

Images of the Urban North: “Grey heritage” in travel narratives in the 19th century

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Sophus Bugge building, Seminar room 12, University of Oslo

Abstracts

Anna Bohlin:

Circulation: organisms and politics in Fredrika Bremer’s travel narrative of Copenhagen

Fredrika Bremer’s *Lif i Norden* (1849) opens with a statement of the interconnection between nature and man: the laws of nature equally apply to humans and to nations. She quotes from the Danish natural scientist H. C. Ørsted, who claims that nature may seem immobile, but knows no rest – nature is always slowly changing. This figure of movement permeates the entire travel narrative from Copenhagen, where Bremer spent approximately six months in the spring 1849 on her way to America. The sketches were published in a Swedish newspaper and subsequently as a book, in Swedish and in Danish, clearly targeting a Swedish audience as her aim was to present Danish culture in terms of achievements in art and science. Thus, Bremer was occupied with a spiritual heritage and did not pay as much attention to architecture as she would, for example, in her travel narrative of Rome a decade later. Nevertheless, the spiritual heritage was for her inextricably connected to grey as well as to green and blue heritage. Firmly rooted in Romanticist nationalism, she understood the nation, the individual and cultural expressions as organically connected to the landscape. In fact, her travel book may be read as a nationalist manual, celebrating Copenhagen and Denmark as an example for the other Scandinavian countries. In my paper I will explore the notion of movement and Bremer’s conceptions of grey, green and blue heritage in relation to contemporary political movements, such as Scandinavism.

Elettra Carbone:

Mapping Norway: Edward Price’s Norway: Views of Wild Scenery (1834) and Its Illustrations

From the end of the eighteenth century, Norway became an increasingly popular destination for British travellers in search of ‘a new and intriguing alternative to the more well-trodden paths’ (Fjågesund and Symes 2003: 39). The artist Edward Price (1800-1885) is today all but forgotten, but his major enterprise, a journey to Norway in 1826, remains immortalised in his illustrated journal *Norway. Views of Wild Scenery*. The seven engravings of Norwegian landscapes that are today part of the UCL Art Museum’s collections were made by the British painter and engraver John Linnell, The Elder (1792-1882) after drawings by Price but were not used as illustrations when Price’s book came out in 1834. The book included, instead, 21 engravings by the British artist Davis Lucas (1802-1881). Later Thomas Forester (dates unknown), who visited Norway in 1848, included Price’s journal in his *Norway and Its Scenery* (1853) and made use of the same engravings by Lucas.

Drawn to Norway by ‘the promise of a superabundance of material’ for his pencil, Price makes a number of references to his sketches and the process involved in their creation. Together, the text and the illustrations ‘map’ Norway, as they construct and communicate spatial knowledge of a region that was still little known to the British reader (Cosgrove 2012: 1). In my presentation I will explore the relationship between Price’s written account, often focusing on the difficulties of the journey as well as the dramatic nature of the Norwegian landscape, and the two sets of engravings by Linnell and Lucas. The story of this text and its illustrations offers an interesting starting point for a discussion on the tensions between green and grey heritage. While cities and buildings hardly appear in the travel narrative by Price and in the published illustrations by Lucas, the correspondence between Price and Linnell (preserved at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge) reveals that the representation of civilisation (people and buildings) seems to have been a key element in the preparation of the original unpublished illustrations engraved by Linnell. Focusing on the representation of Bergen, I will discuss how this case study can cast light on how urban environments struggled to take centre stage in nineteenth century British representations of the North.

Ruth Hemstad:

Images of the mundane North: Samuel Laing's political travel accounts on Norway and Sweden in a transnational perspective

Samuel Laing's well known travel books on Norway (1836) and Sweden (1839) reflect the emerging interest in Britain of exploring the Scandinavian region. New travel books were launched almost every year since the late 1820s, followed by reviews and comments in British and Scandinavian journals and newspapers. However, while the dominant travel narrative of the North was centered on the sublime natural scenery and on exploring the nature, Laing's accounts represent something new. He explicitly underlines in his book on Norway, *Journal of a residence in Norway during the years 1834, 1835, & 1836, made with a view to inquire into the moral and political economy of that country, and the condition of its inhabitants*, that his primary interest is not that of the sublime, but of the mundane. He set out to describe "the social condition and state of the Norwegian people", which, to be sure, is "the most interesting and singular group of people in Europe". His purpose was, as he emphasizes in his book on Sweden, to "collect ordinary facts of common occurrence" and to "draw from them obvious conclusions on the state of its inhabitants", a field where the traveller "may be eminently useful". Being a native of Orkney, with its Norwegian historical connections, later a citizen of Edinburgh, Laing clearly favored Norway to Sweden, praising the Norwegian political development. In his book on Sweden, *A Tour in Sweden in 1838; comprising Observations on the Moral, Political and Economical State of the Swedish Nation*, his critic is so harsh that it immediately provokes a counter-account from the side of Sweden. Laing's 'obvious conclusions' are accordingly intensively discussed in the British, Norwegian and Swedish press. In this paper, I will examine to what extent Laing's travel books, and the subsequent transnational debates, reflect and stimulate a renewed interest of 'Norden' and the Nordic countries regarding nature as well as society and culture, and how the relation between its 'green', 'blue' and 'grey' heritage is understood and discussed.

Alexandre Simon-Ekeland:

Connecting exploration, polar nature and urbanity: About a commemorative plaque for Amundsen and Guilbaud in Tromsø in the 1930s

In 1928, the Italian general Nobile launches a new dirigible expedition to the North Pole. It is a catastrophic failure, and many countries participate in an international effort to rescue the survivors. Amundsen, by then a legendary explorer who had been to both Poles, has some difficulty finding transportation to Spitsbergen. A French team led by captain Guilbaud offers to help; they take off from Tromsø with Amundsen and Lt. Dietrichson in a "Latham 47" plane on the 18th of June 1928, never to be seen again. Pieces of the plane are found several weeks later, indicating that they probably crashed in the Barents Sea.

Five years later, in 1933, the French newspaper *Le Temps* and the Bergenske Dampskibsselskab commemorated the event and the memory of Amundsen and Guilbaud by financing the installation of a commemorative plaque in Tromsø. This plaque is far from being the first erected to commemorate the "Latham" crash and its passengers. Many others were erected for Amundsen in Norway, and individual monuments were installed in France for each member of the crew.

But this specific plaque is woven both in journalistic and touristic practices. It was made in France, where *Le Temps* installed it for some time in the entrance hall of its offices. Then the shipping company took it on a cruise co-organized for the first time with *Le Temps* along the Norwegian coast to the North Cape. During the cruise, the plaque was installed and inaugurated, and the collaboration around the cruise was repeated every year until the Second World War. *Le Temps* advertised regularly for the cruise, both in usual ads, and in "articles" that present the trip and are written by some of their best journalists.

This plaque is interesting in that it conceived as a basis (an excuse?) for spatial practices, located in a city, but evoking the High North and the adventurous explorations that are far from the placid reality of this cruise. Hence I argue that this plaque is, more precisely, used to fictively broaden the cruise to other areas, left imagined: the high North, in a context when this cruise is in competition with others that go all the way to Spitsbergen, and more generally nature, since the cruise mostly stops in cities. It

also serves to give it a historical depth in a process of commemoration familiar to Frenchmen after the Great War.

Kim Simonsen:

Fields of Knowledge - Travelling Back in Time Towards a new Future

Visual, Ecological and Material Aspects of Travel Writing: Urbanscapes, Socioscapes and Ecological in Northbound Travelling European Men of Letters and in Design, William Morris' travels in the North in 1871

The English traveller Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) echoed in 1856 a long series of stereotypes found in learned travel European 19th Century writers that the cities in the Far North, were 'a heap of houses' not interesting in any way. Like others of his time Burton was obsessed with Medievalism, even more so his own image of Ultima Thule and nature in the North.

Having examined a wide range of 19th Century French, German and English travel literature, it appears that nature in the North generally received the most positive image, while villages and towns were a disappointment, often seen as vulgar, plain and backwards. Consequently, picturesque or sublime nature is preferred bleeding into the auto-exoticism of the North, while socioscapes and town are left out or ridiculed. This raises the question of whether travel writers saw the North and the whole region as a part of Europe, or as a more 'primitive non-European' colony, at best a 'deep freezer' of values lost in the centres? Or even on a grander scale, the training ground for the beginning awareness of the Anthropocene, where travel became an intrinsic critique of modernity and the effects of industrialism?

This paper is on the political uses of sea-scapes/naturescapes and cityscape/socioscape divide. Arguing that many 19th century travellers saw the 'backward' image of the Far North as an advantage, or even something utopian and subversive in Ecological terms.

To focus will be on a traveller to break away from the general pattern, the socialist and industrialist William Morris, who travelled to Iceland and the Faroe Islands in 1871. Even we here experienced a well-known 19th century Victorian Medievalist and Historicist vision of the Far North, Morris was fascinated with the design of the boats, architecture of simple farm houses. He believed had not changed since the time of the sagas. His unorthodox and original views on the towns and the socioscapes, as well as landscapes and sea-scapes provided him with an opportunity to remake what industrialism seem to be destroying and at the same time better several fields of knowledge.

Kristina Skåden:

Catharine Hermine Kølle's days in Sweden

In the first half of the 19th century, it was rather unconventional for women to travel alone. Despite this, Catharine Hermine Kølle (1788 – 1959) went on a five-months journey through Norway and Sweden during summertime 1838. Her starting point was the small rural home village Ulvik, at the west coast of Norway, and the highlight of the journey was a longer stay in Stockholm. Kølle was inspired by Alexander von Humboldt's concept "Geography of plants", and thus connected to European circulation of knowledge. By a close reading of her travel-diary and with a close look at her travel-paintings, my aim is to explore how she observes, and represents the green, blue and grey environment in Norway and Sweden. This paper builds on the digital-humanity project: "Mapping the Fields".

Iver Tangen Stensrud:

"Europe is becoming dreadfully 'used up.'" British travellers in Christiania around 1850

"Europe is becoming dreadfully 'used up,'" the *Illustrated London News* proclaimed in 1857 and recommended a trip to Norway. Norway's capital Christiania was not the main reason the Britain's leading illustrated newspaper recommended a trip to the north, but it was a necessary stop on the way. By the mid-nineteenth century, Norway was becoming a tourist destination, especially for British travellers. The majestic landscapes and picturesque countryside were the main attractions, but most tourists also had to come through the Norwegian capital. Like today, Norwegians in the nineteenth century were obsessed with how people from abroad regarded their culture. Travellers accounts of Norway were sometimes reprinted in Norwegian newspapers and magazines. At the same time images

of the city, especially in the popular illustrated press, was part of a complex transnational network of image production.

My paper will look at accounts, both textual and visual, of the Norwegian capital in a selection of travel accounts and handbooks from the mid-nineteenth century. From Willam Henry Breton's *Scandinavian Sketches*, published in 1835 to around the 1870s. This was also a period in which the city experienced major changes. Some possible questions I will address include: In what ways do the accounts of the city change over the period? How was Christiania related to the more central attractions of the Norwegian landscape and countryside? How was the northern climate reflected in the descriptions of the city? In what ways did foreign tourists and their visual and textual accounts of Christiania influence its inhabitants' image of themselves and their urban environment? And how did artists and engravers in Christiania try to "promote" Norway as a tourist attraction?

Even Smith Wergeland:

'Riddled with smog, trash and dirt': The grey heritage of Oslo's East End

In the mid 19th century and onwards, Oslo's East End was going through a face of rapid urbanization. Neighbourhoods like Grünerløkka and Tøyen were transformed from suburban wooden gowns, self-built and unplanned, to brick-laid urban areas with systematic infrastructure and an arsenal of new factories. But modernization was taking its toll on the eastern neighbourhoods as the booming industries not only meant workplaces, investment and economic growth, but also hefty amounts of smog and fumes. Living conditions could be harsh in the East End, especially since the urban development happened so fast that important amenities like sewage systems, water supply and public baths were not installed quickly enough to prevent deadly diseases from spreading. In addition to that, large families were often living densely together in crammed spaces, worsening the already dire circumstances. Even if some parts of Oslo's East End still experience difficulties today it is rather hard to image what everyday life was like in the smog-filled streets of the 19th century. On the other hand, however, it was also a period of gradual improvement. The City of Christiania, as Oslo was still called, began to take serious measures in terms of improving people's life quality. Land was bought, pipes were laid and parks were planned and designed in order to secure basic public needs. The second half of the 19th century was a period of transition during which the city got greyer yet also more diverse, both colour-wise, socially and functionally. It was a time of contrasts and tensions between prosperity and poverty, progress and regression. In this paper I study this heritage through extensive archival work, featuring area maps, illustrations, photos and architectural drawings. I also lend perspectives from existing research, most notably Eilert Sundt's studies of Oslo's working class in the mid 19th century and later studies like *Mennesker i Kristiania* (1979) by Jan E. Myhre and Jan S. Østberg. My primary target of investigation is Tøyen and, more specifically, the span between Tøyen's greenest oasis, the Botanical garden, and one of the greyest settlements, the so-called Gråbeingårdene, a cluster of tenements built in the 1880s and '90s. The term 'heritage' applies to two things within the context of this investigation. Firstly, the social heritage which lives on through a number of different narratives about life in the East End, such as contemporary sociological studies of the area as well as heritage and museum discourses. Secondly, physical heritage in the form of surviving architecture and other urban structures from the 19th century. I devote a fair share of attention to architectural analysis of brick buildings, industrial and residential, highlighting how they have been portrayed as either the problem or the solution for Tøyen, depending on the time and the perspective. Today, local heritage authorities hail Oslo's brick architecture as one of city's most important urban legacies but it has also been known as the architecture of poverty. This is somewhat ironic since this particular building system was installed to cope with poverty issues, as wooden buildings were demolished in order to secure space for brick buildings. Now the tide has turned as brick buildings are often threatened by demolition unless they are listed and thus formally protected. Some brick tenements, however, have become part of an up-scale property marked symbolic of the socio-economic changes which are taking place at Tøyen. My exploration of the area revolves around the complex role of the brick heritage, which has been wrapped in various shades of grey through Oslo's modern history.