INTRODUCTION

This is my third expedition to the north; it is a strange whim to get in love with deserts, with ice and with snow.

Andrew Swinton, 1792

In an article entitled ‘The Viking Road’, the writer and broadcaster Magnus Magnusson sees the daring engineering skills required for the modern oil installations in the North Sea as an echo of the equally adventurous spirit and the maritime expertise represented by the Viking longships more than a thousand years ago (Magnusson 1990, 1). In both of these historical epochs the North Sea, one of the world’s most treacherous and inhospitable stretches of water, has played a crucial role as a highway between, as well as a barrier against, two different cultures. For the British, islanders gradually developing into cosmopolitans, it represented a northern frontier against the Outside, the Unknown, or, as Edward W. Said and other critics have aptly termed it: ‘the Other’. Over the centuries, the Britons’ encounter with their Nordic neighbours – be they friends or foes – had a marked impact not only on how they viewed themselves within their own national borders; it also exerted a radical influence on the ways in which they saw themselves in relation to the outside world.

The present study attempts to take a closer look at how the British, during the turbulent and eventful period of the nineteenth century, cultivated and developed their relationship with one of their closest neighbours, namely the Norwegians. Probably the most striking characteristic of this relationship was the apparently overwhelming incongruity of the two countries. Britain was beyond doubt the world’s leading power in military and commercial as well as
12 THE NORTHERN UTOPIA

industrial terms; it was indeed, during most of the century, the one global superpower, commanding a position greater than that of the United States today and spearheading virtually every field within modern culture, science and technology. Norway, on the other hand, was a peripheral country in most senses of the phrase – hardly a nation in its own right – with a tiny population, consisting primarily of traditional farmers and fishermen. Nevertheless, there developed, in the course of the nineteenth century, strong and intimate bonds between the two countries that were only further strengthened in the twentieth. In the light of the fundamental incongruity already mentioned, the nature of these bonds, as perceived from a British perspective, deserves a closer examination.

One country’s perception of another is necessarily a complex and many-faceted phenomenon; at the same time, any attempt to describe such a perception is bound to resort, sooner or later, to general characterisations. In order to demonstrate that these are supported by a sufficiently diverse spectrum of evidence, this study employs a large number of different primary sources, including travelogues, prose fiction, poetry, newspaper reports, articles from journals and magazines, letters, tourist brochures and handbooks for travellers. But it also includes articles from contemporary encyclopedias and other examples of factual and purportedly ‘objective’ prose. Additionally, this wide spectrum of primary sources is brought into a dialogue with modern critical writing, all of which together will contribute to a new perspective both on the history of Anglo-Norwegian relations, and on the more general history of British self-perception in the nineteenth century.

The issue at stake, then, is how the national character of Norway and the Norwegians was perceived by British commentators from the late eighteenth through to the end of the nineteenth century. It is suggested that this character is not simply reflected in the range of texts under investigation, but actively formulated through them. This assumption – that discourse, and, in the wider sense of the word, literature, articulates and shapes a pattern of cultural identifications – was first formulated as part of a research agenda by that specialism in Comparative Literature known as Imagologie or ‘Image Studies’. After a promising start in the mid-twentieth century it was, for a while, marginalised within the field of literary studies, and kept alive mainly by the efforts of Hugo Dyserinck and his ‘Achen Programme’. Dyserinck himself maintained in his comparatist handbook (1991) and in numerous articles (1966, 1982; and Dyserinck and Syndram, 1988, 1992) that the role of stereotypes and
images was central to the comparative study of cultural encounters and exchanges, and that the role of literature was crucial in the formulation and dissemination of such stereotypes. These insights have gained fresh currency and relevance over the last two decades, as genres like travel writing have come to attract more attention from specialists in literary and cultural studies, and as the formative influence of mental constructs, perceptions and attitudes in human affairs has been more widely recognised in the rise of the new cultural and literary history (cf. Leerssen 2000).

From this theoretical standpoint, the validity of the commentators’ observations of Norway – that is the material and therefore ultimately indeterminable facts about exactly what Norway was like and how it differed from Britain – is of less interest to this study than the reasons for which such observations held credence at the time they were produced, and the ways in which they were expressed. Or, as the Dutch critic Joep Leerssen puts it: ‘even though the belief is irrational, the impact of that belief is anything but unreal’ (Leerssen 2002, 1).

This investigation thus asks rather different questions from those traditionally posed by empirical historians. First, it identifies and explores the many interconnected discourses that circulated around the concept of Norway in the nineteenth-century imagination. At issue here are the political, social, ethnic, literary, religious, aesthetic and – to a lesser extent – biographical contexts that gave rise to the viewpoints expressed in the many published texts on Norway. Whilst individual accounts are undoubtedly shaped and differentiated by the particular writer’s regional origins, class status and gender, as well as by his or her personal idiosyncracies of style, it is the similarity and unity of the writers’ claims that are their most distinctive feature. What inspires and intrigues is the fact that the image of Norway – contradictory though it may at times be – is a shared phenomenon created by what the writers had in common, namely a country of origin and an historical epoch. How Norway appeared in the eyes of these travellers and commentators, and what seemed to be its differences from Britain, are the objects of this investigation, not least because through the expression of these appearances and seemings we can glimpse the fermenting whirlpool of ideas that constituted the British consciousness in the nineteenth century.

Secondly, it is suggested here that representations – in this case of a country and its people – may be deconstructed through the skills of literary and linguistic scholarship. As suggested above, perceptions of Norway are filtered through and shaped by the structures of a wide
register of genres, each offering different representational possibilities. On a micro-level, the idea, for instance, of Norway’s cold vastness and lofty magnificence is constructed through lexical choice, its differences from Britain delicately achieved sometimes through syntactical balance, and sometimes through the juxtaposition of unfamiliar ideas and the careful arrangement of paragraphs. Moreover, the texts are approached not simply as repositories of information, but as dynamic constructs which offer different kinds of relationship with their readers. As such, considerations of audience, purpose, voice and tone are seen as integral to the examination of content. Bringing together as it does both materials and methodologies from the fields of literature and history, this study does not see texts as a mere illustration of history, nor does it see history as a mere background for literature; rather it considers texts to be powerfully constitutive of histories.

Among the highly varied source material, however, there is no doubt that the travelogues deserve particular mention. From the last decades of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth, British travellers to Norway published around two hundred travel accounts, describing in varying detail their Norwegian adventure. A large majority of these were in the form of books, usually published soon after the travellers’ return to Britain, but some were also published as articles in journals and magazines. Undoubtedly, the travelogues constitute the largest and most comprehensive source of information about the British view of Norway in the period. Obviously, it should be kept in mind that the travelogues formed only one element in a great intertextual cycle of information on Norway, whereby non-writing travellers as well as travel writers, journalists, novelists and poets supplemented and modified each other’s observations, thus together producing the multifarious and sometimes contradictory British ‘image’ of Norway. Nevertheless, as opposed to much of the other material, the travelogues – at least the large majority of them – are based not on second-hand information, but on first-hand experience of the country and people in question.

During the last couple of decades travel literature has become the subject of an intense and fascinating academic study, frequently involving cross-disciplinary methodologies and thereby providing insights ignored by more traditional approaches in such fields as literature, history and anthropology.¹ But this diverse use of the

¹ For a list of central works in this field from recent years, see Morgan 2001, 230n.
travelogues has also necessarily raised some fundamental questions about their status as sources of information about the past. First, what kind of ‘mental blinkers’ or culturally conditioned preconceptions should a modern reader expect to find in these observers of well over a century ago; or, from an imagological perspective: to what extent did ‘the conventions and commonplaces inherited from a pre-existing textual tradition (…) overshadow the experience of reality’? (Leerssen 2002, 2). Second, in what ways did external factors, such as the book market, influence the writers’ representation of the Other, in this case Norway and the Norwegians? And third, a large and complex question, triggering several more: how did the writers perceive their own role and their relationship to their audience? Where did they place themselves on the scale between the objective and the subjective, the scientific and the personal, the factual and the fictional? These questions, all of which ultimately revolve around the credibility and the information value of the travelogue, will be tentatively discussed in the following, but will also surface again and again throughout the book as a whole.

The presence of what could be called a national bias or preconception on the part of the observing Briton becomes particularly evident in the way that several writers underline the gulf that exists between themselves and the Other. This concerns in particular the contrast between what is presented as the excessive civilisation of Britain and the corresponding primitive nature of the foreign destination. As a result, and despite the geographical proximity of the two countries, British travelogues from Norway constantly remind a modern reader of texts about other and far more distant places, such as the interior of Africa. Some accounts even make this connection more or less explicit and attempt to explain it. In his book The Oxfordian in Thelemarken (1858), for instance, the Oxford don Frederic Metcalfe discusses the popularity of travel literature and makes the following observation:

Indeed, the avidity with which books of travel in primitive countries – whether in the tropics or under the pole – are now read, shows that the more refined a community is, the greater interest it will take in the occupation, the sentiments, the manners of people still in a primitive state of existence. Our very over-civilization begets in us a taste to beguile oneself [sic] of its tedium, its frivolities, its unreality, by mixing in thought, at least, with those who are nearer the state in which nature first made man (viii; italics added).
The common denominator between ‘the tropics’ and ‘the pole’ is clearly their primitive nature, which comes across as the main contrast to the strains of ‘our very over-civilization’. This particular perspective of the over-civilised Briton observing a primitive Other – incidentally, the term ‘Other’ is equally applicable to both people and landscapes – seems to have a decisive effect on the point of view and indeed the lexical choices adopted by most of the travel writers in question. In the following passage from Thomas Forester’s *Norway and Its Scenery* (1853), virtually every other word suggests the author’s emphasis on the uniqueness of his Norwegian experience, thus exemplifying a point underlined by Leerssen, namely the essentially contrastive relationship between the familiar and the Other:

[T]he true character of the scenery of Norway, and of its simple and well conditioned people, can only be learnt by *scaling* its snowy Fjelds, *penetrating* its secluded valleys, and following the windings of its Fjords into the *depths* of the mountain ranges, by *cross-roads and paths* sometimes all but *inaccessible* even to the *pedestrian* traveller. Those, however, who are disposed to embark in such enterprises, should well count beforehand the cost of the undertaking. It will try the *mettle* of the most hardy, resolute, and enthusiastic lovers of nature in her wildest aspects (49; italics added).

The message is clear: the narrator depicts himself as a hero who has successfully tackled challenges and obstacles that only a select few are able to endure, and he emerges as a character of nearly superhuman stature. In other accounts this sense of undergoing an extreme ordeal is tinged with unintended comedy. Thus, the somewhat pompous Charles B. Elliott, in *Letters from the North of Europe* (1832), gives the following alarming report, not from isolated and mountainous wastes, but from the centre of Bergen – a town of more than 20,000 inhabitants – in the summer of 1830: ‘It has struck one o’clock in the morning, and my companions are asleep. The jackals and wolves are striking up a second to the air of the watchman, who is passing under my window singing his usual chant (...)’ (145). In *Sketches in Holland and Scandinavia* (1885), the celebrated travel writer Augustus Hare succumbs to the same temptation of spicing his narrative with wild and furious beasts: ‘Wolves seldom appear except in winter, when those who travel in sledges are often pursued by them. Then hunger makes them so bold that they will often snatch a dog from between the knees of the driver’ (132). The above examples clearly suggest a narrator who –
Introduction

like a modern war correspondent – bravely puts his life on the line in order to report to his readers. In his *Scenes of Travel in Norway* (1877), Joseph Phythian ruminates even more explicitly on this feeling of being a solitary representative of civilisation in a savage environment. Walking through the crowd at a local fair at Vossevangen together with his fellow traveller, the author reflects:

> We walked on, two Englishmen, as everybody knew. Our nationality is our pride sometimes. I have often felt it an honour to belong to England, for the name, ‘Englishman,’ is grander than that of ‘Roman.’ We scarcely realise this at home, but in a distant land, looking, some way, more broadly upon the world, the fact has more significance. The feeling is not that I, as an individual, am above these other people, but that my country, of which I am a part, is above theirs. And this is particularly the case in Norway, where the distance is greater than in many countries. The position of England is a commanding one. No doubt her wealth is one of the principal sources of homage, but let us hope that the high national character for various excellencies is also an element of power (122).

The passage offers a rare and direct insight into the self-perception of the nineteenth-century Briton and of the self-confidence, mixed with a sense of moral and cultural superiority, with which he regarded the world around him. No wonder, then, that the same author later in the book exclaims: ‘Surely Norway has been made as a playground for the people of other countries, but especially for Englishmen’ (113-14)! His compatriot, the ‘unprotected female’ Emily Lowe, similarly asks rhetorically ‘who but English’ [sic] would dream of travelling into the Norwegian wilderness. Interestingly, she must admit that a certain Ida Pfeiffer, the daughter of a Viennese industrialist, has also performed the same feat, ‘but she confesses to being skinny and wiry, and was able to wriggle about unmolested; the English or Americans are rarely of that make, and so generally blooming and attractive, that it must be a certain inborn right which makes them nearly always the first to penetrate into the arcana of countries triumphantly’ (227). Thus there is no doubt that the travellers’ consciousness of themselves as Britons contributed strongly to the way in which they viewed Norway and the Norwegians – a point that will be underlined in the following chapters.

A second aspect that could be seen as having an influence on the credibility of travelogues is the possibility that their form and content may have been influenced by market demands. Despite Bourdieu’s groundbreaking discussions around the complexity of ‘cultural production’ and ‘the literary field’ (Bourdieu 1999), relatively little
research has been conducted in this very complex area, but it still seems possible to mention some, albeit tentative, factors that may have had an impact on the finished product. First, the main motive for the large majority of the early travel writers was not necessarily to make a profit from the sales. According to Mark Davies’s study *A Perambulating Paradox: British Travel Literature and the Image of Sweden c. 1770–1865* (2000), the relationship between the publishers and the travel writers of the period was a gentlemanly one conducted between equals, and, he adds: ‘While the desire to be published could be strong, I believe its fulfilment answered far more to social/academic ambitions than plain economic necessity’ (31). As an example, he mentions a writer from the 1820s, Arthur de Capell Brooke, who ‘may well have considered the profit motive as unbecoming a man of his rank (captain) and station in life. This would account for the absence, in Murray’s publication ledger, of any mention of copyright fee or profit-sharing in regard to *A Winter in Lapland and Sweden* (1826). His only recompense appears as twenty copies (of a 750 edition); presumably more palatable, albeit their three-guinea retail price, than hard cash’ (31–32).

Another point that Davies underlines is the fact that travelogues from Scandinavia represented a relatively minor part of the overall market for travel literature, and he concludes that ‘very small editions – generally 500–1000 copies – were typical for “serious” travel literature on the North in the 1800s’ (44). He quite correctly adds, however, that, despite obvious parallels, Norway and Sweden were not immediately comparable, and although the popularity of Sweden increased from 1875 onwards, it was ‘not to the extent of neighbouring Norway’ (34). This is confirmed from a list of the publication dates of British travelogues on Norway: not only is there a larger number of travelogues from Norway overall, but out of the close to two hundred texts used as primary material for the present study, seventy-five percent were published in the second half of the century, and more than fifty percent in the period 1870–1900. Thus the popularity of Norway, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1, evidently increased radically in the last decades of the century. It should also be mentioned, with respect to the low print-runs mentioned by Davies, that nearly twenty-five percent of the texts used in the present study went through two or more editions in the course of the nineteenth century, and some, like the works by Clarke, Coxe, Lord Dufferin, Lowe, Williams and the anonymous *Three in Norway by Two of Them*, together with novels by Corelli, Martineau and Lyall, must have meant good business for writer and publisher.
alike. Finally, it is tempting to mention Paul du Chaillu’s two-volume work *The Land of the Midnight Sun* from 1881. Admittedly, Du Chaillu was a French-American explorer, but having previously published extensively on Africa, he was well known to the British public, and in Harper’s *New Monthly Magazine* of November 1881 John Habberton says that du Chaillu’s book was ‘published simultaneously in America, England, Germany, France, Sweden, and Denmark – an incident unparalleled in the history of publishing’ (882). Clearly, such an ambitious publishing venture – the publisher was John Murray – suggests that not just the writer but also the subject appealed to a considerable audience. Against this background, and together with the gradual professionalisation of the publishing industry, it seems reasonable to conclude that the profit motive may have been more evident among both writers and publishers in the second than in the first half of the century. It is, moreover, likely that this consideration, accompanied by increased competition within the market for travelogues, may have encouraged individual writers to underline and exaggerate even further the spectacular, the unique and the extreme aspects of Norway, that is the contrastive elements mentioned above.

A third question with regard to the credibility and reliability of the travelogues as historical sources is how the writers in question perceived their own role as narrators and the validity of their accounts. In his book *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (1983), Percy G. Adams argues that the origin of the novel is largely to be found in the travelogue, and in doing so also shows how the travelogue contains unmistakable elements of fiction: ‘Throughout history [travel] literature has been a combination of the objective and the subjective, of details of setting, history, and customs to go with the traveler’s own experiences, adventures, and reflections’ (108). Still, the fact remains that travelogues generally have a somewhat seductive appearance of objectivity. With regard to those of the nineteenth century, this may have to do with the fact that their immediate predecessors were the so-called topographical accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which more than anything focused on the tangible facts of the countries described. In his book *Loneliness and Time: The Story of British Travel Writing* (1992), Mark Cocker also claims that the majority of accounts from the nineteenth century are concerned with ‘the events of real life’: ‘The idea that the travel book was a work dealing with real facts – an impression often confirmed by index, footnotes and bibliography – rather than an imaginary world, has led to a perception of it as a
literature closely associated with geography or history or some other scientific discipline’ (5–6). Although this is undoubtedly a correct observation, Barbara Korte seems to achieve a more balanced picture in her description of nineteenth-century travelogues:

Many Victorian explorers appear in their accounts as heroes every bit as courageous and enduring as the protagonists of the contemporary adventure novel; moreover, the travelling heroes offered their readers the thrill of adventures which had actually been experienced. Their accounts not only have an exciting travel plot, but they also make the travelling persona an interesting character within this plot (Korte 2000, 88–89).

Still, this does not mean that the eighteenth-century legacy has disappeared from the genre entirely:

Despite the obvious elements of adventure in their texts, the majority of Victorian explorers were nevertheless also committed to imparting information (...). In this manner, the explorers of the nineteenth century continued in the tradition of earlier writing of exploration and scientific travel, even if they generally displayed a more marked concern with the travel plot (ibid., 89–90).

Other critics, however, suggest that the arrival of the subjective element and the marked presence of the narrator’s persona may have started even earlier than the period indicated by Cocker and Korte. In Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992), Mary Louise Pratt discusses – with a reference to Laurence Sterne and his contemporaries – how the so-called sentimental traveller had become a relatively standard element in travel writing from as early as the 1760s onwards. Thus by the time Mungo Park’s famous travel book Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa was published in 1799, the average reader was already well acquainted with the kind of writer who ‘wrote, and wrote himself, not as a man of science, but as a sentimental hero. He made himself the protagonist and central figure of his own account, which takes the form of an epic series of trials, challenges, and encounters with the unpredictable’ (Pratt 1992, 75).

One of the earliest accounts from Norway – Andrew Swinton’s Travels into Norway, Denmark, and Russia in the Years 1788, 1789, 1790, and 1791 from 1792 – gives a good example of the transition from this apparently facts-oriented account to the more subjective and individualistic account generally associated with the following century. In his book Swinton passes a rather caustic remark on the later Archdeacon of Wiltshire William Coxe’s well-known work
Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark, published two years before, but based on a journey, which included Norway, in 1784:

He has given us many accurate and useful details concerning manufactures, commerce, population, public revenue, military establishments, and the ceremonials observed in various interviews with which he was honoured by Nobles, Princes and Kings. These, together with historical extracts from a great number of Writers, with multiplied experiments on the congelation of mercury, made by different Philosophers, at different times and places, swell his volumes to a respectable size as well as price.

It is not, however, long details, biographical, historical, or philosophical, that are expected by every Reader to inform the principal parts of books of travels. What the Traveller himself observed, inferred, suffered, or enjoyed – but above all, manners, customs, dress, modes of life, domestic economy, amusements, arts, whether liberal or mechanical, and, in a word, whatever tends to illustrate the actual state of society, and that not only among the great, but the body, and even the very lowest of the people: all this, in the opinion of those who read rather for amusement, than the study of either politics or natural philosophy, should enter into those narratives which are supposed to hold a kind of middle rank between the solidity of studied discourse and the freedom of colloquial conversation (v-vii; italics added).

From the point of view of a modern reader, this is interesting information, because what Swinton is doing is to introduce his readers to an open discussion both about his own role as a narrator of travelogues, and about the expectations of his readers, and in the course of this discussion he emphasises the importance of the traveller’s subjective experience of his journey. This, he claims, is what contemporary readers would like to see, because they read ‘rather for amusement’ than for the study of ‘politics and natural philosophy’, and are, consequently, not interested in the ‘long details’ of Coxe and others. To simplify, the Romantic – but apparently also pre-Romantic – focus on the individual and the individual experience draws a new degree of attention to the very voice of the narrator, and in the nineteenth century travel writers increasingly reveal an awareness that they somehow find themselves under scrutiny from their readers. In his Norway book from 1829, the Rev. Robert Everest, for instance, shows very clearly that he is not entirely comfortable with his role as a travel writer:
The writing a volume of travels seems to be generally considered an easy task, but any one, who has made trial, will find that it is not so. He will feel that he has undertaken the part of an historian, and that too under considerable disadvantages. He must, at all events, tell a long story, of which he is himself to be the hero; and the odds are not in his favour that he will come off tolerably successful, with two such awkward circumstances against him. Perhaps, the perpetual recurrence to self, the detail of what he ate and drank, of whom he talked to, and who talked to him, of the inns he put up at, and the bills he paid there, may be as loathsome to him as it would be to some of his readers; and, in that case, he has only to glean up the scanty materials which the tract he passes through may afford him. He is to describe not the past, but the present, where his own observations, and not the previous labours of others, are to be his only records to refer to (vii–viii).

Everest, then, shows a considerable amount of uncertainty regarding how to project himself and his role. He is discussing, in short, his own self-representation as a writer, which again is a feature closely connected with the whole image of the romantic artist. Apparently, he faces further obstacles when contemplating the fact that his account is from the barren North:

The North (...) has no classic recollections, no ruined monuments of former splendour, no fantastic, and gorgeous superstitions. He who goes there must be content with seeing mankind in a simple, and happy state, and Nature in her sternest form. Of such enjoyment there is plenty. He will probably quit its shore with a better opinion of his fellow-creatures than he had when he landed on it. And that is something gained (ibid., viii–ix).

The North, it seems, throws the narrator back on the subject of himself even more forcefully than areas abounding with the great and admirable monuments of human achievement. In this empty wilderness, there is hardly anything that can be safely categorised and contextualised within the established conventions of continental culture and thus placed within a common frame of reference. Everything the traveller to Norway experiences is, in a sense, new and will have to be filtered through his or her own individual consciousness before being transformed into a narrative and presented to the reader. Clearly, such a strong element of subjectivity could be seen as undermining the documentary value of the accounts.

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Among the many nineteenth-century British accounts from Norway, there is one that exemplifies this ambiguity with striking and peculiar clarity, and that therefore deserves a more comprehensive treatment. Edward Wilson Landor, a younger cousin of the writer Walter Savage Landor, visited Norway in the summer of 1835. According to R. H. Super, one of Walter Savage Landor’s biographers, Edward was ‘in his early twenties’ (277) at the time. It is not known whether he suffered from the same violent and unpredictable temperament as his more famous cousin, but in the following year he published a two-volume work, Adventures in the North of Europe, Illustrative of the Poetry and Philosophy of Travel, which – at least in parts of the narrative – appears to entice the reader into a no-man’s-land between fact and fiction. The first indication of the work’s somewhat ambiguous status appears on the very first page, in an introduction entitled ‘To the Reader’, where Landor confesses that ‘I wish only to account for having forsaken the common track of travellers, and thrown an air of romance over incidents which, notwithstanding, are literally true’ (1: iii). The sentence, which is not just paradoxical but even self-contradictory, is typical of the way in which Landor deliberately draws a veil around himself and his function as a narrator. He even offers the reader some candidly material reasons for his choice:

Quite aware that in the well-trampled field of literature I had no chance of making an impression as a sober, plodding traveller, I imagined that by creating a more interesting wanderer (…) who should follow the path I had myself pursued, I might, perhaps, win over a few readers who would have taken no pleasure in a mere matter-of-fact, laborious narrative. And I was not the less willing thus to humour (as I thought) the taste of the public, since it left me more at liberty to employ those colourings, and to indulge in those speculations, which will be found, perhaps too numerous, to pervade the ensuing pages. We sympathise with a fictitious character in the expression of thoughts that from a real personage we should scarcely tolerate (ibid., v).

However, as soon as the reader has more or less accepted the fictional character of the work, Landor throws another smokescreen, when he concludes: ‘Every incident, in short, may be unhesitatingly relied on, except such as are on the face of them fictitious – as “the Pastor’s Story,” &c. in the second volume’ (ibid., vi). Having thus played cat and mouse with the reader, Landor has – in a way worthy of his more famous cousin – achieved at least one of his goals, namely that of creating suspense, by making the reader assume a ‘willing suspension
The frontispiece from Edward Wilson Landor’s *Adventures in the North of Europe* (1836). The picture is unusual in that it shows the actual encounter between the traveller and the local inhabitants. The scene is from Telemark and shows both the characteristic local architecture and the famous Gausta mountain in the background.
of disbelief’. As a result, he also arouses the reader’s curiosity concerning the one part of his narrative that is purportedly purely fictitious. The question, then, is how and why this particular story is different from the rest of the account. It is necessary, in other words, to take a closer look at Landor’s pastor.

Having described his journey from Denmark and up the Swedish coast, including for good measure an interesting essay on ‘The Poetry and Philosophy of Travel’ (which will be discussed in ch. 1), Landor enters Norway, and soon after Frederikshald (now Halden). So far, Adventures has not been noticeably different from the majority of other travelogues, and the reader has no apparent reason to raise an eyebrow at the fact that Landor, who intends to go to Christiania, takes a wrong turn at Frederikshald and walks for a couple of days before reaching the southern bank of the river Glomma, on which side he continues. Along the way he passes a waterfall, which is in all probability the one at Sarpsborg described by Mary Wollstonecraft and several other travellers, whereupon, on the third morning, he hears church bells. And this is where ‘the Pastor’s Story’ begins.

The narrator enters the church and takes a seat together with ‘a congregation of about twenty respectable peasants’ (1: 235). He does not understand the sermon, but is struck by the appearance of the officiating minister:

[H]e seemed to be about fifty years of age, his black hair was streaked with gray, his eye dark and sparkling, but sunk in his head from wasting sickness rather than deeply set by nature; his countenance was noble and engaging, though bearing the traces of ineffaceable sorrow, and his hair and deportment dignified and reverend (1: 235–36).

After the service, the two men engage in conversation. It soon appears that the pastor is half English; his name is Ernest Vormensen, and he invites Landor to stay at the parsonage for a few days. The pastor gradually takes the traveller into his confidence and finally confesses to him a terrible secret he has kept to himself for many years. As a young man the pastor, on a visit to England, had become involved in a tragic love affair. In a fit of jealous fury he had murdered his rival, and immediately returned to Norway, never to be arrested. On his return he had fled into the mountains, where he had spent the whole summer. Here he met a perfect female spirit or nymph (Norw. hulder), with whom he fell in love. The two lovers having met regularly for some time, the nymph’s father insisted his daughter ended the relationship, and she finally departed, leaving him
a ring. The pastor then shows Landor the ring, which he wears on his finger, as proof of the truth of his story. Later the same evening both Landor and the pastor go to bed, in separate but adjacent rooms. In the middle of the night Landor is woken by a violent commotion in the other room, and on entering finds that the pastor has had a fit. He soon recovers sufficiently to be able to tell Landor that the nymph has just returned and told him that she will come back for the ring on a specific day later in the week. He also predicts that he will die on that same day. Weak and partly unconscious, the pastor is then nursed for the next few days by his servants at the parsonage, whereupon he dies on the day he had predicted. Landor notices that the ring is no longer on the pastor’s finger, but despite a major investigation among the servants, the ring is not found. Landor then stays for the funeral, and continues his journey with not so much as a comment on the fantastic story he has just related.

As suggested earlier, Landor admits that ‘the Pastor’s Story’ is a product of his imagination, but granted his almost consistent attempts to obscure the difference between fact and fiction, the reader will inevitably speculate as to whether the story is one or the other. This leaves the possibility of at least two different readings.

The story undoubtedly contains a convincing array of fictional elements. First, Landor creates a clever Chinese-box effect of frame narratives that looks surprisingly modern, with the travelogue itself as the first level, the narrator’s story about the pastor as the second, and the pastor’s own story as the third. Furthermore, his story contains such standard features from Victorian fiction as a sudden and unexpected legacy (not included in the above summary); at least two striking and highly unlikely coincidences; a duel; and the fairy-tale element of the nymph. In addition, the pastor’s story carries some rather striking similarities to Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* (1818). Just like Frankenstein’s friendless monster, the pastor, having committed an unsolved murder, roams the unpopulated wilderness in the hope of finding a woman capable of giving his life meaning and purpose. In the same way that the monster offers his heartbreaking confession to Frankenstein, the pastor describes – over several pages – his God-forsaken loneliness to the English stranger:

The awful silence weighed upon my heart; my knees smote together, and I paused and leant upon my staff. I was a murderer, and something told me with terrible distinctness that God had forsaken me, and left me a prey to the bears of the forest, or the relentless demons that pervade it. (...) I felt that I was doomed to wander through life companionless,
pitiless, joyless, — without an object that could afford me interest, or a thought that could give me pleasure (2: 26–30).

It might be speculated that Mary Shelley’s interest in the North and the Arctic, where an important part of her novel is set, also indicates the inspiration she undoubtedly drew from her mother’s — i.e. Mary Wollstonecraft’s — travelogue from Norway, which also includes a description of the waterfall at Sarpsborg, in the immediate vicinity of the pastor’s parish. Considering the few books available to Landor about Norway and the relative fame of *Frankenstein* (the single-volume third edition had been published in 1831), it is reasonable to assume that both Shelley’s novel and her mother’s travelogue had formed part of Landor’s background reading, or even of his reading matter on the journey itself.

Despite these unquestionably fictional elements, however, the story also carries features that make it tempting to investigate possibly factual sources. First, the narrator distinguishes strongly between his own story and that of the pastor; as soon as the latter has concluded his story, the narrator very quickly undermines its credibility both by a series of rational arguments and by drawing attention to the pastor’s ‘excited imagination’ (2: 49). The effect of this is interesting, because although it reduces our faith in the pastor’s tale, it increases our faith in that of the narrator. We are, in other words, led to believe that Landor during his journey met a Norwegian pastor who told him an utterly peculiar story, but thanks to Landor himself we are provided with a healthy scepticism towards that very story (although he himself draws attention to the ring, which he claims to have seen, and which provides an interesting link between the pastor’s tale and that of his own). Second, Landor leaves just enough information about his whereabouts to enable the reader to actually follow his footsteps. He even makes the reader aware, in a footnote, that when he describes distances he uses the word ‘miles’ in the sense of *Norwegian* miles. Also, he insists that during his wanderings before meeting the pastor, he stays on the southern side of the Glomma, but still close to the river. In this way it is actually possible to establish that the church he comes to is almost certainly Varteig church, which at the time was part of Tune parish.

An investigation into the history of the parish shows that the vicar at the time, actually from 1820–1859, was Johan Nielsen Vogt. Thus, there was no pastor dying under mysterious circumstances in 1835, when Landor visited the area, but there may still be interesting parallels between Vogt and Landor’s pastor. First of all, the names
Vormensen and Vogt both begin with the same letters, a not uncommon way of concealing a real identity. Landor furthermore describes the pastor as around fifty years old. Vogt was born in 1783 and was then fifty-two during Landor’s visit. More important, however, is the fact that Landor’s rather detailed description of the pastor’s appearance and personality is strongly reminiscent of that of Vogt. While an active and forward-looking member of the community, Vogt was known to have a strikingly powerful exterior, but was at the same time disturbingly sombre and melancholy. Sven Gøran Eliassen, the historian of Tune and director of Borgarsyssel County Museum, even suspects that he may have been suffering from manic depression.²

Another feature, in the border area between fact and fiction, is the possibility that the pastor’s unhappy love affair may be connected with Landor himself. Although very little is known about his life, some information can be gleaned from the more abundant material about his cousin, Walter Savage Landor. In particular, in Malcolm Elwin’s Landor: A Replevin (1958) it emerges that Edward in 1835, that is the same year that he visited Norway, developed an affair with his cousin’s daughter, Julia, during a visit to Walter Savage’s house at Fiesole near Florence. Edward was then ‘[a] somewhat unsatisfactory young man of twenty-six’ (304),³ and Julia only fifteen. Edward’s feelings were reciprocated, and Mrs Landor was in favour of the match (Field 2000, 96), but the lovers were hardly looking forward to broaching the subject with the formidable and unpredictable Walter Savage, and the affair dragged on for two years, until Edward’s letter to his cousin, asking for his consent to their engagement, was brusquely and decidedly rejected. Thus it is perfectly plausible that Landor, while writing his travelogue between the summer of 1835 and its publication the following year, could personally identify with the pastor’s unhappy love affair, and that this could be seen as one reason for introducing this peculiar parenthesis into his otherwise matter-of-fact account. It would even be tempting, considering Walter Savage’s temper, to read the nymph’s uncompromising father as Edward Wilson’s wry portrait of his cousin.⁴

As the above discussion has demonstrated, perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Landor’s story about the pastor is the way in

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² Mentioned in a telephone conversation with P. F. March 2002.
³ Super, above, claimed he was in his ‘early twenties’. As he was born in 1811, he was actually twenty-four at the time.
⁴ Julia’s and Edward Wilson’s letters from January and February 1837 to Walter
which it moves with almost imperceptible fluidity in and out of the worlds of fact and fiction. As readers we are, in other words, largely the victims of an arbitrary and sometimes rather imaginative narrator, who is in effect a creator of his own reality.

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Thus, so far this introduction may be read as a cautionary tale about the general untrustworthiness of the travelogue as a source of credible information. To sum up, it suffers from stereotyped and nationally conditioned preconceptions; it is subject to the unpredictable forces of the market and the literary field in general; and it is not to be trusted in its distinctions between the factual and the fictional. Furthermore, these caveats apply, of course, even more to the use of poetry and fiction as historical source material. In the context of the present study, however, it is important to keep in mind that the main concern is not primarily with the hard facts concerning Britain’s relationship to Norway, but with the far less tangible phenomenon of the kind of image that British travellers passed on to their countrymen. This is, in other words, not primarily a study of facts, but of perceptions, and these perceptions are, by definition, strongly coloured by a subjective, and sometimes even a creative, element. But this does not make them less relevant as a source for understanding nineteenth-century Britons’ view of the world around them. On the contrary, these aspects, which have traditionally been of minor interest to the political historian, are not just a necessary

Savage Landor, asking for his blessing, still exist in the Warwickshire County Record Office (letter dated 4 February 1837, in CR 1908/276/1-4). They reveal the girl’s desperate plea to her father and the young suitor’s bold defence of his actions and his very forthright criticism of the man who had earlier accused him of baseness. There is also a poem, in fifteen stanzas, from Edward to Julia on the occasion of the broken engagement. It begins as follows:

Ah! fear not that I should upbraid thee
For the course thou art driven to pursue;
Thy kindred and friends have betrayed thee,
But ne'er shall I call thee untrue.

Though thy lips may be forced to discard me,
Thy heart shall not pass to another;
Still, still art thou doomed to regard me
With emotion I would thou couldst smother.
supplement to more factually based descriptions; they may indeed provide us – as a number of image studies have demonstrated – with a more comprehensive understanding of the past than a more conventional approach is capable of doing. Also, if one chooses to regard the travelogues as essentially fictional rather than factual works, they often represent, as in the case of Edward Wilson Landor, an insight into the world of non-canonical writers and their works that may also throw new light on the established names.

As suggested above, the last few years have seen a remarkable output of academic investigations using travel literature as a source for an understanding of the growth of a national British identity, but the large majority of these studies have used primary sources either from the Empire beyond Europe or from the traditional British destinations around the Mediterranean. Northern Europe, and especially Scandinavia, has been strikingly absent, even in such recent and general studies as Marjorie Morgan’s *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (2001). No comprehensive study of British-Norwegian relations based on this kind of material has so far been published, and consequently most of the source material has also been lying dormant for well over a century. As a result of this it has been necessary to allow the primary sources themselves to speak as much as possible. The main ambition of the present work, then, is to open up the field, point to a number of its main features, and encourage colleagues to make use of this fascinating and plentiful material for further studies. This obviously means that a number of areas have either been ignored or subjected to little more than a passing comment. In particular, hardly anything will be said about the significance of the Norwegian and Scandinavian contribution, represented by Henrik Ibsen and others, to the literary and cultural debate in Britain towards the end of the century. There are at least three reasons for this choice: it is a subject large and complex enough to merit a separate investigation; although such a comprehensive study has not yet been written, the general field has been covered from various perspectives, that is in the large critical literature on the central figures and their work; and finally, the ultimate impact of this movement on the general public is more of an early twentieth-century than a late nineteenth-century phenomenon. Also, with respect to Ibsen in particular, Burchardt rightly points out that ‘the attention which he attracted in England was of a purely intellectual, cosmopolitan character (...)’ (193), which hardly served to modify to

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5 For an early account of this movement, see Burchardt 1920, 113–95.
any significant extent the British view of Norway and the Norwegians.

In the thousands of pages written about Norway and the Norwegians, British travellers and commentators obviously touched upon or discussed in depth a wide spectrum of issues. Consequently, in this study a lot of thought and experimentation have gone into structuring the material in a workable way. From the beginning, however, some key areas emerged as central points of focus around which clusters of related topics tended to assemble. In their very basic forms these are tourism, history, society and nature, each of which is awarded a separate chapter. Seen as a whole, these individual approaches to Anglo-Norwegian relations exemplify a number of major and frequently conflicting forces vying for supremacy in the great debates of nineteenth-century European society. The most conspicuous feature is perhaps the fundamental debate, intensifying as the century progressed, about the usefulness, value and unfortunate side-effects of progress. This particular debate is also characterised by a conflict between two very different approaches to contemporary society: one looking back to a simple and supposedly harmonious past; the other looking forward to a future of even more daring achievements. Then, closely related to this overriding tension are topics such as the country and the city, nature and culture, health and disease, the individual and the masses, and the north and the south. The essentially dialectic or binary quality of these central issues is further underlined by the fact that the primary material in question has been assembled and composed by writers who were acutely aware of crossing a boundary between the familiar and the Other. Similarly, this dual focus has been constantly present in the composition of this study, whose various drafts have been travelling – although electronically – back and forth across the North Sea, between the authors, living in Britain and Norway respectively.

In conclusion, the comparative element ensures that a wide range of issues concerning a distant, under-developed country on the fringes of civilisation are seen not – as one might expect – as irrelevant to, but rather as intimately connected and interwoven with the issues of a country at the very hub of progress and modernity. Paradoxically but also encouragingly, therefore, a study of contrasts and opposites between nations and cultures may well produce the conclusion that ultimately the differences between the Other and the familiar are less striking than the fundamental similarities.