

THE ROMANTIC CANON AND THE MAKING OF A CULTURAL SAINT IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

Canon

[ABSTRACT]

This article explores the role of literature and romantic nationalism in the creation of nations as this applies to the Faroese nation, in particular the case of the poet Nólsoyar Páll. It is the ambition to discuss how literature can be a medium of collective identity-making, as it involves the canonisation of what is termed *cultural saints* (i.e. the heroic, mythological, and legendary figures who are seen as founders of communities). The article will give an introduction to the research that considers the dynamics of selected vernacular writers, artists or scholars for inclusion into the canon of cultural sainthood. The following will link a hitherto underexplored part of European romanticism to the developing theory of how durable forms of memory, such as public monuments, banknotes, hagiographies, are constructed.

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KEYWORDS *Romantic Nationalism, Cultural Memory, Canonisation, Cultural Saints and National Heroes*

This article will explore the role of literature and romantic nationalism in the creation of nations, specifically as it applies to the Faroese nation. The article seeks to answer three questions: (i) how were vernacular writers, artists, or scholars selected for the canon and later elevated into cultural saints? (ii) what does the choice of certain writers tell us about canonicity in the nineteenth century? and (iii) how did these acts of canonisation relate to more durable forms of memory, such as public monuments, banknotes, hagiographies, and the politics of memory? The case study I shall use to address these questions focuses on the Faroese poet Nólsoyar Páll.

However, before turning to the Faroese case study, it is important to understand the concept of the cultural saint. A good place to start is with David Aberbach, who comments that, in the nineteenth century, national poets became public figures who understood how to mediate a sense of national pain that would, in turn, stimulate or create national hope.¹ European national poets had high aims for their nations; they strove for independence, unity, power, or recognition. For this reason,

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national poets often convey not just an image of stable national identity but also its opposite: weak identity, which gives an edge of desperation to national assertion. A tendency for a poet to identify with a wounded, weak, humiliated nation might be enhanced by childhood trauma or disability.²

Ann Rigney, in her article on the worldwide commemoration of the nineteenth-century writer Robert Burns (1759–1796), notes that recent critical analysis of the canon has opened up new perspectives on the question of how a nation is formed through the use of cultural memory and symbols, such as literary works and cultural saints.³ Therefore, the study of nineteenth-century canonisation processes amounts not only to a study of cultural pathology, but also to an examination of how a society cultivates its self-image through an active use of cultural memory. Historical heroes were also selected for national honour and elevated to embody a community's political and moral ideals. Jón Karl Helgason sees 'cultural saints' as persons who have been 'singled out as leading representatives of their national culture, giving them a status previously held by regal authorities and religious saints'.⁴ He further argues that it can be revealing 'to refer to these national heroes simply as "cultural saints" and analyse their legacy with reference to concepts traditionally reserved for discussing religious phenomena'.⁵ If nationalism is seen as a secularised, civil religion, cultural saints represent the patriarchy of this religion.

Cultural saints are individuals who are seen to have done service to the nation, fought for the nation, or died as martyrs for the nation. This caused them to be selected for inclusion in the nation's pantheon.⁶ In the following pages, I will build on a framework of ideas put forward by the Cultural Saints of the European Nation States (CSENS) research project.⁷ I will unfold some of the parameters established by the project and use some of the key notions of the entire framework.⁸

The study of cultural saints is based on the analogies which exist in the cultural history of Europe between the selection and the celebration of national artists and the traditional canonisation of religious saints. Hence, a study of cultural saints will need to investigate the artists' 'saintly' status: their *vitae* and their canonisation. It is important to concentrate on the life and the work, as well as on the intellectual context of the individuals in question. Often the canonisation process implied self-conscious strategies of 'culture planning', which is why it is important to focus on shared features that made the cultural saints eligible for canonisation.⁹ Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney argue in their latest book, *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe – Nation-Building and Centenary Fever*, that

The wave of commemorations that passed over Europe in the long 19th century was not only cultural in nature. It was remarkably often – and this was part of its self-reflexivity – focused on culture itself. An inventory of centenary celebrations shows that attention was indeed paid to the recollection of historical events . . . But particular attention was

paid to heroes from the cultural sphere . . . But it was above all literature which stole the commemorative limelight. The large-scale celebration of European writers arguably began with the successful celebration of Shakespeare in 1769 and went on to include, among many others, the centenaries of Goethe (1849), Schiller (1839, 1859), Tasso (1857), Burns (1859), Shakespeare (1864), Dante (1865), Scott (1871), Hooft (1881), Petrarch (1874), Rousseau and Voltaire (1878), Moore (1879), Camões (1880), Pushkin (1880), Runeberg (1904), Prešeren (1905), Wergeland (1908).¹⁰

Cultural saints are often canonised in the same way as literary works in a given culture.¹¹ Nólsoyar Páll has been canonised as a national hero and a cultural saint. Today, he is commemorated as a national hero because he was the first Faroese to build his own ship and start his own trading routes. It is because of this reception that he is still important to the self-image of the Faroese nation today. The case of Páll, which is examined in this article, is furthermore relevant to the question of how a self-image of the nation can be ‘instrumentalised’, crystallised, and later canonised.

The term ‘pantheon’ is used here to refer to the canon of a nation. It has both a symbolic meaning and a physical presence. In some respects, discussions of nineteenth-century hero-worship may appear strange or unusual within the context of the study of literature, memory, and nationalism. At the end of the eighteenth century, and especially in the nineteenth century, new pantheons emerged all over Europe. In France the old church of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris became the resting place for the nation’s most important citizens. Prior to this, in Jægerspris, Denmark, a memorial park was built in 1776. These various pantheons are national ‘Halls of Fame’ through which people could familiarise themselves with the nation’s heroes, the cultural forefathers of the nation.¹²

Romantic Nationalism

The dynamics involved in the creation of cultural saints described above is intrinsically tied up with the romantic nationalism. It should be pointed out that the ballads discussed in this article were not written as romantic or nationalist poems, but they were adapted as such during the period of romantic nationalism. Thus, this article focuses on the usage of old material within a romantic paradigm. In a similar fashion, whilst Nordic mythology, *Beowulf*, and runes, had little or nothing to do with a romantic aesthetics; they became intertwined with a romantic mode of thinking, which established the value of landscapes, myths, memories, and the canon of what is known as cultural saints (i.e. the heroic, mythological, and legendary figures who are seen as founders of communities). These cultural saints, folk heroes, and historical figures, were reimagined through a romantic aesthetics, and thereby acquired a new cultural importance, a process which occurred in nations across Europe.

The (re)discovery and use of medieval literary and historical sources increased the sense of national culture and helped to foster the nineteenth century cult of

the nation state. Put differently, the modern state was legitimised by appealing to the long traditions of its constituent 'nation'. National poetry, historical novels, operas, and national theatre stimulated a sense of identity and were enlisted behind the people's demands for political liberty. Even if the Faroese poet Nólsoyar Páll's ballads (which will concern me in this article) were composed prior to the age of romantic nationalism, Jakob Jakobsen and other literary men later turned him into a national poet and a cultural saint. In fact, the version of Páll that grew out of Jakobsen's writing is a selective vision – for example, Páll came to be seen as innovative, strong, clever, as well as a victim of persecution.

Romantic nationalism occupies a wide spectrum, formulating a link between national essentialism, organicism, and historicism.¹³ The making of nationalism and national identities is a truly transnational paradigm in Europe. Anne-Marie Thiesse refers to the radical change in the 'identity cartography' of European nations, which prepared the ground for a crystallisation of imagined communities which then formed into nations.¹⁴ A considerable amount of cultural creativity and even 'forging' of myths and texts was required in order to provide the symbolic and material basis for shaping new identities. It was important to transform a national ideal into a political force. This led to a century of intense activity in constituting the German, Italian, and Hungarian identities.¹⁵ As Tom Shippey argues, forging can mean both creating a unity of diverse materials or in some cases creating a document with deliberate attempt to deceive.¹⁶ The best-known examples of national epics are Elias Lönnrot's creation of the *Kalevala* (from the *runor* he had collected); James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems; the Old Russian *Lay of Prince Igor* (1795), the Welsh *Triads* (*Trioedd Ynys Prydein*) by Iolo Morgannwg, F. R. Kreutzwald's Estonian *Kalevipoeg* (1853), and T. H. de la Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* (1839). There are also the examples of the *Nibelungenlied*, *La Chanson de Roland*, and *Beowulf*, in which many nations and philologists throughout Europe took an interest.

It is imperative to understand that romantic nationalism nearly follows the same timeline as romanticism itself as a cultural paradigm, but, nevertheless, has a longer afterlife which stretches into the twentieth century. While some cultural saints were still living, when they were recognised, others were canonised posthumously. In the case of small nations, or in young and peripheral nations, those who could gain respect and raise a voice in the fierce combat for cultural capital in the world literary-space became the heroes. Aberbach argues that the smaller and more vulnerable a country, the more its national poets tend to be sensitive to threats to its language and react to protect its national integrity.¹⁷ This has always been true of the Faroese poets, who, in the twentieth century (and probably still today), were supposed to strengthen the community and function as nation builders. I may add to this that the afterlife of romanticism endures especially in smaller nations, such as Iceland and the Faroe Islands, where romantic nationalism continues to be a defining ideology.

According to Joep Leerssen, the construction of a national-romantic histori-

cal consciousness is the very beginning of nationalism. Furthermore, romantic nationalism is a truly cross-European phenomenon:

Romanticism and nationalism, each with their separate, far-flung root-systems and ramifications, engage in a tight mutual entanglement and *Wahlverwandschaft* in early-nineteenth-century Europe; and this entanglement constitutes a specific historical singularity. We can give this singularity a name: Romantic nationalism. And we may understand that to mean something like: the celebration of the nation (defined in its language, history, and cultural character) as an inspiring ideal for artistic expression; and the instrumentalisation of that expression in political consciousness-raising.¹⁸

The special celebration of the nation, its language, history, and the cultivation of a certain national self-image, merged with contemporary, romantic ideals of artistic self-expression. It is 'the instrumentalisation of these expressions in political consciousness-raising' which made romantic nationalism particularly powerful.¹⁹ Furthermore, the *Volksgeist*-historicism of the long nineteenth century created a myth of a possible reconnection with ancient roots which gave birth to a new sense of historical dynamics. Intellectuals, artists, and writers were amongst the first to participate in creating national identities as Thiesse explains:

The formation of national identities was a matter of constant emulation, as indicated by the invocations regularly uttered by national militants to their fellow countrymen: 'Look what the Germans, the English, the Swedish have done . . . if we French, Spanish, Russian . . . want to serve our nation as it deserves we must show that our national heritage is just as rich and glorious'.²⁰

The process of emulation is an ambition and an effort to equal, excel, or surpass another person (or in this case, nation), and thus to compete or rival with some degree of success through imitation. This was especially true during the World Fairs, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, when representations of national identity and accomplishment were displayed visually.²¹

The nation-building processes described in this article took place at a time when Europe was witnessing the break-up of the *ancien régime* and its reconstruction into a system of nations, as well as new nationalist or autonomist separatist movements. At the centre of this process was the transition towards a shared institutional and social framework situated within letters. Librarians, professional academics, archivists, and many others, were concerned with early romantic nationalism and its relation to the notion of the cultivation of culture.²² Once the sense of being different from foreigners was established in the community or in a nation, it was necessary to overcome internal differences in order to create a unified national consensus about a common identity. Therefore it took educational efforts to include larger sections of the population in what Thiesse calls 'education to the national ideal', whereby a common cultural heritage became the basis for belonging.²³ The course of this educational process in the Faroe Islands is

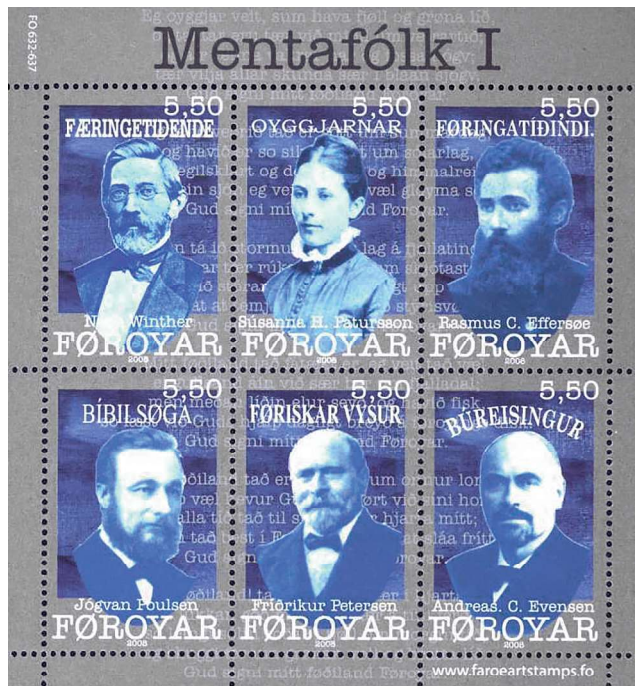
the topic of this article, which explores the emergence of a part of this ‘identity checklist’ and analyses how literature, myths, legends, and memories of heroes have been used to construct a new Faroese canon of cultural saints.²⁴

National Stereotypes in the Canonisation of a Faroese National Hero: The Case of Nólsoyar Páll

The preliminaries to the cultural saint and romantic nationalism clear the ground for understanding the dynamics at work in the aggrandisement of Nólsoyar Páll in the Faroese Islands. It is worth noting that several monuments have been constructed in his memory. Two of them are in Suðuroy, where his ship *Royndin Fríða* was built in 1804. Generally speaking, the body of a cultural saint is represented in statues and paintings that are displayed publicly, and this is happens to be the case with Páll. Like cultural saints in other nations, his image has been reproduced on banknotes and stamps, and his name adorns significant urban features including the main street of Klaksvík, the second largest town in the Faroe Islands.²⁵

After the consolidation of Faroese literature in the 1820s and 1830s, and the establishment of a new language standard in 1846, the question in many minds must have been who should be included in the new Faroese canon? Who, for example, would occupy the position of the new ‘national poet’? Who would be regarded as the leading men of letters? Early Faroese writers such as Claus Lund, Jens Christian Djurhuus, and Jens Hendrik Djurhuus wrote ballads, but were not commemorated as cultural saints. From the 1840s onwards, however, a wealth of writers and readers appeared, as did a library, an extensive body of travel writing, and the works of J. C. Svabo, V. U. Hammershaimb, Nólsoyar Páll and others. However, when speaking of Faroese cultural saints, we must turn to a group of more modern figures associated with the Faroese national movement of the 1840s. Indeed, it was only after this time that a pantheon of special Faroese cultural saints began to emerge.²⁶

Nólsoyar Páll, whose actual name was Poul Poulsen Nolsøe (1766–1808), was a seaman and a poet. He is remembered both for his life as a captain and for his literary texts.²⁷ Páll composed seven ballads and a number of minor poems. Besides *Fuglakvæði* (Ballad of the Birds), the most beloved and entertaining of his ballads is the grotesque and humourous *Jákup á Møn*, in which a shy youth proposes to a young woman, Gýðju, but is rebuffed and ridiculed. The ballad’s famous stanzas are known to every Faroese person today. Páll’s ballads were satirical and critical of the Danish ruling class in the Faroe Islands. Like his predecessor, the more famous Faroese man of letters J. C. Svabo (1746–1824), Páll seems to have been interested in improving the living conditions of the people in the Faroe Islands. For his perceived national deeds, Páll’s portrait was selected as an image to be printed on banknotes. His portrait was drawn by the artist Anders Peter Christian Aigens (1870–1940), who used Páll’s granddaughter Sigga Sofía as a model,



III. ■ [Faroese stamps from 2008 featuring historical figures. Clockwise from top left: the first historian and editor of the first newspaper *Færingetidende* [Faroese news] Niels Winther (1822–1892); the first female editor Súsanna Helena Patursson (1864–1916), who founded and edited the magazine *Oyggjarnar* [The islands], from 1905–1908; Rasmus Christoffer Effersøe (1857–1916), the editor of the first Faroese newspaper *Føringatíðindi* [The Faroese news]; Andreas Christian Evensen (1874–1917), who wrote the first textbooks for public schools; the cleric Fríðrikur Petersen (1853–1917) is famous for writing some of the first national romantic poems; and the teacher and politician Jógvan Poulsen (1854–1941), who wrote the first Bible history for children in Faroese.]

since no portraits of Páll were made during his lifetime. In 1951, the first Faroese banknote (a 5 kroner note) was circulated. A Faroese 10 kroner banknote appeared in 1954, followed by a 100 kroner note in 1964 and, in 1967, a 50 kroner note. The 5 kroner note featured a sheep, while Páll and V. U. Hammershaimb were depicted on the 50 kroner and 100 kroner notes, respectively. The reverse side of each of the notes depicted Faroese landscapes by leading Faroese artists, such as Janus Kamban (1913–2009) and Ingálvur av Reyni (1920–2005).

Having briefly introduced Páll's public image, I will now examine concepts of martyrdom in Páll's work and how he later came to be seen as a visionary. I will also explore remembrance and the visions of Páll in order to illustrate how his ballads became the founding pillars of national culture and identity.²⁸

Thiesse explains that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, many nations in Europe did not have a written history and the story of national found-



III. 2 [Nólsoyar Páll on the 50 Faroese Kroner banknote issued in 1964.]

ing fathers existed only as a few incomplete chapters of a longer narrative that was still to be written.²⁹ Nevertheless, just a few decades later, most nations had tales of heroes who undertook long and painful marches towards freedom. The same holds true in relation to the canonisation of Páll. In 1892, Jakob Jakobsen (1864–1918), a doctor of philology, gave eight lectures at the Faroese Union in Copenhagen on the themes of language and history. On this occasion, he chose to focus on three Faroese heroes: Tróndur, the chieftain in the *Faroe Saga*; Magnus Heinason, the naval hero; and Páll.³⁰ From this point onwards, Páll became a national hero of the young Faroese nation.³¹ Jakobsen's book *Poul Nolsøe. Lívssøga og irkingar* from 1912 created a 'national narrative' which turned Páll's life into historical fiction.

Jakobsen's book and an article of 1892 portray Páll as a man devoted to his native country and culture.³² He is perceived as someone who fought for the Faroese both in life and in writing, especially when it comes to his *Ballad of the Birds*. In Jakobsen's version, Páll was a visionary who envisioned the future of the Faroese nation as an imagined community. Moreover, he is represented as having fought for ideas and the national cause, even if there was no nation at the time.

The construction of national identity involved complex interaction between literary canons and public discourse. Hero worship became significant, especially in the field of literature. Looking at the historiography of Páll, his dramatic life and death are often understood in an excessively narrow, national context. The first Faroese literary history, *Úr bókmentasøgu okkara* (From Our Literary History)

III. 3–4 [Sigmund and Tróndur, modern-day monuments in the Faroe Islands.

The Sigmund statue (top) is placed outside the Lutheran Vesturkirkjan in Tórshavn.

The statue of Tróndur (down) was erected in 2007 in the town of Gøta. Both are by the sculptor Hans Pauli Olsen. Photo: Ole Wich.]



by Mads Andreas Jacobsen, was published in 1921. The professor Christian Matras wrote a small literary history in 1935, which, despite the book's wealth of detail, is best considered as a product of the Faroese nation-building process that was taking place in 1935. The editor Christen Holm Isaksen wrote a series of articles in 1913 about Faroese literature, in which Páll appears as a figure of fascination.³³ Árni Dahl published a Faroese literary history between 1980 and 1983, in which he does not deviate much from Matras's view. Finally, Malan Marnersdóttir and Turið Sigurðardóttir have made some adjustments to the periodisation of Faroese literature, so the first period now includes Páll. Otherwise, they do not provide a revised version of Faroese literary history, but rather confirm the historiographical patterns established by Matras.³⁴

Self-Images in the Canonisation of a Cultural Saint

The *Ballad of the Birds* was supposedly written around 1806 or 1807. It is both satirical and political. It allegorises the official corruption and hardship that Páll endured as an aspiring merchant. All the persons in the ballad are pictured as birds. While the good birds are small and indigenous species, the evil and foreign birds are falcons or ravens. All of the birds in the ballad are subjugated to the eagle. The eagle was intended to represent the Danish king Frederik VI (1768–1839), and his commandant was the falcon. Through the use of allegory, Páll attacked his opponents by introducing them as birds of prey. Páll portrayed himself as a valiant oystercatcher (Faroese: *tjaldur*), who guarded the small birds (which were seen to represent the Faroese people) against the birds of prey.³⁵

The ballad is written in the genre called *táttur* (the so-called 'literary ballad') which imitates the form, the language, and the spirit, of the traditional ballad, but is concerned with contemporary issues and themes. The *táttur*, which is generally satirical, is indigenous to the Faroese and, in its specific form, has never travelled outside the Islands.³⁶ The American anthropologist Dennis Gaffin states that the *táttur* is a form of verbal ridicule, a public spectacle, and a part of a form of verbal virtuosity embedded in the 'physical and social landscapes of the islands'.³⁷ This imagery signalled the creation of a discourse distinguishing between the foreign and the local or regional.

The allegorical bird images should not be seen as an early form of nationalism or the first anti-colonial discourse in the Faroe Islands, since this would be an anachronistic view of what took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Rather, the *Ballad of the Birds* was a criticism of the merchants in Tórshavn, who traded in international goods. The fact that the *Ballad* took on a new meaning at the end of the nineteenth century proves just how powerful the remediation of literature can be in the creation of identity.

Páll is extensively commemorated; his textual and artistic legacy has been distributed and amplified through many editions of his texts, in short stories, visual imagery, and drama.



Ill. 5 [A Faroese stamp from 1977. Because of the *Ballad of the Birds*, the oystercatcher has since been selected as the Faroese national bird.]

J. H. O. Djurhuus's Poem about the Death of Nólsoyar Páll

In 1917, the bohemian lawyer Jens Hendrik Oliver Djurhuus (1881–1948), the national poet of the Faroe Islands, wrote a famous commemorative poem about Páll. The poem is significant because of the way in which Djurhuus commemorates Páll's death as that of a romantic hero, as well as a martyr of the Faroese nation (in the spirit of romantic nationalism). In terms of the politics of memory, Djurhuus wrote other poems on nationally important persons and heroes, including Grímur Kamban, Magnus Heinason, Tróndur (from *The Faroe Saga*) and cultural saints such as V. U. Hammershaimb and Jóannes Patursson. In this, he contributed to the canonisation of these prominent figures and at the same time gained symbolic, cultural and even political capital as a person and a writer. Djurhuus is thus considered a cultural saint of the Faroese nation. The fact that his image was featured on the 1000 Danish kroner bank note shows that he is held in high esteem (ill. 9).

Djurhuus's poetry is a celebration of the Faroe Islands and he often wrote about his desire to return to the Viking age, when the Faroe Islands were a proud nation. As a poet he was inspired by ancient Norse literature, but he also translated contemporary European writers, as well as *The Iliad*, into Faroese.

The stamp reproduced above is a Faroese stamp from 2004 showing an illustration of the poem about Páll by Djurhuus:



Ills. 6–8 [Left: a 1905 bronze and basalt memorial for Nólsoyar Páll outside the Faroese University's Department of Science, by the Icelandic sculptor Einar Jónsson (1874–1954), erected in 1973. Photo: Ole Wich. Right (down): a twentieth-century basalt memorial to Nólsoyar Páll in Suðuroy, where he built his ship *Royndin Fríða*. Photo: Ole Wich. Right (top): a model in plaster for a planned statue of Nólsoyar Páll, made by the Faroese sculptor Janus Kamban.





III.9 [J. H. O. Djurhuus on the 1,000 Faroese kroner banknote issued in 1994.]

Ravnagorr yvir Beinivørð,
 skýdráttur, náttúsól hálv –
 Royndin hin Fríða mót heimastrond
 í brotasjógv og gjálv. . . .

Ræddist ei reysti Nólsoyar Pól,
 Rán fekk frá skaldinum tókk, –
 gotrini sungu heljarljóð
 og Royndin hin Fríða søkk. –
 Dagur kom aftan á niðingsdáð,
 – sorg var í tjaldra fjøld –
 ravnar rýmdu frá Beinivørð,
 tá ið helvt var gingin av øld.

Dagur kom aftan á niðingsdáð,
 Beinivørður í sól –
 frítt stóð fjallið í grønum stakki:
 Rún um Nólsoyar Pól,

. . . missa mæli og mál –
 muna skal annar Nólsoyar Pól,
 mikil í brynju og stál.

[The ravens croak over Beinivørð, / storm and declining moon, / Royndin Fríða is bound for home, /over the waves in the lune . . . / Nólsoyar Poul accepted his fate, / he bowed to Ran and gave thanks, / the cannons sang their hellish tune / and Royndin Fríða sank. / But day broke after this villainy / – the oystercatchers in tears – / the ravens stayed at Beinivørð /for more than fifty years . . . / The Faroese are cowed and suppressed / – losing their speech and appeal – / we need another Nólsoyar Poul, / dressed in armour and steel.]³⁸



III. 10 [Faroese stamps from 2004 commemorating Nólsoyar Páll, featuring an illustration of Djurhuus's poem about Nólsoyar Páll's death.]

The illustration on the stamp shows Rán (in Norse mythology, the goddess of the sea) who comes for the hero, just as it is recounted in the poem. The poem concludes with a statement to the effect that the Faroe Islanders would still be enslaved without a language or goals for the future, had it not been for Nólsoyar Páll. In Djurhuus's poem, there is no doubt that enemies of the Faroes sunk Páll's ship: 'the cannons sang their hellish tune / and Royndin Fríða sank'. While the Faroese remain suppressed, Páll is singing his *Ballad of the Birds* to Rán. The poem concludes with a plea for a new future hero, another Páll. When reconsidering Djurhuus' poem, Leerssen has pointed out what he calls the 'Janus-faced nature of nationalism between nostalgia and modernity'.³⁹ The poem – its celebration of the nation, its language, history, and the cultivation of a certain national self-image – is precisely the sort of 'instrumentalisation' (to use Leerssen's term) of poetry we encounter in political consciousness-raising and which made romantic nationalism particularly powerful.

In summary, many cultural texts – including hagiographies, the national bird, stamps, banknotes, and biographies of Páll – retell the story of this Faroese hero. These are texts that can be found in kindergarten and on university syllabi. Páll's image is even used in a children's menu in the restaurant Hvonn, situated next to the statue in Tórshavn. This form of modern day de-sacralisation only appears to reinstate his image and importance as a cultural saint.

The legacy and the memory of Páll are double-sided: he is both a national hero and a victim. Furthermore, responses to *Ballad of the Birds* have utilised his status as a cultural saint to express grievances and rage over real or imagined oppression. Such anger can inspire cultural revivalism, but can also easily lead to national populism and violence. To some extent, even an act of humiliation can help define national poetry as a part of a process of confronting and mastering the past.⁴⁰ In this way, Jakobsen's and Djurhuus's use of Nólsoyar Páll also come across as ambivalent.



III. II [A 1994 statue of Nólsoyar Páll in Tórshavn.
Sculptured by Hans Pauli Olsen in bronze. Photo: Ole Wich.]

The canonisation of religious saints and cultural saints shows similar patterns of dedication, martyrdom, fighting for ideas, enlightening, educating, and cultivating the memory of the nation. Though the idea of sainthood has shifted context, many traditional elements remain. Hence, poets recycle and use heroes in new ways.

Conclusion: Palimpsest Memory

The construction of national identity in the nineteenth century was a process of constant emulation. The spirit of romantic nationalism was an interlocking system of interconnected ideas, where everyone compared themselves and their nations to other nations. As the nineteenth century progressed, canons became more national, and, in so doing, tended to stress the monolingual and to protect the mono-cultural. All in all, literature played an influential role in shaping the cultural memory of nations, and canons became a part of national ‘awakenings’ that often started as language revivals. Once recovered, such languages (including Faroese) were given a prominent place in the national self-image.

The commemoration of heroes such as Nólsoyar Páll can be understood as an allegorical process: the memory of him connects to the notion of loss but also to the dream of a Golden Age of independence for the Faroe Islands. Consequently, the canonisation of Páll sought to combine idealism, rebellion, and nostalgia – as illustrated in Djurhuus’s poem, in which the disappearance of Páll is made into something at once expressed in terms of sublime imagery (the ship sinking near the cliff) and nostalgic (the loss of a hero). In other words, Páll’s *Ballad of the Birds* became a palimpsest, re-contextualised and reactivated in the creation of new images and the politics of memory.

Even if romanticism and nationalism seem to have different root systems, they were engaged within the same paradigm in early nineteenth-century Europe. The Faroese case does therefore not constitute a specific historical singularity, but is to be seen as a part of the international and interconnected currents of romantic nationalism.

Notes

- 1 David Aberbach, 'The Poetry of Nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 2 (2003): 261.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ann Rigney, 'Embodied Communities. Commemorating Robert Burns, 1859', *Representations* 115 (2011): 80.
- 4 Jón Karl Helgason, 'The Role of Cultural Saints in European Nation States', in *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures. Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar*, ed. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Unit of Cultural Research, 2011), 245.
- 5 Jón Karl Helgason, 'Relics and Rituals. The Canonisation of Cultural "Saints" from a Social Perspective' *Primerjalna književnost* 34, no. 1 (2011): 245–6.
- 6 Marko Juvan, 'Self-Referentiality and the Formation of the Slovene Literary Canon' (paper presented at the *Amsterdam Conference on Cultural Saints*, 18–19 January, 2010), 2.
- 7 See also: <http://vefir.hi.is/culturalsaints/>, and Marijan Dović, 'The Canonization of Cultural Saints: France Prešeren and Jónas Hallgrímsson', *Slovene Studies* 33, no. 2 (2011): 153–70; Marijan Dović, 'The Canonization of Cultural Saints: An Introduction', in *Literary Dislocations*, eds. Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser and Vladimir Martinovski (Skopje: Institute of Macedonian Literature, 2012), 557–69; Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, 'Nation and Elevation: Some Points of Comparison Between the "National Poets" of Slovenia and Iceland', *Primerjalna književnost* 34, no. 1 (2011): 127–46; Jón Karl Helgason, 'Relics and Rituals: The Canonization of Cultural "Saints" from a Social Perspective', *Primerjalna književnost* 34, no. 1 (2011): 165–89; Jón Karl Helgason, 'A Poet's Great Return: Jónas Hallgrímsson's reburial and Milan Kundera's Ignorance', *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 20 (2011): 52–61; Jón Karl Helgason, 'The Role of Cultural Saints in European Nation States', in *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures: Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar*, eds. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury (Tel-Aviv: Unit of Culture Research, Tel Aviv University, 2011), 245–51; Marko Juvan, 'Romanticism and National Poets on the Margins of Europe: Prešeren and Hallgrímsson', in *Literary Dislocations*, eds. Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser and Vladimir Martinovski (Skopje: Institute of Macedonian Literature, 2012), 592–600.
- 8 See the study framework at <http://vefir.hi.is/culturalsaints/>.
- 9 Jón Karl Helgason, 'The Role of Cultural Saints in European Nation States', in *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures. Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar*, eds. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Unit of Cultural Research, 2011), 246–50.
- 10 Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney, *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe – Nation-Building and Centenary Fever*, eds. Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9.
- 11 Jón Karl Helgason, 'Relics and Rituals. The Canonisation of Cultural "Saints" from a Social Perspective', *Primerjalna književnost* 34, no. 1 (2011): 246.
- 12 Inge Adriansen, *Erindringssteder i Danmark. Monumenter, mindesmærker og mødesteder* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2010); Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, 'Group portraits with National Heroes. The Pantheon as an Historical Genre in Nineteenth-century Belgium', *National Identities* 6, no. 2 (2004): 92.
- 13 J. T. Leerssen, 'Notes toward a Definition of Romantic Nationalism', *Romantik: Journal for the Study of Romanticisms* 2 (2013): 9–35.

- 14 Anne-Marie Thiesse, 'National Identities. A Transnational Paradigm', in *Revisiting nationalism. Theories and Processes*, eds. Alain Dieckhoff and Christophe Jaffrelot (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 122.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 16 Tom Shippey, 'A Revolution Reconsidered: Mythography and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Shadow-walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. Tom Shippey (Tempe, AZ: MRTS and Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 1–28.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 268.
- 18 Leerssen, 'Notes toward a Definition of Romantic Nationalism', 9.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 20 Thiesse, 'National Identities. A Transnational Paradigm', 125.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Joep Leerssen, 'The Nation's Canon and the Book Trade', in *European Studies – An Interdisciplinary Series in European Culture, History and Politics*, eds. Dirk Van Hulle and Joep Leerssen, vol. 26, *Editing the Nation's Memory. Textual Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 22. For Joep Leerssen's definition of cultural nationalism, see the following (all by Joep Leerssen): 'Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism', in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. Howard Gaskill (London & New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004); 'Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture', *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 559–78; *National Thought in Europe. A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); 'Viral Nationalism. Romantic Intellectuals on the Move in Nineteenth-century Europe', *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2011): 257–71.
- 23 Thiesse, 'National Identities. A transnational Paradigm', 123.
- 24 The inspiration for the following exploration of cultural saints came from the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN), as well as the session on cultural saints at the 4th Congress of the REELC/ENCLS: 'Literary Dislocations', Skopje and Ohrid, September 1–3, 2011. Furthermore, the papers presented at the workshop 'Commemorating Writers in Europe 1800–1914' in Utrecht December 7–9, 2011 arranged by SPIN, Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney, Professor at Utrecht University. Also, the book Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney, eds., *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe – Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). The workshop Canonization of "Cultural Saints": Commemorative Cults of Artists and Nation-Building in Europe, arranged by Dr. Marijan Dović (Institute of Literature ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana) and SPIN in November 2015 was also an inspiration.
- 25 In 2014, a new café opened in Klaksvík's main street called 'Fríða' after Nólsoyar Páll's ship. And a project is started to recreate his farmhouse in Klaksvík. Furthermore, in 2014, a new statue of Nólsoyar Páll was erected.
- 26 By the beginning of the twentieth century a whole new group of persons and writers, such as the poet Mikkjal Dánjalsson á Ryggi (1879–1956), Pól F. Joensen (1898–1970), J. H. O. Djurhuus (1881–1948), Hans A. Djurhuus (1883–1951), Ricard Long (1889–1977), Rasmus Rasmussen (1871–1962), Símun av Skarði (1872–1942), M. A. Jacobsen (1891–1944), Chr. Matras (1900–1988), Jakob Jakobsen (Dr. Jakobsen), Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen (1900–1938) and William Heinesen (1900–1991) had also become a part of the Pantheon.
- 27 He received his education in the Ryberg Trade Union and later obtained a partial permit to trade, but he and his ship *Royndin Fríða* were lost at sea in 1808. Jakob Jakobsen claims in

- 1892 that Nólsoyar Páll's ship was sunk in the article: Poul Nolsøe, 'Et Livs- og Tidsbillede fra Færøerne ved slutningen af det 18de og Begyndelsen af det 19de Aarhundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 6, 1892, 587. Historian John F. West does not agree: '[T]his theory does not stand up to scrutiny . . . just as its persistence in modern times indicates the ardent and reverent affection in which most Faroemen still cherish the memory of their great compatriot'. See John F. West, *The Emergence of a Nation* (London & New York: C. Hurst & Co, 1972), 67–8.
- 28 The literary scholar Michael Rosenthal has studied Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford, while another literary scholar, Harald Hendrix, also views writers' houses as media of expression and remembrance and a part of the invention of literary tourism. Michael Rosenthal, 'Shakespeare's Birthplace at Stratford: Bardolatory Reconsidered', in *Writer's Houses and the Making of Memory*, ed. Harald Hendrix (New York & Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 31–45.
- 29 Thiesse, 'National Identities', 131.
- 30 Jakobsen's 1908–1912 biography *Poul Nolsøe. Livssøga og írkingar from 1912* transformed this eighteenth-century pioneer of free trade from a figure of popular legends to a national symbol. With his collection *Færøske Folkesagn og Æventyr* [Faroese legends and folktales] (1898–1901), Jakobsen followed in the footsteps of Asbjørnsen and Moe and the Grimm brothers. In his *Diplomatarium Færoense* (1907), Jakobsen published the few remaining Old Norse texts containing references to the Faroe Islands. Jakobsen's view on language was crucially determined by his seminal work on Norn, an early-modern Nordic language spoken on the Shetlands, the Orkneys and in Caithness until it was supplanted by Scots-English in the eighteenth century. With his work *Det norøne sprog på Shetland* [The Norn Language on Shetland] (1897), he obtained a doctoral degree.
- 31 Jakob Jakobsen, 'Poul Nolsøe, et Livs- og Tidsbillede fra Færøerne ved slutningen af det 18de og Begyndelsen af det 19de Aarhundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 6 (1892): 518.
- 32 See Jakob Jakobsen's article 'Poul Nolsøe, et Livs- og Tidsbillede fra Færøerne ved slutningen af det 18de og Begyndelsen af det 19de Aarhundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 6 (1892): 521–40.
- 33 Chr. Holm Isaksen, 'Føroyskur skaldskapur í 19. øld. Páll Nólsoy, Jóhannes Patursson, Jens Djurhuus', in *Bókmentageinar*, ed. Árni Dahl, vol. 1 (Torshavn: Fannir, 1981), 5–28.
- 34 Malan Marnersdóttir and Turið Sigurðardóttir, eds., *Føroysk bókmentasøga 1* (Torshavn: Nám, 2011).
- 35 In the ballad collection *Corpus Carminum Faroensis*, there is an older Ballad of the Birds (Fuglakvæði I). It is known both in Norwegian and in Danish versions, but in these versions it is not known why the birds are gathering. If the ballad was an allegorical tale, the meaning of the tale has been lost. There are other Scandinavian ballads about birds, including the Danish 'Ørnevisen' [The ballad of the eagle] from 1523.
- 36 Dennis Gaffin, *In Place. Spatial and Social Order in a Faroe Islands Community* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc., 1996), 194.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 195.
- 38 J. H. O. Djurhuus, *Yrkingar* (Copenhagen: Mentunargrunnur Studentafelagsins, 1988), 105–6. The quoted version is translated by Anker Eli Petersen.
- 39 Joep Leerssen, 'Viral Nationalism. Romantic Intellectuals on the Move in Nineteenth-century Europe', *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2011): 266.
- 40 Aberbach, 'The Poetry of Nationalism', 263.