

# Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature



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By

Dimitrios Kassis

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7084-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7084-9

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to those who supported me throughout this three-year research. First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother and sisters who needed to make several sacrifices, both financially and emotionally, so that I could complete this research project; indeed without their understanding I would not have been able to complete my research. Apart from my family, it is equally vital to acknowledge the contribution of my supervisors Dr. Efterpi Mitsi, Dr. Vassiliki Markidou and Professor William Schultz; they provided me with the appropriate feedback and enlightened me about various issues of a practical nature. In addition, I wish to thank CIMO for financing my six-month research stay at the University of Eastern Finland under the supervision of Professor Jopi Nyman who undoubtedly contributed to my familiarisation with the Nordic historical context. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Risto Turunen for kindly assisting me in my research on nineteenth-century Finnish culture.

## ABSTRACT

Travel literature has always been associated with the construction of utopias which were founded on the idea of unknown lands. During their journeys in foreign lands, British travellers tended to formulate various critical opinions based on their background knowledge on the country visited. Their attempts to interpret other nations were often misinterpretations of the peoples in question as the Other. At the close of the eighteenth century, when Grand Tourism started to fade away and travelling became a mainstream activity for the middle-class Briton, travel writers attempted to identify with the corners of Europe which had not been spoiled by the spirit of industrialisation. Influenced by the concepts of the *Noble Savage*, the *Volksgeist* and the *Theory of Climate*, British travellers were eager to discover a utopia in sequestered places commonly labelled as peripheries, like Scandinavia. Moreover, throughout the nineteenth century, racial theories such as Teutonism, Anglo-Saxonism, and Nordicism dominated the imperialist discourse of Britain. Therefore, an increasing number of Victorian travellers treated the North as a utopian locus which could be examined in the light of the aforementioned racial theories, or were attracted to the Nordic countries due to their rediscovery of the Old Norse literature.

This book deals with travel narratives on the North that were produced from 1784 to 1897 by both male and female writers whose conceptualisation of gender impacted on their writing. In addition, I demonstrate that these travellers address Britishness through the narrative positions they assumed and through their split cultural identity: partially British, yet concurrently English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh. Given the increasing anti-Celtic spirit which emerged at that time, it is worth reflecting upon the instances in which the North was viewed as the hotbed of racial discourse on British nationhood.

## INTRODUCTION

This book explores the concept of Northern Utopia in British travel literature of the Victorian period. My purpose is to focus on different dimensions of utopian writing on the Nordic countries, concentrating on issues which are intimately linked to the representation of Scandinavian countries by Victorian writers. The originality of the particular research lies in the fact that, while the representation of Anglo-Scandinavian relations- on various levels (political, cultural and racial)- in British travel literature has relatively recently become the focus of scholarship, I attempt to go one step further by analysing those travelogues that have sunk into oblivion. Another factor that reinforces the originality of the particular book is the connection I attempt to draw between the ways in which the Victorian British travellers viewed Scandinavia and how they perceived their national identity. This link brings to the foreground issues of ethnicity related to Englishness, Scottishness, Irishness, and the challenge they pose to these travellers' self-definition.

These issues have already been touched upon, yet in a different vein, in three books of seminal importance to my research: Hildor A. Barton's *Northern Arcadia: Foreign Travelers in Scandinavia, 1765-1815*, Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes' *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* and Andrew Wawn's *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. I will be utilising rather extensively Barton's term "Northern Arcadia" which denotes the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries' set of perceptions about the North during, yet, I will lay greater emphasis on the nineteenth-century travel literature's departure from those beliefs pertaining to the North. I have also relied on Fjågesund and Symes' definition of the term "Northern Utopia" which aptly encapsulates the overall view of the North as a periphery "free from the burdensome conflicts of the past" or an "uncomplicated Utopia" (Fjågesund and Symes 42). However, unlike them, I treat Norway as only one facet of this Northern Utopia and attempt to prove how complicated this image of the North gradually became in the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed one of the aims of this book is to shed light on the parallel development of the inclusive British identity, on the one hand, and the "peripheral" identities of the Celtic populations of the British Isles as well as England,

on the other hand, as the British travellers who undertook journeys to the North inevitably carried with them stereotypical beliefs attached to their own nation. My work also draws upon Andrew Wawn's racial and literary approach to the issue of Anglo-Saxonism in Victorian travel literature as is delineated in his aforementioned book on the Northernist movement in Victorian Britain.

Inevitably, the perspective from which I seek to analyse Scandinavian and English identities entails historical and political dimensions, due to the nature of the research I have been conducting. First, I believe that the socio-cultural framework that influenced the travel writers' view of the Scandinavian countries should be underscored. Second, I would like to stress the fact that the various depictions of Northern Utopia are deeply interwoven with the racial and philosophical theories underpinning the travel writers' discourse. Third, I wish to point out that although the travel narratives I analyse provide by default useful insights into the Victorians' opinion of Scandinavia, I chose not only to present the ideological framework of the epoch but also to incorporate theoretical ramifications into the analysis of these texts- such as the notion of Otherness and the Rousseausque concept of the Noble Savage- in order to be able to further substantiate my arguments.

Notwithstanding the constant stress I will be laying on the reconstruction of Nordic identity by Victorian writers, the main purpose of my research is to link nineteenth-century Scandinavian nationhood with the Britons' contemporary attempt to forge a new identity. The point I wish to make through my analysis of the texts in question is that the nation-building process of Britain is inextricably connected to its juxtaposition with other countries belonging to the 'peripheral world', that is, cultures which did not pertain to Britain. For this reason, when referring to the national awakening of the Scandinavians during the nineteenth century, it is equally necessary to scrutinise the respective political framework in Victorian Britain that influenced Britain's own self-projection in relation to other nations.

It is also important to discuss how influential the writer's gender was on the views of the foreign cultures of the North. Equal stress will be laid on the role of race in the national awakening of both the Britons and the Scandinavians in conjunction to the theories of Gobinism/ Teutonism, Anglo-Saxonism and Nordicism. My purpose, therefore, is to approach Scandinavian identity in tandem with the contemporary racial theories, the spirit of which permeates the depiction of Scandinavia as a utopian locus. Finally, I will attempt to illustrate the importance of Scandinavia in the nation-building project of the British Empire; given the frequent link that

postcolonial discourse tends to draw between the metropolis and the colonies, I aspire to show that Britain's cultural discourse on Scandinavia paved the way for and contributed to the peak of the British Empire. In other words, Scandinavia constituted an ideological hotbed of British nationalism throughout the nineteenth century.

The first part of the book delineates the theoretical background on Scandinavian identity in the Victorian era. Given the rising imperial system in nineteenth-century Britain, the concept of the North was associated with the nation-building project of the Britons, that is, the forging of British identity generically termed Britishness. This nascent concept of Britishness comes to the fore through the Act of Union in 1707<sup>1</sup>, and despite the social turmoil and political tensions it triggered, "the Union state brooked no rivals, but neither did it try to eradicate its constituent nationalities" (Robert Colls 35). In fact, British nationhood was linked to a split national identity of the British citizen, most Britons have always been aware of their separate Scottish, English or Welsh identity "and for an increasing number of them this other national identity has come to be regarded as a primary identity, and the British identity only a secondary identity, or even an identity they no longer want" (Gamble and Wright 1). This is particularly true in the case of the English who, being the dominant ethnic group of the British Isles, were particularly reluctant to identify themselves as British, an umbrella term that diminished their prevalent position as the central power and obviously attributed equal status to the Celtic "peripheries". As pointed out by Paul Langford,

But accepting that being British might involve some lessening of what it was to be English, was far more controversial. In periods when the expansion of the English state stimulated a commitment to a wider British identity, including the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it did little to erode a deeper stratum of commitment to the language of Englishness. (13)

In that sense, the English grew weary of the sudden ascension of the Scottish, Irish and Welsh Britons to the political life of the country, and therefore sought to differentiate themselves from the Celtic other by

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<sup>1</sup> Trade and social relations were considerably affected by such a Union and some Scots treated this Act as an act of treason; Robert Burns addressed his compatriots with the following verses: "O would, ere I had seen the day that Treason thus could sell us, my auld grey head had lien in clay, Wi' Bruce and loyal Wallace!" (Hogg 56).

formulating several hypotheses which reinforced the idea of English racial supremacy over the rest of the British citizens. In fact, Kathleen Wilson contends that the notion of Englishness had already

emerged by the 1760s and 1770s as a nascent ethnicity that, although certainly defined through government, institutions and language, and sharing important features with European and Celtic cultures, still had within it what we would recognize as racialized assumptions, which ranged from the superior capacity of English people for rational thought to the greater aesthetic beauty of the ‘pink and white complexion’. (13)

In light of this Anglo-Celtic conflict, the British Empire in the nineteenth-century, and especially in the mid-Victorian period, is dominated by racial theories such as the theory of Teutonism, formulated by Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, and Anglo-Saxonism, which constitutes the ideological conceptualisation of the North by the founders of the Northernist school<sup>2</sup> in relation to the saga tradition and Viking culture. This ideological background is explored in close connection to the Anti-Celtic spirit that governed Britain, which partly accounts for the constant association of Scandinavian backwardness with the Celtic “effeminised” culture.

The principal hypothesis is that the British travel writers whom I have included in my research tend to view Scandinavia from an imperialist perspective. I will attach particular attention to the role of gender so that I can draw a comparison between male and female travel writing of the same subject-matter, mainly focusing on the travellers’ exploration of the gender dynamics in the countries visited as well as their self-depiction as adventure-heroes, gender transgressors, and scientific authorities. For this reason, factors such as age, social background, gender and origin (England, Ireland or Scotland) play a fundamental role in the analysis of the travellers’ personal agenda prior to their journeys.

The increasing interest in Scandinavia as an attractive locus of inspiration results from the negative impact of the French Revolution on traditional romantic settings such as Switzerland and Italy: as Barton argues, “in its nostalgic search for an unspoiled haven of peace, simplicity and innocence” (98), Europe finds a new Arcadia in Scandinavia, which functions as a modern utopia for all the European intellectuals who wish to apply the ideals of Romanticism to lands which seem to be exotic and less akin to British civilisation. The view of Scandinavia as the new Romantic

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<sup>2</sup> Its main representatives were William Morris, Frederick Metcalfe, and Sabine Baring-Gould.

heaven is mostly explained by the concept of “Northern Utopia” (Barton 15) that emerged during the late-eighteenth century, substituting the long-standing projection of the Nordic countries as a dystopian (savage) world, and presents them as a pastoral world, free from the increasing problems that their imperial neighbour faces at the peak of its industrialisation. During that period, Scandinavia is deemed as the Northern Arcadia by British writers who see it as the northern periphery which reinforces the image of simplicity and virtue, that is, “a dream that recurred constantly in the literature and art of late-eighteenth century” (Barton 149).

Nevertheless, despite the gradual construction of the Scandinavian countries as places of untouched beauty and independent inhabitants in travelogues as well as in fiction, these writers are strongly influenced by the embedded ideals and values of the British Empire given their failure to comprehend the peculiarities of Scandinavian nature: they tend to distort the image of the North (Davies 20) and they either idealise or reproach every new cultural trait they regard as alien to their own idiosyncrasy and value system, thus leading to misconceptions about the land that they initially endeavoured to approach with an open mind.

British travellers’ encounters with several aspects of Scandinavia serve as a valuable source of information that could encapsulate contradictory arguments on Scandinavian culture; in spite of the fact that the Nordic countries are regarded as unspoiled places by the majority of the British writers of the nineteenth century, at the same time they are heavily criticised for their low morals, disorganisation, poor cultural heritage and the reserved character of their people, thus highlighting through contrast the virtues of an idealised sociopolitical system in Britain. Bearing these different opinions on the North in mind, I investigate the writers’ different perspectives on Nordic culture and society as they are eager to apply their philosophical, racial, aesthetic and moral theories to the travel destination. The majority of these writers are idiosyncratically affected by the imperialist spirit which governed nineteenth-century British society’s effort to describe Scandinavian cultural identity through the lenses of the powerful British Empire.

At times this description proves to be erroneous and imprecise, given the historical conditions developing from the late-eighteenth century to the Victorian period: the very term Scandinavia, which is used extensively by British travellers, when they wish to refer to all the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland), is not acknowledged by the citizens of these countries, because this term signifies the unifying and imperialist tendencies of certain Nordic countries, i.e. Denmark and Sweden, at the expense of others (Norway, Finland and Iceland), which

see it as a political construct seeking to suppress their struggle for independence. Even though the Nordic countries are accused of being extremely static compared to the continuous social changes within the fabric of Victorian society, this view does not actually apply to Scandinavian history. In fact, the early- and mid-nineteenth century, during which most British writers choose to write about Scandinavia, is characterised by serious conflicts among the Nordic countries, given the dissolution of Denmark's Union with Norway (1814) and the subsequent annexation of the latter to Sweden. Despite their common cultural and linguistic roots, these countries intensely wish to acquire more autonomy during that period and they distance themselves from the traditional spirit of Scandinavism which emerged several decades after the scathing impact of the Napoleonic Wars on Nordic relations. Therefore, it is of major importance to examine the perspective from which travel writers tended to view Scandinavia, through a stark juxtaposition with their own cultural values and in relation to criteria such as gender and race. Their contradictory definition of Scandinavia as a heavenly yet uncivilised region is worth investigating, since these writers' travelogues either result in or differ from their constant exposure to the British imperialist ideology.

Moreover, the flamboyant and at times confusing image of Otherness constitutes a discourse which will be examined in the light of E. Said's theory of the periphery in his work *Culture and Imperialism* suggesting a binarism of Europe and its others- that is, the dominant civilisation and the marginalised subcultures of the colonised world. Drawing upon a binary opposition between Britain and Scandinavia, which obviously does not fall under the popular postcolonial model since both parts belong to Northern Europe, the project in question will take into serious account the effect of the Empire on the British writers' consideration of Scandinavian identity in the nineteenth century, when the imperialist ideology influenced practically every aspect of the British culture and economy. Yet I should stress that Said's theory, however relevant to the British context might be, it cannot fall neatly within it because on several occasions, Victorian travellers either challenge or abandon their imperialist discourse with the aim of identifying with the natives.

The second part of the book on the late eighteenth-century norms in travel literature will be contrasted to the rest of the travelogues, produced throughout the nineteenth century. Similarly to the Victorian concept of the North, which coincided with the view of the Nordic countries not as a barbarian zone but rather as a dynamic Old Saxon world, uncontaminated by the vices of civilisation, this chapter aims to give a brief depiction of the utopian perspective from which the selected eighteenth-century

travellers sought to picture the Nordic countries unlike their contemporaries. Owing to the tremendous transformations taking place throughout the nineteenth-century, which changed the mapping of the North, the concepts of language, nationality and national identity were brought to the fore “and there was no longer room for a broad and overlapping regional concept like the wide North” (Kliemann-Geisinger 75). This is the reason why this chapter focuses on the travelogues of two late eighteenth-century writers: William Coxe’s travelogue *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark* (1784) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s epistolary narrative *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796). While Coxe’s account constitutes a text which had significant philosophical and moral implications for the emergence of the subsequent theories on Nordic supremacy, Wollstonecraft’s travelogue aims to foreground differences in perceptions of the North through the use of the eighteenth-century aesthetic principles of the picturesque and the sublime.

The third part portrays Sweden both as a utopian and dystopian locus. On the one hand, Samuel Laing’s *Tour in Sweden* (1838) revolves around the moral and religious conditions in nineteenth-century Sweden, during the country’s effort to reconstruct its national identity after the traumatic experience of the Napoleonic Wars. It is worth exploring Laing’s text because it involves an interesting juxtaposition between the liberal system adopted by Norway and the rigidity of the Swedish socioeconomic model. Selina Bunbury’s *A Summer in Northern Europe* (1856) stresses the importance of Gotland as the centre of the Gothic civilisation. She formulates her own ideas in view of the Swedish Nationalist movement, expressed by the Gothic society<sup>3</sup> (Götiska Förbundet) “whose members extolled a Nordic past in which their own Gothic ancestors loomed larger than life-size” (Derry 232) contributing to the revival of the interest in the Viking lore.

In the fourth part, the focus lies on the Norwegian Romantic Nationalism that emerged as a reaction to the country’s annexation to the Swedish kingdom after the dissolution of the Dano-Norwegian Union. Due to Norway’s crucial role as a Northern Utopia amongst British mountaineers as well as amongst Scandinavian scholars, Frederick Metcalfe’s travelogue *The Oxonian in Thelemarken* (1858) constitutes an indicative example of the Oxford movement in mid-Victorian Britain, which reinforces the Anglo-Norse hypothesis that was based on historical, racial and linguistic criteria. Therefore, Metcalfe’s text is viewed in

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<sup>3</sup> Gothic society or Geatish society was a group of nineteenth-century Swedish intellectuals that focused on Scandinavian antiquity, established by the well-known writers Esaias Tegnér and Erik Gustaf Geijer

connection to his other work *The Englishman and the Scandinavian: or a Comparison of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Literature* in which he emphasises similarities in the literary tradition of both countries. Emily Lowe's text *Unprotected Females in Norway* (1856) merges her travel experience with her own views on gender by referring to the attractive qualities of the Norwegian peasantry and the wildness of the Norwegian landscape.

Due to the Victorian antiquarians' conceptualisation of Iceland as a Nordic Hellas, whose saga literature nurtures their effort to construct Britishness through its connection to the medieval literary tradition of the particular island, I will attach significant attention to the function of Iceland as the Ultima Thule. Given the impact of the Northernist hypothesis as a theoretical framework for the consolidation of the British Empire, Sabine Baring-Gould's *Iceland its Scenes and Sagas* (1863) is a text of pivotal importance, for it seeks to identify Britishness through the narration of the various sagas during his journey to the saga steads. Baring-Gould's text stresses the importance of the Northernist unity, firstly propagated by George Stephens, one of the most influential exponents of the Northernist movement in Britain, who translated Icelandic sagas into English and promoted a unity between Britain and the Scandinavian world. Finally, Elizabeth J. Oswald's travelogue *By Fell and Fjord or Scenes and Studies in Iceland* (1882) associates gender with the romancing of Iceland as the country of the sagas.

The sixth part presents the case of Denmark, occupying an imperialist position amongst Nordic countries until the 1860s, when the country turned into a midget state because of its conflict with Germany. The text which explores the Danish version of Northern Utopia is Horace Marryat's *A Residence in Jutland* (1862), which draws a historical link between the Scandinavianist movement after the country's loss of Schleswig Holstein, and Nikolaj Grundtvig's<sup>4</sup> meticulous effort to restore and promote the ancient Viking past of the country. Indeed, through the revival of its folk culture and its connection to Britain, as part of the same Germanic continuum, Grundtvig attempts to build up a new state, based on the Herderian notion of improvement, a cultural struggle frequently stressed in Marryat's text. However, in Lady Wilde's text *Driftwood from Scandinavia* (1884), written during her short residence in Denmark and Sweden, one can feel the Irish writer's effort to defend her Celtic heritage by alluding to the Irish folk tales and the Old Norse literature. In fact, her

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<sup>4</sup>Nikolaj Grundtvig(1783-1872) was a Danish pastor, writer, philosopher and politician as well as the ideological father of folk high schools

text relies on a reversed pattern of the Nordicist theory; instead of focusing on the virtues of Britishness, the writer describes the superiority of the Celtic race over other nations.

The final part examines the function of Finland as an Arcadian society. On the one hand, Charles Boileau Elliott's *Letters from the North of Europe; Or a Journal of Travels in Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Prussia and Saxony* (1832) demonstrates the position of the country on the margins of Western civilisation, and its function as a terra incognita up to the point when its Kalevalaic tradition comes to prominence in the 1850s in Victorian Britain. On the other hand, Ethel Brilliana (Alec) Tweedie's travel account *Through Finland in Carts* (1897) shows the late-Victorian traveller's representation of Finland as a nascent Westernised nation, forging its identity through its runo poetry and the artistic movement of "Karelianism", a movement among artists and scholars who paid homage to the Russian Karelia, one of the main sites mentioned in *Kalevala*.



**PART I:**  
**NORTHERN UTOPIA**  
**AND BRITISH NATIONHOOD**

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE CONCEPT OF NORTHERN UTOPIA

Before embarking on the actual analysis of the term Northern Utopia, which appears to be a complex one, it is necessary to refer to the notion of utopia as encountered and delineated in British travel literature. The term “utopia” was initially used by Sir Thomas More in 1516 to denote “a nonexistent and happy or ideal place” (Trahair x). Yet later on the concept acquired a more realistic dimension and More’s term came to describe distant places which retained traits of the past and were untouched by the obliterating effect of civilisation. This distinction between the imaginary and the real is clearly drawn, and there is no confusion as to what is real and what forms part of the writer’s genius. Utopian writing, therefore, pertains to the constant alternation of two different worlds, and the readers are always capable of adjusting to both worlds, by deciding, depending on their own aesthetic criteria, on what needs to be retained and on what must be suppressed throughout the portrayal of the travel destination.

An important dimension of Northern utopia is that of Arcadia, since Victorian travel writers often use these terms interchangeably, notwithstanding the fact that the concept of Arcadia was introduced to travel writing much earlier. Regarding this aesthetic concept, Ben Okri maintains that it evolved into a pastoralist movement towards the close of the eighteenth century and it was in line with Thomas More’s utopian vision, yet differing from the progressive character of the utopia due to its lost, “unattainable” Edenic dimension (279). As shall be seen, this ideal existence which the word Arcadia came to encapsulate was quickly transformed into the cult of the Noble savage as well into the exaltation of Scandinavian peasantry, given the picturesque (and untouched) aspect of the latter. Due to the limited urbanisation of Scandinavian countries, the rural aspect of their peoples was starkly contrasted with the refined, though corrupt, state of the inhabitants of the large European capitals. It is also worth noting that this interplay between the backward and the pastoral worlds which the North came to embody is perfectly compatible with what underlies the notion of utopia, as it was underlined at the beginning of the chapter: the cultural contrast between one’s native country and the travel destination.

What is more, Ruth Levitas makes an interesting point, suggesting that the term “utopia”, in spite of its generic definition as “the expression of aspirations for a desired way of being or a future state of society, by an individual or group” (189) cannot be approached as a single concept but should rather be distinguished into many different types, according to the writer’s purpose, that is, eutopia, dystopia, anti-utopia and political utopia. As suggested by Levitas, if anti-utopia is termed what “should be reserved for that large class of works, both fictional and expository, which are directed against Utopia and utopian thought” (192), a eutopia is always the desired or idealistic aspect of the utopian society that the author wishes to establish (3), whereas Fátima Vieira underlines that dystopias could be defined as “negative images of the future [...] if dystopias provoke despair on the part of the readers, it is because their writers want their readers to take them as a serious menace” (16).

As mentioned by Nina Chordas, “both ethnography and travel writing were components of early modern utopia; however, the two forms are so closely connected in these texts that they may be viewed as subsets of each other” (30). By picturing themselves as members of a refined culture, nineteenth-century Britons were intrigued by the exotic and the different, that is, with everything that clashed with their everyday experience. As James Buzard puts it, there was a growing appeal “of the foreign, the exotic, all those features in the ‘other’ which differ from the mundane, humdrum everyday experience” (26). Based on this definition, one can grasp the fact that despite the negative attitude of British writers towards people whom they considered to be culturally inferior, they began to endow the Other with positive attributes, given their rising belief in the corrupt state of their own society, and subsequently in the unspoiled manners and mores of the periphery.

Thus, some Victorian travel writers such as Lowe, Metcalfe and Baring-Gould scrutinised Scandinavian social purity as well as their special bond with nature in the most favourable terms while concurrently deploring the alienation of their compatriots from their primordial, innocent state in the name of progress. Martin Åberg affirms that “in reproducing a primordial state of nature, Otherness also became a way of representing the lost virtues of modern man as he had once been before the advent of civilisation” (55). Although the texts of many British travellers are interspersed with images of Otherness, this Othering is expressed as nostalgia for the loss of manners and mores that were sacrificed in the course of time. The unspoiled- from the erosive impact of civilisation-peoples become a common theme in British travel literature since the late-eighteenth century. Focusing on this nostalgic “Othering” of foreign

cultures, Barton purports that there is certain Romantic emphasis on the British travellers' depiction of other peoples. This is mainly seen in the writers' description of a nation's folk tradition as the epitome of its distinctive virtues amongst other countries (81). This sudden obsession of British travel writers with regions and peoples not yet touched by the spirit of civilisation overlapped with Britain's own effort to revive its folklore and epics in its attempt to reconstruct its past and build a new nation. Imbued with the back-to-nature theme which Rousseau and other intellectuals of the mid- and late eighteenth century such as Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats extensively propagated in their writings, travel writers manifested through their writings, several aspects of the Romantic era such as an increasing concern for "primitive and uncivilized ways of life", an infatuation with the sublime or the savage grandeur of nature, a significant emphasis on paganism and other cultural elements of the pre-Christian age, the "cult of the Noble Savage" and an interest in the power of the individual. Kathleen Wilson defines this primitive trend which spread in nineteenth-century Europe and which always stimulated European imagination:

Primitivism, or the concept that humanity in the first stages of society was a model of virtue, simplicity and excellence that civilization corrupted, had a long history, going back to Homer and Hesiod. Most commonly invoked when 'civilized' protagonists confronted 'less advanced' peoples, primitivist thinking placed its objects in an antithetical relation to modernity. (70-1)

Inevitably, all these aesthetic criteria were successfully met within the Scandinavian framework, and this is the reason why an overwhelming number of travellers constructed their own Northern Utopia on the basis of the Romantic canon, even as late as the mid-nineteenth century.

The travel writers' emphasis on the process of Othering different nations, which did not present the same racial, cultural or linguistic characteristics, also raised the issue of literary expansionism, that is, the self-projection of travel writers as imperial beholders in the foreign soil. Addressing these imperialist nuances of travel texts in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said observes that these texts overwhelmingly served the consolidation of the imperial presence both overseas and in Europe, pointing out that "the imperial system is closely aligned with the "power to take over territory", and the subsequent establishment of a "justificatory regime of self-aggrandising, self-originating authority interposed between the victim of imperialism and its perpetrator" (82). This is particularly true in the Scandinavian setting, in the reproduction of

which British travellers conspicuously reconstruct images of the Other, basing their discourse on the idea that nations which are different from the Britons are inevitably inferior. Yet this does not necessarily translate into Britain's effort to colonise Scandinavia, hence Said's argument does not fully apply to the case of the Nordic countries.

What is more, the dichotomy between the civilised South and the barbarian North rested not only on the North's cultural difference from the South but was rather based on the theory of climate, originating in the Aristotelian premise that the "negative effect of coldness freezes the mind and suppresses intellectual agility" (Zacharasiewicz 33). Hence the dystopian image of Nordic people which was frequently substantiated by eighteenth-century narratives on supernatural elements related to the North. Inevitably, as Klitgaard Povlsen suggests, in the eighteenth century "France and England are the constant references in comparison with Scandinavia, and the two countries appear as the most civilised in the world, while the harsh and cold climate of the North reflects the uncivilised cultures there" (14). Iceland serves as a perfect example of a Nordic country which, having been subjected to the prejudices of all travellers who came into contact with its remarkable geological features (volcanoes, geysers), was repeatedly described as the epitome of the dystopian North. As Sumarliði R. Isleiffson notes, the negative bias of European travellers against Iceland in the eighteenth century could be summed up as follows: "there were poisonous fountains and destructive volcanoes, and Hell or Purgatory might even be found on the island, with devils flying about. Living there were superstitious and rude people, far beyond the reach of civilization" (113). In accordance with the dystopian concept of the "far North", Kliemann-Geisinger adds that

because of their unknown areas and waters the Scandinavian North and the North and East of Russia [...] epitomised wilderness and distance and provided space for the image of fabulous and mythical places and people. At the same times these places represented the exotic. (83)

Despite being stigmatised as uncivilised, the Nordic nations did not lose their appeal, and when travelling started becoming a more mainstream activity amongst middle-class British travellers in the late eighteenth century, their sequestered position rendered them more exotic and attractive in the eyes of the British reader. Especially in the case of Iceland, which was perhaps regarded as the most dystopian corner of Europe due to its northernmost geographical position, a constant shift emerges from the utopian to the dystopian projection of the country because, as mentioned by Klitgaard-Povlsen, "dystopia and utopia mix in

complex ways around 1800 and more subjective reflections find their way into published writing of constructions of as well as experiences from the North” (15). Hence the frequent reference of some British travellers to the Ultima Thule, the ancient Greek hypothesis about a wasteland away from the rest of Europe that connotes something eschatological. With respect to the concept of Ultima Thule, which pertains to the Arctic and subarctic regions of Northern Europe, Bloch<sup>1</sup> underlines the importance of this myth which reinforced the dystopian image of Northern Europe. Inevitably, the Scandinavia context relied on a distinctly theological discourse.

As I have already suggested, due to its complex nature, the concept of Northern Utopia is hard to define; it pertains to a vast geographical space (all Scandinavian countries, Iceland included) and it varies according to various phases of the Victorian Era. One factor that obviously changed the travel writers’ attitude towards Scandinavia in the nineteenth century is the reason for which most Victorian writers undertook a trip to the far North. The new fashion, coupled with a shift of focus from the Southern to the Nordic antiquity, which was placed “beyond the bounds of the Graeco-Roman canon” (Barton 3), gave a new impetus to the study of the Nordic countries. At the same time, the dystopian representation of the North as the most primitive part of Europe gave way to a more “eutopian”, idealistic projection of the northernmost sports of the continent, leading to a new mapping of the North on multiple levels (geopolitical, geographical).

It is indispensable, however, to ask why the mapping of the North changed to such an extent at the close of the eighteenth century. The revolutionary movements that manifested themselves in continental Europe, and the subsequent pursuit amongst the members of the intellectual society for places which were not “plagued” by the detrimental effect of war account for the increasing nostalgic glance of the Britons at simpler societies. Fjågesund and Symes underscore the overall political unrest, along with the social status of British travellers, as fundamental reasons

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<sup>1</sup> In times of antiquity, “Thule” was the name given to an archipelago far to the north of the Scandinavian seas. The Greek explorer Pytheas told his contemporaries about this far-away place, and about the year 330 B.C. he sailed northward from Marseille in France in search of the source of amber [...] After Pytheas’ time, the ancients called Scandinavia “Thule”. In poetry, it became “Ultima Thule”, i.e. “farthest Thule”, a distant northern place, graphically undefined and shrouded in esoteric mystery.

As the frontiers of man’s exploration gradually expanded, the legendary Ultima Thule acquired a more northerly location. It moved with the Vikings from the Faroe Islands to Iceland, and, when Iceland was colonized in the ninth century A.D., Greenland became “Thule” in folklore (Gilberg 83).

for the breach of mid- and late nineteenth century from the eighteenth-century outlook on the North, stating that “the revolutions and popular unrest of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were causing general and growing concern; secondly, the majority of travel writers were largely members of the moderate, but far from radical, middle and upper-middle classes” (108). The political stability of the Northern nations was much praised by the Victorians who were accustomed to witnessing social mutations in Victorian Britain.

Since late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century travelogues focus largely on the impact of nature on people’s overall disposition, the depiction of the Scandinavians as noble savages gave them significant appeal, combined with the increasing study of Northern antiquity at an academic level. Concerning the application of this strictly Rousseauesque concept to the Nordic context, Jesper Hede suggests that “primitive ways of life and natural environments, and the revival of old forms of poetry-interests supported by Rousseau’s notion of the noble savage and the concept of the sublime- his conceptions were not new but were built on a Nordic tradition” (38). The peasantry of Norway and Iceland, the folk music of the Finns and the existence of Old Norse poetry came to signify basic components of nineteenth-century utopia. Music, therefore, was quickly incorporated into the Romantic discourse and was often translated both as a sign of primitiveness and innocence.

The harsh living conditions of the Northerners and the more delicate, refined aspects of the Greco-Roman tradition of the Southerners signal a significant polarity between the primitive and the civilised world. Therefore, human corruption in Southern nations is severely criticised by scholars such as Montesquieu, who

saw the South as agreeable and beautiful but also as softening the morals and ethics of its people, while the North with its cold climate might be frightening and sublime but had strengthened the people living there; they had well-built bodies and a strong tendency towards freedom and democracy. (Klitgaard-Povlsen 13)

Drawing upon Montesquieu’s view of the North as a region inhabited by sturdy and masculine peoples in juxtaposition with the effeminate and fallen condition of Southern nations, one could also discern the first steps towards the racialisation of Europe based on the physical attributes of different ethnic groups. It also marks the Britons’ shift of focus from the neoclassical aesthetics towards the natural condition of the human beings, a focus which also gave rise to the polarity between Northern and Southern Europe.

The gradual focus of British travellers on Arcadian societies that retained a savage image compared with Britain, the latter being considered the epitome of civilisation, can account for the construction of Northern Utopia based on the above presumable characteristics of the Nordic peoples (noble savagery, wish to depart from the neoclassical aesthetic norms of the Greco-Roman culture). Focusing on the dichotomy of North versus South that begins to dominate the discourse of travelogues produced at the end of the eighteenth century, Isleifsson observes that:

It is impossible not to mention the changing attitude to the North in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was as if the traditional North-South polarity had suddenly been inverted. The North became positive and the South negative; the North was stable and the South treacherous; the North loved liberty, while servitude dominated in the South. Cold and difficult conditions were challenges which made people strong, while heat made people inactive and lazy. (119)

In accordance with Isleifsson's view, there were several British travel writers who produced their travelogues in the late-eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries that inverted the North-South polarity in favour of the Scandinavian populations, presenting all the-up to that time- negative qualities of the North as positive because of the British desire to question the "indisputable" cultural authority of the Southern civilisations in its attempt to acquire and strengthen its identity in contrast with the Romance cultures. Some of those travel authors, such as Frederick Metcalfe and Sabine Baring-Gould, were also strong advocates of the cultural unity between Britain and the Scandinavian nations.

Finally, the construction of a Northern Utopia rested on the relatively peaceful, stable and detached political conditions of most Nordic nations at the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars and the French Revolution. More and more British travellers became interested in places around Europe which had not been affected by the war expeditions in continental Europe. According to Kliemann-Geisinger, "to focus on the more quiet parts of Europe was a short-term solution and an immediate reaction to the extensive political changes that were caused by the Napoleonic wars" (77). Except for the case of Denmark, whose involvement in the Napoleonic Wars turned against Britain's political interests and therefore led to the mutual hatred between that country and Great Britain, the other Scandinavian countries were often depicted as Arcadian societies which remained unscathed by the continuous political turmoil that characterised other nations.

Since I have concentrated on the principal manifestations of Northern Utopia within the nineteenth-century British context, I believe it is crucial to refer to Scandinavianism which was intimately linked to the sensitisation of the Nordic nations to their cultural heritage. This cultural movement should be viewed as a more intense endeavour of the Nordic nations to construct their nationhood in a collective manner by drawing on their common Viking background. The unification of the North that was attempted in the nineteenth century is of great importance because the Scandinavian nations sought to revoke their national identity by concentrating on their Old Norse language and history, under the threat of a possible Germanisation. It was during the first half of the nineteenth century that the three kingdoms (Norway, Denmark and Sweden) started focusing on their common language, religion and history (Kliemann-Geisinger 81). The national awakening of the Scandinavians, often overlapping with a parallel attempt of the Britons to acquire a new cultural identity by identifying with the North both culturally and racially, was not expressed in the same manner in all Nordic countries. In fact, the national awareness of some Nordic nations (Norway, Iceland and Finland), especially those which struggled to regain their political autonomy from their Scandinavian brethren, was often diametrically opposed to the pan-Scandinavian spirit which was disseminated in the nineteenth century. Yet they all seemed to coalesce with the necessity to utilise language, folk culture and history to address the issue of their political sovereignty (Klitgaard-Povlsen 13).

Owing to the fact that national literature was immediately linked to the efforts of the European peoples to rely on past heroic narratives in order to construct their national identity, it is hardly surprising that Scandinavianism revolved around the saga tradition, from which it derived valuable information on the Nordic nations' common (as well as distinct) characteristics. The leading figure of Scandinavianism, Nikolaj Grundtvig should be considered as the key scholar who paved the way for the Anglo-Scandinavian union. His major contribution rests on his emphasis on *Beowulf*, the rediscovery of which triggered a nationalistic debate and played a crucial role in the development of the Anglo-Saxon identity amongst British scholars. His use of *Beowulf* to address a cultural union with Britain was of pivotal importance, given the desire of the Britons to be link their culture to the ancient Viking imagery. According to Thomas A. Shippey and Andreas Haarder, there are three arguments made by Grundtvig which boosted the idea of Scandinavianism and encouraged the Britons to picture themselves as of pure Anglo-Saxon stock. In particular, Shippey and Haarder remark that

In his 1817 piece he seems to have three major points to make. One- and in this he remains for a long time unique- is his claim that the poem is a 'spiritual whole' but not properly arranged artistically, in a word, Shakespearean [...] his second major area of consideration was the poem's mythic content. He felt a real epic should have universal value and should be related, however shadowily, to the central truth of Christianity [and his third argument] the poem's historicity. (25)

Travelling to the North was not only seen as a form of exploration but also involved some immersion to the newly discovered northern antiquity. In this respect, Victorian travel writers were eager to picture themselves as anti-tourists, who were well acquainted with the cultural background of the North. Hence their attempt to reinforce their erudition with chapters filled with historical/linguistic information on the country visited.

## CHAPTER TWO

# NINETEENTH-CENTURY RACIAL THEORIES ON THE NORTH

Prior to Europe's racialisation, the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) indisputably played a crucial role in the national spirit of early nineteenth century because he was the first to formulate the idea of the *Volksgeist* (people's spirit) and to argue that the contribution of the *Volkssprache* (people's language) was crucial to the building of a nation. As postulated by Bernd Henningsen, "it has long been promulgated and firmly established that he was the father of the idea of national construction based on identity and of the functionalisation of political symbolism and the instrumentalisation of language" (90). In relation to the Herderian link between language and national identity, Henningsen argues that

The significance of the 'Sprachgeist' (spirit of language) is raised to the level of the 'Volksgeist' (spirit of the people), the *Volksgeist* is manifested in the *Sprachgeist* and the soul of a 'Volk' or people is evidenced in its language. The Others are those who do not understand the soul of one's own language and cannot fathom its emotional depth. Language becomes the *corpus mysticum* of the nation. (99)

What Herder suggests is that language can impact decisively on national identity. Thus the mere existence of a language can allow a nation to distinguish itself from the others, owing to its remarkable nation-building properties. Aside from language, Herder's thinking also encapsulates the fact that culture and community are crucial factors in the nation-building process of a country (Barnard 7). He uses the term "community" in a broader sense, thus promoting a further study of language families (mostly Germanic and Romance). In Herder's texts, one can easily discern the German philosopher's firm belief in the constructability of a nation through the existence of a mother tongue that can help its people forge a separate identity from neighbouring nations, when he attests that: "only in its language does a nation become a nation,

only through language is a national feeling of community engendered and-constructible” (794). Given the theory’s actual impact on British national awakening in the nineteenth-century, many Victorians travel writers were intrigued by the linguistic links between English and the Scandinavian languages, and they were anxious to restore the Anglo-Saxon “tongue”, being weary of the effect of Romance languages such as French on their language.

Even though Herder’s theory about the *Volksgeist* focused on the revival of German Nationalism, his emphasis on language as a nation-building tool impacted enormously on the British and Scandinavian ideological contexts as well. As Henningsen points out, “the nation-building process in the Scandinavian countries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries took place between and on the basis of the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism” (91-2). Since the theoretical framework of the late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century travelogues could not derive from the scientific data of the time any reliable information on the racial formation of nations, Herder’s *Volkssprache* was extensively used as the only visible evidence for the placement of different nations into the ladder of civilisation. Inevitably, Scandinavia and Britain could not refrain from taking part in the same philosophical discourse on nationhood via a national language. This is why Henningsen later argues that “no element of Herderian speculation had such a profound and sustained effect in Scandinavia as that of the central language for national identity and political and cultural self-definition” (99). This obviously applies to the Scandinavian political context because the nineteenth-century efforts of the Nordic nations to emphasise their separate cultural identity concentrated more on language and much less on other factors with the aim of placing themselves as distinct ethnic entities on the European map (as shall be shown, this was the case of Finland and Iceland, through their complex language issues). In Britain, one of Herder’s main “disciples” was Thomas Carlyle, whose Herderian concerns are made obvious in many of his published works. Kwame Appiah notes that “we arrive at the racial understanding of literature that flourished from the mid-nineteenth century in the work of the first modern literary historians. Thomas Carlyle [...] wrote in 1831: The history of a nation’s poetry is the essence of its history” (284).

Besides the “nationalisation” of Europe, it is necessary to focus on the racial theories that were linked both to the nation-building project of the Britons and to the representation of Scandinavia. Despite the fact that British writers and philosophers such as Carlyle and Thomas Arnold had produced several works that negotiated British identity basing their views