

## **A Saga for Dinner: Landscape and Nationality in Icelandic Literature**

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Iceland is renowned for its natural landscapes, which volcanic activity and glaciers formed. They feature extraordinary phenomena, such as hot springs and tremendous waterfalls and are the main reason for Iceland's popularity as a tourist destination. The absence of man-made structures is commonly regarded as a prerequisite for the tourists' aesthetic experience (Gunnarsson and Gunnarsson 62). Compared to other European countries, Iceland's population of 317,000 is rather small. The central highlands, which constitute the largest part of the country, are almost completely uninhabited.

Perceptions of landscapes vary in different cultures and even within one culture. They are moreover subject to historical change, as different ideas and ideals are projected on landscapes (Kirchhoff and Trepl 15). One should therefore not ignore that for Icelanders these landscapes are not 'natural' in the meaning of an absence of culture. On the contrary, they are intimately connected to Icelandic history and national identity. A survey from 1997 named the landscape as the most important national symbol in distinguishing Icelanders from other nations, even before the flag and the language (Árnason 112).

Projects which are based on an exploitation of Iceland's natural resources and which involve major changes of the appearance of landscapes raise therefore the question of how they affect national identity. This is particularly visible in ongoing controversies about Iceland's potential for hydropower and industrialisation through the running of aluminium smelters.

Aluminium production is a very power-intensive industry. As energy prices are comparatively low in Iceland and hydropower is commonly regarded as a climate friendly way of producing electricity, Iceland, with its great number of glacier rivers and waterfalls, seems to be an ideal location for this heavy industry. In return, the industry can create job opportunities and income in the country's rural regions. Apart from ecological consequences of such projects, there is also an obvious impact on the appearance of landscapes. As reservoir lakes are necessary for ensuring a steady water flow through the turbines of the appertaining power plants, dams are built and the area behind them is flooded. Waterfalls disappear when they are redirected into tubes for utilisation of their power potential.

Plans to use Iceland's abundant hydropower resources for industrialising and modernising the country had been around since the beginning of the 20th century. These were not realised on a large scale until 1970, when the power station Búrfellsvirkjun and Iceland's first aluminium smelter in Straumsvík

were opened (Hálfðanarson and Karlsdóttir 175). Since then, there have been fierce discussions about plans for a further expansion of electricity production. These were completed between 2001 and 2006 in the controversy over the so-called Kárahnjúkar project.

This project included the construction of Europe's largest dam in the eastern highlands, which with its height of 198 meters is also Iceland's highest building. The water from the reservoir lake covers 57 square kilometers of ecologically sensitive land. The electricity thereof is used by a large aluminium smelter, operated by the American company Alcoa in a small town on the east fjords.

The Kárahnjúkar debate was heated up through the book *Draumalandið. Sjálfshjálparbók handa hræddri þjóð* (*Dreamland. A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation*) by the Icelandic writer Andri Snær Magnason.<sup>1</sup> Published in 2006, it has enormously influenced the debate over Kárahnjúkar in particular and over the exploitation of Iceland's natural resources in general. *Draumalandið* has been described as an awakening of ecological consciousness and as the beginning of a new, widespread environmental movement (Snæbjörnsson 464-466).<sup>2</sup>

But increased awareness of ecological consequences forms only part of the background of *Draumalandið*. Beyond that, the book draws heavily on Icelandic national self-perception in connection to distinct views of nature and landscape. These views in turn have been strongly influenced by Iceland's literary tradition and have developed in correlation with the country's political history.

In the following, I will elaborate the importance of the literary tradition for the contemporary perception of landscape in Iceland. This tradition began with the medieval saga literature, which in the 19th century became linked up to a nationalist view of Icelandic history. A strong focus on national independence and control over the country's natural resources have since then been central elements of Icelandic political debates. Magnason's book *Draumalandið* shows exemplarily how even in contemporary Icelandic literature such a nationalist perspective is combined with a marked appreciation of the country's literary tradition as an argument for preserving Iceland's landscapes.

In historiography, the Icelandic society's past is traditionally divided into three periods, which are deduced from the respective status of independence: A golden age of colonisation and Commonwealth from 870 until 1262; a dark age

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<sup>1</sup> An English translation of *Draumalandið* was published in 2008. As it in part differs considerably from the Icelandic original, in the following all translations from *Draumalandið* are my own and based on the original publication. The same applies to all Icelandic and Old Icelandic sources cited in this article.

<sup>2</sup> *Draumalandið* has even received international attention. In 2010, Magnason was awarded the KAIROS price by the German Alfred Toepfer foundation for his environmental commitment. In 2009, *Draumalandið* was adapted into a film, which since then has been shown on several international film festivals. The book was also translated into German in 2011.

under foreign rule until the 18th century; and a hard but successful struggle for independence afterwards. This tripartite division is still used in recent historical scholarship (Karlsson 2).

The colonisation of the previously uninhabited island began in the 870s predominantly from Norway. It is said to have been completed in 930, when a central legislative and judicial assembly for the whole island, the Althing (*alþingi*), was established. The Icelandic society constituted no democracy in contemporary understanding, but it was in any case an anomaly in medieval Europe, as it was not subject to a king.

Christianisation and the establishment of a church organisation, which began around the turn of the millenium, were the premises for the development of literacy in Iceland. In heathen times, only runes were known, but these were not suitable for writing longer texts and very few runic inscriptions have been found in Iceland. Already in the early 12th century, two vernacular texts that depict the time of colonisation were composed. One is *Íslendingabók* (*Book of the Icelanders*), a short historical survey written by the priest Ari Þorgilsson, the other is *Landnámabók* (*Book of Settlements*), which describes the discovery of Iceland and lists the first settlers – the *landnámsmenn* – in all districts of the country.

From these beginnings, the so-called saga literature developed. In Icelandic, the word *saga* (pl. *sögur*) can denote any narrative, oral or written, regardless of its content. In literary scholarship, however, the term is first and foremost used for written Old Norse narratives from the middle of the 12th to the end of the 14th century. The content of these sagas is of great variety; from lives of kings to fanciful stories full of supernatural beings and magical items. The *Íslendingasögur* (*sagas of Icelanders*), which in English often are called *family sagas*, are best known and of greatest relevance in our context. The main protagonists in this group of roughly 35 to 40 texts are Icelanders and the setting is usually Viking-age Iceland, from about 870 to 1050. All *Íslendingasögur* are preserved as anonymous texts in later manuscripts, but the majority seems to date from the 13th century. Most of the protagonists are historical persons, who are also named in *Landnámabók*. Many of these narratives begin in Norway and describe the emigration to Iceland before developing the main plot. They often center around conflicts which increase gradually in their effects, with revenge and outlawry as very frequent motives. Honor and heroic behaviour are shown as standards of conduct in the saga time, and the depicted society seems to be quite wealthy. Together, *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendinga sögur* shape significantly the image we have of the colonisation period and the Icelandic Commonwealth.

Many of the sagas maintain that the first settlers left Norway because they were not willing to bow to king Haraldr hárfagri (*Fairhair*), who is said to have united Norway under one ruler for the first time. The 14th century *Harðar saga* gives a summary as follows: “Most settlers came to Iceland in the days of

Haraldr Fairhair, because men did not endure his oppression and tyranny, especially those who were of high descent and proud attitude and who were well-off, and they preferred leaving their property instead of enduring attack and iniquity, by neither the king nor any other man” (*Harðar saga* 3).<sup>3</sup> Today, most scholars are convinced that this is rather a later founding myth than reliable historical information and that there had been other reasons for the emigration of so many Scandinavians during the Viking age. Nevertheless, the image the *Íslendingasögur* draw was later to become very influential when questions of national sovereignty were raised.

The Old Norse texts also describe how the previously unsettled island became a cultural landscape through the naming of places, either induced by natural features or by remarkable events. For Icelanders most placenames are still understandable in their original meaning. According to *Landnámabók*, Iceland received its present name when one of its discoverers, the Norwegian viking Flóki Vilgerðarson, climbed up on a high mountain and saw a fjord full of drift ice: “Therefore they called the land Iceland, as it has been called ever since”<sup>4</sup> (*Íslendingabók Landnámabók* 28). The islands Vestmannaeyjar (*islands of the men from the west*) near Iceland’s southern coast were named when some insurgent Irish slaves, the *Vestmenn*, were slain there. The events described in the *Íslendingasögur* cover almost every part of the country, both the lowland and the highlands. Thus most places are associated with narratives about the time of the Commonwealth.

The sagas give no detailed insight into how the *landnámsmenn* perceived the Icelandic landscape, but they often describe natural conditions which apparently had deteriorated already at the time of writing. For example, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, one of the best known *Íslendingasögur*, maintains that during colonisation there had been vast forests between the highlands and the coast. Seals and whales were easy to hunt, as they were not acquainted with humans, and the sea and the rivers were full of fish. There was an abundance of birds’ eggs and salmon, and grain farming was possible.

This is not necessarily an idealisation of the time of colonisation, but probably rather an expression of a consciousness that environmental conditions had changed noticeably since then. There is evidence of birchwoods having covered about one quarter of the country, but these were almost completely cut down soon (Friðriksson 171). Grain farming had been practiced in the beginning, but through a deterioration of the climate this had soon to be abandoned (Gunnarsson and Gunnarsson 57).

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<sup>3</sup> “Á dögum Haralds ins hárfagra byggðist mest Ísland, því at menn þoldu eigi ánauð hans ok ofríki, einkanliga þeir, sem váru stórrar ættar ok mikillar lundar, en áttu góða kosti, ok vildu þeir heldr flýja eignir sínar en þola ágang ok ójafnað, eigi heldr konungi en öðrum manni.”

<sup>4</sup> “Því kölluðu their landit Ísland, sem þat hefir síðan heitit.”

What we can establish as a fact is that the saga literature depicts the wish for freedom from suppression as the main reason for the colonisation of Iceland, that it describes both a favourable environment and how Iceland became a cultural landscape through the process of naming. As we will see, these descriptions were later to form the foundation of a belief that the time of colonisation had been a golden age.

In 13th century, however, the shortcomings of the Icelandic Commonwealth became noticeable. Power was more and more concentrated in the hands of a few mighty families who fought bloody battles against each other. During this time, the Norwegian king gained considerable influence in Iceland, and in 1262 the Commonwealth was abolished. Iceland submitted to the king, who appointed a governor for the country.

When Norway went into a personal union under the Danish king in 1381, this meant for a long time no major changes for the Icelanders, as Denmark was not interested much in its peripheral colonies. Only with the reformation in the 16th century, the ties binding Iceland to Denmark became stronger. In 1550, the king ordered the beheading of the last catholic bishop in Iceland, Jón Arason, for having resisted the establishment of Lutheranism in Iceland. In nationalist historiography, the reformation in Iceland was (and partially still is today) regarded not as a religious question, but foremost as a struggle between Icelanders and Danes (Karlsson 132).

From 1602 until 1787 a trade monopoly was in effect, which restricted all Icelandic trade to Danish citizens, thus shutting out British and German merchants. This led to a famine in the 1750s, when the Danish merchants did not import enough grain to Iceland. Icelandic home rule dwindled more and more with the introduction of absolutism in the 1660s. The Althing lost almost all relevance and was finally abolished in 1799.

Additionally, several catastrophes hit Iceland in the 18th century: A smallpox epidemic killed more than a quarter of the population, unusually cold weather and an eruption of the volcano, Katla, caused a famine in the 1750s, and a tremendous eruption of the Lakagígjar in June 1783, which lasted for about eight months, devastated large areas of Iceland, killed about 75% of the livestock and caused a great famine, in which one fifth of the Icelanders starved.

The hardships of the 18th century led to the conclusion that the whole era since the end of the Commonwealth had been a dark age. Contemporary scholars relativise the role of foreign oppression in causing the perceived degeneration of economy, society and culture. Nevertheless, the decline is still commonly first and foremost regarded as a consequence of the loss of independence in the 13th century (Karlsson 191). This view was strengthened by nationalism, which in the 19th century became an influential movement among Icelandic students. They became acquainted with nationalist thoughts in Copenhagen and soon applied them to the situation of their home country. They contrasted the desolate state of present Icelandic society with the country's

glorious past, as it was described in the sagas, whose historical reliability was not doubted (Helgason 75).

One of the key players in the nationalistic struggle for independence was the poet Jónas Hallgrímsson. With some other Icelanders he founded in 1835 the journal *Fjölnir* with the intention to arouse a stronger patriotism in Iceland. Many of Jónas' best known poems were published in *Fjölnir*. They are characterised by a connection of love for the home country's landscapes, glorification of the past and the claim for national sovereignty.

A good example is the poem *Ísland*, which was included in the first issue of *Fjölnir*. It begins with the lines, "Iceland! Fortunate and prosperous snow-white mother! / Where are your fame, freedom and best spirit?"<sup>5</sup> The land was "beautiful and free"<sup>6</sup> when "the famous forefathers and heroes of good freedom came."<sup>7</sup> In those days, heroes rode through the land, such as Gunnar and Skarphéðinn from the popular *Njáls saga*, and "decorated ships floated at the coast with the finest crews, bringing the goods home."<sup>8</sup> This greatness and prosperity was then contrasted with to the depressing present, when people no longer showed the heroism of old. The land is still beautiful, but the former site of the Althing lies deserted and becomes overgrown by heather and blueberries: "Thus the forefathers' fame has fallen into oblivion and helplessness!"<sup>9</sup> (Hallgrímsson 21-22).

The view of landscape in *Ísland* can be traced back to the theory of culture of the German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who saw human history as a rational continuation of natural history. A landscape is cultivated and shaped by the people who inhabit it, but they are in turn influenced in their cultural development by the landscape. Thus historically every culture forms an unity which encompasses both man and nature and which is unique, as every nation has specific dispositions and every landscape craves adaption and offers different possibilities of utilisation. The beauty of a landscape correlates with the degree of perfection of the culture of the people living in it (Kirchhoff and Trepl 39-40).

As portrayed in *Ísland*, the unity of culture and landscape was a fact during the Commonwealth, expressed both in the beauty of nature and in the magnanimity of the people. Under foreign rule this unity had become dissolved on the part of culture, which had degenerated. But the landscape in its magnificence and beauty still reminds of the unity of old and can thus contribute to an enhancement on the part of the people. Thus, the struggle for

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<sup>5</sup> "Ísland! farsælda-frón og hagsælda hrímhvíta móðir! / Hvar er þín fornaldar frægð, frelsið og manndáðin bezt?"

<sup>6</sup> "Fagurt og frítt."

<sup>7</sup> "Komu feðurnir frægu og frjálsræðis hetjurnar góðu."

<sup>8</sup> "Skrautbúin skip fyrir landi flutu með friðasta lið, færandi varninginn heim."

<sup>9</sup> "Sona er feðranna frægð fallin í gleymsku og dá!"

independence could be regarded as being naturally embedded in the national character of the Icelanders.

A first success for the nationalists was the reestablishment of the Althing in 1845 as a representative assembly with limited rights. Several steps towards increased sovereignty followed, and in 1918, the Act of Union was signed. It turned Iceland into a separate state in a personal union with Denmark, with an own flag, but neutral and without military forces. The contract could be prolonged or terminated by both sides after a certain period. Consequently, Iceland was proclaimed a republic in 1944. But the struggle for independence did not end with this. “The fear of losing the national sovereignty has been one of the most pervasive characteristics of the Icelandic political discourse ever since Iceland became a sovereign state in 1918” (Hálfðanarson, “From Dependence to Sovereignty” 124).

This applies especially to the usage of the country’s natural resources, which are commonly regarded as the main foundation of the economy. A good example is the Icelandic fishing industry, which developed rapidly during the 20th century. Ships from other European countries had been fishing in the waters around Iceland’s coasts since the Middle Ages. Iceland came therefore into conflict with Great Britain, when it gradually extended its fishing limits from four to 200 miles between 1952 and 1975. This led to the so-called ‘Cod Wars,’ as Britain did not accept the expulsion of its fishing fleets and even sent war ships to protect them. In the end, Britain gave in and left Icelandic waters.

Yet the fear of loosing control over Iceland’s natural resources and of thus endangering national sovereignty has not diminished. Until the financial crisis of 2008, this fear had been one of Iceland’s main reasons for not entering the European Union. Long before ecological problems gained wider public attention, this anxiety was the main objection against hydroelectric projects, which would give foreign companies substantial influence in Iceland (Hálfðarson, “Hver á sér fögra föðurland” 326). It also appears as a principal argument in *Draumalandið*, “One can say without exaggeration that Iceland’s most impressive pearls of nature have been on clearance sale during the last 30 years without explaining to the nation what was on sale and what the energy was to be used for”<sup>10</sup> (Magnason 186).

Magnason criticises the belief of many Icelanders that their small country does not have the power to stand on its own feet, but needs someone from outside who offers a solution to its problems and ensures economic prosperity (150). In the past decades, this hope has been tied to aluminium production, but Magnason warns that the subsequent total dependence on mighty foreign companies, which in many parts of the world have a history of human rights abuses, environmental devastation and corruption, will be very dangerous for

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<sup>10</sup> “Öfgalaust má segja að helstu náttúruperlur Íslands hafi verið á brunaútsölu síðustu 30 ár án þess að þjóðinni hafi verið gerð grein fyrir hvað var til sölu eða í hvað orkan átti að fara.”

Iceland's sovereignty (202). A neo-colonialism through power stations and aluminium smelters would therefore not be better than the classical colonialism under the Danish rulers, who equally saw the country above all as a source of cheap raw materials (55). Thus, Iceland's industrialisation is "a threat to the future and independence of Iceland and to the nation's self-perception"<sup>11</sup> (198).

If Icelanders regard economical efficiency as superior principle, this is a heritage from the colonial period according to Magnason. Such a mentality disdains in its onesidedness both extraordinary cultural artefacts, such as Iceland's medieval literature, and the beauty of its landscapes (100). Farreaching plans from the 1970s to almost completely reshape the Icelandic landscape both in the highlands and the lowland in order to produce electricity on a large scale, and thus being able to compete with nuclear power in other countries, Magnason discusses that

through acknowledging such a narrow measurement of value we create our own poverty. Wealth is not measured in money, rather in whether people are able to give their life, environment and culture meaning and worth. Insight into beauty, biological diversity or values which are not measured is close akin to literacy and appreciation for history, archaeological finds, language, the arts und even human lives. A nation that is not able to appreciate phenomena such as Mývatn and Þjórsárver and cannot recognise such values, is like an Italian who regards the Colosseum only as convenient material for road building. Through appreciating the Colosseum solely due to its weight in stone or understating the worth of the place would mean simultaneously obliterating meaning and values. Through playing down the value of Þjórsárver or putting it on the top of the list of planned hydropower projects has been played down the worth and value of Iceland. (166)<sup>12</sup>

The lake Mývatn and the wetland area Þjórsárver are here compared to man-made architecture from the Roman Empire. What first seems like an inappropriate equation becomes clearer when viewed upon the background of Herder's philosophy: if nature and culture form a unified entity and the beauty of the one correlates with the status of greatness of the other, the extraordinarily beautiful landscapes Mývatn and Þjórsárver are simultaneously expressions of the uniqueness and significance of Icelandic culture. Since Iceland does not have artefacts such as magnificent old buildings, which could be compared to

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<sup>11</sup> "ógnun við framtíð og sjálfstæði Íslands og sjálfsmýnd þjóðarinnar."

<sup>12</sup> "með því að gangast við svo þröngu verðmætamati sköpum við okkar eigin fátækt. Ríkidæmi mælist ekki í peningum heldur í því hvort menn kunni að gefa lífi sínu, umhverfi og menningu merkingu og gildi. Skynbragð á fegurð, líffræðilega fjölbreytni eða verðmæti sem ekki verða mæld er náskyld læsi og virðingu fyrir sögu, fornleifum, tungumáli, listum og jafnvel mannlífum. Þjóð sem kann ekki að meta fyrirbæri eins og Mývatn og Þjórsárver og er ólæs á slík verðmæti er eins og Ítali sem sér Colosseum aðeins sem hentugt efni í vegfyllingu. Með því að meta Colosseum eingöngu til þyngdar sinnar í grjóti eða grafa undan gildi staðarins væru menn um leið að glata merkingu og verðmætum. Með því að tala niður verðmæti Þjórsárvera eða setja þau framarlega í virkjunarröðina er verið að tala niður gildi og verðmæti Íslands."

the Colosseum, its cultural heritage first and foremost consists of its literature. The view that the sagas were expressions of a medieval high culture on the same or even a higher level than that of other European countries, was frequently stressed by Icelandic scholars in the 20th century. The comparison to antique Greek and Roman civilisation was equally common (Byock 165 and 170). It becomes apparent in the following statement that in *Draumalandið* that saga literature as an expression of Iceland's high culture and landscape are considered as a unity, "An aluminium factory does not increase the value of the aluminium through stating that the metal has been smelted in an extraordinary beautiful fjord and that the tracts of Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða or even Þjórsárver have been sacrificed exactly with the intent to smelt the aluminium"<sup>13</sup> (Magnason 56).

*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* is an *Íslendingasaga* from the 13th century. The saga's main protagonist Hrafnkell is named in *Landnámabók* as one of the prominent *landnámsmenn* in eastern Iceland. The saga itself is not historically credible, but its plot is located in identifiable places in East Iceland, both in the Highlands and near the coast, which were affected by the Kárahnjúkar project. Both landscape (the fjord) and culture (the saga) form a harmonic, unified entity. This is contrasted to aluminium factories and reservoir dams, which are not part of the unity. They are foreign elements and threaten the existing harmony instead of contributing to its further enhancement.

As shown before, for Jónas Hallgrímsson it was beyond doubt that what the sagas described had been historical reality, and this belief in the medieval literature's credibility was the premise for the assumption that the depicted time had indeed been a golden age. But in *Draumalandið* a more constructivist view is expressed:

It is excellent to dissolve reality regularly and to arrange it again and to prioritise it according to one's own will. Thus it is possible have influence on almost all fields of existence; eating habits, fashion, music, education, politics, arts, architecture, residence and one's own happiness. With a simple thought it is possible to fill worthless things with history, worth and meaning and thus to create value out of nothing.<sup>14</sup> (34)

How such a rearrangement of reality can be accomplished through a stronger connection of landscape, literature and everyday life is illustrated by the example of traditional Icelandic food, which according to Magnason is

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<sup>13</sup> "Álverksmiðja hækkar ekki verðmæti álsins með því að segja að málmurinn hafi verið bræddur í óvenjufallegum firði og að söguslóðum Hrafnkels Freysgoða eða jafnvel Þjórsárverum hafi einmitt verið fórnað í þeim tilgangi að bræða álið".

<sup>14</sup> "Það er ágætt að leysa reglulega upp veruleikann og raða honum saman aftur og forgangsraða eftir eigin vilja. Þannig er hægt að hafa áhrif á nánast öll svið tilverunnar; matarvenjur, tísku, tónlist, menntun, stjórnsmál, listir, byggingarlist, búsetu og eigin hamingju. Með einfaldri hugsun er hægt að fylla verðlausa hluti af sögu, gildi og merkingu og skapa þannig verðmæti úr engu."

extremely undervalued. Although it is produced in beautiful landscapes steeped in (literary) history, to consumers it is offered just like any ordinary industrialised commodity:

When I buy roast saddle of lamb in a shop, I cannot buy the name of the farmer or the family, not the name of the farm as trademark, not the district or the heath. I cannot buy an 1100-year long tradition or 1100 years of habitation somewhere, not round-ups, sheep gatherings in autumn or lambing. I cannot let my guests dine the tracts of Njáls saga, not the bloody battle of Knafahólar or Gunnarshólmur nor a lamb that gnawed the flowers under the mountains Hraundrangar, where the poet walked with knapsack and hiking pole. I am not seized with uncontrollable desire to read out *Ferðalok* of Jónas Hallgrímsson over the meat soup.<sup>15</sup> (49)

As the attachment of food to a certain place is missing, one cannot create real value in terms of place. Were the food connected to the history of the place where it was produced and simultaneously to the narratives bound to this place, a new and qualitatively higher value would emerge through imagination. Following this argument, value is not necessarily pre-existing in the landscape, but must be culturally mediated. Narratives have the capability to change the consciousness of places. The narratives bound to Icelandic landscapes attach a value to them, which is beyond price. *Njáls saga* makes the hills Knafahólar the site of a heroic battle in which three men killed fourteen attackers. The reference to Jónas Hallgrímsson invokes his association of landscape with national independence. On the other hand, his love poem *Ferðalok* (*Journey's End*) raises questions of landscape preservation associated with the literary tradition. The poem describes a love scene at the river Galtará, but, as Magnason points out later in *Draumalandið*, this place no longer exists; a reservoir lake covers it now (195).

The preservation of the narrative as well as that of the landscape is imperative, because neither of them can exist without the other. If the landscape is devastated, the literary texts lose their setting and are no longer connected to specific places and their histories. On the contrary, if Iceland's cultural heritage – mainly embodied by literature – is no longer valued as a crucial part of national identity, then even the landscapes cannot be esteemed appropriately and the attachment to places vanishes. If connectedness is lost, the unified entity of culture and nature is disturbed with the consequence of national degeneration.

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<sup>15</sup> “Þegar ég kaup lambahrygg úti í búð get ég ekki keypt nafn bónda eða fjölskyldu, ekki bæjarnafn sem vörumerki, ekki hrepp eða heiði. Ég get ekki keypt 1100 ára hefð eða 1100 ára byggð á einhverjum stað, ekki göngur, réttir eða sauðburð. Ég get ekki leyft gestum mínum að borða Njáluslóðir, blóðugan Knafahólabardagann eða Gunnarshólma og ekki heldur lamb sem nagaði blómin undir Hraundröngum þar sem skáldið gekk með mal og prik. Ég verð ekki gripinn óstjórnlægri löngun til að lesa *Ferðalok* eftir Jónas Hallgrímsson yfir kjötsúpunni.”

The national perspective with its focus on sovereignty has thus not decreased in *Draumalandið*, but the perception of landscape and literature has at least partly left the realist perspective and shows a tendency toward a more constructivist view. This does not weaken its arguments; whether events described in a narrative are historically true or not, is not the crucial point, when the narratives as such are what links value to place. Icelandic landscapes are thus literary landscapes in the true sense of the word.

However, *Draumalandið* has also been criticised for its adherence to common ideals of Iceland as an undivided, independent nation with a special relation to its 'nature' (Snæbjörnsson 475 and 479). If such a strong focus on the national tradition provides a proper reaction considering the imminent change of Iceland's landscapes due to global warming, demands further discussion indeed, for climate change yet to reach Icelandic literature.

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