellers to use adjectives such as indomitable, intrepid, indefatigable and feisty. In the preface to her *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (1989), Dea Birkett refers to her subject as a “gallery of strong, independent, wilful women,” and in *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (1990), Shirley Foster maintains that “nineteenth-century Englishwomen acquired a reputation for their intrepitude and energy as travellers, noted by their own countrymen and foreigners alike.”⁶ In a Foreword to Birkett’s *Off the Beaten track: Three Centuries of Women Travellers* (2004), Sandy Nairne, Director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, writes that the book is a celebration of people who “overcame enormous barriers” and “challenges relating to prejudice and innate suspicion.”⁷ Views like these may be primarily produced in early varieties of feminist criticism where the foremost aim was to retrieve lost women writers and identify proto-feminist voices, but they are remarkably tenacious, perhaps because they are also very attractive. Thus the image of the plucky woman traveller is reiterated also in modern collections, as in the title and introduction of *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women’s New Travel Writing* (1998):

There’s a monstrous tribe which lives in our imaginations. They wear corsets and long tweed skirts, are armed with parasols and consider hairpins *de rigueur* even up the Amazon. They rampage through jungles, swatting flies and dispensing prejudices, their manifold items of luggage borne behind them by a snaking file

⁶ Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. ix; Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 4

⁷ Sandy Nairne, Director’s Foreword, Dea Birkett, *Off the Beaten Track: Three Centuries of Women Travellers* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2004), p. 7

of natives. [...] This is the tribe of women travel writers: bold, benign and clearly barking.⁸

The implication of the passage is that women who ventured abroad were extra courageous, because as a “monstrous tribe” they also defied the gender norms of their society. At the same time, the introduction to *Amazonian* shows the simultaneous operation of conflicting gender codes: on the one hand, the fact that the women travel at all makes them monstrous and different, on the other, their dress and general demeanour on the journey are consistent with a conventional understanding of femininity. This conflict is present also in S. H. Kent’s *Within the Arctic Circle*.

The interest in women’s travel writing mushroomed in the 1980s, at a time of vigorous activity in second-wave feminism and a growing academic attention to women’s literary history. As Margaret Ezell cautions, however, “our understanding of the past is shaped by largely unconscious acceptance and inculcation of present-day ideologies in our narratives of history.”⁹ This error seems to be particularly imminent when women travel writers are concerned. From the beginning, studies represented women’s travel as a subversive activity in correspondence with the view that the evolution of women’s writing coincided with the evolution of feminism, one of the central theoretical assumptions about literature and gender according to Ezell.¹⁰ The punning titles of Leo Hamalian’s *Ladies on the Loose* (1981) and Jane Robinson’s *Wayward Women* (1990) suggest that women travellers temporarily manage to escape a social control that nevertheless continues to operate, and the title of Robinson’s anthology *Unsuitable for Ladies* (1994) reinforces the idea. The title of Milbry Polk’s and Mary Tiegreen’s *Women of Discovery : A Celebration of Intrepid Women who Explored the World* (2001) again highlights women’s daring and courage. Although more nuanced pictures usually emerge in the texts of the works, the titles certainly suggest that women who travel subvert the gender norms of their society. It

⁸ Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler, Introduction, *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women’s New Travel Writing*, ed. Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler (London: Penguin, 1998), p. vii

⁹ Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 15

¹⁰ Ezell, p. 18

becomes difficult to fit women like S. H. Kent who at least textually conforms to the gender codes into this model.

A logical consequence of the indomitable-woman paradigm is the supposition that women's travel texts must be subversive where gender is concerned. Like Ezell, Nicola Diane Thompson warns against the danger of using present-day ideology to interpret the past so that only those women writers who can be seen as "consistent with current feminist ideas" or those who can be read as "subversive in their adherence to Victorian gender conventions" may be deemed worthy of retrieval.¹¹ There are certainly examples of female travel writers whose works constantly strain against the gender boundaries of their culture. But very often, as in the case of S. H. Kent, travel books by nineteenth-century women stress the authors' femininity and conventionality. Although some women's texts clearly challenge prevalent notions of gendered behaviour, others instead portray foreign travel as perfectly compatible with traditional versions of femininity. According to Shirley Foster, women may, for instance, emphasise their "private and domestic orientation" by employing the journal or letter form, or substitute "self-effacement or self-mockery for more aggressive or positive assertiveness in order to demonstrate true femininity."¹² A personal style is of course typical of touristic travel writing as such, including works by men, while a public-objective style characterises works with a more scientific approach, regardless of whether the writer is a man or a woman. Nevertheless, since the separate spheres ideology circumscribes women's opportunities to take part in public life, a privatising style becomes more or less a hallmark of women's travel writing in the nineteenth century. Thus Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake uses the personal form of letter-writing in her *A Residence on the Shores of the Baltic: Described in a Series of Letters* (1841), Annie, Lady Brassey draws attention to the womanly task of home-making in the title of her *A Voyage in the "Sunbeam": Our Home in the Ocean* (1878) and Ella C. Sykes indicates that she was able to maintain a lady-like stance in spite of travelling in *Through Persia on A Side-Saddle* (1898). In Kristi Siegel's summarising comment, to "get an audience, a woman needed to provide material

¹¹ Nicola Diane Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), p. 116

¹² Foster, p. 19

that was reasonably exciting; to keep an audience, she needed to remain a lady.”¹³ The titles of nineteenth-century women’s travel books, if not always the texts, seem to uphold the gender ideology of separate spheres, at times, to counteract the perceptions that travelling abroad was an unfeminine activity, but at times also to signal a sincere espousal of this gender contract.

When Henrietta Kent presents the northern parts of Scandinavia as eminently suitable for women tourists she consequently accomplishes this both by expanding her own gendered self through demonstrating her capabilities as a traveller, and by making the North fit the requirements of a conventional, nineteenth-century version of femininity. Her observations of life in northern Scandinavia lie within the parameters of what is perceived as women’s experience and her scientific frame of reference is the “feminine” science of botany. Her language is personal rather than authoritative and her style is more suited to the private than the public realm, despite the fact that she wrote for publication. Through this manner of description, S. H. Kent feminises the North and makes it more attractive for women. Indications of her independence and willingness to endure difficulties have the reverse effect, however, and suggest that Kent transgresses the codes of proper femininity. These opposing gender encodings constantly fluctuate and interact in the text.

The increase of women travellers in the second half of the nineteenth century could thus be interpreted as both an outcome of women’s unwillingness to keep to the gender contract and the result of a civilisation, domestication or feminisation of the wildernesses. Whatever the reasons, the development was not universally welcomed. Describing a journey to the English colonies in the 1880s James Anthony Froude compares the safety of the new steamships with women’s domination of the travel writing market:

The days went rapidly by. The cold might be unpleasant, but it was wholesome; we were all ‘well’ – how much lies in that word! – but we had no adventures. [...] The great ocean steamers are not driven into port by stress of weather, but go straight upon their way. Voyages have thus lost their romance.

¹³ Kristi Siegel, “Intersections: Women’s Travel and Theory,” *Gender, Genre and Identity in Women’s travel Writing*, ed. Kristi Siegel (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 2

No *Odyssey* is possible now, no 'Sindbad the Sailor,' no 'Robinson Crusoe,' not even a 'Gulliver's Travels,' only a Lady Brassey's Travels.¹⁴

The steamships that sturdily chug along on their routes remove any sense of adventure from overseas travel. In a similar way, Lady Brassey domesticates the idea of the sea-journey when she presents the Brasseys' sailing-boat as a home. S. H. Kent diminishes the thrill of the North Cape or the Swedish mountain regions by bringing her aging mother to northern Scandinavia. Like the technological developments that have made travel possible for everyone, the advent of women signifies the disappearance of excitement and romance, and places formerly surrounded by an aura of adventure are no longer worth visiting once women or the touristic masses have gained access to them.

Froude's negative reaction to the easy availability and feminisation of travel arises from the view that travel should equal exploration and discovery. "Lady Brassey's Travels" cannot be included in this model. If the exploration narrative and the travelogue are placed beside each other, the exploration account is almost always gendered masculine in relation to the popular travel account. When explorative travel is described in gendered terms, the feminine is almost always the object and the masculine the subject, the typical example being the male explorer traversing the female or virgin land. At the textual level, an important aspect is consequently how the writer presents herself or himself: as discoverer, adventurer, guest, tourist, coloniser, curio-seeker or simply somebody who has made a home in another part of the world for a time. These roles or positions are variously accessible to men and women and the notion of gendered travel is not dependent on the sex of the travel writer, but on the relationship between the authorial role and the objects of description. The governing idea is that the power relation between the discoverer and the land resembles the relationship between men and women under patriarchy. The explorer is masculinised and embodies

¹⁴ James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or, England and her Colonies* (1886; London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1907), p. 68 Also referred to in Anka Ryall, *Odyssevs i skjørt: Kvinnens erobring av reiselitteraturen* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2004), p. 35 and in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 38

culture whereas the land is feminised and represents nature, to be mastered, controlled and subdued. The “colonial mapping of subject lands” corresponds to “the representation of women within patriarchy,” as Catherine Nash notes.¹⁵ This comparison of the conquest of the natural world with the subjugation of women is the basis for eco-feminist critique.¹⁶

If landscape is redefined as a “way of seeing” instead of an object or image, it becomes obvious that it cannot be regarded as innocent or pre-existing, but as something that is constantly being produced.¹⁷ This production involves gendering, but the meaning of the gendered landscape is not predetermined. Especially in women’s travel writing, there are sometimes suggestions of an affinity between the places described and the describer, a kind of feminisation that makes foreign regions seem more woman-friendly. It could be argued that to render place as feminine smacks of complicity with patriarchal ideology or at least naivety, since it recalls the common binary opposition between Nature and Reason corresponding to Woman and Man. The ultimate meaning of a place made feminine is a matter of the writer’s (and/or reader’s) perspective, however. Thus, feminisation of place may be understood both as a negative and a positive move. The more positive variety is what usually emerges in S. H. Kent’s northern narrative.

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To begin with, the narrative style marks Henrietta Kent’s *Within the Arctic Circle* as feminine. Word choice, simple, non-technical language, descriptive models taken from women’s sphere of experience and a sometimes chatty, stereotypically feminine tone combine to give the illusion that the travelogue is basically a private document, a direct

¹⁵ Catherine Nash, ‘Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender, and Landscape in Ireland’, in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (eds.) *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Guilford, 1994), p. 234

¹⁶ See, for instance, Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Karen J. Warren (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997)

¹⁷ Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczygiel, Introduction, *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space*, ed. Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczygiel (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3

communication to a friend. The 1878 comment on *Gath to the Cedars* in *The Times* makes this exact point: “Miss Kent writes agreeably and easily, rather as though she were writing to her friends than for the general public, occupying herself more with the facts of the present than the fancies or even the facts of the past.”¹⁸ The persona Kent projects is that of a reasonably well-educated, middle-aged, middle-class woman, in no sense “manly” or “unfeminine,” but satisfied to take out her books and her knitting when forced to wait for horses (vol. 1, p. 27) and expressing a wish to buy “wool and knitting-pins wherewith to beguile the time” soon after her arrival in Sweden (vol. 2, p. 29). According to Shirley Foster, the canon of nineteenth-century female literature prescribed “appropriate subject matter and style” understood as “topics of romance and home and family life, emphasis on feeling and sentiment, and delicacy and emotionalism of expression,” and the woman who assumed a voice of authority or treated what was considered to be masculine topics “ran the risk of being regarded as unwomanly and presumptuous.”¹⁹ Nicola Diane Thompson has made clear that women writers were reviewed on the basis of how far their works corresponded to or deviated from reviewers’ assumptions about womanly style and content.²⁰ Hence, a privatising style was frequently necessary to ensure publication and sales. Toward the end of the nineteenth century it may even have become financially advantageous for a writer to foreground her feminine sensibility. Mary Suzanne Schriber argues that women “capitalized on the ideological construction of gender to advertise their work as different from men’s; thus in a crowded market they distinguished their works for readers.”²¹ Men’s writing might have been regarded as more informative and authoritative, but women’s works were often seen as livelier and more readable. In 1883, a *Times* reviewer thus described the feminine style of Mrs. F. D. Bridges’ *Journal of a Lady’s Travels Round the World* (1883) as “crisp and bright,”

¹⁸ “Christmas Books,” *The Times* 19 Dec. 1878, p. 3 col. D

¹⁹ Foster, pp. 18-19

²⁰ Thompson, p. 108

²¹ Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Telling Travels: Selected Writings by Nineteenth-Century American Women Abroad* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. xxviii

preferring it to the “long drawn out” narrative of Hugh Wilkinson’s *Sunny Lands and Seas* (1883).²²

In line with the understanding that a properly feminine text should give prominence of domestic themes and areas perceived to be of interest to women, there is a strong focus on house interiors and flowers in Kent’s narrative. Common feminine topics, as listed by Shirley Foster, were “appearance, costume and manners of women; details of domestic life such as household management and culinary habits; behaviour towards children; marriage customs and female status.”²³ Kent notes the “picturesque costumes of the country,” singling out the dress of the peasants near Christiansand as especially “curious or grotesque” but also noting the rich embroidery and the silver buttons that she considers the “prettiest of any costume of Europe” (vol. 1, p. 5). She gives detailed accounts of the places where she stays, commenting on aspects like the state of the bed-linen (vol. 1, p. 22-23), the pot-plants and the “dainty white and gold china cups” used for coffee (vol. 1, pp 37-38). The houses along the northern coast of Norway are mentioned with approval, presenting “a neater appearance than we had previously noticed on the coast, neat and tidy as most Scandinavian houses are” (vol. 1, p. 77) and the description of Kent’s lodgings at Hemmingsvær seems tailored to a gendered conception of tastes:

Later on we sat down to breakfast in the neat dining-room, the walls of which were covered with dark plain paper, relieved by gilt bordering (it was evidently the family sitting-room), a piano and a clock were in one corner of the apartment, one door of which led into a neatly-arranged, well-stocked china closet, and another into a large, spacious kitchen. Between the doors hung a prettily ornamented box like a clock, but on its door opening we perceived it was a receptacle for keys, which each hung on its respective hook. (vol. 1, pp. 180-81)

Kent also provides information about how to be polite in Norway, supplying the imperfect Norwegian phrases “‘Taken for madden’ (thanks for your meal)” to be used after dinner and “‘Taken for sist’ (approx. thanks for your hospitality when we last met) to be used “the next time you meet your entertainer” (vol. 1, pp. 186-87). What is

²² No title, *Times* 21 Jul. 1883, p. 5, col. B

²³ Foster, p. 24

worth remarking upon differs in men's and women's accounts, and Kent's narrative highlights aspects that lie within a conventionally feminine scope of reference. The strategy may be understood as compliance with the codes regulating middle-class women's lives in the nineteenth century, but as Shirley Foster suggests, it can also function as "a covert means of challenging the male norm and of establishing a more female-oriented genre."²⁴

A similar doubleness characterises the science of botany, perhaps the most common framework for scientific observations in women's travel texts. Botany offered women access to scientific knowledge, but it could also be understood in ways that reaffirmed "conduct book constructions of femininity."²⁵ The science went through a series of gendered transformations after the introduction on Carl Linnaeus's sexual system on the British scholarly scene following the publication of *Systema Naturae* in 1735. Early detractors held that the moral and social order might be endangered by Linnaeus's sexual metaphors or at the very least that the sexual classification system was a threat to female modesty.²⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft was among the thinkers reacting against this view:

Purity of mind, or that genuine delicacy, which is the only virtuous support of chastity, is near akin to that refinement of humanity, which never resides in any but cultivated minds. [...] What a gross idea of modesty had the writer of the following remark! "The lady who asked the question whether women may be instructed in the modern system of botany, consistently with female delicacy? – was accused of ridiculous prudery nevertheless, if she had proposed the question to me, I should certainly have answered – They cannot." Thus is the fair book of knowledge to be shut with an everlasting seal! On reading similar passages I have reverentially lifted up my eyes and heart to Him who liveth for ever and ever, and said, O my Father, hast Thou by the very constitution of her nature forbid Thy child to

²⁴ Foster, p. 24

²⁵ Sam George, "Linnaeus in Letters and the Cultivation of the Female Mind: 'Botany in an English Dress'," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (2005), p. 5

²⁶ Sam George, "'Not Strictly Proper For A Female Pen': Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Sexuality of Botany," *Comparative Critical Studies* 2.2 (2005), pp. 191-193

seek Thee in the fair forms of truth? And, can her soul be sullied by the knowledge that awfully calls her to Thee?²⁷

For Wollstonecraft, knowledge cannot be immodest since it involves the search for truth and thus brings the seeker closer to God. Others among her contemporaries appreciated that the Linnaean system ordered nature in a hierarchical model. This hierarchy corresponded well with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century world views, and thus the science could function as a tool of socialisation, helping women in particular to realise the value of an ordered society.²⁸ Gradually, botany began to be understood simply as a pastime for ladies, and by the mid-nineteenth-century most of the fear that women would be offended by botanical descriptions and nomenclature had disappeared.²⁹ Women were seen as particularly suited for the study of nature since they were so close to being nature themselves, and since botanical pursuits could take place in a familial setting there was no danger that great numbers of female botanists would enter public life.³⁰ Between 1760 and 1830, botany thus became increasingly feminised.³¹

But botany was also a university discipline, however, and women were excluded from the universities both as teachers and students through most of the nineteenth century. As Ann Shteir shows, from 1760-1830, “the gendered shape of botanical culture gave women access to botany, but after 1830 the same gendering was inverted to deny them access.”³² Literary botany, popularising works and botanical illustration were fields that still remained open to women, but academic study was part of the masculine domain. At the time of Susanna Henrietta Kent’s northern tour, botany consequently

²⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (1792; London: William Pickering, 1989), pp. 192-93. The writer who considers the study of botany incompatible with feminine modesty is John Berkenhout who expresses this opinion in *A Volume of Letters to his Son at the University* (Cambridge: 1790), p. 307

²⁸ George, “Linnaeus in Letters,” p. 9

²⁹ George, “Linnaeus in Letters,” p. 1

³⁰ Ann Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora’s Daughters and Botany in England 1760 to 1860* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p-35

³¹ Shteir, p. 50

³² Shteir, p. 169

belonged both in the feminine and the masculine realm, although divided into amateur and professional branches.

Both men and women travellers to the north almost invariably express their admiration for Linnaeus and to some extent position themselves as his followers. In Kent's text he is invoked both as "the great botanist" (vol. 2, p. 86, p. 218) and as an authority on Lapland (vol. 1, p. 160, note 1).³³ Kent writes herself into the Linnaean tradition by continually commenting on flowers and plants, as when she describes Hemmingsvær: "The ground was dotted with several kinds of flowers, amongst others the pretty white cornus, 'skov, stierner,' or forest star, as it was called. Gentians, &c." (vol. 1, p. 180). Although only half-seriously, she refers to her observations as "botanical research" (vol. 1, p. 130). Often, she provides the Latin name of the plant, signalling her class and her education, as well as her scientific approach, as when she notes the presence of the reindeer moss "*Lichen rangiferinus*" (vol. 2, p. 61, p. 117), the trumpet moss "*Lichen deformis*" (vol. 2, p. 119) and the "*Saxifraga cotyledon*" (vol. 2, p. 139). Ann Shteir points out that such "[a]ccess to Latin nomenclature was a form of intellectuality in itself, a sign of a larger world to which some women wanted access."³⁴ Yet, Kent's display of Latin terminology is not only for show. On a small scale, she produces new knowledge by reporting on the distribution of plants in the form accepted by the scientific community. The amateurish nature of her botanical observations reinforces the feminine tone of her narrative, but she also joins a scientific conversation where most professional participants are men.

Apart from the woman-coded scientific framework and the stylistic and thematic indicators that mark her text as feminine, Kent's regret that "especially ladies" do not venture north signals that she is writing for women (vol. 1, p. vii). Her aim is to demonstrate the accessibility of the North. From the very start, she undertakes to show that the traveller's sex is inconsequential on the northern tour. Crossing the North Sea, for instance, is described as equally bad for men and women (vol. 1, p. 2) and she demonstrates by her own example that it is perfectly acceptable to go to the North Cape by steamship (vol. 1, p. 31). Physical strength is consequently not

³³ Carl Linnaeus's *Lachesis Lapponica, or, A Tour in Lapland* was translated into English and published as early as 1811. The first translation into Swedish did not appear until 1889.

³⁴ Shteir, p. 56

required. Although she complains a little about discomfort aboard the steamer, she quickly changes her focus to the charm of the voyage and the pretty views (vol. 1, pp. 58-59). On a few occasions, she accepts that women may have special needs, however. When it is to her advantage, she does not hesitate to demand the courtesy due to a lady, as when she turns out the male passengers and requisitions the smoking cabin for her and some fellow women passengers to sleep in on board a crowded ship (vol. 1, pp. 217-22). In Hammerfest she proclaims the accommodation unsuitable for women: “there were no servants, and nothing ladies could eat,” indicating her class expectations as well as her gendered standards (vol. 1, p. 88). Travelling with her mother, she is aware of their vulnerability as women on their own in a foreign country, realising that “nothing but their own integrity” prevented their Swedish guides from robbing and murdering them (vol. 2, p. 167). At the same time, the episode functions to emphasise the safety of northern travel since the women were not, after all, attacked.

Despite occasional contradictions on the level of detail, the overall impression is that the North is a suitable destination for women tourists. The feminisation of the region is partly a sign of the shift in the genre of travel writing from narratives of discovery to accounts of more leisurely pursuits. This genre development is obvious also in, for instance, Alex Hutchinson’s *Try Lapland: A Fresh Field for Summer Tourists* (1870), describing a visit to northern Sweden by Hutchinson and his wife and like Kent’s narrative, written with the aim to popularise northern travel. Corresponding processes affected the images of travel destinations all over the world. Thus English ideas about Italy became more and more feminised as the cult of the ancient Romans was replaced by an interest in art and opera music. The statue “Venus de Medici,” described by John Ruskin in 1840 as “one of the purest and loftiest images of woman that it was possible to conceive” became a particularly important symbol of the change from an understanding of Ancient Rome as a masculine culture to the conception of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italy as a feminine place.³⁵ Emma Hamilton, married to the British envoy to Naples, Sir William Hamilton, and later Lord Nelson’s mistress, became a live

³⁵ Roderick Cavaliero, *Italia Romantica: English Romantics and Italian Freedom* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 174

equivalent to the “Venus de Medici” through her popular performances or “poses,” and a fictional correspondence was the eponymous heroine of Madame de Staël’s runaway success *Corinne ou l’Italie* (1807).³⁶ Travel accounts by women like Hester Piozzi (1741–1821), Mary Shelley (1797–1851) and others confirmed the association between Italy and woman.

Some travel books about the North maintained the image of northern Scandinavia as the home of the Vikings, however. Bayard Taylor’s 1858 travelogue *Northern Travel: Summer and Winter Pictures of Sweden, Lapland and Norway* belongs to this tradition, and at least when conveying his experiences of the Swedish winter, Taylor construes the North as a masculine region that offers adventure and invites only the toughest traveller. For Taylor, northern history with its Vikings and its warlike kings forms a backdrop to his construction of the manly North. In Kent’s narrative, history has a much less prominent place, although it should be noted that the historical surveys that conclude both volumes of *Within the Arctic Circle* include only male figures such as kings and saints (vol. 1, pp. 225–246; vol. 2, pp. 207–221). Like most European and American visitors at the time Kent follows the convention of regarding Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII as warlike giants of history, to be revered and admired (vol. 2, p. 207). Kent’s focus on male historical figures is perhaps not surprising given the state of history-writing at the time, but she certainly fails to take the opportunity to reverse this male-dominated model by including stories about women of the past. Her only gesture towards a more woman-oriented image of northern culture is the fact that the close of her narrative is a long quotation from Fredrika Bremer’s *The Midnight Sun: A Pilgrimage* from 1849 (vol. 2, pp. 223–24).

Ideas about a country’s past contribute to the gender-coding of a location, and a crucial aspect is obviously how the inhabitants, past and present, are gendered. In Kent’s account the objectification and feminisation of the region begins almost immediately with a patronising and somewhat contradictory description of the people as “kindly-hearted, simple-minded, unsophisticated, and intelligent” (vol. 1, p. x). She describes the farmers of Norway and Sweden almost like cattle, as “well-grown, robust” and “fine specimens” (vol. 1, p. 6) and “hale, hearty, sturdy fellows” (vol. 2, p. 13). There are similar

³⁶ Cavaliero, pp. 175–79

descriptions also in Bayard Taylor's text, but the context is different and the view of the farmers as "no milksops" and allusions to the Vikings rather reinforce a masculine gendering of the North.³⁷ Kent does not expect the presence of polite manners in the North, and comments with surprise on the young girls who waited on them "with a courtesy and grace unexpected in these remote regions" during the stay in Hemmingsvær (vol. 1. 178). But there is a neat reversal of this Anglo-Saxon condescension, tinged with at least a little self-irony, when Kent relates how a Swedish woman asks her if England is not a nice country since she has left it (vol. 2, pp. 30-31). In this episode, at least, Kent shows herself reduced from a position of superiority to a kind of immigrant or supplicant status.

Whereas the depiction of the farming population mainly exemplifies a kind of benevolent infantilisation, the Sami are described in considerably more negative terms:

A number of Lapps crowded the place. Diminutive, yellow-skinned, swinish-eyed, high-cheek boned, squat-nosed, thick-lipped people, dressed in short skirts made of reindeer skin girt by a cord about their waists, gaiters of the same material, with tall blue caps on their black lanky-haired heads. (vol. 1, pp. 85-86)

Presented in this way, the Sami are not so much feminised as objectified, particularly since Kent, like many other commentators, notes in connection with a Sami beggar that his or her sex cannot be determined (vol. 2, pp. 104-05). The journey in Sweden provides occasion for a few, more positive comments (vol. 2, pp. 131-132, p. 167), but the overall image conveyed is that the Sami are infants, animals or objects. As objects, they are available for consumption and it is symptomatic that Kent regards the nomad village near Tromsø as primarily organised to provide entertainment for tourists:

Our chief object in staying a few days in Tromsø had been to take that opportunity of visiting a Lapp encampment, as in summer they come down from the Fjelds with their herd, and

³⁷ Bayard Taylor, *Northern Travel. Summer and Winter Pictures of Sweden, Lapland, and Norway* (London: Sampson Low, 1858) 39. See Heidi Hansson, "Bayard Taylor's *Northern Travel* and the Genders of the North," *Edda* 106.1 (2006), p 21

are easily to be found in Tromsdal on the eastern side of the Fjord. (vol. 1, pp. 146-47)

There is no significant difference between references to the people or the reindeer in the camp, and Kent does not acknowledge the Sami village as in any sense a real home-place. For her, the camp, the deer and the Sami constitute a spectacle. To claim that the Sami are only innocent victims is to deny them their agency, however. The village's inhabitants develop a basic tourist industry by demanding payment, turning the visitors' interest in their life-style into profit like the Native Americans who put on "Indian" performances at the Niagara Falls.³⁸ The sense that both Sami and visitors only take part in a show is strengthened when Kent mentions how one of the reindeer was led down to the boat so that a member of the tourist party waiting there might see it, or comments that once the tourists' "curiosity concerning the reindeer had been gratified," the herd was released (vol. 1, pp. 152-55). There is no real access. The tourists are spectators, not participants in Sami culture and remain firmly outside the realities of local life.

Kent's descriptions of Sami life can be linked to an imperialist, orientalisating contempt for foreign peoples, but this does not necessarily mean that the entire text should be regarded as an example of cultural imperialism. Reading only part of the text allows for such generalisations, but when the Sami passages are juxtaposed with sections showing that the tourists, too, become spectacles, this interpretation falters somewhat. On several occasions Kent relates how she and her mother are objects of curiosity. When first coming across the Sami in Hammerfest Kent comments:

From some cause or other, *what*, we could not fix upon, as we were one and all quietly dressed and unremarkable in appearance from any other traveller or Norwegian lady of the place, our appearance seemed to afford them uncontrollable amusement, and so genuine was their merriment, that though far from flattering, we almost found it infectious. (vol. 1, p. 86)

³⁸ See Karen Dubinsky, "Vacations in the 'Contact Zone': Race, Gender, and the Traveler at Niagara Falls," *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, ed. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, with the assistance of Beth McAuley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 251-69

On returning to Hammerfest after her tour to the North Cape she again notes that they “gave fresh amusement to the Lapp community by wandering about the place” (vol. 1, p. 139), in Kvikkjokk, they were an “inexhaustible source of curiosity” to the Sami, and on board the ship to Lofoten, they were closely inspected by their fellow passengers, even their books taken from them and examined (vol. 1, p. 204). Such incidents are repeated throughout the text and reveals that Kent realises that she does not only consume the North but is also herself an object of consumption.

The actual location of the narrative self in the landscape is an aspect that establishes the gender of the traveller in relation to the gender of place. A position privileging visuality suggests the controlling attitude of the surveyor and is usually interpreted as male, the landscape surveyed understood as feminine.³⁹ When Kent assumes the aloof position of a spectator in connection with the Sami camp she consequently assumes a masculine position that feminises the camp’s inhabitants. The disembodied gaze can only establish a one-way relationship which genders the land and its people female. Placing the self within the landscape or participating in local culture, on the other hand, suggest a two-way relationship where interaction is possible. In this case, the traveller does not only define and control the land but is also affected by his or her exposure to natural and cultural features. When the visitor is embodied and to a certain extent vulnerable, his or her association with the land or its culture is usually coded as female, while the landscape becomes more masculine. At least the female-gendering of place relies on the describer’s ability to remain distant, and it is significant that it is mainly in travel and exploration literature that places are gendered at all. Gender is rarely a significant feature of an insider’s construction of place, nor is it particularly relevant to an inside audience. Thus, the intended readership is also of importance for if and how a place is gendered in a text.

The traveller’s position is never stable, not even in textual form, and the same is obviously true about the gender conferred on to the place described. In Henrietta Kent’s *Within the Arctic Circle* the title

³⁹ See, for instance Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 213; Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 88, p. 107

suggests that the visitor is located inside the landscape which indicates a more embodied, female connection with the land, but the narrative also contains examples of disembodied, visual control, as when Kent describes finding a position at the waterfall Lierfossen where she “commanded the whole extent of the superb fall” (vol. 1, pp. 249-50) or when the party “obtained a very beautiful view over the rich, fertile valley” *en route* to Östersund in Sweden (vol. 2, p. 3) The phrases “to command or obtain a view” may be commonly used to refer to natural sights, but they also preserve a cultural attitude that takes the human domination of nature for granted. The observation that Hammerfest is “not a bad looking little town in a photograph” indicates the control inherent in framing (vol. 1, p. 85). A place that can be contained within a frame, conceptual or otherwise, is more readily understood as feminine than, for instance, the boundless and frequently frightening forests of Northern Scandinavia (vol. 2, p. 130, p. 137).⁴⁰

On the whole, however, Kent shows herself as profoundly affected by the North. Her body is unusually present in the text, both in connection with episodes demonstrating mettle and determination and incidents showing discomfort and suffering. Descriptions of fatigue (vol. 1, p. 113, pp. 115-17, pp. 119-21), uncomfortable vehicles (vol. 2, p. 61-62, p. 184), difficult walks (vol. 2, p. 96) and the plague of mosquitoes (vol. 2, p. 113, pp. 122-26, pp. 150-51, p. 184) recur in the narrative. Kent’s body is consequently acknowledged in a way that bestows power on the landscape and feminises the traveller.⁴¹ At the same time, the fact that she shows herself able to endure the hardships can be seen as an expansion of her gendered self. After a difficult climb through sharp rocks and snow near the North Cape she comments:

Putting aside pluck and spirit, to give in was an impossibility, as I could neither be left behind to rest, or have retraced my way without the whole party to the boat. So *Never!* was our emphatic

⁴⁰ See Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. 82-89 for a discussion of landscape gardening and the feminine beauty of the bounded landscape.

⁴¹ There are similar examples of feminisation in Bayard Taylor’s *Northern Travel* in sections where intense cold or snow storms almost defeat the travellers. See Hansson, “Bayard Taylor’s *Northern Travel* and the Genders of the North,” pp. 27-28.

response, and suiting the action to the word, we sprang to our feet and resumed our walk with renewed alacrity, despite many a misgiving as to whether it would be on our own feet we should return. (vol. 1, pp. 107-08)

Both courage and discomfort are exemplified in the passage, and it could be argued that Kent's determination to go ahead is a matter of gender-crossing since she refuses to be bound by the norms regulating femininity that would urge her to give in to her weakness and rest or go back. Her admission that the walk entails considerable difficulty, on the other hand, shows that she has allowed herself to be affected by the place and is, in a sense, controlled by the harsh environment. The tension between these conflicting gender styles is dissolved when the section ends with a description of the party engaged in the homely task of making tea: "Never before or since was there such super-excellent tea!" (vol. 1, p. 111). In Ursula LeGuin's short story "Sur" (1982), about a group of women setting out to discover the South Pole in 1909, tea-making functions as a symbol of homeliness and feminine modesty:

On the twenty-second of December, 1909, we reached the South Pole. The weather was, as always, very cruel. Nothing of any kind marked the dreary whiteness. We discussed leaving some kind of mark or monument, a snow cairn, a tent pole and flag; but there seemed no particular reason to do so. Anything we could do, anything we were, was insignificant in that awful place. We put up the tent for shelter for an hour and made a cup of tea, and then struck for "90° Camp."⁴²

Although the story is based on the idea that the women reach the Pole three years before Amundsen, there is no sense of victory. The women are depicted as almost defeated by the environment, and symptomatically they refrain from erecting any kind of structure to mark their achievement or claim the Pole as their own. The tea-party at the North Cape in Kent's text feminises the situation in a similar way. Kent thus occupies at least two contradictory gendered positions in her work, one signifying her adherence to conventional

⁴² Ursula LeGuin, *The Compass Rose: Stories* (1982; New York: Perennial, 2005), p. 363. I am grateful to Anka Ryall, University of Tromsø, for drawing my attention to this story.

expectations on women and one demonstrating her opposition to constricting gender codes.

Both the gender of place and the gender of Kent as the describer rely to a great extent on the gendered aesthetic frameworks that govern the text. Representations according to picturesque ideals and descriptions foregrounding dramatic natural formations in accordance with the tradition of the sublime succeed each other throughout the text. Without any sense of contradiction, examples of visual control and framing appear alongside passages that figure the landscape as powerful and the visitor as insignificant. A comparison of a Norwegian mountain peak with the Matterhorn demonstrates that Kent sometimes applies an Alpine paradigm that invites the language of the sublime (vol. 1, p. 69). Precipitous crags supported by huge boulders of rock become “proof of creative might and power” in nature (vol. 1, p. 33), and the uncontrollable or primordial aspects of the North are highlighted in descriptions of the “wild-looking shore” of the Namsen Fjord (vol. 1, p. 60), the wild mournful scenery of Magerøy (vol. 1, p. 103), the “weird and grey” forest close to the Swedish border (vol. 2, p. 9) and the primeval forests in Lapland (vol. 2, p. 130, p. 137). Such awe-inspiring sublime scenery is normally coded as masculine in nineteenth-century travel writing, but the meanings of sublime landscapes may differ considerably.⁴³ Bayard Taylor, for instance, variously establishes an affinity between himself and the sublime North and variously shows himself able to withstand the effects of this sublimity and physically or mentally conquer the land. In Kent’s narrative, the sublime is sometimes nothing more than a rather diluted aesthetic category, but at other times it functions as an indication of the power of the North. This is particularly the case when features of the region are presented as indescribable or mysterious. The Lofoten islands, in particular, achieve an almost otherworldly character in the text:

Of all the lovely scenery that the northern coast affords, I know nothing to surpass the indescribable beauty, the ethereal loveliness, of the long ranges of lofty, snowy rocks, with peaks

⁴³ See Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes, *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 280-88 for a useful overview of the sublime as an aesthetic category for nineteenth-century travellers in Norway.

of every imaginable fantastic and contorted form. As we first beheld them rising out of the bright blue ocean, a mass of dazzling whiteness diversified by bluish shadows, and although distant above forty, not looking more than six or seven, miles off in the clear Arctic atmosphere, one felt inclined to think this lovely vision must be a mirage, which would presently change and dissolve from view. It seemed too beautiful, ethereal, and unearthly to be real, and it is impossible to adequately describe it. (vol. 1, pp. 73-74)

The midnight sun eludes explanation in a similar way, as “the aspect of an hour and colouring for which their [sic] is no name” (vol. 1., p. 74) and a phenomenon that upsets “all normal phraseology” since the blazing light makes it impossible to refer to the late hours as “night” (vol. 1, p. 80). The emotional effects of the landscape are emphasised when the shrubs and trees in a forest in Swedish Lapland are described in semi-Gothic terms as presenting “indistinct and shadowy aspects which filled the mind with solemn and mysterious fancies” (vol. 2, p. 182).

Although the meaning of the sublime is far from stable in travel texts, there is usually some indication that the visitor is emotionally or physically affected by the view. Such effects are largely absent from descriptions of scenery perceived as picturesque. By the mid-nineteenth century, the term picturesque had become so watered down that it was mainly used to refer to something vaguely pleasant or pretty. A typical example is Bayard Taylor’s account of the Norwegian farmland: “Hitterdal, with its enclosed fields, its harvests, and groups of picturesque, substantial farm-houses, gave us promise of good quarters for the night.”⁴⁴ The picturesque landscape does not challenge – it comforts. According to Shin-ichi Anzai, the association between women and the picturesque has a long history, and the most typical objects viewed in this manner in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were landscape gardens, natural scenery and human figures like women and the poor.⁴⁵ As comforting and pleasing, the picturesque is also superficial, in the sense that the “picturesque eye”

⁴⁴ Taylor, p. 351

⁴⁵ Shin-ichi Anzai, “Transplantation of the Picturesque: Emma Hamilton, English Landscape, and Redeeming the Picturesque,” *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space*, ed. Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczygiel (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 55

is “content to examine the appearances of things without necessarily seeking their cause or meaning.”⁴⁶ The picturesque object is powerless, in contradistinction to the scenes of the sublime. It exists, but it does not mean anything. Its main function is to inspire a vague sense of well-being and aesthetic delight. Understood in this way, the picturesque becomes perfectly attuned to nineteenth-century constructions of femininity. In S. H. Kent’s text the term primarily appears in connection with man-made objects or structures, like the “picturesque costumes” of the Finnish-speaking minority in northern Norway (vol. 1, p. 139), a “picturesque churchyard” (vol. 1, p. 207), picturesque churches (vol. 2, p. 14. p. 140. p. 210) and the “picturesque city” of Stockholm (vol. 2, p. 210). Hence, her application of the term seems to require the presence of a kind of ornamentation, a feature otherwise strongly associated with femininity.

By the 1870s, “picturesque” had become more or less synonymous with “pretty,” and in the process it had acquired secondary meanings like “undeveloped,” “quaint,” “unspoilt” and “diminutive.”⁴⁷ In Kent’s narrative, “pretty” and “picturesque” are virtually interchangeable, with “pretty” being the more frequent, especially in the second volume where the Swedish segment of the journey is described. The adjective is used about parlours and rooms (vol. 2, p. 18, p. 26), flowers (vol. 2, p. 19), a town (vol. 2, p. 51), a forest (vol. 2, p. 61) and scenery (vol. 2, p. 62, p. 184), and is practically meaningless as far as information goes. Instead, this “discourse of prettiness” becomes a signal of femininity, and as such, it functions to further underscore the accessibility of the North to women visitors.

By feminising and as a result, diminishing the North, Henrietta Kent seems to write herself into the tradition of colonial and orientalisating travel writing. This negative effect of feminisation is particularly obvious when the Sami are described. Even so, a superior approach to the foreign was more or less expected on the English book market, and the condescending attitude represented in the sections of the text concerning the Sami might in some degree have

⁴⁶ Ann Bermingham, “The Picturesque and Ready-to-Wear Femininity,” *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics Since 1770*, ed.. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 85

⁴⁷ See *Oxford English Dictionary*; Sidney K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. xiii

been a genre convention. At least it would have been to Kent's advantage to adhere to a model recognised by her middle-class readers. Nevertheless, there are few redeeming features in her objectifying accounts of the indigenous population, apart from the dubious effect that her own textual self becomes less feminine and more powerful in relation to her descriptions of the Sami. This questionable empowerment is neutralised, however, if Kent's feminisation of the North is more conventionally linked to her narrative persona. When understood as examples of a typically feminine approach, her feminisation strategies could instead be seen as evidence that she truly subscribed to the nineteenth-century gender ideology and its prescriptions of separate spheres for men and women.

Both these interpretations fall into the trap of understanding the feminine as necessarily inferior, however. With a change of perspective, it could be argued that Kent's focus on female experience and her reclamation of the woman's sphere as a legitimate field for observation and description manages to upgrade the feminine. The invention of her narrative self and the invention of place can be seen as interlinked and interacting strategies so that *who* she projects and *where* she is become two sides of the same coin. Kent's feminisation of certain aspects of northern nature could then be regarded as a valorisation of the natural world within a paradigm where nature and a simpler life-style are privileged in relation to a culture understood as the site of urbanisation, industrialisation and pollution. The region "within the Arctic Circle" becomes the opposite pole of the modern city where human beings are rapidly losing their meaning and function as they lose their connection with the land. The view of the North as an alternative to the highly industrialised central parts of Europe is present also in many works by men, not least Bayard Taylor's *Northern Travel* and the influential German travelogue *Reise durch Schweden, Norwegen, Lappland, Finnland und Ingermanland in den Jahren 1817, 1818 und 1820* (1823) by Friedrich Wilhelm von Schubert.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See Heidi Hansson, "'Ett Sveriges paradis.' Friedrich Wilhelm von Schubert i Norrland," *Norden und Süden. Festschrift für Kjell-Åke Forsgren zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Mareike Jendis, Anita Malmqvist and Ingela Valfridsson (Umeå: Skrifter från moderna språk nr 12, Umeå universitet, 2004), pp. 75-85 for a discussion of von Schubert's view of northern Sweden in the early nineteenth century as an Arcadian, innocent region.

Even though it includes the risk of reading the past according to the ideological systems of the present, Henrietta Kent could be placed in the parallel tradition of eco-feminism, and seen as part of a line that also included the eighteenth-century women botanists who shaped a scientific tradition compatible with conventional femininity.

The negative as well as the positive understanding of Kent's feminised presentation of northern Scandinavia can be linked to the larger models of the North as Utopia or Dystopia, pastoral Arcadia or frozen Hell. The final interpretation is a matter of power and perspective. But since there are more utopian than dystopian features in the text, it seems fair to conclude that at least to some extent, Kent's feminisation of the North contributes to increasing the cultural value of the natural and the feminine.