

# The Dream of the North

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# The Dream of the North

A Cultural History to 1920

Peter Fjågesund



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2014



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## Acknowledgements

One important criterion for deciding whether an institution offers true academic freedom is whether it allows research that takes time and that is not confined to narrow, predefined areas, with a predefined purpose. Research that does not contain an element of personal exploration, and the following of promising as well as less promising leads, is hardly worth the name. I am therefore very grateful to my own institution, Telemark University College, which has given me the time and the opportunity to pursue a truly long-term project which, at times, must have seemed unclear at the edges.

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## Preface

During the eight years of writing this book, I have often thought of the multiple and centuries-long attempt to disentangle the maze of the Canadian North – the ice and islands and inlets that might, or might not, eventually reveal a passage through to the Pacific Ocean. I have taken great comfort from the fact that nearly all of those explorers, actually all of them but one, failed to reach their ultimate goal: that of being the first man to take his ship through the Northwest Passage. Thousands of forgotten and half-forgotten heroes instead paid huge sacrifices simply to find one more little piece of a great and essentially unknown jigsaw puzzle. Many of them did not even find that little piece; instead they ended up in blind alleys or, literally, dead ends. There might be something foolish in such an effort, or equally something admirable, and I have, perhaps misled by wishful thinking, allowed myself to think of this project as an example of the latter. Or rather, in the spirit of true exploration and research, I have decided to regard its guaranteed failure as its greatest success. In other words, I have known all along that the ambition behind it could never be fulfilled, but still felt and believed that it has been more than worth the journey.

It is an academic virtue to define one's area of investigation logically and precisely. From the beginning, this project resisted such a procedure. Instead, it expanded and heaved and rose like the swell of the sea under heavy, broken ice or like a whale pushing its great back against the frozen crust on the surface; it constantly refused to stay within its bounds, and like that great, majestic animal wandered off on its own, on long detours, to explore new and unknown waters.

Any journey will contain a number of observations and experiences that are new and surprising to the traveller, but that for others, who have seen the same sights before, will be familiar and self-evident. Still, every journey is different, and so is every traveller. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the following pages may occasionally provide new perspectives on questions and phenomena that individually have been thoroughly explored by former travellers.

There is no denying that however scientific and objective we, as academics, claim or try to be, whatever we produce is still profoundly

coloured by our cultural outlook, and in a work largely concerned precisely with such cultural outlooks, national and regional identities etc., this is an important element to keep in mind. There is also no denying that there are distinct national discourses, often confined to particular languages, with regard to discussions of this kind. Anyone who has collaborated across national and cultural boundaries will be aware of this.

In the post-War period, the Anglo-American research tradition has undoubtedly come to dominate the international academic debate, primarily because English has become the almost all-dominant language of academic discourse. Thus, for instance, in a subject like Theology – at least in the Protestant world – German has lost its once leading position and been replaced by English. The danger of this development is obviously that the academic activity itself – not just the language in which it is presented – gradually and unnoticeably acquires an Anglo-American perspective; that, in other words, the variety of academic approaches is reduced. Seen from the point of view of small language communities, such as those of Scandinavia, Iceland and Finland, this is of course a particularly pressing concern.

Churchill's famous statement that history is written by the victors is more than a cliché; and it does not only apply to the history of armed conflicts. History as perceived by dominant cultures easily becomes history perceived as fact. For a Scandinavian, therefore, the reading of general and representative Anglo-American accounts of western history frequently gives a distinct sense of an Anglo-American dominance that is ultimately biased and unbalanced. Therefore, it is to be hoped that the background of the author of the present work may represent an alternative and ensure perspectives that would otherwise be ignored. As will hopefully emerge from the following pages, this is of particular importance to the topic of this book; the leading role of Britain in northern Europe and the world for several centuries will necessarily be clearly reflected, but it will hopefully be supplemented and balanced by the major contributions of other nations.

This intended balance, however, can always be improved: no writer will possess a fair and representative overview of such a huge field, and the present author is therefore painfully aware that there will be gaps with regard to the cultural history of several nations concerned. This applies to some extent to Germany, but even more pressingly, to Russia. As a compensation for these shortcomings, I can only hope that scholars with a better background in these cultures will roll up their sleeves and write a better account.

Living in a rural community in Norway with a strong sense of tradition, and coming from farmers' stock, but working within an academic context, I have for as long as I can remember felt the tension within Norwegian culture between an urban, cosmopolitan culture and a rural, local folk culture. And it has always seemed to me that these twain shall never meet,

even in as egalitarian a society as the Norwegian; there is actually more than a tension between them – there is an element of hostility that runs into the marrow of the Norwegian cultural and political landscape. In 2013 the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ivar Aasen's birth was celebrated in Norway. In the late nineteenth century, Aasen created *nynorsk*, a new written Norwegian based on the rural dialects as an alternative to the Danish standard that was still in use as a legacy from the four-century-long union with Denmark. On the day of the anniversary, a round of TV interviews with people in the streets – somehow TV always interviews people in the streets, not on country roads – revealed a sometimes aggressive opposition to *nynorsk* as such. In 2013 Norway also celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of Det norske teatret (The Norwegian Theatre). When that theatre, which is exclusively dedicated to drama written in *nynorsk*, was established in Kristiania (Oslo) in 1913, the population of the capital rose in fury against the institution, and thousands of people were involved in veritable battles in the streets.

Still, being educated in the United States and Britain, and having over the years primarily been working in the field of British literature and culture, I began to suspect a long time ago that this tension was not unique to Norway. Consequently, I set out on a search to find its roots, and to formulate some questions. To what extent does it have to do with a conflict between centre and periphery? Which raises another major and even more intriguing question: what is centre and what is periphery, in the first place? Are its roots ultimately to be found in Europe as a whole, or in northern Europe, or does each country need to be treated differently? In short, is it possible to find a common explanatory key to this fundamental friction between high and low culture? Furthermore, to what extent is this tension connected with the process of democratization, i.e. the gradual granting of status to the language, culture and art of common people?

From my Norwegian vantage point, this ambivalence increasingly seemed to be rooted in a fundamental tension between a northern and a southern “pull factor”. And the more I looked into this, the more it struck me that major parts of northern Europe, including Britain, have over the centuries contained such a tension; that, in fact, Europe is a divided continent, and historically speaking it is more divided along a north-south axis than along the east-west axis that was dominant for the fifty-year duration of the Cold War. I am suggesting, in other words, that the former tension is historically more significant and runs deeper into the European sense of identity than the latter. It was this realisation that made me want to investigate if this sense of “northernness” could be more closely identified: which are, so to speak, its component parts? Hopefully, the reader will find this travelogue from a historical journey into what was once the hinterland of European culture as intriguing as did its author.



## Introduction

Look more often to the North.  
Walk against the wind, it reddens your cheeks.  
Find the rough path. Stick to it.  
It is shorter  
North is best.  
The flaming sky in winter,  
the sun miracle on a summer night.  
Walk against the wind. Climb rocks.  
Look to the North.  
More often.  
It is long, this country.  
Most of it is north.<sup>1</sup>

“North” by the Norwegian poet Rolf Jacobsen (1907–94) refers rather unmistakably to a particular country, i.e. Norway, with its baggy South, like a nutritious seed, and the long, thin, protrusion that stretches northwards like a hesitant sprout, reaching for the Pole itself. But the poem is not primarily about nationality, or even geography; more importantly it suggests the presence of another and less tangible quality; that the North, or northernness, is an idea, a concept, or a spiritual or even mystical landscape, which is challenging and demanding, with rough paths and steep rocks, but also strangely attractive, with flaming winter skies and miraculous summer nights. Altogether, the North seems to represent a mental horizon with a range of different and frequently contradictory associations. It is the history of this evanescent phenomenon, from Antiquity to the end of the First World War, that is the topic of this book. As the main title indicates, it is the study of a dream, and like other dreams, it has a tenuous and sometimes unpredictable relationship with reality. As the subtitle suggests, however, it also represents an essential part of western cultural history, and hence of our identity.

<sup>1</sup> “North” (“Nord”) in Rolf Jacobsen, *Nattåpent* (1985), translated from the Norwegian by PF.

***Cardinal Points***

The history of ideas is full of religious, philosophical or scientific concepts that are variously claimed to underpin, influence or even transform our *Weltanschauung*. One of these is the medieval concept of the *scala naturae*, or the “great chain of being”. Others are expressed through such binary pairs as the geocentric and the heliocentric world pictures, the linear and the cyclical views of history, and monotheism and polytheism. The theory of relativity and the insights of modern psychology might similarly be seen as causes of so-called paradigm shifts, i.e. significant thresholds in man’s constantly changing perception of the world and his place in it.

It seems natural to assume that the cardinal points – north, south, east and west – are not perceived or interpreted identically across the globe. It appears logical, for instance, that the respective ways in which Australian Aborigines and Greenland Inuit have viewed the cardinal points would be significantly different, if only because their cultures have originated on opposite sides of the Equator or because the stellar constellations in their skies are different. Also, within the western cultural context, these perceptions may have played and indeed may still be playing a more important role than we often realise.

Obviously, the concept of the West is in itself an indication of the extent to which cardinal points have some kind of limiting, and hence defining power, and, in addition, histories of their own. This book, for instance, will be using precisely ‘the West’ as its frame of reference or point of departure, and be content to define it, rather loosely, as the geographical sphere of western civilisation, i.e. Europe, Russia and America, which also means the area traditionally included in the archaic word ‘Christendom’. Furthermore, it will posit that the West itself can be similarly divided – however arbitrarily – into north, south, east and west. Finally, it will set out to examine the cultural history of only one of the cardinal points within this area, namely the North, in this context capitalised when used to denote the concept as well as the geographical area encompassed by it.

A majority of people in the West – at least those of us who live in what could be called its geographical periphery – have a relatively clear idea as to which one of the cardinal points we ourselves belong to. This specific category is, in other words, closely associated with who we are, or who we think we are. Conversely, we also have a more or less qualified opinion about the characteristic features of the categories to which we do not belong. Thus, there is reason to believe that the cardinal points represent some sort of a mental matrix, an overriding metaphor, a kind of culturally defined and maintained structuring principle that helps us – literally like the compass itself – to orient ourselves in the world. Incidentally, the basic meaning of the verb ‘orient’ is itself precisely “to position or align in a particular way relative to the points of the compass”, and ultimately and



etymologically, of course, it refers to the Orient itself, i.e. the East (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 2007, *s.v.* 'orient'). Our mental orientation, then, is not to be regarded as entirely distinct from our more down-to-earth, geographical orientation. On the contrary, the careful positioning of houses and places of worship in relation to the cardinal points confirms how the two are profoundly interconnected.

The premise that the West can meaningfully be divided into four separate if not always clearly delimited segments does not necessarily assume that all four of these are of equal and comparable significance as labels of identity, but it does assume that there is a dynamic and sometimes conflicting tension between them. Most importantly, however, the present study assumes that at least one of them, i.e. the North, represents a politically and culturally distinct arena, whose history and development, when seen as a whole, forms an umbrella above the individual nation states. In purely geographical terms, the North in the present context comprises northern or Protestant Europe, Russia and North America, together with the enormous, largely empty (that is, unpopulated) expanse to their north, i.e. the Arctic. Incidentally, this definition of the North (with the exception of North America), is also in accordance with the notions of one of the early writers on the North, namely the Roman historian Tacitus (Uffe Østergård in Henningsen et al. eds. 1997, 29).

This book, then, is an attempt to adopt what might be called a macro-historical as well as macro-cultural perspective on a region that is not normally treated as a distinct unit. Furthermore, it will posit a tension between this region and its southern counterpart. Indeed, it will take as a basic premise that the cultural development of the North is inextricably linked to this relationship with the South, which is broadly understood as the Mediterranean region; that the identity of the North can only properly be understood through this contentious and dialectic bond. It will also posit that this relationship can only properly be understood by examining it not just in terms of strictly material conditions, but more so in terms of ideas, perceptions and views of Self and Other. This study may thus be read as an assertion that ideas about the North have served as important cultural and ideological foundation stones in the countries in question, and consequently that they have had an important impact on their general development.

From a macro-historical point of view, one might claim that the first two millennia of Western civilisation (i.e. ca. 500 BC to AD 1500) were dominated by the South, and that from roughly the 1500s, i.e. the Reformation, the northern nations have enjoyed a half millennium of cultural and political supremacy, not just within Europe, but on the world stage. It is the thesis of the present study that ideas and perceptions of the North have – for better or for worse – constituted a significant element in the ideological basis of and justifications for this supremacy. Similarly,

though one may not actively subscribe to either Arnold Toynbee's or Oswald Spengler's speculations on the larger cyclical movements of the rise and fall of civilisations, it seems obvious that this hegemonic position is now on the wane (though not to the advantage of the South). Consequently, one may also ask whether the demise of the northern nations on the world stage is similarly attributable to their specifically northern mindset.

Every dominant civilisation has attempted not only to acquire political and military control of its territories, but also – and equally importantly – tried to establish a cultural foundation and justification that are truly its own. This obviously does not mean that each new cultural regime invents itself from scratch; on the contrary, an important part of its history is precisely the degree to which it borrows from its predecessors or its rivals. However, such borrowings are only reluctantly acknowledged, and as far as possible presented as invented by and unique to the culture in question. Thus the Judaeo-Christian tradition, for instance, has seen no reason to underline the fact that the great Flood in Genesis has its origin in Mesopotamian and other flood myths, or to make a point of the fact that Christian churches were frequently built on old heathen places of worship. Similarly, mythology, oral traditions, literature, music and art have all been used to sustain political and cultural constructions. Thus literary milestones like the works of Homer and Virgil were originally conceived to provide mythical narratives for the specific cultures in and for which they were written. They were, in other words, primarily addressed to particular local or regional cultural spheres, which recognised them as their own, and used them to define their own identity as well as underscore this identity's uniqueness in relation to its surroundings. As a result, their status as universal or *world* literature has provided them with a secondary and, in a sense, unintended role.

Though in a global context the Western world is often seen, both by itself and others, as a more or less unified whole due to a common religion and a common cultural past, it will rather be argued in the following that the West is characterised by a fundamental schism; that the North, from the time of the Reformation onwards, increasingly makes a significant departure – not least through the Reformation itself – from the rest of Europe. It is primarily within this new cultural sphere that ideas about the North were developed which implied that its achievements were compatible with, and at times even superior to, those of the South. Although the following survey may seem to contain a fantastic array of radically different elements, it still pivots around three central themes which intersect, although to varying degrees. These are the polar regions and their exploration; the revival of the ancient culture of the North, together with the growing prestige of popular or folk culture; and the changing view of nature. Something needs to be said about each of these areas and the relationships between them.

## *The Arctic*

As indicated above, there is a vital connection between the North, in the sense of the northern nations, and the Arctic. Without the Arctic, the North would lose an essential part of its unique identity. The culture of the South was intensely focused around the Mediterranean shores, with the closed-in ocean itself as the ever-present point of reference and means of contact. To the south of its narrow southern strip of land were the burning heat and sand of the Sahara, and to the north were the Alps and the great rivers; both of these came to serve as important dividing lines. In addition to this concentrating and centralising effect, the Mediterranean world gathered around the *polis*, the city, with Rome as the ultimate hub of the region from around 500 BC. In the North, on the other hand, the modest population was for a long time scattered, and without the centralising geography of the South. In addition, it possessed a space – the Arctic – that extended into an apparently unlimited, unknown North. From the first tentative exploration of the Arctic until the final discovery of the North Pole at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Arctic was a world beyond the pale of civilisation, but a world that was nevertheless constantly feeding into the imagination of the northern nations, which at the same time were extending their geographical platform by gradually uncovering its secrets. And in the process, fantastic visions were developed, which gave the concept of the North an aura of mystery and wonder.

One such vision imagined, for instance, that the North Pole was a magnetic mountain, the so-called Lodestone Mountain, “a vast landform with a magnetic field so strong that it was said to draw the nails out of any approaching ship and cause erratic behaviour in magnetic compasses thousands of miles to the south” (Officer and Page 2001, 34). Another imagined, as was a respectable scientific position until far into the nineteenth century, that the Arctic Ocean, beyond a crust of ice around 80° N, was open and temperate and perfectly navigable. Yet another imagined spectacular deposits of gold, as exemplified by Martin Frobisher’s disastrous expeditions to the Hudson Strait in the late sixteenth century. One more vision, prevalent in Victorian popular fiction, suggested that Vikings from Iceland or Greenland might have sailed northward during the medieval warm period and founded settlements that had survived but remained isolated from the rest of civilisation. Even more spectacular was the vision that the earth was hollow at the poles, and that there was a navigable channel between the two. There was, in other words, no end to the Arctic’s ability to pull the northern imagination in an ever more northerly direction. Also, there seemed to be no limit to the opportunity for expansion and exploration.

On a more practical level, the arctic seas served as a constant pull factor because of their enormous natural resources in the form of whale,

seal and fish, which over several centuries brought significant income to the northern nations. This activity provided thousands of ordinary people with a first-hand experience of the Arctic, and in turn they ensured that the region became a natural part of the mental and geographical horizon of the countries concerned.

Another essential pull factor was the five-hundred-year-old dream of a route to the Pacific, either through the Northeast or the Northwest Passage. Despite the ancient Silk Road and more recent ocean routes to the Far East, these northern alternatives gave promise of a truly revolutionary transformation, which would make Europe part of a global world and a global economy. Underlining the importance of this particular phenomenon from the 1500s onwards, Sophie Lemerancier-Goddard and Frédéric Regard claim that a more thorough understanding of this aspect of European history “might well entail a revision of the cultural landscape that we inhabit”, and “[m]ore than a sideline to the history of European expansion, [... it] reveals the impact of exploration on personal and collective identity, on the budding imperial ambitions of a community and on the elaboration of a national myth” (Regard ed. 2013a, 1 and 3).

Thirdly, with the advent of industrialisation and urbanisation, and the disappearance of natural scenery, the Arctic served as a frontier of untouched nature, being – with the Antarctic as the only exception – the sole place on the planet that could still offer a pristine and apparently endless landscape, untouched and unspoiled by man. The North contained, in other words, an extra dimension, an inexhaustible and enigmatic world of savage wilderness, with which the Mediterranean South could not compete. Incidentally, this arctic frontier closed with the last major discoveries before the First World War, i.e. roughly a generation after the closing of another frontier in the American West, but like the latter it left a historical legacy that continued long after the event.

Finally, and somewhat paradoxically, the present work will also include, though in less detail, the history of the Antarctic, simply because the Arctic and the Antarctic, in terms of popular perception, and at least up to the First World War, largely play on the same emotional and cultural strings. Thus, even if Stephen Pyne and Elizabeth Leane are right in underlining the many and major differences between these two opposite poles of our planet (Pyne 2004, 39–40 and 88–92, and Leane 2012, 13–16), Peter Davidson is equally right in claiming that “[a]ll the ways of thinking about Antarctica are taken from ideas of the far north” (Davidson 2005, 19). When using the phrase “the polar regions”, therefore, the following account will frequently have in mind both the Arctic and the Antarctic, but the mental horizon will be associated with perceptions about the North.

### *The Northern Cultural Revival*

As to the second theme of the book, i.e. the revival of the ancient and popular culture of the North, there is first of all a dual quality that needs to be underlined. On the one hand, it is used, virtually from the beginning, as an instrument of *nation-building*, i.e. as an inclusive as well as exclusive measure in an attempt to define the cultural and historical identity of a particular nation. In other words, it is intended to unite the inhabitants within the nation's borders, but at the same time to draw a line against those who are outside those borders. On the other hand, this revival should also be seen in a larger perspective, because it was equally an instrument of *regionalism*, in the sense that it encompassed what could be called an entire network of nations, or nations-to-be, namely the geographical region included in this study. As will emerge from the following chapters, this was never a close-knit or formally organised unit, but in their totality the cultural bonds were stronger within the region than with other regions. Again, these common bonds were most prominently displayed in comparison with or in contrast to the South.

Furthermore, probably the most important element of the revival in question, i.e. the rediscovery of the sagas and the ancient mythology of Scandinavia and Iceland, was always felt to be closely connected with the Arctic. After all, the Vikings were seafarers whose field of operation naturally included the entire North Atlantic. It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that the first stirrings of this cultural revival in the second half of the sixteenth century coincided with the first attempts to explore the possibilities of a northern passage to the Pacific; somehow, these early voyages were seen as continuations of the Vikings' more or less routine voyages in the same waters. There was even for a long period the lingering rumour of a potentially surviving colony of Vikings to be found in Greenland.

In addition, Iceland and Norway, in particular, played a central role in providing a link between the Arctic and the history of the North: they were strategically placed with regard to fishing and whaling as well as exploration of the region – Iceland on the way to the Northwest Passage, and Norway on the route to Spitsbergen and the attempts on the North Pole itself. With its territory reaching far north of the Arctic Circle, i.e. to the latitude of northern Alaska, Novaya Zemlya and northern Baffin Island, Norway was also firmly part of the arctic world. Furthermore, both countries had a strong Viking legacy that even well into the nineteenth century was perceived as having survived more or less unbroken from the saga days. Iceland, especially, was the main treasure trove of the massive process of historical documentation that started in the late 1500s.

Because of Britain's central geographical position in the North Atlantic, together with the strong Scandinavian presence in the country

from the 800s onwards, the arctic connection also became a central and self-evident element in Britain's cultural and political orientation, and in its nation-building process. The same applied to such nations as Sweden, Denmark, Germany and the United States. In different ways and to different degrees, all the northern nations thus felt a cultural and geographical kinship with the Far North. Finally, the Norse mythology itself was felt to be closely associated with the nature and the climate of the Far North. Thus the idea of the Fimbulwinter, the three-year-long period of incessant snow and cold immediately preceding the final showdown of the Ragnarok, established a natural connection between the mythical traditions and the geographical proximity of the arctic regions.

Discovery or rediscovery, then, serves as a common denominator between the exploration of the Arctic and the revival of the ancient culture. The same applies to the powerful focus, especially from the eighteenth century onwards, on the culture of the people; in all cases, the qualities of the North – formerly neglected – were being mobilised, and new cultural horizons were opened up, which contributed to a strengthening of northern identity and self-confidence. But what are the chief characteristics of this identity, and how does it stand out from the corresponding revival in the South, i.e. the Renaissance with a capital R? It might be useful to examine this more closely in light of two and frequently overlapping binary pairs, namely that of high versus low culture and that of centre versus periphery.

It is hardly controversial to claim that a given culture's status within the qualitative hierarchy of cultures is frequently a reflection of its geographical proximity to or distance from what is perceived as the cultural centre. The relationship between geography and cultural status, in other words, is not entirely coincidental. From the point of view of the southern, classical tradition, therefore, the North was, not unexpectedly, a geographical as well as a cultural periphery. As a result, the culture of the North – if there was a culture at all! – was almost invariably perceived as being low rather than high. In this context, the polar regions may be seen, from a southern point of view, as a further extension to the traditionally peripheral status of the North: after all, the populated North was seen as a stage on the way that led to the most peripheral region of the globe, i.e. the Arctic, which was generally regarded as empty of people.

The difference between the North and the Arctic, in other words, was only a question of degree. With the accumulation or concentration of people as an obvious criterion for qualifying as a centre, a journey to the North would reveal a gradually decreasing population and, consequently, a gradually increasingly peripheral status, as one approached the empty Arctic. Or, if one condescended to take the small native populations of the Far North into account, the fact that they also happened to be ethnically different from those of the centre could be taken as yet another indication of peripheral status and, essentially, as a disqualification in terms of cultural significance.

The logical conclusion from this was something like the following: the fewer people, the more peripheral; the more peripheral, the more primitive; the more primitive, the less important. The following chapters, therefore, could largely be seen as a study of a tension between North and South in which the former increasingly refuses to accept its status as a periphery of low cultural value, and instead claims the right to call itself a centre, proud of its cultural worth. If this perspective is taken up to the present day, one might see the growing cultural self-confidence among the native populations of the Far North over recent decades as a continuation of the same development.

Furthermore, an essential part of the celebration of the North, as described in these pages, is an almost obsessive preoccupation with the past. In general surveys of western intellectual history, the Romantic period is usually described as an important turning point, at which Protestant Europe especially, not least through German idealist philosophy and the struggle for national identities, developed a keen awareness of the importance of tradition. But as will be apparent from the following, the seed of this consciousness was planted long before Romanticism.

As early as the mid sixteenth century, and inspired by the Mediterranean Renaissance, the North started the long and fascinating rediscovery of its own past. There was, however, at least one important difference between the Renaissance of the North and that of the South: whereas the latter was largely a rediscovery of an ancient culture of elitist learning, produced by and intended primarily for a narrow segment of the population, the former was the rediscovery of a culture far closer to the common people. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that by the time of the mid-eighteenth century, this period's fascination, in the North, with a broad range of folk literature, which was only then beginning to be written down and preserved, was building on a tradition that was already firmly established.

Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that the development of modern democracy in the northern countries was connected to this characteristic, which imbued the lower segments of the population with a cultural significance and status that were largely lacking in the South. Again, centre vs. periphery provides a helpful matrix for the events on the ground: the North demonstrates a different and more tolerant attitude towards cultural and political peripheries than seems to be the case in the South. This may be explained by different social structures, for instance, but it may also have to do with the fact that the North was accustomed, in a way the South was not, to feeling itself labelled as peripheral and thus insignificant. Also, as mentioned earlier, it bordered on the ultimate periphery, i.e. the Arctic.

The culture of northern Europe, in other words, came to possess a dual quality. On the one hand, it retained its links with Mediterranean

Classicism and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in the sense that these continued to form an essential part of the general education of the higher and cultivated classes, and of the religion of society as a whole. On the other hand, however, the same classes increasingly added to this cultural tradition another and parallel dimension, which was rooted in the regional or national cultures of common people. As this latter dimension can be traced back to a period that more or less coincides with the Reformation, it seems natural to assume that this event in itself was an essential mechanism of change.

This should hardly come as a great surprise: after all, the Reformation performed an almost mind-blowing operation by taking the key to salvation, i.e. the all-important communication between man and God, out of the hands of a giant, centralised and highly hierarchical institution (with its centre in Rome), and placed it in the hands of the individual, whoever he or she might be in terms of education or social position. The Reformation was thus in itself a fundamentally democratic project, which by its very nature was bound to draw attention to the lives, and hence the culture, of common people. Luther's translation of the Bible into German was in itself such an explicit acknowledgement of how the communication of essentials was best conducted in the medium that was closer to ordinary people than anything else, namely their own language.

This active rejection of Latin, the traditional *lingua franca* and voice of cultural and religious authority, was in effect the cause of a slow blood-letting of Mediterranean cultural influence in the North. Step by step, the vernaculars, which were like vessels of alternative cultures and traditions, different from those of Rome, became the main channels through which religion, literature and academic discourse were being communicated. In the middle of the eighteenth century, John Wesley, continuing the Lutheran tradition, underlined the importance for the preacher of using a language close to that of the people. Robert Burns went one step further and published poems "Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect"; and James Macpherson's Ossian poems were presented as translations into English from the Gaelic, liberating them completely from any bonds to or dependence on the language and forms of the ancient literature of the South. As will be shown in ch. 3, the phenomenon of the Ossian poems was in itself more than enough to provoke Samuel Johnson, a man firmly connected to an urban, classical tradition, into a blind fury. For him, as would be the case for an educated Italian of the same period, the idea that the language and literature of the Highlands of Scotland might contain anything whatsoever of cultural value was not just ludicrous; it was plainly a contradiction in terms. When Wordsworth and the Romantics, therefore, insisted on using the language and the literature of the people, it was in no way the novelty that it has often been claimed to be; on the contrary, they were firmly imbedded in a well-established tradition.



Largely as a result of the Reformation, then, Rome and the South, to which all roads had led for nearly two thousand years, were slowly fading away from the cultural horizon of the North. The Reformation and the bitter divisiveness that accompanied it, in other words, not only severed old ties and replaced them with a pride in the cultural soil of the North; it also actively stimulated a northern cultural *hostility* towards the South – an attitude clearly visible, for instance, in such a popular phenomenon as the Gothic fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The general and long-term consequences of the Reformation were thereby a radical turning of the tables with regard to the question of high vs. low culture as well as to that of centre vs. periphery. Through the slow accumulation of its own ancient texts, together with the revival of its own ancient languages, all of which had been condescendingly characterised as worthless, the North was building its own alternative high culture, founded on its own ancient tradition, and at the same time redefining the old southern centres as increasingly peripheral.

This alternative high culture was obviously not as monolithic as the Greek and Latin cultures have generally been perceived; nor was it, like the Catholic religion, channelled and streamlined through a universal institution that claimed a spiritual and intellectual monopoly. It was rather to be seen as a loose federation of elements that for a considerable period were cultivated across a wide geographical area but that were eventually increasingly channelled into the struggle of individual nations to establish their own identity. In his book *Beyond Nations* (2009), John R. Chávez interestingly compares “ethnic regions” rather than “national states”, and concludes that “peoples have often had tighter emotional ties to such regions than to such states” (Chávez 2009, iv). Like Chávez’s study, therefore, the present book tries to look beyond the kind of predefined political units that usually form the basis of historical accounts, i.e. nation states, and instead takes as a point of departure a series of geographical areas assumed to have some fundamental cultural features in common. Thus the point of departure is the cultural tensions traceable between the northern and the southern regions of the West.

Clearly, this raises a question concerning the role of nationalism in relation to the concept of the North. In his study *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (2006), Joep Leerssen claims that one of the essential characteristics of nationalism is that it needs to be subsumed within one single and sovereign political unit (Leerssen 2006, 14–15). This does not appear to fit in with the definition of the North above. On the other hand, Leerssen also discusses, along the lines of Chávez, the possibility of “studying a multinational object from a supranational perspective” (a phrase borrowed from Hugo Dyserinck), i.e. another and more comprehensive level above the nation state:

Between the micro-level of nationalism in a single country and the global level of a total world-theory, the case of Europe presents a challenging and, I think, workable mid-size case, if we study it, not just as an accumulation of separate nation-states each with their own antecedent national movement, but comparatively, as a multinational whole to be analysed from a supranational point of view. (*Ibid.*, 268n and 19)

It is the contention of the present book, in other words, that the North represents a comparable “workable mid-size case”, and that it embraces a range of characteristics that are in some ways similar to or recognisable from discussions about nationalism. This means that the North over the centuries in question developed enough of a unified cultural framework to emerge with a kind of common identity worth examining more closely.

### *The Changing View of Nature*

The third theme playing a central role in this book is what I have called the changing view of nature, which in a number of ways relates to the Arctic as well as to the revival of the ancient culture of the North and the discovery of folk culture. First of all, the transformation in aesthetic thought taking place from the early eighteenth century onwards, depended in part upon a change of focus from cultivated to uncultivated nature, and this transformation took place primarily in the North. The aesthetic category of the sublime, and later that of the picturesque, were both designed for and concerned with a natural scenery more or less unmodified by human intervention. The aesthetics of the southern landscape, on the other hand, was mainly concerned with the cultivated landscape, designed and shaped by man. Again, this may be read in light of the above discussion about high versus low culture and centre versus periphery:

The cultivated landscape has a measurable, economic value by virtue of being productive; it is therefore subjected to control, ownership and political power. It is, furthermore, related to a religious tradition in which man is expected to exploit its resources, for his own good and for the glory of God. Consequently, it is integrated, even physically, into an ordered and hierarchical social community; the centre of the cultivated landscape is somehow man himself. The sublime landscape possesses radically different qualities. It is virtually always beyond the pale, in the original sense of the phrase: it is outside the sphere of man's control, literally as well as figuratively, and it is usually not subjected to private ownership. There is, in other words, something fundamentally democratic or anti-elitist about the landscape aesthetics of the sublime. It is thus also strangely reminiscent of the Reformation itself: the way that event transferred man's hope of salvation out of the control of a hierarchical institution to a personal relationship with God, the sublime invites the individual, whether emperor or clown, to experience and enjoy the most spectacular samples

of God's own creation, unfettered by social power structures. There is, in short, something liberatingly anarchical about this unlimited access to the gifts of God.

As suggested, the sublime in this context is also virtually always peripheral or remote. It is not associated with the urban centres of civilisation, which are generally in a more or less immediate proximity to the surrounding cultivated landscape. It is almost as if the degree to which the sublime landscape is freely available is proportionate to its distance from the cultural and political centres. This is the reason why travel, which becomes the means of enjoying the sublime, changes from being a journey from the periphery to the centre (as is the case with the Grand Tour), to a journey from the centre to the periphery. Indeed, from the Romantic period onwards, published travelogues display a continuous competition among travellers about who has visited the most peripheral destination. And there is no part of Europe that possesses a greater supply of remote, sublime scenery than the North. Even the Alps are soon felt to be too close to home and civilisation, and are replaced by such remote destinations as Norway and the Arctic, i.e. places where the populations are so scattered that it is possible to enjoy the sublime in its purest form, virtually without human interference, as exemplified in Caspar Friedrich's famous painting *The Wanderer above the Clouds* (1818). Against this background, it may be argued that the view of nature that is typically associated with the Romantic period and the nineteenth century in general is tailor-made for a northern landscape, or even more radically, was conceived as a conscious or unconscious assertion of northern natural qualities at the expense of the aesthetic standards of the southern landscape.

Especially from the middle of the eighteenth century, then, northern Europe experienced a development of fundamentally contradictory forces: from the moment when political, industrial and scientific developments set in motion a process of massive urbanisation and centralisation, the cultural and aesthetic impulses were largely moving in the opposite direction or, to be more precise, took their nourishment largely from the social, cultural and geographical periphery. In its turn, this tug-of-war, which has been largely overlooked in general historical accounts underlining the somewhat stereotyped march of progress and modernity, had a profound influence on the cultural and political landscape of the North.

### *Contemporary Perspectives*

A northern identity, then, is a feature shared by those nations that for geographical and/or cultural reasons regard themselves as connected with the North and the Arctic. This does not suggest that it means the same to

everyone encompassed by this definition. Recent decades have, for instance, made us increasingly aware of an embarrassingly obvious blind spot in the white, western vision of the North. We are only gradually coming to terms with the fact that it is impossible to talk about a single or homogenous view of the North; that it is rather a palimpsest or a multi-segmented fan that behind such western nationalistic identification labels as British, Nordic, German, Russian, American and Canadian also contains an array of other ethnic and cultural perspectives, represented by Indians, Inuit, Cree, Innu, Sami, Samoyeds, Yukaghir, Chukchi and a long list of other indigenous or first peoples.

However, as the present work is primarily concerned with a historical survey of how the North was actually perceived from Antiquity up to the time of the First World War, i.e. a period in which indigenous perspectives were hardly heard or registered, they will play a correspondingly modest part in the account. With regard to the Arctic, then, this means almost exclusively a view of the region as the Other. For virtually all representatives of European nations above, the Arctic was the Unknown; it was a strange and unfamiliar world, whereas for the voiceless natives it was precisely the opposite; *they* would necessarily have regarded the British, the Norwegians, the Russians etc. as foreigners and intruders into their familiar world.

The one part of this study where the sense of otherness does not apply is the celebration of the legacy of the ancient northern culture, which, on the contrary, was seen as a rediscovery of familiar – if not family – roots, although it completely excluded the cultures of native peoples mentioned above. The North thus represents a mixed and sometimes confusing picture of the familiar as well as the unknown, a feature that may have contributed to the special characteristics of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, behind the present work lies the ambition of trying to tell the story of which main ideas and phenomena have had an impact on the North's perception of itself. For the author, this turned into a much longer and more eventful journey than expected at the outset, but hopefully it is still a story that can be read and understood by anyone with a minimum of historical background knowledge. And there is also another and more complex ambition behind the project: a wish to understand how this emotional, intellectual and mythical tradition affects us today. We are products of history, whether we like it or not. This fact is more than a cliché, and it contains an important, however self-evident, truth: it is only by trying to understand our past that we can draw any sensible conclusions about all the whats, hows and whys of the world we live in. The prism through which we see the present – and the future – can only be the past; there are few alternatives, it seems, unless we regard ourselves as *tabulae rasae*. In this respect, the present attempt to outline the cultural history of the North is also an attempt to adopt a vantage point that might offer a different perception of the territory under investigation from that which

is usually offered. Hopefully, this may in turn help the reader to ask new questions and gather new insights.

We are today surrounded by debates about a wide range of topics more or less directly related to the history outlined in this book. Despite the fact that the relative dominance of the northern nations is on the wane, the northern and arctic regions are, year by year, playing a steadily growing role in the affairs of the international community. At the same time, Europe is witnessing an increasing tension and division between North and South, which in itself points to powerful historical roots begging to be analysed and acted upon. Various forms of fascism are stirring in a number of countries, and even though this phenomenon is not confined solely to the North, we cannot ignore the fact that this is where it showed its most hideous face less than a century ago, and that it grew out of a context necessarily connected to the cultural and political history of the region. Neither can we ignore the fact that history and identity are largely two sides of the same coin; our identity, however we choose to define it, is not only deeply rooted in our past; it is a direct product of it.

We might as well take the bull by the horns and acknowledge that since the Second World War, ideas about the North have largely been associated with political ideas on the far right. We cannot, therefore, neglect the fact that many readers will expect the historical journey described in these pages – even if it ends around the First World War – to move, almost logically, in the direction of ideologies on the far right. However, this is not the place to draw such a hasty conclusion; the task of the present project is simply to chart the waters, i.e. point out as many as possible of the component parts of what could be called the vision of the North, and thus allow the reader to continue his or her own reflections. In 1991, the British historian Roger Griffin defined fascism as “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic [i.e. relating to national rebirth] form of populist ultra-nationalism” (Griffin 1994, 26).

There is no doubt that the northern renaissance from the Reformation onwards contained a considerable element of nationalism, but there is also no doubt that it had a considerably broader scope, and if so, Griffin's fascism is only partly applicable to the movement (if it may so be called). It would, for instance, be highly problematic to argue that a figure like William Morris, who demonstrated an intense preoccupation with the North and the ancient literature and mythology connected with it, should be seen as connected in any way whatsoever with ideas pointing in the direction of fascism. For him, as for many others of his generation, there was no contradiction in being an ardent Socialist and an equally ardent Nordicist, because for Morris the two were intimately connected. It seems, in other words, too facile simply to reduce the fascination with the Nordic past to an outdated and suspect historical pursuit. Thus, if this book makes

the reader realise that the cult of the North contains a wider spectrum of elements than he or she had expected, it has achieved an important part of its objective.

Similarly and on a broader scale, such commonplace labels for the modern age as science, rationality and progress have, at least since the Second World War, generally been perceived as belonging on the other side of the political and cultural spectrum from what is associated with Nordicism, in virtually all its forms. But perhaps it is time to examine more closely if this is entirely true, or if this truism even tends to gloss over some other truisms, all of which need to be unmasked as part of a sustainable way forward. It is, for instance, almost exclusively the forces of science, rationality and progress that are in the vanguard of the intense activity presently taking place in the polar regions, an activity that will continue a more than five-hundred-year-old history of a rather ruthless exploitation of the renewable and non-renewable natural resources in the same waters and territories. Almost daily we are being reassured by politicians, engineers and multinational companies that considerations regarding the environment and the natural resources are given first priority. And daily far-reaching decisions are being made, virtually all of them sanctioning further steps towards the invasion of a world that has always been coveted by the same people who so willingly offer their promises of safeguarding it. Helped by modern technology and changes in the climate, however, this world has never been more accessible to human exploitation and therefore more vulnerable. The opening up of oil and gas fields together with new waterways for international shipping in some of the most vulnerable oceans on the planet thus places an enormous responsibility on the decision-makers in question.

Of the traditional forces of progress mentioned above, there is only one that may potentially change sides, and that is science. Having since birth been the all-important and steadily more sophisticated instrument of progress, science now finds itself faced with a major dilemma. On the one hand, it is the indispensable precondition for the technological innovation that makes the exploitation of the polar regions possible; on the other hand, it is accumulating a body of irresistible evidence – especially from the polar regions – to the effect that the progress it creates is rapidly dismantling the very eco systems science set out to study in the first place.

Frankenstein's monster, who after his creator's death set out for the North Pole to build his own funeral pyre, was once a Gothic fantasy, safely disconnected from reality. Today that fantasy is looking less unreal, and like Frankenstein himself, his modern colleagues are faced with inescapable choices. So far, the forces of progress (as traditionally understood) have reigned more or less supreme, the way they have done for half a millennium. But it may, theoretically, change; it is possible that the traditional forces of progress might not continue for much longer to

monopolise a word that rather immodestly promises a brighter future. In this context, the present book may hopefully show that the various visions concerning the North have partly made us into who and what we are today. This includes, whether we like it or not, ideas that will contribute to our decisions about the future, and for those decisions, an understanding of the past is essential.

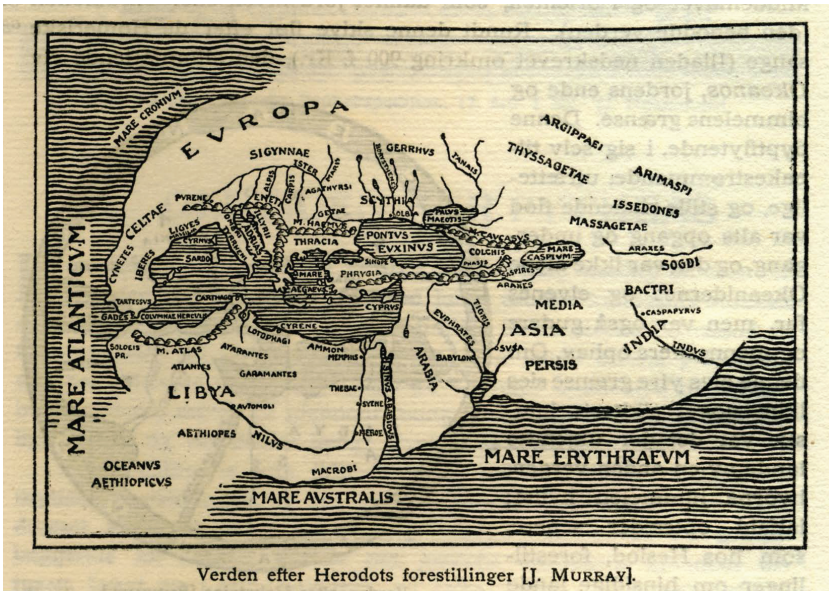




# 1. Finding a Footing: The North before 1700

## *The Mediterranean Looking North*

In his magisterial history of the arctic regions, *Nord i Tåkeheimen (In Northern Mists, 1911)*, Fridtjof Nansen reproduces a map of Europe as it is thought to have been perceived by the Greek historian and geographer



The world as perceived by Herodotus (Nansen 1911).

Herodotus, nearly half a millennium before Christ. The map provides a surprisingly accurate and detailed image of the snug enclosure of the Mediterranean and the territories immediately surrounding it. Starting from the west coast of Spain, however, there is a vague and hesitant line moving in a curve north and then gradually east, before vanishing into a white space. Not even the British Isles are anywhere to be seen. Then

around Denmark, which is also absent from the map, the frame cuts off any further speculation about the northern part of the world.

One could hardly ask for a more striking illustration of the Mediterranean perspective on the North in the early phase of Western civilisation: a place at the back of the world and fundamentally alien, where one's total ignorance could be replaced by an unfettered imagination. Not that the ancient Greeks were indifferent to the North; though far away, it always retained a sense of majestic awe. Observing the stars, they could see that it lay beneath the constellation of the Ursa Major, and consequently they "called the whole of the region *Arktikós*, the country of the great bear" (Lopez 1986, 16). Still, in their triadic climate theory, their home grounds in the Aegean served not unexpectedly as the golden mean, the ideal place for a free, rational and happy life, between the extremes of cold to the north and the burning heat of Egypt to the south (Gonthier-Louis Fink, in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 52).

But it is not for nothing that the Greeks are famed for their curiosity – intellectual as well as geographical – and a historical legend (or a legendary story) has it that Pytheas, a cosmopolitan Greek astronomer and geographer living in present-day Marseilles in the fourth century BC, sailed to Britain and possibly as far north as Norway or Iceland, or perhaps even Greenland, relating upon his return a tale whose written version is long lost. One of the seeds he planted in the collective imagination of the Greeks was that of the mysterious land of Thule or *Ultima Thule*, which would persistently appear on maps until the Renaissance and continue to produce visions of a northern Atlantis for considerably longer.<sup>1</sup> Other ethereal speculations among the ancient Greeks included Hyperboria, the land – as the name indicates – beyond the north wind, where happiness ruled and people lived for ever, passing their lives "in music, dance, serenity and comfort, untroubled by work, strife or disease" (McGhee 2005, 22).

This, then, was the first of a long line of utopias of the North. But there were also visions of the opposite kind: the North as a world of barbaric cruelty, mythical monsters and monstrous weather. Correspondingly, and as an additional feature of the ancient view of the world, an idea of cosmic balance suggested that there must be some fundamental similarity between the extreme north and the extreme south. As a result, if "the North Pole was horrifying [...] the *terra incognita australis* was literally dreadful *beyond* words". On the other hand, according to the same critic, "some classical geographers projected onto the southern void fantasies of paradise or visions of the sublime" (Wilson 2003, 145–46). Such extreme ideas were going to play a major role for more than two thousand years in the numerous imaginative and scientific attempts to unravel the mystery of the polar regions.

<sup>1</sup> In 1944, the American arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson published the book *Ultima Thule*, an attempt to restore the credibility of Pytheas's reports, which had been regarded as fanciful lies for two millennia.

To this somewhat fanciful picture, the Romans in typical fashion added a rather more realistic element. Not only did they get a taste of a northern dimension virtually unknown to the Greeks through their occupation of the major part of Britain from the first to the fifth century AD; in the years around the birth of Christ, they also explored northern Germany and Denmark. In his autobiography, *Res Gestae*,<sup>2</sup> Emperor Augustus describes a voyage in the year AD 4 during which his fleet rounded the tip of Jutland (Hedeager and Tvarnø 2001, 20). However, they were soon forced to acknowledge the presence of a continuous “northern problem”, and as early as in the year AD 9, when the Romans tried to push their borders north and east as far as the river Elbe, they suffered a humiliating defeat that was to echo loudly in northern Europe for two thousand years. Here, at the so-called Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, three Roman legions of nearly 30,000 soldiers were annihilated by a shockingly well-organised army of Germans.<sup>3</sup> 18,000 Romans were slaughtered in the battle, and their leader, the governor of Germania, Publius Quinctilius Varus, who was a harsh and efficient officer married to the grand-niece of Emperor Augustus himself, committed suicide. No wonder the Emperor, in later years, is reported to have moaned: “Quinctilius Varus, give me back my Legions!”

The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest was a decisive event not just for the Roman Empire and for northern Europe, but also for the future of Europe itself. The battle ensured that the European continent was divided, but paradoxically also united, with the Germanic North and the Latin South becoming a “dualistic unit” (Hedeager and Tvarnø 2001, 13).<sup>4</sup> It introduces, in other words, a long history of mutual attraction and repulsion between the North and the South. And it would not take long before the tension once again manifested itself. Soon after that long period of relative stability known as the *Pax Romana* ended around AD 250, Germanic tribes began to cross the Rhine and threaten the stability and security of the Empire.

Caesar (100–44 BC) wrote rather extensively on his encounters with several of the northern peoples, and clearly contributed to the Roman view of these far-away regions. But the main historical source of Roman and Mediterranean perceptions of the North from Emperor Augustus onwards is the Roman historian Tacitus (AD 56–117), who in the year AD 98 produced two works of lasting significance. *Agricola* is the biography and

<sup>2</sup> The full title is *Res Gesta Divi Augusti*, i.e. The Deeds of the Divine Augustus.

<sup>3</sup> This event was later to be exploited for all it was worth by German nationalists in the nineteenth century, and the memorial, the so-called Hermannsdenkmal in the Teutoburg Forest, which was finished in 1875, is still one of Germany’s major tourist destinations. It is situated in Hiddesen, near Detmold in North Rhine-Westphalia. Recent excavations have established that the actual site of the battle was Kalkrieser Berg, north of Osnabrück in Lower Saxony.

<sup>4</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PE.

the name of Tacitus's father-in-law, a Roman governor in Britain who successfully, if only temporarily, subdued the Caledonian tribes, north of what would later be known as Hadrian's Wall. Though sketchy and largely focused on the career of Agricola (AD 40–93) himself, the work also provides a glimpse into the nature and the people of the northernmost part of the world known to the Romans. According to the author, as many as 30,000 Caledonians, under their leader Calgacus, faced the Roman armies at the battle of Mons Graupius in Scotland in AD 84, and although they were decisively beaten, their numbers, courage and pride were an unpleasant reminder to the Romans of the very real threats facing the Empire from the north. Obviously, the threat was mutual; Calgacus, according to Tacitus, said in his speech to the troops before the battle began, that “[w]e, the most distant dwellers upon earth, the last of the free, have been shielded till today by our very remoteness and by the obscurity in which it has shrouded our name” (Tacitus 1975, 80). Thus, the encounter created an awareness on both sides that would contribute to the relationship between the North and the South for centuries to come. The respect of the Romans for these barbarian tribes is easy to detect between the lines of Tacitus's text. Nevertheless, after the victory, Agricola pushed further into Scotland, finding, according to Tacitus,

a huge and shapeless tract of country, jutting out to form what is actually the most distant coastline and finally tapering into a kind of wedge. These remotest shores were now circumnavigated, for the first time, by a Roman fleet, which thus established the fact that Britain was an island. At the same time it discovered and subjugated the Orkney Islands, hitherto unknown. Thule, too, was sighted, but no more. (60–61)

What Thule refers to in this case remains a mystery, but it does not seem likely that Agricola ever came as far north as Iceland or Scandinavia. Also, it is significant that, despite his victory, and despite the impression Tacitus gives, Agricola did not take control of Scotland. Instead, he started a series of fortifications with the apparent object of “bottling up the still unconquered Caledonians in their glens” (Hunter 1999, 38). But even these were soon abandoned, and a few decades later the Romans had effectively retreated further south to the line where Hadrian's Wall was built, a position which was retained until the British Isles were given up around AD 410.

Tacitus's other and more famous work was *Germania*, the first geographical-ethnographical account of this region (Gonthier-Louis Fink in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 57). Although this particular work was not widely read at first, Tacitus still appears to have cemented for several centuries the Mediterranean perception of the Germans, and although he leaves no doubt that they are barbarians, and of a radically different nature from the Romans, he offers a balanced and surprisingly unprejudiced account of their society and customs. Also, he initiates a tradition of contrasting southern and northern values in an almost Romantic fashion:

seeing civilised, Roman society as decadent, he presents the world of the Germans as a healthy antidote. When, for instance, he claims that they “live uncorrupted by the temptations of public shows or the excitements of banquets”; that “[n]o one in Germany finds vice amusing, or calls it ‘up-to-date’ to seduce and be seduced”; and that “[g]ood morality is more effective in Germany than good laws elsewhere” (Tacitus 1975, 117–18), he clearly has a bone to pick with the sophisticated, urban culture of the Empire.

An important element underlined by Tacitus is that of the Germans as forest dwellers, the forest representing the sharpest possible contrast to the open, cultivated landscape of the Mediterranean region (Hayman 2003, 97–98). This focus on the forest was of course later adopted by the German Romantic movement, celebrated as an emblem of the nation, and captured in the Romantic writer Ludwig Tieck’s coinage of the word *Waldeinsamkeit*. Overall, however, for the Romans as well as the Greeks, the concept of “the world” – in the sense of the *civilised* world – must have been inseparably linked to the Mediterranean, or, as the Romans so aptly and with jealous familiarity called it, *Mare Nostrum* – Our Ocean. The idea of the North representing anything remotely like a viable alternative to the South was still centuries away. Rather the North is explicitly defined as a geographical, political and cultural periphery in relation to the self-evident centre.

### ***“Destruction cometh out of the north”***

Even with the collapse of the Roman Empire and the gradual consolidation of the new central institution of the Catholic Church, also based in Rome, the overall power balance – at least in cultural terms – between northern and southern Europe continued much as before in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Admittedly, the Church soon reached far beyond the Mediterranean, including Ireland in the first half of the 400s and Scotland through the founding of the monastery of Iona in the Hebrides in the 560s. Also, it is important to remember that what today may seem like remote regions, such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, were at the time populous, dynamic and outward-looking societies that hardly suffered from a sense of being peripheral to or isolated from a distant centre.<sup>5</sup>

Still, taking a broad perspective one could argue that within the European context the Mediterranean remains the centre of attention throughout the entire thousand-year period from 500 to 1500, and from a southern point of view the North was frequently written off as a place

<sup>5</sup> This is the fundamental thesis of Hunter 1999.

“*frigore inhabitabilis*”, i.e. “uninhabitable because of cold” (Vaughan 1994, 35). The Migration Period from about 300 to 700 seems to have had relatively undramatic consequences for most of northern Europe in comparison with other parts of the continent. A slightly closer perspective, however, reveals some important modifications of this picture. In the course of a few centuries a wide array of Germanic tribes caused a demographic reshuffle in the countries around the North Sea, and it is only after this process had come more or less to a halt that historical names and events begin to emerge with any degree of clarity.

From within and beyond the disintegrating Empire, new groups swung into action and exerted an influence that may not have been immediately noticeable in the old centres, but which over time contributed to a whole new distribution of power. One of these groups – worth mentioning because it came to play a significant role in the later history of the vision of the North – was the Goths. Together with a series of other tribes, the Goths were a main factor in the slow and painful breakdown of the Roman frontiers, and appear to have come from present-day Sweden on the northern side of the Baltic in the centuries before Christ, and later to have penetrated into Poland and Northern Germany. From here they eventually entered the whirlpool of the great migrations and pushed further south and east.

One of the sources for the history of the Goths – a history that throughout retains a powerful focus on the tribe’s northern origins – is provided by a largely forgotten work from the middle of the sixth century AD by the late-Roman historian Jordanes, who lived in or around Constantinople and was himself of Gothic background. Having successfully invaded Italy during the 400s, the Goths were eager to consolidate their position and establish a permanent power base. They realised, furthermore, that acquiring a mythical and heroic past was an efficient way of achieving political respectability. This is probably the background of Jordanes’s work, *De Origine Actibusque Getarum* (*The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*), which after a rather rambling introduction about the world at large and the Great Sea, narrows down its focus. Having mentioned the island of Thule, he says: “The same mighty sea has also in its arctic region, that is, in the north, a great island named Scandza [i.e. Scandinavia], from which my tale (by God’s grace) shall take its beginning. For the race whose origin you ask to know burst forth like a swarm of bees from the midst of this island and came into the land of Europe” (Mierow 1966, 53). He then goes into a detailed and highly imaginative account of the several tribes that lived in Scandza, before moving on to their exodus under King Berig (or Berik) and their many heroic exploits on the European stage. Jordanes clearly wrote with a political positioning in mind<sup>6</sup> – not unlike the way in which

<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive discussion of Jordanes’s political concerns, see Goffart 1988, ch. 2.

Virgil wrote the *Aeneid* as an epic poem about the glorious origins of the Romans – and the Scandinavians' descendants for centuries used it for the same purpose.

Jordanes focused on the eastern branch of the Goths, or the so-called Ostrogoths, but there was also a western branch, the Visigoths, who in the 500s reached as far as Spain. Here their historiographer Isidorus of Seville wrote his *Historia Gothorum* (History of the Goths) in 624, like Jordanes providing his people with a glorious past at the expense of the Romans, whom they had subjugated. In this way, the Spanish were infused with a profound longing for their northern ancestors, especially the Swedes, something which again would surface centuries later (Stadius 2005, 33–34).

Another historical phenomenon of the early medieval period that was going to have a major impact on the future map of Europe, and that would contribute powerfully to the dynamics between north and south, was the reign of Charlemagne (742–814) in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. With both the Roman Empire and later the Catholic Church firmly based in Rome, Charlemagne's choice of Aachen – equally firmly placed north of the Alps – as the centre of his realm, carried a symbolic significance that brought cultural and political prestige to a part of the continent that, seen from the South, was still a barbarian hinterland. It is difficult to imagine the high Middle Ages in northern Europe, with its distinctly northern features in culture and architecture, without taking Charlemagne's contribution into account; it is equally difficult to imagine the Reformation several centuries later without the powerful impetus of the man who, from his northern base, was able to play an independent and authoritative role in relation to the Church itself. The South, in other words, was slowly becoming aware of Europe as a geographical, cultural and political sphere extending far beyond the Mediterranean.

The Vikings were another northern phenomenon that played a central role in the multi-act drama of the early Middle Ages and, like the Goths, they were going to experience a later revival. At first, the events of the north-western corner of Europe were too insignificant to have a noticeable impact on the rest of Europe. One such early incident from the hazy dawn of the region's recorded history is reflected in the story told by the twelfth-century divine Geoffrey of Monmouth to the effect that King Arthur in the year 517 sailed “with his fleete into Island, and brought it and the people thereof under his subjection” (quoted in Markham 1879, 2). The spelling “Island” (or “Iseland”), however, which was common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Seaton 1935, 6), makes it very far from certain that the story actually refers to Iceland, as has been suggested; furthermore, if it were true, it would predate both the discovery and the settlement of the country by three centuries. What seems far less dubious is that at some time in the eighth century, and perhaps even as early as the

seventh, Irish monks travelled and settled as far as the Faroes and Iceland, thus opening up lines of communication hardly used before, but which were soon destined to become part of a large and intricate network.

Then, like a bolt of lightning, the Vikings descended on Europe. The first incident, in 789, was ominous enough: three ships from Hordaland in Norway arrived on the coast of Dorset. The reeve, or bailiff, who gave them a customary welcome, was instantly murdered (O'Donoghue 2007, 86). Then followed the plunder of the monastery of Lindisfarne on 8 January 793; the next year they wreaked havoc in the Hebrides (MacLeod 1997, 61), and soon their range of action was radically extended across the whole of the North Atlantic world. Whereas ships in the region until around 700 seem to have been rowed, the introduction of the square sail around 800 suddenly made longer voyages possible (Szabo 2008, 68).

Equipped with this spearhead naval technology in the shape of large but versatile ships capable of tackling the unruly seas of the North Atlantic, the Vikings launched the first great phase of the centuries-long exploration of this far-off corner of Europe. Iceland, in particular, attracted the interest of Norwegians, whose presence appears to have forced the Irish monks to leave the island, and in the course of the 800s it acquired a substantial number of settlers. A first wave of Norsemen similarly arrived in the Faroe Islands around 825, followed by another wave, led by Harald Fairhair, at the end of the century. Around 850 the Norwegians similarly established an earldom in the Orkneys and a kingdom in Dublin, while in the course of the century Danes and Norwegians took control of a large part of the Midlands and the north of England, known as the Danelaw.

Around 890, Ottar (or Other), a Norwegian from the Troms area, provided for King Alfred of England a sober and generally trustworthy account of his journey past the North Cape, the Kola Peninsula and into the White Sea. This was also the time when the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was written, summing up the history of England and placing an understandable emphasis on the arrival of the Jutes from present-day Denmark. At the same time Scandinavian, mostly Swedish, Vikings penetrated deep into present-day Russia, founding cities and conducting extensive trade even with the Far East. Even *Beowulf*, the heroic 3,000-line epic marking the genesis of English literature, is set in Sweden.

But the Norsemen did not limit their activities to the North: in 860 an army of Vikings attacked Constantinople; in 885 they laid siege to Paris after repeated attacks; and in 911 Rollo, a Viking leader of unclear origin, founded a principality in Normandy, which was soon to have a decisive influence on the course of European history (Gustafsson 2007, 21). Then back in the Far North, the Norwegian King Harald Gråfell (Greycloak) was reported to have fought a major battle in 970 on the shores of the Dvina, probably in connection with the important trading post Kholmogory



(near present-day Arkhangelsk).<sup>7</sup> Soon after, a new round of discoveries followed: in the 980s Greenland was discovered by Erik the Red and settled soon after; less than two decades later, probably in 1002, his son Leif Eriksson travelled even further west and reached Vinland or America. Then, literally to crown the by now close Anglo-Scandinavian connections, the Danish-born King Canute the Great became king of England in 1014, of Denmark in 1018 and of Norway in 1028, thus briefly uniting the three kingdoms until his death in 1035. In the course of less than two hundred and fifty years, the Vikings thus threw the doors open to the whole North Atlantic region, making it an undeniable part of Europe, geographically, politically, economically and culturally. As a result, Europe would never be the same again.

Apart from producing stories and legends of major importance for the future, the discovery of Vinland of course did not produce a lasting settlement. Most of the other discoveries did, however, and the result was a hugely extended sphere of operation for the necessarily limited population of the region, with an important process of consolidation following in the wake of the initial discoveries.<sup>8</sup> The Icelandic Althing was founded in 930, indicating a thriving, independent community. It was followed around 1000 by the introduction of Christianity and – rather strikingly – by the establishment of a literary tradition primarily in the vernacular rather than in Latin. In Greenland, too, a hundred years after the first settlements, the total population has been estimated to have been about 2,000, and archaeologists have excavated nearly twenty churches from the period (McGhee 2005, 91–92). At the most, there may have been as many as 6,000 Norse colonists in the two main settlements (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Greenland”). To the north and east, too, new areas were explored. In 1032, a merchant adventurer named Uleb from Novgorod is said to have sailed beyond the southern tip of Novaya Zemlya and into the Kara Sea (McGhee 2005, 138).

The spectacular range and pace of these voyages suggest that the balance of power, military as well as commercial, was slowly changing; for the first time, the activity in the far North was felt and registered by the powers to the south. Furthermore, with the arrival of Christianity even in these remote regions, church institutions soon followed.<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> The so-called *finneskatt* (Fin Tax or Lap Tax), which applied to groups living outside the realm or jurisdiction of the powers that be, is mentioned as early as the late 800s, in connection with Ottar’s journey to the White Sea. It is an indication of considerable and valuable trade from an early date in the very northern part of Scandinavia and Russia.

<sup>8</sup> Estimates suggest that the total population of Scandinavia and Germany around the year 1000 was c.4 mill., rising to 11.5 mill. by 1340. For the source of these figures, see bibliography: “Medieval Sourcebook: Tables on Population in Medieval Europe”.

<sup>9</sup> Whereas Britain had experienced missionary activity, primarily from Ireland, from the 500s, and gradually adopted the faith in the course of the following century (Black 1996, 11), Denmark is regarded as christianised around 965, when King Harald Bluetooth was

bishopric of Hamburg-Bremen, labelled “The Mission of the North”, was given responsibility for the entire Nordic region until 1105, when it was transferred to the new bishopric in Lund in southern Sweden. From here bishops were probably sent to Greenland from 1124 onwards, and after 1152, from Nidaros (Trondheim).<sup>10</sup> Still, it is the entire, traditional area covered by the bishopric which is the topic of the comprehensive history by Adam of Bremen (d. c.1080), entitled *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (Deeds of the Bishops of the Hamburg Church), which he finished in 1075. The work is full of fantastic accounts of northern peoples and places – the latter including Thule and Vinland – and exerted a considerable influence on the wide array of factual and fictional perceptions about the North in the centuries that followed. In 1136 a monastery was established in Arkhangelsk, and in the first half of the twelfth century, a large number of monasteries were established all over Scandinavia, Finland and Iceland.

Together with the hundreds of churches, the new religion came to wield a powerful and efficient system of communication, and create a sense of cultural cohesion across a wide range of different communities. As the Church was a universal institution, it had its own geo-political agenda and did not aspire or even want to contribute to the development of distinct local or national identities. Still, in the case of Norway, the death of Olaf Haraldsson at Stiklestad in 1030, his subsequent beatification as early as the following year, and his informal title as “Norway’s eternal King” (Danielsen et al. 2002, 88), seem to have played a relatively significant role in the gradual cultivation of a sense of Norwegian identity for centuries to come. In Iceland, similarly, the Church appears in the early period to have been largely under the control of “prosperous farmers, who owned the churches and employed priests to serve in them” (Björnsson 2003, 11).

By this time the so-called Viking Age had come to an end. The successful invasion of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror – himself a second-generation Viking – and the defeat and death of Harald Hardråde at Stamford Bridge outside York in the same year heralded a new age, and in the 1220s and 30s, just a few years after King John signed the Magna Carta in England, Snorri Sturluson at his farm Reykholt in Iceland was writing the history of what was already a heroic past. Admittedly, there are spurious claims in Icelandic annals to the effect that Svalbard might actually have been discovered in 1194 (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Svalbard”), thus marking a new bout of activity, but the twilight was already falling on the Norse world.

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baptised. The Icelandic Althing adopted Christianity in the year 1000, and Norway was christianised in 1030. The situation in Sweden was unclear, but Christianity is clearly present in the country from the 990s onwards (Gustafsson 2007, 28).

<sup>10</sup> Opinions vary somewhat: I.A. Blackwell, in his first supplementary chapter to the 1847 edition of Bishop Percy’s translation of Mallet’s *Northern Antiquities* (Mallet 1847), claims that “[t]he first bishop was ordained in 1121, the seventh and last in 1404” (245).

In the 130-year period leading up to the ghostly advent of the Black Death, the level of communication between the northern countries was on a wholly different scale. On Norway's future national day, 17 May 1230, King Henry III instructed three of his sheriffs to look after the hawks and falcons that he had received from Norway, and on 30 October 1252 he instructs his London sheriffs that "the polar bear which the King recently received from Norway and which is now in the Tower, be provided with a muzzle and iron chains, together with a good rope to hold it with when it goes fishing in the Thames" (Gunnes 1989, 193 and 261).<sup>11</sup> Thus the tables had very decidedly been turned, and Scandinavian swords and armies had been replaced by humble gifts.

In a larger context, it could be argued that the impressive role played by northern Europe, or at least the Nordic countries, in continental politics, was also over for the time being. Despite the fact that Christianity provided a common culture for all of Europe, and Scandinavian armies retained a certain reputation among European powers through the Crusades, the military strength of the North was reduced in relation to its southern neighbours. In 1262, Iceland and Greenland became tributaries of the Norwegian crown, and four years later Norway ceded the Isle of Man and the Hebrides to Scotland (Gustafsson 2007, 42), indicating a more passive role after the death in the Orkneys in December 1263 of the Norwegian King Håkon Håkonsson. Denmark similarly went through a period of chaos and dissolution of royal power, starting a recovery only towards the mid-1300s.

Another significant element emerged, however. From the middle of the 1200s onwards, a new power, separate from that of kings and nobles, arose in the region around the Baltic and the North Sea, namely the Hansa League, initially a loose trade federation of German coastal towns. One effect of this steadily expanding and gradually more influential commercial network was that the Nordic countries, while becoming more closely connected to the Continent, reduced their traditional contact with the British Isles. From 1337 onwards, England was similarly focused on the war with France, the so-called Hundred Years' War, which lasted till 1453.

### *The Dream of the Pacific*

The rise and fall of Scandinavian power during the Middle Ages was obviously due to a number of factors, including one of which the people themselves were undoubtedly ignorant. What they did not know was that Northern Europe at the time was experiencing the so-called "Medieval

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<sup>11</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PF.

Warm Period”, i.e. roughly four centuries with an unusually warm and stable climate, and the population around 1300 was similarly ignorant of the fact that this period was now drawing to a close. “Nothing prepared them for the catastrophe ahead. As they labored through the warm summers of the thirteenth century, temperatures were already cooling on the outer frontiers of the medieval world” (Fagan 2000, 21). Northern Europe was, in other words, entering a period, which was to last until the late nineteenth century, in which a familiarity with arctic conditions – or at least with snow, ice and cold – was far more common than today, not just for the arctic explorers but for the people at home as well. Scientists of the late twentieth century would give the period from the early 1300s to the late 1800s the chilling label “The Little Ice Age”.

With the benefit of hindsight, there is thus a peculiar irony in the fact that Dante Alighieri (c.1265–1321) in the course of precisely these years was working on the last cantos in *Inferno*, the first part of his *Divine Comedy*. Here, in cantos 32–34, which describe the ninth and lowest circle, i.e. the very foundations of Hell, the heat commonly associated with hell has been replaced by cold. Horrified, Dante and his guide, Virgil, enter the scene – the frozen Lake of Cocytus – in which the heads of thousands of traitors, “with their teeth / Chattering like storks” emerge from the frozen surface (Dante 1949, I: 272). They, and we, have reached the world of the worst sinners, who are “frozen into immobility – that is the final state of sin” (Dorothy Sayers in Dante 1949, I: 275), and in the fourth and last round of the circle, the ultimate traitor – Dis or Satan himself – comes into view, three-headed and bat-like, and locked for all eternity up to his chest in a block of ice. Ignorant of the meteorological reality that the colder climate would also eventually reach Italy, there is no doubt that Dante made use of popular perceptions about the North in order to create a world whose horror surpassed even that of a burning inferno.<sup>12</sup>

But a gradual deterioration in the climate was not the only cause for concern in the region; it was soon accompanied by another and more aggressive killer than cold. The cataclysmic arrival of the Black Death (followed by later epidemics) all over Europe from about 1347 had an enormous impact on the North, reducing the population by probably 50 percent. Even a country like Iceland, which was not affected by the Black Death itself, suffered a major epidemic a few decades later, from 1402 to 1404, which also appears to have killed more than half of its people. The consequence for the whole region was that the main characteristic of the fifteenth century was one of crises, revolts and a struggle for recovery (Gustafsson 2007, 67).

<sup>12</sup> But the North also had an equally frightening counterpart in perceptions about the unknown world to the far south, i.e. the terra incognita australis (Wilson 2003, 146), which in Dante’s perpendicular universe would give a new meaning to the phrase “down under”.

As to the history of the northern part of Scandinavia, however, there is one particular point that deserves to be mentioned as it illustrates how the region continued to represent a strategic position of some importance. In the early 1300s, Novgorod (the Vikings called it Holmgard), which had played a central role in the Viking trade with Russia or Gardariki<sup>13</sup> from the 900s onwards, became a threat to Norwegian trade interests in Finnmark, which is today the northernmost county of Norway. In 1326 war seemed imminent, and despite a peace settlement in the same year, the building of Vardøhus Fort, on the exposed east coast of Finnmark, was started, probably in the 1330s, under the young Norwegian-Swedish King Magnus Eriksson.<sup>14</sup> But the period also contains the first intimations of a somewhat more systematic interest in the Arctic.

First of all, the contact between Scandinavia and Greenland had long been sporadic, and in the 1340s Ivar Bardarson (or Bårdsson), a priest from the Bergen diocese, was sent to investigate “a falling-off in the payment of tithes and taxes” (Moss 2006, 35). According to Sarah Moss, he found the Eastern Settlement (Austerbygd) small and scattered and struggling to survive.

However, when he eventually sailed up to the Western Settlement [Vesterbygd], Ivar Bardarson found an eerie scene. He saw the houses along the coast from the sea, and as the ships approached the sailors could see animals grazing around the small farms. Drawing closer, they saw racks where fish were drying, but “there are left some horses, goats, cattle and sheep, all feral, and no people either Christian or heathen.” All the buildings were intact and seemingly inhabited and the big church at Stensness still furnished, but there was no sign of anyone present or recently departed. (*Ibid.*, 36)<sup>15</sup>

Bardarson, then, who later wrote an account of his stay, became an eye witness to the slow collapse of the Norse settlements in Greenland, but failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for their mysterious downfall. Then, after the last documented contact between Greenland and Norway in 1410, a long silence descended (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Greenland”). As will be discussed later, the mystery surrounding the fate of the settlements in Greenland was going to become one of the most haunting enigmas of the whole medieval period, producing an endless number of speculations that found their way into travelogues, poetry and fiction. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Bardarson’s account was reproduced in hand-written and printed form almost continuously from the early sixteenth century

<sup>13</sup> Gardariki denotes an extensive region roughly from Novgorod in the north to Kiev in the south.

<sup>14</sup> See bibliography: “Vardøhus festning”.

<sup>15</sup> Both the Eastern and the Western Settlements were on the west coast of Greenland, the former just to the north-west of the southernmost point, Kap Farvel.

onwards and was used by various explorers in the region.<sup>16</sup> The mystery about the Greenland settlements, however, appears to have found a natural solution: recent ice-core analyses from the period “1343 to 1462 reveal two decades of much colder summers than usual. Such a stretch, year after year, spelled disaster” (Fagan 2000, 67).

Bardarson’s account may possibly also lend some credibility to the otherwise rather hard-to-believe story attributed to Nicholas of Lynne, a Franciscan friar at Oxford and author of a vanished work entitled *Inventio fortunatae* (The Fortunate Discovery) from 1360, about his alleged voyage to the regions around the North Pole (Oleson 1966).<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, the account (allegedly discovered more than a century later) by the Venetian brothers Nicolo and Antonio Zeno about a similar voyage in the 1390s into the North Atlantic, and a map supposedly showing islands etc. that were only discovered much later, probably belongs more to fiction than to fact. Still, these stories point forward to the very real discoveries that came like beads on a string only a century or so later. The Zeno story also illustrates another point, which becomes even more evident in the following century: in accordance with the fact that the Renaissance begins in southern rather than in northern Europe, it is in this part of the continent that the new wave of exploration has its origin, especially in Spain and Portugal.

In this particular respect Britain and the rest of northern Europe still find themselves – almost literally – in a northern backwater, at one remove from that essential accumulation of new knowledge that is an essential prerequisite for innovation. This is perhaps particularly evident in a map from the 1420s by “the first cartographer of the North”, the Rome-based Dane Claudius Clavus (Claudius Claussøn Swart), in which northern Scandinavia is extremely sketchy indeed. At the North Cape Clavus places a cross, with a pregnant Latin phrase attached: *non licet ultra ire*: it is not advisable to go any further (Castrén 1910, 4–5)!

In the mid-1400s, furthermore, at a time when Britain descended into the disruptive and thirty-year-long Wars of the Roses and the fragile Scandinavian Union of Kalmar<sup>18</sup> gradually disintegrated, the Portuguese Prince Henry (“the Navigator”) helped launch the Portuguese school of cartography. Together with technical advances in the use of the quadrant and the astrolabe and the development of such new sailing vessels as the

<sup>16</sup> See Finnur Jónsson’s introduction in Bárðarson 1930, 8–16.

<sup>17</sup> For those interested in the story of Nicholas of Lynne (Nicholas is sometimes spelt Nicolas, and Lynne sometimes Lynn), there is a lot to appreciate, and to question, in Thompson 1996.

<sup>18</sup> The Union of Kalmar included the present-day Scandinavian countries and a large part of Finland, together with Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Shetland and the Orkneys. Even though it lasted for more than a hundred years (1397–1523), the major member countries essentially retained a large part of their independence, which caused major internal conflicts throughout the period.

caravel, this laid the essential foundation for radically more accurate as well as daring navigation, and paved the way for later maritime pioneers. It is an interesting coincidence that this happened almost exactly at the same time as the introduction of printing, and one can only speculate about the relative significance of the two advances in knowledge and technology.

One particular incident from the first half of the fifteenth century serves to illustrate the way in which the Far North – in the eyes of Mediterranean sailors at the time – must have seemed like a world belonging to a totally different dimension.<sup>19</sup> In late April 1431 the Venetian merchant Pietro Querini set out from Crete with what must have been a large ship, with a crew of sixty-eight and a considerable cargo intended for Flanders. After a series of problems, they approached their destination, but were driven off course by violent storms, and eventually, a week before Christmas, had to give up the ship and enter the lifeboats. When after several days one of the lifeboats reached the island of Røst in the Lofoten islands in northern Norway, only sixteen of the crew were still alive, and eventually five more died. The Italian sailors stayed at Røst for more than three months, and both Querini himself and two of his crew later wrote down their accounts, expressing respect and gratitude to the local population and describing, clearly with a reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the experience as a stay "in the first circle of Paradise".

Events later in the century – Bartolomeu Dias's discovery of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 for Portugal and Christopher Columbus's discovery of America for Spain four years later – confirm that the centre of attention has shifted from the eastern to the western Mediterranean, i.e. to the countries with easy access to the Atlantic and thus to a rapidly expanding world. The climax of Iberian dominance was soon to follow: in a hubris of power, Spain and Portugal on 7 June 1494, with the blessing of Pope Alexander VI, sign the spectacular Treaty of Tordesillas, which with supreme simplicity divides the world (most of which was as yet undiscovered) between them with a line from north to south down the Atlantic, chopping a corner off what is today Brazil. Everything to the west of the line would belong to Spain; to the east, to Portugal, thus securing America (except Brazil) for the former, and Africa for the latter.

But nemesis was already lurking in the wings. Even before the handshakes and the signatures at Tordesillas, there were indications that the wind was changing. An apparently innocent and irrelevant incident, which had already taken place in 1470 was the publication of Tacitus's *Germania*, the only surviving manuscript of which had been lying dormant and unknown in a German monastery for several centuries (Stenroth 2002, 83). Now, with a touch of symbolism, by means of the recent German invention of printing, it was put back into circulation,

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<sup>19</sup> The following summary is indebted to Knutsen 1993, 24.

in Venice of all places, forming a part of the great classical revival and slowly beginning to stir proud hearts north of the Alps. As a matter of fact, *Germania* was “to become the single most influential piece of Latin literature in post-medieval Europe” (Leerssen 2006, 41). Only eight years later, in another apparently irrelevant incident, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile established the Spanish Inquisition, as if they deemed it necessary, less than forty years before the Reformation, to stem a rising tide. Thirdly, in the very same year that the Treaty of Tordesillas was signed, an Italian navigator and tradesman, Giovanni Caboto – later more famous under the name of John Cabot – having failed to attract the interest of the Spanish and the Portuguese in his plans to search for new routes to the Pacific, made a decision which could also be seen as symptomatic of a turning of the tide: he moved to England in search of a more enthusiastic employer. At the same time, the seemingly waterproof duopoly created by the Treaty of Tordesillas paradoxically opened up new and unforeseen prospects. According to Richard Vaughan’s *The Arctic: A History*,

[t]he aspiring and vigorous would-be maritime nations to the north of the Iberian Peninsula, the French, English, Dutch, and Danes, excluded in this way from exploring and trading expeditions to the south, directed their attempts to win a share of this new-found wealth in overseas empires towards the east, west and north. (Vaughan 1994, 54)

Cabot had already seen this possibility; he was convinced there was an easier route to the Pacific than round the Cape of Good Hope, and in Bristol he found merchants who were willing to invest in the idea. He also received the goodwill of the first Tudor king, Henry VII, and in 1496 was granted letters patent for an expedition. After an unsuccessful attempt in the same year, he set out from Bristol in May 1497 with one tiny ship and eighteen men. Reaching land – the so called “New Found Land”, whose waters were teeming with cod as well as Basque fishing vessels (Kurlansky 1999, 28–29) – on 24 June, Cabot believed he had reached a part of Asia, but to be on the safe side, he claimed the land for England. On his return in early August he acquired further funding for a new and larger expedition, which set out the following year, never to be seen again (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Cabot, John”).

Cabot, then, clearly initiated the centuries-long British exploration of the Arctic, and it is an interesting coincidence that just as he was preparing for his last expedition, in November 1497, yet another Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, was rounding the Cape of Good Hope on his way – via a southern route – to India. The two voyages, therefore, could be seen as illustrations of how northern and southern Europe, at least for the time being, were going their separate ways, one choosing the “high road”, the other the “low road”. It is characteristic of this early, transitional phase, however, that the English had to hire an Italian to provide their expedition



with the necessary skill and expertise. It is also typical of the period that Portugal, still in pole position, would not passively watch a potential rival open up a new frontier, and as early as in the year 1500 the Portuguese King Manuel I sent the explorer Gaspar Corte-Real in search of the Northwest Passage, i.e. the waterway assumed to exist through the north of the American continent. Having probably reached Greenland (*ibid.*, s.v. “Corte-Real Brothers”), he returned and set out again on 15 May the following year. Like Cabot a few years earlier, he perished at sea, but only after having taken about fifty native Americans captive and sent them back to Portugal on board his brother’s ship. When his brother Miguel in May 1502 left Lisbon with three ships and was himself lost, the Portuguese exploration of the far North was effectively at an end (*ibid.*).

To underline further the early English awareness of the North, it should be mentioned that the Cabot story also had a sequel within the family. After his father’s disappearance, Sebastian Cabot, who like his father had been born in Venice, appears to have convinced Henry VII of the need for another expedition. The younger Cabot never wrote down anything about his voyages, and so his reputation may possibly be based on a rather tall tale, but there is reason to believe that he did lead an expedition for the Northwest Passage in 1508–09 and that he may have discovered not only Hudson Strait but even sailed into Hudson Bay. Regardless of what actually happened, however, the bay, which was initially thought to be part of the Pacific, was not to be charted and named for another century (*ibid.*, s.v. “Cabot, Sebastian”).

When trying to fathom the relationship between northern and southern Europe in the millennium following the collapse of the Roman Empire, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the Mediterranean view of the North generally and its view of the polar regions specifically. One is often left with a feeling that virtually all of Europe north of the English Channel and the Baltic is subsumed within stereotyped perceptions of a “kingdom of the dead, a bottomless pit or precipice, a frozen sea in perpetual dark night, a land of eternal sun” (Vaughan 1994, 35); that England and Greenland, therefore, are different in degree only, and that they essentially belong to the same world of the almost unreal.

This does not mean, however, that southern Europe was totally unfamiliar with the northern world. Cod, for instance, was becoming an increasingly important part of the European diet in the first half of the sixteenth century (Kurlansky 1999, 51); it was largely caught in the North Atlantic by Mediterranean fishermen, not least in order to satisfy the huge demand for fish in Catholic countries, where the Church had allowed “the devout to consume fish on Fridays, the day of Christ’s crucifixion, during the forty days of Lent and on major feast days”, thus creating a considerable market (Fagan 2000, 77–78). This was part of the reason why the Portuguese, for instance, had already paid several visits to what was

later to be called Newfoundland, claimed it as their own discovery, and given it their own imprint in terms of a range of place names, which were later anglicised (Kurlansky 1999, 50–51). Incidentally, the Church also classified whalemeat as “cold” food, acceptable for Fridays and holy days (Szabo 2008, 84), thus stimulating the northern whale fisheries, that were soon to take on major proportions. At the turn of the sixteenth century there was also other evidence that the South was keeping an increasingly keen eye on the North and realising its potentially strategic and economic importance, both in its own right and as a gateway to the East. Similarly, there was evidence that northern Europe would not accept the supremacy of the South for much longer.

### ***The Reformation: The Great Divide***

The sixteenth century was not many years old when Henry VIII (1491–1547) succeeded his father, Henry VII, on 22 April 1509, at the age of only seventeen. On 11 June of the same year he then married Catherine of Aragon, his brother’s twenty-three year old widow, after years of diplomatic manoeuvring involving negotiations with Spain and a papal dispensation.<sup>20</sup>

These complications, however, were a light breeze compared to the storms that were to follow. Henry, who with his daughter Elizabeth I was going to leave an indelible mark on the whole century, played a major role in the history of the North, in the field of politics as well as religion. But this outcome was far from obvious at the beginning of his reign. Under his father, England had become “an important, albeit second-rank power” (Black 1996, 85), and as England possessed neither a language nor a culture whose prestige could compete with those further south, he started out as an unremarkable cultivated and educated man of his time, learning Latin, French and Spanish and being, almost needless to say, a good Catholic. Henry, in other words, started his career as the king of an England that was still in the shadow of the South.

Henry VII’s tentative ventures into the North had been based on a realisation that the Treaty of Tordesillas had squeezed him into a corner. For the time being his prospects to the south – and hence to the markets of the Far East – were more or less blocked by Spanish and Portuguese naval power. Thus to some extent his only obvious choice for exploration was

<sup>20</sup> Henry VII’s arrangement of the marriage between his heir Arthur and Catherine of Aragon, which was formalised by the Treaty of Medina del Campo in 1489, was a clear expression of England’s advantage of a good relationship with its powerful southern neighbour. When Arthur died in 1502, it was deemed politically prudent to save the treaty by replacing Arthur as a marriage partner for Catherine with Henry, the new heir to the throne.

to pursue the vague rumour of an alternative, northern route. During the first twenty years of his reign, his son showed very little enthusiasm for this idea. On the other hand, he is credited by historians with something that was to prove far more important in terms of solving the problem of access to foreign markets, namely the systematic building of a powerful navy. In fact, Henry VII had never owned anything that could reasonably pass as one; at his death, he left behind “seven operational ships, [...] two Great Ships in building, a modest naval establishment at Portsmouth, and an active Clerk of the Ships” (David Loades in Hill ed. 2002, 25).<sup>21</sup>

But the young Henry saw both the need for and the possibilities of a stronger navy, and in the first three years of his reign he increased the number of vessels to fifteen, and by 1540 had forty-five ships, the large majority of which were over a hundred tons and heavily armed. By the time of his death in 1547 the number had risen to fifty-five. In addition, he had in the previous year established the Council for Marine Causes, later to be called the Admiralty (*ibid.*, 32). Hardly any public institution would play a more significant role in the development of the British Empire, and especially in the exploration of the polar regions.

Henry, however, had other and more immediate concerns. Although he was a man of many talents and abilities, that of producing a male heir capable of succeeding him was not among them, at least not for a long time. Having been married for a decade, Catherine had been through a number of pregnancies and births, but all of the babies were either stillborn or died soon after birth, except one daughter, Mary, later to be called Bloody Mary. Fearing for the future of the Tudor dynasty, Henry brooded and waited for nearly another decade before eventually asking the Pope, in 1527, for an annulment of his marriage. This opened up a Pandora’s box, whose contents would have a major impact on the future of the whole of northern Europe. Not only would it, for obvious reasons, put Henry on a collision course with Spain, but it would also pitch the young king in an escalating conflict against the Church itself. And all this despite the fact that Pope Leo X had, only six years earlier, awarded Henry the honorary title “Defender of the Faith” in appreciation of the English king’s uncompromising treatise against Martin Luther.

The tidal wave that would come to be called the Reformation was under way; it was already ten years since Luther had nailed his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg and seven years since his excommunication. In Germany, it hardly improved Luther’s and the Germans’ standing with Rome that Tacitus was once again mobilised in a direct attack on the Church, by humanists as well as theologians, and with an explicitly political purpose. As early as 1497, according to Joep Leerssen,

<sup>21</sup> The following figures have been taken from the same chapter.

the Rhineland humanist Conrad Celtis had lectured on *Germania* at Vienna University, and two of Luther's most vociferous defenders, Ulrich von Hutten and Georg Spalatin, began to praise him as a veritable champion, not of private religious faith, but of the German nation. Luther was made a political as much as a moral champion. In his tract *Arminius*, c. 1520, Hutten made the obvious and very effective comparison: just as in Roman times the ancient German chief had defended the liberties of his country by defeating Varus's legions in the Teutoburg Forest, so the modern German theologian would defend the liberties of the country by defeating the Roman pontiff. (2006, 42)

In other parts of northern Europe, too, the Protestant rebellion was beginning to have an effect. In Scotland, both Lutheran and Calvinist doctrines began to spread almost immediately after 1517, and Scotland also acquired the very first Protestant martyr when Patrick Hamilton was burned at the stake for heresy at the University of St. Andrews in 1528. In Sweden the Riksdag adopted Lutheranism in 1527. As for Denmark, the eighteen-year-old prince Christian had been present at the Diet of Worms in 1521. He was then already an ardent Lutheran, and when he ascended the throne in 1533 it took him only three more years to make Denmark-Norway officially adopt the new faith. In the same year, having started his affair with Anne Boleyn, Henry also acted swiftly. On 25 January 1533, he and Anne were secretly married, and on 7 September Anne gave birth to their daughter Elizabeth (Starkey 2001, 15 and 1). By this time, Henry had already been excommunicated, and by the following November, he had been declared "Supreme Head" of a brand new institution, the Church of England.

The Reformation was an earthquake in several respects. It was a gauntlet thrown down not just to the Catholic Church but also to the staunchly Catholic powers around the Mediterranean, and because the question of religion was profoundly interwoven with virtually all aspects of European society, it was a declaration of political as well as cultural independence.<sup>22</sup> Northern Europe in fact experienced two fundamental transformations at the same time: the Renaissance and the Reformation. As already suggested, the invention of printing and the fast and efficient distribution of printed texts that followed from it were essential preconditions for the speed with which the Reformation swept over the North. In his book *The Gutenberg Revolution*, John Man underlines the mutual interdependence and the explosive power of these events, claiming that "Wittenberg, a small town in Saxony, was the tinderbox, and Martin Luther the match" (Man 2009, 254). Even in Iceland a printing press was acquired as early as 1530 (Mackenzie 1811, 57),<sup>23</sup> and in the wake of the new technology, translations of the complete Bible followed: Luther's German version came in 1534; Miles Coverdale's English version was published in 1535; a

<sup>22</sup> The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was of course a special case, as he ruled over large territories in northern Europe as well as over Spain (as Charles I).

<sup>23</sup> Mackenzie probably has the information from Uno von Troil's *Letters from Iceland* (Eng. translation 1780), which has an entire chapter entitled "Of Printing in Iceland".

Swedish translation appeared in 1541, a Danish in 1550, and an Icelandic no later than 1584. For obvious reasons, it is problematic to interpret these developments as expressions of national self-confidence, but it is still a manifestation of a sense of a northern independence and distance from the South, where Latin to a greater extent was retained as an integral part of the Catholic culture.<sup>24</sup>

In some cases, the common struggle against the Catholic Church also created a sense of a northern trans-national solidarity. According to Ethel Seaton, the Reformation contributed, for instance, to close ties between Scotland and Denmark throughout the sixteenth century: “Religious persecution sent many Scottish scholars to Denmark, where Christian II and Christian III encouraged and welcomed them; and they took not only shelter but ideas from their hosts” (Seaton 1935, 150). The question of religion, furthermore, went hand in hand with other areas of innovation. One such area was cartography, which contributed literally to a more



This silver coin was made in Skien in southern Norway in 1546. The one side identifies Christian III as King of Denmark-Norway; the other side that he is “Vandalorum Gotorumque Rex”, i.e. “King of the Vandals and the Goths”. A thousand years after the Migration Period, these northern tribes were still used to give historical credibility to monarchs.

accurate visualisation of the North. In 1532 the Bavarian cartographer and geographer Jacob Ziegler, who was later to be invited to Sweden by Gustav Vasa, published not only a treatise on Scandinavia entitled *Schondia*, but also a map which, despite a number of rather imaginative elements, was a marked improvement on earlier maps. And in Venice only seven years later, the Swedish priest Olaus Magnus (1490–1557) produced the map of northern Europe called *Carta Marina*, which provided a well of information about the region, and was “surpassed by no other map of

<sup>24</sup> The combination of religious, political and cultural independence from the South is perhaps particularly apparent in the fact that Luther’s closest collaborator, Philipp Melancthon, himself published an edition of Tacitus’s *Germania* in 1538 and contributed six years earlier to another work on the historical role of the Goths (Stenroth 2002, 86 and 89).

the North during the 16th century” (Bureus 1936, ii). Furthermore, “by means of Olaus’s map, a new perception of northern Europe appears to the central Europeans, with the Faroes, the Orkneys and Iceland plotted in” (Stenroth 2002, 92).<sup>25</sup>

But Olaus was not only a cartographer. In 1555 he published his monumental historical work about the northern peoples, *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (History of the Northern Peoples), and the preceding year he had published *Historia de Omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque Regibus* (A History of All the Kings of the Goths and the Swedes), written by his brother, Johannes, who had died ten years earlier in Rome as an exiled Catholic archbishop.

The fact that these two works were published in Latin, in Rome, and were commissioned by the Catholic Church itself – can be read as an indication of a new level of interest in the North. It is also characteristic of the rising prestige of the vernacular that despite a series of reprints of Olaus’s Latin original, the work was quickly translated into other languages, both to the north and the south of the Alps, and became the main source of information – factual as well as fanciful – about Scandinavia for a considerable period of time (Hagen 2013). The work had been more than thirty-five years in the making, and it is an interesting coincidence that Olaus Magnus returned to Stockholm from his eighteen-month journey of northern Scandinavia in the autumn of 1519, almost precisely at the time when Ferdinand Magellan started from Seville on his circumnavigation of the globe. In their different ways, both were opening up new frontiers, but in radically different directions.

With respect to the vision of the North, however, the works of both Olaus and Johannes are of particular interest. In typically Renaissance fashion, Jordanes’s sixth-century account *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths* had been rediscovered in the mid-fifteenth century and first printed in Germany in 1515 – the first of a series of editions to be spread around Europe (Stenroth 2002, 83). There were also contemporary works in the same vein that the Magnus brothers would have consulted. Among them were Albert Krantz’s historical accounts *Vandalia* (1518) and *Saxonia* (1520), and his chronicle of the northern kings, published posthumously in 1546 (*ibid.*, 85–86). Another was Sebastian Münster’s colossal and highly influential *Cosmographia universalis* (A Cosmography of the World, 1544), which despite its Latin title was published in German, with 500 woodcuts and plenty of material on the North, though most of it was borrowed from earlier sources.

These, together with mid-fifteenth-century chronicles of the Swedish kings, enabled the Magnus brothers to make the first presentation for a continental audience of views that would later form the ideological basis

<sup>25</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PE.

of the Scandinavian branch of Gothicism, which allocated to Sweden a unique role in the north of Europe.<sup>26</sup> Anticipating and providing important impulses to this movement, the peak of which was reached a century later, they aimed to build an international awareness of Sweden's historical significance by bringing to light, for instance, the tradition of the runes as an indication of civilisation and ancient wisdom.

Even in Norway, now firmly under Denmark, humanist and nationalist ideas began to surface. Bergen, at the time the largest town in all of Scandinavia, was both a commercial and a cultural centre. It was from here that Absalon Pedersøn Beyer (1528–1575) was sent to Copenhagen to study theology in the 1540s; he then moved on to Wittenberg to study under Philipp Melanchthon, after which he returned to Bergen. Here the cultural elite was already producing translations of the Norse sagas, and it is in this context that Beyer in the 1560s composed what could be seen as an early vindication of Norwegian independence, i.e. his history of Norway, *Om Norgis Rige*. This work, which was not printed until 1781 but which circulated and was used by other writers in manuscript form for a considerable period, made use of a wide range of old written sources, including those of Snorri's sagas that were available to him: the *Anales Regii*, which described the Norwegian kings until 1382; a considerable number of old public documents; and not least, such contemporary sources on the Nordic countries as Sebastian Münster, Albert Krantz and Olaus Magnus (Harald Beyer in Beyer 1928, 16–17). Thus, even in the early and mid-1500s, the Renaissance and humanist tradition had acquired a foothold in the Nordic countries, planting seeds that would come to fruition in the following century.

### *Arctic Attractions*

In 1527, the year when Henry VIII's conflict with the Church started, he also received a five-page letter from the Bristol merchant Robert Thorne, which would have far-reaching consequences. Although Henry was "notably uninterested in finding a Northwest Passage" (Lopez 1986, 323), Thorne was of a different opinion, and may partly have been spurred on by the Florentine Giovanni da Verrazzano's expedition – funded by the French – only three years earlier, which had probably reached as far north as Nova Scotia in search of a route to Cathay, or China (Coleman 2006, 7–8).

<sup>26</sup> The Magnus brothers were not quite unique in presenting such views. A very similar idea is vented in the unpublished utopian manuscript from 1561, *De Paradiso Terristris Loco* (On the Location of the Terrestrial Paradise) by Guillaume Postel (1510–81), an itinerant "French linguist, astronomer, Cabbalist, diplomat, professor, and religious universalist" (*Wikipedia*, s.v. "Guillaume Postel"), who even imagined an earthly paradise on the North Pole (Scafi 2006, 285).

Probably aware of Henry's scepticism, he begins the letter by gently twisting the King's arm: "Experience proveth that naturally all Princes bee desirous to extend and enlarge their dominions and kingdoms. [...] Rather it is to be marueiled," he continues, "if there be any prince content to live quiet with his owne dominions" (Hakluyt 1966, 16). He then moves on to claim, though it was far from true, that to the south everything has been discovered, and so "there is left one way to discouer, which is into the North" (*ibid.*, 18). And initiating such discoveries, he states rather boldly, "it seemeth to mee, is onely your charge and duetie" (*ibid.*). With the necessary precautions, Thorne believes that the North Pole itself will be within reach:

[I]t is very cleere and certaine, that the Seas that commonly men say, that without great danger, difficulty and perill, yea rather it is impossible to passe, those same Seas bee nauigable and without any such daunger, but that shippes may passe and haue in them perpetuall cleerenesse of the day without any darknesse of the night: which thing is a great commoditie for the nauigants, to see at all times rounde about them [...]. (*Ibid.*, 19)<sup>27</sup>

And he adds: "The labour is much lesse, yea nothing at all, where so great honour and glory is hoped for". Once a few obstacles had been overcome, in other words, it would be – literally – plain sailing: Thorne clearly placed his faith in the common but naively optimistic assumption of an open polar sea, a remarkably tenacious image of the polar regions. According to Albert H. Markham, "the King was induced to give instructions for the despatch of a couple of ships, which sailed from the Thames on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, 1527, 'having in them divers cunning men to seeke strange regions'" (Markham 1879, 13). However, having travelled to the north-west and supposedly having reached some unspecified *Meta Incognita*, only one of the ships returned in October the same year, after which there is no more information about the expedition.<sup>28</sup>

During the reign of Henry VIII, there only seems to have been one other English polar expedition. In 1536, the year of the Reformation in Denmark-Norway, "Master [Richard] Hore, a gentleman of goodly stature, and of great courage, given to the studie of cosmographie, encouraged divers gentlemen and others, being assisted by the King's favour and good countenance, to accompanie him in a voyage of discoverie, upon the north-west parts of America" (quoted in Markham 1879, 15). With two ships and a crew of a hundred and twenty, "where of thirty were gentlemen", Hore appears to have achieved little more than to reach Newfoundland, suffer a famine that drove members of the crew "to commit the crimes

<sup>27</sup> A somewhat muddled version of this passage is found – within quotation marks – in Phipps 1775, 2.

<sup>28</sup> The phrase "Meta Incognita", which means "Unknown shore" or "Unknown limit" was invented half a century later by Queen Elizabeth about the southern part of Baffin Island (Ruby 2001, 6).



of murder and cannibalism”, and eventually to be saved by a French ship (*ibid.*, 15–16). The Hore expedition, then, probably offers the first example of the unspeakable sufferings and cruelty that were to accompany the stories of polar exploration until far into the nineteenth century, and which served, in relation to the general public, both as a source of revulsion and a peculiar, irrational attraction.

Still, the dream of traversing the American continent and thus opening up the markets of the East had been given life, and soon took on a dynamic of its own. First of all, no one knew whether a navigable passage actually existed; secondly, no one had any idea as to the extent of the continent and the distance across to the Pacific. The vision, however, with its alluring possibilities, was almost immediately regarded as a fact. All that remained, in other words, was finding the passage. This almost ceaseless search was going to be a constant feature of British foreign policy for four centuries, even to the extent of becoming a kind of moral crusade, though it has been remarkably absent from general accounts of the history of Britain, or that of any of the other countries playing a part in the search. According to a recent study, this picture needs correction: “More than a sideline to the history of European expansion, the search for the Northwest Passage reveals the impact of exploration on personal and collective identity, on the budding imperial ambitions of a community and on the elaboration of a national mythology” (Sophie Lemerrier-Goddard and Frédéric Regard in Regard ed. 2013, 3).

In England the death of Henry VIII in 1547 was followed by a difficult and turbulent period, first under his son Edward VI, who died only six years later at the age of sixteen, and then under his daughter Mary I, whose five-year reign was dominated by her struggle to bring England back to Catholicism and by her marriage to Philip II of Spain, the only son of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. It was under Edward, however, that Sebastian Cabot made his comeback in England after many years abroad, and in 1551 was appointed “Governour of the mysterie and companie of marchant adventurers for the discoverie of regions, dominions, islands and places unknowen” (quoted in Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Cabot, Sebastian”). It was in this capacity he helped organise the first English expedition, led by Sir Hugh Willoughby, to find the other northern route that might lead to the enticing markets of the Far East, the so-called Northeast Passage. And Cabot did not take the idea out of mid-air: an eastern route was made all the more tempting because of a book – *Commentarii Rerum Moscoviticarum* (Notes on Muscovite Affairs) – published as recently as in 1549 by Baron Sigismund von Herberstein, an ambassador from the Austrian Habsburgs to Moscow, who described alleged voyages to the east of North Cape (Carol Urness in Müller 1986, 4). Cabot, in other words, was acting on the latest available information.

Along with the inexperienced Willoughby came also Richard

Chancellor, the “pilot major of the English fleet”, and another competent navigator, Stephen Borough (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Willoughby, Hugh”). As with Hore, however, luck was not on their side. Having left England with three ships on 10 May 1553, with the young and dying king waving goodbye to them, the group were separated off the Norwegian coast. Willoughby nevertheless continued with two ships, but without the essential expertise of Chancellor and Borough, as far as Novaya Zemlya and eventually to the mouth of the Varzina River on the Kola Peninsula, where they prepared to spend the winter. They were found the following year by Russian fishermen, apparently poisoned by carbon monoxide from the stoves on board (*ibid.*).

Thus the hopes of a breakthrough for a north-eastern route were cut short under tragic circumstances. But a step in the right direction had still been achieved. Unaware of Willoughby’s whereabouts, Chancellor continued into the White Sea, where he managed to establish contact with Russian fishermen, who brought him in touch with government officials. As a result of this, Chancellor was unexpectedly invited to travel the more than 2,000 km to Moscow, to visit the Tsar, Ivan IV himself, who enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a trade agreement with the English, seeing it as an opportunity to open up a sea trade that Russia had been denied in the North as well as in the Baltic. Chancellor brought the good news back to London, where a royal charter for what became known as the Muscovy Company was set up on 26 February 1555.

The company, governed by the ubiquitous Sebastian Cabot, was given a monopoly on trade with Russia (and northern Norway), but not only that: it was also given the task of exploring the whole arctic region, to the east as well as west (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Muscovy Company”). This was to have a number of implications as to the relative intensity with which the two alternatives – the Northeast and the Northwest Passages – were to be pursued in the following years: the Muscovy Company favoured the former, whereas other government bodies would support the latter. For even though the Russian connection was welcome and profitable, there was never any doubt about England’s real ambition: finding the road to China and the East. Against this background, the Muscovy Company also forms an interesting parallel to and precursor of the East India Company, which was established forty-five years later.

The tragic failure of attempts to traverse the Northeast Passage also spurred on another and alternative expedition. In 1557 a representative of the Muscovy Company, Anthony Jenkinson, was sent to Moscow to search for a trade route to Persia and ultimately China by land rather than by sea. Again, the Tsar willingly provided Jenkinson and his little group with all necessary letters and licences, and between April 1558 and September 1559, when they returned to Moscow, they travelled beyond the Caspian Sea as far as Bukhara in present-day Uzbekistan, where they had to turn back because the area was at war (Jenott ed. 2001).

By 1560, the religious map of northern Europe had largely been established, separating off the major part of it from the rest of the continent as firmly non-Roman Catholic, thereby creating a divide with lasting and extensive consequences. It was a time of towering individuals – religious and otherwise – whose radical visions not only challenged, but effectively defeated authorities and institutions that had been taken for granted for centuries. In Scotland, for instance, the uncompromising figure of John Knox “wanted to turn the Scots into God’s chosen people, and Scotland into the New Jerusalem. To do this, Knox was willing to sweep away everything about Scotland’s past that linked it to the Catholic Church” (Herman 2006, 15). And south of the border there was a new woman on the English throne, whose father had made it clear that his country was one to be reckoned with. In that respect Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was soon to prove herself, despite discussions about her royal pedigree, truly her father’s daughter. Not surprisingly, royal suitors from the North soon paid visits. Gustav Vasa’s son Erik had made a proposal as early as 1557, and immediately after Elizabeth’s ascension, he sent his brother John (later King John III) to London “with such splendour as to arouse lively interest” (Seaton 1935, 57). But nothing came of it.

Another incident from the early period of Elizabeth’s reign may, not surprisingly, have had a certain effect on the activities of the Muscovy Company and hence on English strategy in the Far North. In 1570 the mentally unstable widower Tsar Ivan IV, later to earn the epithet “the Terrible”, rather surprisingly made a proposal of marriage, which Elizabeth immediately rejected (Wilson 2009, 20).<sup>29</sup> As royal marriages were primarily expressions of strategic and diplomatic alliances rather than of personal affection, the offer had wide implications that could not be treated lightly. Ivan was the first Russian monarch to adopt the title “Tsar”; having inherited a vast country that had been largely unified by his predecessor Ivan III (d. 1505), and having himself made a major effort to annex further enormous territories in Siberia, Ivan represented a geographically distant but potentially extremely important future ally for England. Even accounting for Ivan’s psychological imbalance, therefore, his furious reaction at being snubbed was understandable, and so it is hardly a coincidence that the English White Sea trade was drastically reduced during the rest of Elizabeth’s reign (Spies 1997, 15), and that English exploration in the North turned its attention elsewhere.

Another point worth mentioning in connection with the role of Russia and its relationship with Europe is the country’s religious status. When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, the nation of Muscovy – which later expanded into Russia – quickly came to regard itself as the upholder of the Byzantine, Orthodox faith. With the First Rome lost to

<sup>29</sup> There is some historical irony in the fact that Elizabeth’s Russian suitor eventually even out-did her father in the number of times he married – seven in total.

the heretical, Catholic Church, and the Second Rome, i.e. Constantinople, lost to the Muslims, Moscow came to be seen as the Third Rome (Wilson 2009, 17). From a Russian point of view, in other words, the centre of true Christianity had definitely moved to the North. This development not only boosted Russian self-confidence; it also created an uneasy relationship with Catholic as well as Protestant Europe. As will be seen later, this deadlock was not to change radically until Peter the Great's reign more than a century after Ivan the Terrible. For the time being, however, Russia remained a distant colossus, biding its time.

For Elizabeth, the temptation to challenge the Treaty of Tordesillas was steadily becoming more irresistible. In 1569 the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator had produced a new and revolutionary map of the world, containing among other things a polar continent, and the following year saw the publication of what has been called the first modern atlas, by Mercator's countryman Abraham Ortelius. These, together with a steadily growing supply of updated and improved editions must have served as an open invitation to any maritime power to explore the many as yet unknown corners of the globe. There were even stubborn rumours circulating to the effect that Andres de Urdaneta, the famous Spanish circumnavigator turned monk, had sailed through the Northwest Passage in the 1550s, and that "a Portuguese mariner, Martin Chaque, claimed to have come through in 1556, west to east like Urdaneta" (Lopez 1986, 325).

Elizabeth's die was cast in 1577, when Francis Drake set out in the *Golden Hinde* on his circumnavigation of the globe, a legendary three-year voyage that would earn him the Queen's special favour and the Spanish nickname "El Dragón" – the Devil – for his humiliating robberies of Spanish ships along the way. Drake's spectacular achievement boosted English self-confidence and prepared the ground for the great showdown with Spain a decade later. Still, what hardly anyone knew was that Drake did more than rob the Spanish; he rounded the Strait of Magellan and sailed all the way up to southern Alaska, looking for the western entrance to the Northwest Passage. The voyage is an illustration of the intensity with which the race for finding a northern gateway was being conducted, and the voyage was shrouded in the deepest secrecy. Even on his return, Drake's actual discoveries were only shared with the Queen and a few advisers, and were not published till well into the seventeenth century.<sup>30</sup>

But while Drake was still preparing for departure, another explorer had already returned from his second voyage, causing more than a tremor of sensation. On 8 June 1576, Martin Frobisher (1539–1594) – "previously a much-imprisoned privateer, ambiguous consort of Irish traitors and now, fleetingly, a putative English Columbus" from Yorkshire – had realised an old ambition and set out from London with three ships

<sup>30</sup> For an account of Drake's secret mission, see Bawlf 2003.

to find the Northwest Passage (McDermott 2001, 1). According to the late eighteenth-century writer Richard Pickersgill, the Queen, as they were passing by Greenwich, “honoured them so far as to take her leave of them by waving her hand from the palace window”.<sup>31</sup> Considering what had happened to Hugh Willoughby a few years earlier, the waving goodbye by the monarch should perhaps have been seen as a bad omen, because the tiny fleet of three was soon reduced to one: a small pinnace disappeared in a storm near Shetland, and somewhere around Greenland another ship, the *Michael*, decided to turn round having been separated from Frobisher’s the *Gabriel* among the icebergs (McGhee 2005, 156). In the middle of August, Frobisher reached Resolution Island, south of the huge Baffin Island, where a clumsy handling of Inuit traders led to the abduction of several of his crew (who were never found) and a general breakdown of relations.

When he arrived back in London in October, there was only one object that attracted interest, namely a lump of black rock that one of his seamen had somewhat accidentally collected on the island. Rumours rapidly spread to the effect that it contained gold, and plans for a second voyage quickly took form. The Queen herself invested £1,000 and provided a large ship, which set out from Harwich on 31 May the following year together with the *Michael* and the *Gabriel* (Pickersgill 1782, 30).<sup>32</sup> By late August, 200 tons of ore had been quarried and taken on board; there had been new skirmishes with the Inuit, in one of which Frobisher himself had been wounded; winter was approaching, and Frobisher and his crew were ready to leave, but not without an Inuit family with a small child who had been taken hostage in exchange for the vanished seamen of the previous year. Soon after returning to England the Inuit hostages were dead, and Frobisher and the investors were not getting the answers they wanted about the quality of the ore.

The bubble was still intact, however, and in the spring of 1578 ample funding enabled Frobisher to prepare a fleet of fifteen ships carrying a crew of 360 – all at a total cost of £9,000 (McDermott 2001, 16–17). The Queen once again lent lustre to the grand departure: “she placed a gold chain around [Frobisher’s] neck and extended her hand for each of the captains to kiss” (Lopez 1986, 327). It was, and still remains, the largest expedition ever into the Arctic. Historically, it is important, because it was also the first serious attempt to lay the foundation for a lasting settlement and thus “to serve as a mark of English possession in this region of the world” (McGhee 2005, 167). This time 1,200 tons of ore were taken on board the ships and brought back to England, where a huge smelting

<sup>31</sup> Pickersgill 1782, 24. The book is catalogued in the British Library under the name of Richard Pickersgill, but with a question mark. His name does not appear anywhere on the 70-page pamphlet.

<sup>32</sup> The less likely date of 31 March is given by Hayes 2003, 15.

complex had been prepared. But to no avail: during the following winter it gradually dawned on investors and public alike that the bubble had burst and the money gone.<sup>33</sup>

Despite human tragedies and financial disasters, however, there were still plenty of English seamen who were not prepared to regard the Arctic as a lost cause. Some of them, like two of Frobisher's own officers, made use of the relatively new medium of the printed book and wrote popular accounts of their experiences. Dionyse Settle, who accompanied Frobisher on his second voyage in 1577, was quick to exploit the material and published his account, which achieved considerable popularity, in the same year, as *A True Report of the Last Voyage into the West and Northwest Regions*. George Best, Frobisher's second in command, similarly wrote, according to the later explorer Constantine John Phipps, "a very ingenious discourse, to prove all parts of the world habitable" (Phipps 1774, 3). A more hands-on approach was that of Arthur Pet and Charles Jackman, who in 1580 made yet another attempt to find the Northeast Passage. Having pushed as far as the Kara Sea, the two, in separate ships, lost sight of each other in late August. Pet then returned to England, whereas Jackman spent the winter in Norway, before making a second attempt in February the following year, never to be seen again (Markham 1879, 25). In effect, this brought an end to English ambitions in the north-east for many years to come.

But if the eastern route was closed, the western one was still full of promise – at least to some. In the year of Frobisher's first expedition, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, half brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, had published *A Discourse of a Discoverie for a New Passage to Cataia*, an optimistic pamphlet about the possibility of finding the Northwest Passage.<sup>34</sup> But his ambitions were greater still: having some difficulty, like many of his contemporaries, in distinguishing fact from fiction among the flood of stories of discovery and exploration, he was also "firmly convinced" that it would be possible to "snare the lost Atlantis of Plato or Seneca's Ultima Thule" (Cawley 1940, 124). In 1578, he received "letters patent to discover the north parts of America", whereupon he made his first voyage to Newfoundland the following year (Markham 1970, vi).

During his next – and last – expedition in the summer of 1583 he took possession of the territory "in the name of the Queen, and commenced an examination of its coasts" (*ibid.*), making England's second defiant claim to land that the Spanish would come to consider their own, more or less by divine right. And as a matter of fact, Gilbert does come across as an almost Mephisto-like transgressor, whose final end may seem like an

<sup>33</sup> The final cost of the expedition eventually ran to nearly £25,000 (McDermott 2001, 49).

<sup>34</sup> A summary of the pamphlet is given in McGhee 2001, 15–17. Gilbert's "Epistle to the Reader" is dated 1566 (Gilbert 1968, no pag.) rather than 1576, which suggests that the book remained unpublished for ten years.

appropriate conclusion to a violent life. Dreaded as an uncommonly brutal and merciless officer, especially in earlier campaigns against the Irish, he refused on the return voyage from Newfoundland to sail in one of the big ships, and instead opted for his favourite, the *Squirrel*, a small frigate of only eight to ten tons. Here he was last seen on the night of 9 September 1583. “He was sitting towards the stern with a book in his hand, repeatedly calling out ‘We are as neare to Heaven by sea as by land.’ It is thought that the book was More’s *Utopia*” (Quinn 1966). Later that night the ship went down and was never seen again.

Both Frobisher’s and Gilbert’s expeditions would have been unthinkable without the great Elizabethan scientist and mystic John Dee (1527–1608/1609), who after lengthy visits to Gerardus Mercator and other continental cartographers, was abreast with the very latest in navigation and map-making.<sup>35</sup> Among other things, he was struggling with the question of the magnetic versus the geographical North Pole, and with the longitude problem.<sup>36</sup> Dee provides a good example of how scientific knowledge could be directly translated into political profit: his library “was the largest scholarly collection in England – three thousand printed volumes, plus a thousand manuscripts” (Ruby 2001, 30); as a true Renaissance man, he understood that power was not just based on superior force but also on knowledge, and that the combination of the two would be the key to success. He also realised that just as the Spanish and the Portuguese nearly a hundred years earlier had laid claims to Africa and America, England would have to do the same in order to be taken seriously as an international player. Furthermore, he also possessed a touch of the practical politician; he knew that substantiated claims – whether justified or not – would carry more weight than unfounded demands.

This is the background for the document Dee produced for Elizabeth in 1580, where, with a somewhat lively imagination, he pointed out the English monarch’s historical right to territories in the North, based on a catalogue of English expeditions to the region for more than a thousand years. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Dee has been “credited with inventing the concept of the British Empire and with setting out the legal basis for such an institution” (McGhee 2002, 21).<sup>37</sup> The North, in other words, served as an important platform for England’s first steps towards imperial expansion.

But Dee was not alone in presenting arguments for an English offensive to the North. In 1582 the book *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of*

<sup>35</sup> A summary of Dee’s career is given in McGhee 2002, 17–21.

<sup>36</sup> The latter was a major obstacle to precise navigation and was going to take another 150 years to solve.

<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, Dee uses the phrase as early as 1577, in *The Perfect Arte of Navigation*.

*America* was published in London by Richard Hakluyt (1552/53–1616), a prominent geographer and compiler of historical accounts of British exploration. The book, which provides summaries of past voyages, argues that there is overwhelming evidence for the existence of a Northwest Passage “like to bee open and nauigable a great part of the yeere”. It is also interesting to note that Hakluyt regards “the Portingales time to be out of date” (Hakluyt 1966, 2), i.e. that the Portuguese are on the decline, and that the devious and secretive game of the Spanish has been exposed. As a result, “I conceiue great hope, that the time approacheth and nowe is, that we of England may share and part stakes (if we will our selues) both with the Spaniarde and the Portingale in part of America, and other regions as yet vndiscovered” (*ibid.*).

As a direct result of this steadily rising self-confidence, which before the end of the decade was to take an even more explicit form, another member of the Frobisher-Gilbert-Dee network, John Davis (c.1550–1605), made a further series of expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage. Supported by the Queen’s close adviser and famous “spymaster” Francis Walsingham, who had also been a keen supporter of Frobisher’s expeditions, Davis’s first expedition left England in late June 1585 and made it to the west coast of Greenland and Cumberland Sound on Baffin Island before returning to Dartmouth on 30 September (Markham 1970, xix).<sup>38</sup> Only a few days later he wrote an enthusiastic report to Walsingham, expressing his complete confidence in the existence of a navigable passage to China, and within a few months had provided funding for another expedition, which departed on 7 May 1586.

Arriving on the west coast of Greenland, these explorers met large numbers of Inuit, before turning west and south to the coast of Labrador. Back in London in October, Davis once again drummed up support for a third voyage from Walsingham as well as the Lord High Treasurer (*ibid.*, xxv). By mid-June 1587, Davis was back in Greenland, but with two of the three ships occupied with fishing in order to satisfy the sponsors’ (appropriately called “adventurers”) demands for financial returns, he was obliged to continue the voyage with the *Ellen*, a tiny pinnacle of dubious quality. He managed, however, to sail somewhat beyond 72° N, i.e. halfway up the west coast of Greenland, near present-day Upernavik, before being forced to turn west, not because of ice but unfavourable winds (Lopez 1986, 330–32). Having failed to meet up with the other two ships, he masterfully navigated the little ship back across the North Atlantic, arriving at Dartmouth on 15 September.

Davis did not find the Northwest Passage; he also failed to recognise the all-important Hudson Strait, which he passed. Nevertheless, he contributed significantly to correcting errors on older maps and to adding

<sup>38</sup> Contemporary letters and reports about the three expeditions, some of them by Davis himself, are reprinted in Markham 1970.



new information to the multi-thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle of the route to the Pacific. Also, having seen nothing but open sea to the north from the point at which he turned, he gave new nourishment to the widespread conviction of an open and navigable passage.

By the autumn of 1587, however, the icy waste was the least of England's worries. For years relations with Spain had steadily deteriorated, and Elizabeth, who in the first years of her reign had done very little to strengthen and modernise the navy, had been acknowledging for some years that it was time to act. In the 1570s a solid "momentum was well maintained", and this was further increased after 1580, when King Philip of Spain "secured the succession to the throne of Portugal, and with it a fleet of ocean-going warships" (David Loades in Hill ed. 2002, 42–43).

The mid-1580s saw a series of provocations from both sides: King Philip seized all foreign ships; Sir Francis Drake was back on stage conducting "punitive expeditions" in the Americas and raiding Cadiz, destroying twenty-four Spanish ships; the young and ambitious Thomas Cavendish set out on a circumnavigation of the globe in the summer of 1586, burning ships and towns controlled by the Spanish and securing spectacular amounts of treasure.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the English Navy's dockyards were seething with activity, producing eleven new ships in 1586 alone (David Loades in Hill ed. 2002, 45). It was only a matter of time before the Spanish would attack, and there were intense preparations in both countries. The moment came in late July 1588, when the dreaded 130-ship Spanish Armada approached Cornwall from the south. After a week of intermittent and inconclusive fighting, the Armada, having reached Calais without finding the expected reinforcements, received a battering from English fireships, limping north only to face storm and shipwreck and – in large part – an inglorious end along the coasts of Scotland and Ireland (Black 1996, 109).

Even if the events of the summer of 1588 have been presented as a more clear-cut English triumph than was really the case, there is no doubt that the tables had been turned and that a new strategic constellation was emerging on the international chessboard, with the Queen's gambit very clearly paying off.<sup>40</sup> This general tendency received further momentum from another country that was rising to prominence at the same time, namely the Netherlands.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Reporting from an island in the Strait of Magellan, Cavendish also uses the word "penguin" for the first time, thus offering a small contribution to the history of the Antarctic (Gurney 2007, 63).

<sup>40</sup> One historian has, with beautiful irony, described the event, seen from an English perspective, as "the confident hope of a miracle" (ref. Neil Hanson. 2005. *The Confident Hope of a Miracle: The True History of the Spanish Armada*. New York: Knopf).

<sup>41</sup> For the sake of consistency, 'the Netherlands' is used about the country that in English was frequently described as 'the Low Countries' or 'Holland', the latter being, strictly speaking, only a part of the country (the way in which 'England' is often incorrectly used to denote 'Britain').

As a matter of fact, the Netherlands emerged during the second half of the sixteenth century as an example of an area caught in the tug-of-war between the North and the South. In 1506, only twelve years after the Treaty of Tordesillas, the future Habsburg Emperor and King of Spain Charles V had inherited the area, and in the following decades of religious conflict a determined attempt was made by the Spanish to secure it as a northern Catholic stronghold. This became all the more important after the loss of England to the Reformation in 1534. A turbulent period ensued, which further triggered the Eighty Years' War, starting in 1568, between the Netherlands and Spain. Part of the area, the so-called Seven Provinces, achieved independence in 1581 under the name of The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, bringing Spanish and Catholic dominance to an end.

This new and energetic state – a growing maritime power, like England – contributed to a shifting European power balance not least by turning an important part of its commercial interests to the north, partly by breaking into the old Hanse monopoly on trade with Russia. As early as the 1550s, i.e. at the time of the first English expeditions in search of the Northeast Passage, the Dutch had rounded the North Cape and sailed into the White Sea. In the following decade, their explorer Olivier Brunel succeeded in securing advantageous trade agreements with the enterprising merchant family of the Stroganovs, and over the next couple of decades Dutch trade in the region of the Kola Peninsula flourished, partly at the expense of the English (Spies 1997, 13).

The crowning achievement of the Dutch during this period came with the eminent navigator Willem Barents (1550–97), who during a series of three expeditions in the mid-1590s in search of the Northeast Passage added substantial new knowledge to the geography of the Arctic. In 1594, he sailed along most of the west coast of Novaya Zemlya, nearly succeeding in rounding the northern tip, while the other ships in the expedition attempted a southern route. The following year, with a fleet of seven ships filled with goods for China, Barents found the ice in the Kara Sea preventing further progress. Then in 1596, choosing a more northern route before turning east, Barents first discovered Bear Island and later, on 17 June 1596, the Svalbard archipelago, which he named Spitsbergen.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, Barents was not just a highly skilled sailor; he had also done his homework in terms of finding historical accounts of the region. He probably had on board, for instance, his own handwritten translation of Ivar Bardarson's fourteenth-century account of Greenland, which he had prepared in 1594 (Finnur Jonsson in Bardarson 1930, 15). It was not exactly a land of milk and honey that met the explorer's eye at Spitsbergen. Although many visitors, including William Scoresby Jr. in 1820, saw in

<sup>42</sup> Whether this was really the first discovery of Svalbard is an open question. For a discussion of different theories about earlier visits, see Arlov 2003, 47–54.

it “a kind of majesty, not to be conveyed in words” (Scoresby 1969, I: 110), his father’s surgeon, John Laing, probably came closer to Barents’s experience in his description of the new-found land

The general aspect of this gloomy and sterile country, affords a scene truly picturesque and sombre. The shores are rugged, bold, and terrific, being in many places formed by lofty, black, inaccessible rocks, some of which taper to exceedingly high points, and are altogether bare, and almost destitute of vegetation. The entire face of the country exhibits a wild, dreary landscape, of amazingly high sharp-pointed mountains, some of which rear their summits above the clouds, and are capped with strata of snow, probably coeval with the creation of the world. (Laing 1822, 54)

Nevertheless, it was one of the great discoveries of polar history, as was soon to become apparent. Barents, however, had other things on his mind than sailing home and telling the good news. Instead, he sailed east, making yet another attempt to find the Northeast Passage. Having succeeded in rounding the northern tip of Novaya Zemlya, however, he was locked in the ice at the end of August. In the course of three days the ship had



This map of Northern Europe from 1588 by the German cartographer Sebastian Münster gives an impression of a remarkably intimate and close-knit network of countries and islands in the North Atlantic. Even North America seems very much within reach. As was common at the time, Münster also includes various imaginary islands, such as Friesland, south of Iceland, which continued to appear on maps for a considerable period.

been broken to pieces, and after a further ten desperate months in the ice and the loss of two members of the crew, Barents himself died during an attempt to return home in two open boats (Conway 2004, 15–17 and Arlov 2003, 46–47).

Despite their tragic outcome, the Barents expeditions are still regarded as triumphs of polar exploration, and they are strong indications of the Dutch near-obsession with regard to winning the race for the Northeast Passage. This impatience was further underlined by the 1596 offer of 25,000 guilders by the Dutch States-General for its discovery and the successful publication two years later of Gerrit de Veer's accounts of the voyages.

Other northern countries, too, were waking up to the realisation that the seas and territories to the far north might be more valuable than previously assumed. The break-up of the Union of Kalmar and the Northern Seven Years' War (1563–70) left both Sweden and Denmark-Norway exhausted and unstable; yet, both countries continued to seek control of northern markets and territories. Sweden was almost continuously at war with Russia in the second half of the sixteenth century, trying to maintain its Baltic empire. Helsinki had been founded in 1550 for this purpose, and after the founding of Arkhangelsk in 1584, attempts were similarly made to take advantage of the White Sea trade. At the same time, Denmark, with a stronger western orientation, envisaged a possible revitalisation of the links with its Greenland possessions, links that had been gathering dust for nearly two centuries.<sup>43</sup>

This new awareness was strategic: if Greenland, as was commonly believed, was territorially connected with the American continent, there would be a potential conflict between Spanish and Danish interests. Furthermore, both Spanish and Portuguese ships had been frequenting Greenland for many decades. As early as 1521 the Danish King Christian II had prepared an expedition to the old colony, but eventually it did not materialise, and this missed chance was followed by many years of Danish negligence during which an English presence increasingly replaced the Iberian. In 1579, however, and as a result of Frobisher's much publicised expeditions, which had also claimed Greenland for England, the Danish King Frederik II commissioned the Englishman James Alday to ascertain the actual situation. But both Alday and the Danish adventurer Mogens Heinesøn, who was next to set out, failed to overcome the storms and the ice, and returned with nothing achieved.

In Russia, too, changes were underway, which would slowly break the isolation of the country's northern regions and open them up to the outside world. In the 1580s, for instance, the Cossacks conquered large parts of western Siberia, a significant step in the long-lasting process of a

<sup>43</sup> The following summary is indebted to Lidegaard 1991, 48–50.

unification of the vast Russian Empire. Also, on the arctic coast of western Siberia, a development heralding a new era was taking place around the same time. Just east of the Kara Sea and the northern Urals, between the mouths of the vast Ob and Yenisei rivers, a new town – Mangazeya – was emerging. It was situated at the mouth of another and smaller river, the Taz, and served a new and expanding market, founded by the Pomors, i.e. Russians from the White Sea region who conducted an extensive trade in furs and walrus tusks with Norway, Britain and the Netherlands – with Arkhangelsk as the main port – , and obviously with Moscow. Mangazeya, in other words, represented a major commercial centre east of Novaya Zemlya and more than 1,500 km east of Arkhangelsk.

Historically, Mangazeya is only a brief interlude, however: because of fears of foreign influence in the region, unmanageable communications with the central government, and, as a consequence, Moscow's inability to collect taxes from the trade, the route was forbidden under penalty of death in 1619. The town, which before the ban had a trade of considerable size, even by national standards, quickly declined and, after a devastating fire in 1662, was forgotten for centuries, both a memorial to traditional Russian isolationism and a foreshadowing of the opposite.<sup>44</sup>

Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603 and thus the end of the Tudor dynasty serves as a major historical benchmark not just in England, but in northern Europe as a whole. Admittedly, the late part of the reign of Good Queen Bess, i.e. the fifteen years after the decisive victory over Spain, was far from peaceful: after the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, religion was still a volatile issue; there were continuous problems in Ireland, and a nervous tension between the monarch and Parliament. Nevertheless, the events of 1588 "encouraged a sense of English national destiny" whose impact should not be underestimated (Black 1996, 110). In effect, they laid the foundation for future strength and consequently a further shifting of political weight to the north.

Furthermore, the period leading up to the Queen's death marks a decisive transition in the country's cultural history, providing an unparalleled artistic flowering that firmly demonstrated the extent to which England had acquired a new and powerful cultural self-confidence. The country was no longer simply an importer and imitator but also an exporter of cultural impulses. No one expressed this new situation more powerfully than William Shakespeare (1564–1616) and a series of other writers, including Christopher Marlowe, who was killed in a pub brawl in 1593, and Edmund Spenser, the author of *The Fairie Queene*, who died in 1599. In addition to this, together with her father, Queen Elizabeth

<sup>44</sup> It has been difficult to find detailed information about Mangazeya. The above is largely based on Watkins, "Mangazeya" (see bibliography). I am also grateful to Per Kristian Halle for translations from the Russian website <http://www.mvk-yamal.ru/yamal>, consulted 10 January 2011.

is the main reason for the nostalgia for Tudor England that was going to reverberate through English history for centuries to come. All in all, the massive cultural foundation created by the first phase of the Renaissance in England both confirmed and reinforced the country's economic and military strength, and proved an indispensable boost for the nation-building project that was to follow.

### *Anglo-Scandinavian Connections*

During these years, the British Isles were also experiencing a certain revival of their former connections with Scandinavia. In April 1588, only a couple of months before the Armada started its fatal voyage to the north, the Danish King Frederik II died, largely due to excessive drinking. Waiting in the wings was his eleven-year-old son Christian, still too young to take on royal responsibilities. In the following year, however, his sister Anne – still not fifteen years old – was married to the Scottish King James VI (1566–1625), eight years her senior and the son of the recently executed Mary I of Scotland. As with virtually all royal marriages, there were political deliberations behind the choice. For more than a century, Scotland had mortgaged Orkney and Shetland from Denmark. Admittedly, half a century earlier, James V (1512–42) had regarded them as no more than a few “scattered isles in the polar ocean” (Quoted in Hunter 1999, 159), but times had changed, and Scotland was now eager to prevent the Danes from taking back the islands and thereby securing a bridgehead painfully close to the Scottish mainland itself. The hope was that a Danish princess might bring the Orkneys along as part of her dowry, a strategy which would prove successful (Williams 1971, 13–14).

The wedding took place formally in Copenhagen in August 1589, with Lord Keith, James's representative, acting as a proxy in the King's absence, and was confirmed in Oslo, when the couple met there for the first time in November. Then, in 1596, Anne's younger brother, who was now nineteen, ascended the Danish throne as Christian IV (1577–1648). The coronation on 29 August was followed by celebrations that anticipated the vigour and energy of his fifty-two-year-long reign, including the hard drinking habits that he had inherited from his father: wine was pouring from fountains, and whole, barbecued pigs were served to the public. All in all, the new king spent 150,000 dollars on the feast (Gustafsson 2007, 83).

Thus the young kings of Scotland and Denmark were brothers-in-law, a connection that would become ever more significant with the events following Elizabeth's death in 1603. But before that, while the frail and ageing Queen was still on her throne tackling questions of state with great

efficiency, and while the court was buzzing with speculations about the royal succession, England and Denmark were nervously watching each other's moves. From the very first day of his reign, Christian IV had proved himself a man to be reckoned with. Denmark was a leading power in the region, and the state coffers were blessed with a healthy income from the toll at Øresund, the main waterway to the Baltic. Not surprisingly, this unique source of revenue was jealously guarded by a considerable naval force.

In the course of the 1590s, the tension between England and Denmark was mounting; the two countries had a running disagreement about fishing rights, and Denmark disliked England's attempts to find alternative, northern routes to the Baltic and eastern markets. The considerable Dutch trade in the Baltic was another part of the picture, and England feared that Spain, which still controlled parts of the Low Countries, might force Denmark into an alliance against England by threatening to withhold toll payments. At the same time, there was a fear, too, that James VI, whose candidacy for the English throne had not been formally acknowledged by Queen Elizabeth, would seek assistance from Spain in exerting pressure on England (Brown 1998, 141–42).<sup>45</sup> In the summer of 1599, rumours of an impending invasion of southern England – from Spain or Denmark or both – suddenly erupted into a panic, and although it quickly proved to be a false alarm, it was an indication of the political unease of the period.

According to Keith Brown, this situation forms the immediate background of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which was probably written during the very years 1599–1602. It was, in other words, a radically topical play, which indirectly touched upon a number of contemporary issues. First of all, it may be read as part of the Bard's clever positioning of himself and his company, The Chamberlain's Men, who were building The Globe theatre at exactly this time. The most likely heir to the English throne was not only known to be a patron of the theatre; his queen was also Danish. What then would be more natural than to write a drama based on a story taken from Saxo Grammaticus's *Historiae Danicae* (or *Gesta Danorum*, i.e. The Deeds of the Danes), whose Latin original (written around 1200 and first printed in 1514) had been translated into French as recently as 1570 (Philip Edwards in Shakespeare 1995, 1–2)? In addition, contemporary political events could be echoed in the play: the public, who had shortly before taken dramatic precautions to prevent expected invaders pouring into the streets of London, would quickly get the intended associations from the tense opening scene, where soldiers are waiting for an unidentified enemy to attack.

In the present context, however, *Hamlet* also has more to offer; in effect, it represents an early example of British stereotyped perceptions of

<sup>45</sup> The following discussion of *Hamlet's* relevance to the contemporary political scene is largely based on Brown's intriguing analysis (135–68).

the threat from the North, i.e. the Vikings. Although the word “Viking” was not in common use at the time, “Dane” was more than sufficient to provide the same associations, and as Christian IV was already regarded as an embodiment of the Danes of yore, the play once again managed to kill two birds with one stone, presenting Denmark as an historical as well as a potentially contemporary foe. Even so, because of the play’s timeless and mythical context, there was never any risk that the Scottish Queen – or her husband – should have any reason to take offence: Hamlet’s clearly deliberate use of the word “Dane” both when he returns in Ophelia’s burial scene – “This is I, Hamlet the Dane” – and when with a powerful alliteration he kills Claudius the “damned Dane”, Shakespeare manages to strike a perfect balance between the threatening and the heroic. At the same time, it should perhaps also be noted that Shakespeare rather conspicuously gives his main culprits – Claudius, Polonius and Laertes – southern or classical names. Could the explanation be that these are the characters, belonging to another sphere, with whom neither Danes, Scots nor Englishmen would have any sympathy?

It is not just Shakespeare, however, who plays with stereotyped perceptions of the Danes and their historical role as invaders. In July 1614, little more than a decade after the first performance of *Hamlet*, John Donne wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, Sir Robert More, in which he expressed irritation at another visit to James’s court from the Danish king, who has thereby disturbed Donne’s plans: “Sir, – Our predecessors were never so conquered by the Danes as I am at this time, for their coming have [*sic*] put my little court business out of the way [...]” (Donne 1899, II: 46).

A final point, also touched upon by Brown, which relates to the general idea of the North, is the view of *Hamlet* as a northern counterpart to another play by Shakespeare, namely *Julius Caesar*, which is alluded to by Polonius and which is generally assumed to have been written immediately before *Hamlet*.

When the King of Denmark was still to all appearances the most powerful Protestant monarch in Europe, when all the northern sea-roads led to Elsinore, when the Danes still figured along with the Romans in Englishmen’s consciousness as one of the five conquerors of Britain, when it was beginning to dawn on men’s minds that the old northern world, of which Denmark had been in every way the centre, in many ways offered a curious duplicate of the classical world they had so long supposed to be unique (i.e. possessing an analogous pantheon, etc.) and when the extent of the Danish empire at its high point was fairly generally understood, it was only natural enough that antique Roman thoughts should intrude on a playwright working with some consciousness of the real sixteenth-century Denmark in his mind. (Brown 1968, 176)

In a larger context, then, *Hamlet* could well be seen as a confirmation of the northern self-confidence in relation to southern Europe which started with Henry VIII and which came to full fruition with Elizabeth I and the



defeat of the Spanish Armada. Furthermore, the play could be seen as an early example of the artistic use of historical material from the cultural sphere of the North itself.<sup>46</sup>

But there was also a further reason for the tense political relationship between England and Denmark in 1599 – a reason which directly concerned the two countries' interests in the Arctic. In the middle of April that year a fleet of eight heavily armed vessels quietly left Copenhagen, heading straight for the Kola Peninsula and the White Sea to the east of it.<sup>47</sup> On board were a crew of several hundred and a large number of high-ranking naval officers. The captain of one of the ships – the *Victor* – was a twenty-two-year-old officer with the unassuming name of Christian Frederiksen. In reality, it was Christian IV himself, rightly justified in calling himself Frederik's son.

With an acute political intuition, the young king had very quickly grasped the significance of what was taking place in the Far North.<sup>48</sup> As an example, the officer in charge at Vardøhus Fortress, on the north-eastern extremity of Norway, had sent him a detailed report about a Swedish attempt to levy taxes on the population in the area. In addition he may well have seen the map published by Cornelis Claesz the previous year following on the Barents expeditions, with the newly-discovered territories plotted in (Arlov 2003, 43), and realised that Denmark-Norway's claims in the region needed immediate and forceful backing. This was the reason for the show of military strength and for the secrecy surrounding the three-month voyage. And Christian's claims extended considerably further than just the Finnmark region in present-day Norway; it also included a major part of the Kola Peninsula, together with large stretches of the sea to the north and west, bringing him – not surprisingly – into direct conflict not just with Sweden, but also with England, the Netherlands and Russia.<sup>49</sup>

As was apparent to all of these powers, what Christian was trying to

<sup>46</sup> Another indication of the close cultural connections between England and Scandinavia at the time is the foundation in 1602 of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Sir Thomas Bodley had himself been to Denmark in 1585 as ambassador to Frederik II, and "the first catalogue (1605) of the Bodleian shows a very fair number of books by northern authors" (Seaton 1935, 117).

<sup>47</sup> The following summary is largely indebted to Hagen 2009.

<sup>48</sup> This does not mean that the conflict was new; Frederik II had sent the navy to the area on a number of occasions in the 1570s and 80s, but the death of Frederik in 1588 and of Tsar Fyodor I in 1597 created a new political situation, and Christian IV wanted the matter settled (Rian 1997, 211–12).

<sup>49</sup> The situation is somewhat reminiscent of today's international negotiations with respect to national ownership of fishing and other natural resources at sea. Incidentally, Christian appears to have based his argument on the doctrine of the *mare clausum* – the closed ocean – , which was the principle behind the Treaty of Tordesillas, as opposed to the doctrine about to be formulated, in 1609, by the Dutchman Hugo Grotius of the *mare liberum*, which established the principle of the sea as providing free access to everyone (Arlov 2003, 71).

achieve was to prevent a loss of income at Øresund in case the Northeast Passage presented a viable route to the East, and if necessary to make Vardøhus – strategically placed as a gateway to Russia and the East – into a new Elsinore. In the course of the expedition, the Danish fleet confiscated a number of merchant ships, including some from England, and it was this in particular that awoke the old Queen's fury and brought English-Danish relations to a freezing point. Negotiations about the release of the ships were conducted in Emden in Germany in 1601 and in Bremen in 1602, but Christian refused to budge (Kirsti Strøm Bull and Aage Thor Falkanger in Grotius 2009, 191). Again, for Shakespeare to be writing a play closely connected with Denmark was in itself a clever choice, but he upped his chance of success even further by using the Castle of Elsinore as the play's setting: after all, Elsinore – the centre of the Øresund – was the strategic and financial key to Christian IV's international power game, at a time when his income from the custom fees was at its highest (Seaton 1935, 28–29).

Finally, Shakespeare's imaginative use of northern material is also an indication of a dimension that all along existed as a supplement to the down-to-earth commercial and military focus on the North, namely that of the region as a source of dream and imagination. Perhaps the principal element here was the ancient legacy of Thule, which had continued to keep poets and writers busy for centuries, and which harboured everything from utopian to dystopian ideas. To some extent, it could be argued that Thule, whose actual location was a perpetual enigma, came to represent the evanescent and unfathomable nature of the entire region, i.e. a place beyond the pale, existing in a slightly different dimension from the rest of creation. Because although Thule was at different times associated with specific places, such as Iceland, the Faroes or Norway, it still retained some of the qualities of the North Pole itself, i.e. an unapproachable, frightening attraction, and an ideal mystery around which artistic creativity could spin an almost endless yarn. As suggested earlier, the writers of Greek and Roman antiquity returned to it over and over again, and so did those of the Middle Ages. On the fourteenth-century world map by the monk Ranulf Higden, for instance, it is placed near the Pole, probably reflecting a rather common understanding about its location (Cawley 1940, 36). From both of these traditions, the poets of the Renaissance continued to explore images of Thule, making ample use, together with the purely imaginative, of elements taken from the new discoveries of distant climes. Thus, the Icelandic volcano Hecla, which was frequently associated with perceptions of Thule, was also linked to superstitions about the entrance to Hell.

Generally as regards the north of Europe, one may take the late sixteenth century as the end of the Middle Ages, and the new century as the entrance to a rather different mental horizon. At this threshold it is tempting to quote the Swedish critic Gunnar Castrén, who in a study from

1910 makes the following blunt claim about the sixteenth-century French view of the North: “In the general perception of the time, the North hardly existed as anything but a large, dark, cold emptiness” (Castrén 1910, 9).<sup>50</sup>

This impression is confirmed by the somewhat hasty comment by the Italian poet, priest and diplomat Giovanni Botero (1540–1617), who in the final years of the sixteenth century was publishing the five volumes of his work *Relations of the Most Famous Kingdoms* (1591–98). In it he makes the sweeping claim that Scandinavia is hardly really worth mentioning at all, “because it is as it were situated in another worlde” (quoted in Cawley 1938, 235). Whether this was generally true or not, it was a perception that was soon to change, and some of the fascination of the seventeenth century lies precisely in its transitional nature, with the old world lingering on alongside the new.

### *Wars and Whales*

From a European perspective, the first half of the 1600s was characterised by a continued transition of power from the South to the North: within the Catholic world, the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) in particular resulted in a further weakening of Spain to the advantage of France. At a first glance, however, the picture also looked rather bleak for northern Europe. The war, in combination with famine and disease, left the German states devastated and divided; Britain, weakened by continued religious tension and ultimately a destructive civil war, lost out in relation to France, which witnessed a concentration of power in an increasingly absolutist monarch. In the Nordic countries, Sweden and Denmark-Norway, with frequently belligerent monarchs, were regularly engaged in wars while also competing for supremacy in the region. The Netherlands were similarly caught in the political and religious crossfire of the period.

Despite this confusing picture and to some extent in its shadow, the countries of northern Europe were nevertheless exploring new opportunities and building their strength. Accompanied and to some degree fortified by an amazing wave of cultural creativity, Britain opened up some new and highly significant international doors, preparing the ground for empire in America as well as Africa. Both Denmark-Norway and Sweden entered the period from a position of relative strength: by 1600 they had advanced from pawns to officers on the European chessboard, and for several decades into the seventeenth century they continued to extend their sphere of influence, largely because of ambitious and competent monarchs. Similarly, the Netherlands and Russia, too, continued to strengthen their position from the previous century.

<sup>50</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

The childless Elizabeth's death in 1603 brought the Tudor dynasty to an end, but for the first time united the British Isles under one monarch. The significance of this union in terms of closer ties between England and Scotland should not be overestimated, but it still represents a concentration of resources and a major step in the long and turbulent journey towards a sense of British nationhood. James I's reign may in several respects seem like a departure from that of his predecessor, but when it comes to the focus on the northern and polar regions this is not the case. There are some rather obvious reasons for this: the Dutch discovery of Spitsbergen had increased the awareness of potentially valuable resources in the region; James had a brother-in-law on the Danish throne who had recently demonstrated a considerable interest in the North; the efforts of the last fifty years to find a shortcut to Asia were so far fruitless, but still regarded as promising; and finally, Britain had already developed a somewhat possessive attitude to the Arctic. All in all, there appears to have been general agreement about the importance of a British presence in the region.

Only three weeks after James I's coronation on 25 July 1603, an English expedition led by Stephen Bennet landed at Bear Island. As Bennet must have been aware of Barents's discovery of the island seven years before, the incident may be regarded as an early indication of the rivalry that was to ensue in the region, because when he returned the following year, he named it Cherry Island, "after Sir Francis Cherry, the chief adventurer of the voyage" (Conway 2004, 20). During the brief visit, the crew killed a number of walruses, and on their return to England the Muscovy Company quickly saw the potential for profit.

For centuries, Basque, Dutch, British and Norwegian fishermen had been trawling the waters of the North Atlantic for cod, the "beef of the sea", which, as mentioned above, satisfied nutritional as well as religious needs. It was during these fisheries that the ship *Concord* on 15 May 1602 reached the place on the east coast of America that was aptly named Cape Cod, contributing to the decision a few years later to attempt a permanent settlement further down the coast (*ibid.*, 77–78). Now, the northern and arctic seas promised new and lucrative harvests, and the British were quick to act. Bennet's expedition led to new voyages in both 1605 and 1606; during the latter as many as six to seven hundred walruses were killed in the course of six hours, producing twenty-two tons of oil and a large number of tusks (*ibid.*, 21).

Bennet's voyages coincided with three others: In 1605, having decided "to leave no stone unturn'd" in his attempt to rediscover the old Scandinavian settlements and thus revitalise Denmark's hold on Greenland, Christian IV of Denmark had hired the Scot John Cunningham to explore the coast of the country.<sup>51</sup> In 1602 Christian had secured a monopoly on

<sup>51</sup> The quotation is from La Peyrère's letter cum essay titled "An Account of Greenland", dated 18 January 1646 and addressed to François de la Mothe le Vayer, printed in Churchill 1704, II: 463.

all trade with Iceland (Gustafsson 2007, 107), but both he and his father had had scant success in their attempts to re-establish the connections with Greenland, and now Christian turned to his brother-in-law for help. James I suggested Cunningham and a pilot named James Hall. The expedition was a success; the Danish nobleman Godske Lindenow, who was captain on one of the ships, was able to land in the very southern part of the country. He did not find any old settlements, but was able to conduct an extensive trade with the friendly Inuits, until he very unwisely decided to abduct two of them as a present for the King. Not surprisingly, the “Salvages” responded with “whole showers of Arrows and Stones” (Churchill 1704, II: 464).

Christian, pleased with what had been achieved, immediately made preparations for another and larger expedition, this time under Lindenow’s command, with Hall as pilot and Cunningham as captain of one of the five ships. The expedition was even financed with a separate tax that Christian had persuaded the Danish Parliament to levy. Because of difficult sailing conditions and understandably sceptical natives, however, the expedition achieved very few results and returned to Copenhagen in early October.<sup>52</sup> Still, against the background of the probably considerable public attention around the question of Greenland at the time, it is hardly a coincidence that just two years later the Danish parson Claus Christoffersen Lyschander (1558–1624) published a narrative and rhyming poem entitled *Den Grønlandske Chronica* (The Greenland Chronicle, 1608). In the course of its 5,281 lines – and with a level of poetic ambition slightly reminiscent of Paradise Lost, whose author was born in the very year the *Chronica* was published – it offered a historical, topographical and anthropological description of the country. The work’s objective was clearly to offer a justification for Danish sovereignty of the country under the vigorous leadership of Christian IV and to bring Greenland within the mental compass of the Danes.

Cunningham’s successful expedition for Denmark in 1605 also spurred another English expedition, led by one of his captains, John Knight, the following year, in search of the Northwest Passage. This time it was a joint venture between the Muscovy Company and the East India Company, the latter having been chartered by Queen Elizabeth in 1600. The expedition, setting out in April, was an unmitigated disaster: Knight and two crew members disappeared near Labrador in terrible weather conditions, and the remaining crew miraculously made their way back to London in September (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Knight, John”). In the meantime, while Knight and Bennet were out on their respective voyages, the Danish and the British kings met at Hampton Court to watch the first performance

<sup>52</sup> La Peyrère’s letter from 1646 also mentions a third Danish expedition to Greenland, led by a “Native of Holstein, named Karsten Richkardsen”, but is unable to give the year of the voyage (Churchill 1704, II: 465).

of a new play, with a suitably Scottish protagonist called Macbeth – this play, too, written by the successful London actor-cum-playwright, William Shakespeare. The collaboration between the two kings on the exploration of the North shows both a common focus on important political projects and a contrast to the tension between the two countries only a few years earlier.

Then in May 1607, during a summer so cold that “savage frosts split the trunks of many great trees in England” (Fagan 2000, 103), Henry Hudson, trusting the theories of Robert Thorne and others, left with a small ship and a crew of eleven to look for nothing less than the Pole itself. Returning in September, he had not made it to the Pole, but sailing from the east coast of Greenland, where the ice blocked the way, he had turned east as far as Spitsbergen, seeing large numbers not just of walrus but also of whales (Coleman 2006, 13). Despite the ice he also reached further north than any European before him – 80° 23' N – a record that was to stand until 1766 (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Hudson, Henry”). Hudson’s report, together with those of the previous years, was enough to put the incipient whaling industry on full alert. Like the goldrush in Alaska three hundred years later, the discovery set spectacular rumours in motion, and soon Spitsbergen – unknown a decade earlier – was on everyone’s lips.

Still, it was a few years before the operation got underway. In the meantime, the promise of financial profit from the natural resources of the Arctic also further whetted the appetite for discovering a new route to the Far East. Again, the English were in the forefront; in the next few years a number of expeditions were dispatched, which partly tried to kill two birds with one stone: to search for a passage – to the east, the west, or even to the north – and to further gather information on whales and other opportunities of commercial activity.

But the English were not in the forefront with regard to whaling skills; that position was held by the Basques from both France and Spain, who from well before the middle of the sixteenth century had gained essential experience and expertise by catching a considerable number of whales in the waters around Labrador and Newfoundland. Most likely, this is also the background of the fantastic description in Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, published as early as 1532–34, of how Pantagruel kills a colossal whale with “his fierce javelins and arrows – which in length, thickness, weight, and ironwork were very like the great beams that sustain the bridges of Nantes, Saumur, and Bergerac [...]” (Rabelais 1955, 523). Thus in 1611, the Muscovy Company, realising the need for up-to-date manpower and equipment, hired six Basque whalers, who during an “experimental whaling voyage” taught the English to hunt with small rowing boats and “a barbed iron harpoon attached to a rope” (McGhee 2005, 179).

Whaling, in other words, was a novelty to the English; according to William Scoresby's 1820 survey of the history of whaling, the first trustworthy account of English activity in the field is from as late as 1594 (Scoresby 1969, II: 18).<sup>53</sup> But they were fast learners, and the fisheries quickly expanded; in 1612, seventeen whales were killed; in 1613 an expedition of six ships under Benjamin Joseph and Thomas Edge was sent to the region; in the same year the Muscovy Company used force to secure its whaling rights (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Muscovy Company"); and the following summer Captain Joseph returned with a dozen ships and with instructions to combine whaling and discovery (Markham 1879, 44).

At the same time, English investments, financed by the Virginia Company and the British East India Company, continued to be poured into the search for the Northwest Passage. Again Henry Hudson was chosen to lead an expedition, despite the fact that in November 1609 he had returned from an expedition sponsored by the rival Dutch East India Company. During this voyage, frustrated by his failed attempt to find the Northeast Passage, he had instead sailed west, discovered the Hudson River and claimed for the Netherlands what was soon to become the New Amsterdam colony in America, a Dutch rival to the two-year-old English Jamestown settlement in Virginia.

In the spring of 1610, however, Hudson was back in favour with the English and set off, reaching Iceland in the middle of May and Greenland in early June; two months later he entered what he believed to be the Pacific Ocean, i.e. the great bay that would later carry his name, and by November he was stuck in the ice. Having survived the winter, his intention was to push on west in order to crown his great discovery, but in one of the many dramatic moments of polar history, a number of his crew mutinied, and – with a cruel irony – on Midsummer Eve set him adrift in a shallop together with his teenage son John and seven other sailors. Hardly surprisingly, no one ever saw them again.

The mutinous crew, or at least the eight of them that survived the voyage home, were closely interrogated about their role in the drama.<sup>54</sup> For all we know, they may have sworn their oaths on the new King James Authorised Version of the Bible, which had been published in the same year. But even though their stories did not quite add up, they eventually went free of any charges, the alleged discovery of the Northwest Passage overshadowing the loss of their captain (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Hudson, Henry"). There is indeed plenty of evidence to suggest that investors

<sup>53</sup> The information is contradicted by Sidney F. Harmer's *The History of Whaling* (1928), which claims, for instance, that fifty English vessels were on the Newfoundland whaling grounds in the year 1578 (54).

<sup>54</sup> One of them was Abacuk Pricket, whose dramatic and clearly conscience-laden account of how Hudson was "treacherously exposed by some of the Companie" was printed in Samuel Purchas's famous *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625).

and explorers alike took it for granted that the passage had in fact been discovered and that all that remained was for the next expedition to sail through it (Christy 1966, I: xx). In London, therefore, in an atmosphere reminiscent of the Frobisher days, the sensational news quickly led as many as 160 adventurers to organise a new expedition, and on 14 April 1612, Thomas Button set sail with two ships in order to confirm the findings of the Hudson expedition. Forced to overwinter and losing many of his crew, Button returned the following September to an England still mourning the death the previous November of King James's eldest child, the promising eighteen-year-old Henry, Prince of Wales.

Considering the intensity of the search for the Northwest Passage and the optimistic hope of finding it, it is bound to have been a news item and a topic of conversation in streets and taverns across the country. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that poets also adopted the idea of the search and exploited its metaphorical potential. Thus only a few months after Button's return, on Boxing Day 1613, John Donne wrote his "Ecclogue" on the occasion of the marriage of the Earl of Somerset, where his listeners may have nodded approvingly at the poet's topical use of imagery. In the first part of the "Epithalamion", the cold of the season and the dying of the year are contrasted with the fire in the lovers' eyes:

Thou art reprieved old year, thou shalt not die,  
 Though thou upon thy death-bed lie,  
 And should'st within five days expire,  
 Yet thou art rescued by a mightier fire,  
 Then thy old soule, the sun,  
 When he doth in his largest circle run.  
 The passage of the west and east would thaw,  
 And open wide their easy liquid jaw  
 To all our ships, could a Promethean art  
 Either unto the Northern Pole impart  
 The fire of these inflaming eyes, or of this loving heart (Donne 2006, 96).

And Donne's imagery did not lose its relevance, and Button succeeded in keeping the investors interested: the Passage, he claimed, was not to be found in Hudson Bay, after all, but further to the northwest. Furthermore, during Button's absence, a large number of leading establishment figures impatient for commercial access to the Far East, had obtained a royal charter for yet another company with the necessary financial muscle, the Merchant Discoverers of the Northwest Passage (Christy 1966, I: xxxviii–xlix and II: 642–65).

Not even the totally unsuccessful expedition of William Gibbons, Button's cousin, the following year, brought an end to the investors' optimism, and in March 1615 Robert Bylot, despite his dubious past on the fateful Hudson expedition, set sail together with his highly competent pilot William Baffin and a crew of sixteen. Again, they sailed through the Hudson Strait and into Foxe Basin (although not yet named), and eventually concluded that there was no hope of an entry to the west. On



their return to London in September, Bylot strongly recommended the Davis Strait, to the west of Greenland, as the most likely access to the Northwest Passage (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Bylot, Robert”), a route that had not been seriously attempted since John Davis’s voyages in the 1580s.

With increasingly half-hearted financial backing from the Company of Discoverers of the Northwest Passage, a new expedition, this time under William Baffin, set out from London on 26 March 1616, only a couple of weeks after Sir Walter Raleigh’s release from his thirteen-year confinement in the Tower. During his favourable crossing of the Atlantic, Baffin was necessarily totally unaware of a peculiar coincidence: the death on 23 April of two of the world’s greatest writers, William Shakespeare and Cervantes. He was certainly also ignorant of the fact that the latter had left behind a manuscript, to be published the following year, entitled *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda*. The novel, with the subtitle *A Northern Story*, takes place in a world that would have appeared familiar to Baffin. Possibly acting on the recommendations of the Renaissance Italian poet Tasso “that the mysterious lands of Europe’s far north would [...] make an excellent setting for adventures” (Cervantes 1989, 6), Cervantes had left a story in which his heroes’ journey begins at Persiles’s home in – as one might have expected – Ultimate Thule. It is a story in which they

find themselves astray in frozen seas and stranded on snow-covered islands whose strange names, as well as other exotic details of circumstance and action, are taken from sources such as Olaf the Great’s [i.e. Olaus Magnus’s] colorful *History of the Northern Peoples*. It is in the setting of this twilight zone of midnight sun and midwinter blackness that many of the “marvelous” turns of plot occur. (*Ibid.*)

Among the bewildering profusion of incidents in the book there is the story told by another character, the pirate captain Periandro, of how “a storm drove his ship to the far northern coast of Norway, where it became frozen in the ice and was attacked by a force of soldiers skiing out from the mainland” (*ibid.*, 365).

In accordance with the plan, Baffin pushed north into Davis Strait, and thence into Baffin’s Bay as far as 78° N, exploring the three channels to the west, including Lancaster Sound, which would eventually prove to be the right passage. Still, this was not apparent to Baffin, and with indications of scurvy among the crew, he turned south and eventually reached Dover on 30 August.

Baffin’s return clearly marks the end of the first phase in the history of the search for the Northwest Passage,<sup>55</sup> and it may seem appropriate that the autumn of 1616 also saw the death of the great recorder, editor, collector and translator of accounts of England’s intense polar activity

<sup>55</sup> Another brief effort was made in 1631 with the two separate and highly incompatible voyages of Captain Luke Fox and Captain Thomas James, both of which were unsuccessful. Both captains, however, produced fascinating accounts of their expeditions (see Christy 1966).

during the reigns of Elizabeth and James, namely Richard Hakluyt. It is similarly worth noting that Britain's activity in the North during this period and throughout James I's reign was primarily based on private and commercial rather than state or royal initiatives. This was partly due to the fact that the Royal Navy was not in a fit state to take on such demanding tasks: rather surprisingly, in light of the events of 1588, the parsimonious Elizabeth had passed it on to her successor in a state of corruption and disrepair, and James "was not greatly interested in the navy" anyway (David Loades in Hill ed. 2002, 51). Another reason may have been that in the aftermath of the Armada James and his advisors viewed the significance of polar exploration primarily from a commercial and not a military or strategic perspective.

After the discovery of Spitsbergen, however, Britain was far from enjoying a monopoly in the North; such countries as Sweden and Denmark also joined in the scramble for natural resources and advantageous trade routes. And they were not just active in the political and commercial spheres; success in one area continued to be dependent on progress in another. Thus, once again cartography played an important role, and with a scientist like the brilliant Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), back on Danish soil in the last decades of the 1500s after lengthy stays in Germany, Denmark showed itself to be in the forefront of modern science, again with an improvement in the quality of maps and hence in navigation.

Anders Bure (or Andreas Bureus; 1571–1646), "the Father of Swedish cartography", similarly started his career right at the turn of the century, receiving a commission from Duke Carl (later Carl IX) in 1603 to draw a "*tabula cosmographica regnorum septentrionalium*", i.e. a map of the northern nations.<sup>56</sup> The two countries were also keeping pace with the rest of Europe with regard to the building of academic institutions. By 1600, the universities in Uppsala and Copenhagen, founded in 1477 and 1479 respectively, were enjoying a considerable and growing international reputation. In Uppsala, one of the central figures was Johannes Rudbeckius, professor of mathematics from 1604, an acquaintance of Brahe and the father of Olof Rudbeck, who was to play a crucial role in the revival of interest in ancient Nordic culture later in the century.

Bolstered by this scientific capital, the Nordic monarchs were able to turn such scientific advances into political and military currency. Christian IV, who from 1596 till 1610 expanded the Danish navy from twenty-two to sixty ships, sent the Norwegian-born Jens Munk (1579–1628) to Novaya Zemlya in both 1609 and 1610, in search both of the Northeast Passage and of trading possibilities with the Russians. In 1615, furthermore, after the British had made diplomatic advances with an obvious view to securing control of Svalbard, he "sent a squadron of three men-of-war to assert his

<sup>56</sup> From Herman Richter's introduction in Bureus 1936, v.

exclusive right” over the islands and the surrounding waters (Laing 1822, 123). Then in February of 1615, this military show of force was followed by a letter to the other countries concerned to the effect that no whaling in the region was allowed except with the permission of the Danish king and the paying of an appropriate fee (Arlov 2003, 73).

In reality, however, Christian was not able to enforce the ban. He also had other problems to deal with in the North. Øresund, the Achilles heel of Sweden’s Baltic empire, still prompted the Swedes to look for an alternative northern route to the east, and their powerful King Carl IX (1550–11), who in 1598 had beaten his Catholic rival Sigismund, provoked Christian’s fury by trying to open up trade routes from Sweden through northern Norway and up to the Arctic Ocean, and by collecting taxes and declaring himself “King of the Lapps in Nordland”. The conflict resulted in the Kalmar War in 1611, which after Carl IX’s death in the same year and the Treaty of Knäred in 1613 reestablished Denmark-Norway’s control of northern Norway, but which also – partly because of English intervention – brought the Øresund toll to a temporary end for Sweden as well as England and the Netherlands.

The strategic importance of the Far North, in other words, had significant implications for political as well as commercial interests further south. It is clearly with this in mind that Christian in 1619 decided, from a position of relative strength, to make yet another attempt to find the Northwest Passage, and seize the highly coveted prize. On 16 May that year two ships, led once again by the experienced arctic mariner Jens Munk, set out from Copenhagen. The expedition was to become one of the most disastrous in polar history. Having reached the western shore of Hudson Bay in September, Munk had barely finished preparations for overwintering before some of the crew became ill and died. The symptoms of the disease, which by March had killed half the crew, did not correspond with those of scurvy, for which Munk had taken appropriate precautions, but were probably due to trichinosis, caused by insufficiently cooked meat from polar bears, whose liver, furthermore, is lethally over-rich in vitamin A.

By July, when it was once again possible to sail, only Munk and two other members of the crew were still alive, but with a superhuman effort they managed to cross the Atlantic, landing in Bergen at the end of September, and Copenhagen on Christmas Day 1620. It is probably symptomatic of the urgency with which political leaders at the time were seeking an exclusive access to the markets of the East and thus a competitive edge on their rivals, that Christian almost immediately after Munk’s return demanded that he make plans for yet another expedition, this time in order to establish a colony to exploit the market for furs in the area. “This far-sighted proposal anticipated the foundation of the Hudson’s Bay Company by fifty years” (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Munk, Jens”).

Understandably, however, funding was hard to find, and the scheme came to nothing.

Despite relatively intense activity by the British and the Danes, however, the history of the North in the early seventeenth century would be far from complete without once again including the contribution of the Netherlands, which by the beginning of the 1600s were developing at a pace rarely seen in history. Strengthened with a unique combination of financial as well as human capital – the latter largely in the form of



This woodcut from *Cosmographie Universelle* (1574) by the French priest and cosmographer André Thevet shows the flensing of a whale. In the background, dramatic scenes suggest the dangers of whaling at the time.

highly qualified refugees from the southern provinces – the Dutch had, after the peace of 1609, secured political independence and religious freedom. “Vigorous in themselves”, according to the economic historian Carlo M. Cipolla, “strengthened by the injection of a powerful new dose of vitality and galvanized by the opening of countless new opportunities in oceanic trade, the Northern United Provinces entered into their golden age” (Cipolla 1983, 268).

The Dutch East India Company had been founded as early as 1602, only two years after its English counterpart, and Dutch ships criss-crossed the globe. More important than trade with other continents, however, was their trade with the North, especially with Scandinavia and the Baltic. This, together with the religious situation, clearly connected the Dutch

more intimately with the north than with the south of Europe. Of the many ships sailing through and paying their tolls at Øresund in the first half of the century, between fifty-five and eighty-five percent were Dutch (*ibid.*, 271), and by 1650, Amsterdam was in control of fifty percent of Stockholm's trade (Gustafsson 2007, 129). Similarly, Norwegian timber export, which started flourishing in the 1500s and developed into a major trade in the first half of the 1600s, was largely conducted via Amsterdam, and many Norwegians found work on Dutch ships.<sup>57</sup>

The Spitsbergen and Jan Mayen whaling industry had initially been dominated by the British. In the first years after 1611 they did not just do their best to chase away their rivals; they also claimed that Spitsbergen had been discovered by Hugh Willoughby in 1553 and that it was consequently British territory (Arlov 2003, 71). National interests thus quickly came to the fore: in 1617 the Muscovy Company, according to the early nineteenth-century whaling historian John Laing, “actually made one thousand nine hundred ton of oil” (Laing 1822, 122–23). These were considerable volumes at the time, and it was quickly realised that the whale-fishery represented a “vast national as well as private value” capable of enriching “the adventurers far beyond any other branch of trade then practised” (Scoresby 1969, II: 22–23).

Still, this was small fry compared to the quantities caught later. But the Dutch were not prepared to let a potentially lucrative market slip between their fingers. Having fought off the British in the fjords of Spitsbergen in 1615, using their countryman Hugo Grotius's recently developed doctrine of the *mare liberum* (the Free Sea) as a diplomatic weapon (Jong 1978, 3), it was clear that they had come to stay. In 1614 whaling companies in several Dutch towns had organised themselves as the “Noordsche or Groenlansche Compagnie” in order to acquire a more united front against the British, and the company had been granted an exclusive “right to hunt sea animals off the coasts between Nova Zembla and Davis Strait for three years” by the States-General (*ibid.*, 2).

Once again the Dutch demonstrated an amazing amount of energy and inventiveness: virtually at the same time as their explorers were discovering the western and northern limits of Australia (Forster 1778, 10), rounding the southernmost point of Terra del Fuego and sailing into the Pacific (Gurney 2007, 12), their compatriots in the North established permanent bases – the most famous of them being Smeerenburg (or “Blubbervtown”), on the extreme north-western coast of Spitsbergen. Here they laid the foundation for what was a truly large-scale production of oil and whalebone, both of which were highly sought-after commodities at the time.

<sup>57</sup> Amsterdam became a long-term hub for Norwegian trade. Between 1625 and 1725 as many as 8,000 Norwegian men and 4,000 women emigrated to the Netherlands (Gustafsson 2007, 131).

It was primarily from here that for the next two or three decades the Dutch would dominate the exploitation of a fantastic wealth of ocean-based natural resources. Scientists have estimated the original population of bowhead whales in this relatively limited area alone at perhaps as many as 40,000 and walrus at 25,000 before industrial hunting began (McGhee 2005, 177 and 179). Another study suggests that the number of Fin whales in the North Atlantic was originally as high as 360,000 individuals (Szabo 2008, 79). But it was not to last. One source claims that the Dutch in the space of forty-six years “caught 32,900 whales, the oil and whalebone of which sold for about £15,800,000” (Laing 1822, 86).<sup>58</sup> These are truly astronomical figures, considering the size of the vessels and the pre-industrial efficiency of the production process. In addition, an unknown number of seals were killed. Still, these were obviously modest figures compared to those of later centuries.

Besides Smeerenburg, there were also stations elsewhere along the Spitsbergen coast and at Jan Mayen. The activity was obviously limited to the summer months, but the Dutch also considered the possibility of expanding it into a round-the-year enterprise. This was undoubtedly the reason why on 26 August 1633 the Dutch Greenland Company left a group of seven sailors to overwinter at Spitsbergen. The experiment was disastrous; the heart-breaking journals of the men, reproduced in Awansham and John Churchill’s 1704 *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, reveal how they struggle through the winter, increasingly ill from scurvy. On 27 April, “we kill’d our Dog for want of other Refreshment”, on 31 May the last of the men appears to have died, and five days later the first ship arrived from the Netherlands, finding the bodies and the journals (Churchill 1704, II: 425).<sup>59</sup> Amazingly, however, this was not the end of the experiment. The very same summer the Company left two new groups of seven men at Spitsbergen and Jan Mayen, finding one of the groups dead the following summer (*ibid.*, II: 427–28).

Thus human considerations took a back seat as the Dutch tried to wring a maximum of profit from the natural resources in the area. An interesting depiction of the activity is found in a painting by the Dutch artist Cornelis de Man, *The Whale-Oil Factory on Jan Mayen Island*. The picture, in itself an indication of the significance attributed to whaling at the time, shows an enterprise on an industrial scale against a landscape distinctly taken from the artist’s imagination, i.e. an almost snowless scene – very much like any other Dutch village – except for an oddly funnel-shaped mountain covered in snow and ice in the background. Still, de Man’s picture, painted in 1639, is a celebration of a boom already on the wane.

<sup>58</sup> If the sum mentioned reflects the value of the pound in 1650, the equivalent value at the pound’s 2010 value would be around £15,000,000 per year.

<sup>59</sup> John Laing claims the Dutch ship arrived on 7 June (Laing 1822, 43).

The polar historian Richard Vaughan, using the word “massacre”, claims that the bowhead whale, the hunting of which started in the early 1600s and went on for three hundred years, “was all but exterminated throughout Arctic seas” (Vaughan 1994, 77). In the Svalbard region, however, a downward trend was apparent after no more than a few decades. By 1640 catches were rapidly falling, and within twenty years Smeerenburg was left to decay. This did not in any way mean that arctic whaling generally was coming to an end; on the contrary, it was a rapidly growing business. In 1642 the monopoly of the *Noordsche Compagnie* expired, opening up the possibility of a significant increase in the number of ships.

But the activity now moved from the coast to the open sea, thus creating a completely new production system, by which the blubber was either “rendered aboard ship, or packed in the hold and taken to shore-factories in Holland” (McGhee 2005, 182). When a Dutch commentator in 1644, therefore, claimed that “[t]he Sea of Spitzbergen produces abundance of Whales of such a bigness, that some taken hereabouts have been found to be no less than 200 foot long, and of a proportionable bigness in the Circumference of their Bodies” (Churchill 1704, II: 471), the somewhat fanciful size of the animal may make a modern reader sceptical, but with regard to the actual location, he is probably referring to the sea between Spitsbergen and Greenland. But this second stage in commercial whaling will be dealt with later.

The early seventeenth-century Spitsbergen boom, however, was not representative of northern Europe as a whole. Hardly any other century, with the obvious exception of the twentieth, has witnessed such devastation and social chaos as the seventeenth. A hundred years after the Reformation, religion and politics were still a highly explosive blend. Not surprisingly, the main battle ground of the Thirty Years’ War became the area of present-day Germany, where the religious frontiers met, and where a pulverised political map created endless opportunities for both conflict and conquest.

When the Peace of Westphalia eventually ended the war, the population in the most affected areas had suffered a considerable reduction – estimates vary from ten to thirty percent – and the political map of Europe was significantly redrawn. Christian IV of Denmark, the dominant Scandinavian monarch at the beginning of the century, who had entered the war from a position of strength, had suffered a series of major defeats. After his death in February 1648, his son and successor Frederik III now had to accept his position as king of a second-rank power, especially compared to Sweden, his nearest neighbour. Here Gustav II Adolf (1594–1632) – or Gustavus Adolphus – had succeeded to the throne in 1611. His continental involvement in the Thirty Years’ War

from about 1630 brought him a series of spectacular victories and huge territorial gains in Germany and Prussia, before he was killed at the Battle of Lützen in 1632.

With respect to the development of ideas about the North, Gustav Adolf is a figure of considerable interest. First of all, he demonstrated an impressive awareness when it comes to public image building:

Gustavus Adolphus looked and acted like a modern Goth. At the royal coronation, he had literally dressed up as the Gothic king Berik. He gave speeches challenging the Swedes to uphold the old Gothic virtues, admonishing the noblemen, for instance, “to bring renewed luster to the Gothic fame of their forefathers.” [...] Sweden’s rise to great power had made possible – and even demanded – a greater, more dramatic past. (King 2005, 37)

The king had not taken these ideas out of mid-air. In the years immediately before the coronation in 1617, the Swedish playwright and historian Johannes Messenius had written four dramas containing characters from Sweden’s distant past, and one of these characters was Berik, generally regarded as the first Swedish king (Stenroth 2002, 126). Gustav Adolf, in other words, very cunningly bridged the gap between himself and the heroic origins of the Goths, as described by the sixth-century historian Jordanes. Secondly, in the course of two amazingly successful years as a warrior king on German soil, he earned himself the honourable epithet “the Lion of the North”. Gustav Adolf, in other words, may be seen as playing an important role in laying the foundation of a Swedish national consciousness that was very deliberately taking its ideological ammunition from a distant national past, a strategy that was to have – as will become apparent in the following – an immeasurable impact for nearly three centuries.

To contemporary ears, such phrases as the “Lion of the North” and the “King of the Goths” would have carried unmistakable associations to a previous period of Scandinavian dominance, i.e. the Viking Age. It would even be tempting to claim that the overwhelming early seventeenth-century fascination with Gustav Adolf’s flamboyant career was the first indication of the Viking-based hero worship whose genesis is usually located in the second half of the eighteenth century, and which was going to play such an essential part in the British imperial propaganda machinery of the nineteenth century.

The Swedish lion was not only celebrated in his lifetime for his stunning military triumphs and for his heroic effort as a “champion of Protestantism”, but as with many other timeless heroes, for the event that most powerfully contributed to the myth-making process, his death. Paradoxically, it was by dying in battle that he secured his immortality. In France, Sweden’s ally in the war, the hero was commemorated with a flood of poems (Castrén 1910, 38–41). But even in Britain, which was less directly affected by the war, the first reports of Gustav Adolf’s death were



received with stubborn disbelief, as if the message was contrary to nature. And when the truth eventually sank in, it came “as a blow of stunning force. [...] ‘The grief too great for credit’ of the hero’s death was signaled by poets, anonymous and otherwise, in terms so extravagant that one cannot help wondering if Charles I felt any [*sic*] prick of jealousy. [...] Not only in English verse, but in Latin also were Gustavus’s praises sung” (Seaton 1935, 81–87).<sup>60</sup>

In Spain, one of Sweden’s main military opponents in the Thirty Years’ War, the reactions to the King’s death were not surprisingly rather different. In line with the stereotyped perceptions cultivated by the Mediterranean Renaissance of the Goths, there was a sigh of relief that the “Monster from Stockholm”, “the Swedish Tyrant” and “The New Attila” was dead (Stadius 2005, 37).<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the Gothic roots in Spanish culture responded to Gustav Adolf’s impressive career; by the end of the war in 1648 two books had been published about him in Spanish, both with an underlying admiration for his personality and northern appearance, which were associated with typically gothic qualities. Also, in 1645 one of the Spanish negotiators at the peace settlement in Westphalia three years later, Saavedra Fajardo, published the princely manual *Corona Gótica* (The Gothic Crown), which includes Gustav Adolf in a list of admirable gothic kings, despite the fact that he contributed to the end of Spanish dominance in Europe (*ibid.*, 37–39).

Although Gustav Adolf’s death was a severe blow, Sweden emerged from the Thirty Years’ War as a leading European power. The function of the king’s heir and only surviving child, the six-year-old Princess Christina, was largely filled by the Lord High Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, who had not only been a brilliant advisor to the late king, but who also continued for another twenty years effectively to govern the extensive Swedish empire. The country’s powerful position and international ambition were further confirmed by the foundation of a colony, New Sweden, in the New World, in 1638, and by the treaties of Brömsebro (1645) and Roskilde (1658), which forced Sweden’s arch-enemy Denmark-Norway to cede major territories and to exempt Sweden from the “sound dues” at Øresund.

In the cultural and intellectual field, too, Sweden acquired an impressive reputation, especially during the ten years of Queen Christina’s reign, from 1644 to 1654, when Stockholm and the neighbouring Uppsala became a centre for European scholars. In several respects, this

<sup>60</sup> Another incident which gives an indication of the king’s hubristic character, is the building from 1626 to 1628 of the wildly over-ambitious and top-heavy warship, the *Vasa*, representing the state-of-the-art in ship-building at the time and intended to provide the Swedish navy with a decisive advantage in the on-going war. The king’s demands concerning size and armament, including a second cannon deck, appear to have contributed to the deficiencies of the ship, which keeled over and sank on its maiden voyage outside Stockholm, 10 August 1628 (*Wikipedia*, s.v. “Vasa (ship)”).

<sup>61</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

particular period brings to mind the Elizabethan period in England half a century earlier, not least in the profusion of poetical panegyrics written to the virgin queen by her numerous admirers, many of whom came from abroad. Still, as would soon become apparent, a peak was reached around the middle of the century, and Sweden would face increasing difficulties in maintaining its continental territories. The country's vulnerable position became unpleasantly obvious in 1675 when, after a bungled Swedish invasion of Brandenburg, Denmark exploited Sweden's weakness and crossed the Sound in an attempt to recover some of its former territories. In effect, however, both Denmark and Sweden gradually had to accept a less prominent role in European politics towards the end of the century. With major upheavals in Britain as well, it was France that for a period would emerge as the leading power.

With the benefit of hindsight, European politics in the second half of the seventeenth century could be seen as dominated by the power struggle between monarchs, on the one hand, and what would gradually become representative and democratic institutions, on the other. In Denmark-Norway absolute monarchy was introduced in 1660; in 1680 Carl XI of Sweden could similarly proclaim himself absolute ruler; and the same happened in France, Brandenburg, Austria and Spain (Gustafsson 2007, 120). In Britain, the problems James I had experienced in disciplining Parliament, spilled over into the reign of his son, Charles I. This, in addition to regional and religious conflicts badly handled by the King, led to the outbreak of the Civil War in the autumn of 1642 between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists. By the summer of 1660, the political landscape had been through a series of convulsions that few could have predicted twenty years earlier: the King had been executed for high treason in 1649; for a decade Britain had been a republic under the strict control of Oliver Cromwell; and the King's son, Charles II, had become king in a restored monarchy, but more or less at the mercy of a significantly strengthened Parliament.

A shrewd politician, Charles managed to navigate the frequently troubled waters of British politics, even to the extent of being called the "Merry Monarch". But as he had failed to produce a legitimate son – the fourteen illegitimate ones were not a sufficient compensation – the throne passed to his brother, James II, whose two main political projects were a source of grave concern: a return to Catholicism, to which he had converted, and a gradual introduction of absolute monarchy. Thus, when in 1688 James's second wife, the Catholic queen consort Mary of Modena, gave birth to a boy, thereby creating the possibility of a Catholic succession, a group of prominent Whigs initiated the Glorious Revolution, whereby James's nephew, the Dutch William of Orange, and William's wife, James's Protestant daughter Mary from his first marriage, were invited to replace James on the British throne.

In what was a relatively bloodless transition of power, during which James II fled the country, William and Mary, who were formally joint monarchs, accepted the 1689 Bill of Rights, which further broadened the democratic platform in Britain and similarly limited the powers of the monarch. Furthermore, the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 brought to an end all hopes of a Catholic revival. Thus, at the end of the seventeenth century, Britain had not only overcome three decades of major political and religious turbulence; it had also laid the foundation for a modern system of government that was to provide the country with a political and social stability that many other countries would envy in the years to come. Despite temporary setbacks, Britain was, in short, ready for a long and spectacular period of growth and development in virtually all departments of the nation's life. In this process, in which the country was going to develop from being a regional power on a par with several of its neighbours into becoming a global empire, questions of a northern identity were going to play a central role.

Before addressing these questions, however, it is necessary to deal briefly with two other regions that had an increasing impact on the development of northern Europe and on the ideas relating to it, namely Russia and North America. First of all, it is important to remember that the ancient north-south dichotomy, which very roughly distinguished between Mediterranean civilisation and northern barbarism, was still largely intact in the seventeenth century, even in the North's perception of itself. Obviously, this black and white distinction was now changing, and the topic of this book is precisely the ways in which it did so, but within the general framework of the time, both Russia and North America were still firmly within the northern sphere.

According to Hendriette Kliemann, Russia was, even throughout the eighteenth century, regarded as not just a northern but even a Nordic state. The present-day sense of Russia as being situated in the east, in other words, is the result of a gradually acquired nineteenth-century perception of Eastern Europe as the polar opposite of the West.<sup>62</sup> Thus Peter the Great, who took over the reins of power in 1689, was seen as the major political force in the North, and St. Petersburg was perceived as naturally belonging to the same sphere as Copenhagen, Stockholm and Gdansk (Kliemann 2005, 44). This general perception is confirmed from a British point of view by none other than the poet and politician John Milton, whose posthumous *A Brief History of Moscovia* (1682) describes Muscovy as "the most northern Region of Europe reputed civil" (no pag.).

As suggested earlier, Russia was throughout the seventeenth century slowly consolidating its huge empire. In 1604, Tomsk was founded as the capital of Siberia under the Stroganov dynasty. The Cossacks, trading across

<sup>62</sup> Russia's affiliation with the North is discussed, and essentially confirmed, by Otto Boele (1996).

the vast distances of the north and east, used the great rivers to develop a river-boat technology that helped build a commercial and administrative network (McGhee 2005, 145–46). In a book published anonymously in 1761, *Voyages from Asia to America*, the German historian of Siberia Gerhard Friedrich Müller (who is most likely the author), provides “A Summary of Voyages Made by the Russians on the Frozen Sea, In Search of a North-East Passage” during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Müller 1761, iv).<sup>63</sup> Here he establishes that one of the great early explorers was Semyon Dezhnev, who during his 1648 expedition identified the Bering Strait nearly a century before Vitus Bering, who has usually been credited with the discovery, and thus the possibility of a Northeast Passage to the Pacific. It is only with Peter the Great, however, that systematic attempts were made to collect and systematise information about the northern regions on a large scale. The process began with Peter’s census of Siberia in 1697, but the main part of this effort belonged to the first half of the eighteenth century and thus to the following chapter.

In the New World, too, the countries of northern Europe had mainly focused on the seas and territories in the North. As a matter of fact, the first decades of their contact with the new continent, from the 1550s onwards, were characterised by a struggle with ice and arctic conditions, and it was only in the early 1600s that settlements were established further south. But then things developed rapidly: twenty years after the *Mayflower’s* arrival in 1620, as many as 26,000 Englishmen were living in Virginia and New England (Black 1996, 122), and an institution like Harvard College had already been founded.

Ownership of the land was still far from settled, and there was fierce competition between France, Britain and the Netherlands. The French, in particular, established the future Quebec as a colony in 1663 under the name of New France; in the early 1680s, the Frenchman René-Robert Cavalier claimed large areas in the present-day United States; and in 1687 the French built Fort Niagara to prevent the British from reaching the Canadian upper lakes. Despite these significant French footholds, however, Britain was destined to gradually take control of these immense territories. Of particular importance in this process was the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), which was granted a royal charter by Charles II in 1670 in order “to trade in furs, precious metals, and gems and, if possible, to discover a Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean” (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Hudson’s Bay Company”). The formulation clearly shows how a trade route to the East continued to have a very high priority, despite prospects of a lucrative trade in the territories controlled by the company.

Though getting off to a slow start and only reaching its heyday considerably later, the Company “held the rights to exploit the resources

<sup>63</sup> The date is uncertain.

of some four million square miles of territory, including the shores of the Hudson's Bay and the Arctic Ocean" (Kitson 2001, xv). But companies like the HBC also served other than purely commercial purposes: "These were private companies given public duties like defence and jurisdiction which amounted almost to outright ownership, or sovereignty, over the territories covered by their monopolies" (Vaughan 1994, 116). The HBC would also have another interesting function: over the years, a large number of Englishmen were stationed in the Company's territories as inspectors and administrators. Many of these published accounts packed with action and drama about life in the arctic wilderness. These in their turn inspired, all the way up to the end of the nineteenth century, popular fiction for boys as well as adults that was set in the same harsh environment, thus contributing to an arctic mythology that further helped develop a British sense of national identity, which included the world of the North as a vital ingredient.

Thus, towards the end of the seventeenth century it was primarily the Russians and the British who set the agenda in the arctic regions. In a giant pincer movement from opposite sides of the globe, they led the slow and laborious effort of acquiring control over arctic oceans and territories that with might and main resisted their intrusion. But the effort was not based exclusively on strategic and economic considerations: this was also the time when the North and the Arctic became the object of a scientific, artistic and academic investigation that would in turn supplement and influence the political landscape. And in this process other countries were also involved. It is the development of a cultural sense of northern identity and the discovery of a Nordic past to which we must next turn.

### *The Emergence of a Northern Identity*

Most presentations of the modern rediscovery of the ancient Nordic world focus on the nineteenth century, while tracing its origins further back to around the middle of the eighteenth century. This is a major oversimplification, at best. The truth is that the massive interest visible at this time was the result of the impressive foundation-building in the seventeenth century, and even earlier. And, importantly, this foundation-building was the result of a fascinating collaborative effort across national boundaries, itself illustrating the new and radically improved conditions for the dissemination of learning. By the early 1600s, the art of printing had for more than a hundred years exerted its influence on the exchange of ideas, and despite the growing prestige of the vernaculars, Latin was still enjoying a prominent position, facilitating an international market in books and learning.

It was against this background and the historical legacy outlined in the preceding pages that a nascent consciousness began to evolve about northern Europe as a cultural sphere distinctly different from its surroundings, especially those to the south. Interestingly, this movement – for it clearly deserves such a comprehensive label – was part of the chain reaction set in motion by the Renaissance and the Reformation; it was the result of a free, critical debate that saw beyond the confines of a dogmatic and monolithic Catholic Church. Fundamentally secular, it was a bugle-call for independence in virtually all senses of the word – political, religious and intellectual. Therefore, it was also intimately associated with the world of learning and with the numerous academic institutions emerging in several countries.

In addition, it was connected with another phenomenon gathering an increasing momentum during the 1600s, namely nationalism. But it was not nationalism in a narrow and isolated sense only: it was somewhat paradoxically also a kind of regionalism, in which all of northern Europe, despite occasionally fierce local differences, found and promoted what was in effect a common cultural identity. The combination, then, of humanism and nationalism produced an ideological mixture that was going to prove both resilient and flexible – a true all-weather jacket – for a surprisingly long period of time.

Nationalism and nation-building have always sought legitimacy in the past. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find a steady trickle of works on the history of the countries of northern Europe from the late 1500s onwards. What is perhaps more surprising is that works written in England, on English history, from as early as the 1580s show a strong awareness of the historical connections with the countries across the North Sea. This applies to William Warner's *Albion's England* (1586) as well as to William Camden's *Britannia* (Latin ed. 1586; English ed. 1610). Camden, "who is the first Elizabethan to popularize the term Viking in its 'Saxon' form *wicinga*, discusses the origin of the Danes as a nation, and thereby shows how up to date he is in Danish scholarship" (Seaton 1935, 203–05). His awareness of the past as an essential ingredient in the contemporary nationalist project is also apparent in his stated intention "to restore antiquity to Britaine, and Britaine to its antiquity" (*Wikipedia*, s.v. "William Camden").

In Denmark, the emergent nationalism is apparent in the fact that for several decades the court had wanted a new history of the country. Of course, Denmark already had a proud heritage to look back on in Saxo Grammaticus's sixteen-volume *Gesta Danorum*. But four centuries had passed since that had been written, and in the years around 1600, the Norwegian-born historian and chancellor Arild Huitfeldt produced a new and impressive nine-volume work on the subject. But interestingly, the court was not satisfied, because Huitfeldt's history was in Danish, not in

Latin. As the court was painfully aware, this meant that the work was incapable of serving its primary purpose, namely that of impressing foreign “diplomats, politicians and intellectuals” with Denmark’s glorious past (Skovgaard-Petersen 1999, 388).<sup>64</sup> Admittedly, Rasmus Glad (Erasmus Lætus, 1526–82) had produced two historical epics in Latin hexameter in



This is how the Dutch cartographer Joan Blaeu (1596–1673) imagines how Aeolus, the Greek god of the winds, blows the cold north wind out of a bag. The North is clearly perceived as a place of wild beasts and human misery (*Atlas Major*, 1665).

the 1570s, both of them published in Frankfurt and intended as responses to the Swedish work by Johannes Magnus earlier in the century (Mortensen and Schack eds. 2007, I: 283). But they had been written with the current political situation in mind, and as poetry they did not carry the authority of a proper history. Therefore, it was not until two separate Danish histories in Latin were published in the 1630s by Johannes Pontanus and Johannes Meursius – both of them originally from the Netherlands – that Denmark

<sup>64</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

could boast histories that were accessible to an international readership (Skovgaard-Petersen 1999, 388).

But there was also a home market for national historical material. The author of the previously mentioned *The Greenland Chronicle*, C.C. Lyschander, published a history of Danish kings in 1622, which was written in Danish and covered the entire period from Christian IV all the way back to Adam, in order to prove that the King of Denmark was the person, “through whose veins the royal blood of the whole world is passing” (Mortensen and Schack eds. 2007, I: 275).<sup>65</sup> In addition, Saxo, which had been translated into Danish as early as 1575, was republished in 1645 in a heavily researched and updated edition by Stephan Hansen Stephanius, providing a well of new material based on the editor’s access to Icelandic manuscripts (Stenroth 2002, 107).

In Sweden, too, awareness of the past was an essential ingredient in nation-building. When the monasteries finally closed in the late sixteenth century, their libraries were in several cases moved to Stockholm or Uppsala. In addition, official decrees distributed through the church or the king’s representatives gave strict orders that ancient documents and objects be actively traced and handed in. Ingmar Stenroth refers to such a decree from King Gustav Adolf from 1630, which makes the purpose of collecting the material abundantly clear: “For no nation has older and more famous antiquities than we. That is the proof that we are the oldest of peoples, and that our language is the oldest” (Stenroth 2002, 115).<sup>66</sup> Admittedly, Sweden also received a considerable injection of continental, and especially French, cultural impulses during the seventeenth century, but as will be shown in the following, this does not in any way seem to have reduced the interest in the country’s own national past.

Suddenly, we find Iceland and Greenland also included within the cultural sphere of the North. Iceland in particular, very quickly proves to be a treasure trove of information about the past, and it is evident that this information is perceived as relevant to the history of the region as a whole. As early as 1561, the Hamburg merchant Gories Peerse had published a 270-line poem, “Van Yslandt” (“About Iceland”), which, though largely negative and more fictional than factual, also succeeded in providing some basic information about the country and its people.<sup>67</sup> Then in 1563, the Dutchman Diethmar Blefken travelled to Iceland with two other Hamburg merchants. Many years later, in 1607, he published his account of the voyage. Parts of this account, included in an English translation in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* in 1625, provide a survey of Icelandic

<sup>65</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

<sup>66</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

<sup>67</sup> For an English translation of the poem, see David Koester’s version at [www.faculty.uaf.edu/fdck/yslandt.pdf](http://www.faculty.uaf.edu/fdck/yslandt.pdf) (consulted 10 January 2008).



history from the 900s onwards, and in addition Blefken discusses religion, life and manners, geography, the legal system, and Greenland (Purchas 1625, 643–53).

Although the account is not generally held to be completely trustworthy, it is, together with Peerse's poem, an indication of a new curiosity in countries about which virtually nothing had previously been known. The above-mentioned *Greenland Chronicle* by the Dane Claus Lyschander from 1608 serves a similar function. In the first half of the seventeenth century, references to it are found in several writers, who clearly use it as a source of information about Greenland. John and Awnsham Churchill's mammoth tomes *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1704), for instance, include an anonymous article, translated from a "High-Dutch" (i.e. German) original from 1650. Here the author, in a description of Greenland, obviously struggles with rather limited source material:

In this present Description of *Greenland* we have followed the footsteps of two Chronicles, one of which was very antient, and written in the *Icelandic* Tongue originally, but translated into *Danish*; the second being a Danish Chronicle of a newer date. The Author of the *Iceland* Chronicle was one *Snorro Storleson*, who in his life-time was a Judge [*sic*] in that Country. The second is composed by a *Danish* Minister, call'd *Claudius Christoferson*, who about twenty years ago writ the same in Verse. (Churchill 1704, I: 546)<sup>68</sup>

Snorri, in other words, is still something of an unknown entity to the author, although he has most likely had recourse to Peder Claussøn Friis's edition of Snorri's sagas, published in 1633, which will be discussed shortly. He does not appear to be aware, however, of the Icelandic scholar Arngrim Jonas (often referred to as Jónsson), who having collected ancient Icelandic manuscripts had published a history of Iceland entitled *Crymogaea* as early as 1609, and in 1643 *Specimen Islandiae Historicum*, works which provided an essential basis for later scholars.<sup>69</sup> Jonas is also interesting because he made an active attempt as an Icelander himself to rectify the perception of Iceland created by such biased and misinformed early visitors as Peerse and Blefken.

Another important work from the early seventeenth century is *Septentrio Novantiquus: Oder die Neue Nortwelt* (1613), by the great German humanist scholar Hieronymus Megiser (1554–1618/19), which also brings together a number of central texts and thus attempts to make available as much updated information as possible about the Far North. Judged by modern academic standards, Megiser does not really represent a great improvement on his sixteenth-century predecessors. He includes, for instance, a breathtaking catalogue of giant monsters in the Arctic Ocean, some of which would make even the giant whales seem like dwarfs.

<sup>68</sup> "Claudius Christofersen" is Claus Christophersen Lyschander.

<sup>69</sup> The full title of the earlier work is *Crymogaea sive Rerum Islandicarum Libri III* or *Crymogaea or Three Books of Icelandic History*. 'Crymogaea' is a neologism and is supposedly a translation of 'Iceland' into Greek (Jensson 2005, 2).

Still, the new century represents a noticeable change, and the academic enthusiasm slowly gathering around the history of these countries is particularly evident in a letter, dated Copenhagen 18 December 1644, by the French heretic and millenarian Isaac La Peyrère, who had travelled to the Danish capital in the retinue of the French ambassador. Here he became acquainted with Ole Worm (1588–1655), with whom he continued to conduct an extensive correspondence for several years after leaving Copenhagen in 1646.

Worm was both Christian IV's personal physician and an important expert on ancient Nordic languages, and with Worm's help La Peyrère developed a theory – the so-called pre-Adamite Hypothesis – about the genesis of the Indians and the Inuit.<sup>70</sup> In the process, he acquired a mass of information about the Nordic countries, eventually publishing the books *Relation de Groenland* (1647) and *Relation de l'Islande* (completed 1644, but published 1663). The books were “reprinted in various languages throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century” and made La Peyrère “the leading authority on Iceland and Greenland well into the nineteenth century” (Popkin 1987, 179n and 11). The letter, which forms part of the book on Iceland and which summarises La Peyrère's extensive research, is addressed to François de la Mothe le Vayer, a French writer, tutor of Louis XIV and a member of the French Academy. Having, like Megiser, mentioned Lyschander's *Greenland Chronicle*, he then turns with great gusto to Arngrim Jonas:

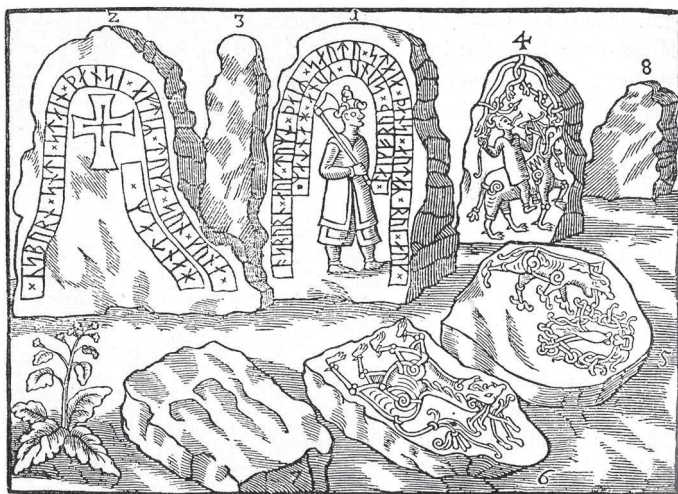
I could wish, *Sir*, You had the opportunity of reading the Writings of *Angrim* [*sic*] *Jonas*, which I have scarce time to peruse. Perhaps you might discover some Reasons for the Antiquity of *Iceland*, which I have either not discovered or neglected. His *Specimen Icelandicum*, printed in *Amsterdam* 1643. Perhaps his *Crimogea* is not so easie to be had; that which I saw, was printed at *Hamborough* in 1609. As I don't question, but you will take abundance of pleasure in Reading of them, so, I will refer my self to them for a more ample Account, of what I have related to you now by way of an Epitome; it being all I was able to learn, and thought worthy your Knowledge, concerning *Iceland*. (Churchill 1704, II: 445)

Even more important than general histories of the countries of the North, however, was the more specific interest in the ancient cultural bonds within the entire northern region, which were now rediscovered and redefined.

Ethel Seaton, in her now old but far from superseded study *Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia in the Seventeenth Century* (1935), provides an overwhelming documentation of the extensive cultural exchange across the North Sea at the time in question. Clearly, this exchange involved only a small number of people, but it should be remembered that the cultural elite, though small, was far more intimately connected

<sup>70</sup> The theory was presented in his book *Prae-Adamitae* (1655), the publication of which appears to have been financed by Queen Christina of Sweden after her abdication – another indication that La Peyrère's continued to retain close connections with his Scandinavian acquaintances long after his departure (Popkin 1987, 13–14).

with the political elite than later became the case, and therefore probably exerted a greater overall influence than its numbers would suggest. Thus when for instance Ole Worm, who was mentioned above, and Peder Griffenfeld, the future Danish chancellor, both started their careers with



Runestones from the Hunnstad monument in Skåne, southern Sweden. Several of the stones were destroyed during the eighteenth century, and only three of them have survived. The illustration is from Ole Worm's *Monumenta Danica* (1643).

three-year study periods in England (Seaton 1935, 153–57 and 162–63), it probably had a far greater impact than the student exchanges of today, which involve hundreds and thousands. Conversely, the English composer John Dowland spent eight years as a lutanist at Christian IV's court from 1598 onwards (*ibid.*, 52), undoubtedly serving as a conveyor of musical impulses between the two countries. It was in this kind of cultural climate that various representatives from the countries around the North Sea initiated a great collaborative effort of revitalising a common cultural past about which, at the beginning of the process, they actually knew very little.

There are two areas in particular which would prove to be essential for the later turn of events: the ancient literature, epitomised by the sagas, and the ancient language, epitomised by Old Norse, both found still to be flourishing in Iceland. An essential part of the latter was the discovery and exploration of the runes. Together, these areas would represent a remarkable parallel to the *general* idea of the Renaissance, i.e. the rediscovery of the ancient languages of Greek and Hebrew, and of the great literary and philosophical heritage that had been lying dormant for more than a thousand years. But whereas the origins of the Renaissance are associated almost exclusively with southern Europe, this northern and somewhat

belated counterpart found in its native soil an alternative which in the course of a few decades gathered an impressive momentum, and which could claim an almost total independence from the dominant culture of the South. This was the realisation that slowly dawned on the scholars of northern Europe from the early 1600s onwards: it was a realisation almost too good to be true in a historical context where an incipient nationalism was intuitively looking for cultural reinforcement.

If Anders Bure was the father of Swedish cartography, his cousin Johan Bure (or Johannes Bureus; 1568–1652) is generally regarded as the father of Swedish grammar. A brilliant linguist, who for the first time subjected the Swedish language to a truly scientific investigation, he was also interested in its history. By his own account, he first started reading and studying runes in 1594 (Karlsson 2005, 37), and in 1599 was given a passport “for travelling in the whole of the kingdom in order to transcribe runic stones” (Herman Richter, in Bureus 1936, viii), an undertaking which resulted in a book about the subject in the same year.

It is appropriate that it was a Swede who pioneered the attempt to unravel the mystery of the runes; no other country has a greater number of runic stones than Sweden, and Bure profited from the fact that the art of using runic symbols was still not quite extinct. Furthermore, he was full of ambition on their behalf. At one point he “proposed that Sweden replace its current alphabet with a revived form of the older, nobler, and more mystical runes” (King 2005, 195). Not surprisingly, the plan never materialised, but Bure’s enthusiasm – together with his contacts in high places – had at least one rather peculiar result: in 1611 a law was passed which established “that no alphabet books could be printed without teaching the runic alphabet and no one was allowed to print them but himself. The result was that the first Swedish alphabet book ever printed had the purpose of teaching runes” (*Wikipedia*, s.v. “Runa ABC”)!

But Bure’s fascination with runes went considerably further than political reforms and personal profit; at heart he was a mystic who saw in the runes a medium for a religious unification with God Himself. Inspired by alchemy and the Jewish Kabbala and partly by John Dee, the English mystic and arctic strategist under Elizabeth I, he developed “a runology that both stayed within the field of linguistics and that slipped into profound esoteric speculations” (Karlsson 2005, 37).<sup>71</sup> He called it *Kabala Upsalica* (The Uppsala Kabbala), and in it developed a secret dimension of the runes called *adulrunor* or *adelrunor*, or original “Ur-runes”, that would later inspire his follower Georg Stiernhielm.

Bure’s runic mysticism is worth mentioning because it is the first, though not the last, example of how the vision of the North would tend to melt into an ambiguous blend of politics and religion. And Bure was not

<sup>71</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PE.

regarded as just another dreamer with far-fetched ideas; on the contrary, he was an important figure of his time. Having been Gustav Adolf's teacher, he was not even allowed to travel abroad by the King: his knowledge of runes was considered so unique that important knowledge about the past might get lost without him (*ibid.*).

Around the same time, Arngrim Jonas, in his Icelandic history from 1609, made claims with similar implications. The Icelandic language, he argued, was an ancient language and the mother tongue of the entire Nordic region. Furthermore, "the language hidden behind the ancient runes [...] is quite simply Icelandic, unchanged through time" (Jensson 2005, 3).<sup>72</sup> Fifteen years later, the cartographer Anders Bure published his great map of Scandinavia and the Baltic, the *Orbis Arctoi* (The Arctic Circle), to which his cousin Johan Bure probably contributed significantly (Herman Richter in Bureus 1936, xvii). Accompanying the map is a booklet containing a lengthy description of Sweden. Though the text is anonymous, it is assumed that Anders himself is the author, partly because Johan's influence appears to be very much in evidence. The writer laments the gradual disappearance of the runes and claims that if they had been saved and been available as written sources, "our people would doubtless have been able to hold its own with any seats of knowledge, with Greeks and Romans. For since writing nurses, promotes and preserves art and science, it is probable that our own people, preferably to other inhabitants of the North, had been cultivating like [*sic*] writing, art and science" (Bureus 1936, 26).

Bure here offers a brilliant illustration of the ambition invested in this cultural legacy at the time: not only does he make obviously nationalistic claims on behalf of the Swedes; he also argues – like Arngrim Jonas – that the runes hold the key to undiscovered cultural treasures which can more than bear comparison with those of the Mediterranean tradition. And he goes on to provide some evidence of this hidden knowledge:

That they have also been cultivating arts evidently appears from the fact that the peasants to this very day in their wands have calendars carved in runic or Gothic writing; from these they are able carefully to compute the seasons of the year, new moon and full moon, bissextile, golden number, dominical letters and other things, hereto appertaining. (*Ibid.*)

Bure's point is clear: the Swedes are as sophisticated and advanced, and have as honourable a history of learning, as any other people. Towards the end of his presentation of Sweden, this becomes even more obvious. First, he makes some overtly, almost belligerent, Gothicist claims:

This is the fatherland and the original home, from which the Goths, the subduers of peoples, have sprung; the glory of their brilliant feats all the neighbouring peoples

<sup>72</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

try to claim as their own. But nowhere in any kingdom or with any people there can be found [...] any fixed or certain denomination or settlement of the Goths, except precisely in the kingdom of the Svear. From them the name of the Goths has spread to other kingdoms. (*Ibid.*, 32)

He then lets the cat out of the bag, making a grand nationalist boast and reminding his readers of those nations who have all along been the underlying challengers to the northern master race: “Finally they [i.e. the Goths] subdued the empire of the Romans, invaded Italy, ravaged the town of Rome and obtained for many years the dominion of Italy, occupied Gaul, founded kingdoms in Spain and became the origin of the noblest dynasties” (*ibid.*, 33).

In the same year that Anders Bure published his famous map and accompanying treatise, the Dane Ole Worm published his first major work on runology. *Fasti Danici* (A Danish Chronology) is a thorough academic discussion of precisely the runic calendars mentioned by Bure. Thus by 1626 Nordic scholars had already laid a solid foundation for later research in a key area of the Nordic Renaissance. To their English colleagues, however, runes were still very much a novelty. The historian Sir Henry Spelman, for instance, opens up a correspondence with Worm in 1629, requesting further information about the phenomenon, and initially somewhat hesitantly employing the term “Gothic letters” rather than runes (Seaton 1935, 225 and 228). For the next twenty-five years, Worm was going to play a crucial role in the lively international debate about runes. Before publishing his second major study in runology, however, he became closely involved in another important publishing venture.

At his death in 1614, the self-taught Norwegian vicar, Peder Claussøn Friis (1545–1614), had left several manuscripts which in the following years circulated in various copies among friends and colleagues.<sup>73</sup> The manuscripts included a major historical-topographical work entitled *Norrigis Bescripfuelse* (A Description of Norway), finished a year before his death: Danish translations from Old Norse of central legal documents from the Viking age, and most importantly, translations of several of the Icelandic sagas. Claussøn Friis, who had probably learnt Old Norse from a local legal servant, had been encouraged in his endeavours by the Danish viceregent in Norway, Axel Gyldenstjerne.

Then, under Worm’s competent supervision, the topographical account of Norway was published in Copenhagen in 1632, and the *Norske Kongers Chronica* (Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings) in the following year. The saga translations, in particular, quickly acquired a reputation for being of outstanding quality and assumed a central position in Norwegian and Scandinavian literature (Arntzen 2000, *s.v.* “Claussøn Friis, Peder”). At the same time, Worm was also preparing publications of his own. In

<sup>73</sup> The following information is indebted to Arntzen 2000, *s.v.* “Claussøn Friis, Peder”.

1636 he brought out *Runir seu Danica literatura antiquissima* (Runes: The Oldest Danish Literature), an anthology of runic texts, and in 1643 *Danicorum Monumentorum* (Danish Monuments), which, being the first systematic study of Danish runic stones, came to be seen as “a lantern unto the succeeding age of antiquarians in England as well as in the Scandinavian countries” (Seaton 1935, 236).

But even more spectacular material was coming to light. The *Edda* texts known – though not published – at the time were generally ascribed to Snorri Sturluson, and were later called the *Prose Edda* or the *Younger Edda*. These were primarily texts about poetics, but also gave a summary of the Norse pantheon and of the stages of the world’s creation and eventual destruction. Then, in the very same year that Worm published his *Danish Monuments*, the Icelandic bishop of Skálholt, Brynjólf Sveinsson, came across some fifty old vellum leaves containing an amazing wealth of ancient poetry about gods and heroes. Because this collection of texts was assumed to have served as background material for some of Snorri’s *Edda*, it was called the *Elder Edda*, or the *Poetic Edda*. Then, when Brynjólf presented the manuscripts as a gift to the Danish king in 1662, they acquired the name *Codex Regius* (The King’s Book).<sup>74</sup>

The find was a powerful boost to the research that was already well under way; for the Nordic Renaissance it had a significance on a par with the discovery of lost or unknown sacred texts, and it is hardly an exaggeration to claim that it considerably enhanced the contribution of the North to the world’s literary heritage. But it would still take more than twenty years before major parts of the texts were published. In the meantime, there were several indications of an increasing awareness, not least among the political leaders in the region, of the extent to which ancient documents might have a function far beyond the cultural sphere. In the war between Sweden and Denmark in 1658, for instance, it was hardly a coincidence that the Swedes looted Danish libraries for valuable manuscripts. One example was the library of the book collector Jørgen Seefeldt, which was generally regarded as one of Denmark’s most precious cultural treasures (Stenroth 2002, 116). A couple of years later, the Icelander Tormod Torfæus (1636–1719), who spent most of his life at Karmøy in Norway, was appointed royal translator of “Icelandic antiquities” in Denmark, and two decades later royal historiographer for Norway. In 1662 the Swedes followed suit and appointed Olaus Verelius (1618–1682) as professor of Swedish antiquity at Uppsala.

Verelius was the leading Swedish scholar in the fields of runology and antiquarian studies, but being – especially after Brynjólf Sveinsson’s sensational find – well aware of Iceland as a source of new material, he had acquired an Icelandic assistant, Jonas Rugman, who had brought a

<sup>74</sup> The manuscripts were eventually returned to Iceland in 1971.

number of unpublished saga manuscripts to Sweden (King 2005, 32–39). In the very same year, Sweden also secured another major treasure, whose existence had been rumoured since the late 1500s, namely the Silver Bible or the *Codex Argenteus*, the sixth-century manuscript of the fourth-century translation of the Bible into Gothic by the Byzantine bishop Ulfilas. Regarded as an essential document in the national history of Germans, Swedes and Spanish alike, it was taken, in the chaos of the Thirty Years' War and its aftermath, on a thriller-like journey across Europe which included theft and shipwreck before being brought to the University Library in Uppsala in October 1662, where it was received with a feeling that “one of the fundamental documents of the fatherland had finally come home” (Stenroth 2002, 130–31).<sup>75</sup> Mention should also be made of the Icelander Runolphus Jonas (or Rúnólfur Jónsson), who in 1651 published the first Icelandic grammar, *Grammatica Islandica*, which provided a first important tool for scholars from other countries who wanted to take the decisive step of actually learning the language in which the sagas had been written.

Finally, in 1665, the *Younger Edda*, together with such essential parts of the *Elder Edda* as *Völuspá* and *Hávamál*, was published in Copenhagen, not just in the original Old Norse, but in parallel translations into Latin and Danish. After Ole Worm's death in 1655, the task of editing and translating the work had been conducted by the brilliant historian and legal expert Peder Hansen Resen (or Peterius Resenius). Now, at one stroke, a profoundly important part of ancient Nordic literature had been made available to an international readership. It is not without reason that Ethel Seaton calls the publication a landmark:

The first great change in knowledge of northern mythology was made by [this] publication. [...] This is the clear landmark in English exploration of northern myth. The *Edda* was credited with absolute authority, and with far greater antiquity than it is now supposed to possess. In its wealth of stories and allusions there was material well worth the antiquarian's study; and in the poems, which were published as *Philosophia Antiquissima* and *Ethica Odini*, there were thought to be the fragments of a system of theology which by giving cohesion to scattered beliefs and legends also added to their dignity. Wormius's frequent quotations from the *Edda* had roused sufficient learned curiosity for the edition of the Danish scholar, Resenius, to be well received, and later writers on northern mythology began to talk familiarly of the Asynjur and the Dyser, of Balder and Tyr. (Seaton 1935, 247–48)

1665, then, is very much a milestone in the modern rediscovery of the Nordic past, but not exclusively because of the publication of *Edda*.

<sup>75</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.



*Atlantis Discovered*

In Uppsala in Sweden, in the very same year, an apparently unimportant event took place which would actually have a profound effect on the celebration of the North, at least for the rest of the century. At the time, Uppsala was rightly enjoying a considerable reputation as a seat of learning, and at the event in question the recently appointed professor of Swedish antiquity, Olaus Verelius, introduced the thirty-five-year-old rector of the university to some of his recent findings. The rector's name was Olof Rudbeck (1630–1702) – a professor of medicine who before the age of twenty had made a breathtaking medical discovery: the human lymphatic system (King 2005, 10–11). He was also a cartographer, a very talented botanist, who became a precursor of Carl Linnaeus, and the architect – without any formal training – of some of the monumental university buildings in Uppsala. And as if that were not enough, he also taught – again without formal qualifications – shipbuilding and pyrotechnics, and had designed an intricate underground water supply system for major parts of the town (*ibid.*, 39–40)!

In many respects he was a supreme personification not only of the insatiable curiosity and the creativity of the age, but also of its healthy scientific scepticism. As to the latter, it should be remembered that Descartes himself had died only a few miles away, during a visit to Stockholm and Queen Christina in 1650, i.e. two years after Rudbeck arrived as a student in Uppsala, and Cartesian philosophy was already having an impact in the university.<sup>76</sup> Despite Rudbeck's amazing knowledge and versatility, however, the history of ancient Scandinavia had so far not been one of his interests, and what Verelius showed him struck him as something new and out of the ordinary. It was the *Hervarar Saga*, i.e. one of the manuscripts brought to Uppsala by Verelius's assistant Jonas Rugman.

According to Rudbeck's Swedish biographer Gunnar Eriksson, Verelius belonged to the Gothicism tradition, which had played a major role in Swedish historiography from as early as the Middle Ages. This tradition had two main branches: the Gothic and the Hyperborean. The former, inspired by Jordanes, claimed that the Goths, who had vanquished the Romans, had originally come from Sweden. This is the tradition underlying, for instance, the French writer Georges de Scudéry's 11,000-line epic poem *Alaric* (1654), the first major Nordic poem in French literature, which was dedicated to Queen Christina, and which presents the Gothic King Alaric as based in the ancient settlement of Birka, on the

<sup>76</sup> Descartes was not the first famous continental scholar to receive a fateful invitation to Christina's court: five years earlier, having served as Swedish ambassador in Paris for ten years, the Dutch legal philosopher Hugo Grotius had died in Rostock, on his way to Sweden.

island of Björkö south of Stockholm (Castrén 1910, 62–67). The latter, with an historical sweep of far grander proportions, regarded the Goths as originating from Noah's grandson Magog, who – according to the legend – had ended up on the island Scandza, i.e. Scandinavia (Eriksson 2002, 259–60).

Eriksson underlines the fact that there was nothing unusual about this theory: because of an unquestioning faith in the traditional chronology of the Bible, which comprised a span of only about 6,000 years altogether, it was virtually common currency at the time for historiographers of particular countries to establish links straight back to the beginning of time. Within such a limited time span it was possible, in other words, to wrap up the whole of human history into one all-encompassing theory. And Rudbeck's reading of the *Hervarar Saga* gave him the tantalising opportunity to begin to do just that.

Reading the Norse saga, Rudbeck discovered some striking similarities between the text itself, Greek mythology, and the various stories about the Hyperboreans and the Goths, and he immediately wrote down a number of notes, questions and comments that were passed on to Verelius and other experts. Within weeks the obsession had taken hold, and he had started the long process that would keep him busy for the rest of his life.<sup>77</sup> In summing up this *magnum opus*, which has been called “one of the greatest insanities in the history of the world” (King 2005, 249), and which at Rudbeck's death in 1702 was still incomplete but comprised four colossal volumes and a volume of plates, one could begin with what is probably the most essential element in his thesis: that Sweden is the cradle of civilisation. In one fell swoop, Rudbeck chooses to see the Oriental and Mediterranean cultures as both recent and relatively inconsequential compared to the Hyperborean culture of the North, which is perceived as the Great Mother of all cultures.

Mobilising the whole machinery of his own multifarious knowledge and creativity, he managed to conjure up an apparently irresistible mass of evidence. Almost as imaginatively as Francis Bacon, who fifty years earlier had revived Plato's myth and placed his Atlantis utopia in the southern Pacific, Rudbeck plants *his* firmly and in complete earnest on Swedish soil, actually right in the middle of Uppsala itself.<sup>78</sup> For him Atlantis is no fantastic utopia on a non-existent island. The word “Atlantis”, in his daring vision, has nothing to do with Atlas, but is the land of the Swedish King Atle – hence the title of his work: *Atlantid*. He reads the Greek word “Hyperborean” as etymologically connected with the Scandinavian “Yfwerborne” (i.e. highborn); alternatively, “-borean” as related to Bore,

<sup>77</sup> The following summary of Rudbeck's ideas is indebted to Eriksson 2002 as well as King 2005.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of Rudbeck's knowledge of and interest in Bacon, see Eriksson 2002, 549–60.

who was Odin's grandfather; in burial mounds, he finds archaeological evidence, in the form of large skeletons, of the legendary giant size of the Hyperboreans; and in church records he similarly finds proof of the longevity of the modern descendants of this ancient race.

Like Anders Bure a few decades earlier, he becomes engrossed in the runic calendars, in the wisdom of ordinary people in the Swedish countryside, and in their profound contact with the distant past. Nearly a hundred years before Rousseau, he represents a distinctly Romantic scepticism to urban civilisation and learning:

The wisdom was not to be sought near seacoasts or borders with other countries, which often undergo rapid change through trade, war, and a host of other interactions. [...] One should go instead far into the countryside, and deep into the distant parts of the kingdom, into the humblest villages. There the bearded peasant offered a mirror onto antiquity, where the past was most preserved and far from tapped out as historical resource. (King 2005, 81–82)

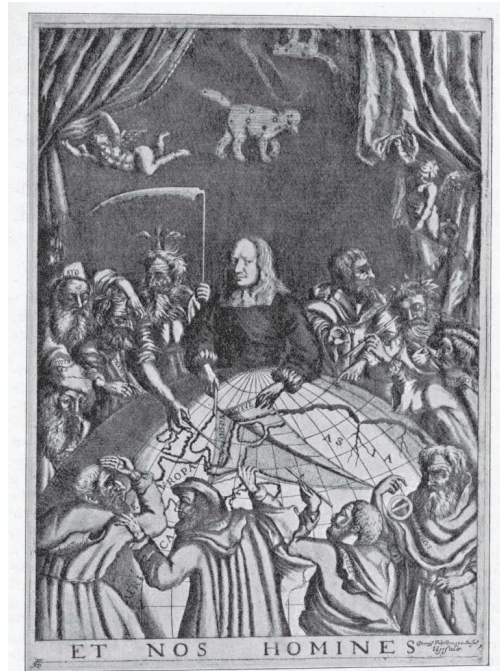
He reads Greek mythology against the background of Norse mythology – not the other way round. Even the Olympian gods in Greece are seen as emigrants from Sweden, whereas the older race of the Titans are assumed to have remained behind and become the forefathers of the Hyperboreans.

For a while, he becomes obsessed with the story about Jason and the Argonauts and the search for the Golden Fleece, and becomes convinced that their journey ended in Sweden. In order to prove it, he even turns to a scientific innovation: experimental archaeology. If Jason and his men had sailed into the Black Sea and up the Russian rivers to the Baltic, they must have pulled the ships – as the Vikings supposedly did – from one river to another. Three hundred years before Thor Heyerdahl, and together with a group of volunteers, he tests out precisely this hypothesis by pulling three boats (built under his own supervision) across a distance of 45 miles in twelve days. Even the famous Pillars of Hercules are firmly identified as the Sound of Øresund. To Rudbeck's fiery imagination, the sky is truly the limit. Discussing the achievements of Rudbeck nearly a century later, Henri Mallet – in Bishop Percy's English translation – rather charmingly described him as having “an imagination eminently fruitful” (Mallet 1847, 72).

Still, there is some method to the madness, or at least some kind of historical logic to the project. First of all, it can only be understood against the religious and political background of the period. Rudbeck was born in the middle of the Thirty Years' War, he was two years old when Gustav Adolf died, and must have grown up surrounded by the stories of the great hero and of the rise of Sweden's empire in the Baltic. He became a student in the year in which the great war ended; he was a young man during the ten-year-long reign of Queen Christina, when Sweden emerged as a nation of science and culture; and in the 1670s, while working feverishly on his Atlantis vision, he witnessed how his country suffered a series of

humiliating military defeats and was slowly brought on the defensive in relation to other states.

It should also be remembered that seventeenth-century conflicts in northern Europe were still very much concerned with the fundamental divide between Catholics and Protestants. This was largely the case with the Thirty Years' War, and the problem resurfaced in Britain in connection with James II's succession in 1688. In the 1670s, Sweden, a fiercely Protestant country, was still coming to terms with Queen Christina's sudden abdication and defection to the Catholic Church in 1654.



Olof Rudbeck explains his ideas to the wise men of the world. This copper engraving by the Dutch artist Padt Brugge appeared as a frontispiece in one of the volumes of Rudbeck's *Atlantid*.

For Rudbeck, the son of a Protestant bishop, the Atlantis project was obviously part of a larger scheme. It is almost impossible not to read it as part of a struggle to assert Swedish nationalism and independence in the political as well as the religious sphere. Placing the ancient Atlantis in Sweden and Scandinavia is in effect a theft of Promethean proportions. Just as Prometheus stole the fire from Zeus and the Olympians, Rudbeck in a sense slips behind enemy lines and, like a burglar in the night, removes everything that for two thousand years had given the Mediterranean and Catholic world a claim to cultural supremacy. Also, by championing the

importance of Scandinavian culture in a historical period before the agreed beginnings of Mediterranean culture, he had in effect monopolised history.

As mentioned above, Rudbeck systematically designed a northern counterpart and substitute for virtually everything the South had to offer. Like a cultural Gustav Adolf, he conquered and subdued enemy territory. Even the fascination with runes, which he inherited from his Scandinavian predecessors, was used as a weapon against the main cultural and literary instruments of the South, namely the Latin alphabet and the Latin language. In Rudbeck's world, this, and even the Greek, alphabet, are nothing but by-products or descendants of the great and mystical Mother of all written communication, the rune (Eriksson 2002, 257). It is no coincidence, in other words, that Rudbeck, at a time when Latin and the vernaculars were vying for supremacy, deliberately and increasingly opted for Swedish, and especially so in an academic context, where Latin was still dominant.

As will be seen in ch. 2, there are interesting parallels between Rudbeck's Atlantis project and the next great manifestation of northern culture nearly a hundred years later, namely James Macpherson's Ossian poems. Rudbeck deserves a central place in the history of the North and of northern cultural identity because, despite the obviously absurd aspects of his vision, he is an integral part of a much greater movement and represents, like Nietzsche, a revaluation of all values that was recognised as groundbreaking. And importantly, he was not just a Swede convincing his own countrymen. In 1681, after the publication of the first volume of *Atlant*, he was welcomed with open arms into the Royal Society in London by such men as Robert Hooke,<sup>79</sup> Isaac Newton and Samuel Pepys: "With Christopher Wren in the presidential chair, [it] sent Rudbeck the following words: 'We are not able to admire enough the power of genius and the abundance of learning [...] by which you uncover the secrets of the past'". And: "It was in fact an expert on the ancient world, former Cambridge University Regius Professor of Greek Thomas Gale, who officially proposed Rudbeck to the Royal Society" (King 2005, 206–07).

Despite Rudbeck's unique achievement, it is also important to remember that he was part of an academic environment which gave Uppsala, at least for a period, a central role in the attempt to create a sustainable northern culture. Olaus Verelius has already been mentioned, and it says a lot about his significance that Rudbeck himself in generous words dedicated his great work to him. Furthermore, the university was blessed with the goodwill of Sweden's powerful and brilliant chancellor, Rudbeck's patron, Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie, who conveniently also

<sup>79</sup> Hooke was not just a brilliant scientist; he was also particularly qualified for appreciating a work on Atlantis: most likely, he was the "R.H." who in 1660 had published a continuation of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (Manuel and Manuel 1979, 253).

happened to be the chancellor of the university. In 1666, he showed the foresight of passing a law that protected antiquities from being looted and destroyed, though the idea was not his own. It came from the antiquarian Johan Hadorph, who was just beginning his life-long and comprehensive documentation of Swedish history through the collection of manuscripts, legal traditions and drawings of more than a thousand runestones.

The following year De la Gardie established the “College of Antiquities”, whose object was the same as the law of the previous year: “to preserve and promote all manuscripts, documents, and other matters that shed light on the ancient Swedish heritage” (*ibid.*, 85). Its first president was Georg Stiernhielm, Johan Bure’s disciple and promoter of runic mysticism. And in 1669 de la Gardie, who had himself acquired a substantial collection of ancient Nordic literature, donated “sixty-four sagas and eddas” to the university (*ibid.*, 188).

Among the members of the College of Antiquities was one of Rudbeck’s colleagues, John Scheffer (or Johannes Schefferus), who also made an important contribution to the study of the North. Being a good example of the university’s academic status and of Queen Christina’s success in attracting scholars of international repute, Scheffer, who was born in Strasbourg and educated partly in Leiden (like Rudbeck himself), was invited by Christina in 1648 to become professor of eloquence and government in Uppsala, where he remained until his death in 1679. Like many of his colleagues, he developed a fascination for Swedish history and produced pioneering work in the field of archaeology, but his fame rests primarily on the comprehensive topographical work *Lapponia* (Lapland), which was published in Latin in Frankfurt in 1673. Other writers had dealt with Lapland at some length before, especially Jacob Ziegler in *Schondia* (1532) and Anders Bure in *Orbis Arctoi* (1626), but Scheffer subjected it to a comprehensive presentation which remained a standard source of information for many years to come, providing an important source for the widely read account *Voyage en Laponie* (A Journey to Lapland) by the Frenchman Jean-François Regnard, of 1681 (Castrén 1910, 30–31).

Also, because of the debated status of Lapland, where the borders between Denmark-Norway, Sweden and Russia were still unclear, the book was in itself a nationalist statement. Although he acknowledges the rights of other countries to parts of the region, Scheffer seems deliberately vague while at the same time asserting Sweden’s central role: “we purpose to treat only of that which is subject to the Government of the Swedes; and this is a vast Country, thought by Paulinus in his History of the North, of equal Extent almost with all Sweden, properly so called” (Scheffer 1751, 3). The academic interest in the book and Scheffer’s stature as a leading European scholar are evident not just from the fact that rumours about *Lapponia* were circulating among expectant scholars as early as December 1672 (Seaton 1935, 213), i.e. before the Latin first edition was available,

but also because the book was translated into English (though abbreviated) as early as 1674, and into German – in an impressive and amply illustrated edition – in 1675.<sup>80</sup>

The late seventeenth century also saw the publication of other important works that contributed to the Nordic revival. Actually, 1675 was a particularly rich year for books about the North. In Hamburg, Rudolph Capel (1635–84) published *Vorstellungen des Norden* (Ideas about the North), an extensive collection primarily about the polar regions.<sup>81</sup> Like Rudbeck's work, it might be read as an interesting illustration of the late 1600s as a transitional period both in terms of the level of actual knowledge about the North and in terms of the more or less universally scientific attitude to it. Capel, for instance, gives a relatively straightforward and generally reliable summary of the many islands in the North, but includes without hesitation "Friessland", which also appears on many maps, but which proved to be non-existent. He describes it, however, in some detail: it is larger than Ireland; the air is very humid; the people there have no vegetables etc. But he also offers an interesting observation about the contemporary interest in the Far North:

There is no region or area in the world about which these days many Christian peoples and nations (however difficult it initially seems) make a greater and more intense effort to find the truth than the polar region (*Tractus Borealis*), probably partly because they hope that by this discovery they may not only be able to obtain relations with the northern Asian tartars and the Chinese, but also to explore the rich East-Indian and other Oriental countries by coming half or even two thirds nearer than before. (Capel 1675, 10–11)<sup>82</sup>

Another publication of the same year that extended the knowledge of the North by focusing, like Scheffer, on one of the less known regions, was *A Description of the Islands and Inhabitants of Feroe*, whose Danish original from 1673 had been written by the Faroese parson Lucas Jacobsen Debes. Once again, the almost immediate translation is a confirmation of Capel's claim about the widespread curiosity in the region.

In France, too, there is a visible interest in the North. One example of this is the account by Pierre Martin de la Martinière (1634–1690), who served as a doctor or "Chiurgion" on a Danish expedition to the Far North as early as 1653, but who did not publish his account until 1671. Within a

<sup>80</sup> Schefferi 1675. The full title of the German edition gives a good impression of Scheffer's extensive work: *Lappland, Das ist: Neue und wahrhaftige Beschreibung von Lappland und dessen Einwohnern, worin viel bishero unbekandte Sachen von der Lappen Ankunfft, Überglauben, Zauberkünsten, Nahrung, Kleidern, Geschäften, wie auch von den Thieren und Metallen so es in ihrem Lande giebet, erzählt, und mit unterschiedlichen Figuren fürgestellt worden.*

<sup>81</sup> The 'D. Capel' on the book's title page probably suggests 'Dr. Capel'. His name is frequently spelt 'Rudolf Capell'.

<sup>82</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

few years, however, it was translated into German as well as English and was widely read as a source about Iceland as well as Norway, both of which he had visited. La Martinière offers an educated outsider's perspective on the North. It is interesting to notice, therefore, that despite being a scientist as well as a compatriot and a contemporary of Descartes, he comes across not just as heavily dependent on such northern predecessors as Blefken and Scheffer but also without his usual sceptical rationalism, and reproduces quite uncritically some of the most fantastic and stereotyped stories about the region. Sailing along the Norwegian coast, heading for the Far North, he offers an account – clearly inspired by Scheffer but giving no indication of either irony or scepticism – about how “the People which inhabit the [Arctic] Circle, [...] are for the most part Sorcerers, and dispose of the Wind as they please”. Consequently, some of the seamen on board go on shore “to purchase one [i.e. wind] for us”. After numerous complications, they find a “Necromancer”, who with three of his “Camerades” is brought on board, where

we bargained with him for a pound of Tobacco, and ten Crowns in Silver, for which they fastned to a corner of our fore-mast Sail, a piece of Linnen Cloth about a foot long, and four fingers broad, in which having tyed three knots, they told us that would do, and then entred into their Skip to return. (La Martinière 1674, 23–24)

The first two knots provide them with perfect wind for some time, but as in a fairy tale, the third knot brings something of a surprise:

The last knot being unty'd, it was not long before there arose a North North-West wind, so furious and violent it seemed to us as if the whole Heavens were falling down upon our heads, and God by a just vengeance intended our extermination for the sin we had committed in giving ear to those Sorcerers; for not being able to keep up our sayls, we were forc'd to abandon our selves to the mercy of the waves, which hurry'd us with so vehement an agitation, we expected nothing but to broken [*sic*] in pieces and drowned. (*Ibid.*, 26–27)

They are thrown on the rocks near the North Cape, but miraculously save the ship with relatively minor damage and reach Vardøhus, where they make preparations for the next leg of the journey, into Lapland. Here, too, in his encounter with the Sami, he seems, like Joseph Conrad's Mr. Kurtz, to fall back into primitivism and superstition and to totally lose the ability to view the phenomenon with rational detachment:

Every house has belonging to it a great black Cat, of which they make great accompt, talking and discoursing to it as it were a rational Creature. They do nothing but they first communicate with their Cat, as believing she assists them highly in all their enterprizes. Every night they go out of their *Cabanes* to consult their dear puss; not can they expect a blessing upon their sports either Hunting, Fishing, Foulng, &c. unless their good Angel goes along with them, which though I have seen many of them, and all have the figure of a Cat, yet by the dreadfulness of their looks, I did and do still think they can be nothing but Devils. (*Ibid.*, 35)



La Martinière, then, is primarily concerned with what he actually – or supposedly – experiences and witnesses during his journey. Possibly because of his nationality and his Mediterranean orientation, he does not show an interest in cultural and historical phenomena that suggest a connection with his own background: the world he observes is essentially strange, peculiar and different, i.e. something he sees entirely from the outside. In addition, it is clear that his experiences are also strongly coloured by southern perceptions going centuries back of a sharp divide between the North and the South, in which the former is generally associated with “demons, devils and a threat to God’s people” (Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, in Jakobsson 2009, 33).

Towards the end of the century, British historians viewing the North, on the other hand, increasingly include Nordic elements as a natural ingredient in their nation’s past. As early as 1670, Robert Sheringham, building upon the popularity of the publication of the *Edda* five years before, makes ample references to the latest Scandinavian scholars in his history of the English (Seaton 1935, 208), and in the 1680s Edward Stillingfleet and Moses Pitt follow suit with major works of a similar approach. Then, in the summer of 1683, this general “wind of change” comes to visible fruition on the political stage:

After a long interval of detachment and even of enmity, the marriage of Prince George of Denmark to the Princess Anne [on 28 July 1683: she later became Queen Anne] again brought about a connexion between the courts of Denmark and England, of which those interested in Scandinavian matters were quick to take advantage. Prince George may not have imposed his personality on the Court, nor done much to show interest in literature, but he was a glittering figure-head on which to drape dedications of such books as Crull’s *Denmark Vindicated*, or even of such a monumental work as Hicke’s *Thesaurus*, which traces the Prince’s descent through the Scyldings from “Odin, *Princeps Asarum*”, and in its peroration quotes the *Völuspá* for a description of Heaven. (*Ibid.*, 72)

Henry Purcell, who had been appointed organist of Westminster Abbey three years earlier, even composed, and probably performed, for the occasion one of his “Welcome Songs”, whose text, written by an anonymous author, celebrates the royal prince “[f]rom hardy Climes and dangerous Toils of War” and welcomes him “to our benigner Isle” (Steenslid 2004).<sup>83</sup>

Two linguistic works of note were also published before the end of the century. In 1683, Peder Hansen Resen – in another praiseworthy effort as an editor – published *Lexicon Islandicum*, an Icelandic dictionary written by the Icelander Gudmundus Andraea (or Gudmundur Andrésón), who had died from cholera in Copenhagen in 1654. The dictionary contains

<sup>83</sup> The lines may have acquired a certain irony in light of the fact that only weeks later a cold set in which in the course of the autumn and winter brought arctic conditions, freezing the ground “to a depth of more than a meter in parts of south-western England and belts of ice appeared along the coasts of south-eastern England and northern France” (Fagan 2000, 113).

a representative blend of Icelandic, Danish and Latin, particularly in its introductory pages, including a Danish poem, signed “Pe. Septimus”. With a strong pro-Icelandic bias the poem celebrates how the Icelandic language, which has long been suppressed by “Dansk, Svensk ok Nordsk”, is now being supported and nursed by these very same languages, so that it will once again achieve “growth and life” (Andraea 1683, 21).<sup>84</sup>

This also sheds some interesting light on the full title of the work, which in effect is a cluster of three alternative titles: *Lexicon Islandicum, sive Gothica Runæ vel Lingvæ Septentrionalis Dictionarium*, which would translate as “An Icelandic Dictionary, or the Gothic Runes or A Dictionary of the Nordic Language”. The author, in other words, appears to have at least a twofold ambition with the work: he wants to bridge the historical gap between modern Icelandic (*Islandicum*) and Old Norse (*Gothica*), thus showing the presence of tradition and continuity; and he chooses – with a touch of mild linguistic imperialism – to see Icelandic as the true mother tongue of the North, and “Dansk, Svensk ok Nordsk” as younger daughter languages. The “*Runæ*” in the title could even be interpreted as a self-confident emphasis on Icelandic as a northern alternative not only to the Latin language as a *lingua franca*, but also as an alternative alphabet, as had been proposed by Johan Bure.

But the introduction also contains other material of interest. As a further confirmation of the close network of scholars, who together generated the Nordic revival, there is a tribute to Olaus Verelius in Uppsala, who eleven years earlier had published the *Hervarar Saga*, for which the *Lexicon* obviously would have been useful. The dictionary itself, in which the Icelandic words are translated into Latin with an extensive use of examples, looks largely like a modern, professionally produced dictionary. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Seaton mentions it together with the other major linguistic work of the period, the Yorkshire divine and scholar George Hicke’s *Grammatica Anglo-Saxonica et Moeso-Gothica* (1689), and concludes that with these two works “the Septentrionalists were equipped for the study of the ancient northern languages” (Seaton 1935, 231).<sup>85</sup> The latter should also be remembered for including the first translation into a modern language of a complete Old Icelandic poem (O’Donoghue 2007, 109).

A third work, also from 1689, which similarly pointed forward to the scholarly work of the next century, was written by Thomas Bartholin

<sup>84</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

<sup>85</sup> The term ‘Septentrionalist’ generally means a student of the North. Etymologically, the word refers to the seven main stars in the Big Dipper, i.e. the main stars in the constellation Ursa Major. Also, the North Star (or Polaris) can be found by extending the line between two of the stars in the Big Dipper, i.e. Merak and Dubhe. The North Star, which forms part of another constellation, Ursa Minor, is unique in always being placed in the north. Thus, in the northern hemisphere, the connection between the Big Dipper and the North Star is an ancient and simple way of establishing the direction to the north.

(1659–90), a young member of a brilliant Danish family of scientists.<sup>86</sup> Bartholin, whose uncle was none other than Ole Worm, had succeeded while still in his mid-twenties in securing a large number of ancient manuscripts for the royal archives in Copenhagen. In the year before he died from tuberculosis, however, he published a major work under the long and rather bewildering title *Antiquitatum Danicarum de Causis Contemptæ a Danis adhuc Gentilibus Mortis Libri Tres*, i.e. “Three Books about the Cause of the Danes’ Contempt for Death while They Were still Heathens”. Written in Latin, the work was “in reality a very comprehensive description of the spiritual life of major parts of the old Norse world, in addition to all those aspects of cultural history that in various ways are related to the faith of the ancient people of the North” (Engelstoft 1933, s.v. “Bartholin, Thomas”).<sup>87</sup> In addition, it included extensive excerpts from such a large quantity of as yet unpublished old Norse material that it effectively amounted to an anthology of ancient texts, printed in the original and with parallel Latin translations. It was in this capacity that Bartholin’s work “achieved an unsurpassed dissemination in the scholarly as well as the poetic world and for a very long time became essential for the knowledge of the ancient North in all of Europe” (*ibid.*). Not least, it would play an important role a hundred years after its publication, during the early stages of English and German Romanticism.

Also in the year of 1689, the Swedish philologist Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld set out on a journey through major parts of Europe, North Africa and the Near East in order to find, as Rudbeck had more or less promised, traces of the Goths, who were thought to have emigrated from their Swedish *vagina populorum* some time in the distant past. The result is meagre indeed, and in the course of his correspondence with the great philosopher Leibnitz, who is highly sceptical of Rudbeck, Sparwenfeld gradually lost faith in the project (Stenroth 2002, 124–25).

Then a year and a half into the new century, on 16 May 1702, a fire raged through Uppsala, destroying Olof Rudbeck’s house and virtually all his possessions, including “his printing press, his curiosity cabinet, some seven thousand completed woodcuts for his *Campus Elysii* [i.e. his new botanical project], and almost every single unsold copy of *Atlantica*” (King 2005, 250). In September, Rudbeck himself died, marking the end of an extraordinary career and an extraordinary century. But although the ashes of his numerous unsold books largely came to symbolise the fate of his *opus maximum* and *idee fixe*, his fundamental vision of the North as a region with a unique history and a unique role to play in the world was destined for a considerably longer life.

<sup>86</sup> His father, also named Thomas Bartholin, has been credited with the discovery of the lymphatic system because he published his findings before Olof Rudbeck, who had made the same discovery at the age of nineteen.

<sup>87</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.



## 2. Preparing for Take-Off: The Early Eighteenth Century

### *Northern Politics and Peter the Great*

On the political stage, the seventeenth century in northern Europe had not been lacking in drama and bloodshed, and the eighteenth similarly started with major military turbulence, especially in the north-eastern corner. The Great Northern War, which lasted from 1700 till 1721, was to have far-reaching consequences for many years to follow. Largely connected with Sweden's Baltic supremacy in the previous century, the war started with a number of states – Russia, Denmark-Norway, Poland-Lithuania and Saxony – uniting in a Northern Alliance against Sweden. But the architect of the war was Russia. In July 1700, the country negotiated a thirty-year truce with the Turks, providing security to the south, but the fireworks on 18 August to celebrate the happy event actually carried an ominous warning, because the very next day Russia declared war on Sweden (Wilson 2009, 71).

In Russia as well as Sweden there was a young and extremely ambitious monarch on the throne. Both were destined to leave indelible marks on national as well as European history. When the war broke out, the Swedish King Carl XII was no more than eighteen and had only acquired the reins of power three years earlier; Russia's Peter I, who was later to earn the epithet "the Great", was twenty-eight, and had effectively only ruled the country since 1696. Carl XII has been called the last of the great Swedish warrior kings, and in the first phase of the war he certainly achieved some stunning military victories.

Though the Alliance opened hostilities by attacking Sweden in February 1700, the Swedes dealt a crushing blow to the Russians at Narva later in the same year by routing an army four times the size of their own. Carl then moved swiftly, attacking Poland in 1701, taking Warsaw and Cracow the following year, and again defeating Peter the Great at Pultusk in 1703. When he invaded Russia a few years later, however, he met fierce resistance, and by this time the modernisation of Peter's army was well underway. The Russian leader had also established a navy, based primarily in Arkhangelsk, and in 1703 he founded St. Petersburg – later to be called the Venice of the North – in order to further secure his hold

on his northern territories and the vital access to the Baltic. The Swedish empire in the region was tottering; in June 1709 Peter won a great and decisive victory at the Battle of Poltava in the Ukraine, effectively spelling the end of Swedish dominance and marking the rise of Russia as a major regional power.

By 1715 Sweden had lost all its Baltic and German territories, and during one of several lacklustre attempts to wrest Norway from the hands of Denmark, Carl XII was killed under mysterious circumstances during a siege at Fredriksten Fortress (present-day Halden in southern Norway) in December 1718. In a series of treaties from 1719 to 1721, the map of Scandinavia and the Baltic was largely transformed, and after another war between Russia and Sweden from 1741 to 1743, the new power structure was further confirmed by the Treaty of Åbo, in which Sweden ceded large parts of southern Finland to Russia. Although by this time, Peter the Great had been dead for nearly twenty years, Russia had acquired a position it was not to lose again: due to Peter's mammoth efforts it was now firmly part of "the governing part of Europe" (Wilson 2009, 100).

In Britain, the new century started less violently, but still with plenty of political drama. In the early spring of 1702, William III (of Orange) died, and left the throne to his sister-in-law, Queen Anne. More importantly, however, Anne's twelve-year reign witnessed an event that was going to have profound repercussions not only in Britain but also in northern Europe as a whole, namely the union of 1707 between England and Scotland. Since 1603, when the Tudor line had died out with Queen Elizabeth I, and the Stuart James VI of Scotland had become James I of England, the two kingdoms had in practical terms been governed as one. Nevertheless, with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that it was really the political union between the two rival kingdoms that gave a boost to both of them and that was an essential precondition for the spectacular success of a surprisingly united Great Britain in the following two centuries.

In 1707 both nations were on the threshold of great things, not least Scotland, which later in the century was to flourish and produce breathtaking achievements in a wide range of areas. Admittedly, this development was not self-evident in the first decades of the eighteenth century. After Queen Anne's death in 1714 and the ascension of George I of Hanover, the union and the new royal family were still to experience the attempted Jacobite coup (1745–46), led by Bonnie Prince Charlie, to re-establish the Stuart dynasty. Still, the period from 1690 to 1750 witnessed a steady consolidation of Britain's position: the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the Union of 1707, the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, and the final defeat of the Stuarts in 1746 were all events that served to establish Britain as an important northern and firmly non-Catholic power, both important

preconditions for the development after 1750 of a distinctly alternative culture to that of southern, Catholic Europe.<sup>1</sup>

A further factor contributing to the gradual shift of focus to the north was the continuing exploration and exploitation of the arctic regions, now expanding into hitherto unknown and uncharted waters as well as territories. Incidentally, this intensive effort, whose hunger for breaking ever new boundaries is intimately associated with an insatiable and constantly developing scientific curiosity, also led to the discovery of the Arctic's polar counterpart, the Antarctic. In 1694, the Dutchman Abel Tasman's account of his voyage half a century earlier, during which he discovered Tasmania, was finally published in an English translation, followed three years later by the English buccaneer, scientist and three-times circumnavigator William Dampier's *A New Voyage Round the World*, creating a widespread curiosity about the Southern Ocean (Gurney 2007, 15). Then from 1698 to 1700, the future Astronomer Royal Edmond Halley made a scientific voyage to the same waters, observing drifting ice from the south. It was not until 1739, however, that the Frenchman Bouvet de Lozier made the first discovery of land as far south as 54° S. It proved only to be a small island, later to be named Bouvetøya,<sup>2</sup> however, and nearly a century was still to pass before a human being set foot on the Antarctic continent.

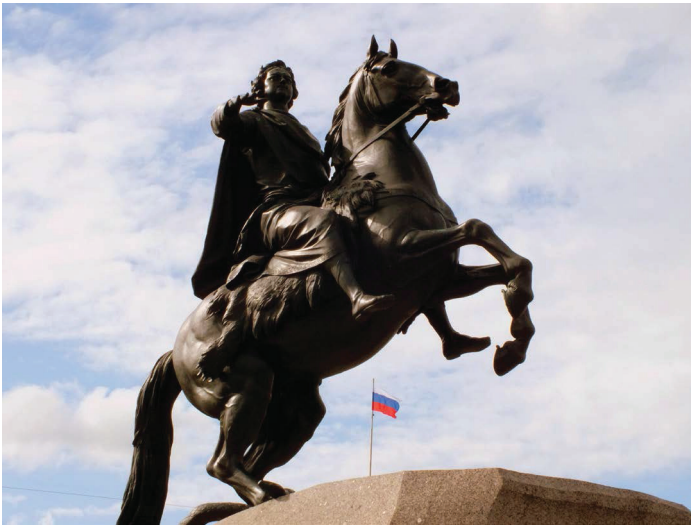
In the polar regions of the North, on the other hand, exploratory efforts were on a grander scale altogether, largely due to the man who was probably the most forward-looking and energetic power player of the period, namely Peter the Great. Even during the first years of his reign, when he was still largely under the influence of his advisors, he must have grasped the strategic and economic potential of the enormous Siberian territories, in most of which the tsar's authority was still weak or non-existent. After alarming clashes between Chinese and Russian groups in the border areas with China, the Treaty of Nerchinsk was signed in 1689 (Frank 1998, 125).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Utrecht ended the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) and prevented a union between the crowns of Spain and France, thus ending French hegemony in central Europe and further paving the way for British expansion.

<sup>2</sup> The island is currently a Norwegian dependency; its official name is therefore Bouvetøya.

<sup>3</sup> The treaty was generally respected for nearly two centuries, but it was after one of the breaches of the treaty that Peter the Great engaged an English diplomat, John Bell, to re-establish peaceful relations with the Chinese emperor. According to Bell's own account, he "set out from St Petersburg the 14th of July, 1719, in company with Messieurs Lange and Grave, attended by a few servants; the first was a native of Sweden, and the other of Courland [region of Latvia]" (Bell 1806, 114). After an eventful and successful journey of about 20,000 km, "[we] arrived safe in the capital city of Mosco [*sic*], on the 5th day of January 1722, where we found his Czarish Majesty, and all the court, who had lately arrived from St Petersburg, and preparations were making for grand fire-works [*sic*], triumphal arches, and other marks of joy, on account of the peace: With which I shall conclude my journey" (*ibid.*, 396).

Having thus established a workable border to the south, the next question was how to pursue the Russian expansion to the north. Not that Siberia was a complete *terra incognita* to the Russians. Gerhard Friedrich Müller, in his account *Voyages from Asia to America* from 1761, claims that they had been navigating the Lena from Yakutsk to “the Frozen Sea” from as early as 1636; that “a Company of Volunteers” had navigated the coastline eastwards from the mouth of the river Kolyma, in the far-eastern region of Siberia, in 1646; and that several rivers in northern Siberia were explored in the course of the 1650s (Müller 1761, iv–vii).<sup>4</sup> In 1686–87, the largely unknown explorer Ivan Tolstoukhov may even have rounded



This giant statue of Peter the Great in the Senate Square in St. Petersburg was erected by Catherine the Great in 1782 in an attempt to establish a link between herself and her famous predecessor.

the Taymyr Peninsula between the mouths of the Yenisey and the Lena. The peninsula, extending to more than 77° N, is the northernmost part of the European and Asian mainland and therefore the most critical point of the Northeast Passage (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Tolstoukhov, Ivan”).

Nevertheless, these were scattered expeditions that were not parts of a coordinated plan, and the amount of solid, undisputable information

<sup>4</sup> Müller (1705–1783) was a German historian and ethnologist who came to Russia at the age of twenty to study the far-eastern regions. He became “one of the first members of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences”, which had been founded by Peter the Great (Carol Urness, in Müller 1986, 3). He also became a member of the Second Kamchatka Expedition (see below). There is actually some uncertainty as to whether Gerhard Friedrich Müller is the author of the work. The Bodleian Library catalogue lists the work under his name, but the book’s title page has “S. Muller”.



was scant. Peter clearly had something else in mind. In 1697, only a year after taking over full political powers, he initiated two apparently contradictory projects. He himself set out westward, to visit Europe, on his so-called “Grand Embassy”, with a cavalcade of “two hundred and fifty diplomats and attendants, complete with an honour guard [...]” (Wilson 2009, 41). At the same time, he dispatched the Siberian Cossack Vladimir Atlasov in the opposite direction, to the large Kamchatka Peninsula near the Bering Sea. Here Atlasov made the population pay tribute to the tsar, and thus laid, according to Müller, “the Foundation of the Conquest of the Country” (Müller 1761, ix). Müller also mentions a series of other minor expeditions during the period from 1700 to 1715. But even these were relatively tentative efforts compared to the systematic and far more comprehensive survey of the remote wastes that Peter initiated towards the end of his reign. Clearly under the influence of western science and its faith in collecting, categorising and systematising information and ultimately applying it to commercial and political ends, Peter realised that this was the only approach that might yield satisfactory answers to questions of fundamental importance to the future of his country.

First of all, he needed to know the natural borders of his vast empire, and an important question in this connection was whether the Asian and the American continents were separate or connected. If they were connected, the century-old search for a Northeast or a Northwest Passage, i.e. a navigable northern route from the Atlantic to the Pacific, was completely futile. Secondly, mindful of the potential conflicts with other powers, he needed to find out if his secret ambition of taking control of North America was feasible (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Bering, Vitus”). This may sound like a ludicrous notion, and with the benefit of modern maps, on which every part of the planet is carefully registered, it is difficult to comprehend the degree of uncertainty and ignorance that encompassed these uncharted regions at the time. Still, there were numerous speculations and apparently trustworthy reports in the last years of Peter’s reign about the possible presence of a large island or even an extension of the American continent immediately to the north of the Kolyma River in eastern Siberia. Some of these speculations even manifested themselves on contemporary maps (Burney 1819, 112–16). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Peter felt an urge for hard and tangible facts, and these included a survey of “the whole of the navigation along the North coast of *Asia*”, i.e. in effect the Northeast Passage (*ibid.*, 117).

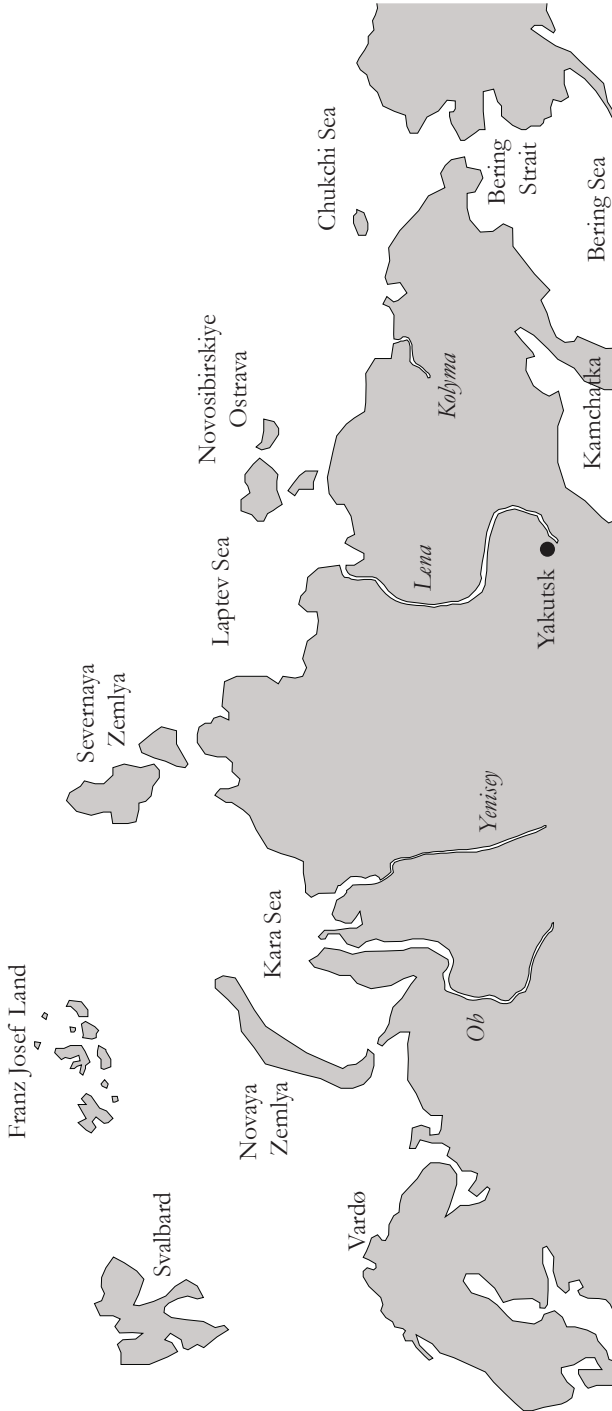
The man Peter had chosen for the mammoth task of bringing Russia’s far-eastern regions into the folds of the empire was the Danish captain Vitus Bering (1681–1741), who had seen twenty years of service in the Russian Navy. Sadly, the emperor only lived to see the very beginning of his great project. As a matter of fact, he died on 8 February 1725, only three days after Bering had departed from St. Petersburg with his employer’s

handwritten instructions and started his journey to Kamchatka.<sup>5</sup> In the summer of 1728, having built, as instructed, two ships, the forty-four-man strong expedition sailed up the east coast of Kamchatka, reaching the Bering Strait on 13 August, and trusting the reports by natives to the effect that the land turned west, Bering decided that the tsar's instructions had been fulfilled (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Bering, Vitus"). Thus, without tangible evidence, and without having seen the coast of America, but worried about the advent of winter and ice, he decided to turn round. Arriving in St. Petersburg on 1 March 1730, Bering was received with considerable attention.

It is also a powerful indication of the significance of his mission that even several years later a quarrel erupted concerning who was entitled to be credited with its results. In another work attributed to Gerhardt Müller, published in 1754, various letters regarding the expedition were reproduced. One of them is by "a Russian Sea-Officer", who appears to have been a member of the expedition, and who attacks a certain "Mr. de l'Isle", who in 1751 had produced a map of the area in question. De l'Isle is clearly the Frenchman Joseph-Nicolas Delisle (1688–1768), a scientist and member of the French Academy of Sciences, who had been invited by Peter the Great to "create and run the school of astronomy" in St. Petersburg (*Wikipedia*, *s.v.* "Joseph-Nicolas Delisle"). The officer does not only intimate that Delisle's map is full of errors; he also criticises him for trying to take the credit for the discoveries made by the Bering expedition.

The background to this becomes apparent from another letter, by "Arthur Dobbs, Esq.; Governor of North-Carolina", who will also appear in a later context. Dobbs generally confirms the Russian officer's version, and supplies a useful piece of information, namely that Delisle's brother had been a member of the expedition, and that he, too, had produced an account of the voyage to the Bering Strait. According to Dobbs, however, "he seems, by his account, not to have been capable of keeping a correct journal, having been sick, and had given himself up to drink large quantities of brandy, to keep up his spirits, which caused his death as he was landing at Avatcha" (Müller 1754, 37). There are indications, in other words, that Delisle's account, which is itself reproduced at the end of the book, is an attempt to save both his own position and his aristocratic family's honour. He mentions, for instance, somewhat casually "my brother's voyage", while

<sup>5</sup> Peter had by this time acquired a reputation in the rest of Europe that could only be compared to that of Gustav II Adolf – the Lion of the North – a hundred years earlier. He was also awarded a similar epithet; at his death, the English dramatist Aaron Hill (1685–1750) published a leaflet containing a poem, written seven years before, entitled "The Northern Star: A Poem Sacred to the Name and Memory of the Immortal Czar of Russia". It expresses an unreserved admiration for the Russian hero: "Northward, unbridled Muse, direct thy Flight, / Where a new Sun inflames the Land of Night [...]" (Hill 1725, 4). The poem is also discussed by Waldemar Zacharasiewicz in Jakobsson (ed.) 2009, 39–40.



With great navigable rivers running north into the Arctic Ocean, a sea route along the northern coast of Russia, linking the Atlantic and the Pacific, would have had an enormous commercial significance.

adding “and that of Captain Beerings”, as if the former took precedence over the latter. It is also interesting to note in Müller’s work, however, a certain northern European (i.e. English, German and Russian) common front against a Frenchman’s demand for a share of the spoils.

The Delisle incident also suggests another salient point, namely the intensity with which the rest of Europe was watching Peter the Great’s nation-building and nation-mapping project, and the way in which it contributed to a readjustment of perceptions of the power balance between north and south, east and west. One indication of this is Philipp Johann von Strahlenberg’s prosaically entitled book *Das Nord- und Ostliche Theil von Europa und Asia* (The Northern and Eastern Part of Europe and Asia). The work, which is an extensive topographical account of Russia, was published in Stockholm in 1730 and dedicated to King Fredrik I, “der Schweden, Gothen und Wenden König”. A brilliant cartographer, von Strahlenberg (1676–1747) came from Stralsund in present-day eastern Germany, where he joined the Swedish army. As a result of the Great Northern War, he spent many years as a prisoner of war in Russia, and this experience, together with an impressive knowledge of languages, enabled him to provide the rest of Europe with a highly topical update regarding Russia and its relationship to Europe. In a lengthy introduction, he spends twenty pages discussing the borderline between Europe and Asia, thus emphasising Russia’s ambiguous position, which had become all the more interesting because of Peter the Great’s dual project: westernisation in combination with an extensive subjugation of the remote Asian regions.

Bering’s confirmation of the existence of a strait between the Asian and the American continents gave a green light to the second and far more elaborate stage of Peter’s ambitious plan, and in this, too, Bering was going to play a vital role. The Great Northern Expedition, or the Second Kamchatka Expedition, lasted for an entire decade, from 1733 until 1742, and “was the most far-reaching, the most tenacious and the most meticulously planned of any Arctic expedition before or since” (Vaughan 1994, 111). It was led by the Russian Admiralty, in much the same way as British polar activity would later be administered by the Royal Navy. The reason was obvious; with a coastline of more than 35,000 km, much of which was unexplored, and with direct access to the Atlantic as well as the Pacific, the sea and not least the rivers provided a potentially effective alternative and supplement to the slow and difficult land routes at a time when trade, as Peter the Great had realised, was becoming increasingly international and essential for future progress. But as several of the great rivers flowed into the Arctic Ocean, it was of crucial importance to ascertain to what extent the trade conducted along these main arteries of the Russian interior could establish national and international connections through navigable sea routes.

The Great Northern Expedition was, in other words, an integral part of Peter's great modernisation project – an attempt to create a national grid of communication lines, which would not only ensure economic growth based largely on the fur trade, but would also provide an administrative network, which was a precondition for effective governmental control.

Although Bering was given overall responsibility for exploring all of the huge territories east of the Ob River and has therefore been remembered as the central figure of the expedition, the various regions and stretches of coastline were systematically delegated to a number of separate groups, which altogether involved more than 1,000 men (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Bering, Vitus”). Together, the two expeditions “made substantial contributions to the history of geographical discoveries [...] and] firmly established official Russian presence in the far reaches of Siberia and, additionally, heralded Russian expansion to America” (Carol Urness in Müller 1986, 3).



During most of the eighteenth century, Prince of Wales Fort (often known as Fort Prince of Wales), in the north-eastern corner of Manitoba, underlined a strong British presence in the region. Its importance declined after a short French occupation of the Fort from 1782 to 1783.

Bering himself, however, did not live to harvest the fruits of his labours. His ship having been wrecked on the Commander Islands east of Kamchatka, he died there of scurvy on 8 December 1741, on the island that was named after him, and in the sea that was also soon to carry his name (Müller 1986, 116). Only a couple of weeks earlier, and unknown to the dying Bering, his first employer's daughter, Elizabeth, had taken over the reins of power in a coup. Probably, she was similarly ignorant about the fact that none of her servants had probably done more to expand her empire than Bering himself.

***The Arctic Race Continues***

Russia, then, after the demise of Sweden, emerged in the first half of the eighteenth century as the leading power in the north-eastern corner of Europe, and in this process the country's vast arctic backyard, to the north-west and to the east of the Urals, played a central role. Incidentally, a parallel development was taking place in the north-western Arctic, especially in northern Canada, which served as a kind of North-American counterpart to the Siberian wastes. Here Britain and France were vying for control of the natural resources both on land and at sea, and of the potentially significant highroad to the East – the Northwest Passage.

Historically, the intensity of the search for the passage had varied from one period to another. Admittedly, some progress had been made during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in terms of charting the maze of islands, inlets and seasonal ice movements, but by the late seventeenth century, the Canadian Arctic still represented a vast Unknown, and consequently a place where hard facts and fiery speculations were often hard to distinguish from each other. In 1708, for instance, an English translation was published of a letter by an alleged Spanish admiral, Bartholomew de Fonte, who claimed he had sailed through the Northwest Passage as early as in 1640. Even as late as the mid-1700s, the letter was believed genuine and used as the basis for a map that similarly showed a perfect and easily navigable channel through the North-American continent.

Though the French were retaining a significant foothold in the New World at the beginning of the eighteenth century, they were slowly being outmanoeuvred by the British, whose Hudson's Bay Company (founded in 1670) had gained a foothold to the north and the east several decades earlier, giving the British the upper hand with regard to the important fur trade in the northern and arctic territories, and simultaneously equipping them with a strategic advantage in the search for the Northwest Passage. Although the active search for the passage had been lying dormant for nearly a hundred years, the awareness of its potential significance was in no way diminished.

Furthermore, new political developments sharpened the British appetite for a new initiative. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 had not only weakened Spain and France in Europe; France had also ceded Newfoundland and Nova Scotia to Britain, together with large territories around Hudson Bay. Then, in 1717, the Hudson's Bay Company started building Fort Prince of Wales on the west coast of the Bay as a manifestation of its military and commercial supremacy in the region (McGhee 2005, 204–05). Thus, as it was assumed by many that the Bay might well contain the decisive opening to the west, it is hardly a coincidence that a new expedition to find the Northwest Passage followed soon after. Also, it should be remembered that such a discovery was one of the declared

objectives of the Company, although – as will be discussed shortly – there was always a divide within the organisation between interests in trade and interests in exploration.

The expedition, led by the nearly eighty-year-old James Knight, who had himself led the initial construction of Fort Prince of Wales, was disastrous. Having departed from Gravesend on 5 June 1707, Knight entered Hudson Bay before the winter, but neither he nor his crew was ever seen alive again, and the tragic fate of the expedition has ever since been shrouded in mystery, although trichinosis – the probable fate of Jens Munk in the same region precisely a century earlier due to the eating of insufficiently cooked polar bear meat – seems a likely explanation (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Knight, James” and McGhee 2005, 203–04). The next attempt at finding the Northwest Passage from Hudson Bay had the same tragic ending. According to an account by Bernard O’Reilly from 1818, a certain Captain Barlow was “sent out in the year 1720, by a company of private persons, to seek a passage to China through some opening in Hudson’s Bay. The undertaking cost the Captain and crew their lives, the ship having been cast away in about the latitude of 63° N. when every person on board perished” (O’Reilly 1818, 231).

The tragic failures of Knight and Barlow caused a lull of twenty years in the search for a navigable route to the Pacific. Still, the Hudson Bay region in combination with the elusive Northwest Passage was of sufficient importance to produce some turbulence at a high political level. It all started with an initiative in 1731 by the previously mentioned Arthur Dobbs (1689–1765), who was then an Irish engineer and parliamentarian, for a renewal of the search for a passage in the Hudson Bay. Losing patience with the refractory attitude of the Hudson’s Bay Company, which effectively controlled the whole region, Dobbs eventually won the support of the Admiralty, and in 1741 an expedition under the command of Christopher Middleton, a former employee of the Company, was dispatched (Williams 2003, 60–61).

His instructions, drafted primarily by Dobbs himself, were to search for an opening in the northern corner of the Bay, and the following summer he explored the area, including the narrow Wager Bay, but he concluded there was no possible opening, and returned to London on 13 October (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Middleton, Christopher”). Here he was immediately accused by Dobbs of being bribed by his former employer to fail to find the passage deliberately in order that the Company might prevent an opening up of the region and, thereby, secure its monopoly of the profitable fur trade. The charge was serious and concerned more than the honour of the two men, and the following year Middleton published his own account of the journey, *A Vindication of the Conduct of Captain Christopher Middleton, in a Late Voyage on Board His Majesty’s Ship the Furnace for Discovering a North-west Passage to the Western American Ocean*. The book begins with a

letter from the Secretary of the Admiralty, Thomas Corbett, to Middleton, dated 23 May 1743, where he informs him that Dobbs has “laid before my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, Objections to your Conduct in your late Voyage in the *Furnace Sloop*, together with the *Discovery Pink*, in order to find out a north-west Passage”. The letter is strict in tone and demands “a very particular and clear Answer to the several Points of Misconduct, which you are charged with [...]” (Middleton 1742, 1–2).

Despite what were probably completely unjustified accusations against Middleton, Dobbs’s position is interesting. Somewhat similar to Martin Frobisher and his spectacular plans nearly 250 years earlier, Dobbs had very concrete ideas of future prosperity in the region, and he expressed them in the book *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson’s Bay, in the North-west Part of America* from 1744, in which he opens up vistas of an almost utopian character:

These Countries, tho’ most of them are in cold Climates, yet in the coldest Parts, even North of the Polar Circle, are inhabited by the *Eskimaux Indians*; and by the Whalebone and Oil, Skins and Furs got there at present, are of considerable Advantage to those who are concerned in that Trade; and if the Trade was laid open, would be of vastly greater Benefit to *Britain*, by affording a considerable Market for our coarse Woollen and Iron Manufactures; and by forming proper Settlements in healthy and shelter’d Situations, out of the swampy Grounds, there might be comfortable Settlements made in most Places, and very tolerable, even in the worst and coldest Parts of that Continent, which are the North-east and North-west Sides of the Bay; but in the Southern and Western Sides of the Bay, there might be made as comfortable Settlements as any in *Sweden*, *Livonia*, or the South Side of the *Baltick*; and farther into the Country South-west, the Climate is as good as the Southern Part of *Poland* and North Part of *Germany* and *Holland*; nothing being wanting to make it so, but the building convenient Houses with Stoves, such as are used in the same Climates in *Europe*. (Dobbs 1744, 2)

Extensive colonisation, in other words, is Dobbs’s response to the challenge from the French, and in order to achieve this, the British government would have to put an end to “the Monopoly and Avarice of the Company” (3), which only serve to “enrich nine or ten Merchants at their Country’s Expence” (66) instead of providing wealth for the whole nation. And the commercial value of the fur trade is not to be scoffed at; to support his claim he quotes the list of furs sold at the Company sale in December 1740 (there were two such sales each year). It included 5,460 “Coat Beaver”, 12,320 “Parchment ditto”, 3,690 “Cubbs”, 3,640 “Damd and Stage Parcht Beaver”, 1,760 “Damag’d Cub Beaver”, 16,300 Martins, 2,360 “Damag’d and Stage Martin”, 560 Otters, 50 “Ditto in Coats”, 730 “Cats” [Lynx?], 300 Foxes, 210 Ditto, 630 Wolverins, 220 “Stage ditto”, 330 Black Bears, 720 Wolves, 40 Woodshocks, 250 Deer, 30 Elks. Altogether 49,600 skins. All in all, the sale amounted to £24,800 (*ibid.*, 199). Still, these numbers were dwarfed by the “Quantities of Skins and Furs imported by the *French* into the Port of *Rochelle* from *Canada* for the Year 1743: 15,000 Old Coat Beaver, 112,080 Parchment Beaver, 10,623 Large Bears, 5,889 Small



Bears, 110,000 Raccoons, 30,325 Martins, 12,428 Otters and Fishers, 1,700 Minks, 1,220 Fine Cats, 1,267 Wolves, 92 Wolverines, 10,280 Grey Foxes and Cats, 451, Red Foxes”, i.e. altogether 311,355 furs (*ibid.*, 201).

Dobbs also had a couple of more cards up his sleeve. In 1745 he was largely responsible for the passing of an Act of Parliament promising a reward of £20,000 for the discovery of the Passage (Hayes 2003, 47), and with private subscribers rising to the bait, another expedition was dispatched the following year with the same partisan instructions as those of Middleton.<sup>6</sup> The leader of the expedition was none other than Middleton’s relation, William Moore, who had served as a captain on Middleton’s second ship on the previous voyage, but who under Dobbs’s skilful manipulation had turned his back on his cousin, apparently tempted by the offer of a new command.

The expedition was a failure in every respect, and no passage was found, but on its return in 1747, Henry Ellis, an “Agent for the Proprietors in the said Expedition” (Ellis 1748, title page), wrote a book which concludes with some interesting reflections that underline how important the Northwest Passage was felt to be for the future of the British nation. Having first provided, like so many other accounts, a historical survey of former attempts, together with a lengthy description of the voyage itself, Ellis in Part III, “Comprehending the Arguments in Favour of a Passage”, discusses the “labyrinth” of Hudson Bay and the several possibilities that have been tried:

By these repeated Trials, we have certainly advanced nearer and nearer to the main Point; and another Expedition, properly conducted, cannot fail of producing an absolute Certainty whether there is such a Passage or not; and since this is a Thing out of Dispute, it seems to be incompatible with our Reputation, as a Maritime Power, as well as inconsistent with our Interests, as a trading Nation, to abandon a Design, that has been prosecuted so far, and wants so little, so very little, of being completed. I beg leave to add to this, that we ought also to consider, how injurious it might prove to the Trade, as well as to the Character of the *British* Nation, if, after pushing this Point so far, Foreigners should reap the Profit of all our Pains and Labour; and by the Help of the Lights that we have afforded them, find out this new Way to the *South Seas*, and to the *East-Indies*; which if it can be found, lies at present so much in our Power, not to discover only, but to become Masters of it [...]. (Ellis 1748, 332–33)

And the case did not end there. In 1752, another former representative of the Company joined the choir of complaints. Joseph Robson, who had spent six years in Hudson Bay and given testimony during the House of Commons hearing, vehemently repeated Dobbs’s damning criticism of the Company by publishing – probably in close collaboration with Dobbs – another book about it: *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson’s-Bay*. Robson certainly does not mince his words:

<sup>6</sup> Dalrymple 1789 claims that the sum was £10,000, “to the fortunate Adventurer who should discover a NW Passage” (3).

The Company have for eighty years slept at the edge of a frozen sea; they have shewn no curiosity to penetrate farther themselves, and have exerted all their art and power to crush that spirit in others. They have kept the language of the natives, and all that might be gained by a familiar and friendly intercourse with them, as much as possible, a secret to their own servants; and the invaluable treasures of this extensive country a profound secret to great Britain. (Robson 1752, 6)

Reading these passages today serves as a fascinating reminder of just how far Britain had come in terms of recognising an open public debate and freedom of speech as crucial elements in a modern society.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Dobbs and his supporters were essentially fighting a losing battle, the enthusiasm for finding the Northwest Passage was petering out and, despite some scattered attempts in the following decades, it was not to receive any major attention again until Ross's and Parry's expeditions in 1818 and 1819.

### ***Greenland and Spitsbergen***

Still, the Northeast and the Northwest Passages were not the only northern alternatives for a sea route to Asia. As early as in the 1500s there had been speculations about an open and navigable polar sea, which might provide access to the Pacific more or less straight across the Pole. With the benefit of both hindsight and modern scientific insight it appears rather obvious that this idea was too good to be true, but this did not prevent several generations of explorers from putting their lives and their reputation at risk to prove its existence.

A late seventeenth-century example is Joseph Moxon's six-page pamphlet from 1674, which reveals such a charmingly naïve faith in an apparently trustworthy witness account that it deserves to be quoted at some length. Moxon (1627–91) is presented in the pamphlet as “Hydrographer to the King's [i.e. Charles II's] most Excellent Majesty”, a position he had held since 1662. In addition, he was a scientist and producer of maps, globes and mathematical instruments, a highly respected printer who produced “the first manual of printing and typefounding” (Drabble ed. 2006, *s.v.* “Moxon, Joseph”), and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was, in other words, a man of considerable scientific authority. If he deserves the title of scientist, however, he was very clearly a scientist of the seventeenth rather than of the eighteenth century, although, as will be shown in ch. 3, his ideas about the Arctic were to resurface almost precisely a hundred years later. “Among the many *Essaies*”, Moxon argues,

<sup>7</sup>Seven years later, another vehement spokesman for the freedom of speech did not quite see what all the fuss was about. In Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), one of the characters complains how Britain and France are conducting a meaningless war “for the sake of a few acres of snow up towards Canada, and are spending on this fine war of theirs more than all Canada is worth” (Voltaire 1993, 75).

that have been made to find a neer Passage to *Japan, China, &c.* the most probable and likely hath as yet (in my opinion) been over-seen, or at least not attempted. And therefore I shall hereby communicate my Conceptions to Publick approbation or censure. It is that a Passage may very probably be about the *North-Pole*. And the Reason inducing me to conceive so, is, That we have no certainty from all the Discoveries that have been made of any Land lying within 8 degrees about the *Pole*: But on the contrary, that I have credibly been informed by a Steer-man of a *Dutch Greenland Ship*, that there is a free and open Sea under the very *Pole*, and somewhat beyond it. And I for my own part give credit to his Relation, and do conceive that any sober ingenious Man would do the like, did he know in what an honest manner, and by what an un-interested [*sic*] accident I hapned to hear it; For thus it was: Being about 22 years ago in *Amsterdam*, I went into a Drinking-house to drink a cup of Beer for my thirst, and sitting by the publick Fire, among several People there hapned a Seaman to come in, who seeing a Friend of his there, who he knew went in the *Greenland Voyage*, wondred to see him, because it was not yet time for the *Greenland Fleet* to come home, and ask'd him what accident brought him home so soon: His Friend (who was the Steer-man aforesaid in a *Greenland Ship* that Summer) told him that their Ship went not out to Fish that Summer, but only to take in the Lading of the whole Fleet, to bring it to an early Market &c. But, said he, before the Fleet had caught Fish enough to lade us, we, by order of the *Greenland Company*, Sailed into the *North-Pole*, and came back again. Whereupon (his Relation being *Novel* to me) I entred discourse with him and seem'd to question the truth of what he said. But he did ensure me it was true, and that the Ship was then in *Amsterdam*, and many of the Seamen belonging to her to justifie the truth of it: And told me moreover, that they sailed 2 degrees beyond the *Pole*. I askt him, if they found no Land or Islands about the *Pole*? He told me No, there was a free and open Sea; I askt him if they did not meet with a great deal of Ice? He told me No, they saw no Ice. I askt him what Weather they had there? He told me fine warm Weather, such as was at *Amsterdam* in the Summer time, and as hot. I should have askt him more questions, but that he was engaged in discourse with his Friend, and I could not in modesty interrupt them longer. But I believe the Steer-man spoke matter of fact and truth, for he seemed a plain honest and unaffected Person, and one who could have no design upon me. (Moxon 1674, 1–2)

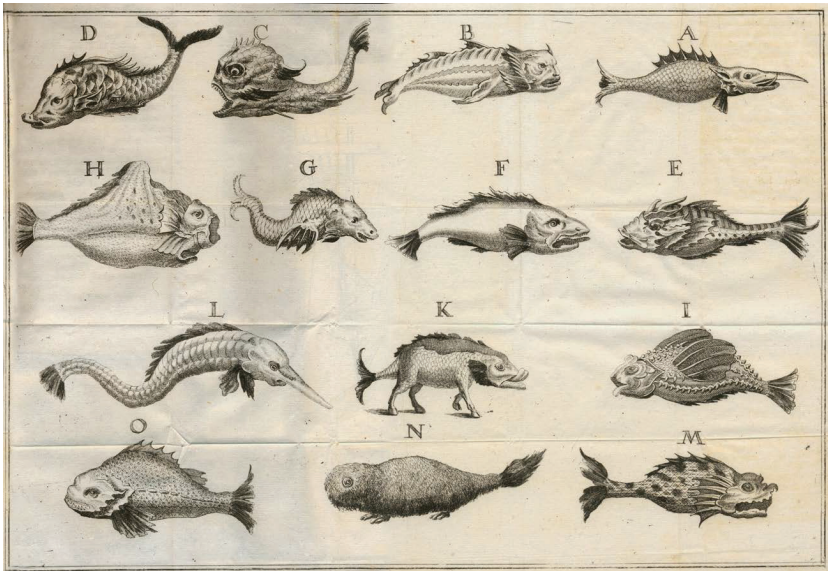
Clearly, with no access to and thus virtually complete ignorance of the true nature of the Pole, it was only a combination of imagination, on the one hand, and scattered scraps of knowledge, on the other, that could bring the discussion forward. Moxon exemplifies precisely this difficult dilemma, and he was not alone.

In 1665 the German Jesuit and polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) had published the work *Mundus Subterraneus* (The Subterranean World), where he launched a theory that was even more spectacular than that of the open polar sea, namely the hollow earth theory: the earth, according to Kircher, was hollow at the poles, so that the ocean could flow, as a mighty river, from pole to pole through the centre of the globe (Godwin 1996, 108). In England, the later Astronomer Royal, Edmond Halley (1656–1742), adopted the idea, developed it into a modified version, and published a treatise about it in 1692.

Not surprisingly, this theory was to become a source of inspiration for various works of fantastic literature. One of them was an anonymous French novella from 1721, *Passage du Pôle Arctique au Pôle Antarctique par le Centre du Monde* (Passage from the Arctic Pole to the Antarctic Pole via the Centre of the Earth). According to Joscelyn Godwin, it is

a very peculiar fantasy, telling of incredible events in absolutely deadpan style. The narrator sails from Amsterdam, but his vessel is swept up by a storm which forces it to the uttermost North. On reaching the Pole, the ship is sucked into a Kircherian whirlpool, and the narrator mercifully loses consciousness. When he comes to, he finds that his ship has been disgorged, still intact, in the Antarctic Ocean. (*Ibid.*)<sup>8</sup>

It is hardly a coincidence that both Moxon's paper and the French novella use Amsterdam as their point of departure; the Dutch continued to contribute powerfully to the exploration of the North. In 1707, for instance, the Dutchman Cornelis Giles, pushing as far north as possible, discovered Kvitøya, to the north-east of Spitsbergen.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of



First published in 1613, Hieronymus Megiser's work on the North was reissued in 1728. This collection of sea monsters, which are described in great detail in the text, is from the latter edition.

fact, he probably made the first circumnavigation of the whole Svalbard archipelago (Arlov 2003, 140). Thus, the Dutch were ideally placed to give credibility to the many yarns that were being spun about the region.

<sup>8</sup> Another work based on Kircher's theory and with a northern connection is the novel *A Journey to the World Under-ground* by the Norwegian-Danish author Ludvig Holberg. The novel, which is often regarded as the first science-fiction novel, and whose initial setting is Bergen, Norway, was written in Latin and published in Leipzig in 1741, but was immediately translated into German (1741) and English (1742).

<sup>9</sup> I.e. the island where the Swedish balloonist Salomon August Andrée died in 1897, after having capsized with his balloon (see ch. 6).

Whole- and half-hearted attempts to break through the supposedly thin crust of ice on the way to the Pole were naturally concentrated around Greenland and Spitsbergen, which meant that step by step new information was being gathered about this central part of the North Atlantic. There had long been major discussions as to whether Greenland and Spitsbergen were in fact parts of a large arctic continent. In Awnsham and John Churchill's mammoth four-volume text anthology *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* from 1704, an article originally published in Dutch in 1650 suggests that Greenland is also connected with Novaya Zemlya. It even goes on to claim that "[s]ome are of opinion, that it is upon the same Continent with America [...]" (Churchill 1704, I: 546). Again, very little of Greenland had been mapped; although the Dutch text had been written more than half a century before Churchill's work was published, it was apparently included as a respectable source of information. Similarly, in 1728, Hieronymus Megiser's work from 1613, *Neu-entdecktes Norden* (The Newly Discovered North) was re-issued, containing a whole chapter on Greenland.

But interest in Greenland was also triggered by other and more peculiar incidents at the time. The climate historian Brian Fagan, for instance, mentions that on a number of occasions "between 1695 and 1728, inhabitants of the Orkney Islands off northern Scotland were startled to see an Inuit in his kayak paddling off their coasts. On one memorable occasion, a kayaker came as far south as the River Don near Aberdeen. These solitary Arctic hunters had probably spent weeks marooned on large ice floes" (Fagan 2000, 116). Thus the cold climate that dominated during this period gave ordinary people in the so-called civilised parts of Europe a more immediate sense of connection with their arctic neighbourhood.

The strategic importance of the Greenland and Spitsbergen region was obvious to all the central powers. Russian ships, for instance, visited Spitsbergen for the first time in 1697 (McGhee 2005, 182), a clear indication of Peter the Great's new and more expansive policy. But the immediate and highly important commercial value of these northern waters was still primarily concerned with whaling. Since the depletion of the stocks along the coast of Spitsbergen around 1650, the industry had gradually moved westward, partly along the east coast of Greenland, and partly even further afield into Davis Strait, along the west coast of Greenland. As indicated above, the Dutch were once again in the lead, and with the collapse of the Noordsche Compagnie, they entered the age of so-called "free whaling". Partly together with ship owners from the cities of northern Germany, where the dominance of the Hanseatic League was now a thing of the past, the Dutch increased their number of ships. In 1670 as many as 148 whale ships were equipped in the Netherlands, and at the same time the Danes and the English more or less pulled out of the race (Jong 1978, 7). A generation later, in the peak year of 1697, 201

whaling ships from the Netherlands and Germany caught close to 2,000 whales and produced nearly 64,000 casks of blubber (McGhee 2005, 182).

The Dutch prominence is evident not only from statistical figures and literary sources; the number of paintings with motifs relating to whaling and hunting in the Arctic by such Dutch artists as Bonaventura Peeters the Elder, Adriaen van Salm, Abraham Storck and Wigerus Vtringa confirms this general impression, while at the same time underlining the national significance of the industry. The historian of Dutch whaling Cornelis de Jong estimates that in the period 1660–1770, the average number of Dutch sailors engaged in whaling each year was around 6–7,000 and that the number of ships was between 150 and 160, which probably justifies his overall claim that “[i]n the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the Dutch were the leading nation in Arctic whaling” (Jong 1978, 17 and 39–42).

Meanwhile England was enviously watching other countries, and especially the Dutch, reaping huge profits from the whaling grounds, without being able to secure a successful opening into the market for itself. After a number of unproductive political moves to stimulate British whaling, including the founding of the London Greenland Company in 1693 (Scoresby 1969, II: 58), matters finally changed in 1721, when Henry Elking, who had long experience with whaling, produced a report for the directors of the South Sea Company, entitled “A View of the Greenland Trade and Whale-fishery”. The South Sea Company, which had been founded in 1711 and given a monopoly on trade in South America, was just then caught in the middle of the infamous “South Sea Bubble”, but managed to keep business afloat despite heavy losses. As in the case of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the markets for fur a few decades later, whaling was perceived as a matter of significance for the national economy, and like Dobbs, Elking claimed that with the right political decisions, England could regain the upper hand in the so-called Greenland trade and “carry it on to greater advantage than any other Nation” (quoted in Scoresby 1969, II: 67).

What is surprising about Elking’s report is not his arguments in favour of resuming whaling, but rather the way in which he describes the industry. In the first chapter, he spends a number of pages on a description of “how the Whale-Fishery is, and ought to be perform’d, from the first Outset to the Return of the Ships” (Elking 1722, 21), i.e. the necessary equipment, the number of ships, their size, crew, dates for the fisheries etc. And with regard to the actual hunting for the whale, he explains that “[w]hen they are entred [*sic*] between the Ice, and they see a Whale, they Row immediately up to him, as close as they can, and the Steerman of the Shalloop, must direct the same to the middle of the Body, because the Head is invulnerable, and towards the Tail is dangerous” (*ibid.*, 25). It is clear, in other words, that a considerable amount of knowledge and experience has been lost among English whalers since the Spitsbergen boom nearly a century earlier.

As a result of this report, various Acts of Parliament were passed which provided exemption from duties together with other advantages for British whalers, and for the next few years the South Sea Company sent about twenty ships each year to Davis Strait. However, the venture remained unprofitable, and was abandoned in 1732. Still, according to William Scoresby Jr., in his excellent account of the northern whale fisheries from 1820, their importance “in a national view, became more and more evident to the British Legislature” (Scoresby 1969, II: 73), which resulted in further measures to stimulate the industry. Thus, the Dutch remained in complete control until the middle of the century, in 1736 alone sending 191 ships and capturing 858 whales, and it was only after 1750 that English and Scottish whaling began to acquire a reasonable volume and to represent a real challenge to the Dutch supremacy.

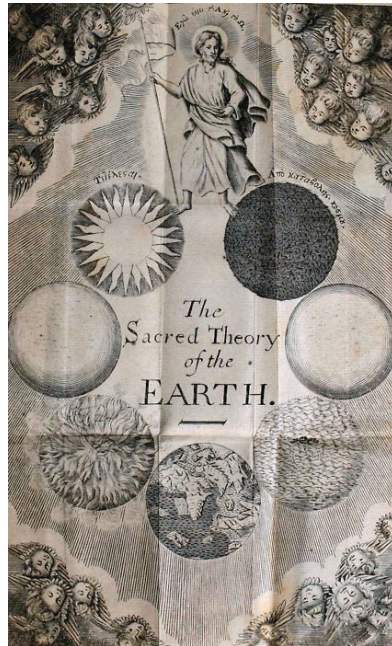
### ***The Nature of the North and Northern Nature***

The efforts by Russia and Britain in Siberia and northern Canada in the first half of the eighteenth century, together with the extensive whale fisheries set up especially by the Dutch and the Germans, represent the first phase in a modern, i.e. a systematic and scientific, approach to chart and take possession of the arctic wastes. By doing this, they also drew these distant regions into the orbits of their nation-building projects. They were, in a sense, domesticating and including this apparently purely *natural* world into their *cultural* spheres on a far greater scale than in previous centuries. For people in northern Europe, the Arctic was gradually being familiarised and made into a mental backdrop – a primitive and natural shadow image – of the increasingly civilised and sophisticated northern world in which they led their daily lives. In the following couple of centuries this unique dimension was going to play a far more important role than it has normally been credited with.

Together with this development, and implicitly connected with it, a new and radically different view of nature began to emerge, which contained unmistakably northern elements. The central feature in this reorientation was a gradual inversion of positions, or a turning of the tables, with regard to man's role in and attitude to his natural environment, i.e. to landscape, in a broad sense. Although civilisation throughout the entire Christian era had regarded nature and the natural landscape as a part of God's creation and thus as carrying an element of its divine origins, focus was still primarily on the idea that man was doomed to an existence in a world marred and maimed by the Fall. Just as the Church for centuries displayed a profound fear of the part of nature that was most intimately associated with man himself, namely the human body, it also gave vent to a

fundamental discomfort with the part of nature that had not been brought under man's control, that is the natural, uncultivated landscape. With the Renaissance world gradually liberating itself from religious dogma, rediscovering pre-Christian, alternative perspectives, and adopting new, scientific approaches to creation as a whole, nature began, step by step, to acquire a different aspect.

In her classic study, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (1959), Marjorie Hope Nicolson discusses the history of man's fascination with mountains, and how before the seventeenth century there was no proper



The frontispiece of Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (English edition 1684).

aesthetics of landscape: “Beauty was associated with living things – women, flowers, birds – rather than scenery and with the small rather than with the large” (Nicolson 1959, 70). Mountains, having been formed after the Fall, were regarded as “symbols of human sin, monstrous excrescences on the original smooth face of Nature”. Traditional Christianity thus branded not only mankind but also the entire natural world with the curse of Original Sin (*ibid.*, 83).

One of the first to inaugurate a change to this one-sided view was the English philosopher Henry More, who in his *Divine Dialogues* (1688) generously welcomed the whole range of God's creation. In his altered



perspective, “[t]he waste places of the world, uninhabitability of torrid and frigid zones, the ‘morbidness’ of extremes of climate, the occurrence of untimely death seem evils to man merely because of his limited point of view” (*ibid.*, 138). Just like the great explorers and discoverers of new and unknown continents, More opened man’s eye and mind to a natural landscape that was also a new mental territory. In the same way that John Milton a couple of decades earlier had concluded *Paradise Lost* and the story of Adam’s and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise with the hopeful phrase that “the world was all before them”, More’s work reflected the optimism and the unquenchable curiosity of the period.

An even more influential work, however, was Thomas Burnet’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, which was first published in Latin in 1681, and in English in 1684. Burnet was royal chaplain to King William III, and on a journey to the Continent, he discovered in the enormous dimensions and irregularities of the Alps a world that undermined everything he had envisaged about the proportion and the symmetry of God’s creation (*ibid.*, 207–08). Against the background of his religious education, this astonishing landscape, though created by God, appeared to him as a neglected man-made cathedral, i.e. as a ruin or the chaotic remains of a once perfect structure.

It was in the process of trying to bring these observations into harmony with his faith (or his theology) that Burnet, himself under the influence of More, gradually arrived at another and theologically somewhat problematic perspective, namely that of seeing all of nature, including its terrifying irregularities, as a reflection of the Creator’s majesty. And it is in this process, while being adamant that what impressed him was not *beauty*, that he essentially established the distinction between what would come to be called the categories of the *beautiful* and the *sublime*, concepts that would very soon produce a wealth of debate primarily among British aesthetic philosophers and which would continue throughout the eighteenth century.

These late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century aesthetic ideas form an interesting background to the increasing amount of knowledge and information about the Arctic that in a variety of different forms was being disseminated at the time. Although it was primarily the Alps that served as the initial trigger for the new aesthetic approach, there can hardly be any doubt that it would be difficult to find more breathtakingly sublime landscapes than in the Arctic, with its endless expanses, the various combinations of sea and ice, darkness and light, cold and emptiness, which exhibited natural forces beyond man’s imagination.

Again and again in the writings of philosophers and in their attempts to describe the landscapes of the sublime, one is reminded of the awesome forms and dimensions of the polar regions. When Sir Richard Blackmore, for instance, in 1716 discusses the *marvellous*, he focuses on the “unusual

occurrences, especially the excursions and transgressions of nature in her operations”, which “move the imagination with great force” (quoted in Ashfield and de Bolla eds. 1998, 41). Hildebrand Jacob, too, in *The Works* from 1735, gives a list of the “unbounded prospects” of nature – especially the ocean – that cause either delight or horror, and he adds: “We are moved in the same manner by the view of dreadful precipices; great ruins; subterraneous caverns, and the operations of nature in those dark recesses” (*ibid.*, 53).

It is particularly interesting to note that the ruin metaphor, which is so intimately associated with the sublime landscape, quickly becomes a standard conceit in expedition reports and fiction as well as in pictorial art from the polar regions. Later in the century, ice as architecture, and especially as Gothic architecture, becomes a pervasive cliché in the various attempts to describe and depict man’s often open-mouthed response to the landscapes and seascapes of the Far North. Consequently, the question may be asked whether this metaphorical idiom was transferred from the Arctic into the philosophical debate or vice versa. On the other hand, it takes some time before these new aesthetic conceptions find their way into the travel writing and the expedition reports. Consequently, it is only after the middle of the century that the new jargon becomes a natural part of the writers’ vocabulary.

The changing view of nature and landscape also manifests itself in other characteristically northern phenomena, such as the landscape garden. As early as in the mid-1600s a figure like John Evelyn had brought attention to the severe deforestation of the English countryside, and with his influential work *Sylva* (1664), he made the planting of trees, and particularly oak, a patriotic duty, though he also had an eye on the Royal Navy’s more down-to-earth needs of substantial quantities of oak timber for ship building (Quest-Ritson 2003, 94). Generally, English gardening moved in the direction of a more and more natural-looking design, and the invention of the ha-ha, dated to as early as 1697 (*ibid.*, 128) and quickly becoming popular across the country, is a typical indication of this trend. Under the influence of the philosophers of the sublime, Joseph Addison, in *The Spectator* on 25 June 1712 – incidentally only three days before the birth of Jean-Jacques Rousseau – criticises English gardeners for being too eager to have trees “cut and trimmed into a mathematical figure” (Addison 1712, 2).

Only six years later Stephen Switzer, who more than any other person was “responsible for the landscape movement” (Quest-Ritson 2003, 115), published his work *Ichnografia Rustica* (Rural Ground Plan), where he not only claimed that “the best and most general Rules that (in Words) I can possibly lay down, are to endeavour to follow and improve the Advantages of Nature, and not to strain her beyond her due Bounds” (Switzer 1718, II: 197), but also followed up Evelyn’s love of trees, recommending the

gardener and the landowner always to have “a particular Regard to large old Oaks, Beech, and such like Trees” (*ibid.*, 199). The focus, then, was constantly on the rural landscape, i.e. the world of the landed gentry, whose position had been significantly strengthened after the Hanoverian succession in 1714, and not unexpectedly, the landscape movement achieved its full momentum in the following decades, with key figures like William Kent and Capability Brown.

The landscape garden, or the English garden, as it has appropriately been called, has been characterised as one of the most important British contributions to Western culture (Solnit 2001, 89), and in the second half of the century, particularly, it acquired a considerable fashion status across all of northern Europe. This is not to deny that the eighteenth century was primarily a period in which Mediterranean and classical ideals dominated European taste in general, including the view of nature. Thus when the Danish-Norwegian writer and historian Ludvig Holberg visited the Alps in 1716 and found them unattractive, his response was entirely typical of an educated man of the Enlightenment (Malmanger 2001, 17 and 32). On the other hand, as has been shown above, the rise of a northern culture, which clearly and with increasing self-confidence presented itself as distinctly different from the dominant Mediterranean and Catholic culture, had its roots as far back as the Middle Ages. And in the early eighteenth century, the general view of nature was only one of the areas in which this trend became apparent. It also manifested itself in a growing interest in more specifically northern landscapes. One of these was Lapland.

### ***The Edge of Civilisation: Lapland***

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Lapland was a frontier region in more senses than one. First of all, it was on the threshold of the polar regions, a half-way stage between civilisation, i.e. people and society, on the one hand, and a world assumed to be more or less void of both, on the other. Secondly, it was ambiguous in terms of political and administrative control. Denmark-Norway, Sweden and Russia, for instance, all laid claims to more or less clearly identified parts of the region, and borders, even in the early eighteenth century, were vague or non-existent (Gustafsson 2007, 113). Thirdly, despite the works of Scheffer and others in the seventeenth century, Lapland was very scantily described from a scientific point of view. Finally, it was ethnically and linguistically complex. With a largely nomadic Sami population that spoke a language mastered by hardly any representative from so-called civilised areas, and with a religion and a culture apparently as different as those of Africa, the region appeared in several respects as a world beyond the pale.

These exotic characteristics, however, also served as a source of curiosity, to the extent that Lapland even attracted an Italian traveller. Francesco Negri (1623–98) was a priest from Ravenna, and in 1663 he left for Sweden and Lapland, apparently for no other reason than an irrepressible desire to see the Far North, although it is also possible that his journey was connected with the Counter-Reformation and the struggle to reintroduce Catholicism in Sweden (*Verso l'estrema Thule* 2003, 19). Negri travelled initially to Stockholm and from there to Tornio at the northern end of the Bay of Bothnia. Unable to continue from here to the North Cape, he returned to Stockholm and spent the following year there, before



Illustration from Lapland from Francesco Negri's *Northern Journey* (1700).

travelling west to Bergen in Norway and sailing up the Norwegian coast to the North Cape, to return via Copenhagen to Revenna in the autumn of 1666, after a three-year journey (Nencioni 2008, 27–28).

His account, *Viaggio Settentrionale* (A Northern Journey), was published posthumously in 1700, and according to Giuseppe Nencioni, his focus was theological and ethnological as well as scientific. With a hunger for the unknown, and anticipating Thomas Burnet's almost involuntary fascination with even the most bizarre aspects of creation, he focussed nearly exclusively upon the great book of nature: "As I did not have the opportunity to read the entire tome, I still made up my mind

to read at least one page of it to see the wonderful letters in it, written by the Divine Hand of the Supreme Author” (quoted by Nencioni 2008, 30).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, this book also included the Sami, to whom Negri pays considerable attention – much of it positive – but who are also described as worshippers of Satan. Still, it is as if Negri, despite being a Catholic priest, adopts a kind of tolerant attitude: the Sami are living at the very edge of civilisation, and, he argues, “it is not strange if their country is extreme in every way, as nature has located it in an extreme position in the world” (*ibid.*, 32).

If one disregards the possibility that Negri may have been sent on a more or less secret mission by the Church, he is something quite unusual: a seventeenth-century Italian tourist in Lapland. Indeed, back in Italy his account must have been received as nearly equivalent to a report from the North Pole. Even from a British point of view, and despite long-standing commercial connections with Norway, Lapland seems to have been perceived in a more or less similar way. In 1699, Captain Tho. Allison published a peculiar account, whose full title tells part of the story: *An Account of a Voyage from Archangel in Russia, In the Year 1697, Of the Ship and Company Wintering near the North Cape in the Latitude of 71, Their Manner of Living, and what they Suffered by the Extream Cold*. The ship was the “Ann of Yarmouth (Burthen 250 Tons)”, which “Sailed over the Bar of Archangel on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1697, about four in the afternoon [...] and bound for London” (Allison 1699, 1). Having turned the North Cape on 25 October, the furious winds forced them to seek an inlet, and having found a place to anchor, they were initially stuck for several weeks in the same spot, with the days getting shorter and winter setting in. The story proceeded almost precisely along the lines of reports from arctic expeditions that were beset in the ice and desperately tried to make it through the winter. On Christmas Day, the crew received a little extra: “After Dinner, I spared out of my own store, to every two men, a Bottle of Strong Beer, which they took thankfully, and made their hearts truly glad” (*ibid.* 41).

As the weeks and months passed by and they remained at anchor in a place apparently without any connection with civilisation, there was an almost Crusoe-like quality about the way they found ways of surviving, new things to eat, etc. Still, by February rations had to be reduced, and Allison added the following melancholy observation: “I cannot forget, what I have more than once taken notice of, that a Bottle of Beer standing behind us, while we sat before the Fire, would contract Ice in the time we were drinking it” (*ibid.*, 65). A few days later, a crew member died, and it was only in March that they succeeded in getting in touch with people and buying new provisions. Paradoxically, they were closer to civilisation than

<sup>10</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

they assumed they were: they were visited by the Governor at Vardøhus Fort, who was able to inform them “[t]hat from *Ward-house* aforesaid, there went a Post to *Copenhagen* every fortnight. So that if any Ship be forc’d in there or thereabouts by stress of weather, finding a Ministers House, they may send to the Town, and from thence to any part of Europe” (*ibid.*, 91–92). Thus at the end of March they were able to sail, and on 21 April they got a view of England, which – echoing their ordeal – surprised them by being covered in snow.

Six years after Captain Allison and his crew returned, they would have been able to find out more about the country of which they had been given such an unpleasant taste. In 1704, Scheffer’s *Lapponia* – originally published in Latin in 1673 and translated into English the following year as *The History of Lapland* – came out in its second English edition. The new edition, “with many curious Copper-Cutts” (Scheffer 1704, title page), also presented a wealth of new and updated material, including a seven-page report on the Swedish King Carl XI’s visit to Tornio in the summer of 1694 together with the visit the following year by two professors of mathematics from the University of Uppsala; and the twenty-two-page essay “The History of Lapland”, a topographical description by Olof Rudbeck the younger, the son of the famous author of *Atland*.

There is no doubt that the new edition was a response to a general demand for information on the subject; the Preface, which in pre-pocket-book days also served as a blurb designed to sell the book, even expressed a hope that “*the light it gives into the occasion and progress of the present War between Muscovy and Sweden, will recommend it as an useful and seasonable Undertaking*” (*ibid.*, no pag.), thus underlining the contemporary political relevance of the region. And it appears to have worked: as will be seen below, the book would soon be noticed by the popular press. Also, it was not long before more works were published. In 1707, a tiny and cheaply produced little volume appeared in Bremen, whose title was *Kurtze Beschreibung des Lapplandes* (A Short Description of Lapland). In the foreword, the author introduced himself as a “Laplander”, but in the third person:

This Laplander, by the name of *Nicolaus Örn*, set out on a journey in 1702, at twenty years of age, from a desire to see foreign countries, and as the first of his countrymen, and travelled by himself through Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Italy to Rome, and wherever he came he caused amazement in his Lapland’s clothes, as no one had ever seen a travelling Laplander. Before his departure he had finished his studies, and so he understood the Latin and the Swedish languages. (Örn 1707, no pag.)<sup>11</sup>

During the journey, he learnt some German and Italian, and having briefly returned to his fatherland in 1705 he soon set out again, in July 1706, in his Lapland dress, to visit France, the Netherlands and England. During this journey he came to Bremen, where he made arrangements for the publication of his book.

<sup>11</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

With Scheffer's standard work having been widely distributed across Europe, and with the reprint of the English version published during Örn's travels, it seems obvious that Örn (1683–1718), too, was responding to what he must have interpreted as a public interest in Lapland. In some ways his work is a relatively traditional topographical account, which offers straightforward information about the region. What is interesting, however, is that the author quite clearly comes across as falling between cultural stools. The book is indeed in a peculiar way an early example of the modern postcolonial phenomenon of "the Empire writing back"; Örn is, for instance, undoubtedly trying to correct some of the misconceptions about the Sami. First of all, he spends an entire chapter on religion, underlining very strongly that the Sami are now proper Lutherans, and he emphasises their honesty, friendliness, helpfulness and generosity. At the same time, he assumes a very different attitude in his description of their physical appearance: "they mostly do not look as proper and *civilised* [orig. *habilitirt*] as other European peoples; and partly also very barbaric; in this, their nature is not alone guilty, but more so their *negligence*" (*ibid.*, 7–8).

This wavering between different positions – between being defensive and apologetic, and between a sense of loyalty to his own people and his acquired, civilised tastes – is also apparent in the fact that it is not even clear whether the author himself is a true Laplander, i.e. a Sami, or not. Whether this confusion was intended in order to acquire attention is not quite clear, but the fact that Örn during his travels abroad introduced himself as "Prince of Lapland" hardly helped to throw light on the case. From this perspective, it is also interesting to note that he so demonstratively wears his Sami costume during his travels, as if deliberately drawing attention to a specifically Sami identity, while at the same time wanting to be regarded as an educated European. On his travels Örn, in other words, is not only a representative of the northern periphery in relation to a continental cultural tradition; within this northern periphery he also represents a further periphery, and neither of these peripheries had as yet acquired a degree of self-confidence that enabled him to stand his ground in relation to the outside world.

Published in German, Örn's book hardly had any impact in Britain, but a writer like Joseph Addison still suggested that an educated man of the time was expected to be familiar with Lapland, or at least that the topic was of public interest. Thus in several issues of *The Spectator* between 1711 and 1714, Lapland was touched upon, and at least twice with explicit references to Scheffer. In an essay from 14 July 1711, for instance, Addison discussed "the Subject of Witch-craft" and "the Relations that are made from all parts of the World, not only from *Norway* and *Lapland*",<sup>12</sup> most likely referring to ch. XI, "Of Magical Ceremonies, and Arts of the Laplanders",

<sup>12</sup> *The Spectator* (ed. by Donald F. Bond, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 14 July 1711.

in Scheffer's work. On 30 April 1712, Addison published a song, i.e. a translation of a Lapland love song from Scheffer, which according to the introductory text breathed "sentiments of lore and poetry, not unworthy old *Greece* and *Rome*" (*ibid.*, 30 April 1712). Then, a few weeks later, a letter in the same periodical began by describing "[t]he Town being so well pleased with" the previously printed ode, claiming that "we were in Hopes that the ingenious Translator would have obliged it with the other also which Scheffer has given us", whereupon the author modestly presented his own translation of the second Lapland love song from Scheffer, which began with the lines: "Haste, my Rain-Deer, and let us nimbly go / Our am'rous Journey through this dreery Waste; / Haste, my Rain-Deer, still still thou art too slow; / Impetuous Love demands the Lightning's Haste" (*ibid.*, 17 June 1712). A further indication of the popularity of the topic is that the latter poem's appearance in *The Spectator* triggered a number of further translations into a number of other languages, including French and German (Castrén 1910, 146).

Another British work that belongs to the same period is *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* (1720), which has traditionally been attributed to Daniel Defoe.<sup>13</sup> Campbell, according to the book, had a peculiar background: his father was a Shetlander with a Scottish Highland background, who by accident ended up in Lapland. Here he married a local woman, who in 1680 gave birth to Duncan. After the death of his mother, Duncan and his father moved back to Britain, where the child's unique career began. Whilst being deaf and dumb, he was also "credited with the gift of second-sight" (George A. Aitken in Defoe 1974, x–xi), a talent inherited from his mother. From the age of fourteen he lived in London (Defoe 1974, 85), where he received considerable attention at court and elsewhere, until his death in 1730. Although Campbell's later life is well documented, there is reason to be sceptical about the truthfulness of the story about his Lapland background. Still, there is no doubt that it was regarded as being closely connected to his supposedly supernatural gifts, as the region was closely associated, as mentioned earlier, with magic and superstition, witches and wind merchants etc. In other words, whether true or not, Campbell made efficient use of a firmly entrenched popular perception about the Far North.

A somewhat different image of Lapland is found in the Scottish poet James Thomson's famous poem *The Seasons*, whose first part, "Winter", was published in 1726.<sup>14</sup> Thomson not only underlines the northerners'

<sup>13</sup> Linda Andersson-Burnett argues that Defoe is probably not the author, but that the book was written by the journalist William Bond, possibly in collaboration with Campbell himself. Ref. Andersson-Burnett 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, Thomson's poem was published only a year after the publication and first performance of Antonio Vivaldi's violin concertos *The Four Seasons* (*Le Quattro Stagioni*), which also has a strong emphasis on the tangible world of nature.



intimate and positive relationship with their wild and merciless natural environment; he also, as opposed to his predecessors, explicitly includes Lapland and the Laplanders in a heroic celebration of the North in general. He does not, in other words, distinguish between the Sami and other people from the North, as had been common in the past and as would become even more common in the travel literature of the next couple of centuries. He even goes so far as to see this “boisterous Race [...], / Who little Pleasure know and fear no Pain” as having “relum’d the Flame / Of lost Mankind in polish’d Slavery sunk” (Thomson 1981, ll. 836–39).

Most likely, Thomson is here momentarily confused about the ethnic constellations of the North, envisaging the northerners and the Laplanders as the equivalents of the Goths, who “Drove martial Horde on Horde, with dreadful Sweep / Resistless rushing o’er th’ enfeebled South, / And gave the vanquish’d World another Form” (*ibid.*, ll. 840–42). But soon the “enfeebled South” is contrasted to a peace-loving North:

Not such the Sons of *Lapland*: wisely They  
 Despise th’ insensate barbarous Trade of War;  
 They ask no more than simple Nature gives,  
 They love their Mountains and enjoy their Storms.  
 No false Desires, no Pride-created Wants,  
 Disturb the peaceful Current of their Time;  
 And thro’ the restless ever-tortured Maze  
 Of Pleasure, or Ambition, bid it rage.  
 Their Rain-Deer form their Riches. These their Tents,  
 Their Robes, their Beds, and all their homely Wealth  
 Supply, their wholesome Fare, and chearful Cups.  
 Obsequious at their Call, the docile Tribe  
 Yield to the Sled their Necks, and whirl them swift  
 O’er Hill and Dale, heap’d into one Expanse  
 Of marbled Snow, or far as Eye can sweep  
 With a blue Crust of Ice unbounded glaz’d. (*Ibid.*, ll. 843–59)

Among his contemporaries, Thomson was not alone in establishing – long before the Romantics – a close connection between the Far North and untouched wilderness. Clearly under the influence of the early parts of Thomson’s *The Seasons*, the legendary poet Richard Savage (1697–1743) in 1729 published his visionary epic poem *The Wanderer*, in which the narrator explores northern, wintry landscapes of sublime and terrifyingly bleak dimensions somewhere on the edge of the polar regions, forcefully echoing his own introspective isolation: “O’er ample Nature I extend my Views; / Nature to rural Scenes invites the Muse: / She flies all public Care, all venal Strife, / To try the *Still*, compar’d with *Active Life*” (Savage 1729, 2). And:

Far hence lies, ever-freez’d, the Northern Main,  
 That checks, and renders Navigation vain;

That, shut against the Sun's dissolving Ray,  
 Scatters the trembling Tides of vanquish'd Day,  
 And stretching *Eastward* half the World secures,  
 Defies Discov'ry, and like Time endures! (*Ibid.*, 6)

In Germany, too, the interest in Lapland continued. In 1713, Johann Gerhard Scheller, who had made a journey through Lapland in 1707–1708, published his *Reise-Beschreibung nach Lappland und Bothnien* (Travel Account to Lapland and Bothnia), which offered a topographical account of the region, and this work was brought out in a new edition in 1748. Finally, in 1739 a book-length topographical poem was published in Copenhagen under the title *Nordlands Trompet* (The Trumpet of Nordland).<sup>15</sup> The author was Petter Dass (1647–1707), a parson in the north of Norway and the son of a Scottish immigrant to the country. In a section of the poem, entitled “About the Laps and the Fins”, he gives a thorough and generally positive presentation of the Laplanders, although the description of their physical attributes, their superstitions and black arts is given with the usual prejudices of the age.

Dass had written the poem in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and manuscript copies had been circulating for several years. He appears, however, to have made later attempts to reach a wider audience with it, because in 1700 a literary journal in Lübeck announced that it was due to be published shortly. Nothing came of it, for reasons that seem mainly to have been due to political intrigues at the Danish court rather than a lack of literary quality (Didrik Arup Seip in Dass 2006, 123–24), and the attempt to have it published may be seen as a confirmation of a certain interest, even on the Continent, in matters concerning Lapland and the North in general.

However, Lapland attracted not only the attention of travellers, adventurers and poets; there were also strong indications that the region was becoming interesting to public authorities and to scientists. During the Great Northern War, Denmark-Norway was conscious of the undecided national status of the territories, and shrewdly concluded that religious conformity might serve as a cautious but potentially effective means of securing their connection to the crown.

At the same time in Norway, a group of seven pietist parsons, who called themselves “Sylvstjernen” (i.e. The Pleiades) and were led by Thomas von Westen, were bringing to the Church's attention the need for missionary work among the Sami in Finnmark. In 1716 von Westen was made responsible for the effort, and in the same year he set out on his first journey in the region. This was followed by two more in 1718 and 1722; he established a separate *Seminarium Lapponicum* (Sami seminary) to educate missionaries, catechists and teachers; and from the 1730s, Finnmark was

<sup>15</sup> For Dass, ‘Nordland’ appears to denote northern Norway in general, but is today the name of one of the northern counties.

gradually absorbed into the general administrative structure of the Church and thus of the state (Oftestad et al. 1991, 149–50).

At around the same time, science was making its first forays into the largely uncharted region. In her book *Sex, Botany & Empire*, Patricia Fara gives an ironic description of the young scientist Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), who in 1732 apparently was as focused on his own career as on making scientific discoveries:

Then 25 years old and funded by the Uppsala Science Society, he set out in a braided wig and elegant leather trousers, well provided with two night-gowns as well as his microscope, goose quills and plant pressing equipment. Also secreted away in his luggage were some useful maps and travel diaries compiled by previous explorers: he kept very quiet about those. Although Linnaeus was away for several months, he spent only eighteen days in Lapland and never even crossed the Arctic Circle into the polar north. Since he was paid per mile, for his final report to the Society he more than doubled the distance he had travelled, drawing maps with long but fictional detours. (Fara 2003, 27)

Fara also draws attention to the well-known painting of Linnaeus from 1737 by Martin Hoffman:

Originally designed to impress a rich patron, this portrait shows Linnaeus in traditional Sami clothes, as though he were an intrepid voyager freshly returned from the hostile Arctic regions. He had, in fact, assembled this costume for touring through Europe to back up his colourful, exaggerated travel tales. [...] By adopting [the Sami's] clothes for this portrait, Linnaeus was masquerading as an exotic indigenous person, a tactic that had the effect of reinforcing his true status as an imperial possessor. Any Sami could (if foolhardy enough) have told Linnaeus how ridiculous he looked. His beret, a present from a Swedish tax collector, was suitable for women in the summer. His winter fur jacket, which he had bought in Uppsala, came from a different region, and his reindeer leather boots were made not to wear but to export for rich, gullible southerners. His shaman's drum – another gift – was an illegal possession. To complete the look, Linnaeus dangled assorted tourist souvenirs from his belt. (*Ibid.*, 25–27)

Not unlike Thomas von Westen, Linnaeus sends a curiously double, or even triple, message to and about the region. On the one hand, he is an intruder who, with a new and scientific discourse, measures, systematises and takes possession – like an invading army – of a culture towards which he is either ignorant or indifferent. On the other hand, he tries to imitate the very peculiarities and characteristics of the region, as if to convince the world of his eagerness to adopt rather than reject or replace its qualities. In addition, by bringing this as yet unclassified region into the fold of the nation, he has to do both of the above: accommodate its peculiarities as a positive contribution to the common culture, and at the same time subordinate them within the same.

Incidentally, Linnaeus was not alone in performing this strangely ambiguous journey into Lapland. Only four years after his visit, an entire scientific expedition appeared, initiated by Louis XV and led by the Frenchman Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759), who was later to become the president of the French as well as of the Prussian

Academy of Sciences. A brilliant mathematician, Maupertuis was involved in a major scientific controversy at the time about the shape of the Earth. His colleague and rival, Jacques Cassini, claimed that the globe was prolate, i.e. egg-shaped, whereas Maupertuis held the view that it was oblate, i.e. flattened at the poles. The so-called French Geodesic Mission, which has been called the first major international scientific expedition, was given the task of solving the problem. It was divided into two separate expeditions: one was sent to Peru and the other to Lapland. The latter was assisted by the Uppsala Professor of Astronomy Anders Celsius, the later inventor of the Celsius scale. Having, like Francisco Negri, arrived in Tornio in the Bay of Bothnia, on the present-day border between Finland and Sweden, they set out again on 6 July 1736 “with a company of *Finland* soldiers, and a good number of boats laden with instruments and provision” (Anon. 1778, 191).

Although the expedition is primarily of scientific interest, it provides a revealing insight into a pre-Romantic relationship, which is even more conspicuous in accounts from the polar regions, between civilisation and wilderness. In an anonymous account of the expedition, possibly written by Maupertuis himself and translated into English in 1778, the landscape through which they travel is infused with no aesthetic value whatsoever. The author describes the various options they have in terms of “penetrating these deserts [*sic*]”, where “we should be forced to take up with the most wretched diet, be exposed to flies” etc. (*ibid.*, 190). Having reached the mountain of Avasaksa about 70 km north of Tornio, he then relates how the expedition, “cleared its top of the trees” and “caused a signal to be built. Our signals were hollow cones composed of a great many large trees stripped of the bark, by which means they were white enough to be visible at ten or twelve leagues distance”. With the work finished, they went to the next mountain, and “[t]hough extremely fatigued, we got to the top of it, and spent the night in cutting down the wood that covered it” (*ibid.* 192). On 31 July they cross the Arctic Circle, and in the course of 63 days set up an intricate system of observation points, which were so conveniently located “that it looked as if the placing of these mountains had been at our disposal” (*ibid.*, 200).

The account leaves the impression of an invading scientific expedition which leaves some strikingly visible marks on the landscape, but without ever referring to the indigenous Sami population, whose lives depended on the land. Against this background, it is all the more striking that Maupertuis, in precisely the same way as Linnaeus, after his return to France had his portrait painted, dressed in an almost identical Sami costume, while with a self-confident air resting his left hand on the top of a globe, as if not only helping to emphasise the flatness of the poles, but also taking – at least scientifically – possession of the region indicated by his costume. Thus there is a potentially unpleasant contrast between Nicolaus

Örn's probably rather hesitant use of his native costume a generation earlier and the flamboyant and intrusive way in which Linnaeus and Maupertuis take possession of it in order to promote their own egos and careers.

Linnaeus' and du Maupertuis's first attempts at scientific ventures into Swedish Lapland were quickly followed by an extensive topographical description of the same region by the Lapland vicar and writer Pehr Högström (1714–84). Despite translations and new editions, Scheffer's *Lapponia* – first published in 1673 and so far the only major work on the region – needed to be updated, and *Beskrifning Öfwer de til Sweriges Krona Lydande Lapmarker* (A Description of the Sami Regions Governed by the Swedish Crown, 1747), while offering a thorough and inside view, also helped to retain a political and strategic focus on a part of the country that was still only rather loosely attached to administrative structures. It is not surprising, therefore, that the book is dedicated to the future Swedish monarch, Adolf Frederik (1710–71), the rays from whose grace, according to the rhyming dedication, “extend to the mounts and shores of Thule”. Furthermore, it promises a description of

A people who spread out around our northern Pole:  
A distant land, which leads us to the ends of the world.  
The people, of whom many a strange tale is being told,  
Have always retained a respectful heart for their King,  
Even though their reputation for some time seemed to dwell in darkness,  
Yet trust in Authority has always shone forth from them.  
They are pleased to be protected in due course by the wings of He,  
Whose fame swirls around the Nordic dales. (Högström 1980, no pag.)<sup>16</sup>

The Laplanders are thus brought within the jurisdiction of central government, not unlike a number of Siberian peoples under the tsar in Moscow, and the local representatives of this authority, in this case a vicar, postulate an allegiance that in practice was virtually non-existent, and that would in fact be developed only after a long and often painful process.

The arrival of the modern world, in other words, was not necessarily a source of freedom and enlightenment for the Sami; on the contrary, the scientific and anthropological mapping of new regions was just as frequently a means of subsuming them within administrative regimes that in return for an unsolicited protection would soon be demanding taxes as well as military service. Högström, however, wrote his work with the best intentions: he was a fierce defender of the Sami, and saw their inclusion in the nation as a way of giving them the rights and the recognition they deserved.

But a work like Högström's also had a broader objective: from a strategic point of view, it served to some degree the same purpose as the planting of the national flag; it spread the message to other nations –

<sup>16</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

especially Denmark-Norway and Russia – that Sweden laid claim to these as yet unexploited, and partly uncharted, territories. And the response was a clear indication of Europe's interest in the Far North: only a year after the Swedish original, a full Danish translation was published, and in Germany two separate translations followed soon after. These, together with a French translation a couple of decades later, provided an interested European audience with a new and trustworthy account of the Far North (Wikmark 1979, 124).

A passage in the foreword to one of the German translations also gives an insight into the continental perception of the northern regions. "The Nordic monarchies", it says,

*and especially those of their provinces that are nearest to the North Pole, have so far suffered the fate that all the accounts emerging from them have been filled with the wildest fables and the silliest stories, to the extent that there are more trustworthy accounts from China and India than from Lapland and Finland, despite the fact that the former are on a different continent. (Ibid., 125)<sup>17</sup>*

The German edition thus echoes Högström's dedication to the crown prince in seeing the Nordic countries and the North Pole (i.e. the Arctic) as belonging to one common region, underlining the need to apply a comprehensive approach to its history and development.

### ***Science, Culture and Religion***

The late seventeenth century witnessed a considerable growth in cultural as well as scientific self-confidence in the whole of northern Europe. A range of institutions, such as universities, libraries, observatories and academies of science, were established in the major cities across the region, gradually redressing the traditional imbalance between northern and southern Europe, and building a foundation for the following century.<sup>18</sup>

In Britain, which was increasingly assuming a leading role, the period saw the publication of such varied milestones as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1687), John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) and Henry Purcell's operas *Dido and Aeneas* and *The Fairy-Queen* (1689 and 1692). In some respects, the above works could be seen as typical of a period that was still leaning heavily on inherited

<sup>17</sup> Italics added; translated from the German by PE.

<sup>18</sup> The Royal Society, London, was founded in 1660; Churfürstliche Bibliothek, Berlin, 1661; Lund University, Sweden, 1668; Greenwich Observatory, London, 1675; Berlin University, 1695. The development continued into the new century with institutions like The Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences, 1700; the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, 1725; The Swedish Academy of Science, 1739; and The Danish Academy of Science, 1742.

cultural models, but in others they clearly indicated a new turn. Milton, who had served as Latin Secretary under Cromwell and used Latin in his correspondence with foreign powers, found the subject matter for his poem in the Old Testament. But there was never any doubt that his political tracts as well as his poetic *magnum opus* would be written in English. Similarly, whilst Purcell found the story of Dido and Aeneas in Virgil, Dido's famous dying aria is still sung in English, and the libretto of *The Fairy-Queen* is taken from the entirely English source of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the vernacular also triumphed in other areas. Even though English had taken a firm hold in public debate in the previous century, its use as a written language now spread to far larger population groups with the first daily newspaper, *The Daily Courant*, published in London from 1702, and the first Scottish daily published from 1705 (Herman 2006, 108). Admittedly, both in Britain and elsewhere Latin survived for a while longer in science as well as theology; thus, a groundbreaking work like Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* was published in Latin in 1735. Still, Newton's *Principia*, which had also originally appeared in Latin, was translated into English as early as 1729. In the same year, the Glasgow professor Frances Hutcheson, one of the founders of the Scottish Enlightenment, was probably one of the first in Europe to lecture in English rather than Latin (*ibid.*, 77), and in 1733 Latin was abolished as the written language of proceedings in English courts of law.

Another example of a shift in the relative cultural strength between North and South is found in the career of the German composer Georg Friedrich Händel (1685–1759). Having achieved some success in Hamburg with his first opera, he had travelled to Italy in 1706 to study and compose together with such contemporary lights as Corelli, father and son Scarlatti, and others. In 1710, however, he made his first visit to England, and in 1712 returned to settle down permanently, having accepted a position under Queen Anne. On 17 July 1717 his *Water Music* was performed for the first time during a royal outing on the Thames, with a full Baroque orchestra on board the royal barge. Two years later, he was appointed Musical Director of the newly established Royal Academy of Music, and in 1727 he became a British citizen, thus gradually adopting a new national identity, even to the point of spelling his name “George Frideric Handel”.

Händel's life and career serve as a demonstration of how a distinguished German composer, whose fame even as a young man enabled him to choose among the most attractive positions at the time, clearly found it professionally and artistically rewarding to live and work in Britain, which until then had been regarded as something of a northern backwater in comparison with the cultural centres of southern Europe. There is even

an interesting irony in the fact that he was drawn to London despite the fact that, apart from the Biblical material, most of the subject matter of his operas, oratorios and cantatas remained primarily Italian or Roman in origin. Furthermore, he continued largely to work, in the capital of the North, with Italian musicians and librettists. Despite powerful links to what had for long been the leading musical culture of Europe, in other words, Händel found in London a cosmopolitan environment that provided him with the freedom and the means of developing his artistic genius to the full. Also, it was very definitely a city on the rise; by the late 1730s it was “both the largest and the richest city in Europe” (Blanning 2002, 273). Moreover, according to Linda Colley’s *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1996), there was yet another reason for Händel’s success among the British:

From the moment he settled in London, George Frederick Handel flattered his new surroundings, and especially his patrons at court, by inserting into his music regular comparisons between events in British history and the endeavours of the prophets and heroes of the Old Testament. The anthem he composed for George II’s coronation in 1727 [...] is a case in point [...]. But it was in the oratorios that he exploited the parallel between Britain and Israel to the full. *Esther*, *Deborah*, *Athalia*, *Judas Maccabaeus* (which was composed in honour of the Duke of Cumberland’s victory over the Jacobites at Culloden), *Joshua*, *Susannah*, *Jephtha*, and self-evidently, *Israel in Egypt* all have as their theme the deliverance of Israel from danger by leaders inspired by God. The moral Handel wanted his listeners to draw was an obvious one. In Great Britain, second and better Israel, a violent and uncertain past was to be redeemed by the new and stoutly Protestant Hanoverian dynasty [...] . It was because he celebrated Britain in this glowing fashion, that Handel became such a national institution. (33)

Händel was not alone in this drift to the North. When François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire, was exiled from France in 1725 because he had offended a French aristocrat, he too chose to go north across the Channel and spend the next few years in Britain. During this period he not only became fluent in the English language; he also acquired a profound insight into the British political, cultural and scientific scene. The result was the influential study, *Letters on the English*, which he published in 1734, and in which he compared Britain favourably with France on several occasions. But during his stay, he also acquired an interest in a northern political hero, the Swedish king Carl XII, who had been killed in Norway less than a decade earlier. The result was a biography, *The History of Charles XII, King of Sweden*, which was published in 1730 and which in the following decades acquired an immense popularity, in the original as well as in a number of translations – two hundred and fifty editions altogether. As a matter of fact, for a considerable number of years it was only the Bible and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* that were published in a larger number of editions (Stenroth 2005, 73).

True to his rationalist principles, Voltaire drew a balanced and sensible picture of the king’s many strengths and weaknesses; Carl XII



emerged in many respects as a victim of his own blind ambition, as a warrior who knew no other reality and had no other objective than war itself (*ibid.*, 72–73). Still, Voltaire was undoubtedly filled with admiration for the spectacular and ultimately tragic career of his subject. He saw him, as well as his chief opponent, Peter the Great, as “the most extraordinary personages that have appeared for more than twenty centuries” (Voltaire 1902, xvi), thus acknowledging, in the wake of the Great Northern War, the contemporary significance of the Nordic world for Europe as a whole. Similar acknowledgements are found in the works of another Frenchman, the playwright Alexis Piron and of the Irish writer Henry Brooke, both of whom wrote plays in the 1730s about Gustav Vasa, another Swedish warrior king. The latter’s play, *Gustavus Vasa: Deliverer of His Country* even achieved notoriety because it was banned from being performed in London by the Lord Chamberlain.

In histories about the early eighteenth century, religion is frequently relegated to the background, imbued with a steadily diminishing significance at the expense of science and secular learning. The conflict between Protestant and Catholic Europe, however, continued to serve as an important dividing line between North and South. Linda Colley makes a major point of how, especially in the long-term rivalry between Britain and France, religion was an essential ingredient in the process of forming a British national identity. After the Union with Scotland in 1707, which suggested the urgent need for an ethos of some sort to bring together the radically disparate parts of Britain, Protestantism provided not only a sense of national cohesion; it also fuelled a perception of Britain as a chosen people, literally modelled – as suggested above – on the Old Testament relationship between Yahweh and Israel. At the same time, Protestantism defined a common enemy in such simple and unequivocal terms that anyone could grasp them. The religious situation in Europe thus helped to underline an already existent polarity: the South turned increasingly in on itself, and so did the North.

### *Anglo-Saxon Revival*

The Marxist historiographical legacy has somehow ingrained into our perception and interpretation of the past a popular notion of a hierarchical structure, in which events on the ground, or the *base*, ultimately trigger and determine the *superstructure*, or ideas and philosophical speculations about society and social change. The history of ideas, on the other hand, almost by virtue of its very name, suggests the possibility of a hierarchy that is quite contrary to that of Marx, i.e. one of ideas filtering down into the social and material world, and thus through their transformative

power effecting change. The growing significance of the North, however, illustrates the extent to which it is impossible to reduce history to such simple and clear-cut categories. Although it would be perfectly possible to construct a plausible chain of events consisting of purely material and economic elements in order to explain this general historical movement, there is no doubt that the idea of a Nordic and Anglo-Saxon revival of the seventeenth century, continued to have a significant impact in the eighteenth. As a matter of fact, it appeared to be gathering a momentum in the years leading up to 1750 that was a direct precondition for the mighty take-off of the following period. As usual, it might be argued that the kind of academic and artistic pursuits in question only concerned a fraction of society at the time, but it would be naïve to assume that their ideologically explosive implications did not reach out far beyond the confined community of artists and academics.

In Britain, in particular, the years immediately after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 represent an interesting transitional period. Admittedly, in a traditional division of political and intellectual history into periods, this is at the very threshold of the Enlightenment or Neoclassicism, a period characterised precisely by the revival of classical ideas and ideals. However true this may be as a general observation, the period nonetheless also represents the threshold of a radically different revival. The University of Oxford, for instance, was during this very period entering upon its heyday of Anglo-Saxon studies, represented first of all by Edward Thwaite, who fostered an enormously fertile academic environment after his arrival at Queen's in 1689 (Fairer 1986, 812).<sup>19</sup>

Another central figure, the diplomat and writer Sir William Temple (1628–1699), who in 1688 had acquired the young Jonathan Swift as his secretary, published the essay “On Poetry” in 1690, which exemplifies rather strikingly the emerging schism between the literary traditions of South and North. While outlining a kind of macro-history of Western literature, he very clearly sympathises with the achievements of the Hebrews, Greeks and Romans. Still, one is left with a feeling that this well-educated and well-travelled cosmopolitan is experiencing an internal tug-of-war between a loyalty to his culturally acquired ideals, on the one hand, and a more profound and perhaps more emotionally charged sympathy with his rude northern ancestry, on the other. Admittedly, he talks about the northern “Cloud of Ignorance”, which with the Middle Ages supplanted the advanced ancient culture, but in a section on “Runick Poetry”, he still complains how at the same time the literary legacy of the North was systematically ignored and undermined by the “Zeal of Bishops and even by Orders and Decrees of State, which has given a great Maim,

<sup>19</sup> Thwaite was most likely aware that his own surname was only a slight anglicisation of the Norwegian *tveit* (a piece of cultivated land).

or rather an irrecoverable Loss, to the Story of those *Northern Kingdoms*, the Seat of our Ancestors in all the *Western parts of Europe*" (Temple 1909, 50).

Temple also had close Scandinavian contacts and was part of an active and alert international network in the field of Nordic studies. He had been offered an ambassadorship in Stockholm (which he declined because of the climate); and his writings on runes in his essay "On Poetry" appear to have been inspired by a work published in Copenhagen only the previous year, *Antiquitatum Danicarum*, by the Danish Royal Antiquarian and Professor of History Thomas Bartholin the Younger (1659–1690) (Seaton 1935, 132–33). All in all, Temple is important as a mediator of a new cultural trend; he is the type of figure that would be read, respected and listened to; in short a figure with the necessary impact to contribute to a changing perception of the North. According to Ethel Seaton, there was nothing new in the fact that Temple quoted from the Latin translation of *Edda* or wrote of runes: "But to see in the Odin and Valhalla legends a national principle or philosophy of life, and in the runic verses an application of this principle, this is new and original in English" (*ibid.*, 134).

And Temple was not alone in this balancing act between opposing traditions. In 1693 Thomas Hooper of University College, Oxford, gave an oration which – though delivered in Latin, as the tradition required – amounted to an attack on the so-called anti-Saxonists, in which he developed the somewhat aggressive strategy of branding his classically-minded opponents as feminine creatures, whose hands "are so delicate that they dare not handle parchments covered with dirt and dust; those minds are too tender to be able to bear the more repulsive sight of Saxon, Gothic or Runic script. The result is that their mental powers are stunted" (quoted in Fairer 1986, 815).

As will be seen in the following, however, Temple's and Hooper's dual orientation was soon followed by an entire wave of more one-sided academic and artistic efforts that more or less relegated the celebration of the classical Mediterranean culture to the position of a stepping stone towards higher things. Though one-sided in the sense of focusing strongly on the revival of the ancient culture of the North, this wave covered a wide remit, which in line with the general curiosity of the Enlightenment included such manifold areas as linguistics, travel and topographical accounts, history, sagas and mythology, and art and literature, all of which will be discussed in the following.

Without linguistic expertise, however, very little could be achieved, and a massive amount of labour was employed in order to recover the lost or forgotten languages of the North. With old sources and manuscripts continuing to come to the surface, the so-called Septentrionalists had to reacquaint themselves – in the same way that Renaissance scholars had had to do with Greek – with a range of languages that were understood

only by the very few. Obviously, the seventeenth century had made a significant start, and not just in Britain. Towards the end of the century, the German scholar Daniel Georg Morhof had produced his *Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache and Poesie* (Treatise on the German Language and Poetry, 1682), in which he established the Gothic language as equally ancient with Greek and Latin (Stenroth 2002, 136), and in 1691 the highly controversial Swede Olof Rudbeck together with his printer Henrik Curio had brought out a lexicon of Old Norse, based on material that Rudbeck's friend and colleague Olof Verelius had left behind at his death in 1682 (King 2005, 241).

As soon as the new century had opened, however, the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, then the home of the University's press, published Thomas Benson's *Vocabularium Anglo-Saxonicum* (1701), a 180-page dictionary into Latin whose small and handy format was probably aimed at a growing audience of scholars across the country. This was followed only two years later by the first volume of George Hickes's breathtaking two-volume work with the appropriately ambitious title *Linguarum Vett. Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archaeologicus*, i.e. "Grammatical-Critical and Archaeological Thesaurus of the Old Northern Languages".<sup>20</sup> The work, which was completed in 1705, covers the whole linguistic spectrum of northern Europe, including extensive grammars of Anglo-Saxon, Gothic, Frankish and Icelandic, backed up by a wealth of language samples from a wide range of historical and legal documents, letters, coins etc.<sup>21</sup> Hickes, who had produced his first major work in the field in 1689, was now hailed as a leading light among the scholars of the North. One of them exclaimed that: "Next to what concerns the preservation of our Established Religion and Government, peace here and salvation hereafter, I know nothing that hath greater share in my thoughts and desires than the promotion of the Septentrional learning" (quoted in Seaton 1935, 274).

In 1715 another grammar appeared, whose full title deserves to be given: *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, First given in English: With an Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities. Being very useful towards the understanding our [sic] ancient English Poets, and other Writers*. The author was not, as one would naturally assume in the early eighteenth century, a man, but a woman: Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756). She was the sister of William Elstob, a highly competent Saxon scholar in Oxford (Fairer 1986, 820–21). But she was much more than that: with good cause she was called the "Saxon Nymph" for her formidable efforts –

<sup>20</sup> The word 'thesaurus' is here used in the traditional sense of 'encyclopedia', or even in its original sense of 'treasury'.

<sup>21</sup> Frankish was the language spoken by the Germanic Franks in the Low Countries and parts of France and Germany from the fourth to the eighth century; a precursor of modern Franconian languages.

despite her lack of formal qualifications – in the field of northern studies. For years she had been working together with her brother on major translation projects, and in 1709 she had published her own translation of the tenth-century abbot Aelfric of Aynsham's *A Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory* (Ruth Perry in Ballard 1985, 22). Furthermore, she is also, together with Mary Astell, regarded as one of the first British feminists.<sup>22</sup>

The grammar itself takes up seventy pages of the book and looks very much like a practical, modern grammar designed for the average, educated reader. What is more interesting, however, is the inclusion of a thirty-five-page Preface, addressed to George Hickes, who had evidently inspired her work. It is perhaps a coincidence, perhaps not, that both Hickes and Elstob were northerners who had settled down in the academic environment of southern England. At least, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that coming from Thirsk in Yorkshire and Newcastle respectively, they would have grown up in a closer contact with traditions, language and customs going back to the distant past than the more internationally oriented elite in Oxford, Cambridge and London.

As David Fairer points out, the period around 1715 marks the climax and the beginning of the decline of Anglo-Saxon studies at Oxford; both Hickes and William Elstob died that year, and although the endowment of an Anglo-Saxon lectureship at the University in 1716 was a sanctioning of the subject as a respectable area of study, it was also to some extent an indication that a period of idealistic enthusiasm was over and that institutional assistance was needed (*ibid.*, 823). Still, this was only a temporary setback, and Elizabeth Elstob's preface is a lively and sharp-witted essay, packed with arguments that would eventually win the day. Thus, paradoxically, by arguing in favour of the past, she speaks for the future. Most importantly, she takes the bull by the horns and establishes a clear-cut conflict between the Latinists and the Anglo-Saxonists, boldly drawing in such risky elements as gender and nationalism, and seasoning it with a touch of almost condescending irony:

I have given most, if not all the *Grammatical* Terms in true old *Saxon*, from Ælfrick's Translation of *Priscian*, to shew the *polite* Men of our Age, that the Language of their Forefathers is neither so barren nor barbarous as they affirm, with equal Ignorance and Boldness. [...] These Gentlemens ill Treatment of our Mother Tongue has led me into a Stile not so agreeable to the Mildness of our Sex, or the usual manner of my Behaviour, to Persons of your Character; but the Love and Honour of one's Country, hath in all Ages been acknowledg'd such a Virtue, as hath admitted of a Zeal even somewhat extravagant. (Elstob 1715, iii)

And on the following page:

<sup>22</sup> For a survey of her life and influence, see Ruth Perry's introduction in Ballard 1985, 21–25. Ballard's book from 1752 about learned ladies in British history was inspired by and dedicated to Elizabeth Elstob.

This hath often occasion'd my Admiration, that those Persons, who talk so much, of the Honour of our Countrey, *of the correcting, improving and ascertaining* of our Language, should dress it up in a Character so very strange and ridiculous: or to think of improving it to any degree of Honour and Advantage, by divesting it of the Ornaments of Antiquity, or separating it from the *Saxon* Root, whose Branches were so copious and numerous. (*Ibid.*, iv)

Like Hickes, she also pays considerable attention to historical documents, especially to texts that demonstrate the complexities and sophistication of the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, thus effectively undermining her opponents' main arguments that the North is backward and primitive. In this particular respect, she would have found plenty of ammunition in a work that had been published right before the turn of the century, namely William Nicolson's *English Historical Library* (1696–99), an extensive anthology of Saxon legal documents (Fairer 1986, 814). Elstob's vigorous and lucid polemic, conducted against a massively male academic establishment, is sufficiently impressive by virtue of being written by a woman, and it becomes no less impressive in light of the fact that it was a direct response to the master of satire himself, Jonathan Swift, who in 1712 had published an essay, in which he criticised the “meaningless pedantry” of all students of Anglo-Saxon (Ruth Perry in Ballard 1985, 22).

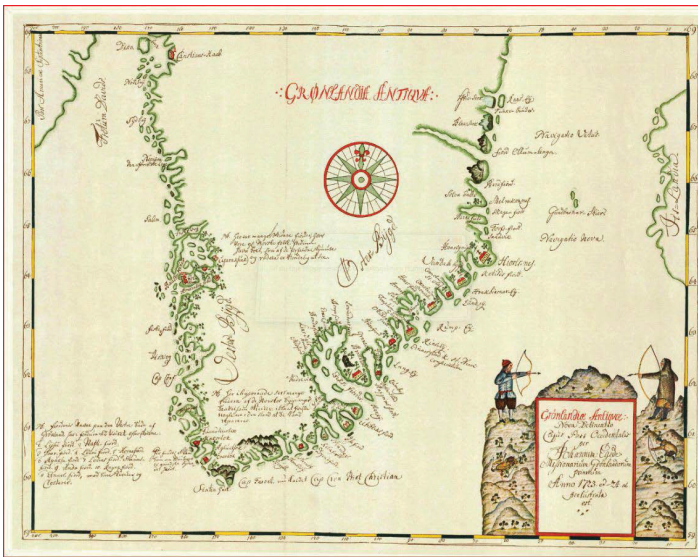
But Elstob also comes across as a woman of political instincts. At a time when dedications were often closely associated with patronage, it is hardly a coincidence that she chose to dedicate her work to “Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales”, i.e. the wife of the future George II and herself the future Queen Caroline, who at the time of the book's publication had only been in Britain for a year. Like her husband, the Princess of Wales was born and raised in Germany, and Elstob very cleverly shows an awareness of the language problems that the move to Britain must have occasioned, but at the same time takes the opportunity to underline the profound historical connections between the two countries:

*Madam*, it addresses itself to Your Royal Highness, congratulating Your Auspicious Arrival into *England*, in a Language which bears a Name that is common both to the *German* and *English* Nations, the *SAXON*. This will not, I presume, make it a less agreeable Present to Your Royal Highness, in whose Royal Offspring the *Saxon* Line is to be continued, with encrease [*sic*] of all Princely and Heroick Virtues. (*Ibid.*, no pag.)

She even suggests that she has taken the Princess's background into consideration when writing the book: “Hoping it might yield some kind of Diversion to Your Royal Highness, I have here and there interspersed some Instances, of *German*, *Francick*, and *Gothick* Words [...]”, and having underlined the Princess's father-in-law (i.e. George I) as a “great Judge and Promoter of all good Learning”, she concludes by recommending “the Study of the *German* Antiquities; in order to the right Understanding and Illustration of which, the Knowledge of the *English-Saxon* Language and Antiquities, is so very necessary” (*ibid.*).

*The Past Is the Future*

Topographical accounts and travelogues from the period also reveal a new interest in the northern regions. Two interesting examples of such works, written by the same author, are Martin Martin’s *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland ca. 1695*, published in 1703, and *A Late Voyage to St Kilda* (1698). Not only were these “among the first printed works to describe the Hebrides and the culture and beliefs of the people of Scotland’s Outer Isles”; they were also written by a native and an insider (Charles W. J. Withers’s Introduction in Martin 1999, 1–2). Martin had studied at Edinburgh, moved to London, and was connected with the Royal Society; consequently, he bridged the gap between the local community



Hans Egede’s draft from 1723 of “Grønlandiae Antiquae”, i.e. Old Greenland, showing the numerous settlements along the coast. The map suggests a medieval Greenland very different from that imagined by the majority of Europeans.

and the cultural elite, alerting the latter to a gradually increasing interest in places usually regarded as far beyond the pale. Another alternative to the fashionable Grand Tour accounts of the period is of course Daniel Defoe’s *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–27), whose three volumes describe with equal enthusiasm not only the central and most populated areas, but also such remote places as the Scottish Highlands and a number of the islands beyond.

In the early years of the eighteenth century, however, Hans Egede, a young pietist curate in Northern Norway, conceived of a far more

spectacular idea. Having developed an enthusiasm for missionary work during his student days in Copenhagen, together with an interest in the ancient history of Norway, he suddenly discovered how to combine the two: he decided to go to Greenland, find the old Norwegian settlements, and, assuming they were still Catholic, convert them to the Protestant faith. In 1719 he was able to present his plans to King Frederik IV (1699–1730) in Copenhagen; in 1720 he succeeded in establishing a company in Bergen whose task was to renew the trade to Greenland, and so in 1721, with additional royal funding, he set off for the former Norwegian colony.

Egede obviously did not find any descendants from the Viking settlements, but fired by his missionary zeal he still spent fifteen years in the country, working relentlessly among the Inuit, learning their language and collecting a wealth of information. In 1732, his work was further supplemented by a contingent of Moravian Brothers, who similarly sought far-flung places for their missionary activities. Returning to Copenhagen in 1736, Egede even established a *Seminarium Groenlandicum* and published a number of scientific works about the country (Oftestad et al. 1991, 153). One of them was *Det Gamle Grønlands nye Perlustration, eller Natural-Historie (A Description of Greenland)*, whose first and short edition was published in Danish in 1729 and immediately translated into German, whereas the second and considerably enlarged and illustrated edition of 1741, which contained a detailed and impressively accurate account of Greenland's topography, history, language and culture, was soon translated into French as well as English. Egede thus provided the European public with a wide range of information about a region which had never before been subjected to such a thorough investigation.

Still, it should be remembered that his dedication was not only motivated by religion; it was also profoundly connected with a nascent vision of a revival of Norwegian power and influence. With Norway as a decidedly junior partner in the two kingdoms, however, the fulfilment of this vision was – somewhat awkwardly – entirely dependent on the clout of Denmark and its king. In *A Description of Greenland*, it is thus difficult to acquire a clear impression of Egede's actual position and focus. In Norwegian history books, Egede has traditionally been called “Greenland's apostle”, and his stay in the country presented as a venture *solī Deo gloria*. But to a modern reader of this work the picture is not quite as clear. Admittedly, the author's humble and long-winded dedication to the Danish Prince Frederik carefully emphasises the religious dimension, but it is not even quite clear whether his use of the term “Greenlanders” applies to the presumed Viking survivors or to the native Inuit.<sup>23</sup> Egede's ultimate objective seems to be political; he has initiated “so pious an Undertaking; because the poor *Greenlanders* have a right to claim your

<sup>23</sup> Prince Frederik was the son of Christian VI (1699–46; reigned from 1730), i.e. the grandson of Egede's original employer, Frederik IV. He later became King Frederik V.



Protection, as well as the Kingdoms of *Denmark* and *Norway*; and are in Hopes of enjoying, one Day, the greatest Blessings under Your happy Reign” (Egede 1745, no pag.). The conclusion of his dedication shows the dual intention of the project:

And though we should fail of Success, in still meeting with the aforesaid Off-spring of the old *Norwegian* and *Island* Christians, who, for ought we know, may all be extinct and destroyed, as we found it on the *West Coast*; yet, for all that, I should not think all our Labour lost, nor our Costs made to no Purpose, as long as it may be for the Good and Advantage of those ignorant Heathens, that live there; to whom we have Reason to hope, our most gracious Sovereign will also extend his fatherly Clemency, and Christian Zeal, to provide for their eternal Happiness, as he so graciously has done for those on the *Western Shore*; seeing that by these Means the old ruined Places might anew be provided with Colonies and Inhabitants; which would prove no small Advantage to the King and his Dominions. This my well-meant Project, that God in his Mercy will advance and promote, to the Honour of his most holy Name, and the enlightening and saving of these poor Souls, is the sincere Desire of, Hans Egede. (*Ibid.*, xiv–xvi)

As will be remembered, Arthur Dobbs was arguing along almost identical lines with regard to the Hudson Bay territories at precisely the same time, although without the religious superstructure. For Egede, colonisation would provide a secure foothold, and the existence of old colonists – living or dead – would be an additional justification for Norwegian or Danish-Norwegian jurisdiction in the region. Later in the book, he returns to this point, claiming that Greenland “may be reckoned a good and profitable Country, provided the formerly inhabited Tracts of Land were anew settled and peopled” (*ibid.*, 217).

There are also other indications that the primary objective of the King’s support was not solely “the Growth and Advancement of the Church of Christ”. In the very same sentence, Egede turns to the “considerable Sum of Money yearly set apart, for the *Greenland* Missionaries Entertainment, which Royal Bounty continues to this Day”. Then, for the first time, one can sense a touch of irritation, as he puts aside the humble phrases: “But as a good deal of this Bounty Money must be employed in the promoting of Trade (without which the Mission could not subsist) but little remains for promoting the proper End of the Mission, which is the Conversion of the Heathens [...]” (*ibid.*, 214–15).

Whether this is Egede simply whining for more money, or expressing dissatisfaction with the King’s priorities, it is evident that his Greenland venture was never a purely religious undertaking: the King used it primarily as a means of generating more revenue, thus establishing a Danish-Norwegian presence in the country and forestalling potential claims from other countries (Weihe 1999, 21–22). Egede, on the other hand, combined the spreading of the gospel with an embryonic vision of a revival of Norwegian power and influence in the region, a vision that was going to be nurtured for a couple of centuries to come. As a result, there are obvious nationalistic parallels between Egede’s project in Greenland

and Thomas von Westen's in Lapland at the same time.

Another area where the nationalist awakening of the seventeenth century continued to develop was that of historiography. Towards the end of that century, a couple of major, older works had been reissued, as an indication of a continuing interest as well as new and better scholarship. In 1685, Peder Claussøn Friis's major history of Norway from 1632 came out in a German translation (Björnsson 2003, 81), thus reaching a far wider and international audience; and in 1695 William Camden's majestic *Britannia*, first published in Latin in 1588, came out in a radically altered version. The editor, Edmund Gibson, had not just translated it into English; he had also expanded it into an 1,100-page tome in a large format, with high-quality illustrations and maps, effectively outlining in great detail the entire ancient heritage of the British Isles, county by county. The work set a new standard of scholarly craftsmanship, as Gibson was well aware; having presented an impressive list of collaborators across the country, he proudly adds: "In short, I can safely affirm that I omitted no opportunity of getting the best Information both from Men and Books [...]" (Gibson's Preface in Camden 1695, no pag.).

In the British context, the new Camden would serve as a standard work for the coming century, but it seems almost to have cleared the field of other historians of ancient Britain for a generation to come. Across the North Sea, however, an Icelander turned Norwegian had been working for decades on the ancient history of virtually the entire Far North, from Vinland to Norway. Tormod Torfæus (1636–1719),<sup>24</sup> who spent more than fifty years as a public servant in the area near Stavanger in south-western Norway, had started his career in Copenhagen as a royal translator of Icelandic sagas, itself an indication of King Frederik III's keen awareness of their significance. Then, having made a brief visit back to Iceland, Torfæus had brought back to Denmark, and later Norway, a large number of key ancient manuscripts, which formed an important basis for his later work as the official historiographer for Norway.

In 1697, he brought out *Prolegomena in Historiam Norvegicam & Orcadensem* (A Preliminary Discussion of Norwegian and Orcadian History), but the most important results of his labours began to appear in the first years of the new century. In 1705, having already published histories of the Orkneys and the Faroes, he presented the very first general work on the history of Vinland or America, *Historia Vinlandiae Antiquae*, in which he argues, more than two hundred years ahead of his time, that the first Norse expeditions to Vinland had landed in Newfoundland. The following year *Gronlandia Antiqua* appeared, which is partly a topographical account, but primarily a detailed discussion of the ancient history in the island, including a complete list of bishops from 982 to 1406 (Torfæus

<sup>24</sup> The following information about Torfæus is indebted to Titlestad (ed.) 2001, 9–23.

1927, 186–97). Then after a thirty-year-long struggle, Torfæus launched what could be regarded as a Norwegian equivalent of the new Camden, i.e. the mammoth, four-volume *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* (History of Norway), in 1711.

With the combination of a thorough knowledge of the European cultural heritage, and of the Old Norse or Icelandic language, together with a whole library of previously unknown primary sources, Torfæus opened up new windows into Scandinavian history of the period up to 1387. At the same time, he also saved several major literary sources by having copies made of originals which, after their return to Copenhagen, were destroyed in the city fire of 1728. Much of Torfæus's work was published in Latin and was thus immediately made accessible to an educated international audience, but it was not a coincidence that Torfæus himself also translated such a work as the *Gronlandia Antiqua* into Danish, which was then the language of Norway as well as Denmark: in Norway, especially, his efforts built an important foundation for the nationalist movement that later in the century would use history, more so than rationalist principles, as the main argument for freedom and independence. In *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*, there is even a decisive Norwegian bias, particularly in the portrait of King Olav Trygvason, the hero whose statement before the battle of Svolder about cowardly Danes was included against the advice of the author's friends. According to Torgrim Titlestad, "Torfæus made Norway important by telling the story of the Norwegian nation and making it interesting in Europe, long before Norway once again became an independent nation" (Titlestad 2001, 19).

Mention should also be made of the most important writer and intellectual in Denmark-Norway in the first half of the eighteenth century, Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), himself an ardent reader of Torfæus's writings. Although Holberg is now primarily known as a writer of satires and plays in the French tradition, two thirds of his voluminous production consists of historical works (Langslet 2001, 224). As a historian, Holberg stands out from the rest of the chroniclers of the Scandinavian past; having spent the first part of his life in his native Norway and then studying in Copenhagen as well as in Paris and Oxford before finally settling down in Denmark, Holberg became Professor of History in 1730, after the distinguished Icelander Arni Magnusson.

As a man of the Enlightenment, Holberg's historical scope was international, and so was his audience. His *Synopsis Historiae Universalis* (Synopsis of Universal History, 1733), for instance, which was typically published initially in Latin, was soon translated into Danish, German, English, Dutch and Russian, whereas his monumental three-volume *Danmarks Riges Historie* (History of the Kingdom of Denmark, 1732–35) was made available in German and Russian translations (*ibid.*, 225). Thus, Holberg was not, like Rudbeck, a fiery spokesman for a narrow

nationalism. He did, however, teach himself Old Norse in order to read relevant documents in the original, and in two works on historical heroes and heroines, he portrayed such diverse historical leaders from the North as Margaret I, Elizabeth I, Christian IV, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. With his sober and objective style he thereby contributed to a dissemination of knowledge about the North far beyond the region's borders.

As the Great Northern War was drawing to a close, Swedish historiographers, on the other hand, were eagerly compensating for the collapse of the country's Baltic empire by continuing Olof Rudbeck's ambitious and highly speculative project of constructing a heroic national past. In 1717, the twenty-one-year-old Erik Julius Björner (1696–1750) published a fifty-page Latin dissertation in Uppsala, *De Svedia Boreali* (About Northern Sweden), which discusses the ancient history of the areas around the Bay of Bothnia, including Finland and northern Norway, connecting their population not just with the Goths and the Vikings, but also with the Flood and with Japheth, Noah's son, often regarded as the father of all Europeans (Björner 1717, 34).

Björner was quickly taken under the wings of another Rudbeck disciple, Johan Peringskiöld the elder (1654–1720), who served as Chief Inspector of ancient monuments and historical buildings. Peringskiöld's son, Johan Fredrik Peringskiöld (1689–1725) was also a keen Septentrionalist, and between them father and son produced an impressive number of translations of ancient texts that were essential to their Rudbeckian theories. One of these texts was the multi-volume work *Scandia Illustrata* (Illustrated Scandinavia) by the Swedish historian and playwright Johannes Messenius (1579–1636), which had remained unpublished for nearly a century, and which treated the history of Scandinavia from the Flood to the author's own time. Peringskiöld the elder saw a somewhat abridged multi-volume version through the press from 1700 to 1705, and in 1718 and 1719 respectively, his son produced translations into Swedish of Adam of Bremen's eleventh-century history of Scandinavia and of Jordanes's history of the Goths.

As Stenroth points out with regard to the latter work, Peringskiöld finds it hard to resist the temptation to correct the Latin text in order further to enhance the idea of Sweden's glorious past. The most striking example is the description of King Berig's journey from Scandia, which according to Jordanes is a relatively low-key affair, involving only three ships ("*tantum tribus navibus*"). Peringskiöld, however, very imaginatively looks for ways of increasing the number of vessels, and comments that

it is well known that when people of old wanted to describe a number higher than a hundred, they would place the little letter *c.* above the number itself, thus: III<sup>c</sup>. That means three hundred; or even the number thousand, *mille*, with an *M.* placed above, thus: III<sup>M</sup>. That means three thousand. The scribes, in other words, who were not

aware of this, may even have made the mistake of inserting or reading *tantum* [i.e. only] instead of *centum* or *millium*. The latter number is confirmed by Homer in *The Iliad*. (Peringskiöld 1719, no pag.)<sup>25</sup>

Then in 1725, as a last effort before his own death in the same year, Peringskiöld the younger managed to produce his father's *magnum opus*, which had been left unpublished at his death five years earlier: *Åttartal för Swea och Götha Konungahus, efter Trowärdiga Historier och Dokumenter i Underdånighet Uppräknat* (Genealogy of the Swedish and Gothic Royal Families, According to Trustworthy Stories and Documents, Humbly Enumerated). Packed almost Camden-like with illustrations of royal stone monuments, rune stones, coins etc., Peringskiöld the younger dedicates the work to Queen Ulrica Eleonora, who had inherited the throne, but who had passed it on to her husband, Fredrik I, in 1720.

The dedication promises to present the Queen's forebears "like a golden chain with its links joined together, beginning with the heathen world, before and after the birth of Christ, connected through the Christian era, continuing into the Royal house of the Swedes and the Goths [orig. *Svea och Götha Konunga hus*], in which Your Royal Majesty, through God's providence, has become a reigning Queen, to the delight of all Your subjects" (Peringskiöld 1725, no pag.).<sup>26</sup> Then, with an astonishing combination of precision and self-confidence, which makes Rudbeck himself look like a sceptic of the first order, the book begins, like Björner a few years earlier, with Noah's son Japheth, who via various Trojan kings and other past heroes is elegantly linked to Odin and Thor. The next chapter then proceeds to start with Odin's son Inge, ending forty-four generations later with Ingeborg, the daughter of the Norwegian King Erik, who died in 1299, thus establishing a complete and apparently irrefutable genealogical line from the Book of Genesis to the Queen herself.

The deaths of father and son Peringskiöld in 1720 and 1725 were not quite the end of the wildly imaginative Rudbeckian theories. As late as 1749, Johan Göransson (1712–69) published a work along very similar lines to that of Peringskiöld the elder, in which he describes a line of one hundred and eleven Swedish kings, going back to 2,200 BC (Stenroth 2002, 163). Similarly, in the following year, he published the large work entitled *Bautil*, a comprehensive catalogue of 1,200 Swedish rune stones from a period of 3,000 years, in which he also presented Scandinavia as the "*vagina gentium & officina nationum*" – the womb of the peoples and the workshop of the nations (Göransson 1750, 3).

But the times were changing; new and more critical, scientific views were beginning to surface. As early as 1726, only a year after the Peringskiölds' parting salvo, Olof Celsius the elder started publishing a

<sup>25</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

<sup>26</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

major work on Swedish rune stones, in which he claimed that their age had been greatly exaggerated (*ibid.*, 156), and a decade later, the poet and historian Olof von Dalin (1708–63), partly inspired by Steele's and Addison's *The Spectator*, launched a satirical attack on his gullible colleagues. In one of these, from 1739, "he produced his 'Tests of Wisdom, or Herr Arngrim Berserk's Remarkable Thoughts Concerning a Discovery in the Earth,' wherein learned parallels are adduced to claim that a copper pot was the helmet of the hero 'Bo the Fat'" (Greenway 1977, 80); and in his *Svea rikets historia* (History of the Kingdom of Sweden, 1747), he claimed that "although Rudbeckianism requires a sort of genius, it does not yield fact, and wherever Atlantis was – if it ever existed – will never be decided" (*ibid.*).

But continental historians were also showing an interest in the North, trying first of all to come to grips with how to categorise the Nordic peoples and their history in the context of European civilisation. This was in itself an indication that northern Europe was gaining in significance and demanding serious scholarly attention. In 1730, for instance, the Frenchman Jean Blaise Des Roches published a multi-volume *Histoire de Dannemarc* (History of Denmark). According to Gunnar Castrén, it is not a work that represents any particular step forward (Castrén 1910, 103–07), but in 1740, the French-German historian Simon Pelloutier opened up a new research front with the first volume of his elaborate *Histoire des Celtes et Particulièrement des Gaulois et des Germains* (History of the Celts and in Particular the Gauls and the Germans).

Pelloutier was a Huguenot and the Librarian of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences, and claimed that the ancient writers had not properly accounted for the origin of the European peoples. In a move that was going to have an impact on the Swiss Paul Henri Mallet only a decade later, however, Pelloutier claimed that the Celts were the ethnic common denominator of virtually all Europeans, including the Hyperboreans, the British, the Scots and Irish, and the original inhabitants of Greece, Italy and Spain. This marked a minor paradigm shift, simply because it acknowledged the peoples, the culture and traditions of the North as belonging naturally within the sphere of civilisation rather than as a primitive world beyond it (Gonthier-Louis Fink, in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 94–95).

Pelloutier was undoubtedly influenced by another German historian, Johann Georg Keyser, who as early as 1720 had published a major work in Latin, entitled *Antiquitates Selectæ Septentrionales et Celtica* (Selected Northern and Celtic Antiquities), which in similar fashion put such ancient monuments as Stonehenge, of which he offers a series of fold-out plates (Keyser 1720), under the same heading as those found in Scandinavia. Before the middle of the century, Keyser's views were further promulgated by his disciple, the Hamburg historian and theologian Gottfried Schütze,

who inherited his teacher's scientific collections. In 1748 Schütze published *Der Lehrbegriff der Alten Deutschen und Nordischen Völker* (The Concept of the Ancient German and Nordic Peoples), which focused heavily on the close connection between German and Nordic antiquity (Blanck 1911, 127).<sup>27</sup>

In Britain, too, a Celtic revival was under way, with a particular emphasis on druidic traditions. The archaeological pioneer William Stukeley (1687–1765), for instance, published a major work, *Stonehenge: A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* in 1740, which also involved him in complicated calculations relating to the changing position of the magnetic North Pole. And in 1747, James Wheeler's *The Modern Druid* made use of the same material with an overtly nationalist bias (Hayman 2003, 88–89).

There was also another area in which history and historiography played an important role in cultivating northern values. Ever since Henry VIII's dramatic break with the Catholic Church in 1535, religion and the possible reintroduction of Catholicism had been either an implicit or an explicit issue in British politics. This was a particularly relevant and sensitive question when new monarchs and royal marriages were at issue. With the Glorious Revolution in 1688, this question appeared to be finally settled. Nevertheless, for a hundred and fifty years, the followers of the Church of England had been working to integrate the new institution at all levels of society, to meet the challenge not just from Rome, but also from the dissenters, on the other side of the spectrum.

An important strategy in this respect was to underline the Church's connection with the past, i.e. simply to provide it with a tradition. In practice, this meant, according to Ruth Perry, to trace "the roots of the English church back past the Norman Conquest to the doctrines of the original Saxon church fathers, and thus to establish an alternative theological tradition to papism and to dissent" (Perry in Ballard 1985, 22). In this way, the Church firmly attached itself to the country and its past rather than to an international institution based in Rome, thus making the religious and the secular history two sides of the same coin, and parts of the same nationalist project.

To several of the writers mentioned above, historiography was now walking hand in hand with ancient literature and mythology. The sagas and other material from the saga period, in particular, were regarded as essential sources of historical information. Johan Peringskiöld the elder, for instance, published a Latin-Swedish translation of *Heimskringla* as early as 1697. The work "is a history of the kings of Norway from legendary times until 1177", and is attributed to Snorri Sturluson (Björnsson 2003, 106).

<sup>27</sup> The full title of the work is *Der Lebegriff der Alten Deutschen und Nordischen Völker von dem Zustande der Selen nach dem Tode Überhaupt und von dem Himmel und der Hölle Insbesondere* (The Concept among the Ancient German and Nordic Peoples of the State of the Soul after Death in General and of Heaven and Hell in Particular).

Peringskiöld also brought out a mixed bag of material in a five-hundred-page, large-format work titled *Wilkina Saga, eller Historien om Konung Thiderich af Bern och hans Kämpar* (The Wilkina Saga, or the Story of King Thiderich of Bern and His Giants, 1715).<sup>28</sup> According to the editor's preface, the saga admittedly contains "partly credible, partly incredible accounts", and is about "the feats of the Goths [*Göther*] abroad". In Rudbeckian fashion, however, the confusion with regard to the meaning of the word *Göther*—whether it should refer to the people of the south-western part of Sweden, or to the Goths in general—seems to be intentional. As to the composition of the text, Peringskiöld claims that it was "written down abroad, then brought here to the Nordic countries, where Norwegians have added some material, partly from German ballads, partly from several accounts by people in Bremen and Mönster [...]" (Peringskiöld 1715, no pag.).<sup>29</sup>

Against this background, a reader has something of a challenge to distinguish fact from fiction. Still, it would be wrong to underestimate the work of the Rudbeckians. Erik Julius Björner, for instance, in 1737 published a work that would have a major impact on writers and artists for the next hundred years; *Nordiska Kämpadater* (Deeds of Nordic Heroes) presented a major collection of first-class translations of Icelandic sagas, accompanied by a lengthy introduction and comments (Lönnroth and Delblanc 1988, II: 22). Less than ten years later, the other staunch Rudbeckian, Johan Göransson, similarly published a translation and interpretation of parts of Snorri's *Edda*.<sup>30</sup>

In Norway, too, the vicar and historian Jonas Ramus (1649–1718) followed up the Rudbeckian approach, but equipped with a Norwegian rather than a Swedish nationalist bias, his project was to prove that several of the heroes of Greek and Roman antiquity performed their feats in Norway rather than Sweden or southern Europe. Thus, in one of his historical works from the turn of the century, *Ulysses et Otinus Unus et Idem* (Ulysses and Odin Are One and the Same, 1702), the title is sufficient to make the author's message clear. But it was not only texts specifically connected with Norse literature and mythology that provided information about the past.

Long before Herder and the Romantic movement, there were writers who were keenly aware of the historical significance of oral, popular texts that had been passed down in the vernacular from one generation to another. One of these was the Danish vicar, linguist and collector Peder

<sup>28</sup> According to Árni Björnsson, the saga, also known as *Diðreks Saga of Bern*, is not about "Berne in Switzerland but Verona in Italy, and 'Piðrekr' is Theodoricus, King of the Ostrogoths around AD 500" (Björnsson 2003, 106).

<sup>29</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PE.

<sup>30</sup> *De Yverborna Atlingars eller Sviogötars ok Nordmännners Edda*, 1746. For a discussion of Göransson, see Karlsson 2005, 42–43.



Syv (1631–1702), who in 1695 published the so-called *Tohundrevisebog* (The Two Hundred Ballad Book), which includes an extensive selection of folk ballads, collected among ordinary people in Denmark and the Faroe Islands (Mortensen and Schack 2007, I: 314). The book was not only the result of Syv's efforts, however. It was based on another work from as far back as 1591, *Hundrevisebogen* (The Hundred Ballad Book) by another Dane, Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616), which was the first printed collection of folk ballads anywhere, and thus a complete novelty in world literature (*ibid.*, 271). With Syv's significant additions, the new work became a major popular success and provided Syv with a heroic status among the Romantics more than a century later.

It was not only scholars and academics, however, who turned to the distant past. Increasing numbers of artists of all categories were also latching on to the wealth of material that was being made available to the general public. At a time when heroic, patriotic and nationalistic material was of topical significance, they were quick to realise its dramatic potential. In Germany, this interest inevitably centres around the perpetual legacy from Tacitus and the relationship between the ancient Germans and the Romans, exemplified primarily by the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD and the German hero Hermann or, in Latin, Arminius. The idea of Hermann as a nationalist hero had already been launched in the early 1520s in the dialogue *Arminius* by the controversial German humanist Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523), but the first to exploit this material in fictional form was the dramatist and novelist Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635–1683), whose novel *Grossmüthiger Feltherr Arminius Herrman* (The Bold Commander Arminius Hermann), was published posthumously in 1689–90.

With its four volumes and three thousand pages printed in double columns, the novel was hardly a bestseller, but it still underscores a contrast that was to have an impact on future generations of Germans, and that would fit smoothly into the Romantic movement a century later, between a corrupt and civilised Rome, and a natural and primitive Germany (Garland 1991, *s.v.* "Lohenstein, Daniel Casper von"). This simple and attractive concept, which nearly two millennia after the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest offered a new triumph over southern dominance – cultural, this time, rather than military – was adopted in a more popular form a few decades later by Johann Elias Schlegel (1719–1749), an uncle of the more famous brothers Wilhelm and Friedrich von Schlegel. *Hermann: Ein Trauerspiel* (Hermann: A Tragedy, 1743) is less than seventy pages long and written in alexandrines, but surprisingly effective as a dramatic work, despite the relatively stereotypical setting.

The German-Roman conflict is drawn right into the middle of Hermann's own family through his brother Flavius who, with his Roman-sounding name, has acquired the culture of and sympathy with

the enemy. Similarly, there are other characters who find themselves in a crossfire between different cultural impulses, and as the conflict escalates, the themes of love, idealism, duty and patriotism are sharply contrasted with opportunism, pragmatism and cowardice. With Hermann emerging victorious from the forest after the battle, Flavius, who has all along been a hesitant traitor, asks his brother to kill him, “[a]nd do not tell posterity that I have lived” (Schlegel 1743, 65).<sup>31</sup> Before his untimely death at the age of thirty, Schlegel – by now the director of the National Theatre in Copenhagen (Kämmerer 1909, 8) – also managed to write another tragedy, *Canut*, whose themes of honour, nationalism, pride and treachery follow closely those of *Hermann*, but with a specifically Nordic rather than German subject matter.<sup>32</sup>

In Sweden, too, the theatre became an early channel for the Nordic revival. In 1737, the twenty-one-year-old Olof Celsius the younger (1716–1794) published the drama *Ingeborg*, based on Verelius’s edition of the *Hervarar Saga* (Breitholtz 1944, 77), which over seventy years earlier had triggered Olof Rudbeck’s fascination with Swedish antiquity. Only a year later, in 1738, the major Neoclassical poet and writer Olof von Dalin (1708–1763), brought out a somewhat parallel play entitled *Brynilda*. Both of these dramas, however, were essentially moulded in the French, Classicist style – the latter was heavily inspired by Racine’s *Andromaque* – and used the old Nordic material in a relatively superficial fashion. Still, they confirmed that the subject matter could be appropriate for art, despite a scepticism, expressed especially by Dalin, with regard to the position of the Rudbeckian hardliners. The same combination of Neo-Nordic and Neoclassical elements are found in the first Swedish novel, *Adalriks och Giöthildas äfventyr* (The Adventures of Adalrik and Giöthilda, 1742–44) by Jacob Mörk and Anders Törngren, which is partly based on Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla* (published by Peringskiöld the elder in 1697), but this time in the form of late-medieval court literature (Lönnroth and Delblanc 1988, II: 24).

In Britain, there was a similar artistic exploitation of ancient lore and legend, and here too an ambiguous blend was created, reflecting a certain confusion over which past ought to be idealised. Henry Purcell’s opera (or semi-opera) *King Arthur*, first performed in the early summer of 1691, and with a libretto by John Dryden, is a case in point. The opera is essentially concerned with the war between the native Britons and the invading Saxons, and the first scene begins with the Saxons making a sacrifice to their chief god Woden (Odin) before going into battle with the Britons, led by King Arthur.

But the plot soon involves a number of very different characters, such

<sup>31</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

<sup>32</sup> The work was first published in 1746.

as sirens, cupids, sylvans and nymphs, together with pastoral elements, from the mythological world of classical antiquity, creating a rather peculiar mixture of both northern and southern impulses. Furthermore, with the help of Saxon magic, “Britain’s mild clime” is for a while transformed into “Iceland and farthest Thule’s frost”, but is eventually saved by Venus herself, who decides that she will make England her new abode: “Fairest isle, all isles excelling, / Seat of pleasure and of love; / Venus here will choose her dwelling, / And forsake her Cyprian grove” (“Opera Guide”, 2011).

It is as if Dryden finds himself in a crossfire of cultural impulses and has problems deciding which to choose. As a result he ends up experimenting with unconventional mythological material, while at the same time retracting to safer ground by retaining elements from a tradition that feels more familiar and recognisable to both himself and his audience. Another striking feature is the similarity between Dryden’s libretto and Schlegel’s dramas discussed above: in both of these works there is a strong nationalist stance involving military heroes from the countries’ ancient past, and their fierce resistance against invasion from abroad. It is obvious, in other words, that the revival of the nation’s past is not only a theme for popular entertainment; it is also an important ingredient in a political and patriotic process.

Only four years later, the same subject matter was taken up by the poet and medic Sir Richard Blackmore (1654–1729), who was later to become Queen Anne’s personal physician. His epic poem *Prince Arthur: An Heroick Poem* (1695), the nearly three hundred pages of which can be something of a trial to a modern reader, but which achieved a quite considerable success, also wavers between different mythological traditions. Although the preface as well as the text itself reflects a relatively stereotyped, contemporary attitude in its many references to classical culture and its use of the heroic couplet, the plot and the main character, Alfred, who is really King William III in an idealised form, are British. The poem also contains very explicit parallels to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which had been published only a generation earlier.

Again, as in Dryden’s libretto, the Saxons are closely connected with the old Norse pantheon, and under Milton’s influence, Blackmore twins Lucifer and the god Thor in a way which is almost identical to the pairing of Satan and Beelzebub in *Paradise Lost*. In Blackmore’s poem, Lucifer “takes his Airy Flight” and lands in “*Lapland Alpes*”, “Where *Thor* resides, who heretofore by Lot / The Sovereign Rule o’er Winds, and Tempests got. / Here in strong Prisons bound with heavy Chains, / His howling, savage Subjects he restrains, / And in Eternal Din, and Uproar reigns” (Blackmore 1695, 6). In classical, Mediterranean fashion, then, the Norse pantheon and the North in general are associated with a primitive and even infernal sphere beyond civilisation; the Lapland reference, in particular, clearly draws on perceptions of evil and superstition. It would not take long,

however, before this overall picture would change, and the saga world and the pantheon of the North would be brought more positively into the fold of Britain's own heroic past.

A quarter of a century later, Blackmore published another work, whose different political focus was a reflection of recent events. Since *Prince Arthur*, the Hanoverian succession of 1714 had necessitated a change of attitude to the question of the Saxons, and in *Alfred: An Epick Poem* (1723), the poet had made a complete U-turn. The poem is dedicated to Prince, and later Crown Prince, Frederick of Hanover (1707–51), the grandchild of George I, and presents a story in which parallels between Alfred and the Prince are almost embarrassingly explicit. Alfred, the British hero, is for instance described in the dedication as “a Prince sprung from the ancient Saxon Race of your own native Land” (Blackmore 1723, no pag.), and the entire poem concerns Alfred's/the Prince's foreign travels and his dramatic return, during which he leads the struggle against the Danes, finds his father mortally wounded, and is proclaimed King after a heroic battle. Thus, as in *Prince Arthur*, the enemy, who are associated with the forces of “the Apostate” or Satan, are the tribes from the North.

But here, too, Blackmore quietly turns the tables, and in a way which may suggest not just political opportunism but possibly also a slowly changing view. Having put the Danes to flight and captured the Danish Queen and her daughter Elfitha, Alfred returns them to the Danish King Gunter, who, overwhelmed by Alfred's generosity decides to convert to Christianity. Then follows a peace settlement:

Next Day the royal Pair to Peace inclin'd  
 With fed'ral Rites a strict Alliance sign'd;  
 And by the God, whom Christian Realms adore,  
 To keep their solemn League religious swore;  
 By which the *Northern* Districts of the Land  
 Were all submitted to the *Dane's* Command,  
 While he a Kingdom did dependent own,  
 And annual Homage vow'd to *Alfred's* Throne;  
 That if the *Dane* should issueless Decease,  
 His Realms to *Alfred* might revert in Peace:  
*Britannia's* middle Regions, and the *West*  
 To *Alfred's* Sov'reign Pow'r subjected rest. (*Ibid.*, 447)

But that is not all; Alfred is interested in an even closer union:

The Kings embrac'd; and to his new Ally  
 Now did *Britannia's* Monarch thus apply;  
 That we in nearer Bonds may yet be ty'd  
 I ask *Elfitha* for my beauteous Bride,  
 Whose lovely Form and Qualities divine  
 To my admiring Eyes unrivall'd shine. (*Ibid.*)

In 1589, the young James VI of Scotland had married the Danish princess Anne, and a hundred years later, the future Queen Anne's wedding to the Danish Prince George had been given a public blessing with Henry Purcell's "Welcome Song". Blackmore, who in the dedication claims that he has played a more central role in bringing the House of Hanover to Britain "than I ever boasted of" (*ibid.*, no pag.), now sanctions once again the Scandinavian bond, while at the same time including Germany in this royal fellowship of northern countries.

As indicated above, Blackmore's poetry has not achieved canonical status, and despite a certain popularity, it was subjected to rather severe criticism, especially from such contemporary heavyweights as Sir William Temple and John Dennis. A year after the publication of *Prince Arthur*, the latter brought out *Remarks on a Book Entituled, Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem*, in which he discusses the qualities of the poem against typically eighteenth-century criteria that he obviously regards as timelessly valid, and finds it wanting. In his Preface to *Alfred* twenty-seven years later, however, Blackmore returns to Temple's and Dennis's criticism, and especially to one point, namely the assertion that it is impossible to base a Christian poem on histories about heathen gods. Blackmore's adamant claim that this is unproblematic makes him into an interestingly transitional figure, i.e. one who had liberated himself from what could be perceived as the straitjacket of the classical tradition, more than the general arbiters of taste at the time.

The growing scepticism against Mediterranean classicism is similarly apparent in another poem which, coincidentally, is also dedicated to "His Royal Highness Frederick, Prince of Wales". As discussed earlier, James Thomson had already shown an awareness of Lapland and the wild landscapes of the North in the influential epic poem *The Seasons* from 1726. In a later work, *Liberty: A Poem* (1735–36), the theme is more political and historical, but once again the movement is distinctly northbound. The poem is divided into five main sections, with each section introduced by a prose summary, and the narrative line throughout the text is that of the Goddess of Liberty's journey through history. The first three of these sections are concerned with Greece and Rome and the way in which liberty hesitantly reared its head before being lost like a flickering flame. Then the early Middle Ages bring a change:

From Rome the Goddess of Liberty goes among the Northern Nations; where, by infusing into them her spirit and general principles, she lays the ground-work of her future establishments; sends them in vengeance on the Roman empire now totally enslaved; and then, with Arts and Sciences in her train, quites earth during the dark ages [...]. (Thomson 1774, 50)

After a brief reappearance in the Italian Renaissance, Liberty then arrives in Great Britain (which for Thomson means Scotland as much

as England). Interestingly, he consistently uses the phrase “the North” about the force that refuses to budge under Roman pressure; even in the early stages of Roman dominance, it is as if Britain and the North are simply waiting for the right moment to welcome Liberty to her rightful home. As with Blackmore, it is also notable that Thomson accommodates the Angles and the Saxons into the ethnic melting-pot that will eventually produce the greatness of the British nation:

[...] from the bleak coast, that hears  
 The German ocean roar, deep-blooming, strong,  
 And yellow-hair'd, the blue-eyed Saxon came;  
 He came implor'd, but came with other aim  
 Than to protect. For conquest and defence  
 Suffices the same arm. With the fierce race  
 Pour'd in a fresh invigorating stream,  
 Blood, where unquell'd a mighty spirit glow'd.  
 [...]  
 Untamed  
 To the refining subtleties of slaves,  
 They brought an happy government along;  
 Form'd by that freedom, which, with secret voice,  
 Impartial Nature teaches all her sons. (*Ibid.*, 102–4)

Not long after, “the Danish Raven” arrives, “Fleet on fleet / Of barbarous pirates unremitting tore / The miserable coast” (*ibid.*, 105), but out of these many and often violent impulses, “the rich tide of English blood grew full” (*ibid.*, 106), a tide that is decidedly northern and that has left the South behind as a stage in a progressive development whose course had only just begun.

With the benefit of historical hindsight, it is hardly an exaggeration to claim that the centuries leading up to the mid-eighteenth century had provided the North with a launch pad that for the next two hundred years would rocket this cold corner of Europe into a position from which it would exert a decisive influence on the course of world history. The countdown was now under way, and it is to this phase of astonishing achievements in a wide range of areas that we must now turn.

### 3. The Great Watershed: 1750–1790

#### *The Problem of Progress*

Political and intellectual historians tend to regard the middle of the eighteenth century as a major watershed for at least two important reasons: it marks the beginning of the great transformation of western society called industrialisation, and it is the period when the modern world, represented first of all by the idea of progress, makes a breakthrough after roughly a century and a half of fermentation. Modernity, however, is not just characterised by mechanisation, innovation and progress, but also by its very opposite. Almost from the moment the idea of progress is generally adopted as a universal law applicable to a wide range of areas, a counter-movement springs to life, consistently undermining it. It is possible to argue, in other words, that the primary feature of modernity is precisely the tug of war between a series of mutually incompatible, or at least hostile, positions.

Nowhere does this ambiguous feature of modernity – this “cocktail of primitivism and progress” (Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes in Carruthers and Rawes eds. 2010, 4) – rise more clearly to the surface than in the North; nowhere does it produce a more vibrant dialectic between utopian and dystopian visions; and nowhere does it become more intimately involved with the search for national and regional identities. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, the North, in short, enters into a more than two-hundred-year-long and at times highly dramatic struggle to identify its own soul, in which forces of the rational and the irrational, the forward-looking and the backward-looking, the civilised and the primitive, the urban and the rural, constantly vie for supremacy. Thus it is perhaps also possible to argue that this fundamental tension caused a dynamic and creative drive that provided the North with its impressive momentum during the period in question. Perhaps it is also not a coincidence that these were the very societies that were in the vanguard of developing democratic government, the fundamental precondition of which was a non-stop debate about virtually all aspects of life.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the revival of the old Nordic culture had been gathering momentum for well over a century, and in the

years around 1750 it was just about to make another major leap forward. But at the same time, another element, with a more recent history, was being added to the growing and constantly self-enhancing significance of the North, namely the celebration of the wild and untouched northern landscape. Together, these two elements were going to create a treasure trove out of which the leading lights of western culture would find inspiration for their art, literature and music for a long period to follow, and thereby would help to position the North as rather more than a major cultural force; indeed this increasing cultural hegemony was a direct reflection of the political and military strength that was now accumulating in the region, especially through the steady, oak-like growth of Britain and Russia.

Around mid-century, Britain was very decisively tipping the political scales in Europe. Within its own borders, the score had been finally settled with regard to the claim to the throne. The Battle of Culloden in April 1746 had not only secured the position of the Hanoverians; it had also once and for all removed the Catholic threat, which had been a recurring issue ever since the Reformation. Most importantly, however, it brought Scotland – decisively and with an iron fist – under English control. There was no going back: the slow process of making the British Isles into one truly unified political and military, if not cultural, unit, was practically at an end.

On the international scene, too, the country was rapidly extending its imperial tentacles. India was conquered in 1757, and full control of the country was achieved thirteen years later; in 1759, Canada was effectively taken from the hands of the French with the victory of General James Wolfe at the Battle of Quebec; and at the end of the Seven Years' War, the Treaty of Paris in 1763 sealed this and a series of other disputes around the world, the general consequence of which was a decisive weakening of France and Spain, and a strengthening of Britain. And British dominance was not only apparent on the battlefield; the incipient industrialisation, which made a much better start here than on the Continent, would soon have a powerful knock-on effect on the economy. For the time being, however, the economy was far more dependent on another area, namely agriculture. Whereas Britain's enemy across the Channel remained conservative or even reactionary with regard to agricultural innovation, and thus experienced hunger and unrest that retarded economic development and laid the foundation for the coming cataclysm, Britain itself was laying the foundations for an agricultural revolution that was an essential prerequisite for its industrial counterpart (Fagan 2000, 103).

Just as Britain was strengthening the western flank of northern Europe, Russia was strengthening that of the east. In 1762, Tsar Peter III – a grandson of Peter the Great – was forced to abdicate for having withdrawn rather unheroically from the Seven Years' War. He was



immediately replaced by his own wife, Catherine. Like her famous predecessor half a century earlier, Catherine pursued a policy of expansion and modernisation, which not only earned her the epithet “the Great”; “Peter I in drag”<sup>1</sup> also ensured that Russia acquired a position as one of the greatest powers in Europe by updating administrative structures, opening up the country to western cultural impulses, and extending its territories by half a million square kilometres.

In this climate of a growing northern self-confidence, the tables in Europe were gradually being turned. Whereas traditionally the North had looked towards the South with admiration, imitated and recreated its cultural and political legacy, learned its languages and copied its art, it now increasingly turned in on itself and its own resources. Indeed, there were conspicuous examples of representatives from the South itself looking to the North with an attitude very different from that of earlier generations. One of these was a nobleman from Bordeaux in the south of France, Charles-Louis Montesquieu (1689–1755), who in 1748 published *The Spirit of the Laws*, which was to have an enormous impact on the view of the North, both in the North itself and in the South. It is difficult to imagine, however, that the impact would have been the same had the book been written by a northerner. Expressed in a language of apparently objective truth, Montesquieu in Book 14, “On the laws in their relation to the nature of the climate”, makes the observation that men are more vigorous in colder climates simply because “[t]he action of the heart and the reaction of the extremities of the fibers are in closer accord, the fluids are in a better equilibrium, the blood is pushed harder toward the heart and, reciprocally, the heart has more power” (Montesquieu 2000, 231–32). And these physiological characteristics are intimately connected with a moral superiority:

In southern climates, a delicate, weak, but sensitive machine gives itself up to a love which in a seraglio is constantly aroused and calmed; or else to a love which as it leaves women much more independent is exposed to a thousand troubles. In northern countries, a healthy and well-constituted but heavy machine finds its pleasures in all that can start the spirits in motion again: hunting, travels, war, and wine. You will find in the northern climates peoples who have few vices, enough virtues, and much sincerity and frankness. As you move toward the countries of the south, you will believe you have moved away from morality itself: the liveliest passions will increase crime; each will seek to take from others all the advantages that can favor these same passions. (*Ibid.*, 234)

The reference to the seraglio – with its associations to Muslim harems – seems almost to intimate a southern culture that has turned both feminine and decadent, and it is placed in sharp relief to the masculine Germanic culture that the revival of Tacitus and the Hermann legend must have

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is used in Wilson 2009, 195.

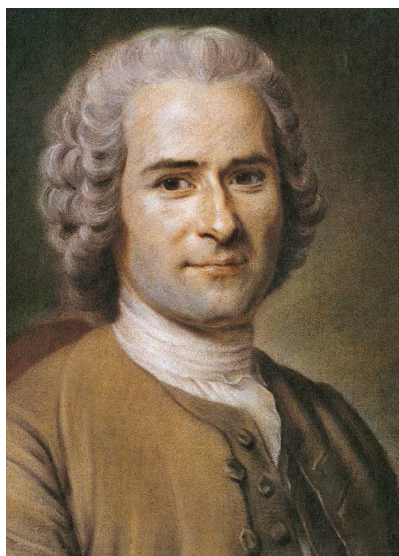
brought to Montesquieu's attention. "In the time of the Romans," he claims, clearly having read his Tacitus, "the peoples of northern Europe lived without arts, without education, almost without laws, and still, with only the good sense connected with the coarse fibers of these climates, they maintained themselves with remarkable wisdom against the Roman power until they came out of their forests to destroy it" (*ibid.*, 235). A firm believer in eternal and rational laws based on scientific principles, Montesquieu reached conclusions that were received with acclamation in the North; and in the South, too, his lucid and convincing style made his message virtually unassailable. He introduced, then, that fundamental polarity between North and South that became a persistent theme in European culture and politics for the next century and a half.

Ironically, Montesquieu happened to die in 1755, the very year in which southern Europe also suffered a massive blow in the form of a natural disaster: on Saturday 1 November, an earthquake, in combination with a tsunami and a huge fire, destroyed Lisbon – the most flamboyantly wealthy and magnificent capital in Europe, just as the gilded churches, cathedrals and squares were full of people celebrating All Saints' Day. Tens of thousands of people died as nearly the entire city collapsed and burned. Even before the disaster, Portugal had been a colossus with feet of clay: for the last fifty years roughly a thousand tonnes of Brazilian gold had flooded the country (Hamblin 2009, 9), building a splendid but fragile financial structure that now came tumbling down, further weakening the country as a political and economic power in Europe. In addition, the earthquake quickly became a test case in the ongoing debate between religion and science, raising questions about progress and man's ability to control his surroundings.

Neither of this would have been Montesquieu's concern as he lay dying a few months earlier, but paradoxically and perhaps unwittingly, he opened ajar the door to a Nietzschean reevaluation of values that would – in a more figurative sense than the Lisbon earthquake – rock the foundations of European civilisation. The figure who would really throw that door open was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). In October 1749, only a year after the publication of Montesquieu's groundbreaking work, and while walking to Paris, Rousseau happened to read the gazette *Mercure de France*, where he came across an announcement of a prize essay by the Academy of Dijon.<sup>2</sup> According to his *Confessions*, the question was a short and simple one: "Has the progress of the sciences and arts tended to corrupt or purify morals?", and he adds: "At the moment of that reading I saw another universe and I became another man" (Rousseau 1995, 294). In this St. Paul-like moment of epiphanic insight, later called the illumination of Vincennes, Rousseau

<sup>2</sup> Rousseau later remembered the episode as having taken place in the summer and in excessively hot weather, but it has since been established that it occurred in October at barely 15°C (Damrosch 2007, 213).

suddenly realised the erroneous ways of the Encyclopaedists and all other believers in science and progress, in other words the very same intellectual and enlightened camp to which he himself belonged. His contribution won the competition, and was published as a pamphlet the following year.



Few thinkers have had a more profound and more varied impact on the social and aesthetic values of the modern world than Rousseau. This portrait is a pastel replica from Maurice Quentin de La Tour's portrait from 1753.

Rousseau matured late as a thinker, and *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (usually called the *First Discourse*), published when he was thirty-eight, was his first major publication. Also, it should be read in conjunction with *A Discourse on Inequality* (the so-called *Second Discourse*) from 1755, which was his response to yet another prize competition from the Academy and Dijon and the result of yet another intellectual epiphany.

*The Second Discourse* is a slim volume of less than a hundred pages, but with an explosive content. In simple terms, Rousseau turned the idea of progress on its head, presenting a utopian vision not of the future, but of a primitive past, before man took possession of the land, and civil society came into being. Performing what was truly a paradigm shift, he regarded civilisation itself – culture, learning, social and political institutions – as the very source of human misery and inequality, while at the same time celebrating a state of nature, governed by instinct rather than reason, as the road to a happy and uncomplicated existence. Influenced partly by a growing number of travel accounts from cultures beyond the pale of civilisation, Rousseau saw the savage and the civilised man as a rather unequal match as long as the latter could

gather all his machines around him; but if you would like to see an even more unequal match, pit the two together naked and unarmed, and you will soon see the advantages of having all one's forces constantly at one's command, of being always prepared for any eventuality, and of always being, so to speak, altogether complete in oneself. (Rousseau 1984, 82)

Rousseau had designed a new version of the Fall – a Fall that he posited had become more entrenched with every new step in the direction of modernity and progress. From an enlightened point of view, his claims were outrageous, but Voltaire and his supporters were soon forced to take him seriously. The *Second Discourse* had an argumentative force that could not be ignored. As Rousseau's biographer Leo Damrosch puts it: "The *First Discourse* had made Rousseau a celebrity; this one revealed his greatness" (Damrosch 2007, 235).

Thus was born a nostalgia for the natural man, the noble savage, who was complete in himself and at home in a world far removed, as Wordsworth would later put it, from "the din of towns and cities". Within a European context, there was really only one way to look in order to find what might still be left of these qualities – northwards; and there is no doubt that intellectuals in the North were quick to see the potential for exploiting the ideological implications of Rousseau's assertions. In Scotland, for instance, which around the middle of the century was buzzing with philosophical debate on a range of issues, such bright intellectual stars as Adam Smith, Lord Kames, William Robertson and David Hume gave important contributions to the discussion about man's position in society and in history, removing it from its traditionally religious and theological moorings, and seeing man as a creature constantly changing with his natural and material surroundings. In all of these debates, the question of progress was, directly or indirectly, a crucial element, and into this academic hotbed impulses from Rousseau and the Continent were soon absorbed.

In the present context, however, one member of the Edinburgh intelligentsia is of particular interest, namely the philosopher and historian Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), who was born in Perthshire, bordering on the Highlands, and who was himself a speaker of Gaelic. Serving as an army chaplain in the Highlands at the time of the Battle of Culloden, he rejected the contemporary Scottish Enlightenment view of the Highlanders as "uncouth barbarians" whose culture ought to be subdued (Herman 2006, 211). On the contrary, and in combination with his later reading of Rousseau, he leapt to their defence in his great work, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). But he did not stop there. His realisation of the powerful qualities of the Highland tradition, now threatened with extinction, resulted in

flights of almost romantic poetry in praise of primitive peoples everywhere, but particularly in the ancient world and among Native Americans. Ferguson found in them what he had found in his Highland regiment: honour, integrity and courage, which commercial society, with its overspecialisation and mental mutilation, destroyed. (*Ibid.*)

Ferguson published his book only a year before the publication, also in Edinburgh, of the first volume of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*ibid.*, 62). This powerful symbol of the belief in the accumulation of scientific knowledge as a means to progress, clashes nicely with Ferguson's work, whose Part II offers a respectful presentation "Of the history of rude nations" (Ferguson 1819, 135). A later section, "Of the history of literature", similarly and unabashedly credits the oral literary tradition of all nations with the same ability to express the sentiments of the community as do the sophisticated writers of civilised societies (*ibid.*, 309–23), thus anticipating Johann Gottfried von Herder's later celebration of folk literature. Ferguson may also have sensed the transformative momentum of another recent Edinburgh publication, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), by the young collector-cum-poet James Macpherson to be dealt with later.

### ***"A Taste of Flora and the Country Green"***

It is no coincidence that "science" is often introduced by the adjective "natural". Nature and science are two sides of the same coin, and the interest in one is profoundly connected with an interest in the other. The second half of the eighteenth century built upon and expanded the foundations laid in the preceding century. Henry More and Thomas Burnet had tentatively explored a radically different concept of nature, and they were followed by scientists, the first generation of the philosophers of the sublime, and of landscape architects who initiated a radically new fashion in garden design (the so-called landscape garden or English garden).

As to the view of nature, the common denominator of these new trends was what Adrian von Buttlar calls "*befreiter Natur*" or "liberated Nature" (Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 113), that is a natural scenery that as far as possible is, or appears to be, free from the influence of human interference. Similarly, this new, idealised scenery was seen as closely connected with the North and the northern national character, and as fundamentally contrasted with the manicured version of nature exemplified by the French baroque gardens. The fifty-year period after 1750 was thus the period when the majority of the great landscape gardens were established. A few of them were built as far north and east as Scandinavia and Russia, and some as far south as France, such as Ermenonville, founded in 1763 and made a place

of pilgrimage from the 1780s onwards because of Rousseau's grave on an island in the park. But the fashion had its major impact in Germany and Britain. The English Grounds of Wörlitz in present-day Saxony-Anhalt were started in the 1760s, eventually comprising a vast area of 142 km<sup>2</sup>, whereas the gardens at Hohenheim and Munich were started in the 1770s and in 1789 respectively.

In Britain, the landscape garden movement is primarily associated with Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716–83), whose career started around 1740, when he was appointed head gardener at Stowe, and who in the following decades was responsible for redesigning the gardens of a large number of estates (Quest-Ritson 2003, 132–33). At the same time, major works were published in Britain as well as on the Continent, promulgating the new ideas. In Germany Christian Hirschfeld published a five-volume work entitled *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (The Theory of Garden Design) between 1779 and 1785, which reached a wide audience in its French translation. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the English garden was not only an expression of a new aesthetic taste. It also had an important practical and economic side: the new design created large tracts for pasture, which actually yielded considerably better income than arable land; and it provided an ideal environment for hunting, shooting and fishing.

The English garden, in other words, far from being only a beauty spot for leisure and enjoyment, was actually a highly flexible and profitable production unit that formed part of a modern agricultural philosophy (*ibid.*, 139–40). William Mason's long didactic poem *The English Garden* (1772–82) is a good example of this combination of the beautiful and the useful, celebrating at least three closely interwoven elements: the beauty of the English, picturesque landscape, as epitomised in the carefully designed but natural-looking garden; the world of the British gentry; and Britain as a nation of freedom and democracy. But Mason's declared ideal remains the untouched landscape, and he personifies Nature as disliking human interference: "Great Nature scorns control; she will not bear / One beauty foreign to the spot or soil / She gives to thee to adorn; 'tis thine alone / To mend, not change her features" (Mason 1782, 4). If read as a metaphorical political statement, it reflects a thoroughly British, Burkean and anti-revolutionary attitude.

Despite Mason's claim, however, the English garden was still very much a product of human intervention; it could even be seen as a man-made counterpart to the original garden created by God Himself. Representatives of the rapidly growing natural sciences were, however, already eagerly exploring nature in its original untouched state. Count de Buffon, publishing his giant, thirty-five-volume *Natural History* from 1749 until his death in 1788, became in effect the father of evolutionism a century before Darwin. He opened up new vistas in zoology and geology,

and questioned the taxonomical system of the contemporary giant, Carl Linnaeus, whose *Systema Naturae* came out in its tenth edition in 1758, describing more than 12,000 species of plants and animals. Linnaeus became a celebrity of science, winning the admiration of Rousseau as well as Goethe, and after his death in 1778 (six months before Rousseau's), his herbarium was sold to a wealthy Englishman for a thousand guineas, on the recommendation of Britain's leading botanist and President of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820) (O'Brian 1997, 240). The Linnean Society was established in London ten years later. Botanical and zoological interest in the North is also apparent in the Rev. John Lightfoot's publication of a *Flora Scotia* in 1777, and in the more ambitious *Arctic Zoology* (1784–87) by the Welsh naturalist and antiquarian Thomas Pennant (Pennant 1998, xvi and xxiii).

The study of plants and animals soon proved to have explosive potential, especially with regard to its religious implications, but this was not the only area in which science was stepping on the toes of tradition. Scientists now gradually began to investigate the earth itself, its composition, history and climate, thereby essentially founding such disciplines as geology and glaciology. From as early as the 1750s, the Scottish farmer James Hutton (1726–97) – later known as the father of geology – had been paying close attention to rocks and minerals, and step by step he developed theories about their formation and development. In 1785 he eventually read a groundbreaking paper to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, which three years later was published in the transactions of the society as *Theory of the Earth*. Here, in a way similar to that of Buffon, he formulated the principles for a view of the earth as the product of a long and turbulent but natural evolution, introducing such a revolutionary concept as deep or geological time, which brought him in direct conflict with orthodox religion as well as other scientists. Similarly, Buffon had in 1778 brought out *Les Epoques de la nature* (Epochs of Nature), in which he presented the idea that the earth had been formed in a series of six stages. By this time, the German mineralogist Abraham Gottlob Werner had also brought out *Von den äusserlichen Kennzeichen der Fossilien* (*On the External Characters of Fossils*), in which he set out his now obsolete theories, collected under the term Neptunism, about the earth's origin.

In 1760, the Swiss cartographer and geologist Gottlieb Sigmund Gruner brought out a three-volume work, *Die Eisgebirge des Schweizerlandes* (The Glaciers of Switzerland), in which he rightly complains that no other “worthy writers have so far taken the trouble of giving a comprehensive description of the glaciers” (Gruner 1760, I: xiii).<sup>3</sup> Though hardly breaking new ground in terms of scientific discoveries, Gruner is interesting for at least two reasons: he collects and systematises all relevant knowledge about

<sup>3</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

glaciers to date, speculating among other things on their origin, their age, different ice qualities, their potential usefulness, the danger they represent, and their altitude. With regard to the latter, he also shows that he is up to date on contemporary scientific literature by referring to the recently published German version of *The Natural History of Norway* by the Bergen bishop Erik Pontoppidan, who makes the rather spectacular mistake of estimating the tallest Norwegian mountains at around 5,400 metres above sea level (*ibid*, III: 20).<sup>4</sup> More importantly, however, he combines scientific curiosity with aesthetic appreciation. In the third volume, for instance, in a chapter entitled “On the Beauty of the Glaciers”, he depicts their sublime enormity: “The beauty of the glaciers is [...] particularly a subject for the poets. From their highest but mostly insurmountable summits, the eye can travel to the remotest regions [...] . Here a sudden and terrible gorge and monstrous, dark depths greet the mind with great fear and fright. [...] You think you touch the sky with your hands. You rise above the clouds” (*ibid*, 15–16).<sup>5</sup> The passage could have been a description of a painting from more than fifty years later – Caspar David Friedrich’s famous *The Wanderer above the Clouds*.

1760 also sees another example of an interest in geology and glaciology combined with a fascination for the aesthetics of the Alps themselves. In this year, and possibly inspired by the fact that Gruner’s work had just come out, the twenty-year-old Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740–99) discovered in the unapproachable and ice-covered mountain ranges “a new world – a sort of ‘earthly paradise’” (Macfarlane 2004, 116). De Saussure went on to become a pioneer of geology, glaciology and Alpine studies generally, and in the 1780s and 90s published the large and influential scientific work *Voyages dans les Alpes* (Journey to the Alps). In combination with Rousseau’s celebration of the Alpine countryside, the works of Gruner, Saussure and others would for several generations draw hordes of scientists, tourists and nature lovers to mountainous and icy regions that so far had only appealed to hunters and commercial and political adventurers. The landscapes explicitly associated with the North, including those of the polar regions were, in other words, suddenly acquiring scientific as well as aesthetic attention.

It is against such a background that Iceland, already a place of fascination for northernists and antiquarians, also became interesting in other ways. Politically, there is no doubt that Britain kept a keen eye on the island to the north, and regarded it as strategically important and as a bridgehead to the Arctic. Like Ireland, with which Britain had long and painful experience, Iceland was definitely within the emerging empire’s sphere of interest, and on several occasions in the past there had been

<sup>4</sup> The highest mountain in Norway is actually 2470 metres above sea level.

<sup>5</sup> Translated from the German by PF.



talk of a British annexation. Henry VIII had received an outright offer from a Danish king desperate for cash, who was willing to sell it for a hundred thousand florins, and in the mid 1780s the question of a take-over appeared again.<sup>6</sup> But nothing materialised, and for some time the main interest focused on scientific rather than political matters.

With an ample supply of glaciers, geysirs and volcanoes, the remote island was a natural laboratory in itself. As early as 1746, the Hamburg “Burgomaster” John Andersson, who had briefly visited the country, had written *Nachrichten von Island, Grönland und der Strasse Davis* (An Account from Iceland, Greenland and the Davis Strait), a work characterised a few decades later as “far from being such as may be relied on with confidence” (Von Troil 1780, vii). In 1752, however, the Danish lawyer Niels Horrebow, who had spent two years in the country, published *Tilforladelige Efterretninger om Island* (*The Natural History of Iceland*), interestingly in the same year as Pontoppidan’s work on Norway, which was soon translated into several languages. The English 1758 edition is a handsome large-format volume, with a subtitle that, in line with the topographical tradition of the time, underlines the country’s natural features: “Containing a particular and accurate Account of the different Soils, burning Mountains, Minerals, Vegetables, Metals, Stones, Beasts, Birds, and Fishes; together with the Disposition, Customs, and Manner of Living of the Inhabitants” (Horrebow 1758, title page).<sup>7</sup> In the preface, Horrebow rightly claims that Iceland “deserves in a great measure to be rescued from the obscurity in which it has long drooped” (*ibid.*, iii), and in doing so, he provides a mass of information, including sixty pages of meteorological observations.

There is no doubt that Horrebow’s and Pontoppidan’s natural histories, both of which quickly reached an international audience, directed British and continental scientists to the North, and this interest was further facilitated by the significant contributions of northern scientists themselves. Linnaeus had already acquired numerous followers, and one of them was Joseph Banks, who by 1772 had still not become the godfather of British science, but at the age of twenty-nine had just returned from Captain Cook’s first voyage around the world, bringing with him a breathtaking collection of botanical and zoological specimens.

Banks immediately became a celebrity, even earning the admiration of the ageing Linnaeus, but the plan to go with Cooke on his second voyage did not materialise, and on 12 July 1772, on the day a year after his return from the Pacific, he set off for Scotland and Iceland. On board were some of the team from the Cook expedition, including Linnaeus’s Swedish

<sup>6</sup> Wawn 2000, 16.

<sup>7</sup> The English editions, published three years apart, of Horrebow and Pontoppidan were both published by the London publisher A. Linde, in large, impressive formats.

disciple Daniel Solander, who despite the waning summer collected a slim *Flora Islandica* during the stay (O'Brian 1997, 165). Another Swede was the young Uno von Troil (1746–1803), “First Chaplain to his Swedish Majesty” (Von Troil 1780, xiv), son of the Archbishop of Uppsala and himself destined for the same office. Some years later von Troil published his *Letters on Iceland* (1780), in which he describes the ascent, at the end of September, of the summit of Hekla, where a major eruption had taken place between 1766 and 1768, and where the group performed a series of thermometer and barometer readings.

In the same year as Bank's visit, another important book on Iceland was also published. Eggert Ólafsson's two-volume *Reise igiennem Island* (Journey through Iceland) clearly contributed not only to the construction of an Icelandic national identity (as pointed out by Karin Schaer), but also, though written in Danish, was “read and received by the majority of the Northern European educated elite” (*ibid.*), and removed some of the cloud of supernatural mystery that had always surrounded the island.<sup>8</sup> Just like Banks and his party, for instance, Ólafsson, whose journey took place in the early 1750s, offers a straightforward and rational description of his ascent of Hekla, which had traditionally been shrouded in a mist of infernal imagery (*ibid.*, 134). It is a paradox, however, that Ólafsson's account contributed to an Icelandic sense of national identity, because according to a later traveller, John Barrow Jr., the purpose of Ólafsson and his co-traveller Bjarne Povelsen's journey had been to survey the whole of Iceland for the Danish king, thereby bringing it even more firmly under the control of the Danish government (Barrow 1835, xv).

Infernal imagery, however, was not enough to describe the events in Iceland that started in the summer of 1783 and that would compete with the Lisbon earthquake a generation earlier with regard to drama and impact. The volcanic eruption of Mount Laki in the south-east of the island, which started on 8 June and lasted for eight months, would eventually prove to be the most lethal volcanic eruption in recorded history. In Iceland alone about 9,000 people (about a quarter of the population), and more than half the cattle died, and the damage was such that the Danish authorities considered abandoning the country entirely by evacuating the rest of the population (Hamblyn 2009, 115–16). Furthermore, major parts of Europe experienced an intensely hot summer in which a thick, sulphurous and “blood-coloured” haze filled the air, followed by an equally cold winter, and death rates rose dramatically in a number of countries affected by the fallout. At first, scientists were unable to explain the highly unusual weather; it took nearly two months

<sup>8</sup> Ref. Karin Schaer's article “From Hell to Homeland: Eggert Ólafsson's *Reise igiennem Island* and the Construction of Icelandic Identity”, in Jakobsson (ed.) 2009, 132. For a more general account of the perception of Iceland, see Sumarlídi R. Isleifsson in Klitgaard Povlsen (ed.) 2007, 111–28.

before the British and continental press brought news about the eruption in Iceland, and even then this was only one of many possible explanations that were being discussed. It was primarily Benjamin Franklin, who found himself in Paris, who eventually identified the Mount Laki eruption as the source of the phenomenon. Thus, as with the ash clouds over Europe in the spring of 2010, Iceland caught the attention of the rest of the world, especially the natural scientists.

The drama of 1783–84 had certainly been registered by the later peer and politician John Thomas Stanley (1766–1850), who in the summer of 1789 arrived in Iceland, and may well have stimulated his curiosity for the country. As a young and enthusiastic scientist, he had most likely also read Horrebow and von Troil as part of his preparations, and as a member of the Edinburgh Royal Society, he was certainly aware that the powerful President of the Royal Society in London, Joseph Banks, had paid a similar visit seventeen years earlier. Stanley's scientific interest was mostly in the "spectacular ebullitions of Geysir", the large Geysir in south-western Iceland that has given name to the entire phenomenon, and back in Edinburgh he published two papers on it (Wawn 2000, 41). But furnished with thermometers, barometers and other modern scientific equipment, like Banks and Ólafsson before him, he also scaled a glacier, the Snæfellsjökull, one of the great natural landmarks in Iceland, on the long Snæfellsnes peninsula on the west coast. It is an interesting coincidence that the ascent took place on 14 July 1789 (Barrow Jr. 1835, 263–75). Thus, as angry mobs were storming the Bastille in Paris, kick-starting the Revolution, a group of young British scientists conquered a 1370-metre-high glacier with a view of the Arctic Ocean.

### *Discovering Britain's North*

The popularity of the landscape garden and the growing interest in the natural sciences, both of which generated and were generated by northern impulses, were nevertheless very much compatible with the urban civilisation that is generally regarded as the dominant characteristic of the eighteenth century. In the British context, for instance, London has probably never before or since been more important as the self-evident hub of the nation. Despite the fact that the landed gentry found itself at the peak of its power, this power – though based in the resources of the countryside – was increasingly channeled through centralised political, financial and cultural institutions, delineating the first contours of the modern, complex social machinery that is more usually associated with the following century and industrialisation.

But British society was changing rapidly in the decades leading up

to the French Revolution. London, with a population of 700,000 in 1750 was quickly approaching a million by the end of the century, and a string of future industrial cities, which had no more than 25,000–30,000 inhabitants at mid century, were growing at a rapid pace. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this is precisely the period when the search began in earnest for clear-cut alternatives to urban growth. A sense of loss, combined with a sense of nostalgia, thus lay at the root of the counter-movement that commenced around the middle of the century, and that had a concrete and spatial as well as a temporal and abstract dimension: concrete and spatial in the sense that it advocated a drive away from the urban centres in the direction of the countryside and other remote areas; and temporal and abstract in the sense that it sought a qualitatively different reality, whose most obvious model was to be found in the world of the past. And almost invariably, this search had a northerly orientation.

Against this background, it is an interesting coincidence that the discovery of the Lake District, or at least the first literary description of the region, can be accredited to a man who combined the love of nature – he studied Gruner as well as Linnaeus keenly (Lytton Sells 1980, 115 and 135) – with a scholarly interest in the national and Nordic past, namely the leading British poet of the mid-eighteenth century, Thomas Gray (1716–71). In the late summer of 1767, two years after having made an extensive tour of the Scottish Highlands, Gray and his friend Thomas Wharton set out on a tour of the Lake District, travelling from Newcastle to Carlisle, and from there to Penrith, Keswick and Cockermouth (*ibid.*, 117), where Wordsworth would be born only three years later. Gray does not seem to have produced any writing from this trip, but in 1769, he and Wharton repeated the journey, spending altogether ten days in the area, and this time he kept a detailed journal, depicting his numerous excursions in a style that was soon to become stereotyped, and even using the fashionable Claude glass to select the right views (*ibid.*, 128–30).

Nearly twenty years before, Gray had of course written “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), which has often been seen as one of the seminal texts of the early Romantic movement, especially in its emotional commemoration of ordinary individuals. The journal, which was not published until 1775, adds another Romantic dimension, namely that of nature worship, which in England came to be centred precisely around the Lake District. This explicit celebration had thus been under way for some time when Wordsworth and others made it famous around the turn of the century. It is obvious, however, that by 1770 the new view of nature had not yet taken hold. An interesting work in this connection is Arthur Young’s *A Six Months Tour through the North of England* (1770), which throughout retains a kind of dual focus by constantly changing between descriptions of different scenery, i.e. wilderness, parklands and agricultural areas. It is almost as if the author is unable to decide whether to adopt

an aesthetic or a utilitarian gaze at the landscape. In another work from the same period and from an even more northerly area, Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), the author hardly spends as much as a sentence on the natural landscape at all.

But this was soon to change. William Gilpin (1724–1804), who had grown up in Cumberland and who more than anyone is regarded as the philosopher of the picturesque, was already circulating his aesthetic theories, which he had been developing for twenty-five years. Thus the interest gradually spread. In 1777 and 1778, the watercolourist Thomas Hearne (1744–1817) travelled in the Lake District and Scotland respectively, combining, like Gray, an interest in the landscape and the past. Having been commissioned to illustrate a major publishing venture, *The Antiquities of Great Britain*, Hearne made careful studies of landscape as well as architecture and thus provided a wealth of material – fifty-two plates for the first volume alone – that was soon to inspire later artists (Hill 1996, 5). And there was undoubtedly a market; when it was published in 1786, it contained a list of several hundred subscribers, including “His and Her Majesty”, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Joseph Banks (Hearne 1786, no pag.).

And a new phenomenon was also under way, one which soon acquired a new term – ‘tourism’ – and many advocates who realised its potential. Tourism, especially when connected with the celebration of natural scenery, was also linked to an increasing democratisation of travel: the Lake District and the Highlands of Scotland were free for anyone to enjoy, and so the new fashion of nature worship would cut across social divisions. This fundamental attitude is not just visible in Gilpin's picturesque, outlined in *Observations on the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1786), which had a broad and non-elitist appeal; it is also the underlying tone in one of the first travel guides, Thomas West's *A Guide to the Lakes* (1778), whose subtitle extends a hearty welcome to everyone: *Dedicated to the Lovers of Landscape Studies, and to All Who Have Visited, or Intend to Visit the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*. This communal approach continues in the first paragraph, which claims that since persons of taste etc. have come to appreciate “the northern parts of the BRITISH Empire, the curious of all ranks have caught the spirit of visiting the same” (West 1778, 1). West even includes those who are ill and need to convalesce: “The water is pure as the air, and on that account recommends itself to the valetudinarian” (*ibid.*, 5).

West's guide became a standard work not least because he included ample quotations from Thomas Gray's journal, and it is especially striking how the description of Grasmere – Wordsworth's future place of residence and source of poetic inspiration – has all the features of the romantic utopia:

The bosom of the mountains, spreading here into a broad bason, discover in the midst GRASMERE WATER; its margin is hollowed into small bays, with eminences; some of rock, some of soft turf, that half conceal, and vary the figure of the little lake they command: From the shore, a low promontory pushes itself far into the water, and on it stands a white village, with a parish church rising in the midst of it: Hanging inclosures, corn fields, and meadows, green as an emerald, with their trees, and hedges, and cattle, fill up the whole space from the edge of the water: And just opposite to you is a large farm house, at the bottom of a steep smooth lawn, embosomed in old woods, which climb half-way up the mountains sides [*sic*], and discover above a broken line of crags that crown the scene. Not a single red tile, nor flaring gentleman's house, or garden-wall, break in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise; but all is peace, rusticity, and happy poverty, in its neatest, most becoming attire. (*Ibid.*, 82–83)

West's book was appropriately published in the year of Rousseau's death, and seems to have made the region into a place of pilgrimage for the Swiss philosopher's disciples. One of them was incidentally the twenty-year-old William Wilberforce (1759–1833), who the following year – his final year at Cambridge – wrote an extensive journal from the first of his many journeys to the Lakes, where he also met up with his Cambridge friend William Cookson, Wordsworth's uncle on his mother's side. Thus, as early as 1780, the contours were already visible of the Lakes as a national shrine, praised by the country's leading lights.

However, while the Lakes were acquiring a status in England as a Rousseuesque and sentimental utopia, with a population that led a simple and happy life in the bosom of nature, things were radically different north of the border to Scotland, and especially so in the Highlands and Islands, where the Clearances following the Battle of Culloden were already having a devastating effect. This essential aspect of Scottish history is described with appropriate anger and frustration in the account *Travels in the Western Hebrides from 1782 to 1790* by the Rev. John Lanne Buchanan. The book was only published in 1793, when the French Revolution was well underway, and it is striking that Buchanan, who was travelling for the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (Buchanan 1793, 9), seemed to combine revolutionary ideas, investigative journalism and ideas of Christian charity in a travelogue that is also a topographical account. As Buchanan himself points out, this extreme western and northern part of the British Isles – including the community on the tiny island of St. Kilda out in the Atlantic Ocean – is more or less a white space on the map for the majority of English readers. In addition, the almost exclusive use of Gaelic in the islands created an efficient language barrier for any English-speaking visitors.

England, the Lake Distric and the Scottish Highlands thus came to represent various degrees of northernness within the British Isles, and with their wildness and remoteness, the Highlands bridged the gap to the Far North in the minds of most Englishmen. At the same time, this inherent contrast was used to remind the people of southern Britain that they had

plenty to be thankful for, as in the topographical poem *The Fleece* (1757) by the Welsh clergyman and poet John Dyer (1699–1757):

With grateful heart, ye British swains, enjoy  
Your gentle seasons and indulgent clime.  
Lo, in the sprinkling clouds, your bleating hills  
Rejoice with herbage, while the horrid rage  
Of winter irresistible o'erwhelms  
Th' Hyperborean tracts [...]. (Dyer 1757, 28)

### *The Grand Tour and the North*

The discovery of Britain's North as a travel destination should also be seen in relation to another phenomenon of the time, namely the Grand Tour. Ever since the second half of the seventeenth century, young and wealthy gentlemen – mostly aristocrats – from the northern nations had spent a year or two travelling in southern Europe. The Grand Tour as an *informal* institution gained its popularity alongside and in close connection with the development of a set of *formal* institutions – the universities – whose social, political and scientific importance was rapidly rising. The Grand Tour was, in effect, a university on wheels, a practical supplement to the theoretical knowledge acquired at Oxford, Leipzig or Uppsala, and as such an essential part of the education of the future elite.

The Tour was a true child of the Renaissance; with Italy and especially Rome as its central destination, it was largely a journey back to the cradle of civilisation, and the cradle of empire. For eighteenth-century Britain, in particular, frequently prefixed by the adjective “Augustan”, the imperial parallels were eagerly embraced. The point of departure for the young northern travellers was, as it is generally perceived, a profound admiration for the achievements of Mediterranean culture, and an ambition to imitate and adopt it for their own. The label “Neoclassicism” is normally understood as reflecting precisely this northern humility towards the superior culture of the South. This picture may, however, be in need of considerable modification.

First of all, it is important to remember that the element of northern admiration was almost exclusively concerned with history, i.e. the *legacy* of Antiquity, and not with the eighteenth-century South. As is clearly visible from numerous contemporary paintings from Rome and other historical cities, the northern travellers must have largely experienced them as places of ruin and downfall, in other words as memorials of a greatness long gone. In addition, they were frequently characterised by poverty, unemployment and other social ills. In her analysis of the Tour, Chloe Chard points out the often ambivalent and contradictory reactions to southern reality that many of the travellers described (Chard 1999, 47). Thus the travellers'

observations could, for instance, easily fall in with such perceptions as those of Montesquieu, who had connected the North with diligence and freedom, and the South with laziness and slavery.

It should also be underlined that the Reformation had left deep scars in the relationship between North and South, and that there was – especially in Britain – an old and powerful anti-Catholicism, which was kept alive in the latter part of the century through the Gothic novel, which will be discussed in more detail below. In several of the travel accounts from the period, this attitude is clearly visible, together with a generally growing pride in the culture of the North itself. Against this background, Italy was superior only to the extent that it expressed an echo of past greatness. In fact, it is an open question to what extent such labels as “Augustan” and “Neoclassical” necessarily and primarily signalled the kind of admiration suggested above. With Britain’s growing stature and self-confidence, there are indications that British travellers rather regarded their own Augustan and Neoclassical achievements as superior to those of Italy, seeing – under the inspiration of the idea of progress – the Roman Empire as a useful and interesting stage on the road to even bigger things and one that had definitely been superseded.

This fundamental ambivalence with regard to the Grand Tour is also suggested by the fact that it was always surrounded by a measure of controversy. Rather than being admired and idealised, it was repeatedly made the object of hateful attacks and accusations that it was a stereotyped cliché. In his book about Venice and the Grand Tour, Bruce Redford mentions how the English poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744) in satirical couplets scathingly describes the Tour as an arena for debauchery and decadence (Redford 1996, 5–7).

Behind this attack lies once more a fundamental scepticism as to the value of the Mediterranean culture in general, and an implicit question as to whether it could measure up to the safe and trustworthy qualities of home. It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that the hot and voluptuous South, as Redford points out, is rather consistently portrayed as the figure of a temptress, who may manage to ensnare blue-eyed northerners, but who is fundamentally irrational and irresponsible. As a consequence, the South is more or less transformed into an enemy to be either avoided or conquered, and rather than allow himself to be overwhelmed, the traveller should use the encounter with the South to gain personal growth and experience for the benefit of domestic improvement. Considering the importance of Rome for the eighteenth century, there is a nice irony in the fact that even Edward Gibbon (1737–94), the author of the majestic *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), does not hesitate in preferring Britain to Italy. Having visited the latter, he returned to England, he says,



“a better Englishman than I went out. Tho’ I have seen more elegant manners and more refined arts I have perceived so many real evils mixed with these tinsel advantages, that they have only served to make the plain honesty and blunt freedom of my own country appear still more valuable to me”. (Quoted in Redford 1996, 2)

Thus in the late eighteenth century, the North not only continued to develop an appreciation of its own natural and cultural qualities; it also actively played on the contrast between those of itself and those of the South. And this northern trend was to be underlined even further by the continuing exploration of the world even further to the north.

### *Arctic Adventures*

Although the second half of the eighteenth century did not see as intense an activity in terms of Arctic exploration as it had at certain periods in the past and as it would in the early nineteenth century, the far North was inevitably drawn, step by step, into the orbit of the northern nations. The main drive behind this process was the way in which science, geographical exploration and commercial interests pooled their resources together, or made use of each other’s findings.

It should be remembered that the Arctic was still guarding a large number of its secrets; it was still very much a frontier, with a literal as well as metaphorical ice barrier preventing access to a world that no man had ever seen. Thus by the end of the century, it is probably true to say that other than the interior of Africa, the Arctic and the Antarctic were the only parts of the globe with major areas unexplored by Europeans. Also, the world still found itself in the grip of the Little Ice Age, which meant that Arctic conditions were more familiar than today in all parts of northern Europe. At mid-century, Iceland, for instance, was more or less surrounded by sea ice for as much as thirty weeks of the year (Fagan 2000, 116).

Against this background, a combination of curiosity and imagination continued to be the main source for more or less credible conjectures as to what was behind the icy veil. This is illustrated in several rather fanciful maps, such as that of the French royal geographer Philippe Buache from 1752, which shows a large island north of eastern Siberia, and – as was not uncommon on older maps – an invitingly broad and open Northwest Passage (Hayes 2003, 41). The Russian polymath Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–65) peddled similar ideas in 1763, inspiring two attempts, in 1765 and 1766, to penetrate the Northeast Passage from Spitsbergen to the Bering Strait, under the command of Captain Vasilij Chichagov. Though they had the full support of Catherine the Great, who was eager to continue the great polar initiative of her famous predecessor half a century earlier, the expeditions failed in achieving their goals (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Chichagov, Vasilij”).

Lomonosov, however, had also breathed new life into another old and highly durable theory, namely that of the open polar sea (Hayes 2003, 55). The Swiss geographer Samuel Engel (1702–84) similarly argued in a French work that was published in 1765, and in an extended German version in 1772, that “the ice was formed only from fresh water, and therefore chiefly near the land, being concentrated at the mouths of great rivers”, and that the Arctic consequently contained a vast and open sea (Savours 1984, 403). These ideas received full backing from an apparently highly qualified source, the French Pacific explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, who in 1766–69 had performed an impressive circumnavigation of the globe, and who in 1772 proposed to the French Navy that a major expedition be dispatched to the Arctic, aiming straight for the Pole, and sailing as far from any known land as possible to avoid the ice (*ibid.*, 402). But the proposal was rejected, and once again the British were on the alert and picked up the gauntlet. According to undocumented sources, Bougainville may even have been approached directly by the British (*ibid.*, 403), who had reasons to be vigilant. Despite attempts by the Russians to keep the rest of the world ignorant of Chichagov’s expeditions, rumours appear to have reached British authorities (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Chichagov, Vasilii”), who hardly needed to be told that the Russians would use a successful outcome as political leverage in the region. Such expeditions were, in other words, made in the name of science and exploration, and for the good of all, but they also carried a strong and increasingly nationalistic element of commercial and military significance.

It is typical therefore that the British initiative was a combined effort between the Royal Society and the Navy. The central player of the former was Daines Barrington (1727?–1800), who only needed a few weeks in his new position as Vice President of the Royal Society to contact the Admiralty and obtain the agreement, in January 1773, formally to propose an expedition. From then on things moved swiftly. The Admiralty took the proposal to King George III, who “was pleased to direct” that the expedition “should be immediately undertaken” (Phipps 1774, 10), and by April an expedition leader, Captain Constantine Phipps (1744–92), had been appointed and two ships – the *Racehorse* and the *Carcass* – made available.

The Phipps expedition marked a new departure in polar exploration. In one respect, Britain was back to square one; the chief objective had not changed for two centuries: finding a sea route to the Pacific. But as the ships were hoisting their sails and slipping down the Thames on 4 June 1773, everyone involved must have felt that this was a wholly different expedition from those of Willoughby, Frobisher and Hudson. The two ships, so-called bomb vessels, were considerably strengthened and provided with a wide array of modern equipment, and the crews were likewise provided for with the very best in terms of food and clothing (Savours 1984, 404). Also,

they were not – like the majority of expeditions – going in search of the Northwest or the Northeast Passage, but were heading straight for the North Pole. Finally, they were not armed with weapons of destruction or with goods to be bartered or sold among the natives, but with the very latest in terms of scientific instruments. Phipps himself was a captain of an entirely new breed. He owned the best library of nautical books in England, and was, according to Patrick O’Brian, “a capital astronomer and mathematician” (O’Brian 1997, 41).

As has been suggested, gaining new ground depended on efficient collaboration between different institutions and areas of expertise, and not surprisingly Phipps’s credentials were of the right kind, meaning in effect that in addition to his formal qualifications, he also had the right connections within the circles of the Establishment. One of these was the omnipresent Joseph Banks, who was still in the early stages of his career. The two had been at Eton together, and in 1766 they had been to Labrador and Newfoundland to pursue botanical studies in the territories acquired from France after the Treaty of Paris three years earlier (*ibid.*, 40). There is no doubt that Banks was pulling the necessary strings; and he also took the opportunity to present Phipps with a long list of “desiderata”, botanical and zoological specimens that he wanted Phipps to bring back from the Arctic (Lysaght 1971, 256–59). In addition, the man who was appointed astronomer of the expedition, and thus the supervisor of the scientific activities on board, Israel Lyons, was also brought in through Banks.

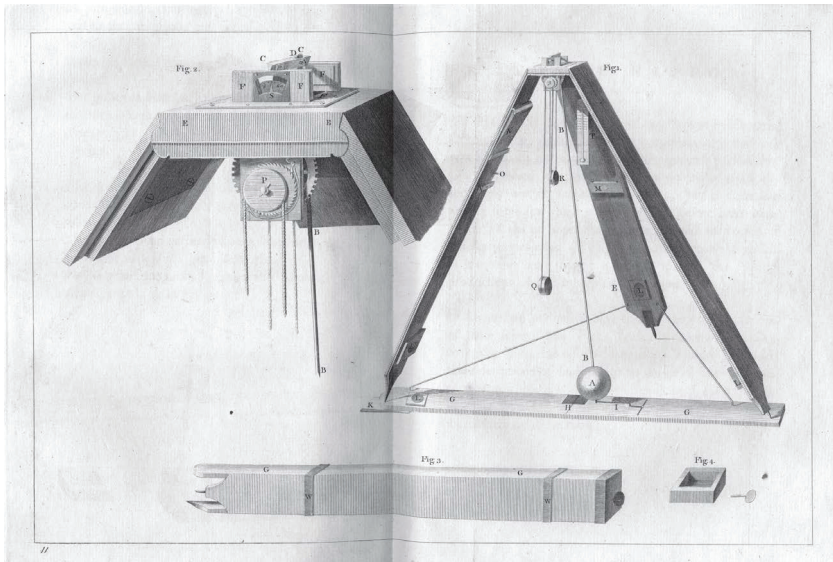
One reason why the Phipps expedition deserves more attention than it has traditionally received is that it serves as an interesting northern or arctic counterpart to another and far more famous expedition at the same time, namely Captain Cook’s Second Voyage.<sup>9</sup> Having returned from his First Voyage in July 1771, Cook once again set sail in July the following year, not to return until July 1775. Consequently, the Phipps expedition was both planned and executed while Cook was away. Still, they had at least two important common features. First, they were both orchestrated by the Admiralty, and so were parts of the same growing global ambition of the British Empire. In this respect, the Phipps expedition, in particular, underlines the importance the British government attached to its vast arctic backyard. Second, both expeditions found themselves playing roles in a scientific competition, which was in effect one of the most nerve-racking chapters in the history of modern science.

Essentially, the question was how to determine longitude with absolute certainty, and the solution to the problem would have enormous implications for navigation everywhere, simply because it would enable any sea captain to decide his exact position at any time, day or night, storm or quiet. The longitude problem was ancient, and John Donne had reflected

<sup>9</sup> The following is indebted to Fjågesund 2008a, 82–83.

the general despair when nearly two centuries earlier, in “Valediction of the Book”, he had said that “to conclude / Of longitudes, what other way have we, / But to mark when and where the dark eclipses be?” (Donne 2006, 23). Still, with a steady increase in naval activity, the problem had intensified, and had become acute after the so-called Scilly Isles disaster in 1707, when 2,000 men in four ships from the Royal Navy drowned as a result of a fatal navigational error. Only seven years later the Longitude Act was passed, a Board of Longitude established, and a prize of £20,000 promised by Parliament for a satisfactory solution (Sobel 2005, 16).

By the time of the Phipps expedition, two main approaches had emerged: the lunar distance method, championed by the Astronomer Royal Nevil Maskelyne, and the approach of the Yorkshire carpenter turned clockmaker, John Harrison (1693–1776). Over several years the latter had produced a series of chronometers of increasingly stunning accuracy, the



A plate from Phipps's *A Voyage towards the North Pole* (1774), showing the pendulum, one of several modern and sophisticated instruments that Phipps brought on the voyage, and that marked the arrival of modern science in the exploration of the North.

point being that a sufficiently precise measurement of the time would solve the longitude problem. In 1765 he received half the prize money for his fourth prototype, the so-called H4. But the Board of Longitude, heavily influenced by Maskelyne, demanded steadily more taxing tests, and as a result, Cook took a copy of H4 on his Second Voyage for further and even more stringent tests. When Phipps set out, however, nobody knew of Captain Cook's whereabouts, or whether the H4 was on the bottom of

the sea, and consequently, Phipps was also instructed to bring two copies of what he himself called the “watch machines” (Phipps 1774, 13). The seriousness of the experiment is emphasised by the extremely strict and detailed instructions provided by the Board of Longitude.

The *Carcass* and the *Racehorse*, then, were not just exceptionally well prepared for the onslaught of the elements; they were also in effect modern research vessels, packed with spearhead technology. This included a sextant, a marine barometer, a telescope, six thermometers and two dipping needles, which measured “the angle between the earth’s surface and the direction of the magnetic field”. Phipps also brought a pendulum “to ascertain the exact distance between the center of motion and center of oscillation of a pendulum to vibrate seconds at London” (*ibid.*, 153). The extensive report Phipps produced and published on his return represents an entirely new level of scientific accuracy and detail, and a radical departure from comparable reports written only a few years earlier. In certain passages it is almost as if the author is using the various instruments as toys for satisfying his childish curiosity. On 15 June 1773, for instance, he notes:

By an observation at eight in the morning, the longitude of the ship was by the watch  $0^{\circ} 39' W$ : Dip  $74^{\circ} 52'$ . At half past ten in the morning, the longitude, from several observations of the sun and moon, was  $0^{\circ} 17' W$ ; at noon being in latitude  $60^{\circ} 19' 8''$ , by observation, I took the distance between the two ships, by the Megameter; and from that base determined the position of Hangcliff, which had never before been ascertained, though it is a very remarkable point, and frequently made by ships. According to these observations it is in latitude  $60^{\circ} 9'$ , and longitude  $0^{\circ} 56' 30'' W$ . In the Appendix I shall give an account of the manner of taking surveys by this instrument, which I believe never to have been practised before. (*Ibid.*, 25–26)

And five days later:

I sounded with a very heavy lead the depth of 780 fathom, without getting ground; and by a thermometer invented by lord Charles Cavendish for this purpose, found the temperature of the water at that depth to be  $26^{\circ}$  of Fahrenheit’s thermometer; the temperature of the air being  $48^{\circ} \frac{1}{2}$ . (*Ibid.*, 27)

Mentioning half degrees as a matter of course and referring in passing to sophisticated mathematical operations confirm the new and rigorous standard that modern science was striving to attain.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the considerable expenditure on scientific and material resources, however, the Phipps expedition was a complete failure from the point of view of its main ambition. The summer of 1773 was particularly cold in the waters around the north-west coast of Spitsbergen, and the

<sup>10</sup> This does not necessarily mean, however, that Phipps’s measurements were exact. Frederick Beechey, who took part in an expedition to the same area half a century later, says about Phipps’s map that “there has been some great error” and that “his plan is so incorrect, that it is quite out of the power of any person to identify the hills with those which exist near the anchorage” (Beechey 1843, 310–11).

ships only reached an altitude of 81° N. According to Phipps, “the ice was one compact impenetrable body” (Phipps 1774, 42), and at the beginning of August, having ventured into the drifting ice looking for an opening, it was only hard work and sheer luck that prevented them from being beset.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that the explanation for the failure lay in the ambition itself. The utter futility or at least the total lack of trustworthy evidence for the idea of an open polar sea, relentlessly pursued by Daines Barrington, should have been obvious to the Royal Society and the government from the start. But the paper that Barrington read to the Royal Society on 19 May 1774, that is after Phipps’s return, shows no sign of regret or self-criticism. Instead he keeps enumerating several observations, all of them of dubious quality and based on undocumented stories, of excellent ice conditions in the summer months. The list includes a “proof”, obtained via one of Barrington’s acquaintances, of a certain Dutchman by the name of Dr. Daillie, who lived in Fleet Street “about the year 1745, where he practised physick”, and who claimed that as a young man he had reached 88° N “when the weather was warm, the sea perfectly free from ice, and rolling like the bay of Biscay” (Barrington 1775, 11). All in all, the paper is surprisingly unscientific, and in sharp contrast to the quality of Phipps’s own report. It is hardly surprising to find, therefore, that despite his high office, Barrington comes across as a man of limited talents. R. W. Phipps, a modern descendant of Constantine Phipps, labels him an “ignoramus” and an “amiable aristocratic British eccentric”, his theories as “totally unsubstantiated”, and quotes another modern critic who has described him as being “remarkably dim-witted” (Phipps 2004, 390).

So then why did the British government provide the funding for a major expedition on such flimsy evidence? It seems beyond doubt that at least part of the answer was a feeling in the leading circles that the Far North was of major strategic importance, and that it was necessary to do something to gain the upper hand in relation to France and Russia. Incidentally, the French appear to have realised their mistake in initially rejecting the proposal from de Bougainville, because according to the account by Thomas Floyd, a midshipman on one of Phipps’s ships, a French expedition led by Bougainville himself was under way to the Spitsbergen waters at the same time as that of Phipps (Markham 1879, 101). Furthermore, in 1771 the French explorer Marquis Verdun de la Crenne had visited Iceland and charted parts of the island’s coastline. According to a later French explorer, Chevalier de la Poix de Freminville, the expedition was purely scientific in nature (Freminville 1819, 85), just like Banks’s previously mentioned expedition the following year.<sup>11</sup> But it was hardly an unknown fact to everyone involved that cartography,

<sup>11</sup> One may of course speculate whether Banks’s expedition may actually partly have been a response to the French visit the previous year.

especially the charting of new or unclaimed territory, was traditionally linked to claims of ownership.

A pattern thus began to emerge, in which science from the late eighteenth century onwards, became an integral part of the international power game in the Far North, introducing a tradition that has continued to this very day. This new element also introduced a terminology and a discourse of a peculiarly paradoxical quality: on the face of it, science was an open, objective and transnational pursuit, and from now on reports would be written and discussions conducted in its particular discourse. On the other hand, strategic and nationalist interests continued to play a central role, but would now have to be read to a greater extent between the lines, or extrapolated from the scientific terms in which they were couched. The endless columns of minute measurements might look absurd for an explorer of the old school, but the central power players quickly comprehended their potential. The conquest of the Arctic, one of the last frontiers on the planet, could only be successfully achieved by employing all the means at one's disposal. This realisation seems to lie behind the fact that although Phipps's expedition was a complete failure with regard to its goal, his report was still translated into French in 1775, just a year after the original, and into German two years later. The pressure was clearly on, and the British were on the ball. Perhaps to sugar the pill after Phipps's failure and to encourage new initiatives, Parliament in 1775 offered an award of £20,000 for the discovery of the Northwest Passage (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Cook, James"), and the following year £5,000 for anyone who successfully sailed within a degree of the Pole (Hayes 2003, 58).

On his return from his Second Voyage in July 1775, Captain Cook had already earned a place in the history books, but he was not a man to rest on his laurels, and on 12 July 1776 – only a week after the signing of the American Declaration of Independence – he once again set sail from Plymouth in the *Resolution*. The instructions he received for the Third Voyage underscored the British government's focus on the polar regions in general, and on the Northwest Passage in particular. He was, however, "to find out a Northern passage by Sea from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean" (Cook 2003, 428), which implied a long voyage past the Cape of Good Hope, south of Australia, via Tahiti and up to the Bering Strait along the coast of North America. To further underline the focus on the Northwest Passage, a smaller expedition, according to a posthumously published book by Daines Barrington, was intended to sail from the Greenland side, and ultimately meet Cook coming from the west (Barrington 1818, xvi–xvii).<sup>12</sup> Neither of these attempts was successful, and with Cook's dramatic

<sup>12</sup> Barrington names the leader of the expedition as Captain Pickersgill. It has, however, been difficult to find evidence both for this expedition and for it being associated with that of Captain Cook. One Richard Pickersgill was an officer on Cook's first two voyages, and there is a 70-page pamphlet "By a Sea Officer" from 1782, which, according to

death in Hawaii in February 1779, and the similar failure of his second in command, Charles Clerke, to find a passage, the main profit from the venture was a considerably improved map of the region, including a major part of the Chukchi Sea, north of the Bering Strait.

Despite setbacks, the British were not going to allow other powers to take control, even here, thousands of miles away from home and on the other side of the American continent. The main rival at the time was Spain, which had a long history in the region, but since Bering's Great Northern Expedition earlier in the century, Russia was also becoming increasingly aware of its remote territories. Again, the enormous, though so far only potential, significance of the Northwest Passage was evident, and it is not difficult to imagine how particularly Britain, well placed geographically and with powerful military and merchant navies, must have envisioned a future in which London almost served as a new Elsinore – a northern gateway, and in this case to the vast and alluring markets of the Pacific. Thus, although the search for the Northwest Passage has usually been seen by historians only as a part of Britain's strictly polar ambitions, there is every reason to see it in a wider context, to recognise it in fact as an important building block in Britain's strategy as a world power.

An interesting work in this context, and with a particular relevance to the region in question is John Meares's *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789, from China to the North West Coast of America* (1790). This tome with gilded edges and beautiful binding is itself an illustration of the financial muscle that lay behind the British effort. Also, it was published right in the middle of a political crisis – the so-called Nootka Crisis – in which Meares was playing a central role. The topicality of the book is further underlined by the "List of Subscribers", which contains several booksellers with orders of up to twenty-five copies each.

The crisis concerned commercial and territorial claims by Britain and Spain in what is now Vancouver Island on the west coast of Canada, and very nearly led to war between the two nations. Meares had been conducting trade, primarily of fur, in the northern Pacific as far north as Alaska for several years, frequently under the Portuguese flag in order to circumvent the trade monopoly of the East India Company, and was thus a somewhat controversial figure. He was, however, a defender of free trade, and it is perhaps understandable, therefore, that in the preface he makes a point of the fact that he has made voyages of *commerce*, and not of *discovery* (Meares 1790, vi). And later on, in a lengthy chapter on the trade between the north-west coast of America and China, he waxes lyrical about the rewards for Britain from a free market, also in this corner of the world:

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the British library catalogue may have been written by Pickersgill: *A Concise Account of Voyages for the Discovery of a North-West Passage* (see Pickersgill 1782 in the bibliography). If so, it is a posthumous publication, because Richard Pickersgill died in 1779 (Cook 2003, 631).



It must afford a very animating satisfaction to every patriot mind, that the trade and commerce of this country are gradually extending themselves over every part of the globe; and that from the encouragement given by wise ministers, and the enterprising spirit of opulent merchants, every corner of the earth where the winds blow and the sea rolls its waves, sooner or later, be explored, to increase the wealth, the power, and the prosperity of the British Empire. (*Ibid.*, lxvii)

Even though Meares and the Nootka Crisis were primarily concerned with the south-west coast of present-day Canada, there is no doubt that the search for the Northwest Passage was an essential ingredient in the tug of war between the major European nations in the period leading up to the French Revolution. Meares spends a whole chapter on “Observations on the Probable Existence of a North West Passage, &c.”, where he mentions several, now largely forgotten expeditions from the 1770s and 80s, whose sole ambition was to break through the ice in the Bering Strait and reach the Atlantic on the other side. Not surprisingly, he suggests that in addition to the number of official expeditions, the major powers may also have sent secret missions in search of the Passage (*ibid.*, lii–lx).

But the race for control of the Arctic was not solely confined to maritime activity. The Northwest Passage, if it existed, would serve as a channel between Europe and the Pacific, but it would also facilitate the exploitation of the considerable resources – known and unknown – in the vast North-American territories. Charting these territories, cataloguing their resources, and establishing the nature of their connection with the Arctic Ocean were, therefore, parts of one large and comprehensive project, which more than one nation was determined to complete, despite growing British control of the region after General Wolfe’s victory at Quebec in 1759 and the Treaty of Paris four years later.

But for the British, too, there were obstacles to overcome. One of them was the ongoing debate, started by Joseph Robson, Arthur Dobbs and others around the middle of the century, about the secretive and inefficient practices of the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1769, another broadside was fired “By an Old and Experienced Trader”, whose real name was probably Alexander Cluny.<sup>13</sup> The book *The American Traveller*, dedicated and addressed to the King, contains a beautiful fold-out map on stiff canvas showing not just the uncharted territories in the North but also an entire continent continuing from the mainland and all the way to the Pole, thereby effectively and rather pessimistically ruling out the possibility of an open sea route. The author then underlines, seven years before the American Revolution, the need for “Mutual Advantage” as “the most solid Basis, the strongest Cement of Union, in all Connections, whether political or private” between Britain and the American colonies, before making an interesting comment on the literary form he has chosen for his narrative. Suggesting a more Romantic and less formal attitude than that

<sup>13</sup> At least, he is listed under this name in the British Library catalogue.

which is found in more traditional travel narratives, Cluny explains why he has opted for the epistolary form:

Besides, in this Method, I may myself take the Liberty of stopping a little while, or going a few Steps out of my Way, now and then, to take Notice of any Thing that may illustrate my Subject, or enforce my own Sentiments, without Fear of giving Offence, which might be taken at such Freedoms, in a Work of a more regular Nature [...]. ((Cluny) 1769, 3)

But the gloves soon come off, and he moves on to a devastating attack on the meaningless monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company, controlled by a few individuals who are "actuated by the most selfish, sordid, and short-sighted Policy, or rather Cunning" (*ibid.*, 13), thereby preventing instead of encouraging growth and new initiative. He then discusses in turn Labrador, Newfoundland and Canada in general, all the time showing how new areas of trade and production could be developed and, like Arthur Dobbs before him, how British colonies ought to be established to serve and administer this huge commercial enterprise. A century and a half before Vilhjalmur Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic*, Cluny envisages a northern world, not generally regarded as habitable, of populous and thriving communities. There is also a badly disguised national pride in his description of the "new Acquisitions":

It brings their Resource for all the Conveniences of Life solely to ourselves, and thereby puts us in the sole Possession of their Commerce. It gives us an Opportunity to push that Commerce to its full Extent, and to enlarge it with those farther Discoveries of new Articles, which the little Experiments we have hitherto been able to make, give us just Reason to expect there. It affords Employment for a great Addition to the Numbers of our Ships and Seamen; and thereby increases our national Strength. – And lastly, it doubles all these Advantages ten-fold, in our Hands, by taking them out of the Hands of our Enemies. (*Ibid.*, 42)

One "Article of Commerce" that Cluny mentions specifically, and that the Company had been aware of for quite some time, is copper. As a matter of fact, the main purpose of James Knight's tragic expedition to Hudson Bay in 1719 had been to find the "vast quantities of gold and copper said to exist near the mouth of the Far-Off-Metal River", later named the Coppermine River, in the Northwest Territories in the far north of Canada (Hearne 2007, xiv). The Company was now moved to make another attempt, and appointed a twenty-four-year-old Londoner, who had spent the last three years at the Prince of Wales Fort on the west coast of Hudson Bay. Samuel Hearne (1745–92), who was to figure as one of the great names in Arctic exploration, spent three years on a journey that he documented in the classic travelogue *A Journey to the Northern Ocean* (1795), and "became the first European to travel overland to the Arctic coast of North America" (*ibid.*, x). Covering more than five thousand kilometres through the so-called Barren Grounds and mostly on foot, he thus brought an end to the



Arctic Ocean

In the search for the Northwest Passage, northern Canada represented an almost endless maze of possible, and mostly impossible, routes between the two great oceans.

centuries-old speculations about the possible existence of a navigable route running through the American mainland (*ibid.*).<sup>14</sup> And although it was a futile effort in terms of finding copper, Hearne's journey opened up vast and as yet unexplored territories to the north and west.

One of his immediate followers was the fur trader Alexander Mackenzie (1764–1820), who worked from the theory that the river later to be named the Mackenzie River, which flowed from Great Slave Lake, actually reached the Pacific through Cook Inlet, in southern Alaska, which would have represented a considerable advantage for the transport of furs and other goods.<sup>15</sup> But he was disappointed: though flowing west for a considerable distance, the river suddenly turned almost straight north towards the Arctic Ocean, which Mackenzie reached on that memorable day, 14 July 1789. It was only on the arduous return trip that local Indians informed him of the existence of another river, later called the Yukon, whose outlet was well south of the Bering Strait, and whose upper tributaries almost reached as far east as the Mackenzie River (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Mackenzie, Alexander").

By a strange coincidence, then, the storming of the Bastille was accompanied by two moments in polar history: John Thomas Stanley and his group of scientifically interested friends looking west from the top of the Snæfellsjökul on the west coast of Iceland; and Alexander Mackenzie looking north to the frozen waters of the Beaufort Sea. In addition, Robert McGhee mentions another event that took place in the same year: on the Chukotka Peninsula, on the extreme eastern tip of Siberia, Russian merchants "established a trade-fair in the lands of the fiercely independent Chukchi" (McGhee 2005, 216). The two great northern powers, stretching their tentacles to their eastern and western extremities, were thus establishing a grip on the entire circumpolar region, bringing with them a modern world of commercial activity and scientific investigation, administered from distant centres. Neither the Chukchi, nor Russian merchants, nor Alexander Mackenzie would have been aware that events on the other side of the globe would further accelerate the winds of change.

But the years leading up to the French Revolution also witnessed an interest in arctic regions closer to home than Canada and Siberia, and though there were no major expeditions except Phipps's search for the North Pole, the process of disseminating information continued. The scientific interest in Iceland's volcanoes, geysirs and glaciers has already been mentioned, but Greenland, too, continued to fascinate European readers, though for other reasons. The mysterious extinction of the

<sup>14</sup> The distances estimated to have been covered by Hearne vary considerably, from two thousand to nearly eight thousand kilometers, in different accounts of the journey.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of Mackenzie's commercially motivated exploration of the region, see Robert Sayre in Regard (ed.) 2013a, 121–37.

Norse settlements was an important element in the arousal of an interest in the country's distant past, but the English and French translations of Hans Egede's *A Description of Greenland* in the 1740s also added an anthropological and contemporary dimension, before anthropology had become an academic discipline.

One of the writers who took an interest in Greenland was, perhaps surprisingly, Samuel Johnson, who "developed a Romantic curiosity about the Arctic", reading Egede's work with keen interest and borrowing freely from it (Horne 2001, 77). In two issues of *The Rambler* in 1751, he published his "A Greenland Tale", a tragic Inuit love story which, according to William C. Horne, amounts to a sensitive discussion of the vanity-of-human-wishes theme, placed in relief against the material primitivism of Inuit life (*ibid.*, 75–90). Johnson thereby made a significant contribution away from a view of the Inuit and other peoples from beyond the pale of civilisation as depersonalised and uncivilised, replacing it with a view that human beings across cultural and geographical divides were essentially no different from each other. The story, with an obvious appeal to contemporary readers, soon began to travel. Ten years after its publication it was "Versified by a Lady" (Johnson 1761)<sup>16</sup> into the conventional couplet form and printed as a separate booklet with the title *Anningait and Ajutt: A Greenland Tale*; similarly, it was soon translated into French, and reappeared in a new French edition as late as 1805 (Castrén 1910, 145).

A more substantial work on Greenland, however, was published in 1765 by David Cranz, a German missionary sent to the country by the leader of the Moravian Brothers, Count Zinzendorf himself. Cranz spent a year in Greenland from 1761 to 1762, primarily writing the history of the Moravians' missionary activity in the country from 1733 onwards. This section constitutes about two thirds of the book, but he also collected a significant amount of other material. The German original of *Historie von Grönland* (History of Greenland), though in a small format, is a tome of 1,100 pages, supplemented by eight plates of good quality, showing maps of the country, different kinds of harpoons and other tools, and provides a wealth of information in the tradition of the historical-topographical travel accounts of the period. And again, the book was rapidly translated into English, confirming a long-standing British interest in the country.

<sup>16</sup> In the British Library catalogue, the versifier is identified as Anne Penny.

***Whaling***

Polar historiography, with its understandable focus on relatively small and often spectacular expeditions, which were in turn documented through extensive reports and accounts published in expensive and therefore not generally accessible publications, may often give a misleading impression of how perceptions of the region were distributed and of who were the primary agents of this distribution. There is no doubt that the upper layers of society were supplied with a considerable amount of information from such sources, but most of this information probably remained within these



*Charles Brooking: Greenland Fishery: English Whalers in the Ice* (c.1750). Many paintings from the whaling grounds show scenes of drama, greed and violence. Brooking's shows a calm that in combination with the picture's title suggests a sense of English control and discipline in a hostile environment. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

same circles. More popular perceptions, on the other hand, must have been far more indebted to the thousands of crew members on whaling ships, who spun sometimes true and sometimes fanciful yarns about their experiences in taverns and homes across the North. The whaling industry, in other words, must have ensured that the Arctic remained a constant topic of discussion and a source of imagination for large segments of the population, and in many coastal areas especially there will have been a large number of people with a first-hand experience of the region.

The four decades before the French Revolution saw a renewed British effort on the whaling grounds in Davis Strait (along Baffin Island and

the west coast of Greenland), starting, among other inducements, with Parliament's decision in 1750 to raise the bounty from 20s. to 40s. per ton to English as well as Scottish whalers. The background was simple: the whale fisheries' contribution to the national economy. This ensured a steady rise in the number of whaling vessels from about forty to roughly eighty a year during the next generation, but with a slump in the 1760s (Scoresby 1820, II: 73–75). But other countries were also active in the same waters, supplying a growing market for oil as well as ladies' stays, made from whalebone (*ibid.*, 79). The Netherlands still retained their position as a major whaling nation, producing large quantities of oil; the Danes returned after some years' absence in the mid-1770s, and combined whaling with other Greenland trade under the control of the newly established Royal Greenland Trading Company; and the previous year the Swedish government joined the fray by providing a Stockholm-based company of merchants with massive subsidies and loans.<sup>17</sup> But the sea continued to be a risky place, the polar seas especially so, and all the fleets suffered devastating losses periodically. In the year 1777, three hundred Dutch seamen lost their lives when their ships were beset and destroyed by the ice (Vaughan 1993, 91–92), but even in an average year a certain percentage of ships and crews were lost, the latter usually dying from cold and the exposure to a merciless environment.

A dramatic story from a few years later, but from Spitsbergen, was related in an anonymous and cheaply printed leaflet with the geographically somewhat confusing title *The Strange Adventures of Seven Liverpool Sailors, Who Sailed out in the Russian Trade and Were Cast Away on the Desert Island of Eastspitzbergen in Greenland*. The confusion appears to stem from the traditional assumption that Greenland and Spitsbergen were territorially connected. The account has an intriguing quality, as it raises suspicions of being fictional while at the same time making every effort to come across as a convincing story of a real experience. The seven sailors, whose full names are given, are part of a crew of forty, led by one Robert Ferguson Meson, on board a whaler fitted out in Arkhangelsk in 1785. On the coast of Spitsbergen, the ship is beset, and seven men leave the ship on the ice to look for a hut that is rumoured to exist in the area. Finding the hut, they spend the night there, but on returning the next morning, "they saw nothing but an open sea, free from the ice, which the day before had covered the ocean: A violent storm which had arisen in the night, had certainly been the cause of this disastrous event" (Anon. 1786, 6). Being fortunate in having taken with them such necessities as "muske, powder and balls, twenty pound of flour, some tobacco, a ax [*sic*], a kettle and some pipes, a tinder box &c" (*ibid.*, 5), the men miraculously survive the winter, are rescued by a Russian ship on 15 August the following year, and eventually return to Liverpool.

<sup>17</sup> For a comprehensive presentation of Danish whaling in the North Atlantic in the period 1771–89, see Fogsgaard 2003.

Despite the apparent accuracy of the information given, including the name of Mr. Lee Row, a “Professor of History in the Imperial Academy of Petersburg”, who takes down the sailors’ narrative, and a reference to the President of the Royal Society Joseph Banks, who encouraged the translation of their account into English, the story still does not quite ring true. First of all, the number of sailors – seven – is striking, both because it carries a certain fairytale quality, and because it is identical to the number of sailors who in 1633 had been deliberately left at Spitsbergen by the Dutch Greenland Company, clearly to establish whether it was possible to survive a winter there. It is also peculiar that both the ship’s captain, who is “in the Government of Archangel”, and the Petersburg professor, who are thus assumed to be Russians, have English-sounding names.

Furthermore, whether true or not, the story clearly appears to have acquired a certain legendary quality, because in a later account by the German writer on the polar regions, Joachim Heinrich Campe, a more or less identical story appears, mentioning the same catalogue of useful implements, but this time in a story about four Russian sailors – with Russian names – and the story is set in 1743 rather than 1785–86. Campe even crowns the narrative by claiming that the sailors managed to acquire such large amounts of hides and fat during their involuntary stay that they became rich on their return (Campe 1825, 103). In view of the considerable risk that voyages to the Arctic entailed, and the cheap and popular quality of the publication, one may speculate whether such stories were actually used to boost morale among sailors, and to convince potential recruits that whaling was not just adventurous and safe, but also profitable.

Pictorial art representing polar scenes frequently stressed the same heroic aspects of life in the region, but also included the unpredictable and destructive forces of nature. Several of the major publications contained plates with graphic and dramatic illustrations, and the official expeditions also took with them especially appointed artists, whose sole task was to document and celebrate the expedition’s achievements. On Cook’s Third Voyage, for instance, the official artist, John Webber, caught a dramatic scene, probably from the Bering Sea, in a large oil painting depicting the crew from the *Resolution* shooting “sea-horses” or walrus from a rowing boat among the floating ice. The picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784, giving the general public a unique and colourful glimpse of scenes and landscapes otherwise described primarily with words or black-and-white illustrations of varying quality. A less dramatic scene, showing the *Greenland Fishery: English Whalers in the Ice* was painted by the maritime artist Charles Brookner around 1750. With a sturdy whaling ship in the centre of the painting, a calm sea, and smaller boats in the foreground towing the huge whale towards the main ship, the picture expresses enterprise and human control of the dangerous natural elements.

In the 1780s, the whaling in Davis Strait was reaching its peak. All the



governments concerned were adjusting their bounties and other legislation to keep catches and profits up. In 1785, the Danish government offered a bounty of 30s. per ton for Danish whalers (Scoresby 1969, II: 83), and the importance of the industry to the Danes had been confirmed the previous year by the publication of Carl Pontoppidan's comprehensive work about *Hval- og Kobberfangsten udi Strat-Davis* (The Whale and Walrus Fisheries in Davis Strait). At the end of the decade, the British were sending more than two hundred and fifty ships a year, bringing back as much as 75,000 tons of oil. But the Klondike days were over, at least for the time being; the Atlantic walrus around Newfoundland had been practically extinct since the middle of the century (Rose 2007, 285), and the Dutch whalers especially, who had maintained a steady annual number of a hundred and fifty to two hundred ships in the region for more than a century, entered into a rapid decline and all but disappeared in the course of the Napoleonic Wars (Laing 1822, 126–27). But the late 1700s was also the time when a new polar world – a northern dimension literally at the other end of the earth – gradually began to unveil itself.

### *The Southern North*

In 1739, the Frenchman Bouvet de Lozier had discovered an island at 54° S in the Atlantic Ocean. This was the first indication of a possible continent even further south, and speculations were running high, as they had for centuries, about this ethereal *Terra australis incognita*. Where hard facts were missing, imagination could take over and fill the gap. Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) had already placed Lilliput in the southern hemisphere, in Van Diemen's Land, later to be called Tasmania, and in 1751, the novelist and attorney Robert Paltcock (1697–1767) published a novel with the long but self-explanatory title *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins, A Cornish Man, Taken from His Own Mouth, in His Passage to England, from off Cape Horn in America, in the Ship Hector*. Strongly inspired by Swift as well as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and pointing forward to such works as Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner",<sup>18</sup> *Frankenstein* and Symmes's utopia *Symzonia* (1820), this voluminous novel tells the fantastic story of the narrator who, blown off course in a ship in the South Seas, comes across a makeshift raft with a solitary man aboard, Peter Wilkins, who claims to have been away from home for thirty-five years. Peter's utopian tale, which goes far beyond the boundaries of realism, is not explicitly set in the South Seas, but the frame narrative gives a clear indication of the mystique generally associated with this area.

<sup>18</sup> As to Coleridge's indebtedness to Paltcock, see Moore 1933, 79–83.

This mystique also appears to have inflamed the imagination of the young Scotsman Alexander Dalrymple (1737–1808), who in India – of all places – and over a period of thirteen years, developed an equally fantastic theory about the existence of a “huge, fertile, and populous unknown southern continent” (Gurney 2007, 16). Fiery brains have never been slow to imagine worlds that only have a fleeting contact with reality, but Dalrymple was something far more than a fiery brain. Also, he was certainly not unaware that a highly respectable French writer, Charles de Brosses (1709–77), in 1756 had published *Histoires des Navigations aux Terres Australes* (*A Collection of Voyages to the Southern Hemisphere*), where he argued a very much parallel case. In 1767, the year in which the second of three volumes of the English translation of de Brosses’s work was published in Edinburgh, Dalrymple brought out the pseudonymous *An Account of the Discoveries Made in the South Pacifick Ocean previous to 1764*, and in 1770 and 1771 he added the two-volume work *A Historical Collection of Voyages [...] in the South Pacific Ocean* (*ibid.*). By this time he had become a member of the Royal Society, having been nominated by Benjamin Franklin, the Astronomer Royal Nevil Maskelyne and other dignitaries; in 1779 he became the hydrographer to the East India Company, and in 1795 the first Hydrographer of the British Navy. In this latter capacity, he “produced thousands of nautical charts mapping a remarkable number of seas and oceans for the first time and contributing significantly to the safety of shipping” (*Wikipedia, s.v. “Dalrymple, Alexander”*).

Dalrymple’s name is a recurring one in the period, and as a cartographer of the seas, and with the whole world as his field of action, it is hardly surprising that he was also interested in the Arctic, and especially the search for a Northwest Passage. As a matter of fact, had he shown a more flexible attitude towards his superiors, he could have taken the place of the man who was to become the greatest explorer in British history, the future Captain Cook himself, on a high-profile expedition to the South Seas. The great scientific event of the late 1760s, the transit of Venus, which provided a unique opportunity to actually measure the distance between the earth and the sun, had largely been a failure at the previous opportunity in 1761, and so the scientific community was determined to make the most of the next chance for more than a hundred years, on 3 June 1769. The French scientist Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis’s observations in Lapland in the summer of 1736 had been one of the building blocks in the project: the attempt to establish the precise shape of the earth.

Dalrymple now noted with satisfaction that one of the positions in the South Seas from which the transit of Venus ought to be observed overlapped with his alleged southern continent (Gurney 2007, 17). Because of his outrageous demands on the Admiralty, however, the opportunity

to prove his theory slipped between his fingers, and the rest is history. Captain Cook's Second Voyage in particular provided a wealth of new and accurate information about the Southern Seas. Between January 1773 and January 1774, covering the period of Phipps's unsuccessful attempt to break through the ice to the North Pole, Cook crossed the Antarctic Circle altogether six times, manoeuvring among loose ice and enormous floating islands, constantly risking shipwreck and certain death. On 15 December 1773, Cook reports that "one of these mases [*sic*] was very near proving fatal to us, we had not weather[ed] it more than once or twice our length, had we not succeeded this circumstance could never have been related" (Cook 2003, 323–24). Still, reaching as far as 71° S, the expedition never sighted land, although in January 1773, having crossed the Antarctic Circle for the first time, the *Resolution* was only about ninety miles north of what was later named the Prince Olav Coast (Rosove 2002, 2–3). The teeming bird life gave strong indications of a land mass to the south of the ice barrier; Cook also showed that "an ocean encircled the globe to the limit of the polar sea ice" (*ibid.*, 7), but the actual discovery of the Antarctic continent eluded him.

On his return to England in the summer of 1775, Cook wrote the account that was published two years later as *A Voyage towards the South Pole*. Altogether, Cook's three voyages, ending with his tragic death, gave a significant boost to British self-confidence, and his *Journals* became a national literary treasure, published in their entirety and in various abbreviated and popular versions. In addition, individual sailors and officers, including John Marra and John Reinhold Forster, published parallel and unofficial accounts that further contributed to the national celebration of Cook's achievements. The former, a gunner's mate who was flogged several times for insubordination and who twice tried to desert (Cook 2003, 629), even managed to publish his anonymous journal from the Second Voyage immediately after the *Resolution's* return, a full two years before Cook himself, most likely in order to make a quick profit.

Like the Arctic, the Antarctic was still to guard its secrets for a number of years to follow. Even after Cook's tentative visit, which represented a minor revolution in cartographical accuracy, there were still millions and millions of square kilometres of sea and land of which mankind had no knowledge at all. Also, political events in Europe would soon offer the British and other navies other challenges than floating icebergs, and so for the next half century, man mostly removed himself from the region and left this breathtaking world of liquid and frozen water to the whales, the seals and the penguins. But the mystery remained, and for the next century and more, the continuing exploration of the North would have a southern counterpart that in many respects would play a similar cultural and political role.

***Reappropriating the Past***

In the North, the polar regions represented an outer frontier, a world that in most cases was geographically external and essentially foreign to the various nations involved. At the same time, however, the continuing exploration of this world also represented a common frame of reference for the countries concerned. For the northern nations, in other words, there was a sense of kinship and intimacy with the Far North that nations further south did not possess to the same degree. In addition, this outer frontier was, as has been suggested earlier, being supplemented by an increasing interest and pride in the natural landscapes of the northern nations themselves, reflecting a steadily increasing self-confidence in relation to southern landscapes that so far had enjoyed a considerably higher prestige, in terms of aesthetic as well as productive value. This inner frontier, exemplified for instance by the discovery of the Lake District was, as will be shown in the next chapter, soon expanded into new and more distant landscapes within the northern region.

But there was also another and more figurative kind of landscape that was being explored with ever increasing intensity, namely the cultural past of the North. As with explorers, cartographers and scientists, who registered, categorised and systematised every imaginable aspect of the natural world, a growing number of scholars, building on the foundations laid during the previous two centuries, continued the careful reconstruction of the languages, the literatures and the histories – in short the cultural heritage – of the North.

The obvious ambition behind this venture was to prove that the North was able to compete with the South not only in terms of natural scenery and natural resources, but also in terms of cultural achievements. But it would be naïve to assume that this project did not also have a profoundly important political and strategic side. This *reconstruction* of the Nordic cultural heritage clearly was not just a matter of finding the hard facts and presenting them as objectively as possible; it also provided a unique opportunity to reconstruct a particular kind of past that served contemporary political ends. To put it more crudely, it was a matter of controlling the present by means of the past, or of taking “imaginative possession of it”.<sup>19</sup> An important feature of this cultural reconstruction during the period in question (the decades before the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars), is that while being apparently nationalistic in character, it also has a strongly transnationalistic element. In the same way that the Arctic – and to some extent the Antarctic – provide a common backdrop for the whole region, so does the cultural heritage, despite

<sup>19</sup> R.A. Markus has used this phrase about the Christians’ annexation of the Roman Empire. Quoted in Prickett 2009, 3.

differences, essentially come across as a unifying force, something that defines the North collectively as different from the South.

This can be seen as an indication that the North was still in a process of liberating itself from the South, thus retaining a sense of the South as a common challenger, or at least as a father figure from whom it was time to take its leave. However, as soon as this process of liberation was more or less completed after Waterloo, the picture changed and internal rifts began to appear. Aggressive cultural nationalism within the northern region, in other words, belongs to a later period.

Another possible explanation for this sense of a northern cultural unity is simply ignorance – that the knowledge about the cultural history of the North was still so insufficient that its various constituent parts were not clearly defined and categorised. Thus for instance Nordic and Celtic elements tended to be fused together, as in the works to be discussed shortly by Paul Henri Mallet from the 1750s onwards, and in the Ossian poems. Thomas Gray, in the first half of 1758, was studying Norse and Welsh poetry side by side “under the headings of ‘Gothi’ and ‘Cambri’” but essentially seeing them as two sides of the same coin (Lytton Sells 1980, 89); Richard Hole, in his poetical romance *Arthur* (1789), is similarly quite open about the fact that the work is not historically correct and that it mixes Scandinavian and Saxon elements (Hole 1789, iii). And in the Reverend Joseph Sterling’s *Poems*, also from 1789, the dedicatory poem to the Irish poet and dramatist John Cunningham, the second stanza promises that “For thee, my friend, immortal Odin waits; / Thy fair achievements will demand his smile; / Valhalla shall unfold its golden gates; / The splendid banquet shall reward thy toil, / Or for thy meed [*sic*] receive the Noble Isle” (Sterling 1789, 141). Both here and in a later poem in the same collection, it is as if the poet regards the two worlds of Nordic and Celtic mythology, with their different conceptions of life in the beyond, as essentially one and the same. In the case of Britain, there was also, after the Battle of Culloden, to some extent a deliberate wish among the Establishment to create a sense of a common, British culture in which differences were played down rather than accentuated. According to Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes, this entailed among other things that “England transformed and appropriated the Celtic in the service of Britishness” (Carruthers and Rawes eds. 2010, 3).

Another phenomenon that underlines an increasingly black-and-white polarity between the North and the South is the fascination with the Gothic. Interestingly, popular Gothic takes as a point of departure the southern Renaissance and Neoclassical stereotyped view of the North as primitive and superstitious and then, rather suddenly and with almost Faustian self-confidence, turns the tables on the whole tradition, redefining primitivism as well as superstition as more or less the opposite of what was originally implied. Chris Baldick offers the intriguing theory

of a connection between modern Gothic and the underlying fear in Britain of the more than two-hundred-year-old spectre of Catholicism. As an essentially Protestant phenomenon, modern Gothic presents an echo of a world in which scheming monks and depraved abbesses threaten a reintroduction of the reign from Rome (Baldick (ed.) 1992, xiv).

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, this threat was no longer the main issue; the focus was rather on the Catholic world as a caricature of the once formidable foe. As a result, just as the modern world is said to take shape; just as the Middle Ages seem once and for all to have become a thing of the past, a stage left behind, the Gothic comes to new life, representing an alternative renaissance, its ruined castles and cathedrals acquiring a symbolic and anti-modern power. Fundamentally, the Gothic becomes a forceful image of the resurrection of a northern cultural pride, in architecture as well as art and literature. As to the history of the Gothic, it is often said to have started with Horace Walpole's purchase of Strawberry Hill in 1748 and its subsequent transformation into the first genuinely neo-Gothic building. As the son of the Prime Minister, Walpole was naturally well placed within leading circles. As a young man, for instance, he went on the Grand Tour with a tutor who was also closely connected with the revival of the northern past, namely Thomas Gray (Lytton Sells 1980, chs. 4 and 5). Walpole's fame rests primarily on the very first so-called Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which claimed to be a translation from an Italian story from the 1500s. Two years earlier, however, he had produced *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, where he argues for the revival of the Gothic (Stenroth 2002, 154).

But even at this early stage, Walpole was not alone in formulating such views. In the very same year, 1762, Richard Hurd, the later Bishop of Worcester, published a somewhat parallel work, *Letters of Chivalry and Romance*. This begins with a clearly implied value judgement: "The ages, we call barbarous, present us with many a subject of curious speculation. What, for instance, is more remarkable than the Gothic CHIVALRY? or than the spirit of ROMANCE, which took its rise from that singular institution?" (Hurd 1762, 1). Then, having already suggested that "barbarous" and "barbarians" are words that need to be injected with a new meaning, he goes on to argue for what is apparently a contradiction in terms, namely barbarous reason: "[...] barbarians have their *own*, such as it is, if they are not enlightened by our reason. Shall we then condemn them unheard, or will it not be fair to let them have the telling of their own story?" (*ibid.*, 3). Having established a secure and democratic foundation, he then asserts – using Tacitus and Caesar for all their worth and thus achieving a classic revaluation of values – that ideals of chivalry, courtesy and gallantry, far from belonging to the Mediterranean culture, have their foundation "in the antient manners of the German nations" (*ibid.*, 19).

Although the Gothic Revival may seem to have appeared more or less

out of the blue, both Walpole and Hurd were in fact links in a long chain. As has been pointed out in earlier chapters, Gothicism had represented an undercurrent in European thought for more than two centuries, especially so in its Swedish variant (Sw. *göticism*), where it had played a major role in political as well as cultural propaganda, especially since the disintegration of the Swedish empire in the Baltic. It was only appropriate, therefore, that the greatest of all Swedish treasures connected with the Gothic, namely the *Codex Argenteus*, the sixth-century manuscript of the fourth-century Bible translation into Gothic, which the Swedes had secured under dramatic circumstances in 1662, was published in 1750 (Stenroth 2002, 156). Also, the fact that it was published in London rather than Stockholm points to a connection between the old, Rudbeckian Gothicism and the new wave that surfaced with Walpole and his contemporaries. The man behind the new edition, the Uppsala university librarian and key Swedish Enlightenment figure Erik Benzelius (1675–1743), died before the work was finished, and the task of completing the project was taken over by the English scholar Edward Lye (*ibid.*, 185). As Benzelius's and Lye's work represented a significant step forward in terms of a critical and scientific examination of the rather fanciful approach of Rudbeck and his disciples, the work brought Gothic studies forward while at the same time underlining their transnational basis.

But more than anything Gothicism was to be associated with architecture. The Gothic cathedral, in particular, was destined to become perhaps the most central image of Romanticism, popularised not only in Gothic fiction, but also in poetry and painting. In the years before the French Revolution, this modern image of the Gothic was still in its infancy, but the essay “Von Deutscher Baukunst” (“On German Architecture”, 1773), by the young and virtually unpublished Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, would soon have a major impact, especially after being included in *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (*Of German Character and Art*), a collection of essays by Herder, Goethe and others, which served as a manifesto for the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Thus, when the ten-year-old Anne Louise Germaine Necker, later Madame de Stäel and an important proponent of the North as an independent cultural region, visited London with her parents only three years later, their visit to Strawberry Hill may well have been partly connected with an insipient Gothic fashion.

In this period leading up to the breakthrough of High Romanticism, there was a noticeable northward trend among artists and intellectuals, resulting in a number of accounts that added significantly to the knowledge about the region. Some of these works, most of them topographical accounts, by such writers as Erik Pontoppidan, David Cranz, Niels Horrebow, Eggert Ólafsson, Uno von Troil, Samuel Johnson and John Thomas Stanley, have already been mentioned in connection with the more explicitly scientific interest in the region. Furthermore, in the summer

of 1779, another scientist, the Danish but German-born entomologist Johann Christian Fabricius visited large parts of southern Norway, and on his return to Kiel wrote one of the first travel accounts from the country, *Reise nach Norwegen* (Journey to Norway, 1779), carefully collecting information of relevance to agriculture, fishing, forestry and mining, but typically describing the country as void of cultural or historical interest. A British visitor from five years later, William Coxe, largely adopts the same view of the country.

Against this background, Thomas Pennant's *Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides 1772* (1774–76) is all the more striking in its alternative approach. Admittedly, his perspective is different: a Welshman, he is not a complete foreigner to the country he observes. But he too is a highly cultivated and well-connected traveller in a culture generally regarded as unsophisticated and backward. Like Fabricius and Coxe, whose works were quickly translated into several languages, he also provides information typical of the topographical accounts, but in addition, he demonstrates a genuine interest in understanding the society he observes from within, and he realises that in order to achieve that goal, he needs to put aside the dogmatic superiority of the urban intellectual and approach its different culture with tolerance and respect. The result is, among other things, a collection of appendices containing interesting and relevant information about aspects of Scottish culture that were in the process of dying out. In the parallel accounts from the same period by Samuel Johnson (1775) and James Boswell (1785), there is no trace of such an attitude, as will be discussed later.

Among continental poets and intellectuals, too, there was a distinct trend, literally in a northerly direction, and Copenhagen seemed to be exerting a particular attraction. In 1751, the young and promising German poet Friedrich Klopstock (1724–1803) was invited to the city by King Frederik V, receiving a pension for the rest of his life and developing an interest in the German and Nordic past. In the following year the Swiss Paul Henri Mallet arrived at the University of Copenhagen as a French lecturer, and was soon to make a name for himself within Nordic studies. In the summer of 1755 he even made what must have been one of the first journeys of primarily cultural interest to Sweden and Norway (Castrén 1910, 120). The poet and playwright Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737–1823) similarly moved to Copenhagen in 1765, receiving important impulses with regard to the Nordic past. Another Swiss, Karl Viktor von Bonstetten (1745–1832), who would later stay in Copenhagen for several years, travelled to Cambridge in 1769 and befriended Thomas Gray. Even the French botanist, writer, and friend of Rousseau's, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814), went on a two-year journey to the North in the early 1760s, visiting Finland and Russia, and using his experiences in his later works, especially the novel *Paul et Virginie* (1878), which reached a wide



international audience (*ibid.*, 159). It is therefore all the more striking that Johann Gottfried Herder in 1788 made a journey in the opposite direction, i.e. to Rome, found the city a “memorial to age” (Lars Korten in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 134), and was only happy when he left it.<sup>20</sup> There is a peculiar paradox, then, in the fact that the North’s celebration of its ancient past was actually, as Herder’s condescending comment about Rome suggests, an indication of its youth and vigour, but this is clearly how it was perceived; the South was an old and exhausted culture, dominated by a Church that effectively barred the way to innovation and progress.

The northern preoccupation with the past found a range of different expressions. One area that continued to receive scholarly attention was the study of languages. Not surprisingly, and keeping up a trend from earlier in the century, Latin continued to lose ground, being gradually replaced by the vernaculars, though still retaining a strong position. A typical example is Uppsala, where by the end of the century “learned tracts were mainly written in Swedish”, and where in 1779 the number of chairs in Latin was reduced from two to one (Östlund ed. 2000, 13). At this time, Sweden was also blessed with a particularly brilliant linguist, Johan Ihre (1707–80), who contributed to the prestige of the Swedish language by fulfilling an old ambition, started by the Rudbeck disciple Olof Celsius: a Swedish dictionary (Stenroth 2002, 157). *Glossarium Suiogothicum* (1769), as indicated by the title, follows up the Swedish insistence on the country’s near-monopoly on everything Gothic, and thus represents a Gothic tradition running parallel with the primarily British strain of neo-Gothicism. But behind the work was also another ambition, and a left-over from the days of empire, of enabling the Swedish language to be “ranked equally with the great languages of the leading countries of Europe” (Östlund ed. 2000, 12).

Ihre, however, also continued and developed another Swedish specialty: the study of runes. In three major treatises on the subject published between 1769 and 1771, he set a totally new and far more rigorously scientific standard for their investigation. With elegance and apparently irresistible authority, he deals with the wildly imaginative arguments of the Rudbeck tradition, leaving, in his own words, “the entire matter to the free judgement of the impartial reader” (*ibid.*, 191). In England a parallel achievement, somewhat compensating for the generally low ebb of Anglo-Saxon scholarship at the time, was the *Dictionarium Saxonico et Gothico-Latinum* (*Saxon and Gothic-Latin Dictionary*) of 1772, started by Edward Lye – the editor of the *Codex Argenteus* – and finished after his death by Owen Manning (Fairer 1986, 825).

With regard to language, and especially historical linguistics, virtually all the major achievements were made by highly educated

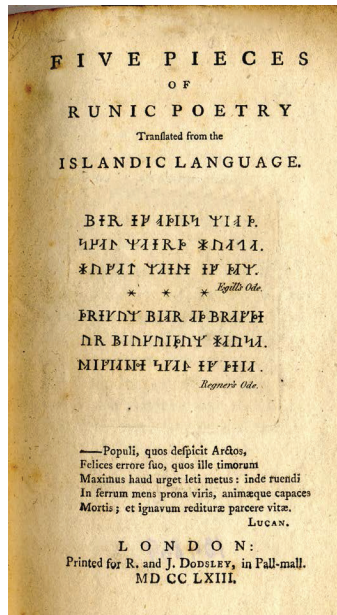
<sup>20</sup> The quotation is translated from the German by PF.

scholars associated with learned institutions. Johan Ihre, for instance, was the Skyttean Professor of Eloquence and Government in Uppsala, and had studied at several of the major universities in Europe. Yet, there is one event during this period whose origin is very remote from the dreaming spires of the academies, but which nevertheless had a major impact on the politics of language. On 31 July 1786, the twenty-seven-year-old son of a Scottish tenant farmer published his first poetry collection, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. With this book, Robert Burns (1759–96) was to take the transition from Latin as an educated *lingua franca* to the national vernaculars one step further. Just as travellers and scientists were making their way out of the major cities and seeking out remote valleys and islands, whose nature and culture they studied, Burns drew attention to their most vibrant living organism, which was in itself a reservoir of cultural information, namely their language. Furthermore, he produced poetry in it, whose quality, in comparison with poetry written in Latin or the already established vernaculars, could not be denied, thereby infusing regions hitherto condescendingly regarded as primitive and uncivilised with a significant dose of cultural self-confidence.

In addition, this awakening of a linguistic consciousness represented a potentially powerful democratic force that in the course of the next hundred years and more would influence the political landscape in several countries. All in all, the period in question shows an increased awareness of language and language politics, exemplified by philosophical essays on the origin of language by such thinkers as Herder and Rousseau. The main focus in the revival of the Nordic world, however, is on history and historiography, on the one hand, and on literature – old and new – on the other.

In the decades before the Revolution, there is a striking number of historical accounts being published about the Scandinavian countries. The Norwegian historian Gerhard Schøning (1722–80) first brought out a book about the “ancient geography” of the Nordic countries in 1751, in which he also developed a theory in opposition to the already discredited Olof Rudbeck, to the effect that Norway and not Sweden was traditionally the central power among the Nordic countries, with a larger territory and a larger population than its neighbours (Larsen 2002, 8). During the period 1771–81, he then produced the large, three-volume *Norges Riiges Historie* (History of Norway), in which he made the claim that Scandinavia had been populated for as long as Italy and Greece, and much longer than Britain, France and Spain. Schøning, furthermore, collaborated with the Danish historian Peter Frederik Suhm, who in 1769 started the publication of a multi-volume history of Denmark from the time of the Flood onwards, with so many primary sources that it included “everything that could be traced” about the ancient history of the country (Blanck 1911, 238–39). In the same year, the Swedish historian Sven Lagerbring

brought out *Swea Rikes Historia* (The History of Sweden). All of these histories were profoundly concerned with the origins of their respective countries, trying to provide each of them with an historical justification that was one step ahead of its neighbour. They served, in other words, as more or less explicit political instruments, and in addition to these new histories, reprints of older ones were used for the same purpose. In 1781, for instance, Absalon Pedersøn Beyer's *Om Norgis Rige* (On the Kingdom of Norway) from 1567 was reissued in Copenhagen, a work that was



The title page from Thomas Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763).

undoubtedly celebrated in the nationalistic Norwegian Club (*Det Norske Selskab*) that had been founded in the Norwegian-Danish capital in 1772, marking the first major step in the direction of Norwegian independence.

There is no doubt about the significance of the works mentioned above as to a growing national self-confidence in the countries concerned, but there is one figure that deserves particular mention with regard to promulgating the knowledge of ancient Nordicism, and primarily so because his contribution encompasses the whole northern region. Paul Henri Mallet (1730–1807) was appointed professor of *belles lettres* in Copenhagen at the young age of twenty-two, and immediately set to work on the ancient history of the country. The first result, published after three years, was *Introduction à L'histoire du Danemarch* (Introduction to the History of Denmark), which marked a new departure by combining

contemporary scholarship with ancient primary sources (*ibid.*, 94). Only seven years earlier, *The Spirit of the Laws* by Montesquieu's had provided the northernists with welcome ammunition, and his Swiss disciple Mallet now repaid the Danes' hospitality by collecting an impressive amount of evidence to support the claim that the Nordic culture was not barbaric but rather was fully compatible with the admired culture of the South. Furthermore, he added to the work's credibility by leaning on another work with French roots, Pelloutier's *History of the Celts* from 1741 (Gonthier-Louis Fink in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 94). Finally, he published the work in French, thus making it immediately available to the European educated elite. It should also be noted that Mallet was, as modern jargon would have it, 'head-hunted' for the job by the Danish government (O'Donoghue 2007, 110), who must have seen the commission as part of an ambition to supply the nation with a heroic and mythical past, which in turn would give credibility to the political establishment.

Nearly two thousand years earlier, Virgil had given Rome its national myth in a quasi-historical manner with the *Aeneid*; and nearly a hundred years earlier Olof Rudbeck had attempted a similar feat for Sweden, claiming to be strictly historical. Mallet now seemed to have done the same for the Scandinavian North, with Denmark as a central point of reference, using a kind of pincer movement, reducing the significance of the cultural contribution of the South while at the same time enhancing that of the North. Mallet, then, does not follow Rousseau in his condemnation of civilisation; he does not praise primitivism as a genuine and admirable state. On the contrary, he tries to show how the ancient Nordic culture, even more powerfully than contemporary southern culture, was governed precisely by Enlightenment ideas.

Mallet's work, which he supplemented with a part two, *Monuments de la Mythologie et la Poesie des Celtes* (Monuments of the Mythology and Poetry of the Celts) in 1756, is a milestone in Nordic studies, and was translated into German in 1765. However, it is the English translation from 1770 – *Northern Antiquities* – by Bishop Thomas Percy (1729–1811) that most effectively gave this Nordic gospel an even broader international distribution. Percy was not just a cleric with a passing interest in Nordic literature. In August 1761, he had spent a fortnight in the Pepysian Library in Cambridge, copying ancient ballads and having tea with Thomas Gray, with whom he discussed ancient poetry (Lytton Sells 1980, 102). By this time, of course, Gray had already published his ode "The Progress of Poesy", where he asserted that all countries, civilised and barbaric, have their poetry, and he had been explicit about the northern realm: "In climes beyond the solar road, / Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam, / The Muse has broke the twi-light gloom / To cheer the shivering native's dull abode" ("Thomas Gray Archive", 2013). After his tea with Gray, Percy had then gone on to publish *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763),

with translations – and partly rewritings – of five Icelandic saga texts, and the preface to this book reveals a significant influence from Mallet, including an insistence on the texts as highly polished and sophisticated literary creations.

Percy even went so far as to excuse the limitations of the English language in comparison with the language of the originals. “If”, he says, “in the following versions there should be found too frequent a recurrence of synonymous phrases, it is entirely owing to the deficiency of our language, which did not afford a greater variety: for in the original the same thought is scarcely ever expressed twice in the same words” ([Percy] 1763, no pag). Two years later, he had also published *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which contained primarily old ballads that Percy himself had collected in and around Northumberland. By the time he set to work on the translation of Mallet’s *magnum opus*, in other words, Percy was well acquainted with the considerable body of work that had been produced on the ancient literature of Britain and the Nordic countries, and had himself become an authority in the field. It is therefore interesting to note that on one particular point, he has an important reservation in relation to Mallet’s original. Like a number of his contemporaries, Mallet had – as the title of his second work suggests – made no proper distinction between the Scandinavians and the Germans, on the one hand, and the Celts, on the other. A crucial consequence of this was that the Gauls (in modern terms the French), were subsumed within the generic and close to synonymous terms Celtic/German/Nordic.

This was a thorn in the eye of a northernist increasingly keen to separate the wheat from the chaff, and Percy consequently spends a lot of energy on building a barrier between the North and the South. Over several pages he argues heatedly against the commonly held notion that the Teutons and the Celts (that is the Germans and the Gauls) are one and the same people. Again Tacitus and Caesar are recruited in to substantiate the argument, and again the strategy is to convince the reader of the northerners’ cultural superiority, this time by focusing on the written word. The Gallic druids, according to Percy,

concealed their doctrines from the laity, forbidding that they should ever be committed to writing, and upon that account, not having so much as an alphabet of their own. In this the institutions of Odin and the Skalds was the very reverse. No barbarous people were so addicted to writing, as appears from the innumerable quantity of Runic inscriptions scattered all over the north; no barbarous people ever held letters in higher reverence, ascribing the invention of them to their chief deity, and attributing to the letters themselves supernatural virtues. Nor is there the least room to believe that any of their doctrines were locked up or concealed from any part of the community. (Percy in Mallet 1847, 14)

Percy here manages rather inconspicuously to include another favourite argument, especially among British northernists, namely that of the

North as possessing an ancient democratic tradition, distinctly different from the undemocratic tradition of the Mediterranean world. Mallet, in his preface, had also underlined a contrast between North and South; he had, for instance, insisted that Rome, as it “increased in grandeur”, had lost its original spirit and degenerated, whilst this same spirit “continued unaltered in the colder countries of Europe” (Mallet 1847, 56–57). He had even quoted Montesquieu to the effect that “the Goth Jordanes ... calls the north of Europe the forge of mankind. I should rather call it, the forge of those instruments which broke the fetters manufactured in the south” (*ibid.*, 58).

There is in Percy’s preface, however, and in his somewhat obsessive exclusion of the French from the distinguished company of the northern nations (perhaps even more so than in Mallet) a reflection of contemporary politics, including a reminder of the fierceness of the Seven Years’ War. And Percy was not alone in using the historical and mythological past for ideological means. In Germany, a first edition of *Schutzschriften für die Alten Deutschen* (Apologia for the Ancient Germans) by Gottfried Schütze had been published as early as the late 1740s. Then, when the second edition appeared in the early 1770s, after the German translation of Mallet had been published with a foreword by Schütze, he included extensive portions of Nordic material, clearly regarding it as applicable to the German context. With the benefit of hindsight, then, it is possible to argue that the revival of northern antiquity was being used for purposes of national ideology and propaganda.

During the hundred-year-period before 1750, a large number of ancient northern texts, especially saga texts, had been saved and published, and thus been made available to scholars and other readers across Europe. This development now continued, but also expanded to new areas. Inspired by Percy’s *Reliques*, Johann Gottfried Herder, for instance, started collecting a wide range of folk ballads from various countries. As early as in 1773, he had identified the large, untapped reservoir of “folksongs, regional songs, peasant songs that certainly would lack nothing when it comes to liveliness and rhythm, naivete and strength of language. But”, he exclaimed impatiently,

who is collecting them? or who cares about them? the songs of the people, from streets and alleys and fishmarkets, in the traditional roundelays of the country folk? songs that are often unscanned and poorly rhymed, who would collect them? who would print them for our critics who are so good at syllable-counting and scanning? (Quoted in Feldman and Richardson 1972, 229)

Answering these rhetorical questions, he then proceeded with great energy to take matters in his own hands, and published two volumes entitled *Volkslieder* (Folk Songs, 1778–79), which were later developed into *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (The Voices of Peoples in Songs, 1807). For

several decades, these texts would serve as sources of inspiration for other collectors as well as artists and composers.

Another important publication in Germany was the *Nibelungenlied*, an epic medieval poem based on the Icelandic *Völsunga Saga*. The discovery of this was the result of years of detective work by the Swiss philologist Johann Jacob Bodmer, who in 1746 made an important find in the Royal Library in Paris: an entire cycle of German *Minnesänge* that had been collected by the late thirteenth-century collector Rüdiger Manesse. Later on he found *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach and the so-called “Hohenems manuscript C of the *Nibelungelied*, the ‘*Iliad* of the Middle Ages” (Christian Klemm, in Lentzsch ed. 2005, 150). It was published as early as 1755, but did not acquire its position as a uniquely German cultural treasure, used extensively in the promotion of a German national consciousness, until after the turn of the century (Björnsson 2003, 79).

Yet another text, with a comparable significance for the British literary tradition, was saved for posterity a few decades later by the Icelandic Professor of Antiquities at the University of Copenhagen, Grimur J. Thorkelin. In 1786 he travelled to England to study Anglo-Danish manuscripts, and the following year transcribed *Beowulf* from a disintegrating original. Admittedly, the text was not published until 1815, and Thorkelin has received severe criticism from later scholars (ref. Fjalldal 2008). Still, his efforts proved to be of invaluable significance, and in the two-part work that he published in London in 1788, *Fragments of English and Irish History in the Ninth and Tenth Century*, the selection itself also appears to have a certain political motivation; the preface emphasises the fact that he has chosen texts underlining the long and “beneficial intercourse” between Britain and Iceland (Thorkelin 1788, vii). This text then enters into and perhaps in some ways even contributes to the ensuing long, intimate and in some ways surprisingly peaceful relationship between Britain and the Nordic countries.

The urgency surrounding the process of saving the ancient Nordic literary heritage is also exemplified by the last text in the book, “Records Concerning the Orkney Islands”, which according to Thorkelin was “published from a manuscript on paper in my own collection. The originals had belonged to the cathedral in Thrundhem [i.e. Trondheim], and were lost in the dreadful fire which happened at Copenhagen in 1728, and proved highly fatal to the Northern literature” (*ibid.*, xi). Thus when the nineteenth-century Norwegian collector of folk ballads Magnus Brostrup Landstad compared his work to carrying treasures out of a burning house, the expression was only partly metaphorical: the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century collectors of ancient texts more than once arrived in the nick of time, and just as often too late.

The close connection between an interest in the polar regions and in the North’s cultural heritage is confirmed by the work of Daines Barrington,

the Vice President of the Society of Antiquaries, who initiated the Phipps expedition to Spitsbergen in the summer of 1773. In that very same year, Barrington also published King Alfred's Saxon translation – together with his own – of one of the key works of the early Christian Church, Orosius's *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, fulfilling an ambition of William Elstob's from the beginning of the century. Barrington, for once rather modestly, claimed that he published it “for my own amusement and that of a few antiquarian friends” (quoted in Fairer 1986, 823). Only a generation later, it would have seemed unusual for one individual to take a profound interest in two such different areas as polar research and Saxon translations of texts from the Early Church.

For more than a hundred years, Iceland had been the main source and the main hunting ground for primary antiquarian texts, and the search continued. This could obviously be considered either as robbery or as blessing, depending on who acquired what material, and where it ended up. During Joseph Banks's visit to the country in 1772, for instance, he undoubtedly obtained a considerable number of texts – according to the Frenchman Chevalier de la Poix de Freminville fifty years later, the number was one hundred and sixty-two, and he described them as manuscripts, suggesting that they were ancient documents (Freminville 1819, 91). Banks's biographer Patrick O'Brian sets the number at one hundred and twenty (O'Brian 1997, 167). Freminville's number is correct, but the hand-written, twenty-two-page catalogue presented to the British Library by Banks together with the texts themselves makes it clear that of the one hundred and sixty-two items, one hundred and seventeen are books printed in Iceland (including *Bibliae Islandiae* from 1584 and *Graduale Islandicum* in several editions, the oldest from 1594)<sup>21</sup>; fourteen are books printed in Copenhagen; and only thirty are genuinely Icelandic manuscripts (Banks [1773], no pag.). Banks, though primarily a natural scientist, was thus more or less combing the country for everything that might be of interest to Nordic scholars, but the fact that the large majority of the printed texts are of a religious character and printed in the late 1600s and the 1700s probably suggests that supplies were rapidly running out. This near-obsessive interest in the Icelandic literary heritage is confirmed by Uno von Troil, Banks's Swedish travel companion, who in his own account from the trip claims that of the roughly three hundred titles he knows have been printed in Iceland, “[I have] upwards of one hundred now in my own library” (Von Troil 1780, 186).

<sup>21</sup> Lat. ‘*graduale*’, Eng. ‘gradual’, is a hymn sung during the Eucharist.



### *Ossian and Oral Traditions*

The recovery of the literature of the North, however, was not only concerned with the saga literature and with ancient manuscripts. As suggested earlier, this was also the period when the awareness of oral literary traditions and the whole concept of folk literature come into being, and in this context there is one literary phenomenon, in addition to the works of Mallet and Percy, that clearly had a particularly strong impact on the cultural climate of northern Europe, and that contributed with an explicitly northern impulse, namely the Ossian poems.

To some extent, Mallet's confusion with regard to the Celtic and other northern elements paved the way for these poems, which in geographical terms not only cover the Celtic parts of the British Isles, but also contain numerous references to the countries across the North Sea. Still, the publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in June 1760 by the still not twenty-four-year-old James Macpherson (1736–96) came very much out of the blue. Nobody seeing the small, plain and authorless volume of no more than seventy pages from the Edinburgh publishers of G. Hamilton and J. Balfour could have guessed that this was the beginning of a literary revolution that would reach far beyond the country's borders. This is not the place to discuss the literary quality of the poems or the much debated question of their origin; the sole concern here is their influence on the cultural scene at large, but it should be noted that Macpherson's preface makes a solemn promise as well as some rather sensational claims:

The public may depend on the following fragments as genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry. The date of their composition cannot be exactly ascertained. Tradition, in the country where they were written, refers them to an æra of the most remote antiquity: and this tradition is supported by the spirit and strain of the poems themselves; which abound with those ideas, and paint those manners, that belong to the most early state of society. (Macpherson 1760, iii)

The poet – or editor, or translator – goes on to claim that the poems have been written down from oral sources of which “innumerable traditions remain, to this day, in the Highlands of Scotland”, and they “are to be ascribed to the Bards; a race of men well known to have continued throughout many ages in Ireland and the north of Scotland. Every chief or great man had in his family a Bard or poet, whose office it was to record in verse, the illustrious actions of that family” (*ibid.*, v–vi). As to the way in which the poems have been transferred from one generation to the next, he says:

They are not set to music, nor sung. The versification in the original is simple; and to such as understand the language, very smooth and beautiful. Rhyme is seldom used: but the cadence, and the length of the line varied, so as to suit the sense. The translation is extremely literal. Even the arrangement of the words in the original has been imitated; to which must be imputed some inversions in the style, that otherwise would not have been chosen. (*Ibid.*, vi–vii)

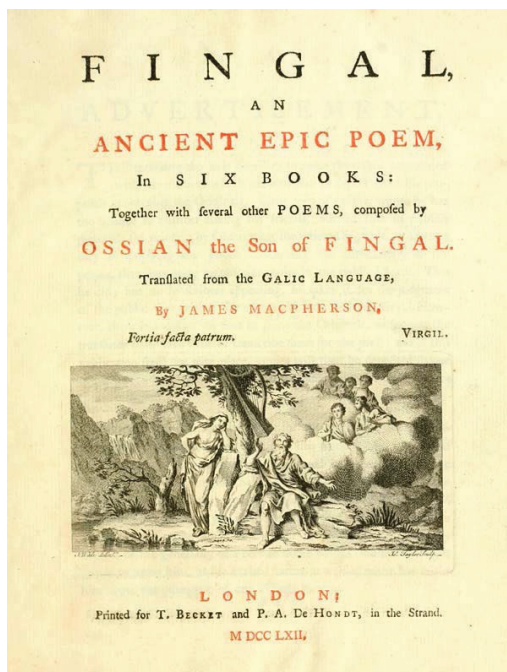
In these few lines, Macpherson opens up a new and vast literary arena. Only five years after Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, he identifies the primitive and uncivilised world of ordinary and illiterate people, living as far from universities and cultural institutions as possible, as a source of a literature that is not only as old as, or older than, major parts of the literary canon, but that also possesses a timeless quality fully on a par with that canon.

Furthermore, like the travellers to Iceland, who collected disintegrating manuscripts and saved them for posterity, Macpherson interviews local people and writes down what they tell him. But the book does not contain the original – he only presents a translation. It is as if he gives a half-mocking intimation that a full understanding of the exquisite subtlety of the poems is beyond the so-called civilised and educated reader of English; it is rather reserved for the few who possess the key to the original, in effect the very people who produced them. He is making the same claim for these ancient Highland poems as the educated elite has always made for its own artistic achievements: essentially, that they can only be fully appreciated by that hermetic elite itself. There is in these lines an immense pride that self-confidently looks back on a more than thousand-year-old tradition of spirituality, learning and exchange of cultural impulses. The Gaelic language, frequently condemned as primitive and barbaric, had for instance “acquired both a written form and a vernacular literature in advance both of English and most other modern European languages” (Hunter 1999, 68). Translating the poems into English, in other words, was not done primarily to raise their cultural credibility by transferring them to a more sophisticated tongue, but simply to allow non-Gaelic speakers – including the large majority of Scots – at least *some* access to their worth.

Only fourteen years after Scotland's bitter defeat at Culloden, this underlying message may not come as such a surprise; it is perfectly possible to read Macpherson's preface as an act of cultural revenge, and possibly as a double one: against England, for its treatment of Scotland; and against the Scottish Lowlands, for its treatment of the Highlands. In both cases, the ambition was to force a powerful majority culture to bow in respect to a literary memorial from a humiliated minority culture. It is a peculiar picture: from the point of view of the established standards of literary taste, the Ossian poems had the lowest possible pedigree: in geographical terms, their origin was almost as remote from the European cultural centres as it was possible to imagine; they had been collected among a population that had been described as animals, vermin and wild beasts; and they had been composed in a primitive and “wholly alien tongue” (*ibid.*, 198 and 175). It is as if a freed slave in the American Deep South in the 1870s had published a poem of the heroic past of the Afro-Americans, translated from some African tribal language, while at the same time claiming that

only a knowledge of this sophisticated language would enable the ignorant white reader to grasp the poem's true quality.

Also, Macpherson had already been inspired by the dream of a great national past – and implicitly of a similarly great future – by reading the Aberdonian Thomas Blackwell's work from 1734, *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (Rüdiger Singer in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 20). The



The title page of the first edition of *Fingal* (1762).

poems' overall message – the celebration of a past filled with the deeds of fighting heroes – is therefore compatible with the political context in which they were launched. Furthermore, this celebration of the past, according to Macpherson, has been kept alive and transferred from generation to generation by another heroic figure, namely the Bard, “an inferior order of the Druids”.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, by presenting Ossian as blind, Macpherson with suave precision thus latches his project on to the well-established admiration for the Greek as well as the Gaelic past, in which Homer is generally portrayed as blind, and borrows from their popular and academic prestige.

But that is not all. Macpherson has all the characteristics of a smooth operator. As the title indicates, he, the literary archaeologist, has so far

<sup>22</sup> Macpherson, in the “Dissertation” to *Fingal*, in Macpherson 1996, 48.

only presented the potsherds or the fragments, but he has got considerably more up his sleeve, and leaves the reader with an alluring vision of a far grander and more comprehensive literary treasure, which under the right circumstances might also see the light of day. But he needs to be coaxed and encouraged, and the concluding lines of the preface can only be interpreted as a pitch for benevolent reviews as well as for financial assistance, so that the treasure, of which he gives an enticing little sample, can be safely secured:

In particular there is reason to hope that one work of considerable length, and which deserves to be styled an heroic poem, might be recovered and translated, if encouragement were given to such an undertaking. The subject is, an invasion of Ireland by Swarthan King of Lochlyn; which is the name of Denmark in the Erse language. Cuchulaid, the General or Chief of the Irish tribes, upon intelligence of their invasion, assembles his forces. Councils are held; and battles fought. But after several unsuccessful engagements, the Irish are forced to submit. At length, Fingal King of Scotland, called in this poem, “The Desert of the hills,” arrives with his ships to assist Cuchulaid. He expels the Danes from the country; and returns home victorious. This poem is held to be of greater antiquity than any of the rest that are preserved. [...] If the whole were recovered, it might serve to throw considerable light upon the Scottish and Irish antiquities. (Howard Gaskill in Macpherson 1996, vii–viii)

He offers, in other words, a brief summary, as a teaser, but one that is detailed enough to slightly undermine his own claim that it needs to be “recovered and translated”.

Still, in August 1760, only two months after the publication of *Fragments*, he set out on his journey “through the Highlands and across to Skye and the Outer Hebrides”, where he collected a considerable amount of material (*ibid.*, xiii). The following summer he made yet another journey, and in 1762 *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem* appeared. This time the publisher was from London, the format considerably larger, the title page in black and red, with the author’s name clearly printed, and with an illustration that would inspire innumerable drawings and paintings: the blind Ossian sits on a rock, with his lyre hanging in a tree above him; a young woman leans on a rock on the other side of the tree, with one breast bared; and in the clouds in the background the ghosts of the ancient heroes are gathered.

In line with the book’s general design, Macpherson includes a sixteen-page “Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity, &c. of the Poems of Ossian the Son of Fingal”, which with a self-assured and academic tone sketches the historical background of the poems, dating them to the third or early fourth century AD, and answers a number of the charges that had been launched against the authenticity of the first collection. He also returns to the poems’ uniqueness and the problem of translating them into English, and defends the decision to produce a literal rather than a verse translation, thus staying as closely to the original as possible, but

admits that the published version is necessarily only a pale reflection of the original, “which contains what is beautiful in simplicity, and grand in the sublime” (Macpherson in Gaskill 1996, 52). As to the demands from some of the critics to see the original Gaelic texts, the “Advertisement” in *Fingal* also contains some interesting, though cagey, remarks: “[...] there is a design on foot to print the Originals, as soon as the translator shall have time to transcribe them for the press; and if this publication shall not take place, copies will then be deposited in one of the public libraries, to prevent so ancient a monument of genius from being lost” (Macpherson 1762, no pag.).

### *The Ossian Effect*

Despite the continuous discussion about the authenticity of the poems, by 1765, when the two texts were collected in a two-volume edition together with a range of previously unpublished texts under the title of *The Works of Ossian*, it was clear that a major literary phenomenon was afoot. The first translation had appeared in Padova as early as 1763. The abbot Melchior Cesarotti allegedly taught himself English in order to translate them into Italian, and the success of his translation took the appreciation of Ossian far beyond Italy (Allen and Allen 1999, 152). The following year, a German translation by Johann A. Engelbrecht appeared in Hamburg; it was immediately discovered by Friedrich Klopstock, and served as inspiration for his ode “Kaiser Heinrich”, which calls for the reawakening of ancient German poetry (Blanck 1911, 147–48). Then in 1765 a journal in Gothenburg publishes fragments of Ossian in a Swedish translation (Christiansen 1944, 12). It should also be remembered that while further translations awaited publication, the Italian and German versions in particular were circulating in a number of European countries (Gaskill 2004, 15).

Yet, though gathering momentum, the wave of interest in the Ossian poems was far from reaching its peak; that would not happen until after the turn of the century. There was nevertheless one country where there was a particularly strong interest, and for which two extraordinarily strong personalities were primarily responsible. Although the first German translation of Ossian had attracted the interest of Klopstock, who again, a few years later, passed it on to the Danish poet and playwright Johannes Ewald, it was not until the second German translation, in 1769, by the Viennese Jesuit and Professor of Rhetoric Michael Denis, that the real interest in Ossian got under way. By this time, Herder was well informed about the poems, and in the winter of 1771, he passed the good news on to Goethe. Together these two figures would lay the foundation for

an Ossian cult that would surpass that in any other country, possibly including Britain.

Goethe may already have been contemplating the novel *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*), which would become a best-seller and a cult book on its publication in 1774; at least there is no doubt that his introduction to Ossian had a fundamental impact on the process of its composition. Written in an epistolary form, the novel follows young Werther from May 1771 until his death in December 1772, and having been introduced, like his author, to the Ossian poems, Werther exclaims in a letter of 12 October 1771: "Ossian has ousted Homer from my heart. What a world that exalted soul leads me into!" (Goethe 1989, 95). Then, in the final and dramatic pages of the novel, a lengthy passage from *The Song of Selma* is included, drawing a whole generation of young novel readers from all over Europe under the spell of Ossian. In the days before modern advertising and branding, James Macpherson could not have asked for a more effective marketing ploy than Goethe's suicidal youth. Only a few years later, one of the many ardent readers of the novel would be the precocious eleven-year-old girl who would later become Madame de Staël (Fairweather 2006, 43). In addition, while Goethe was finishing the novel, Herder contributed an entire section in the collection they were producing together, *Of German Character and Art*, with excerpts from letters about Ossian. However, the extent of the German fascination with Ossian would only become apparent in the following decades.

In Britain, too, the Ossian poems triggered, with remarkable rapidity, a range of responses. Some threw themselves into the debate about the poems' authenticity, whereas others were inspired to pursue more or less parallel projects from other parts of the British Isles. One interesting case is the Rev. Evan Evans's *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (1764), which may at first seem like a Welsh imitation of Macpherson. Just like the latter, he offers literal prose transcriptions of old texts – in this case from the 1200s and 1300s; he assures his readers of their genuineness; and the general theme is very similar to that of the Ossian poems. He even mentions these in his preface, and assures his readers that he does not mean "to set the following poems in competition with those just mentioned", but adds that his investigation into the Welsh bards was not inspired by Macpherson: "It was first thought of, and encouraged some years before the name of Ossian was known in England. I had long been convinced, that no nation in Europe possesses greater remains of antient and genuine pieces of this kind than the Welsh; and therefore was inclined, in honour to my country, to give a specimen of them in the English language" (Evans 1764, i–ii).

The major difference between Evans and Macpherson, however, is that the former used written sources, whereas the latter appears to have primarily used living informants. Thomas Gray, himself with a keen

interest in ancient Welsh literature and with an impressive grasp of the entire field of Nordic studies, kept himself informed about Evans's work, even before its publication, but seems to have been more enthusiastic about Macpherson's than about Evans's contribution. Still, in his little and unpretentious collection *Poems by Mr. Gray* (1768), he includes a little text, "The Triumph of Owen: A Fragment", which is an imitation in rhyming couplets of one of Evans's prose versions (Gray 1768, 101). In the fashion of the day, he treats, in other words, the ancient literature of Britain in precisely the same way as the canonised texts of Greek and Roman antiquity: as models for imitation.

There can be no doubt that from the point of view of Great Britain as a union of several nations, which in addition was in need of building a common and cohesive identity, the popularity and enthusiasm surrounding the Ossian poems must have been interpreted as a signal of a potentially inflammable separatist pride. In Scotland this was plain for all to see, and it was no less clear in England's Irish backyard. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that *An Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland*, published in 1772 by the prominent Irish surgeon and antiquarian Sylvester O'Halloran (1728–1807), is imbued with quite an explicit political message. On the other hand, it can be read as a proof of Britain's democratic tradition and genuine respect for the freedom of expression that such a book was published in London at all.

O'Halloran's initial objective can be compared to that of Rudbeck in Sweden a hundred years earlier: to claim for Ireland and the Celts everything that is valuable and admirable in European history. Ireland was the "prime seat" of Druidism, and instead of allowing Greece the honour of being the cradle of civilisation, he claims that tribute for the ancestors of the Irish who resided in Greece and who in fact taught the Greeks their alphabet. He then takes a particular interest in the Hyperboreans, who, according to the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, lived on an island "opposite the Celtæ": "That Ireland is intended by the Hyperborean Island is, I conceive, in the strongest degree probable from every part of the description" (O'Halloran 1772, 71). He then begins to approach his actual errand:

The Hyperborean island appears then to have been a land very happily situated; free from the extremes of heat and cold, fruitful and pleasant, and nothing but joy and festivity reigning amongst its inhabitants throughout the year. And what country with greater propriety, can lay claim to all these blessings, than Ireland? here [*sic*] the scorching heats of Summer and chilling blasts of Winter are equally unknown; a perpetual verdure appears [...] . (*Ibid.*, 72)

Ireland, he claims, *could have been* "the Eden of Europe":

But, alas! whilst three fourths of the nation are chained down, if I may be allowed the expression, to almost invincible poverty, by a system of laws and politics, as new as unprecedented; and whilst the few, who through uncommon pains have acquired

fortunes, are obliged to send their acquisitions to purchase in a foreign country that permanent security which their own *refuses* them, Ireland cannot hope for those improvements, which IT ONCE POSSESSED, and which it is capable of. (*Ibid.*, 72–73)

O'Halloran's use of history as a political weapon is impressive, however historically misconceived it might be. Himself a Catholic, he paints a picture of an Ireland that was once a fountainhead of civilisation; he discusses one area after another and shows how it was once a country so rich and happy that it fully merited the label of *Insula Sacra*, or Holy Island. It has, however, been reduced to misery by the English. The last part of the book is an indignant description of Ireland under English rule – a catalogue of cruelty and terror, which have made “Ireland a slaughterhouse for near 500 years” (*ibid.*, 205).



Nicolai Abildgaard: *Ossian Singing His Swan Song* (1780–82). The Danish painter's portrayal of Ossian seems to have set a standard for later artists; the old and blind singer is shown with his harp and a spear, the latter suggesting the tales of drama and battle from the past. The painting also reproduces the atmosphere of bleakness and desolation that characterizes the poems. National Gallery of Denmark. © SMK Foto.

O'Hallaran's use of the Irish past points directly forward to the Irish Literary Renaissance a hundred years later, and forms part of the ideological basis for the Easter Rising in 1916 and the twentieth-century



struggle for Irish independence. So does also another and apparently far less aggressive work – *Reliques of Irish Poetry* – that came out in the very year of the French Revolution, and stands out by virtue of being written by a woman. But Charlotte Brooke (1740–93) was quite unlike many of the poorly educated women of her times, and she was amply qualified for the job. The daughter of the writer Henry Brooke, whose play *Gustavus Vasa* had caused a scandal in London half a century earlier and of whose extensive manuscript collection Charlotte made good use, she was directly acquainted with the Irish oral tradition through members of the labouring population that she knew personally.<sup>23</sup>

*Reliques* is clearly inspired by and modelled on Macpherson, but Brooke carefully avoids the former's problematical authenticity by providing the original texts. Not unlike Elizabeth Elstob before her, she also speaks somewhat tongue-in-cheek about her status as a woman, and about the men who have cleared the path for her work. In excessively feminine-sounding and humble phrases, she acquires the – presumably male – reader's confidence: "My comparatively feeble hand aspires only (like the ladies of ancient Rome) to strew flowers in the paths of these laurelled champions of my country. [...] To pluck, and thus to bestow them, is mine, and I hold myself honoured in the task" (Brooke 1789, iii). But she quickly moves on to the fate of her country, and takes as a point of departure O'Halloran's claim that a nation's mettle is measured by its importance "in arts and in arms". Knowing that Ireland is hopelessly inferior to England in military terms, she plays, like Macpherson and others, the culture card: it is Irish culture, and especially its ancient poetry, that will serve as the source of revival.

Once again, the past is employed as the main vehicle for creating a glorious future. And behind this strategy lies a thesis that goes back to Christianity itself, that spirit will eventually prevail over matter: poetry, rooted in the Irish soil, will be superior to English arms. It is therefore necessary to argue for the superiority of the Irish language and its poetry:

It is really astonishing of what various and comprehensive powers this neglected language is possessed. It is pathetic, it breathes the most beautiful and affecting simplicity; and in the bolder species of composition, it is distinguished by a force of expression, a sublime dignity, and rapid energy, which it is scarcely possible for any translation fully to convey [...] . (*Ibid.*, vi)

Again, like Macpherson, she is saying that this poetry is really reserved for those proficient in the ancient language alone (which in effect means the initiates of the down-trodden culture), and that only they can fully appreciate and understand the poems' underlying value. And having offered a rapturous list of their many qualities, she makes yet another fascinating strategic move:

<sup>23</sup> For an informative discussion of Brooke's *Reliques*, see Jung 2009.

But this is not all. – As yet, we are too little known to our noble neighbour of Britain; were we better acquainted, we should be better friends. The British muse is not yet informed that she has an elder sister in this isle; let us then introduce them to each other! together let them walk abroad from their bowers, sweet ambassadors of cordial union between two countries that seem formed by nature to be joined by every bond of interest, and of amity. (*Ibid.*, vii–viii)

Almost unnoticeably, Brooke gains the upper hand by using tradition and *age* as her trump card – an argument, incidentally, in profound harmony with British thinking, as another Irishman, Edmund Burke, would demonstrate with powerful conviction only a year later in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.<sup>24</sup> Again, with alluring feminine delicacy, Brooke invites Britain (by which she primarily means England), to a union, but the invitation is extended by the “elder sister”, thus relegating Britain to a position of immaturity and youth.<sup>25</sup> Being a Protestant, unlike O’Hallaran, Brooke thus works out a compromise, by which Irish nationalism and Britain’s presence in the country are both justified.

The fascination with Ossian, of which the works of O’Hallaran and Brooke were clearly the result, also extended to other arenas. In 1768, for instance, the poem “Oithóna” from *Fingal* was performed in the Theatre Royal in the Hay Market as a three-act dramatic operatic poem, set to music by the currently popular French but London-based composer and violinist Francois Hippolyte Barthelemon. The following year, John Wodrow, a minister on the island of Islay in the Hebrides, brought out a series of Ossian poems, later to be accompanied by *Fingal* in two volumes, in “English heroic rhyme.” His explanation for translating them into the poetic form of the day is that although everyone “possessed of any share of real taste or elevation of sentiment” must be well acquainted with Macpherson’s poems, “the bulk of people, who are generally satisfied with a careless and hasty perusal, are too apt to overlook the beauties that abound in our Northern Bard” (Wodrow 1769, xi).

Gradually, painters and other artists also showed an interest in the phenomenon, as did the incipient tourist industry. As early as 1772, “Sir James Clerk, third Baronet of Penicuik near Edinburgh, commissioned the building of a new stately home” and invited the painter Alexander Runciman “to decorate the ceiling of his great hall with scenes from Ossian” on such a scale that both Runciman and his employer regarded it as a rival to the Sistine Chapel itself (Allen and Allen 1999, 155–56). The Irish painter James Barry was similarly trying to appropriate Ossian as a figure of Irish history (Murdo Macdonald in Gaskill ed. 2004, 395–96), but somewhat surprisingly, the first proper paintings with motifs from Ossian still seem to have been made by the Danish artist Nicolai

<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, Burke also wrote reviews of Macpherson’s *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* as well as *Fingal*.

<sup>25</sup> This was eleven years before the actual union was established.

Abildgaard (1743–1809), who himself owned and studied in great detail several different Ossian translations (Christensen 1972, 13). *Fingal Sees His Ancestor's Ghosts* (c.1782) as well as his famous *Ossian Singing* (1780–82) are both examples of how his interest in historical painting, inspired by the poets Klopstock and Ewald, made the move, typical of the period, from the South to the North, from Neoclassicism of the Mediterranean world to the Romanticism of Shakespeare, Ossian and the Vikings.<sup>26</sup> It was only after 1790, however, that these interests developed into full bloom.

Ossianic tourism appears to have started with Joseph Banks, who on his way to Iceland in 1772 paid a visit to what was destined to become one of the great tourist attractions of the next century, Fingal's Cave, a spectacular formation of vertical basalt cliffs on the island of Staffa in the Hebrides, which according to Macpherson's poem was built by Fingal himself. The visit thus neatly illustrates the contrast, but also the connection, between two different explanations of a natural phenomenon: while Banks's account, which was published in and made known through its publication in Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Scotland*, was an important reason why news of the cliffs spread, his main interest in the island was geological.

Establishing a geographical anchorage for the Ossian poems, as exemplified by Fingal's Cave, became an industry in itself, and in this respect there was a particularly keen contest between Scotland and Ireland, as exemplified by the two painters Runciman and Barry. Another example of this is a little booklet from 1784, *One Day's Journey to the Highlands of Scotland*, ascribed to the Scotsman John Gillies, which deals with the sensitive question of the location of Ossian's grave. During road building between Stirling and Inverness, according to the author, engineers had raised a large stone popularly known as "Ossian's Stone", and underneath it had found stones arranged in a way similar to the descriptions in Ossian of how graves were made at the time. Although the author does not explicitly subscribe to the idea that Ossian's grave had thus been found, his objective was clearly to chain down as many as possible of the supposedly historical exploits of the poems' heroes to Scottish soil.

One interesting example is the claim that Fingal, allegedly active in the 200s AD, had led the Scots in the wars against the Romans. Gillies even mentions two specific battles, in one of which the Romans lost as many as 50,000 men! ([Gillies] 1784, 16). The story is remarkably similar to, and probably indebted to, the numerous German stories about the *Hermannschlacht*. In the Scottish context, it is also difficult not to read into it an allusion to a battle with the army of another empire, whose outcome had been very different, namely the Battle of Culloden only a few decades earlier. Still, towards the end of the booklet, the author's purpose becomes

<sup>26</sup> Different sources date the works differently. The present dates are given by the owner of the painting, the National Gallery of Denmark.

abundantly clear: to reserve Ossian for Scotland. And he turns rather aggressively against the “Irish harpers” whose claims are full of historical errors: “This, with their other fabulous legends, they have been so kind as to circulate in this country, are sufficient proofs to induce the Irish to resign every pretention to the boasted merit of their country, as having given birth to OSSIAN, PRINCE OF GAELIC BARDS!” (*ibid.*, 20).

Although the question of the genuineness of the poems is not an issue in this context, it is tempting to include at least one example of the debate that raged more or less throughout the whole period, and that will serve as an indication of the degree to which the Macpherson phenomenon disclosed a rift between radically different cultures. In his travelogue from his and James Boswell’s journey in Scotland in 1773, Samuel Johnson comes across as the typically urban, educated traveller, whose observations stand in the sharpest possible contrast to Macpherson and his followers discussed above. He begins his lethal tirade against the Ossian poems by undermining the whole concept of a Highland culture: “Thus hopeless are all attempts to find any traces of Highland learning. Nor are their primitive customs and ancient manner of life otherwise than very faintly and uncertainly remembered by the present race” (Johnson 1775, II: 94). Not showing a shred of either interest or tolerance, he begins by attacking the language of the alleged original:

Of the *Earse* language, as I understand nothing, I cannot say more than I have been told. It is the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood. After what has been lately talked of Highland Bards, and Highland genius, many will startle when they are told that the *Earse* never was a written language; that there is not in the world an *Earse* manuscript a hundred years old; and that the sounds of the Highlanders were never expressed by letters, till some little books of piety were translated, and a metrical version of the Psalms was made by the Synod of *Argyle*. Whoever therefore now writes in this language spells according to his own perception of the sound, and his own idea of the power of the letters. The *Welsh* and the *Irish* are cultivated tongues. The *Welsh*, two hundred years ago, insulted their *English* neighbours for the instability of their Orthography; while the *Earse* merely floated in the breath of the people, and could therefore receive little improvement. (*Ibid.*, 99–100)

Dr. Johnson’s premise is clear: a language without a written literature does not count as one, and the common people who speak this unwritten tongue are by definition barbarians. It is as far from the Rousseauesque natural and intuitive wisdom of common people as it is possible to get. And the sacred figurehead of this wisdom, the bard, is simply “a barbarian among barbarians, who, knowing nothing himself, lived with others that knew no more” (*ibid.*, 101). Johnson then delivers a public humiliation of Macpherson himself:

I believe there cannot be recovered, in the whole *Earse* language, five hundred lines of which there is any evidence to prove them a hundred years old. Yet I hear that the father of *Ossian* boasts of two chests more of ancient poetry, which he suppresses, because they are too good for the *English*. (*Ibid.*, 103)

And having added insult to injury by ridiculing the inability of “[t]he editor, or author” to show the original, Dr. Johnson concludes with a broadside against the Scots in general: “A Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist, who does not love *Scotland* better than truth: he will always love it better than inquiry; and if falsehood flatters his vanity, will not be very diligent to detect it” (*ibid.*, 108).

There is something strikingly shrill and at the same time peculiar about Dr. Johnson’s attack. Somebody who is not under threat would not need to resort to such a furious condemnation; someone who feels secure in his position should be able to afford a more generous attitude towards an opponent who – in the former’s opinion – does not even deserve to be taken seriously. One senses, in other words, that a genuine battle is being fought; that Dr. Johnson is taking his opponent far more seriously than he is willing to admit; and that he feels a genuine threat, not just from the Ossian poems, which by this time have started their journey to fame, but from the other cultural impulses that are coming out of Scotland. One of these impulses is, as mentioned above, Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, which was published only eight years after the first Ossian poems, and which presented an eloquent defence of the “history of rude nations”. Hugh Blair, Macpherson’s friend and supporter and himself a representative of the Scottish Enlightenment, had similarly discussed and defended the element of the barbarous in his *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* from 1763. And there were of course even more formidable opponents.

One of them was Rousseau, of whom Dr. Johnson, according to Boswell, said that “I think him one of the worst of men; a rascal, who ought to be hunted out of society” (Boswell 1980, 359). He may also have been aware of the recently published manifesto of the German *Sturm und Drang*, *On German Character and Art* (1773), in which Johann Gottfried Herder contributed with a powerful defence of Macpherson, “Correspondence on Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples”. “Know then”, Herder exclaims enthusiastically,

that the more barbarous a people is – that is, the more alive, the more freely acting (for that is what the word means) – the more barbarous, that is, the more alive, the more free, the closer to the senses, the more lyrically dynamic its songs will be, if songs it has. The more remote a people is from an artificial, scientific manner of thinking, speaking, and writing, the less its songs are made for paper and print, the less its verses are written for the dead letter. (Quoted in Singer & Dunn eds. 2000, 170)

It is perhaps an indication of Dr. Johnson’s somewhat squeezed position that he concentrates his attack on Macpherson alone, whose obvious vulnerability makes him an easy target. Nevertheless, these poems, despite their dubious genesis, represented and gave voice to a cultural force that the educated Londoner quite correctly perceived as a threat to everything

that gave his existence meaning and coherence. It was Macpherson, however, and not Dr. Johnson, who was enjoying a favourable wind. In this *Kulturkampf*, which would continue for another two centuries, and which was also a political struggle, power would gradually be transferred to the common people (the barbarians); their culture and history would come to receive a respect that Dr. Johnson would have found laughable; and the culture of the South, which he regarded as the self-evident basis of western civilisation, would be challenged by values increasingly rooted in the northern soil.

Macpherson, however, was important not only in laying the foundation for an entirely new and democratic view of culture in a wide sense. Together with the aesthetic tradition of the sublime, especially through Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, which was published only three years before *Fragments*, Macpherson was "remarkably effective in evoking the northern landscape as a powerful living force of terrible bleakness and awesome beauty" (Howard Gaskill in Gaskill ed. 2004, 5). For all their readers, in other words, the Ossian poems became inseparably connected with the drama of the wild and sublime scenery of the North, which in turn monopolised the popular notion of the quintessentially Romantic landscape, whose extreme version was the bleakest and most awesome of all imaginable landscapes, namely that of the polar regions.

In this context, there is one phenomenon that has a bearing not only on the landscape that the poems depict and on their relationship with history and the past, but also on their literary features and on the kind of literature that they inspired. Ruins and fragmentation serve as a kind of pervading metaphor for all these different aspects. As Joep Leerssen points out, the title of the first of Macpherson's volumes starts with the word "Fragments", which gives a profound signal about the poems' content and function:

The historicity of all these Ancient Fragments or Reliques is attested, precisely, by their fragmentary nature. The fact that we see a ruin rather than a building is what distinguishes the Parthenon from Versailles, Pompeii from Bath; the hoary old age of the material involved is driven home by the visible sign of erosion and decay. Destruction becomes a patina [...] . (Leerssen in Gaskill ed. 2004, 111–12)

Ossian's is not a world of future-oriented progress or utopian harmony, but rather one that moves in the opposite direction, to a distant and primitive past. It is possible to imagine that this past once contained a sense of wholeness and hope for the future, but it is now a world that is shattered and incomplete, with hardly any hope of positive change. As the bard sings in "Berrathon: A Poem" from *Fingal*:

The blast of the north opens thy gates, O king, and I behold thee sitting on mist, dimly gleaming in all thine arms. Thy form now is not the terror of the valiant: but like a watery cloud; when we see the stars behind it with their weeping eyes. Thy shield is like the aged moon: thy sword a vapour half-kindled with fire. Dim and feeble is the chief, who travelled in brightness before. (Macpherson 1996, 197)

The Ossian poems depict a profoundly pessimistic view of the human condition, thus reflecting the cruel fate of their place of origin after the Battle of Culloden and the merciless Highland Clearances, which by the time of their publication were already under way. The sublime landscapes, made bleak and inhospitable by forces far beyond human control, function as an appropriate backdrop to the hopeless existence of their inhabitants.

The ruin, then, is a transitional stage between man-made and natural processes; it serves as an image of human efforts that struggle in vain against the invincible forces of nature (and politics), which red in tooth and claw invade castles and cathedrals with grass, moss and trees, bringing them slowly back into its fold, and eventually removing every trace of their existence. And again, no landscape is more ruinous, more shattered and torn, more supremely indifferent to human aspirations than that of the Far North. As will be seen in the next chapter, travelogues from the polar regions, especially in the nineteenth century, are permeated by an architectural imagery that constantly refers to giant, ruinous Gothic buildings, and the Ossian poems, having exerted a profound influence on the whole tradition of Gothic fiction, leave the reader with the feeling of being set in a ghostly, cold and desolate landscape, infinitely far away from civilisation, or with no more than fading traces of it; a last station before the world of icebergs, whales and walrus.

It says a lot about the enormous impact of Macpherson's intensely debated poems that for a large number of artists, poets and intellectuals – as for Goethe's *Werther* – Ossian replaced Homer as the supreme image of poetic inspiration. Today, when the whole phenomenon is largely forgotten or only mentioned in passing, it is difficult to understand how this could have happened. It is important to take on board, however, that before Ossian, northern Europe was one step behind the South in one essential respect. *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Nibelungenlied* were, according to Leerssen, either unknown or only very vaguely known at the time: "Indeed, if any vernacular foundational epic was known at all, it was Snorri Sturluson's Icelandic *Heimskringla*, printed in Stockholm in 1697. For the rest, the Republic of Letters suffered from wholesale amnesia as regards any vernacular non-classical texts predating Dante" (*ibid.*, 114).

Ossian, then, appeared to be heaven-sent to those eager to show that the culture of the North was as old and respectable as that of the South. Considering the doubt that was immediately cast on the authenticity of the Ossian poems, as had been the case with various other attempts – such as that of Rudbeck – to construct an impressive northern past, it is

therefore understandable that efforts were made to give them the necessary credibility. This was clearly the motivation, for instance, behind Hugh Blair's *Critical Dissertation*. In large parts of the northern region, there was thus, to put it somewhat crudely, an intense desire to believe in the authenticity of the poems. If they were, as Macpherson claimed, from as far back as the third or fourth centuries AD, one was at least on a par with Roman antiquity in terms of age, and at this time, age was a qualification in itself.

Surprisingly, however, it seems as if the highly legitimate authenticity debate did not seriously reduce the poems' popularity and influence, and there is no doubt that they fostered an enormous interest in the past of all the countries around the North Sea. This interest is apparent in the large number of historical motifs explored by writers and artists at the time, and even though it was Ossian that inspired a large number of such artistic attempts, there was also a steadily growing stream of other contemporary works based on traditional material from other literary traditions.

Several of these focused on a particular figure, the bard, who as already indicated became particularly prominent through the poems of Ossian, but who was already well established by the time of their publication. This figure is of course also closely associated with the idea of the genius as a being with a gift rooted in nature itself, and thus liberated from conventions and regulations. As early as 1747, that is even before Mallet, Friedrich Klopstock had explored this motif in a poem that would later be entitled "Wingolf". Interestingly, the early versions take the Homeric singer as a starting point, but after he becomes acquainted with Ossian in the early 1760s, Klopstock transfers the poem's basis from Greek to Nordic mythology, thus also revealing a transfer of loyalties to his native soil. According to Anton Blanck, Klopstock explains this transfer in the solemn ode "Der Hügel und der Hain" ("The Mound and the Grove", 1767), where a native bard and a Greek poet struggle to win the soul of the first-person narrator. The bard emerges victorious, and "thus the power of the independent, patriotic song of ancient Germany is proclaimed; the Nordic spirit has conquered that of Greece" (Blanck 1911, 155).<sup>27</sup> Also, as Matthew Gelbart points out, the bard is both an individual genius and a representative for a kind of collective group genius, the people themselves. Folk culture and "folk genius" were somehow, and with surprising speed, endowed with an undisputable artistic authority, in sharp contrast to how they had been regarded in the past (Gelbart 2007, 81).

A similar theme of uncompromising pride and defiance is found in Thomas Gray's famous ode "The Bard" from 1757, which is based on a traditional Welsh story about the English King Edward II (1284–1327) who, having decided to kill all the bards in Wales because of their rebellious

<sup>27</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PE.



attitude, is finally faced with their last survivor. The bard, as shown in John Martin's powerful painting from 1817, views the king and his retinue from a crag in Snowdonia, and proclaims "the evils that will befall his descendants, and the final triumph of the Welsh" (Lytton Sells 1980, 76), before hurling himself to his death in the river below. For three years prior to the publication of the poem, Gray had been conducting intensive research into Welsh history and language as well as into Mallet. Despite the massive amount of material at his disposal, however, progress was slow, and inspiration only returned after hearing a recital in Cambridge in May 1755 by the virtuoso on the Welsh triple harp, John Parry. Blind from birth, and thus carrying the classic feature of the bard, Parry had published a collection of folk tunes, *Antient British Music*, from North Wales in 1742, and had since performed regularly in London and elsewhere.

For Gray, the recital must have evoked a sense of a living tradition and a connection with the past, and his enthusiasm is reflected in a letter written immediately afterwards: "[...] Mr. Parry has been here, & scratch'd out such ravishing blind Harmony, such tunes of a thousand year old, with names enough to choak you, as have set all this learned body a'dancing [...]" (*ibid.*, 93). Also, the tradition was perhaps more alive and carried more prestige than one is normally led to believe. At least, Parry was later succeeded by another harpist, Edward Jones, who according to the *Dictionary of National Biography* "was appointed bard to the Prince of Wales in 1783" (quoted in Blanck 1911, 74). It is also obvious from Evan Evans's *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* from 1764 that he tries to give the bards and the minstrels historical credibility by reproducing documents from the Elizabethan period that give instructions as to how they are to be received by local authorities and the like. He quotes, for instance, one proclamation to the general public from the late 1500s about a convention of bards, which concludes:

And that we the said Commissioners, by Virtue of the said Commission, being her Majesty's Council, do give and grant to Simwnt Vychan, Bard, the degree of Pencerdd; and do order that Persons receive and hospitably entertain him in all Places fit for him to go and come to receive his Perquisites according to the Princely Statutes in that Case made and provided. Given under our Hands, in the Year 1568. (Evans 1764, viii)

The bard is, in other words, to be treated in as respectful a manner as public officers of some distinction.

Just as the bard is a persistent motif in works from the Germanic as well as the Celtic and Nordic areas, so is the motif, originating with Tacitus and already explored in the previous century, of the ancient struggle against the Romans. Like the bard motif, it is strongly nationalistic in tone, and is expressly used to demonstrate a sense of independence in relation to traditionally dominant political and cultural forces, which can be summed up as the influence of the South. In Germany, the Hermann legend

continued its appeal to new generations of writers. In 1751, Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), still not eighteen years old, published the poem “Herman”, while his slightly older mentor Klopstock was working on the ode “Hermann und Thusnelda” and other poems, urging the Germans to rise once again to deeds of greatness. But these were just small exercises compared to the dramatic trilogy Klopstock composed during his twenty-year residence in Denmark: *Hermanns Schlacht* (The Hermann Slaughter, 1769); *Hermann und die Fürsten* (Hermann and the Princes, 1784); and *Hermanns Tod* (The Death of Hermann, 1787). Making ample use of material from Ossian as well as Mallet, and probably also finding inspiration in von Lohenstein’s *Arminius* from 1689, Klopstock describes, in the ancient hero’s death and his ascent to the realm of the Nordic pantheon, the breakdown of the German national spirit, but at the same time the promise of its resurrection. According to Ingmar Stenroth, the dramas were dedicated to the German emperor, and triggered “a nationalist German fever that was enhanced by the idea of the heroic deeds of the forefathers” (Stenroth 2002, 186).<sup>28</sup>

In England, Gray’s friend and disciple and the author of *The English Garden*, William Mason, was exploring very similar avenues. Also, his work illustrates how the period is still uncertain as to the use of native material. In his first dramatic venture, in particular, the title gives an indication of the author’s hesitant combination of safe and more daring elements: *Elfrida: A Dramatic Poem, Written on the Model of the Antient Greek Tragedy*. Published in 1752, this work hardly shows any other connection with the Anglo-Saxon past than in the use of the characters’ names. For the rest, it is set, as the lengthy introduction suggests, “in an old romantic forest. For, by this means, I was enabled to enliven the poem by various touches of pastoral description” (Mason 1752, ii). Mason stays, in other words, firmly within the conventional frame of eighteenth-century literature.

In comparison, his most successful play, *Caractacus*, from seven years later, has come a long way, even though the play’s subtitle is precisely the same as that of *Elfrida*. As with the Hermann myth, the material is taken from Tacitus, but this time the plot concerns the Roman invasion of Britain, and the Celtic hero Caractacus, whose last stand was reputedly in Wales, where his legend has since been kept alive. The theme of military defeat and national pride is also the same as in Klopstock, and so is the earnestness of the ideological conviction behind the play. Even the Roman general, Aulus Didius, who after his military victory at the opening of the play shows his soldiers the holy place of the druids and the bards, reveals an almost humble respect for his defeated enemies:

This is the secret centre of the isle:  
Here, Romans, pause, and let the eye of wonder

<sup>28</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PE.

Gaze on the solemn scene; behold yon oak,  
 How stern he frowns, and with his broad brown arms  
 Chills the pale plain beneath him: mark yon altar,  
 The dark stream brawling round it's rugged base,  
 These cliffs, these yawning caverns, this wide circus,  
 Skirted with unhewn stone: they awe my soul,  
 As if the very genius of the place  
 Himself appear'd, and with terrific tread  
 Stalk'd thro' his drear domain. (Mason 1759, 7)

Written two years after Gray's "The Bard" and Burke's *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, and clearly also indebted to Johann Elias Schlegel's drama *Hermann* from 1743, the play not only pays tribute to the bards and druids as honourable representatives of the country's ancient past and of future greatness; it also confirms how British and German writers at the time were using closely related material for more or less identical purposes. Furthermore, it celebrates the awesome and sublime northern landscape, which is the rightful home of this noble cultural past, and which might make a Roman shudder. One of the general's hostages, Caractacus's son Elidurus, even warns him to leave the place, the sooner the better: "Now, if thine eye / Be sated with the view, haste to thy ships; / And ply thine oars; for, if the Druids learn / This bold intrusion, thou wilt find it hard / To foil their fury" (*ibid.*, 8).

In a peculiar manner, the play echoes the twenty-first century so-called war on terror and superpowers caught in guerrilla warfare in inhospitable mountains. When Didius, the representative of the superior military power, rejects the warning and demands Caractacus in exchange for his hostages, Elidurus adds that the ground is packed with subterranean tunnels, where Caractacus and his soldiers will easily be able to hide. Considering the enormous political impact of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century faith in the ancient, indigenous culture of the North, the parallel might throw some interesting light on the lessons of history, and on the way in which the roles of nations change from one historical period to another. In this connection it is also an interesting coincidence that both of Mason's Saxon plays were made into operas by descendants of the Romans. The Italian Antonio Sacchini (1730–1786), one of the leading opera composers of his day, produced *Arvire et Evelina*, which was based on *Caractacus*, and first performed posthumously in Paris in 1788; and his equally prominent countryman Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816) composed *Elfrida*, which was first staged, also in Paris, during the trial of Louis XVI, on 15 December 1792.

The Caractacus story may not have become as popular in Britain as the Hermann myth in Germany, but there is no doubt that the story of a Britain overrun by an empire somewhat paradoxically appealed to the British at a time when they were themselves taking on the position of an empire vanquishing smaller nations; paradoxically, because it might

equally have served as a warning of imperial *hubris*. Furthermore, it may have appealed in particular to writers sympathising with the Celtic fringe, who may have seen in it a kind of double significance. Thus John Huddleston Wynne (1742–1788), for instance, who also wrote a history of Ireland, published a forty-page poem in 1773 entitled *Evelina, Daughter of Caractacus: A Sacred Elegy*, which seems profoundly inspired by the Ossian poems, and which is set in Wales.<sup>29</sup> In a rather peculiar note at the end of the introduction, Wynne even tries to present archaeological evidence, as had been done with Ossian, for the truth of the story of Caractacus's daughter. The "fragment" (or introduction), he claims,

was occasioned by a late Discovery (in a narrow glen, or valley, not far distant from the mountain of *Snowdon*, rendered dark and gloomy by venerable oaks, the growth of some centuries) of a rude stone sarcophagus, of an elegant form, yet of very ancient uncouth workmanship; upon which was cut, in very irregular British characters, – *Evelina*. The sarcophagus was found under the trunks of immense large oaks, whose venerable bows, clothed with a mantle of ivy, seemed for ages to have protected the venerable repository of *EVELINA*'s dust. (Wynne 1774, vi)

Interestingly, Wynne is very deliberately appealing to an aesthetic taste in stark contrast to that of the classical tradition: "rude", "uncouth" and "irregular" have suddenly been elevated to positive qualities, suggesting a U-turn in which northern primitivism openly challenges the values of civilisation. Similarly, he underscores the profound significance of the oak as a symbol of an ancient tradition firmly rooted in the native soil.

### *The Sagas and Contemporary Art*

Despite the interest in specifically German and Celtic history, motifs from Norse sagas and mythology still dominated the artistic exploration of the distant past, and as the material used often required a certain academic qualification to be understood, it is typical that much of the poetry was produced by people with a university background or connection. Thus in Oxford, where Nordic studies were still at a relatively low ebb since the heyday at the beginning of the century, the University's first Professor of Poetry, Thomas Warton the Elder (1688–1745) wrote "A Runic Ode", which was published posthumously in 1748, probably by his son, also called Thomas Warton (1728–90), who succeeded him as Professor of Poetry and who was incidentally an acquaintance of Gray's.

But once again Gray was the pivotal point. When in 1768 he published the inconspicuous collection *Poems by Mr. Gray*, it contained two major poems explicitly inspired by Norse sources: "The Fatal Sisters"

<sup>29</sup> See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2004, s.v. "Wynne, John Huddleston".

and “The Descent of Odin”. He had been working on both of these for many years; the former as far back as 1755, when he had been reading Torfæus’s history of Norway and the Orkneys (Lytton Sells 1980, 100), and they had been in a finished state since 1761. Gray chose motifs – the Valkyries and the Ragnarok, or the Twilight of the Gods – that were destined to be adopted by innumerable artists for the next century and a half, in verse, paintings and music.

After the arrival on the literary scene of the poems of Ossian, it is also striking how the gloomy Ossianic atmosphere started to invade the descriptions from Nordic mythology. This is equally noticeable in the works of the two German visitors to Denmark, Klopstock and von Gerstenberg, who by 1766 were actively exploring Nordic themes. In the latter’s *Gedicht eines Skalden* (Poem by a Bard, 1766), for instance, it is obvious that even though the characters in the poem are taken from Norse mythology, the *skald* and first-person narrator is heavily indebted to the darkly pessimistic atmosphere of his Ossianic counterpart. Thus in the course of a short period of time, von Gerstenberg moves between different mythological worlds in order to express his nationalist sentiments. Leaving the Greek world behind, and following Herder’s vision of the mythology of the North as an “arsenal for a new German genius” (Gonthier-Louis Fink in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 101), he borrows freely, like the rest of his generation, from the Nordic as well as the Celtic worlds, seeing them essentially as one and the same.<sup>30</sup> In his *Oden* (Odes, 1771), a collection of poems written over more than two decades, Klopstock similarly includes a whole section of patriotic poems with Nordic and Germanic motifs.

With Klopstock and von Gerstenberg, and not least with the influential work of Mallet, the new impulses also reached the poets and artists of the Nordic countries, especially Denmark-Norway. In Copenhagen, the Norwegian Johan Nordahl Brun (1745–1816) – one of the founders of the Norwegian Club – wrote the anti-Danish drama *Einer Tambskielver* (1772), about the flamboyant Norwegian saga hero of the same name. It was clear for all to see that the play gave an early warning of how the Nordic material would soon be used to fuel the struggle for independence, and it was consequently denied a stage in the Danish capital (Stenroth 2002, 194). A similar warning of things to come was *Stærkodder* (1785), a poem in fifteen cantos by the multi-talented Norwegian civil servant, poet, editor and writer Christen Pram (1756–1821) – another member of the Norwegian Club. Having found the background material in Saxo, Pram “narrated the adventures of the six-armed Norse Hercules with a tremendous, grotesque imagination” (Niels Lyhne Jensen in Ingwersen and Norseng eds. 1993, 23), which unmistakably intimated a Norwegian nationalist stance. The later claim in a Danish encyclopedia that it was “a

<sup>30</sup> The quotation is translated from the German by PF.

very long and very boring poem in the form of an allegory” (Auken 2005, 31) presumably did not reduce its influence at the time.<sup>31</sup>

In the course of his short life, the Dane Johannes Ewald (1743–81) wrote two dramas, which together mark the beginning of the Danish creative reception of Norse literature and mythology (*ibid.*, 30). *Rolf Krage* (1770),



Nicolai Abildgaard: *Ymir Suckling the Cow Audbunla* (c.1777). According to the *Prose Edda*, Ymir was formed from the ice of Niflheim, the realm of ice and cold. Audbunla licks hoar and salt from the ice and forms Buri (on the left), who becomes the grandfather of Odin. National Gallery of Denmark. © SMK Foto.

based on a story from Saxo’s Danish history from the 1200s, presents a plot in which the author places the old heathen world in relief against the enlightened and humanist values of the eighteenth century. Ewald thus combines the old and the new, and avoids an uncritical celebration of the values of the ancient world. On the contrary, the underlying idea of the play is, as opposed to that of Saxo, that “allegiance, loyalty and friendship are above and incompatible with the old code of honour and with the practice of blood revenge” (Mortensen og Schack 2007, I: 538–39).<sup>32</sup> In *Balders*

<sup>31</sup> The quotation is translated from the Danish by PF.

<sup>32</sup> The quotation is translated from the Danish by PF.

*dod* (The Death of Balder, 1775), Ewald takes as his point of departure an episode from Norse mythology that, like the twilight of the gods, would become a favourite topic for artistic treatment, first and foremost because of its obvious parallels with the Passion of Christ. Without the resurrection from the dead, however, the theme of this heathen version is not a sense of atonement, but the tension between the will of the individual and an independent Fate (*ibid.*, I: 541).

The popularity of the Balder story is evident from the fact that at least two artists very soon after the publication of the drama produced paintings with the same motif. The Dane Peter Cramer (1726–82) depicted the final scene of the actual theatre performance, but the picture reveals a dramatisation that is very far from being historically correct. As Heather O’Donoghue comments, it contains “daintily horrified goddesses with elaborate, fashionable coiffures clustered around Baldr, who is wearing what looks like a Roman centurion’s helmet” (O’Donoghue 2007, 121). Also, the more famous English artist of Swiss-German origin Johann Heinrich Füssli (Eng. Henry Fuseli, 1741–1825) acquired an interest in the subject through his friendship in Rome with the painter Nicolai Abildgaard.

As well as pioneering paintings with motifs from Ossian, Abildgaard is also famous for another and rather peculiar work that finds its subject matter in the creation myth from Norse mythology, namely the giant Ymir suckling at the udder of the cow Audumbla. Still, it is typical of this early use of Norse mythology to more or less directly imitate motifs from classical mythology. Abildgaard’s inspiration came from a motif found in Herculaneum, one of the cities buried by Vesuvius, of Telephos the son of Heracles, who is suckled by a deer. And a decade later, Füssli, after exploring the same motif, followed up with another mythological highlight, the dramatic scene of Thor’s furious battle with the Midgard serpent. Paintings, with their powerful visual impact, may have been as important as poetry and drama in spreading the gospel of northernness to a wider audience. And there are indications, at least in Denmark-Norway, that this cultural impulse was also having a certain political influence. When the eighteen-year-old Crown Prince Frederik (later King Frederik VI) paid a visit to Norway in 1785, it was thought politically correct to encourage him to read Snorri as part of his introduction to the history and culture of the country (Snorre 2006, xxxiii), thus underscoring the line connecting the heroics of the past to the political visions of the present.

In Britain, Gray’s death in 1771 represented a significant loss both from an academic and an artistic point of view. One example of a poem very much modelled on Gray’s odes is “The Carousal of Odin” by the Rev. Thomas Penrose (1743–79), published in his *Flights of Fancy* from 1775. Penrose, however, died only four years later, and a new generation was called upon to carry the torch. Two members of this were Thomas James Mathias (1754?–1835), satirist and scholar, who in 1781 published

*Runic Odes: Imitated from the Norse Tongue, in the Manner of Mr. Gray,* and Gray's own disciple Edward Jerningham (1737–1812), who three years later brought out a little booklet entitled *The Rise and Progress of the Scandinavian Poetry*.

Neither of these shows any great poetic talent, but Mathias is interesting in the way his collection contains elements not just from the Norse and Ossianic traditions, but also from the Tudor legacy, thus creating an eclectic mythology of national greatness. Jerningham's work is an ambitious and somewhat confusing attempt to produce, in poetic form, the mythological history of "Scandinavian poetics". In the advertisement, he explains how the material is taken from the creation myth in the *Edda*, which describes in mysterious terms the creation of "the system of the skaldic mythology" (Jerningham 1784, i). And even though one may agree with the caustic statement by an anonymous contemporary commentator that Jerningham's poems "have been chiefly admired by his particular friends", it is still obvious that the poet in the first stanza sees a new dimension in the Nordic literary legacy<sup>33</sup>:

When urg'd by Destiny th' eventful year  
Sailed thro' the portal of the northern sphere,  
Of Scandinavia the rude Genius rose,  
His breast deep-lab'ring with creation's throes:  
Thrice o'er his head a pow'ful wand he whirl'd,  
Then call'd to life a new Poetic world. (Jerningham 1784, 5)

Richard Hole (1746–1803) is another typical representative of a generation of what might be called armchair Nordicists, whose interest was primarily intellectual and historical. As Andrew Wawn comments, Hole's poem "The Tomb of Gunnar" from 1789 had its origin in a passage from *Njal's Saga*, which he had come across in Thomas Bartholin's *Antiquitatum Danicarum*, published precisely a hundred years earlier. It was, in other words, "created from books rather than life" (Wawn 2000, 250). But this was soon to change. By the outbreak of the French Revolution, Europe had given gestation to a significant number of cultural impulses from the North. And they had by no means spent their force. The nineteenth century was now just round the corner, and it would prove to be a century in which not only the eyes but also the feet of the rest of the world would increasingly be turned in a northerly direction.

<sup>33</sup> See bibliography: "What the literary world thought of Edward Jerningham, Poet".



## 4. Fastening the Grip: 1790–1830

### *The French Revolution*

The French Revolution was a political earthquake that took place not only right in the middle of Europe, but also right in the middle of a period of major change. With an acute sense of foreboding, Edmund Burke claimed soon after the storming of the Bastille that “the French revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world” (Burke 1986, 92). And a few decades later, when the dust from Waterloo had settled, a reviewer commented that “no department of civil and military life, no branch of science, or region of taste and literature, was untouched by this general concussion”.<sup>1</sup>

The eighteenth century was the time when the *scientific* experiment came into its own and brought science forward in leaps and bounds. Similarly, the Revolution was a mammoth *political* experiment, based on the utopian vision that a collective human effort, governed by rationalist principles, could transform an entire society and lay the foundation for a wholly new form of human existence. This is not the place to go into the many intricacies of the Revolution, but there are at least two figures whose roles have a particular relevance to the present discussion, namely Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In a study of these two giants of political philosophy, David Cameron refers to Burke’s own statement to the effect that “to know what the received notions are upon any subject, is to know with certainty what those of Rousseau are not” (Cameron 1973, 1), and sums up the fundamental difference between them as follows:

Burke is empirical, seeking his answers in a study of the historical process and the details of the particular occasion; Rousseau is speculative, deductive, *a priori*, and his authorities are Reason and Nature. Burke has a reverence for the past; Rousseau has a revolutionary’s hatred of the present. Burke has a disposition to conserve; Rousseau, a rage to renovate or overturn. Burke’s appeal is to experience; Rousseau’s, to natural rights. Unlike Burke, Rousseau, if he believes in God at all, removes him from his transcendental dwelling place and situates Him in the heart of each feeling man. Edmund Burke, the defender of the British aristocracy even against itself, sees in politics a world of infinite complexity, and, both by sentiment and design, restricts his speculation to the practically feasible; Rousseau, the rigid egalitarian and herald of modern democracy, has the courage (or foolhardiness) to draw radical conclusions

<sup>1</sup> *The Monthly Review*, March, 1819, quoted by David Duff in Wu (ed.) 1999, 24.

from speculation unadorned by qualification and uncluttered by empirical observation. Rousseau, in a word, is considered to be the intellectual father of the French Revolution, and Edmund Burke its most outstanding opponent. (*Ibid.*, 5–6)

It may be argued, however, that despite major differences, the two thinkers both contributed to what could be called an alternative utopian vision that exerted an enormous impact, especially in the North. For the sake of simplicity, this vision could be called the 'nature utopia', a phenomenon that appears to be totally absent from all histories of utopian thinking. After all, the political utopia soon collapsed, as Burke had predicted, in terror, bloodshed and war, and on its ruins appeared a very different, and in many ways diametrically opposed, edifice, with an alternative vision of liberty.

Whereas the ambition of the Revolution had been to liberate the individual within the framework of an increasingly urban, progressive and rational civilisation, thereby creating a new social reality, the *alternative* vision rejected – sometimes aggressively – this entire premise. It sought fulfilment not within society, but beyond it; not within the confined and civilised world of the city, but in untouched nature. In such a context it suddenly makes perfect sense that Edmund Burke is not just the author of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), but also of *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).

Like Herder in Germany, Burke saw an intimate relationship between politics and nature: both were parts of an organic and constantly evolving process, and history was its manifestation. Thus, by virtue of being a product of history, man is also a product of nature, the two ultimately springing from a common source. Burke's sublime, then, could be seen as a philosophical reaction against the estrangement between man and nature created by Cartesian rationalist philosophy, the Encyclopaedists and the whole mechanical, Newtonian universe. It is also tempting to see it as an almost instinctive premonition of the political cataclysm of the Revolution itself, i.e. an awareness that not just man and nature, but also human society, are capable of letting loose dangerous and uncontrollable forces, all of which, in Burke's pragmatic understanding, ought to be treated with caution.

In this respect, Burke and Rousseau meet in a common and anti-rationalist affirmation of the natural and the organic. Rousseau would have nodded approvingly to Burke's insistence on "the fallible and feeble contrivances of our reason" (Burke 1986, 121), and the former's "Back to Nature" corresponds with the latter's insistence on society as a living, organic body. Rousseau, however, is also full of contradictions: he is utopian in the sense that he believes in a state of natural innocence (although placed in a remote past); and he is dystopian in the sense that he does not believe in the future and in progress.

Although Burke's and Rousseau's messages were delivered before the

outcome of the Revolution was clear, their impact on the revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations depended on the outcome of the Revolution itself. With its cruel failure and the ensuing blood-letting of Europe, the nature utopia offered an opportunity of escape that was grasped by a whole generation, and that has remained a central feature of Western civilisation ever since. For the present purposes, the contributions of such other writers on the Revolution as Thomas Paine and William Godwin are of less significance, as their discussions remained within the sphere of contemporary politics, whereas Burke and Rousseau both developed new visions that regarded this particular sphere in the light of nature as well as tradition. Rousseau's broadside against the idea of progress, together with Burke's unwavering faith in tradition, opened up for a celebration of the past precisely at a time when the North was already opening up its historical treasure trove to the rest of the world, thereby affirming a cultural self-confidence in relation to the South. And as will be seen in the following, the view of nature and the view of the past were largely perceived as two sides of the same coin.

Furthermore, in virtually all of the countries concerned, both the nature utopia and the celebration of the past found their place within a framework of nation-building that gave them a strong additional momentum, which essentially lasted throughout the nineteenth century and only came to an end with the First World War. Waterloo created an entirely new political situation in Europe. For more than a hundred years Britain and France had more or less continuously been at war. A short list of the periods of conflict – 1689–1697, 1702–1713, 1743–1748, 1756–1763, 1778–1783, 1793–1802 and 1803–1815 – is enough to indicate the intensity of Anglo-French relations, and to understand how they became decisive for what Linda Colley calls the “invention of Britishness” (Colley 1996, 1). But now the score was finally settled for many decades to come; France was in tatters, and Britain, together with Russia, emerged victorious from the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and 1815. In the course of the Napoleonic Wars, furthermore, Ireland had been firmly incorporated into the United Kingdom through the two Acts of Union in 1800, and together with enlarged territories around the world and ever increasing imperial ambitions, Britain had a greater need than ever for hammering out a common national identity.

The Congress of Vienna also brought the large number of German states one step – although a short one – closer to what many Germans dreamed of: a united nation. The Holy Roman Empire, consisting of up to three hundred member states, had been dissolved in 1806 and was replaced, after 1815, with the German Confederation, which consisted of thirty-nine states, and which was going to last for half a century. In its search for a national identity, this confederation had, as would become apparent in the following decades, a strong northern orientation. In 1803, one of

the fathers of German nationalism, Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860) had published the book *Germanien und Europa* (Germany and Europe), which established the view, destined to have a long and troublesome life, of Germany as an integral part of the Scandinavian world (Uffe Østergård in Henningsen et al. eds. 1997, 29).<sup>2</sup> As will be seen in the following, this was to have a decisive effect not only on the domestic development of German ideology and identity; it would also affect a range of other countries, culturally and politically.

Across the North Sea, in the Scandinavian countries, a similar need was felt for the mobilisation of national identities, but for different reasons. Sweden, once the great power in the Baltic, had suffered a humiliating defeat to Russia in 1809, and had been forced to cede Finland to its mighty neighbour, creating a wound that would fester in the Swedish soul for years, and leaving the country painfully vulnerable on its eastern flank. In the words of the Swedish General Georg Carl von Döbeln, who on 8 October took leave of the Finnish army, “Sweden is now losing for ever the great Finnish nation, its strongest support. Not only that; the Swedish Army is losing its core and the most significant part of its military power. The motherland is shattered, sunk in profound grief and loss from irreparable sacrifices” (quoted in Stenroth 2005, 13–14).<sup>3</sup> It is against this background, as a temporary cultural compensation for the loss of its military capability, that Sweden once again returned to the dream of its glorious past, and a group of patriots, two years after the loss of Finland, founded the *Götiska Förbundet* (Geatish Society), whose obvious ambition was the recovery of Finland.<sup>4</sup> The man in whom they placed their trust was Jean Baptiste Bernadotte (1763–1844), one of Napoleon’s marshals, who had been elected Swedish crown prince in 1810, and who as king would take the name Carl Johan.

In Finland, similarly, a nationalist movement was under way, which – as in Scotland a few decades earlier – would boost the self-confidence of the nation *in spe* with an epic poem, rescued, just in time, from the collective memory of illiterate peasants. Also, in connection with the fall of Bonaparte, the fates of the Nordic countries were closely connected, as they had been on several occasions in the past. Due to Denmark’s unfortunate alliance with Napoleon, the British had subjected Copenhagen to two fierce attacks in April 1801 and September 1807, killing 2,000 people, destroying a third of the city, and sailing off with the Danish Navy. The Treaty of Kiel in January 1814 then brought an end to the nearly four-

<sup>2</sup> Østergård gives 1799 as the year of publication, which is not correct.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from the Swedish by PF.

<sup>4</sup> The Swedish “götisk” appears in different translations into English: Gothic, Gothicism, Geatish. I have opted for an alternative that prevents confusion with the more generic term “Gothic”.

hundred-year-old union between Denmark and Norway, and the latter was ceded to Sweden as a compensation for the loss of Finland, and as a reward for Carl Johan's contribution to the fall of his former friend and commander.

The Norwegians, however, were not pleased to see their country being exchanged like a pawn on the international chessboard, and in the course of a month in the spring of 1814, an assembly gathering at Eidsvoll north of Christiania had composed a constitution, which was signed on 17 May. In the meantime, the wealthy merchant and landowner Carsten Anker was sent to London to obtain British support for the Norwegian course of action, and even though the demands were not met, and Carl Johan in the summer went as far as invading the country, British sympathies and pressure clearly contributed to giving Norway a relatively free role within the new union, and the necessary elbow room for a continued struggle for full independence. Only a few decades earlier, in the first edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768–71), the information on Norway had given a good indication of the backward and far-away nature of the country, from the point of view of a more centrally placed observer. The entire entry gives the following frugal information:

Norway, a kingdom of Europe, situated between 4° and 30° east longitude, and between 58° and 72° north latitude, bounded by the Atlantic ocean on the north and west, by Swedeish Lapland and other provinces of Sweden on the east, and by the sea called the Categate and Schaggeric on the south. It is a cold barren country, subject to Denmark. (Quoted in Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 33)

In post-revolutionary Europe, the semi-successful initiative by this small and poor nation beyond the pale of civilisation to govern itself in accordance with modern and democratic principles did not pass unnoticed, and there is no doubt that this would contribute significantly to the sharply increased interest in the country in the years after Waterloo. The poem "Norway" (1814) by the Welsh poetess Charlotte Wardle is a good illustration of the way in which the eyes of Europe turned to what was perceived as the Far North for political inspiration, something which would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier. The first of the 160 lines, most of them in the traditional form of the heroic couplet, set the tone with an enthusiastic vigour that runs through the whole poem:

Bright from the arid regions of the north,  
Her genius bursts, he breaks his icy chains!  
One bright Phænomenon he shineth forth,  
The northern light! The light of freedom reigns!  
Hail, brave Norwegian! Son of freedom hail!  
Oh, may your cause, your sacred cause prevail;  
And may no hand of rude oppressive pow'r,  
Crush the bright offspring of this anxious hour –  
Dim the Aurora that in splendour throws,  
The beam of freedom o'er your gelid snows. (Wardle 1814, ll. 1–10)

***Icy Ruins***

Wardle seems to suggest that from a British and continental point of view, Norway and the Arctic were two sides of the same coin. Against such a background, it also makes sense to regard the history of the more or less unpopulated polar regions during the forty-year-period as rather intimately connected with the growing interest in the natural landscapes of the Lake District, Scotland and the Scandinavian countries. The following will therefore focus on the various efforts in the Arctic during the decades before and after Waterloo, before examining more closely how the natural landscapes of the countries in question were gradually brought into the aesthetic understanding of countries further south. It should be underlined, however, that, because of the political situation in Europe, the period demonstrates a rather sharp division between the years before and after 1815: in a sense, the years from the Revolution to the fall of Napoleon could be seen as a quarter-century in which activities as well as the exchange of ideas were put on hold, whilst the following decade and a half saw an immense release in terms of both. Still, seen as a whole, the period reflects a remarkable combination of two very different qualities: the discovery of the polar regions as an object of aesthetic reflection and contemplation, on the one hand, and as an area subjected to the most intense race for strategic and commercial advantage, on the other.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the eighteenth century developed a fascination – not to say an obsession – for ruins as a metaphor for the ambiguous half-way stage between nature and culture. It is as if the ruin created a space in which thinkers of the period could play and experiment with the complex and difficult question of man as a creature belonging to both worlds. In Gothic fiction, for instance, the typical setting – overgrown and derelict castles – became an image for the mental state of the characters, who not only find themselves geographically remote from civilisation but also in a direct dialogue with nature red in tooth and claw, sampling Rousseau's vision of man's happy origins, while at the same time finding themselves in the grip of primitive forces that anticipated Darwin's claim of man's literal familiarity with the beast. The world of ruins, then, was a world where man was faced with the truth about his own fundamental nature – a kind of amoral playing ground where, by making a step beyond the pale of civilisation and into the wilderness, he would discover depths and dimensions within himself that manicured gardens, concert halls, libraries and universities were not capable of opening up. By implication, the ruin represented an expansion of human experience and knowledge; a new territory for the exploring mind.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the polar world, where nature is in its most extreme and pure-bred form, conjured up images of ruin, and usually in the Gothic style, suggesting a link to the literature in

vogue at the time. An early work like John Marra's 1775 account from Cook's Second Voyage employs this imagery in its description of the Southern Seas (Marra 1775, 6), but a more striking example is found in what is actually a strictly scientific work, namely Thomas Pennant's *Arctic Zoology*, which in the long introduction to the first volume describes the ice-filled waters around Spitsbergen in explicitly architectural terms:

Frost sports also with these *icebergs*, and gives them majestic as well as other singular forms. Masses have been seen, assuming the shape of a Gothic church, with arched windows and doors, and all the rich tracery of that style, composed of what an *Arabian* tale would scarcely dare to relate, of crystal of the richest sapphire blue: tables with one or more feet; and often immense flat-roofed temples, like those of *Luxxor* on the *Nile*, supported by round transparent columns of cærulean hue, float by the astonished spectator. (Pennant 1784, I: 86)

There is something almost unnerving about the intensity of this description by the otherwise restrained Pennant. It is as if he is carried away by the quintessentially sublime scene, into a world far beyond the scientific rationality that his very work seeks to impose on it. He is there to categorise and systematise and bring order into chaos, but seems completely overwhelmed by a scene that takes him by surprise and underlines man's smallness in the face of nature in all its majesty.

This view of the Arctic is even more evident in a novel first published in 1826 by Robert Pierce Gillies (1788–1858), *Tales of a Voyage to the Arctic Ocean*. In this massive three-volume work, which in the fashion of the *Arabian Nights* and Boccaccio's *Decamerone* produces an endless series of tales, Gillies – a friend of Sir Walter Scott and a correspondent of Wordsworth (“The Carlyle Letters Online”) – describes a world containing elements of both dream and nightmare:

Amidst those waste and desolate regions of the globe, like unfinished portions of the creation, exhibit the rude materials of Nature's mighty architecture heaped up in wild disorder; where the rough elements, yet untaught to know their places, are seen confounded and scattered among each other – the sea, piled into solid mountains, mingling its white pinnacles with the dark summits of the land – the earth, buried beneath cumbrous loads of frozen water, blending its dreary shores, undistinguished by any boundaries, with the bleak deserts of the ocean; where light and darkness are yet undivided, and where warmth, the world's Promethean soul, unwillingly gives life to the unfashioned matter: – amidst these realms, which seem as if the great Author of the universe had abandoned ere yet their foundations were completed, and while all the superstructure, the ornament and perfection of his design was undeveloped, man, daring the stern dangers which forbid his presence, delights to search into the secrets of his Maker, and strives to unfold the mysteries of his labours. (Gillies 1829, 3–4)

It is almost as if the world of ice here is a combination of a physical as well as a mental landscape, and more than anything this narrative must have reminded contemporary readers of such works as Thomas De Quincey's frightening nightmare landscapes in his *Confessions of an English Opium*

*Eater* (1821), or of John Martin's contemporary canvases of apocalyptic scenes in which mountains and giant human edifices are knocked about by the forces of chaos.

With the new awareness of wild nature as a mirror or a sounding board for the sensitive soul, and with the increasing interest in extreme mental states (the irrational and the grotesque, for instance), the polar world enters the European imagination, thus drastically extending its meaning and significance. Before this period, a picture of a shipwreck in the ice was nothing but a shipwreck in the ice, but when the German painter David Caspar Friedrich (1774–1840), who never visited the polar regions, in 1798 paints the little picture *Wrack im Eismeer* (Shipwreck in the Ice) and in 1823 the larger and far more ambitious *Das Eismeer* (The Arctic Sea), depicting a ship being ground to pieces and disappearing among the merciless ice floes, it is suddenly a picture pregnant with symbolic significance.

Paradoxically, the ruined ship, which is only barely visible, is caught in the deathly grip of another ruin, the shattered blocks of ice, in an uneven battle between indifferent natural forces, on the one hand, and human ambitions and aspirations, on the other. Several decades before Darwin, the picture is, among many other things, a powerful image of the survival of the fittest. Eric G. Wilson, furthermore, implies an interesting connection between *Das Eismeer*, which appears like an unusual motif for Friedrich, and his more familiar Gothic cathedral scenes, by pointing out the former's relationship with religious architecture. The painting, he claims,

pictures a polar ocean as a temple of horror, a realm of cracking ice that crushes ships as if they were paper. Inhospitable to human comfort and control – the ice is an explosion of immense blades – Friedrich's icescape is otherworldly, haunted by a disturbing blue background, rusted burgundy foreground, and a ghostly berg in the distance. Yet, this erupted floe points, like a frozen steeple, to a portal in the sky, a bright orifice through which one might pass to the *axis mundi*. (Wilson 2003, 260)<sup>5</sup>

Nature no longer has a simple and clearly defined value; it has rather become an endless supplier of images for the equally endless range of human moods and reflections, practically a mirror of man himself. As a result, the travellers, explorers and artists enter on an imaginative conquest, interpreting the polar landscape as a reflection of their own individual selves. Barry Lopez underlines the desire among writers on the Arctic to separate themselves from “some of the grim weight of life. That weight was ignorance, poverty of spirit, indolence, and the threat of anonymity and destitution” (Lopez 1999, 310). But it is perhaps more complex than that. As in Friedrich, the real or imaginative journey to the Arctic may result in an encounter with forces of horror and chaos, or, as Wilson puts

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the painting, see Nina Heinrichs, “‘Das Eismeer’ – Caspar David Friedrich and the North”, in Ryall et al. (eds.) 2008, 131–60.



it, a “frozen apocalypse” (*ibid.*, 1). But it could also be seen, against the background of the failure of the French Revolution, as the individual’s disillusioned escape from society and civilisation altogether, into the purity of its literally polar opposite.

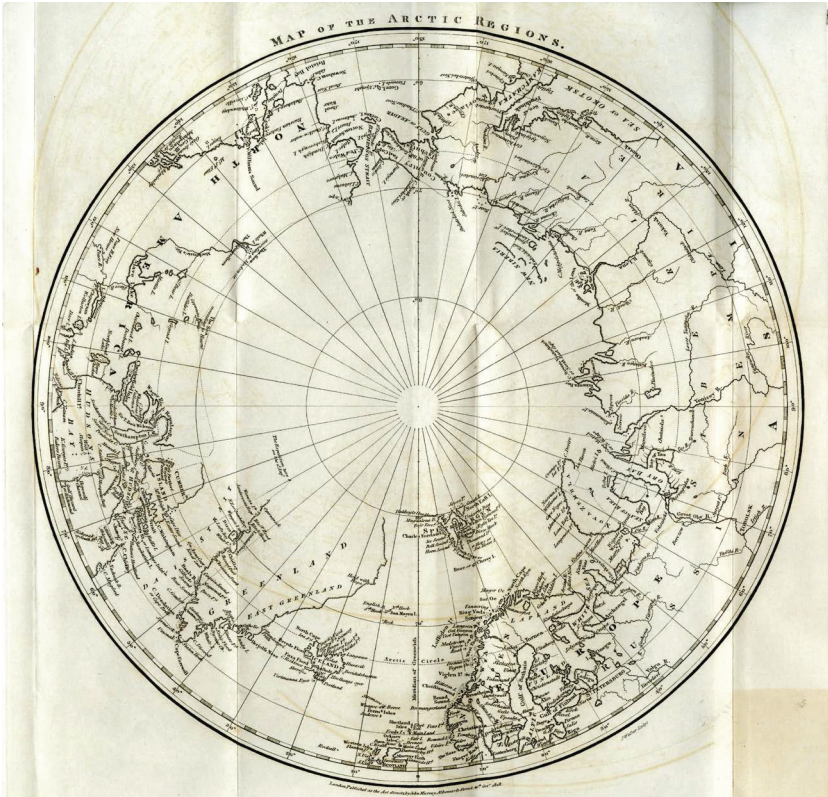
### *Arctic Attack*

Even if Britain had made enormous sacrifices in the course of the Napoleonic Wars, the post-Waterloo years still presented the country with a considerable advantage over its military and commercial rivals. But to some extent, the strong northern orientation of the period was also due to practical considerations and, partly, to events far beyond human control. As to the former, the British Navy, which had expanded to a force of ninety ships and 130,000 men, now needed to slim down to about a sixth of its new size in terms of ships as well as manpower (Coleman 2006, 145). The main problem was the officers, who were entitled to half pay when not on duty (Fleming 2001, 1–2), and this is where John Barrow, later Sir John Barrow (1764–1848), who was to serve as Second Secretary of the Admiralty from 1804 until 1845, was to play a crucial role.

A coincidence or a freak of nature appeared to come to Barrow’s aid in suggesting a solution: in the summer of 1817, reports were coming in from various parts of the arctic regions, indicating unusually small amounts of ice. In the same year Barrow proposed to make use of the opportunity to solve once and for all the old and recurring problem of the Northwest Passage, “the maritime philosopher’s stone” (Williams 2003, 125). The discovery of this would be as strategically significant as it had ever been, and the quest would be the perfect task for the Navy officers who had more than proved their competence in the recent wars.

One of the reports that Barrow received came from William Scoresby Jr. (1789–1857). Even as a young man he was a major authority on the Arctic, having sailed with his hugely successful father, the Whitby whaler William Scoresby Sr., from the age of ten. Scoresby Jr. was not just a whaler, however; he was also a self-taught scientist, who a few years later would publish *An Account of the Arctic Regions* (1820), a two-volume work that has been called “the foundation-stone of Arctic science” (quoted in Harmer 1928, 58) and “a classic of early oceanographical literature” (Alister Hardy in Scoresby 1969, I: no pag.). He was also a regular correspondent of Sir Joseph Banks, and it was precisely via Banks – the now elderly spider at the centre of the web of British science – that Barrow received the welcome news from this highly trustworthy source. According to Scoresby, he had himself witnessed how an area of nearly 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> up to about 80° N along the east coast of Greenland was unusually free of ice (Hayes 2003, 59).

There was also one crucial natural event that was not recognized as such at the time: two months before the Battle of Waterloo, on 19 April 1815, the volcano Mount Tambora in Java, on the other side of the planet, erupted in a massive explosion, which not only killed 12,000 people and reduced the altitude of the mountain by 1,300 metres, but also caused a considerable and long-term climatic impact around virtually the whole world (Fagan 2000, 168). In Europe, indeed, the following year earned



This map from John Barrow's *A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions* (1818) shows that only small parts of Canada north of the Arctic Circle (66° 33' N) had been charted by this time. Davis Strait, west of Greenland, and northern Greenland are also unexplored. With northern Spitsbergen, at 80° N, being for long the northernmost land available, it is hardly surprising that most attempts on the Pole chose this route.

the epithet “the year without a summer”. Temperatures plummeted; in Ireland alone 65,000 people died from famine and disease as a result of failed harvests (*ibid.*, 170 and 173); and “Iceland was virtually stranded, its bays, ports and inlets clogged by ice” (Fleming 2001, 29). This climatic disruption was one of the reasons for the irregular ice conditions in the

North Atlantic in 1817, which reduced the amount of ice in the Far North, and which led to Barrow's success in persuading his superiors to make a new and major push towards opening up the Arctic. Thus a series of different and apparently unconnected factors contributed to making 1818 one of the most remarkable years in the history of the polar regions.

### 1818

As the year 1817 was drawing to a close, two launches were under way in London. In an unassuming publishing house with the impressive name of Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones in Finsbury Square, proofs were being prepared for an anonymous triple-decker written by a barely twenty-year-old woman with a dubious reputation. Mary Shelley (1797–1851), together with her husband Percy (1792–1822), had spent the least cold part of “the year without a summer” with Lord Byron in Geneva. Here, in the cold weather, Mary had conceived the idea of *Frankenstein*, whose modest print-run of five hundred copies was now in the making.

At the same time, in the stately buildings of the Admiralty behind Whitehall, John Barrow was working hard. He had been in his position as Second Secretary for thirteen years, and had initiated a considerable number of expeditions around the world, but his present project was daring as well as expensive, and required a major effort from him and everyone else involved. And everything had to be ready by the end of March.

*Frankenstein* was published on 1 January 1818, in a peculiar way anticipating the massive renewed effort of arctic exploration that Britain was to initiate only a few months later. With a first-person frame narrative by the explorer Robert Walton, who is on an expedition to find the North Pole, the book could hardly have been more topical, and in the course of the following months and amid all the publicity about the polar regions, readers of the work must have received a powerful indication of the mystery and attraction of this remote world of ice and cold. Also, the author's choice of frame narrative is obviously a strong indication of the popularity of the subject of arctic literature and exploration at the time, and for those who saw in the novel something more than a superficial Gothic fantasy, it is bound to have raised questions and speculations of a more profound character.

Neither does the novel come out of the blue when considered in the context of Mary Shelley's own life. First of all, she had in July 1816 visited the glaciers in Chamonix with her husband – an experience that gave birth to the latter's powerful poem “Mont Blanc”, and that is reflected in *Frankenstein* as an early counterpart to Walton's arctic expedition and as

a foreshadowing of Frankenstein's own end. For tourists like the Shelleys, in other words, the Alpine glaciers represented an experience that fed into their perceptions of and ideas about the polar regions.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, Mary Shelley must have grown up with an interest in the North; after all, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had written a travelogue from Scandinavia with which her daughter must have been intimately acquainted.

Also, as appears from her journals, she was a voracious reader, who kept a close eye on new publications. For instance, later in the year 1818, she would be reading the English translation of Hans Egede Saabye's *A Description of Greenland*, which must have been hot off the press (Shelley 1995, 234). In 1817, however, while working on her manuscript, a probable source of inspiration for the frame narrative would have been precisely William Scoresby's *On the Greenland and Polar Ice*, published in 1815, possibly together with the account *A Voyage to Spitsbergen* by Scoresby's surgeon, John Laing, from the same year. Both of these works would have given Shelley useful information and graphic descriptions of polar scenery, which would enable her to imbue her own narrative with the amount of convincing realism that characterises her story. Admittedly, there are few references to polar literature in Shelley's journals, but it is difficult to imagine that she could have written *Frankenstein* without consulting some of the sources that her frame narrator Robert Walton in the first letter to his sister claims to have read with such ardour, and that "composed the whole of our good uncle Thomas's library" (Shelley 1992, 14).

Another intriguing possibility in this context is that Shelley, while working on her novel, had also had access to a specific work of polar fiction published in 1817, namely *A Voyage to the North Pole* by the mysteriously pseudonymous Benjamin Bragg.<sup>7</sup> Like *Frankenstein*, it contains a frame narrative, and it combines elements of the irrational and the fantastic with down-to-earth descriptions of the polar world. The main part of the story describes the protagonist's intense urge to discover the North Pole. When his parents die and he obtains his legacy, he travels, like Shelley's Walton, to St. Petersburg, where he organises an expedition, buying among other things "eight fine Newfoundland dogs" (Bragg 1817, 26). From here, the two protagonists sail through the same arctic waters, Bragg travelling north and sailing via Greenland to Spitsbergen, whilst Walton goes north to Arkhangelsk and from there towards the Pole. And just as Walton welcomes the challenge and the danger of the voyage, preferring

<sup>6</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of the glaciers in *Frankenstein*, see Wilson 2003, 128–33.

<sup>7</sup> A bit of detective work reveals Benjamin Bragg to be the book's publisher, George Walker, who in 1817 published a considerable amount of sheet music but no other novels. In 1813, however, Walker had published another book for juveniles, *The Travels of Sylvester Tramper through the Interior of the South of Africa*, and in *A Voyage to the North Pole*, Tramper appears as a character who is a friend of the author, Benjamin Bragg. It has, however, been impossible to find any further information about Walker.

“glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path” and ensuring his sister that “[m]y courage and my resolution is firm” (Shelley 1992, 15), Bragg insists that “the more difficulty and danger, the greater was the glory. In all great enterprises [...], personal convenience and danger must be laid aside. What man would go to battle if he was afraid to run the chance of wounds and death?” (Bragg 1817, 4–5). This is not to suggest that *Frankenstein* owes any of its originality to Bragg’s novel, but it is an indication of the degree to which Shelley’s mind and imagination were focused on the North, and of how her work was not just a remarkable and almost freak product of her imagination but a reflection of a genuine interest in and research into the polar regions.

This is not the place to subject the novel to a comprehensive interpretation, but with regard to the social and political context into which it appeared, it should be mentioned that it attracted considerable attention, some of which was obviously due to a predictable moral indignation. In its January issue, for instance, the *Quarterly Review* condemned it as “a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity” (*The Quarterly Review*, 18 (January 1818): 379–85).<sup>8</sup> But some of the attention certainly also had to do with the fact that Shelley, as any successful writer, had managed, almost prophetically to touch upon an area of major contemporary relevance. In March, she was also encouraged by a generous and insightful review by Walter Scott in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, which did much to enhance the novel’s reputation.

As Walton’s, Frankenstein’s and the monster’s arctic adventures were being debated in newspapers and journals in the winter of 1818, John Barrow was busy with his own preparations. As for the Phipps expedition half a century earlier, they were swift and efficient, but marred by a problem that would haunt British expeditions for the next hundred years: the Admiralty’s stubborn insistence on naval officers being in charge, despite the availability of men with better qualifications. Thus Scoresby Jr., who was not an officer but who had a vast experience and had been a captain since the age of twenty-one, was grudgingly offered the position as pilot on one of the ships. He immediately and proudly declined the offer (Savours 1999, 42). Plans then went ahead for two major expeditions which, in military fashion were to maximise the chance of a successful conquest by way of a pincer operation. With two ships, Captain David Buchan (1780–1838) and his second-in-command Lieutenant John Franklin (1786–1847) were to repeat Phipps’s direct attack on the Pole via Spitsbergen, and, if successful, to return either via the Bering Strait or to Baffin Bay on the west coast of Greenland. Then, with two other ships

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from [www.rc.umd.edu/reference/chronologies/mschronology/reviews](http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/chronologies/mschronology/reviews), consulted 04.11.2010. The review did not appear as soon as the issue date appears to suggest: the January issue was not published until 9 June (*ibid.*).

Captain John Ross (1777–1856) and Lieutenant Edward Parry (1790–1855) were to sail to Davis Strait and Baffin Bay to search for the long-sought Northwest Passage.

The plans for both expeditions were strongly coloured by Barrow's own optimistic view of what could be achieved, and knowing this, he played on a number of strings to gather popular as well as political support. He was already himself a highly sought-after contributor to the *Quarterly Review*, where his articles on exploration swelled the number of subscribers (Fleming 2001, 7), and he now used the opportunity to drip-feed the public with news of the impending expedition. One of the appointed officers, John Franklin, expressed in a letter fear that one of Barrow's articles would "make the Reader form too favourable anticipations – they will not, I fear, be prepared to receive any accounts of failure" (quoted in Coleman 2006, 152). Similarly, the timing of the publication of Barrow's own *A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions* in the same year was clearly calculated to enhance the public interest in the expeditions. With the introductory note dated 1 August, the book was probably planned to be available just in time for their expected triumphant return. In this work, published in the confident aftermath of Waterloo, Barrow drives home a powerful message of the superiority of Britain and its "spirit of enterprise", exemplified in particular by the Navy (Regard in Regard ed. 2013b, 39).

There is also every reason to suspect that Barrow was involved in the sudden republication of Daines Barrington's old papers, which had been written in connection with the Phipps expedition in 1773. Barrington, who had himself been overly optimistic, had been dead for eighteen years, and so could not be blamed for the fact that the paper that he published in 1775, entitled *The Probability of Reaching the North Pole Discussed*, was now republished with the even more confident title *The Possibility of Approaching the North Pole Asserted*. In addition, the new publication, which even reached a second edition the same year, was supplemented by a paper by the scientist and Colonel Mark Beaufoy, who four years earlier had been court-martialled and relieved of his command (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2004, s.v. "Beaufoy, Mark"), expressing the same naïve optimism as Barrington half a century earlier. It even seems reasonable to assume that the unsigned Preface was written by an insider, probably Barrow himself: it is dated 1 March, perfect timing for making the text available by the end of the month, when the ships were to be inspected; it refers directly to the coming expedition; and it refers to Barrington, whom posterity has characterised as "remarkably dim-witted", as an "acute and ardent [...] inquirer" (Barrington 1818, v). It is obvious, in other words, that whoever was behind the publication had a strong vested interest in its point of view.

The element of national symbolism was also very much in evidence when at the end of the month the inspection of the four ships took place

with large crowds and a royal entourage in the Royal Dockyards in Deptford (Fleming 2001, 39), where a proud list of British explorers had started their voyages since the days of Henry VIII. It was on this occasion, too, that the young poetess Eleanor Anne Porden (1795–1825) was inspired to write a celebration in verse of the memorable event, “The Arctic Expeditions”, whose first stanza strikes the customary chord of heroic patriotism:

Sail, sail, adventurous Barks! Go fearless forth,  
 Storm on his glacier-seat the misty North,  
 Give to mankind the inhospitable zone,  
 And Britain’s trident plant in seas unknown.  
 Go! Sure, wherever Science fills the mind  
 Or grief for man long sever’d from his kind,<sup>9</sup>  
 That anxious nations watch the clanging gales,  
 And prayers and blessings swell your flagging sails. (*Ibid.*, 7)<sup>10</sup>

For Porden the event was also memorable because it was the occasion of her first meeting with her future husband, the commander of one of the ships, John Franklin, who would soon acquire a name for himself.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in the printed version of the poem, the introduction, which refers to her visit to Deptford on 30 March, is dated the following day, 31 March, the day of the inspection itself. When one adds to this the fact that the introduction also humbly mentions “the very able and delightful article in the last Quarterly Review” (written by Barrow), and the fact that Porden’s poem was published by John Murray, who was Barrow’s own publisher, there is once again reason to believe that Barrow had been pulling strings, seeing Porden’s 201 lines of lyrical praise as a useful contribution to his publicity drive.<sup>12</sup>

Before the ships set sail for the Arctic, however, and Barrow’s optimistic theories could be properly tested, another and far more spectacular theory

<sup>9</sup> Porden here adds a footnote – “The inhabitants (if any) of lost Greenland” – suggesting that there was still a lingering memory of the Norse settlements, whose fate was still a mystery. In her preface, too, she mentions this, together with the possibility of reaching the Pole, as a subject “on which for some years my mind has dwelt with peculiar interest” (Porden 1818, 5). Porden’s interest in Greenland may furthermore have been stimulated by Bernard O’Reilly’s book *Greenland, the Adjacent Seas and the North-West Passage to the Pacific Ocean*, also published in 1818 (ref. O’Connor 1985).

<sup>10</sup> For a recent and thorough discussion, primarily from a feminist perspective, of Porden’s poem in relation to Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, see Hill 2008, 53–87.

<sup>11</sup> The polar historian Laurence P. Kirwan says about Porden: “Devoted as she was to him, Franklin appears in her letters as reserved, stiff, conventional, provincial, a man whose narrow evangelicalism proved on occasion an embarrassing obstacle to one of Miss Porden’s sophisticated and convivial taste” (Kirwan 1962, 179). There is thus perhaps more than a fleeting similarity between the relationship between Franklin and Porden, on the one hand, and that between Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his wife Kathleen, on the other.

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of Porden and the Arctic, see Janice Cavell in Regard (ed.) 2013b, 79–94.

with regard to the Arctic and the North Pole was launched – or rather re-launched – on the other side of the Atlantic. On 10 April, John Cleves Symmes (1779–1829) of Ohio, under the pseudonym of Captain Adam Seaborn, started distributing a circular “to institutions of learning in Europe and America, [arguing] that the earth is hollow and open at the poles” (J.O. Bailey’s introduction in Seaborn 1965, no pag.), and that the interior of the planet is habitable and contains unknown civilisations:

I declare the earth is hollow, and habitable within; containing a number of solid concentrick spheres, one within the other, and that it is open at the poles 12 or 16 degrees; I pledge my life in support of this truth, and am ready to explore this hollow, if the world will support and aid me in the undertaking. [...] I ask one hundred brave companions, well equipped, to start from Siberia in the fall season, with Reindeer and slays [*sic*], on the ice of the frozen sea. (Quoted in Griffin 2004, 382–83)

Though a touch of madness was attached to the theory, it went back to Athanasius Kircher’s and Edmund Halley’s ideas from the 1600s, and even if it did not give scientists sleepless nights, it gives an indication both of the enormous popular interest in the polar regions, and of the considerable amount of ignorance that still surrounded them.<sup>13</sup> In fact, up until his death in 1829, Symmes and his theory would receive considerable attention from a number of quarters.

The pseudonymous novel *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820), which was probably written by Symmes and which has been called the first American utopian novel, describes a visit to the nation of Symzonia, which is reached from the Antarctic, and Symmes’s 1826 publication *Symmes Theory of Concentric Spheres* was taken seriously to the point of convincing a number of allegedly sensible people, and receiving twenty-five congressional votes in favour of a petition to send an expedition to test the theory (J.O. Bailey’s introduction in Seaborn 1965, no pag.). As a matter of fact, when Congress in 1836 voted for a \$300,000 appropriation to fund what came to be known as the United States Exploring Expedition (led by Charles Wilkes), it was very much the result of the tireless efforts of Symmes’s disciple, the journalist Jeremiah Reynolds (Robinson 2006, 24).

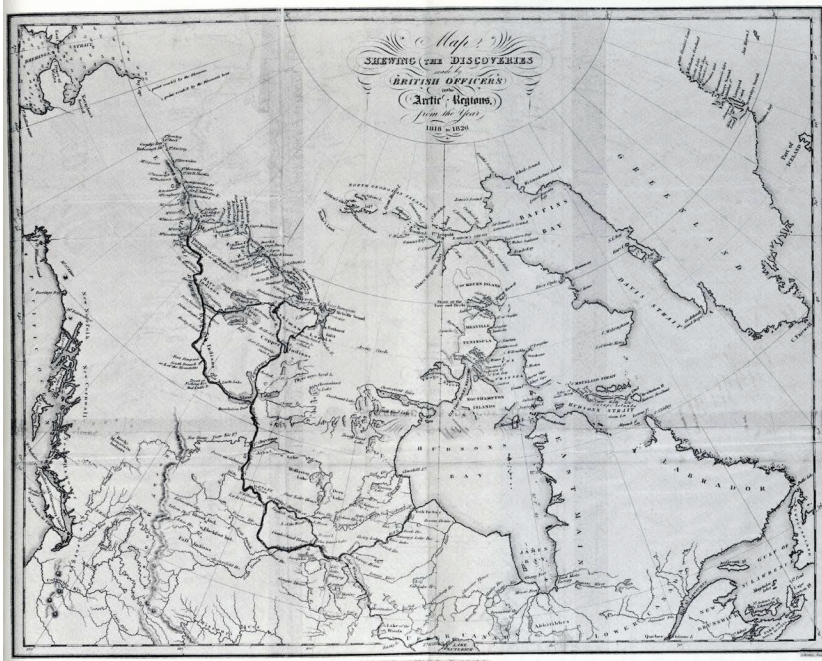
Meanwhile, back in Britain, after the inspection at Deptford, the crews were making the last preparations, and by the end of April all four of the ships were well under way. A month later Buchan and Franklin had reached Magdalena Fjord in northwestern Spitsbergen. From here they just managed to reach beyond 80° N before effectively being stopped by the ice and getting caught in a storm that caused serious damage to both of the ships. Having made the necessary repairs, Buchan and Franklin then limped back to London, where they arrived on 22 October, concluding

<sup>13</sup> The hollow earth theory has since produced a mass of so-called fantastic fiction about life in the world’s interior, much of it set in the Antarctic. Ref. Cordes 2005.



– and unsuccessfully so – the last British attempt to sail across the Arctic Ocean (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Buchan, David”).<sup>14</sup>

Ross and Parry, on the other hand, rounded the southern tip of Greenland at the end of May, making their way northwards along the west coast among dozens of whalers, and reaching the 75th parallel in the beginning of August, now on their own and facing harsher weather.



This map, “Shewing the Discoveries made by British Officers in the Arctic Regions from the Years 1818 to 1826”, shows the breathtaking journeys performed by John Franklin and his men in the Canadian interior during this period. As indicated, a long stretch of the northern coastline to the east and west of the Mackenzie River delta has been charted. In addition, the map shows the crucial Lancaster Sound to the west of Baffin Bay, which opened up into a labyrinth that would require nearly a century of exploration. From *Franklin’s Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea* (1828).

Actually, they were not quite on their own. On 9 August they made contact with a group of Inuit, with whom they were able to communicate thanks to John Sackheuse, a Greenland Inuit member of the crew, who had made his way to Britain and learned the language (Fleming 2001, 38). The group of Inuit belonged to an as yet unknown polar tribe who had seen neither white men nor other Inuit before, and what followed – after considerable

<sup>14</sup> A proper report from the voyage did not appear until twenty-five years later, when Frederick Beechey, one of Franklin’s officers, published his account (see Beechey 1843).

hesitation from the Inuit side – was a friendly meeting of considerable ethnological interest, which was duly recorded by Ross and Parry.

Still, the expedition's main objective was clear: to find the Northwest Passage, and by the end of August, Ross and Parry had carefully examined all the three alternatives: Smith Sound, leading north along the Greenland coast from the top of Baffin Bay; Jones Sound, going west from the bay; and Lancaster Sound, a parallel channel to Jones Sound, but a bit further south. In all three cases Ross, the leader of the expedition, concluded with absolute certainty that they were dead ends, surrounded by major mountain ridges. Ross's fatal mistake, especially with regard to Lancaster Sound, has been much debated, but was probably due to a combination of causes: a lack of experience with visibility in icy waters, time pressure, and a refusal to take advice from younger officers, possibly including Parry (*ibid.*, 49–50).

When the four ships returned to London in the autumn of 1818, there was little cause for celebration. To some extent, the British had become accustomed to welcoming back arctic expeditions with the flags at half mast, but this time expectations had been particularly high: it was the first serious effort in many years; it was planned and prepared better than any previous expedition; and now, well into the new century, science had removed a number of obstacles traditionally associated with polar voyages. Scurvy, for instance, had been more or less eradicated. In 1760 the British Navy had registered 1,754 cases of the disease, but partly based on James Lind's impressive *A Treatise on the Scurvy* (1753), the Navy had since 1795 introduced lemon (i.e. vitamin C) and sauerkraut as a standard preventive measure against the disease, bringing the number of cases down to one in 1806 (Gurney 2007, 42). Ironically, and almost embarrassingly, the total failure of the expeditions in terms of achieving their actual objectives was a sharp contrast with the impeccable physical health of the crews.

But there were other reasons, too, for the Admiralty's tense reception of the expedition leaders. Since Waterloo, Britain and Russia had been close allies, and their collaboration also extended to the polar regions, in which both countries had a profound interest. Thus on 30 July 1815, only a month after Napoleon's defeat, a privately initiated Russian expedition set sail from Kronstadt, the naval base outside St. Petersburg. Admittedly, the British Navy was fully informed, and had even supplied a specially built lifeboat for the ship, the *Ryurik*, and its twenty-two-strong crew (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Kotzebue, Otto von").

The expedition was led by Otto von Kotzebue (1787–1846), whose orders were to approach the Northwest Passage from the Bering Strait. The expedition eventually took more than three years, thus encompassing not only the entire period in which Mary Shelley wrote and published *Frankenstein*, but also the whole planning stage and most of the actual voyages of Ross and Buchan, and naturally produced a considerable

amount of uncertainty in London with regard to the degree of success it might have achieved. However, when the *Ryurik* returned to Kronstadt on 3 August 1818, badly battered and with a captain who was lucky to be alive after having been thrown against a beam in a storm, it soon became clear that little more had been achieved than the charting of some new stretches of the coastlines on both sides of the Bering Strait.

The British could breathe a sigh of relief, and the game was still on, but there must have been tense nerves in the Admiralty, and Barrow must have acted swiftly in order to obtain Kotzebue's news. Judging from the dates of Barrow's book (the preface is dated 1 August), which gives a full summary of Kotzebue's voyage, of Barrow's personal conversation with him (Barrow 1818, 363) and of Kotzebue's return to Kronstadt three days later, it must be the case that Kotzebue actually made a stop in London, providing Barrow and not Count Rumyantsev – his employer – with his first full report.

Though the Kotzebue expedition did not achieve the breakthrough with regard to the Northwest Passage the Russians had hoped for and the British secretly feared, a tale still hangs by it that adds to the impression of 1818 as a year of particular interest. On board the *Ryurik*, employed as the expedition's scientist, was the Frenchman turned German Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838), who in 1814, the year before setting out on the expedition, had published what was going to become a classic of German literature, the fantastic novel *Peter Schlemihl*.<sup>15</sup> It is not known whether Mary Shelley was aware of the novel while she was working on *Frankenstein*, as it does not seem to have been translated into English until 1824, but the parallels between the two works are striking.

First, both of them are in various ways based on the Faust myth, and both, according to Irving Massey, are “tragedies of science; both involve doubles [...]; both raise the question what happens [...] when the intellectual force is detached from its embodiment” (Massey 1976, 138).<sup>16</sup> Chamisso's hero, a scientist like Frankenstein, sells his shadow to the devil for an inexhaustible pouch of money. In both novels, furthermore, there is a fatal pair that are doomed to hate each other; the hero's love is destroyed; grave errors are committed; other characters shy away from the hero; and in both works the hero journeys into the polar regions, which represent a world of utter bleakness and desolation. If Mary Shelley was not aware of Chamisso's work, in other words, the two are nevertheless – with the many contrasts between them – conducting a fascinating and often strikingly parallel debate using popular perceptions of the Arctic as a common resonance board.

<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, Chamisso was acquainted with E.T.A Hoffmann, the father of fantastic literature (ref. Marie-Therese Federhofer, paper at Arctic Discourses Conference in Tromsø, 12–14 October 2006).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion and a comparison of the two novels, see Massey, chs. 7 and 8.

1818, then, had been an eventful year with regard to polar exploration, but all the major expeditions could celebrate Christmas at home, with their ships securely at anchor. Meanwhile, in the little Austrian village of Oberndorf, far from the icy wastes of the Arctic, the Mass on Christmas Day contained a small surprise. The organist Franz Xaver Gruber and the village priest Josef Mohr first performed their short composition “Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht”, which had been composed that very day. Perhaps even the empty spaces of the Far North felt how all was calm and all was bright, with the wondrous star lending its light. But it was not to last. Soon ships and men would return, with shouts and cannon shots. The race had only just started.

### *With Hammer and Tongs*

The following decade witnessed a frantic level of polar activity, especially from the British side, and only a summary of the main events can be given here. It was plain for all that Ross and Buchan had not achieved any of their goals, and Barrow was particularly and profoundly dissatisfied with what he regarded as the former’s half-hearted if not cowardly effort. As a matter of fact, Barrow must have harboured profound doubts about the truth of Ross’s conclusion, because his prescription to remedy the failure was clear: more of the same medicine. And this time he added insult to injury by placing in charge the seconds in command from the previous year, Edward Parry and John Franklin. Like Ross, Parry was to attempt the approach that had been tried for three centuries, i.e. to enter the Northwest Passage from Baffin Bay, or to be more precise: from Lancaster Sound. Franklin, on the other hand, was instructed to go over land across north-western Canada until he reached the ocean, and then trace the Northwest Passage eastwards, with the hope of meeting Parry.

Parry’s expedition contained at last two new elements in relation to past attempts. The first is an inconspicuous incident, which points forward to a major transformation of life at sea. In his journal from the voyage, Parry mentions more or less in passing that because of unfavourable wind as the ships were leaving Deptford, they were towed by a steamboat, “the Eclipse, of sixty horse-power”, down river to Northfleet (Parry 1821, 1). The age of steam had arrived, and as in so many other areas, it would in due course also have an impact on polar exploration. As a matter of fact, one of the pioneers advocating the introduction of steam was Parry’s unfortunate predecessor, John Ross, who a few years later would publish *A Treatise on Navigation by Steam* (Savours 1999, 124).

Secondly, virtually all polar expeditions had so far been seasonal ventures trying to make the most of the short summer to achieve their

goals. If they had taken longer, the plan had usually been to overwinter at a more southern latitude in order to make a new push the following summer. The expeditions that had been forced to spend the winter in the Arctic had generally been disastrous, and so had the inhuman experiments by the Dutch at Spitsbergen in the 1600s. Parry knew, however, that there was little or no chance of sailing through to the Pacific in one season, and made preparations accordingly. Although the two ships, the *Griper* and the *Hecla*, did not reach their ultimate target, Parry disproved Ross's claim of mountains blocking Lancaster Sound, and sailed more than 1,000 km westward from the entrance in Baffin Bay (Hayes 2002, 185), overwintering successfully at Melville Island, roughly half way to the Bering Strait. Still, the following summer was not enough to open the frozen channel, and he was forced to return, disappointed but yet triumphant, claiming a £5,000 parliamentary reward for sailing beyond 110° W (Hayes 2003, 63). Nineteenth-century arctic exploration had, according to Frédéric Regard, found its first hero and its first villain (Regard in Regard (ed.) 2013b, 38).

At the same time, Franklin covered the distance from Hudson Bay via Great Slave Lake to the mouth of the Coppermine River, bringing with him a considerable number of men, including Indian guides and interpreters. From here he charted about 800 km of coastline to the east, before starting on the gruelling journey back to Fort Providence on Great Slave Lake, during which he famously became “the man who ate his boots”. Altogether, Franklin spent more than three years on the journey, which covered about 8,000 km and involved the deaths of several of his men from starvation, together with ominous but hushed-up cases of murder and cannibalism. Modern commentators have frequently been merciless about the expedition, whose results were meagre, to say the least, but like Parry, Franklin returned to a hero's welcome. Focusing on the failings, according to Fergus Fleming, “would have called in question the wisdom of those who sent him” (Fleming 2001, 153), and so, manoeuvred into a peculiarly uncritical mood, the press and the general public were more than willing to celebrate the somewhat dubious triumph.

This will to believe was also very much evident in the impressive reports that both Parry and Franklin published on their returns. It seems reasonable to suspect that once again Barrow was more than mindful of the potential public reaction to the expedition leaders' customary accounts of their voyages, and that he carefully orchestrated their publication. This may be the reason why Buchan did not even write an account, but left it to one of his officers, Frederick Beechey, to do so twenty-five years later, with the lame excuse that Buchan had not had the time to do it (Beechey 1843, 3). Similarly, it is striking to find how Ross's account from his despised voyage in 1818 resulted merely in a two-volume work in ordinary book format, with hardly any illustrations, except the fatal map of Baffin Bay showing the utter impossibility of further advancement to the west,

together with the equally fatal statement: "I have [...] set at rest for ever the question of a north-west passage in this direction" (Ross 1819, vii).

It is, altogether, a miserable little publication compared to the tomes produced by Parry in 1821, and Franklin in 1823. Both of these are very clearly expensive productions, printed in large formats on thick quality paper, and with a considerable number of illustrations, including fold-out maps and plates, and an impressive number of appendices packed with scientific and meteorological observations. There is literally an air of triumph about them: Parry's long fold-out map of Lancaster Sound alone almost thumbs its nose at Ross's failure. It is as if these works have



Being beset in the ice was one of the greatest fears of arctic exploration, and more than once the crews had to make desperate attempts to free the ships by sawing ice-free channels. However, when expeditions began to spend the winter in the ice, it was equally important to enter deep into the bays and find safe winter harbours. Here Edward William Parry's crews are opening up a channel for *Hecla* and *Griper* during their search for the Northwest Passage in 1819 (Parry 1821).

been designed to quell any hint of mutinous murmurs about the wisdom of the enterprise. And the public seemed to swallow the information unquestioningly. According to one critic, the accounts from the polar regions "became a part of people's consciousness in nineteenth-century

Britain”, and Franklin’s, in particular, brought handsome profits to the publisher as well as the author (Kitson 2001, x–xi).

Thus, if part of their intention was to win public support, the explorers appear to have succeeded. At least, for the rest of the decade there was a steady stream of further attempts. Even before Franklin’s return, Parry was dispatched once again, not to Lancaster Sound, but to Hudson Strait further south, to search for a possible opening via Foxe Basin. Two years later he returned empty-handed, together with his second-in-command George Lyon (1795–1832). Then, before his account of the second voyage was published – a book more on the modest scale of Ross’s, suggesting that some of the glory was fading – Parry was then more or less immediately sent out again, overwintering from 1824 to 1825, once more failing to make the big discovery and returning with only one ship, having lost the seriously damaged *Fury* to the fury of the ice. At the same time, the talented but unfortunate George Lyon set off for the northern part of Hudson Bay, suffering two close calls when his ungainly brig the *Griper* was nearly destroyed in two furious storms, and returning to Portsmouth in November 1825 (Lyon 1825), being forced to carry all the blame for the Admiralty’s bad planning.

The search for the Northwest Passage in the 1820s has an unnervingly feverish intensity that a modern reader may find difficult to understand. Towards the end of his account from the third expedition, published in 1826, Parry – perhaps unknowingly – brings the fundamental futility of the undertaking to the attention of his readers. “I am much mistaken indeed”, he says,

if the North-West Passage ever becomes the business of a single summer; nay, I believe that nothing but a concurrence of very favourable circumstances is likely even to make a single *winter* in the ice sufficient for its accomplishment. But this is no argument against the possibility of final success. (Parry 1826, 159)

It is as if Parry, like many others, sees the discovery of a passage as more than a sufficient reward in itself, even if it might have no practical use whatsoever. As with Martin Frobisher’s arctic quest for gold more than two hundred years earlier, the obsession seems to take on a life of its own, reducing all other considerations to insignificance.

The Northwest Passage continued to be very much part of the political power game in the North, as was exemplified by John Franklin’s next venture. In the spring of 1825, after more than a year’s planning and well before the return of Parry and Lyon, Franklin left his one-year-old daughter and his wife – the latter was effectively dying from tuberculosis – to return to the still uncharted coastline of northern Canada. Large parts of the coast had already been mapped, but there was a considerable distance left both to the east and west of the mouth of the Mackenzie River, to which Franklin was instructed to travel overland. The British objective was

clear: to chart the remaining coastline in order to enhance its legal claim to it ahead of the Russians. Admittedly, a treaty had been signed between the two countries about the boundaries of Russian expansion in the north-western corner of America (Coleman 2006, 241), but with still uncharted areas, the whole region was in a state of flux, and in order to be in the running a show of presence was essential.

Franklin's expedition was part of a three-pronged operation, masterminded by John Barrow himself, which involved not just Parry, who was expected to enter from the east, but also Frederick Beechey (1796–1856), who had been second-in-command on Buchan's Spitsbergen expedition in 1818. Departing in 1825, Beechey rounded Cape Horn and reached Bering Strait the next summer, continuing north into the Kotzebue Sound, where the appointed meeting with Franklin was to take place on 10 July 1826. The exact place was the little Chamisso Island, named after the author of *Peter Schlemihl*. Having seen no sign of Franklin, Beechey continued north and then east, eventually dispatching a barge that reached Point Barrow, the northernmost point in Alaska, in late August. No Europeans had ever sailed as far along the northern coast of Alaska. Still, once more the crowning achievement eluded them. What neither Beechey's men nor Franklin knew was that they only had a stretch of about 200 km of uncharted coastline between them (Savours 1999, 120). And so Franklin commenced his arduous journey back to London, where he arrived in September 1827. Assuming that Franklin may have been delayed, Beechey, on the other hand, waited one more summer in the area around Kotzebue Sound, before eventually returning to London in October 1828.

The Admiralty's enthusiasm for the Northwest Passage was now quickly running out, and when John Ross in 1828 presented a proposal for an expedition with steamships, it was turned down by the conservative and sceptical men of power. He obtained, however, private sponsorship, and with this in place, he set off in May 1829 with the paddle-steamer *Victory*, and with his nephew James Clark Ross (1800–62) as second in command. Ross's plan was to return to Lancaster Sound, a place of painful memories, and not surprisingly he intended to get his own back. The crucial place was Prince Regent Inlet, a wide opening running south from Lancaster Sound, where Parry had been forced to abandon the *Fury*. Ross's desperate hope was obviously that the Inlet would prove to be the coveted main road leading to Bering Strait and the Pacific, allowing him the last laugh. Although he had continuous problems with the steam engines, ice conditions were ideal, and he made rapid progress, entering deep into the Gulf of Boothia (which he named after one of his sponsors) before being locked in the ice. Here, fed up with failing technology, he dismantled the engines and put them on shore (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Ross, John"), where they



were left as unlucky charms, foreshadowing later ill-fated attempts by British polar explorers to pit high-tech machinery against merciless natural forces.

The unusually favourable ice conditions in the summer of 1829, however, proved to be a trap rather than a blessing, and the Gulf of Boothia a cul-de-sac rather than a throughway. Ross was forced to spend altogether four winters there before he and his crew, after abandoning the *Victory*, managed to reach Lancaster Sound, where they were picked up by a whaler in the summer of 1833. Despite the complete failure of the expedition, except for his nephew's discovery of the North Magnetic Pole, Ross compensated by having committed an extraordinary feat of survival, bringing with him – more or less safe and sound – twenty of the twenty-three-man crew back to England, where they arrived just in time to prevent three search expeditions from being sent out for them (*ibid.*). Here he received a tumultuous welcome, followed by a knighthood and a stream of international honours and awards (Coleman 2006, 313).

Thus the fifteen-year period after 1818 witnessed a particularly intense series of attempts to finally open up the icy labyrinth of the Northwest Passage. Still, this was not the only area of polar exploration during these years. Greenland and Spitsbergen, too, continued to attract attention, for strategic as well as scientific and historical reasons. In the summer of 1823, for instance, the British scientists and naval officers Douglas Clavering (1794–1827) and Edward Sabine (1788–1883) sailed via Norway to Spitsbergen, and crossed the Greenland Sea to the largely unexplored east coast of Greenland to collect data for the measurement of the Earth's shape. During the voyage along the Greenland coast, they reached as far as 75° N and made the astonishing discovery of a group of twelve Inuit, the first ever to be met by Europeans on the east coast of Greenland (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Clavering, Douglas"). Another stretch of coastline from Cape Farewell up the east coast to Scoresbysund was then explored only five years later by a Danish expedition led by Wilhelm Graah (1793–1863). Due to difficult ice conditions, he only reached 65° N, but charting the coastline, Graah was able to establish that no traces were to be found of the Norse settlements, which according to speculation might even still exist after centuries of isolation (*ibid.*, *s.v.* "Graah, Wilhelm").

In 1827, a more ambitious expedition was undertaken by Edward Parry, who after three attempts on the Northwest Passage followed in the wake of Phipps and Buchan in going straight for the Pole from the north-west coast of Spitsbergen. Having learnt a lesson or two from the unsuccessful attempts of his predecessors, he had taken on board the very real possibility that the conquest could not be made by simply sailing a ship straight through the crust of ice. On the contrary, he knew that the only way might be the hard way: to traverse a considerable distance of ice, on foot.

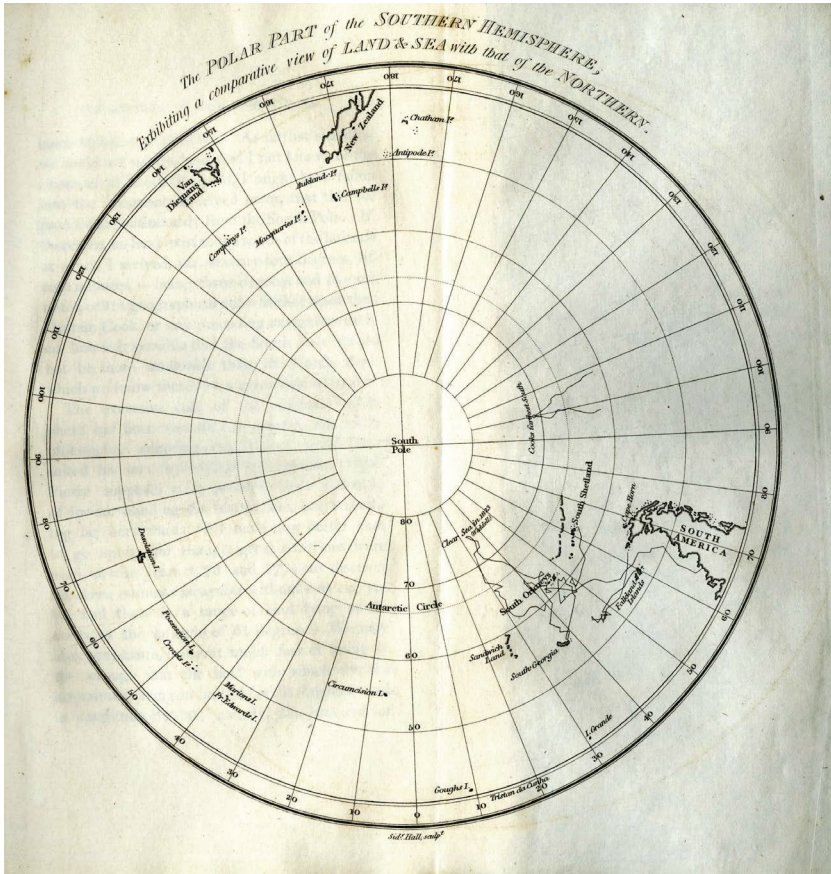
William Scoresby, always the realist, had advised him to “travel Eskimo-style in light sledges drawn by dogs” (Fleming 2001, 233), but again the obvious wisdom of adopting native methods was ignored. Instead of a dog team, Parry made a stop at Hammerfest in Norway and bought eight reindeer which, like Captain Scott’s ponies nearly a century later, were, it was hoped, to take the sledging party quickly and effortlessly to the Pole. Parry even made some unfortunate remarks about the simplicity of the operation, including: “Few enterprises are so easily practicable” (*ibid.*, 235). But the reindeer were not just to pull the provisions. The idea of an open polar sea was still very much alive, and Parry’s plan was therefore to pull two twenty-foot boats on sledges from the southern to the northern edge of the ice barrier, each of them weighing nearly 800 kilos. This, then, would be the challenging part of the journey, although hopes were high of a floor-like sheet of ice on which progress would be swift. And on reaching the polar sea, the rest would be literally plain sailing.

Conditions were somewhat different from expected. The reindeer were incapable of pulling the sledges, and instead of a level plain, “all that could be seen ahead was a vast, quarry-like, jumble of 40ft hummocks and giant pressure-ridges” (Coleman 2006, 290), in combination with lanes of open water. Progress was painfully slow, and to make matters worse Parry was soon to make the same discovery that Nansen and Johansen were to make seventy years later after leaving the *Fram*: the ice, on which they were moving north, was itself moving south, on some days at a pace that eliminated their progress altogether. After five gruelling weeks, and having reached 82° 45’ N (83° N would have earned them a £1,000 prize), the party turned round, and by late August they were back in the *Hecla* and on their way home. Admittedly, Parry had reached further north than any man before him, and the record would stand for nearly fifty years; but there were still 800 tortuous km left to cover, and it is hardly surprising that some time would pass before the next attempt.

Just as the British continued the exploration of the North Atlantic and the Canadian Arctic with a particular view to finding the Northwest Passage, the Russians had large territories in Siberia that were still guarding the ultimate secret about the Northeast Passage. In this connection, Bering Strait and the Chukchi Sea to the north of it naturally had a particular interest. Again, the Russians were as eager to clarify the lay of the land as the British were, and before Beechey’s charting of the northern coast of Alaska, there had been worrying reports to the effect that there might be a large peninsula stretching from the American continent north-westwards to the north of Siberia. As a worst-case-scenario this would mean that the Northwest as well as the Northeast Passages were actually non-existent.

Also, there was uncertainty about the New Siberian Islands (Novosibirskiye Ostrava) north-east of the Lena delta. As a consequence, a Russian expedition led by Mathias von Hedenström (1780–1845), the

son of Swedish refugees in Riga, was sent to explore the islands in 1808 (Hayes 2003, 42–43). Hedenström's second in command was Yakov Sannikov (1780–1812), who had already been travelling in the region for several years, and who gave name to the mysterious “Sannikov Land” to the north of New Siberia, suspected of being part of an arctic continent.



By 1825, when considerable parts of the Arctic had been mapped, the situation in the Antarctic was radically different. As James Weddell's map from 1825 indicates, the Antarctic continent had still not been discovered. Weddell, however, reached a record 74° S, three degrees further than Captain Cook half a century earlier, into what would later be called the Weddell Sea.

Although the expedition added significant new knowledge about the geography of the region, major questions remained unanswered, giving room for extravagant speculations for the next hundred years. Once again, a twenty-first-century reader may need to be reminded that with the entire polar region north of 82° N still completely uncharted and unvisited,

there was an enticingly broad spectrum of possibilities on offer, including continents, islands and temperate seas – perhaps even civilizations, with a bit of luck.

Like the British, the Russians were not prepared to sit and wait for others to find the answers. A decade after Hedenström's return, therefore, yet another Russian expedition, that of Ferdinand von Wrangell (1797–1870), was on its way to north-eastern Siberia, and its chief mission was to settle once and for all the question of a possible connection between the Asian and American continents. The expedition was to last from 1820 to 1824, and even if it was unable to establish whether there was land to the north of the East Siberian Sea, it did ascertain that the two continents were disconnected. As a result, the century-old scramble for the two main prizes in the arctic lottery was not over; tickets could still be bought, but at what price remained to be seen.

### ***The Antarctic and the Whaling Industry***

By the early nineteenth century, various European powers had been showing a distinct interest in the *Arctic* for more than three hundred years, thereby slowly acquiring a certain familiarity with it. During most of this period, the *Antarctic* – or the southern North – had only been a realm of imagination and vague conjecture. It was only in the very last decades before the French Revolution that *some* definite knowledge had been gleaned. During his Second Voyage, Captain Cook, in particular, had established that whatever existed beyond the drifting ice and freezing fog at 71° S was surrounded by open sea on all sides. In addition, the air was full of birds, indicating land to the south, and the sea was full of seals and whales. This was more than enough for commercial interests to move into action, and from the point of view of the major powers – Britain and France – an unwelcome challenger had already made an early start, namely the United States, just at the time when the bonds of union with Britain were being severed.

Virtually all of the American vessels were from the little island of Nantucket off the coast of Massachusetts. As with the Russians in the Bering region, however, the British were not prepared to play second fiddle: they brought their competitors to their knees by placing a punishing import duty on American oil, thereby forcing many of the Nantucketers into their own employ (Stackpole 1972, 13). The French were equally kept in check by the extensive policing of the seas by the Royal Navy, which was altogether bigger and more effective than that of the French.

The British thus largely succeeded in taking control of the South Sea whale fishery, sending on average about sixty ships and between 1,000 and

1,500 men, and producing between 15,000 and 20,000 tons of cargo each season. It was a lucrative business, totalling more than £200,000 a year (*ibid.*, 281–82). But it was not to last, and neither was that of sealing; after about a decade of slaughter, without any regard for retaining sustainable stocks, the seal population of the area had been virtually exterminated (Rosove 2002, 13). With regard to sealing, there was similarly a competition between Britain and the United States, but with the hunting grounds being quickly depleted, this industry reached a peak around 1820, when up to a hundred ships made considerable catches, and then the numbers quickly dwindled, with the commercial value of sealing never representing more than a few percent compared to that of whaling (Basberg and Headland 2008, 23).

The discovery of the new southern whaling frontier, however, did not mean that the traditional fishery in the North came to an end. On the contrary, it continued to be spread out from the Greenland Sea to Davis Strait on the west coast of Greenland, and even deep into Baffin Bay and Lancaster Sound (the so-called North Water and West Water), providing Britain with a veritable whaling boom for nearly three decades. In the years 1827–1830 alone, these northernmost whaling grounds yielded an astonishing 3,400 whales, an average of 850 a year (Harmer 1928, 59–60). This is the period when the Scoresbys were running a hugely successful whaling business from Whitby on the north Yorkshire coast, and it is from one of these voyages, in the summer of 1806, that John Laing, who served as a surgeon on board Scoresby's brand new ship, the *Resolution*, published *A Voyage to Spitzbergen* (1822).<sup>17</sup> Here he provided statistics on “the value of the whale-bone and whale-oil imported into Britain” during the first decade of the new century. With an average value of well over £500,000 a year, it is clear that the northern fisheries represented a much bigger revenue than that of the South Seas.

From its modest beginnings around the middle of the eighteenth century, Whitby developed into one of the major whaling centres in Britain. It could also boast of being the home port of Captain Cook himself. Another such port was Peterhead, north of Aberdeen, whose whaling adventure started in 1788, when the little vessel the *Robert* of only 169 tons sailed to the Greenland Sea, returning with just one ton of oil (Gray 1932, 131). A few years later, it returned with 47 tons, and soon a fleet of varying size sailed each year. In 1817, for instance, “the ten Peterhead ships at the fishing returned with 717 tons – the produce of sixty-four whales” (*ibid.*, 160–61).

It is from the same period that William Scoresby Jr., who was only seventeen during Laing's voyage, himself published his classic *An Account*

<sup>17</sup> Another work from the same year, also offering a highly informative account of a whaling voyage with Scoresby, this time in the Baffin, is George William Manby's *Journal of a Voyage to Greenland, in the Year 1821*.

of the Arctic Regions (1820). In typical fashion, however, this *magnum opus* of whaling and oceanography marked the peak of an era, and the statistics from the Peterhead fleet gives an unmistakable indication of the decline of the practice from the beginning to the middle of the century. In the first decade after 1800, each ship going to the Greenland Sea caught an



One of many illustrations of the dangerous life of the whaling crews. Thousands of men lost their lives in pursuit of the whales or because of the equally unpredictable weather conditions. From George William Manby's *Journal of a Voyage to Greenland, in the Year 1821* (1822).

average of nearly seventeen whales per voyage. In the second decade this had dropped to just over eleven whales, and in the third to just over seven (*ibid.*, 162). And the decline continued. Catches remained high on the west coast, but here too times were changing.

As had been the case around Spitsbergen in the 1600s, overfishing was part of the problem: the British alone caught altogether 2,000 whales in the 1823 season alone, and such inroads into the stock were bound to have an effect. Another problem was the massive losses of ships and men; entering the North and West Waters might bring enormous catches and corresponding profits, but it was also like entering an icy labyrinth, whose door might close sooner than expected. Not surprisingly, these risks made investment capital increasingly hard to obtain (Lopez 1986, 3). On the other hand, the market cried for more. The rapid growth in the whaling industry – in both the Arctic and the Antarctic – was closely connected with the radical social transformation that was taking place, especially in

Britain. Oil in ever greater quantities was needed for the lubrication of industrial machinery, and not least for lighting the streets of the growing cities. And the sperm whale from the South Seas produced an oil of far better quality than that of the Arctic right whale (Stackpole 1972, 18).

The period thus witnessed a double polar race; for the first time, both of the globe's polar extremities became regions of strategic importance, where national honour and prestige were at stake. And as in the North, the race in the Antarctic was conducted along two related fronts: exploitation and exploration, and the latter intensified after Cook's fairly definite suggestions of a possible continent. Bouvetøya, discovered but inaccurately charted by the Frenchman Bouvet de Lozier in 1739, had not been found by Cook, and the first proper observation of land in the Antarctic did not take place until October 1819, when William Smith (1790–1847) – from the same part of Britain as Cook – discovered and went ashore on the South Shetland Islands, about 850 km south of Cape Horn.<sup>18</sup> Then, having been instructed by the Royal Navy to chart the area Smith had discovered, Edward Bransfield (c.1783–1852) made an observation of the Antarctic continent – in fact the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula – on 30 January 1820, believing he was the first man to do so. But Britain and the United States were not the only nations conscious of the opportunities opening up at this new frontier. Russia, too, was harbouring imperial ambitions far from home, and had sent, in July 1819, one of its best navigators, Fabian von Bellinghausen (1778–1852), to the South Seas. On 27 January 1820, having penetrated to nearly 70° S, more than 2,000 km to the south and east of Smith's position, he observed the coast of what would later be called Queen Maud Land, beating Bransfield by three days (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Bellinghausen, Fabian von").

Still, Britain once again turned the situation to its advantage, and this time with the help of a man who represented an ideal combination of exploration and commercial enterprise. James Weddell (1787–1834), one of the great names of Antarctic history, performed altogether three voyages to the region, all for the purpose of sealing. Not finding, however, a sufficient number of seals on his third voyage, he sailed south from the South Orkney Islands in January 1822, and enjoying exceptionally favourable ice conditions, pushed far south into the large sea that would later acquire his name, reaching beyond 74° S, nearly three degrees further south than Cook's record from January 1774. Thus in the introduction to his report written after his return in 1824, he could proudly claim that he had achieved a "higher southern latitude than has been hitherto attained" (Weddell 1825, 1).

Although Smith, Bransfield, Bellinghausen, Weddell and a host of other minor explorers and sealers provided new and essential information

<sup>18</sup> Bouvetøya was strictly speaking not part of the Antarctic, as it was north of the 60th parallel.

and laid the foundation for further discoveries, Antarctica was still a forbidding place, which jealously guarded its secrets. In the following decades, more pieces were added to the giant jigsaw puzzle, but extreme distances as well as weather conditions made progress slow and laborious, and in the larger context it was not until the end of the century that American and European eyes would again be directed towards what by then was understood to be an almost unimaginably giant continent buried under an equally giant sheet of ice.

### *The Popular Arctic*

In the course of the 1820s, more than a dozen major reports from polar expeditions were published in Britain alone, and as indicated above, many of them commanded a considerable readership. But this was not the only, and probably not even the most important, way in which the general public shared and participated in the news from the frozen front, where brave representatives of the nation fought a continuous battle with the elements. Considering the fact that the navies played a crucial role in polar exploration in several countries, it was only natural that it was perceived as an extended kind of warfare, and that the nations' heroes, when leaving and returning, were celebrated with military honours and received the attention of the popular press as well as of popular culture. As will be seen later, the extent of this public attention was to increase considerably in the course of the century, and in a number of ways the 1820s marked the beginning of this development.

Russell A. Potter has drawn attention to the fact that "it was principally through the technologies of *vision* that the Arctic was most keenly and energetically sought", and that this phenomenon "powerfully transcended the conventional boundaries between 'fine art' and popular painting" (Potter 2007, 4). There was one relatively new visual medium in particular that reached a wide and popular audience at this time, namely the so-called panorama, "a massive painting mounted in a continuous circle around the wall of a circular room and viewed from a platform at its center, giving patrons the impression that they had been magically conveyed to the actual place" (*ibid.*, 5). Not only did the panorama provide audiences with a visual experience whose impact must have been experienced as comparable to that of modern 3D pictures, but there were also accompanying printed texts or programmes, which gave plenty of additional information.

One of the early examples of a panorama showing an arctic scene is the *Description of a View of the North Coast of Spitzbergen*, with the lengthy subtitle *Painted from Drawings Taken by Lieut. Beechey, who accompanied*



*The Polar Expedition in 1818; Which is now exhibiting in the large Rotunda of Henry Aston Barker's Panorama, Leicester-Square.* This twelve-page booklet contains a folded, but probably greatly simplified, version of the large-scale painting, with numbers on the various elements of flora, fauna and human activities in the picture, and full textual explanations. Furthermore, it functioned like a twentieth-century newsreel by being made available sooner than the published reports and by reaching a greater number. The booklet could proudly claim that

[t]he interest excited by the equipment of the late expedition towards the North Pole was of so general a nature, that there is scarcely an individual who is not fully in possession of its purport: but as no narrative of this voyage has hitherto appeared before the public, the following little account of the operations of the ships, and descriptions of the country they visited, may not prove uninteresting. (Anon. 1819, 3)

The panorama, in other words, was a response to the growing demand for news, and frequently sensational news, packaged in spectacular fashion, and not surprisingly, arctic scenes were particularly popular, presenting a convincing impression of heroism in landscapes and conditions that contained all the elements of drama and suspense. Furthermore, to cater for the markets outside the major cities, so-called “moving panoramas” were soon developed (Potter 2007, 5), which functioned more or less like travelling cinemas.

Music, too, was an area of popular culture that would soon be reflecting the activities on the arctic front. The piano was in the process of becoming the fashionable instrument for the growing bourgeoisie, and composers responded to the events of the day by producing and publishing sheet music for an expanding market. One of the first examples of this, and clearly a direct response to the first post-Waterloo expeditions, is “The North Pole Waltz” from 1821 by F.W. Crouch. Also, writers of hymns – a genre not primarily associated with contemporary issues – made use of recognizable and topical imagery. Reginald Heber, later Bishop of Calcutta, for instance, undoubtedly had the Ross and Buchan expeditions in mind when he wrote the much-loved “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” in 1819. It is also worth noting that Heber’s first line – “From Greenland’s icy mountains, from India’s coral strand” – captures the geographical extremes of the British Empire, which thereby also includes the polar world in its protective fold. Similarly, in the last stanza, the story of Christ is compared to “a sea of glory [that] spreads from pole to pole”. Even the explorers themselves spread the musical gospel. After Franklin’s first expedition to Canada, his officer and life saver, the artistically minded George Back (1796–1878), published a collection of *Canadian Airs* for voices and piano, celebrating the northern wilderness.

Occasional poetry was another genre that contributed to both confirming and establishing a perception of the northern regions as a

central national concern in the public mind. Eleanor Porden's poem in connection with Ross's and Buchan's expeditions has already been mentioned. A somewhat later example is a prize poem by Thomas Legh Claughton (1808–92), later Professor of Poetry at Oxford, who as a twenty-year-old undergraduate won the Newdigate Prize at the University with the poem "Voyages of Discovery to the Polar Regions", which was read at the Encaenia or degree ceremony on 1 July 1829. The poem needs to be read against the tradition of hero worship at the time, which had especially transformed Parry and Franklin into national icons. Franklin had lost his wife soon after setting out on his latest expedition to Canada; then in November 1828 he had married Jane Griffin (1791–1875), and while Claughton was writing his poem, he had been knighted for his service to the nation. And Parry, besides his earlier achievements, had recently won Britain an additional honour by reaching a record north. There was, in other words, an enormous national sympathy for the arctic heroes, which is reflected in the concluding lines of Claughton's poem:

And him – whose patriot Spirit dared to brave  
 Heaven's angry storms, and Ocean's treacherous wave –  
 Hailed the rude natives of an hundred isles  
 With glad coyennas and with grateful smiles:  
 But fairer England greets the Wanderer now –  
 Unfading laurels shade her Parry's brow;  
 And on the proud memorials of her fame  
 Lives, linked with deathless glory, Franklin's name! (Claughton 1829, 18–19)<sup>19</sup>

The period's growing awareness of childhood also opened up a quickly expanding market for children's literature, and once again arctic exploration provided an ideal setting for tales combining heroism with an edifying moral message. Mary Ann Hedge's *The Orphan Sailor-Boy; or, Young Arctic Voyager* (1824), for instance, offers a typical example of how authors of children's books tended to create a kind of intertextual relationship between their own texts and contemporary events, all the while firmly guided by an authoritative adult voice. The book opens with the young protagonist, Charles Elwyn, who has just been shown the awe-inspiring account of Parry's first voyage, packed with beautiful plates of arctic scenes, by one of his father's friends, whose name – Mr. Willoughby – has an appropriate ring of arctic history. The book impresses Charles profoundly, and he pleads with his father to be allowed to become a sailor. His father then tells him that Charles's grandfather actually went on an expedition to the North Pole, and that he left an account of it, whereupon it gradually emerges that this account is precisely the "Narrative of the Orphan Sailor-Boy".

<sup>19</sup> The word 'coyennas' is explained in a note as "an expression of joy and gratitude amongst the Esquimaux".

Hedge clearly seeks to kill several birds with one stone: playing on the orphan motif enables her to underline how Charles's grandfather, in line with middle-class ideals, worked his way up from nothing; the various crises he faces in the ice, including an overwintering at Spitsbergen, teach him the important "principles of trust and reliance on Divine aid and protection" (Hedge 1824, 82); and by using the grandfather as Charles's moral guide, she shows how essential values are transferred within the most essential institution of the period, the family. Hedge does not quite trust her tale, however, and cannot resist the temptation to make her moral message explicit:

The qualities possessed by Charles are, in a degree, attainable by all. Those which are natural may be improved by diligent and regular study, with undeviating obedience; those acquired may be daily multiplied in number, and perfected by practice; and everyone knows that the disposition, even if not naturally good, may be corrected and ameliorated by watchfulness, a determination to check selfishness, and a reference to those principles of religion, which are so plain that they come within the comprehension of the most ignorant or the most useful. (*Ibid.*, 15–16)

It is not difficult, furthermore, to see how these ideals are closely tuned to those of service for the nation, and so it is hardly a coincidence that Charles, because of his intelligence and perseverance, eventually might sail with Parry on his next voyage. There is, in other words, no better place for building and showing one's moral mettle than the extreme conditions of the Arctic.

And Hedge's arctic book was not the only one to exploit the public mood of celebration and faith in the nation. The following year another anonymous work was published, which makes use of a very similar narrative format: an uncle who has actually sailed with Parry on his first expedition. *Northern Regions: Or, A Relation of Uncle Richard's Voyages for the Discovery of a North-West Passage* speaks, just like Hedge's work, with two voices: one directed at the young readers or listeners, and one at the adult reader, the latter functioning as a pedagogical advisor, who wants to make sure that the book is placed in the right context:

The great interest excited in the present day for the intrepid adventurers to the Northern Hemisphere, has induced me to collect a few interesting and entertaining facts from their narrations, in order to gratify the spirit of inquiry so desirable in youth, [...] and I trust that [...] my young readers will be impressed with this conviction, that courage, resolution, and perseverance, will support men through toils and dangers, and enable them to act an honourable and useful part in the service of their country. (Anon. 1825, iii)

A related moral is found in *A Peep at the Esquimaux* by "A Lady", a collection of children's poems from 1825 about Inuit life, accompanied by forty coloured plates. The book's intention is clearly informative and educational: the point of departure is a visit to the Soho Bazaar, where the children watch a display of Inuit objects. In the process, however, the

guiding voice of the author reveals a rather peculiar attitude to the people concerned. Coming across as a remarkable parallel to the thousands of poor and suffering people in the slums and back streets of industrialised cities, these “harmless natives of the Frozen Seas” are “the most desolate of human beings, [...] destitute of all the comforts and conveniences of life” (*A Lady* 1825, vii). This observation, though, does not conclude with a call for Christian charity or Samaritan assistance; the recommended reaction for her young readers is only “feelings of pity”. In addition, the poems reveal a degree of racial prejudice that reduces the Inuit to something even further down the evolutionary ladder than their urban counterparts:

Of form peculiar, are the face  
And features of this Savage Race.  
By the projecting, high cheek-bone,  
The ESQUIMAUX are chiefly known.  
The visage broad, and vacant gape,  
With the small chin of peaked shape,  
And the nose buried in the cheek;  
No mental qualities bespeak.  
Yet are there some exceptions seen,  
And some there are, of better mien;  
With noses high, and oval face,  
Like beings of another race. (*Ibid.*, 25)

The redeeming feature of these few, who are still within the reach of redemption, is that they are “cheerful, and contended with their hard lot”. Thus, the author arrives at her lesson “to natives of a happier country, who, in the midst of abundance, are often miserable and discontented, even at the slightest privation” (*ibid.*, vii).

This moral message is made even more explicit in the last poem, “A Polar Pastoral”, in which an Inuit hunter criticises his favourite girl because she has turned her attention to the wealthy Europeans who have visited their camp and given her presents. The girl eventually realises her fault and returns to her suitor, accepting her obligation not to try and rise above her station in life. Regardless of how these highly ambiguous texts are interpreted – either as rather primitive anthropological reflections on the Inuit, or as statements about British class relations, or both – they somehow drew the world of the Far North into the consciousness of their readers, and established it as a familiar dimension, which was going to expand significantly in the course of the following decades.

### ***Travellers Turning North***

The late eighteenth century had transformed the relationship between western man and the natural landscape. This development was carried into and was intensified into the early decades of the nineteenth century, which are usually regarded as the peak of the Romantic movement. In the same period, as has been shown above, the polar regions also acquired a steadily more central role in the life of the northern nations. In addition, the growing confidence of a literary and cultural northern heritage gave new prestige to the landscapes from which it originated. As a result, the northern scenery came to represent a contrast to the landscape ideals of the South, developing in the process a separate aesthetic code, which it celebrated with increasing pride and confidence. This was a landscape that might vary considerably from one country to another, but it was fundamentally wild and rugged, frequently perpendicular, sparsely populated, and characterised by extreme natural elements. It was, in short, a landscape where – as opposed to the ideal southern landscape – man to a considerable extent lived either at nature's mercy or in profound harmony with it, but not as its master.

The Lake District and Scotland had received their first influx of artists and travellers as early as the 1760s. In view of the fact that this is the period in which the Grand Tour reaches the peak of its popularity, with young aristocrats flocking to Italy and especially Rome to see the wonders of Antiquity, the turn to the rural North may be seen as the first indication of a turning of the tide. And towards the end of the century a new generation followed suit. Most prominently, William Wordsworth was responsible, together with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, Thomas De Quincey and others, for turning the Lake District, on the very border with Scotland, into the quintessence of the natural – and national – English landscape.

It is difficult to overestimate particularly Wordsworth's impact on his own and later generations. Although his vision relies heavily on such eighteenth-century predecessors as Rousseau, Burke, Gilpin and Gray, his and his generation's nature utopia is coloured not only by the French Revolution, but also by the increasing impact of industrialisation. Returning from various stays in London, Germany and Paris to the world of his youth, in other words, was a statement with not only aesthetic and existential but also political implications. By the end of the eighteenth century, British industry was making rapid progress, having made important improvements in mining as well as iron and textile production. By the early nineteenth century, the steam engine was in the process of causing a revolution in a wide range of areas, and in certain areas, such as the Black Country, the landscapes were taking on the appearance of a post-apocalyptic world laid waste, a scenery that inspired artists like William

Blake and the painter John Martin. Wordsworth's move to the tranquil and pre-industrial village of Grasmere in the Lake District needs to be seen as a direct response to this transformation of the British countryside.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the Romantic and Wordsworthian position contains a remarkably mixed bag of political and philosophical ideas, especially when considered against the events in France and their aftermath. And if Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine are regarded as representative opposites in the fierce debate about the Revolution, Wordsworth could be seen as borrowing rather eclectically from both of them. He does not share, for instance, Burke's rather bleak and pessimistic view of human nature, which would view any utopianism with the most profound scepticism. On the contrary, Wordsworth's vision is both utopian and fundamentally optimistic. His is not Paine's revolutionary optimism, however, which reveals an almost fundamentalist faith in the radical refashioning of society. As suggested earlier, the utopianism of Wordsworth and large parts of the Romantic movement steered in a very different direction. Whereas Paine and the Revolution embraced ideas that could be given such adjectival labels as scientific, rationalistic, progressive, social, urban and modern, Wordsworth is fundamentally hostile to all of them.

Essentially, the whole Romantic vision is based on a sense of loss and a search for a meaningful compensation for that loss. And this sense of loss does not only apply to the failure of the grand political experiment of the Revolution; it also applies, and especially so in Britain, to the gradual disappearance of natural landscapes. Thus both nature and the past are tentative sources of compensation, just as the profoundly melancholic nature of Romantic art and poetry suggests the difficulty of achieving it. Furthermore, the nature utopia is a reaction against the inherently totalitarian tendencies in the political utopia of the Revolution. It is an anti-movement, almost an anti- or counter-utopia, because it is a recoil from politics, society and community, the qualities that are generally central to any utopian vision. Wordsworth's move to Grasmere amounts to an *in toto* rejection of the progressive and social self advocated by the Revolution, and an escape into an individual vision of natural innocence. He rejects social progress for individual progress, tearing the individual loose from his dependence on society.

Anyone who has visited Grasmere and tried to imagine the emptiness and backwardness of the place at the turn of the eighteenth century will realise that Wordsworth cannot have been seeking social and communal involvement, but its very opposite, namely withdrawal and contemplation. For him, nature replaces society as the medium through which the individual may realise his potential and aspirations; it becomes a place in which to seek for an alternative version of one of the Revolution's buzz words – liberty. The chief symbol of liberty is no longer urban crowds

storming hated public institutions like prisons and palaces, but – as Robert Macfarlane points out – something radically different: mountain tops:

[W]hat could more obviously embody freedom and openness? [...] Cities teemed with merchants and thieves, but the mountains! – the mountains were devoid of sin. The mountain-top became a ubiquitous symbol of emancipation for the city-bound spirit, a crystallization of the Romantic-pastoral desire to escape the atomized, socially dissolute city. You could be lonely in a city crowd, but you could find solitude on a mountain-top. (Macfarlane 2004, 159)

Wordsworth's utopia, then, is a utopia of the mind, and the whole concept of progress is transposed from an external and social dimension to the world of the self. Progress is spiritualised, internalised and privatised:

Exploring within, Wordsworth changed English poetry forever. The *Prelude*, as the first long poem on the growth of the poet's own mind, both revolutionised the epic and pioneered a psychoanalytic turn that no subsequent literature would ignore. Wordsworth, in effect, explored the mind while his compatriots were exploring the world. (Fulford, Lee and Kitson 2004, 21)

Thus, although the utopian experiment of the Revolution failed miserably and ended in terror, political utopianism did not come to an end; in the course of the nineteenth century, it would primarily be channelled, as Krishnan Kumar points out, through the Socialist utopia, the true heir of the revolutionary ideology (Kumar 1987, 33–34). But this did not emerge until well into the century. In the meantime, the nature utopia consolidated its position in the shadow of the political utopia, by belying its political implications, which were conservative and even reactionary, denying the value of progress and hankering back to a world that could only be found increasingly further away from the beaten track.

The nature utopia, then, forged an important alliance with the contemporary interest in the past, because both suggested a protest against the invasion of modernity. And despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that northern Europe, and especially Britain, was spearheading industrial and technological progress, the national and nationalistic ideologies of these countries, that is the myths that were mobilised to create a sense of nationhood, were increasingly celebrating a northern scenery and a northern past that had very little to do with the modern world of coal dust and steam engines. With regard to Wordsworth, it should also be remembered that he came from, and decided to return to, a region where local history and place names were profoundly connected with both Scandinavia and Scotland, thus enhancing the northern connection. He was, for instance, a great admirer of Bishop Percy's *Reliques*, and even his indebtedness to Ossian may have been stronger than he was willing to admit (see for instance Moore 1925, 362–78).

Also, he was not alone in exploring precisely these northern parts of England. Major names had been there before him, and just around the time of his return there, young and soon-to-be influential painters like

Thomas Girtin and William Turner – pupils of Thomas Hearne, the artist behind the celebrated work *The Antiquities of Britain* – made extensive journeys that would profoundly affect their careers (Hill 1996, 1–5). A few years later, the painter and engraver William Daniell similarly included the area in his breathtaking, eight-volume collection of illustrations and texts (some of them written by his companion Richard Ayton) from the entire coast of Britain. Based on ten years of travel, and published between the years 1814 and 1825, the work reflects not just a fascination with the natural landscape; it also laments the loss of it, as in the description of the coal mine called the William Pit in Whitehaven on the Cumbrian coast, where the miners “looked like a race fallen from the common rank of men, and doomed, as in a kind of purgatory, to wear away their lives in these dismal shades” (Daniell 2008, 45).

Despite the deep historical divisions between England and Scotland, the natural and demographic features of the Lake District were largely similar to those associated with parts of Scotland, and so from the point of view of southern England, the two tended to acquire many of the same qualities and connotations as places remote from the hustle and bustle of the modern world. This is clearly suggested in an English literary work that has already been discussed in connection with Britain’s massive effort in the polar regions after Waterloo, namely Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In the context of the period, it is only to be expected that Mary Shelley sends her deeply troubled protagonist, Frankenstein, not only to Scotland but to the Orkneys, to fulfil his promise to the monster of creating a female who can become his mate. No doubt Shelley is also aware of the immense popularity of the Ossian poems at the time, and so her choice of setting is a more or less direct response to the reputation of Scotland as a new region of fashion. As a writer of fiction, she could have sent Frankenstein to any destination of her choice, just as she could have sent another hero in the book, Walton, to India or Africa rather than the North Pole, but in both cases she opts for northern destinations. As has been pointed out earlier, there may have been biographical reasons for Shelley’s northern orientation, but the particular choice of Scotland may also be connected with a woman who died less than six months before *Frankenstein* was published, and who deserves a major share of the credit not just for drawing attention to Scotland, but to the North as a whole.

### *Madame de Staël*

The generation from the turn of the eighteenth century contains an impressive number of fascinating and influential figures; it is difficult, however, to find anyone more centrally placed and more directly involved



in the great events across Europe during these turbulent years than Anne Louise Germaine Necker, later and better known as Madame de Staël (1766–1817). Indeed, it is astonishing to find, until recently, how rarely she has been mentioned, especially in Anglo-American accounts of the period, and how few of her works are available in modern English translations.

Born in Paris to Swiss Lutheran parents, she found herself from the beginning sandwiched between the two major European cultural currents – the Catholic South and the Protestant North – a fact that was going to have a decisive influence on her life as well as her ideas. She also grew up



Jean-Jacques Rousseau's compatriot Madame de Staël was one of the great personalities of the Romantic period, but has not received the attention she deserves, especially as a mediator between southern and northern cultural values. Here she is portrayed as her own fictional heroine, Corinne, in a painting by Louise Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun (Museum of Art and History of Geneva).

virtually surrounded by the central cultural and political figures of her time. Her father, Jacques Necker (1732–1804), was not just a successful banker and a writer advocating liberal ideas and economic reforms; in 1777, Louis XVI appointed him Director General (i.e. Minister) of Finance, making him the second most powerful man in France (Fairweather 2006, 31). Her mother, Suzanne, a disciple of her compatriot Rousseau, similarly created a prestigious intellectual salon, where the young and precocious girl met

the leading lights from all over Europe, including such British figures as Edward Gibbon, who had been engaged to her mother (Whitford 1918, 9), William Beckford, David Hume and Horace Walpole. And in 1783, when Germaine was seventeen, her mother would probably have succeeded in marrying off her daughter to another visitor, the brilliant twenty-three-year-old William Pitt, had not Germaine flatly refused to go along with the idea (Fairweather 2006, 46).

In 1786, however, she married the Swedish diplomat Eric de Staël (1749–1802). The match was the result of years of negotiations, involving the kings of France and Sweden, and designed to reinforce Franco-Swedish relations; it was signed and approved by Queen Marie Antoinette herself; and the bridegroom, seventeen years the bride's senior, was made Swedish ambassador to France (*ibid.*, 52–53). Germaine herself took it sensibly; she did not love her husband, but after her father's resignation as the Minister of Finance, de Staël provided her with continued access to the highest circles, and although the marriage proved an unhappy one and soon resulted in prolonged separations and eventually a divorce, she now had a foundation on which to build her eventful and highly unconventional life.

An important part of this life would consist in serving as a political as well as cultural mediator between southern and northern Europe. As early as 1788 she published her first major work, an eloquent defence of Rousseau, who had died ten years earlier. Then, after her father's return to power in the same year, the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, and her father's renewed dismissal in 1790, she stayed in close touch with the political convulsions in Paris, but also spent lengthy periods at Coppet, her beloved chateau in Switzerland. Strongly inspired by the British democratic tradition (Whitford 1918, 10), she advocated liberal and constitutional reform, and at great personal risk helped save a number of people from the increasingly violent revolutionary government. The Terror brought her and her parents' life in further jeopardy, and with the arrival of Napoleon's First Consulate in 1799, she acquired a political opponent who, though fearing her influence, would place a long series of obstacles in her way. Still, it is during the years of Bonaparte that Madame de Staël produces her most significant works.

In April 1800 she publishes *Sur la Littérature Considérée Dans Ses Rapports Avec les Institutions Sociales* (On Literature Considered in Its Relations with Social Institutions), where she argues for religious and political tolerance as a prerequisite for great literature. Towards the end of this work, she underlines, in the spirit of both Montesquieu and Mallet, how European culture is divided between impulses from the North and the South respectively, and echoing Goethe's *Young Werther* – one of the books she loved as a child – uses Ossian and Homer as key representatives of the two traditions.

There are, it seems to me, two entirely different literatures, that coming from the South and that coming down from the North, that of which Homer is the main source and that of which Ossian is the origin. The Greeks, Latins, Italians, Spanish, and the French of the age of Louis XIV belong to that *genre* of literature that I shall call the literature of the South. English works, German works, and some Danish and Swedish writings should be classed in the literature of the North, which began with the Scottish bards, the Icelandic fables, and Scandinavian poetry. [...]

We cannot in general decide between the two types of poetry of which we may consider Homer and Ossian the first models. All my feelings and all my ideas lead me to prefer the literature of the North. But what matters now is to examine its distinctive characteristics. [...]

Northern poetry is much more suitable than Southern to the spirit of a free people. The first known creators of the literature of the South, the Athenians, were more jealous of their independence than any other nation. But it was easier to reduce the Greeks to slavery than the men of the North. Independence was the main and unique food of fortune of the Northern peoples. A certain pride of spirit, and indifference to life, generated by both the harshness of the soil and the gloom of the sky, were to make slavery unbearable. [...]

The Northern peoples, judging by traditions left to us and by Teutonic customs, had at all periods a respect for women that was unknown among the peoples of the South. In the North women enjoyed independence, whereas elsewhere they were condemned to slavery. This is another of the main causes of the sensibility that characterizes the literature of the North. [...]

Finally, the Protestant religion, which almost all of the modern peoples of the North adopted, gave them a more philosophical spirit than those of the South had. The Reformation was the historical period that most effectively advanced the perfectibility of the human species. The Protestant religion harbours no active germ of superstition, yet lends virtue all the support that it can extract from sensibility. In the countries where the Protestant religion is professed, it does not retard philosophical inquiry at all and effectively upholds morality. (De Staël in Berger ed. 1964, 152–54)

*On Literature*, which went through several reprints and two editions in the first year (Fairweather 2006, 258), is in effect a powerhouse of arguments for a cultural paradigm shift on a European scale. Although Wordsworth, for instance, around the same time argues in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* for a new approach to literature, his perspective is essentially British; Madame de Staël, from her unique and transnational position, makes a comprehensive sweep of western literature, and comes down in favour of a new kind of northern and alternative classicism, which celebrates an unschooled, powerful and intuitive genius, such as is found in the saga literature, Ossian and Shakespeare. It is no wonder, therefore, that de Staël a few years later was credited with having created “the art of analysing the spirit of nations and the springs which move them”.<sup>20</sup>

Madame de Staël also wrote fiction, however, and to some extent her most famous novel, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), incorporates the crucial ideas from *On Literature* by exploring northern and southern identities through the turbulent love affair of the two main characters, the Scottish

<sup>20</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Dec. 1818, quoted in Richard Holmes, “The Great de Staël”, in *The New York Review of Books*, 28 May 2009.

Lord Nelvil and the Roman poetess and beauty Corinne. In this way it also provides an interesting background to the contemporary fashion of the Grand Tour, which in the new century was gradually losing its appeal, due not least to such figures as Madame de Staël herself, who shifted the focus northwards. The book, which is set in Britain and Italy from 1794 to 1803, was furthermore yet another affront to Napoleon, who had sent de Staël into a ten-year exile after her first novel, *Delphine* (1802); *Corinne* shows a profound admiration for Britain and a corresponding dislike of Napoleon's so-called liberation of Italy.

The novel went through dozens of editions in French as well as English in the course of the century, "stands among Romanticism's seminal texts" (Raphael in Staël 1998, x), and is thus in certain respects comparable to the Ossian poems in terms of popular impact at the time. There is also an interesting connection between them: just as Ossian is the bard that carries the voice of the nation, Corinne, according to Sylvia Raphael, personifies Italy in a "nation-genius symbiosis" (*ibid.*, xiii). As a further confirmation of this, the lyre became the emblem, in poems as well as paintings, of both Ossian and Corinne, suggesting with its archaic connotations the two singers' roots in their respective national traditions. Finally, a geographical connection is established through the revelation that Corinne actually proves to be half English and the half-sister of Lord Nelvil's fiancé, whose father lived in Northumberland, on the border with Ossian's and Lord Nelvil's Scotland. Considering *Corinne's* enormous popularity in the years before the publication of *Frankenstein*, it does not seem unlikely that Shelley's choice of a Scottish setting for part of her novel was influenced precisely by Madame de Staël.

The popularity of the Ossian poems was considerable in France (see Gaskill 2004, 16–17), but the central role they play in *Corinne* was not least due to their even greater popularity in Germany, where de Staël had spent about six months from the autumn of 1803 until the spring of 1804. This journey, together with another to Austria and Germany in the winter of 1807–08, also inspired another major work on which she started only a year after the publication of her famous novel. *De l'Allemagne (Germany)*, however, swiftly caught the attention of the French censors and the secret police, who nearly succeeded in destroying it as it was in the last stages of printing. In October 1810, 10,000 copies of the first two volumes and the proofs of the third were duly seized and pulped on the direct orders of Napoleon himself, who had personally read the book. In addition, she was given a week "to repudiate all she stood for – or to leave the country" (Fairweather 2006, 372–73).

Madame de Staël had not just stepped on Napoleon's sensitive toes; she had stamped on them with iron heels. By this time, Napoleon and his armies had turned most of Europe upside down, including Italy and Germany, but de Staël had shown the impertinence of writing *Corinne* – a

contemporary novel set in Italy – without even mentioning Napoleon’s name. And now she added insult to injury by writing a massive, multi-volume work on Germany, which celebrated German culture, literature and philosophy, while ignoring the political earthquake that Napoleon had caused in the country, as if it were of little consequence (Tønnesson 2007, 253). No wonder, the Minister of Police, General Anne Jean Marie René Savary, condemned the work as being “not French” (Staël 1813, I: vi). In some ways, de Staël had come between the dragon and his wrath at the worst possible moment, because in 1810 Napoleon was at the peak of his power. On the other hand, from that peak it could only go downhill. De Staël succeeded in securing two copies of the manuscript, and two years later managed to escape via Russia and Scandinavia to England, a move Napoleon had made every effort to prevent.

It is one of history’s ironies that the fleeing Madame de Staël on 2 August 1812 was one of the last persons from the West who saw Moscow before the Russians themselves set fire to it, thereby closing the fatal trap for Napoleon’s invading armies. Moving in a wide circle to the east and north, safely beyond the unknowing emperor’s reach, she arrived in St. Petersburg eleven days later, where she met Tsar Alexander I, and in Stockholm at the end of September (*ibid.*, 275). Here she spent the winter under the protection of the Swedish Crown Prince, Jean Bernadotte, with whom she had a long-standing friendship, doing her utmost “to bring Sweden firmly into the British and Russian coalition against Napoleon” (Fairweather 2006, 409). In particular, she played an important role in the bilateral negotiations between Sweden and Russia, confirming Napoleon’s realisation that she was dangerously efficient not just as a cultural critic but also as a player in the world of politics.

Having arrived in England in June 1813, de Staël secured a contract with John Murray for the publication of *Germany*, in the original French as well as in an English translation. Both editions were published on 4 November. For Murray the open question was whether he would recover the huge sum of 1,500 guineas, which he had paid for the rights, but “it sold out in three days in its French edition and sold 2,250 copies in English by the end of the year” (*ibid.*, 425).

*Germany* is a giant 1200-page work in three volumes, whose essential mission is to teach de Staël’s countrymen what they are missing because of their disregard and disrespect for German culture. Beginning by dividing Europe into the Latin, the German and the “Slavonic” families, she provocatively calls Germany “the native land of thought” (Staël 1813, I: 5). Also, de Staël compares French and German literature, and finds the former wanting: “The sterility with which our literature is threatened may make it be believed that the French spirit itself has need of being renewed by a more vigorous sap [...]” (*ibid.*, 7). This contrast becomes a leitmotif in the whole work; in fact, de Staël seems to be largely responsible for the

myth that runs through the entire nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, of Germany as a young and vigorous nation. “The French”, she claims, “would [...] gain more by comprehending German genius, than the Germans would in subjecting themselves to the good taste of the French”, and “the eternal boundary of the Rhine separates two intellectual regions, which, no less than the two countries, are foreign to each other” (*ibid.*, 218–20). In making this essential distinction, referring to a borderline from the days of Tacitus, she also introduces the word “romantic”, and places the new concept of Romanticism geographically in the North:

The word *romantic* has been lately introduced in Germany to designate that kind of poetry which is derived from the songs of the Troubadours; that which owes its birth to the union of chivalry and Christianity. If we do not admit that the empire of literature has been divided between paganism and Christianity, the north and the south, antiquity and the middle ages, chivalry and the institutions of Greece and Rome, we shall never succeed in forming a philosophical judgment of ancient and of modern taste. (*Ibid.*, 304)

Furthermore, she claims that this is the literature of the future, because “being rooted in the soil, that alone can continue to grow and acquire fresh life: it expresses our religion; it recalls [*sic*] our history; its origin is ancient, although not of classical antiquity” (*ibid.*, 311).

*Germany* thus provides a new and powerful pillar to the edifice of a northern alternative culture to that of the South. From the 1600s onwards, the runes and the saga literature from Scandinavia and the old Anglo-Saxon literature of Britain had been revived to boost northern cultural self-confidence, and since the 1760s the Ossian poems had provided a further impetus, but the primary function of all of this material was to point to the past and to build a *tradition* that could compete with that of ancient Greece and Rome. *Germany*, however, adds a new dimension by pointing to the fundamental weakness of the South, namely its *contemporary* insignificance.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, during their visits to Rome, Florence, Venice or Athens, most of the Grand Tourists experienced these cities largely as an assemblage of ruins, and northern visitors were quick to discover that their cultural contributions lay very decisively in the past. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these travellers – de Staël’s English friend Edward Gibbon was one of them – were frequently appalled at the conditions under which ordinary people lived. Also, contemporary Mediterranean culture did not in any way live up to the standards of Antiquity. In this respect, in other words, the North had no reason to feel inferior. On the contrary, Madame de Staël’s work is a tour de force of German contributions precisely to the culture of the day. Armed with an impressive amount of reading, an amazing network among the German cultural elite, whom she visited during her travels, and with August Wilhelm Schlegel (1765–1845) – one of the fathers

of German Romanticism – as her faithful friend and helper for several years, she was able to present a picture of contemporary German culture that exerted a profound impact. She was, in short, the perfect mediator, because like Montesquieu sixty years earlier, her Frenchness gave her work a credibility that no writer from the North could have given it, and with the work published simultaneously in French and English – followed by a German translation the following year – her message was ensured instant distribution. Only a few years later, Francis Jeffrey, “arguably the most prestigious critic in the English-speaking world in the first two decades of the nineteenth century”, called de Staël “the most brilliant writer that has appeared in our days” (Isbell 1994, 1). More humorously, one of de Staël’s compatriots, Madame de Chastenay, claimed that Europe could count three great powers: England, Russia and Madame de Staël (*ibid.*, 6). As a matter of fact, had Napoleon’s police been only slightly more efficient, the European cultural landscape might have come to look slightly different.

But Madame de Staël does not just underline the impressive quality of German literature and philosophy; she also gives a strong impetus to the Romantic worship of nature by emphasising – again like Montesquieu – the close connection between German culture and the country’s climate and landscape. Interestingly, she even begins Part I of the first volume, “Of Germany, and the Manners of the Germans”, by focusing on the particular role of the forest. She is clearly aware of the mythical significance in German history of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, and she returns to it later in the book, contributing to the peculiarly German celebration of the forest as a national symbol, expressed in the notion of *Waldeinsamkeit*, coined by Ludwig Tieck a few years earlier, and in the powerful paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and others. Again, the primitive and essentially uncultured aspects of Germany are underlined: “The number and extent of forests indicate a civilization yet recent: the ancient soil of the south is almost unfurnished of its trees, and the sun darts its perpendicular rays on the earth which has been laid bare by man” (Staël 1813, I: 11).

Also, in the rest of this section, she returns again and again to how the northern location of Germany makes it different from the South. The description of the northern parts of Germany especially carries almost Ossianic features of gloominess and remoteness from civilisation. “One fears”, she says, “in crossing [the frontier of the Rhine] to hear this terrible sentence, – *You are out of France*” (*ibid.*, 130). But precisely by making such a point of this contrast, de Staël’s statement does not serve as a warning; on the contrary, it contributes to the almost obsessive fascination with the North for the rest of the century. And one region that was going to receive particular attention from both Britain and the Continent was Scandinavia.

***Discovering Scandinavia***

One reason for a focus on the North was of course the French Revolution itself. Like de Staël, large numbers of her countrymen fled from France from 1789 onwards, many of them travelling north. And during the Napoleonic Wars, further numbers fled from other countries occupied by the French armies. According to one estimate, Hamburg alone accommodated as many as 50,000 emigrés (Isbell 1994, 10). But some also moved further north to Scandinavia, contributing, as will be discussed later, to the dissemination across Europe of information about the North.

Most of the travellers to Scandinavia, however, came for less dramatic reasons. Stimulated by new ideas about the natural landscape, artists were, not surprisingly, among the first to explore the region from a purely scenic perspective. In Denmark in the late 1780s and early 90s, painters like Erik Pauelsen (1749–90) and Christian August Lorentzen (1749–1828) made extensive journeys to Norway, bringing back to Denmark motifs of fjords and mountains, and thus largely replacing the need for Alpine tours in search of the sublime. One of Lorentzen's disciples was the young German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), who in 1794 travelled north from Greifswald in Pomerania to Copenhagen, where he would remain as a student for the next four years, receiving important inspiration from Lorentzen's Norwegian landscapes (Kasper Monrad in Malmanger 2001, 22). Eventually, of course, Friedrich would become the most influential and iconic painter of the whole Romantic generation, but only as a result of a rehabilitation in the early twentieth century after several decades of neglect (Mitchell 1977, 6–9). Other German painters who acquired inspiration from the Nordic landscape at the academy in Copenhagen were Philipp Otto Runge and Asmus Jacob Carstens, who will be discussed later in the chapter (Christensen 1999, 88).

In the field of Romantic philosophy, too, the North was placed firmly on the map, thanks especially to a figure who in a remarkable way came to be a mediator of cultural impulses from Scandinavia to Germany, and from Germany to Scandinavia. Henrich Steffens (1773–1845) thereby performed some of the same function between these two northern regions as Madame de Staël at the same time performed between France and Germany. Born in Norway of Dano-German parents, Steffens was the cousin of another future giant of Nordic culture, the Danish Nikolai Frederik Grundtvig (1783–1872), and when he was six, the family moved to Copenhagen. Here he started out as a natural scientist, with a particular interest in geology, but during his early student days in Kiel, and from 1798 in Jena, Steffens discovered philosophy and quickly became closely acquainted with such leading lights as Schelling, with whom he formed a lasting friendship, Fichte, Novalis, the Schlegel brothers, and not least Goethe himself (Møller 1948, 55–62).



Although he acquired a major name among German and European intellectuals, especially after publishing his work on natural philosophy, *Beiträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde* (Contributions to the Inner Natural History of the Earth, 1801), Steffens's German always retained a strong Scandinavian accent, and he consistently called himself “*der Norweger*”. In this way, he became almost an incarnation of his own and his generation's philosophy: he represented precisely that Rousseauesque vision of a world remote from the evils of civilisation that the Germans had already come to associate with the Nordic countries (Norum 1994, 18). With the philosophical blessing of his contemporaries, then, he performed an act of what modern terminology would call ‘branding’, casting Norway, as one of his modern critics puts it, as the repository of everything that is original and genuine (Ivar Sagmo in Lorentz and Skarstad eds. 1995, 25).

It was from this platform, as a celebrated Scando-German philosopher, that Steffens returned to Copenhagen in 1802, still not thirty years old, and began his controversial and groundbreaking lectures on natural and aesthetic philosophy, introducing the Romantic programme to a Scandinavian audience. Most of these lectures are lost, because after having written and published the first nine, the rest – roughly one every week for two years – were delivered *ex tempore*. Still, supporters as well as enemies agreed that he spoke with unusual eloquence, and “people from all classes crowded to the lectures. Students and graduates, ladies and elderly civil servants fought for the chairs. And the entire youthful Denmark sat at his feet” (Møller 1948, 101).<sup>21</sup> Having planted the seed, however, he returned to Germany in 1804, accepting a chair of philosophy in Halle, where even Goethe came to listen to one of his lectures. Later on he moved to Breslau, and eventually, in 1832, was given Hegel's chair of philosophy in Berlin, which had been vacant since the latter's death the year before.

During all these years, Steffens remained in close contact with Scandinavia, and especially Norway, and there is no doubt that he exerted a profound influence on the German perception of the North. Despite his towering position as a philosopher, however, there was another and more popular area in which he reached his widest audience. After an extensive journey of Norway in 1824, his first visit for thirty years, Steffens turned to fiction, and produced a series of works, including the three-volume novel *Die Familien Walseth und Leith* (The Valseth and Leith Families) in 1827, and in the following year a cycle of novels, *Die Vier Norweger* (The Four Norwegians). Both of these works, which are partly fictionalised travelogues, reflect the author's own biography in the sense that they involve characters and settings from different countries, but they are still firmly based in Norway. Like all of Steffens's works, they were first published in German, but were soon translated into Danish, and instantly captivated

<sup>21</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PF.

readers in both language areas. In Norway, the University Library ledger in Christiania shows that only Sir Walter Scott's novels were borrowed as frequently as Steffens's (Ivar Sagmo in Lorentz and Skarstad (eds.) 1995, 31). In these novels, Steffens lays the foundation for a stereotyped view of Norway that would have a fundamental impact, especially on the German perceptions of the country. Ivar Sagmo gives the following characterisation of Steffens's overall message:

Proud young Norwegians travel abroad, prove their natural intelligence and physical and mental strength, but acquire at the same time also what is best of European culture, and then later return to Norway with the wide horizon necessary to build the country. Norway is presented as a bastion keeping the harrowing struggle between revolutionary and conservative forces in Europe at bay. (*Ibid.*)<sup>22</sup>

As was the case with Wordsworth, Steffens's stereotyped and bipolar universe is placed on a north-south axis: the South represents revolution, which again equals modernity, rationality, technology, industry, moral and physical decline etc.; the North represents the past, simplicity, health, honesty and the like, all of it against the backdrop of a breathtaking natural landscape. In this context, the conflicts between the characters are played out, and it is interesting to note the extent to which even Germans, Dutchmen and Danes are infected by the canker of modernity; even these relative northerners have to learn their moral lessons among the Norwegian mountains. The further north, in other words, the less the characters are exposed to moral contamination. In Steffens, Rousseau's Alpine utopia has been transferred to an even more pristine environment.

With regard to travel, the 1790s and the early 1800s represent a special situation in Europe. Because of the wars, which affected large parts of the Continent, and the extensive embargoes, international travel was problematic for virtually a generation. The turn of the century therefore conveniently marks a transition from what could generally be termed the Grand Tour tradition to a more modern mode of travel, considerably inspired by the Romantic movement itself and spearheading one of the transformative phenomena of the period, namely tourism. Also, whereas the former almost invariably had a southern direction, the latter gravitated to a much greater extent to the new frontier of travel in the North.

In this early phase, most published travelogues are so-called historicotopographical accounts, reflecting the utilitarian focus of the eighteenth century, or they represent an interesting transitional stage to a rather different approach. One of the few accounts from the 1790s, *Travels into Norway, Denmark, and Russia* (1792) by the Scottish writer and owner of *The English Review* William Thomson (1746–1817), who published under the pseudonym Andrew Swinton (Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 363–64), begins precisely by underlining how a new European frontier is opening

<sup>22</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PF.

up: “The northern parts of Europe are seldom visited by English Travellers; nor have any of these, within the space of fifteen years, two Gentlemen only excepted, published their Travels” (Swinton 1792, v).<sup>23</sup> But though for Thomson this is not a first visit, he introduces the reader to what is undoubtedly a new and different world in the book’s first letter, dated “North Sea, October, 1788”: “This is my third expedition to the north: it is a strange whim to get in love with deserts, with ice and with snow. I delight to see Nature in her Winter uniform; to be surrounded with rugged rocks and frozen oceans” (*ibid.*, 1). And the celebration of the northern sublime scenery is even more apparent when he approaches the Norwegian coast: “On the third day after we left the shores of Britain, the rocks of Norway appeared, heaving their rugged precipices awfully above the waves that foamed underneath. I renewed my acquaintance with every hill and mountain, and hailed the ancient domains of our conquerors” (*ibid.*, 5).

Only three years after the publication of Swinton’s book, however, another and more prominent writer visited Scandinavia, and Norway in particular. The writer was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) and the book was *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). Like Wordsworth a few years later, Wollstonecraft travelled to the North from the chaos of revolutionary France, where she had dreamed of a new and progressive world. Now, like an inverted Grand Tourist, she found herself in a social and geographical reality that was totally foreign to her. Sent there by Gilbert Imlay, her American lover and the father of her child, in order to recover his investment – a ship that had gone missing with its Norwegian captain – she writes a text that is like a fascinating palimpsest of her many personas: the abandoned lover, the business representative, the journalist, the political observer, the social and cultural commentator, and the nature worshipper.

Arriving in the small coastal towns of southern Norway and apparently being forced to adjust to a time-consuming administrative system, she has time to reflect and to write. Here, despite her alertness to the realities of the day, she clearly finds herself under the spell of the North. In Letter 14, she vaguely addresses her unknown readers as well as her lover, and conjures up a Rousseauesque vision of harmony:

You will ask perhaps, why I wished to go further northward. Why? not only because the country, from all I can gather, is most romantic, abounding in forests and lakes, and the air pure, but I have heard much of the intelligence of the inhabitants,

<sup>23</sup> One of these “two Gentlemen” was William Coxe (1747–1828), historian, Physician to the Royal Household, and Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, who in the capacity of tutor to various noblemen travelled widely in Europe in the 1780s. His visit to Norway, together with the later politician Samuel Whitbread (1758–1815), in 1784 is covered in a supplementary volume to his *Travels in Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark* (1790) (Schiøtz 1970, 106; Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 352.) Here he describes Norway as “a country, though extremely interesting, yet seldom visited by travellers”.

substantial farmers, who have none of that cunning to contaminate their simplicity. [...] The description I received of them carried me back to the fables of the golden age: independence and virtue; affluence without vice; cultivation of mind, without depravity of heart, with “ever smiling liberty”, the nymph of the mountain. (Wollstonecraft and Godwin 1987, 148–49)

Whereas the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* only twenty-five years earlier had written off Norway as “a cold barren country, subject to Denmark”, Wollstonecraft now gave her British readers a taste of a wholly different world. More than that, the book was widely and favourably reviewed and was swiftly brought out in German, Dutch, Swedish and Portuguese translations, thus reaching out to a European audience. According to Richard Holmes, it was not just her best book overall; it also “entered into the literary mythology of Romanticism within a single generation”, inspiring such younger writers as Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth and Hazlitt (Richard Holmes in Wollstonecraft and Godwin 1987, 9, 36 and 41). In addition, Wollstonecraft’s daughter, Mary Shelley, was certainly inspired by her dead mother when she eloped with Shelley in 1814, bringing with her a copy of the book, and – as suggested above – when she later wrote *Frankenstein*, with its focus on northern landscapes.

Others, too, showed an awareness of Wollstonecraft’s account. In 1813, the English translator of the work *Travels through Norway and Lapland* by the celebrated German geologist Leopold von Buch, mentions in his introduction that the romantic scenery along the Norwegian coast “drew from the celebrated Mary Wollstonecraft [...] some of the most beautiful specimens of descriptions in the English language” (Von Buch 1813, iii).<sup>24</sup> And an even more powerful indication of Wollstonecraft’s impact on contemporary readers is found in the ninety-page long poem *The Wanderer in Norway* by the popular poet and Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, Thomas Brown (1778–1820). The poem is entirely based on Wollstonecraft’s own account; it is a deeply sentimental description of her tragic love for Imlay, and is set amid the sublime, Norwegian landscape, which varies from Ossian-like scenes “where savage Nature scorns to bloom, / O’er rocks of terror, and in wilds of gloom” to ecstatically beautiful summer meadows, “all one joy of fragrance and of bloom” (Brown 1816, 61 and 64).<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Wollstonecraft’s book may have been one of the reasons for the journey made in 1799 by Edward Daniel Clarke (1769–1822), later Professor of Mineralogy at Cambridge, and Thomas Malthus (1766–1834). The latter’s travel diaries were not discovered and published until the 1960s, but clearly contributed to his famous *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Incidentally, this work is partly a response to the writings of William Godwin, Wollstonecraft’s husband, and at least the chapter “Of

<sup>24</sup> The German original was published in 1810.

<sup>25</sup> See also Richard Holmes in Wollstonecraft and Godwin 1987, 41–42.

the Checks to Population in Norway”, though not included until the sixth edition of 1826, was based on Malthus’s observations of 1799.

Finally, it is hardly a coincidence that the water colourist and aquatint etcher John William Edy (1760/62–1805) in the summer of 1800 visited precisely the parts of the Norwegian coast that Wollstonecraft had described with such intensity a few years earlier. He was accompanied by another artist, William Fearnside, and the following year both of them exhibited Norwegian scenes at the Royal Academy Exhibition in London. Then, between 1811 and 1820, Edy’s entire portfolio of eighty large colour aquatints was published in eight instalments, and in 1820 in a costly two-volume edition as *Boydell’s Picturesque Scenery of Norway* (Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 72 and 353), providing the first major visual impression of Norwegian scenery for a British audience.

It seems likely, then, that Wollstonecraft’s travel account from Scandinavia, in the English original as well as in various translations, served as a door opener for many of the travellers that followed in her footsteps. Some of these travellers, like Edward Daniel Clarke and the Germans von Buch and Carl Friedrich August Grosse, even went as far north as Finnmark and the North Cape. Another visitor with even more southerly origins, who even happened to meet Clarke in Finland, was the young and wealthy Italian Guiseppe Acerbi (1773–1846), who in 1798 and 1799 made a journey through the Nordic countries, and who published the two-volume work *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland, to the North Cape* in London in 1802. This work was also quickly translated into German and French.<sup>26</sup>

In the beginning, however, the number of travellers to the North was modest, though according to Schiötz’s bibliography, there were more than fifty British travelogues published about Norway alone in the period before 1830 (Schiötz 1970 and 1986).<sup>27</sup> For the nineteenth century as a whole, there are on average about three times as many travelogues from Britain as from countries like Germany, France and the other Scandinavian countries. In terms of time period, Waterloo is once again an important threshold, and from the 1820s, there is a clear turning of the tide; in his introduction from 1823 about a journey he had made three years earlier, the baronet and army major Sir Arthur de Capell Brooke (1791–1858) addresses precisely the reasons for the pull of the North:

While the South has continued the great centre of attraction, it appears no way strange, that the northern parts of the European continent should hitherto have excited so little attention. Veiled, according to the general notion, in almost continual darkness; and fast bound for the greater part of the year in chains of ice; the possibility of a summer has hardly been contemplated, or that such a country

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of Clarke and Acerbi, see Anka Ryall in Klitgaard Povlsen 2007, 265–83.

<sup>27</sup> See also Fjågesund and Symes 2003.

should possess any attractions, likely to repay the labours of the traveller. Such even is the chilling influence of cold over the imagination, that the bare mention of the Arctic regions is sufficient to repress its wandering; and the idea of crossing the Polar circle operates with tourists in general, as a sufficient obstacle to their proceeding thither. (Brooke 1823, v–vi)

At a first glance, Brooke's characterization of the North may seem like a powerful list of reasons for *not* travelling there, but in effect it serves as the very opposite. Accompanied, according to himself, by the massive volume of Pontoppidan's *Natural History of Norway* (1755), Brooke combines this standard source with ideas from Montesquieu as well as Rousseau and Wollstonecraft in a celebration of the North:

As the traveller advances into the north, and gradually leaves behind him the good and evil, which arise in the civilized world from the frequent intercourse between man and man, he will be better able to judge, from the simplicity of the lives and manners of the inhabitants, and the state of happiness and contentment they appear to enjoy, of the effects which civilization, as it is termed, would produce among them; and whether in them the great purpose of life be not more truly answered, than in the crowded part of the community, where self, like a contagion, so surely infects every class, that it seems unfortunately and inseparably connected even with what appears fair, habitual, and guiltless. (*Ibid.*, 73–74)

The artist Edward Price, who in 1826 wanted to cross the Hardangervidda – a huge and virtually unpopulated mountain plateau between Christiania (Oslo) and Bergen – shows a similar attitude:

I endeavoured whilst in Christiania to obtain information respecting the country; and many were the dissuaves to prevent me from going to Bergen; very figurative language prevailed respecting the mountainous region between Christiania and Bergen; an habitual and hereditary dread pervaded those with whom I conversed. It was described as a land of savage heights and unfathomable depths, where wild beasts were ravenous, and starvation would assuredly meet the traveller. [...] I listened with unqualified satisfaction to the respective narrations, and my pulse beat quicker, and enthusiasm rose to its highest point, when full evidence was before me that Norway in its mountainous region bore the impress of sublimity. (Price 1834, 18)

Whereas Norway was thus in the early stages of attracting foreign travellers whose main purpose was pleasure, a country like Iceland continued primarily to attract scientists, antiquarians and polar explorers. In 1806, for instance, a French Navy expedition, whose task was to “advance as near as possible to the pole” (Freminville 1819, 77), spent altogether eighteen days in the country. One of the officers, Chevalier de la Poix de Fréminville (1787–1848), offers a lengthy description of the people and the landscape, and in a similar vein to Brooke demonstrates a surprising tolerance towards a society radically different from his own:

At the first glance, one would conceive the Icelanders to be the most wretched of men, the most destitute of the conveniences of life, and their condition to be the most frightful; but when we reflect on their unagitated character, on the few wants they feel, and the facility with which they can provide for them; if we consider,

likewise, the sweet and intimate union that links them in the bonds of friendship, we must adopt another way of thinking, and even consider them as happier than the Europeans, whose enjoyments are mingled with so many perplexing circumstances, originating in ambition, in disappointments, in bodily infirmities, and the illusions and disquietudes of a thousand different passions. (*Ibid.*, 91)

Although Fréminville shows a rather glaring ignorance of the country by claiming that the language is “a very ancient dialect of the Celtic”, there is a distinctly Rousseauesque touch to his narrative. A rather different description of the Icelanders is offered by the young Englishman William Jackson Hooker (1785–1865), who later became one of Britain’s leading botanists. In 1809 he had been sent to Iceland on the recommendation of the elderly Joseph Banks (Barrow Jr. 1835, xix), and in addition to collecting a large number of plants, he also wrote an extensive account of the country’s history. On his arrival, Hooker was “delighted at seeing some new faces”, but quite at odds with Fréminville’s account, he immediately added: “in spite of their nastiness and stench; and their grotesque appearance afforded us much amusement” (Hooker 1811, 8). And it seems that the hair of the Icelanders created no better impression:

[I]t was altogether in a state of nature, untouched by a comb, and hung over their backs and shoulders; it was matted together, and visibly swarming with little vermin, and their eggs, which are the constant attendants of that part of the human body, when cleanliness is neglected. (*Ibid.*, 9)

This “state of nature”, in other words, is not the kind that Rousseau wanted to revert to. Another, and rather more comprehensive and informative travelogue from Iceland, also from 1811, is *Travels in the Island of Iceland* by the Scottish aristocrat and mineralogist Sir George Steuart Mackenzie (1780–1848), who had spent the previous summer there with his two friends Henry Holland (1788–1873), who contributed a 70-page introduction on Icelandic history and literature, and Richard Bright Jr. (1789–1858).<sup>28</sup> In addition, the young Icelander Olave Loptson travelled with them (Mackenzie 1811, ix). A true scientist, Mackenzie approached the country with a Linnaean eagerness for categorising everything he found, and the book’s extensive appendix contains a wide range of information on such different topics as diseases, plants and minerals, a section on music, a survey of the weather and the like, together with a large number of maps and illustrations.

Still, from a modern point of view, Holland’s thorough introduction is more interesting, with its discussion of the Althing, the constitution and Iceland’s cultural contribution to Europe as a whole. And while Fréminville expressed a kind of condescending sympathy with a naively innocent population, Holland treats Iceland as a country possessing a political tradition that is fully on a par with that of other countries. He

<sup>28</sup> For a more detailed description of the journey, especially with regard to Bright, who later became a pioneer on kidney disease, see Becker and Kark 1976.

even goes so far as to announce that in “this sketch of the constitution which the Icelanders created for themselves, a distinct relation will be traced to the progressive institutions of several of the European states”, thus giving Iceland rather than England the seniority with regard to developing a democratic political system. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Holland, who at the time of their visit was only twenty-two, later became “a promoter of the old northern and modern Icelandic causes in high and learned society”, not least in his capacity as physician to Queen Victoria (Wawn 2000, 34).

Finally, in the last years before Waterloo, Iceland was also visited, independently, by two men who had a common denominator in their interest in languages. Ebenezer Henderson (1784–1858) was a Scottish preacher who became involved in the distribution of Bibles in Scandinavia. Via Denmark, where for a time he was a pastor at Elsinore, he went to Iceland in 1814, and stayed there for nearly a year while developing a distribution system for the British and Foreign Bible Society. In 1818, he then published a two-volume work, *Iceland, or the Journal of a Residence in that Island*. Despite “abounding with much curious and interesting matter,” according to John Barrow Jr., Henderson “is not so sure a guide as he might otherwise have been” (Barrow Jr. 1835, xx–xxi). Henderson later travelled widely in the Orient, learning a wide range of Asian languages.

The same applies to one of Denmark’s greatest linguists, Rasmus Rask (1787–1832), who spent two years in Iceland, between 1813 and 1815, co-incidentally at the same time as Henderson. Rask did not write an account from Iceland, but he edited an *Icelandic Lexicon*, which was published in 1814, and in 1816, after his return to Copenhagen, helped found the Icelandic Literary Society, of which he was the first president. Thus, although Iceland at the time only had a population of about 50,000, and Reykjavik no more than about 300 (Gustafsson 2007, 147), there were several reasons why the remote island in the North Atlantic kept attracting travellers. The most important reason, however, was still – as had been the case for two hundred years – its unique role in the ancient history of the North.

### ***Britain’s Past Is Scotland’s Past***

From the French Revolution onwards, a new generation of artists and intellectuals in Britain and Germany as well as in Scandinavia continued to show an increasing interest in their own ancient history. The great figures from the middle of the century had stepped down – Gray had died nearly twenty years earlier; Mallet had long since moved back to Switzerland; and Bishop Percy was no longer active in the field. Instead a new generation



was coming forth, who in different ways would take northern studies and the popular interest in the North to new heights and into a new century.

In Britain, nobody carried this torch more successfully than Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), and if Gray had been the older generation's great literary transmitter of the world of the northern past, it is a fitting coincidence that Scott was born only a fortnight after Gray's death in 1771. Also, he was no more than a nineteen-year-old student when he first attracted his teacher's attention with an essay, "On the Manners and Customs of the Northern Nations", and having read Gray carefully he gave a lecture two years later to the Speculative Society entitled "On the Origin of the Scandinavian Mythology" (Blanck 1911, 123). From then on he almost single-handedly transformed the world of fiction. According to one of his biographers, A.N. Wilson, "[e]motionally, Scott revealed the past to the nineteenth century [...] ; and he did so not merely for the poets, but for the serious historians, the novelists and romancers, and the architects" (Wilson 1989, 153).

In line with and as a response to the period's interest in the past, then, Scott created the historical novel, killing two birds with one stone: he set it both in the northern past and in the northern landscape. Through a popular literary genre that reached a wider audience than had ever been achieved before, he managed to conjure up a fictional world that made not one, but two or three generations of readers associate literature with the heroic world around the North Sea. The Ossian poems had opened up this cult of the northern mythical past half a century earlier; Scott now expanded it dramatically, inspiring more than a thousand paintings and fifty operas (*ibid.*, 3). His initial literary ambition was in the field of poetry, but he declined the offer of the laureateship, and his only major poetic work with a Norse theme is *Harold the Dauntless* from 1816, an epic poem that reflects the dilemma frequently discussed at the time between Christianity and the old heathen religion.<sup>29</sup> Thus it was primarily in the world of fiction that Scott would make his mark. In his foreword to one of the author's many novels, *The Pirate* (1821), which is "set against a backdrop of misty northern antiquity" (Wawn in Scott 1996, ii), Andrew Wawn describes the work's incredible commercial and cultural success:

The Library of Congress catalogue lists well over sixty entries (many of them American) for the novel up to 1925 [...] . *The Pirate* was also imitated, illustrated, epitomised, excerpted for children, set to music, dramatised on the London stage within three weeks of its publication, and translated for readers in Germany, Spain and (eventually and appropriately) Iceland; its many poems took their place amongst the light musical fare of fashionable soirées, and its characters were frequently referred to in Victorian travel books about Iceland with the familiarity nowadays reserved for soap-opera favourites. (*Ibid.*, i)

<sup>29</sup> The year of publication is usually given as 1817, but at least in the 1836 edition of the poem, it is explicitly dated 1816.

But Scott's fictional universe was more than money and entertainment; it was part of a vision for the future. The return to the Middle Ages "involved an attempt to transform the whole quality of life, and to recover spiritual values in the wreckage of an industrial age" (Wilson 1989, 148). There is, in other words, a fundamentally anti-progressive, Rousseauesque sensibility in these works, and the social and political implication inherent in this sensibility should not be ignored. On the contrary, it reflects, as does virtually any idealisation of the past, a profound scepticism to the contemporary world, and for many people witnessing the industrial and concomitant cultural transformation that was beginning to take place at the turn of the century and that would only accelerate in the Victorian period, medieval and Viking Britain emerged as an alternative route to the future.

Another young and aspiring writer who turned in the same direction was the later Poet Laureate, Robert Southey (1774–1843), who in 1795 – the same year as a new Anglo-Saxon lectureship was established in Oxford (Fairer 1986, 829) – published two poems with Viking motifs, "The Race of Odin" and "The Death of Odin". Both of these celebrate, though rather ahistorically, the vanquishing by Odin and his warriors of the Roman Empire, the two enemies representing freedom and the suppression of freedom respectively. Thus, perhaps in tune with the background of Southey's youthful enthusiasm for the Revolution, Odin here emerges as a rebellious and freedom-loving defender of progress. It would not be long, however, before Southey – like his brother-in-law Coleridge, and Wordsworth – moved to the other end of the political spectrum, and thirty years later, his book *Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829) would pass a damning verdict on the so-called "manufacturing system" and everything that followed in its wake.

But Scott and Southey were not alone in their fascination with the Viking world. In 1797, Southey's good friend from Bristol, Amos Cottle (1768?–1800) – the brother of Joseph Cottle, who published *Lyrical Ballads* – brought out an extensive collection of Norse poetry fashionably translated into rhyming couplets. *Icelandic Poetry, or The Edda of Saemund, Translated into English Verse* also included an introduction, in which Cottle conducted a forceful argument against the idea that the Celtic and the northern tribes were similar, or even identical. As will be remembered, Mallet had not distinguished clearly between the two, but Bishop Percy had, and Cottle leaned heavily on the latter, actually to the extent of borrowing entire passages from Percy's preface from *Northern Antiquities*, though without acknowledging his source. In particular, he underlined how the *written* tradition of the "Gothic Scalds" was radically different from the *oral* tradition of the Celts (Cottle 1797, xi), thus securing the idea of the ancient Scandinavians as learned and literate – which is to

say civilised – as opposed to the rude Celts. Later in the introduction, there was furthermore a congratulatory poem by Southey on the occasion of Cottle's translation, and he too emphasised the "Runic faith":

Wild the Runic faith,  
And wild the realms where Scandinavian Chiefs  
And Scalds arose, and hence the Scalds' strong verse  
Partook the savage wildness. And methinks  
Amid such scenes as these, the Poet's soul  
Might best attain full growth; pine-cover'd rocks,  
And mountain forests of eternal shade,  
And glens and vales, on whose green quietness  
The lingering eye reposes, and fair lakes  
That image the light foliage of the beech [...]. (*Ibid.*, xxxv–xxxvi)

Not unlike Scott, Southey here combines several elements of the fascination with the North: both the literary past and the northern landscape, which together were important sources of inspiration for the many travellers who, as mentioned earlier, began to turn to Iceland and Scandinavia after Waterloo. Later in the same poem Southey even anticipates precisely the popularity of this new destination: "Were I, my friend, a solitary man, / Without one tie in life to anchor me, / I think that I would wander far to view / Such scenes as these, for they would fill a heart / That loathes the commerce of this wretched world, / And sickens at its hollow gaieties" (*ibid.*, xxxvii).

Another writer, who represents an important link between written and pictorial art, is William Blake. Though it is true that Norse motifs do not figure prominently in the writings of the Romantic poets, and that this interest only takes off in the Victorian period, Heather O'Donoghue argues that many of Blake's major poems were "heavily indebted to Norse myth" (O'Donoghue 2007, 119). Also, in 1797 he was commissioned to illustrate Gray's poems, and he produced as many as ten illustrations for "The Fatal Sisters" and "The Descent of Odin" (*ibid.*). At the same time, Blake's friend, the painter Johann Heinrich Füssli continued his interest in northern mythology. In 1798, he started making the first sketches based on the *Nibelungenlied*, which had been first published as early as 1755, but which had remained in relative obscurity until this point. As a matter of fact, Johann Jacob Bodmer, who had discovered the work, was Füssli's teacher and mentor, and over the next twenty years, Füssli would produce a whole series of works – watercolours as well as paintings – based on the *Nibelungenlied*, the sagas and – again – Gray's poems (Christian Klemm in Lentzsch ed. 2005, 149–73).

Norse motifs were also explored by less prominent writers, such as Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866), William Herbert (1778–1847) and Anna Seward (1747–1809). As a young poet of twenty-one, Peacock, who would later become a close friend of Shelley's, published the collection

*Palmyra* (1806), which contains the long and elaborate poem “Fiofvar, King of Norway”. Not surprisingly at this stage, the poem is supplied with explanatory notes, as, according to the poet, “the minutiae of the Gothic Mythology are not very generally known” (Peacock 1806, 89). With its rhyming couplets, “Fiofvar” remains, formally and structurally, firmly within the Neoclassical tradition, but the subject matter is Scottish and Scandinavian: Fiofvar’s beloved, Nitalpha, has been abducted by Yrrodore, the King of Lochlin (i.e. Scotland), and is kept “in magical sleep”, like Briar Rose, in distant caverns, guarded by the evil dwarfs. Fiofvar goes to war and kills his enemy, and is eventually able to wake her up from her sleep. The poem’s Scottish setting may well have been inspired not only by the Ossian poems, which Peacock is sure to have known, but also by his walking tour of Scotland in the summer of 1806, suggesting how the fascination with the North was stimulated by travel as well as literature.

Between 1804 and 1806, William Herbert (1778–1847) – later barrister, MP and rector of Spofforth in the West Riding of Yorkshire, but primarily known as a botanist – similarly brought out a two-volume work with the title *Select Icelandic Poetry*, again in most cases translated into heroic couplets, but also with extensive essays introducing the texts to his audience. It is a further indication of the gradually increasing awareness of textual criticism that Herbert in his notes on “The Song of Thrym”, for instance, criticises both Cottle and Percy for having translated from a Latin prose version of the text, and he points out a number of obvious mistakes that they had made (Herbert 1804–6, I: 9–10). This particular quality was also underlined in Walter Scott’s enthusiastic review of Herbert’s work in the recently founded *Edinburgh Review* in 1806: “We therefore hail with pleasure an attempt to draw information from the fountain-head” (quoted in Blanck 1911, 123).

It is also an indication of the period’s political and cultural network that Herbert’s work is dedicated, with a poem by the author written in a slightly peculiar Danish, to the Norwegian merchant and civil servant Carsten Anker, who was staying in London at the time. A decade later, Herbert furthermore published a three-hundred-page poem, which had been started in connection with the previous work, but had been left unfinished. Rather like Peacock’s poem and Scott’s novels, *Helga* (1815) is an early example of how material from the *Edda* and the sagas was used as a basis for freely conceived, imaginative works. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, in other words, the history of the ancient Scandinavians, made available through traditional sources, was supplemented by a rapidly growing body of purely fictional literature, adding significantly to the total cultural output connected with the North, and laying the foundation for the massive flood of popular Victorian fiction set in the Viking world. A generation after its publication, *Helga* even triggered yet another by-product of the original material, namely an imitation, in the form of “the

pseudonymous Zavarr's *The Viking, An Epic* (1849)" (Wawn 2000, 203). Thus one can observe how the North was gradually acquiring more and more of the features generally associated with classical, Mediterranean culture.

Networking was also a clue to Anna Seward's – or "the Swan of Lichfield's" – interest in the topic. According to Wawn, she was a friend of John Thomas Stanley, who had visited Iceland in 1789, and of Henry Holland, who accompanied Sir George Steuart Mackenzie there in 1810 (*ibid.*, 57). It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume that her poem "Harold's Complaint: A Scandinavian Ode", written in December 1790 (Seward 1810, III: 29), was partly inspired by Stanley's expedition the previous year. But she was also indebted to traditional scholarship. Her poem "Herva, at the Tomb of Argantyr: A Runic Dialogue", first published in 1796, is based on George Hicke's version of "this ancient Norse Poem", i.e. the *Hervarar Saga*, in his mammoth *Thesaurus* from 1703–05. But she underlines her independence by claiming that she has made a "bold Paraphrase, not a Translation", because Hicke's expressions "have a vulgar familiarity, injurious to the sublimity of the original conception" (*ibid.*, 90). Later, of course, Seward's network would also include Sir Walter Scott, with whom she collaborated, and who after her death in 1809 would edit the three volumes of her poetry.

As indicated above, there were a growing number of writers who approached the old North from different angles. A versatile writer like Scott covered a wide range of these – novels, poems and reviews – and he also wrote a lengthy "Abstract of the Eyrbyggja-Saga", which was published, by Scott's publisher, in the huge anthology of old northern texts, *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities*, in 1814, and later reprinted in I.A. Blackwell's extensively revised and expanded 1847 version of Percy's translation.

But the most comprehensive and useful survey of the field at the beginning of the nineteenth century is provided by a now virtually unknown name, Nathan Drake (1766–1836), an essayist and physician who published extensively on Shakespeare and other literary topics. In a series of books entitled *Literary Hours*, which contained an entertaining mixture of genres aimed at the whole family, he included, in the 1804 volume, a book-length essay, "On the Scandinavian Mythology". First of all, he begins with a claim that would normally have been made for the Christian and classical traditions:

The mythology of *Scandinavia*, the religion of our Gothic ancestors, has ... a claim to our particular attention. With it is connected a considerable portion of our annals, and the manners, customs, poetry and laws, not only of this land, but of nearly the whole of Europe, have, in a great degree, derived their form and colour from this wild and singular system of fabling. Chivalry, gallantry, and romantic fiction are more peculiarly the children of the North [...]. (Drake 1804, 273–74)

Then, like a preacher impatient with his flock, he complains that since Gray there has been little progress in the study of the topic, and the good gospel is simply not reaching out to its audience; it is more than thirty years since the publication of the only good guide, Percy's translation of Mallet, and as it needs to be "adapted for general perusal" (*ibid.*, 276), he has taken it upon himself to give such a popular presentation. Drake's message is a pedagogical one: "I shall endeavour by beautiful quotation, critical discussion, and poetic imitation, to render the subject attractive", and he does so by offering a detailed and highly readable survey of the Scandinavian mythology, but although he wants to reach a wide audience, it is first and foremost directed at poets, who with hard work will be able to reap a huge artistic reward:

The poet [...] who wishes to avail himself of the treasures of this rich, and, hitherto, but little explored mine of fiction, must have recourse to the original writers. He must appeal to the Edda and Vulupsa [*sic*], he must study the works of Bartholinus, Wormius, Verelius, Keysler and Mallet, and enter deeply into the minutiae, the bearings and tendency of every part of the system. The *purport* of these Essays is merely to *awaken his attention* to the subject, and to enable *lovers* of poetry, *without further research or trouble*, to *relish* and *understand* the splendid creations, which, in the hands of the genuine bard, this neglected mythology may give birth to. (*Ibid.*, 495)

Surely, if Drake had known how widely dispersed this knowledge would become in the new century, among young and old, academics and popular readers, and how profoundly it would affect the British sense of national identity, he would certainly have felt that his effort had not been in vain.

While the fascination with the Vikings continued throughout the period, the closely related interest in the Ossian poems similarly showed no sign of abating. On the contrary, a generation or two after their first publication, there was a greater output of treatises, poetry and music celebrating them than ever before. Popular composers, in particular, produced a large number of glees and other songs, catering for the rapidly growing middle-class market described earlier in connection with music inspired by the many polar expeditions. More than thirty such compositions were published in Britain during the 1790–1830 period alone, together with various performances at Covent Garden and elsewhere of entire programmes based on Ossian, including the "airs, duets, choruses and argument [...] of the new ballet pantomime" from 1791, entitled *Oscar and Malvina; or, The Hall of Fingal* (Copac catalogue). Most prominently, perhaps, the composer John Wall Callcott (1766–1821), who was a pupil of Haydn, showed a particular interest in historical themes, especially as presented by Thomas Gray, Thomas Chatterton and Macpherson. He composed glees from Ossian for nearly three decades, including "Who Comes So Dark", "Youth of the Gloomy Brow", "In the Lonely Vale of Streams", and "Chief of the Windy Morven" etc.

William Wordsworth, too, during a walking tour of Scotland in the summer of 1803, wrote the poem “Glen Almain; or, the Narrow Glen”, in the place where, according to legend, Ossian was buried. Thirty years later, he would return to Scotland, and to Ossian, in a whole series of poems. “Glen Almain” was published in 1807, the same year that Lord



Jean Auguste Ingres's painting *Ossian's Dream* from 1813 is probably the most iconic of the many Ossian motifs, and confirms the continued interest in the poems half a century after their first publication. Again, as in Abildgaard's painting, the old Ossian is seated, with the harp – the symbol of the bard – and the spear resting powerlessly on the ground. The picture was commissioned by Napoleon, himself a great admirer of the poems.

Byron published his collection *Hours of Idleness*, which contains two lengthy Ossian imitations, “Oscar of Alva: A Tale” and the prose poem “The Death of Calmar and Orla”. Both of these texts reveal Byron's profound immersion in the world of Ossian. 1807 is also the year when Macpherson's texts were at long last published – more than a decade after his death – in their allegedly original, Gaelic form, an event that did little to calm the sceptics, who claimed that most of them were translations into Gaelic from the English versions. Also, two years before, a report from the Highlands Society of Edinburgh, which it had taken eight years to

produce, concluded that it was impossible to pass a final verdict on the genuineness of the poems (Okun 1967, 329).

As a consequence, the discussion continued, but apparently without having a negative impact on their popularity. Even a literary giant like Sir Walter Scott showed more than a passing interest in Ossian; in 1810 he visited Fingal's Cave on the island of Staffa, and in the same year published his hugely successful epic poem *The Lady of the Lake*, which not only sold 25,000 copies in eight months (Wilson 1989, xiii), but which was also indebted to Ossian. In addition, as Georg Fridén claimed more than half a century ago, Scott and Macpherson both “tried to evoke the glorious past of their country; both described with predilection battles and love; and valorous warriors and fair ladies are common to their romances. The Ossianic landscape has lent many features to the setting of Scott's novels and poems: mountains and caves, animals and trees, wind and weather, light and sound” (Fridén 1949, 19).

All of this was eagerly digested by readers of poetry as well as fiction, who learned to see the landscapes around the North Sea as those of a heroic past. One of these readers was the twelve-year-old Branwell Brontë, the only brother of the Brontë sisters, who in July 1820, already familiar with Ossian as well as Scott, sent a letter to the editor of a magazine of his own creation, *Branwell's Blackwood Magazine*, “his spelling”, according to Winifred Gérin, “suffering somewhat from the excitement of the moment”:

“I write to acquaint you of a circumstance which has happened to me and which is of great importance to the world at large. On May 22 1829 [*sic*] the Chief Genius Taly [i.e. Charlotte] came to me with a small yellow book in her hand – she gave it to me saying it was the POEMS of that Ossian of whom so much has been said about whose works could never be got. Upon an attentive perusal of the above said works I found they were most sublime and excellent I am engaged in publishing an edition of them. Quarto 3 vols with notes commentary etc.. I am fully convinced that it is the work of OSSIAN who lived 1000 years ago [...]”. (Gérin 1969, 29)

But there is also another common feature between Macpherson and Scott, which Fridén does not specifically mention: both of them had a profound interest in the culture and the stories of the people. Macpherson's poems were – at least allegedly – quickly vanishing elements of a popular, oral tradition, and if so, his efforts were more or less the first systematic attempt to save this particular material before it disappeared. And in this respect, Scott may be regarded as Macpherson's disciple. In the same year that he, as a twenty-one-year-old student, gave his lecture on Scandinavian mythology, Scott also made a walking tour of the Borders, collecting popular “riding ballads”, and made a similar trip the following year in Perthshire and the eastern Highlands (Herman 2006, 283). A decade later this work was to result in the two-volume collection *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–03), which he expanded in several new editions in the following years. These texts clearly bear the mark of Scott's own



additions and modifications, but still represent an important rescue operation with regard to traditional ballads in the Border region.

Incidentally, at the same time William Wordsworth wrote his Preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, whose first edition had been published four years earlier, and which had partly inspired Scott. In this preface, which with the benefit of hindsight is actually far less original than has often been claimed, Wordsworth idealises a poetry about “[l]ow and rustic life”, written in “language really used by men” (quoted in Wu ed. 1998, 357). In essence, his and Coleridge’s literary ideal was precisely the kind of authorless, popular ballads that Scott was collecting and that Herder had himself collected and written about in Germany a generation earlier. The success of *Lyrical Ballads*, in other words, is an indication of the strong revival of traditional folk culture to which the Romantic movement gave birth. But it was also the result of hard and patient labour over two centuries by antiquarians with an unshakeable faith in the treasures that had been systematically ignored by the cultural and political elite.

The great watershed in a cultural struggle is of course the moment when the elite embraces what it has formerly found unacceptable. In Scotland, this may be claimed to have happened in August 1822, when the sixty-year-old King George IV, who had only reigned for two years, visited Edinburgh. The Battle of Culloden, nearly eighty years earlier, had by no means been forgotten, and neither had the Highland Clearances, which had been going on for decades and were still in full swing, but by the expert help of Sir Walter Scott, who more or less designed and directed the entire visit, a transformation of Scottish-English relations was ensured.<sup>30</sup>

Amazingly, Scott pulled to the fore everything that gave witness to the proud and heroic Highland culture that had most rigorously resisted the invasion not just from England but also from the Scottish Lowlands. Now “kilts, bonnets, tartans, bagpipes and Gaelic battle songs”, many of them on their way to oblivion, were revitalised, in practice laying the foundation for a modern but quasi-traditional Scottish national identity, which has survived to this very day. However artificial, and however much old tensions were quietly buried under pageantry, it was still an extraordinary victory for cultural forces that were rooted far away from and far to the north of the halls of power. When the King, “[f]at, scarlet-faced, breathing heavily and barely able to walk” (Herman 2006, 301) stumbled up the High Street among the crowds to receive the keys to the city, and when at the next evening’s reception he appeared in an “authentic” Highland costume, he did in effect bow to a new cultural trend, which – among other things – also signalled a historical loss of aristocratic power and the advent of the power of the people.

<sup>30</sup> The following is indebted to Herman 2006, 298–302.

***Germany: Vikings, Volk and Fairy Tales***

In the context of German Romanticism, Johann Gottfried Herder plays an essential role, particularly regarding the view of the past. Already in the 1770s, he had collected and published German folk songs; he had been a pioneer in the German fascination with Ossian; he had proposed new ideas concerning the origin of language; and in his work on the philosophy of history from 1774, he had seen – under the influence of Montesquieu’s climate theory – the progressive development of civilisation as moving from Egypt, via the Mediterranean, to northern Europe (Lars Korten in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 130). Moreover, he had laid the foundation for the German idea of seeing the German, the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian peoples as essentially one and the same (Gerd Wolfgang Weber in Henningsen et al. eds. 1997, 44). When it comes to the interest in mythology, he also represents an interesting transitional stage between a traditional Enlightenment focus on the classical, Mediterranean tradition, on the one hand, and a curiosity for the alternative northern tradition, on the other.

In the treatise “Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie” (“On the New Use of Mythology”, 1767), the young Herder had seen mythology primarily as a tool in the service of poetry and art, and had not unexpectedly been almost exclusively concerned with *classical* mythology; thirty years later, in the dialogue “Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung” (“Iduna or the Apple of Rejuvenation”, 1796), two men, Alfred and Frey, discuss more explicitly modern man’s attitude to the *Nordic* mythology. Again, with Iduna being the wife of Bragi, the Norse god of poetry, Herder continues to see mythology as a servant of the arts, but he claims that its Nordic form has an advantage to that of the Greeks: it is natural to the German people, whose literature lacks a mythology of its own (Auken 2005, 21). Herder, then, having already established a common northern ethnic identity, provides an early philosophical justification for the adoption of the Nordic mythology as compatible with the history and the culture of the German people. This would form an important background for the sometimes heated discussions during the next hundred and fifty years about the differences and similarities between the various branches – Nordic, German and Celtic – of the mythology of the North. It would also have a major impact on the use of Nordic mythology by the Nazis.

The transitional stage represented by the period of the *Sturm und Drang* is clearly visible in the little poem “Die Antike an einen Wanderer aus Norden” (“Antiquity to a Wanderer from the North”) by Herder’s friend and collaborator Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) from 1795. Instead of the traditional celebration of the overwhelming beauty and power of the Mediterranean culture, Schiller’s poem reflects a profound sense of ambiguity, estrangement and distance between the two, anticipating

Madame de Staël's sharp distinction in *Germany* nearly twenty years later. It is as if Antiquity is a fading beauty who is no longer confident that her charms will work on the rough and undoubtedly masculine wanderer from the North, who has swum across rivers and climbed the Alps to reach her.

Another important contributor to the German interest in the North is Friedrich David Gräter (1768–1830), who corresponded regularly with Herder and is often regarded as the founder of Nordic studies as an academic discipline (*Nordistik*) in Germany. In particular, he pioneered – like William Herbert in England – a focus on a knowledge of the original sources in their original language at a time when second-rate Latin translations were frequently still in use (Schwarz 1935, 109–10). In 1789, he published the little volume *Nordische Blumen* (Nordic Flowers), which referred back to a German edition of the *Prose Edda*, which had been published as early as 1777 (Björnsson 2003, 85), but Gräter's work announces a new and more academic approach that would soon produce a weighty contribution to the field.

His work also exemplifies that sense of community among scholars from different countries that underlines the transnational nature of Nordic studies. Gräter was only twenty-one when the book was published, but even at this starting point of a prominent career, he dedicated it, humbly but ambitiously, to Peter Frederik Suhm, the author of the grandly conceived *Historie af Danmark* (History of Denmark), which had been under publication since 1782. *Nordische Blumen*, according to Gräter, is “a small collection of translations and essays, which should be regarded as a small contribution to a more intimate knowledge of Nordic literature and mythology” (Gräter 1789, ix).<sup>31</sup> A German scholar, in other words, thanks his Danish colleague in a book that contains primarily Icelandic texts.

Two years after *Nordische Blumen*, Gräter started the journal *Bragur*, which was devoted to the German and Nordic past, and which ran for more than twenty years, and in 1812 he started yet another journal, *Idunna und Hermode*, which lasted for four years. In the course of this period, he developed an extensive knowledge of the last two hundred years of scholarship on ancient Scandinavian literature, and was in constant correspondence with a number of colleagues in Denmark and Sweden (see Schwarz 1935, 90–109). According to Anton Blanck, however, Gräter gradually moved away from the Nordic material and instead focused on medieval German literature. Others moved in the opposite direction; Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) was probably the first to point out, during a series of lectures in 1802, the connection between the *Nibelungenlied* and Icelandic versions of the same legends (Björnsson 2003, 92).

This was, in turn, to fire the imagination of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777–1843), a Prussian baron of French descent, who in the first

<sup>31</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

three decades of the new century produced a series of popular plays and novels with explicitly Nordic themes, in addition to translating original texts into German. Fouqué was also a disciple of Friedrich Schlegel's brother, August Wilhelm, Madame de Staël's faithful companion, and of another member of the Schlegel circle, the writer Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853). Fouqué was a true enthusiast for the Nordic cause, and is a central point of reference for later developments, including Richard Wagner's interest in the sagas. His French background, furthermore, gives his work a wider European appeal, and though he is now virtually forgotten, he was "probably the most widely read of all Romantic writers" (Garland 1991, *s.v.* "Fouqué").

His most celebrated work with themes from Nordic mythology is *Der Held des Nordens* (The Hero of the North), a dramatic trilogy based on the *Nibelungenlied*. Under the inspiration of Tieck and the Schlegel brothers, however, he also included elements from the *Edda*, which he had been studying in the original since 1803 (Claudia Stockinger in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 142), and from the sagas, especially the *Völsunga Saga*. The three plays, *Sigurd, der Schlangentöter* (Sigurd, the Serpent Killer), *Sigurds Rache* (Sigurd's Revenge) and *Aslauga* were first published together in 1810, and were the first attempt to transpose the material from the saga period into contemporary German literature. Although reactions to the work varied, a number of major writers praised it for its qualities (Kämmerer 1909, 16). One of them was Friedrich Schlegel, in the article "Über nordische Dichtkunst" ("On Nordic Literature", 1812); another was Adelbert von Chamisso, the author of *Peter Schlemihl*, who held the work in higher regard than the *Nibelungenlied* itself (*ibid.*, 18). In 1815, Fouqué also published the novel *Die Fahrten Thiodolfs des Isländers*, which was translated into English in 1818 as *Thiodolf the Icelander*, enjoying "considerable early Victorian popularity" (Wawn 2000, 325); in 1816, furthermore, Beethoven urged Fouqué to write a libretto based on his Icelandic material, and in 1826 he published a translation of the *Gunnlaug Ormstunga Saga*, the first translation of an entire saga into German (Björnsson 2003, 93).

Fouqué, a Frenchman turned Prussian, showed an ardent patriotism for his adopted country, and there is no doubt that his works have an explicitly political and nationalistic agenda. First of all, it was important for him to underline Germany's departure from its Enlightenment dependence on the culture of the South. One indication of this "Nordic turn" was the adoption of "the dramatic Homer of the North" (Claudia Stockinger in Arndt 2004 et al. eds., 143), or rather Shakespeare, as a natural, intuitive genius, a reputation that became firmly settled after August Wilhelm Schlegel's highly successful verse translations of seventeen of his dramas between 1797 and 1810. Also, and very much in tune with Madame de Staël's recent works, Fouqué succeeded in attaching a bundle

of labels to the North and the South respectively that ensured a rather explicit stigmatisation of the latter. According to Claudia Stockinger, he identified the North with “‘German’, ‘national’, ‘patriotic’, ‘medieval’, ‘romantic’, ‘Christian’”, and the South with “‘French’, ‘enlightened’, ‘heathen’” (*ibid.*, 144).<sup>32</sup>

Thus, as suggested earlier in connection with Gothic fiction, a turning of the tables is taking place with regard to the traditional positioning of Protestantism and Catholicism, with the latter being written off as false, primitive and superstitious. But that is not all: Protestantism is not only the sole representative of Christianity; it is also, as Herder had suggested, beautifully compatible with the old Nordic mythology. This harmonisation of apparent opposites was obviously necessary in order to create a credible link between the ideals of the past and the political and religious realities of the present, and to make the celebration of the North part of a nationalist programme. But it also underlines how effectively the religious borders established by the Reformation had contributed to the divide between North and South.

For Fouqué this particular divide almost took the form of a sacred demarcation line in his debate with Karl Viktor von Bonstetten (ref. ch. 3), the Swiss émigré who had spent several years in Denmark. Bonstetten was far from indifferent to the ancient northern culture; after fleeing from Switzerland and Napoleon’s armies in 1798, he acquired a vivid interest not only in the countries of the North, but also in their ancient literature. In February 1800, he finished a translation from Old Norse into German of the *Saga of Ragnard Lodbrok*, discussing, in the introduction, the state of Iceland, which “in the days of general barbarism was flourishing, free and more enlightened than the cultivated Europe of today” (Bonstetten 2000, II: 172).<sup>33</sup> In addition, in 1824 he published the book *L’homme du Midi et l’homme du Nord* (Southern Man and Northern Man) where, on the basis of the climate theory, he underlined the advantages of the North in relation to the South.<sup>34</sup> Still, a product of the Enlightenment and, like his friend Madame de Staël, closely connected with French culture, Bonstetten, in an epistle to Alexander von Humboldt, praised the South at the expense of the North (Sigute Wosch in Henningsen et al. eds. 1997, 65).

When Fouqué was made aware of Bonstetten’s claim, he immediately

<sup>32</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

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<sup>34</sup> Sadly, both this work and *La Scandinavie et les Alpes* (Scandinavia and the Alps, 1826) were written before the turn of the century, but were not published until nearly three decades later (although in both French and German versions). The latter work, which is primarily geological, also typically contains a lengthy appendix on Iceland, its history and literature. As Castrén points out, if these works had been published at the turn of the century, they could have contributed to a far earlier international awakening about the North (Castrén 1910, 213).

responded, not with a letter, but with an entire book, with the same title as that of Bonstetten: *Der Mensch des Südens und der Mensch des Nordens* (Southern Man and Northern Man) from 1829. Leaning very much on Montesquieu's climate theory, Fouqué here underlines how the human spirit is directly influenced by its position in relation to the cardinal points, changing gradually, like the colours of the rainbow, on a geographical scale from north to south. Against this background, he concludes that northern man is concerned with time and freedom, whereas southern man is concerned with space (Fouqué 1829, 10).<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in a discussion of such social problems as suicide, drinking etc., he concludes that "the northerner acts more after due consideration, and the southerner more on impulse" (*ibid.*, 37). The result is a consistent defence of qualities associated with the North.

In Germany, too, the fascination with Ossian went hand in hand with that in the Nordic past. In 1795, Herder produced an essay, "Homer and Ossian" in Schiller's journal *Die Horen*, in which he repeated his faith in the genuineness of the poems, despite the considerable doubt that had been expressed since the poems first came out; it is almost as if the entire Ossian phenomenon provides such an essential link in Herder's own vision of an ancient northern literature that he is searching for a diplomatic solution to a potentially embarrassing problem. In the course of the next two decades several new translations of the poems were also published. In addition, they continued to reach new audiences through music and the arts. In particular, Franz Schubert (1797–1828) composed altogether ten Ossian *Lieder* (Songs) between 1815 and 1817 (McKay 1996, 49), reflecting the gloomy, Celtic atmosphere that was their trademark, but at the same time also offering a comment on the current political situation "as the interminable Napoleonic Wars reached their climax on the killing fields of first Leipzig, then Waterloo" (Christopher Smith in Gaskill ed. 2004, 387).<sup>36</sup> But *Lieder* and other works were also produced by less famous composers, such as Friedrich Heinrich Himmel (1865–1814), Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg (1760–1802), the prolific and highly respected Austrian composer Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf (1739–99), and Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832), who was Goethe's friend and Felix Mendelssohn's teacher.

This may be one of the reasons why Mendelssohn (1809–47), still only twenty years old, in August 1829 visited Fingal's Cave in the Hebrides, like Joseph Banks, Sir Walter Scott and so many others before – and after – him.<sup>37</sup> The visit made such an impact on the young and prodigiously talented composer that he immediately afterwards started drafting what

<sup>35</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

<sup>36</sup> For more details on Schubert's Ossian *Lieder*, see Fiske 1983, 83–87.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed description of Mendelssohn's visit, see Fiske 1983, 116–49.

was eventually, in 1835, to become the majestic symphonic poem *Fingals Höhle* (*Fingal's Cave*), usually known as the *Hebridean Overture*, during which the listener for eleven minutes “is swept into an experience of swirling, relentless, undulating, never-ending movement characteristic of the restlessness of the tides and currents of the sea” (Allen and Allen 1999, 29). In the arts, too, motifs from Ossian struck a chord with the German turn-of-the-century generation, but as all the artists involved were closely connected with the Danish art scene, it seems more appropriate to discuss them in connection with Scandinavian artists.

In Germany as well as in Britain, folk culture had provided a new force in the second half of the eighteenth century, not least through the work of Herder. This would receive a further boost at the beginning of the new century, when the second and expanded edition of his *Folk Songs* came out, with the title *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (*The Voices of Peoples in Songs*, 1807). Herder himself had died four years earlier, but the work – a tome of 552 pages – was completed and published by his friend, the historian Johannes von Müller (1752–1809). Like its predecessor, it was inspired by the example of Macpherson, underlining the extent to which the Ossian poems actually triggered an entire movement in European literature. But Herder's collection also differed from Macpherson's in its international focus, including folk songs from a range of different countries. Nevertheless, despite sections on “Songs from the South” and “Songs of the Savages” (*Lieder der Wilden*), the focus is very much on the North, with major sections on “Songs from the Far North”, “From the Northwest” (i.e. primarily Scotland), “Scaldic” (i.e. the *Edda* and the sagas), and “German Songs”. At the same time, Scott's Border ballads acquired a German equivalent with the publication of Achim von Arnim's and Clemens Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder* (*The Youth's Magic Horn: Old German Lieder*), whose three volumes contained more than 700 folk songs.<sup>38</sup> Many of the songs had been considerably modified by the editors, and the work is based on written as well as oral sources, but it is still regarded as an essential contribution to the legacy of German folk literature.

But folk songs represented only one of the literary genres that for centuries had been existing happily beyond the world of printing presses, publishers and libraries. Another was fairytales, to which a massive and lasting contribution was made by the two brothers Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859). Their extraordinary careers started with Wilhelm's publication in 1811 of *Altdänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen* (*Old Danish Heroic Songs, Ballads and Tales*), which, as the title indicates, contains verse as well as prose translations. And Wilhelm's turn to the North is no coincidence: with regard to literature, he claims

<sup>38</sup> The year of publication is usually given as 1805, but although the first volume came out in that year, the three volumes are dated 1806, 1808 and 1808 respectively.

in his lengthy foreword, “in no direction are we more naturally being led than to the North, and therefore it seems appropriate to turn our attention thither” (Grimm 1811, vi).<sup>39</sup> And: the North has created “the most profound and powerful poetry that has ever touched the soul of a human being” (*ibid.*, vii).

Incidentally, Wilhelm’s collection was not only published in Heidelberg, by Mohr and Zimmer, who also published *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, but it was also dedicated to von Arnim and Brentano. Wilhelm and Jacob, however, were already on their way to leaving an even more lasting mark than their admired colleagues. Since 1806, they had systematically been “gathering folk tales and other materials related to folklore” (Zipes 2002, 10). The first major result of this activity was the first volume, in 1812, of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales), which was followed by a second volume in 1815, and by 1830 they had produced – together or individually – a collection of texts from the *Edda*, a study of German runes, a two-volume collection of *Deutsche Sagen* (German Legends, 1816–18); a German grammar (1819); a study of ancient German law (1828); a translation of Irish elf tales (*Irische Land- und Seemärchen*, 1826); and *Die Deutsche Heldensage* (The German Heroic Legend, 1829), and further projects were to follow.

It is no coincidence that Germany precisely at this time produced several major works that celebrated the country’s own culture and history. Austria, Prussia and the cluster of small German states had for a long time been under the powerful influence of French culture. Now, in addition, they were under Napoleon’s iron heel; in December 1805, Prussia and Austria suffered a spectacular and humiliating defeat at Austerlitz, and in the following year at Jena. The scattered resources of the German states were helpless against Bonaparte’s well-oiled military and administrative machinery. The crushing defeats created an intense urge to throw off the French yoke, but the prospects of success were bleak. The sense of nationalism had never gained much strength in the German states. Now, however, the germination that had started in the 1770s and 80s was given a further impetus, though it remained much more of a cultural than a political force; it became in fact something of a spiritual, introspective process. The political implications of the work by Gräter, Herder, Fouqué, von Arnim and Brentano, the Grimm brothers and others were at best ambiguous.

On the one hand, they were democratic: they recognised the traditional culture among ordinary people as a unique contribution to the nation as a whole. The popular tradition suddenly acquired a status alongside the tradition of the elite, and the whole concept of the people (*das Volk*) as a collective carrier and transmitter of a valuable cultural

<sup>39</sup> Translated from the German by PF.



legacy must, in aristocratic circles, have been received with contempt and regarded as vulgar products of revolutionary ideas. On the other hand, the nationalist spirit importantly underlined uniqueness and difference; the Germans, their spirit (*Volksgeist*) and their heritage were being allowed to stand out from those of other countries, implying a defensive or even antagonistic attitude to nations that did not share the same heritage. In Germany, the experience of being trodden underfoot by the French was not just a national humiliation; it also set in motion a collective soul-searching in which the culture associated with the North came to play an essential role.

Napoleon's victories were also the occasion for Heinrich von Kleist's (1777–1811) play from 1808, *Die Hermannsschlacht*, which unsurprisingly and once again turned back to one of the grand moments of German history, the defeat of the Roman legions nearly two thousand years before. According to Joep Leerssen, "Tacitus's ethnography [was] cited to establish a moral distribution between northern virtue-and-patriotism against southern decadence-and-imperialism" (Leerssen 2006, 43). Similarly, and in the same year, the once revolutionary philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) published his famous series of lectures, *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (Addresses to the German Nation), which concluded with power and conviction that German unification was the only appropriate solution. In 1810, partly inspired by Fichte's lectures, one of the most prominent German nationalists, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), founded the *Deutscher Bund* (German Federation), whose combined ambition was to oust the French from the country and to work for a unified Germany. Thus the Napoleonic experience set in motion ideas that would soon acquire the label pan-Germanism, a political vision that, at its most ambitious, would potentially bring together all the German- or Germanic-speaking peoples into one common political and cultural sphere. The stage was set for a dramatic century and a half.

### ***Scandinavia: Old Dreams, New Beginnings***

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the Scandinavian countries were able to observe a rapidly growing international interest in their ancient literature and history. This, in turn, stimulated a further effort, especially in Denmark and Sweden, to exploit the theme as part of a nationalist struggle. Both countries were deeply embroiled in the Napoleonic Wars or in wars triggered by them and, like Germany, experienced turbulent changes. Denmark, fatally allied to Napoleon, suffered devastating losses to the British at the two naval battles of Copenhagen in 1801 and 1807, and eventually lost Norway in 1814. Sweden, once a regional superpower,

became caught between Russia and Denmark in the war of 1808–09, and aided by the supreme incompetence of the Swedish king, Gustav Adolf IV, the country lost Finland to Russia in 1809. During and after these political earthquakes, both Denmark and Sweden understandably sought to mobilise a sense of national identity, and again as in Germany, the logical place to turn was the country's heroic past.

In Denmark, the academic generation that had dominated the second half of the eighteenth century largely ended with the death in 1798 of the prolific historian Peter Frederik Suhm, but a younger generation was well under way. Rasmus Nyerup (1759–1829), for instance, who started out as Suhm's librarian, had already published works on the ancient literature of the Nordic countries before the turn of the century, and in 1808 he brought out *Edda eller Skandinavernes Hedenske Gudelære* (Edda or the Heathen Mythology of the Scandinavians), followed a few years later by a work clearly inspired by Scott as well as Herder and von Arnim and Brentano, *Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen* (Selected Danish Medieval Ballads, 1812–14), and in 1822 a collection of Norse texts. The lawyer and historian Gustav Ludvig Baden (1764–1840) similarly published several works on related themes in the years around the turn of the century.

But the real awakening in Denmark of a popular interest in the country's ancient literary heritage came with Henrich Steffens's previously mentioned return from Germany to Copenhagen in 1802, with the Romantic movement, as it were, in his luggage. Here a generation of young enthusiasts were ready to transform his message into poems and dramas and paintings. One of them was Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), who the year before had responded to an essay competition at Copenhagen University on the question: "Would it be profitable for the literature of the Nordic countries if our writers adopted and generally used the old Nordic mythology instead of the Greek?" (Auken 2005, 39).<sup>40</sup> Oehlenschläger responded strongly in the affirmative, and largely along Herderian lines, leaping to the defence of a tradition usually regarded as a primitive stage left behind by progress.

But it was only after an intense sixteen-hour long conversation with Steffens that his artistic creativity sprang to life (Møller 1948, 84), giving his enthusiasm a form that would shape literary history. His inspiration attached itself to a recent crime in Copenhagen. Two of the treasures of the Royal Art Collections were a pair of golden horns from the 400s AD, found in the ground in Schleswig in 1639 and 1734 respectively, one of them with runic inscriptions. In 1802 the horns, weighing nearly seven kilos, were stolen, causing a sensation. For Oehlenschläger the horns represented – literally – a Golden Age and a direct link to the past, almost

<sup>40</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

on a par with Macpherson's poems, which were claimed to be equally old. The news of the theft, in combination with Steffens's philosophical gospel, fired Oehlenschläger's imagination to the point that he reportedly walked straight home from his nightly discussion and sat down to write the poem "Guldhornene" ("The Golden Horns"), included the following year in the collection *Digte* (Poems), which also contained several other poems with ancient Nordic motifs.

"Guldhornene" is often said to have started the Romantic movement in Denmark (Greenway 1977, 158), and that to have given Steffens's philosophy a poetic and generally accessible expression. In the form of an incantation, the poet pleads with the heroic past to reveal some of its mystery. But the dramatic description of the two findings of the horns – one of them by a maid-servant – also underlines the need once again to make a conscious effort to unearth the distant past and let its golden beauty shine forth to the nation as a whole. And Oehlenschläger would be true to his vision. Realising the need to acquaint himself with the enormous material of Nordic studies, he soon bought Resenius's *Edda* from 1665 and Björner's *Deeds of Nordic Heroes* from 1737 at an auction (Stenroth 2005, 195), and set to work. Thus when Paul Henri Mallet, the Swiss historian who had done so much for the Nordic cause, died in Geneva in 1807, he could rest assured that his legacy was in competent hands.

Oehlenschläger was now the leading star of Danish Romanticism. Still, between 1805 and 1810 he sought new impulses, and with the help of the well-connected Steffens, doors were opened to friendships and acquaintances with such German counterparts as Goethe, Tieck, Fichte and Madame de Staël. Together with Steffens, Oehlenschläger thus became an important line of contact between the cultural scenes of Scandinavia and those of the Continent. But this does not mean that he put his Nordic themes on the shelf; on the contrary, it is during these years that he publishes the two dramas *Balder Hin Gode* (Balder the Good) and *Hakon Jarl Hin Rige* (Hakon Earl the Rich) in the collection *Nordiske Digte* (Nordic Poems, 1807), and after his return to Denmark he produces what is probably his greatest achievement, the trilogy of verse romances, *Helge* (1814), which was based on the author's use of Björner's *Deeds of Nordic Heroes*.

Parallel with the steady output of poems and dramas, this period also witnessed a substantial effort in scholarship on the Nordic past. Peter Erasmus Müller (1776–1834), who eventually became the Bishop of Sjælland, probably delivered the greatest single contribution to a systematic overview of the saga literature. Between 1812 and 1823, he produced impressive studies on the genuineness of the available sources, on the importance of a knowledge of Old Icelandic in understanding them, and not least a three-volume survey and commentary on the sagas that largely laid the foundation for studies in the field for the rest of the century.

Another indication that the Nordic gospel was reaching a steadily wider audience is the pedagogically impressive textbook for schools, *Great and Good Deeds of Danes, Norwegians, and Holsteinians*, whose original Danish version had been published thirty years earlier, and which had already been translated into German (1779) and French (1794). By 1807, when the English translation came out, the author, Ove Malling (1748–1829), had been appointed royal historiographer, and he would later move on to even higher offices. The work had an explicitly didactic and moral purpose, and thus sets a standard for numerous similar works during the nineteenth century. Malling essentially chose a number of stories from the rich reservoir of ancient Nordic texts, each of them designed to illustrate such virtues as magnanimity, patriotism, loyalty, intrepidity, firmness and the like. With this concept, Malling clearly succeeded on several fronts: he introduces the younger generation to a broad field of literature of which the large majority must so far have been ignorant; he made the same generation take it for granted that the texts in question represented at least the same moral standards as the Christian or the humanistic traditions; and he injected his impressionable readers with a major dose of national pride. Admittedly, the moral content was carefully tuned to the Protestant orthodoxy at the time, but precisely because that was the case, the book, which became a household work in Denmark-Norway for at least two generations, sanctioned by state, church and schools, provided the Nordic past with a legitimacy that it had been struggling to achieve.

That did not mean, however, that this relationship between two traditions that had largely been seen as incompatible, had now been settled once and for all. On the contrary, for another towering Danish figure of this generation, it would remain at the core of a life-long struggle. Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872), Steffens's cousin, was only nineteen when the latter returned in triumph to Copenhagen, and by then a student of theology, he received the full weight of his message, while at the same time taking on board Oehlenschläger's powerful celebration of the Scandinavian past. As a result, he threw himself, like Oehlenschläger, with full weight into the study of the old literature, resulting in a series of works in the years up to 1810. In his major study of Grundtvig, Sune Auken sums up the author's arduous journey during this period:

The interpretation of the Nordic mythology that the young Grundtvig presents, is awe-inspiring. After a series of minor attempts, he develops, in *Om Asalæren* [About the Asa Doctrine] and *Nordens Mytologi* [Nordic Mythology] in 1808, a comprehensive interpretation of all the essential sources of the Edda, with *Völuspá* as the norm. The book is a pioneering work in its determination and ability to understand the Nordic mythology as a whole, and it presents the mythology as a victorious drama, which encompasses all of history and continues from the creation of the world to the emergence of a new world at the other end of Ragnarok, so that all of history is shaped by the mythological progress. Later, in the work *Indbydelse til gamle Nordens Venner* [Invitation to the Friends of the Northern Antiquity], Grundtvig presents

a plan for a multi-volume work, whose purpose is to tell the history of the lives of Nordic heroes from the beginning to the end. He succeeds in publishing the first two volumes of this work, *Optrin af Kæmpelivets Undergang i Nord* [Scenes from the Fall of the Lives of the Northern Giants] and *Optrin af Norners of Asers Kamp* [Scenes from the Struggle of the Norns and the Asir], but between the first and the second volume, Grundtvig has lived through the famous religious crisis of 1810 and 1811, and after the crisis Grundtvig regards himself as a fervent Bible Christian. (Auken 2005, 109)<sup>41</sup>

This is a recognizable conflict, and a central feature of western civilization since the Renaissance: the tension between Christianity and Antiquity. Traditionally, however, the former had been represented by the Catholic Church and the latter by Greek and Roman mythology and learning. Now, Protestantism was faced with the challenge from the ancient culture of the North. Malling had largely avoided the problem; he had simply borrowed those episodes from the ancient literature that were immediately compatible with his form of Christianity. But Grundtvig cut deeper; he had the far more ambitious goal of creating a systematic compatibility between the two, or at least dissolving what had so far been regarded as a mutual hostility between them. The result, after a long spiritual struggle, is a Hegelian approach, which regards the Nordic mythology as a rich source of wisdom and insight, but first and foremost as a foundation for the next stage and the higher spiritual level of the Christian faith, similar to the way John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ.

In the course of his long and often turbulent career, Grundtvig never seriously wavered from his fascination with the world of the ancient North, and he continually produced poetry, translations, reviews and studies on the topic. In 1815, for instance, Grimur J. Thorkelin's first modern, philological edition of *Beowulf*, whose original manuscript he had saved in 1787, was published with a Latin translation, and Grundtvig immediately responded with an article in which he pointed out a number of Thorkelin's mistakes. He furthermore promised to make a Danish translation of the poem, a promise he fulfilled in 1820, and via this project he entered into the old Anglo-Saxon world, which was to prove a rich and rewarding area of research, not least because it combined a rootedness in the old northern culture with an explicitly Christian tradition (*ibid.*, 230–31), but also because it provided him with a far more comprehensive view of the old northern world. Later on, in 1828, he was then given a research grant by King Frederik VI to study Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and as a result he spent the three summers of 1829, 1830 and 1831 in England, acquiring an impressive grasp of the field and producing work that still wins the respect of scholars today (A.M. Allchin in Allchin et al. eds. 1994, 11).

There is no doubt that Grundtvig, in his capacity as scholar as well as public persona, exerted an enormous influence, especially in the Nordic

<sup>41</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

countries, on the way in which the ancient northern legacy was perceived and used in political, religious and cultural contexts. He created a unique marriage between two cultural currents that had previously existed more or less separately. In the course of a career that spanned much of the nineteenth century, he somehow succeeded in integrating the ancient culture of the North into the cultural mainstream of a Lutheran society that at the same time was moving towards modernization and industrialization. It is thus one of the many ironies of history that simply because he belonged to a small language community, his stature was never recognized for what it was in Britain and Germany, the two countries where his work would almost certainly have won an attentive audience.

In Sweden, the turn to a heroic past had been tried before. When the Swedish Empire had been slipping away towards the end of the seventeenth century, Olof Rudbeck had launched a desperate attempt to rebuild the nation's greatness with an elaborate and highly imaginative reconstruction of ancient history. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the loss of Finland in 1809 was followed only two years later by the founding of the *Götiska Förbundet* (Geatish Society), which was a direct extension of Rudbeck's ideas, though taking its inspiration even more explicitly from the Viking age. It is also likely that it was inspired by the *Deutscher Bund*, founded by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn only the year before. Thus, as in Denmark and Germany, young enthusiasts were rising in protest as Napoleon's armies were reaching every corner of the Continent.

One of them, Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783–1847) had spent a year in England from August 1809 till August 1810, and returned as an ardent Burkean (Geijer 1932, 24) and a great admirer of Sir Walter Scott. As a result of the journey, he would also become the first translator of Shakespeare into Swedish (*ibid.*, 32). In addition, in the same way that Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig had been placed in direct contact with German Romanticism through Steffens, Geijer had an intense, but always spiritual, relationship with the German writer Amalia von Helvig (1776–1831), who was the wife of a Swedish general and a friend of Goethe and Schiller, and who introduced him to the movement, while at the same time introducing the Swedish poetic and ideological revival to a German and continental audience (Lönnroth and Delblanc 1988, II: 276–77). Geijer immediately became the editor of the Geatish journal, *Iduna*, where in the first year he also published two of his own central poems, “Vikingen” (“The Viking”) and “Odalbonden” (“The Udal Farmer”), which in different ways reasserted the country's past, in the form of the adventurous, sea-faring Viking and the stable, home-bound farmer, both of whom represented a proud and freedom-loving tradition.

But Geijer was not the only star of the new movement. Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846), who like Geijer came from Värmland on the Norwegian border, also contributed to making 1811 a cultural watershed in Sweden.

Similar to the young Oehlenschläger, Tegnér had responded to a prize competition from the Swedish Academy on the topic of how to encourage and support patriotism and a proper national spirit, by writing the grandly conceived poem “Svea” (“Sweden”) in nearly five hundred lines of majestic, Alexandrine couplets combined with verse forms from *Völuspá*. The poem laments Sweden’s fall, and castigates the people for its weakness; there is a distinctly Ossian gloom about it, but it is also a powerful and visionary appeal for reasserting the ancient energy of the North against “the weakness of the South” (l. 28). Another of Tegnér’s poems, “Skidbladner” (1812), similarly uses the image of Odin’s ship as a vessel of poetic inspiration that sails proudly, not to the South, the traditional source of art and creativity, but to the North.

But Tegnér is more than anything remembered for a more mature work, namely *Frithiofs Saga*. This epic, book-length poem in twenty-four cantos, started in 1820 in *Iduna* and finished in 1825, was based on the Icelandic saga *Friðþjófs Saga Hins Frækna* (The Saga of Frithiof the Brave), a love story set in the Sognefjord on the west coast of Norway in the eighth century. A Swedish translation of the original had been available for nearly a hundred years in Björner’s *Deeds of Nordic Heroes*, which a few years earlier had inspired Oehlenschläger’s *Helge*. While clearly taking Björner’s work as his source material, Tegnér was also inspired by his Danish colleague, but still followed his own mind, expanding the story considerably and adjusting it to the mood of the early nineteenth century. The choice of a Norwegian setting was also connected with the fact that after the union with Norway in 1814 Tegnér had written the poem “Nore” (“Norway”), recognizing a fraternal relationship between the two countries rather than one of Swedish domination, and thus sowing the seeds of a Scandinavianist approach. Consequently, *Frithiofs Saga* also carries a political ring, negatively in the sense of its scepticism towards a narrow Swedish nationalism, and positively in the sense of its appeal to a common northern culture, based on a common past (Stenroth 2005, 59–70). The reception of Tegnér’s poem properly belongs to the following chapter, but however forgotten it is today, it was one of the seminal works about the North from the nineteenth century, which was distributed across Europe and America in an almost endless number of translations, and which contributed significantly to the enormous popularity of Viking themes at the time.

The turn to the greatness of the past is also seen in the popular resurrection of the memory of Carl XII, the centenary of whose death was celebrated in 1818. As early as 1811, a year after Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte with cool calculation had chosen the name Carl Johan, Geijer had set the stage with his poem “Karl den Tolfte” (“Carl XII”) which in the form of a monologue by the dead hero himself contributed to elevating this last of the Swedish warrior kings to a superhuman level. During the centenary

celebrations, Tegnéér also produced a poem of the same title, which became one of the most popular Swedish anthology pieces of the century (*ibid.*, 91).<sup>42</sup> In such an atmosphere of national mobilization of past greatness, not least with regard to the monarchy, it is hardly surprising that the responsibility for the education of Prince Oscar, the son of Carl Johan, was entrusted to uncompromising Geatishists (*ibid.*, 101–18). And this came as no surprise, because the world of northern antiquity had been a part of his life from birth. Oscar was the godchild of Napoleon, who had himself chosen his name from the poems of Ossian, a collection of which was always present in the Emperor's pocket.

The Scandinavian interest in the Viking world and in the poems of Ossian are essentially two sides of the same coin, but not unexpectedly the latter took some time to reach Scandinavian readers. The first relatively complete translations in both Danish and Swedish were not published until the early 1790s (Christensen 1999, 85 and Christiansen 1944, 12), but by this time the Norwegian-Danish writer and civil servant Christen Pram had already published the drama *Frode og Fingal* (Frode and Fingal, 1790), which is interesting precisely because Pram, according to his own preface, has “with few alterations and some imagination used Saxo's and Ossian's stories, spliced into one, as a basis for the present drama” (Pram 1790, no pag.).<sup>43</sup> This mixing of sources, in other words, bridges the gap between the ancient worlds of Britain and Scandinavia, reflecting the northernists' dream of a common culture around the North Sea that would be comparable in quantity as well as quality to that of the South, with the North Sea itself as a new *Mare Nostrum*. Steffens, during a journey in Norway in 1794, is similarly reminded of Ossian during an encounter with the sublime Norwegian landscape: “Ossian! I am imbued with your spirit. The frightening winds rush among the half-dead glaciers, blending their noise with the thunderous river. Pouring rain had swelled its waters, and frothing they plunge down the steep, dark precipices” (quoted in Norum 1994, 24).<sup>44</sup>

In the very same year, Nicolai Abildgaard, who as a painter had pioneered the Ossian motif in the 1780s, finished two new works, *Fingal Presents His Weapons to Oscar* and *The Ghost of Culmin* (ca. 1794), and in 1796 his Danish-German pupil and colleague Asmus Jacob Carstens (1754–98), who had been working on Ossian for several years, painted *Fingal and the Spirit of Loda* in Rome (Murdo Macdonald in Gaskill ed. 2004, 399). It is an interesting paradox that precisely here in Rome, in the capital of Mediterranean culture and history, Carstens, together with other

<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the rehabilitation of King Carl XII, see Stenroth 2005, 71–100.

<sup>43</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

<sup>44</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.



artists from northern Europe, were exploring themes and motifs from their own past and their own cultural backyard.

One of these artists was Josef Anton Koch (1768–1839), a Tyrolean painter who under Carstens's influence made a large number of Ossian illustrations, including the oil painting *Moon Landscape with Three Ossianic Heroes beside a Fire* (1800) (Allen and Allen 1999, 174), and several drawings, intended for a fully illustrated version of the poems, which never materialized (Christensen 1972, 16–18). Koch, however, was not the only artist at the time who dreamt of an illustrated edition of Ossian. In 1804, Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810), who in 1799 had been Abildgaard's pupil in Copenhagen and who together with Caspar David Friedrich is now regarded as the greatest representative of early Romantic art in Germany (Mitchell 1977, 1), made an elaborate plan for more than a hundred illustrations. Eventually, he produced only twelve, but in these he went beyond Carstens and Koch; in his eagerness to create a northern mythology, he succeeded in “creating northern heroes in a northern language” (Okun 1967, 344), something which his colleagues had only partly achieved. It is perhaps relevant, in this context, to mention that Runge was a close friend of Steffens, who in his memoirs writes extensively about him (Møller 1948, 126), and who may well have contributed to his preoccupation with the genuinely northern atmosphere in his Ossian illustrations.

The continuing interest in Ossian in Denmark was further confirmed by the new and excellent two-volume translation from 1807–9 by the theological student and later well-known writer Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848), which was rushed through the press because of rumours that another translation was under way (Christensen 1972, 12). It is most likely Blicher's version that a few years later brought the Ossian fever to Norway. Here, before he was twenty years old, the poet Henrik Wergeland (1808–45) adopted “Siful Sifadda” as a pseudonym for his farces, a name inspired by Cuchullin's horse, Sifadda or Sulin-Sifadda, and in his tragedy *Sinclairs Død* (Sinclair's Death, 1828), about the three-hundred-strong Scottish army that invaded Norway in 1612, had Lady Sinclair sing songs from Ossian for her husband (Christiansen 1944, 6).

Just as the interest in the Ossian poems was a phenomenon that encompassed Britain, Germany and Scandinavia, so was the closely related interest in folk culture. The examples of figures like Macpherson, Scott, Herder, von Arnim and Brentano almost immediately also had an impact in Scandinavia. In Sweden, the first effort was made around 1810 by Leonhard Fredrik Rääf (1786–1872), who together with two cousins collected folk songs in Östergötland, though their publication was delayed (Stenroth 2005, 122–23). As a result, the first published collection – *Svenska folk-visor från forntiden* (Swedish Folk Ballads from the Past) – appeared four years later, the result of a collaboration between Erik Gustaf

Geijer and the pastor and historian Arvid August Afzelius (1785–1871). Altogether they produced three volumes of ballads between 1814 and 1818.

In Denmark, Grimm's folk tales similarly spurred on the writer and art historian Just Mathias Thiele (1795–1874), who in 1817 published *Prøver af Danske Folkesagn* (Examples of Danish Folk Tales), partly based on manuscripts and printed texts in the Royal Library, where he worked, and partly on tales he himself had collected in Sjælland. The book's success inspired Thiele to make a more extensive trip among Danish farmers, which resulted in the important four-volume work *Danske Folkesagn* (Danish Folk Tales, 1818–23) (Bricka ed. 1887–1905, *s.v.* "Thiele, Just Mathias"). An example of the way in which folk culture was slowly entering the general cultural scene, even as far away from the major centres as Norway, is the *Singspiel* or musical comedy *Fjelleventyret* (The Mountain Tale), first performed in Christiania (Oslo) in 1825. Both the composer, Waldemar Thrane (1790–1828) and the librettist Henrik Anker Bjerregaard (1792–1842) were clearly inspired by the new fashion. Thrane, in particular, made direct use of elements from Norwegian folk music, thus anticipating the later contributions of Edvard Grieg and others.

By 1830, Europe as a whole was entering a period of radical modernisation and industrialisation, but in the North, in particular, there was an enormous difference between the technologically advanced Britain, on the one hand, and some of the poorest and least developed countries, like Norway and Finland, on the other. In the fifty-year period that follows, this contrast is visible in the fact that cultural and social currents choose rather different, and sometimes conflicting, paths, reflecting perhaps fundamentally contradictory forces within modernity itself.

## 5. The Northern Heyday: 1830–1880

### *Tipping the Scales*

In Europe, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a decisive change in the relative strength of North and South, confirming a long-term trend that had been visible for a hundred years, and that had accelerated since the fall of Bonaparte. Great Britain was clearly the main driving force behind this development, but by no means the only one. Such key statistical indicators as population growth and GDP show an unquestionable strengthening in several of the northern nations. A comparison between, for instance, Britain, Germany and the Nordic countries, on the one hand, and France, Spain and Italy, on the other, shows that in 1830, the population of the former group was significantly lower than that of the latter, i.e. 58 vs. 67 million.<sup>1</sup> By 1880, the balance had shifted decisively in favour of the North, with 90 vs. 82 million.

With regard to GDP, the trend is even more explicit. Available estimates from 1820 show that the above group of northern countries together had a GDP of approximately 67 billion dollars, as compared to 69 billion for the southern countries. In 1870, the GDP of the South had risen to 132 billion (a 91 percent increase), but that of the North to 187 billion (179 percent increase).<sup>2</sup> During the 1830–1880 period, the Russian population similarly grew from 56 to 98 million, representing by far the biggest nation in the West, whereas the United States was rapidly climbing from only 13 to 50 million, and Canada from 1 to 4 million (“Population Statistics”, 2006). Correspondingly, the US GDP rose from 12 billion dollars in 1820 to a spectacular 98 billion dollars in 1870, practically catching up with Britain’s 100 billion at the same time.

The figures reveal a period in which the countries of the North experienced a boom-like growth compared to those of the South. Britain, in particular, exhibited all the characteristics that, at the beginning of the previous chapter, were seen as related to the French Revolution: rationality,

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following population figures for European countries are taken from Mitchell 1992.

<sup>2</sup> This and other figures on GDP are taken from Angus Maddison’s *Contours of the World Economy, 1–2003 AD* (OUP, 2007), as listed in *Wikipedia*, s.v. “List of regions by past GDP (PPP)”. The dollar value is in 1990 equivalents.

science, technology, progress, urbanity, industry, and even perfectibility. Queen Victoria's reign, which began in 1837, witnessed a transformation that exceeded the most naive expectations, in combination with a political stability in the sharpest possible contrast to the generation leading up to Waterloo. Germany and the United States, too, were very much on the rise and destined for a similar development. The revolutionary ideals of freedom, furthermore, of democracy and national independence had not been forgotten. Thus there was not only a constant pressure on traditional and often undemocratic governments and institutions, and a demand for a further democratisation, specifically transfer of power from the aristocracy to the middle classes; there was also an increasing focus on an ideal with strong eighteenth-century roots, of regarding the nation state as the fundamental political unit.

Nationalism and democratisation were really two sides of the same coin. Nationalism by its very nature drew attention to the cultural uniqueness of the geographical region that either was or intended to become a nation. This cultural uniqueness was not primarily associated with the traditional and elitist culture of learning, which was precisely supra-national, with a common anchorage in Mediterranean Antiquity, and closely linked to the nearly two-thousand-year-old tradition of Latin as a pan-European *lingua franca*. The structure of the equally old religious institution of the Catholic Church similarly ignored national boundaries. A nation's cultural uniqueness was rather to be found, as Herder and others had argued, in the *Volk*, among the common people, who until recently had not even been granted the privilege of possessing anything worthy of attention. This elevation of the culture of common people had in itself more of a democratising effect than the series of electoral and economic reforms that took place simultaneously. It may not have provided the masses with improved material conditions, but it did provide them with a sense of cultural dignity that was truly historic. It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that this represents a factor that has been underestimated by historians with a fundamentally materialistic approach to social change.

The nineteenth century has been called the century of the middle class, and what this middle-class culture set out to do, and especially so in the Protestant North, was to graft on to the old, elitist culture, an alternative culture, namely that of the people and that of the specific nation. Admittedly, this attempt had been long in the making, but so far it had been conducted mostly by enthusiasts who found themselves more on the fringes than within the cultural Establishment. This now changed; the indigenous culture – or cultures – of the North was now increasingly institutionalised and brought within the sphere of governments and other public institutions, and was thus brought into the service of the nation. It was, in short, instrumentalised in an attempt to build a national identity and exhibit a national mettle that might enable successful competition

with the neighbours. The process resulted in a group of strangely hybrid national cultures, all of which showed progressive as well as reactionary features, and all of which had a strong concept of a common northern denominator, but which still developed their own distinct characteristics.

With the benefit of hindsight, it was an unfortunate time in which to develop ideals that further underlined the need for strong, competitive nation states. Populations were rapidly rising; there was a steadily growing need for raw materials to feed an expanding industrial system; and the areas of unclaimed territories around the world were quickly dwindling. The strongest indication of the latter was the intense race among the European nations for colonies. The scene, in other words, was already set for tensions and hostilities that would reach a terrible climax in the following century. In such a context, the wars of the mid-1800s involving the northern nations were like volcanic tremors before the eruption. One example, which reveals a strong element of nationalism, is the dispute between Denmark, on the one hand, and the German states of Prussia and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, on the other. Here, well before the unification of Germany, Pan-German arguments had been employed for some time on the German side. Jacob Grimm, for instance, had argued that Jutland was historically German, giving an unpleasant foretaste of a *Lebensraum* philosophy. The dispute resulted in two wars, the First and the Second Schleswig War (1848–51 and 1864), which ended with the inclusion of Schleswig and Holstein into Prussia, and eventually into the German Empire.

Thus, the northern countries had different reasons for consolidating their positions through various nationalist programmes. Denmark had to come to terms with a wholly new reality and a considerable reduction in both land and population. Britain, at the peak of its power, was struggling, as had become apparent in the Crimean War (1853–56), to hold the empire together and retain its influence as the world's only superpower. Norway, Sweden and Finland were in different ways either coming to terms with the reshuffle after the Napoleonic Wars or nursing dreams of further steps towards full independence. And on the other side of the Atlantic, the United States went through a bloody civil war, which eventually saved the union. Most radically, however, Germany was finally transformed, with the unification of 1871, from being a centuries-old conglomerate of scattered and largely uncoordinated principalities to become a massive power, with more than 40 million people (as opposed to 26 million in Britain) and a land mass of 540,000 km<sup>2</sup>, twice that of Britain.

In this context, ideas about and a focus specifically concerned with the North became deeply ingrained in the struggle for retaining a sense of common identity as well as for underlining a national uniqueness. And there was hardly a northern dimension that was more self-evident than the polar regions. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that such countries as

Germany and the United States, which had hitherto played second fiddle in the exploration of the icy wastes, now entered the race with full force; the image of the ancient heroes, who conquered new land with dragon-like ships that stunned their victims, melted together with the modern heroes, whose conquest was spearheaded by superior science, technology and – as before – courage. For the time being, the values and the ideals of the past fitted nicely with those of the present.

### ***The Northwest Passage, at Last?***

In the years after Waterloo, Britain had made a sustained effort to break through to the Pacific via the Northwest Passage. One of the driving forces had been the enthusiasm and conviction of Sir John Barrow that the icy labyrinth was sooner or later bound to reveal a navigable waterway that would bring undreamt-of advantages to the country that could claim it as its own. After the major expeditions of the 1820s, however, there was, as had happened on several occasions in the past, a certain lapse in the British interest in what was regarded as the most promising highway to the East. There was, it is true, still a trickle of expedition accounts from such experienced old-timers as Frederick Beechey, William Parry and George Back, but it is perhaps significant that this was also the time of the appearance of the first major work on the Arctic from the other side of the Atlantic.

In 1831, William Joseph Snelling (1804–48), a Boston-born social critic and writer of down-to-earth short stories from the American Frontier, published the five-hundred-page account *The Polar Regions of the Western Continent Explored*, with the extensive subtitle *Embracing a Geographical Account of Iceland, Greenland, the Islands of the Frozen Sea, and the Northern Parts of the American Continent*. Snelling's is a comprehensive work, recapitulating the history of arctic exploration, discussing in considerable detail the most recent expeditions, and providing his American audience with "a condensed account of what is known of the northern regions of the new world" (Snelling 1831, Preface, no pag.). His purpose is primarily pedagogical, not least in terms of demonstrating the financial significance of whaling, but the work is also a strong indication of the extent to which the United States from this period onwards would be showing a steadily increasing interest in the polar regions. Fifty years after independence and very much aware of his country's growing political significance, Snelling reveals a distinctly nationalist, or even imperialist, approach to the Far North, drawing it into the American sphere of influence. In the very first paragraph, he even goes so far as to lay a certain claim on a country as distant as Iceland: "Lying as it does, much nearer to Greenland than to

any part of Europe, it is without doubt a natural appendage of America. It is also attached to the American Continent by Malte Brun, the highest geographical authority of the present day” (*ibid.*, 1).<sup>3</sup> One of the indications of America’s burgeoning awareness of the need to combine science and exploration, especially in the waters around the American continent, was the founding in 1830 of the Depot of Charts and Instruments, which twelve years later was renamed the United States Naval Observatory (Mulvaney 2001, 55).

Britain, however, had in no way quitted the race for the Northwest Passage, and had no intention of letting its former colony run away with the prize. After literally centuries of efforts, made at huge financial and human cost, Britain simply – though paradoxically – could not afford *not* to make yet another attempt. Furthermore, the discoveries of the 1820s, in combination with John Ross’s report on his heroic return after four years in the ice, had established more or less beyond doubt that the coast, so to speak, was clear. All that was needed was to convert the general optimism into an expedition that could safely and with certainty bring the project to a happy conclusion. It was not to be an expedition characterised by unpredictable youth and risk-taking; the eighty-year-old Sir John Barrow, who had spent precisely half of those years as the Second Secretary of the Admiralty, and who personally must have seen this as his last chance of a triumphant exit, chose a national hero who was also somewhat advanced in years, considering the task at hand. Sir John Franklin, approaching sixty, had spent several years as Lieutenant Governor of present-day Tasmania, but still felt convinced he had something to offer.

There is an unpleasant touch of the *Titanic* about what was tacitly assumed to become Barrow’s, Franklin’s and Britain’s crowning achievement. The expedition was regarded as “little more than routine”, and was calculated to take no more than a year, but to remove any uncertainty, the ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*, were provisioned for three years, with every modern convenience for the 129-men crew, including tinned food, produced according to the latest principles, a library of nearly 3,000 books (Officer and Page 2001, 84–85), and not least, “auxiliary steam power in the form of two railway engines, with screw propellers that could be raised when they were not in use” (Hayes 2003, 84). John Ross’s painful experience with steam a decade and a half before had apparently been forgotten. The importance of arctic experience was also largely ignored: only two of the officers, in addition to Franklin, could boast of first-hand contact with the ice (Fleming 2001, 372).<sup>4</sup> But “[t]he name of Franklin

<sup>3</sup> Conrad Malte-Brun (1775–1826) was a controversial Danish-French poet and geographer, who in France produced major cartographical works. Snelling means, presumably, that Iceland, despite being an island, is territorially connected westwards to America rather than eastwards to Europe.

<sup>4</sup> Another source claims the number was seven (Savours 1999, 178).

alone”, as the President of the Royal Geographical Society put it, “is, indeed, a national guarantee” (Savours 1999, 183).

On 19 May 1845, the ships sailed from London, and then disappeared, except for a brief observation of them in Baffin Bay two months later, into Lancaster Sound and into the white void. Because of John Ross’s recent and successful stay of four years in the ice, however, Britain and the world calmly accepted that the voyage might take some time. Thus, in the steady flow of literature about the Arctic from the period, it is not surprising to find that Charles Tomlinson’s book from the following year, *Winter in the Arctic Regions*, confidently refers to the Franklin expedition. Having summarised, like so many writers before him, the history of arctic exploration and the many discouragements, he adds that

the prosecution of Arctic discovery is not abandoned. An expedition was fitted out by Government [*sic*] about a year ago, and placed under the command of the veteran Arctic explorer, Captain Franklin, who is at this very time wintering in the frozen regions. While waiting the results of his exertions, let us consider what are the dangers and difficulties to which the British seaman is exposed while enduring the severities of an Arctic winter. (Tomlinson 1846, 11–12)

Little did Tomlinson and his readers know that now, not much more than a year after departure, Franklin was already a victim of the very dangers the author was about to describe. Having turned south into Peel Sound, on the eastern side of the Prince of Wales Island, he had reached the Victoria Strait, with King William Island to the south-east. Here, in the only and relatively limited part of the Northwest Passage as yet uncharted, the gates of ice closed behind him, and the horror began.

Back in Britain, concerns were mounting, but only slowly, and the first, three-pronged search expedition was not dispatched until the spring of 1848, from the Bering Strait in the west, from Lancaster Sound in the east, and on land, between the Mackenzie and the Coppermine Rivers. None of them found the slightest trace of Franklin. As it later emerged, by this time Franklin and several of his crew had been dead for more than a year, while the rest – 105 men – had abandoned ship and set out on their fatal journey south towards the mainland, leaving behind them “[a] trail of skeletons, equipment and personal belongings” (McGhee 2005, 230).

Barrow, who had retired in the year of Franklin’s departure, drew his last breath in November 1848, just in time to avoid the first undeniably worrying news from the western front. He was replaced by his son, John Barrow Jr., who, besides being his father’s son, had qualified for the job by travelling extensively in Russia and the Nordic countries, including Iceland, in the mid-1830s. At the same time, Lady Franklin was already busy pushing the Admiralty into a more whole-hearted effort, and appealing to heads of state, politicians and – through letters to the press – the man in the street for additional funding. In her husband’s absence, she ceaselessly and energetically kept him in the limelight and effectively coordinated the



non-official investigation into the mystery of his disappearance, even to the point of seeking assistance from spiritualists (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Franklin, Jane”).

The search for Franklin eventually turned into a more than twenty-year-long national nightmare that bound up huge resources and put Britain on the back foot in relation to other nations with regard to arctic research. Altogether, in the course of this period around forty expeditions penetrated the icy wastes from all imaginable vantage points, and the large majority of them were British (Savours 1999, 190). Actual news of Franklin’s fate was long in coming and only trickled slowly back to London – the first no earlier than 1850, five years after his triumphant departure. And the news did not give reason for optimism. Franklin’s first winter quarters, found on Beechey Island in Barrow Strait, revealed three graves, which in the 1980s would provide scientific evidence that from the very beginning of the expedition the crew had been suffering from lead poisoning from the tinned food.<sup>5</sup>

Some new information was obviously gathered during the search; sailing from Bering Strait, Robert McClure (1807–73) has some claim to being the first to penetrate the Northwest Passage, although it took four years and involved different ships and a march along Melville Sound to Beechey Island (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “McClure, Robert”). Furthermore, areas to the north of Barrow Strait were charted, as the search expeditions did not know which direction Franklin had chosen from his first winter quarters. Finally, the remaining coastline of the North-American continent to the east of the Coppermine River, that is the narrow channel to the south of Victoria Island, was charted sufficiently to prove that there actually was a navigable waterway, ice conditions permitting, between east and west.

The last, and the largest, search expedition funded by the British government was that of Sir Edward Belcher (1799–1877) from 1852 to 1854, with five ships and 222 men. Belcher was uniformly disliked by his subordinates; he searched in an area to the north of Barrow Strait, actually in the opposite direction to that in which Franklin had sailed; he had to spend two winters locked in the ice, largely because he refused to take advice from a more experienced colleague; and he eventually left four ships behind in order to avoid another winter in the Arctic. The expedition “stands proud as the most futile and ill-managed on record” (Fleming 2001, 388), and thus provides a fitting conclusion to almost a decade of national grief and humiliation, at a time when Britain was bogged down in the Crimean War. It is in this context that a report by the Hudson Bay surgeon and explorer John Rae was made public by the Admiralty, containing the first concrete evidence of the Franklin expedition’s tragic

<sup>5</sup> The scandalous story of how the Navy was hoodwinked by the producer, Stephan Goldner, who essentially provided the expedition with a time bomb, has only recently come to light (ref. Cookman 2000, 108–34).

fate; and to make matters worse, it also contained the first and highly unwelcome suggestions of cannibalism among the dying crew.

It is against the same bleak background of national humiliation that Charles Dickens, soon after the publication of the report produced a lengthy two-part response, "The Lost Arctic Voyagers", in *Household Words* in the autumn of 1854. In the very first paragraphs of the article Dickens asserts "that there is no reason whatever to believe" that "picked English seamen of the first class" ever could or would succumb to such demeaning acts ("Victorian Web", 2012). Thus, displaying not just an almost desperate desire to believe but also a breathtaking ignorance of the realities of polar exploration, Dickens gave voice to the fast-fading hopes of the entire nation.

Lady Franklin, in the meantime, ceaselessly continued to raise funds for yet another search expedition, and in 1857, soon after a final rejection from the government, the Irishman Leopold McClintock set off in the schooner the *Fox*. On his return in September 1859, he had not only mapped King William Island and areas around it, but had also found skeletons and relics, enabling him to present a relatively complete picture of the tragedy (Hayes 2003, 104).

Although after so many years there was now very little realistic hope of finding survivors from the Franklin expedition, not everyone had given up. Some, like the American Charles Francis Hall, who will be discussed in more detail later, were even firmly convinced that Franklin might still be found. Between 1864 and 1869, he searched the area between Repulse Bay, at the northern end of Hudson Bay, and King William Island. At Boothia Peninsula, he finally obtained contact with Inuits who sold him various objects, including a spoon bearing Franklin's initials, and on King William Island he also found bones and graves that supported Rae's earlier report about cannibalism (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Hall, Charles Francis"). The final search for an answer to the Franklin mystery then took place in 1878, when the American Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka combed King William Island, collecting further evidence that confirmed Rae's and Hall's findings.

### ***For the Pole***

Not surprisingly, by about 1860 the Northwest Passage had lost much of its lure, and instead the focus shifted to the equally old and well-tried alternative of the North Pole itself. Traditionally, these expeditions had been attempted either via Svalbard or along the west coast of Greenland. The latter now emerged as a golden opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, and the first to attempt it during the Franklin search was Captain Edward Augustus Inglefield (1820–94), who was somewhat loosely

attached to the Belcher expedition. In the summer of 1852, apparently looking for Franklin, he sailed to the northern end of Baffin Bay and through Smith Sound into Nares Strait, beyond 78° N, before being stopped by the ice (*ibid.*, 125). The unsuccessful search for Franklin was not the only reason for a renewed interest in the North Pole. The old idea of a temperate and ice-free polar sea had been given new impetus by a paper published in 1852 by the young German geographer August Petermann (1822–78), who three years later would start the important journal *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* (Murphy 2002, 18).

It was perhaps an early sign of a certain British sense of fatigue that it was now Germany and the US that seemed to be taking the initiative in arctic exploration. In 1851, a young American doctor, Elisha Kent Kane (1820–57), had returned from the First Grinnell Expedition, led by Edwin De Haven, which was the result of Lady Franklin's appeal for American help to find her husband. The expedition, on which Kane had served as surgeon, did not contribute significantly to the search, but it had given him a strong urge for exploration, and with a firm faith in the open polar sea, he was convinced, like Inglefield before him, that he could both find Franklin and reach the Pole. Choosing the same route as the Briton – up through Smith Sound – Kent obtained funding from the New York merchant Henry Grinnell, who had paid for the previous expedition, the financier George Peabody, and the U.S. Naval Department (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Kane, Elisha Kent”). Departing from New York in May 1853, Kane made the most of the summer, and reached marginally north of Inglefield's northernmost position before becoming beset in the ice. From this base, he then explored further north-east during the winter, discovering the large basin that was later named after him, and reaching almost 80° N (Holland ed. 1999, 53). The summer of 1854 brought no release from the ice, however, and he was forced to spend another winter, during which both sides of the basin were charted, but he was only able to go marginally beyond 80° N. By now the expedition was dangerously low on food and fuel, they were suffering from scurvy, members of the crew were dying, and morale was low. Having abandoned the ship, they finally managed, with a superhuman effort, to travel nearly 2,000 km on sledges and in boats to reach the Greenland town of Upernavik at about 73° N in August 1855 (Hayes 2003, 127).

Despite being, at times, a catastrophic leader of men, and despite having discovered neither Franklin nor the North Pole, on his return to New York in October, Kane was not only given a hero's welcome. In his book *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (2006), Michael F. Robinson also presents the extraordinary story of how Kane made a significant contribution to including the Arctic and the North into American culture. He was not quite alone; being “men of consequence”, arctic explorers generally “captured the attention of the nation's scientific

and political elite and shaped ideas and institutions of geography at a time when it dominated American science” (Robinson 2006, 2). Arctic exploration became intimately interwoven with nationalism and nation-building, and Kane was probably the most subtle architect behind this trend. He had a unique talent for reaching out to the masses; he was a brilliant speaker and an equally brilliant writer, and he managed to transform the dubious idea of the open polar sea into a sensational news item that caught the imagination of the nation. He had already laid a solid foundation with extensive lecture tours after the first Grinnell expedition, but with his accounts from both expeditions, published in 1854 and 1856 respectively, Kane became a national celebrity.

At a time when America was rapidly rising in the world, and at a time when major parts of the country had still not been explored and populated, Kane effectively added a frontier in the north to that in the west. Furthermore, though Canada was under British jurisdiction, its status was still vague; the Dominion of Canada was not formed until 1867 – incidentally the same year that the United States purchased Alaska from Russia – and Kane’s exploration of the American Arctic in the 1850s was therefore a logical activity in a nation with a deep-set instinct for territorial conquest. At a time when relations with Britain were still strained, it was also a perfect way of underlining the growing strength and independence of the “new” continent in relation to the old. Finally, as the territories in question were, from the white man’s perspective, an empty landscape, the battle for conquest was free from the drawbacks of war, and could more easily be presented as a common race for science and progress. Against this background, Kane emerged as a hero of his time, and when he died in February 1857, only thirty-seven years old, he was apotheosised by the entire nation. According to Robinson,

he was one of the most celebrated men in America. [...] His extraordinary funeral cortège, which took three weeks and passed through six states, offers some measure of his popularity. [...] Along the way, it made dozens of stops for local procession and memorials. In New Orleans, the mayor and a military company escorted his casket to City Hall, where he lay in state. [...] Before burial, his body lay in state in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, where thousands paid their respects over the course of three days [...] Only Abraham Lincoln’s funeral cortège, which made its way across the country eight years later, would prove more spectacular. (*Ibid.*, 31–32)

The United States continued its pressure on the Pole for another decade, but just as the Crimean War had dominated the mid-50s for the British, the Civil War would come to dominate the 60s for the Americans. Also, it was difficult to follow Kane’s impressive act. Still, his surgeon on the Second Grinnell Expedition, Isaac Israel Hayes (1832–81), was as firm a believer in the open polar sea as Kane, who claimed to have seen it with his own eyes from Kane Basin, and in the years following Kane’s death Hayes rode on the wave of the former’s popularity, gathering support for another attack on the Pole. The expedition starting in 1860, also destined

for Smith Sound, was generally a failure. Hayes managed to sledge across Smith Sound and travel north along the coast of Ellesmere Island, where he claimed to have reached 81° 35' N and to have seen both the open polar sea and the northern tip of Greenland, but the claim is surrounded by considerable uncertainty (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Hayes, Isaac"). On his return in 1861, furthermore, the United States was at war with itself, and all arctic endeavours came to a halt.

Nevertheless, the more remote and unapproachable it seemed, the more the North Pole continued to exert an irresistible attraction on adventurers of the ice, and if the British had left a vacuum after their huge efforts to find Franklin, it was not only filled by Americans. As part of the scramble for colonies, trade routes and generally a role in the world, Germany also wanted a part in the act. Here, too, in other words, nationalism played a key role in placing arctic exploration on the political agenda. The main German figure on this stage was August Petermann, who since the early 1850s had argued for the existence of an open polar sea. As indicated already, he was not alone; to some extent, the theory had acquired a respectable scientific standing.

The argument concerned from what vantage point the open sea might most successfully be reached, and this is where Petermann entered into a dispute with a veteran British polar explorer, Sherard Osborn, who in a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society in 1865 both strongly encouraged a renewed British effort for the Pole and powerfully recommended Kane's route through Smith Sound (Holland ed. 1999, 61–2). Petermann was equally adamant that the only feasible route was via Svalbard. The dispute very quickly left behind the sober, rational vocabulary of science, and took on a nationalist flavour that did not promise well for the future. According to David Thomas Murphy, there was no doubt that Petermann saw the race for the North Pole as directly connected with national ambitions:

The spectacle of united German armies battling foreigners roused ancient dreams of German nationhood, and Petermann exploited the popular feeling that the Germans, as one of the great cultural peoples of Europe, had both a right and an obligation to take part in the general European work of exploration. Patriotic duty, he argued, demanded German exploration: "What a triumph for Germany and the German navy, if the seas and lands beyond 80° north latitude received a *German* nomenclature, if a *German* mariner first advanced there, if a *German* keel first furrowed the floods of the North Pole!" (Murphy 2002, 20)

From the British side, Petermann was accused of throwing spanners into the works of the British, and pursuing, according to *The Times*, "cheap honours for his politically disrupted country" (quoted in Holland ed. 1999, 63). Then, while the British were dragging their heels, the first German polar expedition was made ready.

The first attempt was not promising; the ship suffered engine failure on the way down the river Elbe (Murphy 2002, 23), but in 1868 a

scientific expedition of twelve led by Karl Koldewey (1837–1908) sailed to the Greenland Sea, between Greenland and Svalbard, in order to find the opening in the ice that, according to Petermann, would be created by the warm waters from the Gulf Stream (Hayes 2003, 129). Though reaching slightly beyond 80° N immediately north-west of Svalbard, the Koldewey expedition did little more than repeat the achievement of numerous former expeditions; it seemed as if the Arctic Ocean had formed a line of impenetrable defences at this particular latitude, and denied everyone access to its secrets. When Koldewey returned on a second expedition the next summer, now with two ships, the Greenland Sea was even less accommodating. The ships became separated as they approached Greenland, and neither of them reached beyond 77° N before being stopped by the ice. Koldewey's ship, *Germania*, managed to inspect the Greenland coast from Cape Bismarck and southwards, whereas the other ship, *Hansa*, suffered a tortuous winter before being destroyed by the ice, and the crew battled their way down the east coast of Greenland in small boats before being saved.

Although the first serious German attempt for the Pole resulted in some new information about the Greenland coast, it came – like numerous former attempts – far short of fulfilling its ambition. But it was now almost as if some collective obsession had taken hold of the northern nations, and with the Germans pulling out for the time being, the Americans were back in the ring, this time surprisingly with a man without naval or scientific credentials. But Charles Francis Hall (1821–71) had more or less on his own initiative spent five years in the late 1860s looking for evidence of Franklin's fate, and before then he had also rediscovered, on the southern part of Baffin Island, the remnants of Martin Frobisher's desperately optimistic gold-mining activity from the late sixteenth century. Furthermore, as opposed to the large majority of his explorer predecessors, he had discovered the necessity of living like and with the native Inuit in order to survive and travel in the Arctic. Finally, to make the picture complete, "he came to believe that he had been called north by God" (Officer and Page 2001, 111), thus transferring the doctrine of America's Manifest Destiny to the Arctic.

Now, at the beginning of the 1870s, with the United States recovering from the blood-letting of the Civil War, Hall decided to go for the big prize. Having secured funding both from Congress and the ever-generous Henry Grinnell, he sailed in the *Polaris* from New London, Connecticut, in July 1871. Via Upernavik in Greenland he went straight for Smith Sound, where good ice conditions allowed him to push through Kane Basin and into the northernmost channel before the Arctic Ocean, Robeson Channel, finally reaching a record 82° 11' N before the winter set in (Hayes 2003, 132). It was a spectacular beginning; as temperatures fell, he was positioned virtually on the threshold of what he more or less

assumed was a temperate polar sea, waiting to be conquered the following spring. But it was too good to be true; tension was already high between Hall and the team of scientists on board, and on 24 October the situation quickly escalated:

After returning from a short trek up the Greenland coast, Hall drank a cup of coffee and immediately suffered a violent seizure. The suddenness of the attack led him to believe that he might have poisoned [*sic*] by one of the crew. For a week his condition deteriorated, and he became delirious. After a short recovery, Hall lapsed into a coma and died 8 November 1871. (Robinson 2006, 79)

When the ice finally broke up late the next summer, new drama ensued.<sup>6</sup> Drifting south together with the enormous masses of ice from the north, *Polaris* came under imminent threat, but as the ship was being evacuated, the ice suddenly broke up, leaving more than half of the crew with parts of the stores on the ice, just as the ship, with the rest of the crew, was rapidly released and carried away. After spending another winter on board *Polaris*, the fourteen members of the crew set out in open boats for the whaling grounds in Baffin Bay, and were rescued three weeks later. For the remaining nineteen, including Inuit women and children, the situation was considerably more dramatic. Stuck on a large but deteriorating ice floe, they spent nine months, surviving on seals and birds caught by two of the Inuit, drifting nearly 2,000 km down Baffin Bay to the southern coast of Labrador, where they were brought to safety at the end of April 1873.

Considering the intensity in the search for the North Pole during this period, it is hardly surprising that Britain now, having recovered from the Franklin ordeal, again came to the fore. Despite the disastrous experience of the Hall expedition, the British position was still firmly in favour of the route via Smith Sound. Also, the Admiralty paid no heed whatsoever to Hall's conclusions regarding the necessity of using dogs. On the contrary, the new expedition was to be led by George Strong Nares (1831–1915), an old arctic veteran from the Franklin days and a strong believer in man-hauled sledges (Hayes 2003, 133). The plan, in other words, was simple: sail as far north as the ice permitted, and walk the rest.

Again, there was a promising start. The summer of 1875 allowed the two ships, *Discovery* and *Alert*, to reach a record latitude of 82° 28' N, practically entering the Arctic Ocean (Holland ed. 1999, 76), enabling the hauling parties, led by Albert Hastings Markham (1841–1918), to set off for the Pole as soon as the winter eased its grip. But as had happened before, the dream of a smooth and pleasant plane – a kind of Platonic polar landscape – was contradicted by a rather different reality, and the dream turned into a nightmare. After about a month in the spring of 1876, the explorers had lost one man, were suffering from scurvy, and had only travelled 117 km from the ship. By the time they returned to the base

<sup>6</sup> The following summary is indebted to Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Hall, Charles Francis" and Holland ed. 1999, 60.

a month later, saved in the nick of time by a rescue party, they had travelled 800 km (Hayes 2003, 134). Britain thus failed to re-establish its position as the leading power in arctic research, and became instead one of several countries competing for a trophy that was increasingly unlikely to offer major strategic or material rewards.

This, however, did not prevent the race from continuing, and before the first major modern milestone in polar research – the International Polar Year of 1882–83 – became a reality, the United States would make yet another attempt to reach the Pole. So far, the press had obviously shown a keen interest in polar exploration; it contained all the desired elements of drama, disaster and heroism to secure high sales. The next step was for newspapers to contribute to the funding of expeditions, not least to obtain exclusive rights to the news. In 1879, the proprietor of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, had become intrigued by August Petermann's now modified theory, which claimed that the Bering Strait would provide the most appropriate entrance to the Pole, as the Bering Sea contained a warm current, a so-called "thermometric gateway" (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "De Long, George"). Petermann, who had committed suicide the previous year, had also believed that the Wrangel Island, to the north-west of the Bering Strait, was part of a long arm extending across the Arctic Ocean all the way from Greenland (Officer and Page 2001, 126).<sup>7</sup> The alleged open polar sea, in other words, had partly been replaced by an alleged arctic continent. Nevertheless, Bennett put the necessary money on the table, and one of his reporters on board the ship.

The expedition, led by George Washington De Long (1844–81) and with additional funding from the US Navy and the government, entered the ice in early September, never to be released. Caught in an iron claw of mammoth ridges, the ship was carried hither and thither, past Wrangel Island, which proved not to be part of a continent, and slowly and inexorably in a north-westerly direction. Finally, on 13 June 1881, at 77° N and 800 km from the nearest settlement at the Lena delta, the ship was ground to pieces and sank (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "De Long, George").

Though most of the vital equipment had been saved, the prospects were bleak, as later developments would prove. Setting out in three small boats, the thirty-three men soon split into separate groups, each going to its own fate. Altogether eleven men survived the terrible ordeal, making it to the mainland; twenty-two men died (Holland ed. 1999, 97). One of them was De Long, who, like Captain Scott thirty years later, wrote to the very end a diary that would eventually find its way back to civilisation. Thus the only man to gain from the tragedy was Bennett, who was able to squeeze many a headline out of the vanished expedition as well as the several search expeditions in its wake.

<sup>7</sup> Wrangel Island should not be confused with Wrangell Island (with two l's), which is situated in the Alaskan Panhandle.



The 1860s and 70s had witnessed an enormous effort to conquer the North Pole. Still, despite the many additions and corrections to the maps, and despite significant new insights into life and survival in the arctic regions, there remained vast areas of sea or land – essentially everything to the north of 82°N – that no white man had yet seen. By 1880, however, it was obvious to every nation involved in arctic research that it was only a matter of time before a new barrier would be broken, and that eventually the race would be won. But for the time being, it was as if a respite was needed, before the final push.

### *The Russian Route*

The extraordinary polar activity during the 1830–1880 period was by no means confined to the American continent or to the north-western corner of the Atlantic alone. For centuries, the Northwest and the Northeast Passage had retained a relatively similar status in terms of providing a promise – although so far a rather utopian one – of reaching the shores of the Pacific via a northern route. For the countries in northern Europe, there is no doubt that the former must have seemed like a more attractive alternative; despite Peter the Great's and Catherine the Great's westernisation of their country, and despite its status as a “northern” nation, Russia still very much appeared to be a different world.

By comparison, the ice desert of North America was felt somehow to have a European connection. Also, the Northeast Passage was undoubtedly an even longer route, with equally if not more demanding ice conditions. This had been one of the reasons why even Russians themselves had shown considerable interest in the Northwest Passage, as demonstrated by the Kotzebue expedition in 1815. On the other hand, the numerous rivers flowing to the north and into the Arctic Ocean contained – as Peter the Great had realised – a potential opening up of the enormous territories to trade, both with other parts of Russia and with the rest of the world. However, despite Russia's strengthened position after the Congress of Vienna, where the country, in addition to the acquisition of Finland in 1809, also acquired parts of Poland, it was lagging behind the other northern nations in terms of economic development. With significant military weaknesses coming to the surface in the Crimean War in the 1850s and with the retention of serfdom until 1861, Russia did not really possess the energy or the outward orientation necessary for an active involvement in the race for an arctic highway to the Pacific. This general lack of awareness with regard to the significance of the polar regions was made more than apparent with the so-called Alaska Purchase in 1867, when Tsar Alexander II sold Alaska – a territory of 1.5 million km<sup>2</sup> – to the

United States for \$7.2 million. It is not surprising, therefore, that during this period “Russian work in the North appeared plodding and mundane”, even with regard to the route that in its entirety ran along its own coast (McCannon 1998, 17).

As with the Northwest Passage, its eastern counterpart did not necessarily offer only one route. Would ice conditions, for instance, be more advantageous to the north of Novaya Zemlya than through the strait to the south? For a long time, there had also been considerable uncertainty about the east coast of the island, whether it might extend far into the Kara Sea; the first circumnavigation had not been completed until 1762 (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Novaya Zemlya”), and the second, performed by the Norwegian sealer and ice pilot Edvard H. Johannesen, not until 1870 (Drivenes and Jølle eds. 2006, 39).

Soon after this, a major expedition was launched by a new nation in arctic research – Austria-Hungary. Unlike most expeditions, this one had a relatively open set of instructions; the main objective was, as always, to find a route to the Pacific, but whether the voyage would go across the Pole or through the Northeast Passage, or somewhere in between, was not clearly stated (Hayes 2003, 118). Again, the philosophy behind it was indebted to August Petermann’s theory of a “thermometric gateway”, or more simply put, the assumption that somewhere along the rim of ice around the Arctic Sea there would be a navigable opening. The expedition, which was led by the two officers Karl Weyprecht (at sea) and Julius von Payer (on land), sailed from Bremerhaven in June 1872 in a 520-ton schooner with a 100-horsepower steam engine (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Payer, Julius von”). Having reached the northern tip of Novaya Zemlya, they turned east into the northern Kara Sea, but were soon caught in the pack ice, whereupon the ship started an erratic, eleven-month drift to the north, and then to the west, before approaching, at nearly 80° N, the uncharted archipelago that was given the unsurprising name of Franz Josef Land, to which Fridtjof Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen would return from the north some twenty years later.

Having charted several of the islands, the expedition had to abandon the ship, which was beyond hope of recovery, and start the exhaustive journey, pulling smaller boats on the ice, to the south and the open sea. With the loss of only one member of the crew, they managed to reach Novaya Zemlya in late August 1874, where two Russian ships were just about to go to the mainland for the winter. Less than a fortnight later, they reached Vardø, on the north-eastern extremity of Norway, and thanks to the efficiency of the recently introduced telegraph, the news of their arrival was spread to the rest of the world the following day (Schimanski and Spring 2007, 149). With the fate of the Franklin expedition in mind, it had long been assumed that the expedition was lost in the ice, never to be seen again, and this undoubtedly accounted to some extent for the

almost endless series of receptions which they were subjected on their long return journey from Vardø to Vienna. Apart from the discovery of Franz Josef Land, however, the Weyprecht and Payer expedition brought limited scientific results.

With the benefit of hindsight, it might be tempting to argue that the search in the nineteenth century for a northern route to the Pacific had become an end in itself, and that the original, primarily commercial, value of such an enterprise had been largely forgotten. After all, it was difficult, considering the climatic challenges, to imagine that either the Northwest or the Northeast Passage could ever become viable trade routes. Still, times were changing, and despite the remoteness of a place like Novaya Zemlya and the lack of permanent settlements before 1870, the region had provided hunting grounds for the Russians for centuries, and when Norwegian hunters arrived on the islands from 1869 onwards, it led to clashes and diplomatic manoeuvring between the two countries (Drivenes and Jølle eds. 2006, 33). Also, even at the beginning of the 1830–1880 period, the invention of steam had revolutionised the transport of goods on land as well as sea, and it was hardly unreasonable to expect that technological progress would one day remove the natural obstacles that were still preventing a more large-scale exploitation of the region.

In the 1860s, the Russian merchant Mikhail Sidorov had already attempted to open up trade routes connected with the Russian rivers flowing into the Arctic Ocean, but had not succeeded (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Northeast Passage”). Another man who saw both the technological and the commercial possibilities in the vast but inaccessible territories east of the Urals was the Englishman Joseph Wiggins (1832–1905). Having made a rapid career at sea, he had been the captain of the world’s second largest steam ship, the 4,000 ton *Victoria*, and in the mid-1870s, after encouraging reports from Norwegian fishermen about ice conditions along the coast, he sailed first to the Ob and then to the Yenisey Rivers (Stone 1994, 405–7). After several attempts, which included journeys deep inland, to Yeniseysk and St. Petersburg, Wiggins eventually succeeded in chartering a 650-ton steamer, which in 1878 successfully brought a cargo from Britain to the mouth of the Ob River and returned with a cargo of wheat, which had been transported downriver from further south. “This was the first Siberian produce to be transported to England via the Kara Sea route and vindicated all Wiggins’s optimism in the previous years” (*ibid.*, 407). Wiggins’s flawless voyage had a distinct and promising ring of the future, but the following year, merchants eager to profit from the new route sent five unsuitable vessels to the Ob estuary and failed to return with the 5,000 tons of Siberian produce that had been ordered. As a result, it would be another decade before Wiggins and others could again make use of parts of the Northeast Passage.

However, another man was already in the process of writing history,

by making the first crossing from northern Norway to the Bering Strait, thus being the first in the world to navigate one of the northern sea routes from the Atlantic to the Pacific. By this time, the Finno-Swedish scientist and explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld (1832–1901) was no novice in terms of arctic exploration. In 1868 he had achieved a farthest north (81° 42' N) during an expedition to the north-east of Svalbard; he had studied the interior of the Greenland ice cap; and in 1872–74, during a failed attempt to reach the North Pole from Sjuøyane (the Seven Islands) situated to the north of Svalbard, he had instead crossed and explored Nordaustlandet (North East Land), thus gaining significant experience (Arlov 2003, 193).

Then, in the summer of 1878, Nordenskiöld sailed with two ships, the *Vega* and the *Lena*, from Tromsø to the Yugor Strait south of Novaya Zemlya, where two cargo ships joined the expedition. Having crossed an ice-free Kara Sea, the two cargo ships parted from the others at the beginning of August and sailed up the Yenisey, whereupon the *Vega* and the *Lena* continued north-east, rounding the critical Taymyr Peninsula as the first ships ever to do so (Hayes 2003, 143). It was now late August; from the Lena delta, the *Lena* sailed up river to Yakutsk, while the *Vega* started on the last leg, making good progress and reaching the Chukotka Peninsula and virtually the Bering Strait in late September, but being stopped by the ice. It was an extraordinary feat: in little more than two months, the *Vega* had sailed a distance that, as the crow flies, is nearly 5,000 km, from the northern tip of Norway to the Pacific Ocean. All that now remained was to wait out the winter, enjoy a two-day sail down to the Bering Strait and the Pacific, and start on the twice-as-long return voyage via Japan, the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal back to Sweden. Despite the relative ease with which Nordenskiöld had conquered the Northeast Passage – at least compared to the innumerable and often fatal attempts on the Northwest Passage – one would have imagined it to have been immediately followed by further efforts of a scientific as well as commercial nature. In terms of following the entire route, however, this did not really happen until the great Soviet effort in the 1930s.

### *Whales and Seals and the Southern Seas*

Ever since Captain Cook's Second Voyage, it had been clear that Antarctica, whatever it contained in terms of ice or land, was completely surrounded by the open sea. It did not, in other words, pose the challenge of the Arctic of a highly problematic passage between the world's two great oceans. But Cook had also returned with reports of a teeming animal life, and since then the exploration of the region had been conducted for a mixed range of reasons: whaling, sealing, discovery and science. Furthermore, in

a period of international competition for colonies and as yet undiscovered territories, even the remote and inhospitable Antarctica was regarded as strategically interesting, and even if, as so often before and later, expeditions were launched under the impeccable label of universal, supranational science, national interests were visible right under the surface: “Science’s most important function was as a rhetorical tool, as a means of establishing social authority at home” (Robinson 2006, 5). As a result, from the 1830s, “expeditions were launched more or less simultaneously by France, Great Britain, and the United States” (Pyne 2004, 77), which for some time were effectively competing for hegemony in the Southern Seas.

The French expedition led by Jules Dumont d’Urville between 1837 and 1840, the so-called United States Exploring Expedition under Charles Wilkes (1838–42), and the British expedition led by James Clark Ross (1839–43) all had at least one ambition in common – to discover the South Magnetic Pole. Neither of them succeeded, but in different ways they all contributed some new information to the giant jigsaw puzzle of the Antarctic. On 21 January 1841, a member of d’Urville’s crew was the first man to set foot on the Antarctic continent, or rather on some rocks just outside the shore, whose icy cliffs did not permit the landing of a boat (Rosove 2002, 31). Wilkes’s six-ship and four-hundred-man expedition was badly equipped and badly led, and one of the ships was, according to its captain, little better than “an honourable coffin”. Still, it made a number of land sightings, and “gave the United States international stature in the field of geographical exploration” (*ibid.*, 35 and 33).

The British expedition was conducted in two ships – *Erebus* and *Terror* – whose names only a few years later would be inseparably connected with the Franklin tragedy at the other end of the globe. James Ross, however, was a highly capable scientist with several years of arctic experience, and in 1831 he had planted the British flag on the North Magnetic Pole. Aware of the other two expeditions and eager to find the South Magnetic Pole, Ross decided to sail into the largely uncharted waters later named the Ross Sea, where he also went ashore on Possession Island and claimed Victoria Land for Britain (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Ross, James Clark”). But like d’Urville, he was unable to land on the Antarctic mainland. All along, plant and animal life was carefully being registered by the expedition’s botanist, the young Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911), who like his father William Jackson Hooker before him was to become one of Britain’s leading scientists, and who a few years after the expedition published his *Flora Antarctica*, which is still used as a reference work. Ross also reached a record farthest south, sailing deep into the treacherous ice of the Ross Ice Shelf and reaching 78° 10’ S on 23 February 1842 (*ibid.*).

When Ross returned in 1843, however, as the last of the three expeditions, it would take several decades before European powers again turned to the Antarctic with any force. Thus, the most persistent human

presence in the region during the 1830–1880 period were sealers, some of whom also made a contribution to the charting of the continent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the early decades of the nineteenth century had witnessed a brutal reduction of stocks in the South Seas. Having reached a peak in the 1820s, the fisheries still continued at a lower level. Sealers moved from one part of the Antarctic to the next, emptying the hunting grounds as they went, eventually moving further north and out of the Antarctic itself – to “Crozet and Prince Edward Islands (1840s) and [...] Kerguelen and Heard Islands (1850s)” (Basberg and Headland 2008, 5). By this time, the British had very much backed out of the business, leaving the field primarily to the Americans, who also came to dominate the whaling industry. After the Civil War, however, American whaling also declined sharply, and a limbo phase occurred until others including particularly the Norwegians entered the scene with new and revolutionary technology later in the century (Basberg 2004, 25–6).

In arctic waters, too, the whaling industry was repeating its historically customary practice of harvesting far more than could be sustained. Around the middle of the century, a whaling port like Peterhead in Scotland was still sending about thirty ships each year to the waters around Greenland, but numbers then fell rapidly (Gray 1932, 133). Catches had been falling steadily since the beginning of the century; before 1810 each ship had caught an average of nearly seventeen whales per voyage, but by 1850 the number was down to two, a level retained until the last whaling ship sailed out of Peterhead in 1893 (*ibid.*, 162). Whaling in arctic waters had always been a highly risky business, and with smaller catches, risk-willing capital was becoming less and less available. In one single incident in the summer of 1830 alone, nineteen British ships were lost in what was popularly called “the Breaking-Up Yard” in Melville Bay, and as many as a thousand whalers and sealers were forced to camp on the ice (Francis 1990, 129–30).

Before arctic whaling generally came to an end, however, there was one more fishing ground capable of providing another bonanza. In the 1840s, as a foreshadowing of the goldrush a few decades later, large numbers of the giant Greenland or bowhead whale were discovered in the waters outside of the Alaskan coast, north and south of the Bering Strait. For nearly two hundred and fifty years, this particular whale had been hunted progressively further and further away from the domestic waters of the traditional whaling nations; from 1611 in the waters around Svalbard and the east coast of Greenland, and during most of the eighteenth century along the west coast of Greenland (Harmer 1928, 61). Now, a new and far-away frontier opened up, not least thanks to the American whaler Thomas Welcome Roys, who in 1848 pushed 250 miles north of the Bering Strait, making some rather spectacular catches and setting the whole whaling industry on red alert. The consequences were all too predictable:

The following year, fifty whaling ships set out for the Bering Strait and caught more than 500 bowheads; in 1850, the number of bowheads killed swelled to more than 2,000. In 1852, the waters of the strait were crisscrossed by the paths of more than 220 whaling ships. [...] More than one-quarter of all the bowheads that would eventually be taken in the western Arctic were killed during a few years. Not surprisingly, almost as soon as it had begun, bowhead whaling in the Bering Strait all but collapsed. In 1853, the total catch was only about one-third what it had been the year before. (Mulvaney 2001, 47)<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, the whale was not the only victim of what is very appropriately called the “whaling industry”, because the killing was very much on an industrial scale. A much sought-after alternative when whales became scarce was walrus. According to Kieran Mulvaney,

John Bockstoce and Daniel Botkin calculated that the total catch of walrus in the western Arctic was close to 150,000; David Boeri suggested that between 1860 and 1880 alone, “ships” riflemen may have gunned down 200,000 walrus, a staggering number from a herd that harpoon-carrying Eskimos were becoming increasingly dependent upon for food in the wake of the whale herd’s decimation. Some estimates place the total number of walrus killed throughout the western and eastern Arctic at an almost incomprehensible 4 million. (*Ibid.*, 54–5)

Sealing was hardly less brutal or efficient. In 1847, just as the whaling in the Bering Strait was taking off, Svend Foyn (1809–1894), the Norwegian who would invent the modern harpoon in 1865 and revolutionise whaling, was trying out his new and specially fortified ship, *Haabet* (“The Hope”), in the Western Ice Fields. Like Roys, he pushed beyond conventional limits, going deeper into the ice, and returned with 6,000 seals. A decade later, in yet another new and even larger ship, he caught 16,400 seals in five days (Drivenes and Jølle eds. 2006, 21). Roys, Foyn and other pioneers were thus doing in the empty, arctic wilderness precisely what industrial pioneers were doing in the crowded, smoke-filled cities at the time: contributing to “progress” on a scale the world had never seen, but within a social and political framework that had no other control mechanism than the law of profit. At the time they were regarded as heroes; for Foyn, a deeply religious man who could perhaps be seen as a modern counterpart to William Scoresby Jr., whaling provided a moral purpose: “God had let the whale inhabit [these waters] for the benefit and blessing of mankind [...] , and consequently I considered it my vocation to promote these fisheries” (Francis 1990, 176).

Modern technology, however, did not only play a decisive role for such industries as whaling and sealing; it equally affected the traditional fisheries. And the novelty was not primarily in the catching of the fish. The North Atlantic had always contained enormous and apparently inexhaustible supplies, especially of cod, but also of herring. But the main problem had been speed of transport, the matter of reaching the markets

<sup>8</sup> Statistical figures vary significantly from one historian to another. For even higher figures on nineteenth-century Antarctic whaling, see Bockstoce 1986, 94–7.

before the product went to waste. Somewhat surprisingly, therefore, it was the revolution in transport on land, or rather the advent of the train, that enabled the northern fisheries to expand on a grand scale from around the middle of the century. The railways “made fresh fish an article of cheap mass consumption in Britain and eventually opened up markets for cured fish – especially herring – across vast tracts of central and Eastern Europe” (Robb Robinson in Starkey et al. eds. 2009, 167). The natural resources of the North thereby contributed to the strengthening of the region’s economic growth in relation to the South. Thus the total export of fish from a country like Norway rose from 95,000 tons in 1825, through 175,000 tons in 1855 to 296,000 tons in 1880.<sup>9</sup>

The considerable activity in the northern waters connected with fishing, but especially whaling and sealing, did not only affect the stocks of the resources themselves. It also had a massive and frequently tragic impact on native people in the areas directly concerned. As a result of the white man’s invasion into their small and vulnerable communities, the Indians and the Inuit, suffered a collective disaster that undermined their very existence. Partly due to their modest numbers to start with, and partly because they hardly possessed anyone to represent their case, their tragedy could not compete for the attention of the newspapers and the European public in the same way as, for instance, the Franklin tragedy. As a result, they had to pay the price for – literally – the well-oiled machinery that ensured Europeans and Americans a steadily rising prosperity. With the disappearance of the great sea mammals that had been virtually their sole source of survival, tribes across the arctic region suffered terrible famines during the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, the whalers and sealers provided the natives with generous supplies of alcohol (Bockstoce 1986, 139), which further undermined already tottering communities. But famine and spirits were not all:

The whalers, sapped by poor nutrition, too much whiskey, and the dryness of the polar atmosphere, succumbed to a range of illnesses – influenza, measles, typhus, and others – and these they passed along to the native population, which had never before encountered such diseases and had little or no resistance to them. In 1840, during the first winter spent by a British whaler off Cumberland Sound, cholera claimed one-third of the local Inuit population. Fifty years later, on Southampton Island, in northern Hudson Bay, virtually the entire population was wiped out by typhus that originated in a local whaling station. (Mulvaney 2001, 55)

It was truly a Wild West, a world without any kind of public authority or regulation to prevent disaster. Against this particular background, it was fortunate that from 1865 onwards, the price of whale oil began to fall due to a new and cheaper alternative, namely petroleum oil (Bockstoce 1986, 143), which would be a central ingredient in the next

<sup>9</sup> Statistics by Trygve Solhaug, quoted by Alf Ragnar Nielssen in Robb Robinson in Starkey et al. (eds.), 2009, 110.



phase of industrialisation. Still, for wildlife and natives alike, reality was far removed from the polar world as it was presented to the European public, whose perception of it was the product of a steadily rising mass of information, provided by science, journals and newspapers, fiction and non-fiction, poetry, music and art. Virtually all over Europe, the mid- and late-nineteenth century experienced a voracious demand for news about the frozen regions.

### *Chilling Science*

It might be useful to remember that the winters of the mid-nineteenth century were emphatically colder than today's. Even though the so-called Little Ice Age was gradually coming to an end during the period in question (ref. Fagan 2002, ch. 12), proper winters with snow and ice were a reality not just in the Scandinavian countries and the northern parts of North America, but also further south. Consequently, the sense of connection with the North and the polar regions was more prominent than in today's warmer climate. This, together with the high level of polar exploration, may at least partly explain the intensity with which the natural sciences turned to the same regions and to subject areas connected with them.

One geographical area that played a particular role in the relationship between Europe and the Arctic was Svalbard. Strategically placed at the northern extreme of the ice-free Atlantic Ocean, it had, ever since its discovery in 1596, occupied a central place in the activities of the polar regions, triggering a dual, if not a triple interest, among a number of European powers. During the seventeenth century, the archipelago had provided important whaling grounds; in addition, it had served as a bridgehead – a last *terra firma* – for expeditions towards the Pole; and finally, since the late eighteenth century, it had become scientifically, and especially geologically, interesting. Although the Swedish scientist Anton Rolandsson Martin had briefly visited the islands as early as 1758, the first more systematic investigation was performed by the Norwegian geologist Balthazar Mathias Keilhau (1797–1858), who in 1827 spent six weeks at Bjørnøya and Svalbard, collecting geological, paleontological and botanical samples (Arlov 2003, 168). His account from the visit, published in 1831, is primarily a travelogue, whose value as a source of scientific information is relatively limited, but he notes in the foreword that all the geological observations and other scientific data from the journey will be made available in separate publications (Keilhau 1831, Foreword, no pag.). Being a scientist, Keilhau does not count as a tourist. However, he was accompanied by a German industrialist, Barto von Löwenigh, who in

1830 also published an account of the journey, *Reise nach Spitzbergen*, and who may be credited with being the first proper tourist at Svalbard (Reilly 2009, 31).

Another and far more elaborate expedition to Svalbard took place a decade later. Since Waterloo, France had for natural reasons been almost totally absent from operations in the Arctic, but in 1838, a large expedition – named the Recherche Expedition, after the name of the ship – under the leadership of the French scientist Paul Gaimard (1796–1858), spent two weeks at Svalbard, as part of an exploration of the entire North Atlantic over altogether three summers.<sup>10</sup> The expedition, which also visited Svalbard the following year, consisted of or involved scientists from several countries, and was also – probably as one of the last of its kind – concerned with the historical, anthropological and aesthetic dimensions of life in the Far North. It represented, in other words, a kind of cross-disciplinary approach rarely to be found in today’s polar research. As will be discussed later, the results of these non-scientific observations were in fact perhaps just as important as the twenty volumes of text and plates that were produced to account for the scientific investigation into the region.

Like Iceland, Svalbard also quickly proved to be a fascinating outdoor laboratory, of particular interest to scientists who were only just beginning to conceive some revolutionary theories. In the 1830s, the Swiss geologist Louis Agassiz (1807–73), building on the legacy of his countryman Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (ref. ch. 3), who had revolutionized glaciology half a century earlier, came up with a proposition that twenty years before Darwin “put the glacier theory in the forefront of European scientific debates” (Wilson 2003, 92) and was more than enough to challenge old and religiously based beliefs. With the work *Etudes sur les Glaciers* (Study of Glaciers, 1840), he created the frightening image of the “Ice Age”, “an almost Noachian Deluge of glacial ice across Europe” (Pyne 2004, 279). He replaced, in other words, the archetypal catastrophe by water at the dawn of man’s existence with another, or with several others, over the course of the history of the earth:

Glaciers were to him “God’s great plough,” destructive and chaotic natural forces which signified a beneficent supernatural plan for the universe. The glacial period, to Agassiz, was thus a magnificent, albeit chilly, demonstration of the power of the Deity in causing great catastrophes, events which wiped out life in previous epochs and replaced it with new flora and fauna. (Lurie 1960, 98)

In the search for information about the planet’s past, glaciology and geology were two sides of the same coin, and at Svalbard, Scandinavian scientists, as early as the late 1830s, were making discoveries that were strangely resonant with Agassiz’s theories. They found, for instance, fossils that indicated a totally different climate:

<sup>10</sup> The following is indebted to Arlov 2003, 168–71.

The realisation that much of Spitsbergen was geologically younger than the rest of Scandinavia simply enhanced its attraction. In Scandinavia, most of the fossils discovered were of small sea creatures and dated from the earliest periods in the earth's history. On the other hand, Svalbard contained rich fossil deposits of land organisms, such as plants and dinosaurs. (Drivenes and Jølle eds. 2006, 37)

It was a period of rapid and radical scientific progress, with the new sciences giving old truths a radical shake-up. In Britain, the prominent physicist John Tyndall (1820–93) followed up Agassiz's theories with his work *The Glaciers of the Alps* (1869), in whose preface he refers to the “numerous interesting articles on glaciers which have been published during the last eighteen months, and the various lively discussions to which the subject has given birth” (Tyndall 1896, viii). And in France the great populariser of science, Guillaume Louis Figuier (1819–94) published the *La Terre avant le Déluge* (*The World before the Deluge*, 1863), which was translated into English only two years later. Together with geologists like Charles Lyell (1797–1875) and his friend Charles Darwin (1809–82), these scientists imparted a totally new conception of the natural world and its history, in which Alpine and Scandinavian glaciers and the polar regions became integral parts of a giant narrative, conflicting sharply with that of orthodox religion.

To some extent, polar exploration became a sounding board for this profound cultural tension, and the polar regions its test site. Nowhere else could man observe such mammoth natural forces in full and unimpeded operation. In their presence, words and numbers lost their foothold, as they also did in the incredible accounts of the scientists of the history of the earth. Even William Scoresby, the otherwise eloquent whaler and man of the church, had failed to transmit to his readers the dimensions of the polar world, in his work *The Polar Ice* from 1815. First, he tried with words:

A body of more than ten thousand millions of tons in weight, meeting with resistance, when in motion, the consequences may possibly be conceived! The weaker field is crushed with an awful noise; sometimes the destruction is mutual: pieces of huge dimensions and weight, are not unfrequently piled upon the top, to the height of twenty or thirty feet, whilst doubtless a proportionate quantity is depressed beneath. The view of those stupendous effects in *safety*, exhibits a picture sublimely grand; but where there is danger of being overwhelmed, terror and dismay must be the predominant feelings. (Scoresby 1980, 284–5)

Then he turned to figures:

Suppose the iceberg 3 miles (English statute) long, by 2 broad, that is 14,840 by 10,560 feet surface, and 500 feet deep under water, it would displace 83,635,200,000 cubic feet of seawater; and as a cubic foot of Greenland sea-water weighs 63 lb. 15 oz. 4 dr., or 64 lb. nearly, the weight of the mass would appear to be about 2,389,577,142 tons. (*Ibid.*, 285)

Mid-nineteenth-century European culture was trying, almost desperately, to grapple with the flood of new scientific evidence that made traditional

beliefs seem more and more outdated. Against this background, the First Vatican Council's introduction in 1870 of the dogma of papal infallibility acquires an almost ironic ring, but it is a strong indication of the cultural struggle that was taking place.

### *Franklin In Memoriam*

In the British context, hardly any other literary text reflected the battle between science and religion with greater pain and conviction than Lord Tennyson's book-length poem *In Memoriam* (1850). Incidentally, it was published right at the time of the frantic search for Sir John Franklin, and although it does not contain any direct reference to the disaster, it reflects a mood of not just personal but also national uncertainty and doubt at a time when progress in all its aspects had more or less come to be seen as a law of nature. Now it suddenly seemed as if Tennyson's "nature red in tooth and claw" had come back with a vengeance and turned the world on its head. It was thus a fitting coincidence – or perhaps it was no coincidence at all – that 1850 was also the year of the republication of Scoresby's work from 1835, *Memorials of the Sea*, a collection of episodes demonstrating the importance of Christian worship when in a dangerous, polar environment, and the necessity of observing, as the subtitle of the new edition indicates, "Sabbaths in the Arctic Regions".

Thus memorials seemed to be the appropriate genre of the day, and if *In Memoriam* gave a measure of the national mood, it was as if the search for Franklin was almost as much a search for moral guidance and a reassurance that the world was not off its hinges as a search for factual information about ships and crew. And during the whole decade, Tennyson's "rhymed, and measured, and printed monument of grief", as Charlotte Brontë characterised it (quoted in Gaskell 1975, 422), was accompanied by a host of other occasional memorial poems written specifically on the Franklin disaster. One of the earliest is "The Arctic Regions, and the Hopes of Discovering the Lost Adventurers" by Frederic W. Farrar, "Scholar of Trinity College", Cambridge. The poem, which won the Chancellor's medal at the commencement in 1852, is a ten-page, eloquent balancing act between heroic celebration and a sense of existential despair. In dramatic passages on the merciless natural forces, the poet tries for a moment to look for hope in the Norse legends that "tell / Of a green Eden 'mid the whitening wastes / Of the wild North", but it is no good: "not a flower is here / Save crystals of the bright lamellar snow / And glitter of the cold unheeding stars" (Farrar 1852, 7). He then succumbs to images suggestive of a journey into hell, almost anticipating Wilfred Owen's last poetic reports from the trenches of the First World War:

And the storm came! blaring with hideous trump  
The mad wind pounced upon the tattered shrouds,  
And bent the creaking mast, and howled and screamed,  
And swept in fury o'er the splitting fields  
That rang, and shrieked, and thundered, as the ships,  
Fierce-crashing with their tempest-driven keels,  
Drove plunging thro' the terrors of the night  
'Neath the black sky – so did the storm-fiend speed  
The Erebus and Terror on their way. (*Ibid.*, 9)

As in *In Memoriam*, the only source of hope lies in the beyond, in death itself, here personified as the three pale female figures of faith, hope and charity, the latter of whom – “a weeping lady” – is suggestive of Lady Franklin herself, who in the aftermath of the expedition's disappearance acquired an almost saintly quality.

At Oxford, similarly, there was a prize competition in 1860 for which the theme was Franklin's disappearance. The fact that this took place as late as fifteen years after the expedition's departure is in itself an indication of the lasting impact of the event. A Canadian undergraduate, Owen Alexander Vidal, won the competition with “A Poem upon the Life and Character of Sir John Franklin” against the poem “The Death of Sir John Franklin” by Algernon Swinburne (1837–1909), whose first volume of poetry was published in the same year. Even more so than Farrar's poem, the latter's contribution exhibits a sense of quiet resignation and a solemn, majestic grief which concludes with an apotheosis of Franklin: “This England hath not made a better man, / More steadfast, or more wholly pure of wrong / Since the large book of English praise began” (“Internet Archive”).

A far more grandly conceived poem, “Arctic Enterprise”, was published in 1856 by Chandos Hoskyns Abrahall, and dedicated “by permission, to Lady Franklin, in admiration of her patience, perseverance, and fortitude, under trials unexampled in the annals of her country” (Abrahall 1856, no pag.). Here each of the seven parts is introduced with an “Argument”, and the text, which runs to a hundred and forty pages of poetry and seventy pages of explanatory notes, covers a wide canvas of arctic heroism, beginning with the Scandinavians, but also viewing it in the context of the history of civilisation. Both Farrar and Abrahall, in other words, make an explicit connection between arctic exploration, the Viking legacy and national greatness. For Abrahall, in particular, this is a natural and attractive combination of elements; himself a member of the aristocracy, who frequently played on the Norman and hence Scandinavian and Viking connection, he can personally identify with this interpretation of Franklin's heroic venture and with Britain's claim to fame in general.

The list of subscribers printed at the end of Abrahall's volume also provides useful information about the social groups to which such works primarily appealed. The list of seventy-three names is headed by a number of aristocrats, but is dominated by a large number of higher naval officers,

including such well-known explorers as George Back (three copies), and Sir Edward Parry and Sir John Ross (four copies each). Furthermore, John Barrow Jr. and the Hudson's Bay Company subscribed to ten copies each, Lady Franklin to four, and William Scoresby to two. Abrahall even includes several letters from his subscribers, some of whom had clearly received the manuscript for perusal. One of them was Parry, who must have been virtually on his deathbed, as he died in 1855, and his letter is written from "Greenwich Hospital", the royal hospital for the Navy. In his letter, he mentions that "I have, in my sick bed, glanced through the Sixth Part, to which you have particularly directed my attention; and I beg to thank you for the kind and flattering manner in which you have been pleased to notice my labours in Arctic Discovery" (*ibid.*, 215).

Lady Franklin also lent her name to other poems about her husband, including the similarly ambitious *Euthanasia* (i.e. "happy death") by Erasmus Henry Brodie, which did not appear until 1866, and then with only the first of four planned cantos. The poem extends to more than fifty pages, however, and in the rather wordy preface, the poet extends his thanks "first to Lady Franklin, to whom, when the whole poem is published, I am kindly permitted to dedicate it [...]" (Brodie 1866, xiii). The preface also comes perilously close to admitting that the large number of arctic and other expeditions have "been endured in vain, and noble lives idly lost in a fruitless enterprise". Still, on the redeeming side, they

are the school of our national spirit, and, in a somewhat luxurious and utilitarian age, keep alive that old love of adventure, and contempt for danger and no less for ease and comforts, which possibly indeed, pushed too far, may run riot in romantic extravagance, but which it would be an ill day for England to see extinguished. (*Ibid.*, x-xi)

Brodie is not alone in tacitly admitting an element of futility or a sneaking sense of hollow heroism in connection with Franklin and other arctic explorers, but if a sense of purpose is not found by reference, as in Brodie, to "our national spirit", an appeal to either science or religion frequently has the same function. In his published lecture "Arctic Voyages", which was published in 1861, for instance, the Rev. Samuel Haughton chooses almost precisely the same initial approach as Brodie: "[...] I believe I could not choose, at first sight, a more worthless, a more unimportant object of pursuit, than the study of the North Pole and the pursuit of Arctic exploration".

These expeditions, however,

were got up by lovers of science – not by commercial men. Sordid natures have never done anything great, have never contributed one single thought to the list of great and brilliant thoughts [...] but they prowl like jackals around the lions, who first seek out these great discoveries, watching to turn everything to their own advantage. (Haughton 1861, 30–1)

As was typical of Victorian idealism, polar exploration was relegated to a sphere far removed from that of “commercial men”; rather it was a noble, unselfish and honourable pursuit. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Haughton as a man of the church in the same lecture censures the British government for destroying the native population in the Arctic with



W. Thomas Smith: “‘They Forged the Last Links with Their Lives’: Sir John Franklin’s Men Dying by Their Boat During the North-West Passage Expedition” (1895). It is hardly a coincidence that this picture, showing the tragedy and the horror of the expedition, was not painted until a generation after the last ray of hope had vanished. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

alcohol, and for focusing exclusively on economic gain, whilst the Danes, he claims, have instead preached the Gospel to them. The same elevation of Franklin and his fellow explorers is found in the poem “Sir John Franklin” (1864) by Richard Watson Dixon (1833–1900), a close friend of the painter Edward Burne-Jones (to whom the collection is dedicated), William Morris and Gerard Manley Hopkins:

By the supreme laws  
 Of being, in the human heart a cause  
 Exists, which seeks forever the unknown:  
 This still draws close the links mysterious thrown  
 Between the world of matter and of thought;  
 Still animates the deep relation, fraught  
 With subtlest truth, of every outward thing  
 To the deep soul within the senses’ ring.  
 Now, therefore, they are dearest to our race  
 Who spring with swiftest foot toward the chase  
 Of things unknown [...] . (Dixon 1864, 51–2)

Although a highly competent poet and a man of the church, Dixon seems, like the majority of his contemporaries, to insist on viewing the entire world of the Far North through a set of lenses that keep the reality at a safe distance.

Similarly, Lady Franklin succeeded in her methodical construction of her husband's legacy as a figure of mythological proportions; the nation eagerly accepted it, and it could be argued that this construction period lasted for thirty years (from the expedition's departure in 1845 until 1875, when Lady Franklin died, on 18 July). Less than two weeks later, on 31 July, the product of her final efforts, a Franklin cenotaph, was unveiled in Westminster Abbey. On the same day *The Times* published the epitaph that had been composed a few days earlier and that had been carved on the white marble. Its author was Lord Tennyson, who was the obvious choice not just for artistic reasons; his wife was also Franklin's niece. The epitaph, which Tennyson regarded as his best, may be said to have concluded the long and painful Franklin era with a well-known combination of stoicism and hopefulness:

Not here! The white North has thy bones; and thou,  
 Heroic sailor-soul,  
 Art passing on thine happier voyage now  
 Toward no earthly pole. ("Westminster Abbey", 2013)

### *Narratives of the North*

In Britain, the Franklin tragedy was not only the cause of a long-lasting national trauma; it also contributed strongly to an unprecedented interest in everything connected with the polar regions. Ever since Frobisher's days, these white wastes had formed a part of the British imagination, but from around 1850 onwards publishers, in particular, seemed to have difficulty satisfying the demands to hear more about them made by a quickly expanding reading public. In Germany and the United States, too, there was a growing output of polar literature, but the large majority of works were British, spread out over a range of different genres.

First, there seemed to be an insatiable appetite for histories of arctic exploration. A relatively superficial count reveals at least twenty such titles during the 1850–1880 period, that is from the time when Franklin's disappearance really began to affect the general public. Many of them were large and expensive publications, which few ordinary readers could afford. But this did not prevent the books from achieving a wide distribution. At a time before public libraries were common, a significant percentage of the sales went to private lending libraries, such as Mudie's, and these figures offer a good indication of a book's popularity. In 1859, Mudie's bought 1,000 copies of Lord Tennyson's highly popular collection *Idylls of*



*the King*, and 2,500 copies of George Eliot's novel *Adam Bede*, but 3,000 copies of Leopold McClintock's *Voyage of the "Fox" in Arctic Seas* (Loomis 1977, 95). A few years later, between 1873 and 1875 alone, as many as eight such polar accounts were published, probably closely connected with the focus on the Hall, Markham and Nares expeditions at the time. From the point of view of the publishers, the steady stream of new expeditions and new additions to the knowledge of the region justified a constant process of updating and rewriting, which in turn required new works to be published. In addition, there were a considerable number of accounts from particular expeditions, biographies of famous explorers, and popular scientific works about the polar regions.

As mentioned above, explorers were the celebrities of the day, and it was not just Lady Franklin who played on the public's interest in the private and the personal. The wife of the American hero Elisha Kent Kane, whose death at the age of thirty-seven had caused national grief, showed a considerable commercial talent when she published her biography in 1866, nearly ten years after his death. The book's title page itself must have raised numerous eyebrows at the time. It is as if the author very deliberately drip-feeds the reader with daring information: first, the main title, *The Love-Life of Dr. Kane*, was something altogether new in the context of polar exploration; then the subtitle, "Containing the Correspondence, and a History of the Acquaintance, Engagement, and Secret Marriage between Elisha K. Kane and Margaret Fox", which promised further intriguing insights; and finally, "With facsimiles of letters, and her portrait" (Kane 1866, 1). The book's preface then explains in considerable detail the legal battle that had taken place between Kane's widow and his family prior to publication.

It is tempting to assume that a hundred and fifty years ago, Mrs. Kane's revenge must have brought the revelation of intimacy to an entirely new level. However, the time of publication – 1866 – coincides precisely with the wave of so-called "sensation novels" by such writers as Wilkie Collins, Ellen Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, in which illicit love and legal complications were central ingredients. It seems, in other words, that Mrs. Kane very deliberately made use of those very elements that ensured spectacular sales figures for the most popular fiction at the time.

Thus, the actual expeditions and especially their leaders inspired, in addition to the constant reports in newspapers and journals, a significant production of book-length publications of non-fiction. But they also inspired an even more formidable supply of fictional literature, for children and adults alike. Much of this was in what could be called a realistic vein, but there was also a sizable number of works using the polar regions as a setting for narratives of a more fantastic character.

As in the period before 1830, juvenile literature almost invariably carried an explicitly edifying message, and often tales were set either in

the Canadian wilderness or on board whaling ships. The arctic world thereby served as a classroom for moral improvement – a place where the characters' religious faith and personal integrity were put to the test in situations of hunger, isolation and deprivation. Many of these narratives are so predictable in terms of their message that it is difficult to believe that they might have captured the imagination of their young readers. From lack of a sufficiently convincing plot, some of them, such as for instance *Uncle Philip's Conversations about the Whale Fishery and Polar Seas* (1836), insist that “[i]t becomes all men, as you know, at all times to be Christians”, a point of particular relevance to sailors, who find themselves closer to death than most other people. “But”, Uncle Philip continues, “thousands of them, – yes, ten thousands of them, are not Christians. Indeed, they are a class of men proverbially wicked” (Uncle Philip 1836, 375).

The Arctic as a testing ground for moral uprightness is also reflected in the somewhat macabre title story of John Todd's *The Angel of the Iceberg and Other Stories and Parables Illustrating Great Moral Truths: Designed Chiefly for the Young* (1859). The story, about a spirit from heaven who has come to the polar regions to “catch the last prayer” of the dying members of a polar expedition, is introduced by the main moral lesson, which plays on the metaphor of the cold heart and its symbolic connection with the story's setting:

My young readers will find in this story,  
That the human heart is, by nature, cold and frozen;  
That the skill of no created being can make the heart good;  
That no labour or toil can do it;  
That we must despair of any help but in Divine Power; and  
That the Holy Spirit can melt the heart and make man a new creature.  
(Todd 1859, 18 and 9)

With a pedagogical approach which, at the time, may have been politically correct, but which today has more than a cruel streak, some works also use the miserable conditions of the native people in the Arctic to teach a moral lesson to the underprivileged back home. One of them, *Arctic Voyages* (1831), published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and “thrown into its present form, to render it more attractive to the young”, expresses the hope that the perusal of the work may,

under the Divine blessing, produce in those for whom it is chiefly intended, contentment with their humble lot, and resignation under its privations. However lowly their station, they will here learn, that the poorest condition in these countries possesses comforts, which, by an All-wise Being, are denied to the inhabitants of the Arctic Regions. (Anon. 1831, iv)

Still, some works written specifically for young people successfully told a dramatic story without losing its narrative momentum in needless moralising. One such story was the phenomenally successful *Peter the Whaler* by the writer William Henry Giles Kingston (1814–80), who in

the Bodleian Library catalogue is listed with 273 titles and editions. The novel was first published in 1851, at the peak of the Franklin search, and became Kingston's breakthrough as a writer for boys. The moral message is in no way absent; the protagonist is a clergyman's son who is arrested for poaching, and is sent to sea, where a rough life teaches him the necessary lessons. But as a *Bildungsroman*, it carries a fair amount of credibility, as do the numerous scenes from the arctic world and from the whaling grounds. The final passages, furthermore, depicting his return to England, make convincing use of two ancient literary models: having capsized off the Irish coast and lost all his possessions, he knocks, like the prodigal son in the New Testament parable, on the door of his parents' house, without shoes, hat or jacket. Here he is received, like Odysseus, by barking dogs and a housemaid who does not recognise him.

Other stories repeat the equally conventional stereotype, later characterised by Rudyard Kipling as "the white man's burden", of morally impeccable Englishmen who eventually convert the superstitious natives into civilised beings. This is clearly the basic recipe in a novel like *Ungava: A Tale of Esquimaux-Land* (1853) by Robert M. Ballantyne (1825–94), who for several decades was one of the most popular and prolific writers of arctic fiction for young people.<sup>11</sup> In his youth, Ballantyne had himself worked for the Hudson's Bay Company, and his heroes' roles as carriers of civilisation are a fundamental feature of the colonial subtext in the novels. Thus, it is hardly a coincidence that for a modern reader, the ending of *Ungava* reads like an inverted version of the very different ending of Joseph Conrad's later novel *Heart of Darkness*; having read his fill of popular fiction glorifying the Empire, Conrad simply turned the stereotypes upside down, even to the extent of including a female character – Kurtz's Intended – who was uncomfortably reminiscent of Lady Franklin herself. But throughout his career, Ballantyne stuck to an as yet perfectly uncontroversial recipe, and thus probably squeezed more books out of the icy wastes than any other writer: *Hudson's Bay* (1848), *The World of Ice* (1860), *Fast in the Ice* (1863), *Rivers of Ice* (1875) and others clearly showed young readers how a good, honest Victorian faith in the Almighty would always bring the hero safely back from the savage wastes to the comforts of civilisation.

Still, as the century progressed, other signals were also in evidence. In 1854, another major writer very much in the same vein as Ballantyne, Percy B. St. John (1821–89) published his novel *The Arctic Crusoe* in *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*. The serialisation was followed by several later editions of the book on both sides of the Atlantic. Rather predictably, the twenty-one-year-old protagonist, Henry (Harry) Maynard, is the son of a Plymouth merchant, and he plans to find the North Magnetic Pole before returning to England and marrying his cousin Fanny. From the

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of Ballantyne's arctic adventure stories, see Hill 2008, ch. 6.

very beginning, the novel thus emphasises a contrast, if not a conflict, between a life of secure, bourgeois uniformity and one of dramatic and risky exploration. As the title suggests, the novel is closely modelled on *Robinson Crusoe*, and after a shipwreck, Harry finds himself isolated in the ice, but is eventually joined by an Indian girl, Wah, who had been taken captive by the Inuit. With the arrival of Wah – a female parallel to Defoe’s Friday – St. John introduces a potentially delicate triangle into the story, by means of which he plays very tentatively with established standards regarding race and gender.

The civilising element is still strong; Harry teaches Wah to read in order to “eradicate some of the evil effects of her savage education. I strove above all to instil religious ideas into her mind” (St. John 1863, 219). But the situation is made complicated by the undeniable presence of warm feelings on both sides, and when he eventually asks her to return to her tribe, she refuses, and says about herself, in the third person: “Her skin is red, but her heart is white – the forked tongue of the Pale-face and his reading in the Big Book [i.e. the Bible] have blinded her eyes. She cannot see the Manitou of the Indians. She will go and live in the big houses of the whites. I have said” (*ibid.*, 224).

Not unexpectedly, the dilemma is solved: during an attack from the Inuit, Wah is shot and dies while Harry preaches the gospel to her: “I [...] fairly sobbed aloud, as I saw how completely the savage spirit of this child of nature was tamed” (*ibid.*, 232). And Harry finally marries Fanny, who has resisted another suitor and waited stubbornly for Harry’s return. Still, in an environment comfortably removed from Victorian guardians of morality, *The Arctic Crusoe* represented a genre that could allow itself a certain stretching of boundaries. So-called “survival literature”, according to Mary Louise Pratt,

furnished a “safe” context for staging alternate, relativizing, and taboo configurations of intercultural contact: Europeans enslaved by non-Europeans, Europeans assimilating to non-European societies, and Europeans cofounding new transracial social orders. The context of survival literature was “safe” for transgressive plots, since the very existence of a text presupposed the imperially correct outcome: the survivor survived, and sought reintegration into the home society. The tale was always told from the viewpoint of the European who returned. (Pratt 1992, 87)

Survival literature, however, was not only confined to narratives for the younger generation. The growing market for juvenile literature – largely a product of the post-Romantic emphasis on childhood – was accompanied by and was often difficult to distinguish from the market for more adult readers. Also, due to the extreme natural conditions of the polar regions, virtually all fictional works from this area were in some way or other examples of survival literature.

But “survival literature” is a flexible term that may not be exclusively concerned with physical survival among threatening icebergs; it may also

be applied to a work that, at a first glance, has little to do with the Far North. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), however, is in very real terms the story of a struggle against the forces of destruction, and as the reader will discover in the first couple of pages, the first-person narrator establishes a firm connection between her own survival and the Arctic. The scene is strong and memorable, and sketches with chilling precision the little girl hiding behind the red moreen curtain, reading Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*, whose numerous woodcuts carry her away to "the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape [...]" (Brontë 1985, 40). It had hardly escaped the novel's author that Mary Wollstonecraft a few decades earlier had travelled to the same shores and produced one of the very first travelogues from that country.

Whether deliberate on Brontë's part or not, the reference suggests a perfectly fitting association between the author of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and a fictional character whose resourceful and independent mind would have been hard to imagine without the former's efforts on behalf of her sex. But Jane does not stop at the Norwegian coast:

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with "the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forlorn regions of dreary space – that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surround the pole, and concentrate the multiplied rigours of extreme cold". Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. (*Ibid.*)

Existentially, Jane finds herself deserted in precisely such a cold and inhospitable landscape, and Brontë could not have found a more appropriate, and more topical, metaphor. At the book's publication in the autumn of 1847, the first tremors of anxiety were beginning to spread about the whereabouts of the Franklin expedition, and as the months went by, the metaphor, which was employed again and again throughout the novel, acquired an ever growing significance for the steadily increasing number of readers.<sup>12</sup>

But step by step, little Jane finds her way through these desolate scenes: she survives the hostile surroundings, the cold and the illness at Lowood school, and at Thornfield, where happiness seems to beckon, the narrative is studded with allusions that would echo with an arctic chill in the minds of her readers. During the night before the wedding, as her bridal veil is being rent by the visiting Bertha Rochester, Jane has a dream of fear, in which she sees Mr. Rochester "departing for many years, and for a distant country"; she manages to climb a little summit, from which

<sup>12</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of *Jane Eyre* and the Arctic, see Spufford 1996, 106–10 and Hill 2008, ch. 4.

she can see him, “like a speck on a white track, lessening every moment” (Brontë 1985, 310). Back in her room, after the disastrous scene in the church and the discovery of Mr. Rochester’s wife, she returns to the imagery of the opening pages. She is now

a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; on hayfield and cornfield lay a frozen shroud: lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, to-day were pathless with untrodden snow; and the woods, which twelve hours since waved leafy and fragrant as groves between the tropics, now spread, waste, wild, and white as pine forests in wintry Norway. (323)

Having left Thornfield, she leaves the coach at Whitcross, an empty moorland; the roads “stretch out, east, west, north, and south – white, broad, lonely”(349), and she sets out into the wilderness, wandering aimlessly, and eventually nearly starving to death, only to be saved by St. John Rivers, who proves to be, in his own words, “a cold, hard man”(400). Everywhere coldness and whiteness are associated with desolation, isolation and emotional sterility. But she succeeds in the end; the little girl who left Gateshead and entered on the journey of life became a heroic explorer who, unlike Franklin, eventually managed to break out of the icy prison, to navigate through her life’s treacherous and labyrinthine Northwest Passage, and enter the Pacific Ocean of love and marital bliss. By using the Arctic as a threatening undertone in her narrative, Brontë had – partly by coincidence – created an alternative and finally happy version of what was slowly becoming a national trauma.

But there was also another and actually far more dramatic reason why Brontë’s arctic imagery hit a raw nerve among contemporary readers. As she was composing the novel in the summer of 1847, she was looking back on two years in which the country of her father’s origin had nearly been brought to its knees.<sup>13</sup> In 1843, a potato blight broke out in the United States, and in 1845 and 1846 it hit Ireland, which was almost completely dependent on the potato, with devastating effect. But the Great Famine was not the sole reason why probably more than a million people died.

In late October 1846, the weather turned cold, and Ireland had fifteen centimetres of snow in November, introducing the hardest winter in living memory, and prolonging the famine for years. In this context, in which arctic conditions combined with human suffering on an unprecedented scale within the British Isles themselves, the Franklin expedition paled into insignificance. Together, however, these events very much brought the chill of the polar regions to the attention of the general public, underlining northern Europe’s proximity to the Pole rather than to the warm Mediterranean.

<sup>13</sup> The following is indebted to Fagan 2000, 188–93.

As suggested, *Jane Eyre* joined an already established chorus of writers of more explicitly polar fiction, and new titles were coming. Some of them, such as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Sea Lions* (1849) and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), turned to the world of whaling, where man's encounter with the elements – whether in the northern or southern seas – provided opportunities for an endless supply of drama. The plot of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) similarly turns around the whaling port of Monkshaven (based on Whitby in Yorkshire, close to where the Scoresbys came from) and the environment around the whaling industry. Other works were, like much of the juvenile fiction, taking their inspiration from the innumerable reports from polar expeditions.

In his preface to *The Doomed Ship: or The Wreck in the Arctic Regions* (1855), William Hurton, for instance, offers a summary of previous expeditions, and expresses the hope that his work will “prove instructive to those who have not hitherto carefully studied the chronicles of modern voyagers and explorers” (Hurton 1856, viii). Rather than a down-to-earth account, however, *The Doomed Ship* displays all such ingredients of popular fiction as superstition, love, mutiny, shipwreck and death. The ship *Lady Emily*, sailing from Tromsø in northern Norway to Copenhagen, and with Oriana, a young Danish woman on board, ends up in the Arctic Ocean, where the only survivors are the male, first-person protagonist and Oriana.

Though hardly a tale of the highest quality, the novel, which appeared in several editions, exemplifies a typical sense of connection between Britain, on the one hand, and Scandinavia and the Arctic, on the other. Hurton had already published a lively travel account from Norway, *A Voyage from Leith to Lapland*, in 1851, where he expressed his profound fascination with the country, and the novel contains the almost stereotypical motif of bonds of love across the North Sea, a motif to be frequently repeated – as will be seen later – in popular fiction as well as among later representatives of royalty. Another stereotype is the portrayal of Oriana as a descendant of the Vikings; without losing any of her grace and femininity, she is portrayed as radically different from her Victorian sisters by being fearless in a storm, knowing the ins and outs of navigation, and dealing rather calmly with the near-fatal attack from a polar bear. Works like *The Doomed Ship* thus contributed to establishing a set of ideas about the North and the people of the North that slowly became settled as indisputable truths, not just in the North itself but also outside the region.

Even more so than other literature, polar fiction exhibits a world of extremes; the characters almost consistently find themselves in situations that bring out the whole spectrum of human characteristics, from feats of heroism and self-sacrifice to deeds of the uttermost baseness and evil. Also, because of these emotional extremes, which are a direct reflection of a corresponding natural environment that also largely harbours the unknown, it is hardly surprising to find that elements of superstition and

the irrational play a significant role. In Hurton's novel, for instance, the ultimate reason why the *Lady Emily* so fatally sails into the glacial inferno of the Arctic rather than to Copenhagen, is the deliberate manipulation of the compass by an Italian cabin boy who has been given a minor correction by the captain. But the boy's evil design is also the source of a terrible, inexplicable dream that almost drives the captain to madness a few days before this treacherous act is discovered. And essentially the whole voyage breaks down into a complete pandemonium, with the crew killing each other while the forces of nature are grinding the vessel to pieces. The polar regions, then, serve as a playground for unchecked natural and primitive forces; they become, in a sense, literally the polar opposite of well-regulated, civilised society. At the same time, however, Oriana and the narrator represent precisely the other extreme: the victory of civilised, orderly behaviour.

A similar example is found in *The Frozen Deep* (1874), which Wilkie Collins (1824–89), the “father of the sensation novel”, initially wrote as a play in 1856, but later reworked into a novella. As was his wont, Collins had a keen eye for the dramatic potential of contemporary events, and the work is very clearly based on the Franklin tragedy. But as in Hurton's novel, and possibly influenced by the persistent rumours of cannibalism among Franklin's starving crew, the focus is primarily on two kinds of irrational behaviour. First, an important part of the novella turns on the question whether the central female character, Clara Burnham, is actually in possession of Second Sight, by which she claims to see what is happening in the ice. Second, this sense of the irrational is also present in the relationship between her two lovers, Richard Wardour and Francis Aldersley, both of whom believe themselves to be engaged to her, and both of whom are members of the expedition. Richard, in particular, again covers the entire spectrum of human psychology; on the one hand, his thirst for revenge over his rival, combined with the inhuman suffering they all experience when the expedition breaks down, reduces him – like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – from a civilised gentleman to a ravenous beast. Finally reaching help, he

was a sinister and terrible object to look at. His eyes glared like the eyes of a wild animal; his head was bare; his long grey hair was torn and tangled; his miserable garments hung about him in rags. He stood in the doorway, a speechless figure of misery and want, staring at the well-spread table like a hungry dog. [...] He] seized on the bread and meat with lean, long-nailed hands that looked like claws. (Collins 2005, 95)

In a Darwinian context, he is a survivor of the fittest, but in the course of his ordeal he has, like the crawling Mr. Kurtz at the end of Conrad's novel, lost his humanity. On the other hand, in the middle of this process of mental and physical degeneration and almost against his own will, he literally carries the enemy he had sworn to kill, to the feet of the woman



he loves and places him, alive, in her care, while he himself expires, thereby attaining an almost Christ-like stature by sacrificing his own life in saving the life of his enemy. Once again, the extremity of the arctic environment brings out the worst and the best in human nature.

Although Collins's friend Charles Dickens never wrote a polar novel himself, he not only contributed decisively to *The Frozen Deep* in its first, theatrical version; he also acted the part of Richard Wardour in a number of performances. Furthermore, there were other writers in Dickens's circle who understood and exploited the popular appeal of the theme. One of them was George Walter Thornbury (1828–76), who was an important contributor to Dickens's periodicals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. In 1861, Thornbury published the three-volume work *Ice Bound*, which is strictly speaking not a polar novel, but precisely like Robert Pierce Gillies's *Tales of a Voyage to the Arctic Ocean* from 1826, contains a Decameronian frame narrative about a voyage of arctic discovery in which members of the crew, during a long winter in the ice, tell stories from totally different realms. The frame narrative, in other words, is simply a structural device. It is striking, however, how the description of the voyage northwards into the Davis Strait assumes an almost Dantean quality of a progressive descent into a cold, labyrinthine Inferno. Having described the place as a "region of death", from which the ship slowly navigates into "[the] next region of death" and "through various degrees of cold and danger" (Thornbury 1861, I: 5–6), the narrator creates a sense of progressively more narrow circles, which finally bring the ship to a halt in the merciless grip of the ice. In this way, it is almost as if the voices of the story tellers rise out of some gloomy, frozen centre.

Despite the fact that Britain produced a significant body of polar fiction during the period, no other writer could compete with the fame and the impact of the Frenchman Jules Verne (1828–1905). Also, few writers could compete with his ability to combine the fantastic and the realistic, thus epitomising the breathtaking scientific and technological innovations of the second half of the nineteenth century, and bringing them into the realm of fiction. In these works by the writer who was "on a cumulative basis [...] the most translated writer of all time" (William Butcher in Verne 2005, xliii), the fantastic is dressed in a cloak of realism, whilst the real is equally depicted as fantastic. As to the further categorisation of Verne's work, it may be argued that it belongs primarily under juvenile literature. On the other hand, his novels were read – not unlike the Harry Potter novels in recent years – by young people and adults alike; also, if there is *one* quintessential novel about polar exploration, it is bound to be *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, which was serialised in 1864 and 1865, and first published in book form in 1866, introducing the series "Extraordinary Journeys".

Though it was only Verne's second novel, it would not be the last with

an arctic setting. Parallel with *Captain Hatteras*, he was writing *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), which is partly based on the “hollow earth” theory, and whose setting is the Snæfellsjökull on the extreme west coast of Iceland, where the German professor Lidenbrock finds an opening to the centre of the earth by the help of a coded runic message from an ancient saga manuscript. Still, the two novels mark only the beginning of Verne’s “polar obsession” (*ibid.*, xiv); a string of works from the 1870s to the 90s followed, in which Verne gave his own imagination free play in what were virtually the only regions of the planet that were still unknown and unexplored.

Despite having been translated into English three times after the first translation of 1874, *Captain Hatteras* (also known as *The English at the North Pole*, *The Ice Desert* etc.) has not received the critical attention it deserves. According to William Butcher’s informative preface and introduction to the most recent English edition, which is also justly included in the Oxford World’s Classics, the novel “is not well known. Only three or four full-length articles have been written about it, and no attempt has been made to analyse the work as a whole” (*ibid.*, no pag.). This may not be surprising, considering the fact that popular bestsellers are only very reluctantly included in the literary canon, but it should not encourage potential readers to simply write it off as an adventure story for boys.

First of all, Verne probably did a better research job than most of his colleagues who did not have first-hand experience of the Arctic: “Real-life explorers have said that it gives one of the most accurate pictures of Arctic life ever” (*ibid.*). Writing in 1864, he was obviously profiting from a wide range of expedition reports and other publications in the wake of the Franklin search and the many attempts on the Pole from the 1850s and early 60s. In the novel, this is reflected in practical details of everything from navigation and seamanship to scientific information on glaciology, cartography and the like. It is only to be expected, therefore, that Captain Hatteras chooses Melville Sound, the most commonly used entrance to the Polar Sea at the time, as his approach route. Furthermore, as already indicated, Verne was keenly aware of the technological innovations that were being made at the time, not least in terms of improved steam engines and fortified hulls. Similarly, the novel reflects the still ongoing discussion about the open polar sea, with the accompanying speculations about an arctic continent.

Like *Moby-Dick*, with its technical descriptions of whaling, *Captain Hatteras* at times reads as much as a factual and down-to-earth expedition report as a work of fiction. This is particularly evident in Captain Hatteras himself, who despite his Captain Ahab-like obsession and madness comes

across as a surprisingly real character.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, this feature of the novel also serves to underline how polar exploration and its history are peopled by figures carrying precisely the characteristics of fictional protagonists, who constantly find themselves *in extremis*, on the edge of obsession, madness and death. But Verne's breathtaking yarn, however unrealistic at times, almost certainly also had a direct impact on the real world: there can hardly be any doubt, for instance, that Fridtjof Nansen, thirty years later, must have been inspired by Verne when he chose the name *Fram*, the obvious translation into Norwegian of Hatteras's ship *En avant* (Eng. 'forward'), which just like the *Fram* was specially built to be the strongest ship in the world.

All in all, *Captain Hatteras* underlines the extent to which the polar regions appealed to a whole register of human emotions and aspirations, and how, in the nineteenth century in particular, these regions took possession of the European imagination. It is striking, for instance, how the novel appears not only to refer back to one classic, namely *Moby-Dick*, but also forward to another, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Not only are there parallels between the two novels regarding their underlying discussions of national and even colonial ambitions, with a bewilderingly international array of characters; there are also personal parallels between Captain Hatteras and Mr. Kurtz in their relentless penetration into the unknown, which ultimately leads to little else than madness, death and destruction. And just as the doctor and his companions towards the conclusion of Verne's novel discover a scene strongly suggestive of cannibalistic practices, leading the doctor to exclaim "Horror! Horror!" (Verne 2005, 345), so does the famous conclusion of *Heart of Darkness* contain the same elements. Therefore, even if *Captain Hatteras* is primarily read as a novel of suspense and entertainment, it may also be seen as a narrative of underlying and intriguing complexities.

Could Captain Hatteras, for instance, be read as a twisted representative of progress – as an obsessively Faustian figure, who during his final ascent to the top of the deathly volcano, which he names after himself with an almost Napoleonic *hubris*, actually performs an inverted Dantean descent into the Inferno, similar to that of Thornbury's voyage into Davis Strait? Like Mr. Kurtz, who "had kicked himself loose of the earth" (Conrad 1989, 107), Hatteras, hysterically waving the Union Jack from the edge of the polar crater, reaching "the point of delirium" and showing "every sign of increasing insanity, [...] no longer lived in the realm of men; he was becoming greater than the mountain itself" (*ibid.*, 337). Again like Conrad's hero-villain, he loses his reason, the very hallmark of his humanity, and is transported back to civilisation, a wreck, a nonentity.

<sup>14</sup> The name Hatteras, according to Butcher, "must derive from the expression 'mad as a hatter', found in Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1850), or from Cape Hatteras and Hatteras Inlet, N. Carolina [...]" (*ibid.*, 376n).

In such a context, the doctor – the far more sensible and realistic man of science – could be perceived as the other face of progress, and the two characters together as an example of the double. But regardless of how the dramatic conclusion of the novel is read, it rises significantly above the level of a boys' tale, and becomes a critical comment on mid-nineteenth-century Europe.

As suggested above, an important part of Verne's genius lies in his amazing ability to negotiate the difficult borderline between an almost positivist realism and pure fantasy. Another writer with a similar talent was his American predecessor and mentor, Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49), who may also have provided Verne with one of his northern motifs. In 1841, Poe published his short story "A Descent into the Maelström" in *Graham's Magazine*. Four years later, he brought out a final version of it in *Tales* (Poe 1986, 530). The story's very realistic background is the Moskstraumen, one of the strongest tidal whirlpools in the world, situated in the Lofoten Islands in northern Norway.

The use of the motif exemplifies how information about the North was disseminated from one generation and from one literary source to another. Since it was first included on Olaus Magnus's famous map, the *Carta Marina* from the mid-1500s, the stream was a source of fantastic tales and speculations for centuries. Poe's story, however, specifically mentions a source from the early 1700s – the Norwegian historian Jonas Ramus (ref. ch. 2) – who, inspired by the spectacular ideas of Olof Rudbeck in Sweden, claimed that Moskstraumen was the Charybdis of Homer's *Odyssey*. In the mid-eighteenth century, furthermore, Erik Pontoppidan's *Natural History of Norway* gave a rather detailed and dramatic description of the phenomenon, which again probably forms the basis of the article in the 1810 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a source also mentioned in Poe's story. Even in the *Britannica* article, with its considerable weight of scientific authority, the stream carries a touch of the fantastic:

[It] roars like a thousand cataracts, so as to be heard at the distance of many leagues. The surface exhibits different vortices; and if in one of these any ship or vessel is absorbed, it is whirled down to the bottom, and dashed in pieces against the rocks. [...] Whales have been frequently absorbed within the vortex, and howled and bellowed hideously in their fruitless endeavours to disengage themselves. (Quoted in Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 339)

Clearly aware of this long and often speculative tradition, Poe weaves the harrowing story of three brothers in an open boat who are sucked into the maelstrom. Two of them are drowned, but the third miraculously rises to the surface, with his raven-black hair turned white, after being caught in the giant whirlpool for six hours. There can be little doubt that Verne found inspiration in Poe's story for the conclusion of his novel *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (1870), where the submarine of the mystical Captain Nemo is similarly caught in the Norwegian maelstrom, producing an ending which is appropriately ambiguous.

Polar fiction of the fantastic kind also includes other works by Poe, such as the short story “Manuscript Found in a Bottle” (1833) and the strange and much-debated *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), Poe’s only novel. Both of these works are at least partly set in the South Seas, the latter being “written as the Wilkes expedition got under sail” (Pyne 2004, 164). In both cases, this region serves as a kind of final destination of horror and apocalypse. Strangely bridging the gap between the 1830s and a post-Freudian sense of human psychology, these blind voyages into an unknown South – which could just as well have been an unknown North – are studies of the irrational and of mental deterioration, arguably a foreshadowing of a symbolic use of the polar regions that would become more prominent in the twentieth century. And in creating this overall effect, Poe concludes both texts by employing elements of the hollow earth theory, developed by Athanasius Kircher in the 1660s and popularised in 1818 by John Cleves Symmes, in his idea of concentric spheres (ref. ch. 4). Thus there is a striking similarity between the whirling funnel of the northern maelstrom, which pulls its helpless victims deep down to the bottom of the ocean, and its southern counterpart, which according to the last paragraph of “Manuscript Found in a Bottle” does almost exactly the same:

[T]he ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness of the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny – the circles rapidly grow small – we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool – and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and – going down. (Poe 1986, 109)

In view of Poe’s major impact on French literature and Verne’s “polar obsession”, another French novel, *Laura: A Journey into the Crystal* (1864) by George Sand (1804–76) deserves to be included in a discussion of fantastic polar fiction. Verne and Sand were not unaware of each other; Sand was a great admirer of Verne, and they shared the same publisher, the famous Pierre-Jules Hetzel. When comparing *Captain Hatteras* and *Laura*, it is also interesting to note that they were written almost simultaneously, but as Sand’s dedication of her novel to her daughter is dated 1 December 1863 (Sand 2004, 7), and the serialisation of *Hatteras* started in March 1864, it seems reasonable to conclude that they have been written independently of each other, despite a number of similarities. *Laura* is a strangely surreal novel, which may even be read as a precursor of the more explicitly psychological novels that came later at the turn of the century.

The polar world in the text is primarily the space for a spiritual journey, but at the same time it makes ample use of such natural sciences as glaciology and geology. Similarly, it plays on August Petermann’s speculations about a temperate polar sea, on the somewhat more

imaginative hollow earth theory by John Cleves Symmes Jr., and on the older ideas of the so-called “lodestone mountain”, which was assumed to attract the compass needle. Central to the narrative is a geode, defined as a “hollow stone whose interior is lined with crystals or incrustations” (*ibid.*, 10), and it is into this micro-universe of ice-like crystal or crystal-like ice that M. Hartz, the main narrator, claims to have entered.

It is a peculiar story, whose hallucinatory quality makes it impossible to distinguish between dream and reality; still, M. Hartz and his beloved cousin Laura clearly emerge as a couple reminiscent of Adam and Eve, just as the obscure and rather sinister character Nasias comes across as a mixture of the Wandering Jew, Verne’s Captain Hatteras and a Mephisto figure. The journey inside the crystal, in other words, which is at the same time a search for the North Pole, acquires a peculiar double quality, wavering between utopia and dystopia; it is an icy Eden of absolute purity or, alternatively, a chilly inferno, of a place epitomising an uncompromising search for knowledge – be it religious, existential or scientific. In this regard, it also carries an uncanny echo of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In the end, the romantic frame narrative ascribes the surreal polar journey to M. Hartz’s hallucinations from his reading of *One Thousand and One Nights* alongside Elisha Kent Kane’s arctic expedition accounts.

Sand’s novel thus strongly underlines the powerful imaginative appeal that the world of ice exerted on a generation that was being inundated by fictional and non-fictional literature on and from the Far North. But it also reflects another and far more esoteric obsession, discussed by Eric G. Wilson in his study *The Spiritual History of Ice*, with ice, crystals, magnetism and polarity as possible keys to an understanding of the mystery of life itself. By the time of the Middle Ages, “crystallomancy had become a primary method of divination”, and such figures as Paracelsus and John Dee had been deeply involved in the art (Wilson 2003, 10–13). At the same time, of course, this fascination was profoundly connected with the growth of science, and in his 1721 thesis *The Principles of Chemistry*, the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1653–1735) had even claimed that “the crystal is a window to and mirror of the infinite energy that originates and sustains the cosmos” (*ibid.*, 22).

This idea entered straight into the bloodstream of the Romantics, who were equally obsessed with the concept of polarity and magnetism: “Romantic epistemologies as developed by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and others were dependent on contrary forces, subjects and objects, opposites and reconciliation” (Fulford et al. 2004, 167–8). Against this background, the exploration of the polar regions was something qualitatively different from that of Africa or the Himalayas; it was an exploration of the life force itself, and in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, an understanding of its mechanisms promised “to put science and the soul, long estranged from one another, at one again” (Wilson 2003, 24), thereby untying the

Gordian knot of the Romantics. It is clearly this peculiar combination of science and mysticism that lies at the core of Sand's novel, whose frame narrative not unexpectedly shies away from the challenge, and seeks refuge in a perfectly realistic and sentimental happy ending.

### *Music and Art on Ice*

Like the considerable body of literature – fictional and non-fictional – discussed above, pictorial art and music served as a running commentary on the apparently endless drama that was unfolding in the remote and frozen regions. It is striking, however, that the musical legacy from the period is now largely forgotten, and no major composer appears to have produced any significant work with a specifically polar theme.

As during the pre-1830 period, there are a number of popular songs and shorter piano pieces, which clearly continued to respond to a middle-class demand for music written primarily for home consumption. Some of these works celebrate particular leaders of expeditions, suggested by titles such as “Captain Ross and His Crew: A North Pole Adventure” (1840) and “Our Arctic Expedition: Farewell Waltz to Our Gallant Sailors of the ‘Alert’ and ‘Discovery’” (1875), i.e. the Nares Expedition. Mrs. Hugh H. Knocker’s “Arctic Galop” [*sic*] is similarly “dedicated by permission to Sir Leopold McClintock and the Officers & Men of the Expedition” (Knocker [1876]). The song “The Ice! The Ice!” (1856) by J.E. Carpenter and W.H. Weiss, on the other hand, rather accurately reflects the futility of polar exploration:

The Ice! the Ice! has a realm of his own,  
And he reigns a King on his northern throne;  
Full many have tried, but tried in vain,  
To force a path through his wide domain.  
There’s many a mountain, but never a tree  
On that dreary and desolate northern sea,  
With its shifting shoals, and its drifting rocks,  
That the Mariner scares, and the Pilot mocks!  
(Carpenter and Weiss [1856], 1–3)

Others, such as “The Ice Song” (1840) and “The Old Ice King” (1862), combine the interest in the popular pastime of skating with that in polar exploration. Romantic themes, furthermore, are also present, as in the duet “The Greenland Girl and the Stranger” (1830), whose rather limited poetic qualities still seem to imply a greater trust in the faithfulness of a Greenland girl than in a stranger from the civilised South:

*First voice:*

That love must be warm 'mid the Greenland rocks,  
Which bears with the storm and the rude sea shocks;  
And night after night to its fond hope flies,  
Is there love like this beneath Southern skies?

*Second voice:*

There is love more warm than the northern heart's  
Love that weeps and raves then calmly parts  
From the hold that it seem's with its life to save,  
'Tis not the faith – love of the Greenland wave!

*Duetto:*

Oh! true love, true love! Here's thy home,  
In other climes thou dost but roam  
Thou hast not here false tears and sighs,  
Nor the perjur'd faith of the Southern skies!  
No no no no no no no no no no no no no no! (Wade [1830], 1–3)

In terms of music, then, the fascination with polar exploration produced little other than sentimental comments or uncritical celebrations of heroism.

With regard to pictorial art, on the other hand, a different impression emerges. First of all, there is a wider range of genres represented. Polar themes appear in paintings, engravings and other illustrations, and they cover a broader spectrum of perspectives. As an important part of the documentation from the numerous expeditions, many crews took their own artists with them, and some of these created memorable works of art. In other cases, established artists back home produced works based on sketches produced by members of the crew. Clearly, all of these artists were under a certain obligation to convey an officially palatable version of events. But being aware of the role and expectations of the media, they were also keen to express the human and natural drama that polar exploration provided. Thus paintings like John Wilson Carmichael's *HMS Erebus and Terror in the Antarctic* (1847) and Lt. Gurney Cresswell's *The Perilous Position of HMS Investigator 20 August 1851* (1850–54) may well be viewed as celebrations of British mettle and courage in the face of a hostile nature, but may also, with the benefit of hindsight, equally be regarded as illustrations of wasted efforts and futile heroism. The fact that the latter painting, in particular, depicts the two ships that would later be used for the fatal Franklin expedition, only adds to the ambiguity of the work.

An important series of paintings was produced during the previously mentioned Recherche expedition to the North Atlantic from 1838 to 1840, which included as many as three artists. One of these was the painter François-Auguste Biard (1798–1882), whose wife, Léonie, took part in the expedition and later wrote a popular account from it entitled *Voyage d'une Femme au Spitzberg* (1854; *A Woman's Voyage to Spitsbergen*) (Arlov 2003, 171). Several of Biard's paintings from the voyage depict scenes from Sami life in the north of Norway, but one work in particular departs radically



from the others by addressing a sensitive issue almost consistently avoided, at least from a realistic perspective, in the depiction of polar exploration up till then, namely death.

*Magdalena Bay* is a picture completely devoid of any element of heroic grandeur.<sup>15</sup> It shows three men who are already dead, half covered with a thin layer of snow, and a fourth, sitting and still alive, but helplessly caught in a desolate, merciless landscape of ice and craggy mountains, with the northern lights swirling overhead. Only four years earlier, the Dutch painter Christiaan J.L. Portman had painted *The Death of Willem Barents* (1836), a historical portrait that, despite similarly hostile surroundings, creates a scene at once dignified, civilised and heroic, with more than a touch of the classical pieta.<sup>16</sup> Biard's scene has none of these redeeming features; not even the brightness of the northern lights brings a ray of hope.

Obviously, *Magdalena Bay* may be subjected to different interpretations, and it may not have been intended explicitly as a criticism of polar exploration. Still, in the aftermath of the Franklin tragedy, the Arctic acquired a quality that was at once more complex, more debatable and more ambiguous than before. Also, as the Franklin search had very decisively brought the United States into the polar race, it is hardly surprising that an American artist was next to attract the world's attention with an arctic scene.

The motif of *The Icebergs* by the Hartford painter Frederic Church (1826–1900) was perhaps not particularly original. An awesome, sublime landscape of icebergs and ocean, together with some pitiful remains of a ship, had been explored before, especially by Caspar David Friedrich. The German artist, however, was virtually unknown in his day, whereas Church was already an established artist. "Starting in 1857, the public releases of his major studio pictures and their touring schedules throughout the East, Midwest, and in Britain became news-making events" (Gerald L. Carr in Harvey 2002, 15). Church, in other words, had picked up the gauntlet from his countryman, the explorer Elisha Kent Kane, who died in the year of Church's breakthrough, and who had created an American mania for everything connected with the Arctic. He was also a friend of Kane's successor, Isaac Hayes, who was eagerly collecting funds for a new expedition in search of Franklin (Potter 2007, 180). In the summer of 1859, furthermore, Church had made a voyage to the coast of Labrador and Newfoundland together with his friend and admirer Louis L. Noble, who later published an account from the voyage, *After Icebergs with a Painter* (1861). The narrative is interesting because only a few years after

<sup>15</sup> The actual place, now Magdalena Fjord, is situated on the north-western tip of Spitsbergen.

<sup>16</sup> Portman's painting is in the National Maritime Museum in London. See <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/11851.html>

the publication of Melville's *Moby Dick*, it may almost be read as a kind of parallel text: the metaphor of hunting is the same in both works, but in this case Noble and Church are hunting, not for the white whale, but for another white and sublime product of nature: an iceberg that might serve as a motif for the artist's planned painting.

In addition to his obsession with icebergs, Church played on the interest, triggered by Agassiz, Figuer and other scientists, in the natural history of the earth. But more importantly, when the painting was finished in April 1861, it was dropped like a bombshell right into one of the most dramatic moments in American history – the beginning of the Civil War:

[T]welve days before its debut the bombardment of Fort Sumter realigned the nation's priorities. The shock of a nation finding itself at war rippled through the art market. Church went ahead with the unveiling of his painting at Goupil's Gallery in New York as scheduled on April 24. However, he made a critical concession to current events, titling his painting "*The North*". An ardent Unionist, he went a step further, pledging to donate the proceeds from the exhibition to the newly created Union Patriotic Fund, which supported the families of Union soldiers. (Harvey 2002, 59–61)

The painting, in other words, was made to play an explicit role on the American political scene. But its impact was not limited to the United States alone. When the picture was later put on show in London, the preview party included such dignitaries as Lady Franklin and a host of English arctic explorers (Potter 2007, 187). And the public response was overwhelming; private viewers and art critics alike stood in awe in front of the giant canvas, which measured 163 x 285 cm, and newspapers and journals were filled with reviews, discussions and intricate interpretations of compositional details. Like Captain Ahab's white whale, the iceberg in the centre of the picture assumed an almost archetypal significance that is difficult to fathom a century and a half later. And as a crowning achievement and a strong indication of the public prestige achieved by the picture, it was eventually sold, in 1865, to the English railway mogul Edward William Watkin for the astronomical figure of £10,000 (Gerald L. Carr in Harvey 2002, 20).

Church, however, was not the only American painter to capitalise on the Arctic. In the course of a long professional life, his colleague William Bradford (1823–92), who eventually earned a reputation as "The Painter of the North" (Kugler 2003, 27), probably studied the polar world more systematically than any other artist of the nineteenth century. In the 1860s and 70s, he made a number of voyages to Newfoundland, Melville Bay and Greenland, one of which included Church's old friend and polar expert Isaac Israel Hayes, and during this period, he produced a large number of major works, some of them on the same grand scale as Church's *The Icebergs*. Pursuing a stylistic ideal of a photographic natural likeness, he also pioneered the use of photography, both as a preliminary study for

later paintings and as an artistic technique in its own right. Like Church, he obtained important sales and commissions in Britain, and through the recent reproduction technique of the chromolithograph or ‘the chromo’,



Edwin H. Landseer: *Man Proposes, God Disposes* (1864). © Royal Holloway / The Bridgeman Art Library.

his works also reached out to a large middle-class audience, who for a fraction of the price of an oil painting could acquire the prestigious motifs, “printed on paper in oil colors, then stretched and mounted on canvas in order to give the resemblance of a painting” (*ibid.*, 24).

The extraordinary success of painters like Church and Bradford says a lot about the extent to which the North and the arctic regions were an essential part of the mid-nineteenth-century world. As indicated earlier, this was largely due to the nearly thirty-year-long search for Franklin, which was eagerly pursued on both sides of the Atlantic, and it comes as no surprise, therefore, that a British painter, too, would explore a similar thematic avenue. But whereas the enormous success of the American artists was largely due to their paintings’ subdued and even sentimental mood, which welcomed a wide but relatively uncomplicated range of emotional responses, Edwin H. Landseer (1802–73) approached the issue from a different and more controversial angle.

At a time when uncritically heroic and jingoistic commemorative poetry, together with fiction and non-fiction of a similar kind, was being produced to ease the pain of the nation’s grief and humiliation, the painting *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, which was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1864, could not avoid being seen as a direct reference to the fate of the Franklin expedition. The canvas, two and half metres wide and thus comparable with *The Icebergs* in its visual impact, leaves the spectator with very little chance of retaining any escapist illusions; it is a merciless illustration of “the survival of the fittest”, a phrase coined the very same year by Herbert Spencer in his *Principles of Biology*, but inspired by Darwin’s five-year-old *On the Origin of Species*. And there is little doubt as to who are the survivors. As in Friedrich’s *The Sea of Ice* from 1823

and Church's *The Icebergs*, the destruction of anything man-made is nearly over; the ship is disappearing among the ice floes, but Landseer has added a new dimension: two polar bears chillingly placed almost symmetrically in the picture, tearing to pieces some blood-coloured remnants of the sail and chewing some bones that could *just* perhaps be human.

Landseer's aggressively unembellished revelation of the realities of man's struggle with the elements and of the less attractive truths about the Franklin expedition was destined to make an impression, even ten years after John Rae's report about possible cannibalism on the expedition had caused an uproar in the press. Admittedly, it was "arguably the most popular painting of the show", but it also "addressed an issue that was still controversial and sensitive at the time", and several critics found it inappropriate and tasteless (Høvik 2008, 184 and 188).

With regard to polar exploration, Landseer thus emerges as one of the few genuinely critical voices of his generation, and at least within



John Everett Millais (1829–96): *The North-West Passage* (1874). © Tate, London 2014.

the British context, his powerful statement seems to have silenced the celebratory chorus of writers and artists of the Franklin era. It seems appropriate, therefore, that immediately before Lady Franklin's death in 1875, John Everett Millais (1829–96), one of the founders of the Pre-

Raphaelite School, closed this chapter of British history with a painting of realistic resignation. Though painted during the preparations for the Nares expedition, *The North-West Passage* (1874) also clearly echoes Britain's arctic nightmare of the last three decades; the subtitle – “It might be done, and England ought to do it” – could only be interpreted by contemporary viewers as a reference to the Franklin expedition (Laurent Bury in Regard ed. 2013b, 172).<sup>17</sup> Precisely how Millais's use of the subtitle should be interpreted, however, is perhaps another question; also, this is not the only ambiguous element in the picture. These aspects considered, it takes a bit of imagination to extract from it the straightforward heroic bugle calls of John Barrow earlier in the century.

Altogether *The North-West Passage* depicts a strangely pessimistic scene. Even if the sea and a ship are visible through the window, the blinds are half down, and the room is in a semi-darkness that is profoundly reflected in the mood of the central figures – an old man and a young woman. The viewer's attention is immediately drawn to the old man, clearly a former man of the sea, dressed in black, who sits bending slightly forward, as if half in expectation, with his back to the world outside. He stares vacantly into the air, and his fists are clenched. The woman, who sits on a low stool by his feet, rests her right hand on his apparently unresponsive fist while she is reading in or from a book .

Although a narrative painting, as was typical of the period, the picture consequently invites different and even contradictory interpretations. Clearly, the title as well as the scene itself is full of references to Britain's efforts in the Arctic; the flag, the map, the polar accounts in the foreground, and the pictures on the wall are all suggestive of national pride and enterprise. As a result, one critic claims that the painting “sums up the mood of nostalgia and aspiration with which the public of the time identified” (Savours 1999, 298); another goes so far as to claim that the mood of the painting “is one of optimism” (Thomas 2000, 38).

The old man, however, fundamentally undermines such a reading. There is a tenseness, a bitterness (possibly underlined by the lemon on the plate next to his tumbler of grog) and a sense of quiet despair that seem to indicate either grief at a personal loss, or a failing hope of the return of a loved one. There is even a coffin-like quality about the table, with the flags draping it and the wreath-like flowers. In such a context, the entire scene would suggest futility and hopelessness rather than enterprise and optimism. Still, the picture retains its ambiguity, especially through the presence of the young woman, who might be interpreted as the old man's daughter. She is more likely, however, to be his son's fiancé: the hat on the table and the basket on the floor seem to indicate that she is only visiting, and the only physical contact between the two – the open hand on the

<sup>17</sup> Bury offers an interesting discussion of the different ways in which the picture has been interpreted up to the present day.

closed fist – similarly suggests a lack of intimacy. Despite the ambiguities, however, *The North-West Passage* – yet another giant canvas – sold for the staggering sum of 4,700 guineas (*ibid.*, 37), and in 1897 was given to the nation by Henry Tate and thereby ensured an iconic status.

### ***Fashionable Scandinavia***

By 1830, Britain and the Continent could already look back on a long tradition of viewing Scandinavia and Iceland (the northernmost parts of Europe) as closely connected with the polar regions. The perception of Norway, for instance, as “a cold barren country” was still very much alive. It was largely based, however, on written sources, many of which passed on stereotyped ideas from other written sources. Travelling to these countries for other than political or commercial reasons had always been reserved for the very few.

In the years around 1830, this picture slowly changed; after Waterloo, the embargoes, which had prevented many Europeans from travelling for a whole generation, were lifted, and together with the gradual transformation in public transport represented by the introduction of steam, the following decades witnessed a revolution in travel, which effectively introduced the era of modern tourism from the middle of the century onwards. This is the period when passenger ships with regular departures were introduced across the North Sea and to Denmark, thus radically facilitating access to the whole region. In 1876, for instance, the British traveller William Mattieu Williams, who had witnessed the improvement in travel, reported that

[d]uring the twenty years that have elapsed since my first visit, the development of tourist traffic between England and Norway has been very remarkable. Instead of a vessel of notorious unfitness for passenger traffic, such as that in which I sailed from Hull in 1856, there are now some excellent vessels sailing from that port to the same destination. Instead of carrying six or seven saloon passengers and two in the fore-cabin, they are now all crowded at every trip during the summer. This is especially the case with the *Angelo*, a splendid passage ship of 1600 tons, 262 feet long, 33½ feet broad, with separate dining saloon, drawing room, reading room, state rooms, special promenade, and dormitories for seventy-four first-class passengers. This or other vessels sail weekly between Hull and Christiania, and *vice versa*. Besides there are packets between Hull and Bergen, Hull and Trondhjem; between London and Christiania, Leith and Christiania, Newcastle and Christiania and Bergen, and quite a multitude of indirect routes, such as *viâ* Gothenburg, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Kiel, &c. (Williams 1876, 17–18)

At the same time, roads improved, railways were built, inns and hotels appeared in increasing numbers, and travel agents developed a network of local contacts, thereby effectively constructing a more and more predictable

set of routes and destinations. As a result, the North started to experience a minor inundation of travellers from abroad (see Fjågesund and Symes 2003, ch. 1).

This development is reflected in a large number of travel accounts from the Nordic countries. A count of works listed in Swedish and Norwegian bibliographies of travel literature suggests that during the fifty-year period in question more than three hundred book-length travelogues were published outside Scandinavia about one or several of the countries in the region.<sup>18</sup> As a rough estimate, fifty percent of these were British,<sup>19</sup> twenty percent German, and ten percent French. The rest were Dutch, Italian, Spanish or other European. In addition, there were a large number of articles in newspapers and journals, and passages in travel accounts covering a wider geographical area.

Tourism and travel were increasing everywhere, but Northern Europe appears to have had more than its fair share of the increase, and the popularity of the North coincided with, and was closely connected to, a period of intensive polar exploration. As a result, the meaning of “exploration” was transferred to the private sphere; the numerous expeditions to the arctic regions involving large crews and public funding were taken as models for private, small-scale journeys. One of the travellers to the interior of Telemark in Norway, for instance, claims that it seemed “our expedition were one of exploration in a strange land” (Phythian 1877, 16). In most travel accounts this implies a general tendency to consider at least parts of Scandinavia as being vaguely comparable to other parts of the world that had not been fully explored and that were perceived as underdeveloped in comparison with Britain and the Continent. There is, for instance, a relatively striking similarity between the description of the Inuit in accounts from polar expeditions and of the Sami in travelogues from Norway and Sweden. As will be discussed below, however, this contrast between civilisation and primitivism also carries a fundamental ambiguity.

One phenomenon that deserves particular attention is the fashion, especially among young, wealthy travellers with their own yachts, of emulating the arctic expeditions by sailing as far as Iceland and Svalbard, that is more or less literally to the edge of the ice. Typically, these travellers cum explorers made use of their already existing international network in order to establish the right contacts. One of them was the German manufacturer and burgomaster Barto von Löwenigh (1799–1853), who in 1830 published *Reise nach Spitzbergen* (Journey to Svalbard), an account of his voyage three years earlier to Norway and Svalbard together with the

<sup>18</sup> Schiötz 1970 and 1986, and Bring 1954. For more comprehensive presentations of the topic of this section, see Davies 2000 and Fjågesund and Symes 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Including a small number of American accounts.

Norwegian geologist Keilhau. With the help of his countryman August Petermann, von Löwenigh even succeeded, after his death, in giving a point at Edgeøya – Kapp Löwenigh – his name.

Another such upper-class traveller was, as has been suggested earlier, the young John Barrow Jr., who would later replace his father as Second Secretary of the Admiralty. Barrow had already made two extensive journeys in Russia, Finland and Scandinavia in 1830 and 1833, which resulted in the travelogue *Excursions in the North of Europe*, from 1834. In that same year, still only twenty-six years old and together with two friends, he embarked on a voyage even further north. They were not alone on the 130-ton yacht, however; on board were also “a crew of twelve” (Barrow Jr. 1835, 5)! This, and the title of his account – *A Visit to Iceland, by Way of Tronyem* [i.e. Trondheim], in the “Flower of Yarrow” Yacht, in the Summer of 1834 (1835) – are typical of the upper-class context of the voyage. In Trondheim, furthermore, they welcome on board two Norwegian friends who sail with them to Iceland. One of them was Broder Knudtzon (1788–1864), a merchant and patron of the arts, who in 1814 had worked with Carsten Anker in London to secure British support of Norwegian independence from Denmark (Bull et al. eds., 1923–83, s.v. “Knudtzon, Broder”), and who had a Danish cousin living in Iceland (Barrow Jr. 1835, 109). Incidentally, the young men’s visit to Iceland coincided with that of the Danish Prince Frederick, which further attests to the general fascination with the northern regions.

A third traveller with a similarly privileged background is Frederick Temple Blackwood, better known as Lord Dufferin (1826–1902), whose frequently reprinted account from 1857 has a title similar to that of Barrow Jr.: *Letters from High Latitudes, Being Some Account of a Voyage in the Schooner Yacht “Foam”, 85 O.M. to Iceland, Jan Mayen, & Spitzbergen, in 1856*.<sup>20</sup> At times, Dufferin’s book reads like a combination of a rather unpretentious travelogue and a historical survey of arctic exploration, and his rather unusual route – for a private yacht – points in the same direction. Visiting northern Norway, Iceland, Bjørnøya (Bear Island) and the northern tip of Svalbard, his voyage is actually not dissimilar to many polar expeditions. Also, *Foam* runs into serious problems with the ice, but this is continuously counteracted by the numerous and humorous encounters between the author and his servant, Wilson, who with his black despondency in the face of ice and storms provides comic relief along Jeevesian lines:

Coming to the side of my cot with the air of a man announcing the stroke of doomsday, he used to say, or rather *toll* –  
 “Seven o’clock, my Lord!”  
 “Very well; how’s the wind?”

<sup>20</sup> The popularity of the book has even inspired modern writers. In 1999, the English travel writer and humorist Tim Moore published *Frost on My Moustache*, which is humorously modelled on Dufferin’s voyage.



- “Dead ahead, my Lord – *dead!*”  
 “How many points is she off her course?”  
 “Four points, my Lord – full four points!” (Four points being as much as she could be.)  
 “Is it pretty clear? eh! Wilson?”  
 “ – Can’t see your hand, my Lord! – can’t see your hand!”  
 “Much ice in sight?”  
 “ – Ice all round, my Lord – ice a-all ro-ound!” (Dufferin 1857, 291–2)

Thus, while genuine expedition reports are, as a rule, thoroughly serious and often filled with death and tragedy, the travelogues from the same regions are instead focused on the voyage or the journey as an opportunity for aesthetic enjoyment, relaxation and even entertainment. As a result, Dufferin’s work, for instance, echoes the mood of the popular music on polar themes from the same period.

Still, the large majority of travellers had a very clear notion of what they wanted to see and experience: they certainly did *not* come to the North in order to study the great achievements of European civilisation; they were not Grand Tourists looking for palaces and cathedrals drawn by ingenious architects; and they did not come in order to admire galleries and libraries as reservoirs of man’s most advanced aesthetic and philosophical endeavours. Generally, travellers to Scandinavia were in search of the very *opposite* of what was typically on the menu of the Grand Tourist, and they tended to emphasise it in the most unequivocal terms. The clergyman and angler William Bilton, who visited Norway in the late 1830s, leaves no doubt as to what qualities Norway does and does not possess:

If they were swept away from the face of the earth, the Norwegians would leave behind them no monument of human skill, or labour, or intellect, to tell another generation that a great people had so long tenanted the wide extent of Scandinavia. Nature’s monuments would indeed still remain: Norway’s Fjelder and Fjords would still claim the homage of the admirer of the sublime and beautiful. But no work of public utility or ornament – (its two or three cathedrals can scarcely be reckoned an exception) – no achievement in Science or Literature, wherewith the human mind of one period holds converse with the mind of all times, would exist to excite the regrets and admiration of the future wanderer on these shores. (Bilton 1840, II: 224–5)

Another traveller simply states: “It is nature, and nature alone, that we learn to admire in these remote regions [...]” (Elwes 1853, no pag.).

Romantic nature worship, then, lies at the core of the growing urge to see and experience the North, and the large majority of pages in the many travelogues are dedicated to the authors’ attempts to convey the often overwhelming experience of an unharnessed natural scenery. For many, the sublimity of waterfalls, in particular, amounts almost to an obsession. The English traveller Charles Elton, on his way to Vøringsfossen, which together with the Rjukanfossen offered the most spectacular example of the phenomenon of waterfalls in Norway, comments on a fellow traveller, a Frenchman, who is gradually working himself into a frenzy

as he approaches the scene: “When we were opposite the entrance of the Hardanger Fjord he became very much excited, and cried: ‘I am coming near it! I am coming near it! for thirty years I dream of Vöring Foss!’” (Elton 1864, 125).

For the average nineteenth-century tourist, in other words, the North offered an experience that was primarily associated with leisure or holiday activity and that produced an emotional and aesthetic response. Not surprisingly, the initial wave of visitors were the so-called “salmon lords” (wealthy Englishmen who came to fish salmon in the Norwegian rivers, especially in the North). In addition, the endless tracts of sparsely populated forests and mountains provided first-class opportunities for hunting and shooting. In the course of the 1846–60 period alone, nearly 3,500 bears and nearly 50,000 eagles were reported killed in Norway (Barnard 1864, 189). Norway was, as the traveller and mountaineer William Slingsby called it, “a northern playground”, undoubtedly more than anything a place of adventure.<sup>21</sup> In the same way, there is something almost infantile about the frequent affectation of drama and danger that also accompanies these accounts; it is as if the tourist, whose journey by definition is not only free of risk but also free of any practical purpose, needs to impress the reader with a constantly inflated narrative. In the present context, this means that the qualities typically associated with the North are exaggerated rather than realistically described.

With regard to the presentation of people and society in the countries involved, this results in a strange paradox, or even contradiction: on the one hand, the emphasis on the absence of everything associated with civilisation suggests a view of the North as undeniably primitive. On the other hand, there are sometimes intimations of precisely the opposite, that is a view of the North as strangely sophisticated, and even superior to the dominant cultures further south. This is once again connected with Rousseau’s *Umwertung* of cultural values, which inverts the traditional picture, and sees primitivism and simplicity as superior to civilisation. For Frederick Metcalfe, a Fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford,

[c]ivilization has smoothed the gradients actually and metaphorically [...]. As people progress in civilization, the more prominent marks of national character are planed off. Individuality is lost. [...] But it is not so with the population of a primitive country like Norway. Much of the simplicity that characterized our forefathers is still existing there. (Metcalfe 1858, I: vi–vii)

And having made the journey from the centre of learning to the backroads of Telemark, he had “come to the world’s end; for there is no road for

<sup>21</sup> Slingsby had literally travelled north from the Alps, inspired by Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s father, and the former’s *Norway: The Northern Playground* (1904) was clearly indebted to the latter’s *The Playground of Europe* (1871), which was already a classic of modern mountaineering. For a recent account of the post-Enlightenment history of mountaineering, see Hansen 2013.

wheels beyond it. [...] Adieu to the ‘boppery bop’ of civilization, with all its forms and ceremonies, and turnpikes and twaddle” (*ibid.*, 51).

One of the most interesting writers in this respect is the German Theodor Mügge (1806–61), who enjoyed enough of a reputation in his day for a thirty-three-volume edition of his collected works to be published after his death. A Berliner, Mügge must have been heavily inspired by Henrich Steffens, who had taken over Hegel’s professorship there in 1830, but perhaps especially by his novels. Not only did Mügge himself write several works of fiction set in Norway; he also wrote three travel accounts from Norway and Sweden, including *Skizzen aus dem Norden* (1844; Sketches from the North), which follows precisely the same route from Christiania into Telemark as one of the protagonists in Steffens’s *Die Familien Walseth und Leith*. In 1858, furthermore, he published a collection of four short stories, *Leben und Lieben in Norwegen* (Life and Love in Norway). One of these stories, “Rjukan-Voss” (Rjukan Waterfall) is set, as the title indicates, in Rjukan, and is again closely modelled on the description in Steffens’s novel, even to the extent of giving a central character the same name. Mügge, however, takes Steffens’s celebration of Norway one step further by exacerbating the conflict between two radically different cultural traditions.

In the story, Lars Karstens-Warfsteen, a third-generation German businessman in Norway, epitomises in every respect the nineteenth-century idea of rationality and progress; he is an industrialist who lives on the coast, where he owns an ironworks and conducts a brisk trade in timber, but he also owns a country house in the interior of Telemark, called Guldhalm, a name suggesting his unwavering faith in money and material wealth. At the same time, he feels a profound contempt for the democratically inclined farmers, whom he is forced to deal with. Mügge here has a perfect setting for launching his vision of the North as a place where people live not only in deep harmony with their natural surroundings; they also retain a genuine and organic connection with their proud past, which places them in a direct line from the Viking kings.

This idea of royal descent almost amounts to a stereotype in the travelogues from the North; a series of writers proudly describe their meetings, or audiences, with old farmers who boast a direct line to Harald Fairhair or another Viking king. Mügge may also have borrowed the idea from Fouqué, whose *Der Mensch des Südens und der Mensch des Nordens* (Southern Man and Northern Man) similarly describes the old Icelanders as *Fürsten* or princes (Fouqué 1829, 13). Against the background of the democratic Constitution of 1814, therefore, the Norwegian farmers combine an aristocratic tradition with a fundamental faith in democracy and liberty. Going back to thinkers like Montesquieu, Rousseau, de Staël and Steffens, Mügge’s story, in other words, presents a picture of an unsullied North, a model to be emulated, as against a decadent Germany

looking more or less like an anti-democratic, reactionary, pre-revolutionary France. Karstens-Warfsteen, disenchanted with Norway, plans to move back to Germany:

I am sick and tired of being humiliated by the farmers, tired of seeing how the power and influence of the vulgar masses increase. I do not want to stay in a country where there is no longer a nobility, restrictions or a higher class, where one has destroyed everything and will continue to destroy whatever is left. I want to invest in Germany. (Mügge 1858, II: 49–50)<sup>22</sup>

In Mügge's opinion, Norway represents the very qualities that Germany once possessed. On witnessing the impressive dignity of an old farmer during his journey in 1843, he nostalgically ruminates: "was he not an image of the ancient German freedom, which once also had a home in our fatherland?!" (Mügge 1844, I: 305).

Mügge's ideal farmer seems to embody an apparently impossible and Janus-faced combination of ideals: a child of nature, living far removed from civilisation, he is also a well-informed, modern citizen. Many other travellers similarly express a profound disappointment at the prospects of returning from a holiday in the simple and primitive North to the comforts of contemporary urban life. This paradox lies at the core of the ever growing nostalgia for the northern past that characterises the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

### ***Politicising the Past***

The growing popularity of the Nordic countries as travel destinations was always closely connected with a perception of them as reservoirs of a past that in other parts of Europe had been largely buried under the black smoke from steam engines and obscured by a one-eyed vision of a bright and rational future. The region was still regarded as relatively free from the contamination of the modern world; it was as yet a world of timeless, sublime natural scenery, in which it was still possible to see and to imagine a past of mythical and heroic proportions. Not surprisingly, therefore, the middle of the century fostered a number of critics who also actively propagated a view of the people of the North as eminently suitable inhabitants of this worthy landscape. As will be remembered, writers like Montesquieu, Rousseau, Madame de Staël and others had, ever since the middle of the eighteenth century, provided ammunition for seeing northerners as culturally as well as physically superior to southerners. In Montesquieu, for instance, these ideas appear – from a modern perspective – innocent as well as slightly peculiar. As the nineteenth century progressed, however,

<sup>22</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

and with it a sharper sense of national competition, such perceptions were gradually reformulated and radicalised, absorbing new elements along the way. Race and class, for instance, were increasingly drawn into the debate.

Against the background of the horrors of the mid-twentieth century, it is easy to identify the discussions a century earlier as containing a potentially lethal combination of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) and historical arguments. It is also easy to see that some of the seeds that were sown were weeds that took root in the fertile cultural and political soil of the period. It is far *less* simple, on the other hand, to follow the roots back to their origins, or rather to establish precisely which ideas were the cause of later disaster and which were perfectly innocuous.<sup>23</sup>

Still, there is no doubt that “a medico-psychiatric and natural-scientific language of degeneration” (Pick 1989, 2), which on the surface was unconnected with ideas of the past, frequently turned to history in order to diagnose and describe the allegedly critical situation of the present. In 1855, for instance, the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82), who later acquired the unpleasant epithet “the father of European racism” (O’Donoghue 2007, 130), published the *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*. Incidentally, the somewhat Rousseauesque echo in the title is also partly present in the work itself, which postulates a past in which the various races enjoyed a natural state of original purity before degenerating through a gradual process of interbreeding. According to Gobineau, the races of the North – the so called “Nordic Europeans” – are not only less mixed with other blood, but also superior to those further south.

Similar ideas were promoted by the German writer Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823–97), who with his four-volume work *Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer Deutschen Socialpolitik* (1851–69; *The Natural History of the German People*) became “the most important folkish theorist of the nineteenth century” (Facos 1998, 47). Building on Herder and Rousseau, Riehl – like his countryman Mügge – turned with profound scepticism against the modern urban culture, and sought a genuine, natural state only to be found among the peasants in the remote countryside, that is in a society with vital roots in the deep, pre-industrial past of the nation.

In Britain, the Romantic sense of loss at the dramatic transformation of society was perhaps more outspoken than anywhere else around the middle of the century. Writers and critics as well as artistic and utopian movements all hankered for a return to a reality where – it was argued – social bonds and structures were still intact, and where the individual had a sense of belonging to his natural surroundings.

The Scotsman Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), whose influence was “so extraordinary that it has never been approached in modern British history by any other single intellectual figure” (LeQuesne 1982, 55), saw

<sup>23</sup> The ideological forerunners of the extreme right will be discussed in more detail in ch. 6.



In the 1850s, i.e. before the first archaeological finds of Viking ship burials, ideas about what the ships actually looked like were almost a matter of pure conjecture. This illustration, from the title page of Lord Dufferin's travel account *Letters from High Latitudes* (1857), suggests a rather lively imagination on the part of the illustrator.

the hero as the only realistic instrument for bringing society back to an aristocratic past, and spent the first chapter of *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) on the Norse pantheon and on Odin as the epitome of a true hero. John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William Morris (1834–96) similarly had a profound influence on the artistically backward-looking Pre-Raphaelite Movement, while at the same time nurturing dreams of utopian communities of a distinctly medieval slant. The former's Guild of St. George, for instance, was an attempt to create self-sufficient agricultural communes, run and governed on traditional principles. To all of these, the North was intuitively associated with a past that, by definition, represented a healthy alternative to the degenerating features of the modern, industrial world. Thus the North became part of a positive spiral; northern culture was identified not just with a sublime natural landscape, but also with people who lived their healthy lives in harmony with this landscape; and the qualities of these people and this landscape were in turn identified with their rootedness in the past.

A cultivation of this collective sense of northern identity became visible in the movement called Scandinavianism, which celebrated the profound cultural unity of the Scandinavian countries, and which flourished from the 1840s onwards, especially among Swedish and Danish university students. Northern fraternisation across national boundaries was also evident in the renewal of a tradition going back to King James I, and even to the Viking

age, of forging links through royal marriages. Clearly, the wedding in 1863 between the British Prince Edward and the Danish Princess Alexandra was very much in tune with political and ideological correctness at the time. In the same way, the Danish King Christian IX's visit to Iceland in 1874 to celebrate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first settlements also provided the monarchy with a kind of historical legitimacy.

Not unexpectedly, however, hardly any country was willing to sacrifice its own nationalist cause on the altar of Scandinavianism or international fellow feeling. This became evident, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, in the conflict at the middle of the century between Germany and Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein, whose population was partly German and partly Danish. It also manifested itself in the plans – born from Gothicist ideas – of the Swedish King Oscar I in the mid-1850s of reclaiming Finland from Russia. Instead of cooperation across the borders, the various countries tended to concentrate on their own national struggle, which found its legitimacy in the country's own real or alleged past. In this process, virtually anything might be turned into a significant political statement, as shown by a peculiar story from Scotland. Here, in 1842,

two Bohemian brothers, claiming to be the illegitimate grandsons of Prince Charlie himself, appeared on the scene with their own tartan pattern book, portentously titled *Vestiarum Scoticum*. James and Charles Sobieski Stuart, as they called themselves, had selected seventy-five different setts, each linked to a specific clan, from a sixteenth-century manuscript they claimed had once belonged to Mary Queen of Scots's father confessor – although they could never quite produce the manuscript when others asked to see it. It was MacPherson and Ossian all over again, with a very similar result. Tartans became all the rage in England as well as Scotland. Queen Victoria insisted on them for her Highland retreat at Balmoral Castle. Clan chieftains, and even Lowland aristocrats, suddenly decided they had better line up a “true” clan pattern or get lost in the rush. (Herman 2006, 303)

In Denmark, too, the national past was systematically utilised, even in the service of the most progressive and modern inventions. When the first Danish locomotive was introduced in 1846, it was called Odin (Uffe Østergård in Henningsen et al. 1997, 31). In the same way, the monarchy reintroduced a name from the very origin of the royal line. When the later King Christian IX's third daughter was born in 1853, she was named Thyra, after the first Danish queen, from the early 900s AD (Fjågesund 2009, 563), and her elder sister Dagmar, who later became the spouse of Tsar Alexander III of Russia, was similarly given an Old Danish name. Another event that literally brought the past into the open and gave a tremendous boost to the interest in a heroic national legacy was the discovery in 1867 of the Viking ship at Tune in southern Norway. The very first find of a Viking ship burial, at Borre on the western side of the Oslofjord, had been made as early as 1852, but the Tune ship was sufficiently well preserved

to give – for the first time – a proper impression of what a Viking ship actually looked like. Still, as became apparent later in the century, this was only a beginning: far richer finds were soon to be made and to be used for all their worth.

### *Academia Heroica*

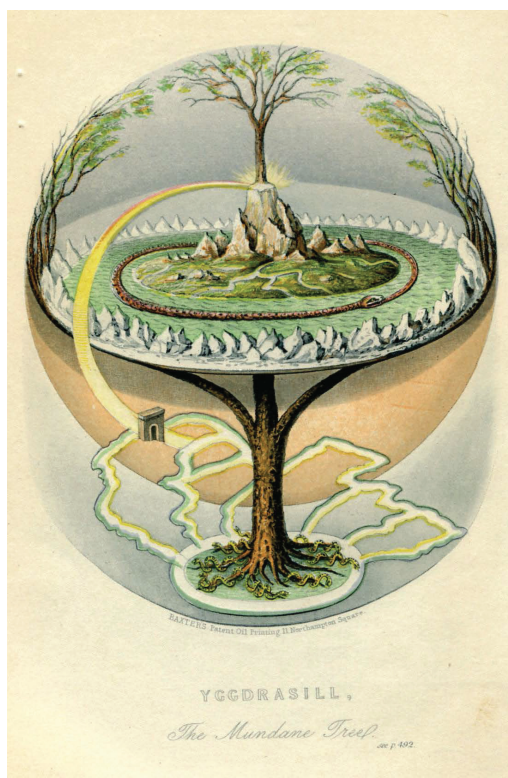
By 1830, the North could look back on more than two hundred years of scholarship to document and to revive a historical and literary legacy that had formerly been neglected and regarded as an expression of a savage and primitive culture. Even though much had been achieved during these years, the period of revitalisation had still not reached its peak. While the project of the Renaissance, with its resurrection of the ancient Mediterranean culture, could be seen as culminating with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the *northern* Renaissance could rather be said to have reached its apex in the course of the nineteenth. Across the region, academics and other learned enthusiasts kept studying, editing and translating primary texts, and conducting a lively intellectual debate, all of which had a considerable snowball effect on the cultural field as a whole.

The exchange of impulses between the countries was considerable. While the Dane Nikolai Grundtvig spent the summers of 1830 and 1831 in England, studying old manuscripts, the Englishman George Stephens (1813–95) moved as a young man to Stockholm in 1834, spending virtually the rest of his life in Scandinavia and ending up as Professor of English at Copenhagen from 1851. Stephens, according to Andrew Wawn, was an extremely prolific, if controversial, figure, who was “strongly committed to the idea of a united old north of which his native England was an integral part” (Wawn 2000, 219). The Orcadian Samuel Laing (1780–1868) similarly lived in Norway from 1834 to 1836, wrote an extensive account of his stay, and was profoundly influenced by the contemporary political situation of the country. But at the same time, he was working on the first English translation of Snorri’s *The Heimskringla, or the Chronicle of the Kings of Norway* (1844), and in his highly influential introduction to the work, he makes explicit connections between modern British society and the Viking legacy that the Scandinavians had brought to Britain and that he had witnessed during his stay in Norway. The same view of the Vikings as the decisive force behind Britain’s current greatness is visible in William and Mary Howitt’s *The Literature and Romance of Northern Europe* (1852), which incidentally also regards the Saxons, by which they mean the Germans, in a radically different and negative light.

A range of other modern translations and editions of ancient material



was also published during the period. In 1830, Ludwig Ettmüller, a friend of Richard Wagner's, published *Voluspá* with a glossary (Björnsson 2003, 97); in 1832 and 1833 respectively, the Swedish expert on runes Johan Gustaf Liljegren (1791–1837) published the comprehensive treatise *Run-Lära* (Study of Runes) and the handbook or catalogue *Run-Urkunder*, which identifies 3,000 runic inscriptions from all over Sweden; two Danish translations of Snorri appeared, the first by the Norwegian landowner and historian Jacob Aall (1773–1844) in 1838, and the second in 1857 by the Norwegian historian P.A. Munch. In addition, a *nynorsk* (New Norwegian) translation by Steinar Schjøtt came out in 1879.<sup>24</sup> The *Eddas*, furthermore, were brought out in English as well as German translations. George Webbe Dasent (1817–96), who came to play a central role in promoting



The frontispiece from A.I. Blackwell's expanded and revised 1847 edition of Bishop Percy's English translation of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities*. Blackwell's edition, published nearly a hundred years after Mallet's French original, underlines the importance of the work for several generations of readers. The illustration shows the Yggdrasil, the tree of life from Norse mythology.

<sup>24</sup> Nynorsk was the alternative form of written Norwegian created by Ivar Aasen around the middle of the century and based on Norwegian dialects.

the ancient culture and literature of the North in Britain, published the *Prose* or *Younger Edda* in 1842; and in 1851 the German poet and writer Karl Simrock (1802–76) published a translation of the *Poetic Edda* as well as the *Prose Edda*, which “was a milestone in the promulgation of Old Icelandic literature in German [...]” (Björnsson 2003, 108).

The increasing availability of the primary texts in modern, accessible translations was further supplemented by a number of historical works, most of which focused with growing intensity on the significance of the Viking age. As was typical of the period, poets were frequently historians and historians poets. In Sweden, Erik Gustaf Geijer (see ch. 4) produced the three-volume *Svenska Folkets Historia* (1832–36; History of the Swedish People), whose sweeping, literary narrative made it into “his principal work of art” (Anton Blanck in Geijer 1932, 32), and in Norway, the poet and champion of Norwegian nationalist culture Henrik Wergeland (1808–45) published *Norges Historie* (1834; The History of Norway). Others, like Ludvig Christian Müller in Denmark, had strong interests in northern languages. Müller not only published an extensive history of Denmark in 1836, but was also an expert on Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon. In all of these, and in Thomas Macauley’s *History of England* (1848–59) and P.A. Munch’s eight-volume *Det Norske Folks Historie* (1852–59; History of the Norwegian People), the nation’s history became a majestic story pointing to a future whose brightness was firmly rooted and founded in a heroic past.

In addition, separate studies were dedicated to the ancient and allegedly common culture around the North Sea. The American Henry Wheaton, for instance, who was a diplomat in Denmark and Russia, wrote a *History of the Northmen* (1831) on the period before 1066, and S.A. Dunham’s *History of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway* (1839) argued that if the “wild legends” from before the tenth century were not included in a history of the region, “nine tenths of northern history must be rejected” (Dunham 1836, I: 3). Separate histories on Iceland were published in 1840 by the Frenchmen Xavier Marmier and in 1858 by the Englishman George Dasent, and at the age of eighty, Thomas Carlyle concluded his writings on the heroes of the North with *The Early Kings of Norway* (1875).

The increased availability of primary texts, together with histories of a heroic past also triggered a demand for more systematic accounts of the religion and the mythology sustaining the ancient culture of the North. This quickly became an arena in which different nationalities competed in order to either gain a share of or to monopolise the phenomenon in question. In 1835, Jacob Grimm, who would later claim that Jutland formed a natural part of Germany, published his *Deutsche Mythologie* (German Mythology), where he strongly emphasised that the heroic stories of the Eddas, on which the mythology was based, belonged to the entire Germanic world (Björnsson 2003, 91). Clearly, this could be seen

as an attempt to secure German access to a cultural arsenal that might otherwise be seen as reserved for the Scandinavian countries and Iceland. Indeed, the title of the work could even be read as an attempt to make it *primarily* German. The new and considerably expanded version of Mallet's and Bishop Percy's *Northern Antiquities*, edited by I.A. Blackwell in 1847, likewise latches what Blackwell calls "the Saxons" (here referring to *the British* and the Germans) on to the mythology of the North, whereas the Howitts, with an even more nationalistic motive, had refused to throw both the Germans and the British into the same category.

The Anglo-German rivalry is perhaps even more evident in the debate over *Beowulf*; there is certainly more than a touch of national possessiveness about Leo Heinrich's study from 1839, *Bëowulf, das Älteste Deutsche in Angelsächsischer Mundart Erhaltenes Heltengedicht*, i.e. *Beowulf, the Oldest German Heroic Poem Preserved in the Anglo-Saxon Tongue!* Further north, on the other hand, the Norwegian P.A. Munch's much reprinted survey from 1840 was – hardly by coincident – titled *Nordens Gamle Gude- og Heltesagn* (Ancient Nordic Legends of Gods and Heroes), thus jealously guarding the mythology's provenance in the Nordic countries.

With the powerful focus on the past, on roots and origins, with the gradual weakening of orthodox religion and the need for providing the different countries with popular and comprehensive narratives, the discussions about mythology were more important and cut deeper than can be understood today. Though with an overwhelmingly northern orientation, this search for the story of the nation also included an interesting oriental or eastern detour, especially so in Germany, where the legacy of the Goths encouraged a search for their historical origin. Ever since the Enlightenment, freethinkers had sought the rise of civilisation in alternative locations to that in the Bible. Some looked to Scythia (north of the Black Sea); others, inspired by Herder and the Schlegels, to India.

This latter avenue, in particular, was explored by the Norwegian-German Orientalist Christian Lassen (1800–76), who in the years 1847 to 1861 published the four-volume *Indische Altertumskunde* (Ancient Teachings of India). According to Joscelyn Godwin, the work "had all the ingredients of master-race thinking: biological superiority, the triumph of the strongest, an emphasis on youth [...], and the primacy of the White Race" (Godwin 1996, 39). Around the same time, Lassen's influential colleague Max Müller (1823–1900), who spent a major part of his career in Britain, lent scientific credibility to the idea, later adopted by the Volkish movement, of Aryanism, the theory that the Anglo-Saxons originated in a "mysterious, semi-Oriental" region of India (Mosse 1989, 89). This theory was soon given a northern and sometimes arctic twist by a number of speculative writers, such as the French philosopher Ernest Renan and the founder of the Theosophist movement, Madame Blavatsky (Godwin 1996, 40–1), and in the decades after 1880, it would become an integral part of the racial myth propagated by the ancestors of Fascism and Nazism.

The late eighteenth-century discovery of the culture of the people as it was found in rural areas, far removed from the centres of elitist culture, had resulted, especially in Britain and Germany, in an intense search for as yet undiscovered material. This process of finding, collecting and securing old treasures for posterity could be seen as a parallel to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century search for the old saga literature. The present search, however, was primarily for an *orally* based culture. This required not just the ability to find old material but also a highly competent interpreter to sift it and present it in a new and different format. The controversies around the Ossian poems had partly demonstrated the complexities involved in this process; in transferring their fairy tales to a written format, the brothers Grimm in Germany, likewise, had to invent a book language adjusted to the oral narrative tradition of the tales. In the Nordic countries, the process had started in the years before 1820 with Thiele's Danish folk tales and, in Sweden, the ballads collected by Geijer and Afzelius (see ch. 4).

In Norway, the work continued with the vicar Andreas Faye (1802–69), who during study trips to Copenhagen and Berlin became acquainted with and was inspired by a number of the leading names of the period. Whether he actually met the brothers Grimm has not been documented, but at least, Faye realised a hope expressed by Jacob Grimm in 1819 that someone would supplement Thiele's Danish work with a collection of folk tales from Norway (Braadland 1995, 5). *Norske Sagn* (1833; Norwegian Legends) was “the first collection of folklore in Norwegian literary history” (*ibid.*, 16), and according to Faye's introduction, he wishes to underline “that he [was] delivering the legends as he has received them, neither adding nor subtracting, and without refinement” (quoted in Braadland 1995, 7). This was very much in line with the editorial principles of the brothers Grimm, but the fact still remains that these collectors (or editors or authors) had a decisive influence on the published product. This is particularly evident in the even more influential work that followed in the wake of Faye's pioneering collection.

In the late 1830s, the two close friends Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1812–85) and Jørgen Moe (1813–82) collected a large number of folk tales, and from 1841 until 1844, they published one volume each year of what became the first edition of *Norske Folkeeventyr* (Norwegian Folk Tales). As with the brothers Grimm, Asbjørnsen's and Moe's intention was to reproduce the tales as they had traditionally been told, but in the process, their narrative style also became an essential ingredient in the struggle to find a national Norwegian written language clearly distinguishable from the dominant Danish. Soon this ambition was also transferred to modern translations of the sagas and the *Eddas*. Indeed, the brothers Grimm had seen these and the folk tales as historically related genres, all of them going back to the Aryan dawn of the nation (Solberg 2007, 28).

A final area in which nineteenth-century collectors and students of folk culture contributed to a changing of mental spectacles was music. Here too there was a traditional contrast between, on the one hand, literate, canonised and “serious” music, and traditions of oral folk music – vocal and instrumental – on the other. During the eighteenth century, and especially



The Norwegian fiddler Augund Tarjeison, or «the Miller Boy», who around 1850 brought the Hardanger fiddle to the urban concert stage, thus introducing the previously neglected folk music of the countryside to the urban cultural elite. Photo: R. Nyblin. ©Telemark Museum.

because of the massive attention given to the Ossian poems, the figure of the bard had emerged as a transmitter of an oral musical tradition, but it was only well into the following century that he started to step out from obscurity. In Denmark and Sweden, the Scottish and German collections of ballads from the beginning of the century had already encouraged a major effort to collect similar material. Svend Grundtvig (1824–83), the son of Nikolai, produced the comprehensive *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser* (1858; *Old Danish Folk Ballads*), which became a model of professional scholarship; and from the 1840s onwards, the Swedish folklorist and writer Richard Dybeck (1811–77) not only published a series of different genres of folk ballads but also initiated a series of folk music concerts in

Stockholm (Stenroth 2005, 156), thereby transporting the oral culture of the people into the halls of elitist culture.

Similar developments were taking place in Norway. In 1845, the Telemark vicar Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–80) was writing down the first sections of the ancient visionary ballad *Draumkvedet* (The Dream Ballad), which despite the uncertainty of its age appeared to be closely related to such early medieval works as the Irish *Vision of Tundal*. *Draumkvedet* indeed raised the same debate as the Ossian poems in terms of its genuine age. In 1852–53, Landstad then published the large collection of *Norske Folkeviser* (Norwegian Folk Ballads), containing an unusually rich material written down from mostly uneducated informants in the interior of Telemark. The collection was supplemented in 1858 by *Gamle Norske Folkeviser* (Old Norwegian Ballads), collected by Sophus Bugge (1833–1907), who was not only the greatest collector of Norwegian ballads, but who had also contributed significantly to Svend Grundtvig's Danish collection from the same year.

In Norway, too, folk music very slowly found its way into the concert halls, and two men in particular exemplify this decisive encounter between cultures that had never communicated before. In 1831, the twenty-one-year-old violinist Ole Bull (1810–80), himself a remarkable musical talent of bourgeois Bergen background, met a man who would open yet further musical doors. Augund Tarjeison, better known as Myllarguten, 'the Miller Boy' (1801–72), was already famous as a virtuoso on the Hardanger fiddle, the uniquely Norwegian fiddle with four or five resonating strings under the main strings. Bull quickly realised Myllarguten's extraordinary genius, but after their first meeting, many years would pass before the two met again. In the meantime, Bull enjoyed a spectacular career as a soloist all over Europe, admired by the major composers and fêted by the crowds. In Italy, he became the new Paganini, and in France he was called "le jeune sauvage" from the far North (Vollsnes ed. 2000, II: 261).

Then, having returned to Norway after the great year of revolutions, 1848, Bull once again met Myllarguten, and the two gave a concert together in Christiania in the spring of 1849. With these two men on the same stage, folk music placed its foot firmly inside the door of the nation's culture, and the Hardanger fiddle, just like Ossian's harp, became emblematic of a musical tradition emanating not from urban academies but from the simple huts of rural farmers. And with Bull's incessant concert activity in all corners of Europe and the Americas, this music reached an ever wider audience. It was only appropriate, therefore, that having just visited the North Cape, where he played to the Arctic Ocean, Bull on his sixty-sixth birthday in 1876 climbed to the top of the Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt, turned his hatless head to the north, and played "The Dairymaid's Sunday" (*ibid.*, 277), his own and most well-loved composition, with its distinct air of the magic tunes from Myllarguten's fiddle.

Still, few countries could rival the extraordinary musical and literary legacy that was coming to light in Finland. Just as the first sensational finds of real Viking ships were literally being unearthed in Norway, so was a spectacular treasure, the epic poem called the *Kalevala*, brought, step by step, out of the collective memory of the Fins and saved for posterity. As usual, however, it did not happen out of the blue. In the second half of the eighteenth century, a groundbreaking work had been published by Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739–1804), the “Father of Finnish History”: the five-volume *De Poësi Fennica* (Of Finnish Poetry, 1766–78) had laid the foundation for a distinctly Finnish literature, and since the country had become a Grand Duchy under Russia in 1809, it was clearly not just the Swedes who had been dreaming of bringing Finland back into the fold; a dream of Finnish independence, too, had been nourished when the Russians, in the interest of weakening the country’s ties to Sweden, had stimulated Finnish nationalist tendencies.

One man in particular, Adolf Ivar Arwidsson (1791–1858), held the torch high during the following decades. Though himself a Swedish speaker, he spoke Finnish fluently, and in the 1820s, having advocated the introduction of Finnish as the national language of Finland, he was expelled from his position as a lecturer at the Academy in Turku (Åbo) by the Russian authorities, who might have regarded with sympathy a loosening of the ties with Sweden, but not independence *per se*. Arwidsson then made Uppsala his base, and here he inspired the Finno-Swedish students to collect oral poetry from the Finnish countryside (Stenroth 2005, 145–6). This burgeoning national consciousness resulted in 1831 in the foundation of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki. Realising, like Arwidsson, the enormous significance of language as a medium of identity, the society soon adopted as one of its first rules that “language is the foundation of nationality” (“Finnish Literature Society”).

No one was more keenly aware of this than the society’s first secretary and one of its founding members, Elias Lönnrot (1802–84), who from the late 1820s had been pursuing Porthan’s and Arwidsson’s ambition. It was not until 1833, however, after his fourth field trip to the Karelian border areas between Finland and Russia, that he began to see the outline of a giant epic narrative. This was more than confirmed by his next journey, in April 1834, when in the course of two weeks he wrote down more than 13,000 lines in the parish of Vuokkuniemi (Keith Bosley in Lönnrot 1999, xxviii). The first edition of the *Kalevala* was published in Helsinki in 1835, and in 1849, the final edition, nearly twice as long as the first, came out, containing almost 23,000 lines (*ibid.*, xiii).

The breathtaking results of Lönnrot’s field trips could be seen as Herder’s most optimistic dreams come true. Despite being sung almost exclusively by illiterate people, unconnected with the world of learning – one of his best informants was a homeless widow, “who scraped a meagre

living by knitting socks” (*ibid.*, xxix) – the *Kalevala* more or less laid the foundation of Finnish as a written language. Again, in the same way that the excavations of the Viking ships in Norway gave a boost to the country’s self-confidence, Lönnrot’s compilation provided the Finnish nation *in spe* with a national narrative of mythological proportions and of an age – though unknown – deserving of humble respect. Once again, northern Europe had pulled out of the hat an ancient epic that could compete with those of southern Europe. Furthermore, Lönnrot’s success in compiling the fifty books or songs into a work of powerful *literary* quality, contributed to the development of a modern literature written in the native language: the first novel written in Finnish was published in 1870, only a generation after the *Kalevala*.<sup>25</sup>

As with the Ossian poems nearly a century earlier, the Finnish epic became “an academic sensation that inspired foreign scholars to write lengthy treatises” (Lauri Honko in Honko ed. 1999, 10). One of these scholars was Jacob Grimm, who as early as 1845 gave a lecture to the Prussian Academy entitled “Über das finnische Epos” (Joep Leerssen in Gaskill 2004, 123). Similarly, translations soon followed into the major European languages: German and French in 1852 and 1867 respectively, but English not until 1888, and then only based on the German translation (Keith Bosley in Lönnrot 1999, xvi). The *Kalevala* thus served a plethora of purposes: like Virgil’s *Aeneid* in Rome, it gave Finland a national epic; like Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in Italy and Luther’s translation of the Bible in Germany, it gave Finland a national language; it gave – at a time of incipient democratisation – credibility and confidence to the literary and musical traditions of common people; and through this injection of cultural pride, it was soon to inspire a wave of contemporary art that drew nourishment from a celebration of the past. The latter feature, however, was not applicable to Finland alone.

### *Arty Vikings*

Though by the mid-nineteenth century the ‘imitation’, usually referring back to classical models, had gone largely out of fashion as a popular literary sub-genre, it could be said to have continued in a different garb. Across the northern nations, the literary heritage of the North itself continued to create a wave of modern literature, art and music of a distinctly backward-looking character. In some cases, this inspired active attempts to imitate the language or the literary forms of, for instance, the sagas; in others, writers and artists chose an old northern setting for works that might

<sup>25</sup> I.e. Aleksis Kivi’s *Seven Brothers*.



also have contemporary relevance. According to Karl Litzenberg, “[a] reasonably complete bibliography of the English essays, poems, novels, and miscellanea which were written in the period under discussion, and which are in one way or another connected with Old Norse literature, will contain several hundred items” (Litzenberg 1947, 17–18). And the situation was much the same in other countries.

At the beginning of the century, Sir Walter Scott had grafted on to the already solid stem of the novel a new branch by creating the historical novel, and this genre in no way lost its momentum with his death in 1832. On the contrary, Scott’s recipe was eagerly adopted by a steadily growing number of colleagues, especially in Britain. Typical titles were *The Sea-Kings in England* (1830); *The Curate of Steinholt: A Tale of Iceland* (1837); *Harold: The Last of the Saxon Kings* (1848); *Vonved the Dane: Count of Elsinore* (1861); *Hereward the Wake: “Last of the English”* (1866); *Erling the Bold: A Tale of the Norse Sea-Kings* (1869); *The Norsemen in the West* (1872); *The Viking: A Novel* (1879) and other similar titles. But there were also more experimental texts, such as the utopia *The Voyage to the North Pole* (1878) by the pseudonym “Daylight”, which combines the two most essential features of the North: polar discovery (including the idea of a temperate polar sea) and the ancient Nordic past. In this Verne-inspired text, three Englishmen in a balloon use a powerful magnet to test the theory of the lodestone at the North Pole, and having successfully landed, they discover a Viking paradise of giant and breathtakingly beautiful people who have eluded the Fall:

Imagine a set of men and women perfect in figure, health, strength, and beauty, and skilled by the practice of ages in the art of graceful movement, gliding on a short, springy sword, surrounded by sweet-scented trees, flowering shrubs, and sparkling fountains, each enlivened by beauteous birds and beasts and fishes, with the dazzling moon and stars overhead, and the bright aurora borealis on all sides, making the night as light as the day. (“Daylight” 1878, 21)

Although “Daylight” produces an unusually dream-like vision of the Viking world, the way in which this world is generally portrayed is still characterised by a profound sense of nostalgia: the northern past represents more than anything a genuinely and admirably heroic age which – it is implied – is painfully unrepresented in contemporary society. Carlyle’s hero-worship, in other words, could be said to be more or less directly reflected in the popular Viking literature of the period.

The same applies to poetry, which embraced the world of the Celts and the Vikings with passion and enthusiasm. A large portion of these texts celebrated a national past that was very deliberately linked to the present, often with a rather flamboyantly jingoistic flair. One obvious example of this is the numerous poems about the Viking sea-kings, who were clearly used to echo the contemporary role of the Royal Navy, Britain’s proudest institution and guarantor of imperial supremacy. In Andrew Wawn’s rather

blunt words: “For long-boat heroics, read gun-boat diplomacy” (Wawn 2000, 105). One of these poets was Gerald Massey (1828–1907), who in such works from the 1860s as “The Norseman”, “Old King Hake” and “The Sea Kings” identifies the invading Vikings as the initiators of Britain’s proud maritime tradition: “Kings quiver at his flag unfurled: / The sea-king’s master of the world” (Massey 1861, 48). On the occasion of the wedding mentioned above between Prince Edward and the Danish Princess Alexandra in 1863, Massey even succeeds in adding yet another dimension to the picture: The poem “A Daughter of the Sea-Kings” initially underlines how in the past “the fire-eyed Raven” came from the North “on wings of war”, but things have changed: “Today, another Norland Bird / Comes floating o’er the foam; / And England’s heart of hearts is stirred / To have the dear bird Home”, whereupon the poem goes on at length as to how the Danish princess promises an infusion of the blood of the sea-kings, who were “the pride and the darlings of Ocean” (Massey 1889, 52–3). Thus, the literature and the history of the northern past were made part of a popular arsenal of imagery that was almost imperceptibly woven into the public consciousness.

On the other hand, the same imagery was also used with caution and scepticism. Poets like Lord Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, for instance, were national celebrities, but like Carlyle, they did not employ elements from the sagas and Norse mythology simply in order to wax lyrical about a distant past. They also used them actively to give vent to their critique of contemporary society. In Tennyson’s Arthurian poems, the atmosphere has borrowed from the Ossian poems a sense of gloomy pessimism that reflects directly the poet’s own bleak outlook on his life and times. And Arnold’s monumental and apocalyptic poem “Balder Dead” (1860), which was influenced by Arnold’s reading of Percy’s *Northern Antiquities* and the historian J.A. Froude’s advice to make use of Norse material (O’Donoghue 2007, 157), clearly shares Carlyle’s cultural pessimism.

A somewhat different, pre-Godot sense of loss of cultural and existential bearings is found in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Dream-Land” (1844), whose equally Ossianic world, which is “[o]ut of SPACE – out of TIME”, still refers to “an ultimate dim Thule” suggestive of a distant northern past. Here, the softer, Pre-Raphaelite sentimentalism of Tennyson is replaced by a hostile and ghostly gothic landscape of John Martin-like sublimity, with “[m]ountains toppling evermore / Into seas without a shore; / Seas that restlessly aspire, / Surging, unto skies of fire; / Lakes that endlessly outspread / Their lone waters – lone and dead ...” (Poe 1984, 79).

Even the Ossian poems themselves, whose first publication celebrated its hundredth anniversary in 1860, continued to inspire a range of different artists as well as academic debate and translations into new languages. In the 1830s, a painter like William Turner (1775–1851) visited the Hebrides and produced the major painting *Staffa, Fingal’s Cave* for the

Royal Academy Exhibition in London in 1832 (Allen & Allen 1999, 31). William Wordsworth similarly produced a series of poems from a similar journey, and in 1841, Felix Mendelssohn's disciple, the young Danish composer Niels Wilhelm Gade (1817–90) enjoyed his breakthrough with the wonderfully powerful and majestic overture *Efterklange af Ossian* (Echoes of Ossian), which today perhaps conjures up the Ossian atmosphere even more convincingly than the poems themselves. In the 1860s, and possibly inspired by Gade's success, another young composer, Johannes Brahms (1833–97), also produced a series of songs from Ossian.

At the same time, royals responded to and helped reinforce the general popularity. In 1847, Queen Victoria visited Fingal's Cave, and seven years later, in 1854, Oscar I of Sweden, whose Ossian-inspired name had been given him by his godfather Napoleon, may in turn have inspired the naming of another Oscar, the son of the famous Dublin surgeon William Wilde. Indeed, there was even a direct connection: Oscar Wilde's father had met, and may even have treated, King Oscar during a visit to Sweden. But according to Wilde's biographer Richard Ellmann, there is no evidence for the rather persistent rumour that the King was actually Oscar's godfather (Ellmann 1988, 11). Nevertheless, the choice of name was undoubtedly linked to his parents', and especially his mother's, enthusiasm for the Celtic literary heritage; to remove any doubt, he was even given the middle name Fingal.

It is, however, impossible to discuss the cultural and artistic impact from the northern tradition in the second half of the nineteenth century without paying some attention to the two giant figures of Richard Wagner (1813–83) and William Morris (1834–96). Admittedly, their legacies may, in different ways, have been somewhat dented during the twentieth century, partly as a result of their strong connections with the northern renaissance. On the other hand, one should be careful not to underestimate the scale of their achievements, not just in the field of art but perhaps primarily in the field of cultural politics. Indeed, the most striking parallel between the two is the way in which they saw their art as inextricably linked to a political programme, or to be more precise: a political and existential vision. This vision, however, is not of the kind that many modern readers would expect, because of the later destiny of these two men. The politics associated with their names may, in other words, deserve some closer scrutiny.

Wagner started his career as an ardent radical in connection with the revolutions of 1848, whereas Morris's political involvement matured more slowly and only came to full fruition in the 1880s, but both were far from narrowly narcissistic artists; on the contrary, they saw – partly as a legacy from the French Revolution – their art as a way of fulfilling ambitions that comprised society at large and that would serve *das Volk* or the people. And for Wagner as well as Morris nationalism was profoundly connected with a celebration of the North. Incidentally, even in their youth both

men started from similar platforms: in the 1830s, the still adolescent Wagner was briefly in touch with the Young German movement, which took its inspiration from French Utopian Socialists and demanded “the unification of Germany, abolition of censorship, constitutional rule and the emancipation of women” (Millington 2012, 25). According to Morris’s biographer Fiona MacCarthy, the equally youthful “Morris and his group at Oxford was in some ways very close to that of the Young England movement of the 1840s”, which

sought to emulate ideals of medieval England, not in a regressive way but a creative one. They wanted to extract from medieval England those elements from which the Victorian age could learn. New societies based on equality of classes; a small-scale quasi-monastic system of community; the return to the country; the revival of physical activity; principles of shared work and work-as-holiday [...]: all these were ideas Morris worked on and developed and in the end, during his Socialist period, elaborated and sharpened almost beyond recognition. (MacCarthy 2010, 63)

Later in their careers, both Wagner and Morris were also under the influence of Marxism as well as Anarchism, and Wagner of course only just escaped arrest on serious charges during the drama of 1848–49 and became a political refugee in Switzerland for more than a decade (Millington 2012, 73–5). In the political universe of these young men, in other words, nationalism and a firm belief in rooting a future society in the native and northern soil were not perceived as reactionary; on the contrary, it was – as we may tend to forget post-1945 – an integral part of a radical and progressive political vision. At root, it was a vision with a profound, Rousseauesque scepticism towards the kind of modern civilisation that was so quickly transforming the nineteenth century. Wagner and Morris, then, would vehemently claim that they wanted progress and improvement for the large segments of society; there is nothing aristocratic or elitist about their visions; no hankering back to medieval power structures. But in order to achieve these objectives, both men were firmly convinced that it was of vital importance to ground the changes in the life and culture of ordinary people; this is the perspective in which the life-long and breathtakingly versatile achievements of Wagner and Morris need to be seen.

For Wagner this meant that he more or less intuitively and from the early stages of his career turned to German, or what he somewhat vaguely called Germanic, material for inspiration. This, in effect, was an essential ingredient in his ambitious “artwork for the future”, outlined in the essay “Opera und Drama” (1850–51). It is clearly also the background for his much debated essay from 1850, “Das Judentum in der Musik” (“Jewishness in Music”), in which he describes the Jews as superficial intruders from a southern, alien culture (Björnsson 2003, 25); they lacked, in other words, the organic connection with the cultural soil that was a prerequisite for the production of genuine art. Wagner’s revolutionary idea of a “reunification of the separate arts – music, dance and poetry (along with architecture,

sculpture and painting) into a grand *Gesamtkunstwerk* or ‘total work of art’” (Millington 2012, 78), was thus inseparable from its fundamental northern cultural identity. The first steps in this direction can be seen in such early works as *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*, 1843), which is set in a Norwegian fjord; in the more mature works of *Tannhäuser* (1845) and *Lohengrin* (1850), both of which are based on old Germanic myths; and in the unfinished *Wieland der Schmied* (*Wieland the Smith*, 1850), which contains his first use of Icelandic legends (Björnsson 2003, 27).

The concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, however, found its crowning achievement in what has been called “one of the most ambitious works of art ever conceived” and “one of the enduring pillars of Western civilization” (Millington 2012, 87), namely *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the seventeen-hour cycle of four mammoth operas – *Das Rheingold*, *Die Valküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* – made to be performed over four days. *Das Rheingold* alone, intended as a prologue, “stretches for two-and-a-half hours of unbroken music” (Speight Jenkins, Jr., in Wagner 1960, iii). And most astonishingly, in the course of this creative process, which altogether lasted for a quarter of a century, he not only produced a radically new musical universe together with an equally new approach to the staging and performing of an opera; as always, he also wrote the librettos himself, which in this case involved an intense study of primary sources. He started out with the *Nibelungenlied*, of which he owned four editions; in addition he borrowed several critical works about it (Björnsson 2003, 98).

Still, his main sources were not German but Icelandic: “the Prose Edda, the Poetic Edda, *Völsunga saga* and *Þiðreks saga*, along with a few details from *Heimskringla*, *Egils saga* and *Gisla saga*” (*ibid.*, 103). In his rendering of these ancient stories, which he modified for his own artistic purposes, Wagner departed from the conventional use of a specific metre with end rhyme, and adopted, as the first opera librettist, the *Stabreim* or alliterative verse of his sources. His reasons, according to Stewart Spencer, were simple:

[T]he *Volk* or common people spoke the language of the heart. By recreating that language, Wagner hoped to address a direct emotional appeal to the stultified hearts of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century listeners and arouse within them a sense of the human emotions which he felt had been destroyed by the corrupting influences of modern civilization. (Stewart Spencer in Millington ed. 2001, 266)

In a sense, then, Wagner’s aim was profoundly democratic and thus in tune with the radical political movements of his time; indeed, his ideal was for himself to serve merely as a mediator for the people: “the new work of art was to emerge as the creation of the *Volk*” (Millington 2012, 90). Nevertheless, the universe he created has of course become impossible to separate from Wagner himself, even to the extent, according to Árni Björnsson, of overshadowing the original myths and legends:

Wagner's mythical world depicted in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* has become more real to most nations of the world than the original fragmentary Norse-Icelandic myths, which have never been widely read. The *Ring* has thus had a deep influence on perceptions of the Norse mythology. (Björnsson 2003, 275)

And there is no doubt that Wagner, with his complete sense of artistic freedom, really did bring a new dimension to the ancient stories, a dimension to which there has ever since been an enormous response from the critics as well as the public. Also, as Robert Donington shows in his classic study *Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols* (first published 1963), the tetralogy's universe is infused with a wealth of themes and elements that make it into a truly nineteenth-century work while at the same time remaining – as was the artist's intention – firmly rooted in its cultural soil.

The superhuman effort of not only launching the *Ring* but also of planning, funding and building the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, did not prevent Wagner from producing three more operas, two of them during the time he was composing the *Ring*. *Tristan und Isolde*, based largely on the early thirteenth-century version of the legend by Gottfried von Strassburg, was premiered in 1865, followed only three years later by the nearly five-hour-long comedy *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Then in 1882, the year before he died, Wagner finished and saw the first performance of *Parsifal*, based on yet another thirteenth-century German legend, an epic poem by Wolfram von Eschenbach about the search for the Holy Grail.

Wagner may thus be said to be the first major European composer whose entire *oeuvre* takes its material and inspiration from the Nordic or Germanic cultural sphere, continuing a development from Händel, who spent the major part of his career in the North, while almost exclusively making use of southern secular and religious material, and Felix Mendelssohn, whose works gathered inspiration from Italy as well as the Hebrides. Wagner's *oeuvre* is, in other words, totally liberated from the Corinthian columns of the classical culture associated with southern Europe. Instead, it is infused with the dark and gloomy atmosphere of the Ossianic poems and the stormy heroism of the sagas. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that subsequent political ideologies that insisted on the cultural supremacy of the North embraced this breathtakingly ambitious work.

But quite independently of this highly double-edged celebration, Wagner's impact is beyond question. Even before his death, more than ten thousand books and articles had been written about him, which meant that with regard to public interest he was only superseded by Christ and Napoleon (Barry Millington in Millington ed. 2001, 132). Especially in the first decades after his death, according to David C. Large, Wagner's influence "reached far beyond the world of music and theatre, embracing most of the other arts, as well as philosophy, social theory and politics" (David C. Large in Millington ed. 2001, 384). The works of such British Modernist writers, for instance, as Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia

Woolf and D.H. Lawrence are all marked by the writers' sometimes decisive encounters with Wagner.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century it was nevertheless William Morris who conducted the closest dialogue with Wagner. Despite obvious similarities, however, or perhaps precisely because of them, Morris was no great admirer of the German composer, and in his “notorious belittlings” of him, he appears, according to Fiona MacCarthy, “at his most pig-headed and parochial” (MacCarthy 2010, 372). The two men never seem to have met, but Morris was introduced to Cosima Wagner in London in 1877 (*ibid.*), a year after both artists had celebrated notable victories – Wagner finally seeing the opening of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus and the first full production of the *Ring*, and Morris bringing out *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, the poetic version of the *Völsunga saga*, the prose translation of which he had published seven years earlier.

Wagner and Morris thus shared a consuming interest in what Morris called “the great Story of the North which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks” (quoted in Coote 1996, 88). But this did not mean that they approached it from the same angle. On the contrary, it has been suggested by several critics that Morris, with little interest in music generally and even less in opera, to some extent wrote *Sigurd the Volsung* as an anti-*Ring* (see Arvidsson 2010, 20 and Ennis 1993). The parallel use of the material, however, by two of the most prominent artists in Germany and Britain respectively serves to confirm how important the Viking world was to the cultural climate of the period.

When reading about the sixty-two-year-long life of William Morris, it is difficult to fathom – even more so than in the case of Wagner – the amazing range of activities it embraced. Being associated from an early age with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and soon becoming the leading figure of the so-called Arts and Crafts movement, he made a decisive contribution – at a time when British industry and technology were developing in leaps and bounds – to the renaissance of a whole series of traditional crafts, many of which were rapidly dying out: cabinet making, stained glass production, illumination and calligraphy, wallpaper design, weaving (of velvet and high warp tapestries), embroidery, textile dyeing, carpet production, paper-making, ink-making and hand-press book printing. Furthermore, when the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (“Anti-Scrape”) was founded in 1877, he was elected honorary secretary (MacCarthy 2010, 375). At the same time he was running a major business, which from 1875 was called Morris & Co, in Oxford Street, which manufactured and sold a wide range of hand-made products, furnishings and decorative arts for private and public customers and institutions.

<sup>26</sup> See Raymond Furness in Millington (ed.) 2001, 396–8 and Fjågesund 2007.

Still, despite the limited number of hours in the day, Morris also enjoyed another distinguished career, which has already been alluded to, namely that of poet, novelist, playwright and translator. After having published two collections of poems in the 1850s and 60s, his major breakthrough as a poet came with the publication of *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), a vast, two-volume (later three-volume) lyrical epic divided into twelve sections whose titles bore the names of the months and including a treasure house of classical tales from the South, and medieval stories from the North. The most famous section of the work, “The Lovers of Gudrun”, based on the *Laxdaela Saga*, alone runs to 150 pages, and was frequently produced as a separate volume. *The Earthly Paradise* effectively made Morris into a new Lord Tennyson – a poetic voice of his time. Literary colleagues like George Eliot, Swinburne and Ruskin, and later Oscar Wilde, also paid their respects (see William Blissett in Faulkner and Preston eds. 1999, 49–50), and later he was considered a likely candidate both as Professor of Poetry at Oxford and, after Tennyson’s death, as Poet Laureate (MacCarthy 2010, 374 and 632).

Partly because of his own reluctance, but partly also because he continued to have an inexhaustible supply of other time-consuming projects that kept him busy, it did not materialise. Alongside the colossal effort of *The Earthly Paradise*, for instance, Morris taught himself Icelandic and together with the Icelander Eiríkr Magnússon produced translations and reworkings of several of the sagas, including, as mentioned above, the *Volsunga Saga* in versions of prose as well as poetry, and the collection *Three Northern Love Stories* (1873). And as if further inspired by the dialectic between North and South, which had formed the structural basis of *The Earthly Paradise*, he also brought out, in the course of the 1870s and 80s, translations of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Homer’s *Odyssey* and the founding text of British literature, *Beowulf*. Then, as if in a fever during the last years of his life, Morris produced altogether nine novels or so-called “prose romances”, most of which were set in worlds of a medieval Germanic or Scandinavian character which were to a greater or lesser degree imaginary. The only major exception is the most well-known of the novels, *News from Nowhere* (1890), which was a utopia set in mid-twenty-first-century England.

So, where did Morris’s persistent focus on and preoccupation with the North come from; what role did it play in the vision behind his almost frantic level of activity over a period of nearly forty years? It might be useful to start with a statement by Morris himself: “The leading passion of my life [...] has been and is hatred of modern civilisation” (quoted by David Leopold in Morris 2009, viii). Somehow this is the crux of the matter, a fundamental instinct in him, which was in evidence even at the age of seventeen, when he refused to enter the Crystal Palace during the Great Exhibition, because of the ugly exhibitions (Coote 1996, 13). Thus from the very beginning, he rose in protest against the forces commonly



associated with progress, i.e. industrialisation, mechanisation, urbanisation, specialisation and centralisation. Instead, he turned with a stubborn faith, two generations after the early Romantics, to the natural world and to the people of the countryside. This is where he found, initially, an echo of those qualities that were rapidly disappearing from the world around him; at the same time, it logically pointed him in the direction of the past. And as his horizons widened, these qualities were increasingly associated with the North rather than the South.

At the time, the latter may not have represented the spearhead of technological progress in the same way as Britain, but it was still connected with the Renaissance and the rise of the modern world, and consequently with science, urban civilisation and sophistication. Morris's journey to Italy in April 1873, like Herder's nearly a century earlier, revealed a dislike of what he saw. According to his daughter, May Morris, his letters home expressed pleasure at the beautiful things he saw, but were still "tinged with a certain sense of disappointment" (Morris 1911, x).

Fiona MacCarthy gives this reaction a twofold explanation. Partly, it had to do with his increasing tension with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his close friend for many years, whose relationship with Morris's wife was too close for comfort, and whose identity and personality were inseparable from Italy and the South. And partly, according to MacCarthy, it was more deeply grounded in a "streak of insularity" (MacCarthy 2010, 327). But charging Morris with insularity seems unfair, and an underestimation of the wholeness of his vision. After all, he could not be accused of a lack of knowledge of European culture; since his student days he had shown an ardent interest in continental art and architecture. Probably his closest friend, Edward Burne-Jones, with whom he travelled to Italy, was closer to the mark when he simply stated: "He really was Northern not Southern in his nature" (*ibid.*). And as if to confirm it, only a few months after returning from Italy, he made his second journey in two years to Iceland.

There is no doubt that to Morris, Iceland fulfilled a number of important criteria for an alternative to his detested "modern civilisation", and served as an injection of artistic as well as political energy. Although he published his *magnum opus*, *The Earthly Paradise*, in the late 1860s, making relatively ample use of Norse material, it was only after his visits in 1871 and 1873 that the North became the common denominator in so many of his activities. Already as a student he had consumed the works of Ruskin and Carlyle, and thereby acquired a profound admiration for medieval, pre-industrial society, but his Icelandic experience opened up to him an actual, contemporary world where a range of these social and cultural features miraculously appeared to have survived, providing a genuine alternative to the realities he came from. Not least, the Icelandic experience contributed fundamentally to his political vision. First of all, he witnessed a society that despite profound poverty was more or less free

from class divisions. Secondly, it consisted of small-scale, decentralised rural communities that were not only dependent upon the natural landscape and its resources, but which also included traditional crafts that gave everyday life an aesthetic as well as a utilitarian dimension. On top of this, the Icelanders had produced a literature on a par with the greatest works of western civilisation. What Iceland came to represent for Morris, in other words, was a comprehensive vision of a society where organic wholeness replaced mechanical atomisation; in short, a viable alternative to Victorian industrialism.

This is the vision that matured after his return, and that becomes the foundation for his political involvement during the 1880s. It is also the vision most clearly expressed in his most famous novel, *News from Nowhere*, which could be seen as his final literary as well as political statement. However utopian this book may seem, and however remote it may appear from the Socialist gospel that Morris professed, it contains an important ideological message. After all, Morris spent at least ten years of his life in a whirlwind of political activity and debate, acquiring a significant amount of practical experience, and somehow it would be too facile to write off the novel as the unrealistic fantasy of a dreamer who never quite had his feet on the ground. Societies of every generation are faced with important decisions as to what values should be given priority at the expense of others, and Morris stood in the midst of this discussion, asserting with great conviction ideas that would, if they had taken hold, have taken Victorian society in a different direction. As with Wagner, these ideas were rooted in the northern soil, i.e. in the cultural and political heritage described in the previous chapters. Today, for reasons primarily to do with the history of the twentieth century, these ideas are generally associated with a backward-looking and even reactionary ideology. For Morris, however, they represented a forward-looking and progressive route out of a fatal maze unwittingly produced by “modern civilisation”. From the point of view of the early twenty-first century, with its steady accumulation of environmental problems and social polarisation, Morris may suddenly seem radically modern rather than old-fashioned, as has been suggested by the Morris scholar Florence S. Boos. Having explained how “Morris’s convictions and ideals anticipated several strands of ‘western’ and ‘first-world’ ecological theory and practice”, especially the “deep ecology” of Arne Næss, she concludes:

[...] Morris’s prose embodied a deep and resonant late-nineteenth-century critique of contemporary environmental and social devastation. [...] More than Engels, Ruskin or Darwin, Morris also offered a view of *the environment* as a social *dwelling*, spoke clearly of the need for a proper harmony of people and the natural order they live in, warned us about the forces which blight and mutilate that harmony, and called fiercely in the last two decades of his life for resistance. (Florence S. Boos in Faulkner and Preston eds. 1999, 40 and 44–45)

Thus, as Europe was approaching the feverish decades called “the turn of the century”, ideas about the North were playing a crucial role in both the cultural and the political debate, and at this stage it was still difficult to decide whether they belonged on the left or the right of the political spectrum.



## 6. The Closing Circle: 1880–1920

### *The Turn of the Century*

The North Pole and the South Pole have now been reached, and ships have meandered their way through the Northwest and the Northeast Passages. After half a millennium of unimaginable efforts, the last white spots on the map have been filled. The northern nations have finally fulfilled one of their ancient dreams, that of conquering the last remaining frontiers of the planet. Is it purely coincidental that this final conquest was performed only a few years before those same nations clashed in a war, at once murderous and suicidal, sacrificing perhaps more than forty million of their people? Or was the conquest of the icy frontiers the last triumph of northern supremacy in the world; did the same conquest herald a gradual decline?

The above is not a quotation, but in the years around 1920 such a questioning, tentative statement could have been made in an attempt to take, with the benefit of hindsight, a comprehensive view of recent events in the centre as well as the periphery of western civilisation.

During the decades before and after 1900, the world could be said to have made the final transition into modernity. In numerous areas, a world relying primarily on human and animal power, and where life was intimately connected with nature and what it could yield, was replaced by one of a very different fibre. Also, for good or ill, it was a period in which the globe became in some senses truly *one*. In 1874, a year after the publication of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the Treaty of Bern had been signed, which effectively created a world-wide postal system, and the First International Polar Year (1882–83) made polar research into a global concern for the first time. On the bottom of the world's oceans telegraph cables were already connecting the continents, and the continents themselves were shrinking with the building of train lines across enormous distances: the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed in 1885 and the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1903, creating efficient bands of communication across the world's most northern and sparsely populated continents. In Paris the tradition of world exhibitions was marked in 1889 by the building of the Eiffel Tower, a 7,000 ton iron edifice that satisfied the "virtual obsession of nineteenth-century engineers" of building a structure rising more than a thousand feet into the air, thereby making it an icon of the age (Harriss 1976, 10). Similarly, in 1898 the world's first international urban planning conference was organized in New York (Morris 2007, 1),

based on the realisation that the new century was that of the city.

With the arrival of technologies that could rapidly transport not only human messages but also man himself from one corner of the world to another, humanity had entered upon a new phase, in which its surroundings, which had always been extendable, were no longer so. The last geographical frontiers were conquered; man had come, literally, to the ends of the earth and had thus finally embraced his entire possible sphere of action, a situation that was to last until the age of space travel.<sup>1</sup> In this transformative period, which profoundly affected man's sense of his own place and role in the world, the extremes of the planet – north as well as south – played an important role.

There was another side to the coin, however, and the more unpleasant aspects of modernity and globalisation were suggested by the publication in April 1896 of the article “On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air upon the Temperature of the Ground” in *The London, Edinburgh and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science*. Written by the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius (1859–1927), this rather inconspicuous article offered the first calculations suggesting a possible connection between human emissions of carbonic acid (i.e. carbon dioxide) and long-term variations in the climate. Thus the scientific discussion about such twenty- and twenty-first century issues as the greenhouse effect and global warming was in reality a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon – a direct result of the very instrument of progress, namely industrialism.

Technology and industry were also behind the first military hostility of global (although primarily Western) proportions – the First World War. Because of a technological development that promised a brighter future for everyone, it ironically also became possible to produce weapons that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier: machine guns, tanks, submarines, airplanes and mustard gas. “The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins”, D.H. Lawrence wrote at the beginning of his last novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from 1928, looking back on the War and reflecting the feelings of a whole generation.

It was the northern world that led the way in this gigantic metamorphosis, in which an ever greater part of the population lived their lives surrounded more and more by technology, tarmac, noise and pollution, and less and less by fields, sea and mountains.<sup>2</sup> There were at least two important elements in this transformation: first, the imbalance between northern and southern Europe in terms of population and GDP referred to in the previous chapter, was further strengthened as the period progressed.

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the highest mountains. Having failed to conquer the poles, the British were quick to name Mount Everest “the Third Pole”. The first serious attempt to conquer this last frontier was made as early as 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Tarmac was patented in 1901 by the British engineer Edgar Purnell Hooley.

It is not within the scope of the present study to discuss the development of capitalism, but Max Weber's *Die Protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus* (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1904–05) clearly links this instrument of growth precisely to the cultural and religious climate of the northern nations from the Reformation onwards. For a long period these indications were not particularly obvious, and in the early nineteenth century, the troika of France, Spain and Italy still had a significantly larger population than that of Britain, Germany and the Nordic countries. But the two groups reached a balancing point in the years around 1870, after which the northern nations took the lead.<sup>3</sup> Thus by 1880, the South had a population of 82 million and the North 90 million. By 1910, the North had more than retained the lead, having risen to 102 million against 94 million in the South.

The GDP, however, showed an even more dramatic trend; whereas the difference between South and North in 1870 had been 132 against 187 billion dollars (i.e. 1990 equivalents), the figures for 1913 were 280 against 500 billion. By the outbreak of the First World War, in other words, the economy of the northern nations was nearly twice as big as that of the South. Russia and the United States, too, experienced a massive growth. The Russian population increased from 97 million in 1880 to a spectacular 160 million in 1910, causing grave concern in the rest of Europe. The Russian GDP similarly rose from 84 billion dollars in 1870 to 232 billion in 1913.

During the 1880–1910 period the US population rose from 50 to 92 million; correspondingly, the GDP for 1870 was 98 billion, but by 1913 it had risen to a staggering 517 billion dollars. However these figures are read and compared (whether Russia and the United States are grouped among the northern nations or not), they do confirm that the relative and absolute significance of the southern nations was radically reduced in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth.

The second element worth noting about the turn-of-the-century period is the rather radical reshuffle that takes place internally between the northern nations. Since the Reformation, Britain had slowly and systematically strengthened its position in relation to all its neighbours and built an empire that covered a quarter of the globe, whereas Germany in particular had remained for centuries a divided, almost scattered collection of small and insignificant states. The latter's unification process, which ended after the Franco-Prussian War with the official proclamation of the German Empire in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles in January 1871, transformed this internal power balance. This second major defeat of France

<sup>3</sup> The following population statistics for European countries are taken from Mitchell 1992. Statistics on GDPs are taken from Angus Maddison's *Contours of the World Economy, 1–2003 AD* (OUP, 2007), as listed in *Wikipedia s.v.* "List of regions by past GDP (PPP)".

in half a century thus did not just contribute to a further weakening of the South in relation to the North; it also provided Germany with a powerful platform that was more or less bound to cause tensions with Britain.

Again, statistical figures leave little doubt about Germany's explosive growth: whereas the population ten years after unification was ten million greater than that of Britain (45 against 35), in 1910 it was nearly twenty million greater (64 against 45). Similarly, by 1913 the German GDP had superseded that of Britain (237 against 224 billion dollars). Germany was rightfully perceived, and largely marketed by the Germans themselves, as a young and vigorous nation, against which Britain appeared somewhat lacking in vitality and inventiveness. For a country that had fostered Darwinism and the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, this was not an immediately promising prospect.

Being an empire, Germany also quickly developed colonial ambitions, founding in the 1880s and 90s a range of private and public organisations with a strong nationalist and expansionist agenda (McGowan 2002, 30–32). The so-called *Weltpolitik* initiative by Chancellor Bülow in 1897, accompanied by a radical expansion of the Navy, was not least a clear reminder to Britain that Germany would not be content merely with national unification. The fact, furthermore, that the colonial frontier, too, was closing, did little to ease the political pressure. Finally, there is an element of ironic symbolism in the fact that when Kaiser Wilhelm II ascended the German throne in 1888 as an energetic twenty-nine-year-old, his elderly grandmother, Queen Victoria, was still on the British throne, remaining there for another thirteen years but representing very much an era on the wane.

Another northern nation that was also coming out of strategic and political hibernation was Norway. When the country achieved independence in 1905, it could look back on six centuries as a dependency of Denmark (1319–1814) and Sweden (1814–1905) respectively. From the late eighteenth century onwards, however, a strong nationalist revival emphasizing the ancient northern legacy gave the country a cultural and political boost that, as will be discussed below, also played a role beyond its borders, and especially so in the polar regions. Thus in Norway as in Germany, a powerful nationalist movement, whose fundamental focus was a unification and harmonization of internal differences, somewhat paradoxically led to an urge to expand and go beyond established borders. In its limited fashion, in other words, Norway's polar adventures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should be seen as an integral part of the last phase of western imperialism.

However, as the nineteenth century was coming to an end it was, as suggested above, the United States that were destined to take over Britain's leading role. In the 1860s, the end of the American Civil War had resulted in a consolidation of the federation through the victory of the North over



the South, giving the former an indisputable political edge and laying the foundation for the country's immense growth in the following decades. At the same time, the United States had purchased Alaska from Russia, which in the present context could also be seen as a further strengthening of the North as against the South.

Both of these events coincided with the gradual closing of the western frontier in the years around 1880. Incidentally, 1880 is also the year in which Britain transferred sovereignty for large parts of arctic Canada to the gradually more independent Canadian government (Hayes 2003, 165). Now, then, for the first time, the exploration of the American Arctic was not in the hands of European powers but in those of Americans and Canadians themselves. And there is no doubt that the United States, in particular, during this period continued, and with increasing vigour, the heroic legacy of Kane, Hayes and Hall.

Also, in the United States as in other countries at the time, nationalism and imperialism went hand in hand, and the Arctic and the sense of the North in general became essential ingredients in the nation-building project that naturally followed from the Civil War. "Arctic mania," according to Sara Wheeler, "persisted from the Civil War to the First World War" (Wheeler 2009, 9), and provided a stage for the demonstration not only of the nation's mettle and energy, but also of an awareness of its position in relation to other countries and, with the closing of the frontier, of the possibility of further expansion. It is, in other words, possible to see this "arctic mania" as an early indication of the United States's positioning of itself as a power to be reckoned with.

In a similar way, Britain's orientation towards the Antarctic at the turn of the century could be seen as an indication of a withdrawal from regions in which it had lost its leading role, strategically as well as economically. Thus, as will emerge from the following survey, the remote regions of the Arctic and the Antarctic continued to reflect the shifting constellations among the powers with an interest in the regions. But more importantly, the focus upon them had an impact on the cultural and political life of the northern nations.

### *The Final Push in the Arctic*

With regard to new discoveries, the northern world of 1880 looked much as it had fifty years earlier. Britain was still shaken by the Franklin disaster and was on the back foot in relation to other nations, and major parts of the polar regions remained uncharted. But the first International Polar Year achieved the object of stimulating renewed enthusiasm, and the following decades would witness a furious race for the long-coveted trophies, all of

which would be gained – or claimed to have been gained – by the outbreak of the First World War.

As to the Northeast Passage, Nordenskiöld had admittedly entered the Pacific, having traversed the long Siberian coast, in July 1879, which meant that the first of the big prizes had been secured. For the time being, however, the return on the investment was still rather modest, in commercial as well as strategic terms. The Englishman Joseph Wiggins, who had explored parts of the route and taken initiatives for trade in the 1870s, now formed a syndicate and made repeated attempts in the course of the 80s and 90s to take cargo back and forth between Britain and ports along the Yenisey. But despite several successful voyages, conditions were too unpredictable, and the syndicate eventually ceased operations (Stone 1994, 409).

Other attempts were made exploiting the possibilities crated by Nordenskiöld's apparently easy voyage. One of them was Russian Georgiy Brusilov's ill-fated expedition in 1912 with the ship *Saint Anna* to find new hunting grounds to the north of Franz Josef Land and to sail through to the Pacific for the second time, thirty-three years after Nordenskiöld (David Roberts in Albanov 2001, xxi). Of the twenty-three crew members only two survived the two-year ordeal, including the navigator Valerian Albanov. His harrowing account, *In the Land of White Death*, was published in Russian in 1917, but remained unavailable, at least in an English translation, until 2000, suggesting how East and West developed their own and separate historical legacies with regard to the Arctic.

Sadly, Brusilov's expedition was not the only one ending in tragedy in this region. In the very same year, the German explorer Herbert Schröder-Stranz (1884–1912), who was planning a full-scale expedition of the Northeast Passage, set out for northern Svalbard on a preliminary expedition with altogether fifteen men. What is interesting in view of developments only a generation later is that the expedition consisted roughly half and half of Germans and Norwegians, and this lack of a clear-cut national profile may be one of the reasons why it has received scant attention in the post-War period. Also, it turned out to be a disastrous lesson in how not to organize a polar expedition: due to Schröder-Stranz's lack of experience – he had never been to the Arctic before – weak leadership, and a continuous changing of plans, the expedition disintegrated into different groups. The result was a series of dramatic and dangerous rescue operations, in spite of which eight of the members of the expedition, including Schröder-Stranz himself, vanished in the ice (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Schröder-Stranz, Herbert").

Tragedies did not prevent the Russians, however, from exploring further the possibilities opened up by the Northeast Passage. In 1913, in an attempt to assert a Russian presence in the Far East in the wake of the disastrous war with Japan in 1904–05, a Russian hydrographic expedition conducted by modern icebreakers discovered the northernmost Russian

territories, Severnaya Zemlya. These were a group of islands nearly the size of Denmark between the Kara and the Laptev Seas, and the discovery confirmed long discredited claims by such early nineteenth-century explorers as Yakov Sannikov and others (Hayes 2003, 168). Still, the Russian Revolution in 1917 heralded a twenty-year period in which the Northeast Passage, or the Northern Sea Route, was given relatively little priority by the new regime. It is true that the Soviets had declared a “goal of taming the North and transforming its icy, hostile wastes into a bountiful, productive powerhouse”, but it was only with Stalin’s great initiative in the 1930s that a real and massive effort was made to realise these ambitions (McCannon 1998, 5).<sup>4</sup>

The apparent half-heartedness shown at least by the major western powers also seems to have characterised their approach to the Northwest Passage. Again, the legacy of the Franklin tragedy ostensibly lingered on for nearly half a century, and so it is perhaps appropriate that the eventual



Photograph of *Gjøa* battling with the elements during Roald Amundsen’s three-year-long voyage through the Northwest Passage. From Roald Amundsen Picture Archive, National Library, Oslo.

conquest of the Passage was almost an anticlimax. Whereas Franklin’s departure was a national event and the expedition “lavishly provisioned and provided” (Savours 1999, 183), there were no dignitaries and no brass bands present when the Norwegian Roald Amundsen (1872–1928) sailed down the Oslofjord late at night on 16 June 1903. On the contrary, due to problems with creditors, the 47-ton herring boat – the *Gjøa* – with a crew

<sup>4</sup> McCannon gives a fascinating account of this short but intense effort, which is beyond the scope of this book.

of seven and six dogs had to slip away under the cover of the semi-darkness of the Scandinavian summer (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Amundsen, Roald”).

Amundsen, who was destined to become one of the giants of polar exploration, had still not made his mark; he was an ardent admirer of Fridtjof Nansen, and had served his apprenticeship as first mate on the Belgian expedition to Antarctica led by Adrien de Gerlache from 1897 to 1899; now, with the backing of Nansen himself, the great opportunity had arrived. Having acquired a dozen more dogs in Greenland, *Gjøa* entered Lancaster Sound, turned south into Peel Sound, and by mid-September reached the southern part of King William Island via the previously un navigated James Ross and Rae Straits. Here, having avoided Franklin’s trap in the Victoria Strait to the west, Amundsen prepared for the winter in Gjøa Haven. From this base, scientific work – especially the locating of the Magnetic North Pole – was conducted for the next two years. The crew also explored and charted extensive areas to the west, including the east coast of Victoria Island. During this period, Amundsen also established excellent relations with the Netsilik Inuit, from whom he gained such essential knowledge about arctic survival as the building of igloos and the driving of dog sleds, skills which would be indispensable in his later career.

It was not until August 1905, two months after Norway had achieved independence from Sweden, that Amundsen eventually left Gjøa Haven and continued west along the channel north of the mainland, reaching Herschel Island west of the Mackenzie Delta before the winter once again prevented further progress (*ibid.*). But the battle was now won, and instead of waiting on board the *Gjøa*, Amundsen travelled over land to Eagle City in Alaska to let Nansen and the rest of the world know, by way of telegram, of his success. As in the case of Nordenskiöld, the voyage had been surprisingly undramatic, and the inconspicuous little ship was little reminiscent of the endless list of large-scale expeditions that for centuries had battled in vain in the frozen maze.

Even more so than the Northeast Passage, the Northwest Passage was an old European dream, but despite the enormous expectations surrounding it and the immense practical potential it appeared to open up, the conquest had few if any immediate consequences. Rather, the discovery within a single generation of these two highways to the East made them seem almost like chimeras whose frantic chase had been more or less futile. But there was also a third potential route to the East – perhaps even more chimerical than the other two – that was still surrounded by an even greater halo of mystery, curiosity and prestige, at least in the public mind, namely via the North Pole. In addition, there was something almost archetypal about the North Pole: it was the quintessential and ever-present point of orientation, at least in the northern hemisphere – a kind of mental anchorage, which was nevertheless characterized by the fact that it had never been seen or properly identified. Did it contain the

legendary lodestone mountain, whose magnetism was so strong that it would pull the rivets out of the ships' hulls; or was it perhaps a huge open hole leading to the interior of the planet (or to the South Pole); or was it an Eden-like place, with palm trees and a temperate sea? Even at the end of the nineteenth century, wild speculations were still in circulation. Also, man's inquisitiveness could and would not leave it alone; somehow, the North Pole *demande*d to be found and brought into the sphere of human knowledge. But it seemed that another obstacle had to be attempted first.

Since the early attempts to break through what was assumed to be a crust of ice preventing access to a navigable sea to the north, Greenland had represented a considerable challenge. Not only was it impossible to know its territorial connections to other continents and thus whether the Pole was accessible by sea or land; its eastern and western coastlines were also giant one-way channels strewn with huge quantities of ice from the north, which either effectively barred the way for any northbound vessel or at least made navigation into a virtually suicidal enterprise. But with its enormous landmass, Greenland also both harboured its own secrets and provided a training ground for future explorers of the Pole itself. Besides the still unsolved mystery of the Norse settlements, the relatively ice-free strip of land along the coast of the island (if it was an island) raised the question of whether the inland ice cap actually covered the entire interior or whether – as was imagined about the Pole – it might contain temperate regions.

Determining this question was the main ambition of the expedition led by Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld in 1883, just a few years after his triumphant voyage through the Northeast Passage. Having reached more than a hundred kilometres inland from the west coast, Nordenskiöld sent his two Sami companions to explore further on skis – then an unusual means of transportation in the polar regions – but they found no indication of an opening in the ice cap (Hayes 2003, 147). Nordenskiöld's theory thus remained hanging in the air. Three years later, the next attempt to cross Greenland was made by “the most driven, even fanatical, Arctic explorer of all time” (Officer and Page 2001, 132), the US Navy lieutenant Robert Peary (1856–1920), who together with a Danish companion managed to travel 150 kilometres inland and to an altitude of nearly 2,300 metres, but who had to turn back for lack of food supplies (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Peary, Robert”).

Though eager to complete a crossing of the ice cap, Peary was held up by other engagements, and this gave another apprentice, the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930), the opening he needed. Since Elisha Kent Kane the world had hardly witnessed an arctic explorer with a greater talent for self-promotion than Nansen. His many photo portraits, for instance, reveal a man obsessively and self-conceitedly concerned with his own image. Like Kane he was also an exceptionally gifted writer. But

these were not his only talents. While realising his golden opportunity, he was in the final stages of his doctorate in zoology at the University of Kristiania, a work that would produce significant new knowledge on the mechanisms of the nervous system in invertebrates. Indeed, one of Nansen's most striking features is precisely the unusual combination of scientific precision and methodicism, on the one hand, and a dare-devil willingness to take outrageous risk, on the other.

These qualities are partly what turns his first major work, *Paa ski over Grønland* (*The First Crossing of Greenland*, 1890), into a reader's *tour de force*. In the introduction, he not only claims that the idea of crossing the ice cap "flashed upon me" (Nansen 2002a, 2) as a sudden impulse that was barely modified later; he also explains the reason for his choice of landing on the generally inaccessible and unpopulated east coast of the island, an idea commonly held to be "simple madness", and then travelling towards the inhabited west coast. "In this way," Nansen writes with a barely concealed air of self-satisfaction and wish to shock the reader,

one would burn all one's ships behind one, there would be no need to urge one's men on, as the east coast would attract no-one back, while in front would lie the west coast with all the allurements and amenities of civilization. There was no choice of routes, "forward" being the only word. The order would be: "Death or the west coast of Greenland". (*Ibid.*)

Furthermore, like many great explorers and scientists, Nansen clearly found a profound satisfaction in challenging established authorities. And writing with the benefit of hindsight and consequently the knowledge of having succeeded, he clearly also emphasizes rather than downplays events that threatened to throw the whole expedition into chaos or collapse. All in all, one is invariably left with the impression that Nansen very deliberately presents a pose, which may perhaps be explained as a combination of his personality and his nationality; after all, Norway was a small and insignificant country, and so the imperial British style of pomp and circumstance, for instance, would not do. Instead, Nansen poses as the outsider, or even the Ash Lad from the Norwegian fairy-tales, who lives by his wits and succeeds by means of impulsive improvisation, always against the odds.

Having arrived in Iceland, the six-man expedition boarded a Norwegian sealer at the beginning of June 1888 and headed for the Greenland coast, where Nansen planned to leave the ship in two small boats and reach the shore. However, due to difficult ice conditions, it was impossible to land, and it was only on 17 July, at around 65° N, that they parted from the sealer. The very next day they were caught in the massive ice current, and saving the boats by pulling them up onto a big ice floe, drifted rapidly south to about 62° N before they managed to reach dry land on 29 July (*ibid.* 97). They then had to row northwards for ten days to regain the lost latitude, before they could finally start the expedition

itself, by taking on the enormous ice cap. Here they were soon made to feel the pain of pulling heavy sledges up to an altitude of more than 2,700 metres through heavy, clay-like snow and crevasses. As a result, Nansen had to change plans and opt for a closer and more southerly destination, that is Nuuk (Godthåb) instead of Qasigiannguit (Christianshåb).

After forty-one days of often merciless weather they reached the west coast at the end of September. By this time, the last ships had left for the autumn, and the group had to spend the winter at Nuuk, where Nansen, with competent instruction from the local Inuit, gathered information about “their methods of hunting and seal-catching, their customs and manner of life generally” (*ibid.*, 259) and not least how to row a kayak, all of which would prove essential qualifications during his next and even more ambitious adventure. The experience would also initiate Nansen’s gradually increasing questioning of the values of modern civilization (Vogt 2011, 72), a sentiment that would be more explicitly expressed in his book *Eskimoliv* (1891), which appeared in English (*Eskimo Days*) and German (*Eskimoleben*) translations only two years later.

Nansen had secured his first major prize and passed his apprenticeship: he had crossed the Greenland ice cap, disproved the theory of his master, Nordenskiöld, of a temperate interior, and convinced the scientific community that the island most likely contained a solid sheet of ice all the way to its northern extremity. Attention now turned elsewhere, and Nansen was ready for the big test. In the 1880s, that meant the North Pole. But again he was not alone. As mentioned above, the Americans had already taken a keen interest in the Arctic and clearly had an ambition of winning the race. In the 1870s, Charles Francis Hall and George Washington De Long had tried two different access routes, along the north-west coast of Greenland and the Bering Strait respectively, the former expedition ending in a miraculous rescue and the latter in death and tragedy.

Then in 1881, an expedition of twenty-six men, funded by the US government and led by Adolphus Washington Greely (1844–1935), set out on the same route as Hall, that is to the northern end of Nares Strait. The main task was charting the northern parts of Ellesmere Island and Greenland, both of which bordered on the Arctic Ocean, but the plan also involved the Pole itself. Initially, the expedition fulfilled its tasks and charted several stretches of coastline, but with relief ships failing to appear both the following summer and the next, tragedy was unavoidable. All the ingredients of human horror – starvation, scurvy, execution, suicide and probably cannibalism – resulted in the deaths of all but six of the crew, with Greely himself as one of the survivors, rescued by an American relief expedition (Hayes 2003, 138–9).<sup>5</sup> With the United States having taken over the role of Britain as the leading arctic power, the similarities with the Franklin disaster were difficult to ignore.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion concerning the allegations of cannibalism, see Robinson 2006, 96–7.

Despite the spectacular failure of the Greely expedition, the Americans still appeared to have the greatest momentum in the race for the Pole at the beginning of the 1890s. Between 1891 and 1895 Robert Peary, back from duties in Latin America, made several attempts to enter the Arctic Ocean from northern Greenland, but failed. This was the moment when Fridtjof Nansen again entered the stage, and this time with a plan that made his trek across Greenland seem like a summer jaunt.

As with his Greenland venture, the expedition had – according to Nansen himself – been conceived in a flash, dating all the way back to 1884 and the reading of a newspaper article that reported on a mysterious find. Objects that indisputably came from De Long's *Jeanette* expedition, which had foundered north of the Siberian coast, had been discovered on the south-west coast of Greenland (Nansen 2002b, 7). Having matured during Nansen's Greenland expedition, the idea was finally presented to the Christiania Geographical Society in February 1890, and it was as simple as it was daring: as the objects could only have travelled across the Arctic with the currents transporting the huge quantities of ice, it should be possible to reach the Pole, or approach near it, by travelling the same route, on a ship. In his book about the expedition, *Fram over Polhavet* (*Farthest North*, 1897), Nansen quoted from an article he published in a Norwegian journal the following year, and with customary calculated bluntness outlined his intention:

My plan is, briefly, as follows: I propose to have a ship built, as small and as strong as possible; just big enough to contain supplies of coals and provisions for twelve men for five years. A ship of about 170 tons (gross) will probably suffice. Its engine should be powerful enough to give a speed of 6 knots; but in addition it must also be fully rigged for sailing.

The main point in this vessel is that it be built on such principles as to enable it to withstand the pressure of the ice. [...] Instead of nipping the ship, the ice must raise it up out of the water. (14–15)

If polar navigation had one absolute and fundamental rule, it was this: not to get beset; not to get caught in the ice. Nansen proposed, with apparently supreme nonchalance, to break this rule. Instead, he proposed to “moor the ship firmly between suitable ice-floes, and then let the ice screw itself together as much as it likes – the more the better. The ship will simply be hoisted up and will ride safely and firmly” (16). As in his Greenland book, he then gleefully went on to cite from a long list of authorities on arctic exploration, nearly all of whom declared, “more or less openly, that it was sheer madness” (19), and that the ship – however built – would be helpless against the forces of the ice.

Nevertheless, it *was* built, and it was called the *Fram* – “forward” – echoing not only Verne's Captain Hatteras, but also Nansen's own uncompromising declaration before his departure for Greenland. It was launched in the autumn of 1892, with a foot-thick and coconut-shaped



hull, and in June 1893 the expedition departed from Kristiania. By the end of September, it had rounded North Cape, passed through the Kara Sea, reached as far east as Novosibirskiye Ostrava and become firmly stuck in the ice. For the next eighteen months, the *Fram* then moved with the current, tackling the ice as Nansen had predicted, and meandering its way in a generally north-westerly direction, with very little drama, although at times the ice “creaked and roared so along the ship’s sides close by us that it was not possible to carry on any connected conversation” (128).

There was only one problem: it followed a route well to the south of the Pole. And this is where Nansen once again showed his willingness for extraordinary risk-taking. On 14 March 1895 a highly unusual parting of ways took place in the middle of the ice at 84° N, which was further north than any human beings had been before. Nansen and one other member of the crew, Hjalmar Johansen (1867–1913), did not literally burn their ship, as Nansen had phrased it in connection with the Greenland expedition, but they left the *Fram* taking with them three sledges, two kayaks, provisions for a hundred days, and twenty-seven dogs.

The idea was once again very simple: while the *Fram* with the rest of the crew could do nothing but continue to drift with the current, the two men and the dogs were to walk straight for the Pole, on a layer of ice covering an ocean that, according to the expedition’s own measurements, was more than 3,000 metres deep. If the expedition as a whole was madness, this was no less so. Clearly, whatever happened, they could not count on catching up with the ship; they were in other words literally forced to find their way back to civilisation on their own. And it was a gruelling march in temperatures below minus 40°C; sometimes they fell asleep while walking and “sometimes we were so weary that our eyes closed, and we fell asleep with the food on its way to our mouths” (289–90). Even more worryingly, however, it soon became clear that there was something peculiar about the position in which the two found themselves at the end of a long day’s haul, and it took some time before they realised the deeply disconcerting fact that as they were going north, the ice was going south.

They struggled northwards for three weeks, reaching a record 86° 14' N, then turned round and set their course for the northern tip of Franz Josef Land, killing their dogs and feeding them to the rest as they went. Progress was slow; the drift carried them westward as much as southward, and lanes of open water created constant obstacles. Though they expected to see land as early as late May, they did not reach the first island until early August. By this time they had no dogs left, were travelling by kayak rather than on foot, and it soon became clear that the only realistic option was to prepare for the coming winter. Thus when the winter set in, they had managed to build an extremely primitive hut of stone and walrus hides, and with ample stores of meat from walrus and polar bear, they faced the rapidly shortening days. But they had very vague notions about where they

were (they were actually on Jackson Island, one of the northernmost islands of the archipelago). When spring came they continued south and reached Northbrook Island, and on 17 June, still assuming that they were further west, Nansen was on the top of a hummock to orient himself when “sound suddenly reached my ear, so like the barking of a dog, that I started” (438).



*Fram* caught in the ice. An observatory for magnetic measurements has been built in the foreground. From Fridtjof Nansen Picture Archive, National Library, Oslo.

Nansen's and Johansen's rescue by Frederick Jackson's British expedition, which against all statistical odds happened to be on the island at the right time, could perhaps be seen as the arctic counterpart to the meeting between Stanley and Livingstone in the African jungle. But it is also a peculiar example of how Nansen's outrageous gamble paid off yet again, because it was not the only lucky draw during the expedition. Only days before he had jumped into the icy water and miraculously managed to save his and Johansen's kayaks, which had suddenly drifted off from the shore and out to sea. With all their possessions on board, their loss would have meant certain death for both of them. And when the two Norwegians eventually landed in Vardø on 13 August, only a week passed before Nansen received a telegram from Otto Sverdrup on board the *Fram*, which was just then heading for Tromsø with the ship and the crew safe and sound after having broken out of the ice at northern Spitsbergen only a week earlier. Once again, Nansen had landed with his feet on the ground, and his theory had been validated for all the world. With this, his active career as an explorer was over, but his career as a cultural and political figure was only just beginning.

The news of Nansen's spectacular feat spread like wildfire through the Norwegian and the international press. On its way down the coast to Kristiania, the *Fram* was given a tumultuous welcome. When after his Greenland expedition Nansen had returned to the capital, sixty thousand people had received him, but "the extent and intensity of this event was on an entirely different scale. These were the biggest celebrations in the city's history" (Drivenes et al. 2006, 106). A Norwegian book about him, which had been written and produced even *before* news of the expedition arrived, was quickly translated into several languages. But in his ultimate goal, Nansen had failed. Although for tactical reasons he quickly redefined his ambition into a wish to penetrate the unknown Arctic Ocean, he was perfectly aware that it was the race for the Pole that was the key question of strategic and national importance (Vogt 2011, 182–5). In a letter written immediately after his rescue, he plainly confesses that "it would have been so pleasant to be able to take the Pole for Norway" (quoted in Vogt 2011, 182).<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, he had brought the Pole even further within the sphere of the possible, and as a result, his failure cum triumph spurred on even more aggressive attempts by other countries to emerge victorious. At a time when the longing for Norwegian independence from Sweden was gathering momentum, it was therefore particularly nerve-racking when immediately after the *Fram* expedition the prominent Swedish scientist and engineer Salomon Andrée decided to outdo even Nansen with regard to finding a sensational means of reaching the Pole, and cut the Gordian knot by travelling in a balloon.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of the story about the race for the North Pole is a muddled affair. What is beyond doubt, though, is that if ever the race had been concerned with science and a wish to gather new knowledge about the Arctic world, it was now purely a battle for a particular and in itself completely worthless point in the ice-covered ocean. The polar historian Laurence Kirwan says about Robert Peary, one of the contestants:

He had no interest in scientific work. He was an engineer and a technologist, a military planner concerned with the strategy, tactics, and logistics of his polar campaign. However illuminating Nansen's geographical discoveries may have been, all that mattered to Peary was that Nansen had failed to reach the Pole. (Kirwan 1962, 274)

In the years between 1898 and 1910 several attempts were made, and the intensity of the race may well be one of the reasons why the rather extravagant claims made by all of those involved have later been seriously questioned. Or more bluntly: it seems that one or several of these explorers may have resorted to a certain amount of creative bookkeeping about where they actually were, and when.

<sup>6</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PF.

<sup>7</sup> This incident will be discussed later in this chapter.

Even if the Americans were to dominate the last stages of the race, a surprise contender suddenly appeared in the Italian Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duke of Abruzzi (1873–1933) and grandchild of the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele II. The expedition procured a ship in Kristiania in the spring of 1899, sailed to Arkhangelsk, and from there to Franz Josef Land, where a winter camp was established on the northernmost island, Prince Rudolf Island. From here a group led by the expedition's second-in-command, Umberto Cagni, set out for the Pole in February 1900 and claimed to have reached 86° 34' N before being forced to return to base. According to Derek Hayes, the truth of Cagni's report of having beaten Nansen's record by less than forty kilometres is more than doubtful, as the information he provided is lacking in detail as well as consistency (Hayes 2003, 154).

At the same time, the American industrialist William Ziegler, eager to secure the North Pole – and his name for posterity – simply by using his purchasing power, equipped an expedition with everything that money could buy. Led by the meteorologist Evelyn Briggs Baldwin (1862–1933), it intended to use the same route as the Duke of Abruzzi, i.e. via Franz Josef Land, but difficult ice conditions and bad leadership prevented him from ever achieving more than the laying of depots. Undeterred by Baldwin's failure, however, Ziegler immediately funded another expedition, this time with one of Baldwin's crew, Anthony Fiala (1869–1950), in charge. Once again, with altogether \$250,000 at his disposal, Fiala chose to start from Franz Josef Land, but the ship was crushed by the ice, and after several failed attempts to approach the Pole, he eventually made it back to civilisation in 1905, only to find that his sponsor had died in the meantime (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Fiala, Anthony").

Thus the field was left open to two men: Robert Peary, who had made repeated attempts on the Pole, and his rival and countryman Frederick Cook (1865–1940), a medical doctor who had been a member of Peary's first expedition to Greenland. Cook, now President of The Explorers Club, was riding on a wave of public enthusiasm after having made the first ascent of Mount McKinley (6,194 m) in Alaska in 1906. Or so he claimed; later research seems to have proved conclusively that his photographic evidence was manipulated and dubious (Bryce 1997, ch. 28). With Peary being delayed, Cook managed to go north to Baffin Bay and Smith Sound as early as July 1907, a whole year before Peary. But he did not intend to use the latter's route from the northern tip of Greenland; instead, he planned to travel from Smith Sound, north-westward across Ellesmere Island and into Nansen Sound, and from there to the Pole.

According to the stories later told by Cook himself, the plan worked; having reached the northern tip of Axel Heiberg Island, he and two Inuit companions entered the Arctic Ocean with twenty-six dogs on 18 March, and reached the Pole on 21 April 1908. Returning south, he came to the

Queen Elizabeth Islands to the west of Ellesmere and Axel Heiberg Islands, an archipelago that had only recently been mapped by Otto Sverdrup, Nansen's captain on the *Fram*. Here Cook was forced to spend the winter, before he reached Smith Sound, Upernavik in Greenland and eventually Denmark. Stopping at the Shetlands, he telegraphed the news of the great conquest to the world on 1 September 1909.

Peary, on the other hand, entered Kane Basin, north of Smith Sound, in August 1908, at a time when Cook was allegedly well on his way to the Pole. During the following winter a large depot was prepared at Cape Columbia, on the northern tip of Ellesmere Island. From here he started 1 March 1909 with a large expedition of men and dogs. By late March numbers had been drastically reduced as the majority had returned to the base, and on 1 April a small team consisting of four Inuit, Peary himself and his faithful black assistant Matthew Henson set out on the last leg



On 19 September 1909, the French journal *Le Petit Journal* presented this cover, showing the furious struggle between Cook and Peary as to who had conquered the North Pole. The attentive viewer will realise that the artist has committed a serious mistake, which might reflect a certain ignorance of the polar regions: the audience of penguins belongs on the other Pole!

from 87° 47' N. According to Peary, the Pole was reached only a few days later, on 6 April 1909, i.e. nearly a year after Cook, and the team was back at Cape Columbia by 23 April. It was not till 6 September, however, when Peary was able to telegraph from Labrador, that the rest of the world received the news, less than a week after Cook's sensational announcement (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Peary, Robert").

A firm conclusion regarding Cook's and Peary's achievements will probably never be reached, but the fact remains that both explorers left highly unconvincing evidence to support their claims. Furthermore, at crucial periods both of them must have been travelling with almost superhuman speed in order to have covered such enormous distances between the verifiable dates of departure and arrival. In Cook's case, for instance, the information provided makes "his venture to the Pole inherently improbable" (Imbert 1992, 72), and "serious doubts" similarly surround Peary's claim (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Peary, Robert"). In the cold light of day it seems, in other words, unlikely that either of the two ever reached the Pole. This did not appear to affect the reception of the news, however, at least not in the United States: "One hundred thousand New Yorkers lined the parade route to greet Cook, a native son of Brooklyn, as he made his way from the harbor [...]. Although his claim had been challenged by rival explorer Robert Peary two weeks earlier, this fact did not appear to diminish the crowds" (Robinson 2006, 133).

The Americans did face an unpleasant dilemma, however: two of their countrymen were making the same claim, and the issue at stake carried an enormous amount of national and international prestige. In terms of national psychology, therefore, it was intensely tempting to believe at least one of the candidates. On the other hand, it was necessary to choose; they could not both have been first to the Pole. And this choice in turn implied a suggestion of dishonesty about the other man. At the same time, the suspicion of foul play was hanging in the air with regard to both. In the United States, the question has been debated to this very day. Not even Robert M. Bryce's mammoth study *Cook & Peary: The Polar Controversy Resolved* (1997) is able to pass a final verdict.

Strangely, however, despite the inconclusive evidence, the race for the North Pole was now practically over. Admittedly, Roald Amundsen would make another attempt to repeat Nansen's drift across the Pole in *Maud* between 1918 and 1921, but the purpose was now primarily scientific, and failing to enter the pack he instead ended up exploring the Northeast Passage and the Bering Strait. But in 1909 his attention, like that of many others, turned in a very different direction, to the only remaining polar prize – an enormous expanse of northernness situated on the planet's southern extremity. Now it was the South Pole or nothing.

### ***The Last Polar Battle: the South Pole***

After James Ross's expedition to the Antarctic in the 1840s, European powers had largely lost interest in the region, at least in terms of scientific and geographical exploration. For several decades, therefore, it was primarily visited by sealers and whalers. A partial exception from this rule was the Norwegian expedition led by Henrik Bull from 1893 to 1895, which will be discussed below. As with the Arctic, however, the end of the century witnessed a new and international awareness about the globe's quickly vanishing *terrae incognitae*. As a result, the Sixth International Geographical Congress, held in London in 1895, singled out Antarctica as deserving of special attention from the scientific community (Mulvaney 2001, 101).

In this way, both of the polar regions were subjected to an intense investigation during the next couple of decades. As many times before with regard to issues of a scientific as well as political nature, this great international effort was couched in a language suggesting a common thirst for knowledge that was to be shared by all nations, but there is no doubt that it was also a race with strong nationalistic and strategic overtones. By this time it was clear that Antarctica was a giant continent, whatever the interior looked like, and with imperialism as well as nationalism being central ingredients in European as well as American politics at the time, no country could ignore an opportunity to secure a piece of the cake. And rule number one was, as always, to show a presence.

Whereas British polar exploration in the pre-Franklin days had been largely initiated by the Navy, and especially by its Second Secretary to the Admiralty, Sir John Barrow, different constellations emerged in the latter part of the century. With the Navy dragging its heels after the Franklin disaster and other less than successful expeditions, the initiative was taken over by the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), which Barrow had helped establish in 1830. The president in the 1890s was Sir Clements R. Markham (1830–1916), a cousin of Albert Markham, the hero from the Nares expedition. After the International Geographical Congress in London, Markham saw an opportunity to bring the Navy back into the game, though in collaboration with the RGS and the Royal Society, who would ensure a strong scientific focus.

While these various wheels were slowly put in motion, however, other initiatives involving other countries materialized more quickly. More or less out of the blue, a Belgian expedition under Adrien de Gerlache (1866–1934) departed for the South in August 1897 in the steam-whaler *Belgica*, with several future explorers as members of the crew, including the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and the American Frederick Cook. After a long and complicated voyage, the expedition did not reach the Antarctic until January 1898, but from March onwards they became the first

expedition to spend the winter locked in the ice in the southern hemisphere. The *Belgica* expedition may not have revolutionized antarctic exploration, but in the context of contemporary imperialism it clearly underlines the scramble for territories and natural resources. It is not wholly coincidental, therefore, that while the *Belgica* expedition was trying to penetrate into an antarctic heart of whiteness, Joseph Conrad was finishing the tale of Marlow's voyage into the Belgian Congo's heart of darkness. Also, the expedition brought back valuable weather observations, and not least, it triggered a reaction from other countries. The race was now definitely on.

At the same time, a British expedition financed privately by the publisher Sir George Newnes and led by the Norwegian Carsten Borchgrevink (1864–1934) reached the Ross Sea on New Year's Eve 1898 in the *Southern Cross*. On board were also seventy-five dogs, the first to set foot on the continent. Having established a base at Cape Adare, the ship left for the winter, leaving behind ten men and the dogs, who became the first group to spend the winter on the antarctic mainland (Cameron 1980, 136). Despite a series of accidents and a strained atmosphere due to Borchgrevink's controversial leadership, the expedition managed to collect a considerable amount of information, together with plants as well as the first insects in Antarctica. It also established the new position of the South Magnetic Pole, since James Clark Ross's location of it in 1841 (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Borchgrevink, Carsten"). Joining the race too were a German and a Swedish expedition, both of which were strictly scientific, but the Swedes, in particular, were made to feel the fury of the antarctic elements when their scientists were forced to spend an extra winter at their base. Even worse, three of them were trapped in a stone hut away from the others, but miraculously survived through the winter on penguin meat (Cameron 1980, 136–7).

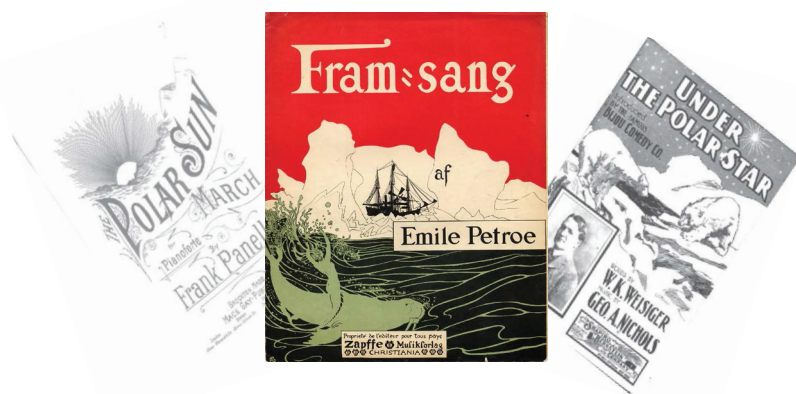
Back in Britain, Borchgrevink's expedition received little attention, perhaps partly because it lacked a clear-cut national basis, but in 1899, as the *Belgica* was on its way home (and *Heart of Darkness* was appearing in *Blackwood's Magazine*) and the *Southern Cross* was still in the southern ice, Markham's plan was receiving a steadily growing interest. Like Barrow, he liked to handpick potential leaders, and he had already chosen a Navy officer by the name of Robert Falcon Scott (1868–1912). As a matter of fact, Markham had spotted him back in 1887, when he was only eighteen:

Indeed Scott was Markham's *beau idéal* of a young British naval officer, closely moulded by the training and discipline of a service to whose traditions he was dedicated with an almost religious fervour. When therefore Scott and Markham met by chance in a London street in June 1899, the meeting seemed to Markham providential. (Kirwan 1962, 257)

Still, time passed, and it was not until late 1901 that the *Discovery*, a ship specially built for the expedition and for antarctic conditions, finally departed for its destination, which it reached in January 1902.



At a time when explorers from other countries were rapidly adopting new techniques, frequently inspired by the natives of the arctic regions, in order to travel and survive in polar conditions, Scott's first expedition proved once again that the British were reluctant to make adjustments, and instead lived by Sir Clements Markham's dictum: "No ski. No dogs"



The piano was an important nineteenth-century bourgeois status symbol, and piano music, produced in large quantities by a range of popular composers, reflected the news and the interests of the day. Motifs from the polar regions had become common around the middle of the century, and after 1880 this continued with numerous more or less explicit references to the expeditions of the period. These are covers of Norwegian, British and American compositions, published around the turn of the century.

(Huntford 1985, 45). Though this was not quite the case: in addition to ponies and motor sledges, neither of which lived up to expectations, Scott had in fact acquired a number of dogs. But experience with dogs was lacking, and the attempts to learn how to drive the teams were unsuccessful. As a result, during their attempt in November to reach the Pole, the group of three – Scott, Ernest Shackleton and Edward Wilson – eventually reverted to traditional man-hauling (Kirwan 1962, 262). After making it to 82° 15' S, 200 miles further south than the old record, they turned and by the skin of their teeth made it back to base. When a relief ship arrived with new supplies, Shackleton was ordered to go home because of illness, much against his will, while the rest of the expedition stayed on for another year before returning home in September 1904 to an overwhelming welcome (Cameron 1980, 141).

With his expedition, Scott had not only passed his apprenticeship as a polar explorer; he had also brought Britain firmly back into the race for the last big trophy. The press was clearly relieved to be able to report about a British polar success; the scientific contributions of the Swedish and German expeditions were conveniently given modest attention, and generally Scott was elevated to a heroic status that would open doors for

him in the event of a new attempt. There was almost a sense, as with the Franklin expedition sixty years earlier, that the groundwork had been so thorough that, if not plain sailing, the final conquest of the Pole was definitely and realistically within reach. And Britain was clearly the nation to clinch the matter. In reality, it was only a question of time before the final push would have to be made.

In a race, time is naturally of the essence. For Scott, therefore, his duties as an officer in the Navy meant restricted opportunities for further exploration. For others it meant the opposite: in the same way that Frederick Cook had emerged to challenge his one-time mentor and countryman, Robert Peary, Ernest Shackleton (1874–1922) now suddenly threw down a very unwelcome gauntlet. With funding from private sources and the governments of Australia and New Zealand, Shackleton became the cause of an exclusively British race for the Pole. Seen from the outside, it would admittedly increase the chances of a British triumph; on the other hand, it infused an endeavour ideally charged with a sense of national harmony with an undesired tension. From Markham's point of view it was close to treacherous, and he dismissed Shackleton as "an absolute cad" (quoted in Cameron 1980, 142).

The expedition sailed in August 1907 in the old and rather dilapidated sealer *Nimrod*, carrying "thirty-nine men, ten ponies, nine dogs, and Antarctica's first motor car, a 12–15-horsepower Arrol-Johnston" (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Shackleton, Ernest"). Shackleton, in other words, stuck to the traditional reluctance with regard to dogs. Planning to go to the Bay of Whales on the eastern side of the Ross Sea, which was the most convenient point to enter the Ross Ice Shelf, Shackleton found it inaccessible and sailed across to McMurdo Sound on the western side, which he had promised Scott that he would not use. Though arriving here at the end of January 1908, it was not till September that he was able to start preparations for the actual march.

Like many expeditions before it, Shackleton's was a near triumph and a near disaster: six members of the crew made the first ascent of Mount Erebus, the world's southernmost active volcano, towering nearly 3,800 metres above the nearby sea; another group set their feet on the South Magnetic Pole; and a third group of four men with Shackleton in charge made it to 88° 23' S, no more than 180 km from the Pole, before they were forced to turn round, faced with the choice between certain death and a slim chance of survival. In his diary for this day, 9 January 1909, Shackleton notes: "While the Union Jack blew out stiffly in the icy gale that cut us to the bone, we looked south with our powerful glasses, but could see nothing but the dead white snow plain" (Shackleton 2002, 223). But survive they did, though they returned like ghosts from the underworld, and only a day before *Nimrod*, as previously agreed, was to sail, presuming them all dead.

Despite the public's enthusiasm for Shackleton's near-triumph, some were instead relieved because a near-triumph could just as well be regarded as a failure. Fortunately, from Markham's point of view, the Pole had not been won, but that was not enough: Shackleton's achievement was still suspicious, and in letters Markham openly questioned the distances he claimed to have covered (Cameron 1980, 146). Still, his one focus was now once again on Scott, who even before Shackleton's return had decided on a new attempt.

Also, as the months went by, it became clear that he was not alone in venturing for the South. In 1909 the Japanese explorer Nobu Shirase (1861–1946) declared his intention of going to the South Pole, having given up the North Pole after the claims of Cook and Peary. And in the same year the German scientist Wilhelm Filchner (1877–1957) started preparations for a major expedition to establish whether the Weddell Sea and the Ross Sea were connected, dividing the continent in two (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Filchner, Wilhelm"). Although Filchner's plans were exclusively



The routes of Scott (left) and Amundsen (right) from the Ross Ice Shelf to the Pole.

scientific and did not include the Pole, Scott would soon enough realise that promises from rivals were of little value. For the time being no one paid much attention to Roald Amundsen, who in the course of 1909 was gathering financial support for another Nansen-inspired assault on the North Pole with *Fram*, this time approaching it from the Bering Strait. The fact that this included a voyage via Cape Horn, which would bring him within striking distance of the Antarctic, did not put Scott on the alert. Still, he had no time to lose.

In an old and dangerously overloaded whaler, the *Terra Nova*, Scott's expedition finally got under way in June 1910. Scott himself stayed behind in England, travelling up and down the country to raise the £40,000 needed, half of which was eventually granted by the government (Young 1995, 109). After joining the sixty-five men, seventeen ponies, thirty dogs and three motor sledges in South Africa (Imbert 1992, 89), Scott made a last stop in Melbourne, where he received the first of several blows, a cablegram from Amundsen, with an unpleasantly staccato message: "Beg leave to inform you *Fram* proceeding Antarctic Amundsen" (quoted in Huntford 1985, 299). Soon after, en route for the Ross Sea, the *Terra Nova* was caught in a violent storm, and with failing pumps was a fraction from sinking. It was not a promising start.

The race between Scott and Amundsen has been endlessly retold and debated over the years, and is so well known that it does not need to be recapitulated in any detail here. In dry facts, both expeditions used the early part of 1911 to lay depots along their chosen routes, and then to wait out the antarctic winter before setting out on the proper journey: Amundsen on 20 October; Scott ten days later. Having traversed the Ross Ice Shelf, the two parties started the climb on to the giant glaciers, which again led to the high-rising Antarctic Plateau. By this stage, the British team had returned their dogs and slaughtered their ponies; the motor sledges had long since broken down. They were back to traditional man-hauling; after all, dogs were, according to Markham, only "useful to Greenland Eskimos and Siberians" (quoted in *ibid.*, 137). Also, when sending the last support team back to base, Scott had made another of his fatal errors: despite having all along prepared for a Pole team of four, he suddenly and almost inexplicably decided on five, adding an extra strain on provisions and equipment that were already cut to the bone.

Even though the Norwegians chose a brutal ascent, via the Axel Heiberg Glacier, up to the Plateau, they were generally well served by their dogs – forty-two in all – combined with the skills of their best skier, Olav Bjaaland, in finding the most accessible routes. Having ascended to more than 3,300 metres above sea level, they were past 85° S by 21 November (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Amundsen, Roald"). Here they slaughtered twenty-four of the dogs, and continued with good speed until they reached the Pole on 14 December. Then, after four days, they started the return journey, which

despite occasional bad weather and hair-raising descents turned into race number two, “at three miles an hour, twenty and thirty miles a day; day in, day out, men and dogs putting on weight. It was a triumph of skills, forethought and organization” (Huntford 1985, 472). In nineteen days they reached the Ross Ice Shelf, and on 25 January 1912, they reached their base at Framheim. They had travelled close to 3,000 kilometres in ninety-nine days (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Amundsen, Roald”). The return journey alone had taken almost exactly one third of this time.

Scott and his men were gradually facing a very different reality. By early January, more than a fortnight after Amundsen’s arrival at the Pole, they had only reached the main plateau, but made satisfactory progress and reached their goal on 16 January, only to find Amundsen’s tent and letter. It was a beaten and dangerously exhausted party that two days later started on the long trek back to the base at Cape Evans. Unlike Amundsen, Scott had planned his provisions with hardly any allowance for delays due to illness, bad weather etc. This now quickly put a stranglehold on the whole group; their strength was ebbing away, allowing cold and hunger to do their work, and under the extra pressure of bad weather their daily marches were becoming shorter and shorter. On 17 February one of the men, Teddy Evans, collapsed and died. On 16 March Lawrence Oates stumbled out of the tent and never returned. Three days later, less than twenty kilometres from the last depot, which would have saved their lives, the three remaining men – Scott, Edward Wilson and Henry Bowers – were caught in a blizzard that lasted for more than a week. The race was run, and the last entry in Scott’s diary was written 29 March.

Roland Huntford’s classic from 1979, *Scott and Amundsen*, offers a damning but never seriously contested portrait of Captain Scott. There is hardly any doubt that his expedition was not only pursued by bad luck, as it tended to be presented after the event and by Scott himself, during his final hours; it was also led by a man who was simply not qualified for the job. A series of disastrous decisions and bad choices led up to the final tragedy, which was, all along, waiting to happen. On the other hand, dying only a few kilometres from the life-saving depot, Scott might just as plausibly have had luck on his side, and survived. Clearly, such an outcome would have placed the expedition, despite Amundsen’s victory, in a wholly different light. However, when the news of the tragedy reached London on 10 February 1913, a myth-building operation started that completely overshadowed actual events and that would transform Scott and his companions into national martyrs of almost unimaginable proportions. But before discussing some aspects of this phenomenon, it is appropriate to consider another feature of polar exploration: the search for natural resources.

### ***Natural Resources***

As had been the case in earlier periods, the fascination with the polar regions at the turn of the nineteenth century was closely connected with the hunger among western nations for new territories. Behind this hunger was the growing need – because of industrialisation as well as rapidly growing populations – for natural resources, on land and at sea.

The arctic as well as antarctic regions represented some of the last remaining parts of the globe that had not been charted, annexed and exploited. The process of geographical exploration outlined above, therefore, was always running parallel with a search for renewable natural resources such as whale, seal and fish, and non-renewable resources like coal, gold and oil. It was no coincidence, therefore, that most of the ships used by the various expeditions were former sealers or whalers: these were the ships built for and used in the extreme weather conditions of these regions. It was also no coincidence that when acting wisely the same expeditions would employ captains and pilots with a sealing or whaling background to guide them safely, or as safely as possible, through a treacherous environment.

Whaling and sealing had always been a business characterised by extreme fluctuations, and the situation after 1880 was no different. In terms of volume, however, sealing was always a very minor industry compared to whaling (Basberg and Headland 2008, 2 and 12). Admittedly, the sheer figures from the former are spectacular, and give an indication of the enormous wealth the arctic waters were capable of yielding. For instance, during his career, the Norwegian pioneer Svend Foyn (1809–94) alone brought about 150,000 seals back from the ice; altogether his four ships killed 450,000 animals in the period leading up to the early 1890s (Jacobsen 2008, 293). Whaling opened up yet a new frontier, not least because the industry was largely transformed by the introduction of new technology. The very same Svend Foyn, who had seen where the future lay, had patented and thus monopolised his invention, the explosive harpoon, in 1870, and this was one of the reasons for Norway's dominance during the period up to the First World War (Basberg 2004, 26). Also, the Norwegians were flexible in that they varied between arctic and antarctic whaling.

With Foyn's monopoly expiring as early as 1882, a veritable bonanza opened up on the Finnmark coast of Norway; in 1883 there were as many as sixteen whaling stations in operation (Francis 1990, 178), and in the 1886 season alone thirty-one ships killed nearly 1,300 whales on the same coast (Jacobsen 2008, 295), but following the usual pattern, it was quickly followed by radically reduced catches, and whaling was eventually banned in the area in 1904. Attempts were once again made further north and west in the waters around Iceland and Svalbard, and in the early 1890s

in the Faroes and Newfoundland, but here too catches were dwindling. As a result of this development, the last Scottish whaling ship bound for Greenland sailed from the once-proud whaling port of Peterhead in 1893 (Gray 1932, 133).

Consequently, the only new hunting grounds were available far away indeed – in the Antarctic – which from the mid-1890s, as we have seen, was also receiving new attention with respect to discovery and exploration. Here sealing was already a well-established industry, but after the great peak around 1820 and smaller booms around the middle of the century, it was clearly in decline, and from 1880 and for at least twenty-five years no more than five to ten vessels of gradually smaller size visited the region each season (Basberg and Headland 2008, 10). The whaling industry, on the other hand, was very much on the rise, and when the Scots in 1892 sent four ships, the Norwegians realised it was time to act (Basberg 2004, 26).

One of them was the shipowner and -builder Christen Christensen (1845–1923), whose ship *Jason*, specially built to tackle the ice, had already transported Nansen and his party to the coast of Greenland, before their crossing of the ice cap.<sup>8</sup> Now, having just returned from the Arctic Ocean, the ship was quickly made ready and sent to the Antarctic under the highly competent captain Carl Anton Larsen. This expedition and another with four ships the following year, gathered essential information and prepared the ground for transferring most of the whaling resources from the Arctic to the Antarctic (Christensen 2007, 66).

By this time, Foyn was in his eighties, but he too saw the opportunities that were opening up, and in 1893 he provided Henrik Bull (1844–1930), an enthusiastic Norwegian emigrant to Australia, with a ship and resources to spend two years in the South Seas. During the expedition, Bull entered the Ross Sea for the first time since James Clark Ross's visit more than half a century earlier, thus making it more easily accessible for the later expeditions of Scott, Amundsen and others (Mills 2003, *s.v.* "Bull, Henrik").

It was not until after the turn of the century, however, that South Sea whaling started a rapid growth. In 1904 Carl Anton Larsen had discovered an ideal natural harbour at Grytviken in South Georgia (south-east of the Falkland Islands), an area teeming with whales, especially rorquals. In Buenos Aires and with Argentinian capital, Larsen set up the *Compañía Argentina de Pesca*, and then returned to Grytviken to build a shore station with a full-scale whale-oil factory, and start what would become a whaling adventure.<sup>9</sup> Altogether six shore stations were established, creating

<sup>8</sup> The ship was later bought by the Duke of Abruzzi and used on his expedition to Franz Josef Land in 1899–1900. Christensen also rebuilt the *Belgica* for De Gerlache's expedition to the Antarctic in 1897 (Christensen 2007, 65).

<sup>9</sup> The following is indebted to Basberg 2004, 29.

a substantial capacity. In addition to this, yet another novelty, and an alternative to the shore station, was introduced. Larsen's former employer, Christen Christensen, now launched the concept of the floating factory ship, which would soon revolutionise the whaling industry.

Although many shore stations still remained in operation, and Grytviken was not finally abandoned until 1966, the many innovations and rationalisations ensured that the whaling industry expanded rapidly, as is confirmed by the statistics from the period. In the 1909–1910 season, for instance, as many as 3,500 whales were killed in the waters around South Georgia alone, and nearly 2,000 around the South Shetlands (Basberg 2004, 29). Three years later as many as 10,760 whales went through the industrial processing plant at Grytviken in one year (Francis 1990, 191). Similarly, the number of barrels of whale-oil produced worldwide in the years before the First World War – two thirds of which came from the Southern Seas – shows a radical and progressive increase: 1906: 75,000; 1910: 320,000; 1911: 625,000; and 1913: 800,000 (Harmer 1928, 73–5).

Norwegian companies were responsible for an average of at least 65 per cent of this production. Still, these figures were small compared to the enormous catches of the decades after 1930, when so-called pelagic whaling (in the open sea), in ships with stern slips upon which the whole whale could be pulled on board, reduced the stocks in the Antarctic by nearly 37,000 animals during the most successful seasons (Basberg 2004, 29). Furthermore, a whole series of inventions for dismembering the carcass and processing the oil, the meat and the bones made the whole enterprise more efficient and more profitable (Drivenes 2006, 177).

Whaling on an industrial scale was not something entirely new; as early as the 1600s, Smeerenburg on the north-west coast of Spitsbergen had exhibited many of the same characteristics as Grytviken four centuries later. Still, the invention of the explosive harpoon, in particular, carries an almost symbolic significance. As a matter of fact, in the field of slaughtering animals, the modern harpoon could be regarded as a foreshadowing of the arsenal of modern weapons that was soon to be used in the slaughter, also on an industrial scale, of human beings, in the battles of the First World War. Like other men of progress, Foyn had concluded that manpower was no longer enough, and in developing the explosive harpoon it was, according to his biographer, “the mechanical methods of industrialism that would have to be systematised and adopted, based on steam power and modern artillery technique” (Jacobsen 2008, 146).<sup>10</sup> This meant that man could kill not just a far larger number of, but also the biggest, mammals on the planet – animals that had generally so far been unapproachable – the blue whale and the rorqual. In the same way modern warfare made it

<sup>10</sup> Translation from the Norwegian by PF.



possible to kill tens and hundreds of thousands of people where in the past it had only been possible to kill tens and hundreds at a time. During the period in question, in other words, industry and technology invaded the polar regions, thus bringing in a dimension that has continued to affect them profoundly, though on a limited scale compared to the volume of activity that is currently under planning.

With regard to traditional fisheries, especially of cod, there was also a problem with the depletion of stocks, although it was more of a gradual development than in the whale fisheries. As a matter of fact, as late as the 1880s it was still generally assumed that the supplies were practically unlimited. At the 1883 International Fisheries Exhibition in London, the eminent biologist and “Darwin’s Bulldog”, Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), claimed with the full authority of science that “[a]ny tendency to over-fishing will meet with its natural check in the diminution of the supply, [...] this check will always come into operation long before anything like permanent exhaustion has occurred” (Kurlansky 1999, 122). But in Newfoundland, for instance, where virtually the whole population worked in the fishery, the tons of fish landed per person had been falling steadily from the middle of the century because of gradually falling catches, and the trend was continuing into the new century (Rose 2007, 286–7). As the First World War was approaching, in other words, it was becoming increasingly clear that the renewable resources in the polar oceans were being slowly, or in some cases quickly, eroded.

The search for non-renewable resources, usually in the form of mining, had for several centuries been one of the driving forces behind arctic and antarctic exploration. It was not always for purely scientific reasons, in other words, that expeditions kept their eyes open for minerals and metals. The demanding logistics of mining in polar regions, however, always represented an additional challenge. Also, over the centuries there had been some rather disastrous ventures, such as Martin Frobisher’s attempt at gold mining off Baffin Island in the late 1500s. Similarly, the hope of the Hudson’s Bay Company of mining copper around the Coppermine River, in one of the least hospitable and accessible corners of the Canadian wilderness, never materialised. Nevertheless, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a more systematic charting of natural resources was taking place, such as in Alaska by American and in Greenland by Danish authorities. When commercial mining in the Arctic started around the turn of the century, however, it was actually once again Svalbard that was at the centre of attention.<sup>11</sup>

Essentially, it was mining more than hunting and trapping that transformed Svalbard from an archipelago without permanent settlements

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<sup>11</sup> The following is indebted to Drivenes and Jølle 2006 (eds.), 146–52.

to an industrial community of some significance.<sup>12</sup> Quarrying for coal had taken place in the islands from around 1870, but after more thorough analyses revealed promising deposits in 1899, especially along the west coast, wheels were quickly set in motion, and several companies established. The national status of Svalbard was still unclear, and claims for mining rights came in from several countries, but primarily from Norway, and in 1905, the same year that Norway achieved independence from Sweden, Norwegian sovereignty was formally recognised, followed by the Svalbard Treaty fifteen years later. The mining was gradually taken over by a publicly owned company, which is still operating the mines. Thus for more than hundred years, Svalbard has represented an arctic environment in which such traditional activities as hunting, trapping and fishing have existed side by side with industry and tourism.

A somewhat parallel industrial development took place in Alaska, where natives for generations had witnessed oil seeps in the Prudhoe Bay on the northern coast (Wheeler 2009, 71). These fields were, in fact, not to be developed until the late 1960s. It was rather in the Gulf of Alaska, in the south-eastern corner of the state, that the first oil fields were opened up in the years around 1900. The fields at Katalla produced significant quantities of oil between 1911 and 1933, when the site was abandoned (Shumenko ed. 2011, 2). Coal, on the other hand, was found in smaller pockets around the state, and production remained very modest, whereas huge reserves of copper were found at the turn of the century near the Kennicott Glacier, also in the south-eastern corner. But like the Katalla oil fields, the copper mine closed down in the course of the 1930s. All in all, Alaska therefore remained relatively untouched by large-scale industrial activity until after the Second World War.

In the long term, and especially with the growing environmental awareness in the latter part of the twentieth century, oil in particular was going to play an essential role in the political tug of war over the exploitation of natural resources in the polar world. A century earlier, however, the black gold had still not acquired its future all-important status as the fuel of progress. At the time, gold proper was alerting more people and creating more headlines. Indeed, few events at the turn of the century caused a greater sensation and produced more myths and legends concerning the North than the great stampede for gold in the Yukon (in north-western Canada) and Alaska from 1896 to 1900. Frobisher had long before demonstrated how man's hunger for gold could send him with amazing speed on a slippery slope into hysteria. In *his* case the public response was without any foundation in reality; this time, with actual gold being found, and at a time of newspapers and telegraphs, the news and the interest instantly spread like wildfire.

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<sup>12</sup> Today, Svalbard has a population of about 2,700.

The first rumours of gold in the North started trickling out as early as in the 1860s, but the quantities were small and the country brutally inaccessible. Even as late as the 1880s, no more than two hundred white men lived in Alaska and the Yukon (Berton 2007, 2), an area the size of Greenland (or four times that of France). But when entire nuggets of gold were found in 1896, the fever rose rapidly (Wheeler 2009, 66). A number of towns grew up virtually overnight, nearly all of them along the Yukon River, the 3,700-kilometre-long main artery running from the northern end of the Rocky Mountains in the Yukon, north-west into Alaska all the way up to the Arctic Circle, and then gathering volume on its long way south-west to the Bering Sea.

Those hungry for gold thus had the choice between travelling up river from the sea – from Seattle a journey of nearly 10,000 kilometres – or down river after having entered the interior over land. The latter option was shorter, starting at the northern end of the Alaska Panhandle, but it included a couple of challenges: the 1,000-metre-high Chilkoot Pass had to be climbed with two tons of mandatory provisions, and once the river on the other side of the Pass had been reached, a boat or raft had to be built for the 1,000-kilometre hair-raising journey through dangerous rapids north to Dawson City or one of the other towns.

In the course of the rush, gold worth enormous sums was found; “[f]rom June to November 1898, ten million [dollars]’ worth of Klondike gold was sent to the United States mint in square ironbound boxes”. Still, of the more than one hundred thousand men (and some women) who joined the rush, only four per cent found gold, and as with most lotteries only a handful made a profit: “It is estimated that the Klondike stampedeers expended sixty million dollars in 1898 alone, or six times the total amount of gold taken from the diggings” (Berton 2007, 135 and 137).

The Klondike gold rush was a short-lived mania; one year Dawson City, for instance, contained more than twenty thousand people, and the next it was virtually a ghost town. Yet, the rush had some significant effects. First of all, it ensured that yet another of the enormous, unexplored areas of northern North America was charted and opened up to human, or rather the white man’s, enterprise. Second, together with news of explorers like Peary and Nansen, it continued to guarantee that the world of ice and snow was constantly in the public mind. The word ‘Klondike’ was everywhere: “It was impossible to open a newspaper without seeing the word applied to everything from spectacles to false teeth. For almost six months it occupied the front pages to the virtual exclusion of other news” (*ibid*, 67). In addition, one of the most popular writers of the period, Jack London, immortalised this northern phenomenon with tales that, later in this chapter, will receive well-deserved attention.

***Science, Technology and the Problem of Progress Revisited***

The North, at least in its extreme form of a polar no man's land of pure whiteness, could perhaps be perceived as the quintessential contrast to everything generally associated with science, technology and progress, a world where man deliberately sheds all his layers of culture and civilisation, and exists exclusively on nature's own terms. In reality, however, this world had all along been a battleground on which man, armed precisely with such tools of civilisation as ships, maps, instruments of navigation and other scientific inventions, would prove his unique place in creation and his ability to exceed the ordinary limits imposed by nature. And as the nineteenth century progressed, this heart of whiteness was increasingly invaded precisely by science and technology, and this invasion was again an expression of progress; each new step closer to the poles, for instance, was regarded as a step up the ladder of progress towards complete enlightenment.

The constant emphasis on the expeditions' primarily scientific objectives was another way of equating exploration with progress; indeed the goal of the entire century-long venture was the mathematical figure of 90°, which was itself the result of man's scientific partitioning of the planet into an abstract grid. As a consequence, the North contained a fundamental ambiguity: it became, on the one hand, an arena in which spearhead technology was employed to subjugate the forces of nature; on the other, it became an admired image of Nature in its purest and most majestic forms. By the turn of the nineteenth century, this ambiguity was more and more openly reflecting a tension, if not a conflict, between the very forces of progress, which had dominated the old century, and forces that questioned or even rejected them as the self-evident way forward. In more simple terms, the North came to exhibit with particular clarity the problems and dilemmas of modernity, continuing in a direct line the fundamental questions raised initially in the mid-eighteenth century.

D.H. Lawrence's novel *Women in Love* (1920) ends with one of the main characters, Gerald Crich, wandering off into the icy wastes of the upper Alps, where he meets his end.<sup>13</sup> Earlier in the book, Gerald is described as a true British hero, as "a soldier, and an explorer, and a Napoleon of industry" (Lawrence 1989, 116). He is, in effect, the very embodiment of the British hero of civilisation and progress of the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

For Lawrence himself, however, Gerald represents the forces of destruction. In the powerful "Industrial Magnate" chapter, he is portrayed as a ruthlessly efficient mine owner who sacrifices the principles of humanity for technological rationalisation and a relentless pursuit of profit. *Women*

<sup>13</sup> For a full discussion of the following, see Fjågesund 2008b.

*in Love* was written during the bleakest period of the First World War, but rather than being explicitly present in the novel, the War hovers vaguely in the background. In many ways, however, Gerald might be seen as a personification not just of Britain, but also of the War itself; he represents the whole set of British ideals, including militarism, imperialism and industrialism, which Lawrence holds responsible for what he effectively regarded as the end of the world. Therefore, Gerald and all his family are also doomed to destruction.

In this context, it is striking that the climactic scene of Gerald's death bears a more than passing resemblance to Captain Scott's death only a few years earlier, or even more explicitly to the death of one of Scott's companions, Captain Oates. The public impact of the news of the disaster in the Antarctic can hardly be overestimated; it shook the British nation to its foundations. Three days after the news of the tragedy reached London, the *Evening News* declared: "People think of nothing else, talk of nothing else, read of nothing else" (quoted in Jones 2003, 103). And when a memorial service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral, ten thousand were consigned to the streets outside (Maxtone-Graham 2000, 335).

Considering the enormous attention surrounding this event, it is difficult to imagine that the general reader of the novel would not immediately see a connection. This would also help explain the fact that Lawrence had major problems in finding a publisher when he had finished the manuscript in 1916. At least one publisher told Lawrence's agent rather bluntly that "the writer's expressions of antipathy to England and the forms of English civilisation [... at a time] when people are sacrificing all that is dearest to them for their country" strongly contributed to a negative decision (quoted in Fjågesund 2008b, 186).

It seems, in other words, that Lawrence, in his fury over the War and what he regarded as Britain's responsibility for it, broke the old and unwritten law of always presenting those who gave their lives in the polar regions in pursuit of poles and passages as heroes and martyrs for king and country. Instead, he allowed a character with features strikingly similar to those of Scott to die an unheroic death that was not only ordained by fate but also deserved, because he was the very embodiment of the forces of destruction. As the publisher suggested, such iconoclasm was dangerously close to treason, an accusation Lawrence was to face in the autumn of 1917. This does not mean that Lawrence was alone in asking fundamental questions about the ultimate consequences of the massive industrialisation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A series of cultural pessimists, from Thomas Carlyle onwards, represented in effect an early tradition of green thinking; what is new, in view of the above reading, is that Lawrence draws the mythology surrounding the polar regions into the discussion and radically uncovers tensions that had been largely ignored.

In the British context, one of these tensions or paradoxes is that

between progress or innovation, on the one hand, and a fundamental conservatism, on the other. Being the most modern and progressive country in the world during the late 1800s – the workshop of the world and a pioneer in science – Britain might have been expected to show a particular aptitude in adopting new strategies and solutions. And to some extent it did; as the Franklin and Scott expeditions showed, it was quick to exploit the possibilities of such novelties as steam, tinned food and motor sledges. But almost invariably, the results were disastrous, primarily because of a consistent refusal to learn from others and from experience. Again and again expeditions were sent into the ice, manned by representatives of the Navy who lacked polar experience.

Even more seriously, in an act of imperial *hubris*, the thinking and the planning contained an ingrained prejudice against everything natural as well as native. Paradoxically, the very tools of modernity (science, technology and a blind faith in the subjugation of nature), became self-defeating obstacles against genuine progress. The sledges, skis, food and clothing of the natives were rejected as primitive and backward. Dogs, which had been used by the Inuit for literally thousands of years, were similarly ruled out and replaced by the man-hauling of large, unwieldy sledges, a procedure that often proved hopelessly inefficient.

At the back of this blind spot was clearly another and more general assumption, namely that it would be unnatural and illogical as well as demeaning for so-called civilised nations to receive advice and assistance from tribes still perceived as primitive. Instead, with the misconceived logic of an empire, the British consistently saw themselves as being “at war with the elements in a treacherous landscape” (Lopez 1986, 226) that could only be conquered by the instruments of the British themselves. Hence Sir Clements Markham’s unconditional dictum: “No ski. No dogs”.

This is perhaps part of the explanation why a country like Norway, with its greater familiarity with the polar regions and a radically different political and cultural tradition, would naturally adopt a very different approach to this particular environment. In *The First Crossing of Greenland* as well as in *Farthest North*, for instance, Nansen repeatedly emphasises the importance of working *with* nature rather than against it. Indeed, the whole concept of the drift across the Pole was based on this collaboration with the forces of nature. Admittedly, Nansen was himself a scientist, and the *Fram* was also a modern laboratory conducting sophisticated and up-to-date research. Still, the greatest beauty of his account of the voyage lies in the way in which the men on board the ship constitute an almost utopian community who live and work in profound harmony with the enormous forces that are constantly, though erratically, carrying them through the unexplored wilderness. It is a self-sufficient world, reminiscent of William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*: “There was nothing, from the most delicate instruments down to wooden shoes and axle-handles, that could not be

made on board the *Fram*” (Nansen 2002b, 100). And the ship itself is like a Noah’s ark almost divinely protected, though caught like a vulnerable chick in the violent embrace of a monster. Nansen even intimates that the voyage has a rejuvenating effect:

For my own part, I can say that the Arctic night has had no ageing, no weakening, influence of any kind upon me; I seem, on the contrary, to grow younger. This quiet, regular life suits me remarkably well, and I cannot remember a time when I was in better bodily health balance than I am at present. I differ from these other authorities to the extent of feeling inclined to recommend this region as an excellent sanatorium in cases of nervousness and general breakdown. This is in all sincerity. (*Ibid.*, 145–6)

Sarah Moss similarly underlines the contrast between Nansen’s fundamentally democratic crew structure on board the *Fram*, as opposed to the aristocratic and hierarchical structure that was typical of the British expeditions (Moss 2006, 76).

Nansen, then, apparently manages to strike a balance between the mystical fascination of the Arctic and the search for scientific truth. A writer of considerable literary talent, he litters his accounts with descriptions of the breath-taking beauty of his surroundings, thus retaining an emphasis on the aesthetic dimension, which had been an important feature since the arrival of the sublime in the eighteenth century.

Another figure, who appears as far more ambiguous in his relationship with the polar world, is the controversial American anthropologist and explorer of Icelandic descent Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879–1962), who perhaps more than anyone else contributed to a changing perception of the Arctic and its people. Stefansson spent nearly ten years on expeditions to the area around the Beaufort Sea, and in his book *The Friendly Arctic* (1921) he argues, like Arthur Dobbs and others in the late eighteenth century, that rather than an inhospitable desert of ice, the polar world is a place perfectly fit for human habitation. By building on the experience and practices of the Inuit, Stefansson took one step further the ideas of Nansen and others that the key to survival was the ability to cooperate with the forces of nature and make use of what it could provide. As a result, he proved that it was possible to live for long periods of time without the kind of support that explorers had traditionally regarded as essential for survival: “On the whole trip”, he says, “whatever its duration or destination, we would live exclusively by hunting after the first five or six weeks which would use up any supplies we might bring from home. The trip would last twelve weeks at the shortest and a year or two years at the longest” (Stefansson 1921, 124).

Thus by advocating the “friendly Arctic”, Stefansson might, on the one hand, be said to underline an essentially ecological and sustainable approach to the polar regions. On the other hand, according to Barry Lopez, Stefansson was a wolf in sheep’s clothing, who not only saw science as an instrument of development but also claimed that “Canada’s

economic future lay in the North and that the Arctic Ocean was destined to become a 'Polar Mediterranean,' with large coastal ports, submarine traffic beneath the ice, and a network of transpolar air routes" (Lopez 1986, 387–8). Similarly, the title of his next book, *The Northward Course of Empire* (1922) revealed a fundamentally colonial gaze on the resources of the region (Francis 1997, 161).

David Thomas Murphy, in his book *German Exploration of the Polar World*, likewise touches upon the problematic aspects of progress when he claims that the increasing focus on scientific exploration

ultimately corroded the dreams of polar mystics. Once the secrecy of the Poles was finally and thoroughly violated, when they had been mapped and charted and drawn into the mundane world of everyday science, the eccentric speculative literature that had grown up around them died. Polar fantasy faded as science ascended. (Murphy 2002, 6)

Superficially, such a claim is undoubtedly correct, but the fact still remains that these regions have continued to challenge the human imagination, producing, in addition to a large body of works on science and exploration, a steadily growing flow of literature and art concerned precisely with the mystery and attraction of the Far North. It is admittedly true that the majority of the fiction dealing specifically with the region is stereotyped and generally characterised by a celebration of the white man's heroic encounters with a hostile environment.

This is the case, for instance, with the many tales by Jules Verne, who continued to produce such works into the period in question, and those by "the British Jules Verne", the Scotsman Gordon Stables (1840–1910), who also published numerous boys' books from the polar regions. One of them, *To Greenland and the Pole* (1895), even shows how fiction and exploration accounts existed almost symbiotically, and how fiction boosted the images of public heroes: published while Nansen had still not returned from his *Fram* expedition, the novel is based on this very voyage as well as on his Greenland crossing a few years earlier. In his preface, furthermore, Stables himself mentions that "Nansen, the brave Arctic explorer – whom may God bring back from his daring venture – you will have no difficulty in recognizing as the prototype of my chief hero Reynolds" (Stables no year, no pag.). In most cases, therefore, these writers simply contributed to confirming and cementing an already established public perception, and generally this picture persisted until the end of the century.

Nevertheless, it is tempting, with the benefit of hindsight, to read into the years leading up to the First World War a gradually increasing scepticism regarding the very idea of progress. The Scott tragedy was part of this picture, however much it was shrouded in heroic celebration. And despite the enormous attention this tragedy received in the winter of 1913, there was another event, incidentally also directly connected with the polar regions, that less than a year earlier created international headlines on a



similar scale. As one critic puts it: while Britain, having been informed of Amundsen's triumphant return, was waiting for news from Scott's ship, "another ship intervened" (Maxtone-Graham 2000, 332).

As a news story, the sinking of the *Titanic* on 15 April 1912 also contained specific dramatic elements that added to its impact; unlike Scott's death, it came completely unexpected. Also, whereas the antarctic disaster followed a traditional and recognizable pattern of tragedy, the deaths of more than fifteen hundred people in the icy waters of the North Atlantic infused the event with almost unfathomable proportions. Two years later, with the first battles of the Great War, such death tolls would become an almost daily occurrence, but in 1912 such a number of losses were usually associated only with rare natural disasters reassuringly remote from the western world. In addition, the sinking of the *Titanic* contained ingredients that consciously or subconsciously were bound to affect everyone.

Most significantly, it was impossible to ignore the fatal presence of two separate elements – the ship and the iceberg – both of which could have been invented by a superb artist with a keen eye for symbolism. On the one hand, the *Titanic* had long before its maiden voyage been hailed as the very image of progress. Literally for millennia, man had been plying the oceans, but always with a constant risk of shipwreck and death. Now, for the first time, modern engineering appeared to have virtually removed this threat by building, as if against nature itself, a ship that could not sink, or so the rumour went in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. On the other hand, pitted against this quintessence of human ingenuity and symbol of man's control of ostensibly unmanageable forces, was the silent, giant and mindless iceberg that quietly obeyed the laws of nature and went on its way down Davis Strait and into the Atlantic Ocean, most of it hidden under the surface, like an evil ghost.

In a historical perspective, the *Titanic* disaster carries an unmistakable sense of *nemesis*. From a British perspective, in particular, it echoed – in roughly the same waters – the Franklin tragedy, which had been "so well outfitted and with objectives so clear it seemed impossible of failure" (Lopez 1986, 361). A similar hubristic naivety ensured that the *Titanic* was equipped with far fewer lifeboats than were necessary. In sum, the tragedy served as a reminder of the fragile nature of ideas that had seemed to promise a never-ending spiral of progress. Even at the time, while the shock was still being digested, such bleak reactions were being circulated. Little more than a week after the event, for instance, Thomas Hardy wrote the poem "The Convergence of the Twain", which was published a few weeks later in connection with a *matinée* in aid of the "'Titanic' Disaster Fund" (Bailey 1972, 264). Here, in the very first stanza, such phrases as "human vanity" and "the Pride of Life that planned her" announce an attitude of critical soul-searching that includes the "Jewels" and the

“vaingloriousness” of the many wealthy passengers on board. As against the man-made “twentieth-century Frankenstein creation”, the iceberg takes on the inevitable power of fate, or God, or perhaps simply nature.<sup>14</sup> Hardy is not clear; he uses the phrases “The Immanent Will” and “the Spinner of the Years”, but whether his frame of reference is Christian or mythical, the iceberg represents not only blind and meaningless chance but, in some way or other, an element of just retribution.<sup>15</sup>

The loss of ships and human lives in the Arctic was nothing new. Whalers and sealers had always lived under a constant threat from merciless natural forces. “[E]ven a 250-ton ship could conceivably be crushed in two or three minutes, [...] like a grand piano caught in an industrial press” (Lopez 1986, 215), and during the worst seasons, hundreds of men disappeared. What was special about the *Titanic* was the assumption of invulnerability combined with the fact that a large number of the victims belonged to the category that could normally observe such disasters from a safe distance. In this sense, too, it could be seen as a foreshadowing not only of the War, with its loss of lives across the social spectrum, but also of a century of greater political equality. Furthermore, the passengers on board the *Titanic* came from a range of different countries, and viewed from an early ecological perspective, the iceberg’s indiscriminate choice of victim thus served to underline the extent to which modern men, irrespective of nation, were all literally in the same boat. On the other hand, the *Titanic*’s voyage could also be seen as what *should* have been a truly modern crossing, one of perfect comfort and safety, in a manner that we have since come to take for granted. In this way, it marks a transitional stage between a time when man was still fundamentally a part of and subjected to nature, and a time when he could rise above it and subject it to his will.

The technological development that made this transition possible is particularly apparent in the way in which aviation entered the inhospitable world of the Far North. Considering the overwhelming obstacles that the arctic landscape represented in terms of treacherous seas and impenetrable ice barriers combined with enormous distances, it is not surprising that here, even more so than in more accessible landscapes, the possibilities of aviation presented a particularly attractive prospect.

<sup>14</sup> The Frankenstein metaphor is used by Margaret Atwood in a discussion of another *Titanic* poem, by the Canadian poet E.J. Pratt (Atwood 1995, 21).

<sup>15</sup> With regard to the fate of the *Titanic*, Stables’s *From Pole to Pole* (1886) contains a frighteningly prophetic description of the danger of drifting icebergs: “Ah! lass, such things happen far more often than we are aware of. A huge iceberg floats off from the point end of the main ice-pack; once some distance away, the wind gets better hold of it, and its voyage is begun. Southwards and asouthwards and southwards, slowly perhaps, but terribly surely, and now it is getting into the track of ships. Some will miss it, hundreds may. But there is one - see her coming with the lights brightly burning, for it is night. Nights, and maybe little wind, night, and maybe hardly bedtime yet, and the passengers, both fore and aft, are happy and joyful, or content at least, and never dreaming of danger. Ay, yonder comes the ship, and yonder comes fate in her winding sheet of snow -” (24–25).

At the turn of the century, ballooning was no longer a new and untried technology. The first proper balloons had been produced in the late eighteenth century, and the first manned flight – a twenty-seven-minute venture over Paris – as early as 1783 (Holmes 2009, 129–30). Still, the technology developed slowly, and not surprisingly, one of the major difficulties was navigating an object that, not unlike Nansen's *Fram* in the ice, was largely dependent on the whims of nature. This was dramatically illustrated during the siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when French troops within the beleaguered city tried to send balloons across the German lines in order to communicate with the French forces outside. One of the balloons, with two men on board, was caught by the wind and carried to the north, past Calais and further across the North Sea, before it eventually fell down – the men unhurt – in the snow-covered mountains of Telemark in southern Norway, having travelled a distance of 1,250 kilometres in fifteen hours (Cohn 1978, 47).

Despite the level of risk, however, somebody was sooner or later bound to take the new technology into the Arctic, stake everything on one card and go for the North Pole itself. There was, as it were, something irresistible about the two- or even threefold element of risk: travelling through the air, in the most inhospitable climate conceivable, and over a landscape that reduced the chance of survival to a minimum. Surprisingly, it was not a reckless gambler, but a prominent scientist, engineer and professor at the University of Stockholm, Salomon Andrée (1854–1897), who eventually made the attempt. Also, when the plans were made, every passing month seemed to suggest that Nansen's voyage, which had been generally characterised as madness, and of which no one had received any news, had probably ended in disaster, underlining the need for alternative solutions if the Pole were to be conquered.

Andrée had considerable experience with ballooning, and collected with surprising ease the necessary funding for the expedition. Again, like Nansen's ship, Andrée's balloon – *Ørnen* (the Eagle) – was custom-made for the purpose, and included a system of draglines developed by Andrée himself for steering the balloon. When filled with 4,760 m<sup>3</sup> of hydrogen, it was capable of carrying three men and a considerable amount of equipment. The chosen place of departure was Danes Island, just off the north-western tip of Spitsbergen and roughly 1,100 kilometres from the Pole. After a failed attempt in 1896, Andrée and his two companions finally took off on 11 July 1897. The ambition was to cover a distance of altogether 3,700 kilometres.

Because of a near-catastrophic take-off, Andrée's drag lines were effectively useless, and because of difficult weather conditions the balloon was frequently dragged along the ice. After altogether sixty-five hours of erratic flight, they landed at about 82° N, having travelled 430 kilometres (Rolf Kjellström in Wråkberg ed. 1999, 45); here the three men were

forced to abandon the balloon and set out for Franz Josef Land. This soon proved a futile effort, as they were drifting – like Nansen and Johansen – westward whilst walking in an easterly direction; they therefore decided for the Nordaustlandet (North East Land), the second largest island at Svalbard. As was not established until much later, however, their journey in fact ended at Kvitøya (White Island), about a hundred kilometres east of Nordaustlandet, at the beginning of October. Here a discovery was made in 1930 of a grave, equipment and diaries that have helped reconstruct the tragedy.

Thus the first major attempt at avoiding all the drudgery of terrestrial exploration by flying to the Pole ended once again in the forces of progress being defeated by those of nature; paradoxically, the *birth* of arctic aviation ended in the *death* of those involved. Unsurprisingly, however, this was only a temporary setback. Also, as one might expect, it was the nations in the vanguard of technological development that now took centre-stage, namely the United States and Germany, underlining, as suggested earlier, the Far North as a battleground of apparently incompatible forces.

Michael F. Robinson uses the American Walter Wellman (1858–1934) as a typical case in point. In fact, Wellman had anticipated both Baldwin and Fiala in getting funding from wealthy American sponsors, and in the 1890s, he had made two unsuccessful attempts to conquer the North Pole by traditional means. But in the new century, as Peary and the Norwegians were adopting the well-tried techniques of the Inuit to conquer the poles, the “Journalist, Explorer, Aeronaut” (Wellman 1911, title page) had a different approach:

Earlier explorers had struggled with nature in order to confirm themselves as men of character. Wellman now tried to frame these efforts as the echoes of an earlier age. “The time ha[s] come to adopt new methods,” he wrote, “to make an effort to substitute modern science for brute force, the motor-driven balloon for the muscles of men and beasts stumbling along like savages”. (Robinson 2006, 108)

Wellman, in other words, was a representative of progress in its most aggressive and optimistic pre-War form, and his book *The Aerial Age* (1911) reads almost like the uninhibited celebration of the machine in the Futurist Manifesto from 1909 or the description of Gerald Crich’s running of the mines in Lawrence’s *Women in Love*. Every problem, it was postulated, must have a technical solution, and Wellman quickly realised that the fundamental weakness of the balloon, despite Andrée’s improvements, was the problem of steering. It was, more or less, the victim of the elements; it was, in short, still obeying nature rather than man. In that respect, the “motor-driven balloon” or the “dirigible” – soon to be called the airship – was a radical improvement, and between 1906 and 1909 Wellman made three attempts at Spitsbergen to get his giant 185-foot long construction, appropriately named *America*, off the ground.

With Wellman’s failure, the Germans took the initiative. As early

as 1900 Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin had conducted several successful flights, and in 1908 he had “founded an airship construction works, and influential Germans were considering the possibilities that a floating, maneuverable platform seemed to offer in the high latitudes” (Murphy 2002, 108–9). Like Wellman, Zeppelin then moved his activity to Spitsbergen, and in the years before the War developed the concept further. There was, of course, a logical third stage after the balloon and the airship, namely the aeroplane, which was developed primarily by the American Wright brothers from 1903 onwards. But here the Russians, too, were in the running, and in August 1914, during the very first days of the War, the pilot Yan Nagursky “became the first person to fly an airplane north of the Arctic Circle” (McCannon 1998, 18), and even reached as far as 76° N at Novaya Zemlya (Mills 2003, *s.v.* “Airplanes”).

As Europe went to war, then, aviation had brought a new dimension not just to warfare, but also to the polar regions. Reflected in such juvenile fiction as *The Boy Aviator's Polar Dash* (1910) by Captain Wilbur Lawton, it heralded a new heroic age, where figures like Amundsen and the Italian Umberto Nobile (1885–1978) ensured that polar exploration, from now on, would be conducted largely from the air. For obvious reasons, the War interrupted this development, but during the 1920s airships reigned relatively supreme as a means of covering the enormous distances in the Arctic, and it was this technology that made the first crossing of the Arctic Ocean possible in 1926. Considering the uncertainty surrounding Peary's and Cook's claims, it is not unlikely, therefore, that this crossing, performed by Amundsen and Nobile, was in fact man's first view of the North Pole. Despite the enormous opportunities opened up by the use of airships, they were nevertheless destined to be little more than a parenthesis in the history of aviation, and from the 1930s onwards they were rapidly replaced by aeroplanes.

Although science is usually categorised as an instrument of progress and improvement, it may not always and with necessity point in a direction welcomed by public opinion. As suggested in ch. 5, for instance, glaciology and geology at the middle of the nineteenth century introduced a number of perspectives that were perceived as conflicting sharply with traditional religious and cultural values. With the intense focus on the polar regions during the 1880–1920 period, it makes sense that glaciology in particular continued to expand as a science, delving into the distant past of the planet, as it could be studied in the Arctic and Antarctic.

In many cases, this took the form of sober scientific studies that gradually expanded the understanding of the ice and its movements. One of these was the first comprehensive textbook on the subject, *Handbuch der Gletscherkunde* (Glaciological Handbook, 1885) by the German scientist Albert Heim. But despite, or perhaps because of, the strong emphasis on the past and its importance for the present, it was also tempting to apply

this knowledge in order to draw conclusions about the future. According to modern climate historians, the so-called Little Ice Age, which had lasted for nearly half a millennium, came to an end in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Scientists of the 1890s, however, were frequently of a different opinion. In *The Cause of an Ice Age* (1891), Sir Robert Ball (1840–1913), the Royal Astronomer of Ireland and a defender of the so-called “astronomical theory”, advanced the view that

the influence of the planets has occasionally visited some of the fairest regions of our globe with a scourge more deadly than the most malignant pestilence [...]. Slumbering in the Arctic regions lies at this moment the agent of the most dire calamities. That agent has once, and more than once, been aroused into activity. Time after time it has happened that the planets have by their influence on the earth's orbit brought down on our temperate regions the devastations of the great ice-sheet. From its normal home at the Poles the great glaciation has spread southward. (Ball 1891, 170)

Another scientist, Charles Austin Mendell Taber (1824–1911), who rather saw the great ocean currents as the source of long-term climate change, similarly claimed in his book with the ominous title *The Coming Ice Age* (1896) that “the northern temperate zone, with all other parts of the earth, is slowly approaching a cold epoch” (Taber 1896, 86). And with almost apocalyptic gravity, he concludes that

the time will come when there will be such accumulation of ice stores on the land and in the sea [...] that [...] there will not be sufficient warmth remaining in the tropical seas to [...] subdue the intense cold stores in the immense gatherings of ice. And thus the earth, which began its career with a warm temperature, and so continued for long ages, will finally terminate in an endless glacial age. (*Ibid.*, 87)

Such a bleak outlook may serve as a suitable introduction to a discussion of the role of the North with regard to the cultural and literary climate at the turn of the century.

### ***Utopia and Dystopia: Northern Modernism***

For obvious reasons, 1914 has been regarded as a watershed in the history of Europe as well as the world at large. But the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War were also rich in events that contributed not only to a political but also a cultural climate change. Mention has been made of the sinking of the *Titanic* and of Captain Scott's death. Virginia Woolf was similarly aware of a change in the air, but sensed its impact slightly earlier: “[O]n or about December 1910”, she says in a famous statement, “human character changed. [...] The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910” (Woolf 1924, 4).

It is generally agreed that Woolf had a particular event in mind, namely the first exhibition of so-called Post-Impressionist art in London. This form of art “was not just a new way of seeing the world, it offered a new way of understanding the world. It defined a new relationship between man and nature, and developed a new connection between the spectator and the work of art” (Bullen ed. 1988, 1).

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the northern world was very clearly the dominant political force in the decades around the turn of the century. In cultural terms, this period coincided with the movement of Modernism, in which the same nations played a central role. In the introduction to their seminal collection *Modernism* from 1976, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane make a point that is relatively unusual in English-language accounts of literary and intellectual history; rather than focusing on the Mediterranean and/or Anglo-American tradition, they underline the extent to which the northernmost countries in Europe essentially set the movement in motion:

In trying to pin Modernism down – tentatively and crudely – in terms of men, books and years, attention is first drawn to Scandinavia: to the publication in 1883 of a series of critical essays by the Danish critic Georg Brandes with the significant title of *Men of the Modern Breakthrough* (*Det Moderne Gjennembruds Mænd*). In no time at all – conceivably by the virtue of the stature Brandes had achieved throughout the Germanic world – the epithet “modern” became a rallying slogan of quite irresistible drawing power. (Bradbury and McFarlane in Bradbury and McFarlane eds. 1986, 37)

Led by such literary figures as Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), Knut Hamsun (1859–1952), August Strindberg (1849–1912) and, in the arts, Edvard Munch (1863–1944), this movement was most strikingly characterised by being “a good generation *earlier* than the Anglo-American Modernist upswing” (*ibid.*). Furthermore, it was deeply connected with the German cultural scene, which had been made aware, again by Brandes’s lectures, of a man virtually unknown even in Germany itself, namely Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Thus, when Woolf felt that human character changed in 1910, she was essentially registering a late tremor from rumblings across the Channel and the North Sea. In this context, however, the dating and the geographical origin of the movement are not the issues at stake. What is more important is that Modernism, according to the same editors

was in most countries an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old regimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear [...]. (*Ibid.*, 46)

The question to be discussed here, then, is to what degree this movement, which is fundamentally characterised by internal tensions and contradictions, finds an echo in the world of snow and ice described in the

previous pages; or more specifically, whether the world of snow and ice may have had any impact on the cultural phenomenon called Modernism, with its incessant wavering between utopia and dystopia.

Woolf chooses the year between 1909 and 1911, those of the conquests of the North Pole and the South Pole respectively. She chooses the moment in history, in other words, when the last geographical frontiers are closing. At these frontiers, and in the battle to conquer them, it is as if the modern world keeps confronting itself, and exploring its own areas of doubt and contradiction, with the polar world as a kind of contrastive Other. One such area is time.

As illustrated in Lawrence's "Industrial Magnate" chapter in *Women in Love*, the mood of Modernism has always been regarded as closely connected with the emergence of the machine age, that is with technology and industry. In such a context, time is reduced to a mechanical control system that reduces man – typically the worker – to the status of a mindless cogwheel. Increasingly, this industrial regime is also extended to society at large: the more densely it is populated, the greater is its need for regulation, and the more it is subjugated to the disciplining categories of time. For this reason, modernist writers become almost obsessively preoccupied with time, scattering their texts with symbol-laden clocks and watches (see for instance Stevenson 1992, ch. 3). Fundamentally, then, time in the modern sense of mechanical chronology becomes the opposite of freedom; freedom is primarily characterised by the absence of the clock; it is the periods that defy being measured and possessed by some external and alien force or authority. And where is this sense of temporal freedom more readily and naturally available than in the polar regions, which are as remote from civilisation as it is possible to get?

No expedition account seems more littered with such reflections than Nansen's *Farthest North*. Having made the extraordinary choice of letting himself be carried by the forces of nature on the heaving bosom of the ice, Nansen has literally liberated himself from the temporal constraints of the world and approached a state best described by William Wordsworth's favourite word: calm. As the weeks and months pass by, Nansen's narrative from the arctic night becomes a meditation, in which time seems to have become an irrelevant dimension, having been replaced by a poetic or even religious sense of timelessness. His prose deserves to be given free rein:

Nothing more wonderfully beautiful can exist than the Arctic night. It is dreamland, painted in the imagination's most delicate tints; it is colour etheralised. One shade melts into the other, so that you cannot tell where one ends and the other begins, and yet they are all there. No forms – it is all faint, dreamy colour music, a far-away, long-drawn-out melody on muted strings. Is not all life's beauty high, and delicate, and pure like this night? Give it brighter colours, and it is no longer so beautiful. [...] Up in the blue of the cupola shine the stars, speaking peace, as they always do, those unchanging friends. In the south stands a large red-yellow moon, encircled by a yellow ring and light golden clouds floating on the blue background. Presently the



aurora borealis shakes over the vault of heaven its veil of glittering silver – changing now to yellow, now to green, now to red. It spreads, it contracts again, in restless change, next it breaks into waving, manyfolded bands of shining silver, over which shoot billows of glittering rays; and then the glory vanishes. [...] Here and there are left a few waving streamers of light, vague as a foreboding – they are the dust from the aurora's glittering cloak. But now it is growing again; new lightnings shoot up; and the endless game begins afresh. And all the time this utter stillness, impressive as the symphony of infinitude. I have never been able to grasp the fact that this earth will some day be spent and desolate and empty. To what end, in that case, all this beauty, with not a creature to rejoice in it? Now I begin to divine it. *This* is the coming earth – here are beauty and death. But to what purpose? Ah, what is the purpose of all these spheres? Read the answer if you can in the starry firmament. (Nansen 2002b, 104–5)

Barry Lopez waxes similarly lyrical about this “symphony of infinitude”, this wintry stillness of the Arctic, which he describes, quoting the explorer George De Long, as “a glorious country to learn patience in”. And he goes on: “Time here, like light, is a passing animal. Time hovers above the tundra like the rough-legged hawk, or collapses altogether like a bird keeled over with a heart attack, leaving the stillness we call death” (Lopez 1986, 171–2).

The fundamentally Romantic character of these descriptions is no coincidence; they are clearly and explicitly a legacy of that tradition, with its alternative perspective to that of a Hobbesian urge for control and conquest. The perception of the Far North is, in other words, surrounded by a profound sense of ambivalence. Nansen's and Lopez's prose reveals an urge for a kind of communion, oneness and harmony that represents a deliberate regression from the values of progress and of time portioned out in perfectly identical units, like products on a conveyor belt. Margaret Atwood, in her book with the intriguing title *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995), discusses the phenomenon she calls “the Grey Owl Syndrome”, or rather “the desire among non-Natives to turn themselves into Natives”, and she concludes:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the age of the colonial wars receded, motifs of revenge and warfare gave way to themes of nostalgia; and as the age of the explorers receded as well, living like the Natives in order to survive in the wilderness was translated into living like the Natives in the wilderness in order to survive. Survive what? The advancing decadence, greed, and rapacious cruelty of white civilization, that's what. (Atwood 1995, 35)

Obvious popular examples of such heroes from other corners of the globe are Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and Tarzan in the stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875–1950), published from 1912 onwards.

In T.S. Eliot's “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915), the first-person narrator famously claims that “indeed there will be time / ... / Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions, / Before the taking of a toast and tea”

(Eliot 1982, 12), thereby exemplifying Modernism's intense preoccupation with time. Then, in a passage from *The Waste Land* (1925) – “Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal” (*ibid.*, 65) – Eliot mentions another central Modernist image that also seems to find an echo in the icy wastes. In physical terms, the *city* is a concentration of social impulses; nowhere does man gather together with greater intimacy. Furthermore, it is the most perfect product of civilisation – a giant, finely tuned and perfectly regulated instrument, like a clock; a place constantly dependent on man's presence, interference and participation. In this respect, it represents the sharpest possible contrast to the polar landscape, which, to use a common cliché, is perceived as “the loneliest place on the planet”. But from the point of view of white, western civilisation, this landscape is not just lonely; it is empty. It is, furthermore, a place where man essentially does not belong, or where he is even unwanted; it is a place that almost consistently resists man's presence and makes him an alien creature in an alien environment.

On the other hand, such a description may again be turned on its head, because the city of Modernism is not just a cosy and well-regulated beehive of human intimacy and togetherness; it is also the very opposite: a place of hostility and coldness, where the sense of emptiness and alienation is overpowering, and man finds himself as if in a limbo, removed from nature as a protective and benevolent force. In the decades prior to the First World War, it was even, as suggested in ch. 5, frequently regarded as the scene of human degeneration. Thus from a radically Rousseauesque angle, this quintessence of civilisation became an inverted Darwinian environment in which man regressed into the state of a beast, as depicted in H.G. Wells's dystopian allegory *The Time Machine* (1895).

Once again the idea of progress is under fire. In such a perspective, the polar world might be seen as representing a viable alternative to a civilisation that is rapidly going down the drain. Regardless of how these many and contradictory aspects are juggled, however, the turn of the century witnessed, not least through a fast-expanding distribution of news, a dramatic juxtaposition of elements that pointed in radically different directions with regard to the social and cultural development of western society. It is not surprising, therefore, that the period and Modernism as such are characterised not by measured calls for the golden mean but by various forms of extremism, which particularly in the field of politics would only escalate after the end of the War.

When it comes to the encounter between the polar landscape and the cultural atmosphere of the period, there is one radical voice that deserves particular attention. It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that Jack London (1876–1916) was the first writer to really spread out the whole canvas of the polar world and to create high-quality stories in which characters and landscapes melted together in a truly elemental and existential battle for

survival. Paradoxically, by using this setting, far removed from the world of modernity, he succeeded in touching a raw nerve in millions of readers, a steadily increasing number of whom lived their lives in crowded urban environments.

Growing up in San Francisco, he was only twenty when the gold rush started, and like many Californians he jumped on the bandwagon. In the summer of 1897 he travelled north, climbed the dreaded Chilkoot Pass together with thousands of others, and entered for a year a world that brought human existence into the sharpest possible relief. As London's biographer Alex Kershaw puts it: "The north, with all its yearnings and tragedy, was the richest metaphor any writer could want for life itself" (Kershaw 1998, 73).

There is a touch of symbolism in the fact that his breakthrough came with a story published in January 1900, right on the threshold between the old and the new century, because in his writings he debates some of the central issues bridging the old and the new world against a physical environment that is apparently timeless and unchangeable. This tumult of impulses may also serve to explain the profoundly contradictory quality of London's work. A recurring theme, however, seems once again to be the question of progress. On the one hand, London had been a Socialist since he was twenty, and he never wavered from this position. On the other hand, he received powerful impulses from such thinkers as Darwin, Spencer and eventually Nietzsche. In addition, he grew up in the so-called "Strenuous Age",

a time when America believed it needed to reclaim the ethos of its pioneer past. The turn-of-the-century immigration of millions of poverty-stricken Europeans to America's newly industrial cities had turned the dream of a New World into a nightmare of squalor, rampant crime and mass unemployment. Many Americans longed to return to the days before urbanization – before 1893, the year in which the historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier closed. (*Ibid.*, 88)

London, then, was looking for a new frontier, and the only direction to turn was northward. After his first success with the story "An Odyssey of the North", he then quickly published a range of works based on his northern adventure: the short story collections *The Son of the Wolf* (1900), *The God of His Fathers* (1901) and *Children of the Frost* (1902), the two novellas *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906), and the novel *Burning Daylight* (1910).

Here, in the Yukon, London had found a world he embraced wholeheartedly, where progress, in the sense of scientific, technological improvements within an urban, crowded and civilised environment, had no place. Neither did Socialism, also with its inherent faith in progress and its appeal to solidarity. Klondike, as London experienced it, was somehow the very opposite of civilisation; a space in which genuine freedom existed, where the struggle for existence was brutal and merciless, but where it

also brought out the best in the individual. Representing a tradition going back to Rousseau and anticipating Freud's *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), London implied a sceptical and questioning attitude to the values of civilisation.

Even though London has never acquired the status of a canonised writer, he did acquire that of a cult writer. Also, the strength and quality of the public impact on perceptions of the North from his writing should not be underestimated. Despite producing a range of literary texts with other geographical settings, he will probably be remembered as a writer primarily associated with the arctic or semi-arctic environment of the Yukon. In London it is very much the landscape, with its relentless cold and isolation that quickly causes man's humanity to disintegrate.

Furthermore, the North is a place where the contrast between man and beast becomes vague and blurred, simply because he sees the two as more or less two sides of the same coin. In fact, several of his stories carry more than a touch of the beast fable or the animal allegory, in the sense that animals play the roles usually assigned to humans. In the story "Bâtard", for instance, the elemental cruelty of both man and dog balances perfectly in a ferocious battle of life and death, in which the dog eventually outwits the man. Even the title – translated 'bastard' – seems to suggest a melting together of incompatible elements, as if the human and the brutish might be difficult to distinguish. In the famous *The Call of the Wild*, the main character – the dog Buck – clearly represents the white man, as opposed to the wolves, who represent the native Indians. Here London also inserts into the narrative his conviction of the white man's superiority, essentially transforming this story of a dog into a tale of colonisation; Buck, though coming from California, quickly adjusts to his new environment, and becomes the master of the wolves. In this respect, London's story shows more than a passing resemblance to Cooper's Leatherstocking tales and the hero Natty Bumppo, who is also a white man gone native.

In several of the stories, similarly, the childless London is mildly obsessed with the need of his Anglo-Saxon heroes to pass on their genes to native women, thereby providing them with a more competitive offspring. As Scruff Mackenzie, the hero in "The Son of the Wolf", says matter-of-factly to an Indian chief who is reluctant to let him have his daughter: "My people are greater than thy people. It is destiny" (London 2001, 14). Again and again, London explores the world of dogs and wolves, white men and natives, in various ways depicting the violent encounter between nature and civilisation.

It might be argued that London in these stories, instead of rejecting civilisation, actually defends it; that the white man (or the dog!) in accordance with the tenets of the white man's burden passes on his actual or assumed superior qualities to creatures further down the ladder. *White Fang*, for instance, turns *The Call of the Wild* a hundred and eighty degrees

round and ends rather sentimentally with the formerly brutal dogwolf happily domesticated on a Californian estate. But this is not the general pattern: in virtually all his stories, London underlines the importance of brute force, and there is no higher purpose for either man or beast in this ruthless wilderness than survival and procreation.

Also, in the powerful story “The League of the Old Men”, civilisation is pitted against the allegedly primitive world of the natives, and is found wanting. Thus London does not even always take the white man’s superiority for granted; in the encounter between the old Indian, Imber, who has come to Dawson City to confess to his numerous murders of white men, and the white system of justice, the reader is clearly led to sympathise with the Indian. In effect, the story voices a critique, not unlike that of Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, of white, imperial values. In his confession to the court, Imber says that

the white man come as the breath of death; all their ways lead to death, their nostrils are filled with it; and yet they do not die. Theirs the whiskey, and tobacco, and short-haired dogs; theirs the many sicknesses, the smallpox and measles, the coughing and mouth-bleeding; theirs the white skin, and softness to the frost and storm; and theirs the pistols that shoot six times very swift and are worthless. And yet they grow fat on their many ills, and prosper, and lay a heavy hand over all the world and tread mightily upon its peoples. (*Ibid.*, 178–9)

Ultimately in London, the North emerges as a strangely ambiguous place, beyond good and evil. It is a place where man, in order to survive, must learn to shake off his cloak of civilization, and once again become a natural creature. In this respect, his works are an interesting comment on the prevalent fear in late nineteenth-century society of degeneration – a fear mostly concerned with the urban poor, but also reflected in works like Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), where the beast likewise lurks beneath the surface of the privileged. In London, on the other hand, this return to a natural state does not carry overtones of degeneration; being generally amoral, it is rather a process that brings out the qualities that are essential to existence, primarily the instinct for survival. In this way the North represents a kind of healthy primitivism – perhaps even a genuine alternative to the sense of progress represented by an urban and civilized environment.

With his extraordinary popularity, therefore, London contributed significantly to creating a perception of a North that was not just fascinating and heroic; he also brought this perception into a powerful dialogue with the issues of his day and implicitly questioned a number of established truths. At the same time, he gave the Romantic nature utopia a new dimension, precisely by splicing it with impulses from Darwinism and turn-of-the-century vitalism and primitivism. It is no coincidence that *The Call of the Wild* has been called “America’s Greatest World Novel” (Labor, “A Centennial Tribute”).

Reading London's stories today, one is still left with a sense of injustice: perhaps partly because they are lacking with regard to political correctness, London has – despite recent reappraisals – largely been relegated to the status of a writer of boys' tales, whose many other works have missed the attention of critics and literary historians. In fact, by his death in 1916 he had published – in only sixteen years – forty books, had earned a million dollars and was attracting considerable attention from Hollywood (Kershaw 1998, 279). More importantly, however, London's northern tales taught new writers like Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac and Upton Sinclair, together with a range of writers in other countries, how to write a good story, and so left a lasting and powerful legacy.

As reflected in London's works, illness and health lie as a pervading metaphor underneath the whole cultural climate of the period, and as was suggested above, the city was figured as the centre of disease. The rapidly growing urban centres, which were dangerously inadequate in terms of public hygiene, became actual death traps for thousands of people when epidemics like cholera and typhus broke out. In addition, huge waves of migration, not least to the United States, in combination with a radical increase in travel generally, exacerbated the problem even further. The often-admired characteristics of modernity were thus also the causes of human misery and degradation. Against this background, the nostalgia for polar purity becomes fully understandable. Captain Barclay in Gordon Stables's novel *From Pole to Pole*, for instance, admits he is not a doctor,

but I'll wager my best hat, that there are thousands of ailing people among the middle and upper classes, that would be quite set up again by a voyage like this; dyspepsia would fly before the bracing breezes of Greenland north; *ennui* would be frozen to death, and all kinds of nervous ailments would drop to the bottom of the sea, and never be seen nor felt again. (Stables no year, 54)

On the other hand, there is a peculiar paradox in the western celebration of Inuit and Indians as representatives of rude health and natural living, considering the fact that the white man himself brought the whole arsenal of diseases that effectively wiped out the large majority of the indigenous populations. Also, considering the fact that at the outset these populations were small and scattered over enormous territories, the effects were all the more devastating. On St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, for instance, as many as a thousand Inuit (two thirds of the whole population), died from starvation and smallpox between 1878 and 1881 (Vaughan 1994, 272). In an attempt to come up with a comprehensive statistic concerning the extent to which the white man brought, as Jack London's hero Imber suggested, "the breath of death", historians have estimated that as many as ninety percent of the indigenous population of North America may have died as a result of the white man's arrival (Lopez 1986, 10). In this way, the horrors of the modern world were immediately transferred to the areas that were allegedly free from contamination.

In addition to physical disease, there was also – in the northern countries – a less tangible sense of cultural and spiritual decadence, as expressed in works like Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893) and Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). In Britain, furthermore, the Pyrrhic victory in the Second Boer War (1899–1902) and the disillusionment in its wake undermined faith in the country's military supremacy and encouraged a search for alternative values. There is no doubt, therefore, that the heroism of polar explorers together with the natural life of Indians and Inuit contributed to an attempt to counter the alleged process of decline.

One innovation, with a strong emphasis on health, in a spiritual as well as physical sense, was the Scouts movement. In Britain and the United States, Robert Baden-Powell (1857–1941) and Ernest Thompson Seton (1860–1946) respectively founded this organization in the first years of the new century, the former in particular imbuing it with a relatively explicit military profile, whereas the latter “brought city boys into the wilderness on the premise that ‘savage play’ would strengthen youths against the ills of civilization” (Robinson 2006, 123). In Germany the so-called Wandervogel movement was founded in 1901 (Griffin 1994, 88), subscribing to very similar ideas and growing to become the most important youth movement in the country until it was banned by the Nazis in 1933. In Norway, Fridtjof Nansen might be claimed to represent a similar ideal with his scepticism to progress and his nostalgia for the wilderness and the past.

Jack London, then, is not alone in struggling with the ambiguities involved in this rather sudden celebration of peoples and cultures that were almost universally agreed to be primitive and inferior to those of the West. The leading Danish writer Johannes V. Jensen (1873–1950), for instance, turned rather surprisingly all the way back to the Ice Age in his novel *Braen* (*The Glacier*, 1908), a kind of Darwinian fantasy where the main character, Dreng, explores what it means to be one of the first human beings.

Behind Jensen's choice of such an ultra-primitive setting, there was necessarily a preoccupation with stages of cultural development, and this phenomenon was indeed being discussed by comparative anthropologists at the time. One of the groups under scrutiny was obviously the Inuit, about whom large amounts of material were being collected. In this connection, David Thomas Murphy discusses an interesting aspect of German polar exploration: the strikingly positive description of the Inuit in German polar literature, as opposed to its English-language counterpart, which was “typically given to tut-tutting at the ‘uniformly filthy and disgusting’ character of Eskimo personal and domestic hygiene as well as their ‘extreme absence of morals and their utter want of shame’ in sexual matters” (Murphy 2002, 165).

To some extent, the German view was based on a commonly held distinction between so-called *Kulturvölker* and *Naturvölker*, which was not necessarily and in itself racist, though it rather quickly moved in that direction. Murphy therefore believes that the positive German view of the Inuit had one key explanation: “Germans admired the Eskimo ability to survive in the Arctic environment” (*ibid.*, 167). The same view is largely present in Nansen’s account from Greenland. Indeed, in some respects, his description of his and his companions’ wintering at Nuuk (Godthåb) goes even further, and presents the natives as polar Arcadians:

Among these folk at least joy is not yet a forgotten thing. It really does one good to see the way in which they dance in Greenland. Here they do it to move their limbs and refresh their minds. Here there are no bitter-sweet visages of uncompromising propriety, no misshapen forms or extravagant dresses, no bored wearers of black coats, white shirts, and gloves; none, in fact, of all that futility that stalks about a European ballroom and takes the place of the Graces and other good spirits that should be found there. (Nansen 2000a, 256)

This positive view of the Inuit, however, does not prevent Nansen from giving a rather consistently racist description of his two Sami expedition members, Ravna and Balto, who come across as childish, superstitious and naïve, and generally of little practical use, very much in line with the stereotype of the noble savage.

The admiration of the primitive, then, is constantly on the edge of slipping over into prejudice and discrimination. But there may also be another explanation why the natives of the arctic regions were generally met with greater tolerance than many of those in other parts of the world: being migrant peoples, the Inuit did not have a specific and clearly defined territory that they would naturally defend as their own. Partly, their territory was not land but ocean, and partly it was of a dimension that, for all practical purposes, was impossible to delimit. Furthermore, like the Inuit themselves, the natural resources that sustained them were constantly on the move, fluctuating enormously from year to year and season to season. In this way, the different conceptions among Europeans and natives of the ownership and harvesting of what nature produced caused, for a long time, relatively little tension.

The relationship between the white man and the natives, however, was always based on the premises of the former. In fact, looking back on it, one of the most striking features of most of the literature from the Arctic is the blind spot in the eyes of the white reporters; the indignation, quoted above, concerning the Inuit’s ignorance of Victorian moral norms is only one example of how the white man until very recently has shown an almost consistent inability, or unwillingness, to take on board the meaninglessness of regarding his own standards as universal rather than culturally conditioned. Therefore, despite the fact that a number of white western explorers gained essential knowledge from the natives, their overall



attitude to other ethnic groups appears to have remained unchanged. It is hardly surprising to find, therefore, that explorers like Peary and Cook made sure that they did not reach the Pole (if they did so) together with other white men. The fact that Peary supposedly performed the feat together with his black servant, Matthew Henson, and four Inuit, and Cook with two Inuit, was clearly calculated so as not to pose a threat to the two explorers' individual claims of having been the first men on the Pole. Incidentally, the same pattern repeated itself half a century later with the conquest of Mount Everest ("the Third Pole"), where the triumph of Edmund Hillary for a long time overshadowed that of his Nepali Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay.

If the traditional history of polar exploration confines the native population to a role in the background, the absence of women is even more striking. Still, it is hardly an exaggeration to claim that a reevaluation of gender roles was one of the essential features of Modernism as a cultural phenomenon and of the period's social and political scene. For the first time in European history, an overwhelmingly patriarchal society was seriously challenged by a determined female protest movement. It was the period of the New Woman, of the suffragette and the suffragist; literature and art, from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) onwards, were filled with heated debates about the issue; and the period culminated with the granting of suffrage to a large proportion of western women in the years around the First World War. At the same time, the fear of decadence and degeneration brought up the question of masculinity, especially in the aftermath of the trial against Oscar Wilde for sodomy. Some blamed the problem on the forces they regarded as undermining the values of western civilisation; others blamed it on civilisation itself. An American psychologist "believed that civilization threatened the manhood of America's youth" (Robinson 2006, 123). The question, then, is whether these challenges to traditional gender roles were in any way reflected in the intense preoccupation of the period with the Far North.

From the very beginning of polar exploration, it was firmly defined as an activity almost exclusively reserved for men, or more specifically for a small elite of men demonstrating an exceptional degree of masculinity. Murphy's observation of German polar exploration is undoubtedly applicable also to the other nations:

The Poles were a male domain. All the participants in every one of the expeditions under consideration were male. The polar world was discovered and initially interpreted for Germans, and Westerners in general, through the eyes of men. Polar exploration combined elements of warfare, sport, and science, and it was presumed that it required the same exclusively masculine qualities demanded by these related pursuits. (Murphy 2002, 14)

Indeed, as a legacy from the tradition of the sublime and the picturesque, it is almost as if masculinity and northernness are two sides of the same

coin – a view also propagated by such turn-of-the-century writers as D.H. Lawrence and Thomas Mann.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas the soft, undulating Mediterranean landscape is quintessentially feminine by virtue of being fertile and – in a patriarchal culture – expertly husbanded by the farmer, the northern landscape gradually takes on a different quality. The category of the picturesque, primarily associated with British gardens and landscapes, for instance, could be seen as a half-way stage between the masculine and the feminine, in which the pressure of male authority is slightly reduced; it is half wild and half cultivated, and could be compared, according to Tim Fulford, to a wife threatening “unguarded disorder”: “Gardening becomes the artful imitation by feminine wiles of nature’s female tendency to excite the male by offering glimpses of herself that cannot be immediately commanded [...] by his gaze. And so [...] the gardener encourages nature to play the coquette, to imitate artfully the sexually appealing disorder she tends spontaneously to produce” (Fulford 1996, 125). The sublime landscapes further north, however, are decidedly masculine. The numerous nineteenth-century travel accounts from Norway, for example, leave no doubt about the gendering of such typical natural attractions as giant waterfalls and deep fjords surrounded by black, perpendicular cliffs (see Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 292–6). Norway, then, serves almost as a bridgehead to the supremely sublime and masculine landscapes of the polar regions.

In all of the examples above, it is taken more or less for granted that the so-called “gaze” that observes these landscapes is male, and that it is an essentially possessive gaze. Polar literature, too, is almost exclusively narrated by male voices, and with the exception of romantic polar fiction, where the presence of women is sometimes a plot requirement, they are either, as suggested, strikingly absent or waiting patiently at home, quite outside the realm of male action and observation.<sup>17</sup> It seems, in other words, that the typical male gaze is one that speaks as an active observer from personal experience, whereas the typical female gaze is that of a distant and second-hand observer, who not only has to be content with *imagining* the polar world but whose imagination is also wholly dependent on and thus largely coloured by male, first-hand reports. And the well-established eighteenth- and nineteenth-century view of the Arctic as sublime and masculine is generally carried over into the twentieth.

Nevertheless, during this period of a slowly shifting power balance

<sup>16</sup> See Andreas Blödorn in Arndt et al. (eds.) 2004, 177–99. In *Women in Love* this is how Gudrun sees Gerald for the first time: “There was something northern about him that magnetized her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glister like cold sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing” (Lawrence 1989, 61).

<sup>17</sup> An exception from the rule is Robert Peary’s wife, Josephine, who travelled with him on two of his Greenland expeditions. During the 1893–95 expedition she set out heavily pregnant, and gave birth in Greenland.

between the sexes, examples are also found of alternative ways of gendering these inhospitable landscapes. According to Margaret Atwood, the Canadian poet Robert Service (1874–1958) “habitually personified the North as a savage but fascinating female” (Atwood 1995, 17), and in *Farthest North*, Nansen similarly offers a fascinating personification of the arctic night as a woman:

[...] But , O Arctic night, thou art like a woman, a marvellously lovely woman. Thine are the noble, pure outlines of antique beauty, with its marble coldness. On thy high, smooth brow, clear with the clearness of ether, is no trace of compassion for the little sufferings of despised humanity, on thy pale, beautiful cheek no blush of feeling. Among thy raven locks, waving out into space, the hoar-frost has sprinkled its glittering crystals. The proud lines of thy throat, thy shoulder, curves, are so noble, but, oh! unbendingly cold; thy bosom’s white chastity is feelingless as the snowy ice. Chaste, beautiful, and proud, thou floatest through ether over the frozen sea, thy glittering garment, woven of aurora beams, covering the vault of heaven. But sometimes I divine a twitch of pain on thy lips, and endless sadness dreams in thy dark eye. (Nansen 2000b, 144)

In this passage, the once-proud, masculine hero suddenly comes across as ignored and humiliated by a superior but indifferent and unapproachable female. This feminised Arctic is like a classical marble statue that despite its undeniable beauty and perfection lacks all the loving and altruistic qualities traditionally associated with women. Is this only a reflection of Nansen’s own complicated relationship with his wife, or does it suggest a new uncertainty regarding the roles of men and women respectively?

It is also interesting to note that another of the great polar heroes, Captain Scott, who had been handpicked at the age of eighteen by the homosexual Sir Clements Markham, was suffering from “personal insecurity. He was never certain of himself, never sure that he would be able to do what was asked of him” (Young 1995, 83). As a compensation, he married the formidable sculptor Kathleen Bruce, who literally chose him after his first expedition to Antarctica, largely, it seems, because she was determined to give birth to the child of a hero: the masculinity of the polar landscape was transferred to the man who had, at least partly, brought it under his control. As a matter of fact, she was so obsessed with her own ambition that, when writing to inform him of her pregnancy, she asked him to “sing triumphantly for it seems we are in a fair way to achieve *my aim*” (quoted in *ibid.*, 105; italics added). It is perhaps also an indication – and an ironic one – of changing sexual roles that Kathleen Scott in 1911, during her husband’s fatal expedition, spent a week with Nansen at a hotel in Berlin, making Nansen exclaim in a subsequent letter to her: “I feel like a Faust, who has got a draught of the fountain of life, and has become young again, suddenly and unexpectedly” (quoted in Huntford 2000, 464).

In all of these cases, it is the polar landscape that is infused with a particular gendered quality, be it male or female; the roles of native

men and women, on the other hand, are not taken into consideration as contributing to the perception itself. With the white man entering these regions almost exclusively with other males in the form of a tight-knit group, it is only to be expected that the encounter with native women receives particular attention. For a long time, this attention is held in tight moral and religious reins; fiction as well as expedition reports would avoid any suggestion of relationships between white men and native women, as is also the case in most nineteenth-century travel literature.

Again, Jack London here represents a new and radically different approach; while depicting a world that might be regarded as masculine in its merciless struggle for survival, he consequently also takes for granted the necessity of females for the perpetuation of life, and places them in the middle of the action. Traditional morality and sensitivity are therefore swept away, to be replaced by practical and working relationships, even if they involve white men and native women. As a matter of fact, in “The White Silence”, the opening story of his first collection of short stories, London describes a highly unconventional *ménage à trois* consisting of Ruth, a pregnant Indian woman, her white husband, Mason, and another white man, Malemute Kid, who are travelling together under conditions that represent a constant battle to survive. When Mason is seriously injured by a falling tree, he eventually convinces Malemute Kid to shoot him and continue the journey with Ruth. Admittedly, Ruth is obedient to her dying husband as well as to Malemute Kid, because “it did not seem in the nature of things for women to resist” (London 2001, 9), but she is an active participant in the drama, and she understands and accepts the cruel logic of the situation, which would have been the same for men as well as women. Indeed, her being a woman and an Indian become more or less irrelevant under the circumstances. This and other stories by London thus echo, however indirectly, modern ideas advocated at the time by radical women who fought for a society where women could take part in the real world, on a par with men.

### *The Case of Germany*

As suggested in the previous pages, the intense activity in the polar regions contributed to, as well as reflected, the highly contradictory atmosphere of the period. But this atmosphere also affected the social and cultural life of the northern nations in a broader sense. Although ideas about the North had for a long time been playing a significant role in several of these countries’ attempts to define their different national identities, the pre-War years witnessed how these ideas were now being radicalised, and especially so in Germany. In one sense, this process was interrupted by the War; in

another sense, the War could be seen as the trigger of its last and most dramatic phase, which lies beyond the scope of this book.

It is hardly surprising that the rapidly developing Germany that emerged from the unification of 1871 demands particular attention. What *may* be surprising, however, is the fact that this new and energetic nation, with apparently every chance of pursuing the path of progress, seemed to become bogged down both by an obsession with the past and by a profoundly pessimistic view of the future. Despite important proponents of similar ideas in other countries, cultural pessimism or *Kulturpessimismus* is more than anything associated with Germany and the German-speaking countries. Interestingly, this sense of pessimism was also partly directed against Modernism as an expression of turn-of-the-century sentiments.

A typical representative of this view is Max Nordau (1849–1923), who is now virtually forgotten, but who for a period was a major European voice, perhaps even a modern Rousseau. Though starting out as a firm believer in progress and a Darwinian development towards higher forms, he came under the influence of the Italian psychologist Cesare Lombroso, who in his studies of criminals instead claimed to observe a tendency towards retrogression. Nordau's cultural critique was launched in two major works, *Die Konventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit* (*Conventional Lies of Our Civilisation*, 1883) and *Entartung* (*Degeneration*, 1892), both of which went along way towards defending conventional nineteenth-century values and attacking the symptoms of a modern, feverish urban society, as this was expressed in the art of the period. Towards the end of the latter work, Nordau, who was himself a doctor, gives the following diagnosis: "We stand now in the midst of a severe mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria, and it is natural that we should ask anxiously on all sides: 'What is to come next?'" (Nordau 1913, 537).

Ideas of the North seem to have played an important role in this general outlook, precisely at a time when the conquest of the poles signalled the end of colonial expansion. Actually, its origins were even older than that. In the article "The Historical Roots of National Socialism", the historian F.L. Carsten underlines how Germany started on its fatal course towards Nazism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, after being crushed by Napoleon's armies. The hatred felt by the Germans, in other words, was directed southwards, i.e. against the French, who by such firebrands as Ernst Moritz Arndt and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn were categorised as a depraved and bastardised race, as opposed to the allegedly pure-bred Germans (F.L. Carsten in Feuchtwanger ed. 1973, 119–20). In the same fell swoop Catholics generally were included, which basically rendered all all of southern Europe as anathema for all good Germans. Mention should also be made of a growing scepticism towards Christianity itself, which in this context served as yet another unwanted southern element.

More commonly, however, the fire was directed not against Christianity itself but against the people among whom it originated, – the Jews. Towards the end of the century, anti-Semitic propaganda was radicalised, alongside an increasingly aggressive *Alldeutscher Verband* (Pan-German League) that also propagated an alternative version of Darwinism. One of the movement's ringleaders was Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), the English son-in-law of Richard Wagner, who in his influential *Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 1899) chose to interpret the concept of the survival of the fittest as applying to races rather than individuals (McGowan 2002, 27).<sup>18</sup>

This redefinition made the racial map of Europe into a battlefield between Aryans, Slavs, Jews and others, and fuelled the argument in favour of a nation state with a clearly defined and homogenous identity. It was an ideological position that imagined enemies on virtually all sides, and that could easily slip from defensive protectionism to aggressive expansionism. Unfortunately, in addition to France to the south, Germany was surrounded by substantial powers – Britain to the west and Russia to the east. In terms of cultural identification, therefore, Germany turned its attention northwards, to those countries it perceived as its nearest relations, not least with regard to race.

This sense of claustrophobia in terms of the opportunities for physical expansion was partly compensated by elevating the search for a national identity on to a higher plane. Roger Griffin adopts the distinction between *Kulturnation* and *Staatsnation* and the important concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*: after unification, various nationalist ideologies

sought to persuade Germans to see themselves as something far more significant than mere citizens of the juridic nation-state or partners in the contractual “civil society” on which liberal theorists set their sights. Their true destiny was to reconstitute themselves as members of the organic, national/racial community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) which had supposedly existed before the waning of the cultural forces sustaining it. (Griffin 1994, 85)

The words *Volk*, *völkisch* and *Volksgemeinschaft* thus lacked clear-cut meanings that could be defined by rationalist principles, in the here and now. The *Volk* was not simply the population; to a large extent it was a mystical conglomerate consisting primarily of elements from Germany's cultural past. According to George L. Mosse, it “symbolized the desired unity beyond contemporary reality. It was lifted out of the actual conditions in Europe onto a level where both individuality and the larger unity of belonging were given scope” (Mosse 1989, 15).

But there was another important ingredient, too, closely connected with the past, namely nature. Man is not a freewheeling atom, disconnected

<sup>18</sup> The book went into its tenth edition in 1912 (Feuchtwanger ed. 1973, 123).

from his physical surroundings and the culture of his forefathers; he is rather a social creature who is figuratively, and almost literally, *rooted*. Therefore the physical home ground, or *Boden*, on which one's ancestors have trodden, and in which they are buried, is part of the culture, just as the culture is part of the home ground. In this way "Volkish thought made the Volk the intermediary between man and the 'higher reality'", and the landscape "became a vital part of the definition of the Volk through which it retained continuous contact with the life spirit of the transcendent cosmos" (*ibid*). Against such a background, personal and social harmony could only be conceivable in a situation where these various ingredients were satisfactorily represented. The *Volksgemeinschaft*, then, is a profoundly organic concept, inseparable from its geography.

This is the situation in which Germany more or less decidedly directed its attention to the North. This did not mean that the country no longer continued to cultivate its ancient connections with the Mediterranean culture, but when it came to finding the building blocks for Germany's emerging national identity, they were primarily to be sought in the North, in its cultural heritage and its natural landscapes. As Germany and northern Europe in general were increasingly taking on a leading role in relation to southern Europe, there was also felt to be a growing logic in leaving the culture of the South behind as a stage in an inevitable development. Indeed, if the classical Mediterranean culture was seen as equivalent to "civilisation", as was traditionally the case, the North might have to exchange it for another and alternative civilisation. This seems to be part of the background for the *Kulturpessimismus* that plays such an important role at the turn of the century; culture "as we know it" had lost its vitality.

As suggested in ch. 5, there is a democratic element in this changing outlook: civilisation was generally represented by and associated with cultural and political elites; if the *Volk*, however, could be the point of departure for an alternative set of fundamental social values, these values would have a far more comprehensive basis. Being, at least in this sense, anti-elitist, it could also be said to go against another characteristic feature of the modern world, namely centralisation; the elites and their power are traditionally concentrated in the major cities, whereas the *Volk* is also to be found in the periphery. In *Zur Kritik der Zeit* (A Critique of Our Time, 1912), another typical proponent of cultural pessimism, the German industrialist, writer and politician Walther Rathenau (1867–1922), who was incidentally also one of Edvard Munch's patrons, laments how modern man has lost the qualities of "humble pride, wise truthfulness, fearless faith and powerful sensitivity" that several hundred years ago were so typical of the Germans: "However, if one removes oneself from the urban centres to such remote areas as Friesland, Jutland and southern Sweden, then there

are still today people, even tribes, who justify and confirm the ancient descriptions” (Rathenau 1917, 18–19).<sup>19</sup>

In this process, speculative and esoteric doctrines, which were by definition peripheral in relation to the established cultural and intellectual values, were bound to play an important role. To some extent they were interesting precisely by virtue of being peripheral. As a result of the massive interest in history in the generations after the Romantic period, and of the interest in establishing national identities, based to various degrees on the concept of the *Volk*, one of the obvious questions to be asked was: where do the Germans come from? In other northern countries, similar questions were asked with regard to *their* origins.

The question was far from new, and largely as a result of anti-southern, anti-Catholic and partly anti-Christian sentiments around 1800, Romantics like Herder and Friedrich von Schlegel had turned to the Goths as the forefathers of the Germans, and ended up with the conclusion that their roots were to be found in India.<sup>20</sup> This view, which was labelled Aryanism, would, according to Schlegel, ensure that the Germans “would be forever free from their Semitic and Mediterranean bondage” (Godwin 1996, 38). But he did not stop there; having wondered

how the Indian influence could have reached so far as to mould the languages of Scandinavia [...] he recalled that the Indians had a high veneration for the North, and for the wonderful mountain of Meru at the North Pole. [...] In an epoch-making sally of emotionally-laden etymology, Schlegel connected the word Aryan with *Éhre* the German word for honor. So the Germans and their ancestors, the ancient Indians, were pre-eminently the people of honor, the aristocracy of the human race. (*Ibid.*, 39)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a range of other writers adopted Schlegel’s theory, or sought to develop it further, especially by emphasising the northern or arctic, rather than the Indian, connection; the latter did, after all, retain an unwanted non-white element, whereas “locating the beginnings of the Indo-Germans at the Pole permitted a reversal of cultural debts” (Murphy 2002, 179). Like Olof Rudbeck in seventeenth-century Sweden and James Macpherson in eighteenth-century Scotland, the Germans preferred to locate their founding, national stories within their own cultural sphere, and in the same way that the Romans had described the Mediterranean as *Mare Nostrum*, the Germans had long since firmly adopted *Norden*, including the Arctic, as their *terra nostra*.

Also, the question of the origin of the Germans easily slipped into a discussion of the origin of man *per se*, thus bringing into the equation the ancient but ever topical speculations as to where the Atlantis and the Garden of Eden were actually situated. And at the end of the nineteenth

<sup>19</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

<sup>20</sup> The following is indebted to Godwin 1996, chs. 4 and 5.



century, a considerable part of this debate was still conducted within a respectable academic framework. Thus for instance William F. Warren, President of Boston University, published a book in 1885, *Paradise Found: the Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole*, whose preface begins with the words: “This book is not the work of a dreamer” (Warren 1885, vii). He then goes on in great detail to consider his radical hypothesis: “THAT THE CRADLE OF THE HUMAN RACE, THE EDEN OF PRIMITIVE TRADITION, WAS SITUATED AT THE NORTH POLE, IN A COUNTRY SUBMERGED AT THE TIME OF THE DELUGE” (*ibid.*, 47). The book, furthermore, is “respectfully dedicated” to Professor F. Max Müller of the University of Oxford, who had succeeded in replacing the use of the word “Indo-Germanic” with “Aryan” in the academic debate. Many German scholars had preferred the former, which monopolised the German connection with the Indian origin and excluded the British and the French (Godwin 1996, 39–40). Once again nationalist sentiments are easily detectable. The Austrian philologist and anthropologist Karl Penka, however, argued for a Scandinavian homeland, whereas the German philologist Otto Schrader regarded the Ukraine as the place of origin (*ibid.*, 43). Regardless of all this, northern scholars certainly saw no reason to turn to the South for suitable candidates.

Other contributions came from outside the academic sphere, such as the work *Isis Unveiled* (1877) by the Russian occultist and founder of the Theosophical Society Madame Blavatsky (1831–91). Interestingly, considering her Russian background, she places the cradle of humanity in the regions north of the Himalayas, and in her later work *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) she further develops her theory of so-called root-races, the second of which was the “Hyperborean root-race which had dwelt on a vanished polar continent” (Goodrick-Clarke 2004, 20–21). This idea was adopted by Friedrich Nietzsche, “who opened his 1895 essay *The Antichrist* with a metaphorical identification of his new northern supermen with Hyperborean peoples of the Arctic” (McGhee 2005, 31). Sadly, Nietzsche was not the only one to be inspired by Blavatsky’s visions of the past, with their strong northern bias. Three men in particular – Guido von List (1848–1919), Jörg Lanz (or Lanz von Liebenfels; 1874–1954) and Rudolf von Sebottendorff (1875–1945) – contributed to visions of Thule (the northern Atlantis). Together they also laid the mythological foundation for the growth of German National Socialism in the years after the First World War.

Though brought up an Austrian and a Catholic, List was soon drawn to the study of runes and the *Eddas*, and in the 1890s he devised a gnostic nature religion – Wotanism – that circled around Wotan (or Odin), the leader of the Norse pantheon. Like Rudbeck in Sweden, List claimed that there had been an extensive Ario-Germanic Wotanist religion in Germany and Austria for several millennia before Christianity; this was described as a golden age that could still be traced in visible ruins, place names,

popular legends, heraldry, nursery rhymes etc. As a result, the ancient Icelanders were “Wotanist refugees from Christian persecution in early medieval Germany” (Goodrick-Clarke 2004, 49). Into this cauldron, he then mixed elements from Blavatsky’s Theosophy, Rosicrucianism and freemasonry. The element of hope and optimism lies in the claim that the old teachings have survived in the keeping of the *Armanenschaft* (members of the priesthood who escaped the persecution of the Church and fled to Iceland and Scandinavia), who had saved the teachings in a secret language – the *Kala* – that was transferred through initiates in secret societies (*ibid.*, 69). List’s message is clear: the culture of the South, represented by the Church, has replaced a far more sophisticated northern culture, but it is now time for the latter to return to power.

All of this was quickly utilised by Jörg Lanz, who added a dose of social, and even national, Darwinism, along Chamberlainian lines. In 1904 he published the book *Theozoologie* (Theo-Zoology), with the bizarre subtitle *Oder die Kunde von den Sodoms-Äfflingen und dem Götter-Elektron*, Or the Lore of the Sodom-Apelings and the Electron of the Gods. As suggested by the title, it claimed to inaugurate a new science, and saw all non-Aryan races as a product of a Fall and consequently as no more than semi-human. The central theme of the book was “the imminent regeneration of the German people through otherworldly powers once they have thrown off the literally sub-human influence of feminists, socialists, homosexuals and Jews” (Griffin 1994, 87), and for these groups and races Lanz recommended “enforced sterilization and castration; deportation to Madagascar; enslavement; incineration as a sacrifice to god; and use as beasts of burden” (Godwin 1996, 49). Also, being a master race, the Germans were justified in appropriating whatever possessions they might need from other, inferior peoples: “*Theozoology* thus represented an extraordinary compilation of theological and scientific ideas in support of the restoration of aristocratic authority in a pan-German realm” (Goodrick-Clarke 2004, 99).

Rudolf von Sebottendorff, a self-styled aristocrat of working-class origins, was destined to play a central part in finally handing over the ideological hotchpotch of the years prior to 1920 to the emerging national socialists. In 1912 two central groups had been established: the *Reichshammerbund* and the *Germanenorden*, the latter being a secret organisation based on the several Wotan lodges inspired by List. Sebottendorff joined the *Germanenorden* in Bavaria during the War, at a time of schism and falling membership. Also, to avoid problems with political opponents, the group started meeting as the *Thule-Gesellschaft* (Thule Society). Then in November 1918 the bohemian Jewish journalist Kurt Eisner led a Socialist coup in Munich. Two days later, Sebottendorff spoke to a Thule meeting, making extensive use of ideas from List:

“As long as I hold the iron hammer [...], I am determined to pledge the Thule to this struggle. Our Order is a Germanic Order, loyalty is also Germanic. Our god is Walvater, his rune is the Ar-rune. And the trinity: Wotan, Wili, We is the unity of the trinity. The Ar-rune signifies Aryan, primal fire, the sun and the eagle. And the eagle is the symbol of the Aryans. In order to depict the eagle’s capacity for self-immolation by fire, it is coloured red. From today on our symbol is the red eagle, which warns us that we must die in order to live”. (Quoted in Goodrick-Clarke 2004, 145)

The *Thule-Gesellschaft* set itself “against the atheism of Communism and the materialism of modernity, claiming allegiance to an ancient spiritual force, the ancient heritage of the Germanic race” (Kavenna 2005, 136). Its emblem was a dagger on a shining swastika sun-wheel. Two years later, in May 1920, the final version of the Nazi flag made its first appearance with the swastika as the central symbol.

### *Northern Travel*

By the turn of the century, a solid foundation had been laid over several centuries for a celebration of northern nature as well as culture, and as a result Scandinavia and Iceland, in particular, had experienced a steady flow of travellers from the 1830s onwards. With improved communication and opportunities for a larger number of people to travel, this development continued up to the outbreak of the First World War.

From a German point of view, especially, polar exploration and the northern mysticism of esoteric theorists melted together with a wide-ranging interest in the Viking age and with the impulses provided by Henrik Steffens and others earlier in the century (ref. ch. 4). For a Germany entering the industrial age by leaps and bounds, the North, it seems, continued to represent a haven of nostalgia and a stabilising corrective to the uncertainty surrounding the rapid transformation of society. A writer, for instance, like Princess Therese of Bavaria (1850–1925), a highly talented ethnologist, natural scientist and traveller, produced an impressively detailed and factual travel account from Troms and Finnmark, *Über den Polarkreis* (Across the Polar Circle) (Bayer 1889).

But generally the focus seemed to be more on the North as a source of mental hygiene. According to Heinrich Hart, who in 1891 published his *Hochlandsbriefe aus dem Norden* (Highland Letters from the North) in the journal *Freie Bühne für Modernes Leben* (Free Stage for Modern Life), Norway is “a piece of earth where one can be *human*, where a ‘new man’ can be reborn, set free from the dregs of history, upbringing and the everyday routine” (quoted by Ivar Sagmo in Arndt et al. eds. 2004, 174–

5).<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, the *Freie Bühne* is also the journal where Knut Hamsun, only a year earlier, enjoyed his German breakthrough, with the translation of his first novel, *Sult* (*Hunger*, 1890). However, it was not primarily this avant-garde text of urban alienation that was going to be the key to Hamsun's popularity in Germany; the first novel that really responded to the sentiments expressed by Hart was *Pan* (1894), a poetic love story set in the mesmerising landscape of northern Norway, well within the Arctic Circle. By 1920, the novel had gone through eighteen German editions, and together with a series of other novels and short stories, it secured Hamsun an extraordinary position among German readers and fellow writers for half a century.<sup>22</sup>

Incidentally, the setting of *Pan* also added an extra dimension for the German audience: the first-person narrator, Lieutenant Glahn, opens his narrative by turning back to his "Nordland summer", Nordland simply being the name of the Norwegian county. But in the German terminology of the North, *das Nordland* is frequently used to denote rather vaguely the countries of the North, and the use of "Nordlandsommer" in the German translation of the novel is therefore a nicely intended error on the part of the translator. *Nordland* may not have explicitly included Germany, but was clearly perceived as encompassing the blood relations as well as the cultural origins of the Germans (Roll-Hansen 1993, 27). In this way, German readers must have felt that Hamsun was writing about a world they could justifiably identify as their own.

This same tendency is visible in a pedagogical work from 1909, Walter Niemann's *Das Nordlandbuch: Eine Einführung in die Gesamte Nordische Natur und Kultur* (The Northland Book: An Introduction to the Entire Nordic Nature and Culture). In the introduction, Niemann emphasises that he has chosen to draw the limits of *das Nordland* as widely as possible, including what is really the old Viking world (Niemann 1909, vii–viii). Interestingly, considering the fact that the book was written only five years before the War, Britain as such is not included, whereas the Orkneys and the Shetlands are. Furthermore, although Niemann appears not to include Germany, the last chapter in the section on "Nordische Kultur und Kunst" is entitled "Germanische und Nordgermanische Kunst", and he makes a point of mentioning that Nordic artists have traditionally used Germany as a base (*ibid.*, 224). *Nordgermanisch* was also a term that provided a much desired link between the German and the Nordic. Against this background, it is not surprising that the number of German travel accounts from Norway rose rather sharply from the 1890s onwards, and that the first proper "Nordland cruise", arranged by the Norddeutscher Lloyd company, was launched on the German market in 1890 (Roll-Hansen 1993, 65).

<sup>21</sup> Translated from the German by PF.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Hamsun and Germany, see Heming Gujord's article in Fjågesund (ed.) 2009, 37–63.

But there was also another and far more decisive factor involved: only a year after his coronation, Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was already one of the great European celebrities, had made his first visit to the Norwegian fjords and to northern Norway, including the North Cape. And it was not going to be the last; he would make altogether twenty-two visits to the country in the years between 1889 and 1914 (*ibid.*, 47). As a result of the public interest surrounding the Kaiser, and the large number of people accompanying him – his giant ship *Hohenzollern II* was filled with servants and friends, and followed by up to twenty-five vessels from the German Navy (Skotheim 2011, 146) – the Norwegian holidays became major PR events, extensively covered by German and Norwegian newspapers. Not only did they serve to market Norway as a tourist destination in Germany; more importantly, they helped underpin the Kaiser's position back home by showing him in an idealised Germanic setting, surrounded by enthusiastic Norwegians, who welcomed him wherever he went ashore. As early as 1886, one of Wilhelm's close friends, Philipp zu Eulenburg, had introduced him to the Nordic world and underlined the tension between north and south, the Germanic and the Roman. "As a cardinal point, the North represented everything that was healthy, fresh and unsentimental" (Roll-Hansen 1993, 50).<sup>23</sup>

An integral part of this interest was the saga literature and its nineteenth-century renaissance, and one work that never ceased to fascinate the Kaiser was Esaias Tegnér's *Frithiof's Saga* from the 1820s, large passages of which he knew by heart. The way Ossian was Napoleon's constant literary companion, Frithiof was Wilhelm's.<sup>24</sup> The saga hero was associated with Sogn on the west coast, and in 1911, the Kaiser decided to express his gratitude for twenty years of Norwegian hospitality by presenting two statues – one of Frithiof at Vangsnes and one of Frithiof's father in law, King Bele, across the fjord at Balestrand. The latter ended up as an out-door statue of ordinary size, but the former was given dimensions that had never before been seen in Norway. The German sculptor Max Unger conceived a more than ten metre tall bronze statue of fourteen tons, placed on a twelve metre tall foundation, with Frithiof leaning on his sword and watching sharply towards the west for enemy ships. The statue was unveiled on 31 July 1913, with the Kaiser and the Norwegian King Haakon present.

It was a strangely ambiguous situation. Clearly, the Kaiser was sincere in his wish to express his gratitude. On the other hand, his eyes and mind were always on Germany, and the statue was undoubtedly once again part of a domestic PR campaign. First of all, Frithiof was dressed not as a Norwegian Viking, but as an ancient Germanic warrior, and in his speech,

<sup>23</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PF.

<sup>24</sup> The following is indebted to Skotheim 2011, 199–206. See also ch. 4 on the *Frithiof's Saga*.

the Kaiser underlined his wish that the statue would be a reminder of the solidarity between the Germanic tribes. Everyone with a sense of German and Germanic history would also see the similarities between the Frithiof statue and the Hermann statue that had been erected in the Teutoburg Forest in 1875 as a commemoration of the victory over the Romans. There was, in other words, a Pan-Germanic vision behind the choice of place and motif. Secondly, the ceremony had a strikingly military character: a guard of honour consisting of a hundred seamen from the Norwegian and German navies surrounded the statue, and in the fjord outside there was such a strikingly powerful presence from the German Navy that it reminded local commentators of an invasion rather than a friendly visit.

The observation was perhaps more apt than commonly assumed. One of the most important, and probably fatal, elements in Wilhelm's plan to strengthen Germany's position was to build a navy that could measure itself against that of the British, and the arms race that followed represented a growing source of concern in London (McGowan 2002, 31). By means of his Norwegian holidays, however, Wilhelm could kill two birds with one stone: first, he could witness what was perceived as the cradle of Germany's maritime tradition and become associated among his people with its impressive development; and second, he could renew the fundamental cultural and ethnic connections between the two countries (Roll-Hansen 1993, 85).

In this respect, according to Svein Skotheim, Wilhelm had little concern for Norway as a contemporary nation; his *Nordlandfabrt* was a journey into a world of myth whose ultimate use lay in Germany: "The Frithiof statue was a gift from Wilhelm to Wilhelm, a gift from the German Emperor to the German Empire" (Skotheim 2011, 206).<sup>25</sup> Less than a year was to pass, however, before everything would change, change utterly. As usual, the Kaiser returned to Balestrand in the summer of 1914, but on 25 July, sitting in a logchair in the studio of his friend, the Norwegian national romantic painter Hans Dahl, he received the telegram informing him that the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia had expired. Having given Austria his promise of support in case of war, Wilhelm knew what was in store. What he did not know was that he would never see his country of myth and dreams again.

In the course of his many summers in Norway, Kaiser Wilhelm crossed the Arctic Circle seven times, thus illustrating a tendency of the period: both because of the intense focus on the race for the North Pole from the 1880s onwards and because leisure travel became safer and more predictable, not least because of the use of steam, tourists and travellers were gradually going further north. Mass tourism in fact entered the world formerly reserved for polar exploration. Thus a range of travel accounts

<sup>25</sup> Translated from the Norwegian by PF.

appeared with titles such as *Pictures of Arctic Travel*, *From England to Iceland*, *Über den Polarkreis*, *Letters from High Latitudes*, *In Arctic Seas*, *Ein Spitzbergenfahrt* and the like. It is as if the polar regions had lost their ring of deathly cold and constant risk of shipwreck, and become a place to be enjoyed.

Tourism in the Far North was not entirely new. Even before 1880 a number of young “Gentleman Yachtsmen” had ventured, as described in chapter 5, all the way to Svalbard, and more were to follow, either in private yachts or in whalers and sealers. Walter J. Clutterbuck’s *The Skipper in Arctic Seas* (1890), for instance, is the story of two “land-lubbers” who sail to the east coast of Greenland and on to Jan Mayen and Spitsbergen with a whaling vessel. According to the happily chattering narrator, they know “nothing about the places we were going to or of the ‘paraphernalia’ of arctic travel”, and their knowledge of sailing is limited to a vague awareness that the sea is a “dismally damp place” (Clutterbuck 1890, 2 and 7)<sup>26</sup>; the Arctic, however, provides wonderful entertainment.

One of the attractions for this category of travellers was hunting, and this was also an essential element when the first proper tourist cruise, sailing from Bergen to Svalbard, was organised by the Norwegian opportunist Henry Clodius in 1881 (Reilly 2009, 38–9).<sup>27</sup> The voyage was a dismal failure, and despite a brief attempt in 1884, it was not until the 1890s that British, Norwegian, French and German companies started to send cruise ships on a more regular basis. Partly inspired by the Kaiser’s enthusiasm for Norway, the Germans in particular ventured to the Arctic in considerable numbers. One cruise, in 1900, even went as far as Franz Josef Land.

Also, whereas in the beginning the ships could only accommodate a few hundred passengers, those used in the years immediately before the War were frequently considerably larger; the *Grosser Kurfürst*, owned by Norddeutscher Lloyd, for instance, could carry more than 2,500 passengers. Thus with altogether a hundred and eight cruise ships visiting Svalbard in the years between 1881 and 1914 (Reilly 2009, 195–201), literally tens of thousands of tourists were able for the first time to get a first-hand experience of a region otherwise experienced exclusively by armchair travel. In addition, another considerable number of tourists used the regular routes from Britain and the Continent to Scandinavia and Iceland, especially in the summers. By 1880, for example, there were as many as three shipping lines competing for the passenger traffic to Iceland alone (Wawn 2000, 287).

Despite the considerable presence of German tourists in Scandinavia, the British were still very much in the majority. Measured by the number

<sup>26</sup> Together with J.A. Lees, Clutterbuck also wrote one of the most widely read travel accounts from Norway, the humorous *Three in Norway by Two of Them* (1882).

<sup>27</sup> The following is indebted to Reilly’s account.

of travel accounts from Norway, for instance, German publications amount to roughly forty per cent of the British number. There is also a sharp increase in the last two decades of the century. According to Eiler Schiøtz's comprehensive bibliography of foreigners' travels in Norway up until 1900, there are more than a hundred and sixty British printed travelogues – books or articles – registered for the 1880–1900 period alone, actually more than in the entire fifty-year period prior to 1880. Also, especially in the 1890s, it is difficult not to see the growing interest in the North as connected with the media attention around explorers like Nansen, Andrée and others.

Furthermore, Germany was not the only country to send prominent representatives to the North. In September 1883, the British Prime Minister William Gladstone was on a holiday cruise to the Orkneys together with the elderly Poet Laureate, Lord Tennyson, when the two – rather in tune with contemporary fashion – decided on an impulse to cross the North Sea and visit Norway.<sup>28</sup> Even if this was only a brief visit to Kristiansand on the south coast, it clearly made an impression on the Prime Minister, and in the summer of 1885, after being defeated in the elections in June, he returned for a stay of some three weeks.

There are strong indications that these two visits, together with Gladstone's extensive reading on Scandinavian history, politics and social relations, contributed to his position on at least two specific contemporary issues. After his first visit, he supported the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1884, which extended the franchise to new groups of smallholders and leaseholders in the rural areas, and after his second visit he made a radical move: he decided to support Home Rule for Ireland. Having returned to power in February 1886, he launched the First Home Rule Bill, and in his speech to the Commons made explicit comparisons with Norway's relative independence within the union with Sweden. His views came at a price; he lost the vote and the following election, and the issue in question contributed to the split in the Liberal Party, but during his fourth term in office from 1892, a Second Home Rule Bill was passed, though it was defeated in the Lords (Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 190–5).

Despite the importance of a developing tourist industry and of celebrities setting trends for the less wealthy, the most efficient distribution of ideas – frequently stereotyped ideas – about the North may still have taken place through fiction. Popular novels were, after all, printed in large numbers and reached tens of thousands of readers across a relatively wide social spectrum. And there is no doubt that the writers of such fiction were keenly aware of the trends of the time, such as for instance leisure travel. Relationships and marriages across national boundaries in the North were nothing new, especially among royalty, and the German writer

<sup>28</sup> For a more detailed account of Gladstone and Norway, see Fjågesund and Symes 2003, 189–96.



Theodor Mügge, for instance, had explored the idea in his short story from Rjukan from 1858 (ref. ch. 5). But with the opportunity of frequent and affordable communication, novelists were quick to conceive interesting plots including those that dealt with affairs of the heart.

One of these writers was Edna Lyall (pseudonym for Ada Ellen Bayly, 1857–1903), who by the mid-1880s was already a well-established writer. After two lengthy holidays in Norway in 1886 and 1888, she then published *A Hardy Norseman* (1890), which not only became a very popular novel on both sides of the Atlantic, but was also a work of obvious literary merit. The book portrays Norwegians in Britain and Britons in Norway, thereby creating a genuinely cross-national narrative. But first and foremost, it reflects the view, which by this time had become established as a cultural truism, that everything northern (including people, nature and history), represented an antidote to the decadence that characterised modern, urban life.

Thus underlying the narrative is once again the motif of illness and health. The English heroine, Cecil, is suffering from *ennui* and has a “consumptive look” (Lyall 1890, 55), but is otherwise a representative of such admirable Victorian values as hard work, Christian humility and charity. The Norwegian protagonist, on the other hand, whose name, Frithiof, connects him rather explicitly to Tegnér’s and Kaiser Wilhelm’s hero, personifies such qualities as honesty, pride and resoluteness – in short, the kind of energetic drive that was felt to be disappearing with the cloyingly civilised life of the city. In other words, at a time when Britain, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, was struggling to retain its position in relation to other nations, the values of the North were being employed as an injection of new life. But it is clearly the *combined* positive features of Cecil and Frithiof that point to a successful future; Frithiof, too, modifies and adapts his Viking virtues to a modern reality.

To confirm the above points, there are obvious similarities between Lyall’s story and at least two other novels from the same period, namely Durham Griffith’s *An Arctic Eden: A Tale of Norway* (1892) and Marie Corelli’s *Thelma: A Norwegian Princess* (1887). *Thelma*, in particular, describes the somewhat unlikely love story set in Finnmark of a Norwegian girl whose father is keeping up his Viking traditions, and a young English baronet whose name – Sir Philip Bruce Errington – strongly underlines his need for redemption, not unlike Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

It is also interesting to note that the book originally had another subtitle, *A Society Novel*. When changing it to *A Norwegian Princess* it is as if Corelli and her publisher must have realised that it would profit sales to play on both history and the popularity of Norway as a tourist destination: like Lyall’s Frithiof, Thelma is as much an aristocrat as Sir Philip, and therefore perfectly compatible as a partner. Actually, she is

more than compatible, because she has steered clear of the decadent world that has threatened to destroy him. Therefore, the opening scene is full of symbolic significance: the lonely and solitary Sir Philip, having travelled to the North Cape, is watching the midnight sun. There, on the threshold to the Arctic, he is enjoying the ultimate experience of nature in its purest and most sublime form.

But this northern world is not one of terrifying storms and biting cold; it is a place where, “though beyond the Arctic circle, the climate in summer is that of another Italy, and the landscape a living poem fairer than the visions of Endymion” (Corelli 1894, 2). And this is where he discovers the elusive girl who, Cinderella-like, leaves in a boat without telling him her name. It is, in other words, the natural innocence of the North, where the girl and the scenery are two sides of the same coin, that provides the young man’s redemption. It is an indication of the reading public’s appetite for narratives of this kind that Corelli’s novel came out in a spectacular fifty-six editions (Mains 1989, 129).<sup>29</sup>

### ***Ancient Nordicism: Constructive or Destructive?***

The 1880–1920 period witnesses an enormous interest in the northern past, in northern Europe as well as in North America. With the benefit of hindsight, however, it is as if the intensity of the interest is proportionate to the pace with which the development of the modern world is making this very interest obsolete or irrelevant.

As suggested above, the German fascination with the North must be seen against a profound cultural pessimism, which stubbornly resisted the transformation that was taking place. It seems reasonable to ask, therefore, to what extent the Nordicism in question was first and foremost an escape, and to what extent it was a constructive attempt to mobilise an alternative to a modern world that to many seemed to undermine everything that was certain and familiar. And an equally difficult question: to what extent are we able, after the Second World War, to examine the turn-of-the-century interest in the North, as it came to expression in other countries, without being unduly influenced by the ensuing tragedy in Germany? In other words: should the Nordicism of the period be rejected *in toto* as a blind and dangerous alley, or would it be equally justifiable to see it as a constructive alternative, as in the work of William Morris, to the more than obvious faults and weaknesses of the modern, progressive world? Or alternatively, could it even be seen as an expression of precisely progress itself?

<sup>29</sup> Mains 1989, 129. Clearly, it also had a wider and more long-lasting appeal, because it was translated into Urdu in 1972!

In 1901, Johannes V. Jensen published a collection of essays with the title *Den gotiske Renaissance* (The Gothic Renaissance), which addresses precisely these questions. Here he claims, to the surprise of a twenty-first-century reader, that the western world has witnessed a “heathen breakthrough” that does not find expression “in a spiritual form, but on the contrary in completely material terms. I am not thinking of literature or art but of the *things* of our time – the rails on the ground, the machines that turn everything upside down [...]” (Jensen 2000, 11).<sup>30</sup> This is what he calls a gothic renaissance, and by gothic he simply means that “it has originated in Britain but is equally applicable to the United States and then Germany and Scandinavia – all blond peoples” (*ibid.*).

Essentially, he sees the gothic as an expression of the practical, the down-to-earth, the hungry for power and the not particularly sophisticated, and British imperialism as the dream of the Goths to rediscover their origin, i.e. the warm countries from which they in fact came (*ibid.*, 140). Jensen, then, seems to regard the modern, progressive, industrialised northern world as a product of Gothicism, and his conclusion appears to be that it is northern Europe and the United States that will survive, whereas the Mediterranean world will go under. However dated and peculiar Jensen’s analysis may seem, it suggests that the Nordicism of the period was not necessarily and exclusively reactionary and anti-modern. It might as equally well be seen as the very image of progress.

One figure that personifies this ambiguity is Fridtjof Nansen, who earlier in this chapter has been described as bridging the gap between science and progress, on the one hand, and a profound distrust of modern civilisation, on the other. But Nansen was also a builder of bridges in another important respect: he came to personify the connection between two heroic Norwegian histories – the old and the new. Through his polar feats, he came to be seen as a direct descendant of the old Vikings; through his conquest of the polar world – the very world in which the Vikings themselves were operating but which even they could only partially master – the emergent Norwegian nation had found the ideal hero to create an inseparable bond between past and present.

Paradoxically, the ancient past was not just ancient; it was also modern and progressive; the cultural pessimism, so prevalent in Germany, was in Norway balanced by a powerful national optimism for the future, which was again fuelled by a celebration of the past. Also, Nansen was surrounded by people who actively contributed to building his reputation: his brother-in-law, the historian Ernst Sars (1835–1917) provided an interpretation of Norwegian history that promised a period of future greatness (Stenseth 2000, 44). Furthermore, when plans were launched in 1895 for a new and lavishly illustrated edition of the Snorri sagas, and

<sup>30</sup> Translated from the Danish by PF.

Nansen's friend, the painter Erik Werenskiöld (1855–1938), was given a central role, his use of Nansen as the model for King Olav Trygvason “neatly symbolised [his] elevation to a national totem” (Huntford 2000, 397). It is also an indication of the nationalist mood at the time that the costly Snorri edition, which was published in 1899, and the subsequent “national edition” together sold as many as 170,000 copies in a country of 2.2 million people (Finn Hødnebo in Sturlason 2006, x).

After the *Fram* expedition, then, Nansen was a hero of the sea – the most prestigious arena in which a Norwegian might excel, and as luck would have it, his building of the ship and his daring voyage took place just at a time when the nation was engaged in the discovery of astonishing ancient treasures that seemed almost automatically to establish yet another connection between the man, the country and the past. The excavation of the Tune ship in 1852 had been a sensation, but the find of the much better preserved Gokstad ship in 1880 was even more so, and could not have fitted better with Nansen's image. The *Fram*, captained by a modern Frithiof the Brave, naturally took the form of an up-to-date Viking ship that lived up to the tradition of exploration and conquest. And then, when the lavishly decorated Oseberg ship was found in 1903, together with a large number of extravagantly carved objects, Nansen, who was also a highly competent illustrator, was additionally seen as coming out of an ancient tradition that could proudly assert its own worth. The Vikings were not just primitive pirates; they were also cutting-edge shipbuilders, craftsmen and artists.

As well as exhibiting Norway's seafaring tradition, which primarily associated him with the coast, the sea and the world beyond, Nansen also became, after the Greenland expedition, the great pioneer of modern skiing, an ancient northern means of transport mainly associated with the inland terrain of mountains and forests.<sup>31</sup> In this way he effectively embraced the entire nation with an ideology that combined a rootedness in the distinctive natural scenery of the country with an ancient cultural past, but again in such a way that it suggested a dynamic and progressive thrust, just like the *Fram* (i.e. “forward”) itself. Thus when the royal Nansen in the Snorri illustrations was viewed alongside the photographs of the skiing Nansen, it would only have been natural for the contemporary public to remember Knud Bergslien's iconic historical painting from 1869, in which, seven hundred years earlier, two Vikings on skis brought the baby king Håkon Håkonsson to safety across the snow-covered mountains.

Finally, the degree to which Nansen's reputation, at home and abroad, was almost imperceptibly linked to the history of the nation was

<sup>31</sup> It is an interesting fact that skis as well as the cariole, the uniquely Norwegian horse cart that virtually every nineteenth-century traveller to the country describes in great detail, are a means of transport for the individual, a feature which implicitly underlines the element of human self-reliance in relation to nature.

not exactly reduced by the rumours that he was of royal blood. And it seems more than likely that his paternal grandmother was the illegitimate daughter of “Frederik VI, King of Denmark from 1808 to 1839 and hence, until 1814, King of Norway” (Huntford 2000, 412). It is not surprising, therefore, that Nansen was mentioned, during the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905, as a possible future president in the case of Norway becoming a republic, or even, as the writer Arne Garborg suggested, “a royal pretender” (quoted in Huntford 2000, 406).

In other countries, too, the old northern world was being celebrated. Despite being a melting pot of countless nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, the United States showed a keen interest in exploiting the qualities connected with the North. In 1887, for instance, a statue of Leif Eriksson was erected in Boston, “within suspiciously convenient distance of Harvard University. Ancient and modern, Viking and Victorian, linked arms” (Wawn 2000, 13). During the World Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, furthermore, one of the main attractions was *Viking*, a replica of the Gokstad ship, which was successfully sailed across the Atlantic to prove it could tackle the ocean. The stunt was financed by the Norwegian shipbuilder Christen Christensen, whose ship *Jason* had taken Nansen and his team to Greenland, and as the *Viking’s* crossing coincided with the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of America, it was obviously also a thought-provoking contribution to the debate about who was actually the first white man on American soil (Christensen 2007, 68).

An even more intense debate followed five years later, when a rune stone, dated 1362, turned up near the town of Kensington in Minnesota. It was allegedly found buried in the ground, “clasped by the roots of an aspen or poplar tree”, by a Swedish-American farmer and his ten-year-old son (Blegen 1968, 6). Admittedly, modern runologists have more or less unanimously agreed that the stone is a hoax, and recent documentary evidence from the family involved in the find seems to confirm this view. The temperature of the debate, however, is in itself interesting. The fact that a relatively large number of Americans, though primarily local, believed – and still believe – in its authenticity, clearly reveals an ardent sense of connection, or a hope of such, with a remote Scandinavian past. It is also an interesting indication of the degree to which this cultural legacy, even today, touches very different strings in different countries; whereas in Germany it would have awakened unpleasant memories, in the United States it is exclusively a source of cultural pride.

In Britain, the interest in the culture and traditions of the North continued to find expression in a wide range of areas. In the field of literature, particularly, there is no doubt that William Morris’s massive contribution from the 1860s until his death immediately after his trip to Norway in 1896, inspired a whole school of writers. As a result, the post-1880 period abounds with historical novels set in Iceland and Scandinavia,

with titles such as *The Champion of Odin*, *The Fall of Asgard*, *Harold the Boy-Earl*, *Grettir the Outlaw*, *The Star of Valhalla*, *The Viking Path*, *Thorstein of the Mer* and the like. Many of these have deservedly faded into oblivion, but there are also works among them of genuine power.

One of them is H. Rider Haggard's *Eric Brighteyes* (1891), which Andrew Wawn justly describes as "[a]rguably the finest Victorian Viking-age novel" (Wawn 2000, 331). Having spent several weeks in Iceland doing research, in addition to consulting Morris personally, Haggard created a memorable gallery of characters, who are psychologically convincing while being caught, as is typical of the sagas, in a web of fate. The female characters, in particular, are drawn with particular intensity, and especially for readers familiar with modern literary discussions of gender roles, the saga-style focus on strong women gives the novel a surprisingly contemporary ring.

Painters similarly produced Viking motifs in large numbers. The Ruskin and Morris disciple William G. Collingwood (1854–1932), who also wrote novels and travelogues on the same theme, produced several illustrations and paintings, including a work from 1875 that depicts the gathering of the Althing at Thingvellir. The motif itself, which echoed Iceland's proud democratic traditions, would necessarily have been interpreted in the context of the contemporary struggle for an extension of the franchise to the British working-class male. And Sir Frank Dicksee (1853–1928), a fashionable painter of sentimental scenes from history and legend, appears to have killed two birds with one stone when he painted *The Funeral of a Viking* in 1893. The picture shows a dead Viking chief lying in state on the deck of a burning ship that a group of men are trying to launch into the stormy sea. Besides referring to a favourite scene from Norse mythology, namely the funeral of the god Balder, the painting may also be alluding more or less explicitly to an almost identical scene in the novel by Marie Corelli mentioned above, *Thelma: A Norwegian Princess*, which had been published a few years earlier.

Frequently, art also went hand in hand with music, as in the case of the Wagner operas, whose enduring popularity throughout the period inspired a number of paintings and illustrations. This is the case with the painting *The Ride of the Valkyries* (1890) by William T. Maud (1865–1903), for instance, whose motif may also owe a debt to the rather similar *Valkyrie* by the Norwegian painter Peter Nicolai Arbo from 1869. The illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867–1939) similarly produced a series of striking and dramatic illustrations for several of the Wagner operas. But British composers also produced music alluding to the northern world. The most well-known work by Frederic H. Cowen (1852–1935), who was one of the leading composers of his day, was the symphony called *Scandinavian* from 1880, which was inspired by a tour of the Scandinavian countries and widely performed for several years. Ten years later he produced the opera of the strikingly Norse title *The Orgrim*. Then in 1893, the new star

of English music, Edward Elgar (1857–1934) presented the choral work *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*, which also alluded explicitly to the sagas.

However, the mythological world of the North was not confined solely to the sagas and the Old Norse culture. The enormous popularity of the Ossian poems in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was slowly fading out, probably partly due to figures like Wagner and Morris, who provided a relatively similar world of ancient northern heroism. But several works, especially within shorter musical formats, were still being produced with motifs from the Celtic twilight. Another literary phenomenon with strong national roots was the Finnish *Kalevala*, which continued to enhance its international reputation. An English translation was finally published in 1888, and an Italian appeared in 1909. Still, it was primarily the Finns themselves who extended the celebration of the poem to other art forms. From the 1890s onwards the leading painter of his generation, Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931), produced a monumental series of paintings that have become established visualisations of the poem. Similarly, Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) composed a number of major works with direct reference to *Kalevala*, including the symphonic poem *Kullervo* (1892).

### ***Robert Ames Bennet's Polar Romance***

The turn of the century witnessed a confusing range of ideas that circled around various perceptions of the North. It seems appropriate, therefore, to conclude this attempt to chart an exceptionally complex cultural, or rather politico-cultural, landscape with a discussion of a book that deals with at least two main ingredients from the previous pages: the exploration of the polar regions and the rediscovery of the age of the Vikings. In addition, it contains, like ideas of the North in general, a mix of elements that could be characterised as utopian and dystopian, or progressive and reactionary. Furthermore, it points beyond the scope of the current work, towards the tragic exploitation and corruption of ideas concerning the North in the decades following the First World War. Finally, it serves to show that the unpleasant side of these ideas is a not just a European but also an American phenomenon.

Joseph Conrad's rather more famous *Heart of Darkness* and Robert Ames Bennet's *Thyra: A Romance of the Polar Pit*, which might merit a tandem reading, embraced the turn of the century with a nicely symbolic symmetry, the former being published in 1899, the latter in 1901, but both showing a Janus face towards the past and the future respectively. But while Conrad turned decisively to the south and the African jungle,

Bennet turned to the north and the Arctic.<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps also symptomatic that whereas Conrad came from old east-European aristocratic stock and acquired the identity of an Englishman, Bennet (1870–1954) was a man of the New World. Like Jack London, he even came from “out West” (Denver, Colorado), where he spent most of his life, working as a lawyer and later as a surveyor before becoming a full-time writer.<sup>33</sup>

Echoing rather strongly the novel *The Voyage to the North Pole* (1878) by “Daylight” (ref. ch. 5), *Thyra* describes an American polar expedition that in 1896 is trying to reach the North Pole from Franz Josef Land with dogs and sleds. It consists of four men: Doctor Godfrey, who is the first-person narrator; Lieutenant Balderston; “his trusty negro sergeant, Black”; and the giant Icelander Thord Brorson, who is seven and a half feet tall. Having failed to reach their destination before the spring sets in, they are trying to return to base when they suddenly discover an empty balloon that comes drifting towards them.<sup>34</sup> They scramble on board and are immediately carried swiftly northwards. While in the air, they discuss the saga of Jarl Biorn, who in 925 AD travelled north from Iceland with a large expedition to find an allegedly “rich and beautiful country”, but never returned. As they approach the Pole, large mountain ridges appear. Here, before landing, they formally take possession of the country by throwing out a liquor bottle and naming it Polaria. Suddenly they hear a howl and discover “the figure of a savage, – naked, squat, hairy, with the face of a gorilla” (Bennet 1901, 24), who attacks the balloon with stones. Black shoots the creature, and they land.<sup>35</sup>

It appears that they have discovered an unknown continent by the Pole, which contains an entire civilisation of Icelandic-speaking descendants of Jarl Biorn, who in the interim has been transformed into a mythical half-god called “the Hero”. The expedition immediately rescue two of these descendants – the girl Thyra, who is attacked by a bear, and her brother Rolf, who is pursued by enemies, and from them the expedition learn that the local civilisation consists of three main clans or groups, in a hierarchical pattern: the Runemen, the Thorlings and the *dwerger*, or dwarfs.

The Runemen, who number about 30,000, are the pure and direct

<sup>32</sup> The following is based extensively on Fjågesund 2009.

<sup>33</sup> *Thyra* was his first novel. His second, *For the White Christ* (1905) was, according to Bennet’s own autobiographical sketch, a thoroughly researched novel on “the Dark Ages and the Norse viking in relation to the reign of Charlemagne”. It was also claimed to be “the nation’s bestseller in 1905” (see Fjågesund 2009, 567, notes 3 and 6). His remaining oeuvre consisted of around fifty more novels about the American West, some of which were also filmed.

<sup>34</sup> The balloon contains an obvious allusion to Andrée’s tragic attempt to reach the Pole in 1897.

<sup>35</sup> Later page references are given in the text.



descendants of Jarl Biorn. They are governed by the Allthing and have a religion based on what they call the Holy Rune. The *dwerger*, one of whom they have just killed, are “naked hairy beast-men” with a primitive language and “rude weapons” (178). The Thorlings are originally Runemen, who at one point refused to accept the laws of the Allthing and were driven into the forest of the Ormvöl, where they are governed by their king, Hoding, and his giant half-sister Queen Bera, and have become half mixed with the *dwerger*. The whole country is called Updal (the upper valley), and the central town is called Biornstad (Biorn’s place). Bennet’s peculiar narrative, which clearly contains utopian as well as dystopian elements, may not be a work of lasting literary value. But it does reflect in a rather fascinating fashion how the contemporary northern world was trying to deal with such issues as politics and society, religion, colonialism and racism.

First of all, the novel is obviously written with a profound enthusiasm for the ancient world of the North, and there is no doubt that this particular world is portrayed as a positive alternative to modern, western society, very much in the style of William Morris’s utopian fiction of the late 1880s and early 90s. Though governed by the Allthing, the social structure of Updal is based on the guilds, which organise the different crafts. The novel does, in other words, imply a strong element of scepticism against modern industry and mass production, and the combination with the arctic setting serves to underline the distance from the modern world generally. On a guided tour of Biornstad and its impressive “Runehof”, an immense, roofed structure with “stairways and numerous porticoes, balconies and archways” (74), the members of the expedition witness this peaceful, harmonious society at work:

Everywhere was to be seen the same cheerful industry as in the Weavers’ Court, and almost every moment some interesting new point came up. Balderston was wreathed in smiles, for a few inquiries had confirmed his surmise that Updal was a fully organized social democracy. “Think of it, John!” he exclaimed. “This is indeed a true people’s palace. We’ll find no slums here. And their government – it’s nothing but pure out and out democracy and Christianity.” “But how could they have gotten the idea? The old Norse had their kings and classes.” “Yes; but with them the law was supreme, and they had direct legislation through the Allthing. We think of them as heathen pirates, yet many of their laws and customs would put our own to shame. We send to the penitentiary the man who steals food when without work and famished; they pardoned him. We have fire companies, but they had community fire-insurance. When a homestead burned, the owner had his property restored by his district, except luxuries – mark that!” (83–84)

In this utopian Viking world, Bennet appears to see a confirmation of the best aspects of American republicanism and an Anglo-American work ethic, with an honest, down-to-earth population, whose furniture, for instance, is “plain and unpretentious” (103). The contrast is the tyrannical monarchy of the Thorlings, which is based on fear and violence. One may

also trace here the old American hostility to a traditional, hierarchical pre-revolutionary Europe governed by kings and aristocrats.

The situation is similar with regard to religion. The Holy Rune of the Runemen prove to be incoherent fragments of the Sermon on the Mount that a learned thrall who had travelled with Jarl Biorn had brought with him, and after a meal “each of the family made the crosslike sign of Thor’s hammer” (83). Bennet thus creates a christianesque version of Norse mythology, which thereby becomes palatable to the modern visitors. The Thorlings, on the other hand, are under the spell of the Orm, which is presented as a giant, idolatrous stone serpent whose power is based on superstition and fear of human sacrifice. In addition, there is the actual serpent, the monster Nidhug, in the Hela Pool deep down under the place of worship.

The cult of the Orm thus carries all the characteristics of so-called primitive cultures, while at the same time connecting nicely with the Christian tradition of Satan as the serpent. But the story also represents a typical nineteenth-century view of colonialism and imperialism as a moral crusade to convert infidels and bring civilisation to the heart of darkness. Thyra, however, contains no element of the Conradian scepticism to the white man’s use of enforced enlightenment. The four newcomers to Updal have no qualms about rooting out the Thorlings’ religion and supplementing the Holy Rune with more passages from the Bible, thus invading the religious landscape in which they are nothing but visitors.

For a modern reader, Bennet’s novel comes across as fundamentally racist. First of all, the narrative expresses a deep admiration for Jarl Biorn’s Updal descendants:

One could scarce imagine a more attractive assembly. The pick of all Scandinavia and North Germany could not have been more stalwart and fair. Men, women and children all alike seemed perfect in health and physique, and bright with intelligence. I did not perceive a single stupid or evil face among them (67).

And similarly, at the end of the book, during the final battle with the Thorlings and the *dwerger*, there is no doubt about who represent the superior race:

And now the Rune warriors girt in the rest with a band of steel. Here were no weak children, no unarmed women, but strong men, skilled in arms – viking sons clad in full war gear, wielding blades which shore with ease through wood and stag-horn. Even Caesar’s famous tenth legion never withstood the assaults of the impetuous Gauls with more perfect discipline. Despite my ignorance of tactics I could see that every movement was the detail of a skilful battle plan. I looked for the hersir, – the cool, adroit, captain in the rear, directing the blue-cloaked udallers. But nowhere in the fierce tumult could I distinguish any commander. [...] The wolf-leaps of the beast-men were met by slashing strokes, each a death-blow (246–7).

Three of the four balloon travellers carry the same impressive features, especially of course Thord, the giant Icelander. Sergeant Black, however, is of course black, and corresponds perfectly to the contemporary stereotype of his group. Though tall and strong, he is also naïve, stupid and filled with superstitious fear. Bennet simply seems to justify his presence by presenting him as a foil to the other members of the expedition and the Runefolk, and thereby creating a smooth transition to the Thorlings and the *dwerger*. By his own fellow travellers he is called variously a “black idiot”, a “grinning dog” (5) and a “blasted nigger” (54), and his ridiculously exaggerated black English similarly reduces him to a place beneath his companions on the evolutionary ladder. In this way, a vague, almost imperceptible, connection is established between Black and the last group in the novel, the “beast-men” or the *dwerger*, whom Black, to make the picture complete, calls “Apaches”.<sup>36</sup>

*Thyra* describes a classic situation of western imperialism: the master race, the Runefolk, has a relatively short history in the country compared to the *dwerger*, who appear to be native to the land. The latter group also have “brown bodies” (248), appear as a “brown mass” (247), have “slit eyes” (179) and are generally described as “weak-loined” (248). On the other hand, they are barbaric and dangerous and behave more like beasts than men. They find themselves at a Stone Age-like level of development with regard to tools and weapons: “[...] clutched in the apish paws were rude weapons – unchipped flints, pieces of staghorn, shapeless clubs [...]” etc. (178).

Also, they seem to have no ordered social structure or any language comprehensible to ordinary humans. Nevertheless, they have been sufficiently human-like to succeed in introducing the Thorlings to the cult of the Orm, and to mix with them. The narrator even brings up the question of their possible origin, and speculates whether they may belong to some antedeluvian race that, “cut off by the Glacial Epoch from the rest of mankind”, had “degenerated under the blight of their Serpent god into the brutal *dwerger* of the nether pit” (188). Regardless, they are not treated with any respect. On the contrary, in the final battle, they are killed by the hundreds as if they were vermin, with no trace of compassion, and then thrown into the Hela Pool and thus eradicated, so that a new and happy age may begin in Updal.

As Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels’s *Theozoologie* was not published until 1905, it is difficult to imagine how Bennet could have been influenced by his ideas. On the other hand, the presentation of the *dwerger* is more or less

<sup>36</sup> It is a strange coincidence that Robert Peary eight years after the publication of *Thyra* supposedly reached the Pole together with his black companion Matthew Henson. Peary and Henson had, however, been on several well-publicised expeditions to the Arctic before the turn of the century; it is not inconceivable, therefore, that Henson has inspired the character of Black, despite obvious differences between them.

identical with his clear-cut dualism, which according to Goodrick-Clarke “describes the battling forces of Good and Evil, typified by the Aryan accemen and their saviour Frauja, a Gothic name for Jesus, who calls for the sacrificial extermination of the sub-men, the ‘apelings’ and all other racial inferiors” (Goodrick-Clarke 2004, 90).

Similarly, in an article from 1903, Lanz claimed that the presence of such non-Aryan races as the pygmies (who had recently been discovered by Europeans), were the result of a Fall, in which the Aryan race had committed bestiality with particular beasts, so-called *pagatu* and *baziati*, “which derived from an earlier and quite distinct branch of animal evolution” (*ibid.*, 94). Bennet’s novel, then, reflects the core idea in Lanz’s theozoology, – the relegation of other races to an evil as well as beast-like status – and similarly justifies a treatment that would otherwise be morally



The swastika on the cover of the first edition of Bennet’s *Thyra: A Romance of the Polar Pit* (1901).

untenable. Bennet’s message thus seems to connect rather perfectly with that of pre-Nazi philosophy in Germany and Austria, and this is further underlined by the fact that the cover of the original edition of the novel includes a large, beautifully rounded swastika.<sup>37</sup>

Being an American, however, Bennet may have been primarily concerned with issues closer to his own shores. As is well known, at the time the United States were experiencing a massive wave of immigration

<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, according to Joscelyn Godwin, the swastika has also been used, due to its astrological background, “as a symbol of the Pole and of motion around it” (Godwin 1996, 146).

– in the year of *Thyra's* publication alone as many as 400,000, many of them from eastern and southern Europe. But far from all were Europeans; from the latter part of the old century, there had also been a large Asian immigration, which resulted in a general scare among White Anglo-Saxon Protestants of what is often called the “Yellow Peril”. One result of this scare was the Chinese Exclusion Act from as early as 1882. Furthermore, Samuel Gompers, the President of the American Federation of Labor from 1886 until 1924, whose political orientation would harmonise with the novel’s social-democratic message, argued rather sweepingly that “[t]he superior whites had to exclude the inferior Asiatics by law, or, if necessary, by force of arms” (quoted in Rovner 2008, 49).

Clearly Gompers as well as Bennet saw the “Yellow Peril” from an American West Coast perspective; after all, the Asian immigration came across the Pacific from the west. But once again there are European origins. The so-called father of scientific racism and the author of the influential work *The Inequality of Human Races* (1853–55), the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau, had towards the end of his life been “consumed with the idea that Chinese armies [...] would overrun Europe and destroy white civilization” (Blue 1999, 114). He also “legitimized white opposition to Chinese immigration to California, Hawai’i and the British dominions” (*ibid.*, 117), and being a close friend of Richard Wagner, his ideas were thoroughly familiar to the composer’s son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain.

In the 1890s, Kaiser Wilhelm himself, the inveterate traveller to the Norwegian fjords, was keenly concerned about the “Yellow Peril”, actually to the extent that the English phrase appears to be a translation of the Kaiser’s coinage ‘*die gelbe Gefahr*’ rather than the other way round (*ibid.*, 121). Thus it seems that Bennet is writing against the background of a widely held fear of a yellow invasion, against which a kind of ultimate northernness, or more precisely the utopian image of a pure, Aryan civilisation at the North Pole, might herald a ray of hope. For Bennet as for Gompers, it seems, there was no contradiction between this fear and the brutal attempt to deal with it, on the one hand, and what he celebrates as social democracy, on the other.

With regard to gender roles, too, *Thyra's* mixture of Viking and modern elements deserves some attention. The novel contains three clearly defined female characters – Thyra, Jofrid and Bera. Of these Thyra appears, throughout most of the book, as the stereotyped example of the Victorian, romantic, blushing maiden – “beautiful as a Norse goddess” (32) – who leaves everything in the safe hands of the male heroes. Still, in her first encounter with the travellers, she is a huntress, a “Polar Valkyrie” (36), who in the act of doing a man’s work is wounded by a bear. She combines, therefore, a highly conventional female role with that of the strong women of the sagas.

In contrast to Thyra, her close friend Jofrid is a “small, gipsy-looking girl” (93). She has been the hostage of the Thorlings and has been chosen, against her will, to be the Orm Vala (the priestess of the Orm). She is under an evil spell and looks frail and ill, until the curse is lifted with the final destruction of the Orm. Jofrid, then, provides the opportunity for the balloon farers to visit the Thorling realm and ultimately to remove their religious power base. She also combines the stereotyped perceptions of the period of both race and gender. Like an Eve character, she has, because of the weakness of her sex and because of her ambiguous ethnic background, brought evil into the innocent Eden of the Runefolk.

The Jofrid character is heavily indebted to the sagas, which abound with powerful and unpredictable female characters, such as Hallgerd in *Njal's Saga*. Some of these characters are also associated with the black arts. It is often Sami women who have this function, and Jofrid's physical features closely resemble the stereotyped image of the Sami from the travel literature and fiction of the period. Here Bennet may for instance have been inspired by Rider Haggard's *Eric Brighteyes*, where the important Swanhild character, though psychologically more volatile than Jofrid, is created along similar lines, being the daughter of a Finnish witch.<sup>38</sup>

Queen Bera, on the other hand, represents a very different ideal, namely the physical prowess associated with the Nordic peoples. She becomes Thord's mate and equal: a giantess who is correspondingly masculine and violent. It is only towards the end, when Thord's feet have been crushed and he needs a woman's hand, that she acquires some qualities of the caring, self-sacrificing Victorian woman.

Thyra, Jofrid and Bera thus represent three rather different woman characters, two of whom to some extent challenge the conventional role of the female at the time. In sum, this creates an altogether more complex picture of women, and it seems evident that this development is not just connected with Ibsen's dramas, the New Woman and a general trend towards women's emancipation; it also appears to be connected with the period's fascination with the sagas and Norse culture in general. Somewhat paradoxically, in other words, ancient and apparently outdated ideas contributed to a forward shift in modern gender roles.

As is indicated by the novel's subtitle – *A Romance of the Polar Pit* – Bennet, like Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, operates with a hierarchical, almost Dantean, universe. Probably, the novel is also indebted to Symmes's hollow-earth theory (ref. ch. 5), which means that this universe may implicitly be converted to a verticality of north and south: Updal lies “two miles below sea-level” (58), and there is a progressively downward movement to the territory of the *dwerger*, with the Hela Pool and the monster Nidhug at the very bottom. Then, as indicated, there is a

<sup>38</sup> The name is probably taken from the *Völsunga Saga*.

corresponding racial hierarchy. As a result, Bennet's choice of setting in combination with the North European ethnic origin of the Runefolk, describes a powerful scale of cultural as well as racial values: the North is consistently associated with superiority, and South with inferiority.

As an American text about an American expedition that without a trace of hesitation takes its own cultural superiority for granted, Bennet's novel foreshadows the country's leading position in the new century, while at the same time leaning heavily on the European, northern culture that once so dominated the old. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in other words, the northern world, represented by formidable powers on both sides of the Atlantic, might be said collectively to stand at the peak of its power and self-confidence. But it was not to last. Two world wars in quick succession would transform the cultural and political chessboard, and in ways that no one could have predicted before the summer of 1914, the celebration of the North as an ideological instrument would suffer blows from which it would never recover.





## Postscript

It may be argued that the present study ends at an arbitrary point in time, and there is some truth in such an allegation. In the early stages of this project, the ambition was to take the presentation up to the present time. However, as new perspectives kept intruding and requiring space, it soon became clear that the period after the First World War would be far too demanding to include within the framework of a wide-ranging historical account. Also, with the increasing degree of academic and scientific specialisation over the last century, it seems that a separate study in a multi-author format would be more appropriate as a means of charting the complex development of the North, and perhaps especially the Arctic, during this period. Thus the end of the present study coincides with the end of the period of active polar discovery, which had lasted for nearly half a millennium. But it also ends at a time when the view and use of the North as an instrument of a cultural and political ideology were on the point of being radically transformed.

On the one hand, this transformation, from around 1920, ensured an unparalleled attention around the cultural heritage of the North; on the other hand, it led, after 1945, to an almost complete silence throughout the cultural sphere under discussion in this book. Growing up in the 1960s and 70s, the author himself belongs to a generation that received an extremely sparse introduction to this part of the history of the North. Interestingly, the same seemed to apply, at least in the Scandinavian context, to the heroic period of ardent nationalism and polar exploration at the turn of the nineteenth century; it was as if this, too, had been contaminated by the ultra-right's appropriation of northern history in virtually all its aspects. This now appears to be changing, and this book is an attempt to grasp, from a rather broad perspective, the component parts of what might very tentatively be called a northern identity. For that purpose, a wide range of literature has been a constant guide and inspiration.

Traditionally, polar history has been written as an isolated historiographical subgenre, with few perspectives beyond the regions themselves. The production of works within this genre has been considerable and persistent over a long period of time – literally centuries, responding to an equally persistent popular interest. The present study has made use

of close to thirty such accounts, most of them relatively recent, and there are many more. Another and related polar topic, whose history has also formed a small and rather isolated part of general historiography, is that of whaling and sealing. Together these two historical subgenres have provided much of the factual information used to outline the close relationship of the northern nations with the Far North. These works, together with a range of academic articles on more particular aspects of the polar world, have been indispensable to the present project.

In addition, in a work with a chronological progression, an important ambition has been to use a wide register of primary sources from the periods in question. With regard to the Arctic and the Antarctic these have naturally included contemporary reports from the numerous expeditions, frequently written by the expedition leaders themselves, but also fiction, poetry, art and music which in various ways responded to the public interest in this particular topic.

When it comes to the wider political and cultural significance of these regions, on the other hand, the supply of literature has traditionally been relatively limited. But this appears to have changed from roughly the 1980s onwards. During that decade, two books in English appeared which both deserve the label of modern classics, i.e. Lopez (1986) and Pyne (1987). Incidentally, the former work deals with the Arctic and the latter with the Antarctic, and in that respect they both have at least one foot in the tradition mentioned above. But they also widen the scope considerably; they do not simply recapitulate the concrete achievements of the numerous expeditions, but provide profound insights into the popular fascination with these remote regions, not least by being high-quality literary texts in their own right.

In the 1990s, several studies of this kind appeared that discuss individual countries and their relationship with the frozen regions: Atwood (1995) and Francis (1997) on Canada, Spufford (1996) on Britain, and McCannon (1998) on Russia, the latter providing an intriguing account of Stalin's massive arctic offensive, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this book. In addition, Godwin (1996) is a fascinating study of polar myth and Nazi ideology. Then in the first decade of the new millennium, more than a dozen books confirmed the growing trend: Murphy (2002) and Robinson (2006) are excellent studies of the German and the American fascination, respectively, with the polar world; Grace (2002) follows up Atwood's and Francis's Canadian studies from the previous decade with an impressively wide-ranging work; David (2000), in the same vein as Spufford, discusses Britain and the Arctic in the nineteenth century, and Davidson (2005) similarly discusses the role of the North in art, music and literature, especially in the twentieth century. Kavenna (2006) introduces a new genre that combines history and an almost journalistic personal travelogue. The same applies to Wheeler (2009), whereas Moss (2006)

and Hill (2008) are primarily studies of various aspects of polar literature. Wilson (2003) provides an original investigation into the theme of ice as reflected in the Romantic imagination.

As mentioned above, however, the focus on the polar regions is only part of a broader focus on the North in general, because the process of discovery was not only confined to the uncharted waters and territories around the poles. The cultural history of the North, folk culture, and the changing view of nature represent similar areas of discovery, or rediscovery, for which a large number of works have been useful. In light of the project's ambition of collecting such a range of perspectives under a single heading, it is no coincidence that it has found a home as a publication in the series *Studia Imagologica*. Although imagology may frequently have been associated with a study of national characteristics and stereotypes, its fundamental focus has always been on a broad range of comparative studies of cultural exchanges and encounters, frequently on the basis of literary texts, fictional as well as non-fictional. Thus, the founding father of the modern, post-War brand of imagology, Hugo Dyserinck, contributed to a supranational or multinational approach to this study of texts, a tradition continued and developed by Joep Leerssen, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz and others. Imagology, in short, provides a generous academic platform, which, in the present author's opinion, opens up the often restrictedly materialistic focus of traditional historiography and utilises the whole canvas of the past, thus creating a space for new and different perspectives. Also, it constantly turns its attention to traditions and perceptions of national or regional identities as constructs that need to be analysed and understood as products of a historical totality. In this way, furthermore, it takes on board elements from cultural studies, by expanding the cultural field in which it operates, and from studies of multiculturalism.

The present book is not the first attempt to subject the concept of the North and its historical development to closer scrutiny. In the *Studia Imagologica* series itself, a number of scholars have either implicitly or explicitly approached the topic from a number of different angles: Fjågesund and Symes (2003), Beller and Leerssen eds. (2007), Jakobsson ed. (2009) and Zacharasiewicz (2010). In addition, a wide range of other studies, explicitly or implicitly concerned with the North, have been indispensable. Herman (2006), Hunter (1999) and MacLeod (1997) provide fascinating introductions to the Scottish Enlightenment and the Highland culture; Wawn (2000) is a tour de force on Britain and nineteenth-century Vikingism; O'Donoghue (2007) is also concerned with the use of Norse myth in the twentieth century, whereas three early but still highly readable studies – Castrén (1910), Blanck (1911) and Seaton (1935) – offer valuable information on the intellectual and literary exchanges between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe primarily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Stenroth (2002 and 2005) maps the

roots of Swedish nationalism, whereas the many useful contributions in Arndt et al., eds. (2004) offer a multi-national approach to the view of "Norden". A similarly wide-ranging approach is reflected in Henningsen et al. eds. (1997) and Klitgaard Povlsen ed. (2007). In this context, mention should also be made of Stadius (2001 and 2005). Germany and the cultural politics of the North are covered by such well-known studies as Mosse (1989), Griffin (1994), Godwin (1996), McGowan (2002) and Goodrick-Clarke (2004) etc., and Boele (1996) covers the perceptions of the North in Russian Romantic literature. Furthermore, several studies have been used which deal with individual figures or phenomena, such as the Ossian poems and Celticism (Gaskill ed. 2004, Allen and Allen 1999, Arndt et al., eds. 2004, Carruthers and Rawes eds. 2010); Olof Rudbeck (Eriksson 2002, King 2005); Rousseau (Damrosch 2007, Cameron 1973 etc.); Madame de Staël (Berger 1964, Fairweather 2006, Isbell 1994, Tønneson 2007, Whitford 1918); Richard Wagner (Arvidsson 2010, Björnsson 2003, Donington 1974, Ennis 1993, Millington 2001 and 2012); William Morris (Coote 1996, Ennis 1993, Faulkner and Preston eds. 1999, MacCarthy 2010); and Jack London (Kershaw 1998), to mention just a few.

The book's aim has thus been to combine broad and survey-like perspectives on the periods and their developments, with more concentrated studies of central figures who in various ways embody important transitions in the perception of the North. Clearly, it has been impossible to cover all parts of this enormous canvas with the same degree of accuracy and detail. Indeed, there are bound to be numerous areas which have been discussed too fleetingly, or not at all, and important sources of information that have been ignored. At the bottom of all academic research, however, lies the confident hope that future scholars will find it worthwhile to inquire further into the many unanswered questions.

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