

THE CANONIZATION OF CULTURAL SAINTS: FRANCE PREŠEREN AND JÓNAS HALLGRÍMSSON

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France Prešeren (3 December 1800, Vrba–8 February 1849, Kranj), unanimously recognized as the best poet of the Slovenian Romanticism, has posthumously often been referred to as the “greatest Slovenian genius,” the one who “elevated” the nation and cultivated its language, and who enabled the Slovenian ethnos to stand upright within the “assembly of nations.” The enormous extent of the secondary artistic and scholarly corpus related to Prešeren, the astonishing amount of Prešeren mnemotopes, the dense network of “christenings” (both of venues and institutions) throughout Slovenia as well as in the diaspora, and Prešeren’s ascendant position in school curricula clearly demonstrate his unrivalled stature as the “national poet.”¹

Jónas Hallgrímsson (16 November 1807, Öxnadalur–26 May 1845, Copenhagen) is “the best-loved and most admired poet of modern Iceland: *ástmögur þjóðarinnar* (the darling of the nation),”² states Dick Ringler in his *Bard of Iceland*. The American researcher and translator of Hallgrímsson’s poetry has also provided a condensed résumé of the views of later Jónas’s devotees: “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 2002: 3).³ It is therefore no surprise that Hallgrímsson soon after his death became a “poetical icon of Icelandic nationalism” (Egilsson, “Ways of Addressing”) and that he was the first Icelander to have a public statue erected, in a prestigious location in central Reykjavík, in 1907.⁴ Like his contemporary,

¹ Even compared to the other “national poets” in the region, such as Mácha, Petőfi, Mickiewicz, or Botev, Prešeren’s stature seems somewhat unique.

² Literally, *ástmögur þjóðarinnar* means the “beloved son of the nation.” Jónas used the expression for his colleague, a poet Bjarni Thorarensen in the memorial poem from 1843. Later it was used for others (Jón Sigurðsson, Matthías Jochumsson, and Hallgrímur Pétursson), but at least after Halldór Laxness’s *Atómstöðin* (Atom station, 1948), which speaks about the translation of Hallgrímsson’s mortal remains from Denmark to Iceland, it is usually used regarding to Jónas.

³ This condensed formulation by Ringler from 1992 was later often quoted both by Icelandic and foreign researchers.

⁴ The statue (a self-portrait) of the famous Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844), a gift of the city of Copenhagen, uncovered in Reykjavík in 1875, does not really count here. Thorvaldsen’s Icelandic identity is indirect: his

France Prešeren, whose statue was unveiled two years before at an even more distinguished site at the urban node of the provincial metropolis Ljubljana, Hallgrímsson can also be regarded as a “national poet” who occupies a remarkable, central position in the literary and cultural life of his national community.⁵

The idea of “national poets” is not a new one. The roots of its logic stretch back to the Enlightenment and Pre-Romantic periods and are inherently linked with the impulses that have been guiding the formation of distinctive European national cultures during the “long nineteenth century.”⁶ From this point, the national poets and the modes of their inauguration have become subject to various critical treatments: today, a common stance is that this issue is to be observed within the broader context of European cultural nationalisms. However, the growing interest in “national poets”—as represented, for example, in the extensive thematic section in the recent history of literary cultures of East-Central Europe—does not indicate that the possibilities of comparative studies and interpretations are exhausted. On the contrary, it seems that space for detailed comparative work is only just beginning to open (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2010).

This article will try to draw parallels as well as differences in the processes of the making of national poets in two very dissimilar environments. Slovenian and Icelandic literary cultures—in the European context both (semi)peripheral—lacked any direct linkage, yet both of them had developed cultural processes that were sometimes amazingly analogous.⁷ One such process is obviously the *canonization* of national poets. The origin or etymology of this useful concept itself calls attention to the fact that national poets (such as Prešeren and Hallgrímsson) may adopt certain features that resemble religious sainthood, and can therefore be explained as some kind of *cultural saints*. Principally, such saints are not necessarily poets, but simply artists who “represent their native culture better than other artists of their time” and who “form part of the canon of nationalism as a “civil religion” and are considered to have played a crucial

father was an Icelandic migrant, mother was Danish, and the sculptor himself spent most of his life in Italy.

⁵ This article is based upon comparative articles on Prešeren and Hallgrímsson, published in *Primerjalna književnost* (Dović 2011, Helgason 2011, Egilsson 2011).

⁶ In the context of the SPIN project (Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms), the “long 19th century” covers the period from of the nationalization of European national cultures, which took place from the end of the eighteenth century until the start of the WW I. Cf. www.spinnet.eu and Leerssen (2006).

⁷ Indirect links lead to German Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism—to Herder, the Schlegel brothers, Fichte, Kant, and others.

role in the construction of national identities” (CSENS, “About the Project”).⁸

The idea of canonization of cultural saints as an emanation of secularized religiosity of nationalism has already been discussed, even if the term “cultural saints” has not yet become widespread (cf. Helgason 2011). I will use this term to describe the shift of perspective in the comparison of the Slovenian and Icelandic cases. First, I will outline the basic features of the methodological framework for such an observation.

Canonization of cultural saints: “vitae” and “canonization”

Regarding the framework for research of individual cases of canonization of European “cultural saints,” it proved reasonable to distinguish between two major categories—i.e., the “vitae” and “canonisation.” While the *vitae* refers to what the individual himself has “contributed,” intentionally or not, to his or her eligibility, canonization in the strict sense mainly refers to the posthumous activities of other agents—that is, the intricate social network that directs the complex processes of collective memories (cf. CSENS).

Regarding the *vitae*, two important things need to be mentioned. First, it has to be noted that the canonization of cultural saints is a historically specific process that can only take place in the broader context of the rise of national (literary) cultures; only in such a context can the deeds of individuals become *acta sanctorum*, the saints’ deeds, in the eyes of later epochs. Put in another way, the “cultural saints” never appear in a vacuum, they always occupy a certain functional position which has, at least rhetorically, been opened by others before, simultaneously, or after them in the context of the awakening of the national culture.⁹ This means that dealing with “vitae” is not only a random gathering of biographic bits but needs to be clearly oriented towards those elements of the biographic arsenal that carry explanatory potential regarding the individual’s “eligibility.” In other words, among the chaotic treads of individual “lives” one has to find what later could merge with canonization in a complex process of (re)interpretation, appropriation, and often also invention.

Among the categories of particular interest, are *confessing* (declarative appurtenance to the national and cultural community), *martyrdom* as individual suffering or sacrifice for this community, *remembrance and visions* as telling or constructing the nation’s past and

⁸ This is a working definition, set up by Juvan, Dović, Helgason in Egilsson for the CSENS (*Cultural Saints of European Nation States*) project platform.

⁹ On the rhetorical opening of the Slovenian Parnassus see Juvan (2004) and Dović (2007).

imagining of its future, *fighting for ideas* of the national cause, *enlightening, educating, and cultivating their people* through the broadening of the literary repertoire and its inclusion into a broader (greater in terms of the symbolic capital) tradition, and finally *founding the pillars of national culture*—e.g., the cultural and linguistic institutions (cf. CSENS).

On the other side there is a category of “canonization” that in its narrower sense relates to the posthumous voyaging of the author and his legacy. In this respect one should consider how the *saint’s days* came to be commemorated (how the dates of birth, death, or other important events were given significance); how the *sacred places* (usually places of birth, death, residing, or other) were designated and venerated, how various *relics* (corporal remains and other material, physical legacy) were preserved, restored, and displayed in modern secular reliquaries; how the (textual or other) *corpus* has been preserved, continually reproduced, and commented upon; how the streets, buildings, awards, schools, and other institutions have been *christened* in the saint’s name; how the saint has been publicly portrayed as an *effigy* (paintings, sculptures) as well as mechanically reproduced on banknotes, stamps, postcards, etc. as an *icon*; how the special *rituals*, such as commemorations, festive talks, and pilgrimages to sacred places, have developed along the saint’s legacy; and how the *hagiography*, stories “from the life” in many generic and stylistic variations with different degrees of credibility (from constructs for children and popular biographies to adaptations in other media and scientific books), have evolved. Of great interest is also the emerging of the *mantras*—fragments, quotations and images, etc. that are being continuously recycled for the maintenance of the saintly status, and especially the *indoctrination*—e.g., the cultivation of the high value of the saint and his work through the education system; and also the rich (intertextual) *tradition* that is inspired by a canonical status of a certain work or a corpus and stimulates new products in many different artistic and cultural spheres, its part (or backside) often being the (parodic) *desacralization* (cf. CSENS).

As will be demonstrated, the canonization of both Prešeren and Hallgrímsson can be quite adequately described by the above-mentioned categories, provided by the methodological framework of the CSENS. Even if it will not be possible to deal with all the relevant aspects of canonization in detail, a comparative overview will point to many parallels in both canonization processes, but also reveal several notable differences.

Prešeren and Hallgrímsson as “candidates” for canonization

An overview of general features of the two emerging national cultures of the first half of the nineteenth century shows that both of them *share* a good deal. Slovenian as well as Icelandic community were both

politically and economically subordinated in greater imperial formation—e.g., the Habsburg and the Danish monarchies. The metropolises of Vienna and Copenhagen, both being dominant centers of education and intellectual life, had important cultural roles. In both cultures, the first half of the nineteenth century was the time when the aspirations for national revival grew stronger, and in this context also claims for cultural and political autonomy were increasingly more determined. Especially language and literature were becoming the main instruments for invigorating national identity. However, both “literary cultures” in this period can be described as weak literary polysystems, subordinated to more developed and more prestigious polysystems, and therefore inclined to adopt the elements and patterns of their evolving repertoires from abroad (Dović 2004: 71–73; Helgason, “Eggért glói”). At the same time, both of them displayed poorly developed infrastructure for the production and distribution of (vernacular) literature—printing, publishing, bookselling, reviewing, libraries, and media systems in general were hardly able to ensure the minimal circulation of books (and ideas).

Such parallels should not blur the fact that, in the broader picture, both cultures display several significant differences. Due to a sparse and predominantly rural population subject to centuries-long Danish colonial exploitation (unlike the relatively balanced development of the Habsburg lands), the degree of functional differentiation and modernization in Icelandic society was perceivably lower than in Kranjska (Carniola), the Habsburg land with a predominantly Slovenian population. It should then be of no surprise that Copenhagen’s importance, as compared to that of Vienna, was substantially greater. Rural Reykjavík had in 1800 only 300 inhabitants (out of the 50,000 people on the whole island) and possessed—in contrast to Ljubljana—practically no cultural infrastructure. For young Icelandic intellectuals, among them also Jónas, sailing into Copenhagen for the first time was an immense cultural shock. The lively setting of the Danish metropolitan capital was indispensable to stimulate important cultural and publishing projects of the Icelandic national revival (such as an Icelandic literary society and the magazine *Fjölur*).¹⁰

From yet another point of view, Icelanders had a notable advantage in comparison to Slovenians: a long, rich, and lively literary tradition in a language that remained practically unchanged from the times of medieval *Edda*. To be sure, Slovenian writings can be traced into the Middle Age as well, and both cultures can claim to possess a printed translation of the entire Bible in the same year (1584), but the quantity, quality, and diversity

¹⁰ For the Icelandic part, this short outline is based on papers by Óskarsson, Ringler and Jónsdóttir, partly also by Kreutzer and Bandle. Many valuable explanations were given in correspondence with my Icelandic colleagues Jón Karl Helgason and Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, to whom I express sincere gratitude.

of both traditions is simply not comparable. When Icelandic culture (together with literature) was touching one of its deepest bottoms at the end of the eighteenth century, behind it were centuries of poetic creativity: an exceptional wealth of stories, plots, and heroes in hundreds of preserved sagas (which represent the beginning of European vernacular fiction), and a rich pallet of complex, sometimes highly demanding poetic forms, coupled with a lively tradition of versification of all sorts. Such a tradition surely provided a convenient basis for the national awakening. Also, apart from the fact that Iceland was a remote and isolated island with clearly defined boundaries, this tradition was probably a reason that the representatives of the Icelandic revival had no major quandaries regarding the national and cultural identity. On the other hand, in the heterogeneous and strategically sensitive Central European areas, delimiting and shaping of separate “identities” was one of the key processes of the nineteenth century and a major issue of national movements.

When we compare the lives of the two poets, Prešeren and Hallgrímsson, we quickly come across several parallels that do not seem merely accidental from the viewpoint of *vitae*. Both of them lived and died in the first half of the nineteenth century. They were both very talented poets of the Romantic era who eventually became the most esteemed and influential “national poets.” They were both born in simple rural settings, in villages far from great towns, and due to their talent gained university educations that enabled them to enter the bourgeois middle-class. For both of them, their time in the imperial metropolis, where they studied and started to publish poetry, was of immense significance. Later, both of them kept returning to their homelands (temporarily or permanently), and were actively involved in the activities of the national revival as intellectuals. Both of them have decisively co-shaped the single most influential literary medium of their time—in both cases it was an annual almanac, *Kranjska čbelica* (Carniolan Bee, 1830–33, 1848) and *Fjölnir* (1835–39, 1843–46).

Their canonization was certainly stimulated by the fact that they both intentionally took up cultural planning—in both cases with a strong reference to the legacy of the Enlightenment—and systematic broadening of the literary repertoire: they both introduced new, demanding poetic forms into the vernacular poetry, such as the elegiac distich, terza rima, ottava rima, sonnet, triolet, and other verse forms. Leaning upon the ideas, derived from Schlegel brothers and other thinkers of German (Pre)Romanticism that were circulating among the European intellectuals of the era, they both actively supported the elitist, aesthetic model of the development of the national cultures and in this way induced conflicts with different visions of national development.¹¹ At the same time, in their poetic opuses they both

¹¹ In Slovenia, such a conflict was the so-called “črkarska pravda” (the war of letters), behind which stood the antagonism between a more sophisticated

used self-referential topoi to construct and support the cult of poetry and tried to elevate the status of the poet by praising tradition and predecessors.¹² They both massively contributed to the construction of national identity by telling or inventing the “nation’s past” (Prešeren’s “Krst pri Savici” (“The Baptism on the Savica”), Hallgrímsson’s “Gunnarshólmi”), by strengthening the identity and patriotism (Prešeren’s “Zdravljica” (“A Toast”), Hallgrímsson’s “Ísland”), and by declaring or foretelling a brighter future. Finally, both of the national poets were inclined to (moderate) bohemianism, extravagancy, and even dandyism. They interfered in local affairs and scandals, both shared a passion for very young girls and died quite early, lonely, disillusioned and wretched. In both cases various (often apocryphal) rumors and gossip began to spread while they were still alive, gossip that have later been incorporated in various ways into the construction of the mythology of the national poet.¹³

Alongside such obvious parallels, several differences need to be mentioned. It seems that the group gathered around *Fjölnir* in Denmark—the almanac was created and published by four Icelanders, one of them being Jónas—managed to become a coherent gang of young intellectuals with shared interests, while its Carniolan counterpart, the *Kranjska čbelica*, had less features of a real movement. Hallgrímsson, as a member of a combative group, expanded his activities from poetry to the more active cultural planning. He strove to establish or consolidate different roles in the literary system; if necessary, he could be a militant critic, as when he set forth his aesthetic credo in the famous annihilating critique of the Icelandic “rimur” tradition and Sigurður Breiðfjörð, published in the 1837 edition of *Fjölnir*. In contrast, Prešeren’s views can only be accessed indirectly from

developmental model, represented by Čop and Prešeren, and a moderate, “sober” option, favored by the famous Vienna-based Slovenian scholar Jernej Kopitar. The Icelandic conflict is comparable (even if the direction center-margin was opposite): Copenhagen-based *Fjölnir* attacked the more traditional magazine *Sunnanpósturinn*, launched at the same time (in 1835) in Reykjavík (edited by an archdeacon Helgason and a judge Sveinbjörnsson). The sharpness of Hallgrímsson’s notorious attack on “rimur” in 1837 can also be understood as an act of competition in the cultural field and an attempt to degrade the magazine that stood against the more modern concepts of *Fjölnir*. In fact, ideas of Jónas and his fellows were not generally accepted; and time had to pass to turn the initially unpopular magazine into a “groundbreaking publication” (Jónsdóttir 2004: 215).

¹² Hallgrímsson wrote many such poems. Pastoral elegy “Hulduljóð” (Lay of Hulda, 1841–45), written in stanzas, is dedicated to the memory of a poet Eggert Ólafsson (1726–68). The poem “Bjarni Thorarensen” (1841) is Jónas’s tribute to his contemporary, the first poet of Icelandic Romanticism.

¹³ The role of the oral tradition, in both cases connected to love and erotic adventures, improvised versification, partying, and so on was of great relevance in the process of canonization.

his poetic works (especially satirical) and partly from sparse correspondence. The theoretical and critical part was therefore left to richly cultivated, and intelligent, but not really prolific Matija Čop; besides, the *Čbelica* was in fact only allowed to publish poetry in the restrictive setting of the *Vormärz* censorship.¹⁴

In terms of genres, Hallgrímsson's opus is far more diverse in comparison to Prešeren's; besides poetry it includes critiques, essays, and short stories.¹⁵ In his learned writings, which form a notable part of his opus, Hallgrímsson, often referred to as "a poet and scientist," displays his second nature of a geographer and explorer who strives to realize a gigantic project of a geographic description of Iceland, a project that strongly binds him to the spirit of the Enlightenment. As regards the poetic texts themselves, both poets are rather dissimilar (cf. Egilsson 2011). Compared to Prešeren, Hallgrímsson is more obsessed with the celebrating of the fascinating Icelandic nature, its beauty and sublimity, while Prešeren is much more focused on individual problems of existence, poetry, love, and eroticism. They both translated from contemporary Romantic literature and took quite a "free" stance towards the pre-texts,¹⁶ but the translated opus is less important for Prešeren, who paid more attention to adaptations of folk motifs. A notable difference also relates to the way they incorporated new repertoire elements into the domestic traditions (something characteristic of both of them). In contrast to Prešeren, who had very limited traditional sources, Hallgrímsson could mine a rich Icelandic poetic heritage: he created a great part of his opus in traditional forms, such as the alliterated *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttur*. He even introduced new, structurally highly demanding models of poetic composition.¹⁷

Another fact that needs to be mentioned is that Hallgrímsson was more openly nationalistic than Prešeren, thus also being more adequate for becoming an outright "poetic icon of the Icelandic nationalism" (Egilsson,

¹⁴ In contrast to the Habsburg censors, who actively co-shaped mental coordinates of the Slovenian "literary republic," their Danish colleagues did not interfere much into the Icelandic national revival.

¹⁵ Hallgrímsson wrote a strikingly daring prose piece "Grasaferð" (Gathering Highland Moss, 1836), which is considered to be the first Icelandic short story. He also wrote travel prose, fairy tales in Andersen's manner, and "gothic" stories.

¹⁶ Prešeren mostly translated from Byron and Bürger, Hallgrímsson from Shiller, Chamisso and Heine. But Hallgrímsson also translated scientific texts, for example on astronomy and swimming, topics that we could hardly imagine to be tackled by Prešeren.

¹⁷ Hallgrímsson was the first to combine heterogeneous concepts of poetical composition in an artistically persuasive manner: he adjusted structural alliteration, which is the fundament of all Icelandic tradition, to the syllabotonic prosody and rhyme (cf. Ringler 2002: 361–84 ; Kristmannsson 2009: 337–38).

“Ways of Addressing”). As a convinced nationalist, he “outlined the ideological parameters for much of nineteenth-century Icelandic political poetry” (Jónsdóttir 2004: 218). Even more, he tried to insert himself into political decisions by attempting to convince the influential Jón Sigurðsson to set up the new Icelandic parliament (Alþing) in the remote Þingvellir, the ancient site of Icelandic parliamentarianism, instead in Reykjavík. The “Fjölnismenn,” as the men of *Fjölnir* were later called, claimed that Þingvellir was the only proper *locus* of the new parliament because ages ago it had been confirmed by a national spirit, *þjóðarandi* (behind such a belief, Herder’s *Volksgeist* may be echoing). This quarrel marked two important poems by Jónas, the “New Alþing” (“Alþing hið nýja” [1841], published in 1843) and “Mount Broadshield” (“Fjallið Skjaldbreiður” 1841), both of which can be read with reference to specific political disputes.

“Afterlives”: The posthumous canonization

When considering parameters which are of interest from the point of canonization in the strict sense, it is quite obvious that in Prešeren’s as well as in Hallgrímsson’s case, the canonization began soon after the poet’s death and that its social effects stretch into the present. The number of parallels is surprising.¹⁸ Dates of birth and death of both poets along with several other dates (such as the first edition of poetry or unveiling of a monument) have been turned into proper saint’s days, often commemorated on a regular basis, or even declared a national holiday. The sites of birth, residence, schooling, writing, death, etc. have been piously marked with inscriptions, plates and monuments, and often turned into museums. Their entire material legacies have been treated with utmost delicacy; some pieces have even become proper cultural relics. The mortal remains have in both cases been translated: excavated and solemnly reburied in another place.¹⁹ Streets, buildings, institutions, etc.—both in capitals as well as in other cities and villages—bear their names (christening), their images have been depicted in numerous publicly displayed paintings and reproduced on banknotes as icons. At the beginning of the twentieth century, statues of both poets were placed in the centers of the respective national capitals.²⁰

¹⁸ For more detailed description of some elements cf. Helgason 2011.

¹⁹ Prešeren only two years after his death, in 1851, while Jónas was reburied a century after his death. On the “translation” of bones, see Gspan (1949) and Helgason (“Journey’s End 1946”).

²⁰ It should be noted that Hallgrímsson’s statue in 1907 was not placed on such an exposed position as Prešeren’s in 1905. An equivalent position—namely, the center of Austurvöllur square—was already occupied by the Thorvaldsen’s statue (see footnote 3), and in 1931 it was “taken over” by Jónas’s contemporary, a nationalist politician Jón Sigurðsson (1811–79). In this way,

Their work has—literally to the last letter—become a subject of the obsessively pedantic textual criticism that continued to produce new editions and reprints. Every line of their written texts became a starting point for hundreds and thousands of new lines of rigorously scientific, popular, or ideological meta-discourse; every documented or assumed bit of their biographic files inspired further treatments, research, and evaluations. They became an endless source of remaking, post-processing, translation into other genres, critical interpretation and appropriation. Alongside flourishing discursive corpuses, the focus of which they came to occupy, a growing set of “mantras,” generalizations, and simplifications has evolved: it has been actively shaping the bases of the life of both national communities. Only a few years after their deaths, the artists’ works became compulsory reading for schoolchildren, thus nourishing indoctrination as a key means of transmitting the canonization’s social effects. As such, they became and—due to constant reproduction of such a status—remained a source of intertextual games: from writing commemorative and laudatory poems in their honor to outright imitation, from respectful citation to parody, derision and desacralization.²¹ Their poems have induced dozens of visual depictions and illustrations and hundreds of new compositions, some of which have gained broad popularity.²²

the statues of artists slowly set off for a less attractive (even if still central) location in the city park near the lake Tjörnin: Thorvaldsen in 1931, and Hallgrímsson at the centenary of his death in 1945. It seems interesting that practically all public statues in Iceland in the first decades of the twentieth century were made by the same sculptor, Einar Jónsson. Prešeren’s statue has, on the contrary, after the initial controversies in 1905, remained firmly on its position and became an indispensable identification symbol of the Slovenian capital (cf. Kos 1997 and Dović 2010).

²¹ This complex development cannot even be touched upon here. Generally, in literature it is possible to follow a broad spectre from glorifying and memorial poetry through thematic and formal allusions, from remakings to parodies that often thematize the processes and effects of canonization (such as the aforementioned novel by Laxness, *Atomstöðin* [1948], which deals with the reburial of Jónas’s mortal remains). Boundaries of literature are often crossed to other genres; desacralization is also frequent, as two newer examples testify: both Icelandic songwriter Megas and Slovenian poet and performer Rozman Roza ironically deconstruct the mythological aura created around the national heroes, mock their toping, and so on. But in the end, desacralization and parody never really subvert the canonical status of an author.

²² Jónas may be in a slight advantage if we consider how strongly his poems with newly composed melodies remained present (how many people can still sing them): it is an impression in Iceland that many people are able to sing by heart at least some of the most popular tunes. According to Bulovec’s bibliography (1975), Prešeren’s works have been set to music some 300 times, but with the exception of Stanko Premrl’s “Zdravljica” (The toast), today’s Slovenian

Both poets lived just long enough to catch at least a glimpse of their artistic fame; but their actual journey to Parnassus in fact started later. If Prešeren managed to publish his collection *Poems (Poezije)* during his lifetime, Hallgrímsson's opus, apart from the poetry published in *Fjölnir*, remained scattered or in manuscript after his sudden death in 1845. The first edition with the simple title *Poems (Ljóðmæli)* came out two years later; it was prepared by Brynjólfur Pjetursson and Konráð Gíslason, Jónas's *Fjölnir* comrades, in 1847. The second edition, by Hannes Hafstein, later an influential poet and politician himself, followed in 1883. Hafstein's introductory essay contributed notably to consolidation of Jónas's canonical status. In the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in the interwar period, publishing activities grew: scholarly edition of collected works, many popular editions, anthologies, prestigious reprints, manuscript facsimiles, jubilee editions, and mass reprints flooded the book market. Prešeren's case was even more intense: his works entered the period of publishing and reprinting mania a little bit earlier and to a greater extent (Bulovec 1975). In both cases, the canonization has had stimulating effects on domestic readership and on the sector of literary mediation in general.²³

But it is not only the quantity of the growing "secondary corpus" that deserves attention here. It is also very important to stress the fact that the preservation of Jónas's legacy and his canonization—and exactly the same goes for Prešeren—was never a matter for ciphers; it always occupied prominent figures with highest cultural and political ambitions.²⁴ This

anthem, none has really survived as a folk song, even if "Pod oknom" (Under the Window) by Jurij Flajšman was once very popular.

²³ First scholarly editions came out almost simultaneously: Matthías Þórðarson's Hallgrímsson in five volumes in 1929–36, Avgust Pirjevec and Joža Glonar's Prešeren's collected works in 1929, and France Kidrič's *Prešeren* in 1936 (followed in 1938 by a biography). The same is true of the first scholarly monographs: Kidrič published his book on Prešeren in 1938, and Þórðarson's work came out in 1936 as a fifth volume of Jónas's collected works. Apart from that, number of editions on the market displays much greater and earlier editorial and publishing activities regarding Prešeren. For example, the edition by Luka Pintar for Kleinmayr & Bamberg was reprinted five times between 1900 and 1923, even if it had to compete with other editions, such as Anton Aškerc's for the publisher Lavoslav Schwentner (1902, reprinted in 1913), early facsimile (!) of the manuscript of *Poezije* (1908) by Blaznik's printing office, and Avgust Žigon's *Prešernova čitanka* (Prešeren's textbook, 1922) (cf. Bulovec 89–123).

²⁴ Hafstein later became the first Icelandic minister in the Danish government and even has a statue dedicated to him in Reykjavík. Þórðarson, the editor of the first scholarly edition, was a leading Icelandic archaeologist of his era and the one who set off for Copenhagen in 1946 to bring back the right Hallgrímsson's bones and rebury them in Þingvellir. Publishers or editors of Jónas's works were also the controversial politician Jónas Jónsson (1941) and the famous

demonstrates that canonization of national poets in the nineteenth century was not merely a game or a battle within the aesthetic field; in fact, it was directly pinned to the sphere of power and authority in the emerging nation state.²⁵

This dimension reveals itself even more when one considers the nodal points of *interpretation* and *appropriation*, two processes whose constant reproduction is vital for the restoration of the canonical status. In this respect, both candidates for canonization have opened up broad enough thematic and ideative fields in their poetry, they left behind a few enigmas, handy for speculation, and wrote several interpretatively demanding or even ambiguous texts, thus enabling contradictory conclusions regarding their “real” stances towards eroticism, faith, revolution, and other things. In this way, a broader space was opened for different ideological usurpations—they could serve nationalists of different political colors, and at the same time be used for legitimization by conservatives, liberals, and communist revolutionaries.²⁶

In both cases all of the later appropriations have been enabled by a similar basic impulse: the radical reevaluation that through the turn towards the aesthetic, attempted to sublimate the awkwardness of the nationalistic paradigm and especially to soothe its brutal cultural utilitarianism. Such an axiological twist has finally offered a proper platform for the symbolic elevation of both Prešeren and Hallgrímsson. It seems almost symptomatic that the beginning of such a twist is linked to the second edition of both poets’ opus, in both cases—in contrast to first editions—equipped with a new tool: an introductory essay written by a prominent contemporary. In fact, Josip Stritar and Hannes Hafstein used similar canonizing strategies. In his 1883 preface, Hafstein writes about Jónas: “He gets his language from the hearts of the people, his poetry from the natural beauty of the country,” while his “poetic genius” is coupled by understanding of the spirit of natural sciences (Hafstein XL). Hafstein continues to compare Jónas’s nature

Nobel Prize winner Halldór Laxness, whose edition came out in 1957, on the 150th anniversary of poet’s birth. Contemporary scholarly edition (*Ritverk Jónasar Hallgrímssonar*), comparable to Prešeren’s *Zbrano delo* from 1965, was prepared by Haukur Hannesson, Páll Valsson, and Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson in 1989.

²⁵ Egilsson (“Ways of Addressing”) states that only after the favorable outcome of the emancipatory phases in 1918 and 1944, Jónas’s poetry has lost its political impact; later, more attention was paid to his last poetic phase, which is less nationalistic, but more personal, pessimist or even nihilist.

²⁶ Slovenian communists have, according to Boris Ziherl, one of the leading post-war ideologists, “consecrated the resolution of their first congress with Prešeren’s verse” (Ziherl 70). Icelandic communists referred to Hallgrímsson as well: the leader of the leftist association “Rauðir pennar” (The Red Pens) Kristinn E. Andresson has promoted this group as an heir of the Fjölirnir group (cf. his book *Ný augu: tímar Fjölismanna*, 1973).

poetry to the then already well-known Lake School in England (probably unfamiliar to the Icelandic bard himself). Jónas's praising of nature is represented as a reflex of his patriotism, but at the same time it is set side by side with the already established group of "lake" poets, thus bringing Jónas into (spiritual) connection with contemporary poetic movements outside Iceland. In this respect, Hafstein's study resembles the influential Stritar's essay, written for the second edition of Prešeren's poetry in 1866. This edition marked a crucial evaluative rupture in Slovenian culture, establishing Prešeren's aesthetic primacy and paving the way for the inauguration of the national "genius" to the throne of the "national poet."²⁷

From today's perspective, Prešeren's and Hallgrímsson's paths to a privileged position within the domestic culture may seem almost inevitable, as if somehow being "natural." This impression is false: one still has to account for the fact that while still alive, neither of the poets enjoyed a consensual, general respect and adoration within his community. The cultural forces that posthumously promoted their advancement first had to settle accounts with potential rivals: Prešeren with the popular poet Jovan Vesel Koseski (1798–1884), and later on with Simon Gregorčič (1844–1906), while Jónas had an even stronger rival, an elder contemporary Romantic poet, Bjarni Thorarensen (1786–1841). In this respect, the stories are not really comparable. At the point of replacement of the utilitarian, nationalist axiological criteria via the already mentioned aesthetic by-pass, carried out by the "Young Slovenes" in the second half of the nineteenth century, Prešeren has been declared a "poetic champion" beyond any doubt (see Dović 2010, and Ahačič 2006). In Iceland, on the contrary, many critics have long been ascribing equal or even higher value to Bjarni when comparing the two Icelandic Romantic greats. Bjarni's bust was also manufactured (though not displayed in an open air square or in a park, but in a museum), and Bjarni was quite often referred to as "the father of Icelandic literature of the nineteenth century." An overview of anthologies and school textbooks demonstrates that neither of the poets could gain a decisive advantage, at least in the first decades after their death. Comparisons between the poets, who in private were friends with high respect for each other's work, remained a critical commonplace with no clear answer: they were often mentioned together, as kinds of Romantic

²⁷ Stritar's 1866 statements speak for themselves: "Every nation has a man whom he imagines with a holy, pure nimbus above his head. What to Englishmen is Shakespeare, to Frenchmen Racine, to Italians Dante, for the Germans Goethe, for the Russians Pushkin, and to the Poles Mickiewicz—this is Prešeren for the Slovenes. [...] If the nations were assembled on Judgment Day to prove how they had managed their talents and how every one of them had participated in universal, human culture, the small Slovene nation could fearlessly prove itself among others with one small book, Prešeren's *Poezije*" (48).

twins—the Icelandic “Goethe and Schiller,” as Jónas’s namesake Jónsson stated in his 1941 edition of Hallgrímsson’s poetry.²⁸

To be sure, even Hafstein himself in his 1883 essay estimated that Bjarni is more inventive than Jónas, and that his poetry reaches deeper inwards. But at the same time, he gave a slight advantage to Jónas, partly by referring to two widely known anecdotes—namely, after reading the fresh manuscript of “Gunnarshólmi,” Bjarni is supposed to have declared that the time has come for him to “cease writing verse.” At the same time he allegedly said that after his death Jónas would be the only national poet (Jónsdóttir 2004: 219). This story has later been regularly reproduced in both domestic discussions and abroad. Characteristic in this respect is also the poem that Jónas dedicated to Bjarni when he was informed of his death (and may have even read it at his funeral): he denominates Bjarni “the trustworthy, beloved son of the nation” and “the flower of the land” (“ástmögur Íslands hinn trausti / og ættjarðarblóminn!”).²⁹ Jónas ascribed to his deceased poetic colleague the very same label that was later to become related to him.

Conclusion

This comparison has pointed to a number of interesting parallels between the making of the Slovenian and Icelandic national poets, their canonization and figuring as cultural saints. But at the end, it should be stated that Prešeren’s canonical status is not really comparable with Hallgrímsson’s.³⁰ In many respects, Prešeren is at a considerable advantage as a national poet. One of them is obviously the extent of textual production and reproduction: even more than through the meticulous treatment of the

²⁸ There were posthumous collections of both Bjarni and Jónas published in the same year (1847), and both of them immediately became school textbooks. In 1850, their function was assumed by a compilation entitled *Snot*. Among the 108 songs, it contained twenty-three by Bjarni and twenty-two by Jónas.

²⁹ Dick Ringler’s translation (“faithful defender of Iceland / and friend of its people”) is far from literal in this case. Also see footnote 2.

³⁰ The fact that the international range of Prešeren’s Icelandic colleague may be slightly smaller does not play a significant role here. While Prešeren has enjoyed at least a limited reception abroad already during his lifetime, Hallgrímsson was not really well known outside of Iceland at least until recent Ringler’s translations (2002). At the end of the nineteenth century, the first German translations appeared. In an anthology from 1897, Josef Poestion chose twenty-eight Icelandic poets: most space is taken by Jónas (332–84) and then by Bjarni (289–320); but in a later edition, entitled *Eislandblüten* (1904), Jónas’ rival received a slight advantage. Danish translations were quite late: a moderate selection was published in 2007. Dick Ringler published his excellent English translations (employing alliteration) in the *Bard of Iceland* and partly also on the Internet.

primary textual basis, the remarkable Slovenian obsession with Prešeren is displayed through the secondary corpus: the quantity of (scholarly) treatments, adaptations, remakes in other genres, and the density of intertextual references, seem to be really unusual.³¹

The difference in the extent of the meta-discursive corpus—in both cases it exponentially outnumbers the primary source texts—can to a certain degree be explained by statistical factors, such as the population, extent of cultural activity, and development of the book chain. But a number of other observations confirm the impression that Prešeren was canonized faster, more energetically, more radically, and, especially, more exclusively. Such an impression is only strengthened when one compares the institutionalization of dates, sites, museum build-up, evolvement of rituals, ceremonies, and other indicators. This difference may be best represented by the symbolic fate of the poets' monuments. On 10 September 1905, the liberal leaders in Ljubljana dropped four gigantic curtains and unveiled Prešeren's statue at the very heart of Ljubljana, Carniola's provincial capital, on the Square of the Virgin Mary (which later, of course, became Prešeren Square). The event was accompanied by mass euphoria, orchestrated by nine gunshots from the Ljubljana castle, and spontaneous singing of the Pan-Slavic anthem "Hej Slovani!" (Hey, Slavs!). At this point it became perfectly clear that Prešeren had surpassed all his rivals.³²

Today, it is quite impossible to imagine this statue being moved to another location (for example, to Tivoli Park in central Ljubljana, which would roughly correspond to the relocation of Jónas's statue into the city park). In 1945, when the bronze Jónas travelled into the stillness of the lake Tjörnin, the new socialist authorities in Slovenia actually instigated a new wave of Prešeren's adoration. It is then quite justified to say that Prešeren's position in the Slovenian cultural canon is more dominant in comparison to Jónas's. The uniqueness of Prešeren's canonical status is an interesting phenomenon in itself. Only a detailed comparison with cultures that in

³¹ While in Iceland one can find few books devoted entirely to Jónas (the first was published in 1929, and others came out after WW II, especially in the last decades), in Slovenia there are dozens of monographs dedicated to Prešeren.

³² In fact, the first half of the nineteenth century offered very few potential rivals to Prešeren. Even a cursory overview of his contemporaries' poetic production shows there is no reason to doubt that learned men's enthusiasm about Prešeren was sincere.

similar circumstances did not develop a similar cult of a national poet could bring more accurate answers as to why this has been so.³³

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³³ The question is whether the stubborn hypothesis of “Slovenian cultural syndrome,” which emphasizes the special relevance of poetry for Slovenians because of the lack of, for example, relevant political figures (such as the Icelander Jón Sigurðsson), or of historical and mythological figures in general (such as massively provided by sagas), is sufficient for such an explanation (Dovič 2010: 106–109).

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POVZETEK

KANONIZACIJA KULTURNIH SVETNIKOV: FRANCE PREŠEREN IN JÓNAS HALLGRÍMSSON

Razprava primerjalno obravnava kanonizacijo dveh romantičnih pesnikov, Franceta Prešerna (1800–1849) in Jónasa Hallgrímssona (1807–1845), ki sta vsak v svojem kulturnem okolju (slovenskem oziroma islandskem) nesporno dosegla status nacionalnega pesnika. Razprava skuša pokazati, da je kljub manjšim razlikam pri kanonizaciji oba mogoče razumeti ne le kot nacionalna pesnika, temveč tudi kot vzorčna »kulturna svetnika«.