UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Iceland: a postcolonial literary landscape?

van der Liet, H.

Publication date

2011

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Thi Timit Lof: Festschrift für Arend Quak zum 65. Geburtstag

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van der Liet, H. (2011). Iceland: a postcolonial literary landscape? In G. Kroonen, E. Langbroek, H. Perridon, & A. Roeleveld (Eds.), *Thi Timit Lof: Festschrift für Arend Quak zum 65. Geburtstag* (pp. 447-471). (Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik; No. 67). Rodopi.
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/rodopi/abag/2011/00000067/00000001/art00030>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

ICELAND: A POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY LANDSCAPE?*

by Henk van der Liet – Amsterdam

En vit munum opt þess iðrask, er vit erum of málgir,
ok sjaldnar mundum vit þessa iðrask, þó at vit
mæltim færa en fleira.

[But we often have cause to regret having said too
much, and we would more seldom have cause for
regret if we spoke less rather than more.]¹

Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða

Abstract

How does Iceland appear in postcolonial literary texts by writers from Denmark, the former colonial power? Three texts from modern Danish literature were chosen, with Iceland as their main theme and based on first hand knowledge of the country gathered through sojourns and travels by the authors: *Rejse paa Island* (Journey on Iceland, 1954) by Martin A. Hansen (1909-1955); *Nord for Vatnajökul* (North of Vatnajökull, 1994) by the writer-art historian Poul Vad (1927-2003) and *Rævesletten og andre islandske omveje* (The Fox Plain and other Icelandic detours, 2009) by the painter-graphic artist Per Kirkeby (1938-) and the writer Keld Zeruneith (1941-).

These travelogues, in various ways, are hybrids of text and image emphasizing Iceland's exotic, insular and primarily literary qualities. Critical analysis leads to the hypothesis that these postcolonial depictions are characterized by a high degree of descriptive stylisation and aestheticism and by a prominent role of visual forms of representation. While decolonisation itself is an issue in the oldest work discussed, this is no longer the case in the two more recent books. Iceland has become a post-colonial landscape, a palimpsest-like space where political open wounds from the past are overwritten by the aesthetic gaze, which primarily focuses on the graphic qualities of the Icelandic countryside.

1. Introduction

For some time now a debate has been going on in Scandinavian literary criticism about the validity of the concept of literary history based on national language, identity and territory. New notions and theoretical concepts have contested this traditional point of departure in

* I am indebted to Anders Bay for making me aware of *Rævesletten* and to Alan Swanson for comments and linguistic assistance.

¹ Translation used: Terry Gunnell 1997.

literary studies and history. A number of alternative opinions were introduced in the course of the 1970s, when notably postmodernist, imagological and postcolonial approaches to literature gained ground. The latter primarily originated from English literary and cultural studies and they have become widely popular in academic circles in the Anglophone world, especially since the 1980s. The adoption of postcolonial points of view has also had an impact on Scandinavian literary studies, albeit that they have disseminated slightly later there than elsewhere. Not surprisingly postcolonial approaches first appeared in literary criticism in countries that had a substantial colonial past. Scandinavia followed a bit later and postcolonial theory first gained momentum there in the 1990s. Today the notion that postcolonial aspects of culture, including literature – also in a Scandinavian context – constitute valuable tools to understand the past, as well as the radical metamorphoses that happen in contemporary, globalized culture and society, is hardly disputed. At the same time one must face up to the fact that the word ‘postcolonial’ has caused a lot of misunderstandings and that it has been – and still is – used in a vast number of contexts, which does not make it any easier to define the word comprehensively.² From a literary point of view, it is important to keep in mind that whatever the theoretical framework and objectives may be, it always is the empirical, analytical work with texts, which forms the core business of literary scholarship. Furthermore, we have to acknowledge that the particular interest of a postcolonial approach to literature is to look at thematic and discursive manifestations of cultural contacts, conflicts, dichotomies and hierarchies, and how they are expressed in the literary domain. It is the textual manifestation of an implicit or explicit cross-cultural contact, confrontation or negotiation – the necessity of a “contact zone” in the terminology of Mary Louise Pratt – that postcolonial criticism needs to investigate.³ Therefore I have chosen to look at some textual resources that were written during, or in the aftermath of, actual journeys in a previously colonised country by travelers from the former colonizing state; in this case respectively Iceland and Denmark.

Postcolonial texts are predominantly produced by individuals who

² One of the most comprehensive introductory books on this topic still remains Ashcroft a.o. 1989.

³ Pratt 2008.

have a background in a foreign culture, a cultural minority, or by writers who understand themselves as part of – or spokesperson for – the “subaltern”, i.e. an imagined community that wishes to “write back”. This is often part of an emancipation process accompanied by a demand for a (more prominent) place in literary history. In Scandinavian literary studies this is for example the case with authors with immigrant roots, or who have an ethnic minority cultural background, e.g. the Sami and Greenlanders.⁴ Although it has been maintained that Scandinavian literature, and especially Danish literature, does not have any tradition in postcolonial writing worth mentioning, this has been severely questioned by a number of scholars.⁵ A wealth of texts can be mentioned, among many others Karen Blixen’s oeuvre, Peter Høeg’s *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* (1992), Thorkild Hansen’s documentary fiction, most of Henrik Stangerup’s novels, Jørn Riel’s short stories and a substantial part of Vagn Lundbye’s oeuvre too.

In the present essay, though, I should like to investigate the question how the former colony – i.e. Iceland – appears in literary texts produced by writers from the dominant colonial power, in this case Denmark, in a period after the formal end of colonial rule, which for Iceland happened in 1944. For this purpose some samples of modern Danish literature have been chosen, all texts with Iceland as their main theme, and all of them are based on first hand knowledge of the country, gathered through sojourns and travels by the authors. Furthermore, all the texts under scrutiny here can generically be categorized as *literary* documents about Iceland. This means that they are by no means tourist brochures, or anything like it; they are obviously literary texts, written by authors with good reputes as literary artists. In short: each of the authors that will be dealt with in the following has travelled to and on Iceland after the colonial era and they all have a literary background. These common characteristics make it possible to compare the texts in order to get an impression of what the discourse in contemporary Danish literature is on the former colony Iceland.

⁴ Quite a different case is Karen Blixen (1885-1962), who wrote *Out of Africa* (1937); as a European colonial writer she depicted colonial life from a more or less reversed perspective, i.e. she herself was part of a minority, the politically dominant European colonial elite; she challenges the Eurocentric cultural self-understanding and stereotypes in a number of ways. See for example: Aiken 1990.

⁵ Cf.: Hauge 2001, van der Liet 2004 and Oxfeldt 2005.

2. Exploring the familiar

Just like Norway, Iceland is among the few nations in the world that once were Danish colonies. Greenland, The Faeroese and the Virgin Islands were of course also under Danish rule, but they are – formally speaking – not independent states. Thus the relationship between Iceland and Denmark is a special one. For many centuries Iceland was a part of the Danish-Norwegian dual monarchy and after the dissolution of the dual kingdom in 1814 Iceland stayed part of the kingdom of Denmark. It was not until 1944 that Iceland became a sovereign and independent state.

Although Iceland definitely was a Danish colony, it never had the same ring of exoticism to it⁶ as for example was the case with Greenland or The Virgin Islands, presumably because of the lack of ethnic difference between the Danish colonizers and the colonized. In many ways, ethnically, but also linguistically and historically, Danes and Icelanders share the same origins. The only real objective differences between Denmark and Iceland are the diverging topography, geology and wildlife. Through the years these differences have attracted numerous visitors to Iceland, and in many instances extensive journeys in the desolate and rugged countryside were made. Often these trips are referred to as “expeditions”, which adds an extra adventurous aura to them. Nevertheless, according to the OED, an expedition is “A journey, voyage, or excursion made for some definite purpose”, and – one might add – especially for scientific or military purposes. The “problem” with Iceland for many Danish travellers is that the country is in many ways too familiar, well mapped and described in advance. Thus, the notion of undertaking an actual “expedition” is rendered a bit odd, or even erroneous, because Iceland had already been discovered, colonized and turned into an iconic literary landscape, mainly by Norse settlers, as early as the 9th Century A.D. Incidentally, the period of settling, conquering or “taking” of Iceland is described in detail in *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlement), a text presumably composed in the 13th century, and a source with which each of the Danish authors we will look at here was familiar. The idea of “discovering” Iceland in an exploratory fashion must therefore be profoundly nuanced. Furthermore, the Icelandic literary heritage has, since the

⁶ For a brief and lucid definition of ‘Orientalism’ and ‘exoticism’: Ringgaard 2010: 63.

Romantic era, clearly been perceived as a superior literary achievement, which hardly – if ever – could be matched by anything in Danish literature of the era. Instead of an exotic place, waiting to be explored and subjected to the “foreign gaze”, Iceland for Danish visitors was a “different” kind of former colony, i.e. a country that in some respects was (or had been perceived as) the home of superior literary art. Precisely because Icelandic literature had such a canonical status and because it played a crucial role in the process of establishing a self-image of mainland Scandinavian literature in the Romantic Age,⁷ it makes sense to have a look at contemporary Danish literary sources and the way Iceland is depicted in them. Questions to be answered are: what role does the colonial past play in contemporary Danish literary texts about Iceland? And what kind of literary discourse is applied in them?

The three books under scrutiny here are: Martin A. Hansen’s *Rejse paa Island* (Journey on Iceland) published in 1954 and illustrated by the well-known artist Sven Havsteen-Mikkelsen (1912-99); Poul Vad’s *Nord for Vatnajökul* (North of Vatnajökull, 1994)⁸ and finally *Rævesletten og andre islandske omveje* (The Fox Plain and other Icelandic detours, 2009), a work that is the result of a cooperation between the painter and graphic artist Per Kirkeby (1938-) and the writer Keld Zeruneith (1941-).

3. Journey on Iceland

The author Martin A. Hansen (1909-55) was quite a cultural celebrity in the years right after the Second World War. He was one of the leading Danish post-war writers, and a charismatic central figure in the coterie around the short-lived but highly influential literary and cultural journal *Heretica*, which was published from 1948 till 1953. Hansen himself was one of the two editors of *Heretica* in the years 1950-51, and immediately after his editorship he started to work on *Rejsen paa Island*.

The book was written during and in the wake of a journey of nearly two months to Iceland, in the spring of 1952.⁹ In Martin A. Hansen’s

⁷ Ísleifsson 2007: 178.

⁸ One chapter of this book was translated into English. Cf.: Vad 1995.

⁹ Actually the journey was first bound for the Faeroe Islands and then went on to Ice-

oeuvre, *Rejse paa Island* is one of his final major works. It appeared at a moment in time, when his fame as a writer and cultural personality was at its highest, especially after his immensely popular novel *Løgneren* had appeared in 1950.¹⁰ Two years later, in the very year that the journey to Iceland took place, Hansen's *chef d'œuvre* appeared, *Orm og tyr* (Snake and Bull). This book, just like *Rejse paa Island*, was also illustrated by Sven Havsteen-Mikkelsen, in the case of *Orm og tyr* with a series of woodcuts, while the former contains only charcoal drawings. *Orm og tyr* is a monumental non-fiction work which thematizes Danish national history, Scandinavian cultural heritage, archaeology and the history of the peasantry.¹¹

One of the main issues in Martin A. Hansen's post-war oeuvre was the question how it should be possible in the future to refer to the common Scandinavian cultural heritage, like the Viking era and the pagan Germanic past, after a war in which this cultural domain had been extensively utilized in Nazi ideology.¹² And it is exactly this common Scandinavian cultural heritage, Old Norse literature, the Viking past etc, *Rejse paa Island* deals with, both in the text itself as well as in the charcoal drawings by Havsteen-Mikkelsen.

It was a request from the publisher Carit Andersen – who had recently launched a series of travel books by well known authors and/or illustrators – which enticed Hansen and Havsteen-Mikkelsen into the trip to Iceland in the spring of 1952. The book and the entire series reflect an interesting (intermediate) phase in the development of modern Danish tourism in the Twentieth Century. The overall design of the books, e.g. by the size of the volumes and the lack of maps etc, shows that the series was primarily targeted at a readership with literary and artistic demands, rather than with exclusively touristic interests.¹³

land, and vice versa. It took place from May 17 until July 8 1952. Cf.: Hansen 1999, bd. III: 1216. Entries in Hansen's (published) diaries can be found in bd. II: 783-791.

¹⁰ *Løgneren* became one of the all-time bestsellers in Danish literary history. The text was first broadcast as a radio-play in the spring of 1950 and was later, in 1970, made into a motion picture directed by Knud Leif Thomsen.

¹¹ These topics pervaded most of Hansen's work in the 1950s until his untimely death in 1955, and they are also strong motifs in Havsteen-Mikkelsen's art.

¹² Cf.: van der Liet 2011.

¹³ *Rejse paa Island* is the only work looked at here which was part of a book series.

4. North of Vatnajökull

The second title to be dealt with here, *Nord for Vatnajökul*, was written by the Danish art historian and writer Poul Vad (1927-2003), who as a matter of fact had made his debut in the journal *Heretica* in 1951, while Hansen was one of the editors.¹⁴ Vad was an art historian of repute, not merely because of his notable studies on Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), but also for a number of books, essays and articles on other artists and on various literary and cultural topics,¹⁵ including this book on Iceland. Throughout his career, Poul Vad developed a twofold oeuvre, i.e. besides his professional, art historical work he also engaged in the writing of fiction. *Nord for Vatnajökul* added considerably to Vad's standing in Danish literature in the 1990s. The book also appeared in a German translation, tied in with a new German translation of the Icelandic saga which had initially inspired Vad to write this book.¹⁶

In contrast to Hansen and Havsteen-Mikkelsen, Poul Vad was not directly requested to write *Nord for Vatnajökul* by a publisher. The book does not appear like a coffee-table book, as *Rejse paa Island* does in a way, nor does it signal touristic purposes. Apart from two illustrations on the front and back cover, *Nord for Vatnajökul* is without any pictures, it just contains text, and the book design shows more kinship with other collections of essays by Vad than with travel guides in general.

Nord for Vatnajökul is a generic hybrid. It is not a traditional travelogue, nor a pure personal *memoire* or autobiography. The background of the journey to Iceland is elaborated and explained in the text and can be summarized as follows: In the early 1960's Poul Vad met an Icelandic painter and (would-be) architect during a stay in Paris,¹⁷ later

¹⁴ Cf.: van der Liet 1997: 18.

¹⁵ The best known volumes of personal and critical essays by Vad are: *Bristepunkter* (Breaking Points, 1992). *Knudepunkter* (Pivotal Points, 1993) and *Det springende punkt* (The Heart of the Matter, 1997).

¹⁶ *Islandreise. Auf den Spuren einer Saga* was translated by Hanns Grössel and appeared in 1998, including a new German translation of *The Saga of Hrafnkel* by Dirk Huth [pp. 147-181]. An Icelandic translation, *Norðan Vatnajökuls*, translated by Úlfur Hjörvar was published by the publishing house Ormstunga in Reykjavik in 2001.

¹⁷ This painter-architect, called Hördur by Vad, can be identified as Hördur Ágústsson (1922-).

this Icelandic acquaintance sent him a copy of one of the canonical medieval Icelandic sagas, the *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, and this brief, but highly intriguing text made such an inescapable impression on Vad, that – approximately a decade later – he went on a literary pilgrimage to the eastern part of Iceland, the area where most of the narrative of this saga is situated. The reader of *Nord for Vatnajökul* does not receive any information about Poul Vad’s journey to and from Iceland; the text merely starts with a few introductory remarks about writing in general. Once the Icelandic scene is set, Vad describes how he drove in a rented land rover through a landscape that some seven or eight hundred years earlier had been used as the backdrop for a story by an anonymous saga writer.

Thus, after a quarter of a century, and more than thirty years after the memorable meeting with the Icelandic in Paris, the offspring of the encounter, *Nord for Vatnajökul*, appeared in 1994.

5. The Fox Plain

The third book on Iceland here is *Rævesletten* (2009), a cooperation between the visual artist and architect Per Kirkeby and the writer Keld Zeruneith. Both are Danes and they both had been to Iceland on earlier occasions. Kirkeby not only supplied the book with a number of drawings, etchings and paintings, he also wrote quite a substantial portion of the text. On the other hand, Zeruneith not only contributed texts, he is also responsible for the photographs in the book. They are in stylish black and white and a crucial asset for the overall composition and appearance of this work.

Strikingly, Kirkeby and Zeruneith refer to their journey as “the expedition”, and in a sense this is the correct phrase, as they have a well defined objective in mind, i.e. to “see those places from the sagas we hadn’t been able to visit on the previous journey”.¹⁸

An obvious difference between Martin A. Hansen’s *Rejse paa Island*, Poul Vad’s *Nord for Vatnajökul* and *Rævesletten* is the relationship between the illustrations and the texts. The only book not containing any illustrations is *Nord for Vatnajökul*, in the other two works the illustrations play a prominent role. In the case of *Rævesletten* one can even say that its appearance comes close to that of a coffee table book.

¹⁸ Cf.: Kirkeby 2009: 159. The term “the expedition” is also used on p. 167.

Common to all three books is the fact that they were created on the basis of a journey on Iceland, that they relate to the past and that they also contain remarkable commentary on the travelling experiences themselves, especially concerning the difficulties of transportation on Iceland. These difficulties are in my opinion (deliberately) exaggerated by the authors because they offer them the opportunity to be induced to all kinds of digressions, in order to divert, postpone or slow down the course of the narrative. Martin A. Hansen on the other hand is rarely lured into digressions and he tries to stick to the rhythm of the journey as the basis of his narrative. In *Rævesletten* there is hardly a storyline, instead, a range of different genres, techniques – visual and textual – are brought together and merge into a collage-like final product. The interplay between textual and visual resources is not only crucial to the overall structural design of the book, but it also is an integral part of the text's recurrent reflexions on the act of reading, the transfiguring, visualizing and 'deciphering' of the contours of the landscape, through the representational forms of roadmaps etc.¹⁹

6. Not a living soul

Just like the other two books under scrutiny here, Martin A. Hansen's *Rejse paa Island* is thematically characterized by two main topics, i.e.: Icelandic nature and medieval literature. For Hansen, who was a lover of both, this journey back in time and into a world of natural and literary beauty meant a great deal. The main narrative in *Rejse paa Island* is often interrupted by insertions on literature, history, and so forth, thereby offering more textual and generic variety than might be expected from a travelogue. The text not only contains fragments clearly originating from the diary the author kept during the trip on Iceland,²⁰ but it also contains (meta-)reflections on generic characteristics and compositional principles. These technical reflections are in a rather delicate way connected to some of the choices the author makes on what to write and what to leave out of his travelogue. He declares, for instance, that the choice for this "loose" or "less solid" genre²¹ also implies that he was unable to include his impressions from the capital

¹⁹ Cf.: Kirkeby 2009: 48 and 162-64.

²⁰ See the similarities between the Hansen 1954: 107-108 and Hansen 1999: 783-791.

²¹ "Rejseboeger skrevet af skønlitterære Tjenere er fra gammelt en løs Genre og maa være det. De bygger ikke et Taarn af Soliditeter", Hansen 1954: 77.

of the country, “the city of Reykjavik, the powerhouse of modern Iceland”.²² Thus, the choice of form (genre) is juxtaposed to choices concerning the subject matter of the text, prioritizing the countryside and landscape, instead of urban environment and the many Icelanders living there. As a result, Hansen writes very little about people.

From this perspective the opening scene of *Rejse paa Island* is highly interesting for a number of reasons. One of them is the fact that Iceland is described by means of a kind of graphic and iconic representation and stylisation, which causes the landscape – as well as the text – to be understood through an abstraction of the landscape, that is, it is mediated through the metaphorical representation of the geographical map. In these opening lines we meet a first-person plural narrator,²³ who studies an unfolded roadmap on the steering wheel of his car, somewhere in a pitch-dark Icelandic night.²⁴ Because of the darkness and the mediated relationship between landscape and map, the author feels completely disoriented and the world around him appears estranged and alienated. Everything becomes “spooky”, and the scenery is summarized by the author in phrases like: “Everything is dark. [...] Now stillness has become strange. It appears unnatural, or supernatural. The quiet seems to come from an ambush. A very dramatic stillness.”²⁵ Words like “dark”, “grim”, “black”, “gloomy”, appear time and time again, throughout the book, and the only bright spots in this dark world that offer the narrator any consolation are the animals, especially horses, sheep and birds, that he encounters. In short, Martin A. Hansen’s Iceland is a desolate place, where the inhabitants hardly play a role at all, because, as he puts it: “People have left these places”.²⁶

Furthermore, the narrator describes the Icelandic countryside as the diametrical opposite of what he is used to at home (wilderness versus cultivation), but at the same time he emphasizes that Icelandic society

²² “saaledes har Pennen som landlig Dypperedskab ikke magtet Staden Reykjavik, det moderne Islands kraftige Værksted”, Hansen 1954: 78. See also Handesten 1992: 121.

²³ The narrator’s companion is merely referred to as “the painter”, cf. Hansen 1954: 23.

²⁴ Cf.: Hansen 1954: 7f.

²⁵ Hansen 1954: 7: “Det hele er dystert. [...] Nu er Stilheden besynderlig. Det virker unaturligt, eller overnaturligt. Stilheden kom ligesom fra et Baghold. En meget dramatisk Stilhed”. All translations in this article, unless indicated otherwise, are produced for this occasion by the author, HvdL.

²⁶ Hansen 1954: 38: “Mennesker er rejst fra disse steder”.

does not differ much from the rest of Scandinavia.²⁷ He mentions, for example, the fact that living standards in Iceland are comparable to those at home, but that the sheer velocity and magnitude of the change Icelandic society has gone through is more radical than elsewhere, and that the impact on the lifestyle and mentality of the Icelanders seems to have been more profound than in the rest of Scandinavia. And when Hansen observes the Icelanders, his pessimistic views of what is going to happen to Scandinavian cultural heritage in the years ahead are spelled out: "This entire revolution affects the mentality: the steady rhythm and enduring memory of agrarian life still remain, but will soon be bygones and on Iceland change has been much more drastic than in the traditional Scandinavian countries".²⁸

In particular Hansen turns vehemently against the influence of American popular culture, which he apprehends as a major threat to the richness of Icelandic culture. Americanized modernity, which Hansen calls a "hackneyed culture"²⁹ is not only imported from the USA or the UK, but also indirectly through mainland Scandinavia, thus making Iceland some sort of cultural pocket of resistance, surrounded by the threatening evils of modernity. Exemplary of the drawbacks of (Americanized) modernity is the fact that for Hansen modern Icelandic architecture is often associated with "ugliness", while traditional houses are linked to positive connotations of "beauty" etc. Hansen must, more or less reluctantly, accept that traditional architecture also means poor and unhealthy housing conditions and – ugly as they may look – modern dwellings have improved Icelandic standards of living and life expectancy of the population enormously. The price that postcolonial Icelanders had to pay for these advantages of modernity was according to Martin A. Hansen substantial, and in the long run it would lead to cultural impoverishment: "The standard of living was lower in the past, but then people had much more time at their disposal. Because of the high standard of living, most people nowadays become addicted to hurried and nervous busyness".³⁰

²⁷ Cf.: Hansen 1954: 13.

²⁸ Hansen 1954: 39: "Hele Omvæltningen paavirker Mentaliteten, Bondelivets sindige Rytme og lange Erindren findes nok, men er vel snart en Saga blot, og Forandringen er paa Island gaaet meget voldsommere for sig end i de gamle nordiske Lande".

²⁹ Hansen 1954: 42-43: "en Banalkultur".

³⁰ Hansen 1954: 53: "Levestandarden i Fortiden var lavere, men de gamle havde meget

Nevertheless, the few times when Hansen actually refers to conversations with Icelanders, the tensions and political debates related to recent historical event and notably the process of decolonization can be sensed right beneath the surface. Danish colonial rule is directly addressed in the fifth chapter of *Rejse paa Island* and again it is placed in a literary rather than a political context. For Icelandic nation building and for an understanding of Icelandic national identity, the return of the bulk of the Icelandic medieval manuscripts from Denmark in the 1970s was of immense importance. The actual political suppression of the Icelanders was never taken seriously by the Danes and, as a reaction, the Icelanders seem to look at the Danes in the same way. In a conversation with a “sensible and influential” Icelandic Hansen refers to,³¹ this man actually makes fun of Danish colonialism:

But let us not take these old issues too much to heart. As time goes by we may even find something positive to say about Danish rule in the past. It was, after all, not meant so badly. Not that we exactly admired you people, but the Danes were just not the worst to have to deal with. One has to admit that they actually were a bit foolish. In any event they did not notice the opportunities here at all. [...] But as imperialists, Danes are kind of funny.³²

Martin A. Hansen actually is the only author under scrutiny here who really takes the issue of mutual Danish-Icelandic colonial history seriously. He even argues extensively for rethinking the two countries’ common history from a (new) postcolonial point of view. Although he does not use the word, this is what he essentially asks for:

Today’s Danish historiography on the relationship with the North Atlantic nations is negligible. What our encyclopaedias and reference works tell us about the history of Danish-Icelandic relations is usually produced by Icelanders, and as a rule, by learned men whom one reads with confi-

store Overskud af Tid. Med den høje Levefod bliver de fleste Nutidsmennesker Slaver af jagende Travlhed”.

³¹ Hansen 1954: 75: “klog og indflydelsesrig”.

³² Hansen 1954: 75-76: “Men lad os ellers ikke tage saa tungt paa de gamle Sager. Efterhaanden vil vi maaske ligefrem faa et og andet godt at sige om Fortidens danske Styre. Det var ikke saa ond ment. Ikke at vi just beundrer jer. Danskerne var bare ikke de værste vi kunde have faaet at trækkes med. De var nemlig lidt dumme, det maa man sige. De havde overhovedet ikke Blik for Mulighederne her. [...] Men Danskerne som Imperialister er lidt morsomme”.

dence. But it is not a Danish effort, and frequently one misses an attitude in which also circumstances and opinions representing common Danish-Icelandic history play a certain role.³³

7. Journey to a library

Nord for Vatnajökul has – at least – a double narrative structure. It deals with a journey in Eastern Iceland, and contains concrete information about the landscape and other generic ingredients of the travelogue, but at the same time numerous digressions of an (auto-) biographical nature and about literature, especially about *Hrafnkel's saga Freysgoða*,³⁴ are woven into the narrative. Thus the text oscillates between past and present, as well as between fact and fiction. *Nord for Vatnajökul* can be characterised as a report of a journey into an unknown country, and at the same time as an exploration into a well-known literary realm, just like in Hansen's case.

The fact that the author of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* is unknown results in the absence of the usual places of interest for the literary tourist, such as the place of birth of the author, or the house where a book was written, a museum or the burial place of the author. In this case Vad had only the text and the landscape in which the narrative was set at his disposal and therefore the landscape and the handful of people Vad meets during his journey are charged with a surplus of meaning, or as Vad himself puts it, his travel experiences are invested with a touch of mysticism, "a kind of shamanism".³⁵

Although *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* plays a crucial role in the book, Vad more or less reluctantly summarizes the contents of the saga,³⁶ be-

³³ Hansen 1954: 79: "Det er forsvindende, hvad der fra moderne Tid findes af dansk Historieskrivning om Forholdet til Atlanterhavsnationerne. Hvad vore Leksika og Haandbøger har om det historiske dansk-islandske Forhold er tiest skrevet af Islændere, gerne lærde Mænd man læser med Tillid. Men det er ikke dansk Indsats, og jævnlige maa man savne en Indstilling, hvori ogsaa Fællesrigets Vilkaar og Synspunkter spiller en vis Rolle".

³⁴ See: Bredsdorff 2001: 87-94.

³⁵ Vad 1994: 37: "en slags åndemaneri".

³⁶ The saga text is about the chieftain Hrafnkel of the manor Aðalból, who forbade the servants in his household to ride on one of his horses, which was dedicated to the pagan god Frey. Of course one of the shepherds, called Ejnar, violates the house rule and is killed by Hrafnkel as a retribution. When Ejnar's father demands proper compensation for the loss of his son a chain reaction of revenge and reprisal is unleashed,

cause he feels that the text is already “boiled down to an essence”,³⁷ and later the style of the saga is referred to as “a kind of epic minimalism”.³⁸ The reason why *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, according to Vad, is such an intriguing tale is the fact that the outcome of the story, from a contemporary moral point of view, is unsatisfactory. The text does not celebrate the victory of good over evil, but it displays the fundamental characteristics of a man with a “natural” urge to exercise power and to administer authority. In Poul Vad’s view, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* is about making choices in life and about the crucial moments when destiny rules and people react more or less instinctively. Those who know how to deal with authority and power will eventually win, while those who are not fully prepared and equipped for it tend to fail, despite their eagerness and motivation.

Nord for Vatnajökul is not a travelogue, as the text is not structured as a coherent account of Vad’s journey to Iceland. Rather, it is a series of loosely connected – or sometimes even unrelated – chapters which barely deal with the journey on Iceland at all. In one chapter Poul Vad establishes a connection between the original medieval saga and the political philosopher Machiavelli’s analyses of power and psychology of tyrannical personalities.³⁹ In another part of the book the author unfolds a variety of digressions, personal anecdotes and art historical and architectural criticism.⁴⁰ Vad also discusses what others, writers and scholars, have written about the saga and its artistic and existential meaning. In this connection Vad is particularly critical of his Swedish colleague Per Olof Sundman (1922-92), who – just like Vad – obviously had been fascinated by *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* and had used it as the model for his own novel *Berättelsen om Sām* (1977).⁴¹

Right from the introduction it is clear what Vad sees as the purpose of *Nord for Vatnajökul*. He describes it as some kind of quest, as he

as can be expected in a saga. The rather surprising outcome of the labyrinthine narrative that follows is that Hrafnkel first loses all his property and estate, but then, as time goes by, he is able to regain all of it, and even more, as his reputation increases due to the fact that he manages to overcome his misfortune.

³⁷ Vad 1994: 14: “køgt sammen til en essens”.

³⁸ Vad 1994: 16: “en slags episk minimalisme”.

³⁹ Vad 1994: 132-142.

⁴⁰ For example: Vad 1994: 18-26 and 27-28.

⁴¹ Vad 1994: 124-131; see also: Schottmann 1989: 117-137.

states that his goal was to visit the manor of Aðalból, the place where the central events of the saga are situated, Northeast of the Vatnajökull, the largest glacier of Iceland. When he finally arrives at the fabled farmhouse, it turns out to be less romantic and far more down-to-earth than he had expected. It is a huge and ugly concrete building and nothing of the original buildings can be found anymore, but still some of the literary mystique is maintained, albeit in a surprising way, as it turns out that the present farm owner (also) is a renowned connoisseur and collector of books.

Photograph of Aðalból, from: *Rævesletten og andre islandske omveje. Saga- og kortlæsning* (2009), courtesy of Keld Zeruneith.

As a matter of fact the “climax” or rather the anti-climax of *Nord for Vatnajökul* is a rather bizarre encounter with this extremely taciturn book collecting farmer and Vad concludes that: “The most sophisticated concept- or performance artist from the twentieth century could not have done it any better”.⁴²

⁴² Vad 1994: 91: “Den mest udspekulerede koncept- eller performancekunstner fra det tyvende århundredes slutning kunne ikke have gjort det bedre”.

Just like in his blockbuster novel *Kattens anatomi* (1978), in *Nord for Vatnajökul* Vad recounts a journey which in reality would have taken only a short while. Playing with the discrepancy between narrated time and narrating time is actually one of the hallmarks of Vad's technique.⁴³ Sometimes a lot of things happen in a few lines, while at other moments time seems to come to a standstill in Vad's texts. Moreover, this narrative technique is also in line with the way saga texts are constructed and in some instances Vad even seems to imitate the saga stylisation.⁴⁴

8. Goodbye to the real world

Geographically speaking, *Rævesletten* primarily deals with the northern and eastern parts of Iceland. Previously Kirkeby and Zeruneith had visited other parts of the country and they clearly wanted to avoid overlap and redundancies. This means that, also in this book some parts of Iceland are left aside, or only touched on in passing. This 'selective' approach is clearly a feature common to all the texts looked at in this article. It seems as if the rugged, inhospitable countryside, where very few people live, is of far greater interest to the postcolonial gaze of the Danes, than anything else, at least more than urbanized Iceland and the people living there.

Obviously *Rævesletten* contains distinctively different artistic forms of expression: the figurative (drawings, paintings, etchings, photographs) and literary narrative (travelogue, retelling of sagas).⁴⁵ With respect to the figurative aspects, the book understands itself as part of an artistic tradition of Danish illustrated works on Icelandic topics. Especially the drawings made by Johannes Larsen (1867-1961) in the late 1920s are important as a frame of reference.⁴⁶ The fact that Johannes Larsen's illustrations are mentioned in the preface of *Rave-*

⁴³ Cf.: Ricœur 1984-1988.

⁴⁴ This is especially evident in a number of instances where Vad applies quasi-traditional oral forms, e.g. Vad 1994: 101: "Sådan sluttede jeg beretningen om mit møde med Pall Gislason".

⁴⁵ The most important sagas that are retold in *Rævesletten* are: *Víga-Glúm's saga*, *Grettir's saga*, *Njál's saga* and the *Laxdaela saga*.

⁴⁶ Larsen visited Iceland twice, in 1927 and in 1930, both times in order to make illustrations for a new and prestigious three-volume work with translation in Danish of the bulk of the Icelandic sagas: *De islandske Sagaer I-III*, Copenhagen 1930-1932.

sletten (p. 7) is a clear indication of how the author and artist wish to see the relationship between text and images in their book. Kirkeby and Zeruneith do not want the various graphic forms of representation to be direct illustrations of what they saw during their journey, but they rather apprehend the graphic results as a means to “capture the polymorphous contours and atmospheres of the landscape”.⁴⁷ While Johannes Larsen’s drawings were exclusively meant to illustrate the old saga texts, the photographs, sketches etc. in *Rævesletten* are reproduced in their own right as art; they do not primarily refer to the sagas, but relate to the journey. Kirkeby’s etchings etc. are mostly non-figurative and without titles or captions, whereas Zeruneith’s photographs are all geographically identifiable and supplied with titles to assert that. Thus, the relationship between text and images in *Rævesletten* is completely different from *De islandske Sagaer*, and differs also from the figurative charcoal illustrations in Hansen’s *Rejse paa Island*.

The journey by Kirkeby and Zeruneith was well planned, and they clearly looked for localities and trajectories which appear in some of the Icelandic sagas. Furthermore, the fact that in some cases descendants of the people who are recorded in the medieval saga texts still live on the same farms and places as their predecessors, makes a deep impression on Zeruneith. At the same time he is aware of the discrepancy between his own, romanticised preoccupation with medieval heroism and contemporary reality, as he is confronted with e.g. scrap yards and rundown farms, instead of the grand homesteads of the past he had imagined.⁴⁸ In other words: in *Rævesletten* Iceland is not characterized by the impact of human activity on the landscape, but primarily through the absence of it. It is first and foremost the radical contrast between diminutive traces of human presence in the landscape, and the overwhelming greatness of nature; the empty, vast and open spaces, the glaciers, the geysers, the immense lava fields, etc. that mesmerize Kirkeby and Zeruneith. The unfathomable and unpredictable forces of nature also represent a constant threat. The possibility of

⁴⁷ “Men modsat Johannes Larsens præcist stedangivne tegninger tilsigter Kirkeby først og fremmest at indfange topografiens mangeformede konturer og stemningslejer”, Kirkeby 2009: 7. Apart from the attention given to the work of Johannes Larsen and *De islandske Sagaer*, hardly any other literary reference is mentioned by Zeruneith and Kirkeby.

⁴⁸ Kirkeby 2009: 46.

imminent destruction not only catches the visitor's attention, but it simply threatens to overshadow everything else. The emphatic focus on nature also seems to deepen the gap between the Icelanders on the one hand – who are constantly exposed to these 'threats' and whims of nature and who have learned to live with it – and the tourists on the other hand. One has to conclude that the sagas and the natural beauty of Iceland are by far the main points of interest to Kirkeby and Zeruneith, whereas neither the local population, the political situation, the culture, nor the colonial past play a role of any significance in *Rævesletten*.

Zeruneith is interested in the (historical) connection between the man and the saga that is named after him, and the topography of the area, of which the name Hrafnkel has been a part for centuries. According to Keld Zeruneith it is the combination of saga texts, landscapes and saga-names 'inscribed' in these landscapes that bring about a kind of "transcendent composition" (p. 48). Interestingly, the presence of people is not mentioned at all, and the Icelanders do not in any way contribute to the profound "joy" and feelings of "solace" (p. 48) the author experiences. This differs clearly from Poul Vad's book, in which a variety of remarkable, interesting and peculiar people appear are described in sympathetic terms.

The difference between the painter Kirkeby and the author Zeruneith is that the former looks at topographical maps as abstractions from the "real" world and translates maps back to the landscapes they represent, while the latter looks at the textual and narrative aspects. Zeruneith is not primarily interested in the relationship between maps and landscape, but rather in the names of places and the stories, travels, experiences of space and time these maps refer to. And Zeruneith observes, looking at a map of Iceland, that despite the emptiness of the country, virtually "everything is identified and has been given a name" (p. 47). The topographical names in many cases establish a connection between the present and the past, because either they are literally present in saga texts, or they refer to events that the sagas deal with.⁴⁹ In that way place names are written relicts of human activity, just as the sagas or, for that matter, the books under scrutiny

⁴⁹ Place names such as Hrafnkelsdalur and Aðalból are present in the text of *Hrafnkel's saga* and are also mentioned in *Nord for Vatnajökul* and *Rævesletten*.

here. When the people are gone, their stories may live on.⁵⁰

Among the first texts that are mentioned in *Rævesletten* is *Hrafnkel's saga*. It is a bit surprising that Zeruneith does not mention Poul Vad's book at all, especially because *Rævesletten* starts at the same spot, the farm called Aðalból, which was Vad's destination in *Nord for Vatnajökul*. It is also remarkable to see the differences between the two books. Poul Vad's journey is entirely organized around the journey to Aðalból. Whereas Zeruneith and his companions only mention the place in passing and emphasize that today it is merely a modest roadhouse or cafeteria for the few people who pass by. Not a trace can be found of the spectacular drive to Aðalból Poul Vad tells about, nor of the impressive private library collection that he found there a few decades earlier. Just like all the other signs of human activity in Iceland, also this immense library seems to have fallen prey to the ravages of time. Through the contrast between Zeruneith's cafeteria and Vad's library the decay and decline of cultural values is emphasized and only nature is described in positive terms. Also the Icelanders that Zeruneith and company meet during their journey are surprisingly indifferent, not only to foreigners, but also to life in general it seems. When, for example, they come across a man operating an excavator, Zeruneith contemplates: "Here I met [...] an Icelander, completely alienated from his antecedents, his only identity is the colossal monster he releases beneath himself".⁵¹

Apropos of machinery, the fact that all the Danes who travel on Iceland themselves employ rather impressive motorized means of transportation is hardly part of their reflections, although it is of some importance to the overall stylisation of their narratives. In the case of Martin A. Hansen a "jeep" was used, Poul Vad rented a "land rover" (which is also depicted on the cover of the book), while Kirkeby and Zeruneith made use of an unidentified four-wheel drive automobile. Thus, the romantic notion of being on a real "expedition" and "discovering" Iceland, as if it were unknown, maiden and unmapped territory, is for one thing enhanced by the ruggedness of the countryside and amplified even more by the use of the epitome of the exploratory vehi-

⁵⁰ Poul Vad reflects on this issue in his meta-literary introductory chapter 'Ved Lagarfljót' in Vad 1994: 7-8.

⁵¹ "Her har jeg mødt [...] en islænding, fuldstændig fremmedgjort for sin forhistorie, hans eneste identitet er det vældige uhyre, han udløser under sig", Kirkeby 2009: 83.

cle, the 4x4. Although the trips through the Icelandic countryside recorded in these works were no expeditions in the proper sense, they at least looked like it from the outside. By employing this form of transportation the authors in a way re-enacted archetypical exploratory behaviour, and enhanced the stylisation of it.

9. A postcolonial landscape

What has become clear from these three presentations of journeys on Iceland in modern Danish literary sources is that the emphasis in all three texts is on Iceland as an exotic, insular and primarily literary phenomenon. Notwithstanding the many similarities, cultural, historical and linguistic kinship, Iceland is rendered “different” in these books, and its “strangeness” is continuously described and stressed. All the texts that we have looked at preserve and underscore Iceland’s exotic qualities, while other, more familiar aspects are only mentioned in passing or left out of the description altogether. Especially the fact that the island’s natural beauties are continuously brought to the fore, while the capital Reykjavik – where over a third of the entire Icelandic population lives today – hardly plays any role in these three books at all, is more than just coincidental.

Especially Martin A. Hansen’s depiction of Iceland is characterized by the absence of human life. In the discourse he applies, in particular when he describes the landscape, he makes it clear that there is life in the Icelandic countryside, but this life is mainly attributed to animals, often sheep, but more frequently and very passionately indeed, to birds. This may well be the result of the author’s special interest in birdlife, but it is nevertheless remarkable that birds seem to function as indicators of life on the island, rather than humans.⁵² In other words: Iceland is a vital place, but primarily for animals, as it does not really qualify for human life.

Among the first things Keld Zeruneith observes is that Iceland’s interior looks “like a landscape on the moon”,⁵³ and a repeated discursive feature is the establishment of connotations like “emptiness”, “repetition”, “infinity” and “brilliant monotony”. Here “emptiness” is associated with positive values, i.e. the absence of all the negative as-

⁵² E.g.: Hansen 1954: 158ff.

⁵³ “Som et månelandskab, ubefolket, saligt [*sic*] tomt for ord”, Kirkeby 2009: 51.

pects of contemporary life: “The mobile phone is dead [*sic*], no connection, one is in a literal sense at a loss”.⁵⁴ But “emptiness” and the fact that everything is referred to as “*intet*”, i.e. “nothingness”, is of course only a manner of speaking. “*Intet*” in this context simply expresses that no human activity can be observed anywhere. And when Kirkeby and his companions arrive in a village, for example, the village is depicted in a thoroughly dramatic and emphatically negative manner, it is a place in decay, with death and ruin waiting for the last living creatures who unavoidably have to perish:

on the main street the last four forgotten children in knitted caps – the smallest in the last stroller in the world. Their eyes gawk glassily at us. The houses have dead windows, the harbour is furnished with lost fishing and storage facilities, unhitched platform trucks that continue to rust away in the drizzling rain, while we consume our supper [...].⁵⁵

In short, despite the natural splendour of the countryside, the place is doomed to vanish, because it is an inhospitable place for human beings. The children in the scene quoted above are “forgotten”, the smallest child is sitting in the “last” stroller in the world, the houses are characterised by the word “dead” and the harbour is a mere scrap yard. And to emphasize the atmosphere of doom, decay and the notion that humanity is losing ground here, the word used when the visitors consume their supper, is in Danish “*nadver*”, a word that linguistically refers to the biblical Last Supper, and thereby establishes a reference to the imminent dissolution of this (small) community.

For Kirkeby and Zeruneith Iceland represents a place of doom where people live on the edge, and where the visitor can experience that the surface of the earth is merely “a thin membrane on top of a huge reactor”.⁵⁶ And this observation leads Kirkeby to a series of existential, and even metaphysical, speculations. The Icelandic context, with lava, geysers, eruptions etc., brings Kirkeby to envisage apocalyptic perspectives. The biblical notion of the result of human exis-

⁵⁴ “Mobiltelefonen er død, ingen forbindelse, man er i bogstaveligste forstand på Herrens mark”, Kirkeby 2009: 51.

⁵⁵ “på hovedstrøget de sidste fire glemte børn i strikhuer – den mindste i den sidste klapvogn i verden. Deres øjne glør glasagtige på os. Husene har døde vinduer, havnen er møbleret med fortabte fiske- og opbevaringshaller, afhægtede ladvogne, der rustet videre i støvregnen, mens vi indtager vores *nadver* [...]”, Kirkeby 2009: 52.

⁵⁶ “er en tynd hinde på en stor reaktor”, Kirkeby 2009: 160.

tence – summarized by the metaphorical phrase “ashes to ashes” – in Iceland has not only a proverbial meaning, but represents also an actual threat and a quite literal circumstance. This explains why Kirkeby understands the emptiness and darkness in Iceland as a fundamental, existential experience: “Look into the blackness and experience the fear and insight which is called eternity and resurrection”.⁵⁷

All the texts presented here are in various ways hybrids of text and image. Most evidently this is the case in *Rævesletten*, where more space is dedicated to graphic forms of representation than in any of the other books. The second half of *Rævesletten*, for example, is exclusively created by Per Kirkeby, and after an uncommented section with etchings (pp. 135-147), he continues with a series of notes and observations about the pleasures of reading and interpreting topographic maps. All these aspects make *Rævesletten* a fundamental cross-over text where text and image merge and are of equal importance. Martin A. Hansen’s *Rejse paa Island* also contains many illustrations, but these drawings are clearly subordinate to the text, they remain illustrations to the text, as they do not engage in any inter-medial exchange between text and image. Finally, art historian Poul Vad’s book, curiously enough, has the most explicit literary focus, as his book deals with a saga text from the past and incorporates a variety of literary topics in the narrative, but no illustrations, apart from the illustrations on the front and back cover, are involved. Vad nevertheless a number of times incorporates remarks on Icelandic art, culture and architecture in his book, and the references to visual art always lie just around the corner.

This leads to the hypothesis that postcolonial depictions of Iceland seem to be characterized by a high degree of descriptive stylisation, aestheticism, and a prominent role of visual forms of representation.

While decolonisation itself is an issue in the oldest of the three works discussed here, Martin A. Hansen’s *Rejse paa Island*, this is not the case in Vad’s *Nord for Vatnajökul* or in *Rævesletten*. In the latter two texts Iceland has become a country like any other, with spectacular natural reserves, but without noticeable traces of Danish colonial rule. And when e.g. Poul Vad briefly addressed the political situation

⁵⁷ “Se ud i sortheden og oplev den angst og indsigt som hedder evighed og opstandelsen”, Kirkeby 2009: 161.

in Iceland, e.g. in a description of a meeting between the President of Iceland and a group of writers, colonial history does not seem to have any significance anymore.⁵⁸

Thus, over the last half a century Iceland has become a postcolonial landscape, a palimpsest-like space where people and political open wounds from the past are overwritten by the aesthetic gaze, which primarily focuses on the graphic qualities of the Icelandic country side. From a historical perspective, one might describe this process as a transformation or transmutation, which turns Iceland into a “sublime” literary landscape, basically without living human beings that might disturb the ‘saga picture’, open for other artistic interpretations, and way beyond the dark pages of Dano-Icelandic mutual history.

Bibliography

Text editions

- De islandske Sagaer I-III*, transl. by Johannes V. Jensen (a.o.), Copenhagen, 1930-1932.
- Hrafnkel's Saga and other Icelandic stories*, translated, with an introduction by Hermann Pálsson Harmondsworth, 1971.
- The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi*, translated by Terry Gunnell, *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson (5 vols), Reykjavík, 1997. Vol. V: 261-281.

References:

- Aiken 1990: Susan Hardy Aiken, *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*, Chicago.
- Andersen 2006: Per Thomas Andersen, *Identitetens geografi. Steder i litteraturen fra Hamsun til Naipaul*, Oslo.
- Anderson 2003 [revised ed.]: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London & New York.
- Ashcroft a.o. 1989: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, London & New York.
- Beller a.o. 2007: Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Imagology. The Cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey* [Studia Imagologica 13], Amsterdam & New York.
- Bredsdorff 2001: Thomas Bredsdorff, *Chaos and Love. The Philosophy of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, Copenhagen.
- Dyserinck 1977: Hugo Dyserinck, *Komparatistik: eine Einführung*, Bonn.

⁵⁸ Vad 1994: 18-19.

- Gunnell 1997: see Text editions.
- Handesten 1992: Lars Handesten, *Litterære rejser – poetik og erkendelse i danske digteres rejsebøger*, Copenhagen.
- Hansen 1954: Martin A. Hansen, *Rejse paa Island* [Ill. af: Sven Havsteen-Mikkelsen], Copenhagen.
- 1999: Martin A. Hansen, *Dagbøger I-III* [Anders Thyrring Andersen & Jørgen Jørgensen eds.], Copenhagen.
- Hauge 2001: Hans Hauge, "Postkolonialisme", in: Johannes Fibiger, Gerd Lütken & Niels Mølgaard (eds.), *Litteraturens tilgange – metodiske angrebsvinkler*, Copenhagen: 369-405.
- Hulme 2002: Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge.
- Ísleifsson 2007: Sumarliði Ísleifsson, "Iceland", in: Beller a.o. 2007: 177-179.
- Jakobsson 2009: Sverrir Jakobsson (ed.), *Images of the North. Histories – Identities – Ideas* [Studia Imagologica 14], Amsterdam & New York.
- Kirkeby 2009: Per Kirkeby & Keld Zeruneith, *Rævesletten og andre islandske omveje. Saga- og kortlæsning*, Copenhagen.
- Lakoff 1980: George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago and London.
- Laxness 2008: Halldór Laxness, *Independent People*, London.
- Magnússon 2010: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with Words. A Social History of Iceland*, London.
- Oxfeldt, 2005: Elisabeth Oxfeldt, *Nordic Orientalism. Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination 1800-1900*, Copenhagen.
- 2010: Elisabeth Oxfeldt, *Journeys from Scandinavia. Travelogues of Africa, Asia and South America 1840-2000*, Minneapolis & London.
- Pálsson 1971: see Text editions.
- Pratt 2008: Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone", in: *From Inquiry to Academic Writing: a Text and Reader*, Boston.
- Ricœur 1984-1988: Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1-3 [trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer], Chicago and London.
- Ringgaard 2010: Dan Ringgaard, *Stedssans*, Århus.
- Said 1995: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Harmondsworth.
- Schottmann 1989: Hans Schottmann, "Die Geschichte von Hrafnkell und Sám", in: *ÜberBrücken. Festschrift für Ulrich Groenke zum 65. Geburtstag*, Knut Brynhildsvoll (Hrsg.), Hamburg: 177-137.
- Sundman 1977: Per Olof Sundman, *Berättelsen om Sám*, Stockholm.
- Vad 1994: Poul Vad, *Nord for Vatnajökul*, Copenhagen.
- 1995: Poul Vad, "North of Vatnajökull" [transl. by W. Glyn Jones], in: *Danish Literary Magazine*, 8: 15.
- 1998: Poul Vad, *Islandreise. Auf den Spuren einer Saga* [aus dem Dänischen von Hanns Grössel], München.
- Van der Liet 1994-95: Henk van der Liet, "Med firehjulstræk ind i sagaånden", in: *Litteraturmagasinet Standart*, vol. 8, 5: 24.

- 1997: Henk van der Liet, *Kontrapunkter. En studie i Poul Vads skønlitterære forfatterskab*, Odense.
- 2004: Henk van der Liet & Astrid Surmatz, "Indledning. Postkolonialisme og nordisk litteratur – en orientering", in: *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek*, vol. 25, 2: 3-14.
- 2005: Henk van der Liet, "Martin A. Hansens *Heretica*-breve i international belysning", in: *PS. Om Martin A. Hansens korrespondance med kredsen omkring Heretica*, Anders Thyrring Andersen (ed.), Copenhagen: 69-82.
- 2011: Henk van der Liet, "The Nordic Way Out: Europe in Danish Literature after the Second World War", in: *European Identity and the Second World War*, Michael Wintle & Menno Spiering (eds.), Basingstoke: 111-123.