

**DENMARK'S LITTLE BROTHER: THE IMAGE OF ICELAND
IN ADAM OEHLenschLÄGER'S DRAMA *PALNATOKE***

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ABSTRACT

The drama *Palnatoke* by Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) tells the story of an alliance of Vikings who lay the foundation stones of the Danish state. The author of the article analyses the image of Iceland and Icelanders in the drama. The article argues that the friendly, peace-loving Icelandic protagonist who travels around the world stands for Scandinavianism, a movement promoting political and cultural cooperation of the Nordic countries. In addition, the character shows some features of the Beautiful as opposed to the Danish Sublime – he is partly feminised. As a result, he looks up to the Danes. Iceland and Denmark are not on an equal footing; Denmark's attitude to Iceland is colonial and paternalistic. On the one hand, Iceland is praised for its literature and knowledge and Icelanders for their pure hearts. On the other hand, the Icelander is depicted as inferior and in a primitivistic way.

Keywords: imagology; Scandinavianism; Romanticism; Danish literature; Old Norse literature; Adam Oehlenschläger; postcolonialism; the Sublime; Nordic Orientalism

1. A Drama of National Characters

As soon as one reads the list of characters introduced in Adam Oehlenschläger's drama *Palnatoke*, it is clear that the drama about the birth of Denmark as a nation is going to present a tableau of "national characters". For most of the characters on the list, there is an information about their land of origin. Thereby, the personalities of the protagonists are explicitly linked to the geographic areas they come from before the drama opens. Hence, the drama can be read not only as a story about a handful of individuals, but also as a text that creates a certain image about both Denmark and Iceland: a mixture of facts, stereotypes and imagined reality. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that the Icelandic traveller Thorvald has some feminine and primitivist features, and the relationship between Denmark and Iceland proves to be paternalistic. The aim of this article is to analyse the image of Iceland and Icelanders in this drama, drawing mostly on imagology.

Imagology is a field within comparative literature studies that examines the way ethnic groups and geographical areas are depicted in literature. Above all, it is concerned with stereotypes that stem from a polarised "we" vs. "the others" mentality. Imagology aims at describing how literary representations emerge and how they work in identity formation.

To this end, it analyses how images develop across texts, which role representations play in the text in focus and, of course, in which cultural, political and poetological circumstances the images took shape. As such, imagology is fundamentally interdisciplinary: for instance, I also make use of postcolonial theory and gender theory in this article.

The plot takes place in Denmark in the year 991, and it spins around a conflict between the old king Harald Bluetooth and his son, Svend Forkbeard. The main protagonist Palnatoke is a *jarl* (earl/chieftain) on the Danish isle of Bornholm. He aims to replace the old, incompetent, dishonest king Harald Bluetooth with Svend. Therefore, he establishes an alliance of faithful friends that take an oath to build an independent Danish state and help Svend ascend to the throne. Driven by hatred, the old king Harald repeatedly tries to have Palnatoke killed. After the third attempt, Palnatoke sneaks into the palace and kills the king. When Svend inherits the crown, he swears revenge for the assassination of his father. Palnatoke admits to the murder, explaining his reasons, and the young king forgives him. Suddenly, Palnatoke's friend Bue storms into the room, believing that Palnatoke has been killed by Svend, and in the heat of the conflict, he drives his sword through Palnatoke. The dying chieftain grants forgiveness to both Svend and Bue, and both parties are reconciled.

2. The Burning Question of Poetics

The drama was published in 1809 by Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger, one of the most prominent Danish Romantic writers. Not only did he write the poem "Guldhornene" ("The Golden Horns") in 1802, which is widely considered to be the literary manifesto of Danish Romanticism, he was also one of the three contestants in a well-known competition organised by the University of Copenhagen in 1800. Inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder, the university formulated an open question to the public about whether it would be useful for writers to draw inspiration from Nordic mythology as an alternative to the previously prevalent Greek and Roman imagery. In his essay, Oehlenschläger does not directly dismiss reproducing topics of classical antiquity, but he considers them worn out. Nordic mythology on the other hand, claims Oehlenschläger, allows for much more fantasy as there are not so many historical sources. Besides, using Nordic mythology would promote patriotism (Van Gerven 2018, 45–72). Despite the fact that a more conservative candidate won the first prize in the end, the competition sparked an intense social debate, and what is more, contributed to the Nordic renaissance, the revival of Old Norse texts as a source of inspiration for Nordic writers (Králová and Králová 2017, 15).

It is worth viewing the Nordic renaissance in a broader context as an attempt to rehabilitate the image of the North in general. The North has long suffered from a sense of low self-esteem in comparison with the South. According to Astrid Arndt, this has its roots in antiquity, especially in the accounts of the North by Hippocrates and Pomponius Mela. Their negative images of the world north of the Alps as a barbaric, backward, underdeveloped area had long shaped the North's self-conception (Arndt 2007, 387–388). During the period of Classicism, the ancient Greek and Roman art served as a sought-after source of inspiration, and many artists from beyond the Alps felt that the best one could do was to imitate Southern culture. In that context, the Pre-Romantic Nordic renaissance fell within

a larger rehabilitation project. The rehabilitation was twofold: the North was trying to prove that its culture was on a high level as well, and positive new values such as being unspoiled by civilisation and living in harmony with nature, were introduced (Fink 2004, 106), so that the aesthetics changed in favour of Nordic themes and motifs.

The plot and the main characters in *Palnatoke* were directly inspired by Old Norse texts, especially *Jómsvíkingasaga* ("The Saga of the Jómsvíkings"). As mentioned above, the plot is carefully chosen to support a nation-building narrative. Harald Bluetooth as a historical person is known for having raised the rune stones in Jelling. According to the inscription, he had reigned over both Danes and Norwegians and he had converted them to Christians. The raising of the rune stones is mentioned in the drama together with other frequently used national symbols, such as beeches, menhirs and burial mounds¹.

Similar to Friedrich Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* and Franz Grillparzer's *König Ottokars Glück und Ende*, *Palnatoke* falls into the genre of foundation dramas (*Gründungs-drama*) recounting a foundation myth. These texts produce narratives about the birth of a nation, incorporating national stereotypes and a legitimisation rhetoric.

3. Iceland's Softer Virtues or How to Be Man Enough in Romanticism

It is the building of the Danish identity that is vital in this play; the image of Iceland is simply a means to support it. The alliance established to assist Svend gain the crown is composed of friends who have all descended from royal predecessors (Oehlenschläger 1929, 32). They come from various parts of the Nordic area: Skåne, Bornholm, Fyn and Iceland. The landscape each of them grew up in is inextricably intertwined with their character, as we can see, for example, in the scene where two members, Thorvald from Iceland and Bue from Bornholm, become friends:

BUE.

Vi har et gammelt Ordsprog,
At man skal ikke skue Hund paa Haaret;
Det passer prægtigt paa os begge to.

THORVALD.

Du redelige Kæmpe!
BUE.
Island ligger
Vel fuld af Iis og Snee, men Ilden brænder
I Grunden der; og hvad der gielder Lærdom,
Og Runer og Historier, af dem
Har I da fuldt op. Det er intet Under,
At du forstaaer at skikke dig saavel.

¹ These objects are classified as typical Danish national Romantic symbols in Adriansen, *Nationale symboler i Det Danske Rige 1830–2000*, 126.

THORVALD.

Den vakkre Bue er saa brav, som stærk.

BUE

ryster hans Haand.

Bornholm er stenet, fuld af Klipper, men

Det er ei sielent, at man finder der

Karfunkler dybt i Flintestenen. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 71)²

The use of nature as a characterising tool sits at the edge of climate theory, a pseudo-scientific ideology stating that the “national character” is formed by the landscape and the climate people live in. But since both landscapes are depicted as harsh, cold and barren, it is not a simple one-way logic. If this were the case, Thorvald and Bue would be just as hostile and cold as the landscape. It is *despite* the harsh conditions that their noble spirit is born. A paradox is involved: a clear opposition between the *appearance* of both landscapes and protagonists on one hand, and their *inner spirit* on the other hand.

The depiction of the Nordic landscape seems to be strongly affected by the poetics of *the Sublime*. This poetics has its roots in antiquity, and it had undergone a great deal of changes throughout the history of aesthetics, for instance under the influence of Immanuel Kant. However, it was probably Edmund Burke who had the most profound impact on the Pre-Romantic understanding of beauty. This English philosopher was hailing a new type of aesthetic values and calling them sublime: everything that produces emotions of terror, pain and danger. His aesthetic re-evaluation befitted the Pre-Romantic movement. When the Pre-Romantics, in their *ad fontes* endeavour, re-discovered Old Norse literature, Burke was the one who helped to re-establish what earlier would have been perceived as barbaric literature. Thanks to his notion of the Sublime, rough Viking warriors, hostile cold landscape and violence could now be viewed as something profoundly aesthetic and appealing.

² BUE.

We have an old saying
That one should not judge a dog by its coat;
That is true for both of us.

THORVALD.

Honourable warrior!

BUE.

Iceland may well be
Full of ice and snow, but a fire burns
In the deep; and when it comes to knowledge
And runes and stories, you have
Plenty of them. No wonder
You have such good manners.

THORVALD.

The bold Bue is just as brave as he is strong.

BUE

Shakes his hand.

Bornholm is stony, very rocky, but
It is not unusual to find
Gems buried deep in flints.

[All the English translations of the quotes from *Palnatoke* in this article are my own.]

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757, Burke distinguishes between two versions of beauty. Whereas the Sublime is linked to greatness, strength, roughness, harshness and darkness (Eco 2005, 290), the Beautiful is associated with smallness, restraint and grace. As Peter Shaw points out, Burke's notion of the Sublime and the Beautiful is strongly gendered. While the Sublime is linked to intellect and masculinity, the Beautiful goes hand in hand with matter and with the feminine. Furthermore, the Sublime is more highly valued (Shaw 2017, 78–81).

The Danish identity as presented in *Palnatoke* is decidedly masculine. Masculinity is repeatedly hailed by the Danes as a positive value: it is linked with strength, honesty, verity and bravery. Palnatoke, too, takes pride in his masculinity:

PALNATOKE.

Aldrig var

Min Tunge Hersker over min Forstand.

Klogskaben tidlig gaaer fra Drikkelaget

Med Qvinderne, den skranter, maa tilsengs,

Den er af skrøbelig Natur, den modstaaer

Ei Mødens Kraft. Men Sanddruheden, Herre!

Den vaager ud paa Natten, som en Mand,

Den drikker uanfægtet med den Bedste.

Og vinder alt i Kræfter, som den drikker. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 17)³

Masculinity is one of the central values for the Danish identity-to-be, for the alliance. As Palnatoke explicitly puts it:

PALNATOKE.

[...] vi stifte vil et Manddomsforbund,

Der vorde skal den faste danske Stok,

En Sømagt mellem Dannemænd i Jomsborg;

Hvor Løgn og Svig, Bagtale, Tvedragt skal

Forbandet være, og hvor ingen Qvinder

Maa bringes inden Byens Mure.

[...] Vort Samfund grunder sig paa enig Styrke,

Og Blødhed kommer kun fra Qvinderne. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 41)⁴

³ PALNATOKE

Never has

My tongue gained control over my judgement.

Cleverness leaves the drinking company early

Together with the women, it is ailing, it has to go to sleep,

It is fragile and cannot bear

The power of mead. But truthfulness, lord!

It stays up, like a man,

It drinks undisturbed with the best one.

And he who drinks wins all power.

⁴ PALNATOKE.

[...] we will establish an alliance of manhood

That shall become the firm Danish trunk,

A seapower of Danish men in Jomsborg;

When the Icelander Thorvald thinks of joining the alliance, he is accused of effeminacy by a boy called Vagn who, too, wishes to be taken in. In Old Norse literature, this act would be considered a *níð*, a severe accusation attacking one's honour (Meulengracht Sørensen 1980, 23). Palnatoke categorically dismisses the accusation and explains why Thorvald may be accepted into the alliance of men:

VAGN.

Et Qvindehierte!

PALNATOKE

vred.

Stille Dreng!

Om og din Krop er alt fuldvoxen, stærk,

Skalst du dog nyde mange Skiepper Salt,

Før du forstaaer at dømme om en Mand,

Mindst om en Thorvald. Sigvald! overil

Dig ei, udstødte Ord er vendingsløse.

Jeg kiender ham, har ofte seet ham stride,

Hvor han sin Fiende Stykke gav for Stykke,

Raat for Usødet. Men det er vel sandt,

Langt meer han glimrer fra en anden Side.

Ingen i Nord er saa berømt, som Thorvald,

For Godhed, Trofasthed og Hielpsomhed.

[...] Det er en Hædersmand. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 40)⁵

When Vagn accuses Thorvald of effeminacy, he is afraid that Thorvald might bring some elements of the Beautiful with him in the alliance. And indeed, Thorvald does show several of its attributes. In his chapter about the Beautiful, Burke describes it as follows:

Where lie and deception, slander and pretense

Shall be banned, and where no women

May be brought through the city walls.

[...] Our society builds upon united strength,

And mildness comes solely from women.

⁵ VAGN.

A woman heart!

PALNATOKE

angrily.

Be quiet, boy!

Your body may be grown, strong,

Yet you shall experience many winters,

Before you can judge a man,

Especially one like Thorvald. Sigvald! Do not

Act hastily; the words you utter cannot be taken back.

I know him, have often seen him fighting,

Striking the enemy one blow after another,

He pays back in his own coin. But it is true

That he is more acclaimed for something else.

In the North, there is no one who can surpass Thorvald,

In good-heartedness, loyalty and helpfulness.

[...] He is an honourable man.

Those virtues which cause admiration, and of the sublimer kind, produce terror rather than love. Such as fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like. Never was any man amiable by force of these qualities. Those which engage our hearts, which impress us with a sense of loveliness, are the softer virtues; easiness of temper, compassion, kindness and liberality; though certainly those latter are of less immediate and momentous concern to society, and of less dignity. (Burke 2015, 89)

Thorvald's softer virtues stand for three things. Firstly, they are more or less Christian values. Secondly, they represent the Beautiful. And thirdly, as a consequence of the latter, they make him less dignified in the eyes of some Danes. The fact that Thorvald is partly feminised goes together with the colonial relationship between Denmark and Iceland. He stands for the second sex, the Other, necessary for the identity of the Self (the Danes coming from Skåne, Fyn and Bornholm) to be built. As Edward Said shows in his *Orientalism*, the colonial discourse is intertwined with gender polarity and a gendered way of thinking about the coloniser and colonised (Said 1979, 309). In nationalist narratives, the coloniser's identity tends to be male (McClintock 1995, 352–355).

Thorvald's position within the alliance is quite unique. At first he shows some of the attributes of the Beautiful, and as such is perceived as effeminate. But when he is accepted into the alliance and becomes friends with Bue, the sublime masculinity of the Danish group is revised and enriched with some new features previously perceived as belonging to the Beautiful, and therefore unmanly: peacefulness, wisdom, kindness, friendship, emotionality.

After Thorvald becomes a member, we can see that some values are successfully re-evaluated. For instance, when Palnatoke sheds tears over the fate of his fatherland, he is no less a man in the eyes of his friends:

PALNATOKE.

O Danmark, o mit arme Fædreland!

BUE.

Du græder, Toke? [...]

Meer end af Løvens, end af Bjørnens Blod

Har tolv Mænds Styrke Bue Digre drukket

Af dine Heltetaarer. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 68)⁶

By rebranding crying as a sign of strength, the drama successfully integrates a well-established leitmotif of the German *Empfindsamkeit* movement (Alt 2023, 38) into the new Danish male identity: the tears as a sign of affect, subjectivity and a melancholic reflection.

⁶ PALNATOKE

Oh Denmark, oh my poor fatherland!

BUE.

Are you crying, Toke? [...]

A power of twelve men,

greater than from drinking a lion's or a bear's blood

I have gained from your heroic teardrops.

4. Thorvald's Scandinavianist Mission

Thorvald is called "Far-Travelled" ("Vidforle") because he goes from place to place:

Fra Barnsbeen var min Lyst at læse Sagaer,
At høre Eventyr i Borgestuen.
Da jeg blev større, drev min Videlyst mig
Fra Island rundtomkring i alle Lande.
Saadan henrinder frydeligst mit Liv.
Jeg kan ei binde mig til enkelt Sted. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 28)⁷

As Birgit Neumann points out, literary images, apart from constructing identity, often serve concrete political goals (Neumann 2009, 276). With his love of travelling, friendliness and quiet mind, Thorvald stands for Scandinavianism, a movement promoting political and/or cultural cooperation among the Nordic countries, which was immensely popular during Romanticism.

The final scene of Act III presents a true Scandinavian idyll, solemnly harmonising the sublime Denmark (Bue) with the beautiful Iceland (Thorvald) in a scene full of emotionality, patriotism and pathos. As a sign of his friendship, Bue offers blood brotherhood to Thorvald (a widespread habit in Old Norse literature), but Thorvald asks for something else. Both principles turn out to be organically complementary, as they merge in a new, Scandinavian unity:

THORVALD
Behold dit Sværd, det kanst du bedre føre
End jeg.
BUE
utaalmodig.
Hvad vilst du have da?
THORVALD.
Giv mig
Dit Venskab.
BUE
omfavner ham.
Hvis du nøies vil med det, Da [sic!] skalst du have det saa friskt og varmt, som
Det kommer ud af dette danske Hierte.
THORVALD.
Ærlige, dierve Kæmpe!

⁷ Ever since I was a child, it was my biggest joy
To read sagas and listen to
adventurous stories among the servants.
When I grew up, my taste for travel
Drove me from Iceland from country to country.
My life runs in the most peaceful fashion.
I cannot bind myself to a single place.

BUE.

Vise Thorvald!

Du est en Blomst i Freden, jeg en Ulv

I Krigen.

THORVALD.

Begge for vort Fædreland!

BUE.

Og begge Fienden farlig. Fred og Krig

Gaaer Haand i Haand, er Venner! Lad saa Nogen

Herefter vove paa at true Danmark!

De gaae bort Arm i Arm. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 72–73)⁸

In 1809 the Danish state included what is now Iceland, Norway, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Yet tellingly, Iceland is the only one of these four areas which is represented in the alliance. There is a Norwegian figure present in the drama as well, the jailor who sets Svend and Thorvald free after they are captured by Harald; he is characterised in a positive light, but he is neither a warrior nor a member of the alliance. Nobody from the Faroe Islands or Greenland is to be found in the drama. Thus, the “peripheral” Nordic areas are underrepresented. Given that Oehlenschläger wrote his drama in the age of Scandinavianism, this might seem to be a contradiction. However, it reveals a lack of interest in these areas in general, unless they have something valuable to offer to the Danish identity – like Iceland had with its literature heritage.

⁸ THORVALD

Keep your sword, you can sway it better

Than me.

BUE

impatiently

What do you want then?

THORVALD.

Give me

Your friendship.

BUE

embraces him.

If you are satisfied even with that, you can have it so fresh and warm

As it comes from this Danish heart.

THORVALD

An honest, open-hearted warrior!

BUE

Wise Thorvald!

You are a flower in peace, I am a wolf

At war.

THORVALD.

Both for our fatherland!

BUE.

And both dangerous to our enemy. Peace and War

Go hand in hand, they are friends! From this day on, let anyone

Try to threaten Denmark!

They leave arm in arm.

5. The South as Common Enemy

Some historians claim that Scandinavianism fell apart after 1864 because of the absence of a common enemy. But as Tim van Gerven argues, the Nordic countries did have one common enemy: the South and its dominant position in the cultural and political sphere (2018, 68). Among other things, Scandinavianism was born as a reaction to anti-German sentiment in Nordic society in the eighteenth century. The growing patriotism in Denmark was often directed against the German language and culture (Feldbæk 2017). Under Struensee's government 1770–72 Germans were often regarded as a foreign element. In 1776 a new law was passed which banned people without Danish citizenship from applying for clerical jobs in Denmark (Busck and Poulsen 2007, 148). The anti-German sentiment culminated with *Tyskerfejden* (the feud with Germans) in 1789–90, a public debate about the many Germans in the administrative and cultural sphere.

In Oehlenschläger's drama, the South is consistently negatively portrayed, and one of the binding missions of the alliance formulated by Palnatoke is to stand against it:

PALNATOKE.

Sværges endelig tilsidst,
At vi vil grunde en selvstændig Stat,
Et Bolværk imod Sydens Argelist.

ALLE.

Vi sværge! (Oehlenschläger 1929, 42)⁹

In *Palnatoke*, the South is represented by bishop Popo from Schleswig. In 1809 Schleswig was a part of Denmark, but it had a significant German population. In 991 it was Danish, as well, because Harald Bluetooth had incorporated the area into Denmark. There may be a connection between Popo and Germany given Popo's origin, but it is not strong enough to make him a German national character. Rather, he can be understood as representing the South in general together with the Catholic Church.

He is portrayed as a mendacious, guileful, cowardly, two-faced man who attempts to spread Christianity in the North. According to the Jónsborg Vikings (the members of the alliance), the South is corrupt (Oehlenschläger 1929, 31). It is something that threatens to replace the old wisdom with new ethics in a manipulative way. When, for instance, Popo tries to build bridges between himself and Palnatoke by telling lies and betraying king Harald, Palnatoke makes it clear that he intends to draw his wisdom from Nordic knowledge alone:

POPO.

[...] Lige

⁹ PALNATOKE

Finally swear to me
That we will establish an independent state,
A palisade against southern treacherousness.
ALL
We swear!

For Lige, hedder det, skal Venskab holdes.
Er det ei saa?
PALNATOKE.
Det Ordsprog er ei gammelt;
Det findes ei i Odins Havamaal;
Fra Syden er det kommet seent; (Oehlenschläger 1929, 53)¹⁰

In addition, Popo is repeatedly linked with the feminised, fragile Beautiful even more than Thorvald: he wears dress-like clothes, he begins to cry when his life is in danger, he is afraid to lose his life, he lies and offers to betray Harald, he does not say plainly what he thinks. Unlike the Danish heroes who often have wives (outside the ports of Jónsborg, of course), he has no sexual relation. While Thorvald's softer virtues are interpreted as masculine, Popo remains the most effeminate figure in the drama according to the alliance's masculinity standards.

As for Christianity, a distinction is made between religion on one hand and the Catholic Church and its representative Popo on the other:

PALNATOKE.
[...] Og Christendommen, en uskyldig Lære
Om stille Dyd, maa selv bekvemme sig
Til Skalkeskiul for Eders Synder. – Popo!
Du vilst dig sammenligne med Anschar?
Med Rimbert? med de dydefulde Mænd,
Hver uden Egennytte, venlig hver,
Og agtet hver af Hedning, som af Christen?
Du vilst dig sammenligne her med mig?
[...] Ha gaa du falske Judas! (Oehlenschläger 1929, 60–61)¹¹

There are several points to note. Firstly, Palnatoke identifies himself with a group of influential priests of the past. Secondly, and this is not an isolated case, he speaks using

¹⁰ *POPO*
[...] Equals
Make the best friends, as they say, if the friendship shall hold.
Is it not right?

PALNATOKE.
The proverb is not that old;
It is not written down in Odins Havamaal;
It came from the South not so long ago;

¹¹ *PALNATOKE*
And Christianity, the innocent teaching
About silent virtue, must endure being used
As a guise for your sins. – Popo!
You want to compare yourself with Anschar?
With Rimbert? With the virtuous men,
Both selfless and friendly towards everyone,
Respected by every pagan and Christian man alike?
You want to compare yourself with me?
[...] Begone you false Judas!

Christian phrases. In many ways, he behaves like a Christian despite being formally pagan and praying to the gods of old.

The same goes for Thorvald. Just like Palnatoke, he explicitly sympathises with Christianity (Oehlenschläger 1929, 67) although he remains pagan. He always helps people (the old jailor sets them free because he recalls Thorvald having saved his life back in the day); he is wise, friendly and peace-loving. He does not always follow Christian ethics (for example, he plunders just like other Vikings). Nevertheless, he shows plenty of Christian virtues, even though they are combined with some elements of the *Sublime*. When Palnatoke defends Thorvald's manhood, he mentions his Christian behaviour as one of his arguments:

Alt, hvad i Strid han faaer til Bytte, deler
Han blandt de Fattige, løskiøber Fanger
Og klæder dem. Man vise mig en Christen,
Der staaer i milde Dyder over ham. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 40)¹²

It is precisely *because* of Christian values that Palnatoke deems Thorvald honourable and manly – the apologetic scene serves to demonstrate that true Christian values do not stand in opposition to the manhood of the Danish Vikings and that they can be successfully combined with the Sublime.

Interestingly, Oehlenschläger diverges from the pre-text in certain aspects. Oehlenschläger adopted both Thorvald's name and some of his characteristics from an Old Norse short story (*þáttur*) called “Þorvalds þáttur víðförla” (“The Tale about Thorvald Far-Travelled”). Many of his adventures or features are taken almost exactly from the pre-text. But in the Old Norse tale, Þorvald is baptised early in his life and goes on to spread Christianity in Iceland; in fact, his evangelising mission and the conflict with the heathens in Iceland form the main part of the plot. This is omitted in Oehlenschläger's version, possibly in order to avoid connecting Thorvald to the Catholic Church coming from the South.

Thus, it is the Nordic warriors that are the bearers of true Christianity, with Palnatoke and Thorvald at the forefront.

6. “Back to My Modest Cottage!”: Primitivist Utopia and Paternalism

There is one more important aspect in which Thorvald differs from his alter ego. In Oehlenschläger's version, he is very peace-loving and, as a fighter, cannot compare to the Danes from Bornholm. This, he is convinced, disqualifies him from the alliance, so he does not seek to become a member at first:

¹² He shares everything he takes from plunder
With the poor, he buys prisoners free
And gives them clothes. Show me a Christian man
That surpasses him in soft virtues.

Jeg kan ei tage Deel i Eders Forbund.
 Til dette Forbund hører sielden Styrke,
 Og Lyst til Krig. Det har mig Nornen nægtet.
 Forskiælligt deelte Himlen sine Gaver.
 Nogle blev givet vældig Handlekraft,
 Andre fik ei den rige, bedre Deel;
 Til Giengield skienkte Himlen dem et aabent
 Og trofast Hierte, Evne til at skatte
 De Andres Virksomhed. Blandt dem er jeg. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 38)¹³

By contrast, the Þorvald of the *þáttr* is an excellent warrior: “He was strong and bold, skilled in arms and keen in battle, [...] braver in battle than the other warriors” (“The Tale of Thorvald the Far-Travelled”, 359). Even after the christening, Þorvald keeps killing his adversaries: for instance, when he is accused of effeminacy by two poets, he simply slays them. It is the bishop who urges him to bear the disgrace and be patient (Oehlenschläger 1929, 365).

The question arises: why does Oehlenschläger feel the need to make these changes? Due to his lack of fighting spirit, Thorvald not only ends up in a position where he can offer his Scandinavianist friendship and serve as a non-Catholic Christian model, but he also loses some respect. He feels as if he does not fit in, he is even convinced he cannot become a legitimate member of the alliance. Comparing himself with the Danes, he has low self-esteem. He has not received “the richer, better part” of the talent by the norms; instead of agility and an appetite for war, he stands out by being a loyal friend, capable solely of admiring “other people’s activity”.

It is striking how many stereotypes Oehlenschläger adopts from the depiction of Iceland in the influential Latin chronicle *Gesta Danorum* by the Danish medieval historian Saxo Grammaticus (c 1160 – c 1220). He describes Iceland as follows:

Nor may the pains of the men of Thule [Iceland] be blotted in oblivion; for though they lack all that can foster luxury (so naturally barren is the soil), yet they make up for their neediness by their wit, by keeping continually every observance of soberness, and devoting every instant of their lives to perfecting our knowledge of the deeds of foreigners. (Saxo Grammaticus)

The resemblance between the texts illustrates Joep Leersen’s assertion that images do not simply replace one another; rather, they tend to accumulate so that a single image of a land or ethnic group often builds upon several sediment layers of images coming from previous texts (Leersen 2007a, 343). Several of Saxo’s remarks regarding Icelanders

¹³ I cannot become a part of your alliance.
 It features an unusual strength,
 And an appetite for war. That has been denied to me by the norms.
 Heaven allocated its gifts diversely.
 Some of us were gifted with great agility,
 Others have not got the richer, better part;
 In return, they have received an open
 And loyal heart, the capability to admire
 Other people’s activity. I am one of those.

are echoed in Oehlenschläger's drama: the barren land, modest life conditions, Iceland as a literature and history archive and Icelanders' keen interest in others. In the period of 1750–1850, the images of Icelanders often build upon Saxo's stereotype of a learned nation, but combined with primitivism, the Sublime and the idea of the noble savage – native people who, thanks to living outside civilisation, have maintained a noble spirit, a simple mind and an uncorrupted heart (Ísleifsson 2015, 153–201).

Thorvald does not only admire the activities of others, but he also loves the Danish landscape and feels more at home in Denmark than he does in Iceland:

Farvell! du skønne, danske Strand! hvi tvinger
En grusom, en fortørnet Norne mig,
At flygte bort, paa Nattens sorte Vove,
Til Heklas Sne, fra dine Bøgeskove? (Oehlenschläger 1929, 124)¹⁴

As has already become apparent from the previously mentioned scenes, Thorvald feels inferior to the members of the alliance. In his dialogue with Bue, Thorvald looks up to him. By the same token, he maintains a modest attitude towards Palnatoke ("du est / En vældig Helt, og jeg en ringe Mand"¹⁵, Oehlenschläger 1929, 116); and unlike everyone else in the alliance, he does not have royal blood to boast of.

In spite of all this, Palnatoke invites Thorvald to join the company, praises him and shows deepest respect for him:

Vakkre Thorvald!
Du est en Bondesøn, men dine Dyder,
Din Sindrigthed, Bereisthed og Forstand
Har gjort dig værdig til at gaee i Lag
Med Keiseren i Achen. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 32)¹⁶

True, the Icelandic protagonist is idealised like no one else in the drama, but what kind of ideal is it? Despite his praise, Palnatoke does not try to talk Thorvald out of his sense of inferiority. In the drama, Thorvald merely enjoys the role of a faithful friend. In *Jómsvíkingasaga*, which is where Oehlenschläger drew his inspiration for most of the plot about Harald, Svend, Palnatoke and the Jómsborg Vikings, there is no Thorvald. Oehlenschläger combined two sources, incorporating the tale of Þorvald into a bigger narrative. Thorvald is then no longer the main protagonist, but it is Palnatoke who enjoys the most

¹⁴ Farewell! Thou Beautiful Danish beach! Why does
The cruel, angry norn compel me
To flee away on the dark waves of the night,
To Hekla's snow, from your beech woods?

¹⁵ you are / a great hero, and I am a little man

¹⁶ My dear Thorvald!
You are a son of a peasant, but your virtues,
The richness of your spirit, your travel experience and wits
Make you worthy of being good company
Even to a kaiser in Aachen.

space. As a result, there is no notion of the fame, wealth and, most notably, power that Þorvald gains when he becomes a celebrated hero in his own story:

He went all through the Greek empire and came to Constantinople. The emperor himself received him with great honour and gave him many excellent gifts of friendship because God's grace was close about him, and his fame flew among the people wherever he went, so that he was honoured and respected by great and small alike as a pillar and support of the true faith, and honoured as a glorious confessor of our Lord Jesus Christ by the emperor in Constantinople himself and his chieftains, and no less by all the bishops and abbots throughout the Greek empire in Syria. Most of all he was honoured in the eastern Baltic, sent there by the emperor as a leader or ruler appointed over all the kings in *Russia* and the entire Greek empire. ("The Tale of Þorvald the Far-Travelled", 367; orig. *italics*)

Let us briefly compare Þorvald with other important characters in terms of their psychology. Þalnatóke is acclaimed for his strength, excellence in archery, wisdom and agility, but he murders the defenceless Harald in cold blood. In a similar fashion, king Harald is deceitful and full of hatred, and he has no hesitation in sending an assassin after Þalnatóke. Yet when the monarch is alone, it is obvious that he suffers from isolation and a guilty conscience. Prince Svend is generally hailed as a good alternative, but when he wants to punish Þalnatóke for killing Harald, he lies to him in order to lure him to the castle. Contrarily, Þorvald is universally adored in the course of the play, and his perfectly good-hearted, simple nature stands in sharp contrast to the complexity of other characters.

Þorvald has so much faith in people that he cannot believe Svend capable of a dishonest deed, although others are much more realistic in their view of Svend. At the moment when Svend sends a false message to Þalnatóke, Þorvald is so shocked by such behaviour that he decides to leave Denmark immediately and return to Iceland. Since he cannot live in an ambiguous, problematic world where people do not always act in accordance with what they say, he feels he has no choice but to flee to his primitivistic utopia:

Jeg staaer forladt af ham; og skynder mig
Fra disse skumle, kongelige Sale,
Hvor Listen yngler lumsk i hver en Krog,
Tilbage til min tarvelige Hytte. (Oehlenschläger 1929, 177)¹⁷

In addition to the primitivistic utopia, the image of Iceland reproduces the well-established topos of Iceland as a periphery. Þorvald is about to sail to a place detached from the plot's setting, to an isolated, cold land. In contrast to the palace, the civilisation and the order Denmark represents, Þorvald lives in a land where people live in cottages ("hytte") instead of houses ("hus"). The primitive living conditions of Iceland together

¹⁷ I stand here forsaken by him [Svend]; I make haste to flee
Away from these bleak royal halls
Where subterfuge lurks in every corner,
Back to my modest cottage.

with Thorvald's childish naivety would reduce Icelanders almost to the level of noble savages, were it not for Thorvald's literacy and cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

As Henk van Liet points out, Iceland's is a specific case of colonialism (2011, 451). Even though Iceland is often presented as inferior in Danish literature of the Romantic Age, Danes simultaneously admire Iceland and sing praises to Icelandic literature and historiography; it is admired as the cradle of Nordic culture, a literature archive, the place of origin. Of course then, the reader is presented with Iceland as a topos rather than an actual place (Skyum-Nielsen 2015, 356), which is why some scholars speak of "Scandinavian orientalism".

The term was coined by Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson (2000, 254–255). According to Said, the "Orient" is in fact a topos created by Westerners in order to help them build their own Occidental identity, to exercise imperialism and legitimise colonialism (1979, 177). Similarly, some Nordic scholars claim that the same goes for Scandinavia and its "peripheral" areas, such as Iceland and Greenland. In this light, Iceland becomes a topos created to support the Danish identity.

Nordic orientalism as a term is already well-established in Scandinavian literature studies (Hauge 2007, 27–28), and scholars have repeatedly pointed out that the way "peripheral" Scandinavian areas such as Iceland and Greenland are described in the colonial discourse often resembles the way Africa and the Orient used to be portrayed by Europeans (Ísleifsson 2015, 60). Nevertheless, the image of Iceland in this drama should not perhaps be reduced to a simple coloniser – victim scheme. As shown before, the auto-image of Denmark together with the heteroimage¹⁸ of Iceland meld together, and the Icelandic protagonist is the most positive character in the drama. Palnatoke is undoubtedly the one who is politically active and progressive; who establishes and presides over the alliance, who plays the main role and who makes the decisions. By contrast, Thorvald's role is much more passive and partly atavistic: he spends most of his life reading sagas and chronicles about the deeds of others and represents the connection to the Nordic past. But as a promoter of Scandinavianism and Christian values, he embodies the political, ethical and aesthetic vision, which actually makes him partly progressive as well.

To conclude, the image of Iceland in Oehlenschläger's drama *Palnatoke* is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, Thorvald is admired for his wisdom, knowledge, travel experience and soft virtues such as friendship, helpfulness and selflessness. Moreover, he is the bearer of new values, such as emotionality, compassion, kindness or friendliness, which enhance the poetics of the Sublime. On the other hand, Iceland plays second fiddle in the plot. The Icelandic protagonist is partly feminised and associated with the Beautiful which makes him feel inferior to the Danes. The idealised, primitivist portrayal of Icelanders leads to a reduction of psychological complexity. Hence the relationship between Iceland and Denmark is profoundly paternalistic. At first glance, the text may seem to

¹⁸ Autoimages are images of the Self, whereas heteroimages are images of the Other.

invite Iceland into the emerging Scandinavian identity with open arms. However, the role assigned to Iceland within the brotherhood is that of a little brother.

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