Nation and Elevation: Some Points of Comparison between the "National Poets" of Slovenia and Iceland

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This article compares the poetic means of elevation used by two "national poets," France Prešeren and Jónas Hallgrímsson, arguing that the latter elevated both his native country and the vernacular language by using aesthetic models.

Keywords: national literary canon / Slovene poetry / Icelandic poetry / national poets / Prešeren, France / Halgrímsson, Jónas / comparative studies

Each of them did what any aspiring "national poet" would try to do in the nineteenth century. They reinvented their native language as a medium of modern poetic thought and expression. They introduced Italianate forms such as the sonnet and the terza rima into the national repertoire. They voiced the cause of their nation and tried to rally their countrymen around it. They wrote a "national epic," looking back to a crucial period in their nation's history but mythologizing it at the same time, emphasizing its former glory and democratic principles. They were part of a close circle of patriotic intellectuals that published their writings in a new literary journal. However, their life and work was also beset with similar troubles and paradoxes. They could be sarcastic about their lot and about the foreign power that suppressed their nation, but enjoyed education in its universities (in Vienna and Copenhagen, respectively) and versified willingly in the oppressor's tongue (German and Danish). They were each unhappily in love with a woman they could never obtain and sublimated her in their exquisite poetry. They drank too much and produced convivial festive poems that are still sung. They were celebrated as poetic geniuses in their time, but even more so after their untimely deaths. Poetry was not their profession, however: one was a lawyer, the other a geologist. In the end, though, each was canonized as a "national poet" and gradually became a

"cultural saint," to quote a concept that articles in this periodical put to the test. They even received their own statues in the center of the capital of their respective countries. One lived in Slovenia, the other in Iceland. One was called France Prešeren, the other Jónas Hallgrímsson. They were near contemporaries: the Slovenian was born in 1800, dying in 1849; the Icelander was born in 1807, dying in 1845. Nonetheless, they never met and neither knew of the other's existence, despite their apparent twin destinies.

How comparable are these poets really, and to what extent can the correspondences be seen to conform to the idea and role of a "national poet"? Some of them seem arbitrary at first sight and one is tempted to brush them aside as being irrelevant. Can unrequited love, a drinking problem, and an untimely death be on the nationalistic agenda? Perhaps not as such, but in retrospect they seem to have added up to an overall image of poetic suffering and even martyrdom, which in turn only strengthened the case for accepting these individuals as "national poets" and "cultural saints." In fact, some aspiring "national poets" in East-Central Europe did fashion themselves as sufferers and martyrs for the fatherland, which could lead "to a poetic death wish (which came to fulfillment in their lives)" (Neubauer 13). As for unrequited and sublimated love, it certainly was at the heart of the Petrarchan sonnet tradition adopted by both Prešeren and Jónas in some of their most nationalistic poems. One should therefore not rule out any factor beforehand, but scrutinize them all.

Moreover, one should not neglect the differences either because they can be just as revealing as the similarities. This article argues that Jónas was quite unlike Prešeren in being basically a nature-orientated poet, but that his landscape aesthetics are nevertheless quite comparable to what Prešeren achieved through other poetic means and are just another side of the nationalist agenda. Because the article is being published in a Slovenian periodical, I presume that the reader has a basic knowledge of the life and work of Prešeren. However, as far as Jónas is concerned, an introduction is surely needed and so I begin by briefly summarizing his life and work.

Jónas Hallgrímsson

Jónas Hallgrímsson, a natural scientist by education and profession, is the single most influential poet of modern Icelandic literature. "His work transformed the literary sensibility of his countrymen, reshaped the language of their poetry and prose, opened their eyes to the beauty of their land and its natural features, and accelerated their determination to achieve

political independence" (Ringler 3). Along with the other members of the circle associated with the journal *Fjölnir*, Jónas defined Icelandic national romanticism for decades to come, and after his premature death became its poetic icon. When Iceland gained full independence from Denmark in 1918 and became a republic in 1944 (it had been a province in the Danish state since the late fourteenth century), Jónas' poetry gradually lost some of its political and iconic status. However, this also made it possible to reevaluate his contribution to Icelandic literature and culture on less nationalistic grounds than before, and the last decades have seen renewed interest in his poetry, among both the public and scholars. Attention has especially been drawn to the final phase of Jónas' poetic activity, when he moved away from nationalistic and medieval motifs towards a more personal kind of poetry, modern in diction and elegantly balanced between dark broodings and a romantic irony, which shows the growing effect Heinrich Heine had on him.

Jónas was born on 16 November 1807, in Öxnadalur, a valley in the Eyjafjörður region in north-central Iceland. He lost his father, a clergyman, in 1816, and difficult living conditions ensued for his widowed mother and her children. Jónas studied at the Latin School at Bessastaðir, south of Reykjavík on the Álftanes Peninsula from 1823 to 1829, and then worked as secretary to the magistrate in Reykjavík from 1829 to 1832. He went to Denmark and studied at the University in Copenhagen from 1832 to 1838, first law and then natural sciences, finishing his studies by taking examinations in mineralogy and geology. He travelled extensively around Iceland from 1839 to 1842, in spite of ill health, working on a scientific description of the geography and the natural history of the island. He continued working on this project in Copenhagen in 1842 and 1843, at Sorø in Sjælland (1843–1844) and again in Copenhagen (1844–1845; he did not live to bring it to a conclusion). He co-edited the periodical *Fjölnir* (1835–1839 and 1843–1845); its final issue (1846, printed in 1847) was devoted to Jónas' writings. He died on 26 May 1845.

"Romanticism in Germany and Denmark, the wave of liberalism caused by the July revolution in 1830, and the nationalism in Eggert Ólafsson's *Poems* (1832) all combined to mould Jónas" (Einarsson 234). Jónas burst into bloom as a poet when he left Iceland for Denmark to study at the University in Copenhagen. He made his name with masterfully crafted panoramic poems, which reimagined the glory of the Icelandic Commonwealth and juxtaposed it with the present lethargy of the Icelandic nation ("Ísland" 'Iceland', 1835, and "Gunnarshólmi" 'Gunnar's Holm', 1837, the latter based on a famous incident described in the medieval *Njál's Saga*). As he did so, Jónas introduced classical meters

into Icelandic literature, such as the hexameter and the pentameter (elegiac distichs), along with romantic (originally medieval and renaissance) meters such as the terza rima and the ottava rima, although the *fornyrðislag*, which Jónas based on the Old Norse Eddic poems, always was his favorite meter. Later on he was to introduce the sonnet and the triolet to his fellow countrymen, using these meters with great virtuosity in poems full of longing for his Icelandic muse and his own native valley ("Ég bið að heilsa!" 'I send greetings!' and "Dalvísa" 'Valley Song', both written in Sorø in Sjælland 1844), feeling estranged as he did in Denmark during the last years of his life. Using another Eddic meter, *ljóðaháttur*, he wrote "Ferðalok" ('Journey's End', 1845), an elevated love poem, which also alludes to the end of Jónas' life journey because he seems to have been haunted by thoughts of impending doom.

Nature is always a prominent motif in Jónas' poetry, especially its more pleasing aspects, but also sublime elements, as in his description of a volcanic eruption in the tour poem "Fjallið Skjaldbreiður" ('Mount Broadshield', 1841). "Hulduljóð" ('Lay of Hulda', 1841–1845) is an ambitious but unfinished nature poem in the tradition of the pastoral elegy. It is dedicated to the memory of Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768), a natural scientist and poet that Jónas considered to be his great predecessor. His pronounced admiration for Eggert, a man of the Enlightenment, shows that Jónas' interests were not exclusively romantic, as is also evident in the *Fjölnir* circle's declaration that their periodical was committed to *usefulness*, *beauty*, *truth* and "that which is *good* and *moral*" (*Fjölnir* 1835: 8–13), indicating Enlightenment values as well as romantic ones. Nature, formerly a benign force and presence to the poet and the natural scientist, becomes hostile in Jónas' late poems, written with a Heine-like twist of the traditional loco-descriptive genre ("Annes og eyjar" 'Capes and Islands', 1844–1845). This shift in Jónas' world view has been seen to be part and parcel of a new trend in Scandinavian and Icelandic literature and sensibility, a turning away from national romanticism and *poetic realism* (Bandle) towards pessimistic and nihilistic *romantisme* (Óskarsson 271–273).

A versatile writer, Jónas was able to produce with equal ease short stories ("Grasaferð" 'Gathering Highland Moss', dating from around 1836 and considered to be the first short story written by an Icelander), *Reisebilder* such as Heine was famous for ("Salthólmsferð," 1836), *Kunstmärchen* in the fashion of Hans Christian Andersen ("Fífill og hunangsfluga" 'The Dandelion and the Bee'), gothic tales ("Stúlkan í turninum" 'The Girl in the Tower'), and mock-heroic pieces ("Gamanbréf til kunningja" 'The Queen Goes Visiting'; a humorous description of Queen Victoria's state visit to France in 1843). He furthermore wrote scathing critical reviews, a

famous example being the one he delivered in *Fjölnir* 1837 against the epic poetic genre known as *rímur*, which had been popular in Iceland for hundreds of years until Jónas criticized them from an artistic point of view, thereby indirectly offering his own aesthetic manifesto. This versatility also shows in his poetry because he had many distinct strings in his harp, ranging from elegy ("Bjarni Thorarensen," 1841, Jónas' tribute to the first Icelandic romantic) to convivial festive songs ("Borðsálmur" 'Table Hymn', 1839). He also tried his hand at translation, sometimes rendering his originals so freely that they should rather be seen as independent variations on a given theme. However, his choice of authors—including Horace, Schiller, Chamisso, and Heine repeatedly—again points to classical and contemporary models and influences, especially German literature.

Elevating the national

As can be gathered from this short summary, Jónas was basically a nature-orientated poet and was quite unlike Prešeren in this respect, whatever else they may have in common. Prešeren may have used landscapes or some place *as a setting*—such as Lake Bohinj and Lake Bled in *Krst pri Savici* (The Baptism on the Savica, 1836)—but he seldom tries to describe nature as such or make it his principle subject. This difference is actually very revealing about the possibilities open to an aspiring "national poet" in the nineteenth century, and it is the focal point of my comparison of Prešeren and Jónas. I argue that the elevation of *vernacular literature* to standards set by classical and especially renaissance models, which Prešeren carried out so extensively and elegantly in his works, can also be seen—although on a smaller scale—in the works of Jónas, but that he furthermore tries to elevate *his native country* in a similar fashion. He does this by two means principally: first, by describing Icelandic nature *as landscape*, according to aesthetic models developed in European art, and, second, by representing a certain site *as a lieu de mémoire*—a symbolic element of memorial heritage—and even as an enchanted place because of its significance in national history. I am not saying that Prešeren did not do something to this effect in some of his poems, such as representing the Bohinj and Bled areas as *lieux de mémoire* in *The Baptism on the Savica*, but describing nature as landscape does not seem to feature nearly as strongly in his poetic opus as it does in the case of Jónas. The different means of elevation ultimately served the same nationalistic purpose, which was to make the nation—its language, its literature, and its land—culturally valid and raise it to a European level.

As Prešeren scholars have aptly demonstrated, he seems to have worked according to a cultural and nationalistic program that his learned friend Matija Čop (1797–1835) was instrumental in developing and was at least partly based on German models. Henry Cooper sums this up as follows:

> Čop did share with the Schlegels many general perceptions of the world of letters. These shared viewpoints are of critical importance not only in understanding Čop, but Prešeren as well. They are, in Boris Paternu's formulation of them, as follows: that poetry is the foundation of a cultured nation, therefore for a nation to be cultured, it must cultivate poetry; that it must do so in its own language, the one distinctive feature which most clearly sets off one nation from another; that art as a whole, made up of numerous national components, is, however, international, and that the art of one nation can and should have an impact on that of other nations; that of all the art forms represented in the world in their time, the Italian stand higher than the rest, and therefore represent a suitable source upon which less developed nations might draw. (Cooper 43)

Marijan Dović has recently pointed out how subtle and political this program was, even if it centered on literary forms:

> It is important to emphasize that Prešeren was implementing the literary program of his erudite friend, the theoretician Matija Čop. Together with Čop, Prešeren took up the project of proving the aesthetic potential of Slovene through mastering the most complex and appreciated forms of European poetry. Under the influence of ideas on cultivating national literatures by Friedrich Schlegel and others, Romantic forms, especially the Petrarchan sonnet, were considered to be a criterion for judging the aptness of a language for vernacular poetry. Prešeren successfully fulfilled his aesthetic (and political) mission of including "backwards" Slovene literature in the emerging community of national literatures. (Dović 100)

The great achievement of Prešeren was to show, through his mastery of the sonnet form and by reinventing Slovenian as a poetic language, that it was second to none in this respect. In all, Prešeren wrote forty-six Slovenian sonnets, a number that certainly dwarfs Jónas' meager output of only three sonnets in Icelandic, but they were undoubtedly based on a similar thought, although Jónas was not working according to any such preconceived and carefully worked-out plan as Čop and Prešeren were. These sonnets by Jónas are in the Petrarchan fashion and one of them, "I send greetings!" has had a long-lasting effect on Icelandic literature and is still sung and known by heart by many Icelanders. Even if it is not comparable to Prešeren's sonnet output, this singular work arguably caused a kind of shift in the literary system and became a model on which many other Icelandic poets based their sonnets. Jónas adopted other Italianate

and renaissance forms, although on a smaller scale than Prešeren. As already mentioned, he used terza rima and ottava rima in "Gunnar's Holm," just as Prešeren did in *The Baptism on the Savica*. He was not able to read Italian poetry in the original like Prešeren, but learned how to use these poetic forms through his reading of German translations of Italian works, and also by reading original works in the Italian style by German and Danish poets. Jónas may, for instance, have modeled his use of terza rima on Chamisso's poems, such as "Deutsche Barden: Eine Fiktion" (Ringler 142), a further reminder that both he and Prešeren were strongly influenced by German literature and aesthetics, and this fact alone may explain a number of similarities in their works. In many ways, however, they were in a dissimilar position as poets regarding their own literary tradition. Prešeren was not as lucky as Jónas in having such an impressive amount of "national classics" like the Eddic poems to channel into. The revival of Eddic meters was one way of elevating the modern-day vernacular, as Jónas did consequently throughout his poetic career, and it should be thought of as a parallel to his introduction of Italianate and other renaissance and classic poetic forms into the national repertoire (Egilsson, "Eddas, Sagas and Icelandic Romanticism"). However, another way of elevation was to describe the home country—the *patria*—in culturally accepted terms, by making its nature a worthy subject of elegant poetry.

Elevating the land

Marshall McLuhan was one of the first scholars to point out how much nineteenth-century romantic poets really owed to landscape artists in their descriptions of nature, which had by then become one of the principal subjects of poetry throughout Europe. McLuhan claimed that many of them were strongly influenced by the visual arts and tended to depict nature in a painterly manner, emphasizing color, form, and perspective. In contrast, many twentieth-century poets treated nature in a different way, for which McLuhan invented the critical term *interior landscape* or *paysage intérieur*. As the term implies, modern poems of this kind tend to be more psychological and introverted than the poetry of the nineteenth century (McLuhan 135–155). Much has been written since on the connection between art and literature with regard to the poetry of place and landscape aesthetics in general. Malcolm Andrews has written extensively on the picturesque tradition in poetry and shown how British poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries moved away from classical descriptions of landscape, with mythical settings derived from Greece and Rome (similar

classical transplants are known in Slovenian literature; see Juvan 122–123). Instead, they began describing their home country and the immediate locality as a worthy subject in itself. At the same time, however, these poets used aesthetic categories, such as the pastoral, the sublime, and the picturesque, to order and enhance their descriptions of the landscape, emphasizing its beauty and significance for the nation (Andrews 11–23). Elevating the land according to culturally accepted ways of seeing and understanding nature is an important moment in the history of nationalism because it infuses the home country with meaning and value, not only practically—praising its productivity and so on—but at an aesthetic level as well.

Let me begin by looking at some examples of such descriptions in the works of the two poets being compared. There is at least one stanza in *The Baptism* that Prešeren dedicates to describing nature, and it is in fact a very good example of the pictorial effect on poetry (here quoted in Henry Cooper's and Tom Priestly's English translation):

> Here to this isle with lake encircling round
> Which nowadays is Mary's holy shrine:
> Against the sky stand tow'ring peaks snowbound,
> Before them spread the fields; the fair outline
> Of Castle Bled perfects the left foreground,
> While rolling hills the right hand side define.
> No, Carniola has no prettier scene
> Than this, resembling paradise serene.
> (Prešeren 121)

Here Prešeren conforms to the aesthetics of the picturesque, as is evident from his emphasis on the visual aspects of the scenery, describing nature *as landscape* through the employment of framing, perspective, outline, foreground vs. background, and the pleasing variety of the whole scene. However, this is not typical of his descriptions of nature, which are few and far between, and more often used to reflect thoughts and feelings of the characters:

> The matching violence of man and cloud
> By darkling night is ended now, and bright
> Sunrise now gilds the threefold peaks unbowed
> Of Carniola's grey and snowbound height.
> All tranquil lie Lake Bohinj's waters proud,
> Of battle now no trace remains in sight.
> But armies of fierce pike beneath the waves
> Fight other denizens of th' watery caves.

Does not, O Črtomir, this selfsame lake
Resemble you, as on its shore you stand?
War's outward noise was calmed before daybreak,
But by the storm within you are unmanned.
That ancient worm, much worse now, is awake
—As I the trials of life well understand—
It cries for still more blood from out its lair,
Yet hungrier are the harpies of despair.
(Prešeren 119)

This may look like *paysage intérieur*—an introverted psychological description of landscape—but it is of a more classical nature, as can be gathered from the fact that a number of lengthy Homeric similes find their way into *The Baptism*. Here is one:

Unleashed as fury by a storm impended,
The guard cries out for help amidst the clashes;
Unnumbered lives are in the fray expended.

And as a torrent in a downpour gushes,
Comes crashing down a mountain side like thunder,
Engulfing all before it as it rushes,

And will not e'er relent, all drowning under
Its waves, save for some great obstruction—
So does Valjhun the pagan soldiers sunder.
(Prešeren 117)

Prešeren's use of nature imagery thus seems to be rather incidental, and he certainly does not try to turn nature or his home country into a poetic subject in itself. He simply chooses to go another way in elevating the nation and the vernacular, using intricate poetic forms to great effect.

Jónas on the other hand makes nature his business and employs a variety of methods and models in defining and describing it. They range from the scientific to the pastoral and the sublime (Egilsson, "Ways of Addressing Nature"—the article centers on the poem "Mount Broadshield"). In a number of important poems he adapts the well-established conventions of the picturesque, emphasizing the visual aspects of certain Icelandic settings and landscapes, carefully represented with the eye on visual variety, depth, framing, color, shape, and other such pictorial factors. Jónas is no exception to the rule that what is new in Icelandic nature poetry of the nineteenth century often proves to be an imported kind of vision, whether it is sublime, pastoral, or picturesque.

One could even argue that Jónas derived his nationalistic vision of Iceland from abroad, ironically from Danish sources, because his first at-

tempt at producing a rhetorical image of the country, in the poem "Ísland" ('Iceland', 1835), was clearly modeled on a work by Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850). In 1805 the Danish poet had published the poem "Island! hellige Øe!" ('Iceland! Holy Isle!'), which reappeared in 1823 in an altered version, now beginning with the words "Island! Oldtidens Øe" ('Iceland! Antiquity's Isle'; see Ringler 102–105). The obvious resemblance between the poems by Oehlenschläger and Jónas, both celebrating Iceland of old in elegiac distichs, has often been pointed out, but the irony seems to have escaped most scholars, perhaps owing to Jónas' powerful appropriation of the poetic subject and its representation, making it look and sound so utterly Icelandic that its Danish origins seem inconsequential. Nonetheless, leaving irony aside, one can certainly see this as a cultural power struggle, an aspiring "national poet" of a small nation and province trying to wrest his country as a poetic subject from the hands of the "national poet" of the ruling nation. Jónas wrote the poem at the urging of his learned friend and *Fjölnir*-collaborator, the philologist Konráð Gíslason (1808–1891), and it shows every sign of being part of a nationalistic agenda. Indeed, on its publication in the first issue of *Fjölnir* in 1835, it followed an introductory article by the circle's ideologue, the reverend Tómas Sæmundsson (1807–1841), who emphasized the importance of loving one's country, and to cultivate that love by opening one's eyes to its beauty:

> One thing's for certain: much else could remind each and every Icelander of this love, if he glances over the green valleys, where the hills are alive with cattle and sheep and horses, and looks into the streams, clear as the sky—salmon and trout splattering about playfully. We do not find the islands boring when the fish almost run ashore and the birds cover skerries and rocks. The sky is clear and beautiful, the air clean and healthy. And the sun, when it reddens the mountains on summer days' evenings, but the smoke rises straight into the air—how gentle and beautiful the districts are! And the more countries we see, the more eagerly we desire to be back in Iceland. But if you, Icelander, truly want to cultivate your love of the country, then leaf through its life, and acquaint yourself with all that is written there about the education and achievements of your forefathers. (*Fjölnir* 1835: 2–3)

In accordance with this twofold nationalistic emphasis on the beauty of the land and the history of the nation, Jónas chose certain key-places in Iceland as motifs in his poems. They include the Þingvellir area—the principal *lieu de mémoire* in this poems, as the former site of the Commonwealth national assembly—described by him in the poems "Iceland" and "Mount Broadshield"; Mount Hekla and the surrounding area, described in the poem "To Mr. Paul Gaimard"; the Fljótshlíð area and the surrounding countryside, including Eyjafjallajökull, and various mountains in the neighborhood, described in the poem "Gunnar's Holm," just to mention

the most famous descriptive poems by Jónas. "Gunnar's Holm" is the most elaborate landscape poem he wrote and I consider it in some detail because it seems to me to be critical in the development of the visual definition and nationalistic interpretation of Icelandic nature. It is his attempt at writing a "national epic," albeit on a much smaller scale than *The Baptism* by Prešeren—but then he could use "shorthand" because he had a whole medieval saga to refer to, and did not have to put the pieces together from various sources in order to create a coherent work, like his Slovenian counterpart had to do. It is by far the most intricate poem Jónas was ever to compose and it is regarded by many to be an unsurpassable formal masterpiece in Icelandic literature. If any one poem can be said to have defined the national cause of the Icelanders, this is it.

"Gunnar's Holm," written in 1837 but appearing in the 1838 issue of *Fjölnir*, is divided into two equally long terza rima parts (33 + 33 lines). The first one describes a panorama of the countryside that is at the center of the medieval *Njál's Saga*. The description adheres to many principles of picturesque aesthetics. The country is described from a high angle or prospect, seen from the mountain-tops with an overview of the entire countryside from east to west. The description is detailed in its emphasis on rugged variety and the landscape as a composition of contrasting elements, all according to picturesque principles. It is a carefully balanced composition of both sublime and pastoral elements, ranging from cliffs and volcanoes to green pastures and grazing sheep in the valley below, with a winding river, which is one of the stock-images of picturesque paintings. The painterly aura of the poem is emphasized by various, well-chosen words describing color, line, visual depth, and so on. I quote the beginning of the poem (in Dick Ringler's English translation):

> The sun's imperial pageant in the west
> purpled the Eyjafjalla Glacier, standing
> huge in the east beneath its icy crest.
> It dominates the summer dusk, commanding
> the screes beneath it, sketched against the cold
> sky like a reef where tattered clouds are stranding.
> Hugging its roots, cascading waters hold
> hoarse conversation with the trolls, where wary
> Frosti and Fjalar hoard their secret gold.
> Northward you see the Summit Mountains, very
> sober and formal in their blue-black frocks
> but girt with green where steep and valley marry
> and helmed with snow above their sable rocks.
> They stare at tarns whose streams will soon be plying
> their way through meadows filled with lazy flocks

and sprinkled thick with little farmsteads lying
deep in the shadow of the sheltering heath.
Far to the north, its snowy peak defying
the heavens, Hekla stands on guard: beneath
its bulwarks, bound in dungeons deep as night,
Terror and Death are gnashing greedy teeth,
while high above them palisades of bright
obsidian glitter, glassy as a mirror.
From there you look on scenes of pure delight:
Wood River glides through leafy glens, then, nearer,
murmuring more softly, makes its leisured way
through farmlands ripe with radiant harvest—dearer
than gold—and grassy meads where cattle stray.
High on the hillside fragile blossoms gleam;
golden-clawed eagles glide above their prey
(for fish are flashing there in every stream)
and whirring throngs of thrushes flit and trill
through birch and beech groves lovely as a dream.
(Ringler 136–137)

This is a beautified image of the present state of the countryside in question, described as being overgrown with wood and vegetation—Jónas' attempt at visualizing the state of the land in medieval times, during the presumed glory days of the Icelandic Commonwealth. As mentioned later in the poem, the surrounding countryside has eroded since the Middle Ages, as a result of the overflowing of the local river and other natural factors that have made the country barren and arid. In that sense the projected image is of a *paysage moralisé*—"a description of a prospect in which the prominent landscape features" are "invested with emblematic significance" (Andrews 14). This is best exemplified by the arresting image of the only piece of land still green in this area, the very place where the hero Gunnar Hámundarson at Hlíðarendi decided not to leave his country, as he had been forced to do, and returned instead to his farm, as is described in detail in the second part of the poem. The last part is in ottava rima:

His story still can make the heart beat high,
and here imagination still can find him,
where Gunnar's Holm, all green with vegetation,
glistens amid these wastes of devastation.
Where fertile meads and fields were once outspread,
foaming Cross River buries grass and stubble;
the sun-flushed glacier with its snowy head
sees savage torrents choke the plains with rubble;
the dwarves are gone, the mountain trolls are dead;
a desperate land abides its time of trouble;

but here some hidden force has long defended
the fertile holm where Gunnar's journey ended.
(Ringler 138)

Because the hero refused to leave his homeland behind, citing the beauty of the hillside of his farm as being his reason for not accepting outlawry, he has proved to be a true Icelander and will in the end give his life for the love of his country, unjustly killed by his scheming enemies, as Jónas' nationalistic interpretation of *Njál's Saga* suggests (a comparable "national sacrifice" can be seen to take place in *The Baptism* by Prešeren and is referred to at the end of this article). The evergreen spot in the otherwise eroded countryside is a visual reminder of the blessing bestowed by the land itself on those that are ready to die for it. Protected by a *genius loci*—"some hidden force" that "has long defended" Gunnar's Holm—it is an enchanted place, presented as a *lieu de mémoire*, a particular spot of earth imbued with meaning and supernatural power as a result of its significance in the history of the nation. On the whole, the poem can be taken as the verbal equivalent to a historical landscape painting, a familiar enough genre in European art of the preceding centuries (on such history painting, see Flacke).

Many poems by nineteenth-century Icelanders were to be based on an approach similar to this one, and what should be borne in mind is that they were written in a particular context and historical situation. There is no doubt that such landscape poetry, with varying degrees of historical or mythical allusions, rendered in striking picturesque terms, enhanced nationalism in Iceland and was meant to do so, and its impact was all the more for the simple fact that landscape painting was virtually nonexistent in nineteenth-century Iceland. It only came to prominence around the turn of the twentieth century with such pioneering landscape painters as Þórarinn B. Þorláksson (1867–1924) and Ásgrímur Jónsson (1876–1958). Jónas and a number of Icelandic nature poets of the nineteenth century—not least of all Steingrímur Thorsteinsson (1831–1913)—provided the nation with striking visual images of the country, such as they knew from foreign sources, where landscape painting had developed and resulted in certain aesthetic categories. Interestingly enough, the places that Jónas and Steingrímur pick as settings for their poetry are often the same as those the succeeding landscape artists of the twentieth century would visualize in their paintings; for instance, Þingvellir, Hekla, the Laugarvatn area, and other such places that were mediated as pivotal to the Icelanders. In that sense, the modern landscape painters followed in the footsteps of the verbal landscape painters of the nineteenth century, closing the circle, as the poets themselves had originally been influenced by the picturesque artists preceding them.

I conclude by looking at another poem by Jónas that spells out even more clearly how the home country is to be seen in picturesque terms and interpreted in the political context of nationalism. It is the poem he wrote on behalf of the Icelanders—taking his stance as a "national poet"—to the famous French explorer and researcher, Paul Gaimard. It was sung in Icelandic and also presented in a Latin translation in a banquet held for the distinguished Frenchman in Copenhagen in 1839.

The first five verses of the poem are as follows (in Dick Ringler's English translation):

> Standing on Hekla's stony height
> you stared at braided rivers gleaming
> over the peaceful plains and streaming
> out to an ocean broad and bright,
> while Loki lurked among the boulders
> lying beneath the mountain's shoulders—
> were you not awed by Iceland then,
> this ancient realm of crag and glen?
>
> Riding a steed of rugged stock
> you roamed through many an upland valley,
> pausing where tumbling torrents dally
> dimly with dwellers in the rock,
> while high in steep and stony passes
> straggle-haired sheep ate fragrant grasses—
> were you not awed by Iceland then,
> this ageless land of moor and fen?
>
> Looking on lava's vast extent
> along the stream where chieftains hosted,
> back in the days when Iceland boasted
> her proud and ancient parliament
> (its towering tents are long forgotten,
> their turf foundations wrecked and rotten)—
> did you not ache for Iceland then,
> openly shamed before all men?
>
> Here, beneath Copenhagen's towers,
> a host from Iceland greets you, knowing
> Frenchmen will never fail in showing
> love for a land as free as ours,
> where liberty still laughs and dances
> though lamed by tyrannous circumstances,
> and all its natives need or want
> is nourishment from wisdom's font.
>
> (Ringler 163)

Here again are all the main elements of picturesque descriptions: a vantage point at the top of Mount Hekla, from where the surrounding countryside is shown with emphasis on the visually arresting features of the landscape, followed by similarly constructed sights from other locations around the country. Once again Jónas turns to the *lieu de mémoire* at Þingvellir in the third verse, using the neglected state of the place, the local ruins, as a reminder that Icelanders should rise up and resurrect their national assembly, just as he had done with great effect in his eloquent and provocative poem "Iceland" (on Þingvellir as a *lieu de mémoire*, see Hálfdanarson; on the picturesque penchant for ruins in a landscape, see Andrews 41–50).

The fourth verse, citing the present celebration "beneath Copenhagen's towers," is a reminder that what is being witnessed here is not a direct description of the immediate surroundings, but word-pictures made up in a distant place. Copenhagen was central to Icelandic nationalism, as was Vienna to the corresponding activity of the Slovenians. Wherever they were situated, poets like Jónas and Prešeren were very adept at building within the vernacular a kind of movable mental space that could be entered by their fellow countrymen. Joep Leerssen has quoted Heine's words on the vernacular being a "portable fatherland" in this respect:

> In the realm of culture, Vienna can be a Bulgarian or Greek centre of learning even though geographically and politically it is far removed from the Rodopi mountains or the Peloponnese. Heinrich Heine, based in Paris, famously called the German language his "portable fatherland" (*mein portatives Vaterland*). The extraterritorial (or rather: territorially a-specific) location of many early concerns and workers in cultural nationalism is not an anomaly, but a fact of life. Whereas nationalism as a social and political movement takes place in a geographical space, cultural processes take shape in a mental ambience which is not tethered to any specific location. (Leerssen 565)

Considering that the poem to Gaimard was sung and furthermore presented in Latin on a public occasion in Copenhagen, Jónas must have been taking a risk criticizing the Danish authorities so openly because censorship was still in effect at the time (although "lamed by distress" or "plight" would be a more accurate translation of the original, rather than "lamed by tyrannous circumstances" because Jónas did not imply tyranny in such an obvious manner). One doubts that Prešeren would have gotten away with such reckless behavior, but then censorship was carried out more actively by the regime under which he lived, the Habsburg Monarchy. He was even forbidden to publish part of the excellent drinking song "Zdravljica" ('A Toast', 1844), which speaks across borders and celebrates humanity

in a convivial fashion (Cooper 65–67; on conviviality in connection with romantic nationalism, see Rigney). The fate of that poem, which eventually became the national anthem of Slovenia, must be one of the happiest examples of poetic justice known to humankind.

Concluding remarks

Before summing up, I would like to return to a point made at the beginning of this article, on the association of national ideals with the sublime love of a woman, common to both poets. Having seen how Prešeren and Jónas use various means of elevation, this should make it easier to understand how it works. A few examples from each poet are discussed below.

In "Sonetni Venec" ('A Wreath of Sonnets', 1834), Prešeren declares his sublime love for Julija Primic, just as he voices the cause of their nation. In the middle of the cycle, sonnets 7 and 8, he recounts difficult episodes from Slovenian history and hopes that an "Orpheus"—obviously referring to himself—will come and "enflame our love of fatherland / And comfort our dissension so unwise, / Anew unite the Slovenes, firm to stand!" (Prešeren 93). The national ideals, and even the active role of a "national poet," are here associated with the sublime feelings for a woman because they are all brought together in the intricate form of a wreath of love sonnets. In *The Baptism*, the hero's love for a woman is also at the center of Prešeren's "national epic." Črtomir converts to Christianity and will preach the Gospel to the Slovenians because of his love for Bogomila, but they will not be joined in this life, only in Heaven, as she explains to him: "Then with the Father I, your virgin bride / Shall wait for you on high in heav'n serene / Until your flocks their pastor's death lament, / Till you up to the realms of light are sent" (Prešeren 143). It is a love that will not be consummated and has to be sublimated, resulting in a kind of "national sacrifice," comparable to the one made by the Icelandic hero in "Gunnar's Holm," who offered his life for the love of the land.

The national is also associated with a female presence—or absence—in some of Jónas' poems. In the sonnet "I send greetings!" an Icelandic speaker abroad asks the warm winds of spring and the waves, "who crowd toward Iceland with an urgent motion," to "embrace with bold caresses / the bluffs of home," just as he asks a migratory bird headed north to give his greetings to the girl he loves. The home country and the beloved are not only associated here but become similar by being approached sensually, through imaginary touches and caresses: "Lightly, O winds, kiss glowing cheeks and tresses!" (Ringler 263). In "Journey's End" the love of a girl

is again closely associated with the land, as the poetic speaker remembers how they travelled together through the countryside in summer, their mutual attraction described in pastoral terms. Though they have had to part and may never be joined in this life, the poem concludes with the sublime declaration that "not even eter- / nity can part / souls that are sealed in love" (Ringler 283). Last of all, in the "Lay of Hulda," the spirit of Iceland is personified in the female Hulda ('the hidden one'), who is present but silent throughout the poem, as the speaker—who begins by claiming he is not a poet, but nevertheless goes on to compose the poem—and the spirit of the late Eggert Ólafsson, along with an Icelandic shepherd, take turns in versifying. Hulda is presented as a kind of national or natural muse, and chaste bosom companion.

In all these poems, an idealized or sublimated woman is associated with the national cause or the home country. In Prešeren's case at least, this could be traced back to the Italian model, as it involved a double elevation; that is, the elevation of the national—through the application of the vernacular—and the elevation of a woman (Petrarch's Laura and Dante's Beatrice). One could also see this as a continuation of the female personifications of various countries and nations, common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Britannia, Germania, Italia, Romania, Svea, and the Icelandic *Fjallkonan* ('Lady of the Mountain'), who were usually depicted as beautiful and virtuous. The age-honored female embodiments of virtues had indeed become more radicalized around the time Prešeren and Jónas were coming into their own as poets, a famous example being Eugène Delacroix's painting, *Liberty Leading the People* (*La Liberté guidant le people*), painted in 1830 to commemorate the July Revolution. Moreover, because nationalism gradually became a kind of secular religion in the nineteenth century, it is perhaps not surprising that the professed and idealized love of the land and of the nation sometimes started to resemble the sublimated love of a woman or a muse. Whatever the reasons, both poets have a tendency to associate the national and the feminine.

To sum up, then, I have argued that the elevation of *vernacular literature* to standards set by classical and especially renaissance models, which Prešeren carried out so extensively and elegantly in his works, can also be seen in the works of Jónas—including the elevation he achieves through "national classics"—but that he furthermore tried to and succeeded in elevating *his native country* in a similar fashion. He did this principally by two means, as I see it: first, by describing Icelandic nature *as landscape*, according to aesthetic models developed in European art, and, second, by representing a certain site *as a lieu de mémoire* and even as an enchanted place because of its significance in national history. The different means of

elevation used by Prešeren and Jónas—sometimes associated with a sublimated love of a woman or a muse—ultimately served the same nationalistic purpose, which was to make the nation—its language, its literature, its land—culturally valid and raise it to a European level. These were simply different ways of achieving the same nationalistic goal.

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Narod in povzdignjenje: nekaj primerjav med »nacionalnima pesnikoma« Slovenije in Islandije

Ključne besede: nacionalni literarni kanon / slovenska poezija / islandska poezija / nacionalni pesniki / Prešeren, France / Halgrímsson, Jónas / primerjalne študije

Razprava skuša pokazati, da je povzdignjenje (elevation) *domače literature* na raven klasičnih in še posebej renesančnih standardov, ki ga je v svojih delih tako elegantno in ekstenzivno izvedel France Prešeren, značilno tudi za delo islandskega pesnika Jónasa Hallgrímssona (vključno s povzdignjenjem, ki ga ta doseže s pomočjo »nacionalne klasike«). Ob tem Jónas poskuša in tudi uspe povzdigniti svojo *rodno deželo* zlasti še s pomočjo dveh sredstev: najprej z opisovanjem islandske narave *kot pokrajine* v skladu z estetskimi modeli, ki so se razvili v evropski umetnosti, zatem pa še s prikazovanjem določene lokacije kot *lieu de mémoire* ali celo kot začaranega (enchanted) kraja zaradi njegovega posebnega pomena v nacionalni zgodovini. Različna sredstva povzdignjenja, ki sta jih uporabljala Prešeren in Hallgrímsson – neredko so bila povezana s sublimirano ljubeznijo do ženske oziroma muze – so na koncu služila istemu nacionalističnemu namenu: potrditi kulturno vrednost naroda – njegovega jezika, literature, pokrajine – ter ga dvigniti na evropsko raven.

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