When taking into consideration the warm reception the book has received, as well as the prestigious awards, one ponders upon whether the nation is relieved by the loss of its leading political patron? Or whether this acceptance unveils tolerance towards anyone who tries to tarnish the president's image. Páll Björnsson deconstructs the very icon that was consciously constructed of Jón Sigurðsson for a political purpose.

The story begins in a society of inequality. The funeral procession in Reykjavík in the spring of 1880 when President Jón Sigurðsson (hereafter "President Jón") and his wife Ingibjörg Einarsdóttir (1804 -1879) were reburied, was deliberately divided by class and gender. In the very farewell of the nation to President Jón, the occasion token was used for reproducing the existing social inequalities. Women were assigned a lower status in the celebrations to commemorate President Jón. Also, there was lack of consideration towards President Jón's widow during the preparations for President Jón's funeral in Copenhagen in December 1879, which was organised in such a way as to promote political consolidation. Páll Björnsson writes the book from a gender point of view, thus making it an uncomfortable reminder of the national patron's lack of stand when it came to the one of the most controversial issues in political debate of the age.

Páll Björnsson analyses how the political icon of President Jón was cultivated by the new media (newspapers) by appealing to emotions, whereby sorrow was converted into national mourning, remembrance into national commemoration, and funerals into national festivities. This analysis is welcomed by the reader who interprets the political presence of President Jón in modern politics after his death as a key-factor in a nation-building process. where the inhabitants of a country have been transformed into a political nation that is able to have a state of its own. Páll Björnsson does not specifically mention this, but President Jón himself lead actual Icelandic politics, which for decades prevented the parliament of Iceland (Alþingi) from acquiring a treasury under its own power for the sake of implementing a nation-building policy.

The publication of the book has not resulted in the loss of the overnight loss of the icon of Presidet Jón as regards the legitimisation of political authority in modern society. On Iceland's national day of 2010, the Icelandic Minister of Education referred to his ideas on educational matters in a speech held at President Jón's birthplace in Hrafnseyri. Páll Björnsson questions,

in a footnote, whether President Jón was a prime mover in educating the nation as hitherto believed. His school-policy did not gain ground in his lifetime. Quite the opposite, the focus on independence politics made it impossible for Icelanders to establish a comprehensive school-system as other nations did in that period.

Páll Björnsson's book is not about President Jón himself, his life and actions. The book is about diverse exploitation of him as an icon, from souvenir production to image creation of big companies. The book is about Icelanders and how an image has been utilised for political purposes. In the beginning, this was done to preserve a society divided by class, gender, age groups and regions, characterised by the authorities' fear of common people's political organisation. The endeavor was to create a single opinion in a disparate society. Páll Björnsson infers how powerful a political weapon the image of President Jón was for those who wanted him in their camp. All stakeholders wanted to have a share in him as their icon of choice.

Páll Björnsson also concludes how difficult it has been for state authorities to honour their duty to pay respect to the "the legacy of President Jón" (pp. 183-211). We read about the problematic realisation of the objectification of the icon in such a way that it can be more than just that. For one, the difficulties in finding an objective for the rebuilding of President Jón's birthplace at Hrafnseyri in a remote and depopulated area, or in justifying what kind of function it would have. However, the couple's sepulcher in Reykjavík found its function, while the real success story is the statue standing opposite Alþingi. Páll Björnsson's book is a contribution to the analysis of the original legend of the birth of a Republic. President Jón himself spent most of his life in Copenhagen, the capital of the Danish North-Western-Atlantic empire. The icon-creators realised the importance of an untainted image of the unequivocally Icelandic Jón Sigurðsson. This can be interpreted as the solution of the paradox for nationalistic thinking of a national -hero who chose to live amidst the claimed oppressors.

The author uses in an original way the fact that the ship carrying the bodies of the couple for the funeral in Iceland had the name of the mythological Phoenix, the bird that in our culture symbolises renewal. President Jón was renewed. Here the reader calls for further analysis of

the Jesus-like symbolism that can be found in the writings on President Jón in the first decades after his demise. There are many examples therein of religious symbols being replaced with political ones during a time of secularisation in Western societies. It is clear that the book rests on a theoretical analysis and that the discourse in Iceland on the ideological roots of the Republic calls for theoretical writings on this issue. Here, however, we merely have a description.

Páll Björnsson quizzes the nation on President Jón as a good teacher would do. This is done by using questionnaire (N 1363, response rate 70%). The answers are analysed by gender, age, region and schooling. The result is that image is superior to knowledge. Only a minority knows well the life and work of President Jón and why he was given the title “President”. Highly educated males in the prime of life know President Jón best, other groups less so. However, the majority regard President Jón as an important unifying symbol for the nation, consider it right to honour his memory and are proud of him.

The acceptance that characterises the response to the book Páll Björnsson has written is justifiable. Páll Björnsson enters a new field in the research on President Jón’s legacy. The book is an elaborate treatise. You can appreciate this elaboration even just by looking at the carefully chosen pictures. Some are in colour. Viewed as a whole, the pictures tell us as critical a story as the written text itself. Interestingly, President Jón is revealed as two different characters in two different paintings, as a bronze statue in fabrication, alongside gentlemen, protesters, extremists, women, students, commoners and in a teargas haze. The narrative is lively. The footnotes are quite many and often replicating the text of the sources, thus deepening the premises for the descriptions in the text. The book offers lists of people’s names, pictures and sources. No misspellings or grammatical errors could be found.

This review discussed whether the warm reception of a critical book on a national-hero at his bicentenary represents tolerance towards a new sentiment on President Jón or a liberation from his enduring authority. The book on President Jón written by Páll Björnsson offers the nation a chance to reunite with an ex-national -hero and finds it difficult to understand why he is still so politically massive in spite of his physical absence.

Páll Björnsson, Jón forseti allur? Táknmyndir þjóðhetju frá andláti til samtíðar (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2011) | 4