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Reimagining the Past to Revitalize the Present

Legends and nationalism in Irish and Icelandic revivalist poetry

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Abstract

As an element of cultural memory, the legendary past of a nation can be constantly reworked and reinterpreted in each particular context to suit contemporary concerns. In the nineteenth century, Irish revivalist poets, such as William Butler Yeats and George William Russell, and Icelandic revivalist poets, such as Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson, purposefully reconstructed their countries' legendary pasts as golden ages in order to reinvest them with nationalistic significance. Recontextualizing the cycles of Irish mythology, in the Irish case, and the sagas and *Eddas*, in the Icelandic case, the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets sought to establish unified national identities, justify the greatness and distinctiveness of each of their nations, and reinvigorate their countrymen with vigor and nationalism. In doing so, these poets helped form the ideological bases of Irish and Icelandic pursuits of increased autonomy. Therefore, using a memory studies perspective, this thesis will demonstrate that through reinterpretations of their nations' legendary pasts, Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets played instrumental roles in developing nationalist ideologies and, thus, in contributing to the early stages of the Irish and Icelandic independence movements. Although previous research has focused on the reception of Icelandic and Irish legendary texts individually, by employing a comparative approach, this thesis will not only attempt to render greater insight into the Irish and Icelandic cases, but to provide further implications for other nineteenth century European nationalistic movements and even for other contexts as well.

Menningarlegt minni eins og það birtist í hetjusögum þjóða um fyrri tíð er í stöðugri endurvinnslu og endurtúlkun í því ólíka samhengi sem hentar á hverjum tíma. Á nítjándu öld birtist fornaldarrómantík í ljóðum írsku skáldanna William Butler Yeats og George William Russell, og hjá íslensku skáldunum Bjarna Thorarensen og Jónasi Hallgrímssyni, en öll þessi skáld endurmótuðu þá mynd af fortíðinni sem hetjusögur í löndum þeirra drógu upp í því skyni að hlaða á þær þjóðernislegu mikilvægi. Með því að skapa nýja umgjörð um sagnasveig írskra goðsagna á Írlandi og um fornsögurnar og eddurnar á Íslandi reyndu þessir írsku og íslensku endurreisnarmenn að skapa sameiginlega þjóðlega sjálfsmynd, réttlæta mikilfengleik og sérstöðu þjóða sinna og blása landsmönnum sínum baráttu- og þjóðernisanda í brjóst. Þannig áttu skáldin þátt í að leggja hugmyndafræðilegan grunn að leið Íra og Íslendinga í átt að auknu sjálfstæði. Með því að beita sjónarhorni minnisfræða í þessari ritgerð er reynt að sýna fram á að með því að endurtúlka hetjuasagnafortíð þjóða sinna í anda rómantískrar endurreisnar hafi írsk og íslensk skáld gegnt lykilhlutverki við að þróa hugmyndafræði þjóðernishyggjunnar og þannig lagt sitt af mörkum á fyrstu stigum írskra og íslenskra sjálfstæðishreyfinga. Enda þótt fyrri rannsóknir hafi einkum fengist við viðtökur íslenskra og írskra hetjusagna í hvoru landi um sig er í þessari ritgerð reynt að beita samanburðaraðferðinni, bæði til þess að veita betri innsýn í aðstæður á Írlandi og á Íslandi og líka til þess að benda á að þetta sjónarhorn skipti máli í samhengi við evrópskar þjóðernishreyfingar á nítjándu öld og jafnvel enn víðar.

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1. Introduction

Possessing a unique and impressive legendary tradition is a vital component in the cultivation of a nation's self-image and nationalist ideology. In different nations in different time periods, these legendary pasts are reinterpreted to conform to the interests of that context. In the case of Ireland in the nineteenth century, poets of the Irish Literary Revival, such as William Butler Yeats and George William Russell, recontextualized aspects of Ireland's legendary Celtic past in order to foster a proud, united Irish consciousness and promote Irish nationalism. Similarly, nineteenth century Icelandic revivalist poets, such as Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson, reimagined elements of the Icelandic legendary past, as portrayed in the *Íslendingasögur*¹ and *Eddas*, in order to formulate a distinctive and empowered Icelandic identity. In both cases, the revivalist poets reinterpreted their countries' legendary pasts as national golden ages. In doing so, the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets helped develop distinctive national identities, promote national pride, and reinvigorate their countrymen by indicating that the gloriousness which characterized their legendary pasts remained an integral part of their nations' spirits and, thus, was destined to be recaptured once more.

As a result, the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets helped provide the nationalist ideals as well as the cultural arguments necessary to justify increased political autonomy for their nations. These cultural justifications were then implemented by Irish and Icelandic political figures in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to mobilize the masses and to try to appeal to their foreign rulers. Although this process is observable in both Ireland and Iceland, the later stages of their nationalist movements differed: Ireland's pursuit of independence ultimately resulted in violence while Iceland's aspirations for increased autonomy remained nonviolent. Therefore, using a comparative approach between the two nations not only reveals that reworking a

¹ It is important to note that Bjarni and Jónas would have considered the Old Icelandic Medieval texts of the *Íslendingasögur* as largely historical portrayals of the Icelandic Commonwealth period rather than as legendary depictions as they are perceived today.

nation's legendary past to produce a proud national self-image is an international phenomenon, and one particularly prevalent in nineteenth century Europe, but also an important process for fostering different types of nationalist movements. As a result, although nationalist developments and pursuits of independence are generally considered primarily political endeavors, cultural nationalism, or identification and pride deriving from a community's culture, and its proponents can be seen as pivotally influencing these movements ideologically: this is exemplified by the nineteenth century Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets who formulated foundational nationalist ideals through their recontextualizations of their nations' legendary pasts.

1.1 Research History

While this thesis will focus on cultural elements of modern nationalism in the nineteenth century, prior to modern conceptions of nations and nationalism, different population groups identified themselves and were identified by others by various criteria throughout time.² This has caused scholars such as Anthony D. Smith to emphasize that modern nations and national identities had roots in these pre-modern collective cultural and ethnic identities and, as a result, modern nationalism should not be perceived as a purely recent concept.³

In terms of previous research regarding modern nationalism, the topic of cultural nationalism did not dominate early scholarship, but instead was generally believed to be secondary to, or a product of, political nationalism. In *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background*, which was first published in 1944, Hans Kohn identified nationality and nationalism as primarily historical and political concepts, though at times including cultural elements, which are purposefully constructed.⁴ Elie Kedourie focused on the political aspects of nationalism and did not acknowledge cultural

² Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Emergence of *Norðrlönd* in Old Norse Medieval Texts, ca. 1100-1400," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 25-40. For example, Sverrir Jakobsson examines how the term *Norðrlönd* in Old Icelandic Medieval texts helped to identify Northern people of that time with certain cultural traits and a shared self-image.

³ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 180.

⁴ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 8-19.

nationalism as ultimately having a distinct role in cultivating nations or national identities.⁵ In *Nations and Nationalism*, which he first published in 1983, Ernest Gellner argued that industrialism caused a need for nationalism and cultural homogeneity and, thus, a shared culture is simply a reflection of this need rather than an active part in the process of nationalism.⁶ Like Kohn, Gellner also indicated that a shared nation is perceived rather than objective reality.⁷ However, for Gellner, as well as for the later scholar Eric Hobsbawm, in terms of nationalism, culture remained secondary to, or even a consequence of, politics.⁸

Unlike his predecessors, Miroslav Hroch presented cultural nationalism not as a secondary factor, but rather as the first phase in the formation of a nation when a national identity is created based on shared cultural, social, and historical traits.⁹ In addition, Hroch highlighted the importance of a shared memory of a collective past in the formation of a nation.¹⁰ Therefore, aspects of his framework are useful for analyzing the role played by poets and artists in developing nationalism through their nations' legendary pasts.

Building off of previous scholarship which established that nations are created rather than naturally occurring, Benedict Anderson developed the idea of the nation as a constructed "imagined community."¹¹ He also emphasized the importance of the rise of vernacular and printing in the process of nationalism.¹² As Jonathan Allison points out, these are useful notions when describing the influence of writers, such as Yeats, who imagined and projected a specific Irish identity through his works.¹³

⁵ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 58.

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 38-39, 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9-10.

⁹ Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe," in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 84-85. See further, Joep Leerssen, *The Cultivation of Culture: Towards a Definition of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, Working Papers European Studies Amsterdam, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Opleiding Europese Studies, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2005), 10-15. Leerssen outlines and expands upon Hroch's model.

¹⁰ Hroch, "From National Movement," 79.

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹³ Jonathan Allison, "W. B. Yeats, Space, and Cultural Nationalism," *ANQ* 14, no. 4 (2001): 59.

Although previous scholars acknowledged the influence of culture on nationalism to some degree, Anthony D. Smith's works were some of the first to privilege cultural elements in analyzing the development of nationalism. Smith emphasized the significance of highlighting shared symbols, myths, memories, and traditions in the creation of national identity.¹⁴ Moreover, Smith also stressed the importance of cultural nationalists, such as writers, in constructing national consciousness in its early stages; however, he discussed their influence from a more theoretical stand point rather than a literary one.¹⁵ In addition, Smith analyzed the significance of an imagined national golden age in the process of developing nationalism, specifically its ability to inspire national identity, dignity, and belief in a glorious destiny, among many other functions.¹⁶ This thesis will build off of Smith's model of the components and functions of an envisioned golden age to demonstrate how exactly cultural nationalists' reconstructions of legendary pasts played vital roles in promoting nationalism.

John Hutchinson, a student of Anthony D. Smith, followed in his predecessor's footsteps by emphasizing the significant impact of cultural nationalism on nationalist movements. Hutchinson proposed the idea that cultural and political nationalism are two different processes, with cultural nationalism focusing on fostering a moral revival and political nationalism attempting to gain sovereignty.¹⁷ He applied his theory to the case of Ireland, analyzing the history of cultural nationalism in Ireland's nationalist movement over the period of three cultural revivals.¹⁸ Therefore, Hutchinson significantly contributed to research concerning cultural nationalism in general and its specific role in the Irish case. This thesis will attempt to expand upon and alter some of Hutchinson's ideas and add literary analysis of the Irish revivalist poets.

Joep Leerssen provided both historical and literary analysis to show how cultural nationalists, such as Irish revivalist writers, contributed to the Irish nationalist movement by envisioning a distinctive Irish identity in order to validate Ireland's worth

¹⁴Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 66, 92. See further, Anthony D. Smith, "The 'Golden Age' and National Renewal," in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 36-59.

¹⁷ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-324.

and legitimacy.¹⁹ In the process of doing so, Leerssen primarily used imagology, or the notion of projecting a self-image based on uniqueness; however, to a lesser extent he also used elements of cultural memory studies, *explicitly* when discussing *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory, and *implicitly* when analyzing how cultural nationalists reimagined a common Irish past to form an Irish national consciousness.²⁰ Leerssen also emphasized the significance of cultural nationalism as a crucial component of nationalist movements.²¹ Moreover, he suggested that nationalism begins with the process of the "cultivation of culture" in which nationalists recontextualize aspects of their culture and reinterpret them with new meaning to construct nationalist ideology relevant to their own time period.²² Leerssen indicated that this model has the potential to be applicable to all nineteenth century European nationalist movements; however, it needs to be implemented in different case studies.²³ Since this model is supposedly observable cross-nationally, Leerssen also expressed that a comparative approach is imperative.²⁴ As a result, by comparing how Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets recontextualized and reinterpreted their native legends to render nationalism in the nineteenth century, this thesis puts Leerssen's model into practice, though with specific emphasis on the cultivation of legendary pasts.

There has been a wealth of scholarship focusing on the Irish revivalist poets including articles which discuss how their poems helped form an Irish national consciousness through references to Ireland's legendary past. Eugene O'Brien specifically traced how Yeats reinterpreted Irish mythology in order to create a separate, proud Irish identity and how, in the process, Yeats reimagined both the Irish past and the Irish present.²⁵ However, O'Brien focused more on Yeats's changing views and

¹⁹Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 2-7. However, Leerssen does not include close-readings of multiple works by the same author.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6, 109.

²¹ Leerssen, *Cultivation of Culture*, 31-32.

²² *Ibid.*, 4, 22-23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4. See further, Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, "The Renovation of Native Past. A Comparison between Aspects of Icelandic and Czech Nationalist Ideology," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 4 (2000): 688-709. Sigríður has applied this idea by comparing the role of native pasts in the Icelandic and Czech nationalist movements.

²⁴ Leerssen, *Cultivation of Culture*, 17.

²⁵ Eugene O'Brien, "Yeats and the creation of an Irish mythology," in *The Question of Irish Identity in the Writing of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), PDF e-book, 128-144.

development as a poet rather than on discussing how his work impacted the ideology of the Irish nationalist movement.

M. K. Flynn acknowledged that although Anglo-Irish revivalist poets' primary interest was in aestheticism above politics, he points out that they, along with other Irish cultural revivalists, helped build an Irish identity, mobilize the masses, and foster Irish nationalist ideals which could be politicized.²⁶ However, he did not explore literary texts themselves nor did he extensively discuss the role of Irish legendary past in the fostering of Irish cultural nationalism.

In addition, Geraldine Higgins demonstrated how the Celtic legendary figure of Cú Chulainn²⁷ was recontextualized by various authors, including Yeats, Russell, and even the Easter Rising leader, Pádraig Pearse, to reveal how the Irish legendary heroes could be reshaped for various purposes, including promoting a revitalization of the Irish people in Yeats and Russell's case and encouraging separatism in Pearse's case.²⁸

When discussing Icelandic nationalism in the nineteenth century, previous research has primarily focused on historical analysis; however, some scholars have also recognized the role of Icelandic revivalist poets and of Old Icelandic literature in inspiring Icelandic cultural nationalism. As early as 1938, Richard Beck discussed the work of Bjarni Thorarensen, particularly the Romantic influence and sentiments apparent in his poetry, but also how he used references to Iceland's legendary past to encourage nationalism and heroic virtue in his countrymen.²⁹

Jesse Byock discussed the importance of the sagas in the process of constructing modern nationalism in Iceland and in composing cultural arguments for Icelandic independence; however, he focused on the role of the intellectuals of the twentieth century rather than on nineteenth century revivalist poets in disseminating national pride

²⁶ M. K. Flynn, *Ideology, Mobilization, and the Nation: the Rise of Irish, Basque and Carlist Nationalist Movements in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 36-38.

²⁷ Cecile O'Rahilly, ed., *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, trans. Cecile O'Rahilly, Irish Texts Society, vol. 49 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970). Although O'Rahilly uses the spelling, Cú Chulaind, this thesis will use the spelling of Cú Chulainn as this is the most common spelling used in scholarship. The spellings of other Irish names will follow O'Rahilly's choices where applicable.

²⁸ Geraldine Higgins, *Heroic Revivals from Carlyle to Yeats* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4-9, 24-68, 108-146.

²⁹ Richard Beck, "Bjarni Thorarensen—Iceland's Pioneer Romanticist," *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* 15 (1938): 73-75.

through these Old Icelandic texts.³⁰ Nonetheless, he demonstrated how the sagas can be recontextualized for nationalistic purposes.

Gunnar Karlsson traced the rise of nationalist sentiment in Iceland, applying ideas from Smith, Hroch, Hobsbawm, but most of all, Gellner, and determined that the main reason Icelandic nationalism became widespread relatively early for European standards was due to the nation's social mobility.³¹ However, Gunnar also acknowledged how the tradition of interpreting the Icelandic Commonwealth as a golden age made the Icelandic people more supportive of Icelandic nationalism and how the Icelandic cultural contributions of the sagas and *Eddas* made the Danish state give more consideration to concessions such as restoring the Alþing.³²

Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth focused on post-Medieval reception of Old-Norse literature in Europe in "The Norse Muse," taking on a primarily historical perspective.³³ While they recognized that renewed interest in the Old Norse texts helped form national consciousness and inspire national movements in nineteenth century Europe, the scholars ultimately determined that adding nationalistic sentiment to Old Norse literature proved "destructive" to the texts as their use in Nazi propaganda caused their subsequent decline in European intellectual circles post-World War II.³⁴ However, while their analysis connecting Old Norse texts and nineteenth century European nationalism is valid for the Icelandic case, the idea that Old Norse literature was compromised by Nazism in the twentieth century is not applicable to the Icelandic situation.

Mats Malm also analyzed the reception of Old Icelandic literature, focusing specifically on how Denmark and Sweden utilized Old Icelandic texts, and the manuscripts themselves, for nationalistic purposes in the seventeenth century. He argued that these Scandinavian nations used Old Icelandic texts to validate their national

³⁰ Jesse Byock, "Modern nationalism and the medieval sagas," in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. Andrew Wawn (London: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 172-173.

³¹ Gunnar Karlsson, "The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland," in *Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World*, ed. Sven Tägil (London: Hurst & Company, 1995), 45-59.

³² *Ibid.*, 43-44, 48-50.

³³ Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth, "The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project," *Alvíssmál* 9 (1999): 3-28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-28.

greatness and to try to establish one nation's preeminence over the other.³⁵ In doing so, Malm demonstrated how cultural arguments can be used to legitimize national worth and how legendary pasts can be reinterpreted in order to promote nationalism, ideas which can be used to illuminate the Irish and Icelandic cases.

Also focusing on the reception of Old Icelandic literature outside of Iceland, Andrew Wawn discussed North American and British interest in the sagas and *Eddas* in the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.³⁶ He suggested that Old Icelandic texts were used as subject matter in Britain to justify English imperial supremacy and in North America to connect Americans of Scandinavian ancestry with the lands of their heritage.³⁷ Moreover, He demonstrated how the Old Icelandic texts inspired, and continue to inspire, British and American literature, thereby revealing the ability of Iceland's legendary texts to be recontextualized to suit many time periods and many purposes.

Contributing greatly to the study of Icelandic revivalist poet, Jónas Hallgrímsson, Dick Ringler not only provided English translations of the vast majority of Jónas's work, but he discussed some of Jónas's influences, motivations, and political beliefs.³⁸ In addition, Ringler provided close-readings of Jónas's texts, taking into account biographical information as well as historical context, which greatly contributed to analysis of Jónas's work for an English-speaking audience.

Jón Karl Helgason contributed to post-Medieval reception studies of the *Íslendingasögur* by offering a survey of their use and popularity in Iceland. Jón Karl discussed how the *Íslendingasögur* were reinterpreted as golden ages in different contexts and for different purposes.³⁹ For example, he argued that from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century Icelandic poets used references to the *Íslendingasögur* to emphasize their nation's supposedly poor conditions and that

³⁵ Mats Malm, "The Nordic demand for medieval Icelandic manuscripts," in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, eds. Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), 101-105.

³⁶ Andrew Wawn, "The idea of the Old North in Britain and the United States," in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, eds. Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), 131-142.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

³⁸ Dick Ringler, *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

³⁹ Jón Karl Helgason, "Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 70-80.

nineteenth century poets, such as Jónas, created increasingly politicized reinterpretations of the *Íslendingasögur*.⁴⁰

Taking on a historical rather than literary perspective, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson analyzed the development of Iceland's nationalist movement, focusing in part on how Iceland's distinct language and literature influenced the movement's progression.⁴¹ Guðmundur claimed that Iceland's cultural achievements gave politicians such as Jón Sigurðsson justifications for greater political autonomy for Iceland.⁴² In addition, he also expressed that the esteem the Danish state had for Iceland's language, *Eddas*, sagas, and cultural heritage caused the Danish government to be more amenable to granting Iceland increased independence.⁴³

Lastly, Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson traced the reception of Old Norse mythology in nineteenth century Icelandic literature⁴⁴ and argued that Icelandic writers used references to the *Eddas* and sagas to foster Icelandic Romanticism, and, starting in the 1830s, to suit political purposes.⁴⁵ Sveinn Yngvi also analyzed the role of the saga-sites in Jónas's poems and argued that Jónas's poetry served to encourage Icelandic nationalism.⁴⁶ In addition, Sveinn Yngvi discussed the reception of Old Norse mythology in twentieth and twenty-first century Icelandic movies and music.⁴⁷ In doing so, Sveinn Yngvi displayed how Old Icelandic texts have been, and continue to be, recontextualized to reflect contemporary views and interests.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 72-73, 78-79.

⁴¹ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "From Linguistic Patriotism to Cultural Nationalism: Language and Identity in Iceland," in *Languages and Identities in Historical Perspective*, ed. Ann Katherine Isaacs (Pisa: Edizioni Plus - Università di Pisa, 2005), 56–62. See further, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Severing the Ties- Iceland's Journey From a Union with Denmark to a Nation-State," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 31, no. 3-4 (2006): 239, 244.

⁴² Guðmundur, "Linguistic Patriotism," 57. See further, Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 246.

⁴³ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Icelandic Nationalism: A Non-Violent Paradigm?," in *Nations and Nationalities in Historical Perspective*, ed. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson and Ann-Katherine Isaacs (Pisa: Edizioni Plus - Università di Pisa, 2001), 9.

⁴⁴ Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, "The Reception of Old Norse Myths in Icelandic Romanticism," in *Det norrøne og det nationale: Studier i brugen af Islands gamle litteratur i nationale sammenhænge i Norge, Sverige, Island, Storbritannien, Tyskland og Danmark*, ed. Annette Lassen (Reykjavík: Stofnun Vigdísar Finnbogadóttur í erlendum tungumálum, 2008), 103–122.

⁴⁵ Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, "Eddas, sagas and Icelandic romanticism," in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, eds. Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), 109-111.

⁴⁶ Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, "Nation and Elevation: Some Points of Comparison between the 'National Poets' of Slovenia and Iceland," *Primerjalna Književnost* 34, no. 1 (2011): 135-140.

⁴⁷ Sveinn Yngvi, "Eddas, sagas," 116.

1.2 Theory

Although some previous scholars have utilized elements of memory studies when analyzing the reception of Old Icelandic and Celtic legendary texts, none applied an explicitly memory studies perspective to analyze how cultural nationalists, specifically revivalist poets, recontextualized their nations' legendary pasts as golden ages in order to form unique, proud national identities. However, a memory studies perspective can most aptly be used to examine this process. As Jan Assmann points out, the "cultivation" of elements of a society's cultural memory at any given time serves to render a "self-image" in that contemporary context.⁴⁸ Therefore, through their reinterpretations of their nations' legends, both Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets can be seen as constructing national self-images to fit their time period. Since the concept of cultural memory emphasizes the importance of culture in the process of shaping a self-image, memory studies is a particularly helpful theoretical tool in tracing how the recontextualization of a people's cultural past can help render a national identity in the nineteenth century sense.

The memory studies concepts of canon and archive⁴⁹ help illustrate that the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets did not passively regurgitate information about their nations' legendary pasts. Instead the poets deliberately selected cultural texts, such as the cycles of Celtic mythology in Ireland's case and the *Íslendingasögur* and *Eddas* in Iceland's case, from each nation's archival memory and recontextualized them in their own day, infusing them with relevancy, to establish them as national canon. Ann Rigney not only emphasizes that cultural memory is always being reinterpreted in a new context, but points out that collective remembrance must be recognized as having an

⁴⁸ Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65, *Cultural History/Cultural Studies* (1995): 130-133. The term "cultural memory" used in this thesis refers to Assmann's definition of "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."

⁴⁹ Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sarah B. Young, *Media and Cultural Memory / Medien Und Kulturelle Erinnerung*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 98-104. The canon, or working memory, characterizes cultural memory which is constantly being reinvested with meaning in each context so that the past is remembered in terms of the present. The archive, or passive memory, on the other hand, implies that memories are not being recontextualized and instead are simply stored.

agenda.⁵⁰ Using these ideas, the Irish and Icelandic poets can be seen as purposefully recontextualizing their native legends to suit contemporary concerns; in particular, they used glorified reinterpretations of their legendary pasts to establish proud national identities, promote nationalism, and reinvigorate their contemporaries. In addition, "memory" rather than "history" focuses on understanding the interaction between past and present in any given context with the recognition that the perception of the past is affected by the present and the perception of the present is affected by the past.⁵¹ Therefore, memory studies is the best theoretical lens for analyzing how by reinterpreting their legendary pasts as golden ages, the Irish and Icelandic poets not only used the past to shape their present but also changed perceptions of their nations' pasts as well.

Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of cultural memory which are infused with ideological significance,⁵² is also helpful in understanding the process undergone by revivalist poets in using native legends to promote national consciousness and pride. *Lieux de mémoire* are created and reaffirmed with the purpose of promoting local and ethnic values and, at times, nationalism.⁵³ Revivalist poets established their legendary texts as *lieux de mémoire* by reconstructing them as designations of cultural memory and as reflections of national character. Thus, by highlighting the uniqueness and splendor of their legends, these cultural nationalists ultimately used them as ideological, national symbols to validate the distinctiveness and worth of their nations. This is also evident in their reinterpretations of physical locations as well, seen for example in the Jónas' reinterpretation of Þingvellir as a national representation of Iceland's wisdom and innovation.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ann Rigney, "Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 17-18, 22.

⁵¹ Marek Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory: New Perspectives in Memory Studies," *History Compass* 11, no. 6 (2013): 463-466.

⁵² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-8, 12.

⁵³ Pim den Boer, "Loci memoriae—Lieux de mémoire," in *Cultural Memory Studies An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sarah B. Young, Media and Cultural Memory / Medien Und Kulturelle Erinnerung, 8 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 21. According to den Boer, *lieux de mémoire* are filled with ideological and nationalist sentiment.

⁵⁴ See 2.2.2. Jónas Hallgrímsson for more on this topic.

1.3 Research Questions

Previous research concerning the reception of the Irish and Icelandic legendary pasts has focused on theory and history,⁵⁵ and few scholars have analyzed how the reinterpretation of these native legends by Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets impacted the Irish and Icelandic nationalist movements in the nineteenth century. Therefore, with a greater emphasis on literary analysis, this thesis will examine how by recontextualizing their legendary pasts, Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets helped establish nationalist ideologies and, consequently, influenced their nations' pursuits of increased political autonomy.

In addition, several previous scholars have emphasized the role played by cultural nationalists in forming and disseminating nationalism and have developed theoretical models that may illuminate this process. Therefore, this thesis will apply some of these models to the Irish and Icelandic cases, specifically Leerssen's "cultivation of culture" framework and Smith's golden age framework, to examine the impact of Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets on developing nationalism in their countries. Moreover, since Leerssen emphasizes that cultural nationalism requires a comparative perspective, especially to establish a "typology" of nineteenth century European nationalism,⁵⁶ this thesis will employ a comparative approach.

Lastly, as discussed earlier, unlike previous scholarship, this thesis will employ a memory studies lens to reveal greater insight into the process of recontextualizing native legendary pasts for contemporary interests.

1.4 Source Material

Ireland and Iceland were selected as the subjects of this thesis for a number of reasons: they were politically subjugated to a foreign ruler; they underwent literary revivals in the nineteenth century; they pursued increased autonomy through gradual nationalist movements at around the same time; they possess distinctive legendary pasts

⁵⁵ With the exceptions of Leerssen and Ringler in particular, who also provided literary analysis.

⁵⁶ Leerssen, *Cultivation of Culture*, 4.

and impressive literary traditions which have been crucial to their self-images throughout their histories.

The selected materials are poems by Irish revivalist poets William Butler Yeats and George William Russell, and poems by Icelandic revivalist poets Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson. The specific poems chosen reveal reconstructions and reinterpretations of Celtic legends in the Irish case and of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Eddas* in the Icelandic case. These poems were composed in Europe in the nineteenth century under the influence of modern nationalism and Romanticism.⁵⁷ In both cases poems which were composed in the early stages of national pursuits of increased autonomy, before the larger nationalist movements occurred, were deliberately selected. In the Irish situation, the poems were composed in the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, the decades which preceded the Easter Rising and subsequent Irish War of Independence. In the Icelandic situation, the poems were composed in the early to mid-nineteenth century which slightly predated the restoration of the Alþingi and the National Assembly of 1851, and occurred a few decades prior to the establishment of Iceland's separate constitution.

Poetry was chosen as the type of source material because the "poetic imagination" was elevated above other forms of Icelandic literature in the nineteenth century⁵⁸ and because Ireland had a strong tradition of poetry in the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ Yeats and Russell's poems were selected because both poets were prominent in the period leading up to the Irish War of Independence and they utilized Celtic legendary references extensively in their works. Although later Icelandic poets such as Grímur Thomsen may have used references to the Old Icelandic texts to a larger extent, Bjarni and Jónas's poems were selected because these earlier poets were some of the first notable Icelandic writers to usher in Romantic ideals, reinterpret the sagas and

⁵⁷ See further, Royal J. Schmidt, "Cultural Nationalism in Herder," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 3 (1956), 408. Influenced by Herder, the romantic notion of a nation at this time suggested that nation-formation was a "cultural development" and that each nation possessed an intrinsic "national character." These ideas may have influenced cultural nationalists such as the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets.

⁵⁸ Þórir Óskarsson, "From Romanticism to Realism," in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. Daisy Neijmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 254.

⁵⁹ This is particularly evident in the later two Irish revivals, periods of renewed interest in Irish elements which are felt to have been forgotten. This will be expanded upon in section 2.1 Irish Revivalist Poets.

Eddas in creative works rather than in translations, and help develop Icelandic nationalism in its early stages.

1.5 Method and Structure of the Thesis

The first section of this thesis will concern the Irish revivalist poets William Butler Yeats and George William Russell. First, the section will provide the historical context in which these poets worked as well as an overview of the important poets who influenced their works. Next, the specific poems of, first, Yeats and, then, Russell will be analyzed to illustrate how these poets reinterpreted aspects of the Celtic legendary past to help develop a proud Irish national consciousness and propel Irish nationalism. Following this, an interpretation section will discuss how Yeats and Russell's reinterpretations of the Irish legendary past as a golden age contributed to an Irish nationalist ideology which had further implications in later stages of the Irish independence movement.

The next section will feature analysis of Icelandic revivalist poets Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson. The section will begin with a summary of both the poets' historical context and their predecessors. Then, both Bjarni and Jónas's poems will be closely examined to analyze how the poets recontextualized elements of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Eddas* in order to help foster national pride and a unique Icelandic identity. Lastly, there will be an interpretation section which will analyze how Bjarni and Jónas ultimately helped provide nationalist rhetoric and cultural justifications for increased Icelandic political autonomy by reimagining the Icelandic legendary past as a golden age in their poems.

The following section will compare and contrast how Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets recontextualized their native legends and what influence their reinterpretations had upon later stages of their nations' pursuits of autonomy. In doing so, this section will attempt to illuminate each individual case further, show the significance of Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets as disseminators of cultural nationalism, and demonstrate the important role of re-envisioned legendary pasts in advancing the Irish and Icelandic nationalist movements on an ideological level.

The last section of this thesis will make final conclusions concerning the Irish and Icelandic cases and discuss the possibility that the ideological bases of European nationalist movements depend, at least in part, upon cultural nationalists and their recontextualizations of their nations' legendary pasts. This section will also consider the role of reimagined legendary pasts in other contexts and offer recommendations for future research.

2. Analysis

2.1 Irish Revivalist Poets

Although some scholars, such as Gellner and Hobsbawn, identify nationalism in primarily political terms,⁶⁰ cultural nationalists make significant contributions to the advancement of nationalist movements by helping cultivate national identities and pride. Such is the case in Ireland in the late nineteenth century as, arguably, in many European countries at around that time.⁶¹ As stated before, one particularly influential group of cultural nationalists in propelling nationalistic ideology were Irish revivalist poets, such as William Butler Yeats and George William Russell, who looked to Ireland's legendary past to create a proud Irish self-image. However, these poets were greatly inspired by their predecessors as well as the ideals of their time period, particularly Romantic notions of aestheticism and interest in the past as well as Herderian ideas which emphasized the importance of propelling a distinct national culture.⁶²

As Hutchinson demonstrates, Ireland underwent three cultural revivals which revitalized and emphasized Ireland's Celtic cultural heritage: the first revival occurred in the mid-eighteenth century by antiquarians, writers, and intellectuals; the second took place in the 1830s by historical scholars and journalists; the third, the Irish Literary Revival, transpired in the late nineteenth century primarily by poets, folklorists, and intellectuals.⁶³ Many of the ideals that inspired these revivals corresponded to similar sentiments in the rest of Europe around the same time, such as an increased interest in discovering historical truth in the eighteenth century and in developing a unique

⁶⁰ Hobsbawn, *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, 9-10.

⁶¹ Leerssen, *Cultivation of Culture*, 4.

⁶² Royal J. Schmidt, "Cultural Nationalism in Herder," 407, 414.

⁶³ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 50.

national spirit in the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ These different principles account in part for what distinguishes the first Irish revival from its two successors: the first revival depicted ancient Ireland as a worthy civilization to justify Ireland's right to equality with England while the following two revivals emphasized Ireland's glorious cultural heritage to demonstrate Ireland's unique worth and establish the Irish identity as distinct from England. Therefore, the first revival can be seen as primarily propelling Irish patriotism, whereas the other two perpetuated what is now considered modern nationalism, which rendered convincing cultural justifications for Irish autonomy.⁶⁵ However, while the Irish revivals of the 1830s and the late nineteenth century had similar pursuits of fostering a proud, united, and distinct Irish identity, the 1830s revival was derailed by the disaster of the Great Famine which began in 1845. The Great Famine, and the perceived inaction, and even culpability, of the English, contributed to a shift from cultural interests to more political, revolutionary attitudes and culminated in the disastrous Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848.⁶⁶

Although the 1830s revival ultimately failed in the sense that the nationalist movement declined in the decades that followed, as previously stated, the poets of the 1830s revival greatly influenced the later poets of Irish Literary Revival, including Yeats and Russell. Two of these influential 1830s revivalist poets were Thomas Davis, one of the founders of the Young Ireland movement, and Samuel Ferguson. Both Davis and Ferguson were Anglo-Irishmen who sought to unite the Anglo-Irish Protestants and Gaelic Catholics.⁶⁷ Moreover, Davis wished to uncover an Irish consciousness that could empower and morally revitalize the nation.⁶⁸ Therefore, in an attempt to unify the Irish people, and morally revive Ireland in Davis's case, Davis and Ferguson used

⁶⁴ Ibid., 57. For more on "national character," see Schmidt, "Cultural Nationalism in Herder," 408-409.

⁶⁵ Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, 3-4. See further, Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 61-62. Hutchinson discusses how the earlier revival did not focus on Ireland's cultural distinctiveness.

⁶⁶ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 109-111. Young Ireland was a movement that originally published the newspaper *The Nation* which propelled cultural nationalism. It was associated with O'Connell's Repeal Association which sought to end the Act of Union of 1800 which had dissolved the Irish Parliament after the Rebellion of 1798. However, after O'Connell failed to secure the repeal, and its moderate leader, Thomas Davis, died, the movement became more militant. Partly inspired by the Europe's 1848 Year of Revolution and partly motivated by bitterness at England's perceived apathy to the Great Famine, participants in the Young Ireland movement attempted the Young Irelander Rebellion which was unsuccessful.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 92-93, 98.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 97-98. In particular, Davis wished to prompt moral regeneration and stop England's materialistic influence.

references to Ireland's common cultural heritage of the Celtic legends in their poetry.⁶⁹ Like Davis and Ferguson, Yeats and Russell were also Anglo-Irish poets who endeavored to build a proud Irish identity that could unify both Anglo-Irish Protestants and Gaelic Catholics.⁷⁰ Inspired by Davis and Ferguson's poetry as well as by Romanticism and its tendency to glorify the past, Yeats and Russell identified the Irish legendary past as the vehicle for providing this proud, united, and unique national identity.⁷¹ Thus, the poets of the Irish Literary Revival purposefully selected Celtic mythology as canon, or active cultural memory, and reinterpreted it in the context of their own day to fashion an Irish self-image that emphasized uniqueness, virtuousness, and courage. Specifically, they reimagined the Irish legendary past, particularly figures and events from the Mythological, Ulster, and Fenian Cycles,⁷² as Ireland's golden age.⁷³ By portraying the Irish legendary past as a glorious golden age, Russell and Yeats inspired Irish nationalism and ultimately contributed to the creation of a nationalist ideology with the potential to motivate and mobilize both political leaders and the masses in support of Irish independence in the late nineteenth century and onwards.

2.1.1. William Butler Yeats

As stated, Yeats was influenced greatly by his own time period and by poets of the 1830s revival; however, he was also greatly inspired by his contemporaries. The self-sacrifice and nationalist pride of the Irish separatist John O'Leary was a source of inspiration for Yeats.⁷⁴ Douglas Hyde, Standish O'Grady, and Augusta Lady Gregory's dedication to reviving Irish folklore and legend also impacted Yeats and encouraged him to focus on the Irish legendary past in his own works.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid., 93, 98, 135.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 141. As followers of mysticism, Yeats and Russell wished to unify Anglo-Irish Protestants and Gaelic Catholics through mystic spirituality.

⁷¹ O'Brien, "Irish mythology," 131-133.

⁷² The Mythological Cycle is supposed to have occurred in the pre-historic past, the Ulster Cycle in the first century A.D., and the Fenian Cycle near the third century A.D. The tales are preserved in Middle Irish Medieval manuscripts. Yeats and Russell relied on English translations as they did not speak Irish. This thesis will analyze their references to the Mythological and Ulster Cycles.

⁷³ Smith, "Golden Age," 59. Thus, they followed Smith's golden age framework, as discussed previously.

⁷⁴ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 131.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 131, 145, 157. O'Grady was particularly influential as he was one of the first writers to recontextualize the figure of Cú Chulainn.

Yeats chose to revive the Irish legendary past for several purposes: to establish and elevate the Irish identity, to reinvigorate the Irish people, to unite the Irish people through shared culture rather than race or religion. This is made evident in his poem, "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time," which starts by exclaiming:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain, battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold...⁷⁶

Yeats begins his poem with an invocation to the "Rose," symbolizing beauty and "spiritual love,"⁷⁷ to inspire him to discuss Ireland's ancient past. In doing so, Yeats indicates that the Irish legendary past embodies these aesthetic principles and, thus, is deserving of recognition and appreciation. As a result, Yeats justifies Irish legends as worthy subject matter and attempts to establish them as unique cultural contributions on par with the rest of Europe.⁷⁸ By purposefully depicting the Irish legendary past as both distinctive and praiseworthy, Yeats contributes to the formation of a proud Irish identity.

In addition, Yeats reinterprets the Irish legendary past as a golden age in order to foster a united national consciousness, empower his people, and imbue them with invigoration. He does this primarily by recontextualizing Irish legendary heroes, emphasizing their virtues, and suggesting that these qualities are an innate part of the Irish identity that must be recaptured. First, Yeats refers to Cú Chulainn, the most admirable warrior of the Ulster Cycle, and arguably of all Irish mythology, who was renowned for his great deeds, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and courage.⁷⁹ Cú Chulainn was

⁷⁶ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 35.

⁷⁷ Although other Irish writers used the rose to symbolize Ireland, Yeats instead emphasized the rose's associations with these aesthetic qualities, see further, Philip L. Marcus, *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 22.

⁷⁸ Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, 209.

⁷⁹ O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, 7-136, 148-272. Cú Chulainn faithfully served King Conchobor, defended Ulster, and was such a fierce warrior that entire armies feared him. The seeress, Feidelm, refers to Cú Chulainn, stating, "lond láith i n-airthiur a chind, / óenach búada ina thilchind (The hero's light is on his brow, / his forehead is the meeting-place of many virtues)," see *Ibid.*, page 7, line 234-235 for the Irish original, and page 144 for the English translation.

considered by many, including Yeats, as the "Celtic ideal."⁸⁰ Therefore, by evoking the image of Cú Chulainn in this poem, and in others,⁸¹ Yeats reaffirms a unified Irish identity by reminding his countrymen of their impressive, shared cultural heritage. Moreover, Yeats uses Cú Chulainn as an "exemplar of national virtue"⁸² to inspire the Irish people to revive their supposedly innate qualities of heroism, integrity, and self-sacrifice by emulating their ancient Irish hero.⁸³ In addition, Yeats specifically chooses to reference an episode from Irish folklore in which Cú Chulainn, having just accidentally killed his own son, is prevented from attacking his own men in his frenzy by being bewitched by druids to fight with the ocean, or the "bitter tide," ultimately culminating in his death.⁸⁴ Yeats selects this incident to portray Cú Chulainn as a tragic hero in order to reaffirm an Irish self-image or "true self."⁸⁵ To Yeats, tragedy was an inherent part of the Irish identity and reflecting the spirit of Ireland in his own work was the key to representing the Irish people.⁸⁶ Thus, Yeats emphasizes the tragic nature of Cú Chulainn to mirror and glorify the tragic heroism inherent in the Irish identity.

Following his reference to Cú Chulainn, Yeats next alludes to a Druid, emphasizing his link to nature by portraying him as "wood-nurtured," his mystery by calling him "quiet-eyed," and his magical wisdom by describing how he "cast" dreams. Thus, Yeats depicts Ireland's ancient past as a golden age by suggesting that it possessed

⁸⁰ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 145. Cú Chulainn was such a poignant symbol of Irish pride that other revivalists, such as Russell, Lady Gregory, and Standish O'Grady, and even the Easter Rising leader, Pádraig Pearse, referred to him to empower the Irish people, see further, Murray G. H. Pittcock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 80-81. Higgins also discusses how various Irish cultural nationalists reinterpreted Cú Chulainn to suit their needs, see further, Higgins, *Heroic Revivals*, 4-9, 24-68, 108-146.

⁸¹ Yeats, *Poems*, 39. For example, in "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea," Yeats emphasizes Cú Chulainn's "mournful wonder" and the "glory of his days."

⁸² Smith, *National Identity*, 128. Smith identifies setting up legendary heroes as virtuous ideals as a common undertaking in fostering nationalism.

⁸³ Smith, "Golden Age," 50. Yeats's recontextualization of Cú Chulainn shows Smith's idea of "continuity" by implying these attributes are, and have always been, part of the Irish identity.

⁸⁴ Cú Chulainn unknowingly killing his son is chronicled in *Aided Óenfhir Aífe (The Death of Aífe's One Son)*, see further, Thomas Kinsella, ed., *The Táin: From the Irish epic Táin Bó Cuailnge*, trans. Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 39-45. However, Cú Chulainn battling with the sea is not included in Medieval Irish manuscripts but is part of a folkloric legend, see further, A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 26-28. Yeats reinterprets this adaptation in this poem and in "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea."

⁸⁵ Smith, "Golden Age," 49.

⁸⁶ Marcus, *Irish Renaissance*, 193. Yeats makes this evident in a letter to Russell, writing, "absorb Ireland and her tragedy and you will be the poet of a people, perhaps the poet of a new insurrection."

a deep understanding of the natural and spiritual worlds.⁸⁷ In doing so, Yeats endeavored to embolden the Irish identity by suggesting that profundity, spirituality, wisdom, and regard for nature were innate parts of the Irish spirit. This stood in direct contrast to the materialism associated with England at that time, which many Irish revivalists perceived as destructive to their own nation.⁸⁸ As a result, Yeats's reinterpretation of the Irish legendary past not only served to elevate the Irish identity and propel deep values associated with Irishness, but to establish Ireland as "dichotomized" from England in a moral and ideological sense by preferring profundity over industry.⁸⁹

Yeats goes on to reference another hero of the Ulster Cycle, Fergus mac Róig. Fergus was known for having been the king of Ulster until his position was usurped by his step-son Conchobor⁹⁰ and for being a courageous and principled warrior.⁹¹ In this poem, as in "Who Goes with Fergus" and "Fergus and the Druid," Yeats reinterprets Fergus as willingly giving up his kingship to instead reside in nature and pursue spiritual knowledge.⁹² Through this recontextualization of Fergus, a representative figure of Ireland's legendary past, Yeats implies that the qualities of wisdom, valor, virtue, and spiritual connection are both part of the Irish heritage and part of the Irish character. In doing so, Yeats formulates a proud Irish consciousness and also encourages his countrymen to exhibit the same virtues in order to return Ireland to the golden age it once was. In addition, as he did with Cú Chulainn, Yeats portrays Fergus as a tragic figure, shown when he expresses that the "dreams" given to Fergus by the Druids to develop his spiritual knowledge bring him "ruin." In doing so, Yeats may attempt to reflect the tragic heroism he felt was part of the Irish identity, perhaps due to

⁸⁷ Yeats, *Poems*, 20-21, 61. Echoes of this can also be seen in "A Stolen Child" and "Hosting of the Sidhe." In these poems, Yeats highlights the connection of the faeries, or *aes sídhe*, with spirituality, magic, and nature. These mythical beings derive from the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, an otherworldly race linked to gods of the Irish Mythological Cycle, see further, Yeats, *Poems*, 438. For association between the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, wisdom, and magic, see Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best, eds., *Tochmarc Étaíne*, trans. Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1938), 20-21.

⁸⁸ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 98, 144, 169, 238.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

⁹⁰ See further, Kinsella, *The Táin*, 3-4.

⁹¹ O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, 133, 269. Fergus is portrayed as a heroic, skilled warrior who keeps his word.

⁹² Yeats, *Poems*, 36-37, 48-49. In "Fergus and the Druid," Fergus leaves his kingship and seeks out the Druid to teach him "dreaming wisdom."

the Irish people's resilience in the face of atrocities such as the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland and disasters such as the Great Famine.

The consequences of Yeats recontextualizing figures of Ireland's golden age such as Cú Chulainn, a Druid, and Fergus in his poem are two-fold: on one hand, Yeats alludes to these figures to highlight Ireland's unique cultural heritage and form an empowered Irish identity, while on the other hand, Yeats uses these legendary heroes as "moral innovators,"⁹³ meant to inspire his Irish contemporaries to reinvigorate their nation. As a result, Yeats's poems ultimately help develop the nationalist ideology necessary to propel the Irish independence movement in its later stages by encouraging revitalization, national pride, and a united and distinctive Irish identity.

2.1.2. George William Russell (A.E.)

Though often eclipsed by Yeats, George William Russell, or A.E., was a vital and influential contributor to the Irish Literary Revival. Like Yeats, Russell recontextualized and reinterpreted the Irish legendary past as a golden age in order to unite, empower and inspire the Irish people through their shared, glorious cultural heritage. This is evident in his contribution to *The Irish Theosophist*, "The Awakening of the Fires," which consists of a poem followed by an article. The poem begins with an ethereal scene of nature infused with Irish mythological and legendary figures:

When twilight flutters the mountains over
The faery lights from the earth unfold,
And over the hills enchanted hover
The giant heroes and gods of old...⁹⁴

Depicting the mystic hour of twilight, Russell portrays "faery lights" as emanating from the earth to establish a connection between the mythological beings of the faeries and the natural world. Similarly, he links the "enchanted" figures of the gods and heroes of

⁹³ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 30-31. Hutchinson describes cultural nationalists as "moral innovators" who use a glorified portrayal of the past to inspire ideological movements which regenerate the present.

⁹⁴ George William Russell, *A.E. in the Irish Theosophist* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), PDF e-book, 202. This e-book has collected Russell's entries from the journal, *The Irish Theosophist*, and printed them together. "The Awakening of the Fires" was first published in the *The Irish Theosophist* in 1897.

Ireland's ancient past with nature by placing them amidst the natural landscape. By portraying these mythological and legendary figures as characterized by a strong relationship to nature and as a part of the spiritual and natural worlds themselves,⁹⁵ Russell reimagines the Celtic legendary past as a moral golden age of profundity and earthly and spiritual understanding. In doing so, Russell establishes pride for the Irish identity by emphasizing the wisdom and moral values of the Irish heritage. In addition, by embedding these legendary figures directly into the Irish landscape, Russell implies that these figures and their virtues still permeate Ireland and that the perpetual heroic and spiritual soul of the Irish people simply must be evoked once more by the Irish people to regain their destiny.⁹⁶ Therefore, Russell can also be seen as reinterpreting the Irish legendary figures as moral exemplars in order to inspire his countrymen to regain the golden age of Ireland's past by embodying the same moral ideals. Russell's intention to utilize the Irish legendary past act as a source of empowerment and motivation for the Irish people is more apparent later in "The Awakening of the Fires" when he writes:

The child of earth in his heart grows burning
Mad for the night and the deep unknown;
His alien flame in a dream returning
Seats itself on the ancient throne...⁹⁷

Russell portrays a "child of earth" infused with energy, passion, and spirituality and indicates that this child's "flame" of rejuvenation "seats itself," or rests, on Ireland's ancient past. In doing so, Russell suggests that the key to the reinvigoration of Ireland is the inspiration drawn from the golden age of Ireland's legendary past.

In addition, in the article which follows this poem, Russell even goes so far as to describe Ireland as "the forlorn hope of idealism in Europe,"⁹⁸ thus highlighting Ireland's admirable qualities and asserting its equal, or even surpassing, value compared to other European nations. In justifying Ireland's worthiness in this manner, Russell contributes to nationalist rhetoric which rationalizes Ireland's entitlement to

⁹⁵ As a mystic, these were ideals Russell valued highly.

⁹⁶ Smith, "Golden Age," 50-51. Following Smith's model, Russell establishes continuity in the Irish identity as always having been moral and directs the Irish people towards a supposedly glorious destiny.

⁹⁷ Russell, *Irish Theosophist*, 202.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

independence. Moreover, Russell identifies Ireland's spiritual heroism as not only unique and venerable, but as vital to the resisting the materialism felt to be encroaching upon Ireland. Russell, like Davis before him,⁹⁹ connoted materialism and its subsequent moral degeneration with England and maintained that materialism would "fetter progress" in Ireland.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in emphasizing Ireland's moral virtue through its legendary past, Russell distinguishes Ireland from its colonizer, establishes Ireland's superiority of values, and provides nationalistic argumentation for Ireland's independence through the implication that England's materialism will endanger Ireland's noble spirit, advancement, and destiny.

In recontextualizing Ireland's legendary past, Russell also attempts to unify the Anglo-Irish Protestants and Gaelic Catholics through a shared Irish identity with a common and impressive cultural heritage. This is demonstrated in one of Russell's later poems, "Twilight by the Cabin," in which he composes:

This is Etain's land and line,
And the homespun cannot hide
Kinship with a race divine,
Thrill of rapture, light of pride.¹⁰¹

Russell refers to Étaín, a beautiful heroine from the Mythological Cycle who was romantically pursued by *Tuatha Dé Danann*, such as Aengus and Midir, and married to the High King Eochaid Airem.¹⁰² By suggesting that all Irish people are of her "line," Russell implies that Irish people share a noble identity through their shared legendary ancestors and mythological traditions. This is underpinned by his declaration that the Irish people have "Kinship with a race divine." The "race" Russell refers to here is not a biological race but rather a cultural race.¹⁰³ Therefore, he elevates the Irish identity by suggesting it has noble origins and unifies the Irish people by asserting that they share this admirable identity.

⁹⁹ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 98.

¹⁰⁰ Russell, *Irish Theosophist*, 208. See further, Higgins, *Heroic Revivals*, 37. Higgins points out Russell's anti-imperialist sentiment and his dismissal of English industrialism.

¹⁰¹ George William Russell (A.E.), *Collected Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935), 262. This collection of poetry was originally published in 1913.

¹⁰² Bergin and Best, *Tochmarc Étaíne*, 10-61. See also, Russell, *Collected Poems*, 428-429. Russell identifies Étaín as a goddess.

¹⁰³ Higgins, *Heroic Revivals*, 39.

By reimagining Ireland's legendary past as a golden age characterized by nobility, virtue, and both earthly and spiritual awareness, Russell attempted to unify the Irish people with a shared self-image, validate Ireland's worth, assert Ireland's distinctiveness from England, and energize Irish men and women with the passion to revive their nation. This, in turn, helped develop the Irish nationalist ideology which would prove vital to the progression of the Irish independence movement.

2.1.3 Interpretation of the Irish Case

In reinterpreting the Irish legendary past as a golden age, Yeats and Russell followed a trend observable in many other countries seeking to promote nationalism. Keeping with Smith's model describing how elites reconstruct an ethnic past as a golden age, Yeats and Russell selected a legendary past that was "authentic" because it had a long literary and cultural history, "usable" because it had an empowering and enlivening effect, and "capable of reinterpretation" because the concerns of their own day could be projected onto it.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, their reimagined Irish legendary golden age also fulfilled the functions delineated by Smith: it helped develop national consciousness, cultural pride, continuity of an Irish identity, the perception of an illustrious destiny, and a re-establishment of Irish cultural "space."¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, to tailor Smith's explanation to the golden age envisioned in Yeats and Russell's poetry, some amendments must be made. Above all, Yeats and Russell selected Irish legends and established them as canon in Ireland's cultural memory in order to project a specific self-image, or "true self" as Smith calls it. However, these poets did not just aim to uncover an Irish national consciousness, but one that was characterized primarily by its esteemed individuality. Thus, the "true self" they sought to establish was largely "auto-exoticist,"¹⁰⁶ or defined by its uniqueness. This was of particular importance in attempting to disprove the conception of the Irish heritage as "barbarous"¹⁰⁷ and instead depict Ireland's ancient Celtic past as both original and

¹⁰⁴ Smith, "Golden Age," 55-57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 48-51.

¹⁰⁶ Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, 225. Leerssen's term "auto-exoticism" indicates an interest in defining one's identity through "one's distinctness and one's distinctiveness."

¹⁰⁷ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 167.

worthy. Moreover, even more crucially, establishing the Irish identity as unique placed the Irish self-image in opposition to the English identity. By emphasizing the originality of Ireland's legendary Celtic past as well as its distinctive values of heroism, virtue, self-sacrifice, wisdom, and spirituality, the poets in effect validated and defined the Irish identity by its "un-English" qualities, as the English were instead associated with the Normans and Anglo-Saxons as well as materialism and lack of moral fiber.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, it is vital to recognize that when formulating an Irish self-image, revivalists such as Yeats and Russell greatly emphasized Ireland's distinctiveness, and particularly, its distinctness from England.¹⁰⁹

In addition, Smith's model overlooks the importance of reinterpreting a golden age to inspire a revitalization of moral virtues, which was a major aim of both Yeats and Russell. Although Smith does demonstrate that a reconstructed golden age establishes a connection between the present and ancient times, reaffirms a nation's dignity through its past, and indicates that it is the nation's destiny to regain its past glory, all of which are evident in the Irish case, he neglects how it can also inspire a national renewal on a moral level. For Yeats and Russell, reimagining Ireland's legendary past as a golden age which exemplified heroism and virtue was not only imperative in constructing an admirable Irish identity, but in providing the means with which Irish men and women could re-attain their glorious golden age. In other words, Yeats and Russell re-envisioned the Celtic legendary past as a golden age through heroes who demonstrated self-sacrifice, spirituality, courage, and integrity in order to suggest that these virtues were inextricable to the Irish spirit and simply needed to be renewed to revive Ireland from stagnation.

Yeats and Russell's development of a proud, unique Irish identity and their perpetuation of moral rejuvenation helped cultivate the nationalist ideals necessary to propel Irish independence. Scholars such as Hutchinson claim that cultural nationalism

¹⁰⁸ Leerksen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, 221, 225. See further, Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 144, 171.

¹⁰⁹ Some perceive this attempt to portray an Irish culture and identity as distinct from Ireland's colonizer as an act of resistance, see further, Tahir Hamdi, "Yeats, Said and decolonization," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51, no. 2 (2015): 221-222. See further, Richard Kearney, introduction to *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions*, ed. Richard Kearney (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), 8. For a contrasting perspective, see Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, "Yeats, Postcolonialism, and Turn-of-the-Century Aesthetics," *European Journal of English Studies* 3, no. 3 (1999): 314-326. Gjurgjan disagrees with considering Yeats's work as postcolonial and maintains that while Yeats's work recovers Irish cultural space, this reflects his aesthetic and turn-of-the-century sentiments rather than attempts to be subversive.

and political nationalism, while intersecting, are ultimately separate processes with separate contributions.¹¹⁰ However, while the explicit aims of cultural nationalists such as Yeats and Russell may have differed from the more radical goals of separatists such as Pádraig Pearse, as Joep Leerssen asserts, cultural validations are "intrinsic" and inextricable components of a nationalist movement as a whole, rather than operating outside of the larger movement.¹¹¹ Therefore, Yeats and Russell's reinterpretations of the Irish legendary past as a golden age, which expounded Ireland's unique identity, greatness, and glorious destiny, fulfilled more than cultural aims by ultimately helping provide nationalist ideology and argumentation for Irish independence.

Cultural arguments formulated by cultural nationalists like Yeats and Russell held political significance, application, and repercussions. For example, political nationalists, such as Arthur Griffith and D. P. Moran, built upon Yeats and Russell's ideals by attempting to justify Ireland's right to political autonomy through its cultural distinctiveness and unique national identity.¹¹² Moreover, they utilized Yeats and Russell's validation of Ireland's innate spirituality and uprightness to polarize Ireland and England and to condemn English influence as the basis for Ireland's moral deterioration.¹¹³ Using cultural nationalism as the foundation of their nationalist ideology, Griffith and Moran garnered widespread support for Irish independence in the early twentieth century, especially among the Catholic population, through their publications and speeches, and, most importantly, through Griffith's involvement in and formation of the republican political party, Sinn Féin.¹¹⁴ Therefore, cultural arguments proved vital in developing a strong and inspiring nationalist ideology capable of catalyzing political support for Irish independence.

In addition, Yeats and Russell's cultural arguments that Ireland was a distinctive and worthy nation that simply needed to recapture its legendary and glorious past for regeneration impacted arguments for Irish economic progress and independence. Russell himself expressed that a shift from English materialism and a return to the

¹¹⁰ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 9, 152.

¹¹¹ Leerssen, *Cultivation of Culture*, 8.

¹¹² Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 168-169. Moran, however, maintained that this cultural identity extended only to Catholic Gaels.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 145-147, 168-169.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168- 170, 189. Sinn Féin became instrumental in propelling Irish independence following the Easter Rising in 1916.

agricultural co-operative model of the Celtic past was the key to Irish economic revitalization and prosperity, and he pursued this idea by acting as an organizer for Sir Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society.¹¹⁵ Both a socialist and a nationalist, James Connolly similarly followed in the footsteps of the Literary Revivalist poets and looked to Ireland's past for inspiration by attempting to recover Ireland's "Gaelic clan system" as an economic model for contemporary Ireland.¹¹⁶ Building off of the nationalist ideology established by cultural nationalists such as the Irish revivalist poets, reformers like Connolly maintained that the Irish economic system should match Ireland's own unique character and inheritance rather than follow England's approach. This perspective ultimately yielded extreme results in Connolly's case. Convinced Ireland had a right to economic and political independence and also frustrated with the threat of Irish conscription in World War I, the Dublin Lock-out,¹¹⁷ and the lack of progress in parliament to increase Irish autonomy, Connolly's socialist nationalism eventually radicalized and he helped form the Irish Citizen Army, which along with Pearse's Irish Volunteers, took part in the Easter Rising in 1916.

Additionally, the cultural nationalism propelled by revivalist poets such as Yeats and Russell arguably influenced other insurgents of the Easter Rising as well as the public's response to the rebellion. By glorifying the heroism and self-sacrifice attributed to Irish legendary heroes like Cú Chulainn and Fergus, Irish revivalists such as O'Grady, Ferguson, Russell, and Yeats encouraged the Irish people of their own time to regain and exemplify those virtues themselves. This inspired separatists like Pádraig Pearse, who, along with Connolly, was a primary leader of the rebellion. In response to the perceived moral decline of Ireland and the failure of parliamentary measures such as the Home Rule Act to grant Ireland autonomy, Pearse considered it his duty to emulate Cú Chulainn and revive his nation through his own necessary self-sacrifice in the rebellion.¹¹⁸ Moreover, by idealizing the heroism of Celtic legendary warriors, Yeats and Russell also impacted the sentiments and reactions of the larger Irish population to the Easter Rising. Although the rebellion itself was not popular with the majority of the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 142-145. See further, Higgins, *Heroic Revivals*, 38.

¹¹⁶ Kearney, introduction to *The Irish Mind*, 24.

¹¹⁷ The Dublin Lock-out was a major labor dispute over the right for workers to unionize starting in 1913 with effects lasting into 1914. Hundreds of people were injured and faced economic turmoil.

¹¹⁸ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 157, 294. See further, Higgins, *Heroic Revivals*, 108.

Irish people initially, after the drawn-out executions of the leaders of the rising and thousands of unfounded arrests, opinions started to shift in the favor of the rebels.¹¹⁹ Perhaps just as Irish legendary heroes, such as Cú Chulainn, were glorified for their courage and self-sacrifice, the same qualities found in the rebel martyrs rendered admiration and sympathy in the Irish people at that time.¹²⁰ Even Yeats himself, who did not agree with violent resistance, could not help but feel some inspiration from their actions, proclaiming in "Easter, 1916," "A terrible beauty is born."¹²¹ Furthermore, highlighting how these rebels were later perceived as embodying Cú Chulainn, their deaths were commemorated by Oliver Sheppard's statue, *The Death of Cuchulain*, in 1935.¹²²

The cultural nationalism propelled by Irish revivalist poets such as Yeats and Russell through their recontextualizations of Ireland's legendary past did not operate tangentially to the larger Irish nationalist movement. Instead, by propagating a proud and distinct Irish identity, reinvigorating the Irish people, and inspiring ideals of heroism, self-sacrifice, and morality, the Irish revivalist poets vitally contributed to the nationalist ideology which helped advanced the Irish independence movement.

2.2 Icelandic Revivalist Poets

The Icelandic nationalist movement garnered extensive interest in Iceland in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹²³ While there were arguably many other factors, certainly this was in part due to the cultural nationalism propelled by Icelandic revivalist poets such as Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson. Both poets studied in Copenhagen and were influenced by the development of Danish nationalism and Romanticism, which emphasized uniqueness, sentiment, nationality, aestheticism, medievalism, and a general concentration on the past.¹²⁴ Bjarni himself attended the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 189, 295.

¹²⁰ M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism 1882-1916* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 257-258.

¹²¹ Yeats, *Poems*, 202-205.

¹²² This statue resides in the General Post Office in Dublin which was one of the major sites of the Easter Rising.

¹²³ Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 48.

¹²⁴ Beck, "Pioneer Romanticist," 73.

lectures of Henrik Steffens in 1802, which have often been credited with introducing the ideals of German nationalism and Romanticism to Denmark.¹²⁵ Adam Oehlenschläger was also impacted by these lectures and his work with Old Icelandic material was a source of inspiration to both Bjarni and Jónas.¹²⁶ Icelandic writers of the previous century also influenced Bjarni and Jónas through their patriotism and work with the *Íslendingasögur* and *Eddas*. For example, Jón Þorláksson translated *Paradise Lost* into Icelandic using eddic forms and Eggert Ólafsson compared Iceland's legendary past with his own time to emphasize the decline of Iceland and the need for its revitalization.¹²⁷ In addition, Bjarni himself was a source of inspiration for Jónas, and, in fact, they collaborated on ideas and remained good friends until Bjarni's death.¹²⁸

Influenced as they were by these early proponents and precursors of nationalism, scholar-poets such as Bjarni and Jónas sought to uncover a unified and empowered Icelandic spirit,¹²⁹ or consciousness, and, like their predecessors, they looked to Iceland's legendary past to do so. Therefore, they selected and recontextualized elements of their nation's cultural memory, specifically the *Íslendingasögur*, as well as the *Eddas* to a lesser degree, and re-established them as national canon with the deliberate intention of projecting a proud national self-image, proving national worth, and revitalizing their nation. Bjarni and Jónas primarily accomplished this by purposefully portraying the legendary past depicted in these Old Icelandic Medieval texts as a golden age in their poetry.¹³⁰ In doing so, they exemplified how memory of the past is constantly reinterpreted to accommodate contemporary purposes and portray

¹²⁵ Ibid., 73. Beck states that Steffens influenced Bjarni. Steffens studied under Friedrich Schelling and was also exposed to the works of Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe which were influential in propagating nationalist sentiment in nineteenth century Europe. See further, Sveinn Yngvi, "Eddas, sagas," 109. Sveinn Yngvi also emphasizes the impact of Steffens's lectures on Bjarni.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 109. Sveinn Yngvi asserts that Oehlenschläger's poem, *Guldhornene (The Golden Horns)*, brought Romanticism to Scandinavia. See also, Beck, "Pioneer Romanticist," 73-74. Beck states that Oehlenschläger influenced Bjarni. See also, Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 4. Ringler indicates that Jónas was inspired by Oehlenschläger.

¹²⁷ Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 241-242.

¹²⁸ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 4, 24, 208-210. Jónas even wrote Bjarni an elegy.

¹²⁹ See further, Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, "Hugmyndir íslenskra höfunda á 19. öld um þjóðarbókmenntir: Nokkrir þættir," in *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl 1994*, ed. Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrun Kvaran, and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1994), 327-354. Hallfreður discusses how nineteenth century Icelandic writers purposefully developed the ideology of an Icelandic national spirit and applied these ideas to their work.

¹³⁰ This legendary past supposedly took place during the Commonwealth of Iceland which spanned from the tenth through the thirteenth century.

a specific self-image in each context.¹³¹ In addition, by recontextualizing Iceland's legendary past as a golden age, Bjarni and Jónas contributed to the nationalist ideology which would later propel Iceland's pursuit of increased political autonomy by revealing Iceland's distinctive identity, unique accomplishments, and glorious cultural heritage.

2.2.1 Bjarni Thorarensen

While whether or not Bjarni "pioneered" Icelandic Romanticism is a subject of debate,¹³² his poems, composed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, clearly illustrate the desire to portray an aesthetic re-rendering of Iceland's legendary past as a golden age in the hopes of inspiring patriotism and revitalization. In "Um afturfarir Fljótshlíðar (The Decline of Fljótshlíð)," Bjarni chooses both his poetic content and form from Old Icelandic literature in an effort to reinvigorate Icelandic pride, identity, and morale. The first stanza of the poem describes the site of Fljótshlíð, a region most famous from an episode in Chapter 75 of *Brennu-Njáls saga*. In the episode in question, the hero, Gunnarr Hámundarson, on his way to leaving Iceland due to a three year banishment sentence, is thrown from his horse and upon arising is so overcome by the beauty of Hlíðarendi, a specific region within Fljótshlíð, that he tells his brother, Kolskeggr, who is also banished, that he will stay in Iceland despite threats to his life.¹³³ Symbolizing the decline of the times, Bjarni's poem emphasizes how the land has degenerated from the once vibrant meadow of the Commonwealth period that so inspired Gunnarr to a muddy field in the modern day. The next and last stanza goes on to portray the figure of Gunnarr as looking out over this deteriorated state of Fljótshlíð, from his burial mound and his disillusionment with the landscape, and by extension with Iceland itself:

¹³¹ Assmann, "Collective Memory," 130. See further, Rigney, "Plenitude, scarcity," 14.

¹³² Beck, "Pioneer Romanticist," 71. Bjarni argues he was. See further, Þórir, "From Romanticism to Realism," 251. Þórir points out that some scholars regard Bjarni as the only true Icelandic romantic poet.

¹³³ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk fornrit, vol. 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954), 182-183. As stated in Chapter 19, Gunnarr was from Hlíðarendi, within Fljótshlíð, see *Ibid.*, 52. Bjarni and Jónas's poems are partly why this episode, and the sites of Hlíðarendi and Fljótshlíð, became iconic.

Gunnar hátt
af haugi lítur
slóðir fagrar fyrr
fölar orðnar,
og iðrast nú
að aftur hvarf
að bera bein
blá við hrjóstur.¹³⁴

[Gunnarr high
from his mound sees
tracks beautiful before
pale have become,
and regrets now
that he returned
to be buried
in this barren place]¹³⁵

Gylfi Gunnlaugsson argues that Bjarni's poem simply expresses his disappointment at nature's destruction of a landscape that Bjarni loved, particularly because he grew up on a farm in Hlíðarendi.¹³⁶ However, Bjarni's deliberate choice of reinterpreting Gunnarr, an esteemed saga hero who chooses death rather than leave Iceland, as disappointed, and Fljótshlíð, a beautiful and important saga setting, as decayed in the modern age, suggests different intentions. By purposefully selecting elements of Iceland's golden age which encapsulate Icelandic pride, specifically Gunnarr and Fljótshlíð, and by extension *Brennu-Njáls saga* itself, Bjarni attempts to foster a proud and united national consciousness for his countrymen by reminding them of their "true self"¹³⁷ through their shared, unique, and impressive legendary origins. Moreover, he utilizes *fornyrðislag*, an eddic poetic form used in some Medieval Icelandic texts, most notably in a number of poems in *Eddukvæði*. In doing so, he highlights the cultural contributions of Icelanders to the world, elevating Iceland's unique and remarkable identity.

¹³⁴ Bjarni Thorarensen, *Ljóðmæli*, ed. Jón Helgason (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1935), 102.

¹³⁵ My translation.

¹³⁶ Gylfi Gunnlaugsson, "Old Norse Poetry and New Beginnings in Late 18th- and Early 19th- Century Literature," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 147-148.

¹³⁷ Smith, "Golden Age," 49.

However, Bjarni does not reinterpret these aspects of Iceland's legendary past purely to glorify the Icelandic identity; this is obvious by the dreary depictions of Fljótshlíð and disillusionment expressed by Gunnarr. Neither though does the deterioration described by Bjarni serve as a lament for Iceland and its long-past golden age. Instead, Bjarni's poem is foremost intended as a powerful incitement of the Icelandic people. Depicting Gunnarr, the epitome of Icelandic bravery, resilience, and patriotism, as having lost his fervor for the landscape of Hlíðarendi, and depicting Fljótshlíð, a region which symbolizes the beauty of Icelandic nature, as having lost its vitality is a challenge to the Icelandic people to regain their former glory and pride. Bjarni's implication is that contemporary Iceland has lost the splendor and patriotism of its golden age; however, by indicating that this golden age is a part of Iceland's past and inheritance, he suggests it can be restored once more. Thus, Bjarni's poem renders nostalgia, but, more importantly, it generates a sense of continuity¹³⁸ which urges Icelanders to revive Gunnarr's noble and passionate spirit within themselves and, not create, but recapture, their nation's destined majesty. Given that in the nineteenth century, sovereignty was considered a prerequisite for "material and cultural progress,"¹³⁹ this idea of reclaiming a glorious national destiny had implications in the later stages of Iceland's independence movement in that it helped justify increased political autonomy for Iceland.

In "Veturinn (Winter)," Bjarni also reimagines Iceland's legendary past as a golden age to foster national pride and identity; however, he emphasizes Iceland's singularity and virtues more emphatically. In the poem, Bjarni anthropomorphizes winter as a majestic saga warrior and uses the eddic form of *fornyrðislag* to do so, composing:

Hvör ríður svo geyst
 á gullinbrúvu
 hávan of hifin
 hesti snjálitum...

¹³⁸ Ibid., 50. According to Smith, "continuity" links history and generations together and allows recognition of "heroic individuality," thus, it has the power to render both a national identity and pride.

¹³⁹ Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 245. According to Guðmundur this idea influenced Danish politics greatly in the 1860s. See further, Schmidt, "Cultural Nationalism in Herder," 408-409.

Glóir á gunnsnörpum
grásteind brynja,
hangir ísskjöldur
hal á öxlum.¹⁴⁰

[Who rides with such fury
A fiery charger —
Through the high heavens
A horse snow-colored...
Glowing glitters
His gray armor;
On his shoulder there hangs
A shield ice-covered...]¹⁴¹

By depicting winter as a striking warrior reminiscent of the saga heroes,¹⁴² Bjarni highlights the distinctiveness of the Icelandic identity on two levels: on one hand, he elevates Iceland's unique legendary past and literary traditions, and, on the other, he exalts Iceland's distinct nature through its weather. He goes on to write, "Afl vex því öflga/er hann þat nálgast"¹⁴³ (The strong are strengthened/When his step approaches).¹⁴⁴ Bjarni's implication here is that Icelanders are already innately strong, most likely due to their mighty legendary ancestry, but that winter, despite its usual negative connotations and the hardship it causes, ultimately empowers the Icelandic people further by teaching them the virtue of resilience. The theory that Bjarni is drawing upon, the idea that the climate of a nation affects its character, first originated in the work of Montesquieu.¹⁴⁵ It was then expanded upon by German Romanticists such as Schelling and Herder, and then further propelled by Steffens, who spread the idea to Bjarni in his Copenhagen lectures.¹⁴⁶ Bjarni utilizes this idea for his own purposes, suggesting that the Icelandic national spirit is inherently strong both due to Iceland's courageous ancestors and also due to its empowering climate.¹⁴⁷ Thus, he not only instills national pride but

¹⁴⁰ Bjarni, *Ljóðmæli*, 118.

¹⁴¹ Richard Beck, *Icelandic Lyrics: Originals and Translations* (Reykjavík: Þórhallur Bjarnarson, 1930), 31.

¹⁴² Þórir, "From Romanticism to Realism," 263. Þórir echoes this interpretation.

¹⁴³ Bjarni, *Ljóðmæli*, 119.

¹⁴⁴ Beck, *Icelandic Lyrics*, 33.

¹⁴⁵ Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Imaginations of National Identity and the North," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 14-15.

¹⁴⁶ Gylfi, "Old Norse Poetry," 136.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, "Golden Age," 49. In doing so, Bjarni also "re-roots" the Icelandic identity in its distinct land.

encourages heroic and virtuous revitalization by reminding his countrymen to embody the resilience and strength exhibited by their courageous ancestors¹⁴⁸ and wrought by their land.

By fostering an empowered and unified Icelandic identity, justifying Iceland's worth and individuality, and reinvigorating the spirit of the Icelandic people, Bjarni helped render the foundations of Icelandic nationalist ideology.

2.2.2 Jónas Hallgrímsson

Considered by many a national poet of Iceland,¹⁴⁹ Jónas Hallgrímsson propelled Romanticist and nationalist ideals in his poetry with the intention of inspiring Icelandic nationalism and greater political autonomy. Many of Jónas's poems, as well as some of his essays, were first published in *Fjölnir*, a journal published from 1835 to 1847 by a group of Icelandic students and scholars living in Copenhagen who used it as a platform to foster Icelandic pride and encourage increased Icelandic sovereignty.¹⁵⁰ In their literature, the Fjölnismenn helped develop cultural arguments for increased Icelandic independence which had political implications. The journal even briefly attracted Jón Sigurðsson before he started his own journal, *Ný félagsrit*.¹⁵¹ One of the major ways Jónas and his fellow Fjölnismenn, cultivated cultural nationalism through their works was by reimagining the Commonwealth of Iceland as a golden age in order to justify Iceland's greatness and entitlement to increased political autonomy.

Jónas was an avid enthusiast of "The Works of Ossian,"¹⁵² texts about the Celtic legendary past which were believed at the time to have been translated from Gaelic by James Macpherson.¹⁵³ Seeing as the texts fulfilled Romantic ideals, promoted nationalism, and increased esteem for nations such as Ireland and Scotland, perhaps it is

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *National Identity*, 128. This follows Smith's idea of heroes being reimagined as virtuous "prototypes."

¹⁴⁹ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵¹ Hallgrímur Sveinsson, *The National Hero of Iceland: Jón Sigurdsson, a concise biography*, trans. Hersteinn Pálsson (Hrafseyri: Vestfirski forlagið, 1996), 30-33. Jón Sigurðsson joined *Fjölnir* but quickly left thereafter supposedly because of conflict over the publication's leadership in 1841.

¹⁵² Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 4, 20.

¹⁵³ Macpherson supposedly translated the work in the late 18th century from Gaelic Medieval manuscripts written by the bard, Ossian, but this has been determined to have been fabricated.

no surprise that Jónas wished to also use native legend to elevate his own country. Therefore, in his poems, Jónas reinterpreted aspects of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Eddas*¹⁵⁴ in order to portray an Icelandic golden age infused with nineteenth century nationalist sentiment. Many of Jónas's poems depict the Icelandic legendary past in an idealized manner, but if one poem encapsulated his attempt to reimagine an Icelandic golden age, it would be "Ísland (Iceland)," shown by the excerpt:

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, alþingið 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.
Þá riðu hetjur um héröð og skrautbúin skip fyrir landi
flutu með fríðasta lið, færandi varninginn heim.¹⁵⁵

[Here came our famous forebears—those freedom-worshipping heroes—
out of the East in their ships, eager to settle the land.
Raising their families on farms in the flowering laps of the valleys,
hearty and happy they lived, hugely content with their lot.
Up on the outcrops of lava where Axe River plummets forever
into the Almann Gorge, Alþing would meet every year:
there lay old Þorgeir, thoughtfully charting our change of religion;
there strode Gissur and Geir, Gunnar and Héðinn and Njáll.
Heroes rode through the regions, while under the crags on the coastline
floated their fabulous ships, ferrying goods from abroad.]¹⁵⁶

In this section of the poem, Jónas reconstructs elements of *Brennu-Njáls saga* and refers to other aspects of Iceland's legendary past in order to reinterpret the Commonwealth of Iceland as an illustrious golden age. In doing so, he bolsters pride for the Icelandic identity. However, while the first portion of the poem is dedicated to nostalgically depicting this golden age, the second section chronicles Iceland's subsequent

¹⁵⁴ Jónas often utilized the eddic form of *fornyrðislag*, see further, Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 363.

¹⁵⁵ Jónas Hallgrímsson, *Ljóð og lausamál*, ed. Haukur Hannesson, Páll Valsson, and Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, Ritverk Jónasar Hallgrímssonar, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Svart á hvítu, 1989), 63. Jonas originally published many of his poems in the journals *Fjölnir* and *Skírnir* in the 1830s and 1840s. Editions of his collected poems were not published until after his death, with the first in 1847, see Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 447.

¹⁵⁶ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 101.

degeneration in modern times, concluding with, "Ó, þér unglíngafjöld og Íslands fullorðnu synir! / Svona er feðranna frægð fallin í gleymsku og dá!"¹⁵⁷ (O you children of Iceland, old men and young men together! / See how your forefathers' fame faltered and passed from the earth!)¹⁵⁸ By portraying Iceland's legendary past as a golden age in contrast with its dejected present, Jónas attempts to urge Icelanders to re-attain their past magnificence and, in the process, ultimately provides his countrymen with an ideological basis for increased Icelandic political autonomy.

One way Jónas reimagines the Icelandic Commonwealth period as a golden age to inspire his own time in "Ísland" is by highlighting the virtues of saga figures such as Gissur, Geirr, Gunnarr, Héðinn and Njáll. These characters all derive from *Brennu-Njáls saga*; therefore, referring to them reaffirms the *Brennu-Njáls saga* text as part of Icelandic national canon and cultural memory, and contributes to an Icelandic self-image and national pride. By specifically referencing Gunnarr and Héðinn, or Skarpheðinn, both of whom were courageous and successful warriors, Jónas emphasizes the heroic heritage of Icelanders.¹⁵⁹ Jónas also refers to the characters, Gizurr, Geirr, and Njáll, who were reputed for their wisdom, particularly in terms of law.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the figure of Njáll, the main protagonist of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, was also renowned for being noble and helping others with his legal expertise.¹⁶¹ By recontextualizing heroic, noble, and wise saga characters, who are in contrast with the stagnation of his own time, Jónas both elevates the Icelandic identity by pointing out its honorable ancestry, and reinvigorates his countrymen by encouraging them to follow the example of their forefathers.

Jónas further depicts Iceland's legendary past as a golden age by glorifying Iceland's past autonomy. He does so by emphasizing the sovereignty enjoyed by Iceland's legendary ancestors, calling them "frjálsræðishetjurnar (freedom-worshipping heroes)" and implying that they came to Iceland from Norway primarily to benefit from

¹⁵⁷ Jónas, *Ljóð og lausamál*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 101.

¹⁵⁹ Einar, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 70, 91. In Chapter 25, Skarpheðinn is depicted as "øruggr (fearless)" and full of "styrkr (strength)." Hallgerðr says Gunnarr "vaskastr er á Íslandi (is the bravest man in Iceland)" in Chapter 35. English translations of *Brennu-Njáls saga* quotes are my own.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 145. In Chapter 56, Gizurr, Geirr, and Njáll are described as "inna vitrustu manna (the wisest men)."

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 57. Njáll is described as "heilráðr (giving good counsel)," "vitr (wise)," and "dreglyndr (noble-minded)" in Chapter 20.

that sovereignty.¹⁶² In doing so, he idealizes the Icelandic Commonwealth as a golden age due to its freedom and, thus, reinforces the desirability of increased Icelandic independence in his own time. Moreover, he also establishes continuity in the Icelandic desire for self-governance, justifying contemporary Icelanders' wish for greater independence by suggesting that Icelanders have always inherently desired freedom and have a tradition of autonomy that simply needs to be reclaimed. In addition, Jónas not only emphasizes how Iceland's ancestors benefitted 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 being "svo glaðir (hugely content)" with their circumstances and even depicts Icelandic nature as 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 his depiction of Iceland in his own time, about which he composes "Það er svo bágð að standa í stað¹⁶³ (it is bitter to stand here, stalled and panned in the present)!"¹⁶⁴ By emphasizing the prosperity of Iceland's autonomous past with its stagnant, powerless present, Jónas 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 foreign leadership.¹⁶⁵ As a result, the cultural nationalism apparent in Jónas's work has significant repercussions in establishing nationalist ideology by using cultural means to ultimately justify increased Icelandic independence on cultural, economic, and political levels.

In addition, in "Ísland," Jónas also reimagines Alþingi, the general assembly now known as the oldest on-going parliamentary institution, and its location, Þingvellir, to build national pride and provoke revitalization. Jónas both describes how the Alþingi assembled with saga heroes each year during the Commonwealth period and depicts the

¹⁶² Gísli Sigurðsson, "Constructing a Past to Suit the Present: Sturla Þórðarson on Conflicts and Alliances with King Haraldr hárfagri," in *Minni and Muninn: Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell, and Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2014), 175-176, 186-187. 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 further, Snorri Sturluson, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, in *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, vol. 1, Íslensk fornrit, vol. 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941), 117-118.

¹⁶³ Jónas, *Ljóð og lausamál*, 63.

¹⁶⁴ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 101.

¹⁶⁵ Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 242. This notion was echoed by other nineteenth century nationalists such as Gísli Brynjólfsson. See also, Schmidt, "Cultural Nationalism in Herder," 408-409. This idea may have been inspired by Herder's notion that foreign involvement impedes the natural progress of a nation.

landscape of Þingvellir and the Axe River, Almannagorge, and lava field found there. Similarly, in "Fjallið Skjaldbreiður (Mount Broadshield)," Jónas provides depictions of Þingvellir and its surroundings, with emphasis on the nearby mountain of Skjaldbreiður, and also includes a reference to Grímr *geitskör*, who supposedly chose the location of the Alþingi.¹⁶⁶ In both cases Jónas emphasizes two important aspects of Iceland's uniqueness and national worth, its nature and legendary past,¹⁶⁷ and converges them in the landscape of Þingvellir. In doing so, he suggests that the Alþingi is inextricably rooted in Iceland and also imbues the site of Þingvellir with ideological significance for Iceland. As a result, Jónas conceives Þingvellir as a *lieux de mémoire*¹⁶⁸ and recontextualizes the site for his own purposes of propelling a nationalism. By portraying the Alþingi at Þingvellir during Iceland's golden age in poems such as "Ísland" and "Fjallið Skjaldbreiður," Jónas reuses Þingvellir as a physical and symbolic reminder of Iceland's worthiness, and, thus, reinvests the site with national pride. In addition, by choosing to emphasize Alþingi, the oldest continuing parliament, Jónas highlights Iceland's contribution to modern politics and also suggests that the Alþingi is part of Iceland's natural state. Therefore, when he points out later in the poem that Alþingi is gone and that the Lögberg at Þingvellir is obscured by heather in his time period, Jónas indicates that Iceland has lost an integral, natural part of itself when the Alþingi was dissolved by Denmark in 1800. As a result, Jónas recontextualizes Alþingi, and its site at Þingvellir, to contribute to nationalist ideology in several ways: he promotes a proud Icelandic consciousness; he provides continuity in Iceland's desire for greater political autonomy; he justifies why Iceland deserves greater political autonomy; he suggests that

¹⁶⁶ Jónas, *Ljóð og lausamál*, 129-132. For an English translation, see Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 192-194.

¹⁶⁷ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 3-5. Jónas not only expressed interest in Iceland's literary, legendary, and historical traditions to encourage nationalism, but, as a naturalist, Jónas also focused on Icelandic nature as another element of national pride. This is evident in poems such as "Fjallið Skjaldbreiður" and "Drangey." See also, Wawn, "Old North in Britain," 132. An interest in both Iceland's nature and its literary history was also common in British explorers who visited Iceland in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹⁶⁸ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12. According to Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are sites of memory that are "ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness." See further, Sveinn Yngvi, "Nation and Elevation," 136. Sveinn Yngvi also identifies Þingvellir as a *lieux de mémoire*. See further, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Þingvellir: An Icelandic 'Lieu de Mémoire,'" *History and Memory* 12, no.1 (2000): 7-15. Guðmundur primarily discusses the construction of Þingvellir as a *lieux de mémoire* in terms of twentieth century nationalism but also concerning nineteenth century nationalism as well.

Alþingi, and the increased self-governance it represents, must be restored for Iceland to attain its magnificence once more.¹⁶⁹

Recontextualizing the same episode of *Brennu-Njáls saga* used by Bjarni in "Um afturfarir Fljótshlíðar," in "Gunnarshólmi" Jónas reinterprets the Commonwealth of Iceland as a golden age in order to inspire his contemporaries into recapturing their country's past glory. Jónas specifically does so by using the saga-site of Gunnarshólmi, supposedly the location which inspired Gunnar to stay in Iceland, as a *pars pro toto* for Iceland itself. Jónas begins the poem with glorified, lush imagery of Gunnarshólmi and its surroundings of Fljótshlíð 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. He follows this idyllic description with a reinterpretation of Gunnarr and Kolskeggr's ride towards the ship that will take them to Norway.¹⁷⁰ After describing both men's fierceness, steadfastness, and nobility, Jónas explains how Gunnarr looks back and sees Hlíðarendi and is so struck with its beauty that he refuses to leave his beloved country even though he knows it will cause his death. Just as Bjarni did, Jónas purposefully selects and hyperbolizes this saga episode in order to foster a proud Icelandic self-image due to its beautiful landscape, its inspiring literary and cultural heritage of the sagas, and its patriotic and heroic ancestry. However, Jónas not only instills national consciousness and pride through legendary means, but also uses this saga scene to catalyze his contemporaries into reclaiming Iceland's supposedly former radiance. In the last section of the poem, Jónas does this by analyzing the incident from a modern day perspective writing:

Því 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.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Jónas and his fellow Fjölismenn believed that the Alþingi should be re-established at Þingvellir because of its cultural and historical significance; however, Jón Sigurðsson was successful in having it established in Reykjavík.

¹⁷⁰ Einar, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 182-183.

¹⁷¹ Jónas, *Ljóð og lausamál*, 79.

[For Gunnar felt it nobler far to die
than flee and leave his native shores behind him,
even though foes, inflamed with hate and sly,
were forging links of death in which to bind him.
His story still can make the heart beat high,
and here imagination still can find him,
where Gunnar's Holm, all green with vegetation,
glistens amid these wastes of devastation.]¹⁷²

Jónas glorifies Gunnarr as a symbol of Icelandic pride¹⁷³ and courage in order to inspire his countrymen to demonstrate the same patriotism and heroism as their legendary ancestor. In addition, Jónas uses the land itself to stimulate the Icelanders of Jónas's time to reinvigorate their nation by using it as a metaphor for Iceland's contemporary situation. Jónas illustrates that, unlike its abundance during the Commonwealth period, the surrounding land of Gunnarshólmi has deteriorated in the modern day;¹⁷⁴ however, the patch of land that so arrested Gunnarr still remains lush. Therefore, Jónas invests this symbolic plot of land with patriotic hope for Iceland, suggesting that despite the stagnation of Iceland's people in his own time, Iceland's past greatness can be re-attained through a revitalization of its people. As a result, Jónas reworks Iceland's legendary past as an exalted example for Iceland's present, giving his countrymen the motivation to reclaim their nation's "glorious destiny"¹⁷⁵ through renewed patriotism, dedication, and sacrifice rather than passively allowing their nation to stagnate and decay.

Although references to the *Íslendingasögur* feature more prominently in Jónas's oeuvre, he also alludes to the *Eddas* to elevate the Icelandic identity. This is evident in "Hulduljóð (The Lay of Hulda)" which references *hulduþjóð*, or hidden-people. The *hulduþjóð*, which are similar to the Irish *aes sídhe*, are present in Icelandic folklore and likely originate from the *álfar* of Old Norse mythology.¹⁷⁶ Although the poem is

¹⁷² Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 137-138.

¹⁷³ Þórir, "From Romanticism to Realism," 268. Þórir identifies Gunnarr as "patriotism personified."

¹⁷⁴ This destruction of the landscape was caused by the Þverá river; however, Jónas's concern is not the actual deterioration of the site, but rather its symbolic value.

¹⁷⁵ Smith, "Golden Age," 51.

¹⁷⁶ Terry Gunnell, "Waking the Dead: Folk Legends Concerning Magicians and Walking Corpses in Iceland," in *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture*, ed. Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherini (Berkeley: North Pinehurst Press, 2012), 237. For more on the *álfar*

primarily a tribute to Eggert Ólafsson, it is Hulda, one of the *hulduþjóð*, who encourages Jónas to compose it, shown in his first lines, "Skáld er eg ei, en huldukonan kallar / og kveða biður hyggjuþungan beim¹⁷⁷ (No poet I. Yet here is Hulda calling, / hailing me gently, urging me to sing)."¹⁷⁸ Jónas goes on to describe nature and discuss spirituality, shown in this later stanza:

Hvað er í heimi, Hulda!? líf og andi,
hugsanir drottins sálum fjær og nær,
þar sem að bárur brjóta hval á sandi,
í brekku þar sem fjallaljósið grær;
þar sem að háleit hugmynd leið sér brýtur,
hann vissi það er andi vor nú lítur.¹⁷⁹

[Hulda! The world is life and ghost and glory,
with God in different shapes in different souls,
wherever blossoms chant their blazing story
or battered whales lie dying in the shoals,
wherever souls ascend to truth or near it —
he saw all this, whom we behold in spirit.]¹⁸⁰

Since it is Hulda who motivates Jónas to compose this poem, and, thus, to contemplate divinity, spirituality, and nature, Jónas may suggest that Iceland's legendary past had a connection to both the natural and spiritual worlds. Therefore, he establishes a history of Iceland possessing profound rather than superficial values. Moreover, by pointing out Eggert's recognition of these ideals, stating "hann vissi það (he saw all this)," Jónas suggests that his contemporaries should follow the example of their legendary past, as encapsulated in Hulda, and appreciate nature and spirituality above modernistic materialism just as Eggert did. In addition, perhaps Jónas depicted these profound values as innately Icelandic to show Iceland's distinctiveness from Denmark, as Denmark was more associated with industrialism and luxury in comparison to Iceland at

see Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds., "Grimnismál," in *Eddukvæði*, vol. 1, Íslensk fornrit Eddukvæði (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 368-369. In stanzas 4-5, there are references to "álfum (elves)" and "Álfheim (the land of the elves)."

¹⁷⁷ Jónas, *Ljóð og lausamál*, 116.

¹⁷⁸ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 174.

¹⁷⁹ Jónas, *Ljóð og lausamál*, 117.

¹⁸⁰ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 175.

that time.¹⁸¹ Therefore, Jónas deliberately recontextualizes figures of Icelandic legend in order to create continuity in Icelandic values and identity, national pride for Iceland's deep principles, and, perhaps, distinction between Iceland and Denmark.

2.2.3 Interpretation of the Icelandic Case

As illustrated, Bjarni and Jónas reimagined Iceland's legendary past as a golden age in order to mold Icelandic cultural memory to the concerns of their day. Following Smith's outline, by portraying this envisioned golden age, Bjarni and Jónas served several functions: they revealed Iceland's "true self;" they reclaimed national space; they established continuity with Iceland's legendary past; they restored Iceland's dignity; they suggested that Iceland's destiny is simply waiting to be regained.¹⁸² However, while Smith's model is applicable to the Icelandic case, as in the Irish case, some of his ideas can be expanded upon. For one, although Smith does mention the importance of recognizing a nation's individuality when establishing its "true self" through its golden age, as previously stated, there is not sufficient emphasis placed on the significance of establishing a nation's uniqueness in order to foster national pride. Highlighting Iceland's distinctiveness seems to be a major intention in the poetry of Bjarni and Jónas. These poets deliberately utilize native legends rather than classical mythology; thus, they validate the *Íslendingasögur* and *Eddas* as important elements of Icelandic cultural memory which reaffirm Icelandic national consciousness and individuality.¹⁸³ Moreover, in doing so, they establish Iceland's unique cultural contributions as "high culture"¹⁸⁴ and demonstrate that they are as equally impressive as other European traditions.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, Bjarni and Jónas capitalize on Iceland's distinctiveness to not simply define, but elevate, the Icelandic identity. At the same time, by focusing on Iceland's unique culture, past, and identity, these poets also demonstrate Iceland's difference from Denmark and, in Jónas's case, perhaps indicate that this entitles Iceland to increased political autonomy.

¹⁸¹ Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 47-48.

¹⁸² Smith, "Golden Age," 48-51.

¹⁸³ Assmann, "Collective Memory," 130.

¹⁸⁴ Byock, "Modern nationalism," 165.

¹⁸⁵ Sveinn Yngvi, "Nation and Elevation," 144.

In addition, one function of Bjarni and Jónas's envisioned Icelandic golden age which Smith's model overlooks is to prompt "moral regeneration,"¹⁸⁶ though more in the sense of recovering specific virtues than a moral code. By portraying the Icelandic legendary past as a golden age characterized by courage and spirituality, Bjarni and Jónas attempted to revitalize their nation on a deeper level, using Iceland's legendary past to inspire their countrymen to aspire to heroism and embrace a more true and profound understanding of life than their industry-driven foreign ruler.

Lastly, expanding upon Smith's notion that a reimagined golden age can reveal a nation's "destiny," a vital function of Bjarni and Jónas's golden age depiction was to show Iceland's past wealth and freedom in order to suggest that this affluence and autonomy could be re-attained. Thus, they used Icelandic legendary past to not only show Iceland's supposedly perpetual desire for autonomy, but Iceland's potential for economic prosperity and political freedom in the future through the restoration of its independence.¹⁸⁷

As evidenced above, by recontextualizing their native legends and reinterpreting them as depicting a golden age, Bjarni and Jónas's poetry helped build a proud Icelandic identity, prove Iceland's worth, and encourage contemporary Icelanders to revitalize their nation. In accomplishing this, Bjarni and Jónas set the tone for subsequent Icelandic poets, such as Grímur Thomsen and Gísli Brynjúlfsson,¹⁸⁸ and contributed immensely to Icelandic cultural nationalism. Moreover, their cultural arguments helped provide a nationalist ideology that proved crucial to political¹⁸⁹ and economic argumentation for increased political freedom for Iceland. Influential politicians such as Jón Sigurðsson benefitted from the national consciousness that these poets helped formulate and he often depended on cultural arguments to validate Iceland's right to

¹⁸⁶ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 9.

¹⁸⁷ Guðmundur, "Þingvellir," 15-17. These ideas were influential in the later stages of Icelandic independence in the early to mid-twentieth century and were even taught as historical reality in the Icelandic school system by influences such as Jónas Jónsson. However, as Guðmundur points out, the teaching of history and textbooks in Iceland have lost much of this nationalistic sentiment in the modern day.

¹⁸⁸ Sveinn Yngvi, "Reception," 107-111, 116-119. Like Bjarni and Jónas, Grímur and Gísli used references to Old Icelandic texts in their poems to foster national pride. However, Grímur did so to develop Scandinavianism more generally, while Gísli did so to explicitly encourage increased Icelandic political autonomy.

¹⁸⁹ Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 50. Gunnar argues that the "cultural root" developed by Arngrímur Jónsson as well as cultural nationalists like Bjarni and Jónas was vital for political nationalism.

increased autonomy.¹⁹⁰ In addition, Bjarni and Jónas's recontextualizations of Iceland's legendary past created justifications for greater economic independence by providing the argument that Iceland's prosperous golden age could not be recovered with a foreign ruler, an idea which held popularity in Icelandic and even Danish politics and was perceived as a historical reality.¹⁹¹

The cultural nationalism endorsed in Bjarni and Jónas's poetry not only appealed to politicians, but to the masses. Nationalism became more popular among the Icelandic population than in other countries in the early nineteenth century, perhaps because the Icelandic population could be convinced of their nation's supposed cultural homogeneity and, thus, unified more easily.¹⁹² Moreover, unlike nineteenth century Ireland, in which the minority Anglo-Irish Protestants dominated upper-class professions and political positions, the ruling class in Iceland, though educated in Denmark, were primarily Icelandic. Since the majority of Icelanders, including intellectuals, upper classes, and farmers, despite class differences still felt that they shared a common history and cultural background, reconstructing Iceland's legendary past as an Icelandic golden age could convincingly shape a proud and united Icelandic identity.¹⁹³ In addition, the popularity of the sagas in Iceland in the nineteenth century¹⁹⁴ and the pride Icelanders had for them perhaps made the Icelandic population more receptive to cultural justifications for increased political autonomy based on the Icelandic legendary past.

Perhaps most importantly, cultural arguments for greater Icelandic independence were persuasive to the Danish government. The sagas and *Eddas* reached back into the legendary history of not only Iceland, but all of Scandinavia; thus, Scandinavian countries, such as Denmark, depended on these Old Icelandic texts to help shape their

¹⁹⁰ Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 246. For example, like Bjarni and Jónas, Jón Sigurðsson argued that Iceland could only regain its innate "energy" through greater autonomy and that Iceland's uniqueness or "particular nature and conditions" entitled it to greater freedom. However, it is important to note that Jón Sigurðsson and other Icelandic politicians of his time did not pursue complete independence from the Danish kingdom, but only increased political freedom.

¹⁹¹ Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 242, 245. See further, Guðmundur, "Linguistic Patriotism," 57. Jón Sigurðsson emphasized that a nation can only progress by following its own "traditions."

¹⁹² Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 48, 58-59. Gunnar 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.

¹⁹³ Iceland also had a history of glorifying its legendary past, which may have also made nineteenth century Icelanders more receptive to this argumentation, see Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 49.

¹⁹⁴ Jón Karl, "Continuity?," 71. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that nightly readings of the sagas on farms declined.

national identities.¹⁹⁵ Since the Medieval manuscripts of the sagas and *Eddas* were recorded by Icelanders and written in Old Icelandic, a language closely resembling Modern Icelandic, the Danish state held Iceland and its cultural contributions in high regard.¹⁹⁶ Arguably, the Danish state's admiration for Iceland's literature, manuscripts, and language made Danish authorities more receptive to the argument that Iceland's unique cultural background and achievements entitled it to greater autonomy. This in turn made the Danish state more prone to concessions, such as restoring the Alþingi, establishing a separate Icelandic constitution, and, eventually, granting Home Rule to the Icelandic government.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, Danish nationalists ascribed to similar Herderian notions as Icelandic nationalists; therefore, the argument that Iceland's unique character and distinctive cultural heritage justified its right to greater autonomy would have resonated with Danish politicians. In addition, the ideas that foreign rule hindered a nation's potential and that a nation's progress depended upon its self-governance were popular in Danish politics.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, perhaps the argument that Iceland could only regain its golden age of prosperity through greater independence may have been persuasive. Respect for Old Icelandic literature and mythology could not have been the only reason Danish authorities granted Iceland increased autonomy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it may partly account for why the Icelandic independence movement was both a peaceful and successful endeavor.

3. Comparison of the Irish and Icelandic Cases

In the case of both Ireland and Iceland, nineteenth century revivalist poets had a significant impact on their nations' nationalist movements by providing empowering and persuasive nationalist ideologies. Stimulated by the ideals of Romanticism and nationalism pervading Europe in the nineteenth century, Irish and Icelandic revivalist

¹⁹⁵ Malm, "Nordic demand," 101-105.

¹⁹⁶ Guðmundur, "A Non-Violent Paradigm?," 9. See further, Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 43-44. See further, Guðmundur, "Linguistic Patriotism," 57-58.

¹⁹⁷ Guðmundur, "A Non-Violent Paradigm?," 7. Guðmundur identifies Denmark's receptive attitude towards Icelandic nationalism as paramount to Iceland's increased autonomy through nonviolent means. See also, Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 44. Gunnar highlights how Denmark was convinced to restore the Alþingi because of cultural arguments.

¹⁹⁸ Guðmundur, "Severing the Ties," 245.

poets sought to develop proud, unique, and united national identities and reinvigorate their nations. These poets chose their native legendary pasts as the means with which to do so. Although this is a trend apparent in many countries seeking to foster nationalism at different points in time, what perhaps caused this approach to be particularly effective in both Ireland and Iceland was the fact that both countries possessed unique and esteemed literary and legendary traditions. Although Scandinavian countries claimed to share Old Icelandic texts as part of their cultural heritage, both the sagas and *Eddas* were regarded as distinctly Icelandic cultural contributions.¹⁹⁹ While there was some overlap between Scottish and Irish mythological and folkloric tradition, many of the Celtic legends were recorded in Medieval Old Irish and Middle Irish manuscripts and were considered largely Irish creations. Thus, in both the Irish and Icelandic cases, revivalist poets retrieved their nation's unique legendary past from their country's archival memory, established it as national canon, and reinterpreted it as a golden age in order to meet their own interests of defining and empowering their nation. However, despite undergoing similar processes, there are many points of comparison between the Irish and Icelandic situations.

Both the Irish and the Icelandic revivalist poets reconstituted their native legends to foster a distinctive and proud national identity and to prompt a revival by encouraging their countrymen to regain their past glory. In both situations, the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets recontextualized their ancient heroes as paragons of nobility, courage, and virtue in order to instill the same qualities in their countrymen. In addition, both the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets also reinterpreted the similar mythical beings of the faeries, *aes sídhe*, and *Tuatha Dé Danann*, in Ireland's case, and the *huldubjóð*, in Iceland's case, in order to highlight their nations' innate connections to the natural and spiritual worlds within the land itself and to encourage profundity above the materialism associated with their foreign rulers.

However, unlike the Icelandic revivalist poets, Yeats and Russell also propelled a moral revitalization. Due to the perceived moral decline in Ireland, thought to be caused by England's materialistic influence, the Irish revivalist poets aimed to regenerate their countrymen by reconstructing legendary figures as "moral

¹⁹⁹ Malm, "Nordic demand," 101-105. The texts were written by Icelandic writers, in Icelandic, and in Iceland, but, as Malm points out, they held nationalistic significance for Sweden and Denmark.

exemplars"²⁰⁰ who exhibited heroism, wisdom, and self-sacrifice but also held ideals of truth, spirituality, and connection to nature. Therefore, their national regeneration had an emphasis on morality which ultimately served to dichotomize Ireland and England. The Icelandic revivalist poets, on the other hand, did perpetuate similar virtues and values, but they did not identify Denmark's influence as necessarily causing moral decline. Instead, Bjarni and Jónas seemed to link lethargy with Iceland's supposed stagnation, thus, their works focused on reinvigorating their countrymen and inciting them to the noble action of their ancient past rather than making Denmark's influence a question of morality. As a result, the dichotomy these poets emphasized was between Iceland's past and present rather than between Iceland and Denmark. However, in the process of emphasizing Iceland's distinctiveness in their poetry, Bjarni and Jónas pointed out Iceland's differences from Denmark²⁰¹ and Iceland's potential for regained prosperity and freedom without the interference of outside leadership.²⁰² Moreover, Jónas, along with other contributors to *Fjölnir*, also attempted to preserve Iceland's unique culture by purifying Icelandic from Danish influence.²⁰³ Therefore, contributors to Icelandic Revivalist poetry and Icelandic linguistic purism can be seen as distinguishing Iceland from Denmark to a certain degree. However, they did not intend to set up a dichotomy, nor did they attempt to vilify Denmark in the process. Therefore, although both the Irish and Icelandic Literary revivals aimed to regenerate virtue and national fervor, the Irish case produced a more moralistic, anti-modern, and anti-English sentiment in the nineteenth century, while the Icelandic case was significantly less polarizing at that time.

The cultural nationalism propagated by the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets had a significant impact on their nations' political pursuits of increased autonomy. In both cases, the revivalist poets provided nationalist ideals which helped justify each nation's right to greater sovereignty. They did so by glorifying their legendary pasts as

²⁰⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, 66.

²⁰¹ This is evident in Jónas's "Hulduljóð" as discussed previously.

²⁰² As discussed earlier, this is suggested in Jónas's "Ísland."

²⁰³ Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 17, 392. A parallel for Icelandic linguistic purism can be seen in the Gaelic Revival, which focused on spreading the Irish language. Its main proponent, the Gaelic League, was founded in the same period as the Irish Literary Revival, see further, Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 2. For the Gaelic League's later association with separatism and the Easter Rising, see Kelly, *Fenian Ideal*, 190, 198.

golden ages to each reveal a unique national spirit and cultural distinctiveness. Both Irish and Icelandic political figures then utilized these claims of cultural distinctiveness to validate their demands for increased self-governance. While political figures in both countries also used cultural arguments for economic independence by suggesting a country's prosperity is tied to its autonomy, in Iceland, this played a greater role,²⁰⁴ especially when argued by Jón Sigurðsson.²⁰⁵ Although political leaders such as James Connolly also argued for economic independence through cultural arguments, the most effective politicians in gaining public support, such as Arthur Griffith, focused on cultural arguments that demonstrated Ireland's innate morality and England's immoral influence. Icelandic politicians, on the other hand, did not suggest that Denmark caused moral deterioration in Iceland at that time. Nevertheless, in both cases, politicians implemented cultural arguments to justify their nations' pursuits of increased autonomy, thus propelling the nationalist movements.²⁰⁶

After being implemented by political figures, the cultural nationalism cultivated by revivalist poets served to mobilize the Irish and Icelandic public; however, this process rendered greater discord in Ireland and, for a variety of reasons, ultimately culminated in violence. Nationalism became widespread more quickly in Iceland, perhaps because of the relative religious homogeneity and the perception that all Icelanders shared a cultural background.²⁰⁷ Although there was some debate how to go about increasing autonomy, the majority of the Icelandic population supported some form of increased independence in the second half of the nineteenth century, though at this stage the nationalist movement pursued only increased political freedom rather than full autonomy.²⁰⁸ This less radical shift and shared interest in Icelandic nationalism perhaps made the pursuit of increased Icelandic autonomy more organized, directed, and successful without violence or serious opposition. Meanwhile, in Ireland, not only was

²⁰⁴ Perhaps economic arguments were more persuasive in Iceland because of the Danish–Icelandic Trade Monopoly which, although arguably necessary, was largely perceived as detrimental to Icelanders at that time.

²⁰⁵ Guðmundur, "A Non-Violent Paradigm?," 7-8.

²⁰⁶ Although Hutchinson perceives it as a "failure" that cultural nationalism must be later institutionalized by more political means to propel nationalist movements, in fact, by providing the ideological basis for nationalist movements, Irish and Icelandic cultural nationalists allowed their nationalist movements to progress, see Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 41.

²⁰⁷ Gunnar, "Emergence of Nationalism," 48, 57-58.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

there a divide between the Anglo-Irish Protestants and Gaelic Catholics but between the political groups of Irish unionists and Irish nationalists. Even among nationalists there was a division between Irish republicans, who supported more radical action, and Irish reformist nationalists, who condoned only non-violent, parliamentary measures.

However, cultural nationalism appealed to all of these groups by promoting a distinct and proud Irish identity. For Anglo-Irish men and women it presented a way to unify the Anglo-Irish Protestants and Gaelic Catholics.²⁰⁹ For all Irish nationalists it legitimized claims for independence and, when propelled by figures such as Griffith, had the mass support of the Irish population in the early twentieth century.²¹⁰ Therefore, although the Irish people were not as united in the cause for increased autonomy as in Iceland, the ideals of cultural nationalism were ultimately pivotal in propelling the Irish nationalist movement by appealing to each faction.

In addition, as discussed previously, cultural nationalism impacted both the motivation of and the response to the Easter Rising in 1916. The motivation can be seen in how Easter Rising leaders such as Pádraig Pearse and James Connolly subscribed to ideals of Irish cultural nationalism, believing that the Irish identity was distinct and worthy and that only by casting off the antithetical and degenerative influence of the British and embodying the heroism of Ireland's legendary past could Ireland re-attain its true destiny. In addition, without the nationalist sentiment, polarization of England, and glorified virtues of heroism and self-sacrifice fostered by cultural nationalists such as the Yeats and Russell, sympathy for these initially disliked rebels would not have been possible. What followed was the rise in followers of the more radical Sinn Féin political party, which also subscribed to notions of Ireland's cultural distinctiveness and innate moral character, and, with Sinn Féin's support, the start of the Irish War of Independence in 1919.²¹¹ Therefore, although the cultural nationalism perpetuated by Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets affected the mobilization of their populations, the

²⁰⁹ Although figures such as Moran and Pearse tried to suggest that the Irish cultural identity belonged only to Catholic Gaels. Griffith, who founded Sinn Féin, however, sought to incorporate both Anglo-Irish Protestants and Catholic Gaels.

²¹⁰ Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, 168, 170, 178-179. This is not to say that cultural nationalism solved the divides between these groups. The Irish Civil War, based on disagreement over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, demonstrated continued divisions among nationalists.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 170, 189.

ultimate outcome of this mobilization was vastly different, with one situation inducing widespread, peaceful support and the other ultimately culminating in violence.

Another significant difference in the role of cultural nationalism in the Irish and Icelandic pursuits of increased sovereignty was its impact, or lack thereof, on the foreign governments; this also had a major hand in why the Irish situation turned violent and the Icelandic situation did not. Significantly, in Iceland's case, the Danish state was ultimately receptive to cultural justifications for increased autonomy. This may be partly due to the fact that Iceland was not pursuing full autonomy at that time, but also because the Danish state depended on the Old Icelandic texts to develop their own national identity and, therefore, greatly respected Iceland's cultural achievements. Though it was by no means a quick process, the Danish state conceded Iceland more and more autonomy by its own volition, avoiding any need for violent rebellion: first, reinstating the Alþingi in 1845, 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 1918.²¹² Iceland finally declared itself a republic in 1944 during the German occupation of Denmark. In Ireland, on the other hand, there was a history of violence with its colonizer. Since the English conquest of Ireland in the sixteenth century there were periodic rebellions throughout Ireland's history, not to mention perceived betrayals by the English government due to the Cromwellian conquest, Penal Laws, Act of Union 1800, and Great Famine. Moreover, despite finally passing the Home Rule Act in 1914, England did not implement it nor make other concessions for increased Irish autonomy. Therefore, as Alexander McGill points out, the English government appeared not to be as "benevolent" as Denmark,²¹³ perhaps because England had no investment in the contributions of Ireland's Celtic heritage for its own nationalism and, therefore, did not sympathize with cultural arguments as validations for Irish independence.

While the Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets of the nineteenth century both promoted nationalist ideals by recontextualizing and reinterpreting their unique legendary pasts as golden ages, there was variation in their method of doing so.

²¹² Guðmundur, "A Non-Violent Paradigm?," 7.

²¹³ Alexander McGill, *The Independence of Iceland: A Parallel for Ireland* (Glasgow, P. J. O'Callaghan, 1921), 16. See further, Guðmundur, "A Non-Violent Paradigm?," 9. Guðmundur describes Denmark's response to the Icelandic nationalist movement as "enlightened and generous."

Furthermore, the impact of their cultural arguments on politicians, the public, their foreign rulers, and their nationalist movements at large, also diverged significantly in many ways. Notably, while the Danish government was swayed by Icelandic cultural justifications for greater independence to a certain degree, the English government was not convinced. Moreover, while the Icelandic population remained, on the whole, politically united and nonviolent, Irish politics radicalized and developed into rebellion and war. However, in both cases, the distinctive national identities, empowerment, and nationalist ideals cultivated by Irish and Icelandic revivalist poets ultimately proved instrumental to their nations' nationalist and, and later, independence movements.

4. Conclusion

Overall, by reimagining their nations' legendary pasts as golden ages, Irish and Icelandic nineteenth century revivalist poets contributed to forming the nationalist ideology necessary to garner support and legitimate pursuit of increased autonomy in Ireland and Iceland. Consistent with Smith's "golden age" framework, these poets used glorified reinterpretations of their native legends to establish distinct and proud national identities. Moreover, their re-envisioned legendary past provided the cultural arguments necessary for political figures to justify their claims for greater independence and for the general population to be mobilized in support of the nationalist movements. Although the ultimate outcomes differed in Ireland and Iceland, with the Icelandic case eliciting sympathy with the Danish state and the Irish case progressing into violence, in both situations the importance of cultural nationalism, deriving from a unique legendary tradition and propagated by revivalist poets, cannot be overlooked. As a result, the Irish and Icelandic cases reveal that cultural nationalists, such as poets, can be vital formulators of the nationalist ideals necessary to initiate and propel nationalist movements.²¹⁴ Moreover, through a memory studies lens, both cases also exemplify how reinterpreting a nation's legendary past as a golden age is a crucial component in constructing a national self-image invested with pride, unity, distinctiveness, and

²¹⁴ Smith, *National Identity*, 92. This supports Smith's argument that cultural nationalists, such as poets, are the most significant contributors to the development and dissemination of nationalist ideals.

validation and, thus, in providing significant ideological contributions to nationalist and independence movements.

As a result, the Irish and Icelandic case studies validate Leerssen's idea that cultural cultivation was fundamental in forming the basis of nationalist movements in European countries in the nineteenth century. Although this limited study of only two nations does not necessarily indicate that his framework is applicable to all cases of nationalism-building in nineteenth century Europe, it reaffirms his notion. However, this thesis not only supports, but builds upon Leerssen's ideas. For one, it specifies that the cultivation of the cultural element of a national legendary past was vital to the development of European nationalist movements in the nineteenth century. Moreover, this thesis indicates that revivalist poets in particular played a significant role in recontextualizing these native legends in order to render national consciousness, pride, and reinvigoration. In addition, this thesis suggests that through their reinterpretations of their nations' legendary pasts, revivalist poets not only aided nationalism-building but pursuits of greater political autonomy by equipping nationalists with cultural justifications for their nations' increased independence. However, these ideas warrant further analysis through additional case studies. Therefore, perhaps future research could utilize a memory studies perspective to analyze how revivalist poets' recontextualizations of their nations' legendary pasts as golden ages influenced the independence movements of other European countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by helping formulate nationalist ideologies.²¹⁵ It would also be informative to examine how cultural nationalists besides poets, such as other writers, artists, intellectuals, and musicians, also partook in this process.

In addition, by using a memory studies perspective, the process of reinterpreting nations' legendary pasts to address contemporary interests can also be observed in many other times besides the nineteenth century. For example, Medieval Icelandic manuscript producers retold Icelandic legends in versions of the sagas, *Eddas*, and other texts in order to reaffirm the legendary tales as part of Iceland's cultural memory and give them

²¹⁵ Finland, Norway, Hungary, and Slovenia would be stark examples. For a comparison between the Icelandic and Czech cases, see Sigríður, "Renovation of Native Past," 688-709.

relevance and significance in their own time.²¹⁶ In the modern day, tourist brochures from the 1990s refer to Iceland's legendary past and the *Íslendingasögur* to emphasize Iceland's singularity and its vast cultural contributions in order to make it a more desirable vacation site.²¹⁷ As a result, a memory studies lens can be used to analyze how recontextualizations of a nation's legendary past can address contemporary concerns in not only different nations, but in different time periods within those nations. Moreover, a memory studies perspective may also be useful in addressing reinterpretations of legendary texts in the modern context of multiculturalism, in which reimaginings of nations' legendary pasts are used to serve different functions and are, perhaps, divorced from nationalistic endeavors in order to become relatable, accessible, and appealing to individuals with different cultural backgrounds.

²¹⁶ Merrill Kaplan, *Thou Fearful Guest: Addressing the Past in Four Tales in Flateyjarbók*, *Fellows Folklore Communications* 148, no. 301, ed. Satu Apo et al. (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2011), page 21-25. Kaplan points out that legendary tales were recontextualized in Medieval Icelandic texts to address the interests of the Medieval period and adapt to a Christian culture.

²¹⁷ Gísli Sigurðsson, "Icelandic National Identity: From Romanticism to Tourism," in *Making Europe in Nordic Contexts*, *NIF Publications* no. 35, ed. Pertti J. Anttonen (Turku: Nordic Institute of Folklore, University of Turku, 1996), 67-68.

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