“A wholly undeserved reputation for recklessness”

Narrative and the representation of danger in Slingsby’s Norway the Northern Playground

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Eng4394 – Master’s Thesis in Literature in English

30 credits

The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

Faculty of Humanities

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Autumn 2021

Acknowledgements

To complete this thesis has been a long process for me, and the combination of being a student while working as a teacher has been challenging, but also very rewarding.

I firstly wish to thank my supervisor, Juan, for his encouragement, enthusiasm and honesty in his guidance. Although I did not always take the direction he envisaged, his feedback saw me to moderate and adapt my argument to what hopefully turned into a more reasonable result in the end. Secondly, I must thank the exceedingly generous Jakob Lothe, who introduced me to Slingsby's text in the first place, but who more importantly has provided invaluable insight by allowing me to access forthcoming material and giving advice despite his retirement.

Thanks to my family, especially my mother, who brought me up in a way which made me fond of literature and culture, and my father, who took me and my siblings to experience Slingsby's incredible playground, Jotunheimen, at first hand.

I must also offer my gratitude to my colleagues at Marienlyst, who have supported and facilitated for me to complete this project in the hectic day-to-day work as a teacher in Oslo.

Lastly, huge thanks to the amazing friends I have made at the University of Oslo, especially Kjetil, Oda, Marianne, Christina and Ingrid, who have shown me that it is possible to have great fun and perform well academically at the same time. I owe you a lot.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> In a well-found vessel, with a good pilot, we have none of
> that mixture of danger which gives dignity to the traveller.
>
> Scott

This epigraph is replicated in the same manner as the British mountaineer and writer William Cecil Slingsby (1849-1929) presents it as a frame to one of the chapters in his 1904 travel book *Norway the Northern Playground: Sketches of Climbing and Mountain Exploration in Norway Between 1872 and 1903*[1]. Slingsby introduces each chapter in the book with up to three of these references from a wide array of literary works; from broadly renowned writers such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Marcus Aurelius, to less famous, Nordic texts like 'Fridjof's Saga' in *Heimskringla*. The usage of epigraphs is thus an interesting characteristic of *Norway the Northern Playground* that clearly affects the narrative, but it was the specific epigraph from above which spurred the idea for this thesis. Upon my first reading of Sir Walter Scott's lines within Slingsby's text, a curiosity aroused to investigate the following questions: Did Slingsby believe that danger was a necessary component for a journey to be dignified or worth experiencing? Besides the inclusion of the epigraph, is such an attitude expressed explicitly or implicitly in his narrative? If so, how does it affect the modern reader, who might see the text through the lens of postcolonial theory, or with the complex relation between reality and fiction in travel literature in mind? Although the full answer is more complex, Slingsby is motivated by danger, which may be connected to the tendency that dangers and discomforts became a function or feature for some Victorian travel writers to portray a truer or more authentic travel, in which hardship and uneasiness were markers of distance to lazy, popular tourism (Thompson 122). Upon an examination of the representation of danger in Slingsby's text, however, a line from chapter IX struck me as particularly interesting, in which Slingsby in the year after his most significant accomplishment—the first ascent of Norway's third tallest, but most prestigious mountain, Store Skagastölstind—is experiencing issues in finding a native

[1] Referred to as *Norway the Northern Playground* from this point in this thesis, which is suggested by Peter Fjågesund as an abbreviated title. If not stated otherwise, all references to Slingsby in the text will be from his original 1904 version.

guide to accompany him on an expedition to Stölsnaastind: “The fact was, that the ascent of Skagastölstind the previous year had endowed upon me with a wholly undeserved reputation for recklessness amongst the natives, who did not then appreciate, as they do now, the fact that mountain-climbing is a great and most legitimate sport” (Slingsby 102).

For one thing, this statement involves the perception held by at least some natives that Slingsby was reckless in his undertakings in Norway, which he merely labels as “undeserving” without further comment. Significant from a narratological perspective, however, is also that this chapter is presented before his actual rendering of the ascent of Skagastölstind, even though the latter event precedes it in time. In this respect, it breaks the chronological appearance of the book and affects the reader’s understanding of the narrative. This presents the fundamental question of this thesis: how does Slingsby depict danger in *Norway the Northern Playground*, and how is it connected to and affected by his narrative? Another relevant aspect in this sense is his representation of and interaction with the natives in Norway. Slingsby was a Briton who travelled during the height of imperialism and the British Empire, but on his expeditions, he was entirely dependent upon natives as guides and porters, as well as for food and lodging. Although Norway was never subject to the British Empire, it was significantly contrastive to Britain as the most supreme and advanced nation in the world, while Norway at the time was a peripheral nation in terms of power and industry, with a population that mostly consisted of fishermen and farmers (Fjågesund 12). Slingsby was thus a tourist from the most powerful nation in the world, who came to Norway and introduced the sport of mountaineering as we know it in the country, and he is widely considered the pioneer and founder of modern Norwegian Alpine enterprises. With Slingsby’s reliance on the natives on his travels, one element of this thesis is therefore an examination of the perspectives of natives in connection to dangerous situations. As a mountaineer with adventure and an expressed attitude to conquer as many peaks in Norway as possible in mind, one would expect that Slingsby is willing to expose himself to risk and danger—but what is his attitude towards the perceptions of his native expedition companions? Although there is no intentional motivation for this thesis to conclude whether Slingsby’s reputation needs to be questioned or not, my discussion of narrative in *Norway the Northern Playground* will include a postcolonial or even moral component or assessment.

My main approach is to close read passages that implicitly or explicitly deal with the two principal dangers Slingsby encountered on his expeditions—the dangers of river-fording and the

dangers directly connected to mountaineering—which will be compared and discussed through the lens of postcolonial and narrative theory in the two chapters of the thesis. Whilst one literary centrepiece is insufficient to draw conclusions about travel literature in general, my argument will thus engage in the contemporary discourse through relevant theoretical perspectives applied in the academic field across authors and literary periods. In this way, the study seeks to contribute to the expanding and compelling studies of travel literature by providing an examination with a focus on the depiction of danger—in which there is no extensive study published in this writer's knowledge.

William Cecil Slingsby was born into an upper middle-class family in Bell-Busk near Gargrave in Yorkshire on May 25th, 1849. He was educated at Cheltenham College, but unlike many other prominent Victorian mountaineers, he was not shaped or influenced by any prestigious university, as he left school at the age of sixteen to enter the family business of cotton spinning and weaving. His father and uncle succeeded from a wealthy farmer, who founded the business together to become rather successful through their investments in mills—which saw Slingsby to grow up in a wealthy home with servants, stables and a tennis court. He was inclined towards the mill industry from an early age, and quickly became a partner through his productivity as a salesman and his resolute efforts in the modernisation of the mills (Readman 1101). After the passing away of his father and uncle, Slingsby and his cousin, John Arthur, became co-owners of the business, but although Slingsby had brought success through his forward-looking approach of modernisation, John Arthur was reluctant and conservative to the extent that he forced Slingsby out of the company by 1909 (1101).

Nonetheless, with his privileged background and position, Slingsby rarely found himself in shortage of money to fund his lengthy expeditions of mountaineering and hunting around Europe. Despite his professional obligations in Britain, he became one of the most renowned alpinists of his time, and beside his personal travels and expeditions, he also took leading roles in various climbing organisations. The most prominent in this regard is the Alpine Club, which was founded in London in 1857 as the first worldwide mountaineering organisation—to which Slingsby served as vice-president from 1906 to 1908. He was also the president in the Yorkshire based Rock and Fell Climbing Club, as well as granted honorary memberships in the Norwegian Trekking Club and the Norwegian Alpine Association (Norsk Tindeklubb). On a personal level, his interest in mountaineering spurred at an early age, and he highlights Edward Whymper's

book *Scrambles Amongst the Alps* as his perhaps most significant influence (Slingsby 420)—a legendary figure in mountaineering history, being the first man to have ascended the most prestigious mountain in the Alps, the Matterhorn, in 1865. Slingsby would go on to make his name with the first ascent of his own prestigious mountain elsewhere, but the similarities between Slingsby and Whymper are not merely restricted to mountaineering deeds, but also in style of writing. Whymper's introduction of the Matterhorn in the following passage is an illustrative example:

> Not only was this mountain reputed to be the highest in France, and on that account was worthy of attention, but it was the dominating point of a most picturesque district of the highest interest, which, to this day, remains almost unexplored. The Matterhorn attracted me simply by its grandeur. It was considered to be the most thoroughly inaccessible of all mountains, even by those who ought to have known better. Stimulated to make fresh exertions by one repulse after another, I returned, year after year, as I had opportunity, more and more determined to find a way up it, or to *prove* it to be really inaccessible (Whymper 2).

Whereas most Victorian alpinists ventured to the Alps to make their names, Slingsby diverged from this path and initiated his mountaineering career in more unexplored country. In 1872, he travelled to Norway for the first time, to which he developed a profound connection and passion, not merely for its picturesque nature, but also for its culture and people—which saw him to return as many as twenty times over the course of fifty years. His most significant alpine accomplishment was also situated in Norway, where he found his own special mountain, the third tallest, but most prestigious Skagastölstind, which he became the first man to ascend in 1876. Prior to Slingsby's spectacular solo-ascent, the mountain was deemed unclimbable, and the resemblance between Whymper's passage on Matterhorn and Slingsby's first impression of Skagastölstind is apparent in the way they set the stage for the climax of their travel narratives:

> I shall never forget as long as I live my first view of Skagastölstind, the grandest European mountain north of the Alps. Our guide told us that it was the highest mountain in Norway, that it had not yet been ascended, and that no doubt it was impracticable. Can it be wondered at that, when I saw the weird form of this mighty mountain in bright

> summer sunlight towering, like King Saul, head and shoulders above his fellows—a score of sharp aguilles of fantastic shape—I determined, if possible, on some future occasion, to make the first ascent? (Slingsby 33).

Slingsby ultimately rendered the tale from his first ascent in the most renowned chapter of his book, 'The Ascent of Skagastölstind', but although he wrote enthusiastically of his numerous expeditions and ascents in various alpine journals throughout his life, he remained officially silent concerning his uncontestably greatest mountaineering achievement for almost thirty years until the publication of his book in 1904. His potential motivations for withholding the story for so long, as well as his motivations for the actual daring climb of the mountain, will be discussed in connection with narrative and the representation of danger in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Slingsby's travels to Norway resulted in the book *Norway, the Northern Playground; Sketches of Climbing and Mountain Exploration in Norway Between 1872 and 1903*, which consists of 38 chapters with a textual narrative that renders of a selection of his experiences in different parts of Norway. Most of the chapters narrate of specific mountaineering expeditions, but there are also sections on hunting and the exploration of areas that he found particularly intriguing. Significant from an academic point of view and the questions of this thesis are also the many reflections, which sees *Norway the Northern Playground* to be an autobiographical travel account that paints an illustrative picture of the author to the readers. A notable element in his reflections and descriptions also concerns Norwegian culture and its people, which makes the book particularly interesting from a postcolonial perspective. Whereas Slingsby was a devoted supporter of the British Empire who wrote during the peak of imperialism, his book arguably distinguishes itself from other prominent Victorian travel accounts through his favourable emphasis on Norway. This will be an aspect in the analysis of danger in the thesis, more specifically with respect to how he writes about his expedition companions and their exposure to danger, in which Slingsby unsurprisingly showcases a sense of superiority as a Briton over the native Norwegians in some sections. Nevertheless, there are also several elements in the book that make Slingsby come forward as respectful and humble, especially when considering the British imperialist mindset that dominated the time of his travels.

In *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1814-1914*[2], Patrick Brantlinger defines imperialism as "an evolving but pervasive set of attitudes and ideas toward the rest of the world" (8). The most obvious feature in this regard is the advocacy of expansionism through military means—often justified through the notion of racial superiority—but Brantlinger also points out that the perhaps most essential factor of an imperialist mindset is an excessive support and loyalty to the Empire—both regarding the governing nation and its subjected colonies. The construction of imperialism as ideology took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and was facilitated through the emergence of new understandings of and attitudes towards race and culture—like the theory of evolution published by Charles Darwin through his 1853 book *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin's ideas on natural selection eventually brought the distorted thinking of social Darwinism into existence, providing a seemingly scientific justification for racial domination and the white man's burden to educate or even rule the world. With the appearance of threats to British hegemony the late nineteenth century—like the potential rise of other world powers in the United States, the German Empire and Russia, the Irish endeavours for Home Rule, the scramble for African colonies and modernisation at sea—a self-conscious discourse or ideology of imperialism became a defence strategy of the British Empire as Victorian political and cultural confidence dwindled (Brantlinger 14). Imperialism thus became a deliberate reaction that developed towards jingoism and racism, which in literature was expressed in the form of a white, heroic endeavour against the dark and evil powers of black barbarism (MacKenzie 45). In this respect, travel literature played a significant role in the construction of imperialism as a self-conscious mindset, and Mary Louise Pratt echoes Brantlinger in the claim that the reflections of mostly male travel writers were justifying expansionist operations, with portrayals of classic heroic quests of retrieving what rightfully belonged to the powerful Western nations (Pratt 200-201).

Whereas Norway never was subject to the British Empire, Slingsby was a profound supporter of it, and Peter Hansen connects imperialism with Victorian invention of the sport of mountaineering in the following manner:

[2] This paragraph on imperialism as ideology and in literature has been incorporated and adapted from a term paper I wrote for the course ENG4345 in Spring 2021 entitled "From Sense of Injured Merit: Intertextuality and the Ambiguous Argument of Empire in Tennyson's Ulysses".

> "[It] demonstrates that middle-class men … actively constructed an assertive masculinity to uphold their imagined sense of Britain's imperial power … Middle-class mountaineers adopted the languages of exploration and adventure from contemporary explorers in the Arctic and Africa to describe their climbing. These languages transformed the ascent of unclimbed Alpine peaks and passes into representations of British masculinity and imperial 'conquests' ... Mountain climbing helped to legitimize exploration and the broader imperial expansion by transforming imperialism from an abstraction into something tangible and readily accessible to ambitious professional men ... Not everyone could travel to remote corners of the globe, but middle-class men with a few weeks' holiday could reach Switzerland and act out the drama of the empire in the Alps (Hansen 303-304, 312, 322-323).

The connection between Slingsby and imperialism is suggested by Peter Fjågesund and Ruth Symes, who remark upon *Norway the Northern Playground* in their well-received study *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions on Norway in the Nineteenth Century* from 2003, in which they systematically examined virtually all pieces of travel literature representing British perspectives of Norway between 1800 and a few years into the 1900s. Here they suggest that to British Victorian travellers, Norway could be considered a northern frontier that was used by adventure-seeking Britons to define themselves against an outside, the unknown or the Other (11). Unlike the fashionable Alps where Whymper had seized the last unscaled mountain in 1865, Norway offered unconquered territory in the form of unexplored alpine areas and mountains not yet ascended. In this respect, Fjågesund implies that Slingsby travelled to Norway because the country offered a new frontier for him to explore and make his name (313).

Although there are hints of an attitude of conquest in Slingsby's text—in which his references to Skagastölstind and his expressed attitude to ascend as many peaks in Norway as possible are clear indications—this view is toned down by Paul Readman, who has made a significant academic contribution regarding Slingsby through his 2014 *Historical Review* journal article entitled "William Cecil Slingsby, Norway, and British Mountaineering, 1872–1914". Readman states that even though Slingsby was a profound supporter of the British Empire, there was no explicit connection between his professional view of mountaineering and his political perspectives, with his love for mountaineering primarily deriving from his "very personal reverence for nature and a persisting appreciation of the mountain sublime" (Readman 1100).

With respect to the statement by Hansen that modern mountaineering was invented as an "assertive masculinity", Slingsby was significantly supportive of women's involvement in mountaineering, as he brought his sister to Jotunheimen in the summer of 1874—rendered in the chapter "An English lady in Jotunheim", and he guided and accompanied the Norwegian female pioneer of mountaineering, Therese Bertheau, in her accomplishment to become the first woman to ascend Skagastölstind in 1894. Ann Colley furthermore uses Slingsby to showcase how prominent members of the Alpine Club encouraged and accompanied women on expeditions, with the example that he brought along the fearless Miss Oliphant to reach the summit of Dents des Bouquetins in 1888 (Colley 131). The examinations and results of this thesis will see that Slingsby's book is complicated in the expressions of imperialistic attitudes, but will be inclined towards Readman's view, and with his article being the arguably most thorough academic contribution on *Norway the Northern Playground,* it will be a recurring reference in the discussion of the thesis.

Although Slingsby is an acclaimed character in the global field of mountaineering and thus features in multiple alpine journals and books, there have been remarkedly few academic contributions regarding Slingsby and *Norway the Northern Playground*. Jakob Lothe, however, showcases Slingsby's modern relevance in a chapter in the forthcoming book *Nordic Travels*, in which he fascinatingly discusses Slingsby's use of epigraphs to highlight how their inclusion affects the reading of the book. One of Lothe's conclusion points is that the epigraphs not only drive the narrative forward, but also provide a critical view and autobiographical reflection upon it, as well as to indicate Slingsby's attitude to travel and to life (Lothe forthcoming). Moreover, Lothe's example concerning an epigraph from Slingsby's chapter V, referencing a poem by Goethe, hints towards the speaker's standstill in movement that in extension could implicate death; a key observation which is relevant with respect to the connection between death and the dangers that entail the endeavors of a mountaineer. Goethe's poem also portrays the harmony between the speaker of the poem and nature, which is one of many epigraphs in alignment with Readman's view on Slingsby's approach to mountaineering separated from political and imperialistic expressions. Lothe concludes that the epigraphs, which in many instances are from fictional literature, complicate and destabilize the relationship between reality and fiction in *Norway the Northern Playground*—and his examination of the interplay between the epigraphs and Slingsby's narrative will be important to my discussion regarding narrative and the

representation of danger, in which the epigraphs are central both to understand his attitude to travel and how he depends on his memory in the presentation of his story.

Although Lothe does not address the abovementioned Scott citation—which is understandable as Slingby's book includes 52 quotations in total—his examination of epigraphs in *Norway the Northern Playground* strengthens the idea that the citation of Scott reflects Slingsby's attitude towards danger. Scott's quote, which introduces Slingsby's chapter VII, does not derive from fictional literature, but from his private diaries, reprinted in J. G. Lockhart's *Memoirs of the life of Sir Walter Scott.* The epigraph is taken from a passage in which Scott writes about his exploration in the seas north of Scotland, rendering a situation with a fire on his ship as it sails in the waters near Fair Isle, situated between Shetland and Orkney Isles. This event is followed by an uneasy night, with the tide complicating the navigation in treacherous waters of high risk of hitting reefs and rocks:

> This tide certainly owes us a grudge, for it drove us to the eastward about thirty miles on the night of the first, and occasioned our missing the Fair Isle, and now it has caught us on the return. All the landsmen sicker than sick, and our Viceroy, Stevenson, qualmish. This is the only time that I have felt more than temporary inconvenient, but this morning I have a headache and nausea; these are trifles, and in a well-found vessel, with a good pilot, we have none of that mixture of danger which gives dignity to the traveller. But he must have a stouter heart than mine, who can contemplate without horror the situation of a vessel of an inferior description caught among these headlands and reefs of rocks in the long and dark winter regions of these regions. Accordingly, wrecks are frequent (Lockhart 135).

The circumstance that Slingsby selected a quotation from this specific passage in Scott's diary notes appears to be quite arbitrary, and an initial interpretation is that he did so because he liked the sound of the lines, with the context not providing any transparent link to mountaineering. Scott's travels are, however, situated in an area of Scotland with strong connections to Norwegian Vikings, which in turn is a significant link between Britain and Norway that Slingsby highlights as his perhaps strongest influence concerning his interests in Norway and its culture. Chapter VII also deals with what Slingsby considered to be the principal danger while exploring in Norway in the early 1870s; the fording of rivers—which sees that the

context of Scott's text is more relevant. The chapter by Thompson on nineteenth century travel writing in *The Cambridge History of Travel Literature* is interesting in this regard, which highlights that dangers and discomforts became a function or feature for some travel writers to showcase a truer or more authentic travel, in which hardship and uneasiness became a marker of distance to lazy, popular tourism (122). Using the example of *Eothen*—a narrative written by Kingslake, who travelled in the Middle East and the Balkan countries—Thompson states that many travel writers wanted to distance themselves from the mechanised, oppressive modernity, seeking back to a simpler time of Romantic primitivism or even taste for misadventure. In this respect, he argues, they intended to position themselves in alignment with the more arduous explorers in history, using methods of travel that seemingly provided a truer form of knowledge. This sentiment can be found in Slingsby's reflections upon the modernisation of mountaineering, which will be elaborated upon in chapter 1 of the thesis. In consideration of Lothe's conclusion that the epigraphs provide insight into Slingsby's attitude to travel, the quotation of Scott is thus an argument that supports the interpretation that Slingsby was willing to seek out danger on his travels—something which an examination of other sections throughout *Norway the Northern Playground* further amplifies.

Danger is not a concrete thing as much as a concept—and is defined by OED as the possibility of suffering, or a cause or likely cause, of harm or injury, which in turn sees its amenability to be more of a subjective feeling or understanding. The sentiment of danger is widely applied as an effect in fictional texts, often used as a part of a conflict to provide tension and progression to the narrative of the story. Barbara Basbanes Richter, however, adds to these functions by suggesting that danger could play an instructive role for readers, using the example of danger in children's literature over time has evolved into a teaching tool which—when applied correctly—can introduce and help children to navigate the complexities of their worlds and realities (334). In a similar notion, descriptions of and reflections on danger can be relevant in travel literature as potentially instructive and educative for colleagues and successors, in which a travel account by an influential mountaineer and adventurer like Slingsby can be of high significance. Thus, descriptions of danger are also found in reality-based literature like biographies, historical texts and travel accounts, but the norm in this respect is that authors should write in alignment with realism and historical accuracy to preserve a seal of authenticity.

To position travel literature straight-forwardly as a reality-based type of literature is however slightly problematic[3]. A central question and even disagreement in travel literature revolves around its ambiguous position between reality and fiction, which affects the way it is defined as a genre or field of study. Tim Youngs, an important scholar in the contemporary discourse on travel literature, claims that a travel text must be presented in first-person from the author-narrator's point of view, but more significantly, he also asserts the distinct requirement that an author must have undertaken the travel referred to him- or herself for a narrative to be considered travel writing (Youngs 3). To consolidate this definition, he refers to his colleague and co-author in the writing of *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Peter Hulme, who states that the genre must entail the rendering of a factual travel because of an ethical dimension of informing the readers correctly. Since the journey in various forms is a part of many literary narratives, one needs to make a clear distinction between fact and fiction. If a journey described has not actually taken place, the work therefore ought to be 'discredited' as an imaginary voyage (4). In consequence of these requirements, many texts are eliminated from consideration in Youngs and Hulme's eyes, even though they arguably could have contributed richly to the genre of travel literature.

This assertion is however disputed by Barbara Korte in *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, who argues that there is always an ambiguous relationship between the author and the narrator, even if the requirements of Hulme and Youngs are in place. An analysis of any narrative must take the distance between an author, a narrator and—in the case of a travel narrative—the travelling persona of a text into critical consideration (12). Because travel writing applies the same narrative techniques that are found in fiction, Korte argues that reality in travel literature merely depends on the readers' assumptions of facts or authenticity, which ultimately see no distinction between travel accounts and entirely fictional literature (10). To illustrate her point, she quotes Jonathan Raban, who in one of his own travel narratives, *For Love and Money*, addresses the transformation of a travelogue into the processed story which is released as a meaningful travel account:

[3] Parts of the following presentation of reality and fiction in travel literature have been incorporated and adapted from a term paper I wrote for the course ENG4412 in Spring 2020 entitled "Narrative and Authenticity in Greene's The Lawless Roads"

> The first thing it needs is an ending, for only in retrospect (and often in long retrospect) will the dust of travelling settle and the journey begin to emerge as a story, of sorts […] For travelling is inherently a plotless, disordered chaotic affair, where writing insists on connection, order, plot, signification. It may take a year or more to see that there was any point to the thing at all, and more years still to make it yield an articulate story. Memory, not the notebook, holds the key […] Memory […] is always telling stories to itself, filling experience in narrative form. It feeds irrelevance to the shredder, enlarges on crucial details, makes links and patterns, finds symbols, constructs plots (246-248).

Furthermore, Raban states that travel writing is "'a notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed' (253). In this respect, Korte applies Raban's confessions to argue that in travel literature, "[t]he actual experience of a journey is reconstructed, and therefore fictionalized, in the moment of being told", as an author who tells a story in retrospect is likely to have been—intentionally or unintentionally—affected by different factors (Korte 12). With reference to Raban's remarks, travel writers might hold an ulterior motivation which could see them to alter a text to construct coherence or put forward a message, invent a character to invigorate the story, or simply to portray him- or herself in a better light than what truly occurred on the journey. In this sense, the readers who seek a stamp of authenticity in travel writing in the same way as they might do with autobiographies and historical accounts, could be mistaken because travel texts are not necessarily fully rooted in reality—even if the author did undertake the travel described in the text. This argument is also emphasised through the modern example of Bruce Chatwin, who is pointed out by Kaasa to showcase the fact that prominent authors have disputed with their publishers to have works being classified as fiction rather than travel literature—indicating that for some authors, there is more value in a fictional perception than a documentary one (Kaasa 476). Hulme and Youngs' assertions that "travel writing cannot be made up without losing its designation" and "travel writing is certainly literature, but it is never fiction" (Youngs 5) could thus always be challenged, even if their travel literature requirements are in place in a text. Although Youngs and Hulme's contributions to the field of travel writing are highly significant, Jakob Lothe's broader definition is arguably more reasonable, in which travel literature is a unifying designation of texts which accounts for one or several travels (Lothe, Refsum & Solberg 187). This does not mean that every text in which a travel takes place is travel writing—which would see that most fictional

works could be included—but that travel must be a central theme in the text, or that the journey must have highly significant implications for the development of the plot, structure and the characters of the story (Kaasa 474).

Slingsby's travel account is in alignment with Youngs and Hulme's definition of travel literature, as there is little doubt that he completed the travels to Norway that he describes in *Norway the Northern Playground.* The people and the places to which he refers to are evidently real people and actual places, and many of his chapters are based on articles that were published by established and acknowledged alpine journals and books. A significant example is the yearbook of the Norwegian Trekking Association, which was particularly concerned with mountaineering and climbing in the end of the 1800s, and many of Slingsby's chapters had previously been published in various editions before being republished to a wider English-speaking audience through *Norway the Northern Playground*. Nonetheless, the form is fragmented, and even though it is narrated from a first-person perspective that is Slingsby himself, he had the opportunity to present his text as he considered to be appropriate at the time of its publication, and there are indications that he adapted his narrative or even omitted specific details to correspond with how memorised them, or even wanted to memorise them. The term "sketches" as part of the original title is thus interesting, indicating that the book is part of a larger whole, perhaps in alignment with how the author wants to remember it. This is relevant to the analysis of the narrative and the representation of danger of this thesis, as I will discuss the possibility that Slingsby altered his story to appear more humble or reasonable to his readers. Even though the chapters appear somewhat chronological—with general introductions of first impressions and remarks on Norway and Jotunheimen in the first chapters, followed by specific expeditions in a seeming chronology in time—there is also a mix-up concerning the order of events, especially with respect to the ascent of Skagastölstind, which is intentionally built up as the climax of the first half of the book. Some chapters are thus linked to others and have a function to set the stage or foreshadow what is to come, whilst others appear in an arbitrary order with no coherence between the anterior or the subsequent chapter or story.

Interestingly, some of the expeditions which Slingsby renders were documented or remarked upon by his travel companions, which provides a different perspective than the author's regarding the same encountered situations. These are useful sources for this thesis in the sense that they can provide an alternative representation of the described events as well as with

Slingsby's character—as he rarely touches upon his personal traits and characteristics in his own material. Furthermore, these sources are relevant with respect to the understanding of danger, as we shall see in the discussion of Slingsby's ascent of Store Skagastölstind—which was also rendered by his companion Emanuel Mohn in the 1876 yearbook of the Norwegian Trekking Association. The ambiguous line between reality and fiction in travel literature is thus relevant in the sense that it affects the way one could or might interpret Slingsby's manner of writing. His role as a mountaineering pioneer was well established by the time he published *Norway the Northern Playground* in 1904, and as someone who inspired many successors in both Britain and Norway into the hazardous sport of mountaineering, there arguably was a moral obligation for him to portray the events of his travel account in an honest and truthful way. Slingsby was also a devoted supporter and wrote at the height of the British Empire, which sees that not only his attitude towards adventure and danger, but also his interactions with natives are relevant to consider from a critical postcolonial perspective. Although there is no intentional motivation for this thesis to conclude whether Slingsby's reputation needs to be questioned or not, the discussion of Slingsby and *Norway the Northern Playground* will thus include a moral component or assessment.

This aspect will be the most relevant in the first chapter, which will provide an analysis on how Slingsby writes about another peril that entailed his travels, namely that of fording rivers. The moral aspect here will be connected to his attitude towards natives on his travels, and more specifically his potential willingness to expose fellow expedition companions to danger. In this respect, Slingsby's link to imperialism and the British Empire is a relevant inclusion—a thread which will continue into chapter 2. This chapter will deal more explicitly with the representation of the danger concerning mountaineering, an activity defined as an extreme sport in the terms of Brymer and Gray (2009), whereas the most likely outcome of mismanaged mistake or accident is death (136).

Chapter 1: River-fording and interaction with Norwegians

The early years of Slingsby's adventuring career took place in the 1870s, before the popularisation of mountaineering in Norway that occurred in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early 1900s, and therefore also before the modernisation facilitated by tourism through the construction of bridges and hotels. On Slingsby's early travels, the alpine areas were therefore significantly less accessible, and many places were troublesome to reach and mostly uninhabited for large parts of the year due to the high waters in the rivers. For one thing, this saw that Slingsby was fully dependent on the locals for food and lodging on his alpine expeditions, but it also ensured that Slingsby got to experience the wildness of the rivers first-handed—which provided a source of both danger and excitement for him to experience. This chapter will examine the passages in which Slingsby writes about the dangers of river-fording in *Norway the Northern Playground*, but the discussion will also be linked to how he writes about his interactions with the locals on his journeys. There are aspects of the book that can be criticised from a postcolonial perspective, but although there are some ambiguous features regarding his expressed attitude towards Norwegians in the book, a main argument in this chapter will be that Slingsby was not only highly fond of the Norwegian nature, but also the Norwegian people—whom he considered closer in kin to the Britons than any other people in the world. As a privileged Victorian who strongly supported the British Empire, Slingsby unsurprisingly showcases traits in demeanour and in writing with some imperialistic traits, and he can appear arrogant from the perspective of a modern, critical reader. Nonetheless, my argument will be that his potential arrogance or sense of superiority is slight in comparison to most British Victorians. Slingsby is, however, willing to boast and exaggerate in a humorous manner especially with respect to his river-fording experiences and their entailing dangers, which are interesting to compare with his descriptions of the dangers in mountaineering—to be discussed more elaborately in the subsequent chapter.

Jotunheimen is the area which contains most of the tallest peaks in Norway—including Store Skagastølstind—which sees it to be the most significant setting of Slingsby's adventures in Norway. As the closest village to Jotunheimen in the south-east, Aardal is important as a starting point for expeditions, and the village is also the outlet of the river Utla; the artery of the majestic valley Utladalen. This river became the source of both danger and excitement for Slingsby on his

expeditions, and he interestingly points out river-fording to be the "principal danger to be encountered" in the 1870s and earlier (90). To consolidate this claim, he provides a concrete example from 1873 of a young student who was carried away and drowned after losing his footing in the attempt to ford the river Breidlaupa near Lake Bygdin (91). The first mention of river-crossing in the book is in the general introduction to Jotunheimen in chapter III, as he reminisces on the memories of a time in which mountaineering was the subject of the few pioneers in a romantic setting of less facilitation and comfort:

> Ah! Little does the modern mountaineer who lives in comparative luxury at Turtegrö know of the free life on the fjeld which we enjoyed to the full in the seventies. Little does he know of the difficulties and even of the dangers of wading across glacier rivers, perhaps only knee deep. No; he has bridges now, and formerly a tour round Jotunheim was impracticable before the middle of June because the rivers could not be forded and no folk had yet to come to the sæters. Little does he know of the fun of crossing a river like the Utla, on a horse, bareback, and holding on like grim death to the man in front of him, when at one time when the horse's knees, nay probably his fetlocks, may be clear of the water. While his tail is floating behind, and at the next moment his nose has to be held up high to prevent the water from getting up into his nostrils, while his hocks are clear behind. Ah! that is real sport, especially when you know all the time that your Norse leader, who cannot swim a yard, has taken you purposely to the worst part of the two fords merely for the fun of the thing (39).

The initial way to read this passage is that Slingsby is boasting about the expeditions he took part in and completed in a time in which there were no other options than to face the dangers of river-fording—something which subsequent adventurers and mountaineers will be unable to experience due to modernisation. Slingsby presents this as a privilege, as if the danger of river-fording is a sport to enjoy to which he was fortunate to be exposed to and tough enough to have survived. As he points out straight after, however, the changes of modernisation are to some extent also for the best: "Ah! now is the time of prose and plenty. We had the poetry and hunger. Fortunately, each condition represents much thorough enjoyment, and probably the balance is well adjusted" (39). In this respect, his reflective comment ensures that he avoids the potential incentive and misinterpretation that subsequent adventurers should actively seek out

unnecessary and dangerous river-fords, even if they have access to bridges and safe crossings. River-fording and the complementary danger were subsidiary parts of being an early-days mountaineering pioneer, not the main motivation for an expedition in itself—which of course was related to the mountains, not the rivers.

Slingsby and his similar adventurous-minded companions were however not entirely averse to seek out dangerous river-fords even if they could be avoided, as later chapters in the book also manifest. In this respect, the critique regarding the passage lies in Slingsby's willingness to seek out danger unnecessarily and potentially endanger other members of his expedition crew. He emphasises the fact that his Norwegian leader "cannot swim a yard", as if it is something that makes the situation more interesting or exciting, which is something that might put Slingsby in an unfortunate light. There is little doubt that he has taken the freedom to write in a boastful tone in this passage ("Ah! little does the modern mountaineer know … Ah! that is the real sport"), which arguably sees the rhetorical context to be less serious and more exaggerated and humorous. He also highlights that the leader has actively made the decision to be exposed to danger, indicating that he complements Norwegian guides as similar minded to himself in the urge towards risk. Although he thus ascribes his leader significant—and perhaps even reckless—courage, he points out later in the book that he was an adequate swimmer himself (178), seeing that there is no doubt that Slingsby himself was in significantly less danger than his guide.

The function of the passage is arguably to describe and inform to the readers about what river-fording was like in the 1870s, in which the described situation is presented as a typical example—something which the more specific renderings about river-crossings in later chapters also confirm. The passage thus invites the readers to picture a situation in which he and his Norwegian expedition leader are in peril, "holding on like grim death to the man in front", with a river like Utla as considerably dangerous through the ferociousness and unpredictability of the water and the river-currents. Whereas it is one thing is to willingly seek out and expose oneself to danger in search of amusement and adventure on one's own account—which is to be expected from Slingsby as an adventurer and mountaineer—it is something entirely different to unnecessarily endanger other people for the same reasons, even if they are paid guides or leaders. Slingsby does state that the leader has chosen the fording spot, so to highlight the passage as a direct critique of Slingsby's active participation in the endangerment of others would be an overstatement. Nevertheless, as a privileged tourist who actively seeks out and embraces

dangerous situations "merely for the fun of the thing", this approach and description invite a critical reading that could shed Slingsby in an unfortunate light of arrogance and recklessness, especially if they are part of a tendency that can be connected to an imperial sense of superiority or—even more morally suspect—an attitude of conquest as a Briton in Norway. The way he writes about the situation is relevant to scrutinise because it expresses a possible willingness to put the life of others in peril for his own amusement. There are several important questions to examine in this regard. Firstly, it is essential to answer if the situation in chapter III is an anomaly or a representative depiction of Slingsby's attitude towards danger and the Norwegian people. Furthermore, it is also reasonable to ask if there is a link between Slingsby's adventurous and possibly dubious attitude and the conquests and expansions of the British Empire—which was a relevant mindset for many British adventurers in Victorian times.

In 'British Perspectives on Norway in the Nineteenth Century: The Example of Three in Norway by Two of Them', Jakob Lothe examines similar questions regarding the attitude displayed by the two British travellers, James Arthur Lees and Walter J. Clutterbuck, who wrote *Three in Norway, by Two of Them* following their travel to Norway in the summer of 1880. Lothe investigates the link between the narrative and imperial consciousness and ideology displayed by the authors of this book, which is clearly identifiable, but which to some extent is redeemed by a sense of humour and self-irony on the narrators' part. Interestingly, the narrator in *Three in Norway* is not a single person, but refers to the point of view of the entire group of the three Britons on the journey—pseudonymously given the names Esau, John and the Skipper—from the perspective of 'we'. According to Lothe, however, the 'we-perspective' of *Three in Norway* also indicates a British perspective on Norway in general. For one thing, the authors establish a direct link to British readers through the statement that it is intended for "English-speaking visitors to Norway, past, present and future" (Clutterbuck 161). As their purpose for the journey is the "search for trout, reindeer and the picturesque in the savage country of Norway" (xii)—in which their intention is to interact with Norwegians as little as possible—they also draw a line to separate the British on the journey and the native Norwegian people they encounter (Lothe 161-162). Although the word 'savage' arguably refers to the wildness of the Norwegian nature here, it also hints at a prejudiced attitude of the Britons, indicating Norway's implied primitiveness as a contrast to Great Britain and the British Empire as the most powerful and advanced civilization in the world.

This attitude or sense of superiority remains a continuous element throughout *Three in Norway*. What is perhaps the clearest example is when John joins up with the rest of the group after being absent for the first part of the journey, greeting the other two by the words "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"—which is responded by "Mr. Stanley, I believe?" (106). As Lothe points out, this is an unmistakable reference to the infamous conversation between two British imperialists in 1871, with Livingstone being the only white person present in the concerning part of Africa at the time (Dugard). Although Norway never was a subject for conquest under the British Empire and the reference was made primarily with a sense of humour in mind, it evidently showcases a disrespectful attitude of the Britons towards the Norwegians, and there is little doubt that the narrators mostly consider themselves superior to the natives they encounter on their journey.

The example of *Three in Norway* is interesting first and foremost because the authors visited many of the same locations in Norway as Slingsby during the approximately same period. Lees and Clutterbuck were not skilled mountaineers or adventurers to the same degree as Slingsby, however, which sees their exposure to danger to be less relevant, nor did they visit Norway for such long periods and on multiple occasions like Slingsby did. Nevertheless, their way of reference regarding the native people of Norway is an intriguing point for comparison between the two travel narratives, and to a large extent they can also be contrasted. In the terms of Syed Islam, the narrators in *Three in Norway* are obviously sedentary travellers, meaning that they are withheld by an obsessive need to establish difference, which consequently creates a boundary to separate the traveller from the encountered other (Islam viii). In his influential study *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka*, Islam categorizes travellers into two modes of travel, sedentary and nomadic, which are distinguished based on how travellers react to otherness. According to Islam, the sedentary variant is undeserving of the name 'travel' from an ethical point of view, as he considers the movement in space in sedentary travel—which he explicitly connects to modern tourism—as a means of othering or to seek affirmation of an egocentric self in the mirror of others (209). This description also fits well with Fjågesund and Symes' remark that Britons in nineteenth century used Norway as a reference point to highlight their own image of being a superior people. On the contrary, Islam advocates in favour of nomadic travel—in which the traveller encounters otherness by adaptation and "the performative enactment of becoming other". Where sedentary travellers hardly register other cultures and

peoples, nomadic travel "impels one to come face-to-face, without the paranoia of othering that represents the other in relation to oneself" (vii), and are thus, in Islam's view, the only ones who conduct their travels ethically and authentically.

Whereas Slingsby also wrote *Norway the Northern Playground* primarily with an English audience in mind, there is no doubt that his tone and attitude towards Norwegians, their culture and their way of life are much different than his countrymen Lees and Clutterbuck in their travel account. On a general note, Slingsby writes warmly and respectfully about the Norwegian people, whom he proudly depicts as closer in kin to the British than any other people in the world. Especially for Northern England and Yorkshire men like himself, the link to Norway is transparent through the impact of Viking presence and invasions between the years 793 and 1066. This is highlighted already in chapter I, where he expresses a particular fascination with the philological similarities between Northern dialects of English and the Norwegian language, as well as an appreciation of the ethnic intermixture from the time of the Vikings: "Most of the qualities which are especially cherished in the North of England to-day, the sturdy independence, dogged endurance, and self-reliance, to name no others, and the best blood which we possess, we have derived from our 'forelders', the Vikings of Scandinavia" (Slingsby 14). Consequently, the editor of Climber magazine, Walt Unsworth, writes in his memoir of Slingsby that he felt more at home in Norway than in most of England, not only providing him with a sense of home, but also the prospects of unexplored mountains, hunting, fishing and "the companionship of the most friendly nation on earth" (Unsworth). Whilst Lees and Clutterbuck preferred to socialise within their group of Englishmen and as little as possible with Norwegians, Slingsby also makes the point that:

> "[b]y travelling alone … one has much better opportunities of getting to know the home-life of the people than when travelling with English friends, and one receives kindness and gentle attentions to which the ordinary tourist is a complete stranger. I have travelled hundreds of miles too in the company of peasants, and at other times with ladies and gentlemen, and have invariably met with courtesy and consideration on the part of the Norse folk, be they gentle or simple" (15).

Slingsby's eagerness to socialise with Norwegians was of course facilitated by his ability to speak, read and write in the Norwegian language, which he was dedicated enough to have

mastered by 1876—merely four years after his first visit to Norway (Readman 1114). In this respect, Slingsby inclines towards being a nomadic traveller in Islam's terms, and his appreciation of and willingness to adapt to the Norwegian ways of life are quite distinguished from conventional male, British travellers in the nineteenth century, even in Norway. Unlike the group of travellers in *Three in Norway*, Slingsby depended largely on the assistance of the natives on his travels, and he was accompanied by Norwegian mountaineers and guides on most of his expeditions and ascents. As Readman points out, these companions rarely shared Slingsby's social status (Readman 1113), and Slingsby proclaimed that "class for class, the Norse people are better educated than we are in Great Britain, and that the best of blood which courses in our own veins was derived from our Norse ancestors" (Slingsby 46). This statement is remarkable not only as a significant compliment to the Norwegian people, but also because it is untypically out of alignment with the British nationalism at the time. Still, Slingsby was a proud Briton and a devoted supporter of the British Empire, but his profound feelings for Norway, from nature and landscape to culture and its people, are undoubtedly evident through his literary works as well as his legacy in Norway. In this sense, there is no apparent reason to assume that Slingsby held a dubious attitude towards Norwegians.

Whereas there is no further explanation or description of the incidence with the unnamed Norwegian leader from chapter III, nor a return to the aspect of river-fording until later in the book, there is a passage twelve chapters later which further exemplifies Slingsby's attitude to danger. This passage from chapter XV, called 'Exploration of the Vetti's Gjæl', is an interesting case for comparison because it describes a similar event to the one from chapter III, which could clarify the situation and redeem Slingsby's unfortunate manner of expression. In the passage, Slingsby writes about a time he travelled in Jotunheimen alongside Anfind Vetti—the owner of Vetti Gard in Utladalen—to keep an appointment with Thorgeir Sulheim. Sulheim is a recurring character in the book whom Slingsby portrays as a friend and a man after his own heart. This is expressed already in Slingsby's first mention of Sulheim in *Norway the Northern Playground,* as he uses the example of Sulheim to illustrate that Norwegians could be as impressed with danger as himself, with Sulheim watching Slingsby "like a cat watching a mouse" on a precipitous mountain path in Fortunsdal (34-35). Slingsby and Sulheim became very intimate over the course of twenty years of expeditions together in Norway in the late nineteenth century, which for one thing is manifested through Slingsby's recounts of Sulheim in his works. As Readman

points out, their friendship is also made clear through their letter correspondence, which proves that Sulheim visited Slingsby in his home in England; a significant gesture at the time, both in consideration of the invitation from Slingsby's part and the considerable travel arrangements for Sulheim to carry out. Furthermore, Sulheim allowed Slingsby as a foreigner to participate in the local shooting of reindeer, which was a violation of the Norwegian regulations of hunting at the time (Readman 1115).

The intimacy between Slingsby and Sulheim is relevant with respect to the other major river-fording passage in *Norway the Northern Playground*, in which their similarity regarding the approach to danger between the two is very much apparent. In chapter XV, the matter at hand is a hunting expedition, in which Slingsby and Vetti are travelling up along Utla to join Sulheim in the killing of some troublesome bears in Utladalen. Slingsby provides the following description of their initial encounter on the opposite side of the river:

> The Utla, a narrow white stripe seen from above, was a broad, furious, and unfordable glacier river when we reached it. After much halloing, a girl saw us and brought Sulheim. He signalled to us to go further down, and led a horse about a mile below the sæther, when he mounted the animal bare-backed and plunged into the river. Anfind said it was impossible to cross, and I feared so too, but I well knew that Sulheim had the blood of the Vikings coursing in his veins, and that if any one could cross the river, he was the man. The Utla was fifty to sixty yards wide, the colour of the Visp at Zermatt, but with much more water. No bottom, of course, was visible, the current was frightful, and the bed of the river very uneven. We watched the bold pair with anxious eyes. Now the horse would be up to its belly in the water, then its forelegs would drop into a hole, and its outstretched nose would be floating on the surface while barely hock-deep behind. Next, its tail and quarters would be submerged, whilst it was only fetlock-deep on the front. At another time the current would seem to be carrying the animal down the river, when Sulheim would turn its head up-stream and urge the faithful beast onwards. Then there might be a few yards of easy going, when all at once the see-saw would begin again. At last, to our great joy, they got across, and Sulheim gave me a hearty welcome, and then carried my ice-axe, rope, and knapsack across, and how he managed to get safely over is a mystery. He then returned for me. I got astride behind him, carrying my rifle-case, and my own adventure began. Although there was considerable danger, I felt it impossible with such a man as Sulheim to have the least fear, and in fact we laughed most of the way

> across, and I much enjoyed the fun. Had we slipped into the water, which was not at all improbable, though we were both good swimmers, it is not at all certain whether we could have come to land or not, as just below us were rapids exceedingly uncomfortable to look at. We came, however, safely across after the most exciting ride I have ever had, though I have ridden across country to hounds in England nearly all my life.
> When we got across Sulheim said:
> 'Slingsby, you too must descend from the Vikings. I brought you across here just to see if you had any pluck. There is an easier ford a little further down' (Slingsby 178-179).

Whether this incident and the one brought up in chapter III are one and the same is not entirely evident. On the one hand, the two descriptions are clearly similar, with the fording of the river Utla—or a river like Utla—in both cases, but with the one from chapter XV described more explicitly and in more detail. In chapter III, Slingsby introduces Jotunheimen and the danger of river-fording on a general level, but he does highlight or even boast to the readers of a specific situation or situations in which his Norwegian leader has deliberately taken him to the worst part of the river to ford it. This of course matches well with Sulheim's comment "I brought you across here just to see if you had any pluck. There is an easier ford a little further down". Sulheim is undoubtedly the initiator of this dangerous river-ford, and he showcases a similarity in nature to Slingsby in the sense that he is willing to seek out danger merely for the excitement and fun of it. This is further consolidated in the subsequent passage as well, in which Slingsby renders of a moment to illustrate Sulheim's spontaneity and playful urge for adventure, with the latter being struck by an impulse to dash his horse into Fortun's river—urging Slingsby to follow—proceeded by a gallop and a shared rush of laughter (179).

The obvious evidence that Slingsby has described two different events in the chapters III and XV is the statement in the latter which clearly affirms that both him and Sulheim were capable swimmers. This disarms the danger significantly, with a risky situation in a river being much more critical for someone who cannot swim, and there is an apparent contrast to the statement in chapter III that his Norwegian leader "cannot swim a yard". The tone in chapter XV is also different, in which Slingsby intentionally highlights the seriousness of the situation, building a suspense from the beginning of the passage through descriptions like "[t]he Utla was […] a broad, furious, and unfordable glacier river", "Anfind said it was impossible to cross" and "the current was frightful", continued by a dramatic rendering of Sulheim fording the river. The

the word “unfordable” in this sense paradoxically indicates that their ultimate success was an impossible accomplishment. Whereas Slingsby claims that Sulheim’s bravery made him feel fearless and invincible, as well as pointing out how much fun and excitement he drew from the incident, he also states that “there was considerable danger” and that it was “not at all improbable” that they should have slipped into the water. Although this could be categorised as boasting in the same manner as the descriptions from chapter III, the seriousness of his tone is different, in which he describes the situation to entail that if an accident was to occur, his and Sulheim’s capability to swim was likely to be their only chance of survival. Yet, in chapter III he chooses to explicitly point out that that his Norwegian leader was an incapable swimmer. The humorous tone in the passage from chapter III creates an effect of boastful exaggeration that is not apparent in chapter XV, and his choice to highlight the leader’s inability to swim—as if is something which makes the situation more interesting or thrilling—is thus unfortunate, and the questionable recklessness of Slingsby cannot be explained from this comparison alone.

Apart from the build of Skagastölstind as the climax of the book, the structure of *Norway the Northern Playground* is quite fragmented, so it is unlikely that Slingsby had any intention of writing a partly constructed plot and narrative for cohesion—which sees that there is no apparent reason for him to connect the dots between the two events to a further extent, even if they supposedly were one and the same. It is also a possibility that chapter III and chapter XV were written years apart from each other, with several of the chapters being written for alpine journals and the yearbook of the *Norwegian Trekking Association* before being republished in *Norway the Northern Playground,* which in turn could see Slingsby to have overlooked in edit such a mistake as to call the Norwegian leader an unskilled swimmer in the first description and a capable swimmer in the next. Nevertheless, the textual evidence points more towards a conclusion that the two chapters describe separate occurrences. Slingsby had already brought up Sulheim by chapter III, which sees that there is no reason to refer to him as the Norse leader instead of his real name, even though his motivation in bringing up the situation is arguably to give a general impression of river-fording in the 1870s, not to render about the details of one specific event. In chapter VII—which is where Slingsby highlights river-fording as the principal danger to be encountered in Jotunheimen—he also makes a point of having become an expert of crossing rivers due to much experience, claiming that although he “with much practice became more or less of an adept”, was close to be carried away by rivers on three separate occasions

(90). This is followed by yet another recount of a river-fording episode, this time after a reindeer stalk, in which he spent more than an hour in the crossing of a river merely twenty yards wide, having to use a stick and his rifle as support to avoid being carried down the river (91). This indicates that Slingsby forded many dangerous rivers on his expeditions, which in turn makes it less likely that chapter III and chapter XV describe the same occurrence, and that Sulheim was not the unnamed Norwegian leader whose life was apparently in jeopardy in chapter III.

Chapter VII is also the chapter introduced by Scott's epigraph, "in a well-found vessel, with a good pilot, we have none of that mixture of danger which gives dignity to the traveller", and although its intertextual context appears arbitrary regarding mountaineering, it makes more sense in connection with river-fording as a topic. If one connects the epigraph to his reflections upon the modernisation of bridges and hotels, Scott's term "a well-found vessel" might be analogous in the sense that Slingsby considers these constructions to have removed an aspect of the wildness and excitement that he appreciated from exploring Jotunheimen in the early days of mountaineering in Norway. With respect to the functions of the epigraphs presented by Lothe—that the epigraphs provide a response to the chapters in the form of autobiographical reflection to the narrative—it is thus fair to assume that Scott's quote represents Slingsby's attitude to danger to some extent. Although he does not directly reflect upon it in *Norway the Northern Playground*, his descriptions of river-fording events thus showcase his willingness to actively seek out danger merely for the fun of it.

The discussion of this chapter has showcased that Slingsby could write humorously and was to some extent willing to exaggerate regarding river-fording and its entailing dangers. He proudly depicts these situations as something that belongs in the early days of mountaineering, to which he was fortunate to experience and tough enough to have survived. There are aspects of his boastful perspective and portrayals which could be subject to criticism, in which his approach to danger or sense of superiority can appear unfortunate to a modern reader. However, the degree of danger in a specific situation is not something that can be de facto determined as an objective truth from the way it is presented in a text, nor from the way it is experienced by a single person. The sentiment of danger is subjective, and for adventurers like Slingsby and Sulheim, it is likely to connote something different than for most people. This thread of discussion will continue in the next chapter, which will focus on the renderings that are more directly connected to mountaineering. In these situations, Slingsby's position as a pioneer and role model induced

more responsibility and sobriety to his descriptions than was the case for his display regarding river-fording, which he also showcases through a far more reflective and careful approach in his presented narrative.

Chapter 2: Narrative and the De-emphasis of Danger

During Slingsby's travels in Norway, he was likely to have been the most experienced mountaineer in the country, and his equipment of ice-axes and nailed boots were a significant advantage in comparison to the natives who accompanied him. In his own narrative, as well as in references to Slingsby by other accounts, it is also clearly manifested that he possessed a profound determination to succeed, with a strong willingness to take risk in the process of reaching his goals. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between his descriptions of danger in river-fording and the dangers connected to mountaineering, in which his narrative is seemingly adapted to be in alignment with an overall message in *Norway the Northern Playground.* This discrepancy in the representation of danger, as well the discussion of how and why he adapted his narrative, are the main topics of this chapter.

That Slingsby's subjective understanding of danger was always universally shared by his travel companions is unsurprisingly not the case. A clear example of this is manifested in chapter VI, in which he accounts for a time he attempted to ascend Gjeldedalstind alongside his British friend Dewhurst and the Norwegian porter and guide Rolf Alfsen in July 1874. According to Slingsby, the only fear held by the group prior to the expedition was the fording of the river Koldedöla; a danger which proved to solve itself as they were able to locate a natural bridge of snow after walking alongside the river for merely a mile or two (Slingsby 77). As the following passage showcases however, this understanding of danger was not shared by Rolf:

> Before gaining the rib of rock we had a wide bergschrund to cross. At the place we first came it was impracticable, and we had some difficulty in finding a suitable crossing. The blue depths and the icicles hanging from the lips of the schrund did not quite please Rolf; indeed it was rather an uncanny place. After an interesting rock-scramble of 150 to 200 feet we reached the upper glacier. The rocky cone-shaped summit was still in clouds, but with my sketch and observations made with the compass, our way could easily be found. We intended to reach a rock ridge a few hundred feet below the summit, to lunch there, and to wait for the clouds to blow away, which we felt certain would be the case before very long.
>
> The second glacier was much more crevassed than the first, but there were neither difficulty nor danger. The crevasses, as a rule, were very deep, but not more than

> five or six feet wide, and there were good and substantial snow-bridges wherever they were required. We plodded along, and success seemed almost within our grasp, when, much to our surprise, Rolf solemnly unroped, said he would go no further, and asked us to pay him on the spot. After a little gentle persuasion we convinced him that there was no danger, and we went on again. Soon the clouds obscured the rock ridge, and after making many dramatic gesticulations our friend untied himself again, and said the he would descend to the valley alone, which indeed would have been madness, as we were at that time in a somewhat intricate maze of crevasses. We all sat down in the snow, and though Dewhurst and I argued in bad Norse for half an hour, our friend was inexorable. He had a wife and family at home, and would not further endanger his life with two crazy Englishmen, but would return and leave them to their miserable fate. We then had a meal of fladbröd, cheese, and cold tea, and tried to admire the view.
>
> Though there was not the least danger for us, we could not conscientiously leave Rolf alone on the snow whilst we went forward to make a quick ascent of the peak, because we were afraid that he would set off alone, descend by our track, and thus incur, through gross ignorance of snow-craft, a real danger unsuspected by him (78-79).

This account is interesting for several reasons. For one thing, the narrative form shifts between the I-perspective of Slingsby and a we-perspective of the group, with the latter reminiscent to the one from *Three in Norway* in the sense that it appears to include the British explorers Slingsby and Dewhurst to a larger extent than Norwegian porter Rolf on the expedition. Slingsby liberally uses the we-form to express the assessments of the group, (for instance "[t]he only thing we feared in connection with the ascent […]" and "[…] which we felt certain would be the case before very long"), but Rolf's utterings and actions on the glacier and the mountain indicate that these estimations applied merely for Slingsby and Dewhurst and not for the Norwegian porter. This is, of course, most evident when Rolf decides that he does not wish to "[…] further endanger his life with two crazy Englishmen, but would return and leave them to their miserable fate"—a comment which clearly showcases that his sentiment is out of alignment with the two Britons, as well as his significant lack of faith in the expedition at least at that specific point in time. Moreover, the distinction between the Britons and Rolf is manifested through Slingsby's rather patronising tone, most evident through the reference of Rolf as "our friend" who was "inexorable" despite the Britons' seemingly better judgements, but also by labelling his decision to descend by himself as "madness". Like the British gentleman he was,

Slingsby restrains himself from being directly disrespectful against Rolf though, and he arguably downplays the situation through a lack of detail and direct judgement. Nevertheless, his underlying sarcastic verdict regarding Rolf's conduct on the mountain is very much apparent, and it is implicitly indicated that Rolf is to blame for the expedition's lack of success. With the narrative emphasis on the two British explorers taken into consideration, the passage thus hints towards a sense of superiority of the British over the Norwegian perspective of Rolf.

Whereas Rolf was introduced as an emergency substitute for the gallant and apparently more capable Ole Rödsheim in the previous chapter, he is still described as someone who could serve as both guide and porter, "who knew all the mountain paths, and was more or less used to glaciers" (70). In this respect, he was not some unexperienced or overly anxious native who incidentally happened to join the expedition, and Slingsby rehired Rolf on his subsequent travel to Norway two summers later, with the intention for Rolf to take part in the expedition to Skagastölstind. Although he did not end up accompanying Slingsby on his most glorious accomplishment as mountaineer, chapter VIII refers to Rolf as significantly useful in the days prior to the ascent, whose path-finding abilities and life experience saw Slingsby to discredit himself and Dewhurst as novices in comparison (98). Slingsby also states that "[i]t was with genuine feelings of regret […] that we parted from Rolf who had acted as our guide, porter, cook, valet, and friend for some ten days" (99). He does however comment on the seeming change in Rolf's demeanour and approach in comparison to the occurrences of chapter VI, as he manifests some surprise that Rolf expressed no fear and "went most pluckily" in the climbing of Dyrhaugstinder, despite the notion that "the dangers were much more apparent than those on the Koldedal mountain" (97).

Even though Slingsby expressed a sense of surprise regarding Rolf's conduct in Morka-Koldedal in chapter VI, he did foreshadow the porter's refusal to progress even earlier in the passage through the statement "the blue depths and the icicles hanging from the lips of the schrund did not quite please Rolf". Furthermore, this antecedent description is followed by Slingsby admitting that the bergschrund was "rather an uncanny place". A bergschrund is the cleft in which the ice of a glacier is merged with the rock of the mountain and is generally considered to be a substantial obstacle even for skilled contemporary mountaineers[4], and the

[4] A leading company of climbing equipment, Petzl, states that bergschrunds are technically difficult and complicated obstacles to which not even modern equipment necessarily provides sufficient protection. Particularly the leader is

term ‘uncanny’ is defined by Oxford English Dictionary as mischievous, untrustworthy, or even dangerous. In this way, Slingsby admits that there is some exposure to risk, and despite his withholding and discreet descriptions, his continuous claims to Rolf and the readers that there was “not the least danger” are thus contradictory at least to some extent. Nonetheless, Slingsby remains adamant in his stance, pointing out that the real danger would be if Rolf were to commence on the descent by himself, which leaves Slingsby and Dewhurst with no other option in their eyes than to abolish the expedition.

It is likely that the two Britons were mostly right in their assessments of the dangers on the expedition in Morka-Koldedal. Although Rolf displayed his pluck and capability as guide and pathfinder in Utladalen on Slingsby’s subsequent journey to Norway in 1876—and therefore in some sense redeemed himself in Slingsby’s eyes—it is likely that the discrepancy between Rolf and the Britons on Gjeldedalstind can be explained by their knowledge and experience in mountaineering—and especially in snow-craftsmanship. In the first chapter of *Norway the Northern Playground,* Slingsby interestingly credits the sport of mountaineering to have been invented by Norwegian Vikings—but it was largely forgotten in Norway until Boeck and Keilhau marked Jotunheimen on the map through their academic discovery in 1820 (7). As Slingsby however proudly points out, mountaineering was not thoroughly introduced “as a noble sport” until the late nineteenth century by the British[5]—a process in which Slingsby himself was among the most essential initiators. His experiences in the Alps in between his travels to Norway are significant in this regard, where snow-craftmanship was a far more developed aspect of mountaineering—something which saw him to be an expert in snow-craft far beyond virtually any Norwegians at the time. The British mountaineers were the only who used nails in their boots, which was a huge advantage when traversing glaciers, and snow-axes were even more crucial, which were not a part of mountaineering equipment in Norway until they were introduced by Slingsby and other British mountaineers. This is also expressed through the example of Knut Lykken, who unlike Rolf did participate in Slingsby’s successful expedition on

subjected to risk, as it is generally difficult to place intermediate protection, and the second in line is cannot safely provide substantial security as anchor in every situation (https://www.petzl.com/US/en/Sport/Crossing-a-bergschrund-on-a-snow-slope?ActivityName=mountaineering). Accessed 17 Dec 2020

[5] In *The Northern Utopia* (2003), Fjågesund highlights this as another Anglo-Norwegian connection and compliment from Slingsby’s part, with him interweaving the fates of Norway and Great Britain through the notion that mountaineering originally was a Norwegian sport invented by Vikings, which in turn was re-introduced by the British in the nineteenth century (314).

Skagastölstind in 1876, but who had never seen an ice-axe before Slingsby showed him his own. In this respect, Rolf's prerequisites as a member of a mountaineering expedition that involved glacier-traversing differed severely from the prerequisites of the two Britons.

This is significant information and deserving of some reflection from Slingsby—but is nevertheless merely mentioned as a brief patronising comment on Rolf's objection and wish to descend the mountain on his own: "[…] we were afraid that he would set off alone, descend by our tracks, and thus incur, through gross lack of snow-craft, a real danger unsuspected by him". For one thing, the passage thus showcases how Slingsby is considerably dismissive to other people's understandings and perceptions of dangerous circumstances. In this respect, there is a similar situation a few chapters later where the abovementioned Knut Lykken—who is presented as more adventurous than Rolf—exclaims "he is insane, that Englishman … he is going to kill himself, that Englishman" with reference to Slingsby when he climbs a passage that Knut considered too dangerous at Thorfinstind (131, my translation). These examples showcase Slingsby's profound motivation for success, but which in many situations was given precedence over the sentiments of at least some of his travel companions. That Slingsby's judgement and perception of danger were reckless, however, is difficult to assess from his own perspective in his own narrative, but as we know, he points out that he received a reputation of recklessness during his time in Norway—which he comments on to be "wholly undeserved" without providing any further contextualisation or explanation (102). Moreover, the examples manifest what is arguably a limitation in Slingsby's awareness of his own subjectivity, or at least a lack of willingness to consider the understanding of a different perspective than his own. On the contrary, he presents the situations and the consequent dangers as objective truths, not his subjective understanding as the most experienced mountaineer in Norway; a tendency which could be considered a limitation to the quality of narrative in *Norway the Northern Playground* overall.

Critical awareness of subjectivity would become more common in modernist travel narratives in the 1930s, in which the British novelist Graham Greene is an illustrative example. In his travel narrative *The Lawless Roads*, set in Mexico during the religious revolution of the socialist elite in 1938, Greene connects his own personal issues with the anxiety of the world on the brink of war, but with a brutal honesty towards both himself and his surroundings—including the people he encounters. Greene famously states in the preface of the book that "[t]his is the

personal impression of a small part of Mexico at a particular time, the spring of 1938", as well as declaring that some of the conclusions he draws in the book were proven to be mistaken, which sees him to gain credibility as a narrator in the sense that he showcases an awareness and even dares to be critical against his own perspective. Furthermore, the example of another travel account by Greene, *Journey Without Maps* (1936), showcases that the same experience of a particular journey or expedition can be perceived entirely differently by different people. This book reports of Greene's travels in West Africa and resembles *The Lawless Roads* in both form and thematical content, but in this narrative, he was accompanied by his cousin Barbara Greene who wrote her own account of the journey. Greene depicts Barbara as a passive and silenced presence in his own narrative, but in her travel book, entitled *Land Benighted* (1938), she provides a different viewpoint to the same experiences, but holds entirely different interpretations and perceptions of the events than those presented by Graham Greene (Youngs 161). Greene was an immensely successful author from the interwar-period, and to compare him with Slingsby is arguably unfair towards the latter, but the point that Slingsby failed to showcase an awareness of his own subjective perspective is a drawback to his book, and he thus, in this writer's opinion, misses out the potentially appealing and exclusive aspect of travel literature of self-criticism or self-awareness.

Slingsby clearly asserts a feeling of disappointment regarding the failed attempt to ascend Gjeldedalstind, expressed initially through the comment "[a]fter our frugal meal we inscribed indelibly in our memories the word defeat", in addition to the admittance of regret for being "so easily defeated" by the end of the chapter. For one thing, this highlights Slingsby's attitude to defeat and failure in comparison to most other people that accompanied him on his expeditions. Regarding the Koldedal expedition, however, he also states that its conclusion was ambivalent to him, in which he admits that he was glad Rolf refused to proceed because the unplanned descending lead to an incidental discovery of a path back to Vetti described as "one of the most varied and interesting walks that I have ever had" (Slingsby 79). The term "interesting" in this respect is something that illustrates the argument concerning Slingsby's de-emphasis of dangerous situations, being a typical word he applies regarding mountaineering and the potential perils that entail it. The term is commonly used to refer to routes, glacier passing, climbs or other mountaineering experiences in *Norway the Northern Playground*, and in addition to being mentioned in connection to the walk back to Vetti, he also uses 'interesting' to describe a rock-

scramble right after the foreshadowing of Rolf's predicament on the mountain. Other examples are on page 75 regarding glaciers near Lake Gjendin, on page 97 in the rendering of the intricacies of crevasses, and on page 105 in which Slingsby writes about an arduous climb on his second—and this time successful—attempt to ascend Gjeldedalstind in Koldedal:

> We followed ledges, to all appearances systematically arranged to aid in the ascent, on which we placed many *varder* to guide us on our return. We could see far up the mountain, but not to the top. Anfind led us capitally, and brought us on to the narrow eastern arête. Here we turned west, and our climb began to be more arduous, but at the same time more interesting. All who have climbed in Jotunheim know what good rock gabbro is for the purpose, and how well it holds the nails of an Alpine boot. Here it was grand. The strong south-west wind added a little spice of danger, the precipice on our right was quite in unison with our undertaking, and a heavy snowstorm when near the top gave variety to our adventure (105).

This example is interesting because this description of a mountaineering expedition is arguably the one which is most alike Slingsby's renderings of river-fording in the sense that he hints towards his attraction to danger. Although this sentiment is not as straight forward as in the previously discussed examples with the Norwegian guide or the river-crossing initiated by Sulheim across Utla, the descriptions that "the strong south-west wind added a little spice of danger" and the "heavy snowstorm when near the top gave variety to our adventure" are clear reminders that he appreciates an aspect of danger on his expeditions. With respect to depictions of mountaineering, however, this example is generally an anomaly, in which he primarily advocates caution and showcases sobriety in his approach. The downplay or de-emphasis of danger connected to mountaineering, like in his rendering of the situation with Rolf and Dewhurst, is thus a tendency in the descriptions of his expeditions in *Norway the Northern Playground*.

When comparing how Slingsby writes about mountaineering with his accounts of river-fording, the difference is even more apparent. Concerning the experiences of river-fording, we have seen a somewhat uncritical tone and use of exaggerated adjectives like "impossible", "frightful" and "exceedingly uncomfortable", statements like "how he managed it is a mystery", "there was considerable danger", as well as the highlight of an experience to be "the most

exciting ride [he] ever had". In this respect, he is willing to directly connect danger concerning river fording with fun and excitement. On the contrary, he is reluctant to do the same with descriptions of mountaineering, in which terms like "interesting", "somewhat intricate", a feature which "gave variety", "awkward crevasses" (274) and "a sporting route, which might lead to success or end in failure" (109) are significantly more common. There are some clear hints that Slingsby is willing to seek out danger in mountaineering, like when he is told that a projected route "was impracticable, that there was a large glacier, full of crevasses, and that it could never be crossed by man", to which he replies "[w]hat greater encouragement could be given to Englishmen fond of adventure, 'sound in wind and limb and warranted not to jib'?" (58). However, he never straight forwardly reflects upon or discusses danger as a distinct motivation for him in the book, in which the inclusion of Scott's epigraph is the most explicit indication.

What these examples clearly showcase, however, is Slingsby's adamant urge not to give up expeditions, which we have seen is a sentiment not always in alignment with the other members on his expeditions. This determination is perhaps most transparently illustrated in his successful climb of Skagastölstind; the expedition in which Slingsby famously abandoned his two fellow expedition members to complete the last interval on his own, becoming the first man to ascend a mountain deemed to be unclimbable. Although it is unlikely that readers of *Norway the Northern Playground* are unaware of Slingsby's achievement, he withheld his own account and perspective of the expedition for 28 years before publishing the book in 1904. In this respect, the ascent of Skagastölstind makes a reasonable climax of the book, and he builds up the ultimate accomplishment in the first chapters through multiple reflections and descriptions. The most notable are the references to his two early attempts to climb the mountain in 1972 and 1974, mentioned in the chapters 'To Skagastölstind or not?' and 'A Lady in Jotunheimen', in which he was prevented to go through with the expedition because of bad weather and the lack of finding a qualified guide. In the summer of 1876, however, he is accompanied by his friend Emanuel Mohn, and the hired guide and porter—but originally a reindeer hunter—Knut Lykken, who together constituted the full crew that would ultimately see Slingsby to succeed in the end.

The successful attempt is accounted for in the chapter 'The Ascent of Skagastölstind', which opens with a hint of ambivalence in the form of the reflections in his waking hours, in which he is contested by the prospects of "joyful conquest, or of ignominious defeat" (150). After brief descriptions of the first part of the expedition and a few digressions in the narrative

concerning his previous experiences in the Alps, he states that he took a lead in the guidance of the group due to his knowledge of the area and Skagastölstind being his special mountain, before they encounter their first difficulties in a snow-slope about 500 feet from the foot of the mountain. This is where the first hint of discrepancy between Slingsby and Knut—the guide and porter who replaced Rolf—is highlighted in the chapter, in which Knut points out that the snow is too steep on the intended route, to which Slingsby replies "that it was the only way where there was even the ghost of a chance, and that we must try it" (155). With great caution, they manage to reach a spur which separated two glaciers in the area and locate a snow-patch which seemingly presents a shocking discovery to Slingsby: footsteps in the snow. Here, he eloquently draws an analogy between his surprise and Robinson Crusoe's[6] to find footsteps in the sand on his deserted island, before he ponders upon the possibility that a different party of mountaineers had reached the summit before him—but he is soon relieved to conclude that the tracks descended from a bear. After "some interesting step-cutting through some seracs" and the witnessing of an avalanche on the far side of the mountain (156), they manage to cross the glacier after some hardship, in which he recounts a dangerous situation where his feet "passed through and revealed uncanny depths and a blue haze which was not reassuring" (157). Then they face an area in which Slingsby in advance had expected "considerable difficulty or, possibly, defeat"—but were fortunate to be provided the natural assistance of an earlier avalanche, which facilitated "a ready-made road on the rocks" to reach the top of the bergschrund (157). This is where he firstly alludes to a clear sentiment of failure:

> Looking towards the true Skagastölstind, 518 feet above the skar, I felt that I was beaten after all, and my dream at an end, as it is difficult to imagine any mountain presenting a more impracticable appearance than is shown at first sight by this peak from the skar … The first 150 to 200 feet appeared to be the worst, and I thought that if those could be surmounted, the top might be won, but really I did not then think there was the slightest possibility of doing it. Of course there was no snow couloir, as the rocks were much too steep to allow snow to accumulate there in any quantity (158-159).

[6] In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)—which many scholars consider the starting point both for imperialism in literature and travel literature as a genre (Brantlinger 11; Youngs and Hulme 4)—the narrator is battered with surprise when he finds footprints in the sand, after spending years in solitude on an island near the coasts of Venezuela and Tobago to which he is shipwrecked.

Slingsby seemingly admits defeat at this point and decides to ascend Vesle (the smaller) Skagastölstind before his companions—who could not keep up with his pace on the mountain—join up with him. Mohn and Knut catch up sooner than expected, however, and he returns to enquire with Mohn about reaching the peak of the main mountain, to which he receives the reply "[w]ell, I suppose that we can now say it is perfectly impossible" (159). Nonetheless, despite the appearing hopelessness of the situation, Slingsby is suddenly determined to try to ascend Store Skagastölstind against all odds and asks the others to join him in the attempt. Mohn refuses due to his depletion of energy, while Knut states that he will not risk his life on the mountain. "I will at least try, though I do not think I can manage it", Slingsby responds, before he briefly accounts for his sudden change in demeanour in the following manner: "Fortunately, I was perfectly fresh, and of course had an excellent stimulant in the uncertainty of my enterprise and the delights of entering still further into the unknown; and besides this, it is rarely safe to say that a mountain wall which you have never studied in profile, but have face to face with you, is unclimbable" (159). This is arguably one of the most imperialistic passages in *Norway the Northern Playground*, encapsulating the motivation of explorers to venture into the unknown in pursuit of new conquest that Thompson referred to concerning nineteenth century mountaineers. In this respect, Fjågesund's connection between Slingsby and an imperialistic approach to mountaineering is reasonable, especially when one also takes Slingsby's expressed target—to ascend as many peaks as possible on his travels in Norway—into consideration. From this point in the narrative, however, Slingsby is quite vague about the specific events, something which he also remarks in the passage rendering of his ultimate success:

> Up there I must go, or nowhere else: of choice there was none; but still, when viewed closely, it looked more hopeful than at the first glance … Soon, I got into difficulties in the corner, and, but for a ledge not so broad as my hand, from which I had to knock away the ice, I should thus easily have been defeated, as without aid of this foothold, the mountain, on this side at least, would be inaccessible. My friends saw me at this place, and vainly tried to call me back, but with the help of my well-tried ice-axe I surmounted the difficulty. I avoid going into details about this and other places, but I made minute notes the following day, as if I were to attempt to describe them I should undoubtedly be accused either of exaggeration or perhaps of foolhardiness by readers unaccustomed to Alpine work, when at the same time I might be guilty of neither. Suffice to say that what

> under the most favourable conditions must be a tough piece of work, was made more so by the films of ice with which every little ledge was veneered. Three times I was all but beaten, but this was my especial and much-longed-for mountain, and I scraped sway the ice and bit by bit got higher and higher … For the first time I had to trust an overhanging and rather a loose rocky ledge. I tried it well, then hauled myself up to terra firma, and in a few strides, a little above half an hour after leaving my friends, I gained the unsullied crown of peerless Skagastölstind (160).

Whereas the chapter on the ascent of Skagastölstind provides many answers—like why his companions did not accompany him all the way to the top, his struggling thoughts with the possibility of defeat, and some insight into his motivation behind the daring solo-ascent—there are also many unanswered questions about the mountain, the details of the ascent and exactly how it affected Slingsby in the aftermath. For one thing, he states that he avoids going into detail about some sections of the final climb because he fears that he would be accused of exaggeration or foolhardiness, but only vaguely proclaims that he "might" be guilty of neither. Although his lack of detail is in alignment with his de-emphasis of danger concerning mountaineering experiences, there are indications from other sources that the ascent of Skagastölstind affected Slingsby in ways that are not confessed in the book—where the primary emotions he expresses are pride and reverence: "those 518 feet which I climbed in solitude, I always look back upon with a feeling of veneration, as they formed an event in my life which can never be forgotten" (163). He admits, however, that he "would never have attempted, alone, rocks such as those, upon any other mountain" except Skagastölstind, the mountain to which he had "centred all [his] energies" since he first put his eyes upon it in 1872 (162-163), but beyond this concession, there is no direct critical assessment or reflection upon his own conduct or undertakings at Skagastölstind until the final chapter of the book.

On his comrades, on the other hand, he asserts that his biggest disappointment was that he could not share the experience with Emanuel Mohn by his side, which he follows up in the next chapter, 'Rest after toyle', by stating that Mohn deserved to take part in the accomplishment and uphold the Norwegian honour as part of the successful expedition. In its aftermath, there was a sense of national displeasure that a foreigner became the first man to ascend the most prestigious mountain in the country, but Slingsby praises Mohn's role as a significant pioneer of Norwegian mountaineering, highlighting him to possess "the ancient adventurous spirit of the

Vikings" and commending him for being one of the most unselfish and enthusiastic comrades he ever travelled with (170). On the contrary, Slingsby is harsh against Knut Lykken, whom he criticises to have failed not only once, but twice in doing his job, as he also forsook an expedition on the exact same place as he did with Slingsby when Harald Petersen became the first Norwegian to ascend Skagastölstind in 1877. According to Slingsby, Knut could not "plead fatigue and loss of sleep, which on the first occasion, and then only, could be urged as a legitimate excuse for shirking his duty" (171). Overall, however, he writes enthusiastically about the surge of Norwegian mountaineering and mountaineers after his accomplishment, even stating that Petersen deserved if not more honour, then more credit than himself for being the first Norwegian to achieve the accomplishment.

As we know, Slingsby withheld his version of the ascent of Skagastölstind until the publication of *Norway the Northern Playground* in 1904, but rumours of the expedition caught the public eye at the time and was remarked upon by Norwegian press, both while it unfolded and in the aftermath. Whereas Slingsby was severely more critical against Knut Lykken in his own narrative, the newspaper *Dagbladet* alluded in their recount that Mohn was the weakest link of the expedition, reporting that he almost brought the entire group to their death while attempting to climb Thorfinstind a few days before they turned towards Skagastölstind (Larsen 64). According to *Dagbladet,* Mohn lost his grip while leading the group and supporting the others with a rope, but they were saved by the efforts of Knut, who managed to recapture a solid grip on the glacier. This incidence is never referred to in Slingsby's account, even though it supposedly occurred during the same expedition of Knut's burst-out "he is crazy, that Englishman! He is going to kill himself, that Englishman!". Furthermore, Mohn also gave an interview with *Bergens Adresse* on the 9th of August 1876—merely a few days after the ascent of Skagastölstind—and a fuller account of the expedition in the yearbook of The Norwegian Trekking Association from 1876. Although Mohn's retelling is in alignment with Slingsby's regarding his struggles with the possibility of defeat and refers to his initial admittance of surrender, he recalls many aspects of the expedition that Slingsby omits from his own telling, especially regarding the conversation of the group on the bergschrund—which is arguably what prompted Slingsby sudden change in approach and demeanour.

For one thing, Mohn points out that on the last stretch before Slingsby went by himself—where Slingsby also made much distance on the other two—they had to ascent a vertical ice wall

in which a single misstep would lead to death, and that himself and Knut had the huge disadvantage of not having nails in their boots like Slingsby did (Mohn 113). At this point, Slingsby suggested that the wisest choice for Mohn would be to stay behind, but Mohn's determination saw him to complete the section despite his fatigue and the danger of the situation (114). On the bergschrund before Slingsby decided to go on by himself, Mohn was struck with surprise by the turn of events when Slingsby completely altered his approach after seemingly having forfeited the expedition, and Mohn connects this directly to his comment he "[i]f there had been two well trained alpine climbers here, I think they might have managed it" (Mohn 114). Mohn writes that the statement touched Slingsby's most tender point, and the historian Arne Larsen asserts that it made Slingsby change his approach and attempt the ascent alone, going far to suggest that it might have been misinterpreted by Slingsby to allude that he was not a well-trained alpinist, in which the language barrier saw him to throw all restraints aboard as a reaction of annoyance against his inadequate companions (Larsen 70). This is, however, a speculation, and Larsen also highlights that Slingsby held an entirely different urge and willingness to take risk and move out of his comfort zone, with a profound determination to not give in that few mountaineers could match at the time.

The features of urge and determination are also described by Mohn, who renders of their meal near the foot of the mountain where he asked Slingsby to make a quick sketch of the peak of Skagastölstind for academic reasons, to which Slingsby replies: "There is no time for that. Now or never! I have come to Norway on purpose" (Mohn 109). While rendering his experience of Slingsby's solo climb to the top, however, Mohn's feelings and reaction appear ambiguous. On the one hand, he asserts that he was not the least worried about Slingsby as he watched him climb the mountain wall "like a cat", but on the other, he also displays that he wished Slingsby was prohibited from going so the mountain could be confidently deemed unclimbable. After Slingsby had made it to the top and was descending, he recalls another sigh from Knut like the one on Thorfindstind—"he is going to kill himself, that Englishman"—while Mohn himself showcases more confidence before they finally reunite at the bergschrund where they had separated. Here, Mohn describes a Slingsby consumed with the graveness of the situation, as he attempted to congratulate Slingsby by saying that he now must be the proudest man in the world: "No, do you know what I felt when I was on the top? That I was a great fool, and now I feel very thankful" (117). There had been an incidence on the descent that had made a great impact on

Slingsby, in which he had to use his ice-axe as the only support while standing on a rock that could barely hold a man's foot. One small slip or the loss of his support would have seen him to fall a thousand feet, and there was a high risk of losing his axe, which would also have meant certain death as he would have been completely unable to descend. On the way back to Vormelid, Mohn furthermore recalls a situation much like the one on Thorfinstind, in which he slipped and would have dragged the entire group down the bergschrund, if not for the efforts of Knut who used all his power to keep his foothold. Slingsby, on the contrary, states that the second portion of the day, after he had completed the ascent, "was in brilliant sunshine. Success had been granted to me at all events, and, better still, a safe return to us all" (Slingsby 163).

The discrepancy between Slingsby and Mohn's accounts goes a long way to confirm the statement by Korte that the actual experience of a journey is reconstructed, and therefore fictionalized, in the moment of being told. It does not mean that Slingsby's account is false, but it clearly showcases that the narrative either has been adapted by the author intentionally to serve a purpose, or that it has been significantly affected by Slingsby's memory. As a reader of *Norway the Northern Playground,* it is thus significant to keep in mind that the narrator is Slingsby in 1904 looking back on his career as a mountaineer, in which the function of memory can be considered what Lothe appropriately outlines as "not a stable archive" (Lothe forthcoming). The epigraphs, however, can be the key for readers to understand both these aspects of Slingsby's narrative. For one thing, he introduces the chapter of the ascent of Skagastölstind with the first stanza of Thomas Moore's song entitled *When Time, Who Steals*: "When time, who steals our years away, / Shall steal our pleasures too, / The memory of the past will stay / And half our joys renew". This epigraph not only connects Slingsby's feelings of pride and preciousness to the story of Skagastölstind—which he shares to a wide audience for the first time and associates to a feeling of veneration—but also puts an emphasis on memory in the rendering of a story. It is clear from Slingsby's narrative that he is fond of his memories from Norway overall—which we have seen all the way from his boastful descriptions of river-fording before the modernisation and "touristification" of mountaineering, to his appraisals of Norwegian people and culture, to his presentation of the conquest of Skagastölstind—yet memory is a fragile and unstable archive. In this sense, there is an argument that Slingsby as narrator has displaced or forgotten memories related to fear, danger and annoyance against expedition companions, in which the predominant memories of Norway he is left with are the positive. "'All's well that ends well' is an axiom that

may rightly be associated with this day" (151), Slingsby admits early in the chapter of the ascent Skagastölstind, which suits well with the tendency in *Norway the Northern Playground* that he generally keeps a generous, respectful tone and highlights the positive aspects of his travels, which are the ones that are most consolidated in his memory and that he treasures the most. Yet, he also states that the events at Skagastölstind formed his life and would never be forgotten, so the question is whether he intentionally leaves out the descriptions of danger and the criticism against his companions, and if so, for what reason?

An answer is hinted towards in the final chapter, entitled 'Farvel; notes on guides and guiding; invitation of the mountains to mountaineers.' In this conclusive chapter, Slingsby retrospectively reflects on his experience as a mountaineer in Norway, and unlike most other parts of the book, it holds no progressive narrative or specific expedition accounted for—but is more of a summary of his experience and a message to other mountaineers who seek to follow in his traces. The epigraph here is interesting yet again, this time presented through the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Let us be grateful to writers for what is left in the inkstand; / When to leave off is an art only attained by the few". The inclusion of this epigraph indicates that Slingsby held a purpose to leave the readers to fill in the blanks through their own interpretations and understandings of the book, in which they are meant to appreciate what is omitted by the author. In this respect, the term "sketches" in the full title of Slingsby's book is important to keep in mind, which is defined as a rough or unfinished piece of work, or an account or description that provide basic details. The chapters of *Norway the Northern Playground* could thus be seen as fragments of a larger, unfinished picture, or analogically the untold, complete story of his travels in Norway. Slingsby knew this, not the least because he was a significant contributor to the yearbook of the Norwegian Trekking Association himself, so he was certainly aware of the account provided by Mohn in 1876, and the epigraph suggests that he considered the omissions from his narrative a positive thing.

Nonetheless, in the final chapter, he continues the excuse to have completed the final section in solo fashion at Skagastölstind, asserting that in his entire career, he completed the first ascent of a difficult mountain on two occasions, but also that "the stupid practice of solitary climbing cannot be too severely condemned" (420). He justifies his approach by stating that there was a lack of adequate guides during his early years in Norway, seeing him to have no alternative than to be self-learned and self-reliant. Not for one moment, however, does he

advocate the practice of guideless climbing, "until at least four seasons apprenticeship have been served under the leadership of masters of the craft, and even then, in nineteen cases out of twenty, I think it to be the wiser course to continue to mountaineer with good guides" (420). Moreover, he highlights that the principal danger regarding mountaineering in Norway is to climb with inexperienced amateurs or "so-called guides" who do not know when to order a retreat (416, 419)—without mentioning Mohn or Lykken by name—but that in 1902[7], mountaineering had become so popular in Norway that there are competent guides and porters to be hired in most areas, and that the excuse he had in 1876 is no longer applicable to modern mountaineers (421). Mountaineers must not be indulged in trifling, he states, as he proudly claims mountaineering to be "the finest sport in the world", but which must be taken seriously, something all worthy of being termed mountaineers know: "They will not deny the fact that with this sport, as well with all other noble sports, there is a little element of danger; but, at the same time they will assert with equal truth that, with forethought, prudence, and by putting into practice certain well-established maxims, these risks can be reduced to a minimum" (416).

This reveals that Slingsby connects an element of danger to all noble sports, which is in alignment with the inclusion of Scott's epigraph in chapter VII as an inclination that danger is a motivation for him, but which is merely implicitly represented in the narrative and never directly stated. A clearer citation from Slingsby in this regard can however be found in the script from an annual meeting with The Rock and Fell Climbing Club in 1909, where he confesses in a toast that "[t]here is no sport worthy of the name of sport that is without some little bit of danger, and I would give but little for the sport where danger is absolutely eliminated" (*Journal of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club* 290). Like in the last chapter of *Norway the Northern Playground,* though, he also appeals towards sobriety and prudence, as he immediately follows up with the assertion that "[a]t the same time, I think it is absolutely wicked to risk one's life knowingly". In both this toast and the final chapter of his book, he thus uses his position as one of the most renowned mountaineers of his time to appeal the next generation of mountaineers, and the chapter functions as a sober reflection of his experiences in Norway. But are these statements in alignment with the rest of Slingsby's narrative in *Norway the Northern Playground*?

[7] Slingsby states in a footnote to the chapter that he wrote and published most of the final chapter for the Norwegian Trekking Association's 1902 yearbook

Conclusion

Although the de-emphasis of danger concerning mountaineering might indicate that Slingsby is an advocate of prudence, we have seen that there are sections in *Norway the Northern Playground* in which he clearly appreciates and seeks out danger, especially regarding river-fording in the early days of mountaineering in Norway. Whether Slingsby was reckless is a question that takes a subjective interpretation or speculation to answer, but both his own narrative and several of his companions give the impression that he was very willing to take risks in his profound determination to ascend as many peaks in Norway as possible. However, he either omits aspects and descriptions of his expeditions which many would consider risky and dangerous, which we have seen is likely to be intentional from Slingsby's part. This is not directly problematic, as the applied narrative techniques and the adaption of texts are, following the argument of Korte, apparent in virtually all travel accounts. In turn, this diminishes the line between reality and fiction and sees that one should take the relationship between the author, narrator and travelling persona into critical perspective when analysing Slingsby's text. "Memory […] is always telling stories to itself, filling experience in narrative form. It feeds irrelevance to the shredder, enlarges on crucial details, makes links and patterns, finds symbols, constructs plots", Raban confesses, and the adaptation in Slingsby's narrative is thus a consequence of the fact that he published and wrote most of the book with a retrospective view on his career, in which he had the opportunity to present his account in the way he wanted it to be perceived by his readers. This is apparent in Slingsby's representation of danger, which is ambivalent and ambiguous, where Slingsby advocates prudence and sobriety on the one hand, while proudly or even boastfully depicting dangerous situations on the other. He intentionally tones down or omits descriptions of danger connected to mountaineering, which might be a precaution with respect to his reputation in Norway and his position as a renowned and influential mountaineer at the time of his writing. In this writer's opinion, however, Slingsby's omissions and de-emphasis are unfortunate in the sense that an honest reflection, self-awareness and self-criticism would make his narrative even more interesting and appealing.

In his historical account of Skagastölstind, Larsen is surprised that Slingsby did not continue his ventures in Jotunheimen after 1876 at the same pace as he did before—in which there were dozens of maiden peaks to ascend for the first time—and speculates whether his

experience from the ascent of Skagastölstind struck cold blood in his veins, seeing him to withhold his story for almost thirty years and change his approach to mountaineering in the aftermath (Larsen 57-58). Following this thesis' examination of Slingsby's narrative and representation of danger, in combination with Mohn's account of their expedition at Skagastölstind, I believe there is textual evidence to suggest that he did. Although he presents a message and implementation of epigraphs that advocate the need to slow down, with a motivation for mountaineering situated in his "very personal reverence for nature and a persisting appreciation of the mountain sublime" (Readman 1100), Slingsby has adapted his narrative to be in alignment with this view on mountaineering—which is undoubtedly truthful and authentic on his part—but which was not necessarily his view through his entire career. As Fjågesund implies, there was somewhat of an imperialistic motive in Slingsby's approach to mountaineering, perhaps especially in his early years, and there are sections in *Norway the Northern Playground* that express the attitude that mountains are there to be conquered, as well as a language of adventure and the discovery of the unknown which is linked to imperial explorers. Whereas Slingsby was a profound supporter of the British Empire and wrote during the peak of an imperialism which expressed jingoist and racist features in literature, there are, however, few explicit connections to imperialism in *Norway the Northern Playground* besides the rather innocent language about mountains and nature. On a general note, he is enthusiastic, humble and respectful in his reference to Norway and Norwegians, even if he in some sections expresses a sense of superiority as a Briton. The latter is, however, very much expected from a Victorian travel writer, in which it is reasonable to keep Brantlinger's remark in mind: "It was good to be British and on top of the world, a member of the most enlightened, progressive, civilized race in history, and to most Victorians and Edwardians it would have seemed crazy to deny it" (Brantlinger 14).

Slingsby's narrative is intriguing and complex, not the least because of the implementation of epigraphs, which both provide insight into his attitude towards travel, danger and to life—but also blurs the line between reality and fiction. *Norway the Northern Playground* is primarily a celebration to mountains from one of the most renowned mountaineers in history, especially in Norway, in which the author's passion for the country's people, nature and mountains was profound and authentic. Its representation of danger is, however, ambiguous and ambivalent, in which an interesting question for further research would be to consider how the

book affected his successors and their attitude to danger—in which the likes of Arne Næss and Peter Wessel Zappfe are known to have taken significant inspiration from Slingsby. Slingsby's message is, nevertheless, clear:

> The mountains of Norway—probably the oldest in Europe—invite us all. Let us go then and learn amongst them the wholesome lessons which Nature never withholds from those who really love her. The musician, the artist and the poet will get inspiration amongst the purple, cloud-wreathed mountains. The philosopher and the politician will learn something of the sense of proportion. The schoolmaster, with the experience of the man, will for some time become the frolicsome boy again. The hard-headed business man will forget his worries and his money-bags, and will become imbued, for a time at least, with a wholesome air of romance.
> … Go then to the mountains for all that is best worth having in life (421).

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