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Ein målmann dristar seg ut:
Aasmund Olavsson Vinje in Edinburgh and
the Emerging Nynorsk World View

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Introduction

Arne Kruse's contributions to promoting Norwegian language and culture in the wider world have been of enormous value to cultural relations between Norway and other countries. This is especially true of cultural contacts between Norway and Scotland, his adopted home. On a more personal level, Arne's work has also been of life-changing significance for generations of students, including his passion for raising the profile of Nynorsk, the lesser-used of the two official written standards of Norwegian, and Arne's first written language. It is no coincidence that many advocates of Nynorsk have emerged from his classes, and my first real immersion in Nynorsk was back in 2003–04, with Arne's second-year literature classes on the extraordinary novel *Fuglane* (1957) by Tarjei Vesaas.

In giving many in Edinburgh their first encounter with Nynorsk, Arne has followed in the footsteps of writer Aasmund Olavsson Vinje (1818–70), one of the language's earliest users. In 1862–63, this linguistic and cultural pioneer had an extended stay

in the Scottish capital, even venturing to the university that would one day be Arne's workplace, apparently for the opening of the winter session by the Principal, Sir David Brewster.¹ Vinje wrote of this event: 'There was hissing, and shouting, and throwing of peas and herrings, and waving of hats and sticks, producing on all sides of me a noise that was deafening. [...] I was thankful when I escaped from the meeting with unbroken bones'.²

While in Edinburgh, Vinje wrote *A Norseman's Views of Britain and the British* (1863). In addition to the material promised in its title, the book included probably the first essay-length account in English about the emerging cultural and linguistic movement later known as Nynorsk. In this text, Vinje wrote:

Away in the wild district of Möre – a district of islands, fiords, and mountains – there lived a young man who [...] had applied himself with wonderful energy to the task of self-culture. He perused, and to some purpose, all the works which that poor region could supply to him. The libraries of the captain and the clergyman he speedily exhausted.³

Had Vinje lived a century or more later, he could well have been describing the young Arne Kruse growing up on the islands of Nordmøre, but he was instead writing about the man from Sunnmøre who had laid the groundwork for this new standard of Norwegian, Ivar Aasen (1813–96). Vinje's essay about the language is an unassuming milestone for the international profile of Nynorsk, appearing as an appendix in the book he wrote in Edinburgh. Over the last century and a half, *A Norseman's Views of Britain and the British* has been largely

1. *The Scotsman* 1862: 4.

2. Vinje 1863a: 22.

3. *Ibid.*: 3 (appendix).

forgotten by an Anglophone readership, and it is only recently that the significance of the appendix has been re-evaluated in Norway and first translated into Norwegian.⁴

Over eighty years ago, Sigmund Skard called for this book to be studied from a broader historical perspective.⁵ This chapter is intended as one step in that process. The aim is to explore how Vinje's book, even though it was first written in English, contributed to an emerging world view that would come to characterise the Nynorsk movement.

In terms of methodology, this chapter will not provide an exhaustive account of the many topics covered in Vinje's book, which could be characterised as a culture-critical manifesto with satirical elements, blended with travel literature, and a sprinkling of Bakhtinian grotesque realism.⁶ Due to the focus on shaping a world view, many of the references will be to the earlier, more general parts of Vinje's book. These are the sections that best illustrate his positioning *vis-à-vis* the subject matter.

Later sections of the book continue in a critical vein, arguably with increasing intensity, as Vinje highlights the social inequalities he witnessed, with discussion ranging from social class, the aristocracy, land ownership, and the power of capital to matters such as literature, agriculture, education, the press, political parties, religion, architecture, the legal profession, and some intriguing metaphors involving drainage. Peter Fjågesund points to Vinje's perspectives on a global power, coming from a representative of a more peripheral European viewpoint, being interesting in their own right.⁷ At the same time, Vinje was entering into a greater European debate.⁸ Meanwhile, his critical views of British society

4. Grepstad 2018; Vinje 2018.

5. Skard 1939a: 336.

6. Solberg 1992: 46; Fjågesund 2021: 289.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.: 317.

gave him new perspectives on social developments in Norway too.⁹ From this network of viewpoints and gazes, a counter-hegemonic tendency with a particular relationship to power and authority acquires a clearer focus, a tendency that would become a defining feature of the Nynorsk movement as it developed.¹⁰ This chapter therefore seeks to show how Vinje's travels abroad informed and reflected the ideological foundations of the Nynorsk movement.

After outlining the context of Vinje's international journey, and the aims of his time spent in Edinburgh, I will move on to compare Vinje's approach to travel with that of another renowned Scandinavian writer, a contemporary of Vinje, who wrote about his own travels in what Vinje called *Bretland*, namely Hans Christian Andersen. This comparison will shed further light on what was distinctive about Vinje's methods, which is also of relevance for the further discussion of how Vinje's book was received in reviews of the time. As will be seen, Vinje's views and the ways in which he took account of contemporary power structures may not have won him many admirers among Victorian journalists on the western shores of the North Sea. He clearly sought to distance himself from the Anglomania that he claimed 'pervades every country' and described as 'a disease'.¹¹ One fairly typical London review of the book claimed of Vinje's stay that 'most of that time he seems to have devoted himself to picking as many holes as possible in our coat'.¹² For another reviewer in Liverpool, meanwhile, the book was 'obviously the production of an acute and intelligent observer'.¹³

Although I believe there is a discernible current tying in with longer-term ideologies in the Nynorsk movement, certain

9. Skard 1939b: 434.

10. Puzev 2011.

11. Vinje 1863a: 91.

12. *The Standard* 1863: 2.

13. *The Albion* 1863: 6.

other elements of Vinje's thought that will be mentioned are extremely antiquated. Some other aspects of the book may seem overly scholarly from a modern perspective, with obscure and antiquated references, but many aspects of the satire and social criticism are still relevant.¹⁴

Background and itinerary for Vinje's international expedition

Aasmund Olavsson Vinje was one of the very first writers to make active use of Landsmål, the language that would later become known as Nynorsk. In 1853, Ivar Aasen published his *Prøver af Landsmaalet i Norge*, providing a template for a modern written standard of Norwegian based on the common denominator elements he had earlier sought to identify among spoken Norwegian dialects through his grammar (1848) and dictionary (1850). In 1858, Vinje began the publication of the newspaper *Dølen*, marking the debut of Landsmål in the press and giving the language a significant boost. *Dølen* translates as 'the dalesman' – in other words a person from a dale, glen, or valley. Vinje described his journalistic mission in the very first lines of the foreword to the first issue:

*Dølen var i lang Tid ein vanvyrð Mann; men, Gud ske Lov, no er den Tid snart ute, og han dristar seg hermed ut i By og Bygd. Han vilde gjerne tala med Folk om Eit og Annat, som ligg honom på Hjartat; men han veit ikki ret, hvad Maal han skal mæla. Han kunde nok tala dansk, det er ikki for det; men han vilde no helst vera norsk, som han er fødd.*¹⁵

14. Solberg 1992: 44.

15. [Vinje] 1858: 1.

The dalesman was, for a long time, an object of disdain; but now, thank God, that time is almost over, so out he ventures through town and country. He would dearly like to talk with people about various things that concern him; but he is not sure exactly which language to speak. He could of course speak Danish if it comes to that; but he would really prefer to be Norwegian, as he was born.

The language as Vinje wrote it could be idiosyncratic, as he felt his way further forward along the path laid out by Aasen to define and expand this new standard of Norwegian. As Vinje later wrote, his spelling, neologisms, and reintroduction of words with a basis in Old Norse could leave his readers 'at times sorely puzzled'.¹⁶ Even those first lines of *Dølen* given above featured a footnote to the word *ikki*, clarifying that *ki* *udtales* *kji* ('*ki* is pronounced *kji*').¹⁷ Besides contributing to the corpus planning in the early development of Nynorsk, Vinje is well known for his work as a lyricist and the general role he played in advancing Norwegian journalism.

It was a major journalistic expedition that brought Vinje to Edinburgh. In June 1860, he applied to a government travel-grant scheme for the arts and sciences administered by the Royal Frederick University of Christiania (now the University of Oslo). Vinje's application for 400 speciedaler was to support a journey with the following purpose, as proposed by Vinje:

[...] *for under en Reise i det nordlige England og navnlig Skotland at gjøre sig bekjendt med de derværende comunale Indretninger og Retstilstande med stadigt Hensyn til Traditioner og Folkeliv.*¹⁸

16. Vinje 1863a: 4 (appendix).

17. [Vinje] 1858: 1.

18. Vinje 1969: 112 (letter 57, 16 June 1860).

[...] by travelling to northern England, and especially to Scotland, to investigate the local civic infrastructure and legislative situation with consistent reference to traditions and everyday life.

The university's appointed committee granted Vinje the funding. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen were among the other applicants for a bursary, although their applications were initially turned down. The newspaper *Aftenbladet* protested, pointing to its former editor Bjørnson's international renown and doubting Vinje's qualifications, suggesting sarcastically that he might as well be sent to Scotland to learn the bagpipes.¹⁹ The government intervened, so Bjørnson was awarded 500 speciedaler for travel to Italy, and Vinje was awarded 250, while Ibsen remained empty-handed.²⁰ In 1862, Vinje was awarded a supplementary grant of 100 speciedaler from the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters, followed by a further 80 in 1863.²¹ He was also supported with contributions from friends and contacts in Norway.²²

Vinje's motivations for crossing the North Sea and for what he would write about may, in fact, be surmised from the first sentence in that first leader article in *Dølen*, which was effectively what might today be called a mission statement, as this dalesman sought to venture forth into the world. Now the dalesman would venture further than Norwegian town and country, heading out into the wider world. He wished to learn something on his travels, make comparisons between conditions in England and Scotland on the one hand and Scandinavia on the other. He also seems to have thought that

19. *Aftenbladet* 1860: [2].

20. Halvorsen 1885: 13; Vesaas 2001: 262–263.

21. Vinje 1969: 130, 144.

22. Djupedal 1968: 29–30.

this journey may give him indications of future political and economic developments to come in the rest of Europe.



Figure 1: Vinje photographed by Adolphe Anjoux, 270 rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, 1863. Public domain.

He would try to see the reality he encountered through his characteristic *tvisyn* (dual vision), a way of seeing things from

contrasting perspectives, of taking life seriously but also seeing its humorous side, in an ironic fashion. According to Vinje, those who can use this type of vision *sjaa med eit Augnekast liksom Retta og Vranga paa Livsens Vev, soleides at me lettare kunna liksom graata med det eine Augat og læ med det andre* ('somehow see both sides of life's tapestry in one glance, as if we can more easily cry with one eye and laugh with the other').²³ This also fits well with a conception of truth that Vinje claimed to have discerned in the work of Meïr Aron Goldschmidt and that had appealed to him: *Sandheden er ikke noget Fixt og Færdigt, men en Proces, noget Flydende* ('Truth is not something fixed or finished, but a process, something fluid').²⁴ In any case, the contradictions and disparities that Vinje would encounter had the potential to show both sides of a complex social and political tapestry.

Many of Vinje's contemporaries in Scandinavian literature and art travelled further south in Europe, drawn by the civilisations of classical antiquity and the heritage of the Renaissance to places such as Italy. For Vinje, Rome stood out as a former empire, but he was clearly intrigued instead by the prospect of visiting an empire near the apex of its development. He already foresaw the decline of the British Empire when he wrote of this as a law of nature:

Will theories, the results of which in other nations lie before us in history fail to produce their natural consequences in Britain? The laws of nature are generally steadfast, and it would be a hazardous policy to trust to a suspension of these laws for the aversion of a gigantic catastrophe.²⁵

23. Vinje 1861: 28.

24. [Vinje] 1851: col. 58.

25. Vinje 1863a: 46.

In the published Norwegian translation, this passage is more specific, questioning a suspension of these laws *for Englands Skuld* ('for England's sake').²⁶

Vinje's mention of *navnlig Skotland* ('especially Scotland') in his original application shows a clear desire to pay particular attention to this country, although the official announcement of Vinje's funding was less geographically specific than in the application, mentioning merely *en Reise i England og Skotland* ('a journey to England and Scotland').²⁷ Vinje's preferred destinations were stated in various ways in other letters: to his father, for instance, he once wrote of travelling *beint til Skotland* ('straight to Scotland'), while to Georg Sibbern, the Norwegian Prime Minister in Stockholm, he described his impending *engelske Reise* ('English journey').²⁸ Shortly before he left, he wrote of undertaking *en Reise i Skotland og det nordlige Engelland* ('a journey to Scotland and the north of England').²⁹ Some reasons for his special interest in Scotland were explained further in his original application:

*Det er historisk bekjendt, at Nordmændene i gamle Dage stode i stadig Forbindelse med England og især Skotland med tilliggende Øer, og at mange af dem nedsatte sig der. [...] Sproget er i den Grad ligt vort Folkemaal, at en Skotlænder og en norsk Fjeldbonde strax forstaa hinanden.*³⁰

It is well known historically that Norwegians in ancient times were in constant connection with England and especially Scotland with its adjacent islands, and that many of

26. Vinje 1873: 52.

27. Djupedal 1968: 28–29.

28. Vinje 1969: 122 (letter 63, 26 August 1861), 128 (letter 68, 11 May 1862).

29. Ibid.: 129 (letter 70, 12 May 1862).

30. Ibid.: 112 (letter 57, 16 June 1860).

them settled there. [...] The language [there] is so similar to our popular spoken language that a Scot and a Norwegian mountain farmer would immediately understand each other.

Vinje's argument would appear to be that the further north you come in England and Scotland, the stronger the connections are with Norway. To some extent that is true, but it is quite an exaggeration to suggest that the average Scot and a Norwegian mountain farmer would immediately understand each other's language. This notion may hold a little more water if applied solely to Orkney and Shetland, where the Scandinavian language Norn was spoken possibly until the 1700s.³¹ Even that was some considerable time before Vinje wrote his application, though, and Vinje will most likely have heard three other main languages being spoken in Scotland: English, Gaelic, and Scots.

Vinje wanted to learn English, the majority language of the countries he intended to visit, so in September 1861 he went to Vågå, where an Englishman named Eardley John Blackwell (1832–66) would help him. Blackwell was a mountaineer who had settled in Vågå several years earlier.³² Vinje and Blackwell initially got on well together, but they appear to have fallen out, perhaps because Vinje had fallen in love with Blackwell's sister-in-law, and when Blackwell found out, he is said to have threatened to shoot Vinje.³³ The host is also reported to have been enraged by Vinje's characterisation of politics in Blackwell's homeland as *pelande roten* ('quite rotten').³⁴ Vinje left Vågå somewhat abruptly in February 1862 and returned to Christiania.³⁵

31. Knooihuizen 2005; Barnes 2010.

32. Schiötz 1986: 19.

33. Vislie 1890: 179.

34. 'Hugleik' 1912; Mo 1969: 12.

35. Vinje 1969: 122.

His journey finally began in June 1862 as Vinje set forth on board the steamer *Lindesnæs*, which was also carrying 250 students and academics to a pan-Scandinavian congress. Vinje accompanied them via Malmö and Lund to Copenhagen, before continuing to Hamburg, from whence he sailed on the steamer *John Bull* to London.³⁶ According to Olav Midttun, Vinje arrived in London in July 1862.³⁷ He would go on to spend almost a year in Britain, but it seems that he left England fairly early on, arriving in Scotland in any case before the end of September.³⁸ He then seems to have been mainly based in Edinburgh for around nine months, until 12 June 1863. On the way home he called in London and Paris, returning to Norway on 19 July 1863.³⁹

While in Edinburgh, Vinje stayed in the New Town, at 22 Dundas Street, as a lodger of Mary Mackenzie, wife of the solicitor David M. Mackenzie, and her sister (see Figure 2).⁴⁰ Apart from an apparently quite intense dislike of Mr Mackenzie, Vinje was extremely happy in Dundas Street. To the linguist Hans Ross, Vinje wrote of Mrs Mackenzie and her sister: *Det er sanne Kvendfolk baade tvo* ('They are both real ladies').⁴¹ The husband was, according to Vinje, often drunk and selfish, with Vinje even expressing a hope that Mr Mackenzie would soon

36. Vesaas 2001: 279–282.

37. Midttun 1960: 81.

38. Vesaas 2001: 288.

39. *Ibid.*: 301–302.

40. Post Office 1862: 206; Vesaas 2001: 289. According to the 1861 census, Mary Mackenzie and her sister Eliza McIver (a banker's wife) were born in Ireland in c. 1814 and 1816, respectively. Marriage records show that David Monypenny Mackenzie (born 1814) married Mary Doherty in June 1844 at St Cuthbert's in Edinburgh, while Eliza Doherty married John McIver (of City Bank, Glasgow) in August 1843 at Coleraine. Curiously, the Mackenzies already had an earlier Norwegian boarder staying with them on the census date in April 1861, the agricultural chemist (Hans) Anton Rosing (1828–67).

41. Vinje 1969: 135 (letter 72, 26 November 1862).

die. He felt pity for Mrs Mackenzie and wrote of his desire to take her with him back to Norway.⁴²

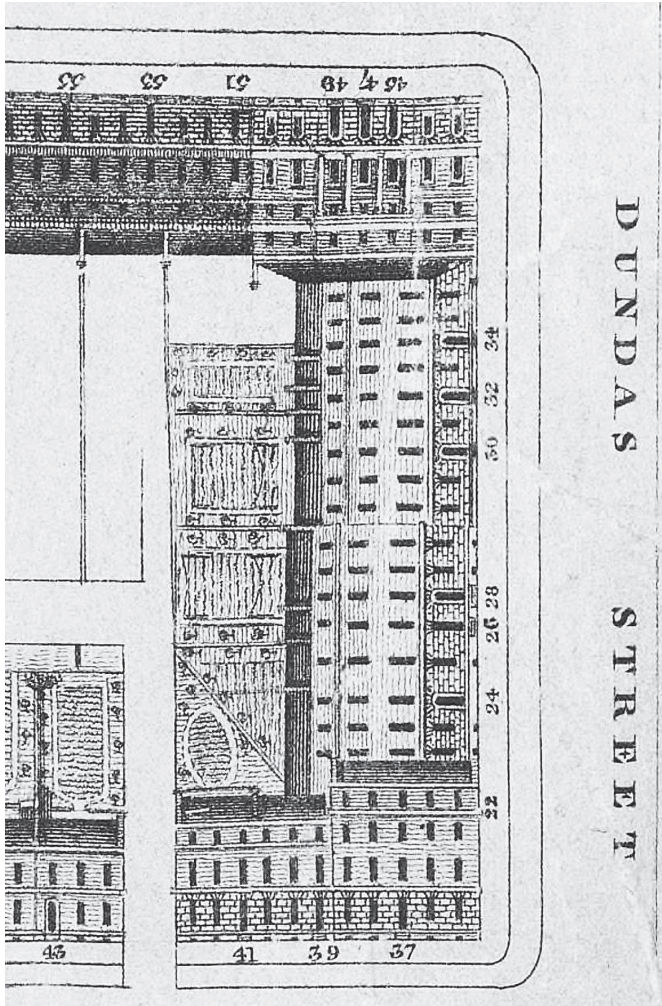


Figure 2: Vinje lodged at 22 Dundas Street, shown in this excerpt from Robert Kirkwood's 'Plan & Elevation of the New Town of Edinburgh' (1819). His tutor John Caven's address at number 32 can also be seen. The name of the street is now a focus of ongoing controversy in relation to the name's colonial links, and its namesake in Toronto is already due to be renamed.⁴³

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42. Ibid.

43. Dewar 2020; Draaisma 2021; Mullen 2021.

A Norseman's Views

A Norseman's Views of Britain and the British was published in Edinburgh in late May 1863, roughly a fortnight before Vinje left Scotland.⁴⁴ It comprised sixteen chapters styled as 'letters' written in English and addressed to Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807–73), a well-known poet and professor of philosophy. Vinje claimed that the choice of format and distinguished addressee was because *Britain* [sic] *er et Land for Titler* ('Britain is a land of titles'), although Welhaven was actually Vinje's third choice.⁴⁵ Welhaven agreed to his name being used after Carl Arnoldus Müller (Vice-President of the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters) had turned down the offer and Marcus Jacob Monrad, another professor of philosophy, had not responded to Vinje's request.⁴⁶ Vinje also wrote some extended articles in Norwegian for *Dølen* about his time in Britain, but his book was much more comprehensive.

The book was written with help from Vinje's English tutor in Edinburgh, John Caven (1826–1914) of 32 Dundas Street.⁴⁷ As Vinje wrote: 'My task of wrestling with a foreign language was, perhaps, equally difficult with his of mastering foreign views'.⁴⁸ Caven, educated in Edinburgh and Rome, later emigrated to Prince Edward Island, and on his death was described as Charlottetown's 'most highly cultured citizen – one whose

44. *The Scotsman* 1863: 4.

45. Vinje 1969: 147 (letter 77, 27 April 1863).

46. *Ibid.*; Vesaas 2001: 292.

47. *Post Office* 1862: 137; Vinje 1969: 135 (letter 72, 26 November 1862), 145 (letter 75, 9 February 1863).

48. Vinje 1863a: [i].

ability was proved as teacher, lecturer, editor, poet and singer'.⁴⁹ Vinje was not the only illustrious author whose craft was influenced by Caven, as among his students at Charlottetown's Prince of Wales College was L.M. Montgomery, creator of *Anne of Green Gables*. She later recalled that 'if one wanted, one could learn a good deal from him', and 'there was a certain tang about "Old Caven", as we irreverently called him behind his back, that one could not forget'.⁵⁰

Vinje was keen to translate the book into Norwegian himself, writing to publisher Jørgen Wright Cappelen: *Stakkars Norske Publicum som skal læse Dølemaal eller Engelsk, dersom det ellers har nogen Lyst til at læse mig* ('The poor Norwegian readers who will have to read the dalesman's language or English if they have any desire to read my work').⁵¹ He started on the translation task but would not complete it in his lifetime.⁵² The remainder was translated by Halfdan Halvorsen, with the result published as *Bretland og Britarne* (lit. *Britain and the British*) in 1873, three years after Vinje's death.

Olav Vesaas points out that the Norwegian title is quite misleading in that it overlooks the centrality in the books of this particular Norwegian's views and reactions to the places he visited.⁵³ This is indeed true, and there are other curiosities within the titles in both languages.

The word *Norseman* is primarily used in English to describe the Scandinavians of ancient or medieval times, especially the Viking Age. *Norwegian* is more geographically specific, and also much more widely used (see Figure 3), but by using *Norseman*, Vinje may be characterising himself as a particular kind of

49. *Charlottetown Guardian* 1914: 3.

50. Montgomery MacDonald 1927: 30–31.

51. Vinje 1969: 150 (letter 79, 3 June 1863).

52. Vinje 1873: v.

53. Vesaas 2001: 293.

Norwegian: one sailing in the wake of the Vikings and walking in their footsteps. Not only was Victorian society obsessed with titles; a romantic image of the Vikings was also prevalent at that time. By choosing to describe himself as a Norseman, Vinje may have also been tapping into a self-characterisation as a ‘noble savage’, in the terminology of that era, who had inherited some of the Vikings’ legendary wanderlust. A Victorian audience may well have been attracted to the notion of reading what a modern Viking made of contemporary society in islands where Vikings had once settled, as suggested in some reviews of the book: ‘our Norseman laughs [...] with the lungs of Thor himself’.⁵⁴ Perhaps the title could also be read in Vinje’s typically ironic style, as well as connecting with the titular dalesman figure of his newspaper.

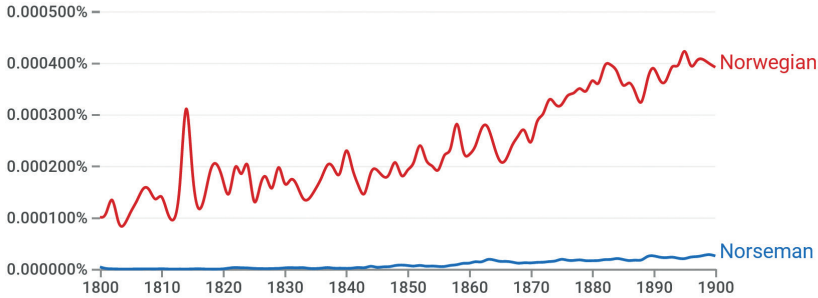


Figure 3: Comparative frequency of ‘Norseman’ and ‘Norwegian’ in 1800–1900, as seen in the Google Books 2019 corpus of books predominantly in English. *Google Books Ngram Viewer*, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>. Accessed 4 March 2022.

As for the Norwegian title, the name *Bretland* is also quite unusual, harking back to earlier times. Vinje has picked up an Old Norse term that *Store norske leksikon* claims was mainly used for Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany – in other words the main areas where the Brythonic languages Welsh, Cornish,

54. *The Athenæum* 1863: 268.

and Breton are still in use, albeit now as minority languages.⁵⁵ In that sense, *Bretland* denotes two parts of the island of Great Britain that Vinje did not seek to cover in any detail, and one part of present-day France, but it was still an apposite name to use. After all, the geographical nomenclature of this group of islands to the south-west of Norway is fraught with complexity. Hungarian-born writer George Mikes joked almost a century later that '[w]hen people say England, they sometimes mean Great Britain, sometimes the United Kingdom, sometimes the British Isles – but never England'.⁵⁶ The pattern can be even more pronounced in other languages, especially when colloquial terms have the upper hand over what might be geographically correct.

In a festschrift for Arne Kruse, a great scholar of place-names, some further toponomastic reflections seem appropriate. The most widespread term in English for the whole archipelago is still *the British Isles*, but this can be controversial, not least in Ireland, and especially in the Republic of Ireland. In fact, use of that term seems to have peaked in 1941 (see Figure 4). Wordier alternatives such as *the British and Irish Isles*, *the Anglo-Celtic Archipelago*, or *the Northwest European Archipelago* have found some limited acceptance but remain relatively rare. Many avoid names altogether by speaking of *these islands*, but if the author and translator of *Bretland og Britarne* were at home in Norway, would they refer to *those islands*, and if so, which islands are those? *The[se] islands* is also the term used by the British-Irish Council, the international body formed as a result of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and which brings together representatives of eight governments: those of Ireland, the United Kingdom, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Jersey, Northern Ireland,

55. *Store norske leksikon* 2020.

56. Mikes 1946: 10.

Scotland, and Wales. More recently, the name-avoiding term has acquired a different currency as the name of a public affairs debate group that characterises itself as ‘[e]nthusiastic about the Union’.⁵⁷ These brief considerations of geographical naming still hardly scratch the surface of how the inhabitants define their national identity, but the terminological challenges do point to a political situation that has historically been in flux and is still subject to change.

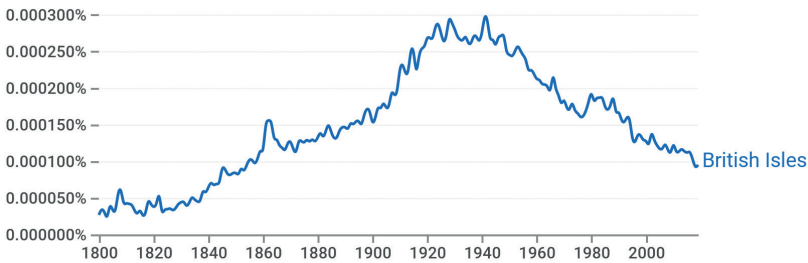


Figure 4: Occurrences of ‘British Isles’ (1800–2019) in the Google Books 2019 corpus of books predominantly in English. *Google Books Ngram Viewer*, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>. Accessed 4 March 2022.

Naming all the islands as a group was not a major concern for Vinje. He wrote some passages about Ireland, and very little about Wales except in articles for *Dølen*, but the elements of the book that could be considered travel literature mainly covered England and Scotland, which are predominantly situated on the same island. In Norwegian, although *Bretland* had previously mainly denoted other specific parts of the archipelago’s largest island (plus a neighbouring territory on the European mainland), it was still a fitting name to adopt into *dølemål*, and *(Stóra(-))Bretland* has some wider use as the island’s name in Faroese and Icelandic. That said, it is not certain without

57. These Islands [n.d.].

manuscript evidence whether *Bretland* was chosen by Vinje or, for instance, by Halfdan Halvorsen later in the translation process. There seems to be no occurrence of the word *Bretland* in Vinje's own writing beyond the Norwegian translation of the book, but instead *Britain*, whether when writing in Norwegian or in English.⁵⁸ In any case, Vinje clearly appreciated these nuances of naming, or perhaps John Caven made sure he did. In Vinje's book and in many of the letters he wrote, he was fairly careful to specify if he was referring to England, Scotland, or both. There were some exceptions, such as writing from Edinburgh 'I promised to write You a letter from England in English and I am now about to redeem my promise'.⁵⁹ Exceptions aside, such a generally meticulous approach cannot be taken for granted in travel writing in this part of the world, even among authors from the islands in question: 'As in many other fields, "British" is often used when "English" would be more accurate, and "English" sometimes silently includes texts that might be better described as Scottish, Welsh, or Irish'.⁶⁰

Vinje begins his first letter in the book by stating his intentions:

I came to Britain, as you are aware, with the fixed resolution of examining and studying the institutions of this great commercial land, and the manners, habits, and pursuits of its people. [...] I have wandered far, seen much, and learned something. [...] I have played the pedestrian for hundreds of miles, backwards and forwards, through the lonely glens and sheep-farms of the Scottish highlands. I have witnessed military displays on Wimbledon Common, and beneath the Crag

58. See e.g. [Vinje] 1863b; Vinje 1969: 147 (letter 77, 27 April 1863).

59. Ibid.: 137 (letter 73, 24 December 1862).

60. Pettinger 2016.

of Arthur's Seat. I have listened to the debates in the Houses of Parliament, and spent weeks in the Great Exhibition. I have even caught a distant glimpse of a fox-hunt.⁶¹

Although much of what Vinje described may have been based on fleeting glimpses, his biographer, Olav Midttun, described the book as one of the first Norwegian works of sociology, as Vinje was attempting to find the common characteristics of other societies.⁶² While the book does have some characteristics of travel writing, Djupedal concurs that Vinje was not a tourist; he was carrying out fieldwork.⁶³

Characteristically for the time, Vinje seemed to believe that there were organic patterns in society and history dependent on country, climate, and race. His views are sometimes quite crude in their espousal of what might be early social Darwinism, although Vinje often tempered such statements. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) had been published less than three years before Vinje arrived in Edinburgh, the same city where Darwin had earlier embarked upon his abortive medical training, studied marine life of the Forth, and learned taxidermy skills from John Edmonstone, a freed slave from what is now Guyana. Vinje was open to new ideas and impulses, but it seems he may have rejected evolutionary biology: 'I am seeking for reason and coherence, and, without going so far as some learned men in their disputes about the missing link between the gorilla and the man, I go pretty far'.⁶⁴ Vinje repeats somewhat crude ideas of ethnic superiority,

61. Vinje 1863a: 1. Unless it is relevant to include the Norwegian translation, quotations will be given from Vinje's original English text, as it is the primary source text.

62. Midttun 1960: 83.

63. Djupedal 1968: 32.

64. Vinje 1863a: 4.

attributing to contemporary ethnographers the idea that ‘the superiority of the British people is due to the cross mixture of races from which it has sprung’.⁶⁵ He then retreats from that line of argumentation: ‘My limited knowledge of the workings of nature in this way will not allow me to enter upon such a subject’.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, he continues with some racial judgments inferring that there are shared qualities with Scandinavians like himself:

The British are really a good race. You cannot be long among them before you see that. In the south of England you can clearly trace the prevalent infusion of Roman blood, but as you go northwards you discover more and more of the Gothic, till you come to Yorkshire, and Scotland, where the relationship to the Scandinavian tribes is obvious.⁶⁷

There is also some considerable tension between the romantic and the rational in Vinje’s writing. For instance, another feature typical of the period is Vinje’s attempt to explain certain cultural traits through reference to the landscape or climate. He believes that the maritime climate may have had a positive effect on his health, and thereby assumes it is likely that the inhabitants are also healthy. Even the industrial impact on the atmosphere is incorrectly ascribed health-enhancing qualities, although this may well be meant ironically, with Vinje’s typical *tvisyn*: ‘The climate is invigorating, and even the smoke and coal dust are healthy’.⁶⁸

65. Ibid.: 14.

66. Ibid.: 15.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

Vinje's observational methods, compared to Andersen's

While Vinje's project was not strictly scientific in nature, if Olav Midttun described it as one of the first Norwegian works of sociology, then it is worth considering Vinje's methods, which may make him partially a social anthropologist. Georg Sibbern, the aforementioned Norwegian Prime Minister in Stockholm, was one of those who had provided Vinje with letters of introduction, but Vinje writes that he barely used them:

I have them still in goodly numbers occupying an honourable place in my writing-desk. And why? Because it is an opinion I hold, that the formal visits, invitations of ceremony, and parties of pleasure, which are the usual results of letters of introduction, teach a man nothing. They are in all nations the same, their character being generally 'much ado about nothing.' They contain, moreover, this element of evil, that they may very easily engender prejudices and prepossessions in the mind of the stranger. I therefore prefer to remain unknown, and from my obscurity study real life.⁶⁹

Vinje had already more than hinted at this approach in his funding application:

Den, som vil og kan sætte sig ind i det meget, vi allerede vide om disse Lande, han vil altid finde en Ledetraad; men det tør dog forudsættes, at meget i denne Henseende endnu er at lære, især naar Tingene saa at sige sees nedenfra, og at der ikke som vanligt mest gaaes efter officielle Indberetninger. Og i denne Henseende

69. Ibid.: 2.

*tør jeg maaske uden at gaa Beskedenheden for nær sige, at jeg som opfødt blant vore med den skotske saa nær beslægtede Almue ikke vilde have liden Hjælp i denne Omstændighed [...].*⁷⁰

Whoever wishes to familiarise themselves with the great deal we already know about these countries, and who is able to do so, will always find some relevant clues, but it may nonetheless be assumed that there is still much to learn in that respect, especially when the object of interest is seen, so to speak, from below, and if official reports are not taken as the main sources, as is usually the case. And in this regard I dare say, without being too modest, that I would have no small advantage in such circumstances, having been brought up among our common people, so closely related to those of Scotland.

The idea of seeing society from the bottom up was not shared by all writers travelling at that time, as can be seen if we compare Vinje's approach to observing society with that of another contemporary Scandinavian writer, Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75), who visited England and Scotland, including Edinburgh, almost exactly fifteen years before Vinje, in the summer of 1847.

Andersen's visit was much shorter than Vinje's, at just over two months, and the celebrated Danish writer spent most of that time in or around London. It is no exaggeration to say that Vinje and Andersen were quite different personalities. While Vinje had to address an application to the king for his funding to visit Britain, Andersen's situation was the reverse, as he describes it in his autobiography, *Mit livs eventyr*:

70. Vinje 1969: 112 (letter 57, 16 June 1860).

*En Dag spurgte Kongen mig, om jeg dog ikke ogsaa skulde see England. Jeg svarede: jo, og at jeg netop i den tilstundede Sommer tænkte paa at komme der. 'De kan jo faae Penge hos mig!' sagde hans Majestæt. [...] 'De repræsenterer nu i England den danske Literatur, og De maa derfor leve nogenlunde smukt og godt!'*⁷¹

One day the King asked me if I ought not also to see England. I said, 'Yes,' and added that I was thinking of going there the following summer.

'Then you can have the money from me,' said His Majesty. [...] '[Y]ou represent Danish literature in England now, and so you must live well and in comfort.'⁷²

Still, Andersen turned down the offer as he had sufficient funds of his own, and several other wealthy friends. As mentioned above, Vinje had been provided with letters of introduction but preferred not to use them. Andersen, meanwhile, did not need letters of introduction: his work was already well known in Britain, and he had contacts among the aristocracy and royalty.

Further contrasts are evident from their descriptions of the moment they stepped ashore. On 23 June 1847, Andersen wrote in his diary: [...] *Engelænderne ombord havde varet mig Ingen at troe, naar jeg steg i Land, Ingen at indlade mig med* ('[...] the Englishmen on board had warned me not to trust anyone when I went ashore, not to take up with anyone').⁷³ Vinje claims to have been immediately much more trusting:

When I landed near London Bridge, I addressed a man who had come to meet some acquaintance that he expected to arrive by our steamer from the Continent. I asked him

71. Andersen 1855: 403.

72. Andersen 2013: 369.

73. Andersen 1974: 205; Andersen 1990: 165.

for some hints as to lodging and the like, and he acted as a most excellent friend. He took such a deal of trouble with me during the whole of my stay in London, that I really got ashamed of all the kindness he shewed me.⁷⁴

Andersen did not delay in attending high-ranking appointments. The day after his arrival, he visited the Danish ambassador and then went to meet royalty: *Kjørt ud til Marlbor[ough]-House, blev indladt i et kongeligt Værelse; Arvestorhertug kom, faldt mig om Halsen, kyssede mig, vi sad sammen [...]* ('Drove out to Marlborough House; was admitted to a royal chamber. The hereditary grand duke [Charles Alexander of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach] came, embraced me and kissed me. We sat together [...]').⁷⁵ Vinje, as already noted, preferred a different approach to expanding his social network, seeking to gain a more representative picture:

Some of my countrymen, however, at the Great Exhibition [in London], were of a decidedly different frame of mind; and their perseverance in importuning our Secretary of Legation, our Consul, and Commissioner, for tickets of invitations to parties and festivals, made me oftentimes feel pity for these pestered officials, and ashamed for their persecutors.⁷⁶

Andersen felt quite comfortable in the company of aristocrats, writing on 26 June 1847: *Man siger, at Aristocratiet i Engeland udelukker alle Kunstnere fra deres Kreds, jeg kan ikke sige det, jeg fandt de venligste Menneske[r], den hjerteligste Modtagelse* ('People say that the aristocracy in England excludes all artists from their circle; I can't say that – I found the friendliest people,

74. Vinje 1863a: 8.

75. Bredsdorff 1954: 559; Andersen 1974: 205–206; Andersen 1990: 165.

76. Vinje 1863a: 2.

the heartiest reception').⁷⁷ For Vinje, meanwhile: 'The British are certainly good-looking, but I have been disappointed in not finding the aristocracy the best looking portion of the population, as I have often been led to believe'.⁷⁸

The two travellers' accounts are full of many more contrasts, although the essential difference is that Vinje was so eager to see life from more marginalised viewpoints. Andersen was also interested in real life and social conditions, but the journalist Vinje was keen to explore this in a different way:

One evening I followed a different method, and put myself under the guidance of a London detective, whose acquaintance I had purposely made. Among the indescribable haunts of misery and crime, I on that night learned more of modern civilization than was possible in the suffocating crowd of the Guildhall festival, though in neither society do I think that much is to be got worth the keeping.⁷⁹

This method of embedding himself with a representative of local law enforcement shows some journalistic enterprise and a significant determination to see other viewpoints, in keeping with the *tvisyn* for which he is known. In the Norwegian translation, this passage also contributed to the expansion of the Norwegian lexicon by allowing Vinje to coin the word *Upps nusare* (in some later editions *opps nusar*) to describe a detective, although the term does not seem to have caught on. Vinje did not rely only on observation as a method, though; newspapers were another key source, albeit one that could be problematic.

77. Andersen 1974: 209; Andersen 1990: 169.

78. Vinje 1863a: 19.

79. Ibid.: 2–3.

Vinje's social criticism and the book's reception

Throughout the book, Vinje was quite scathing in his criticism of some aspects of British life, not least social inequality, the role of capital, elitism, and land ownership. This stood in contrast to the generally positive views of Britain held in Norway at the time, and his criticisms did not escape the attention of reviewers. For Vinje, industrialised Britain was not as progressive as he may have once thought, but conservative and reactionary.⁸⁰ The London *Standard* called Vinje 'a lunatic pure and simple', as did its sister papers the *Evening Standard* and *Morning Herald*.⁸¹ A leading article in the *Glasgow Daily Herald* described him as 'like a special pleader retained by Louis Napoleon for the glorification of France and the disparagement of Great Britain', while a follow-up two days later claimed that 'there is little to be got from Mr. Vinje's letters'.⁸² According to the magazine *John Bull*, the book was 'full, indeed, of valuable hints', but Vinje was plagued by 'very strong prejudices'.⁸³

In his skilful overview of the book's initial reception, Sigmund Skard located twelve reviews in English from 1863 of Vinje's book (nine in the London press and three from Edinburgh).⁸⁴ Through extensive searches in digital repositories I have thus far found a further nine, spanning the years from 1863 to 1917 (three from Glasgow, and one each printed in Aberdeen, Dublin, Edinburgh, Liverpool, New Orleans, and New York). In addition, there are other newspapers that

80. Fjågesund 2021: 301.

81. *The Standard* 1863: 2.

82. *Glasgow Daily Herald* 1863a: 4; 1863b: 3.

83. *John Bull* 1863: 444.

84. Skard 1939a; 1939b.

printed extracts without a review (including publications in Brechin, Brighton, Dublin, Glasgow, Kirkwall, and Nairn), one reader's letter about the book (in Glasgow), and one of the reviews Skard had previously uncovered was reprinted in the *Bombay Gazette*.

When appraising the book's reception in his selection of reviews, Skard recognised that many critics showed clear satisfaction with the status quo, coupled with unconscious snobbery.⁸⁵ Paradoxically, this reaction may even have reinforced some of the points Vinje had sought to make, when publications such as the *London Review* claimed that: 'The author of the book before us tells us nothing new when he says that we have an extraordinary reverence for rank and money. [...] But we see what he does not, that to both there is a bright as well as a dark side'.⁸⁶ Such reviewers may not have picked up that he was reacting to the less critical Anglomania that he described as rampant in many countries and that only saw a bright side. As Vinje wrote: 'Shallow observers might even call the state of things here perfect'.⁸⁷

Aside from ideological opposition to Vinje's criticisms, many reviewers pointed to possible exaggerations or inaccuracies. Vinje's usual audience in Norway knew to expect unusual leaps of thought and ironic *tvisyn*, while readers abroad were less sure what to make of this.⁸⁸ Arguably Vinje's *tvisyn* was an antidote to what otherwise would have been more shallow observation. Furthermore, Peter Fjågesund points out that the description of Vinje on the title page as 'Advocate before the High Courts of Justice' might have misled readers; Vinje did indeed have legal training, but his main occupation was

85. Skard 1939a: 333.

86. *London Review* 1863: 638.

87. Vinje 1863a: 90–91.

88. Skard 1939a: 332.

as a writer occupying a very particular position in Norwegian culture.⁸⁹ But there is an intriguing pattern in that the book's reception was occasionally more positive in reviews from beyond London, perhaps reflecting the more marginalised viewpoints Vinje supported.

The fact Vinje spent more time in Scotland was picked up by many reviewers in England too, remarking for instance that 'on the whole, his letters, written from Edinburgh as they are, seem written chiefly from Edinburgh information, and from an Edinburgh point of view'.⁹⁰ Already in the second 'letter' in his book, Vinje writes about coming to Scotland, where he felt more at home: 'I got tired of London, its bustle and din; and in order to make the change as complete as possible, I betook myself to the far-off valley of Glencoe. [...] It much resembles, on a small scale, the Vestfiordale, and many of our Norse dales'.⁹¹ He felt similarly of urban Scotland: 'In Scottish cities, more particularly in Edinburgh, I can almost fancy that I am walking in our Norse towns'.⁹² Vinje wrote at length comparing the landscape of Scotland and Norway, the people, and place-names. The aforementioned early social Darwinist ideas are evident in how Vinje compared the so-called 'races' he encountered. He often related these comments to more social concerns, such as the Highland clearances:

What a noble race these Caledonians are! It was regiments of them that stood like a wall against the Imperial Guard at Waterloo. It is all very well to have sheep instead of people in these Highland nurseries for soldiers, but sheep will not

89. Fjågesund 2021: 291.

90. *The Reader* 1863: 576.

91. Vinje 1863a: 11.

92. *Ibid.*: 15.

repel invasion, or fight England's battles. Perhaps the consumers of mutton in the large cities, tradesmen, operatives, and artists will fight well. This remains to be seen. [...] When men now-a-days are shooting and feeding sheep where the Caledonians lived in days of old, they no doubt think that great progress has been effected. *Nous verrons*.⁹³

While many Victorian commentators on this side of the North Sea romanticised the wildness of the Highlands, Vinje saw it as a warning:

The Highlands is a graveyard, and the passing bell seemed ringing in my ears as I saw parish on parish laid out for sheep. How very picturesque! exclaimed some Londoners, as their carriage bowled along through the wilderness. Picturesque! certainly. Come hither, my artist friend, when you design a sketch from Faust, throw me in those Scottish Highlands as a scene for Mephistophiles [sic] to gloat over pleasantly. [... H]e would exult to see human beings making way for sheep, and grouse, and deer. Some day he may probably see the greater part of Europe in this condition. The Highlands are but the beginning of the end. It is the beginning of a higher civilisation, we are told; but independent people do not like this civilisation.⁹⁴

Vinje's concerned reactions were not shared by all contemporary Scandinavian visitors. For instance, Reidar Djupedal contrasted Vinje's reactions to the Highlands with those of Norwegian poet Andreas Munch (1811–84). While Vinje perceived a human tragedy, Munch was swept away by the

93. Ibid.: 13–14.

94. Ibid.: 14.

beauty of the landscape.⁹⁵ In the most recent newspaper review of Vinje's book, an outlier from the midst of the First World War, David MacRitchie writes positively in an article for the Glasgow *Daily Record and Mail*, and seems appreciative of Vinje's 'lament over the depopulation of the Highlands'.⁹⁶

Perhaps tellingly, several reviewers criticised Vinje for not using his letters of introduction to meet more highly ranking individuals on his travels, but Vinje had made a point of this, as discussed above. For the *Saturday Review*, this meant that Vinje 'disdained to set about the right way of obtaining reliable information' and 'deliberately refused to avail himself of the only method of effectually studying [British society]'.⁹⁷ This clearly shows that such reviewers saw access through more privileged channels as 'the right way' to study society. The *Aberdeen Journal* was more measured on this point:

[...] the Norseman's criticisms are more cynical than they probably would have been if he had gone into circles to which his letters might have gained him access. At the same time his animadversions contain truth, – perhaps more truth, coming as they do from a perspicacious and candid stranger, than many of us may be willing to admit; and at all events, it may do us no harm to take a look at some of our national features as pourtrayed by such a one.⁹⁸

Skard noted that some reviews, while still including criticisms of Vinje, appeared more receptive to hearing his ideas, and that *skotsk lokalpatriotisme* ('Scottish local patriotism') may have

95. Djupedal 1968: 27.

96. MacRitchie 1917: 2.

97. *Saturday Review* 1863: 802.

98. *Aberdeen Journal* 1863: 6.

been a factor.⁹⁹ One reason why some Scottish publications were more open to Vinje's ideas could be down to his portrayal of the Scots.

We and the Swedes are much better friends than [the Scots and English] are. I have, therefore, independently endeavoured to form my opinion of the mutual relations between them, and have come to the conclusion that the Scots are the superior people. The more mountainous country is sufficient to account for this; besides, the popular education is much better in Scotland than in England [...]. My own experience, and that of other foreigners I have spoken with, certainly convinces me that the Scottish population, as a whole, stands intellectually higher than that of England.¹⁰⁰

This may explain the apparently more extensive reprinting of such extracts in Scottish newspapers. It is also worthy of note that the mountainous landscape he credits with making a people 'superior' is the very aspect of the Scottish landscape he has already compared to Norway, and the mountains are where the dalesman lives: *Dølen* himself.

With higher praise reserved for Scotland, some reviews took aim at Vinje's tutor, John Caven – unnamed in the book – blaming him for the criticism of British society:

M. Vinje, whose book is published at Edinburgh, is so convinced of the superior intellect and education of the Scotch to those of the English nation, that we should much regret if he had been induced by this consideration to make so unfortunate a choice of an interpreter. M. Vinje has

99. Skard 1939a: 334.

100. Vinje 1863a: 18–19.

discovered that the old hatred between the English and the Scotch still burns lustily; but it would be a pity if a member of the latter nation had given vent to his bitterness of feeling, not only by translating a virulent attack on the sister-country, but by perpetrating murder by his own hand on the language of its Sovereign.¹⁰¹

Other reviews were a little softer on this point. While still noting Vinje's preferences, they saw that Vinje had 'no hatred for the British. [... H]e testifies to their open kind-heartedness, and compliments their roast beef with having relieved him of some of his wrinkles. "The British," he says, "are really a good race." But his preference is for the North Britons [...]'¹⁰²

With Vinje's many criticisms, some reviewers believed Vinje was placing himself or Norway on a pedestal with a 'self-complacent assumption of superiority'.¹⁰³ However, with his questioning of power structures and of pre-conceived ideas of superiority among and about the inhabitants of an island at the centre of a global empire, was he instead trying to show that Britain – or specifically England and Scotland – were not so unlike Norway, or other countries?¹⁰⁴

The most effusive praise of all seems to have come from newspapers outwith England or Scotland. The *New York Herald* writes that it 'is a very droll book, and pays off British writers for the absurd slanders and misrepresentations which they have published in reference to this country', although this may be a backhanded compliment.¹⁰⁵ In Dublin, *The Nation* wrote of Vinje as an 'honest thinker and manly writer' who 'has

101. *Saturday Review* 1863: 803.

102. *London Review* 1863: 639.

103. *Illustrated London News* 1863: 707.

104. Solberg 1992: 44–45.

105. *New York Herald* 1863: 7.

no sooner gained footing in Britain than he lays about him in the good old Scandinavian fashion, *i.e.*, right pluckily, with the battle-axe of the nineteenth century – “the pen”.¹⁰⁶ While sharing in Vinje’s ‘measured’ condemnation of the clearances, this review focuses especially on his treatment of Ireland. A review by the London-based *Athenæum* had earlier described Vinje’s characterisation of the British state’s response to the Great Famine in Ireland as ‘the most unfounded of all lies’, but for *The Nation* this shows that Vinje is ‘possessed of a very accurate insight into the true state of things’.¹⁰⁷ Crucially, this Irish newspaper also remarked:

Not one of your complaisant tourists is he – who so readily chime in with the tones of the dominant or ruling powers in whatever lands they may happen to visit, never daring to question wrong, but meekly accepting might as right. He is rather of that class of impartial philosophical observers and notetakers, becoming, we are happy to say, every day more enlarged [...].¹⁰⁸

Vinje’s perspectives, coming from a political and geographical periphery of Europe himself, were not lost on all readers. Similarly, *tvisyn* could come into its own when focusing on stark social contrasts, bringing matters to the fore that might not otherwise be immediately apparent, especially to readers less familiar with the geographical context in question.

106. *The Nation* 1866: 554.

107. *The Athenæum* 1863: 268; *The Nation* 1866: 554.

108. *Ibid.*

Conclusion: An emerging Nynorsk world view

The appendix Vinje wrote about the Norwegian language struggle is an early statement of the Nynorsk movement's programme, and perhaps the first time that a Norwegian wrote about the language debate in English, as Ottar Grepstad has pointed out.¹⁰⁹ In examining Anglophone reviews of the book, none I have seen thus far make much mention of the appendix, except the following comment, which contains a fairly egregious error: 'Herr A.O. Vinje [...] is [...] favourably known in his own country as a zealous partisan of a movement for the revival and encouragement of the Norse tongue as the ancient language of Sweden [sic]'.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the short appendix contains a great deal of interesting material on the language question, not least the way Vinje creates an almost mythological image of Ivar Aasen, as described in the introduction above.

It is, however, not only this appendix that makes the book Vinje wrote in Edinburgh an important chapter in the history of Nynorsk. Although the book was originally published in English, it is evidence of some significant traits in the emerging counter-hegemonic Nynorsk world view, which would come to be characterised by a radical and democratically inspired tendency for critical stances towards power structures.¹¹¹ A particular mix of National Romantic and Enlightenment ideas – themselves impulses from abroad – had shaped the Norwegian cultural climate at the time Aasen embarked on his linguistic project, and those ideas were still influential. A distinct Nynorsk culture was still in its early days, but *A Norseman's Views of Britain and the British* marks a key moment

109. Grepstad 2018.

110. *The Press* 1863: 765.

111. Puzey 2011.

when Nynorsk ideologies – as represented by Vinje, a pioneering user of the language – encountered contemporary impulses from the wider world that helped to crystallise that oppositional, power-critical stance in a wider context than the Scandinavian sociocultural and historical *milieus* in which the language originally known as Landsmål had been created.

Returning to Vinje's mission, this was, after all, a chance for *Dølen*, the Dalesman, to venture out even further than *By og Bygd* and into the wider world, engaging with social debate on many levels. To a greater degree than many travel writers of the time would have done, he attempts to portray this world from the bottom up, with his ironic tone and satirical content, showing many typical traits of his character and writing. Harald Beyer wrote of Vinje: *Han er omskiftelig som ingen annen, springende, impulsiv, lettrørt og kynisk, hjertevarm og taktløs, radikal og konservativ, upålitelig og trofast, halvt bondegutt, halvt europeer* ('He is unpredictable like no other, leaping, impulsive, emotional and cynical, warm-hearted and tactless, radical and conservative, unreliable and loyal, half farmer's boy, half European').¹¹² Beyer's description has been criticised as imprecise, with Digernes arguing that Vinje was in fact unusually consistent.¹¹³ However, in this book, we see examples of all these attributes, and, not least, Vinje shows that it is possible to be both a farmer's boy and a European, demonstrating what that might mean in practice. He participates in international social debate with an independent mind. By venturing out into the world, and reflecting on his experiences and discoveries, he implicitly reflects back on Norwegian society too.

While there are many outdated elements in the book, there is also much that is still of relevance. On the bicentenary of Vinje's birth, philosopher Gunnar Skirbekk wrote that this particular

112. Beyer 1952: 242.

113. Digernes 1954.

book is *hyperaktuell* [...] *i den pågående diskusjonen om forholdet mellom globalisert kapitalisme og statlege institusjonar* ('hypertopical [...] for the ongoing discussion about the relationship between globalised capitalism and state institutions').¹¹⁴ Skirbekk feels the book is helpful as he wonders: *I vår tid, med spenningar mellom USA og Europa, og mellom Storbritannia og EU, kor står så vi, her i Skandinavia, her i Noreg?* ('In this age, with tensions between the USA and Europe, and between the UK and the EU, where do we stand, here in Scandinavia, here in Norway?')¹¹⁵ In the appendix on the language question, Vinje writes in relation to Norway's close relationship with Denmark and Sweden: 'But that this holding together may not prove a failure like the Calmar union, no one of these nationalities must be absorbed by the others, but have its own autonomy in language, literature, legislation, and government'.¹¹⁶ With such thoughts in mind, Vinje's book may indeed be equally topical on both sides of the North Sea to this day.

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114. Skirbekk 2018: 17.

115. Ibid.

116. Vinje 1863a: 6 (appendix).

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