CHAPTER 5

Scandinavia

Elettra Carbone

After centuries dominated by the cultural supremacy of the south, the end of the eighteenth century marked a progressive shift in British perceptions of Scandinavia leading up to what Peter Fjågesund refers to as 'The Northern Heydays'.[1] From the 1830s onwards, Britain, Germany, and the Nordic countries also experienced tremendous population growth and economic expansion in comparison to France, Spain, and Italy. As Astrid Arndt argues, 'the Northern nations were still ascending towards maturity, whereas the Romance cultures had already passed their zenith'.[2] Scandinavia shared these trends with Britain and could be seen as part of the same Protestant 'north', but it also represented a further, utopian north still partially untouched by industrialization and urbanization. British representations of Scandinavia often emphasized its geographical proximity and cultural affinity while also pointing out significant differences and Britain's overall cultural superiority.[3]

Politically, Scandinavia, like 'the north', was a fluid concept. Following the dissolution of the Kalmar Union (1397–1523), the empires of Denmark and Sweden dominated the Nordic region: Denmark encompassed Norway (until 1814), Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland (until 1944), and the united duchies of Schleswig-Holstein (until 1864).

[1] In this chapter 'Scandinavia' refers to the kingdoms of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The modern, comprehensive phrase 'Nordic countries' includes contemporary Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden and the autonomous territories of the Åland Islands, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Peter Fjågesund, *The Dream of the North: A Cultural History to 1920* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), p. 331.

[2] Astrid Arndt, 'North/South', in Manfred Beller and Joseph Theodoor Leerssen (eds.), *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters; A Critical Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 387–9 (p. 388).

[3] Fjågesund, *The Dream of the North*, p. 212; Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes, *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 38–9.

Sweden, the biggest power in the Nordic region in the seventeenth century, included Finland until 1809, when it was lost to Russia, and Norway from 1814 when, following the Treaty of Kiel, it was ceded by Denmark, on the losing side after the Napoleonic Wars, as part of the redrawing of European national borders. While Norway was not independent throughout the nineteenth century, it embarked on a nation-building project with the aim of affirming its political and cultural identity as a separate and independent country, which it became only in 1905.[4] These geopolitical shifts account for the different configurations of 'Scandinavia' as well as the shared history of these countries in the period considered in this chapter. Notwithstanding their shared past, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway followed different paths that led them to their respective modern-day status. Both their similarities and the differences between them are characterized in British representations.

Three case studies will help us to understand British interest in Scandinavia, which became not only an alternative travel destination but also the source of new literary forms and motifs. Examining the work of three women writers, I will explore the impact Scandinavia and its representations had on British travel writing and drama. With *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) the philosopher and women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft published the first account of travel through Scandinavia by a woman traveller. Among nineteenth-century travellers her book became a point of reference and a testament to the growing attraction of the Scandinavian landscape.[5] The Romantic conception of Norwegian natural landscapes in Wollstonecraft's *Letters* also informs the so-called cultural discovery (and rediscovery) of Old Norse literature and ancient mythology in Harriet Martineau's *Feats on the Fjord* (1841), a tale for children set in Norway. Martineau's novel demonstrates the interchange between fiction and travelogues, showing how the latter inspired representations of Scandinavia in other genres.[6] When from the 1880s onwards the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen started conquering Europe with his naturalist plays,

[4] Sara Ayres and Elettra Carbone 'Introduction', in Sara Ayres and Elettra Carbone (eds.), *Sculpture and the Nordic Region* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1–11 (pp. 2–3); Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, 'Editorial Introduction to Nordic Cultures', in Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen(eds.), *Introduction to Nordic Cultures* (London: UCL Press, 2020), pp. 1–8 (pp. 1–2).

[5] See Dimitrios Kassis, *Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), p. 53.

[6] Kathryn Walchester, *Gamle Norge and Nineteenth-Century British Women Travellers in Norway* (London: Anthem Press, 2014), pp. 15, 141.

Scandinavia began to acquire a 'modern' literary reputation. In Britain, *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* featured the New Woman, and many of Ibsen's followers were indeed women who wrote about and worked for emancipation. The writings on Ibsen's work published in the British press by the feminist Maria Sharpe Pearson are indictive of the impact of Ibsen's work on British audiences. For the latter Scandinavia was both geographically and culturally close – and yet far away. This 'allure of accessible difference' continues to feed Britain's fascination with modern-day Scandinavia in more recent literary trends.[7]

Beyond the Beaten Track

From the late seventeenth century onwards, Scandinavia would become an increasingly popular destination for British travellers in search of less-explored destinations and 'an unharnessed natural scenery', far from the beaten track of the Grand Tourists of southern Europe.[8] Paradoxically, improvements in travel services and infrastructure made Scandinavia a more popular destination, resulting in more travel accounts of one or several countries in the region, of which roughly 50 per cent were British.[9]

Yet in 1795, when Mary Wollstonecraft set off to Scandinavia on private business, little was known about this region in Britain and few had travelled there, to the extent that British geography textbooks and encyclopaedias still mentioned sea monsters; a rumour Wollstonecraft dismisses.[10] *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* would eventually become one of the most popular and influential travel books on this region, and it played a pivotal role in consolidating ideas about the three Scandinavian countries, shaping the

[7] Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, 'Nordic Noir in the UK: The Allure of Accessible Difference', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 8/1 (2016): 1–11 (p. 3). In addition to Nordic Noir, other popular areas of interest and fascination in recent years have included Nordic children's literature and publications on Nordic lifestyle, promoting culturally specific concepts such as the Danish 'hygge' (cosiness), which in 2016 was officially included in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. See Charlotte Jane Berry, 'Publishing, Translation, Archives: Nordic Children's Literature in the United Kingdom, 1950–2000' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2014) and Ellen Kythor, 'What the Hygge? Britain's Hype for British Hygge', *Scandinavica*, 57/2 (2018): 68–83.

[8] Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, pp. 38–9; Fjågesund, *The Dream of the North*, pp. 382–3, 385. On the Grand Tour see Chapter 14 in this volume, by Zoë Kinsley.

[9] Fjågesund, *The Dream of the North*, p. 382.

[10] Karen Hust, 'In Suspect Terrain: Mary Wollstonecraft Confronts Mother Nature in *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*', *Women's Studies*, 25/5 (1996): 483–505 (p. 484); Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, p. 339; Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ed. Tone Brekke and Jon Mee (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 90.

figure of the woman travel writer.[11] *Letters* was quickly translated into German (1796), Swedish (1798), Dutch (1799), and Portuguese (1806). The journals of Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, and Hazlitt all mention Wollstonecraft's account.[12] *Letters* was also one of the most important influences on another famous Romantic journey, namely that to France, Germany, and Switzerland by Percy and Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont in 1814, recorded in *A History of a Six Weeks' Tour*.[13] While Mary Shelley, Wollstonecraft's daughter, did not travel to Scandinavia, she experienced 'the Arctic sublime' during her stay in Switzerland.[14]

Officially, Wollstonecraft travelled to Scandinavia, accompanied by her maid and infant child, to discover what had happened to a shipment of silver that in 1794 was sent from France to Sweden by her American lover Gilbert Imlay.[15] Her role was to represent Imlay's interests, but her official affairs did not prevent her from recording her impressions, which later became the travel narrative. Travel literature was, in fact, a genre in which she had been interested for some time, as shown by the over twenty reviews of accounts she published prior to her own, her reflections on the function of travel and on the image of the traveller.[16] In *Letters* she put these reflections into practice, emphasizing the significance of travel as a formative experience – while warning that '[t]ravellers who require that every nation should resemble their native country, had better stay at home' – and emphasizing the importance of the traveller's 'I' in travel accounts.[17] In her 'Advertisement' she explained how the aim of the book was to allow 'remarks and reflections [to] flow unrestrained', focusing on 'the effect different objects had produced on my mind and feelings' and giving 'a just view of the present state of the countries' she passed through.[18]

[11] Walchester, *Gamle Norge*, pp. 18–19.
[12] Eileen Hunt Botting, 'Wollstonecraft in Europe, 1792–1904: A Revisionist Reception History', *History of European Ideas*, 39/4 (2013): 503–27 (pp. 509, 517).
[13] Walchester, *Gamle Norge*, pp. 18–19.
[14] Janice Cavell, 'The Sea of Ice and the Icy Sea: The Arctic Frame of *Frankenstein*', *Arctic*, 70/3 (2017): 295–307 (p. 301).
[15] Tone Brekke and Jon Mee, 'Introduction', in Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, pp. ix–xxviii (pp. x, xiv).
[16] Ibid., p. xv; Ingrid Horrocks, 'Creating an "insinuating interest": Mary Wollstonecraft's Travel Reviews and *A Short Residence*', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 19/1 (2015): 1–15 (p. 2); Anne Scott Sørensen, 'A Picturesque Travelogue: Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, 1796', *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 4 (1996): 31–43 (p. 34).
[17] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 34; Horrocks, 'Creating an "insinuating interest"', pp. 2–3.
[18] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 3.

Yet Wollstonecraft revealed her cultural bias by comparing Scandinavia to France and England, affirming their cultural superiority:[19] 'If travelling, as the completion of a liberal education, were to be adopted on rational grounds, the northern states ought to be visited before the more polished parts of Europe, to serve as the elements even of the knowledge of manners, only to be acquired by tracing the various shades in different countries.'[20] Swedes are portrayed as 'sluggish' and 'a caricature of the French', and Norwegians are still uncultured, while Danes are indolent, ignorant, and adverse to innovation.[21] As the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft also criticizes female domesticity and men's oppression of women, something she observes – to varying degrees – in all three Scandinavian countries.[22]

Wollstonecraft's letters depict the three countries both as part of the same region, held together by political interests, a shared history, and some natural and cultural features, and as separate countries with individual identities and characteristics. She writes about Norway's union with Denmark, with which the Norwegians, despite their sympathies for the French revolutionary cause, appear satisfied. She also writes about the conflicts between Denmark and Sweden, referencing, for instance, the 'Battle of Quistram [Kvistrum]' of 1788, which Sweden lost to Denmark-Norway.[23] Moreover, like many travellers throughout the nineteenth century, Wollstonecraft identifies hospitality as a trait among the Scandinavian people and talks about the rocky coasts of Scandinavia as a common feature of the landscape of this region.[24] However, the differences between the three countries take centre stage in Wollstonecraft's letters with the representation of an impoverished, somewhat underwhelming and backward Sweden, an impressive Norway thanks to its scenery and 'unique freedom', and a politically retrograde, disappointing Denmark.

Wollstonecraft's focus on the differences between the three countries may be explained through the author and artist William Gilpin's definition of the 'picturesque traveller', namely one who travels with 'the expectation of new scenes continually opening, and arising to his view'.[25] Travelling

[19] Karen Klintgaard Pavlsen, 'Eighteenth Century Stereotypes of the North: An Introduction', in Karen Klintgaard Pavlsen (ed.), *Northbound: Travel, Encounters & Constructions, 1700–1830* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007), pp. 11–24 (p. 14); Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, p. 155.

[20] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 109. [21] Ibid., pp. 15, 42, 45–6, 101, 105, 114–15.

[22] Kassis, *Representations of the North*, p. 55. [23] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, pp. 27, 40–4.

[24] In relation to hospitality see for instance ibid., pp. 8, 31, 54, 113. [25] Ibid., p. 33.

from one Scandinavian country to the other, Wollstonecraft looked, in fact, for new scenes and features. She was moved by Sweden's natural beauty but also by the poverty and indolence of the population, which, she believed, was affected by the cold climate. Denmark was even more disappointing as it possessed, in her view, 'none of the wild charms of [the heaths] of Sweden and Norway'.[26] Norway, on the other hand, became the focal point of her travel account. As soon as she reached the Norwegian fjords, she hailed the grandeur of the views, a theme that she continued to expand on with representations of mountains, waterfalls, and images of summer in the north.[27] Moreover, she deemed the Norwegians, despite their not being an independent nation by this point, 'the most free community I have ever observed', characterized – in contrast to their Scandinavian neighbours – by industriousness and vivacity.[28] The untouched Norwegian nature – in stark contrast to an increasingly industrialized Britain – and the independence of the Norwegian peasants with their 'entitlement to property and their political rights' continued to be key features in nineteenth-century British travel accounts of Norway, shaping the country's distinctive place in British literature as a northern utopia that contrasted with Britain's 'vanishing natural scenery' and capitalist drives.[29]

Further North: The Arctic

The centrality of nature in British representations of Scandinavia is emphasized by the prominence in both travel accounts and fictional texts of the countryside rather than towns. In Wollstonecraft's account little is said about the capitals of the three Scandinavian countries, as these are not seen as representative of 'a national character'.[30] Wollstonecraft did not visit Stockholm and only passed through Norway's Christiania, but she was unimpressed by it as it did not present 'any combination of objects so strikingly new, or picturesque, as to command remembrance'.[31] In line with her representation of Denmark, her visit to Copenhagen was the anti-climax of her journey: she was surprised by the lack of 'any pleasurable sensation', having heard of the city's splendour.[32] Lacking the striking natural characteristics of the Scandinavian peninsula, Denmark was seen as a 'liminal place', a physical and metaphorical bridge to the countries

[26] Ibid., p. 119. [27] Ibid., p. 32.
[28] Ibid., pp. 40–1, 45. Kassis, *Representations of the North*, p. 59.
[29] Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, pp. 181–9, 268, 296–345.
[30] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 15. [31] Ibid., p. 82. [32] Ibid., p. 99.

further north.[33] Wollstonecraft, who encountered Copenhagen after the fire that destroyed much of the capital in 1794, interpreted its physical ruin as an apt backdrop for the depravity and indolence of its citizens.[34] Victorian writers tended not to associate Denmark with the Arcadian image of the north, and its representation in British literature was later further complicated by the historical events of the first decades of the nineteenth century. These included the British attack on Copenhagen in 1801 following diplomatic and trade tensions, and the British seizure of the Danish fleet and bombardment of the Danish capital in 1807 as retaliation for the country's alliance with France during the Napoleonic Wars.[35]

Deeply disappointed by the cities, Wollstonecraft regretted not being able to travel further north where, she states, 'the country [. . .] is most romantic, abounding in forests and lakes, and the air pure' and the inhabitants, 'substantial farmers', are known for their 'intelligence'.[36] The natural and cultural superiority of the northernmost regions of Scandinavia was a feature common of several travel accounts of the time, which resonated with the so-called mystique of the Arctic. As Arnold Barton has argued, the Arctic represented in fact 'the ultimate Nordic experience, expressing the most basic motives for travels in the North: exoticism, primitivism, and escape from Mediterranean classicism'.[37] Perhaps the most lingering example of Arctic imagery is the narrative frame of Captain Walton's North Pole expedition in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

The fascination with the Arctic – dominated by the representation of a striking and merciless nature – is explored in Harriet Martineau's tale for children entitled *Feats on the Fjord: A Tale of Norway*, which centres on a

[33] Kassis, *Representations of the North*, pp. 236–8; Henriette Steiner, '"The More I See of the World . . .": London as Metropolitan Paradigm in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796)', *The Literary London Journal*, 9 (2011), 2, http://literarylondon.org/the-literary-london-journal/archive-of-the-literary-london-journal/issue-9-2/the-more-i-see-of-the-world-london-as-metropolitan-paradigm-in-mary-wollstonecrafts-letters-written-during-a-short-residence-in-sweden-norway-and-denmark-1796 [accessed 29 October 2021].

[34] Steiner, '"The More I See of the World . . ."'; Elettra Carbone, 'The Cheerful Danes: Henry Clarke Barlow's "Revelation of a Writing-Case" (1856) on Copenhagen', *Scandinavica*, 58/2 (2019): 153–73 (p. 163).

[35] Kassis, *Representations of the North*, pp. 235–6; Arnold H. Barton, *Northern Arcadia: Foreign Travelers in Scandinavia, 1765–1815* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), p. 175; Thomas Munch-Petersen, *Defying Napoleon: How Britain Bombarded Copenhagen and Seized the Danish Fleet in 1807* (Stroud: Sutton, 2007), p. 97.

[36] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 85. [37] Barton, *Northern Arcadia*, p. 116.

rural community 'within the arctic circle, in Nordland, not far from the foot of Sulitelma, the highest mountain in Norway'.[38] The third book of the series *The Playfellow*, it was originally intended as a novel 'for young persons', and became, like Wollstonecraft's *Letters*, another influential text about Scandinavia, and particularly Norway, among British readers. The book continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, although, remarkably, Martineau had never travelled to Norway.[39] Nevertheless, Martineau's representation of the country played a significant role in preparing future travellers and consolidating the image of Norway in the British imagination.[40]

According to a notice from the publisher in the 1846 edition, the narrative is a vehicle for 'educating' the reader about 'Life in foreign lands', and this is evinced by the notes explaining Norwegian-sounding words and traditions throughout the text.[41] The didactic aim of the book is emphasized by the agenda of the *Playfellow* series, commissioned by the publisher Charles Knight, who was closely associated with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge founded in 1827.[42] The story reaffirms a number of recurring themes about Norway and Norwegians, such as the rocky coasts, the beauty of the fjords, and the Norwegians' status as 'social and hospitable people'.[43] The theme of the independence and freedom of the Norwegian peasants – also developed in Wollstonecraft's letters and generally common in British representations of Norway – is also central to Martineau's plot and is woven into her moralistic message.[44] We see this through the representations of Erligsen and Madame Erligsen, who own the farm where the story takes place and who – like all other farmers in Norway according to the narrative – are self-sufficient. Through their rationality, strength, and authority, they demonstrate a clear understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of their country. They provide for and protect their family and workers, act sensibly in moments of crisis, and,

[38] Harriet Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord: A Tale of Norway* (London: C. Knight, 1846), p. 12.
[39] Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord*, p. 7; Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, pp. 74–5.
[40] Walchester, *Gamle Norge*, pp. 148–9.
[41] Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord*, p. 7. Her story was inspired by other travel accounts such as Henry Inglis's *A Personal Narrative of a Journey through Norway, Part of Sweden and the Islands and States of Denmark* (1826) and Samuel Laing's *Journal of a Residence in Norway during the Years 1834, 1835 and 1836* (1836).
[42] Ainslie Robinson, 'Playfellows and Propaganda: Harriet Martineau's Children's Writing', *Women's Writing: the Elizabethan to Victorian Period*, 9/3 (2002): 395–412 (pp. 395–6).
[43] Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord*, pp. 9–11.
[44] Robinson, 'Playfellows and Propaganda', pp. 399–401.

while they themselves do not succumb to superstition (another key theme of the story), they respect old traditions.

As in Wollstonecraft's *Letters*, British culture and society are compared with the Norwegians' way of life. For example, the narrator introduces the reader to the tradition of 'betrothment' in Norway, which, she explains, 'is a more formal and public affair [. . .] than with us' as young people need to wait for a house to become available on the estate before getting married.[45] The Norwegian way of life is presented as an alternative one ruled by different systems and values and often also affected by climate and geography. However, if the Norwegians are represented in Martineau's text as a different, somewhat simpler, but still organized society, the Sami people – or the Lapps as they were known in British literature of the time – are portrayed as 'simple children of nature'.[46] Wollstonecraft had not met any 'Laplanders' but mentioned in her *Letters* a collection at the Royal Museum in Copenhagen of their 'dresses, arms, and implements [. . .] displaying that first species of ingenuity which is rather a proof of patient perseverance, than comprehension of mind'.[47] Fjågesund and Symes argue that British ethnographic interest in Norway was spurred by the co-existence of these two 'types': 'the Caucasian Norwegian, with his protestant religion, his Teutonic heritage and his apparent "aristocracy"' seen as close to the Anglo-Saxon Briton, and the Sami, who 'in appearance, religion and culture' were very different and generally considered 'backward and inferior'.[48] Martineau characterized the Sami people through the eyes of the Norwegian characters as cowards and ignoramuses.[49] While they contributed to Norway's economy by trading with the farmers and participating in some social events, they were still 'dirty and despised'.[50] It is important to point out here that such descriptions were entangled with, and representative of, broader Victorian discourses about ethnographic exhibitions and race.[51]

One of the central motifs in Martineau's tale is superstition and belief in the old pagan myths, represented by the main character, the maid Erica, as opposed to belief in Christian religion, represented by the Bishop of

[45] Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord*, pp. 14–15.
[46] Linda Andersson Burnett, 'Selling the Sami: Nordic Stereotypes and Participatory Media in Georgian Britain', in Peter Stadius and Jonas Harvard (eds.), *Communicating the North: Media Structures and Images in the Making of the Nordic Region* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 171–96 (p. 172).
[47] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 112.
[48] Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, pp. 196, 202–3.
[49] Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord*, p. 145. [50] Ibid., pp. 208–9.
[51] Robinson, 'Playfellows and Propaganda', p. 172.

Tronyem (Trondheim), who visits the farm and frees Erica from her superstition at the end of the story. Throughout the novel, we discover that a series of events, which superstitious people like Erica interpret as the result of the intervention of supernatural creatures such as 'Nipen' (likely to derive from Njörðr, a Norse divinity protector of seafarers and fishermen), all have a rational explanation.[52] Martineau's narrative reflects the growing interest in Old Norse myths in Britain from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, when they were placed on equal footing with Greek and Roman mythology and seen as 'a crucial element in the study of human cultural development and anthropology'.[53] Works such as *Northern Antiquities* (1770) translated into English by Thomas Percy, and two translations of the *Edda* (by Amos Cottle in 1797 and William Herbert in 1804), as well as the reworking of Old Norse mythological motifs by Thomas Gray and William Blake, exemplify this trend.[54] Old Norse divinities and their powers are listed at the end of Martineau's tale when the Bishop of Tronyem explains to Erica that the old religion arose because 'the people saw grand spectacles every day, and heard wonders whichever way they turned; and they supposed that the whole universe was alive'. Instead of blaming those who still trust in these 'tales', he goes on to state that these beliefs will persist for as long as these stories are narrated.[55] Within a generation, however, Norwegian playwrights would turn the country's reputation for folkloric superstition into one of trailblazing modernity regarding women's and social issues.

Scandinavia and Modernity

The image of a 'modern' Scandinavia that developed in Britain in the last decades of the nineteenth century was closely connected to the so-called modern breakthrough, a term used in the history of Scandinavian literature to refer to the period from the 1870s to the 1890s when strong realist and naturalist movements spread from Scandinavia, championing a socially engaged literature.[56] By then, Scandinavian literature was widely

[52] Edgar C. Polomé and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Njörðr', in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), X, p. 6641.

[53] Heather O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 149–50.

[54] Ibid., p. 105. [55] Martineau, *Feats on the Fiord*, pp. 216–18.

[56] The term 'det modern gennombrud' ('the modern breakthrough') is associated with the Danish scholar Georg Brandes and his influential lectures and publications on the main currents in European literature between 1871 and 1875.

read and imitated throughout Europe, stimulating debates about gender roles in traditionally patriarchal societies.[57] This represents a remarkable shift in literary dynamics: from being unknown writers of little international significance still reliant on the imitation of other European traditions or on the oral retelling of myths and anecdotes in Wollstonecraft's and Martineau's texts, Scandinavian authors became champions of modern forms and topics, as I will examine in this last section in Maria Sharpe Pearson's writings of the 1890s. When contextualized in light of Ibsen's reception as a progressive playwright in Britain, Sharpe Pearson's articles are a clear example of how, from the late 1880s onwards, British audiences looked to Scandinavia, and in this case particularly to Norway, as a source of technical and social innovation.[58]

Ibsen's breakthrough in Britain occurred between 1889 and 1896, once his reputation had been established in Scandinavia and Germany.[59] The London premieres of Ibsen's plays during these years sparked strong reactions and debates with their combination of theatrical realism and the challenge to traditional morals and ideals, particularly those linked to the institution of marriage. On the whole, Ibsen's reception in Britain was polarized. Many criticized his new dramas for their immoral content – which came into conflict with public censorship and the double standards of Victorian society that made such an institution necessary; others found his work 'provincial' and 'gloomy' because it came from a 'minor' and 'peripheral' culture.[60] However, the so-called Ibsenites praised these same works for their realism and engagement with pressing social issues.[61] These included renowned figures such as the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw and the South African activist Olive Schreiner, who admired Ibsen's works for their international impact on a theatrical and political level, and

[57] Susan C. Brantly, 'German and Scandinavian Literary Relations', *Scandinavian Studies*, 61/4 (2019): 441–58 (p. 450); Fjågesund, *The Dream of the North*, p. 455.

[58] Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, p. 76.

[59] Germany functioned as a cultural mediator in the European reception of Scandinavian literature. Throughout the nineteenth century it remained the first non-Scandinavian country where the works of most Scandinavian authors, including Ibsen, were disseminated before gaining international status. See Brantly, 'German and Scandinavian Literary Relations', pp. 441–7; Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, '"Too Far from Picadilly": Ibsen in England and France in the 1890s', in Inga-Stina Ewbank, Olav Lausund, and Bjørn Thysdal (eds.), *Anglo-Scandinavian Cross-Currents* (London: Norvik, 1999), pp. 187–202 (p. 187).

[60] See Tore Rem, '"The Provincial of Provincials": Ibsen's Strangeness and the Process of Canonisation', *Ibsen Studies*, 4/2 (2004): 205–26.

[61] Giuliano D'Amico, 'Six Points for a Comparative Ibsen Reception History', *Ibsen Studies*, 14/1 (2014): 4–37 (p. 13); Tore Rem, 'British Reception', in Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem (eds.), *Ibsen in Context* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 175–83 (p. 176).

William Archer and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, who translated his works into English. Ibsen's dramas became particularly popular among supporters of women's rights. As Tore Rem observes, a 'conspicuously large number of Ibsen's followers were women' to the extent that 'Ibsen's links to female emancipation became his foremost and most enduring political association to Britain'.[62] This is mirrored in the discussions and reviews of his works in feminist newspapers such at *The Women's Penny Paper*, later known as *The Woman's Herald* (1891–3) and as *The Woman's Signal* (1894–9), which was an official organ of the British Women's Temperance Association, appealing to a wide female audience by trying to negotiate new and traditional forms of femininity to give a voice to women's interests.[63]

Today Maria Sharpe Pearson is hardly known, but in the late 1880s and 1890s she sided with the Ibsenites and used Ibsen's works to debate the role of women in British society in the feminist and radical press. Sharpe Pearson initially developed her interest in Ibsen in connection with her involvement with the Men and Women's Club, founded in 1885 by the then Goldsmid Professor of Applied Mathematics and Mechanics at University College London, Karl Pearson, who later became her husband. The club was made up of twenty 'middle-class radical-liberal, socialist and feminist' members (ten men and ten women) who met to discuss various topics linked to 'the changing features of sex and gender'.[64] In 1889 Sharpe Pearson also travelled to Norway to write and learn Norwegian, and between 1889 and 1894 she published four articles on Ibsen's authorship, focusing on his representations of women in his dramas and emphasizing how these do not provide ready-made answers but ask questions about the role of women in society.[65]

[62] Rem, 'British Reception', p. 177.

[63] Maria DiCenzo, 'Feminism, Theatre Criticism, and the Modern Drama', *South Central Review*, 25/1 (2008): 36–55 (p. 45); Emma Liggins, 'Not an Ordinary "Ladies' Paper": Work, Motherhood, and Temperance Rhetoric in the "Woman's Signal", 1894–1899', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 47/4 (2014): 613–30 (pp. 613–20).

[64] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 135.

[65] Sharpe Pearson's articles on Ibsen include a substantial essay initially presented at the Men and Women's Club and later published in *The Westminster Review*: Maria Sharpe Pearson, 'Henrik Ibsen: His Men and Women', *The Westminster Review*, 131/6 (1889): 626–49. This was one of the first essays on Ibsen in the British periodical press. In addition to this, she published three shorter newspaper articles: 'Henrik Ibsen's Women or "Noblesse Oblige"', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 29 June 1989, pp. 6–7; 'Ibsen's New Drama', *The Woman's Herald*, 31 January 1891, p. 227; 'Henrik Ibsen's Heroines', *The Woman's Signal*, 16 August 1894, p. 100.

Sharpe Pearson's first two published articles appeared soon after she saw the premiere of *A Doll's House* translated by William Archer at the Novelty Theatre together with members of the club, many of whom, particularly the women, were left 'breathless with excitement' by the performance.[66] The production sparked a battle between the Ibsenites and the Anti-Ibsenites in the British press, and, in 'Henrik Ibsen's Women or "Noblesse Oblige"', Sharpe Pearson specifically addresses the 'criticism of the performance in the majority of the newspapers'. This, she argues, shows 'that the masculine mind has no answer' to the questions asked by the play where Nora, like many other women characters in Ibsen's dramas, finds herself torn between individuality and freedom on the one side and duty and social responsibility on the other.[67] The need for debate initiated by Ibsen's plays – a debate which appears to have been possible only in radical and feminist papers – is stressed in her later articles, which engage with discussions about Ibsen's later works. In 'Ibsen's New Drama' she reviews *Hedda Gabler* (1890), which was published simultaneously that same year in Denmark, England, France, and Germany.[68] Hedda, viewed by some critics – including some women writers and intellectuals – as the incomprehensible, demonic, and unfeminine lead in a scandalous play, is represented in Sharpe Pearson's review as the quintessential middle-class woman.[69] Instead of condemning Hedda as a 'self-righteous narcissist and degenerate woman' who rejects motherhood and commits suicide, Sharpe Pearson shares the view of those middle-class female audiences who saw Hedda as 'an ordinary bourgeois wife [. . .], whose calm exterior [. . .] masks a deeper dissatisfaction'.[70] As Sharpe Pearson puts it, she is 'one of those women figures of suppressed and unused power, with a bitterly restless desire to live and be free, which Ibsen loves to paint'.[71] While she acknowledges that Hedda is 'a destructive force in society', she maintains that she 'has some justification' as she has been turned 'to bitterness' by the 'externally false conditions of society'.[72]

[66] Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 166; for further details on the significance of the performance at the Novelty Theatre for intellectual debates about the 'woman question' see Rem, 'British Reception', p. 179.
[67] Sharpe Pearson, 'Henrik Ibsen's Women or "Noblesse Oblige"', p. 6.
[68] D'Amico, 'Six Points for a Comparative Ibsen Reception History', p. 8.
[69] Ellen Mortensen, 'Ibsen and the Scandalous: *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*', *Ibsen Studies*, 7/2 (2007): 169–87 (p. 169).
[70] Ibid., p. 178; Susan Torrey Barstow, '"Hedda is all of us": Late Victorian Women at the Matinee', *Victorian Studies*, 43/1 (2001): 387–411 (p. 394).
[71] Sharpe Pearson, 'Ibsen's New Drama', p. 227. [72] Ibid., p. 227.

Ultimately, for Sharpe Pearson, as for other Ibsenites, Ibsen's modernity lies in his ability to open the audience's eyes to elements in 'our present social life' and 'to observe humanity from a new standpoint, that of the realist gathering new facts'.[73] She argues that, while Ibsen may not sympathize with his characters in all their acts, 'he sees and understands the difficulties which led to those acts'.[74] Sharpe Pearson's literary ambitions ended with these short articles on Ibsen's work, for – despite the promise of a modern marriage in the form of an intellectual union – she abandoned her intellectual ambitions in order to take care of her three children while her husband Karl Pearson dedicated himself to his new field of study, eugenics. Her writings may only be fragments in the wider corpus on Ibsen's British reception, but they are representative of her and other British women's attempts to establish a public presence for themselves in contemporary debates which many hoped – thanks also to Ibsen's contribution – would change the condition of women in the society they lived in.

Landscapes, Traditions, and Values

As the source of new literary motifs and genres from the nineteenth century onwards, Scandinavia has provided female writers like Wollstonecraft, Martineau, and Sharpe Pearson with the opportunity to carve their own space and develop their voice in the British literary tradition while helping shape British perceptions of this region. As illustrated in the three case studies developed in this chapter, the allure of Scandinavia is linked to its 'exotic' landscape – as shown particularly by the fascination with the Arctic – combined with a perceived kinship with British culture and society.

Over a century later, it is, arguably, a similar mixture of distance and proximity that has influenced more recent literary trends from this region such as Nordic Noir. Nordic crime fiction first gained international success from the 1970s onwards with the translation of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's co-authored police procedurals featuring Martin Beck. In the 1990s Peter Høeg's *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992; *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, 1993) and Henning Mankell's Wallander series reached an even wider audience, culminating in the global success of Stieg

[73] Ibid.; Pearson, 'Henrik Ibsen's Heroines', p. 100.
[74] Pearson, 'Henrik Ibsen's Heroines', p. 100; Mortensen, 'Ibsen and the Scandalous', p. 174.

Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* (2005–7).[75] Multiple film and television adaptations also paved the way for television series such as *The Killing* (2007–12) and *The Bridge* (2011–18), gaining them a mass audience in Britain that accepted the subtitled original as essential to the 'Nordic' part of the genre as well as opening the British television market to further foreign crime imports. Several scholars have observed the appeal of the genres 'exotic' features: frozen landscapes and silent characters alongside values perceived as typically Nordic, such as welfare and social justice, which are seen by some as threatened by 'neoliberal policies, global financial crises and [. . .] austerity measures' particularly in Britain.[76] Nordic Noir has also served to draw attention to questions of equality, thanks partly to the great number of internationally acclaimed female writers from the Nordic countries (such as Camilla Läckberg, Liza Marklund, and Karin Fossum) and partly to the prominence in Nordic crime narratives of female lead investigators balancing work and family commitments.[77] Beck's and Wallander's taciturn moroseness found refreshing counterparts in Sarah Lund's tenacity and Saga Norén's autism. Nordic Noir demonstrates, as did Wollstonecraft's, Martineau's, and Sharpe Pearson's texts, that 'the north' can count on a receptive British audience for the character of its landscape and traditions and for a rigorous debate about modernity.

[75] See Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 203–12.
[76] Ibid., p. 5.
[77] Ana Alacovska, 'The Gendering Power of Genres: How Female Scandinavian Crime Fiction Writers Experience Professional Authorship', *Organization*, 24/3 (2017): 377–96 (pp. 386–8).