

Saga-Sites of Memory

Jónas Hallgrímsson, Icelandic Nationalism, and the *Íslendingasögur*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the cultivation of saga-sites as *lieux de mémoire* by Icelandic national poet Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1845) and its ideological impact on the Icelandic nationalist movement. Fusing saga and landscape, cultural memory and place, in his poetry, Hallgrímsson reimagines sites from the *Íslendingasögur* as encapsulations of an Icelandic national spirit, access points to a past golden age, and catalysts of revitalization and political change. In doing so, Hallgrímsson contributed to the nationalist ideology that garnered widespread support for Icelandic nationalism and furnished Icelandic politicians with justifications for increased autonomy. Danish nationalists felt that the cultural past embedded within Iceland crossed national boundaries. The Danish state's indebtedness to distinctly Icelandic contributions for their own nation-building arguably made Danish politicians amenable to arguments for greater Icelandic sovereignty.

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article examine la culture des saga-lieux comme lieux de mémoire par le poète national islandais Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845) et son impact idéologique sur le mouvement nationaliste islandais. Par la fusion de la saga et du paysage, de la mémoire culturelle et du lieu, dans sa poésie, Hallgrímsson réimagine les sites de l'*Íslendingasögur* comme des encapsulations de l'esprit national islandais, des points d'accès à un âge d'or passé et des catalyseurs de revitalisation et de changement politique. Ce faisant, Hallgrímsson a contribué à l'idéologie nationaliste qui a suscité un large soutien au nationalisme islandais et fourni aux politiciens islandais les justifications pour une autonomie accrue. Les nationalistes danois estimaient que le passé culturel ancré en Islande dépassait les frontières nationales. La dette de l'État danois à l'égard de contributions qui concernaient l'Islande de façon distincte, pour la construction de la propre nation de cette dernière, a sans doute rendu les hommes politiques danois réceptifs aux arguments en faveur d'une plus grande souveraineté islandaise.

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Early nineteenth-century Europe experienced an onslaught of political turbulence and a concomitant rise in Romantic nationalism, a term Joep Leerssen describes as “the celebration of the nation (defined by its language, history, and cultural character) as an inspiring ideal for cultural production; and dissemination and instrumentalization of that production in political consciousness raising” (2018, 36). Interest in native legends, supposed golden ages of history, and national landscapes abounded as cultural nationalists sought to uncover a unique and inherent national character, or what Johann Gottfried Herder called *Volksgeist*. In many cases, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century politicians and activists instrumentalized the notion of a distinctive national spirit in order to promote greater democratic representation or even political autonomy. Icelandic national poet Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845) engaged in such “cultivation[s] of culture” (Leerssen 2018, 23): by reimagining national spaces and a past Icelandic golden age, Hallgrímsson left a lasting, ideological impact on Iceland’s process of nation-building.

In Hallgrímsson’s poetry, glorification of the past melded with idealization of landscape through recontextualizations of saga-sites featured in *Íslendingasögur* such as *Njáls saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. He reimagines locations such as Þingvellir, Gunnarshólmi, and the farm Fróðdál as proof of Iceland’s worth and distinctiveness and as temporally complex conduits to a past golden age, which though perhaps distant or muted in his own day, reverberated in Icelandic nature and character, waiting to be regained. In doing so, Hallgrímsson cultivated these landscapes as *lieux de mémoire*, important sites of collective memory with deep nationalistic resonance (Nora 1989, 10–11). By reaffirming these sites of Icelandic cultural memory and emphasizing their innate and perpetual presence in Iceland—rooted in both mind and physical landscape—Hallgrímsson ennobled his country’s cultural heritage and helped foster a proud and unique national self-image in his own day.¹ Moreover, he used these sites as rallying points for not only national pride and self-identification but also for political change. In effect, his recontextualizations of these selected saga landscapes contributed to the early, ideological stages of the Icelandic independence movement by mobilizing his compatriots in support of Icelandic nationalism, which took the form of separatism,² and creating cultural justifications for greater Icelandic sovereignty that would appeal not only to Icelandic politicians but—due to a sense of shared, or transcultural, memory—Danish officials as well.

Though primarily remembered as a poet, Hallgrímsson was a devoted natural scientist, who was as invested in exploring and extolling Iceland’s unique landscape as he was in elevating its literature, glorifying its past, and shaping its political future. While he showed interest in nature and poetry in his younger years in Iceland, namely during his secondary education at Bessastaðir, Hallgrímsson undertook these pursuits in earnest at the University of Copenhagen

from 1832 to 1838. There, he studied natural history and—along with a number of other Icelandic students living in Copenhagen “who became deeply influenced by Johann Gottfried Herder’s notion of ‘national spirit’” as well as by Danish Romanticism (Oslund 322)—began the Icelandic nationalist journal *Fjölnir*. Most of Hallgrímsson’s poems, as well as some of his essays, were first published in *Fjölnir*, which, running intermittently for nine numbers from 1835 to 1847, functioned as a platform to foster Icelandic pride and encourage increased Icelandic sovereignty (Ringler 30). While Icelandic critics often found *Fjölnir*’s publications controversial, the journal helped develop and disseminate nationalist ideals among an influential Icelandic intelligentsia.³ The journal even briefly attracted the renowned Icelandic politician Jón Sigurðsson (1811–1879)—often credited with attaining major strides in Icelandic independence—before he started his own journal, *Ný félagsrit*.

In blending together nature and a shared Icelandic legendary past—or historical past as it was considered at the time—in his vernacular poetry, Hallgrímsson drew upon several outside influences. Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768), who lauded Iceland’s nature and used its legendary past to emphasize the need for national revitalization, loomed large for Hallgrímsson in this respect (Ringler 3). Renowned national poet Bjarni Thorarensen (1786–1841), whose poetry features references to Old Norse literature and Icelandic landscapes, likewise proved influential. Perhaps most interestingly, Hallgrímsson, like Thorarensen before him, was influenced by Danish Romanticists such as Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850). In his poetry, Oehlenschläger drew upon the ideas of a Danish golden age and a distinctive Danish spirit, glorified Iceland’s land and culture, and even implied “that ancient history is tied to national space” (Rix 441). In a number of poems, Hallgrímsson reflects Herderian notions of an innate and unique Icelandic identity, depicts a national golden age, and uses national space in a manner comparable to Oehlenschläger. He even responds directly to the Danish poet in a number of works.⁴ As will be discussed, Danish and Icelandic nationalists’ mutual regard for Herderian philosophy and, most importantly, their shared idealization and reliance on Icelandic cultural memory and land for their respective nationalistic interests vitally impacted Iceland’s independence movement.

I understand Hallgrímsson’s fusion of saga and landscape, cultural memory and place in terms of Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire*, sites where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (1989, 8). As Stefan Brink elaborates, *lieux de mémoire* are “sites of cultural memory that simultaneously store and allow for the communication of symbolic cultural structures, e.g. national stories and myths, and help engender a collective sense of shared history and identity in the present” (613). Hallgrímsson saturates national spaces and memory with nationalistic concerns of “the present”: his use of saga-sites of memory are “not about fixed preservation but reconstruction” of both the past and of the sites themselves (Glauser, Hermann, and Mitchell 8). Joep Leerssen illuminates this

process through his concept of “cultivation of culture,” which describes how aspects of a culture’s heritage “are, at a specific historical juncture, lifted from their context of origin by a professionalizing philological elite; they are recontextualized and instrumentalized for modern needs and values; and they are invested with a fresh national symbolism and status” (2005, 22–23). In effect this is the development that Hallgrímsson undertook: he reestablished saga-sites as locations of cultural memory, reinterpreting them and filling them with renewed symbolic meaning in order to address contemporary interest in promoting a strong sense of Icelandic identity and nationalism.

More specifically, Hallgrímsson reimagined saga-sites—and the Commonwealth period they supposedly chronicle—as evidence and vestiges of an Icelandic golden age. According to Anthony D. Smith: “The return to a golden age is an important, and probably an essential, component of nationalism. Its role is to re-establish roots and continuity, as well as authenticity and dignity, among a population that is being formed into a nation, and thereby to act as a guide and model for national destiny” (59). In reconstructing the cultural memory of a golden age, Hallgrímsson thus engages past, present, and future: he conjures and reaffirms a glorious and collective past; he validates a present collective identity; he shapes a vision for Iceland’s future, one that implies regeneration and political change. Oscar Aldred has asserted that “landscapes ... are a nexus or a convergence of multiple temporalities” (60). Hallgrímsson’s *lieux de mémoire* of saga landscapes likewise embrace and convey “multiple temporalities.” Furthermore, the very nation they construct is “Janus-faced”: it “forges a modern aspect for itself, yet simultaneously looks back to a putative historical identity or to a golden age to justify the collectivity” (Koranyi and Cusack 192–93).

It is important to point out that while it is significant that the material locations of the saga-sites exist and, to a certain extent, can even be mapped—adding legitimization to claims to a supposed golden age through a “sense of realism and verisimilitude” (Lethbridge 69)—Hallgrímsson produces these *lieux de mémoire* by means of literature. According to Jürg Glauser, “literature provides an ideal place in which memory is generated and discussed; literature is the medium, through which a certain culture ... may best engage with the position, function, or the meaning of memory within this culture” (2018, 232). Hallgrímsson’s poetry provides a method of articulation and dissemination of cultural memory in a way in which landscapes alone could not. Furthermore, as Björn Ægir Norðfjörð points out, Iceland “construct[ed] its very national identity on its *separate* language and ... literature” (13). Hallgrímsson’s endeavors can be seen, on the one hand, to reaffirm the sagas as nationally defining cultural achievements and, on the other, to answer the demand—by Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847), for example—that Icelanders “live up to the literary reputation of their ancestors, and to start writing great national literature again, to show the world that the spirit of their Nordic forefathers had not left them” (Halink 2018,

807). Hallgrímsson makes use of Old Icelandic literature and provides his own literary contributions—written in Icelandic⁵—to define and empower a national identity.

In addition, Hallgrímsson draws upon the “locating’ of culture, a semioticization of landscape” already established in the literature of the sagas themselves in his work (Glaser 2000, 209). As has been well-established by scholars, the *Íslendingasögur*—as well as other sources such as *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók*—clearly, and inextricably, link narrative to location. Within such texts, shared cultural memory is imprinted onto Icelandic landscapes. Successive generations, including Hallgrímsson’s own, could instrumentalize, build upon, and re-shape the memory and ideology associated with these locations: this has caused scholars to characterize such landscapes as “palimpsest-like,” capable of being re-written yet bearing traces of earlier cultivations (Lethbridge 68; Osborne 46). On one hand, in his poetry, Hallgrímsson makes use of the cultural memory already invested in saga landscapes; he purposefully avails of sites pre-possessing cultural value. On the other hand, he readjusts and magnifies the political relevance of these lieux de mémoire: Hallgrímsson re-invests these sites with contemporary, nationalistic significance, rallying his countrymen and legitimizing Iceland’s claims to increased sovereignty by cultural means in the process.

Significantly, Hallgrímsson’s cultural claims to increased Icelandic autonomy proved persuasive beyond Icelandic borders, resonating with the Danish state. The effectiveness of Hallgrímsson’s nationalist ideology arguably relied not just on cultural memory but the “transculturality of memory,” memory’s ability to move across not only temporal but national borders (Erll 10). Due to the perceived transculturality of Old Norse collective memory—the idea of shared cultural memory between Iceland and Denmark—Danish nationalists, politicians, and authorities were more inclined to sympathize with cultural arguments for increased Icelandic autonomy, especially as they availed of this transcultural memory to shape their own Danish nation-building. In this regard, Danish sympathy derived from the “multidirectional” facet of transcultural memory (Rothberg 11), from the sense that cultivations of Old Norse memory mutually reinforced both Danish and Icelandic nationalisms.⁶ As a result, Hallgrímsson’s cultural cultivations and nationalist argumentation ultimately helped prompt the gradual implementation of liberatory measures for Iceland through peaceful, legislative means, his re-inventions of Old Norse memory contributing to widespread support for Icelandic nationalism at home and to consideration and concession from Denmark abroad.

Hallgrímsson’s most clear and direct attempt to project a proud, distinctive national self-image, prompt the revitalization of his nation, and legitimize Iceland’s claims to greater autonomy occurs through his cultivation of his “principal lieu de mémoire” of Þingvellir (Egilsson 136), the site of the general assembly of the Alþingi, which met in this location from the Saga Age until Denmark dissolved

its parliamentary power in 1800. Þingvellir [Assembly Fields], taking its toponym from its association with the Alþingi [All Assembly], notably figures in saga literature such as *Brennu-Njáls saga* as well as in *Íslendingabók*. Such works served to imprint cultural value onto Þingvellir, establishing the site's nexus of physical location, history, and toponym as a part of Icelandic cultural memory and even ethnogenesis.⁷ Though invested with cultural significance through these texts, Þingvellir's ideological value waned in the eighteenth century: the drive towards Enlightenment and modernization in Iceland by figures such as Magnús Stephensen (1762–1833) diminished interest in supposedly antiquated relics such as Þingvellir's Alþingi, and Icelanders observed its 1800 disbanding with relative apathy. The next generation, however, revived the cultural significance attached to Þingvellir and added political value besides, value that has since permeated the lieu de memoire. Specifically, Hallgrímsson and the other contributors to *Fjöltnir*—called the Fjöltnismenn—used their journal in part to foster support for the re-establishment of the Alþingi at this site,⁸ reimagining Þingvellir as the foundation of an admirable, self-governing Icelandic community and as a symbol of Icelandic nationhood in the process. Hallgrímsson's "Ísland" [Iceland] (1835)—which, significantly, was the first poem published in *Fjöltnir*—encapsulates such nationalist interests, instituting Þingvellir as a defining and politically significant site of Icelandic nationality.

In the first portion of his poem, Hallgrímsson describes Iceland in its saga-days, the Commonwealth period, which extended from Iceland's settlement until 1262, when Iceland entered into an agreement with the king of Norway:

Landið var fagurt og frítt, og fannhvítir jöklanna tindar,
himininn heiður og blár, hafið var skínandi bjart.
Þá komu feðurnir frægu og frjálsræðishetjurnar góðu,
austan um hyldýpishaf, hingað í sælunnar reit.
Reistu sér byggðir og bú í blómguðu dalanna skauti;
ukust að íþrótt og frægð, undu svo glaðir við sitt.
Hátt á eldhrauni upp, þar sem enn þá Öxará rennur
ofan í Almannagjá, alþingjð feðranna stóð.
Þar stóð hann Þorgeir á þingi er við trúnni var tekið af lýði.
Þar komu Gissur og Geir, Gunnar og Héðinn og Njáll.
(1989, 63)

[The land and the snow-white peaks of the glaciers were beautiful and peaceful, the heaven cloudless and blue, the ocean was shining bright. Then came here from the east our famous forefathers and good freedom-loving heroes over the very deep sea into a place of happiness. They built for themselves buildings and farmsteads in the corners of the flower-filled valleys; increased in accomplishments and fame, thus quickly became pleased with their lot. High up on the lava field, there where the Öxará River flows, down into Almannagjá, the assembly place of our forefathers stood. There stood Þorgeir at the assembly when the Christian

faith was accepted by the people. There came Gizurr and Geirr, Gunnarr and Héðinn and Njáll.]⁹

Extolling the beauty of Iceland's landscape and the glory of its past, Hallgrímsson presents an Icelandic golden age replete with heroism, natural beauty, freedom, and prosperity. He creates a cohesive sense of nation and unique national identity by "locating the power of imagination in an invented history, and grounding it in an imagined geography" (Osborne 41). He accomplishes this primarily by centring on the "imagined geography" of Þingvellir, reverently depicting its landscape—the Öxará (Axe River), Almannagjá (Public Gorge), and lava field—and the "invented history" of the *Íslendingasögur*, triumphantly describing how the Alþingi assembled with legendary saga heroes there each year during the Commonwealth period. Hallgrímsson glorifies several important aspects of Iceland's uniqueness and value—its nature, legendary past, and literary accomplishments—and converges these attributes in one place, Þingvellir. In doing so, Hallgrímsson uses Þingvellir as a physical and symbolic reminder of Iceland's worthiness and individual character, re-establishing the saga-site as a lieu de mémoire that represents Iceland as a collective community and distinctive nation.

Notably, Hallgrímsson embeds specific saga heroes of *Brennu-Njáls saga* directly into the site of Þingvellir. As a result, he reaffirms the saga as part of Icelandic national "canon," or active cultural memory (A. Assmann 100), and contributes to a proud Icelandic self-image. Referencing Gunnarr Hámundarson from Hlíðarendi and Héðinn, or Skarpheðinn Njálsson, both of whom were courageous and successful warriors, Hallgrímsson emphasizes the heroic heritage of Icelanders.¹⁰ Hallgrímsson also refers to the characters, Gizurr hvíti Teitsson, Geirr goði Ásgeirsson, and Njáll Þorgeirsson, who—especially Njáll—were reputed for their honour, integrity, and wisdom.¹¹ By recontextualizing heroic, noble, and wise saga characters and placing them into the landscape of Þingvellir—the so-called "hjartastaðurinn," or the place of the heart (22)¹²—Hallgrímsson not only reminds his countrymen of their shared and impressive cultural heritage, but he implies that Iceland's "heroic individuality" (Smith 50) is still recoverable or accessible to contemporary Icelanders. The admirable traits of Iceland's past are portrayed as still present, innate, and embedded within the foundations of Iceland itself. The landscape of Þingvellir, fused with an impressive history and literary tradition, in a sense provides a vehicle for cultural Icelandic memory, a link between past and present that encapsulates Iceland's supposedly enduring wise and heroic identity, or inherent "spirit." Significantly, this spirit was distinctive from that of its foreign ruler. According to Herderian philosophy, "an important purpose of government is to maintain and develop naturally the national character of the people over which it has power" and, "all else being equal, the boundaries of the state should not exceed those of the people: the

uniting of several nations into a single state should be avoided” (Patten 683). Hallgrímsson’s portrayal of a unique Icelandic character, therefore, had significant nationalist implications, especially when instrumentalized later by Icelandic politicians such as Jón Sigurðsson.

Of course, most significantly, what Hallgrímsson also depicts at the “heart” of Iceland in its saga-site of Þingvellir—and thus an innate and defining feature of Icelandic character—is the Alþingi and the desire for self-governance that it represents. He connects the location directly to the Alþingi by referring to the annual meeting there during the Saga Age and even to the specific event of Iceland’s conversion to Christianity at the recommendation of the pagan lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði Þorkelsson in 1000 AD, as recorded in *Íslendingabók*. Likewise, in poems such as “Til herra Páls Gaimard” [To Mr. Paul Gaimard] (1839)—a poem popularly sung in Iceland following its composition (Ringler 166)—the landscape of Þingvellir evokes for Hallgrímsson Iceland’s “frístjórnarþingi frægu’ um heim” [the parliament of an independent government, famous throughout the world] (1989, 104). In “Fjallið Skjaldbreiður” [Mount Broadshield] (1845) Hallgrímsson even indicates that Alþingi’s presence is protected by the landscape of Þingvellir as well as perpetual: “Enn þá stendur góð í gildi / gjáin kennd við almenning” [Then still stands valid in force, the gorge associated with the common people] (1989, 132). In validating this unbreakable connection between Þingvellir and Alþingi, Hallgrímsson indicates that Iceland’s tradition of self-rule is inextricably rooted in its national origins and in its landscape, that the Alþingi is part of Iceland’s natural state on a physical and ideological level.

In “Ísland,” Hallgrímsson not only suggests that Iceland is innately self-governing, but that Icelanders inherently desire autonomy and that such autonomy enables, or even engenders, national greatness. He expresses this by emphasizing the sovereignty enjoyed by Iceland’s legendary ancestors, calling them “frjálsræðishetjurnar” [freedom-loving heroes] and implying that they came to Iceland from Norway primarily to benefit from that sovereignty.¹³ In doing so, he idealizes the Icelandic Commonwealth as an “epoch of political independence” (Helgason 2005, 79) and establishes continuity in the Icelandic desire for self-governance, justifying contemporary Icelanders’ aspirations for greater independence by suggesting both that they have always inherently longed for freedom and have a tradition of autonomy—encapsulated in the Alþingi and preserved at Þingvellir—that simply needs to be reclaimed. In addition, Hallgrímsson not only emphasizes how Iceland’s ancestors benefited from freedom, but also from the prosperity that accompanied that freedom during the supposed golden age of the Commonwealth of Iceland. He describes the legendary heroes as wealthy and “svo glaðir við sitt” [so pleased with their lot] and even depicts Icelandic nature as “blómguðu” [flower-filled], or abundantly thriving. In doing

so, he depicts the Commonwealth of Iceland, a period in which Iceland was autonomous, as an age of affluence.

This stands in direct contrast to the second portion of his poem, which focuses on the present.¹⁴ Depicting Iceland in his own time, Hallgrímsson writes, “Það er svo bágð að standa’ í stað og mönnunum munar/ annaðhvort aftur á bak ellegar nokkuð á leið” [it is so distressful to stand still, and people are different either with their backs turned or facing somewhat to the front] (1989, 63). Hallgrímsson projects a sense of stagnation, immobilization, and even apathy: he implies that his contemporaries either ignore, or turn their back to, the lethargy and degeneration of their own day, or acknowledge the situation without taking any action to repair it. By juxtaposing the prosperity of Iceland’s autonomous past with its stagnant, powerless present, Hallgrímsson seems to propel the notions that a nation is more economically successful when it is self-governing and that a nation’s decline is caused by “an alien government” (Hálfðanarson 2006, 242).¹⁵ These liberal and Herderian notions gained currency at this time in Europe, especially among the Icelandic intelligentsia in the wake of Iceland’s many eighteenth-century misfortunes of earthquakes, famines, epidemics, and volcanic eruptions, particularly the Móðuharðindi: “Jón Sigurðsson and other nationalist leaders blamed Danish rule not for the eruption itself, but for the series of catastrophes that followed, which could have been prevented or at least mitigated with better—more local—management” (Oslund 322). Hallgrímsson thus exposes the need for Icelandic self-governance, condemning the conditions under Danish leadership on one hand, and deriding the apathy of the Icelanders in allowing their subjugation to continue on the other.

Hallgrímsson goes on to point out that although Iceland’s nature continues to be beautiful in his own day—“Landið er fagurt og frítt” [the land is beautiful and free] (1989, 63)—and the past that it signifies remains alive through Þingvellir’s continued presence, one important thing has changed: “En á eldhrauni upp, þar sem enn þá Öxará rennur / ofan í Almannagjá, alþing er horfið á braut” [But up on the lava, there where Öxará still flows, down into Almannagjá the Alþingi has vanished away] (1989, 63). As a consequence, he implies that an integral, natural part of Iceland degenerated when the Alþingi was dissolved by Denmark in 1800. In his conclusion, “Ó þér unglingsfjöld og Íslands fullorðnu synir! / Svona er feðranna frægð fallin í gleymsku og dál!” [Oh you multitude of children and full grown sons of Iceland! Thus is the fame of your forefathers fallen into oblivion and torpor] (1989, 63), Hallgrímsson suggests that Icelanders’ reattainment of their forefathers’ fame, their past golden age, rests in the re-establishment of the Alþingi at Þingvellir, in other words, through greater Icelandic sovereignty. As Simon Halink points out, while Hallgrímsson’s poem could be interpreted as a national eulogy, it instead “contains a message of hope”: with Hallgrímsson’s cultivation of the lieu de mémoire of Þingvellir—far from being forgotten—cultural memory continues to be inscribed upon this site and the site itself functions as

a “promise for the future” (2014, 219). A temporally complex national symbol, Þingvellir serves as a conduit to a golden age of the past, a catalyst for pursuit of greater autonomy in the present, and an assurance of Iceland’s glory and self-governance in the future.

It is interesting to note that Hallgrímsson’s nationalistic poem draws upon Adam Oehlenschläger’s revised version of a poem also titled “Island” (1823)¹⁶: according to Dick Ringler, “there is no question that Jónas’s poem is closely dependent on Oehlenschläger’s” (103). The opening lines of the works roughly correspond: while Oehlenschläger’s begins “Island! Oldtidens Æ, Ihukommelsens vældige Tempel” [Iceland! Ancient Isle, the great Temple of Memory] (1823, 233),¹⁷ Hallgrímsson’s proclaims “Ísland! farsældafrón og hagsælda hrímhvíta móðir!” [Iceland! Land of happiness and prosperous frost-white mother] (1989, 63). Yet, while both poets show admiration for Iceland, namely for its past, as illustrated, Hallgrímsson’s poem is just as invested in his nation’s present, namely its political situation.¹⁸ Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson argues that “in Jónas’ powerful appropriation of the poetic subject and its representation ... 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” (136). In a sense, Hallgrímsson does seize back control over Iceland as poetic material by creating poetry about Iceland for *Icelandic* political purposes. At the same time, Hallgrímsson echoes and takes advantage of Oehlenschläger’s—and Denmark’s—veneration of Iceland. He affirms that Iceland is a land of memory and majesty, but he further, and crucially, suggests that Iceland’s uniqueness and greatness validate a proud and separate Icelandic consciousness, that this distinctive identity entitles Iceland to autonomy and, moreover, that Iceland’s deprivation of self-governance stagnates the nation’s potential, or even destiny, to regain its past golden age. He does this primarily through the formulation of Þingvellir as a lieu de mémoire.

In Hallgrímsson’s poetry, Þingvellir operates in accordance with each of the three modes of a lieu de mémoire, “material, symbolic and functional” (Nora 1996, 14). Hallgrímsson not only valorizes the material setting of Þingvellir, but he draws on its functionality as a “direct link through the land back” to a supposed Icelandic golden age (Sigurðsson 1996, 43) and reimagines the site as a symbol of national consciousness and pride as well as a representation of Iceland’s natural state of autonomy. Hallgrímsson’s appropriation of legend and landscape, his reinvestment of ideological value into the lieu de mémoire of Þingvellir, functioned as an effort to spur Icelanders into political action while also providing justifications for increased Icelandic independence on cultural, economic, and political levels. While he certainly did not accomplish it single-handedly, Hallgrímsson as well as other Fjölismenn were ultimately successful in helping persuade the Danish monarchy to reinstitute the Alþingi in 1843, though at Reykjavik rather than at Þingvellir, as recommended by Jón Sigurðsson (Halink

2018, 809); this in part demonstrates the vital impact of cultural arguments on the Icelandic independence movement. Despite the fact that the Alþingi was not re-established at Þingvellir, Hallgrímsson's work helped endow the site with enduring political, nationalistic relevance. The controversial 1946 reburial of Hallgrímsson's remains at Þingvellir speaks to the establishment of both the poet and location as mutually reinforcing national icons, especially where the Icelandic government is concerned.¹⁹ Moreover, Hallgrímsson's nationalization of the saga site paved the way for national celebrations held there in 1930, 1944, 1974, and 1994, celebrations that again reinvested the site with political force.²⁰ The national significance of Þingvellir so well-established by Hallgrímsson's "Ísland"—which "(at least the beginning of it) is still popularly sung in Iceland" (Ringler 104)—and reaffirmed by later developments continues today, the site acting as a lieu de mémoire in the form of a prominent, nation-defining tourist destination.

In "Gunnarshólmi" [Gunnar's Holm] (1837), Hallgrímsson similarly recontextualizes a saga-site, the titular Gunnarshólmi, for purposes of nation-building. Rather than appealing to continuity of Icelandic self-rule, however, in this case, he primarily appeals to continuity of Icelandic patriotism. The poem draws on an episode in Chapter 75 of *Brennu-Njáls saga* concerning Gunnar Hámundarson, "the most attractive and unreservedly admired of Icelandic saga heroes" (Ringler 139). On his way to leaving Iceland due to a three-year banishment sentence, Gunnar is thrown from his horse. Upon arising, the warrior is so overcome by the beauty of Hlíðarendi, his home region, that he tells his also-banished brother, Kolskeggr, that he will remain in Iceland: "Fögr er hlíðin, svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnfögr sýnzki, bleikir akrar ok slegin túni, ok mun ek ríða heim aprt ok fara hvergi" [Lovely is the hillside—never has it seemed so lovely to me as now, with its pale fields and mown meadows, and I will ride back home and not leave] (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 182; *Njal's Saga* 123). Even when reminded by his brother that failing to honour his sentence will mean his death—an outcome prophesized by his wise companion Njáll—Gunnar steadfastly asserts, "Hvergi mun ek fara" [I will not leave] (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 183; *Njal's Saga* 124). In his poem, Hallgrímsson reinterprets the location indicated by "local tradition" to be the site of this event (Ringler 140), called Gunnarshólmi, as a "symbolic element of memorial heritage," or an Icelandic lieu de mémoire (Egilsson 131). Hallgrímsson transforms local active memory into national canon, and cultural elements into defining components of nationhood: he inscribes a national dimension to this site—and to its corresponding saga and saga hero—using it to cultivate a patriotic, empowered Icelandic self-image and inculcate Icelandic nationalism.

Hallgrímsson undertook the composition of the poem in the summer of 1837 in part due to the influence of Bjarni Thorarensen—the foremost Icelandic poet at that time—who encouraged him to write on the subject not long after Hallgrímsson had re-read *Brennu-Njáls saga* and visited the site (Ringler 140). Thorarensen himself had written on the topic in "Um afturfarir Fljótshlíðar" [The

Decline of Fljótshlíð] (1821) (Thorarensen, 1: 101–2). Aspects of Thorarensen’s poem carry over into Hallgrímsson’s: both discuss the degeneration of the Icelandic landscape surrounding Gunnarshólmi since the Commonwealth period, and both allude to what would become an iconic episode of *Brennu-Njáls*, arguably due to their very own reinterpretations. Yet, in its passionate exaltation of Iceland’s landscapes and past and its patriotic, political message to its contemporaries, Hallgrímsson’s poem encapsulates an evocative nationalist ideology that has caused Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson to assert, “If any one poem can be said to have defined the national cause of the Icelanders, this is it” (137). Indeed, Thorarensen upon hearing the poem for the first time supposedly remarked, “Now it’s time for me ... to stop writing poetry” (Ringler 141), offering a creation myth, so to speak, for Hallgrímsson’s place as a, if not *the*, national poet.

Hallgrímsson begins the poem with the glorified, lush imagery of the land nearby Gunnarshólmi, where “má líta sælan sveitarblóma” [one may see the blessed rural blooming] observed in its surroundings in the Commonwealth period, emphasizing the landscape’s beauty and abundance and pointing out specific, striking landmarks such as Eyjafjalla Glacier, the Summit Mountains, and Hekla (1989, 77). He follows his lengthy, idyllic description of Icelandic nature with a reinterpretation of Gunnarr and Kolskeggr’s ride towards the ship that will take them away from Iceland to their banishment, describing both men’s fierceness, steadfastness, and nobility. Hallgrímsson goes on to devote particular attention to Gunnarr’s decision to stay in his homeland before describing the site of Gunnarshólmi and the erosion of the surrounding area in the modern day:

Dví Gunnar vildi heldur bíða hel
 en horfinn vera fósturjarðarströndum.
 Grimmlegir fjendur, flárri studdir vél,
 fjötruðu góðan dreng í heljarböndum.
 Hugljúfa samt eg sögu Gunnars tel,
 þar sem eg undrast enn á köldum söndum
 lágan að sigra ógnabylgju ólma
 algrænu skrauti prýddan Gunnarshólma.
 (1989, 79)

[For Gunnar would rather endure Hell, then be absent from the shores of his native land. Fierce enemies, buttressed with false treachery, manacled the good fellow in bonds of death. Even so, I recount the well-loved tale of Gunnar because I am still amazed at low-lying Gunnarshólmi, decorated with an all-green garniture, conquering the savage fearful wave on the cold sands.]

For centuries, Icelanders looked to the sagas to reinforce values and guide behaviour, with saga heroes such as Gunnarr acting as “role models” (Helgason 2005, 65). In this poem, Hallgrímsson deliberately selects *Brennu-Njáls saga*, the

illustrious Gunnarr, and the site of Gunnarshólmi and bestows them with a new, political significance and national status: he not only reaffirms these elements as aspects of Icelandic cultural memory but re-envisioning them as indicators of Icelandic identity and nationalism. He does so by reimagining Gunnarr's act of remaining in Iceland "as a patriotic one—a national declaration" (Norðfjörð 14) and transmuting its ideological power onto the supposed location of this event. On the one hand, Hallgrímsson imprints a national value onto this episode—and by extension *Brennu-Njáls saga* itself—with lasting significance: in fact, following Hallgrímsson's work, "Gunnarr's 'return' had become so fully accepted by the Icelanders as a patriotic gesture that the scene—and thereby the saga which contained it—had begun to acquire the status of a national emblem" (Helgason 2005, 74).²¹ At the same time, he locates and condenses this national value in the synthesizing saga-site of Gunnarshólmi.²² In his preface to the poem, Hallgrímsson points out that the local populace identified how "stendur eptir grænn reitur óbrotinn" [still stands an undamaged spot] where "Gunnar frá Hlíðarenda snúið aptur" [Gunnarr from Hlíðarenda turned back] (1838, 32); however, in the poem itself, he builds off of this local memory and reshapes this location into a lasting, reinterpretable symbol of Iceland and Icelandicness, a lieu de mémoire. Through this lieu de mémoire, Hallgrímsson narrates his nation: Iceland's majestic nature, impressive literary tradition of the sagas, and patriotic past coalesce in the still—though barely—visible location of this saga-site, which Hallgrímsson uses to reflect a national self-image that is worthy, unique, and nationalistic. In other words, Hallgrímsson's reinterpretation of Gunnarshólmi redefines the site, its toponym, and its related saga episode in national and nationalistic terms, catalyzing a patriotic Icelandic identity in the process.

Hallgrímsson not only instrumentalizes this saga-site of memory to define his nation but also to catalyze his contemporaries into reclaiming Iceland's supposed former greatness. Hallgrímsson acknowledges the "savage fearful wave on the cold sands" in the area around Gunnarshólmi, that is the erosion and destruction of the once fertile fields caused by the Markafljót river; however, he suggests that Gunnarr—"patriotism personified" (Óskarsson 268)—remains embedded in this landscape due to the fact that the patch of land upon which he fell still remains lush and thus also capable of inspiring similar shows of patriotism such as Hallgrímsson's own poem. Moreover, the golden age that Gunnarr represents—an age of patriotism and virtue—also continues to endure through this site and the cultural memory imprinted upon it. According to Dick Ringle, it is both the material and symbolic nature of Gunnarshólmi that makes Hallgrímsson's call for renewed patriotism effective:

The river of time and change, endlessly flowing, has washed away the glories of Iceland's heroic past, but Gunnar's Holm has survived into the present as the objective correlative of the memory of Gunnar himself: a man of heroism, energy,

virtue, and—above all—unswerving loyalty to the land of his birth and love for its overpowering physical beauty.
(139–40)

As a *lieu de mémoire*, Gunnarshólmi functions on both physical and ideological levels: the site evokes the past but also locates it in a tangible location in the present. By suggesting that a glimmer of Iceland's past greatness persists in this plot of land, Hallgrímsson implies that the glory and patriotism that characterizes Iceland's golden age remains accessible, continuing to characterize an innate Icelandic character and a "glorious destiny" (Smith 51). He attempts to mobilize his countrymen into recovering their nation's "true self" and national destiny (Smith 49)—promised through the persevering site of Gunnarshólmi—through revived nationalism. Simon Halink asserts that the decline of the Icelandic landscape since the Commonwealth Period was commonly attributed to the shortcomings of Iceland's foreign ruler (2018, 808). Ostensibly, for Hallgrímsson, re-attainment of a national golden age—and thus the restoration of Icelandic nature and a true self—would more specifically necessitate renewed Icelandic nationalism in the form of renewed Icelandic autonomy. Hallgrímsson's poem thereby operates as an incitement for his countrymen to restore Icelandic sovereignty in order to enable "material and cultural progress" (Hálfðanarson 2006, 245) rather than allow their nation to stagnate and decay under foreign leadership.

Hallgrímsson's "Gunnarshólmi" uses poetic and physical space to recontextualize Icelandic legend and cultivate cultural memory for nationalist purposes. Building on the work of Jan Assmann, Sophie Bønding asserts that "myths as instantiations of cultural memory shared by a group ... serv[e] two possible functions": they either establish a sense of continuity between past and present or highlight a discontinuity, namely by "presenting the present as deficient in comparison to an idealised, glorious past" (784). "Gunnarshólmi," though drawing on legend rather than myth, utilizes both functions. In terms of discontinuity, Hallgrímsson uses the surrounding area of Gunnarshólmi to show a break between past and present, contrasting the vitality of the autonomous Commonwealth Period with the deterioration caused by foreign leadership. In terms of continuity, through the saga-site, Hallgrímsson creates the sense of an innate, empowered, and patriotic national character consistent with a past golden age. He also implies that this golden age—despite temporary stagnation—remains a part of Iceland's destiny. As the *lieu de mémoire* conveys a distinctive Icelandic spirit as well as the need for political change for Iceland to fulfill its national destiny, Hallgrímsson's instrumentalization of Gunnarshólmi links the call to nationalism to a sense of place as well as to a sense of shared national history. The nationalist discourse located within Gunnarshólmi not only helped mobilize the Icelandic people to support increased Icelandic sovereignty and persuade

Danish officials of Iceland's right and need for this sovereignty but also had a lasting impact on the construction of Icelandic character well into the twentieth century and even today.²³

Furthermore, Hallgrímsson's cultivation likewise had a lasting ideological impact on the site itself, with the poem of "Gunnarshólmi" becoming as inextricable from the location of Gunnarshólmi as even Gunnarr. In this, the poem in question had an even more salient effect on Gunnarshólmi than "Ísland" and related poems did on Þingvellir,²⁴ the former site almost purely dependent on Hallgrímsson's poem for its continued political significance. Despite Gunnarshólmi's clear relation to *Brennu-Njáls saga* in local memory prior to Hallgrímsson's poem, it only rose to prominence as a national, and even touristic, site following—or because of—the poem's publication and popular reception.²⁵ In a sense acting as a recapitulation of Gunnarr's supposed act of patriotism, Hallgrímsson's nationalistic composition overlays, or certainly amplifies, the ideological power of Gunnarr's return to the extent that the lieu de mémoire functions as an encapsulation of the patriotism expressed by both saga hero and national poet, the physical location of Gunnarshólmi and its toponym having become synonymous with Icelandic nationalism.

In the summer of 1841, Hallgrímsson travelled extensively throughout Iceland conducting research for a project on the "Description of Iceland" funded by the Danish government. During this time, he visited Snæfellsnes, the peninsula in which *Eyrbyggja saga* is set, and wrote "Aldarháttur" [On the Spirit of the Age] (1845), a short poem in skaldic meter "kveðið á reið fyrir neðan Fróðá" [composed while riding down below Fróðá] (1989, 133; Ringler 202).²⁶ Echoing "Ísland" and "Gunnarshólmi," in this poem, Hallgrímsson juxtaposes past and present through the synthesizing site of a saga landscape in order to provoke his contemporaries into revitalizing their nation. Likewise, he reinvests an *Íslendingasaga* and a saga landscape with new ideological importance in the process, though recontextualizing *Eyrbyggja saga* rather than *Brennu-Njáls saga* in this case. Interestingly, however, in contrast to his previous poems, beyond referring to the saga stead's name, Fróðá, Hallgrímsson makes no other direct reference to his saga of interest: he does so in order to use the lieu de mémoire of Fróðá to prompt active participation in Icelandic cultural memory and elicit a conscious sense of membership and belonging among his contemporaries to their nation. In Hallgrímsson's poem, Fróðá becomes a site of nation-building, not just an element of Icelandic history and culture, but a reflection of national consciousness.

Known best from *Eyrbyggja saga* as the site of a number of supernatural hauntings, Fróðá was the farm of Þuríður Barkardóttir, who was not only involved in causing these hauntings but also partook in an affair with Björn Ásbrandsson. The first part of Hallgrímsson's poem draws upon a specific episode in *Eyrbyggja saga* when Björn, on his way to Fróðá to visit Þuríður, must take shelter in a cave

after he is assailed by a storm conjured by a sorceress at the behest of Þuríður's husband. Hallgrímsson describes Björn's encounter with the storm:

Hingað gekk hetjan unga
 heiðar um brattar leiðir,
 fanna mundar að finna
 fríða grund í hríð stundum
 (1989, 133)

[The young warrior went here over the steep paths of the heath, in a blizzard sometimes, to meet a lovely “ground of the ‘snows of the hand’” [silver > woman].]

In this portion of the poem, Hallgrímsson characterizes Björn—a renowned warrior and poet—as willing to sacrifice his safety for his lover. Hallgrímsson reimagines this figure as a representative of an Icelandic golden age, both supposedly marked by heroism and vigour. He abruptly contrasts the grandeur of this Icelandic past with the coarseness and passionlessness of his own day:

nú ræðst enginn á engi
 (í ástarbáli fyrr sálast),
 styttubands storð að hitta,
 stýrir priks yfir mýri.
 (1989, 133)

[Now no “steerer of the unshod stick” [man] (formerly one died in the fire of love) undertakes to meet an “earth of the skirt-tie-up band” [woman] over the swamp on the outfield.]

While initially Hallgrímsson avails himself of the site of Fróðá to evoke a supposed Icelandic golden age, he goes on to use it to catalogue Iceland's decline. Giving the saga-site a national dimension, he saps the setting of its former dignity and vitality and exposes the deterioration of the present. As Dick Ringler suggests, “the disparity between past and present ages is not only asserted through outright statement but is also suggested—quite wittily—at the level of style” (Ringler 204). In order to reflect his nation's enervation and degeneration in the modern day, Hallgrímsson substitutes elevated diction for informal, prosaic language, shown, for example, in the shift from “young warrior” to “steerer of the unshod stick [man].”²⁷ Similarly, his choice of kennings mirror this shift. While Hallgrímsson uses a more refined, classical kenning to denote “woman” in the first portion of his poem—“ground of the ‘snows of the hand’” [silver > woman]—he instead chooses his own invented, mundane kenning when describing his own time—“earth of the skirt-tie-up band” [woman]. Through content and form,

Hallgrímsson illustrates how his contemporaries have exchanged a heroic, glorious past for a sobering and unromantic present.

Nonetheless, although Hallgrímsson suggests that Iceland's Saga Age has disappeared and expresses disillusionment with his own time, paradoxically, through the site of Fróðá—"a landscape enlivened by the old stories" and one of the "farms ... still carrying the same names as in the Saga Age" (Halink 2018, 807–8)—he implies that Iceland's golden age still imbues its present and has the potential to shape its future. The site of Fróðá thereby accesses both past and present simultaneously: even while the present can be observed in all of its lackluster disappointment in the landscape, *Eyrbyggja saga*—Iceland's noble and invigorated past—superimposes itself, its memory inextricable from its site. Infusing the lieu de mémoire of Fróðá with not only just cultural but *national* significance, Hallgrímsson uses references to the saga stead as a reminder of past national greatness and heritage as well as of a persistent, admirable Icelandic identity. At the same time, Hallgrímsson also implies that without a national revitalization, Iceland's glory will continue to deteriorate. He suggests that Icelanders must live up to the glory of their inheritance by exhibiting the same passion, nobility, and heroism, perhaps through a passionate and heroic commitment not to a lover but to their nation and its political plight.

Such nation-building is arguably apparent in Hallgrímsson's attempts to instrumentalize the saga-site to re-establish feelings of national belonging. As stated, nowhere in his poem does Hallgrímsson actually discuss *Eyrbyggja saga* directly; he refers only to Fróðá in his subtitle. As Brian S. Osborne argues, place-names are not only "prompts and vehicles for the telling of" stories, but "an expression or manifestation of cultural identity and belonging" (80). In alluding to Fróðá, Hallgrímsson not only "prompts" cultural memory of *Eyrbyggja saga* but attempts to make Icelanders "aware that they constitute a community," a national one (Bønding 784): Icelanders by means of being Icelanders—privy to their own unique national history, saga tradition, and territory—are meant to understand Hallgrímsson's references through the signifier of "Fróðá" alone and, thus, feel a sense of national cohesion and belonging. In essence, through Hallgrímsson's cultivation, the text of *Eyrbyggja saga*, its physical saga-site of Fróðá, as well as the site's toponym all become signs of shared Icelandic nationality. Though Hallgrímsson's reinterpretation of Fróðá perhaps had a less insistent ideological impact than his reinterpretations of Þingvellir and Gunnarshólmi in the long term, the sense of national unification, cultural homogeneity even, engendered through Hallgrímsson's instrumentalization of this site and others like it was significant both in encouraging support for the Icelandic nationalist movement and in justifying Iceland's right in becoming a more self-governing nation-state, as both Danish liberals and Icelandic nationalists at this time believed a people's sense of shared culture and identity should constitute its nationhood.²⁸

Through his re-establishment of sagas-sites such as Þingvellir, Gunnarshólmi, and Fróðá as lieux de mémoire, Hallgrímsson defined and elevated his nation by its unique and impressive lands, legends, literature, and history. He not only exposed a supposedly inherent Icelandic spirit but reaffirmed its distinctiveness and worth. Furthermore, through saga landscapes, where past and present, material and symbolic meet, he demonstrated that an Icelandic golden age characterized by patriotism, affluence, vitality, and autonomy needed to be, and was destined to be, regained. In doing so, Hallgrímsson contributed to the nationalist ideology that would propel the Icelandic independence movement. According to Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “what makes the Icelandic nationalist argumentation worthy of note is how successful it was in convincing the people it needed to convince,” both Icelanders and their foreign ruler (2006, 238). Since the majority of Icelanders, including intellectuals, upper classes, and farmers, despite their class differences, felt that they shared a common history, territory, and cultural background, Hallgrímsson could draw on these elements through recontextualizations of saga-sites to convincingly shape a proud and united national identity and mobilize widespread support for Icelandic nationalism among the Icelandic population. This was further made possible by the popularity of the sagas in Iceland in the nineteenth century as well as by the fact that Iceland also had a history of glorifying its legendary past, which may have also made nineteenth-century Icelanders more receptive to this argumentation.²⁹

Hallgrímsson also furnished Icelandic politicians with justifications for increased Icelandic independence that would appeal to Danish officials. Hallgrímsson’s creation of a national golden age parallels other European cultural productions in service of nineteenth-century nationalist movements. However, what sets the Icelandic independence movement apart to a certain extent, was the receptiveness on the part of some Danish officials to the cultural arguments for increased autonomy advanced by Icelandic nationalists and their supporters. Cultural justifications for Icelandic autonomy arguably proved convincing both for reasons that align with the Romantic nationalist ideology sweeping Europe at the time and for others that are quite unique to this particular case, namely the “transculturality” of Old Norse collective memory (Erll 10).

On the one hand, it would have been difficult for Danish politicians and authorities to completely disregard Iceland’s claims to increased self-governance based on the fact that Danish nationalists subscribed to much of the same liberal and Herderian philosophy as Icelandic nationalists at this time: “Both groups considered the nation-state, unified on the basis of common culture and language, as the state form of the future while complex monarchies, mixing people of various cultural backgrounds under one government, were linked to absolutism and the reactionary politics of the past” (Hálfðanarson 2006, 242). The premier Danish Romanticist, Adam Oehlenschläger, projected notions of an innate Danish spirit, for instance, in “Guldhornene” [The Golden Horns], which appeals to a golden

age of Denmark's past—symbolized by two ancient golden drinking horns found in Danish farmland—to encourage the Danish people to regain their supposedly “lost identity” and glorious destiny (Felcht 107). Oehlenschläger's construction of a distinctive Danish identity based on the memory of an impressive collective past can be seen—like the work of later Danish nationalist N. F. S. Grundtvig³⁰—as creating the foundations of the nationalist ideology later implemented in the shift from absolute to constitutional monarchy. Such ideology is evident, for example, in the argumentation of Danish liberal politicians who, “inspired by the spirit of the French Revolution and romanticism of the time ... emphasized cultural separateness of the Danish nation, which directly because of its uniqueness should gain self-authority by democratic representation” (Bergmann 39). Yet, by reaffirming the notion that each nation innately possesses a distinct character, that state and spirit are intrinsically tied, and that a nation's progress depended upon its self-governance, Oehlenschläger not only helped form the basis of Danish nationalism—these notions becoming widespread in Denmark over the course of the nineteenth century—but inspired Icelandic poets such as Hallgrímsson to use native myths and legends for a similar purpose and even in much the same way. Significantly, when Icelandic politicians such as Jón Sigurðsson echoed and implemented the nationalist, Herderian sentiments expressed by poets like Hallgrímsson, arguing that Iceland's “particular nature and conditions” entitled it to greater sovereignty and that “the country should be allowed to govern itself as much as possible, in order for the great energy, which is inherent in the country but lies dormant, to be revived and to mature,” the majority of Danish politicians and officials—who depended on these notions for their own sense of nation—were amenable (Hálfðanarson 2006, 246).³¹

Nonetheless, it was not just the acknowledgement of Iceland's unique national spirit that caused Danish politicians to sympathize with Iceland's cultural justifications for sovereignty. Arguably, the principal factor was a shared sense of Old Norse memory between the nations and, concomitantly, Denmark's investment in Iceland's cultural contributions, its language, its manuscripts, its myths and legends, and even its land. The Old Norse sagas and *Eddas* were recorded by Icelanders, written in Old Icelandic (a language closely resembling Modern Icelandic), and preserved in medieval Icelandic manuscripts. Yet, these texts reached back into the legendary history of not only Iceland, but all of Scandinavia. Danish nationalists—as well as other Scandinavians—relied upon materials such as the *konungasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, and *Eddas* for their own “cultural vindication” (Loftsdóttir 92)³² and to prompt their own political shift towards increased representation. As such, Danish politicians highly respected Iceland and its cultural contributions,³³ and the nation's land was even seen as an access point to a shared Scandinavian golden age.

In fact, *prior* to Hallgrímsson's work, Adam Oehlenschläger approbated Iceland's connection to a glorious past in works such as the aforementioned

“Island” [Iceland] (1823), and prominent Danish politician Orla Lehmann—who played a major role in Denmark’s transition into a constitutional monarchy—extolled Iceland in 1832:

Men ligesom indefroset mellem hine fjerne Iisfjelde, hvordan Tidens Storme ei naaede, vedligeholdt det [Oldtidens Liv] sig i næsten uforandret Reenhed paa Island, saa at vi i det see en levende Oldtid, et talende Billede af Fortidens Liv—Derfor maa det islandske Folk være hver Skandinaver kjært, og vi ville i de nuværende Islænderes Character, Levemaade og Sædvaner vist kunne finde Træk af vor Oldtids Physiognomie, som vi forgjæves ville søge i vor Hedeolds henmuldrede Ruiner eller livløse Annaler.

(Lehmann 1832, 7, 524, cited in Oslund 327)

[But, as though frozen among these distant icy mountains, where the storms of time never reached, it [ancient life] is preserved in Iceland in an almost unaltered purity, so we can see there a living past, a rich picture of past life. Therefore the Icelandic people must be dear to every Scandinavian, and we will find in the present-day Icelandic character, lifestyle and customs, the trace of our past physiognomy, for which we would look in vain in our own moldering ruins and lifeless annals.]

(Oslund 327)

For Danish nationalists such as Lehmann—as well as for figures like Oehlenschläger—Iceland’s landscapes and culture kept the glorious “Oldtidens Liv” [ancient life] of Scandinavia alive, acting as a reminder of a past Scandinavian golden age even while Danish landscapes had deteriorated in his own day. The Danish state’s indebtedness to these distinctly Icelandic traditions and their vision of Iceland as a pipeline to Denmark’s golden age arguably made Danish politicians and authorities more easily persuaded by cultural arguments for Icelandic self-governance and more prone to concessions as the Icelandic nationalist movement built on such argumentation was instrumentalized by Icelandic figures such as Hallgrímsson and Jón Sigurðsson over the course of the nineteenth century.

The first Danish concession, King Christian VIII’s restoration of the Alþingi in 1843, reflects the significance of cultural considerations in the Icelandic nationalist movement. As early as 1840, the king—who was “suspected of liberal tendencies”—expressed the desire to offer a “gesture towards the remote speakers of the ancient Danish language” through the re-establishment of the Alþingi at Þingvellir (Karlsson 2000, 205), as was called for at this time by the Fjölnismenn. Despite the potential risk of offering a concession to one dependency while the Danish duchies Schleswig and Holstein experienced unrest, the king nonetheless elected to make this allowance out of respect for an idealized Icelandic past and culture rather than out of any necessity.³⁴ A later position taken by Lehmann

likewise reveals the impact of cultural justifications on the gradual development of Icelandic independence. Perhaps unsurprising given his interest in a more democratic government in Denmark, Lehmann outspokenly supported further concessions of increased Icelandic autonomy. In a 1869 parliamentary debate, he argued that due to “the appreciation for what all the Nordic people owe them for faithfully preserving the remnants of the past, from which we all must obtain our future hope,” Iceland deserved “a status in the state to which it would be difficult to find any parallels” (Hálfðanarson 2006, 244; Lehmann 1869, 51–52). Lehmann, like many Danish politicians, did not support full independence for Iceland in part due to “pride” (Karlsson 2000, 216) and the fact that Iceland “seemed to require substantial financial aid from Denmark” (Hálfðanarson 2006, 245). Nonetheless, based on cultural argumentation, namely Iceland’s unique character as well as its preservation of and physical link to Old Norse literature and memory, Lehmann—and, in fact, many Danish politicians and officials—believed that Iceland had legitimate claims to increased autonomy. As such, the Danish state gradually granted Iceland more autonomy: first, reinstating the Alþingi in 1843, then granting Alþingi legislative power and a constitution in 1874, then increasing Home Rule in 1904, and finally recognizing Iceland as a state in union with Denmark in 1918, though Iceland only became a republic in 1944 during the Nazi occupation of Denmark.

In a sense, Hallgrímsson not only cultivated lieux de mémoire in Iceland but exploited the vision of Iceland as a lieu de mémoire for Denmark. The power of the resulting nationalist ideology engendered by his work can thus be seen as depending upon, or at least reflecting, the idea of memory as transcultural, or as “continually moving across and beyond ... territorial and social borders” (Erll 2011, 10). Moreover, as previously suggested, in this case, memory can also be seen as “multidirectional” (Rothberg 10). Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney explain that multidirectional memory “reveals how the memory narratives central to the identity of one group can, in travelling, help model the narrative of another group in a manner that is mutually-supportive” (10). In the eyes of Danish nationalists, Iceland’s cultural memory constituted not only its own self-image, but part of Danish cultural memory and a Danish self-image as well. This in turn caused these Danish figures to recognize and validate a worthy and distinctive Icelandic identity. Icelandic nationalists such as Hallgrímsson further cultivated this notion of a worthy and distinctive Icelandic identity but instrumentalized Iceland’s unique national consciousness and its impressive attributes—its land, literature, and history—in service of greater Icelandic sovereignty: he infused his countrymen with nationalist sentiment and drive and, in effect, also capitalized on the shared cultural memory between Iceland and its foreign ruler and Denmark’s consequent respect for Iceland to render Danish officials sympathetic to the Icelandic cause. Though it took time, when Icelandic politicians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries utilized the nationalist rhetoric and cultural

justifications that Hallgrímsson helped create, they were eventually successful in persuading Danish politicians and officials to grant Iceland greater self-governance.

Significantly, nationalists in countries such as Ireland who cultivated similar cultural arguments for independence from England proved convincing only to domestic populations. Figures such as Easter 1916 insurrectionist Pádraic Pearse and, less radically, literary revivalists W. B. Yeats and George William Russell engendered an empowered and separate sense of Irish identity through the revival of the Irish language and Celtic legend. Yet, while their works helped mobilize local support for Irish nationalism—in Pearse’s case, even prompting rebellion—their cultural argumentation failed to resonate with their foreign ruler. Unlike the Danish state, which relied upon Icelandic culture for its own nation-building, England had no such investment in its dependency’s cultural accomplishments and heritage. This discrepancy may account for why the English government was less prone to granting Ireland increased sovereignty, failing to grant concessions or to implement Home Rule even after finally passing the Home Rule Act in 1914, eventually resulting in the Irish War of Independence. The transcultural memory shared between Iceland and Denmark, in contrast, produced a certain amount of sympathy and respect lacking in the Irish case and, thus, the unique circumstances necessary for a peaceful, gradual shift towards Icelandic independence.

By re-establishing the saga-sites of the *Íslendingasögur* as lieux de mémoire, Hallgrímsson helped create the nationalist ideology that precipitated political change for his nation in the nineteenth century and beyond. In vitally contributing to the ideological stages of his country’s nationalist movement, Hallgrímsson partook in a process observable in other European nations at around the same time, including even Iceland’s foreign ruler. What is unique about the Icelandic case, however, is not that Danish Romantic nationalists directly influenced Icelandic Romantic nationalists, that they both recontextualized medieval texts for nationalist purposes, or that they both ascribed to similar Herderian philosophy. What is unique is the fact that both instrumentalized Old Norse cultural memory that was felt to be preserved in Icelandic materials—namely, its manuscripts and landscapes—for their nation-building processes and that Denmark’s dependence upon Iceland for its own self-image and nationalist movement in turn affected the success of the Icelandic independence movement. Other European nationalists using cultural justifications for their independence movements found considerably less success when appealing to foreign rulers who had no personal investment in their cultural attributes. The transcultural memory imbued in Iceland’s landscapes and literature, and glorified by Danish and Icelandic Romantic nationalists, was one of the key factors that made the difference.

NOTES

1. As such, Hallgrímsson's cultural productions align with Jan Assmann's definition of cultural memory as "that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image"; see J. Assmann (132).
2. The term "nationalism" used throughout this paper refers specifically to modern nationalism, processes of nation-building reflecting "the wish for ethnic and political boundaries to coincide" (Karlsson 1995, 34), which took on a particular urgency in nineteenth-century Europe. As Gunnar Karlsson suggests, "in Scandinavia generally, the separatist solution has prevailed" in response to the "problem of nationalism" (1995, 34). "Icelandic nationalism," then, as discussed by Karlsson as well as in this paper, denotes significant political implications: it suggests national identity-formation as well as separatist developments. Nonetheless, this is not to say that collective identity-formation did not occur prior to this period in Iceland. After all, the sagas themselves were sites of cultural identity long before the nineteenth century; see, for example, Jakobsson (25–40), who illustrates how the term *Norðrlönd* in Old Icelandic medieval texts, including sagas, helped identify Northern European people of that time with certain cultural traits and a shared self-image. Such developments inform Hallgrímsson's own cultivations of Icelandic cultural memory and identity, with the distinction that his developments further a separatist, modern nation-building agenda.
3. This is not to say Hallgrímsson's poems were not also distributed—and influential—to the Icelandic public. This is evident, for instance, in how the nationalistic poem "Til herra Páls Gaimard" [To Mr. Paul Gaimard] (1839) was sung widely among Icelanders shortly after its composition; see Ringler (166).
4. Most notably "Ísland," as analyzed later in this essay.
5. For extensive discussion of the significance of language in Icelandic nation-building, see Hálfðanarson (2005, 55–66).
6. For more on multidirectional memory—as opposed to competitive memory—in enabling mutually-supporting processes of identity-formations—see Rothberg (4–18).
7. In tracing "Iceland's Ethnogenesis," Verena Höfig acknowledges the formation of the Alþingi as one of many "important markers in Icelanders' cultural memory, as condensed forms of traditions, values, and expressions of an accumulated historical heritage" in texts such as *Íslendingabók* (125).
8. While the Fjölismenn pursued the restoral of the Alþingi, they were not the first nineteenth-century figures to do so, Baldvin Einarsson (1801–1833), for example, had paved the way in this endeavour.
9. Excerpts from Hallgrímsson's poetry will be accompanied by literal translations by Shaun F. D. Hughes, unless otherwise indicated.
10. In Chapter 25, Skarpheðinn is depicted as "øruggr" [fearless] and full of "styrkr" [strength] (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 70). Hallgerðr says Gunnarr "vaskastr er á Íslandi" [is the bravest man in Iceland] in Chapter 35 (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 91).
11. In Chapter 56, Gizurr, Geirr, and Njáll are described as "inna vitrustu manna" [the wisest men] (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 145).

12. Hermannsson not only discusses Þingvellir as the place of Iceland's heart, but connects it with national memory as well as with developments of Icelandic nationalism into the twentieth century and even beyond; see Hermannsson (21–45). Halink, drawing on Hermannsson's discussion, likewise refers to Þingvellir as the "location of the nation's 'heart'"; see Halink (2014, 216).
13. The notion that Iceland was settled during Haraldr *hárfagri* Hálfðanarson's reign, ostensibly because of his tyranny, was first proposed in *Heimskringla*, which is attributed to Snorri Sturluson; see Sturluson (117–18). For further discussion; see Sigurðsson (2014, 176).
14. In "Ísland" as well as many of his other works—including "Gunnarshólmi" and "Aldarháttur" discussed further in this article—Hallgrímsson draws on the tradition of *Heimsósómakvæði* (Poetry on Worldly Folly), a type of Icelandic literature that juxtaposes past and present to expose the magnificence of the former and the "folly" of the latter. *Heimsósómakvæði* became increasingly prominent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and continued into the nineteenth century, used here by Hallgrímsson to further his political, nationalistic agenda.
15. For further discussion of Herder's "anti-imperialistic" contentions; see Schmidt (408).
16. The earlier version of Oehlenschläger's "Island" begins "Island! hellige Øe!" [Iceland! holy isle!] (1805, 1: 233–36). As suggested by scholars such as Helga Kress, Hallgrímsson most likely drew inspiration for his own poem from Oehlenschläger's shortened revision, "Island! Oldtidens Øe" [Iceland! Ancient isle] (1823, 1:182–83); see Kress (28n. 56). The 1823 version was re-printed in the last collection of Oehlenschläger's poems to be issued before his death (1845, 21).
17. Translation mine.
18. It is worth noting that the patriotism expressed in Hallgrímsson's poem echoes that of Bjarni Thorarensen's "Íslands minni," though Thorarensen's work does not as directly point to a political motivation; see Thorarensen (1: 27–28).
19. For a detailed account of the reburial of Hallgrímsson; see Helgason 2003.
20. For more on these national events at Þingvellir as well as the site's continued status as a *lieu de mémoire*; see Hálfðanarson (2000, 5–29).
21. Furthermore, Hallgrímsson's work arguably contributed both to the perception of *Brennu-Njáls saga* as a national text and, more specifically, to the 1844 reprint of the saga published in Iceland and not in Copenhagen as the first edition had been.
22. As Hallgrímsson reshapes this landscape to fit his own ideological, nationalistic concerns in this manner, as Glauser suggests, his poem is ultimately "repräsentativ ... für die nationalromantische Füllung von an sich leerem Raum mit historischer, nationaler, kultureller Sinnhaftigkeit" [representative of the national romantic filling of empty space with historical, national, cultural meaning] (Glauser 2011, 62). Translation mine.
23. For more on the lasting impact of this reading of "Gunnarr's 'return,'" as well as *Brennu-Njáls saga* more generally; see Helgason (2005, 74–80).
24. As discussed, Hallgrímsson certainly helped invest the site of Þingvellir with its political power. At the same time, evocation of Þingvellir does not as inevitably connote Hallgrímsson's poems as does evocation of Gunnarshólmi.

25. For example, just decades after the poem's publication, Kristian Kålund (1844–1919) travelled to the site of Gunnarshólmi and made reference to Hallgrímsson's poem; see Kålund (256). This connection persists today; see Hjálmarsson (176–77).
26. The title of the poem, "Aldarháttur," alludes to the well-known poem of the same name by Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674), which, following the tradition of Heimsósómakvæði, places the majesty of the past in opposition to contemporary follies; see further Ringler (203). The classical skaldic meter used—the *draught* variant of *dróttkvætt*—likewise brings the past into confrontation with the present.
27. By "steerer of the unshod stick [man]," Hallgrímsson refers to someone like a shepherd or peasant who does not have the wherewithal to own a stout walking staff with an iron tip (*broddstafur*) but has to be content with a thin and fragile unshod stick (*prik*).
28. For further discussion on Icelandic and Danish politicians' attitudes towards greater Icelandic autonomy and their subscription to liberal, democratic, Herderian, and nationalist ideals; see Hálfðanarson (2006, 240–46).
29. Gunnar Karlsson identifies Icelandic nationalism as widespread at this time due to the support for increased Icelandic autonomy shown by farmers at the National Assembly of 1851. For further discussion on how Iceland's "unusual social mobility" translated to pervasive support for its nationalist movement as well as on how Iceland had a tradition of idealizing its saga tradition; see Karlsson (1995, 33–62).
30. For analysis concerning how Grundtvig used Old Norse mythology as the basis for a Danish identity and a vehicle for social cohesion; see Bønding (782–87).
31. For additional discussion on Herderian philosophy and Jón Sigurðsson, particularly in relation to *Ný félagsrit*; see Hughes ("Herder's Influence" 2020, 385–86). For example, as Hughes suggests, *Ný félagsrit* contributor Sigurður Melsted (1791–1861) espouses Herderian principles concerning national identity in his article "Um þjóðerni" [Concerning Nationality].
32. Prior to the nineteenth century, Scandinavian countries utilized these Icelandic materials for political purposes. For example, Denmark and Sweden both depended on Icelandic manuscripts to prove their supposed preeminence over the other in the seventeenth century; see Malm (101–8).
33. Hálfðanarson too identifies Denmark's esteem for Iceland's culture as an important factor in Iceland's successful, and peaceful, independence movement; see Hálfðanarson (2001, 9).
34. In fact, this decision went against the recommendations of King Christian's VIII Chancery; see Karlsson (2000, 205).

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