

# American Travellers in Scandinavia



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By

Dimitrios Kassis

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of the racial theories of Nordicism and Anglo-Saxonism at the threshold of the twentieth century changed the cultural and political mapping of the world and gave a new impetus to the construction of national discourses both in Europe and overseas. In its complex situation as a former colony and a rising empire, America strove to forge a new identity based on the biological findings of fresh scientific fields, the so called “pseudosciences”. In their travel texts, American travel writers wished to revive their ties with the Old Norse world, embarking on trips which aimed to link the discovery of Vinland by the Vikings with the nineteenth-century rediscovery of the Old Norse culture by the Victorian and American scholars.

The purpose of this book is to explore American perceptions on the Nordic countries which contributed to the construction of the nineteenth-century American national identity. The concepts of Nordic unity and Americanisation of Northern Europe in response to the increasing immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe are connected to American travellers’ parallel attempt to reflect upon the Nordic societies from a utopian perspective.



## INTRODUCTION

In my previous books *Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature* and *Icelandic Utopia in Victorian Travel Literature*, I explored the concept of Northern Utopia in British travel literature during the Victorian period. My aim was to focus on several utopian dimensions of the Nordic countries fostered through their idealistic depiction by Victorian travel writers. However, the American contribution to the reconstruction of the North as a modern utopia has not sufficiently been discussed in my previous work; therefore, I felt it was my obligation to produce a separate volume that would address the considerable role of American scholars/travel writers on the field. In the same vein, this work aspires to shed light on American travellers' romanticisation of the North and the various issues attached to the nation-building agenda of nineteenth-century Americans.

Before embarking on my analysis of the travelogues, it is of paramount importance to draw the reader's attention to the racial theoretical framework that developed in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to influence the American view of the European North. It would also be of interest to examine the degree to which American travellers' perceptions of the Nordic countries differed from the opinions expressed by their British counterparts. It is, therefore, worth emphasising the significance of the racial theories of Anglo-Saxonism, Nordicism and eugenics that occupied an integral part of the American national discourse at the close of the nineteenth century, always in relation to the Nordic context.

As has already been alleged in my previous works, the rediscovery of the Old Norse sagas and the revival of the folklore triggered a further need of the Victorians to identify with the northernmost corners of the European Continent. The doctrine of Teutonism, otherwise called Gobinism due to its basic representative Comte Arthur de Gobineau, stressed the "Saxon" predominance in the amalgamation of the Germanic stock. Owing to their reluctance to assume a secondary position in the nineteenth-century European discourse, Victorian Britons developed their own racial paradigm, Anglo-Saxonism, which was conveniently in harmony with the mixed background of their population. Even though Anglo-Saxonism was

at first manifest after the rediscovery of the Old Icelandic epics to rekindle the Anglo-Nordic ties, it quickly transformed into a racially tinged theory which became a common denominator amongst members of the British Empire.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, several allegations on the racial purity of the English were made due to the rather remote geographical position of the British Isles from continental Europe. As Frank H. Hankins suggests, it was “England, the land of the Anglo-Saxons, who had been partially saved from corruption by their insularity” (53). This “ideal” insular position of Britain obviously nurtured the race pride of the Victorians and intensified their desire to relate culturally and racially to other nations, which were considered peripheral yet unspoiled. Consequently, Victorians frequently resorted to the Nordic context to strengthen Anglo-Saxon supremacy by strengthening their ties with the intellectual societies of the Scandinavian nations.

Due to the fact that there was no clear-cut distinction between terms such as nationality, ethnicity and race, the Herderian concept of the *Volksgeist* was often evoked in Victorian travelogues, thus proving an identification of language with race (Young 44). For this reason, Victorian travellers were eager to comment on the striking similarities between English and the Scandinavian tongues. However, with the advent of anthropological sciences such as anthropometry and phrenology, otherwise called “pseudosciences”, Victorians attempted to substantiate their racial claims based on their supposed racial superiority over the colonised world and the “Other”. From a cultural paradigm, Anglo-Saxonism was gradually incorporated into the self-aggrandising political agenda of the British Empire, thus pointing to a “special Anglo-Saxon mission in the world[...]which cultivated the doctrine of the overwhelming preponderance of Anglo-Saxon blood in the British people, of Anglo-Saxon traits in English character” (Hankins 161).

Notwithstanding their strenuous efforts to fashion themselves as racially pure or direct descendants of the Vikings, the British could not deny the existence of different ethnic groups in the British soil, such as the Scottish, the Welsh and the Irish. Given the English predominant role in insular politics, Anglo-Saxonism was often manifest as a reaction against the presence of the Celtic populations, on the premise that “Celts were not even Europeans” (Young 104) or that they were “inessential minorities bereft of cultural capital” (Young 178). Yet British imperial agenda behoved a more inclusive nation-building theory. This is why, even with

the introduction of the pseudosciences, the concept of Britishness attempted to account for the mixed racial background of Great Britain, as the very meaning of the term Anglo-Saxonism (Angles/Celts and Saxons/Germanic) suggests. Inevitably, the continual contrast between the Briton and the Other, that is, the colonised was essential in order to draw a clear racial distinction between the dominant inhabitants of the British metropolis and the colonial peripheral world.

Given all the above, it can be easily understood that Americans were faced with an even more complex situation in their forging of a national identity. Their precarious position as a former colony and a multicultural nation posed a great challenge to American national discourse, as the Anglo-American rivalry often overshadowed the American attempt to revive its ties with the United Kingdom. The problematic relation of the United States to the imperial model should be seen in the light of William Spanos' thesis on the centre and periphery. As underlined by Spanos:

This understanding of the relation between center and periphery is, of course, what Enlightened Europe called its *mission civilisatrice*. And, it should not be overlooked that, its ultimate origin is the Roman imperial model: the relation between a (manly) civilized Rome, the Metropolis- the City as *measure*- and the uncivilized periphery, the amorphous, unknown, and unnamed (obscure) or "unimproved" (uncultivated) provinces that were not yet incorporated into the *orbis terrarum*. (44)

Based on this model, the United States might be seen as a nation trapped between the two positions, given the systematic Eurocentric view of America as the New World, which was isolated from the political conditions pertaining to the European framework. Yet nineteenth-century American philologists did not remain behind the European geopolitical developments; in fact, they succeeded in incorporating and further developing the English version of Anglo-Saxonism by substantiating the theory with racial theorems of their own. Paradoxically, Americans pictured themselves as an undeniably pure stock, the *Homo Americanus*, "endowed with the Anglo-Saxon love of liberty and respect for law" (Hankins 8) to differentiate themselves from the Black and Indian groups as well as from the new immigrants who flocked into the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe. American theorists such as Madison Grant, Charles Gould, Clinton Stoddard Burr and Fairfiled Osborn gave a new impetus to the European racial discourse through the introduction of new, more 'scientific' data to the idea of white supremacy. The American Anthropological School which was established at the close of the nineteenth century served the need to present blacks and whites as

“entirely distinct races that would never succeed in intermixing, and that the white race would remain predominantly Anglo-Saxon despite the arrival of other European immigrants” (Young 92).

In their *Passing of the Great Race*, Grant and Osborn subverted the Herderian hypothesis on nationhood, by claiming that “European history has been written in terms of nationality and of language, but never before in terms of race; yet race has played a far larger part than either language or nationality in moulding the destinies of men”(1). His focus on race proves the American belief in the biological criteria as a piece of evidence for the racial connection between different nations. Language (or Volkssprache/ national language in Herder’s theory) is discarded as an unscientific criterion, despite its use as a fundamental criterion for the delineation of European nations in early and mid-nineteenth century. American scientists’ reluctance to regard language as a racial element might be attributed to the use of English as a lingua franca throughout the colonial world. As Grant and Osborn affirmed, “in America we hear daily the English language spoken by many men who possess not one drop of English blood, and who, a few years since, knew not one word of Saxon speech” (8). In other words, a common language does not presuppose a common racial origin, especially in the case of American citizens of different ethnic backgrounds.

In nineteenth-century American racial theories, physiognomy appears to play a fundamental role in the distinction between different racial types. As Grant and Osborn purport, “mental, spiritual and moral traits are closely associated with the physical distinctions among the different European races” (106). According to this definition of physiognomy, the physical attributes of the different racial groups denote distinct mental capacities, as well. This focus on physiognomy also requires a careful interbreeding amongst members of the same race. Gould argues that nature laws are applicable to human beings, as well, as regards reproduction:

With animals physical capacity can be improved by care in breeding. Man is no exception to this general animal law. Physically fine specimens of the race of man are just as much the result of careful breeding as physically fine specimens among the animals. (3-4)

Considering the importance of physical traits in a nation’s further racial classification, American theorists also attempted to demonise a potential race crossing between the white members of the old American society, that is, the old immigrants and the influx of newcomers from

Eastern and Southern Europe, who supposedly belonged to the Mediterranean or Alpine stock. When addressing the growing tendency of older generations of Americans to mix racially with other racial groups, Stoddard Burr warned his compatriots that the situation “threatens not alone ourselves, but in an insidious racial degree menaces the blood and character of our descendants to infinite generations; and thus imminently threatens the stability, genius and promise of achievement of the American Commonwealth” (6).

That racial admixture poses a threat to the foundation of the American society might be linked to the nineteenth-century strongly held belief of the Americans in heredity as a means of reproducing cultural superiority or inferiority. If heredity has an instrumental part in the distinction between superior and lower races, then one can deduce from such a definition that racial refinement would be impossible. According to Stoddard Burr, education and environment cannot improve sufficiently the condition of inferior racial types, as these factors cannot “be compared to heredity as a guiding force in the formation of national character, or in determining the destiny of mankind. For man makes the environment, not environment the man (136-37). Based upon this statement, it might be argued that heredity defined an ethnic group’s categorisation in society and races deemed inferior could never alter their condition.

As has already been suggested, Anglo-Saxonism came to the foreground as a theory which endeavoured to revive the cultural ties between England and the North and to reconcile England with its Saxon and Celtic background through the convenient umbrella term Anglo-Saxon. Owing to the introduction of the biological criteria of heredity and physiognomy to American national discourse, American theorists attempted to define race by drawing strictly upon racial criteria which could unify the colonisers of Saxon background under the more inclusive term Anglo-Nordic or Nordic. Stoddard Burr alleged that

Within the American people the Nordic stock has always been most important in numbers and has composed the body politic of the nation since early Colonial days. It is comprised of the various elements among the early settlers and the later immigrants originating from Northwest Europe; including the English, Scotch-Irish and Scotch, Welsh, Highland Scots, Irish, Scandinavians, Dutch, Germans and the majority of our French and, to a lesser extent, our French Canadian immigrants. (137)

What is particularly striking is that American philologists and anthropologists attempted to establish a unity between all the nations

belonging to the Nordic stock, that is, the common Germanic racial background of the aforementioned ethnicities. In doing so, they adopted a more inclusive approach to nationhood and race, given that the British version of Anglo-Saxonism excluded from its national discourse even the Celtic peripheries of the Empire. On the contrary, American theorists opted for the Nordic hypothesis or Nordicism which included all the older colonisers of the American continent. As pointed out by Stoddard Burr,

The term Anglonord, or Anglo-Nordic (English-speaking Nordic), is a far more apt term than Anglo-Saxon to apply to Native Americans. Americans of German, Irish, French, Dutch, Belgian, Swiss, Scandinavian, British and Canadian ancestry, who make up the bulk of our nations permanent population, are identical in race, whatever their individual religious or political views. (207)

Drawing upon this definition, Nordicism sought to unify all Americans of Saxon origin in juxtaposition with the English, who wished to accentuate the differences between the English and the Celtic groups of Great Britain or Britain with the Germans who wished to appropriate the North for their own imperial needs. On the basis of their supposed pure Nordic stock, Americans drew a clear-cut distinction between the earliest settlers of the American continent and the new stock in an attempt to protect their interests. If Britons attempted to forge a Northern unity with Scandinavian Europe, Americans fashioned themselves as the new hope of Nordic unity between the United States and all the Germanic peoples:

As a matter of fact, the hope of Nordic unity lies in the influence of the United States in the Nordic world. Upon our country devolves the sacred duty to heal the breach between the British Isles, Germany and France. Since white Americans are mostly sprung from ancestors originating in these three nations, our interests must forever be interlocked with theirs, whatever may be our own national policies. (Stoddard Burr 222)

Clearly, the white population of the American society was anxious to identify with the European nations which were more akin to the Americans on both a cultural and a racial level. This anxiety emanated from their need to dispel any allegations on their mongrel status in the modern world:

Our importation of multitudes of ignorant and utterly alien laborers will, among other calamities to our body politic, degrade it. But while we should be warned in time and take proper measures to control this evil, and do so instantly, our position is still strong, for there are yet left in America fifty

million people the greater part of whom can trace their ancestry to Colonial days before pollution began. (Gould 16)

Because of the growing number of immigrants from all over the world at the close of the nineteenth century, older generations in America resented the presence of “alien” newcomers, treating this phenomenon as a threat to their supreme racial background. As a result, the demonisation of the new racial stock and the parallel glorification of the Saxon origins of American settlers, whose extraction dated back to the “colonial days” occupied a prevalent position in American political discourse of the period. In order to safeguard their compatriots’ “superior” Nordic stock, American theorists placed significant emphasis on the degeneracy which would result from racial admixture and the perils of hybridity as a state of racial degradation. As regards hybridity, Grant and Osborn observed that “if the Melting Pot is allowed to boil without control and we continue to follow our national motto and deliberately blind ourselves to all ‘distinctions of race, breed or color the type of native American of colonial descent will become extinct’(123). Otherwise put, there was a need to control immigration and social intercourse amongst older and newer members of the American society.

Due to the significant focus of the Americans on heredity, the movement of the eugenics gained ground both in the United States and in Europe in order to ‘secure’ racial purity. Discussing the issue of racial improvement, Grant and Osborn claimed that “man has the choice of two methods of race improvement. He can breed from the best or he can eliminate the worst by segregation or sterilization” (27), linking this method of racial refinement with the ancient Spartan method of race improvement, the “apothetai”.

In the light of these racial theories, it is indispensable to refer to the role of the European North in the rise of Nordicism and to explore the way in which the North accounted for the infatuation of American travellers with Scandinavia. In accordance with the basic tenets of Nordicism, the Nordic race “originated south of the Baltic in Eastern Germany, Poland, Russia and Scandinavia where they enjoyed a long period of isolated incubation and spread thence towards the east and the west”(Hankins 182). This strong belief in the origins of Germanic Europe in Scandinavia as a European “broodland” was further addressed by Grant and Osborn, who viewed the European North as the ideal utopian locus for the glorification of the Nordic race, when stating that “only in Scandinavia and northwestern Germany does the Nordic race seem to maintain its full vigor

[...] Denmark, Norway and Sweden are purely Nordic and yearly contribute swarms of a splendid type of immigrants in America” (96). Grant and Osborn’s statement proves their desire to rekindle the ties with the Old Norse world with the aim of presenting the Americans as a racially unspoiled nation, the direct descendants of the Vikings.

The nineteenth-century American discourse was also in perfect harmony with the gradual change of the European mapping and the transformation of the Nordic nations from barbarous European peripheries into the centre of the Nordic civilisation. The increasing view of the North as a utopian locus, unscathed by the corruption and the vices of the South coincided with the systematic endeavour of the Americans to fashion themselves as a pure Nordic stock. At a racial level, Sweden was often invoked as the centre of the Gothic world, and in particular the island of Gothland. As pointed out by Grant and Osborn, “the traditions of Goths, Vandals, Lombards and Burgundians all point to Sweden as their earliest homeland and probably all the pure Teutonic tribes came originally from Scandinavia and were closely related” (83). On a cultural level, however, there was a need to connect America with Iceland, the supposed cradle of the Old Norse culture, in view of the rediscovery of the Old Icelandic texts. According to Andrew Wawn, Iceland, with its unspoiled image and rich medieval literary tradition, came to symbolise “the ancient unity between northern kith and kin” (283). This is the reason why a significant number of old Northernists from Victorian Britain, as well as American travel writers, yearned to venture a trip to this sequestered spot of Europe. Moreover, the myth of Vinland prevailed in the nation-building agenda of the Americans because

This spectacular colonisation was probably the result of a combination of foolhardy courage, an urge for discovery, and maritime skill, qualities that would have provided the young and energetic America with a direct share in the Vikings, and a useful set of national myths into the bargain (Fjågesund and Symes 149)

The constant allusion to the myth of Vinland certainly connoted the intimate racial relations once shared between the Americans and the Scandinavians. It also attributed a more powerful role to the Americans as descendants of the first Viking colonists in response to the growing attempts of the Britons and the Germans to “appropriate” the North as an indispensable part of their own national discourse.

If the North was revered by Victorian Britons as the proper hotbed for their cultural and racial pursuits, in the eyes of the Americans the Nordic

nations epitomised all the physical and spiritual attributes which American society needed to maintain in order to reduce the effects of the “alien immigrants” that constantly arrived in America from Eastern and Southern Europe and dispel the rumours of American mongrelism.

Considering the above racial framework, the purpose of this book is to trace the extent to which the travelogues are permeated by the Nordicist spirit. Inevitably, issues such as gender and race will be taken into consideration, as both factors can contribute to the travel writers’ view of the North in conjunction with their parallel attempt to construct American identity.

The first chapter of the book concentrates on William Joseph Snelling’s text *The Polar Regions of the Western Continent explored* which might be regarded as one of the earliest attempts of the American travellers to address the Nordic unity between the United States and the Scandinavian context through the application of the Herderian concept of the *Volksgeist* and the challenge of eighteenth-century travel tradition. The second chapter focuses on Mary Amelia Boomer Stone’s *A Summer in Scandinavia* in which the travel writer explores the issues of gender and race in line with the theory of Nordicism. As regards the third chapter of the book, John Dean Caton’s travelogue *A Summer in Norway; with Thoughts on the Industries, Habits, Customs and Peculiarities of the People* stresses Norway’s central position in Nordicist discourse as the cradle of the Nordic race but also challenges common racial stereotypes related to the Arctic regions. The fourth chapter centres on Theodore Ledyard Cuyler’s *From the Nile to Norway and Homeward* which addresses the racialisation of the North in accordance with the American nation-building agenda. Maturin Murray Ballou’s text *Due North; or, Glimpses of Scandinavia and Russia* discusses the American-Viking connection on several levels and investigates the role of gender within the Nordic framework. In his travelogue *Arctic Sunbeams, or, From Broadway to the Bosphorus by way of the North Cape*, Samuel Sullivan “Sunset” Cox foregrounds the idea of the Americanisation of the North and propagates the concept of *Homo Americanus* as the new, culturally improved race that constitutes an amalgam of the Nordic subgroups.



## CHAPTER ONE

### WILLIAM JOSEPH SNELLING: *THE POLAR REGIONS OF THE WESTERN CONTINENT EXPLORED; EMBRACING A GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF ICELAND, GREENLAND, THE ISLANDS OF THE FROZEN SEA AND THE NORTHERN PARTS OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT*

William Joseph Snelling was born in 1804 in Boston, Massachusetts to Colonel Josiah Snelling. At the age of 14, he studied at the West Point military academy. He abandoned the military school after two years and he moved to Minnesota, where he started working as a merchant, trading with the Indians. Due to his capacity as a merchant, he quickly befriended a Sioux tribe, a fact which influenced his future writing career, as it enabled him to become acquainted with their language and customs. He also developed a keen interest in explorations, and in 1823, he took part in an expedition under Major Stephen H. Long to explore the surrounding area.

His infatuation with the Native American culture is proven by his participation as an interpreter in the negotiations to end the hostilities between the Dakota and the Chippewa tribes (Woodall 370). In 1828, he returned to Boston where he embarked on his career as a journalist in the main journals of the region such as *American Monthly*, *Boston Book*, and the *New England Galaxy*. In 1831, he wrote the article *Truth: A New Year's Gift for Scribblers* as a form of critique against the American society and its stereotypical representation of the Indians. However, he is best remembered for his collection of frontier stories *Tales of the Northwest, or, Sketches of Indian Life and Character* published in 1830 in support of his pro-Indian ideas. His short stories might be regarded as the earliest examples of frontier American literature. As Woodall suggests, Snelling "is most at home among the frontiers of Indian tradition and

legend and he has registered at first hand the impressions a sensitive nature received of those early days, when the Sioux Indians were still a nation” (385). His Indian tales subverted nineteenth-century American conventions on Native American life, involving stories “of the cultural conflict resulting from the early white settlements on the frontier” (Reichardt 336). He wrote under different pen names such as Solomon Bell. He also wrote poetry and undertook several journeys throughout the United States and across Europe. He died in 1848.

In his travel narrative *The Polar Regions of the Western Continent explored*, published in 1831, he provides the reader with factual information on Iceland and its people. He is also one of the first travellers to venture into Greenland with the aim of concentrating on the Inuit population’s manners and mores. In the prefatory part of his travelogue, Snelling makes direct reference to the myth of Ultima Thule and alludes to the significant role of the island in American culture:

In compiling a work on the Northern Regions of America, we hope it will not be thought amiss if we begin with Iceland; though that island has been long considered a part of the old world, and was, perhaps, the Ultima Thule of the Ancients. Lying as it does, much nearer to Greenland than to any part of Europe, it is without doubt a natural appendage of America. (1)

Through his reference to the historical link between Iceland and America, Snelling wishes to shed light on Iceland as the cradle of the Anglo-Saxon culture to enlighten the reader on the potential cultural unity between the two nations. The writer’s statement on the geographical proximity between the United States and Iceland/ Greenland is of paramount importance because Snelling does not wish to reproduce the dystopian image of the Arctic regions but rather seeks to portray them in an entirely different light which subverts the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stereotypes attached to these regions. According to Karen Klitgaard Povlsen 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). Contrary to the depiction of the Arctic regions as territories inhabited by savages, Snelling makes it clear from the very start of his travelogue that he wishes to dismiss any allegations of dystopian nature by focusing on Iceland’s status as the Ultima Thule of the ancients. His contemplation of Iceland as an Ultima Thule coincides with the nineteenth-century meaning

of the concept as an “Arctic adventure, discovery and exploration” (Bravo et al. 6).

Intrigued by the literary accomplishments of the Icelanders, Snelling also dwells extensively on the importance of education in Iceland, as well as on the dissemination of knowledge amongst the inhabitants of the island regardless of class. The remarkable literacy rate of this remote island is highlighted by Snelling as follows:

As there are none or few parish schools in Iceland, the mental cultivation of youth depends in a great measure on the parents. In general these are not wanting in their duty, for their sense of national honor and of self-respect is very high. The children are taught their letters by their mother, and the higher branches of education by their father: every clergyman is bound to visit the several families twice or three times a year, and on such occasions he catechizes old and young. (29)

Clearly, the writer sets the focus on Icelandic progress in the field of letters in order to question past depictions of the island as a barbaric part of the European continent. In doing so, Snelling rejects the eighteenth-century concept of the Wide North, which was manifest as “distaste for Gothic barbarism and by a reverence for classical Antiquity” (Thom 212). Unlike other travel writers who visited the island, Snelling elaborates on the sophisticated aspect of the Icelandic people, despite the harsh weather conditions with which they are faced in their everyday life. In particular, the writer purports that:

And in many cases, the amount of science and literature acquired is truly astonishing. It is not uncommon to hear ragged peasants discussing topics, which, in other countries, are only propounded from the chairs of learned professors. (30)

The writer’s utopian view of Iceland is further stimulated by the existence of the Old Norse epics which gave the island a new status as the cradle of the Anglo-Saxon culture. It is obvious that Snelling is strongly influenced by the rediscovery of the sagas and revalorisation of the Nordic nations as a major part of European civilisation. Thus, he is anxious to stress the island’s contribution to European literature in the medieval period, during which other European nations had sunk into darkness:

The early and successful application of the Icelanders to the study of the sciences forms a perfect anomaly in the history of literature. At a period when the darkest gloom was spread over the European horizon, the inhabitants of this comparatively barren island, near the north pole, were

cultivating the arts of poetry and history; and laying up stores of knowledge, which were not merely to supply posterity with data, respecting the domestic and political affairs of their native country, but were also destined to furnish very ample and satisfactory information on a great multiplicity of important points connected with the history of other nations. (37)

Snelling's increasing view of Iceland as the centre of European history derives from the resurgence of interest observed in 1850s both in the United States and in Victorian Britain. Given that the intellectual societies of the time overwhelmingly looked upon the Nordic countries as beacons of the Old Northern antiquity, the writer's comment on the unnatural, yet remarkable position of Iceland as a cultural metropolis of Europe is closely linked to his romancing of the North.

Snelling further enhances the utopian view of Iceland as a Nordic Hellas through his reference to Snorro Sturluson and Ari Þorgilsson (Frode), the medieval chroniclers in Iceland:

The art of writing in Roman letters (for the use of Runic characters was known long before), was introduced into Iceland in 1057. The historical composition of Icelandic writers are very numerous, and are known by the name of Sagas. Most of them are worthy of full credit. Their minuteness and simplicity are strong evidence of their truth, and their authenticity is established beyond a doubt by volumes of extrinsic testimony. Some of these writers studied in Europe, but Ari Frode and Snorro Sturluson never left their native island. The golden age of Icelandic literature was from the beginning of the twelfth to the middle of the fourteenth century. (31-2)

What strikes the reader in the above excerpt is Snelling's firm belief in the historical authenticity of the Old Icelandic manuscripts. His desire to acknowledge the significance of Icelandic historiography is associated with his intention to restore the cultural status of the Nordic nations, an undertaking which is also linked to the reconstruction of American identity. Sumarliði R. Isleifsson claims that there was a "strong demand for Nordic cultural heritage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century" (156), a phenomenon which accounted for the increasing number of travellers who visited Iceland with the aim of experiencing glimpses of the Old Norse world.

Likewise, Snelling emphasises the national poetry of the Icelanders as a token of their intellectual superiority, when addressing the rich skaldic poetry of the island:

The ancient Scandinavians were, and the Icelanders are, possessed of a peculiar and original national poetry; deeply tinged with the boldness and enthusiasm that distinguished the race of Odin. The gift of poetry was supposed to be inherited from Odin himself. The skalds, from whom it emanated, were bards by profession, and rehearsed their effusions for the amusement and instruction of assembled companies. Their subjects were the history and the warlike deeds of their progenitors, and the praises and exploits of the gods of their ferocious mythology. (32)

His depiction of the Nordic nations as peoples endowed with artistic attributes reveals the impact of the Herderian hypothesis on the travel canon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century travelogues. As Seamus Deane puts it, “the national discourse of European nations revolved around the production and recovery of a national literature” (362). Hence the writer’s Herderian stress on the fundamental role of folk culture and national literature in the amalgamation of national identities. Snelling adds to this nation-building approach to literature a racial dimension as well, as he portrays Scandinavians as a nation impregnated with an inherent tendency towards art. Nonetheless, his desire to draw a link between the gift of poetry and Nordic peoples’ artistic disposition does not conform to the Nordacist view of art as an effeminising activity. Contrary to Snelling’s positive view of the Scandinavians as an artistic race, Stoddard Burr elaborates on the masculinity of the Nordic stock, propagating that:

Great commercial and manufacturing nations must subsidize art and music if they would have the latter survive. Neither America nor present-day England, Germany, France, nor even Italy, any longer encourages or produces such geniuses as those of the past. It is certain, too, both from contemplation of the past and signs for the future, that the introduction of cheap manual laborers from Italy and elsewhere does not produce artistic fecundity in America. (185)

Stoddard Burr’s dismissal of art as a capacity which is not akin to imperial nations is starkly juxtaposed with Snelling’s utopian view of the North as a cultural utopia. As has already been argued, Snelling does not assume the position of the imperial beholder, a narrative position which ascribes a subordinate role to the country visited, but yearns to shed light on the accomplishments of the Icelandic nation. Instead of depicting the Icelanders as a savage or idle nation due to the northernmost geographical position of their country, he questions the deterministic theory of climate which dominated the travel canon until the 1850s by attesting that:

Their predominant character is that of unsuspecting frankness, pious contentment, and a steady liveliness of temperament, combined with a strength of intellect and acuteness of mind seldom to be met with in other parts of the world. They have also been noted for the almost unconquerable attachment which they feel to their native island. With all their privations, and exposed as they are to numerous dangers from the operation of physical causes, they live under the practical influence of one of their common proverbs. (35)

If one looks at the above comment, it is obvious that the writer does not embrace the view of the Icelanders as noble savages, an attitude that typified early-nineteenth century travellers but rather wishes to exalt their vivid temperament, their unspoiled manners and mores and their patriotic attachment to their country, despite their exposure to perilous living conditions, treating all these elements as signs of an advanced civilisation which remained uncorrupt by the vices of the modern world. His highly idealistic outlook on the islanders seeks to deconstruct the pervasiveness of the theory of climate. Discussing the influence of the theory of climate in European thinking, Isleifsson purports that:

until the eighteenth century and even later, Classical views, following the climatology of Aristotle, still had a significant influence on European ideas of the world. According to the Classical view, the climate in the far South and North was so extreme that these areas were more or less uninhabitable; civilized life was impossible [...] In Central and Southern Europe, this negative image of the North prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and until the eighteenth century. (112-13)

In juxtaposition with this conceptualisation of the North as a region inhabited by savages, whose intellectual abilities could not improve because of the unprivileged climatic conditions of the Arctic territories, Snelling portrays Icelanders as a heroic nation, in constant struggle against the hostile elements of nature:

In the people of Iceland we see a proof, if a proof were needful, that the happiness of a people in no wise depends on the nature of the country they inhabit. Few persons would choose Iceland for a residence: there is nothing inviting in their barren rocks and yawning craters; yet would they not exchange their desolate abode for any in the world. We have reason to be proud of Iceland, as belonging to the new hemisphere. The virtue of its inhabitants, their moral and industrious habits, and their love of country, have stood the test of time longer than those of any race whatever. From all that appears, these are likely to endure as long as their island. (49-50)

Patriotism appears to occupy a distinct position in Snelling's travel discourse. This shows his loyalty to the Herderian definition of patriotism which was based upon the notion of freedom: as Frederick Barnard maintains, "Herder posits a sense of imperfection and a sense of freedom, then, as the foundation for the emergence of human culture and the formation of distinctive national identities" (9). In spite of the desolate aspect of the Icelandic landscape, Icelanders are depicted as a liberty-loving people in close communion with their fatherland.

On another occasion, Snelling acknowledges the remoteness of the island as a beneficial condition for the preservation of its unique language. There are two instances in the travel narrative which suggest that Snelling is well versed in the Herderian linguistic hypothesis and is concerned with the impact of language on the Icelandic people's racial and cultural definition:

The remoteness of this island, and the little intercourse which its inhabitants have maintained with the rest of the world, have effectually secured the purity and originality of this ancient language; and it is a curious fact, that while our ablest antiquaries are often puzzled, in endeavouring to decipher certain words and phrases in writings which date their origin only a few centuries back; there is not a peasant, nor indeed, scarcely a servant girl in Iceland who is not capable of reading with ease the most ancient documents extant on the island. (37)

The Icelandic is justly regarded as the standard of the grand northern dialect of the Gothic language. While the Swedish and Danish, and even the Norwegian, which is a kind of middle dialect, have been more or less subject to the influence of the Teutonic or German branch, that originally spoken in Scandinavia, has been preserved in all its purity in Iceland. In the middle ages, it was known by the name of Dansk Tunga, or, the Danish Tongue; the Icelanders at first called it Norraena, because they had brought it along with them from Norway, which name pretty much resembles that of Norns, or Norse, by which the corrupt dialect, spoken till within these few years in some parts of Orkney, has been designated. (36)

Snelling's approving glance at the remoteness of the island is undeniably utopian. It is also reminiscent of Hankins' thesis that Britons' long revered self-depiction as a nation "saved from corruption by their insularity" (53). In this case, Icelandic insularity is seen as a positive development in the country's superior cultural state. It is far from a mere coincidence that another island, Gotland, was also deemed as the "cradle of Gothic culture" (Hägg 5) due to its unchanged aspect. Even though Snelling does not utilise language to touch upon the racial purity of the

Icelandic nation in an explicit manner, he makes the assumption that Iceland's sequestered position has transformed the island into a cultural metropolis for all Germanic nations. For this reason he attempts to draw a comparison between Icelandic and the other Scandinavian variants, which ascribes to Icelandic the status of the mother language due to its purity and limited influence from neighbouring languages.

Apart from his depiction of the Icelandic nation, Snelling also provides the reader with a thorough analysis of the nineteenth-century condition of the Greenlanders. Given his infatuation with the Native-American customs, one can associate his pro-Indian attitude with his empathy for the miserable conditions under which the Inuit population of Greenland must live.

The Danes, in re-establishing their claims to the possession of Greenland, have done very little towards ameliorating the condition of the natives. The natural disposition, however, of the Uskees, gypsy-like, makes them appear to conform to the manners and religion of their masters; yet little less doubt of their insincerity exists. It must be acknowledged that the conduct of many of the Danes sent thither, as it is said, for their crimes, is not well calculated to reconcile them to European sentiments. They are, if spoiled by such corrupt example, looked upon as intractable. (106)

From the above comment it can be deduced that the writer links the backward condition of the Greenlanders (Uskees) to the corruption of their Danish masters. The natives of Greenland are seen as an intractable, corrupt group due to the use of the island as a colony of Danish convicts.

Once again the originality in Snelling's travelogue is his unwillingness to assume the position of the imperial beholder, as he is interested in the detrimental effect of the white population on the lifestyle of the local people. His anti-imperialist stance towards the Greenlanders is intimately related to his overall concern about the consequences of colonial activities. Therefore, he deconstructs the long held belief that the North was a barbarous zone, totally bereft of civilisation. Concerning the case of Lapland, Lurcock observes that "'Lapland' held for eighteenth-century readers some of the mythological power that Siberia had in later ages, as a place of great remoteness, beyond the boundary of civilised life", and was notorious "throughout Europe for magical practices and sorcery" (7). Considering the remote geographical position of Greenland from the rest of the world, Snelling does not endorse this deterministic concept of the Wide North, nor does he demonise Greenlanders, notwithstanding their distance from the supposed 'civilised' world of the times.

If Arctic regions were often described as places of darkness and sorcery, Snelling seems to subvert this travel convention. On another occasion, he addresses the mixed background of the Greenlanders, whose descendants are the offspring of intermarriages between the Danish colonisers and the colonised, that is, the Inuit. As the writer notes:

The Danish convicts and settlers have intermarried with the Uskee women, and a mixed generation is now remarkably predominant where the government has been fixed. Some of the children of the Europeans by the Uskee women are quite fair, but all have that remarkable attachment to their country which the genuine natives evince. (107)

In view of the negative connotations attached to hybridity by nineteenth-century pseudoscience, the writer's positive view of the race admixture between two different races, the Danes and the Inuit, challenges the importance of race purity, which was revered in Nordacist discourse. If, according to Gobineau, "general hybridization lowers the superior race and brings a chain of consequences that nothing can balance or repair" (208-9), Snelling formulates the exact opposite; that race crossing can refine the backwardness of primitive nations. In addition, the writer praises their emotional attachment to their country.

Another excerpt of the travelogue indicates the writer's desire to stress the positive attributes of the Greenlandic nation, which outnumber the hardships which they need to tackle in their everyday life and pose a threat to their very existence:

Strictly honest in all their dealings, they are exceedingly watchful that they be not cheated; and he must indeed be worse than savage who would wrong people of such exemplary integrity as theirs, The hardships and perils through which they must, toil in order to procure material articles for barter, should also induce a humane consideration of their condition, and protect them from injustice. (109)

Paul Langford claims that qualities such as honesty, hospitality and simplicity are usually praised by Western societies but are always ascribed to subaltern cultures (88). Nevertheless, this does not apply to Snelling's anti-conformist attitude, given that, in this excerpt, he claims that savages are those who aim to take advantage of the Greenlanders' poor state. In that respect, he attacks the stereotypical relation between the traveller and the travellee, that is, what Alison Blunt has characterised as "the popular distance between a 'civilised' traveler/ observer and 'savage' native" (66). Snelling's differentiated view of the natives also becomes apparent, when he touches upon Greenlandic hospitality:

They are extremely hospitable, particularly to any of their own nation who happens to pass near their abode, in removing from one place to another in quest of seals. A brotherly invitation is instantly given, and the utmost attention is paid to the stranger, who freely imparts his experience of the season, and receives in return such information as he requires. It is this interchange of good offices which makes them set so high a value on each other. (117)

The writer's interpretation of these manifestations of hospitality is not linked to any attempt to depict them as racially or culturally inferior on account of their friendliness towards foreigners. On the contrary, it is staunchly opposed to eighteenth-century travel literature, according to which "the negative assessment of the consequences of a northern location in the globe was enhanced by unfavourable associations of the North generally with demons, devils and a threat to God's people" (Zaharasiewicz 32). Snelling dismisses such allegations, a fact which is also noticed in his approving mention of Icelandic hospitality:

It would appear that the Icelanders are kind, and hospitable to strangers, as they are in the habit of bidding them 'come in peace,' and invoking blessing on their heads, as well as of mounting them on their shoulders to carry them ashore when they land. In every house there is a room set apart for the accommodation of strangers, which is always the best in the house. On entering a house, the salutation of the visitor is 'May God be in this place;' and the reply is, 'The Lord bless you,' even when the visit is at an unseasonable hour, and very inconvenient. (43-4)

Unlike other travelogues in the Arctic regions, which are permeated by a discriminatory, self-aggrandising spirit, Snelling's text is not characterised by the demonisation of the natives.

All in all, Snelling's travel text is strongly influenced by Herder's theory on nationhood, as there are several instances in his travelogue which suggest an obvious ideological affiliation to the Herderian concept of the *Volksgeist*. Snelling's text, however, breaks away from the racial conventions of the period, as the writer questions the theory of climate and the pseudosciences which sought to impose a deterministic outlook on human race. Deeply concerned with the reconstruction of the image of the countries visited in the eyes of the American reader, Snelling attempts to draw an analogy between the indigenous people of Iceland and Greenland with the condition of the Indians in his native land. Hence his complete rejection of the racial construct of hybridity which segregated nations which were considered inferior to the supreme white race.