Icelandic Utopia in Victorian Travel Literature

Icelandic Utopia in Victorian Travel Literature

By

Dimitrios Kassis

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Icelandic Utopia in Victorian Travel Literature

By Dimitrios Kassis

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9087-1
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9087-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before embarking on my analysis, I seize this opportunity to dedicate this book to my family, given that they have assisted me all along. I wish to emphasise their incontestable contribution to the completion of my work. Without their financial and emotional support, I would never have the chance to publish the present book.

I would also like to thank my supervisors Associate Professor Efterpi Mitsi, Assistant Professor Vassiliki Markidou and Professor William Schultz from the Department of English Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens for their accurate observations on my text.

INTRODUCTION

This book focuses on Iceland as a nineteenth-century utopian locus in the light of racial theories attached to the Icelandic framework. In particular, it investigates the ways in which five nineteenth-century travellers defined their national identities and genders in relation to Iceland during the Victorian period, in which European nationalism surged. Similar issues have been treated in my previous book, *Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature*, but in a broader manner as they were not limited to one Nordic country. It is therefore worth noting that this work should be regarded as a continuation of the previous one

Other works which have contributed to my further understanding of the utopian view of Iceland are Hildor A. Barton's *Northern Arcadia: Foreign Travelers in Scandinavia, 1765–1815*, Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes's *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the 19th Century*, and Andrew Wawn's *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Given that my research is primarily concerned with the representations of Iceland as a utopian locus, I use Fjågesund and Symes's definition of the term "Northern Utopia," which describes the set of values and stereotypes overwhelmingly attached to the North throughout the nineteenth century, and consider the gradual contemplation of this peripheral word as the cradle of the Germanic nations. My work also relates to Andrew Wawn's analysis of the major racial and literary movements in Victorian Britain that also pertained to Iceland. When necessary, I seek to emphasise the travel writers' socio-cultural backgrounds in connection with the historical context within which they penned their travel narratives. Moreover, I have attempted to underscore the reconstruction of Iceland in accordance with the racial theoretical frameworks, such as Teutonism and Anglo-Saxonism, that underlay the nation-building agenda of Britain, without overlooking the parallel political developments in Iceland itself.

Given that some of the travel writers (Disney Leith, Ethel Brilliana Tweedie) are female, it would be equally interesting to investigate the extent to which gender influences their perception of Iceland and the way

in which they choose to portray its inhabitants, occasionally imbued with the imperialist ideals of colonial Britain.

Furthermore, since most writers endeavour to depict Icelandic identity, it is inevitable that they do so in conjunction with their own definition of Britishness. After the Act of Union in 1707, it became an imperative to incorporate the Celtic populations of the British Isles into the imperial agenda of the British Empire. Even though the national discourse of the British "tribes" was quickly interwoven with this necessity, many English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish were reluctant to integrate into the new reality, and, as pointed out by Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright:

> The kind of nation-building that was practised in many other countries, aimed at rooting out older allegiances and identities, and constructing a single national identity, did not succeed and was only partially attempted in the United Kingdom. (1)

In spite of the nineteenth-century political discourse, based on which there was an increasing tendency to use the umbrella term "British" to define the new national identity, the dominant English group felt that the new term questioned their rule over the Celtic peripheries, whereas the adoption of the same term was seen by the Irish and Scots as a means to accept the English attempt to culturally annihilate them. Hence the racial rivalry that reached its apex at that time, as highlighted by Robert Colls:

> Beneath the great British arch, it was national feelings, not British ones, which provided the heart and soul of identity. Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and English identities were left alone so long as they were not thought threatening. At first they attracted the older British antiquarianism, but in the eighteenth century they attracted a distinctively *Celtic* antiquarianism which, in the nineteenth century, would be pressed to serve the nationalist cause. (43)

This Anglo-Celtic rivalry triggered an ardent debate on the racial origins of the British inhabitants, which resulted in the prevalence of the Anglo-Saxon paradigm up to the close of the nineteenth century. If one wishes to reflect upon the racial history of Britain, it can be observed that British discourse was influenced by several theories that shared an identical pro-Nordic basis.

While Teutonism (otherwise called Gobinism) was Joseph Arthure de Gobineau's effort to unite all Northern nations under the generic term "Teuton," ascribing to Germany a leading position, Britons immediately

embraced Anglo-Saxonism, which was more convenient to their complex national identity and could adapt neatly to their imperial plan. According to Paul A. Kramer:

> While used as a shorthand for racial purity, Anglo-Saxonism featured a contained hybridity. No other late-nineteenth-century racism wore so prominent a hyphen. Anglo-Saxonism represented the alloy of superior but distinct racial elements. While sharply delimited, that hybridity and the theoretical possibility of future assimilations lent porousness to Anglo-Saxonism's boundaries in race, culture, and destiny. (132)

Notwithstanding the firmly held nineteenth-century belief in the degenerate aspect of mongrel nations, the Britons opted for a theory which was perfectly compatible with their self-portrayal as descendants of the ancient Vikings. At the same time, they sought to bridge the gap with the ethnic groups that could not fit with the new racial model they propagated, such as the Irish and the Scots. In order to corroborate their hypothesis, they revoked their old cultural ties with Iceland and the other Nordic nations in an effort to safeguard their status as a nation of pure Saxon stock. To this end, they often resorted to the Herderian concept of the *Volksgeist* in order to illuminate the linguistic and literary connection with the North. As regards the notion of the *Volksgeist*, Johann Gottfried von Herder's attempt to connect the language and folk culture of a nation with its nation-building process impacted decisively on British consciousness. As Bernd Henningsen suggests:

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

This could successfully apply to the case of Iceland, whose ideal position as an island, in addition to its distance from continental Europe, had helped the country preserve its Viking culture and simultaneously enabled it to develop its own literary production—the sagas. The unspoiled aspect of the country and its natural attractions rendered it the hotbed for the resurgence of British nationalism in connection to the Old Norse world.

As a direct response to these racial theories, which were often permeated by an anti-Celtic spirit, the Celtic groups of the British Isles sought to forge their distinct identity through their parallel attempts to

revive their language and literature. Manifested as early as 1760, Ossianism might be regarded as one of the first attempts of the Scottish population to declare its cultural independence from their dominant English "neighbours." Later on, as Joe Clery maintains, Ireland occupied a prevalent position in the pro-Celtic discourse through the Young Ireland Movement, which flourished in the mid-nineteenth century along with the Irish Literary Revival (otherwise termed the "Celtic Revival"), and which might be deemed:

> the constitutive moment in the development of a modern Irish post- or anti-colonial culture. As a broad cultural movement, the Revival owed much to earlier nineteenth-century cultural developments such as antiquarian and folkloric studies, the cultural nationalism of Young Ireland, and German and Irish philological studies of Celtic languages and civilization. (257)

Unlike the complexity with which the forging of Britishness was often faced, Icelandic society appeared to the British traveller much simpler with its class-free, rural population and limited communication with continental Europe, which, after the Napoleonic Wars, had undergone a significant degree of fragmentation. Due to the contemplation of Iceland as a Nordic Hellas, whose saga literature nurtures the Victorian antiquarian effort to construct Britishness through its connection to the medieval literary tradition of the island, it is inevitable that I will bestow significant attention on the island as both a cultural and political entity.

Sir John Barrow's text *A Visit to Iceland by Way of Tronyem in the "Flower of Yarrow"* signals the transition from the dystopian image of the island as the epitome of the barbarian North to its utopian conception as a storehouse of European history, conveying the spirit of the Arctic explorations organised in that period. Ethel Brilliana Tweedie's *A Girl's Ride in Iceland* provides the reader with a more racial approach to the island, affected by the Darwinian theories on human evolution. Moreover, Anthony Trollope's travel narrative *How the "Mastiffs" Went to Iceland* illustrates the conflict between the roles of the traveller and the tourist in Iceland, the former denoting a more sophisticated approach to the travel destination and the latter a materialistic appropriation of the country visited.

Frederick Metcalfe's travel narrative, *The Oxonian in Iceland; or Notes of Travel in that Island in the Summer of 1869 with Glances at Icelandic Folklore and Sagas*, explores Icelandic identity in conjunction with the notions of the *Volksgeist* and the Old Norse literature. As the title of the

travelogue suggests, Metcalfe embarks on a journey to the country in order to foreground the country's function as an Anglo-Saxon utopia. Produced at the close of the nineteenth century, Disney Leith's travelogue *Iceland: Peeps at Many Lands* is written to inform young British children about the importance of the small island to British culture and introduce them to basic tenets of Anglo-Saxonism.

CHAPTER ONE

SIR JOHN BARROW JR: *A VISIT TO ICELAND BY WAY OF TRONYEM IN THE "FLOWER OF YARROW"*

Lieutenant John Barrow (1808–98) was the son of Sir John Barrow,[1] the illustrious British statesman who was renowned for his significant contributions to eighteenth-century travel literature through his expeditions with Captain Cook in several countries around the globe. He became Head of The Admiralty Record Office in 1844 and was a founder member of the Hakluyt Society, which dealt with exploratory expeditions. Having acquired from his father an interest in the Arctic regions,[2] he set up an Arctic council to search for the missing explorer John Franklin.[3] His increasing fascination with the North led him to write two travel narratives based on two journeys he realised in Iceland and Norway. One of these, *A Visit to Iceland by Way of Tronyem in the "Flower of Yarrow,"* written in 1834, could be deemed an indicative example of early Victorian travel literature, providing the reader with a concrete image of the island and its inhabitants.

In his travelogue, Barrow touches upon crucial issues which were closely related to the Icelandic culture. What is particularly interesting is his effort to present Norway and Iceland as one by relying on their common Viking past, a tendency which is reminiscent of the Northern Unity propagated by both Scandinavian and British scholars in their efforts to bring together all Scandinavian nations against the possible threat of a German appropriation of the North. His travel experiences allow him to gaze at the Scandinavian countries from a highly comparative perspective,

---

[1] Sir John Barrow (1764–1848), First Baronet.

[2] His father was the principal founder of the Royal Geographical Society in 1830, and one of his famous travelogues was *Voyages of Discovery and Research in the Arctic Regions* (1846).

[3] John Franklin (1786–1847) perished while on an exploratory voyage to King William Island in Canada.

addressing the literary tradition of the Scandinavian world as well as various aspects (landscapes, people) which synthesise the profile of each country in the eyes of the British reader. One of the unique characteristics of this travel writer is his particular familiarisation with the world of exploration, having been prematurely exposed to the eighteenth-century travel expeditions of his father to distant lands, such as China and South Africa. This background significantly contributed to the amalgamation of his perceptions in relation to the two unknown countries, to the average British audience, on the basis of historic and geographical information enhancing the validity of his narration.

However, in order to discuss the qualities of this travelogue, it is more than essential to refer to the actual socio-historical backgrounds of Iceland and Norway at the time of Barrow's account. In spite of their common Viking lineage, Iceland and Norway were shaped differently through the course of time, a fact which is also obvious in the writer's description of each country. The connotations with which these countries were associated in the early nineteenth century were also distinctive, owing to the Icelandic marginality from the main political developments in the European map and Norway's incorporation into different unions which undermined the country's national identity.

With respect to the political status of Norway amongst the Scandinavian countries, the history of the land had been marked by a series of unions which resulted in the country's subjection to the Danish or Swedish yoke. Being under the Danish rule for several centuries (since 1380), in a union called the Twin Kingdoms, Norway had been reduced to a Danish province at a political level. Since its first annexation to Denmark, the Norwegian kingdom was, in the eyes of the foreigners, "a part of Denmark and what mattered more, in Danish eyes it was the same as any of the other provinces" (Derry 89). During the long-lasting period of the Twin Kingdoms, in which Norway assumed a secondary position, the Danish language was the lingua franca of the Scandinavian world and the Norwegian variants could not achieve official recognition.

A looser unity was imposed on Norway in 1814 by the Treaty of Kiel, through its annexation to the Swedish kingdom despite the heavy protests of the Norwegian population, who claimed full independence. The traumatic outcome of this treaty shattered the hopes of the Norwegians for full sovereignty. Yet, the new change in the country's status inaugurated a new era of patriotism, which accelerated Norway's complete separation from the Swedish-Norwegian union and the dissolution of the latter

political construct (Skougaard 33). Barrow's short residence in Norway occurred during a period which was overshadowed by Norway's dynastic union with Sweden. Despite the writer's passing reference to the country's struggle for independence, Norway experienced the strongest nationalist period of its history from 1815–60. Burning issues such as the country's economic autonomy from Sweden and the gradual eradication of Danish cultural remnants in Norwegian culture (Derry 233) came to the fore in a more imperative manner. The country's nationalist movement, which led to the rediscovery of the Old Norse literature and contributed to the linguistic "purification" of Norwegian culture from Danish elements, could have had an impact on Barrow's viewing the North as a hotbed of nationalist activity and cultural revolutions.

Concerning the historical background of Iceland during the period that Barrow visited the island, it might be argued that its geographical location hindered the country's self-reliance and largely determined its fate on the political scene. In parallel with the Norwegian nationalist movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Iceland commenced its own ideological battle against its complete dependence on the Danish kingdom. According to Derry, "the Icelanders, too, experienced a fresh national stimulus" (232). Nevertheless, unlike Norwegians, who tried to have their national identity recognised through constitutional policies, the Icelandic people attempted to defy the Danish dynasty through the island's rich literary heritage, that is, the skaldic[4] and Eddic[5] poetry which flourished in the medieval period. The virtues of the Icelandic literary tradition were promoted by Jón Sigurðsson (1811–79), a native scholar and expert on Icelandic sagas, who undertook the role of Iceland's spiritual leader in the country's patriotic struggle (Sveinsson 23). As a matter of fact, Barrow's voyage to Iceland coincided with the beginning of the heated debate about the island's independence from Denmark, which came true over a century later in 1944. Apart from the undoubtable impact of the saga tradition on Icelandic cultural awareness, the language issue also affected the country's gradual separation from Denmark given the differentiation of the Nordic languages from the ancient Norse language, which remained uncontaminated from external influences.

[4] Oral poetry of the Middle Ages paying homage to a particular noble or heroic personality.

[5] Epic poetry sung or chanted dealing with Viking myths of less complex character than the skalds.

The selection of the two countries by John Barrow as essential components of his travelogue is all but coincidental. Iceland's cultural ties with Norway attribute a certain degree of universality to Viking culture. At the same time, being a terra incognita to the early Victorian reader, Iceland could only be projected by the writer through his direct reference to Norway as a country with which the British reader was more familiar on a cultural level. The introductory part of Barrow's travelogue summarises his fundamental approach to the Nordic countries and what they stand for in the eyes of a British traveller:

> When at Tronyem[6] last year I felt a strong desire of visiting Iceland, not however at that time, but on some future occasion. I wished for an opportunity of comparing the character and condition of the natives of that island with their kindred and ancient stock—the Norwegians; and I wished also to contemplate the extraordinary physical phenomena resulting from subterranean fire which have been, and still are, in operation, on the surface of this large island, from a period of time to which neither the memory nor the records of man extend (5).

In this introductory passage, Barrow explicitly states his purpose for the creation of his travelogue. Having already visited Norway, he wishes to set out on a new journey to Iceland, a distant land whose present is interwoven with its glorious Viking past. On the other hand, the experience of numberless natural phenomena such as the geysers, which are only observed upon the volcanic Icelandic soil, adds to the overall suspense with which the writer wishes to embellish his story. In doing so, this early Victorian writer tends to embrace the vision of early nineteenth century travellers towards the place visited. If utilitarian purposes characterised the need of eighteenth century travel literature, "travel for its sake" and an increasing fascination with the unknown became the main trends at the close of the eighteenth century, an attitude which is closely related to the prevalence of Romanticism in the spirit of European intellectuals.

In the case of Iceland, Barrow is well aware of the attraction that this island may exercise on the Briton, considering the common Germanic past of England with the Nordic countries and the development of Gothicism or Teutonism which began to dominate British literature at the dawn of the nineteenth century (Barton 3). If Norwegian fiords satisfied the Briton's necessity to be exposed to scenes of unspoiled beauty and grandeur, Iceland epitomised the Romantic concept of human communion with

[6] Trondheim.

nature, given the remoteness of its landscapes and the constantly changing properties of its soil.

As argued by Fjågesund and Symes (16), there is a common tendency amongst British travel writers to present their voyage to a distant land as part of a heroic mission and their own role as of "superhuman stature." What is more, they often depict themselves as redeemers of the exotic country, the reputation of which they are assigned to restore in the eyes of the English readers. In the travel narrative in question, Barrow does not seem to adopt this attitude towards the Scandinavian countries. Moreover, he seeks to familiarise the British audience with quotations derived from *Henry V*, a typical English play, in which a passing reference to Iceland is made:

> Of the numerous works that have been published on Iceland, of which the catalogue contained in the English translation of Dr. Yon Troil's letters amount to one hundred and twenty, few are known to the English reader; the greater number being in the Danish, Swedish, German, or Icelandic languages—some few in Latin. To our immortal Bard, however, who appears to have known everything, though we know little or nothing of what concerns him personally, Iceland was not wholly a terra incognita … "Pish for thee, Iceland dog! Thou prick-eared cur of Iceland!" Shakespeare never missed the proper epithet.[7] (6)

Drawing upon the Shakespearean tradition, Barrow not only alludes to England's cultural connection to Iceland due to their common Germanic heritage, but also seeks to demonstrate that Iceland may be a relatively unknown country to England in practical terms but not in literary terms, since the most-celebrated English writer has the three low-class characters of his play (Nym, Pistol, and Bardolph) mention the name of so distant an island, a fact which connects Shakespearean tradition to that of the skaldic production, also produced for the Old Norse courts around Scandinavia. That the British audience was originally familiar with the world of the sagas is highlighted by the writer all along, making extensive references to the skaldic poetry of the Icelanders throughout his travelogue. The emphasis on the connection between Shakespearean works and the saga tradition is also drawn by the writer for another reason—Shakespearean texts played a crucial role in the formation of British cultural identity. As claimed by John J. Joughin in *Shakespeare and National Culture*, Shakespeare was appropriated by British philosophers as a colonial icon, since "in thinking Shakespearian texts, the embodiment of a sovereign

[7] *Henry V* (Act II, Scene I).

culture" (330) emerged during the early stages of British nationalism. Therefore, the Icelandic National Romanticism, during which the Eddic literary tradition was brought to the foreground, is linked by the author to Britain's own efforts to achieve a national identity through the use of classical texts such as Shakespeare's. Barrow's strong belief in the nation-building project of the Icelanders through the use of literature can be explained by the nationalist context of his era, when nations started to claim their distinct identities on the basis of epics of the Middle Ages. This is why he alludes to the Elizabethan tradition, because, as Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin put it, the Elizabethan theatre came to be synonymous with British self-identification and consequently "flowered in an era of national awakening" (112) like the early nineteenth century. Barrow seems to envision a similar national resurgence for Iceland, based on the country's national literature. His idea reminds us of Herder's similar emphasis on epic literature as a fundamental component of a country's national identity.

With reference to the depiction of the Icelanders by the writer, it is worth noting that before attempting to formulate his own ideas in relation to the indigenous people, Barrow gives an account of the serious misconceptions to which several Western travellers had been led during their short sojourn on the island. In particular, he lays stress on the exaggerations with which these travelogues are beset by satirising these writers' attempts to add an element of mystery to their travel experiences. The first example given by Barrow is the travelogue *Voyage des pays septentrionaux* written by Pierre Martin de la Martinière, a French doctor, in 1671:

> He then gives some account of the natives—that is of the fishermen—some of whom, he says, live in caverns in the rocks, others in huts, some built with fish-bones, some with wood covered with turf. They and their beasts lie under the same roof; they are all ugly, both men and women they lie upon hay or straw in their clothes with skins upon them, and make but one bed for the whole family. All their work is fishing; they are nasty, rude, and brutal: they are almost all of them wizards and witches; they worship the devil by the name of Kobald; they worship an idol cut out of a piece of wood with a knife, very hideous to look on, which they adore privately, and hide for fear of the Lutheran priests. (8)

Through his reference to another travelogue, written by de la Martinière, who is "coincidentally" a French writer, Barrow wishes to juxtapose the validity of his own journey in Iceland with previous writings on the same topic which lacked a great deal of credibility. Being an early Victorian

writer, Barrow acknowledges the erroneous conceptions of the Scandinavian world by eighteenth-century travellers, who appeared to be more concerned with the impact of their exaggerated descriptions on their readers than the serious misrepresentation of specific peoples who were unknown to the writers' countrymen. In that way, Barrow challenges several travel narratives which were produced at the close of the eighteenth century. These travelogues were characterised by imprecision in many respects given their highly fictionalised character, such as Martinière's account of his journey to Iceland, which stands for the stereotyped manner in which the Western reader tended to contemplate distant lands. The largely dystopian depiction of the island, coinciding with the equally negative image of the North in the eighteenth century, is here challenged by Barrow, whose discourse expresses the clash between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views of the North. Barrow's attempt to ridicule the French writer's extensive focus on the supernatural and repulsive characteristics of the island overlaps with the abandonment of these clichés in the nineteenth-century travel literature on Scandinavia. The conflict seen in Martinière's and Barrow's texts on the North stems precisely from the gradual change in the projection of unknown areas following the advent of technological evolution. Since the majority of European regions had become highly accessible to the nineteenth-century traveller, the fashion of blending the fictional with the real faded out. Therefore, if the North for the eighteenth-century traveller "epitomised wilderness and distance and provided space for the image of fabulous and mythical places and people" (Kleimann-Geisinger 83), the nineteenth-century traveller was infatuated with the folk culture and national literature of the travel destination, influenced by the Herderian principles. What is more, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz claims that eighteenth-century travellers set the focus on the infernal aspect of Arctic regions such as Iceland, associating them "with demons, devils, and a threat to God's people" (32). The exaggerated narrations of Martinière's travel account are used by Barrow to project his own travelogue as a reliable text, the reliability of which derives from his accent on concrete events instead of fictitious images of witchcraft that enhance the picturing of the island as an earthly hell. To put it briefly, Barrow wishes to make it explicit to the reader that the originality of his travelogue resides in his rejection of the eighteenth-century canon.

As Fjågesund and Symes have affirmed, a great deal of travel narratives written in the eighteenth century fail to draw the distinction between the factual and the fictional, thus leading to the reproduction of preconceptions that are partly or totally unfounded, considering the actual

developments in the country which are described (30). Clearly, the depiction of the indigenous people as evil, monstrous, and violent corresponds with the need of the eighteenth-century reader to confirm their stereotypes concerning the distant Other and be emotionally involved in the suspense created by the fictional world of the writer. It also coincides with the use of the grotesque in the creation of the peripheral/utopian world. As suggested by Nina Chordas, in the early stages of travel writing utopia is extensively defined as a grotesque world, since "that which exists on the margins of the known world … need not be unduly worried about or even integrated into existing paradigms, precisely because of its ex-centric position" (40). In this case, the "ex-centric" overlaps with the peripheral world, and the centre is the Western civilisation, that is, the writer's place of origin; for Martinière the centre is France, whereas in the eyes of Barrow it his home country. Yet Barrow wishes to provide the reader with a travel account governed by objectivity, hence the reference to the erroneous depiction of the island by the French traveller.

Barrow moves on to comment on the Romantic depictions of Iceland by Johann Anderson, the Mayor of Hamburg,[8] a scholar who never visited the country, and therefore the validity of his writing was deemed highly dubious.

> The next writer that the English reader knows anything about is one Anderson, a burgomaster of Hamburg, who, however, was at no time on the spot, but gives such stories he could pick up from masters of ships, and supercargoes trading to Iceland. Horrebow, who succeeded him, truly says that the old burgomaster's book is filled with romantic tales, and false and severe accusations. (8)

Once again, the British writer questions the validity of an eighteenth-century German scholar who does not possess any travel experience whatsoever, and who serves as a fine example of eighteenth century travel writing, which is often imbued with instances of fictionalised sentimentality (Hulme and Youngs 75). Based on the previous examples of travel literature (Martinière's and Johann Anderson's), which can easily be doubted due to their poor reliability, Barrow attempts to provide his readers with his own, more reliable definition of the Icelandic people, eliminating to a significant extent the supernatural proportions of the island and its people:

---

[8] Johann Anderson, *Nachrichten von Island Grönland und der Straße Davis, zum wahren Nutzen der Wissenschaften und der Handlung* (1746).

> The condition of the poor Iceland fishermen is, I believe, as miserable, taking into consideration the horrible climate, as that of any human beings on the face of the earth, but they certainly are not quite such savages as the Frenchman has represented them. (8)

Barrow's formulation of the nineteenth-century Icelander does not reproduce the extraordinary images which are found in the other accounts. In accordance with his description, the small nation suffers from extreme poverty and its primitive state results from the extremely harsh conditions constituting an endemic feature of this northernmost European territory. Throughout the travelogue this description is reminiscent of the concept of "noble savage," which is often attributed to the indigenous people of the northern peripheries in order to express their primitive living conditions. In Barrow's eyes, Icelanders symbolise the continuous struggle of the human element against the wild forces of nature which pose an immediate threat to its existence, a view that is both related to the spirit of the Enlightenment and the Age of Romanticism. As put by Martin Åberg: "Enlightenment Ideas of progress posited man and nature in a constant state of conflict" (63), since nature was firmly associated with the fate of mankind both as a whole and at an individual level. From Barrow's perspective, Icelanders are certainly not the repulsive, heathen creatures in eighteenth-century travel narratives like Martinière's. He rather pictures them as modern fighters, who are in constant battle with nature's elements, a fact which also alludes to the notion of the noble savage, and "in reproducing a primordial state of nature Otherness also became a way of representing the lost virtues of modern man as he had once been before the advent of civilisation" (Åberg 55).

After having introduced his readers to the basic misconceptions about Scandinavia, fostered by several travel writers before his time, and not surprisingly of foreign origin (either French or German), Barrow gives a free translation of a Norwegian folk song, which he translated on his journey to Røros, a Norwegian town near Trondheim. It is clear that the writer is more interested in focussing on the Norwegian peasantry's mentality and much less on the actual description of the places he comes across in his journey from Norway to Iceland. This is hardly surprising because both Scandinavian folk culture and peasantry were positively mentioned by British travellers as they wandered in search of the real spirit of Scandinavian peoples—their *Volksgeist*. In addition, the prevalence of the folk element in those countries was perceived by the majority of British travellers as a sign of the revival of the Old Norse poetry, hence Barrow's emphasis on the Norwegian folk song.

Furthermore, the beginning of his travelogue with a folk song seeks to stimulate the interest of Barrow's countrymen for the folk tradition in Norway in order to strengthen the country's Romantic depiction as a land steeped in its ancient mores and manners. As maintained by Barton, there is a certain pre-romantic emphasis on the picturesque depiction of other peoples, which is often seen in the writers' descriptions of a nation's folk tradition as the epitome of its distinctive virtues amongst other countries (81). This point becomes apparent in the symbolic function of the Norwegian peasantry in the following excerpt:

> I had an opportunity of witnessing, as I had already frequently done, both in this and my former excursions, the decent and well-behaved manner in which the children of the peasants are brought up. The spot was a miserable cottage, situated by the roadside, without a human habitation for many miles near it; yet on entering the hovel, I found three little children … the mother on her return, having heard from them what I had given them, was equally ready with her children to express her thanks by the usual mode of offering her hand. (36)

Given the above incident, the portrayal of Norwegian peasantry complies with the average depiction of Nordic populations by nineteenth-century British travellers. This depiction relies on three important criteria which augment the country's Arcadian dimension and render its image more attractive to the civilised world. According to Fjågesund and Symes (168), British observers tend to concentrate on simplicity, honesty, and hospitality as the main virtues of the underdeveloped Northern territories, a fact which is also visible in Barrow's intercourse with the local people of Røros:

> It was pleasing to remark the courteous behaviour of the peasantry, who invariably in passing wished me good-day, and generally removed their caps from their heads, holding them in their hands till they had passed the cariole. (28)

Yet, these criteria, which are praised by the writer as evidence of innocence and alienation from the industrialised world, are not evaluated from the same perspective when the writer seeks refuge in the hut of a Lappish family:

> I had scarcely finished my sketch when the husband came in; whom I immediately set down in my own mind, as a far less agreeable looking person than his wife. I offered to take his portrait, as an accompaniment to that of his mate, but he seemed rather unwilling to allow me to do so: however after assuring him that I only wished to have it to show to my

> friends, at a distance, how the Laplanders wore their clothes, and by coaxing him with a few skillings, he at length stepped out, with all the dignity he could master, into the centre of the room. It was as much as I could do to refrain from smiling at the ludicrous and self-important manner in which he took up his position, and the awkward attitude into which he threw himself, for the purpose of having his graceful figure transferred to paper. (42)

If Barrow appears to sympathise with the poverty of the Norwegian peasantry, he does not seem to be so sympathetic throughout his interaction with the Sami (also known Laplanders or Laps in the English-speaking world). His attitude towards the members of the Sami tribe reflects the British conventions in relation to the stock British conceptualisation of the Laps. Barton aptly observes that although British travellers tend to apply the concept of the noble savage to the Norwegian peasantry as a particularly positive attribute, they demonise the Norwegian Sami's nomadic life due to its complete deviation from the Western civilised society, generating a remarkable degree of negativity (119). In Barrow's text, the Sami are depicted as a tribe bereft of human characteristics. It appears that there are certain limitations as regards the criteria that the participants of the New Arcadia must fulfil: their close communion with nature and their manners cannot be totally distant from the British cultural system. The eccentric lifestyle of the Norwegian rural population, deriving straight from their glorious Viking background, constitutes a point of attraction to the average British reader. On the contrary, Pagan cultures like the Sami, with strong animistic features, cannot fall into the same category, and are therefore judged as disagreeable and prone to exclusion.

As Boehmer explains, imperial discourse fosters the stereotypic reproduction of the natives as subaltern populations who need to be subjected to a process of civilisation so that they can be domesticated in alignment with the demands of the Empire (25–6). The process of othering which is implied by Boehmer impacts on every cultural aspect of a civilisation. Owing to the Sami's distinctive lifestyle, which is reminiscent of other nomadic tribes' inferior positions (such as the Gypsies), Barrow broadens the gap between Norwegians and the Sami tribes in Norwegian Lapland. If Norwegians are seen as attractively primitive people, the Sami do not appear to have the same status, and they are judged by the writer in the most negative manner, despite their unquestionable communion with nature, both culturally and spiritually (Lehtolla 2005). The strict Victorian racial definition, which Barrow suggests, strikes the reader as a paradox; although he critiques overstatements made by other travellers in the

beginning of the travel account, in this episode he tends to reproduce a demonization of the North. In that respect, Norway symbolises the familiar Other and Sami the distant Other: "the Caucasian Norwegian, with his Protestant religion, his Teutonic heritage and his apparent aristocracy fared well; not so the Sami, who in appearance, religion and culture was very different" (Fjågesund and Symes 196). What differentiates Barrow's travelogues from those of earlier decades is his application of racial criteria to the portrayal of the Scandinavian peoples—the simple life of the Norwegians triggers the writer's interest in another Germanic nation's manners and mores. On the contrary, the Sami, bereft of the "supreme" racial attributes of the Teutons, are classified as animalistic and awfully primitive. The above arguments can be partly substantiated by the depiction of a Sami woman during his journey to Lapland:

> The only human being near them was an old woman, who was busily employed in boiling some reindeer milk. She was, without exception, the ugliest creature, in the shape of a human being whom, as Dr. Clarke has observed, a person unaccustomed to the appearance of them, meeting one suddenly in the midst of a forest, would start from the revolting spectacle: "The diminutive stature, the unusual tone of voice, the extraordinary dress, the leering unsightly eyes, the wide mouth, the nasty hair, and sallow shriveled skin—the vellum of the pedigree they claim"—all appear at first sight out of the order of nature and dispose a stranger to turn out of their way.[9] (44)

Concerning the above extract, the writer's depiction of a Sami woman illustrates to a significant extent the Victorian conventions about the Occult. Influenced by the growing interest of the British reader for the Gothic element, Barrow resorts to the same writing strategies as the ones employed by the travel writers whom he accused of being unreliable in the introductory part of his travelogue. The Lappish woman embodies the exact opposite to the Germanic ideal in terms of appearance: she is both physically and culturally repulsive resembling a witch in all her aspects. The writer obviously adheres to the increasing generalisations about the Arctic that prevailed in many literary texts near the end of the eigtheenth century. As maintained by Omberg (76), Lapland was regarded by a significant number of writers as "a gruesome, remote, ice-bound region where the Scandinavian gods had been worshipped and magic had been practised for centuries, and, in some, literary circles, allusions to the

[9] Quote from the travelogue *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa*, written by Edward Daniel Clarke (1769-1822) , an English naturalist and travel writer

barbarous North, to Odin, Thor and the cauldron of the Lapland witches excited a peculiar kind of thrill." It is not surprising that Barrow stresses the darkness which the image of the old woman encompasses, thus alluding not only to the weird witches of Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, but also to the ancient Greek representation of the Fates. As argued by Reed, supernaturalism constituted a derivative of Gothic fiction and was mainly a "sensational narrative device" (440). In this case, the writer's attitude towards the woman denotes his general animosity for everything related to the heathen world. Due to the Sami world's total incompatibility with the value system of the Victorian society, Barrow fails to consider objectively an alien form of culture and tends to reiterate the increasing beliefs in the evilness of those who preserved their heathen customs. In spite of his initial "commitment" to the accurate transmission of the pictures he comes across to his readership, the extensive references to the evil Sami and their animistic customs imply his close attachment to eighteenth-century dystopian images of the North. The depictions of Sami women as witches also prove that the writer has taken into consideration the emergent racial theories that sought to distinguish superior (Nordic) racial groups from inferior (Oriental and non-Caucasian) nations.

Without much doubt, Barrow is well aware of the race theories which started to spread after the second half of the nineteenth century and were closely linked to the rise of the British imperial system. Race inferiority became one of the most burning issues, and the ideological construction of the European empires of that period was largely based on the theory of Teutonism, which suggested that "men of the 'Nordic Race' … are qualitatively superior to the remainder of mankind" (Gregor 351). Barrow's belief in the racial inferiority of the Sami people is particularly evident at the end of the chapter about Norwegian Lapland, in which he details the overall impression he acquired from his intercourse with the "Laplanders":

> I perhaps ought to doubt my faculty of judging; and equally of my sense of hearing; for so far from finding the voice of the Laplander soft and effeminate, according with the softness of his language, as is stated by the same authority, it appeared to me to be precisely the reverse. Their language itself sounded harsh, and the pronunciation not unlike that of the Irish market-women one hears in Covent Garden; and they talked so loud and so rapidly, as to give to a stranger the idea of their quarrelling. Those I visited spoke the Norse language, as well as their own. (46)

In spite of his initial promise that he would adopt an impartial stance towards the Arctic peoples, Barrow seems to be trapped in the racial

conventions of his time which are founded upon strongly held stereotypes. Like many other contemporary British travel writers, Barrow cannot comprehend cultural conditions which are not akin to the practices of his own culture. The rising imperial system throughout the nineteenth century does not favour the coexistence of distinctive cultural characteristics in the same space. Therefore, the coexistence of a Norwegian (Germanic) and Sami (Pagan) element is totally absurd for a British citizen who is not accustomed to heterogeneous social forms (Warren 235). What is also interesting is the analogy that the writer draws between the Sami and the Irish languages, neither of which belongs to the Germanic or Latin languages. This attitude is closely related to the anti-Celtic sentiment that arose in nineteenth-century England in an effort to forge the Anglo-Saxon identity in juxtaposition with the British peripheries. Michael Hechter refers to the theory of the Celtic fringe, an English nationalistic theory permeated by everything related to the national peripheries of Britain: "the pervasiveness of anti-Celtic racism in the works of prominent nineteenth-century English ethnologists, historians and literary critics has been amply documented" (260). This "internal colonisation" model reveals the strenuous efforts of nineteenth-century Britons to merge into one nation, given the existence of a core-periphery relation between England and the Celtic groups in Britain (Scots, Irish, and Welsh). As mentioned by Hechter, within the British framework one can observe "the maintenance of peripheral cultural identity as a form of political mobilization among groups perceiving themselves to be disadvantaged" (233). Acknowledging the importance of the core-periphery concept in the amalgamation of Britishness, Barrow centres on the inferior language groups of the Sami and the Irish in order to project the Germanic culture, Anglo-Norse in our case, as the core civilisation and the Celtic/Sami cultural groups as members of the same periphery. This clear distinction between the Germanic and the savage world is evident in the following excerpt, in which the author stresses both the wretched existence of the Sami and his growing weariness of being among them:

> Having fully satisfied my curiosity, and being thoroughly drenched with rain, I was not sorry to take my leave of these poor creatures; for, with all their apparent gaiety, occasioned no doubt by the visit of a stranger, and the exhilarating effects of a good dram of brandy, it was melancholy to reflect upon their apparently wretched state of existence; but it seemed to confirm what Dr. Johnson has said,—that existence is a blessing, under any circumstances: in point of fact, we are not competent to judge of what others feel, who are placed wholly under different circumstances from ourselves in every stage of life. Here, at least, their excessive cheerfulness, and apparent content, seemed to contradict any idea of real suffering. (47)

Drawing upon this summary of the writer's opinion of the Sami, the contradictory attitude of the average early Victorian traveller can be discerned. On the one hand, the Sami are poor and need to live in a constant battle with the forces of nature. Their primitive state of existence does not impede them from being hospitable with the strangers and they hold an optimistic doctrine in life. On the other hand, the writer wishes to distance himself from such a primitive human race since this people is not blessed with the superior spiritual characteristics of the Brit (and the Teutonic race in general). The idea of primitivism, which is commonly associated with the innocent Arcadian image of the populations who are not contaminated by the vices of the industrialised world (here embodied by the Norwegians), does not have any positive connotations with respect to the Sami, who are "physically, linguistically, and culturally very different from the rest of the Norwegian population and did not fit easily into any well-known ethnographic category" (Fjågesund and Symes 200).

In addition to the writer's disdainful comment on the Sami, it is worth stressing the paradox observed in his argument about the role of the travel writer. In this passage, Barrow claims that: "we are not competent to judge of what others feel, who are placed wholly under different circumstances from ourselves in every stage of life." By these words he draws a clear-cut distinction between the idea of Englishness and the concept of the primitive Other. As argued by Said (95), "the capacity to represent, portray, characterise and depict is not easily available to just any member of any society." The paradox of Barrow's statement lies in his own interaction with the people that he undertakes to describe—the Englishmen ("we") may be not be entitled to criticise different ways of life. Yet the circumstances (obviously of a cultural nature) which are mentioned in his text are the criteria according to which he chooses to represent and condemn them when they do not reach the high racial and cultural standards of the rising British Empire.

The paradoxes which are widely encountered in Victorian travel literature can be explained by the ever-changing sociopolitical mutations that took place in that period. Contradictory statements do not constitute exceptional cases in the recording of British travelling experiences but rather a general rule (Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 23). What these travelogues do have in common is the conscious or subconscious effort to promote the ideals of the British Empire, justified by theories about racial superiority amongst Europeans, as mentioned earlier with the Nordicist movement. Regarding the idea of Englishness, which is also omnipresent in Barrow's travelogue through his intercourse with the native people, the

following passage is indicative of the writer's belief in the power potential of the British Empire, commenting on the English business undertakings in Northern Norway:

> One, indeed, has for some years been successfully worked by a company of Englishmen, who call themselves "The Alten Mining Association" … What an extraordinary people our countrymen are! In one of the most desolate and inhospitable regions of the globe, in the 70th parallel of latitude, buried for at least five months in ice and snow, to spend at once a large capital on a doubtful speculation, which, however, it seems has fortunately succeeded! Whither will they go next? (54)

In this extract, Barrow interrupts his narration in order to indulge in an exaltation of his own land. His direct but rather abrupt reference to the British exploratory expeditions in the Arctic Circle, in which his father and himself played an essential role, expresses the expansionist ideology which determined the British politics of the writer's time. The use of a country or people with the aim of energising the myths about the expansion of Englishness (Bratton 1986) does not constitute a peculiarity in Barrow's imperial discourse; it should be treated as a common denominator in various travelogues produced during all the phases of the nineteenth century, that is the early, mid, and late Victorian Era. Even though Barrow attempts to recreate an image of Iceland as an Arcadian locus, he is oblivious of his purpose upon his encounter with the Icelandic peasantry. The idea of the noble savage, which has mainly positive connotations, is put aside by the author; sluggishness, apathy, and drunkenness seem to be the negative features of the Icelanders that Barrow wishes to convey to the reader. As regards drunkenness, the writer draws a link between this vice and the low-classes, which are more prone to intoxication than members of the upper class:

> Like all sea-port towns, however, Reykjavik is not free from the vice of drunkenness, which is by no means uncommon among the fishermen and the lower orders in the town. Indeed we happened to witness a deplorable instance of it in the person of an old woman, who was lying under a boat upon the beach, in a miserable state of intoxication, and who, we afterwards heard, ended her existence on that very spot. (83)

Barrow's views on the subject relate to Victorian conventions with respect to intoxication. In *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, Teresa Mangum affirms that many middle-class Victorian writers were