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Voices from the Radio Operator's House

*A partial translation of Steinunn G. Helgadóttir's
Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins
and accompanying methodological analysis*

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í þýðingafræði

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a translated excerpt of the short story cycle *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins*, accompanied by both a brief literary analysis of the text as well as an analysis of my own translation process.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first, I introduce the text, examine it in terms of its genre—a short story cycle—and its primary stylistic features, discuss its critical reception in Iceland, and identify the scope of my excerpted English translation of the text. Chapter two delves into translation theory, with particular reference to Hans Vermeer’s *skopos* theory and Katharina Reiss’ text types. It also discusses the ‘creative’ methods of translation and identifies the *skopos* of the present translation. In chapter three, I look at the major challenges I encountered while translating *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins* and how I used the previously discussed creative strategies to address these. Chapter four is a brief conclusion.

My translation excerpt, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s house,” comprises the first nine stories of the source text, or roughly one third of the book.

ÚTDRÁTTUR

Þessi ritgerð er þýðing á hluta smásögusafnsins *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins*, ásamt stuttri bókmenntagreiningu og greiningu þýðingarferlisins.

Ritgerðin skiptist í fjóra kafla. Í þeim fyrsta kynni ég textann, rýni í hann m.t.t. bókmenntagreinarinnar – þ.e. sagnasveiga – og helstu stíleinkenna, ræði um hvernig bókinni var tekið á Íslandi og greini umfang þýðingar minnar á hluta textans yfir á ensku. Í öðrum kafla ræði ég þýðingarfræði og sérstaklega kenningu Hans Vermeer um *skopos* og textagerðir Katharinu Reiss. Ég kem einnig inn á aðferðir þar sem þýðandi leyfir sér að vera „skapandi“ og greini *skopos* þýðingarinnar sem fyrir liggur. Í þriðja kafla fjalla ég um stærstu áskoranirnar sem ég þurfti að takast á við þegar ég þýddi *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins* og útskýri hvernig þær skapandi aðferðir, sem ég nefndi í þriðja kafla, komu að gagni í þeim efnum. Í fjórða kafla fjalla ég stuttlega um helstu niðurstöður.

Sá hluti bókarinnar sem ég þýddi nær til fyrstu níu smásagna „Voices from the Radio Operator's house“ (sem er titill bókarinnar í þýðingu minni), eða ríflega þriðjungs íslensku útgáfunnar.

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This thesis and translation are the culmination of five years of study at the University of Iceland. I neither spoke nor read more than the most rudimentary Icelandic when I arrived in the country and so reaching this point has been a long and often arduous process, throughout which I benefited immensely from the knowledge, guidance, patience, and good will of any number of people, a few of whom I'd like to take the opportunity to recognize here.

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And to Mark, my first and last reader, who always has just the right word.

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Chapter 1

Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins: An Introduction

Published in 2016, *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins* (henceforth shortened to *Raddir*) is the first novel by visual artist and curator Steinunn G. Helgadóttir. Steinunn is also a poet, and previously published two volumes of poetry: 2011's *Kafbátakórinn* ('The Submarine Choir'), which was awarded the Jón úr Vör Poetry Award, and *Skuldunautar* ('Debtors'), which came out in 2013.

The book opens on the eponymous radio operator, a solitary man who keeps writing novels only to find that as soon as he's completed them, the exact same books are being published by someone else. "...[P]að er bara ein hugsanleg skýring," his sole friend, a member of the local Paranormal Society tells him. "[P]ér *blæðir* sögum" (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 17). Convinced by this theory, the radio operator builds himself a sort of Faraday cage in which he can write, protected from the threats of "hugsanaflutningur" [telepathy] (17) and story theft. The bunker also allows him to turn the tables, he says, and go on the offensive: "...sjálfur er ég kominn í veiðihug og veröldin er full af ónotuðum sögum" (21).

From here, the narrative spirals outwards. We meet two twin sisters, different in every way except their looks, who are taking over the corner store owned by their terminally ill mother. A pair of aging fishermen, still trying to make a living within an industry that is rapidly changing around them. A young man on a mission to meet his 11 half-siblings, all of whom are one year older than him and none of whom he previously knew existed. A bookseller on an ill-fated vacation in Spain. Two brothers trying to recreate the recipe for the best hamburger they've ever eaten. Thus, reading

the book feels distinctly panoramic. Or, as literary critic and scholar Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir writes,

Raddirnar úr húsi loftskammtamannsins taka á sig sjálfstætt líf innan verksins. Þær tala ekki endilega saman, heldur mynda frekar raddaðan og (ó)samstæðan kór sem stingst upp í eterinn eins og uppréttir þræðir og skapa þannig mynd sem minnir á strengjabrúður sem vaða inn og út af sviðinu, rekast stundum á og stundum alls ekki (Úlfhildur).

Although the book is presented as a novel (as opposed to a short story collection, for instance) each of its chapters readily functions as a stand-alone tale with its own self-contained plot arc, narrative POV, characters, and resolution. When read all together, however, these stories reveal underlying connections to one another, whether these are more concrete, such as repeated characters and locations, or more abstract, such as repeated themes, symbols, and motifs.

This novel/story format has made the book difficult to categorize. For instance, in her radio program “Orð um bækur,” Jórunn Sigurðadóttir called it a “Skáldsaga eða *skáldsögur*,” remarking that

...[mér] finnst svolítið erfitt að lýsa þessari bók...sem hefur að geyma eins og ég segi frekar sögur en sögu og þó líka sögu að svo eina sögu...og mér fannst svo spennandi hvernig hún kom í ljós svona smátt og smátt fyrir mér þegar ég var byrja að lesa hana. Ég vissi ekkert um hvað ég var fara að lesa.

In his discussion of the book, Kári Tulinius notes that *Raddir* generated a lot of public interest specifically because of its curious structure (Kári 112). He employs a more poetical metaphor to describe the book’s nested story form, saying,

Kannski mætti líkja formgerð *Raddir loftskammtamannsins* við brauð. Ýmsu ólíku er blandað saman og með því að hnoða og bíða þá opnast sameindirnar

og mynda net tenginga. Jú, það eru göt í hleifnum, en þau þurfa að vera þarna annars hefði þetta ekki risið hærra en hrúgan í byrjun...Steinunni G.

Helgadóttur tekist að búa til verk sem lyftir sér hærra en það hefði gert sem smásagnasafn (114).

In her own review, however, Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir pinpoints the short story cycle genre right off, writing:

Eitt af skemmtilegri formum bókmenntanna eru sagnasveigar eða samtengdar smásögur. Verk af þessu tagi eru stödd mitt á milli skáldsögu og smásagna, samsett af smásögum sem saman mynda óljósa, eða kannski frekar misljósa heild eða samfellu. Stundum er einhver rammi utan um sögurnar, en ekki alltaf. Steinunn G. Helgadóttir sem er þekkt fyrir myndlist og ljóð velur sér þetta form til að spinna vef sagna ólíks fólks sem verður á vegi hvers annars, sumar persónur eru nátengdar, aðrar afar laustengdar (Úlfhildur).

It is honestly no wonder that the book's structure was the subject of so much curiosity and discussion. I myself had never encountered the term "short story cycle" until I came across it in Úlfhildur's review. For this reason, it's important to step back and examine the unique features of this mode of "borderline writing" (Zavala 281). This will not only be useful in terms of thinking about how to best go about translating *Raddir*—for, as Katharina Reiss writes, "...it is the type of text which decides the approach for the translator" (Reiss 17)—but also in terms of understanding where the book fits, or indeed, *doesn't* fit, within the broader context of contemporary Icelandic literature.

1.1 The Short Story Cycle

First defined by Forrest Ingram as “a set of stories so linked to one another that the reader's experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others” (Ingram 1),¹ and furthermore, as “a set of stories linked to each other in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit” (5), the short story cycle has often been viewed as a natural progression of classical Western literary forms. Theorists have viewed it as “...a literary genre that has its predecessors in early composite texts and in the loosely connected framed tales of the medieval and Renaissance periods” (Dunn and Morris 1)—that is, everything from Homer’s *Odyssey* and Arthurian legends to *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* (21).

Discussions of this genre in its contemporary form nearly always situate it within an Anglo-American context,² with Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* generally held up as the prototypical example, “...the center of the short story cycle spectrum” (Ingram 4). Other frequently cited examples include James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (Dunn and Morris 39; Luscher 159; Ingram 9), Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples* (Dunn and Morris 81; Luscher 155; Ingram 323), and any number of works by William Faulkner, though most often *Go Down, Moses* (Clarkson 11; Dunn and Morris 66; Luscher 157).

¹ Ingram’s first definition of the short story cycle was presented in his Ph.D. dissertation in 1967 and is what I quote here. By the time he published this thesis as a book of the same name in 1971, however, he had, as Suzanne Ferguson points out, updated his definition to stress authorial intentionality: “... a book of short stories so linked to each other *by their author...*” (Ferguson 103).

² It does bear noting that two of the authors whose work I’ve referred to in the course of my research locate the short story cycle within different, if overlapping, literary/linguistic traditions. Cassidy Hildebrand’s dissertation focuses on *Mises à Mort*, a Quebecois short story cycle, which she situates in relation to other Quebecois works, alongside the oft-cited Anglo-American canon. And while Rebekah Clarkson notes that her primary theoretical and literary inspirations come from the US, her dissertation and own short story cycle is nevertheless rooted within an Australian context, “...connected to the early Australian writers, particularly those who used the cycle form to portray regional life” (Clarkson 10).

The hybrid nature of short story cycle has challenged literary scholars, not least in agreeing upon what to call it. In addition to Ingram’s foundational term—which has frequently been adopted by scholars alongside their own variant definitions (Hildebrand 8)—the short story cycle has also been dubbed (in English) the “composite novel” (Dunn and Morris 1), the “short story sequence” (Luscher 148), or even referred to by the vague term “discontinuous narratives” (Clarkson 5).³ A range of terminology exists in Icelandic as well: the genre has been called “samtengdar smásögur” (Úlfhildur) or “smásagnaruna,” “smásagnasyrpa,” “smásagnasería,” and “smásagnahringur,” (Ásta Halldóra 24), although these terms seem to have been directly derived from English terminology, rather than originating within a larger, Icelandic discourse. The most common Icelandic term, based on the relative dearth of material found via database and internet searches, is (smá)sagnasveigur (Ásta Halldóra; Guðríður; Úlfhildur).

Scholars have grappled with the exact terminology because within a theoretical context, it’s important “...to understand how formal concerns influence interpretation” (Ferguson 15). However, for the purposes of the present thesis, it is not necessary to closely examine or critique these competing definitions. Suffice to say, I have specifically chosen to view *Raddir* as a “short story cycle” not only because this is “...the most commonly used term in current discussion, at least within the Anglo-American tradition,”⁴ but more importantly, because this term best represents the literally cyclical form of *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins*.

³ Clarkson reminds us that in addition to these, there are a “plethora of terms used by theorists to describe the genre” which include “macrotext, recueil, short story compound, integrated short story collection, composite fictions, rouvelles, paranovel, [and] quasi-novel,” not to mention “other terms used by readers, reviewers, critics and writers [which] include linked stories, story collections, novels, novel constellations, and novel-in-stories” (Clarkson 7).

⁴ It’s worth noting that the short story cycle and related serial narrative genres have a robust presence in other literary traditions. Lauro Zavala points to the “magnificent serial and

Cycles, orbits, and rotations are prevalent throughout this work. Not only does *Raddir* begin and end with the same character (albeit in different contexts), it also features a number of thematic revolutions. María, one of the book's recurrent characters, is encountered “[á] sporbaug um öndvegissúlurnar” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskéytamannsins* 25), her nightly “orbit” around Reykjavík. Later, María's mother describes herself as being like a newly discovered planet, “á sporbaug í kringum tvær sólir” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskéytamannsins* 76). Janus, another of the primary protagonists, is making his way around the Ring Road, visiting his siblings along the way. Characters who narrate their own chapters later pop up in the background of others, and seeing these people in different contexts gives the reader a feeling of coming full circle, again and again. There is, as Ingram writes, “a dynamic pattern of recurrent development” (Ingram 309) here. As he writes, this pattern consists of

...the repetition of a previously used element (motif, phrase, character, etc.) in a modified form or context, in such a way that the original usage takes on added dimensions in the later context. Also, the original usage is itself affected (in retrospect) by its new relationship to an expanded context (Ingram 309).

1.1.1 Setting and Pattern within the Novel

fragmentary narrative compositions” from Mexico and Latin America, which have, among other things, been called *cuentos enlazados* (“interwoven stories”) (Zavala 285).

In addition to Ingram's definitions, I have also kept that of Dunn and Morris⁵ in mind, stressing as it does the "organizing principals" of setting, collective protagonist, and pattern (Dunn and Morris 15). *Raddir* makes extensive use of two of these.

Setting

In their discussion of setting as a "referential field," Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris build upon Eudora Welty's understanding of place as a "gathering spot" in fiction, explaining that in this interpretation, place "...implies much more than the geographic location of a town or region" (Dunn and Morris 30). In fact, they say:

...she means "place" and "setting" to be interchangeable, so that a consideration of "where" a literary work is set may also include "when" and "for how long" and "with whom," among other factors (30).

This multifaceted understanding of a setting as a "referential field" then allows the reader to "...establish connections during the act of reading" (31) and creates a sense of deeper, lived experience within the text: "...setting is not only place but also the *effect* of place" (41).

As is perhaps only to be expected from a contemporary novel whose plot has been intricately woven into a real-life landscape, setting is an incredibly strong feature of *Raddir*—and that's to say "setting" in Welty's understanding. On one level, this strong sense of place extends very literally from the specificity of local geography and landmarks within the text. Characters eat *kjammi* at BSÍ (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 33), feed the ducks on Tjörninn (41), look at the horses at the

⁵ "The composite novel is a literary work composed of shorter texts that—though individually complete and autonomous—are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principals" (Dunn and Morris 2).

Heimsenda stables in Kopavógur (93), and leave their broken-down Lada on the side of the Miklabraut freeway (104).

Locations and routes are often verbally charted in such a way that the reader could potentially follow the text like a map. The chapter “María” is a great example of this: at the ringing of the bells in Hallgrímskirkja (a locational marker in itself), the titular character steps out of her family’s *sjoppa*—which we find out in a later story is located in Þingholt (104)—and then proceeds on her circuit around town: up past the church and the old Landspítali building and down Laufásvegur (28), over to *kvosin*, Reykjavík’s “gamli miðbær”⁶ (“Kvosin”), and then back to Hljómskálagarður, the park next to Tjörnin, over to the old harbor and further along to Grandi (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskeytamannsins* 29), before turning back around and walking to the Sólfarið statue looking out toward Esja (30).

I would point out that contemporary Icelandic literature is replete with such wayfinding: the use of real places and replicable orbits creates, I believe, a sort of bond, a sense of familiarity with the (Icelandic) reader. However, this does occur with a higher degree of frequency and specificity in *Raddir* than in many other contemporary Icelandic novels. What’s more, Steinunn uses her reader’s geographical familiarity to her advantage and stretches it, plays with it: hidden among the real locations, there are several mentioned in the novel that don’t actually exist—an Icelandic fishing village called Fálkafjörður (34); a Norwegian suburb called Gertrutsbro (112)—but only a reader with a local’s knowledge (or a predisposition for Googling) will know that.

⁶ “HVAÐ er það sem stundum er nefnt “kvosin” í Reykjavík? Sumir tala um gamla miðbæinn. Það má ef til vill greina svæðið öðruvísi. Ef við hugsum okkur að það sé svæðið fyrir austan Garðastræti, Grjótabrekkan og flatlendið allt austur að Lækjargötu, þ.e. Vonarstræti, Skólalbrú, Kirkjustræti, Aðalstræti, Pósthússtræti, Austurstræti, Hafnarstræti, Tryggvagata, Lækjargata og upphaf Vesturgötu og Veltusundið” (“Kvosin”).

We know now, however, that setting extends beyond the literal “where” of a piece of fiction, and *Raddir* is full of the kind of setting-based reference points that convey, once more, “the effect of place” (41). The fishing industry, for instance, is almost a character in and of itself. Many of the characters are sailors, and so there are a number of references to work at various levels of the industry—be it on a ship or in a fish freezing plant—as well as various nautical terms and idioms related to the sea. The former U.S. military base in Keflavík also looms large in the background, with both direct and indirect references throughout to the *kanar* who were stationed there (68). Then there are the heaps of subtler cultural markers that fill the stories, references ranging from 60s pop song lyrics to offhand mentions of “nammidagur” (42) or an overwhelming scent of baking extracts (73), which, in context, is an oblique reference to indigent, but habitual drinkers’ practice of consuming these as an inexpensive alternative to brennivín.

Lastly, there are also a number of indirectly referenced historical markers, such as the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010. Many of these are, of course, events that would likely even be remembered by a larger international audience, but not necessarily backgrounded in the way they are. For instance, in “Nonni og Manni,” Nonni, who works in construction, describes a difficult period in his life:

Mín eigin tilvera varð einmanaleg. Vinnan, sem hefur alltaf verið mér mikilvæg, var nú orðin stopul og fjárhagurinn eftir því. Að lokum var svo komið að mér var varla orðið vært heima fyrir rukkunum og okurvöxtum og það endaði með að ég flutti til Noregs, kom mér upp litlu verktakafyrirtæki (106).

When I first translated this passage, I simply did so with the understanding that the character was having general financial troubles. However, the chronological markers

within the stories, subtle though they sometimes are, were enough to locate most, if not all, episodes within a specific timeframe. And so, what I failed to realize was that the passage above was specifically referencing the financial collapse in 2008—the author had to point this out to me.⁷

All of these elements, from the most surface-level details to ‘deeper’ references, are then woven together to create the intricate fabric of *Raddir*’s setting. What’s more, they are integral to what I think of as being *séríslenskt* in the novel: those strongly, uniquely Icelandic details that root both the fictional characters and the (Icelandic) reader in a shared frame of reference and gives the work an extra layer of veracity. These are at the heart of what I want to preserve about *Raddir*, and indeed, any work of fiction that I translate, as I will discuss more in section 3.2.

Pattern

Dunn and Morris write that “...an image or symbol or plot pattern may become a motif through repetition, and vivid motifs may effect and enhance whole-text coherence” (Dunn and Morris 81). Such plot patterns and thematic repetitions are recurrent throughout this book. “Ef eitt þema er ráðandi í bókinni er það fjólskyldan, og vandkvæðin sem geta fylgt því að vera tengdur öðrum blóðböndum” (Kári 112) writes Kári Tulinius, who I heartily agree with. We are made privy to the intricacies of a wide array of blood relations in almost all of the stories. To name two examples (out of many): we observe a father and his daughter trying to “...búa til fallega minningu” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 46) during their weekend

⁷ Since first drafting this thesis, it has been helpfully pointed out to me that “Nonni og Manni” is also likely a reference to the 1925 book of the same name by Icelandic children’s author Jón Sveinsson (nicknamed Nonni) about his and his brother Manni’s childhood. The book was later adapted into a popular TV series. This is another example of an embedded reference that I, a foreign reader, didn’t pick up on, but which would be readily apparent to an Icelandic reader (Helga).

together, and later, learn of Nonni and Manni's close bond with their grandparents, who raised them, versus their strained relationship with their mother (97).

Family-building outside of more traditional relationships is also a recurrent motif. The radio operator finds unexpected solace in the company and friendship of his neighbor: "Ekki veit ég af hverju það stafar en líklega er hann eina manneskjan sem ég þoli orðið nálægt mér"(13). And again, in another chapter, two aging sailors take comfort in one another, in a relationship that has not always been close, perhaps, but has withstood the test of time: "Ég stend hikandi á mottuni þegar Biggi kemur hlaupandi og faðmar mig. ... í þessu faðmlagi er öryggi sem ég hef ekki fundið lengi" (38).

Another notable motif is the color violet. There are unconnected usages of the color, such as when the bookseller examines the violet book covers in her shop (80). But there are also repeated usages of the same violet dress in different contexts. In the first chapter, the radio operator has a one night stand with a girl in a violet dress (4). In the next, that woman's daughter, María, puts on the same dress before going out for the evening (27). From there, she (and/or the violet dress) is then noticed at intervals throughout the book by different characters in different places, such as in a bar downtown (123). The repetition of the color violet emphasizes the fact that a character we've met has just reappeared in an unexpected context—not unlike passing someone in downtown Reykjavík who you recognize, but don't know well enough to say hello to. It is also visually striking, a quality that we'll see (in chapter 1.2) is also of particular importance in the book.

1.1.2 The Short Story Cycle in Iceland

Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins is not the only Icelandic example of a short story cycle, but the genre nevertheless remains in very much a fledgling state in Iceland. As such, it has not received significant attention from either Icelandic literary scholars or readers (Ásta Halldóra 2). There are, however, a few notable examples of Icelandic works that could be classified, in one way or another, as short story cycles.

In her BA thesis, Guðríður Óskarsdóttir discusses Guðmundur Andri Thorsson's 2011 *Valeyrrarvalsinn*, which she points out as being unique among other Icelandic story cycles for being the only one to actually carry "sagnasveigur" as a subtitle (Guðríður 24).⁸ She notes that Guðmundur Andri's conscious decision to adhere to this genre is clear throughout the book:

Hver saga getur staðið sjálfstætt, saman mynda þær sterka heild með tengingum við persónur og atburði, skipulagið er fastmótað með ramma og jafnvel mætti nefna stílinn sem sameiginlegt einkenni (Guðríður 25–26).

Moreover, the author has specifically stated that he "...hafði gaman af að leika sér með tengingar innan verksins" (Guðríður 26).

However, even in the absence of such explicit intentionality, there are a number of Icelandic texts that fit the model of what Guðríður terms "Íslenskir þorpssveigar," (Guðríður 24) or Icelandic village cycles, a term that she extrapolates from a form that Dunn and Morris say is a precursor to the short story cycle: "...the village composite, a group of stories linked primarily through setting" (Dunn and Morris 22). Specifically, Guðríður names Jón Kalman Stefánsson's *Sumarljós og svo kemur nóttin*, with its village setting and collective "þorpsröddin" (Guðríður 27). This

⁸ A search of Gegnir does confirm that *Valeyrrarvalsinn* is still the only published book that features this subtitle, although there are two unpublished theses from the Creative Writing department that self-identify as such. In her thesis, Ásta Halldóra Ólafsdóttir also draws attention to two works with a different, but still similar subtitle: both *Ástir samlyndra hjóna* by Guðbergur Bergsson and *Hinsegin sögur* by Böðvar Guðmunsson are subtitled "tengd atriði" (Ásta Halldóra 26).

work is also referred to as a “þorpssögusafn” (Ásta Halldóra 17) by Ásta Halldóra Ólafsdóttir in her own BA thesis about the genre, along another work by Jón Kalman, *Skurðir í rigningu*, whose internal linkages (using the terminology of Ian Reid) are present, though they are not quite as clear (Ásta Halldóra 18).

Ásta Halldóra finds further examples of Icelandic short story cycles or sequences in Böðvar Guðmundsson’s *Sögur úr seinna stríði*, which is unified by a common theme—“...sex sögur sem eiga það sameiginlegt að beina sjónum sínum að stríði eða deilum með einum eða öðrum hætti” (Ásta Halldóra 19)—as well as *Aldingarðurinn* by Ólaf Jóhann Ólafsson and *Í allri sinni nekt* by Rúnar Helgi Vignisson. In the case of both of these latter works, she says,

Verkin fjalla um eitt meiginþema sem skoðað er út frá fjölmörgum sjónarhornum með það að markmiði að gefa sem skýrasta og fjölbreytilegasta mynd af umfjöllunarefni (Ásta Halldóra 23).

Understanding the broader literary landscape that *Raddir* springs from does provide useful context, but it is not productive to put too much weight on possible influences that Steinunn may have derived from these previous Icelandic short story cycles, or to attempt to see the book as part of a wider recognition and implementation of the genre within the country. This is because Steinunn, although a poet, is primarily coming from a visual arts background, and I would argue that it is that artistic context which has been more influential on the author’s writing style and choice of narrative structure.

1.2 Unique Stylistic Features of the Novel

The influences of the visual arts and poetry are evident throughout *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins*, with the former most obviously represented by the photographs that precede each chapter. However, the influence of the visual arts can also be discerned in the actual experience of reading the novel, which might be likened to flipping through a photo album, watching an episodic, metafictional film (Kári 113) or—as Kristinn Pálsson put it in his book review on the University of Iceland’s website Hugarás—walking through an art museum:

Steinunn skrifar hér áhugaverða bók sem minnir stundum á gallerí.

Skemmtilegt getur verið að grípa í bókina og lesa nokkra kafla óháð efni sem á undan kom því kaflarnir lifa sjálfstæðu lífi. Það er oftast eitthvað nýtt sem býður manns, eins og þegar rölt er um sýningarsal ólíkra málverka.

There is also a poetic and visual turn to the book’s creatively imagistic descriptions. “En ég held þó áfram að fleyta kerlingar á himinum með vinum mínum” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 9) says the radio operator of his nightly conversations with people all around the world. Or, when a jet plane passes overhead, leaving a thick, white contrail in its wake, he says: “Ullarkenndur halinn klippti í sundur Texas Tower-mastrið sem ég pantaði í hitteðfyrri og efsti hluti þess virtist svífa burt (13). Later, the terminally ill shopkeeper lies in bed, remembering her former customer, Pétur, “sem er eins og abstraktmálverk í framan” (74). As she explains:

Andlit magurt, útlínurnar hvassar og langt, mjótt nefið svolítið skakkt.

Varirnar eru þunn bláleit strik en löng og dömuleg mentolsígaretta dinglar alltaf í munnvikinu. ... Frásagnir af æsilegum atburðum renna viðstöðulaust út

um annað munnvikið á meðan sígarettureykurinn felur augað hinum megin, þetta neðra sem er dregið í pung (74).

There is also an element of magical realism is at play in many of these tales, a quality that is perhaps most clearly represented in “Ascension,” in which an erstwhile sailor (a minor character from earlier chapters) is reincarnated as a crow and spends his days whiling away the hours with other former humans—“Við erum nokkur hér sem svona er ástatt fyrir” (90)—and trying to cheer up one of his companions who struggles with depression. This magical realism ties the various narratives together: not only is the last chapter narrated by a ghost, it also brings us full circle, back to the radio operator—but this time, he’s a not a real person, but a fictional character in someone else’s story.

1.3 Critical Reception in Iceland

Raddir was reviewed in a number of prominent media outlets upon its release and it seems that its reception was universally positive. It was, for example, a ‘Book of the Week’ on RÚV’s popular weekly literature program “Kiljan,” whose host, Egill Helgason, said it was “Óhemju áhugavert og frumlegt verk. Það kemur einhvernvegin á mann alveg úr óvæntum áttum...” (“*Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins*”). In a review for *Visir*, Brynhildur Björnsdóttir gave the book four out of five stars, calling it a “haganlega fléttuð bók þar sem söguþræðir eru spunnir sundur og saman á heillandi hátt,” and concluding that “...er hægt að lesa aftur og aftur og finna nýja fleti á fólki og sögum, jafnvel sínum eigin.”

Raddir was also awarded the 2017 Fjöruverðlaun, an annual award given to female authors in Iceland. In its rationale for nominating the book, the selection committee echoed reviewers’ comments about the book’s originality, strong

characterizations, and the skill with which Steinunn blends narratives and narrative voices, saying:

Höfundur leikur sér með ólík sjónarhorn og hversdagsleikinn og fantasían mætast gjarnan með óvæntum hætti. Með hófstílltum lýsingum og flæðandi stíl nær höfundurinn sterkum hughrifum og fangar skáldskapinn í tilverunni. Sögurnar eru allt í senn sorglegar, spaugilegar eða þrungnar undirliggjandi óhugnaði. Allt þetta hefur Steinunn G. Helgadóttir á valdi sínu, að því er virðist áreynslulaust og léttilega. Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins er samspil fjölmargra radda úr fortíð, nútíð og framtíð sem snerta við lesandanum (“Fjöruverðlaunin 2017: Tilnefningar”).

It bears noting that the positive critical reception that the book received in Iceland has translated into recognition for the author abroad: in April 2017, Steinunn was named one of Literature Across Frontiers’ “Ten New Voices from Europe,” a project that “...has given a global platform to interesting writers who were little known outside their own countries” (“New Voices from Europe 2017”). It’s to be hoped that this heightened profile might make it easier to find an English-language publisher for *Raddir* in the near future.

1.4 Scope of the Present Translation

Raddir is composed of 26 chapters, nine of which have been translated for the purposes of this thesis. Although the chapters can be read individually, their chronological relation to one another within the book is important, and so I elected to simply translate the first third of the book, rather than selecting chapters to translate at random. This selection provides a good introduction to the work as a whole, as it introduces all of the major characters, as well as dipping into the primary themes and

motifs that characterize the overall text. There are several mini-story cycles within the overall narrative—the story of the bookseller, the story of Janus, and the story of Nonni and Manni—and the first episodes of each of these arcs are also represented in my sample.

While meeting the basic length requirement of this Master’s thesis, an excerpt of this scope will also afford more opportunities for publication. It is my hope that my having already finished translating a third of the book will provide an additional incentive to English-language publishers when thinking about purchasing its translation rights. It is also makes for a substantial sample to send to send to interested parties.

I have, in collaboration with the author and the publisher, already sent enquiries and samples to five American publishers. Two of these presses have passed on the project; three are yet to reply. This is no real surprise: the difficulty of finding an English-language publisher for a translated novel, particularly within the US, is well-documented, attributed to everything from “the limited number of US editors who speak a foreign language” (Williams) to “economic concerns, including the cost of paying translators” and “the elusiveness of a reliable audience” (Morris). As such, I am taking advantage of the book’s patchwork structure and submitting single chapters to English-language literary journals, not only in the US, but also in Canada, Ireland, the UK, and Germany. It is my hope that any success in publishing individual chapters will help raise the author’s profile, making it easier to find a publisher for book as a whole. A side benefit of these smaller successes would also be, of course, that they would raise my own profile as a translator and hopefully encourage publishers to work with me on novel translations in the future.

Chapter 2

Determining the *Skopos* of the Present Translation

Translation is an action, writes Hans J. Vermeer, and “[a]ny action has an aim, a purpose” (Vermeer 221). Naturally, then, the translator must have this purpose in mind while completing a project: “...skopos and mode of realization must be adequately defined if the text-translator is to fulfill his task successfully” (Vermeer 221). This commonsense approach to translation has proved very useful to me during previous and more circumscribed projects, and so it was my intention to embark on the present translation in a similarly purposeful way—that is, with a clearly articulated translation goal (*skopos*) in mind.

Vermeer asserts that a translation, or “target text” (Vermeer 221), is separate and unique from its source, which was composed for its own specific reasons within its own specific cultural context for its own specific readership. The target text has a different and separate purpose, context, and readership, of course, meaning that the original and the translation “may diverge from each other quite considerably, not only in the formulation and distribution of the content but also as regards the goals which are set for each” (Vermeer 223). It should be noted here, however, that absolute conformity to the target culture at the expense of that of the source is not by any means a necessity—in fact, Vermeer goes to significant pains to emphasize that ...one legitimate *skopos* is maximally faithful imitation of the original, as commonly [sic] in literary translation. True translation, with an adequate *skopos*, does not mean that the translator *must* adapt to the customs and usage of the target culture, only that he *can* so adapt” (Vermeer 228).

Vermeer’s theory argues for a *skopos* that orients itself around the needs of the as-of-yet non-existent target text. On one hand, this is rather liberating, allowing the

translator the freedom to look outside of the boundaries of the source text and, among other things, to address his or her readership on its own terms, within its own cultural context. On the other hand, it requires some mental gymnastics to anticipate what the needs of a text will be within an entirely new and separate context, as well as to imagine the needs of a purely theoretical readership. (Attempting to address a translation directly to this theoretical reader can, in fact, create its own problems, as I will discuss in more detail in 3.2.)

In establishing the *skopos* of my own translation, then, I wanted to follow Vermeer in ultimately privileging the translation, and understanding it as new and necessarily different from the original. However, his theory by no means suggests that the source text is irrelevant in this purpose-building. In fact, his discussion on a translator's "commission," that is, "the instruction, given by oneself or by someone else, to carry out a given action—here: to translate," (Vermeer 229) turns our attention back to the nature and form of the source text:

...the specification of purpose, addressees etc. is usually sufficiently apparent from the commission situation itself: unless otherwise indicated, it will be assumed in our culture that for instance a technical article about some astronomical discovery is to be translated as a technical article for astronomers (Vermeer 229).

A source text, we see here, generally carries within it a purpose, a *skopos*, when one sets about translating it. This then draws our attention to the work of Vermeer's sometime collaborator, Katharina Reiss, whose work on text types and translation criticism have been integral to the way that I formulate my goals when approaching new translation projects.

2.1 Katharina Reiss: Text-Types and Translation Methods

Under normal circumstances, "...where the purpose is to transfer the text of the original into a second language without abridgement, expansion, or any particular spin" Reiss asserts that "...the type of text is primary factor influencing the translator's choice of a proper translation method" (Reiss 17). Her text typology is subdivided according to the three functions of language (as identified by Karl Bühler): "to *represent* (objectively), *express* (subjectively), and *appeal* (persuasively)" (25). Of course, a text might not solely adhere to one of these functions. "And yet," Reiss writes,

as one or another of these functions becomes *dominant* in any given text, it becomes evident that distinguishing the three basic functions is justified: the depictive function is emphasized in *content-focused* texts, the expressive function emphasizing *form-focused* texts, and the persuasive function emphasizing *appeal-focused* texts (Reiss 25).

Raddir úr húsi loftskeytamannsins is a work of literature, and though not traditional in its structure, certainly adheres to the typical dominant qualities of an expressive, or form-focused text:

In these texts, the author makes use of formal elements, whether consciously or unconsciously, for a specific esthetic effect. These formal elements do not simply exercise an influence over the subject matter, but go beyond this to contribute a special artistic expression that is contextually distinctive and can be reproduced in a target language only by some analogous form of expression (Reiss 31–32).

Formal elements may include a wide variety of stylistic elements, including tempo, rhyme scheme, use of metaphor, idioms, or proverbs, and more. “Even a single sound,” says Reiss “can constitute an important formal element” (Reiss 32–33).

Although the content of a piece of narrative fiction—in this case, a short story cycle—is obviously an integral element of the text, it does not need to be transferred over to the target text with the sort of exactitude that would be required if one were translating, say, a technical manual. Rather, capturing the source text’s aesthetic essence is what’s the key here, which Reiss says “can be done by creating equivalents” (Reiss 33). There’s flexibility in this process, and indeed, inventiveness:

...the translator will not mimic slavishly (adopt) the forms of the source language, but rather appreciate the form of the source language and be inspired by it to discover an analogous form in the target language, one which elicits a similar response in the reader. For this reason we characterize form-focused texts as *source language* oriented texts (Reiss 33).

Although it proceeds more directly from the source text and source language, Reiss’s approach ultimately echoes Vermeer in privileging the target text and language: that is, rather than “slavishly” mimicking the source, Reiss encourages the translator to use “analogous form[s]” and “equivalents.” However, as Abigail Cooper discusses in her Master’s thesis “The Creative Translator,” it is possible to become too wrapped up in ideas of perfect equivalence where an even more flexible, creative approach might ultimately serve the target text better (Cooper 37). As she writes:

It is no overstatement to say that creativity is in fact a necessary part of the translation process, if the translated text is to emerge as a successful work of literature. Since loss is, as has been mentioned previously, unavoidable, it

follows that the only way to deal with this is to ensure that the translator puts something back (27).

2.2 The Creative Approach

This creative approach and ‘putting back’ is one that necessarily views the target text as independent from its source—“A translation is not a derivative work but simply a new and different original” (59)—and is accomplished by employing various strategies, rather than strictly adhering to one. In her discussion of this, Cooper builds on Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet’s concept of “compensation,” saying that in situations where a feature of the source text or language cannot, for one reason or another, be replicated in the target text,

[a] translator might ‘compensate’ for this by adding something to the target text that gives a similar impression...By this means, so the idea goes, essential information can be preserved, albeit transmitted in a different way. This strategy is unambiguously creative; the translator is adding something original which did not directly come from the source text. However, I would also argue that the definition of compensation could usefully be significantly broadened to include original content that makes up, in a more indirect fashion, for the phenomenon of translational loss (28).

Thus, a translator might employ a more varied vocabulary to translate a single word in the source text, or make “creative efforts to compensate” (29) when the reverse is true, and a myriad words in the source language are encapsulated by a single term in the target.

Later in her argument, Cooper identifies situations in which the translator may have reason to “...use very subtle domesticating techniques” (54) within the target

text, for example, by integrating indirect Shakespeare quotations into an English-language translation of *Sjálfstætt folk*, creating echoes that “...tie *Independent People* in with the English literary tradition” (55). Conversely, she also sees use in the “foreignising effect” (48) accomplished when the target language has been ‘stretched’ through “...the transfer of certain elements from the source language” (41), such as loan words. As she writes:

...unfamiliar names serve to remind the reader that this is in origin a foreign text, set in a foreign land and culture. Loan words are always a creative feature of translation, in that they expand the vocabulary of the target language, whether simply within one particular translated text or whether they enter the language in more general usage (48).

All of these creative strategies are instructive, I believe, not least because Cooper shows how they can be successfully implemented within a single text. It is not then tantamount to a translator’s success that the translator select but one translation method, but rather that she be conscious of various strategies that can potentially be employed (i.e. domesticating vs. foreignizing a text) and then successfully apply them depending on the needs of a particular text or passage.

2.3 *Skopos* of Voices from the Radio Operator’s House

Keeping these theories and my previous discussion of the most notable (stylistic, generic, cultural) characteristics of the book in mind, I can now articulate the *skopos* of ‘Voices from the Radio Operator’s House,’ my translation of *Raddir úr húsi loftskýtamannsins* as follows:

- To create an independent, target-oriented text that captures the aesthetic and cultural essence of the source text.

- To preserve those characteristics which are integral to the work as a short story cycle.
- To accomplish the above-stated goals through the use of a mix of creative strategies that privilege my own ‘authorial’ choices, as translator, over hard and fast equivalences.

Chapter 3

Voices from the Radio Operator’s House: Selected Translation Issues and Their Solutions

I’d like to start this examination of the primary challenges addressed while translating *Raddir úr húsi loftskeytamannsins* by making a few general observations.

In keeping with my intention to bias my translation towards the target text, I have changed certain typographical and syntactical features in “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” (henceforth “Voices”). For example, dialog has been put in quotation marks instead of being integrated into the narrative without any punctuation, as is done in the original.

I have also made use of contractions, which are extremely common in English. These do not, strictly speaking, exist in Icelandic, although one sometimes sees two Icelandic prepositions or conjunctions written as a single one in literary texts. My feeling is that English writing that lacks contractions feels stilted and awkward. Therefore, when the elongated forms of typically contracted words—such as “cannot” instead of “can’t” or “does not” instead of “doesn’t”—are used within “Voices,” it has been done with a conscious eye to the style and flow of a particular passage or line of dialog.

Particularly long paragraphs—and sometimes especially long sentences as well—were also often split up into smaller pieces in order to suit English conventions and increase ease of reading. The exception to this would be in cases where a passage or sentence was obviously constructed in an elongated way for stylistic purposes.

Take, for example, the following passage:

Móna's not one for romance, Móna sees to the business side of things, Móna's never been lazy, never resented doing more than María, and even though Móna has sometimes also used that prosthetic hand of hers to take more than her fair share—nesting herself down in the best corner with state-of-the-art computer gadgets and a leather armchair—we leave well enough alone because Móna deserves it, and she knows it (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator's House” 51).

Normally, I would tend to split a sentence like this into smaller ones or, at the very least, punctuate it with semicolons so as to avoid a run-on sentence in English. However, this is obviously a hasty, run-on thought that gathers momentum through its repetitions and its lack of full stops. In cases like this, I adhered to the author's original structure, even if the result did not exactly conform to English syntactical norms.

Lastly, as this is a contemporary piece of artistic fiction, it obviously did not make sense to utilize footnotes. As such, when I felt that the reader would require additional information or context, I included intertextual notes that fit in, I hope, with the existing style and sentence structures so as not to stand out overmuch to the reader.

3.1 Challenges of Translating a Short Story Cycle

As Cassidy Hildebrand points out in her dissertation regarding the translation of a Quebecois short story cycle, “[w]hen we read (and translate) a text, we have expectations as to the reading of that text based on our knowledge of the genre” (Hildebrand 172). Taking a novel as an example, she continues:

...we expect the work to consist of a unified plot and structure, so we approach our translation with the goal of maintaining and achieving consistency throughout, using a cohesive method (72).

Conversely, it is likely that most readers of “Voices” will not come to the text with an awareness of the genre, or even realize that the book is a short story cycle in the first place. They will, instead, come to understand that the stories are interconnected while reading. As we know from its reception in Iceland, that element of surprise significantly contributes to readers’ enjoyment of the text, and so it must be preserved within the translation.

As such, I would encourage the English language publisher not to add any more information about the book’s structure to its promotional material, nor would I advocate for giving it a telling subtitle or other internal “signals” as Robert Luscher suggests are often used to clue the reader into a short story cycle’s overall coherence (Luscher 159). There are no chapter numbers in the original text—simply freestanding and sometimes rather abstract titles. I have chosen to maintain this in the translation as well, as to add in chapter numbers would suggest a false novelistic continuity.

3.1.1 Recurrent Themes and Motifs

Although the book’s structure is not something that I want to unduly emphasize for the reader, it was important while translating to be particularly attentive to the existence of those themes and motifs that crop up throughout the work. In this, consistency was key.

It was important, for instance, that the color *ffólublár* always be translated as “violet,” and not some variation on this (light purple, lavender, lilac, etc.) which

would disrupt the repetition and reader's sense of recognition. The "sírenurnar" heard at the end of "María" and the "sírenuvæl" at the beginning of the following story, "Þessi eina og sanna ást," also needed to be translated consistently.

Both the radio operator and María's mother refer to the "skemmtistaður" where they met (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 6, 76), and although in this instance, a case could be made for these two characters using different words for the same place (see section 3.1.2 below), I felt it was more important to preserve the sense of repetition. I therefore chose to use the English word "discotheque" in both cases (Steinunn, "Voices from the Radio Operator's House" 1, 61). My overall approach, then, was to ensure that any vocabulary connected to a recurrent motif, location, or theme was translated in the same way throughout the target text.

3.1.2 Disparate Voices

While it was of particular importance to maintain consistency in the way that thematic or motif-related vocabulary was translated, it was also vital that each of the different stories in "Voices," maintain just that: their own unique voice, tone, and style. There are, of course, aspects of Steinunn's writing style that are consistent throughout the whole book. Her use of visual imagery, for one, or certain phrasings, such as the repeated use of the word "sjálf(ur)" when a character is expressing their own feelings or intentions.⁹ Nevertheless, each narrator and character is fully realized, with a unique voice and way of speaking, and it's important that they don't all sound exactly the same.

⁹ "Sjálfur kom ég ekki auga á neitt óvenjulegt þar" (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 14) says the radio operator; "sjálf vel ég Horses með Patti Smith og set heyrnartólin í eyrun" (29) says María; "Ég heyri sjálfur hvað röddin er smeðjuleg" (45) says the father in "Don't Worry."

In this, I let myself be guided by the stylistic differences and tone shifts apparent in the source text, while also attempting to bring in natural English colloquialisms and speech patterns that would be appropriate for the different characters. Thus, Vilhelmína, a little girl waiting in line at a carnival, exclaims “Yeah-huh!” when a little boy tells her that “Batman doesn’t wear a dress” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 33). “Yeah-huh” is more of a sound that English-speaking children utter when they want to contradict someone than a ‘real’ word, but it is entirely appropriate for what Vilhemína says in the Icelandic text, that is: “Jú” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 45).

Pétur and Biggi Tooth, the two sailors who run into each other in “Another Love,” speak quite differently, of course—both from Vilhelmína and from each other. Biggi Tooth is exuberant, hyperbolic, and chatty, at turns folksy and slangy. His friend is quieter, speaks a bit more slowly, and has his own folksiness, although his has a more reserved quality. This yields the following exchange:

“Yeaaaaah,” he says. “Yeaaaaah. Goddamn great out there. Was there last year.” He gets a faraway look on his face. “But actually, I didn’t spend that much time in the dorm...Most often stayed with Eva Eir. You know, she’s Gulli’s daughter—the bigwig who owns the processing plant and the trawlers.”

I choke on my coffee. I know that Eva Eir is the best-looking woman in those parts, at least 30 years younger than Biggi, and not short of admirers. Old man Gulli is a bear of a man and it’s been my understanding that he can be a real hard-ass when anyone tries to cozy up to his little girl ((Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 24).

Biggi's speech is peppered with obscenities—"goddamn great" here; "It was a real fucking cozy reception" later (25)—while Pétur tends towards 'lighter' expletives and descriptors: "a bear of a man" or "a real hard-ass." And so, even though these two men are both old friends and sailors and speaking together within the same chapter, they still sound like individuals with their own manner of expression.

3.2 Icelandic Context, American Reader

As stated earlier in this paper, setting—in its most multifarious sense—is vital to *Raddir úr húsi loftskýtamannsins* and serves to impart a feeling of familiarity and veracity to the Icelandic reader, to root both them and the fictional characters they encounter in a shared frame of reference. Capturing this *séríslenskt eðli*, this uniquely Icelandic essence, to the best of my ability was one of my fundamental goals when I set out to translate this novel. It is also probably the greatest challenge that I faced during the translation process. Of course, there were elements of this underlying context that could not be effectively conveyed to the English reader in their entirety, and in these instances, I strove to 'put something back,' to quote Abigail Cooper once more. Ultimately, the successful rendering of *Raddir's* Icelandic-ness—and successful I hope it was—depended on my being able to both 'domesticate' and 'foreignize' the target text on a case by case basis, and to compensate for any 'losses' in the translation.

3.2.1 Foreignizing the Text

It has been my habit to try and include Icelandic words within my English translations in order to preserve some of the original's "flavor" and to remind the reader that "this is in origin a foreign text, set in a foreign land and culture" (Cooper 48). I made the

same choice in “Voices,” opting to not only maintain character and location names in their original nominative spelling as a matter of course, but also to keep terms that I felt had a particularly Icelandic resonance in italics in the target text, accompanied by an intertextual explanation.

So, for instance, Biggi Tooth orders “sviðkjamm[i] og malt” in the café at BSÍ bus station (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskéytamannsins* 33). In the translation, it reads: “Straight off, he gets a good table and orders the house specialty: *kjammi*, or boiled sheep’s head, and a malt soda” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 23, additions underlined). Elsewhere, “*lopapeysa* sweaters” (20) are observed in a shop window.

There are, on the other hand, instances when I could have used italicized Icelandic terms within the translation, but chose not to. For instance, I used a direct translation of “nammidagur” in “Don’t Worry”—“candy day” (30)—although I did still use an intertextual explanation to provide the necessary context: “But it’s also Saturday—so-called ‘candy day,’ when shops nationwide sell sweets at half price—so we pay a quick visit to the corner store on the way...” (30, addition underlined). In this case, I felt that the term itself wasn’t as iconic, although the ‘phenomenon’ was worth explaining. The original sentence simply reads “En það er líka nammidagur...” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskéytamannsins* 42). So if I had just left the sentence without an added explanation, “candy day” would likely be unclear to the reader.

There is another instance where I could have used an Icelandic term but didn’t. I’m honestly not entirely happy with the result, although I think it’s the best one possible given the constraints. This is regarding the word *sjoppa*, which is used throughout the text to refer to a location that is central to several plot lines. I believe that the *sjoppa* is a unique Icelandic institution that is certainly iconic enough to merit

the use of its Icelandic name in the target text. Its traditional offerings—hot dogs, candy, cigarettes—are as particular to the *sjoppa* as deli sandwiches, canned food, and iced coffees are to bodegas in New York City. However, I didn't think that I would be able to effectively convey all of the necessary context for a *sjoppa* within a short intertextual note, not least because I would have had to do this multiple times, across stories, as each chapter must be able to stand on its own. It was also important that I use a single term and stick with it (see 3.1.1) and so I couldn't use *sjoppa* in some instances, where the note would have fit into the text seamlessly, and another English term in a different place.

Ultimately, I chose “corner store,” despite the fact that this is, perhaps, somewhat misleading because the *sjoppa* in question isn't necessarily located on a corner. “Kiosk” would perhaps be more appropriate in terms of what is usually sold in such venues—candy, tobacco, newspapers—but in the US, this word is more commonly associated with the electronic terminals used for self-service in grocery stores or airports. Moreover, newspaper kiosks in the US are generally stalls that one walks up to for a quick purchase, rather than a structure that you can enter and potentially spend time in. A corner store, on the other hand, evokes the kind of atmosphere found in an Icelandic *sjoppa*, namely: it is often a neighborhood hub where locals will stop by for a chat with the proprietor. “Corner store” also felt more appropriate than words like “convenience store,” “mom-and-pop,” “deli,” “drugstore,” “quickie mart,” etc. because it is commonly recognized and seemed to me to be the most regionally non-specific, as opposed to “bodega” or “deli,” for instance, which suggest a specific location.

3.2.2 Domesticating the Target Text

Alongside those moments where I tried to bring ‘foreignizing’ elements into the target text, are also those in which I attempted to smooth out, or ‘domesticate’ references that I felt would be lost on the English-speaking (American) reader. In these cases, the hope is to still retain the overall ‘feel’ of the original, but to convey that feeling through less specifically Icelandic means.

Title Changes and Substituted Cultural References

One of the most obvious examples of this strategy is in “Another Love: Fish Out of Water,” which originally had the title “Þessi eina og sanna ást: Bjargvættir Verðmætanna.” The title draws from two uniquely Icelandic sources: firstly, Björgvin Halldórsson’s 70s breakup ballad, “Sönn ást,” which is quoted at the end of the story, and secondly, a sort of invented idiom about fishing in Iceland. As Steinunn explained to me in an email:

Titillinn er til kominn vegna þess að talað er um fiskinn sem aðal verðmæti Íslendinga. Þegar ég var að alast upp töluðu merkilegir karlar um að bjarga verðmætum þegar þeir sendu menn á sjóinn og fólk inn í fiskvinnsluna, svo þetta er eins og orðaleikur (Steinunn, “Þessi Eina Og Sanna Ást - Spurningar”)

To start with, the main title. It would have been quite easy to translate this directly, which is what I would have done, had the lyrics not been quoted later in the chapter. Translating the song lyrics, posed several complications, not least because they rhyme:

Eldur fór um æður mér,

og langar leiðir sást

að ég hafði fundið

þessa einu sönnu ást (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 38).

For one thing, if I had translated the lyrics more or less word for word, the musical (rhyming) quality would have been lost. But if I had attempted to preserve the rhyme, I would have had to change the title line as well. There is also a tongue-and-cheek aspect to the lyrics when taken as a whole: the singer has found his one true love, yes, but she's left him. This irony would be recognized by Icelandic readers familiar with the song, but wouldn't come across if I simply translated the text in its existing excerpt. There was also the problem that although Björgvin Halldórsson is a very well-known and iconic Icelandic musician, he isn't known in the US at all. So there's nothing for the reader to latch on to here, nothing to help him or her "hear" the kind of song that's playing in the background of the scene.

My first thought was to perhaps use the existing English lyrics that Björgvin used in a Swedish recording of the song in the 80s:

Nothing in this whole wide world

can help me bring you back

Guess I should have known by now,

you've given me the sack (“‘Sönn Ást’ Varð ‘True Love’”).

This certainly gets the underlying breakup theme across, given that it's much more explicit, and it also solves the rhyming problem. But these English lyrics, used then also for the title, would totally miss the other subtext at work, namely, that these two aging sailors have found the most important companionship, their 'one true love,' in one another.

As such, it was obviously a better choice to find an English-language song from the same era, with the same undertones and musical style as the original, but which would be more recognizable to an English-speaking audience. I opted for “Separate Ways” by Elvis, the chorus of which goes as follows:

There's nothing left to do but go our separate ways

And pick up all the pieces left behind us

And maybe someday, somewhere along the way

Another love will find us

This song fit all the above requirements and had the secondary benefits of being by a singer who was (and is) incredibly iconic internationally, which nicely parallels the fact that Björgvin was/is quite iconic locally. Elvis is also famous enough that it wouldn't be completely unlikely for an Icelandic fisherman in a remote village to be listening to his songs.

I didn't feel that the wordplay and cultural context of the subtitle could be easily conveyed to a foreign readership, so once again, I opted to find an equivalence in English. I chose “Fish Out of Water,” because this idiom not only points to the characters being sailors, it also picks up on their sense of difference and isolation in this chapter. Biggi, for instance, has lots of stories about how successful he's been professionally and romantically, but Pétur nevertheless finds him living alone in a bait shack at the edge of town. And for his part, Pétur says:

And maybe it's only natural that I don't always get what's going on, because every time I come to this place, I know fewer people and all my old friends are gone. Most of the people who work here now are foreigners. I don't understand them, and they don't understand me and I can't deny that I'm lonely (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator's House” 26).

These two men are, then, very much ‘fish out of water’ themselves.

I took a similar approach to the chapter title “Í skjóli fargsins,” which is quite abstract in the Icelandic, but became, I thought, far too much so in a direct English rendering. This chapter is about a terminally ill mother reflecting on her life working in a *sjoppa* with her two daughters, and so I first thought the English idiom “Labor of Love” would be suitable. For one, “labor” points to childbirth, which is appropriate for the maternal theme. The meaning of the phrase—an endeavor undertaken for personal satisfaction rather than monetary—also fits well with the idea that the narrator stayed in her shop and catered to both the needs of its motley regulars and her somewhat eccentric daughters because she loved doing it, not because she’d ‘get anything’ out of it.

I disposed of this title, however, when Steinunn noted that she’d meant to emphasize weightiness in her original title—the weight of one’s burdens in life, perhaps, but also the more literal weight of candy piled on the corner store’s shelves (Steinunn, “Re: Síðasta Kaflinn”). As such, I opted for a totally different title—“Anchorage”—which evokes the idea of safe harbor, which is thematically important to the chapter, as well as weight. It also ties in with the recurrent fishing motif, and the fact that many of the regular customers of the *sjoppa* were once sailors.

There is one more notable instance in which I adjusted cultural references to suit the target audience. This has to do with the book titles mentioned in “Framhaldssaga I.” In this passage, narrator examines a shelf in her bookshop, looking at all the books with violet and pink covers:

...*Haustskip, Konan við 1000°, Meistarinn og Margaríta*. Svo fljóta litirnir yfir á bleikt með *Dansað við Regitze, Fern fra Danmark og Pólstjörnuna* (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 80).

Whether these books actually have violet and pink covers, I don't know. What's more important here is that all of the books mentioned have a specific recognizability for the reader of the source text, where they probably wouldn't for the American reader.

Haustskip is a popular historical novel which has never been translated into English. *Dansað við Regitze* and *Fern fra Danmark* are both Danish books, the first of which was made into a film that was shown in the US (under the title *Memories of a Marriage*), but as far as I can tell, neither have been translated into English.

Pólstjarnan is actually an Icelandic translation of *Polar Star*, an American Soviet-era thriller, but it is far less well-known than *Gorky Park*, its predecessor in the same series, which was also made into a movie.

In order to then reintroduce a feeling of recognition when the narrator reads off these titles—rather than simply dropping in a meaningless series of names—I decided to replace a few of these with titles that would be more familiar to the American reader, but nevertheless would still belong to the same milieu that the originals did. It was also important, as the author reminded me, that the new titles all have been published prior to 2010, as this story takes place just before the Eyjafjalljökull eruption that year— fact that isn't obvious from this chapter, but is made clear in the next installment of this mini-cycle: “Framhaldssaga II.”

My revised book list was then as follows:

...one of Björn Th. Björnsson's perennially popular historical novels, Hallgrímur Helgason's *Woman at 1000°*, *The Master and Margarita*. Then the color flows into pink with *Anecdotes of Destiny*, *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared*, and *Gorky Park* (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator's House” 63).

Instead of replacing *Haustskip*, I simply drop the title and describe its subject matter. Hallgrímur Helgason is a well-enough known author in the US that I could simply add in his name, without having to change the title to something that is more available in America, such as *101 Reykjavík*. *The Master and Margarita* is a major work of world literature and requires no additional introduction. *Anecdotes of Destiny* by Ísak Dinesen features a story that is well-known in the US (“Babette’s Feast”) and *The Hundred-Year-Old Man* is not only Danish, its major themes are similar to those of *Fern fra Danmark*. Lastly, I simply used *Gorky Park* instead of *Polar Star* because the former will be more immediately recognizable.

In this way, the bookseller’s shelf still reads as a bookshelf in an Icelandic shop, with Icelandic and Danish and American books side by side, rather than a shelf in an American bookshop, where the titles might very well all be American. However, the reader still gets a little bit of help here, so that he or she can also potentially feel the same sense of familiarity than an Icelandic reader would.

Anglicized Syntax

There are, obviously, many syntactical differences between Icelandic and English, which often makes a direct rendering of sentences and phrases rather difficult if one intends to preserve the ‘fluency’ of the source text. Of course, scholars—Lawrence Venuti foremost among them—have argued against this mode of translatorial smoothing, in which

...the translator works to make his or her work “invisible,” producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems “natural,” i.e., not translated (Venuti 5).

In the case of English translations, this habit reinforces a cultural and linguistic hierarchy in which “aggressively monolingual” readers, “unaccustomed to the foreign” are pandered to by means of

...fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide [them] with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in the cultural other (15).

This is an important idea, and one which I return to consistently in my translations, not least because my deep belief that English-language readers (specifically Americans) need to engage more with ‘the cultural other’ was one of my primary motivations in becoming a literary translator in the first place.

However, while I want to avoid reinforcing cultural hegemony with my translations, I also want to produce beautiful pieces of literature that are a tribute to their source texts and source cultures, and which will be valued for their ideas and aesthetic qualities, rather than picked apart for perceived errors and “translatese” (4). I believe that aggressively ‘visible’ translations can backfire, discrediting the source text author, the translator, and the work itself, none of which serves my larger goal of inspiring American readers to look outside of their (literary) borders.

One of the qualities that I bring to the table as a translator is that I am a skilled writer in my own language—a talent that scholars have recognized as being vital for translators of literary works (Reiss 17). I have then the ability, I believe, to render translations that read fluidly and beautifully in a variety of different registers in English. And so, keeping in mind my target-text oriented approach, I choose to exploit this talent and generally opt for translations that ‘flow’ and adhere more closely to English syntactical norms than those of Icelandic.

One example of the way in which I did this in “Voices” can be seen in the reversal of negation in the text. There are a number of instances in *Raddir* where a character expresses an affirmative with a phrase of negation. For example, the owner of the *sjoppa* saying: “Mér liður ekki illa” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 62). Of course, there’s nothing particularly difficult to understand about the phrase “I don’t feel bad,” but it’s simply not the way that most English speakers would express this sentiment. If one doesn’t feel bad, one *does* feel good. It’s more common in English to express things in terms of what one has, rather than what one lacks. And so, in my translation, “Mér liður ekki illa” becomes “I’m feeling okay,” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 48). Similarly, in the same chapter, “Mér er ekki sama” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 64) becomes “It matters to me” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 50).

Racial and Ethnic Descriptors

In several places in the book there are adjectives used to describe race and/or ethnicity. While these descriptors are not meant to be anything but neutral in the Icelandic, however, they take on a different resonance within an American context, which is, in our current moment, engaged in larger social debates about race and ethnicity. As such, I had to be particularly deliberate in how I translated these words, and I did not ultimately decide to handle all of them in the same way.

The word “skásettur,” was the first that popped out to me. In “María,” the narrator sees three women approaching her and describes them:

Þar koma þrjár ungar konur á móti mér. Þær eru fallegar, glæsilega klæddar og allar með grisju neðan við skásett augun” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 28).

It seems clear from the description of their eyes and the masks that they are wearing that these are Asian tourists, and again, the descriptor is meant to be neutral.

However, when the same descriptor is transferred into an English-language—and more particularly, American—context, it suddenly takes on a much different tone.

First and foremost, the words “slant” and “slope” have a history of being used as racial slurs for Asian people in English, a resonance that can hardly be said to have dissipated in recent years, given a current Supreme Court case recently fought in the US over the use of the former word (*Unspeakable Trademark*), and an Ofcom ruling about the use of the latter as a racist term on the British TV show “Top Gear” in 2014 (Singh). Even when the descriptor “slanted” (or its close cousin “almond-shaped”) is not being used as an epithet, however, it is often still taken offensively when applied to Asian people’s eyes, considered an exoticizing word that makes generalizations about ‘Asian’ appearance which are often not even terribly accurate, considering that Asian people have many disparate ethnicities and, more importantly, eye shapes (Chow). As outlined in *Writing with Color*, “a blog dedicated to writing and resources centered on racial & ethnic diversity” (“Writing With Color”):

Some Asians do not find the phrases “tilted” or “slanted” to **ever** be appropriate when describing Asian eyes. It’s genuinely triggering for many Asians, particularly those who have been harassed, abused or bullied by racists. Other Asians, however, don’t find those phrases problematic. **I’m going to suggest you stay away from those phrases.** Why? Because there’s

no reason to trigger/harm your audience (“WWC Guide: Describing Asian Eyes”).

While I wouldn’t always advocate for superimposing the cultural debates occurring in the target culture onto a source text, I believed it was important to avoid the word “slanted” or “sloped” in this instance (and at least one later in the book) because of two things. For one, these descriptors have the honest potential to wound or offend within the target culture, as is obvious from the above discussion. Just as important, however, is the fact that it was neither the author nor the character’s intention to offend in this context. Had this been the intention, it would have been my responsibility, I believe, to render the slur as accurately as possible, protecting neither the reader nor the character/author with more delicate wording. The word I opted for instead, “upturned,” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 19) could still potentially be read as exoticizing, general, or just as coded as the word “slanted.” In that I did not think it reasonable to fully remove the reference, however, which would have been an act of pointless censorship, I thought it was better to pick a word that carries less socio-historical weight, which I hope “upturned” does.

I dealt with the word “lappneskur,” or Lappish, in a different way. This word comes up in “Framhaldssaga I,” wherein the narrator remarks that she spent a flight reading an exciting crime novel, “[ég]...gæði mér á lappnesku morði með taugastyrkjandi” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskýtamannsins* 83). The word “Lapp” (and its derivatives in other languages) is also considered offensive; those who belong to this ethnic group prefer the term “Sami” (Rapp; “Sami”).

After much debate, I elected to let the term stand in English: “...[I] gorge myself reading a nerve-wracking Lappish thriller” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 66). This word does, unfortunately, have the potential to

inadvertently wound or alienate a reader. However, the word “Lapp” and the cultural debate around it are practically non-existent in the US, and so there is far less potential of this. This is not to say that racist or culturally insensitive terminology should just be thrown around in places where there are less people likely to be offended. However, I decided that since again, the character meant no offense and was less likely to “trigger/harm” (“WWC Guide: Describing Asian Eyes”) the audience with her use of the term, it was best to let the character use her own words and not impose my own sensibilities about this onto the text. After all, people in Iceland have a different relationship to racial and ethnic signifiers than people in America (or Norway, etc.) do, and so it’s only natural that an Icelandic character might use terminology that an American character may think twice about.

3.2.3 Loss and Compensation

Although I generally feel that the idea of what is “lost” in translation is often overstated, it’s undeniable that there are certain nuances of every text that will, at the very least, be difficult to bring across in a translation. It is then up to the translator to determine how important those elements are, i.e. whether it is worth restructuring a whole passage in order to convey a single linguistic nuance. While undertaking the translation of *Raddir*, I of course encountered elements that I decided didn’t merit this sort of translational juggling. In these instances, though, I generally tried, as much as possible, to mitigate that loss in some way.

This came up several times in instances with words that have double meanings. One example would be the word “rándýr,” as it appears in “María”: “Snýr í mig rándýru baki” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskammtamannsins* 30). The narrator has been rejected by a wealthy lover, who here sits with his back to her. In Icelandic,

the word is both an adjective, meaning ‘expensive’ and also a noun, meaning ‘a carnivorous animal.’ There’s no word that contains both meanings in English, and so I elected to use two: “His elegant, wolfish back is to me” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 21). This makes the wordplay more explicit in the English, but conveys the nuances of the original with a bit of a twist: his back is ‘wolfish,’ which conveys a predatory, almost hulking, menacing nature and appetite.

In another instance, a mother remarks on the scent of her newborn twins as they sleep in her bed with her: “[ég] naut þess að finna þennan nýja ilm sem ég hafði eignast” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskéytmannsins* 76). Here, the verb “eignast” can mean both ‘to own or acquire’ or ‘to give birth.’ It references the character’s propensity to go out and buy herself nice things with her salary each month, as well as the actual act of giving birth to her daughters. Again, this double meaning is lost in English translations of the word. Instead, I translated the line as “[I] enjoyed smelling this new perfume that I’d brought home with me” (Steinunn, “Voices from the Radio Operator’s House” 61). This then captures the idea of bringing home a new purchase and bringing home babies from the hospital.

Lastly, a character name in “Uppstigning” also required some adjustment and compensation. The narrator of this story is a crow who used to be a human sailor named “Raggi á Ránni,” (Steinunn, *Raddir Úr Húsi Loftskéytmannsins* 89)—‘Raggi on the Mast’ (or more specifically, ‘Raggi on the crossbar of a mast on a large sailing vessel, like a pirate ship’). The nickname not only tells you something about the character (he was a sailor, good at climbing), its alliteration also makes it playful. So ‘Raggi on the Mast,’ doesn’t work, particularly because it doesn’t sound like a something a person would ever be called in English.

I attempted to come up with other variations on this nickname, most of which involved changing the character's name. I briefly considered 'Manni on the Mast,' but dropped this because there's another character named Manni in the book. Picking a name out of thin air also seemed somewhat presumptuous. What I did, instead, was to flip the names of two characters in the same story, Raggi á Ránni and Sigurður Pé. The latter's name then became Ragnar Pé (putting the diminutive 'Raggi,' into its standard form) while the narrator became Siggi. 'Siggi on the Mast,' was, however, no better in terms of alliteration, and so I decided to find another characteristic about the character to help make up a new nickname. In fact, he's best known for importing foreign cigarettes—it's a detail that is mentioned in more than one story—and so the nickname "Siggi the Ciggy" felt like a perfect fit.

4. Conclusion

This thesis has examined Steinunn G. Helgadóttir's *Raddir úr húsi loftskammtamannsins* in terms of its genre and style characteristics, situated the book within a broader Icelandic social and literary context, and also provided a framework for how I have approached a partial translation of the novel into English. In so doing, I have articulated the overarching purpose, or *skopos*, of the translation to be threefold:

- To create an independent, target-oriented text that captures the aesthetic and cultural essence of the source text.
- To preserve those characteristics which are integral to the work as a short story cycle.
- To accomplish the above-stated goals through the use of a mix of creative strategies that privilege my own 'authorial' choices, as translator, over hard and fast equivalences.

Undertaking this translation has been a consciously creative endeavor that has stretched and challenged my abilities as a reader, a writer, and a translator. It is also one which, it must be added, was greatly aided by the willing collaboration of the author. This collaboration extends beyond simply answering questions about the text and making 'corrections.' Rather, it involves a greater level of generosity, the willingness, that is, to experience one's text as but one version of many and to allow the resulting translation to exist as its own entity and to even celebrate it as such. This 'collaborative creativity' has been deeply useful to the present project, and will also provide me with an ideal, a point of reference to refer to back to when undertaking future translations of contemporary Icelandic fiction.

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