



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Ritgerð til BA-prófs
í Íslensku sem öðru máli

(Þjóðar)sálin hans Jóns míns í enskri þýðingu

Þýðing á allri bókinni *(Þjóðar)sálin hans Jóns míns* eftir Birki
Blæ Ingólfsson

Mansoor Ahmad Malik

Leiðbeinandi: Þóra Björk Hjartardóttir
Júní 2023

ÍSLENSKU- OG MENNINGARDEILD

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Ritgerð þessi er 10 eininga lokaverkefni til BA-prófs
við Íslensku- og menningardeild á Hugvísindasviði Háskóla Íslands

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Ritgerðina má ekki afrita nema með leyfi höfundar.

Ágrip

Þessi ritgerð er lokaverkefni til BA-prófs í íslensku sem öðru máli við Hugvísindasvið Háskóla Íslands. Ritgerðin skiptist í tvo hluta. Fyrsti hluti ritgerðarinnar skiptist í þrjá kafla. Í fyrsta kafla er fjallað um höfundinn Birki Blæ Ingólfsson og bókina hans *(Þjóðar)sálin hans Jóns míns*. Í öðrum kafla er stuttlega sagt frá þýðingum og þýðingaraðferðum. Þriðji kafli er tileinkaður helstu vandamálum sem komu upp í þýðingarferlinu og hvernig þau voru leyst. Í seinni hluta ritgerðarinnar er ensk þýðing á allri bókinni *(Þjóðar)sálin hans Jóns míns*.

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Inngangur

Bókmenntir hafa verið stór hluti Íslendinga öldum saman. Kvöldvökur voru eitt af helstu einkennum samfélags í forni tíð. Á tímum þar sem bækur og sögur voru ekki víða til á prenti, safnaðist samfélagið saman í baðstofunni og hlustaði á sögur sem fólk hafði lært munnlega frá kynslóð til kynslóðar. Með þróun þjóðarinnar var gert átak að þýða erlendar sögur á íslensku, eins og Grimmsævintýri, sem gerðu Íslendingum kleift að kynnast og skilja erlenda menningarheima¹. Fræðimenn erlendis og Íslendingar sem fóru erlendis í nám, eins og Hannes Hafstein, Gestur Pálsson, Einar H. Kvaran o.fl., hjálpuðu þjóðinni að þróast í bókmenntum með því að þýða og kynna erlend hugtök og bókmenntir á íslensku, sérstaklega á síðari öldum². Þýðingar hafa alltaf verið stór hluti af þróun bókmenntanna á Íslandi.

Nú til dags er það ekkert leyndarmál að hundruð bóka hafa verið þýddar yfir á íslensku úr norsku, sænsku, dönsku, þýsku, ensku, frönsku, ítölsku, pólsku o.s.frv. Á sama tíma hafa margar íslenskar bækur verið þýddar yfir á þessi tungumál. Þýðingar yfir á og úr íslensku eru í fullum gangi víða um heiminn.³

Viðfangsefni þessarar ritgerðar er þýðing úr íslensku yfir á ensku á allri bókinni (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns* eftir Birki Blæ Ingólfsson og á sama tíma að gefa lesendum innsýn í menningarheimi Íslendinga. Ritgerðin skiptist í þrjá kafla og lýkur á þýðingu bókarinnar. Í fyrsta kafla er fjallað um höfundinn og bókina hans (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns*. Í öðrum kafla er sagt í fáum orðum frá þýðingum og þýðingaraðferðum. Hér verður stuttlega sagt frá sérfræðingum og kenningum þeirra eins og Roman Jacobson, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Eugene Nida, Hans Vermeer og Katharina Reiss. Þriðji kafli er tileinkaður helstu vandamálum sem komu upp í þýðingarferlinu og hvernig þau voru leyst. Í lok ritgerðarinnar er ensk þýðing á allri bókinni (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns*.

Markhópur þýðingarinnar er fyrst og fremst enskumælandi fólk, annað hvort á Íslandi eða í erlendis, sem njóta bókmennta en vilja einnig kynna sér íslensku menningu, eða eins og Birkir Blær segir að fá hana *beint í æð*. Áhugaverðast við frumtextann er sú staðreynd að viðhorf til íslensku menningar er birt frá sjónarhorni Íslendinga sjálfs.

¹ Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2012:1

² Jón Karl Helgason 2011

³ Distill 2020

1. Höfundurinn og verkið

1.1 Birkir Blær Ingólfsson

Eitt það besta við Ísland er smæð samfélagsins. Í leit minni á netinu um höfundinn fann ég aðeins nokkrar línur hér og þar. Ég velti fyrir mér hvernig ég gat skrifað heilan kafla um höfundinn og ákvað svo að hafa samband við höfundinn sjálfan. Ég fann Facebook síðu hans og eftir að hafa kynnt mig og efni ritgerðarinnar sendi ég honum nokkrar spurningar í einkaskilaboðum á Facebook Messenger sem hann var mjög fús að svara⁴.

Birkir Blær Ingólfsson er Reykvíkingur og fæddist þann 14. janúar árið 1989. Hann lærði lögfræði við Háskóla Íslands en fannst hún óbærilega leiðinleg og ákvað að hætta í lögfræðinámi eftir að hafa klárað BA próf. Í gegnum árin hefur hann starfað sem blaðamaður, rithöfundur, saxófónleikari og saxófónkennari. Ásamt nokkrum félögum stofnaði hann kvikmyndafyrirtæki, Act4, og er nú til dags að starfa þar sem handritahöfundur sem er draumastarfið hans og er núna að leggja lokahönd á seríu tvö af þáttaröðinni *Ráðherranum*. Fyrsta sería *Ráðherrans* kom út árið 2020 og fékk Edduverðlaun sem besta leikna efnið.⁵

Blaðamennskan og ást á tónlist hefur hjálpað honum talsvert í starfinu sínu sem rithöfundur. Samkvæmt honum kynnist maður samfélaginu býsna vel sem hann er hluti af þar sem hann fylgist með því allan daginn. Þar að auki smíðar hann texta og skrifar fréttir af því sem gerist í samfélaginu sem er ágæt æfing. Varðandi tónlist segir hann að það sé auðmýkjandi að reyna að læra að spila vel á hljóðfæri og að það sé agalega mikil vinna sem gildir í raun og veru um allt í lífinu. Þetta kenndi honum að vinna af kostgæfni í öllu sem hann vildi afreka. Í sambandi við áhrif tónlistar segir hann í fyrrgreindum einkaskilaboðum:

Stundum þegar ég hlusta á tónlist finnst mér tónlistarmenn geta vakið tóna til lífsins. Og mig langar einnig að geta vakið orð til lífsins. Og af því ég hef heyrt tóna sem vakna til lífs, þá hef ég þælt mikið í því hvernig maður geri það með orðum. Ég veit enn ekki svarið. En þæli talsvert í því. Og þær þælingar eru innblásnar af tónlist.

Árið 2017 gaf Birkir Blær út bókina (*Þjóðar*)sálin hans *Jóns míns* sem gefur lesendum innsýn í menningarheimi Íslendinga og árið 2018 var hann handhafi Íslensku

⁴ Birkir Blær Ingólfsson, munnleg heimild, 15. apríl 2023

⁵ Eddan 2021

barnabókaverðlaunanna fyrir barnabók sína *Stormsker – fólkið sem fangaði vindinn*⁶. Þar að auki hefur hann skrifað smásögur, ljóð og þáttaröð eins og áður var nefnt. Upplifun hans sem rithöfundur hefur verið margþætt og frá því hann byrjaði að skrifa hefur hann þroskast mikið og vill gjarna halda því áfram. Varðandi þetta segir hann enn aftur í fyrrgreindum einkaskilaboðum:

Það er þroskandi að vera rithöfundur. Maður þarf mikið að vera að þæla í alls konar. Maður vinnur jú með hugmyndir. Sem verður til þess að maður reynir að fylla hausinn sinn af alls kyns hugmyndum - með því t.d. að lesa. Svo maður hafi hugmyndir í höfðinu til að móða sögur úr. Og maður er mikið að reyna að setja sig í spor annarra sem ég held að þroski með manni samkennd og mannskilning. Sem mér þykir fallegt.

1.2 (Þjóðar)sálin hans Jóns míns

(Þjóðar)sálin hans Jóns míns var fyrst gefin út árið 2017 og er sú fyrsta í bókaflokknum *Fræjum, ritgerðaröð um samfélagið og samtímann* gefin út af forlaginu Partusi⁷. Bókin er byggð á þjóðsögunni *Sálin hans Jóns míns* þar sem konunni hans Jóns er alveg sama um reglur, gengur upp til himnaríkis með sál eiginmannsins í skjóðu, móðgar alla dýrlingana og svindlar sálinni hans inn í Paradís.

Í gegnum þjóðsöguna sýnir höfundurinn hugarheim og sjálfsmynd íslensku þjóðarinnar sem eru byggð á hugtökunum *undantekningarhyggju, sérmeðferð* og síðast en ekki síst á hugtakinu sem Íslendinga lifa eftir *þetta reddast*. Hann dregur einkenni Íslendinga saman í eftirfarandi orðum: „Mark Twain hefur sagt að til þess að ná árangri í lífinu þurfi maður tvennt: fávísku og sjálfstraust. Konan hans Jóns míns er ekkert annað en fávíska og sjálfstraust í sinni hreinustu mynd, fléttuð saman í eina persónu – eða réttara sagt, eina þjóð.“⁸

Ein af fyrstu spurningum sem ég var spurður þegar ég kom til Íslands var: „Hvernig finnst þér Ísland og hver er skoðun þín á Íslendingum?“ Það er mjög erfitt að svara slíkum spurningum, jafnvel 10 árum síðar, sérstaklega sem útlendingur. Það býr alls konar fólk á Íslandi eins og í öllum öðrum löndum og vegna þess er mjög erfitt að svara þessu í stuttu máli. En bók Birkis svarar slíkum spurningum á léttan og skemmtilegan hátt – ekki frá sjónarhorni útlendinga, heldur Íslendinga!

⁶ Kolbeinn Tumi Daðason 2018

⁷ Bókabúð Forlagið e.d.

⁸ Birkir Blær Ingólfsson 2017:54

Sjálfur skrifar hann um bókina á Facebook síðunni sinni:

Ég var að skrifa bók. Einhvern tíma fór ég nefnilega að hugsa að íslenska þjóðin væri að mörgu leyti lík bóndakonunni krúttlegu í þjóðsögunni af Sálinni hans Jóns míns sem gekk upp til himna og valtaði yfir Guð og Jesú og alla dýrlingana og dúndraði sínum heittelskaða framhjá kerfinu og inn í Paradís. Þið vitið, kunningjavelðið og svo þetta túrbó-sjálfsstraust, stórasta land í heimi og inspired by Iceland og séríslensk einkenni ættuð frá víkingum og allt þetta. Ég ákvað að skrifa um þetta og ætlaði fyrst bara að skrifa tweet eða status á feis eða eitthvað létt og laggott en hafði svo alltof mikið að segja og endaði óvart á því að skrifa bók.⁹

Stíll bókarinnar er frekar nútímalegur og kaldhæðinn og orðaval Birkis er að mestu leyti frekar einfalt. Ég myndi líkja stíl bókarinnar við kenningu Gests Pálssonar um raunsæisstefnuna í kringum 1880 sem sagði að þarfasti maðurinn fyrir land og þjóð sé „kómedíuskáld, sem gæti sýnt okkur vel og greinilega, hvernig við lítum út í spegli.“¹⁰

Viðbrögð fólks við bókinni voru misjöfn. Flestum var alveg sama, óskuðu honum til hamingju og gleymdu svo að hann hafði nokkrum tíma skrifað bókina. Á hinn bóginn fannst mörgum bókina afar skemmtileg. Hann hitti konu sem sagði honum að bókin hefði breytt því hvernig hún hugsar um Íslendinga og að hún hefði breytt lífi sínu.

⁹ Birkir Blær Ingólfsson 2017

¹⁰ Jón Karl Helgason 1989:133

2. Þýðing og þýðingaraðferðir

2.1 Hvað er þýðing?

Samkvæmt íslenskum orðabókum merkir orðið *þýðing* ‘túlkun’, ‘útlekking’, ‘skýring’, ‘að þýða úr einu máli á annað’¹¹ og það ‘að þýða bókmennta- eða nytjatexta af einu tungumáli á annað’¹². Enska orðið *translate* sem á rætur sína í latínu merkir það sama. Túlkun er svipuð og þýðing þar sem frumtexti er sagður á öðru tungumáli eða menningarheimi. Munur milli þýðingar og túlkunar er sá að í túlkun er frumtextinn fluttur munnlega, birtist aðeins einu sinni og markttextinn verður til undir tímapressu þannig að hvorki er hægt að endurskoða eða leiðrétta. En í þýðingu er hægt að skoða frumtextann aftur og aftur og leiðrétta markttextann o.s.frv.

Þýðingar eru í raun og veru ein af nauðsynlegum leiðum til þess að get flutt einstaklinga heimsins inn í heim hvers annars burtséð frá því hvort það sé heim menningar, stjórn mála, efnahags eða samfélags. Þýðingar eru ein leið til þess að við getum skilið hvort annað. Samkvæmt Juliane House er þýðing aðferð þar sem einhver frumtexti er þýddur og fluttur yfir á annað mál svokallað markmál.¹³ Sérfræðingar eins og Wilss, Nida og Taber bæta við að þýðing feli í sér að markttextinn er eins jafngildur frumtextanum og hægt er. Ástráður Eysteinnsson lýsir efninu í *Tvímæli* og skrifar: „Þýðing felur allajafna í sér að einhver höfundur hefur samið texta (ritað mál af einhverju tagi) á máli sínu (til dæmis rússnesku) og einhver þýðandi flutt þennan texta yfir á sitt mál (til dæmis íslensku).“¹⁴

2.2 Hugtök um þýðingar og þýðingaraðferðir

2.2.1 Roman Jakobson (1896-1982)

Roman Osipovítsj Jakobson var rússneskur málvísindamaður og einn af þeim fyrstu til að nálgast þýðingar sem vísindi en ekki list. Samkvæmt Bergljótu Kristjánsdóttur var hann: „...einhver áhrifamesti fræðimaðurinn á sviði hugvísinda á 20. öld og fékkst við fjölbreytt viðfangsefni, einkum á sviði málvísinda, bókmenntafræði og táknfræði.“¹⁵ Eins og aðrir fræðimenn fjallaði hann mikið um umorðun og merkingu þýðingar eða

¹¹ Íslensk orðabók 2007:1231

¹² Íslensk nútímamálsorðabók e.d.

¹³ House 2018:10

¹⁴ Ástráður Eysteinnsson 1996:26

¹⁵ Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir 2011

eiginlega þýðingu. Í ritgerð sinni *Um málvísindalegar hliðar þýðinga* skiptir hann þýðingum í þrjár megin gerðir.¹⁶

1. *Intralingual translation* eða þýðing innan tungumálsins. Með öðrum orðum er sama málkerfi notað til þess að endurflytja tiltekin boð. Við getum kallað þetta *umorðun*.
Dæmi um þetta getur verið Íslendingasaga sem hefur verið endursögð fyrir börn. Sama tungumál er notað en orðaforði og stíllinn o.s.frv. er lagaður að börnum.
2. *Interlingual translation* eða þýðing milli tungumála. Hér er talað um að flytja merkingu frá einu tungumáli yfir á annað sem við getum sagt sé *eiginleg þýðing*.
Dæmi um þetta er að þýða íslenska bók eða texta yfir á ensku.
3. *Intersemiotic translation* eða þýðing milli táknerfa. Hér er talað um að nota annan tákniðil til þess að endurflytja tiltekin boð.
Dæmi um þetta getur verið texti sem er fluttur yfir í dans eða tónlist eða skáldsaga yfir í kvikmynd.

2.2.2 Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher var þýskur guðfræðingur, heimspekingur og prédikari.¹⁷ Hann er þekktur sem faðir túlkunarfræðinnar og var mjög umdeildur. Hann var þýðandi og átti stóran þátt í mótun þýðingafraði.

Árið 1818 flutti Friedrich Schleiermacher fyrirlestur við vísindaakademíuna í Berlín og greindi frá hinum ýmsu aðferðum við þýðingar. Samkvæmt honum getur *hinn eiginlegi þýðandi* valið milli tveggja aðferða til þess að leiða saman höfund og lesanda sem má ekki blanda saman. Þessar tvær leiðir eru:

1. Að færa lesandann til móts við höfundinn
Hér fer lesandinn í raun og veru á sama stað og þýðandinn var þegar hann las og fór yfir frumtextann og hann fær að vita hvernig þýðandinn sjálfur skildi frumtextann. Þýðandinn reynir að bæta lesandanum upp þekkinguna

¹⁶ Ástráður Eysteinnsson 1996:28

¹⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica e.d.

sem hann þarf til þess að skilja frumtextann og hann reynir líka að miðla tilfinningunum og áhrifunum sem hann varð fyrir þegar hann las frumtextann.

2. Að færa höfundinn til móts við lesandann.

Hér er höfundur textans færður inn í markmálið og markmenninguna. Með öðrum orðum reynir þýðandinn að þýða á tiltekinn hátt þar sem það virðist vera eins og höfundurinn þekki markmenninguna og tali beint á markmálið. Íslenskur höfundur er færður inn í þýsku og textinn er þýddur eða skrifaður eins og höfundur væri þýskur að tala við þjóð sína.

2.2.3 Eugene Nida (1914-2011)

Eugene Albert Nida var bandarískur málfræðingur og biblíuþýðandi. Í bókinni sinni *Toward a science of Translation* fjallar hann um hugtakið *jafngildi* (e. equivalence). Samkvæmt Eugene Nida eru öll tungumál mismunandi og engin tvö tungumál geta verið alveg eins. Þýðingafræðilega séð merkir þetta að sjálfsögðu að engin þýðing getur alveg samsvarað frumtextanum orð fyrir orð þ.e.a.s. að enginn marktæki getur verið alveg eins og frumtextinn. Samkvæmt Eugene Nida og öðrum sérfræðingum geta tungumál hins vegar haft sömu merkingu eða gildi.

Þar sem tveir textar á mismunandi tungumálum geta ekki verið alveg eins eða *jafngildir* er mikilvægt að finna jafngildi sem hæfir best. Til þess að geta gert það þarf þýðandinn að athuga frumtextann og velja fyrir sér:

1. Boðinu sjálfu – formi og inntaki eða efni textans. M.ö.o. efninu sem textinn fjallar um og hvers konar tungumál er notað í frumtextanum.
2. Tilgangi höfunda/þýðanda – er tilgangurinn að upplýsa, að kalla fram ákveðnar tilfinningar eða ákveðna hegðun?
3. Viðtakendunum og hæfni þeirra – er þýðingin fyrir börn, fólk sem er ekki vant að lesa, fólk sem er vant að lesa eða jafnvel fyrir sérfræðinga? Það er líka mikilvægt að velja fyrir sér af hverju þetta fólk vilji lesa textann.

Jafngildi getur verið tvennskonar a) formlegt jafngildi (e. formal equivalence) og b) áhrifajafngildi (e. dynamic equivalence). Í formlegu jafngildi er áherslan lögð á form og

inntak frumtextans þ.e.a.s. á tungumál, orð, málnotkun og efni frumtextans. Hér reynir þýðandinn að hafa frumtextann og markttextann eins nálæga og hægt er. Í áhrifajafngildi er áherslan lögð á lesandann og viðtakandann þar sem frumtextinn, merking og boðið hans eru flutt yfir á markmál og markmenningu lesandans. Þetta er í raun og veru svipað og í kenningu Friedrich Schleiermacher um að færa höfundinn til móts við lesandann. Samkvæmt Eugene Nida er best að hafa blöndu af báðum jafngildum í þýðingu en að fórna fyrst formlegu jafngildi og leggja áherslu á áhrifajafngildi eða lesandann og viðtakandann.¹⁸

2.2.4 Hans Vermeer (1930-2010) og Katharina Reiss (1923-2018)

Hans Vermeer og Katharina Reiss voru þýskir málvísindamenn og þýðingarfræðingar sem voru best þekkt fyrir að leggja grunninn að og móta skoposkenninguna. Kenning og framlag þeirra til fræðanna gegnir stóru hlutverki í þýðingafræði eins og hún lítur út í dag.

Skoposkenningin miðast fyrst og fremst við markttextann, markmenninguna og viðtakanda. Skopos er grískt orð sem þýðir markmið eða tilgangur og í skoposkenningunni ákveður þýðandinn sjálfur markmið og tilgang þýðingarinnar. Samkvæmt skoposkenningunni er frumtextinn athöfn sem höfundur framkvæmir með ákveðinn tilgang í huga. Út frá þessu er búin til samskipti milli þess sem skrifar frumtextann og þess sem les hann. Þessi texti hefur ákveðið hlutverk (eða fleiri) sem er(u) háð tíma, rúmi og menningu. Þegar einhver þýðir frumtextann verður hann viðtakandi í frummennningunni en framleiðandi í markmenningunni og þegar hann þýðir ákveður hann sjálfur hvert hlutverk textans er miðað við viðtakendur og markmenninguna.¹⁹

Munurinn milli jafngildiskenningu Nida og skoposkenningu Vermeer og Reiss er að í jafngildiskenningu liggja tengslin milli frumtexta og markttexta en samkvæmt skoposkenningu liggja tengslin í hlutverkinu sem þýðandinn ákveður sjálfur fyrir markttextann.

¹⁸ Ástráður Eysteinnsson 1996:89-92

¹⁹ Venuti 2000:221-223

3 Þýðingarferlið og vandamál við þýðingarvinnuna

3.1 Þýðingarferlið

Ég las bókina fyrst í námskeiðinu *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og þjóðtrú* í BA-náminu í íslensku sem öðru máli. Því meira sem ég las bókina, því meira laðaðist ég að henni og viðhorfi höfundarins og hún varð fljótlega ein af mínum uppáhaldsbókum. Þegar að kom að velja texta til að þýða var það í raun og veru löngu ákveðið mál fyrir mig. Ég las bókina aftur í heild, sérstaklega hlutann sem valinn var fyrir þýðingu og byrjaði að velja fyrir mér og að taka eftir hvað gæti verið erfitt að þýða o.s.frv.

Þar á eftir byrjaði ég að þýða textann. Ég hef mikla reynslu af því að þýða texta. Meðal annars er ég í þýðingarteymi fyrir *The Review of Religions* og ég þýði aðallega texta á úrdú yfir á ensku í hverri viku. Í þessu þýðingarverki fylgdi ég sama þýðingarferli og ég fer eftir þegar ég þýði úr úrdú. Á meðan ég þýddi textann undirstrikaði ég og skrifaði niður öll orð og orðatiltæki sem mig langaði að skoða aftur og betur, bæði á ensku og íslensku. Næst endurskoðaði ég þýðinguna, bar hana saman við frumtextann og leiðrétti textann eftir því sem mér fannst viðeigandi að laga. Þegar ég var orðinn frekar ánægður með þýðinguna bað ég konuna mína, sem er með BA-gráðu í enskum bókmenntum, að lesa hana og láta mig vita af öllu sem ég þyrfti að endurskoða og leiðrétta.

3.2 Form og stíll þýðingarinnar

Við þýðingarvinnuna lagði ég mesta áherslu á að marktextinn væri eins nálægt frumtextanum og hægt er en á sama tíma reyndi ég láta hann hljóma eðlilega og flæða vel. Mér finnst mjög mikilvægt að nota orð í marktexitanum sem jafngilda upprunalegum orðum í frumtextanum. Ég reyndi að forðast að leggja aðeins áherslu á og flytja yfir merkingu frumtextans eins og Cícero²⁰ og Híerónímus²¹ gerðu þegar þeir þýddu úr grísku. Mig langaði frekar að færa lesandann til móts við höfundinn sem, samkvæmt Friedrich Schleiermacher, er eitt af einkennum hins eiginlega þýðanda²². Til að mynda getur höfundur frumtextans valið milli formlegs máls og óformlegs máls. Ef hann

²⁰ Robinson 1997:6-9

²¹ Robinson 1997:24-26

²² Ástráður Eysteinnsson 1996:77

ákveður að nota óformlegt mál og orðafar þá get ég ekki ákveðið að þýða textann á mjög formlegan hátt og öfugt bara til þess að textinn flæði vel og sé fallegur.

Ég myndi segja að þýðingin mín sé í samræmi við kenningu Eugene Nida um formlegt jafngildi þar sem áhersla er lögð á form og inntak frumtextans þ.e.a.s. á málkerfi, orð, málnotkun og efni frumtextans og reynt er að hafa frumtextann og marktann eins nálægt og hægt er. En þetta merkir alls ekki að þýða þurfi orð fyrir orð því að það er nauðsynlegt að fylgja reglum og venjum á markmálinu líka.

3.3 Vandamál við þýðingarvinnuna

3.3.1 Setningafræðileg atriði

Ég gat fylgt að mestu leyti ytri umgerð frumtextans. Málsgreinar í þýðingunni voru inndregnar á sama stað og í frumtextanum. Hins vegar bætti ég við kommu og semíkommu til þess að laga nokkrar setningar að ensku. Þar að auki skipti ég nokkrum lengri setningum í tvennt, þrennt og jafnvel í fleiri þar sem langar og flóknar setningar geta truflað lestur textans. Dæmi 1 sýnir hvernig frumtextinn lítur út (a), hvernig ég þýddi textann á ensku og bætti við kommu (b) og hvernig frumtextinn myndi líta út samkvæmt mínum breytingum (c). Á blaðsíðu 16 skrifar Birkir Blær:

1)

- a. Hún hugsar þetta náttúrulega í hálfkæringi, á ekki von á því að forsjónin bænheyri hana, en svo tekur karlinn sótt og ætlar loksins að drepast, og þá fær kerling auðvitað samviskubit, má ekki til þess hugsa að missa hann, enda búa þau ein á afskekktum bæ og hún finnur hvað hún verður einmana án hans.
- b. She naturally thinks about this half-heartedly, but is not hopeful that fate would answer her request. Subsequently, the husband falls ill and is finally going to die. The old lady then naturally becomes remorseful, as she cannot bear the thought of losing him. After all, they live alone on a distant farm and she feels how lonely she will be without him.
- c. Hún hugsar þetta náttúrulega í hálfkæringi, á ekki von á því að forsjónin bænheyri hana. En svo tekur karlinn sótt og ætlar loksins að drepast. Og þá fær kerling auðvitað samviskubit, má ekki til þess

hugsa að missa hann. Enda búa þau ein á afskekktum bæ og hún finnur hvað hún verður einmana án hans.

Í dæmi 2 er sýnd enn lengri setning sem getur verið heil málsgrein. Hér ákvað ég að skipta setningunni í fimm aðeins styttri setningar. Hann skrifar á blaðsíðu 14:

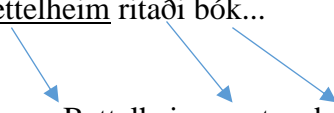
2)

- a. Ég biðst forláts, en skyr bragðast eins og gömul jógúrt sem hefur staðið í sólskini í nokkrar vikur og harðnað svo áferðin minnir á tréspæni – það þarf þrisvar sinnum meira af mjólk til að búa til skyr heldur en jógúrt, ástæðan fyrir því að þetta tíðkaðist hér er væntanlega sú að við vorum vön því að borða skemmdan mat, skyrgerð þekktist um alla Skandinavíu á landnámsöld en hún lagðist alls staðar af nema hér, ef til vill vegna þess að hinir lærðu að gera jógúrt sem smakkaðist betur – allir nema við, því við vorum of einangruð, og í dag erum við dæmd til að veggfóðra fordyri landsins með lofgjörð um skyr, einfaldlega vegna þess að eitt af því sem raunverulega staðfestir að við séum þjóð er skyr.
- b. I beg your pardon, but skyr tastes like stale yoghurt that has been sitting in the sun for several weeks and hardened to a texture reminiscent of wood shavings – you need three times more milk to make skyr compared to yoghurt. The reason for this to have been adopted here is probably that we were used to eating spoiled food. Making skyr was commonly known across all of Scandinavia during the period of settlement, but it discontinued everywhere except here; perhaps because others learned to make yoghurt, which tasted better – everyone but us. The reason for this is that we were too isolated. And today we are doomed to wallpaper the hallway of the country with praise for skyr, simply because one of the things that truly affirms that we are a nation is skyr.
- c. Ég biðst forláts, en skyr bragðast eins og gömul jógúrt sem hefur staðið í sólskini í nokkrar vikur og harðnað svo áferðin minnir á tréspæni – það þarf þrisvar sinnum meira af mjólk til að búa til skyr heldur en jógúrt. Ástæðan fyrir því að þetta tíðkaðist hér er væntanlega sú að við vorum vön því að borða skemmdan mat.

Skýrgerð þekktist um alla Skandinavíu á landnámsöld en hún lagðist alls staðar af nema hér; ef til vill vegna þess að hinir lærðu að gera jógúrt sem smakkaðist betur – allir nema við. Því við vorum of einangruð. Og í dag erum við dæmd til að veggfóðra fordyri landsins með lofgjörð um skyr, einfaldlega vegna þess að eitt af því sem raunverulega staðfestir að við séum þjóð er skyr.

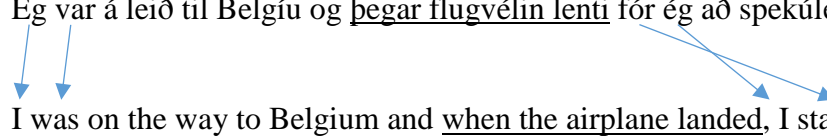
Kjarnafærslan var annað atriði sem ég þurfti að athuga sem beitt er á ólíkan hátt á ensku. Venjuleg orðaröð í íslensku er frumlag – sögn – andlag eins og í dæmi 3 sem er tekið af blaðsíðu 26:

3)

- a. Áður nefndur Bruno Bettelheim ritaði bók...
- b. The aforementioned Bruno Bettelheim wrote a book...
- 

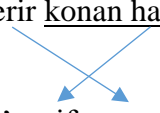
Í kjarnafærslu er einhver annar liður eins og atviksliður, forsetningarliður, nafnliður eða aukafallsliður færður í fyrsta sæti og persónufornafnið er fært eftir persónubeygðu sögnina. Samt sem áður breytir þetta atriði ekki orðaröðinni á ensku þar sem persónufornafnið kemur samt á undan persónubeygðu sögninni. Neðst á blaðsíðu 11 er setning sem inniheldur venjulega orðaröð og aukasetningu sem er færð fremst með kjarnafærslu. Orðaröðin í íslensku verður þá sögn – frumlag – andlag en heldur áfram að vera frumlag – sögn – andlag á ensku. Birkir Blær skrifar:

4)

- a. Ég var á leið til Belgíu og þegar flugvélin lenti fór ég að spekulera...
- b. I was on the way to Belgium and when the airplane landed, I started speculating...
- c. Ég var á leið til Belgíu og þegar flugvélin lenti ég fór að spekulera...
- 

Annað dæmi má finna á blaðsíðu 21. Hér skrifar Birkir Blær:


5)

- a. Þrátt fyrir það gerir konan hans Jóns mín sér ferð til himnaríkis...
- b. Despite this, Jón's wife travels to heaven
- 

- c. Þrátt fyrir það konan hans Jóns míns gerir sér ferð til himnaríkis...

Í nokkrum tilfellum ákvað ég að breyta orðaröð setninga aðeins til þess að forðast klaufalega setningagerð. Í staðinn fyrir að hafa atviksorðin *nevertheless* og *probably* við hliðina á hvort öðru, sem hljómar ekki vel, ákvað ég að færa orðið *nevertheless* fremst í setninguna. Á blaðsíðu 48 skrifar höfundurinn:


6)

- a. Tilkomumesta birtingarmyndin er samt líklega aflandsfélagaeign Íslendinga...
- b. Nevertheless, the most outstanding manifestation is probably the Icelanders' ownership of offshore companies...
- c. The most outstanding manifestation is, nevertheless, probably the Icelanders' ownership of offshore companies...
- 

3.3.2 Kyn orða

Öll nafnorð í íslensku hafa fast kyn sem fer eftir formi orðsins en ekki eftir merkingu þess eða líffræðilegu kyni þeirrar lifandi veru sem orðið vísar til. Það sama gildir ekki á ensku þar sem nafnorð sjálf eru kynlaus og aðeins merking orðanna ákveður kyn þeirra. Hvort nafnorð er í karlkyni eða kvenkyni kemur aðeins fram þegar vísað er til fólks, og í sumum tilfellum til dýra, með persónufornöfnum. Hlutir og allt sem er ekki lifandi hafa almennt hvorugkyn þegar vísað er til þeirra með persónufornöfnum. Þetta er mikilvægt að athuga þegar áherslan er lögð á að hafa marktextann eins nálægt frumtextanum og hægt er því að það er nauðsynlegt að fylgja málfræðilegum reglum á markmálinu líka. Á blaðsíðu 10 notar höfundurinn persónufornafnið *hún* í sambandi við kvenkynsnafnorðið *skyr-auglýsingin*. Hér er ekki hægt að þýða *hún* með *she* heldur þarf að nota persónufornafnið *it* í staðinn. Annað dæmi um þetta atriði má finna á blaðsíðu 39 þar sem Birkir Blær notar persónufornafnið *hún* í sambandi við kvenkynsnafnorðið *nefnd*. Hér skrifar hann:

7)

- a. Aftur að nefndinni og þeirri mynd sem hún ákvað að draga upp af Íslandi...
- b. Back to the committee and the image it decided to paint of Iceland...
- 

3.3.3 Sérnöfn

Mikið er talað og rætt um hvernig íslensk nöfn, örnefni o.s.frv. eiga að koma fram í þýðingum og hvort það sé gott og viðeigandi að bæta við útskýringum og niðurmálgreinum. Að mínu mati er mikilvægt að nota upprunalegu nöfnin til þess að færa lesandann til móts við höfundinn. Það er hægt að bæta við útskýringum um stafrófið og framburð í upphafi þýðingarinnar og það er líka hægt að bæta við neðanmálgreinum til þess að útskýra stuttlega nokkra hluti – að sjálfsögðu aðeins þar sem nauðsynlegt er. Þannig getur lesandinn færst að heimi höfundarins en skilið hlutina á sínu tungumáli líka.

Til að mynda talar höfundurinn um *Pepsi-deildina* á blaðsíðu sjö. Í staðinn fyrir að bæta orðum við í textanum sjálfum um að um íslenska fótboltadeild sé að ræða, fannst mér viðeigandi að útskýra stuttlega í neðanmálgrein hvað átt er við með *Pepsi-deildinni*.

8)

- a. ...líkt og mannsönurinn væri markmaður í tapliði í Pepsi-deildinni.
- b. as if the Son of Man was the goalkeeper on a losing team in the Pepsi league*.

*The highest level men's football league in Iceland, also known as *Besta deild karla*. (neðanmálgrein)

Annað dæmi kemur fram á blaðsíðu níu þar sem höfundurinn talar um *Leifsstöð*. Ég notaði sérnafnið *Leifsstöð* en bætti við stuttri neðanmálgrein til að útskýra hvað átt er við með sérnafninu.

9)

- a. Það er eitthvað sérkennilega íslenskt við Leifsstöð.
- b. There is something very Icelandic about Leifsstöð*.

*Keflavik International Airport, or Leif Erikson Air Terminal.
(neðanmálgrein)

Það sama gildir um orð eins og *appelsín* á blaðsíðu 11.

10)

- a. „Það ótrúlegasta við Ísland ... er ekki tæra og hreina vatnið sem kemur úr krönunum okkar ... heldur sú staðreynd að við blöndum appelsínugosi og eimuðu malti saman á jólnunum til að ná hinu eina og sanna jólabragði.“

- b. “The most unbelievable fact about Iceland...is not the clean and pure water that pours out of our taps. Rather, it is the fact that over Christmas, we mix the carbonated appelsín drink* with distilled malt in order to acquire the one and only Christmas flavour.”

*Carbonated orange drink, similar to Fanta. (neðanmálgrein)

3.3.4 Orðaval

Stíll Birkis er frekar nútímalegur og kaldhæðinn og orðaval hans er að mestu leyti frekar einfalt. Að sjálfsögðu er ýmislegt sem þýðandi þarf að fletta upp, rannsaka og velta fyrir sér til þess að skilja nákvæmlega hvað höfundurinn á við og til að geta þýtt textann á réttan hátt. Eitt séreinkenni texta Birkis er að hann notar erlend orð af og til. Í upphafi textans, á blaðsíðu sjö, notar hann danskt orð og segir: „...[hún] móðgaði alla dýrlingana í forbífarten og sagði Maríu mey að...”

Þar sem ég hef aldrei lært dönsku þurfti ég að rannsaka málið. Ég fletti orðinu upp í orðabókum og spurði dönskumælendur hvernig og í hvaða samhengi orðið er notað. Eftir að hafa skilið hvernig orðið er notað þýddi ég setninguna á eftirfarandi hátt.

11)

- a. ... [hún] móðgaði alla dýrlingana í forbífarten og sagði Maríu mey að...
- b. Along the way, she insulted all the saints and told the Virgin Mary that...

Einnig notar Birkir Blær ensk orð í gegnum bókina og þýðir eða útskýrir þar á eftir merkingu orðsins á íslensku. Í þessum tilfellum ákvað ég að nota enska orðið og sleppa útskýringunni. Á blaðsíðu 30 skrifar hann:

12)

- a. Til er einfalt orð sem lýsir slíkum hugsunarhætti: *exceptionalism* eða undantekningahyggja á íslensku.
- b. There is a simple word that describes such mentality: exceptionalism.

Mér fannst ekki viðeigandi að bæta við *or undantekningahyggja in Icelandic*. Það sama gerði ég þegar Birkir Blær fjallar um bók Guðna Th. Jóhannessonar. Hann nefnir íslenskt nafn bókarinnar, *Sögu Íslands*, og útskýrir svo innan sviga að hún væri einungis gefin út

á ensku og nefnist *The History of Iceland*. Hér ákvað ég að sleppa útskýringunni innan sviga.

13)

- a. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, forseti, lýsir þessu á kjarngóðan hátt í bókinni *Sögu Íslands* (sem nefnist í raun *The History of Iceland og var einungis gefin út á ensku*).
- b. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson described this in a vigorous manner in his book, *The History of Iceland*.

Á hinn bóginn talar höfundurinn um bók Brunos Bettelheims *The Use of Enchantment* og segir þar á eftir hvernig má þýða nafnið á íslensku. Hér ákvað ég að nota orð og þýðing hans líka og sýna hvernig titil bókarinnar gæti verið þýdd á íslensku til þess að færa lesandann til móts við höfundinn. Á blaðsíðu 26 skrifar hann:

14)

- a. Áðurnefndur Bruno Bettelheim ritaði bók sem fjallar um áhrif þjóðsagna á sálarþel barna, er nefnist á ensku *The Use of Enchantment* og gæti útlagst sem *Nytsemd töfra* á íslensku.
- b. The aforementioned Bruno Bettelheim wrote a book about the impact of folktales on the psychology of children. In English, it is called *The Uses of Enchantment* and can be translated as *Nytsemd töfra* in Icelandic.

Í einu tilfelli notar Birkir Blær þýskt orð. Þar sem ég er með þýskan bakgrunn var það ekkert sérstakt vandamál en samt eitthvað að athuga. Hann skrifar efst á blaðsíðu 36:

15)

- a. Ég vil ekki hljóma eins og *besserwisser*, en skáld eru ekki séríslenskt fyrirbæri.
- b. I do not want to sound like a know-it-all, but poets are not a phenomena unique to Iceland

Orðaval höfundarins getur verið frekar óformlegt og í þessum tilfellum reyndi ég að endurspegla orðaval hans í marktættum líka. Á blaðsíðu 30 segir hann:

16)

- a. ...en hún þælir ekki í því, lítur aldrei inn á við. *Þetta reddast bara, hugsar hún, sjitt hvað þetta reddast bara.*
- b. ...but she does not give it any consideration and never takes a look inside. 'This will be fine', she thinks, 'shit, this will just be fine.'

Hér notar hann orðið *sjitt* sem er slangur aðlagð að íslensku og fannst mér viðeigandi að nota sama orð og höfundurinn *sjitt/shit* í staðinn fyrir að segja *oh, how this will just be fine* eða eitthvað í þeim dúr.

3.3.5 Orðatiltæki og orðasambönd

Nokkur orðatiltæki og orðasambönd komu fyrir í textanum sem ekki áttu hliðstæður á ensku. Í þessum tilfellum reyndi ég að finna orð eða orðatiltæki sem jafngiltu merkinguna í íslensku. Á blaðsíðu sjö skrifar Birkir Blær: „Svo gaf hún öllum langt nef...“

Það er alls ekki hægt að segja „she gave everyone a long nose“, á ensku. Í staðinn fyrir þetta notaði ég eftirfarandi orð:

17)

- a. Svo gaf hún öllum langt nef, sér í lagi almættinu.
- b. She was impolite to everyone, particularly to the Almighty.

Dæmi um orðasamband má finna í eftirfarandi setningunni: „Samt er það hann sem fær aktúalt að heita eitthvað í sögunni, hún fær ekkert að heita frekar en aðrar konur á Íslandi í gamla daga...“

Þegar ég las setninguna fyrst aðgreindi ég *ekkert* og *frekar en*. Ég veit hvað *ekkert* og *frekar en* merkir en í þessu samhengi vissi ég alls ekki hvernig að þýða orðin þar sem *frekar en* er venjulega notað til að gefa gagnstæða merkingu. Ég velti þessu lengi fyrir mér og spurði þá nágranna minn. Hann útskýrði orðasambandið strax og gaf mér annað dæmi um merkingu *frekar en* þegar einhver neitun kemur á undan eins og í *hún var ekki hissa, ekki frekar en venjulega* sem merkir að hún var ekki hissa eins og vant var. Í samræmi við þetta þýddi ég textann á eftirfarandi hátt.

18)

- a. Samt er það hann sem fær aktúalt að heita eitthvað í sögunni, hún fær ekkert að heita frekar en aðrar konur á Íslandi í gamla daga...

- b. Despite this, it is he who is actually given a name in the story. She is not given a name just like other women in Iceland in the old days.

3.3.6 Tilvísun

Þegar fjallað er um Ísland og atriði sem gerðist hér á landi er venjulega vísað til íslenska heimilda. Í allri bókinni vísar höfundurinn til íslenskra heimilda eins og í umfjöllun um hrúnið, EM ferðina og Panamaskjölin. Tilvísanir og tilvitnanir eru ekkert sérstakt vandamál þar sem sama þýðingaraðferð er notuð og í þýðingunni almennt. Á hinn bóginn notar höfundurinn nokkrar enskar heimildir líka. Í sambandi við þetta fannst mér ekki viðeigandi að þýða enska heimild, sem var þýdd yfir á íslensku, aftur á ensku. Heldur ákvað ég að finna upprunalegu heimildina og nota hana í þýðingunni eins og hún er. Hann notar orð Guðna Th. Jóhannessonar úr *Sögu Íslands* (e. *The History of Iceland*) og segir:

19)

- a. Svo mætti Ólafur einn daginn með fullmótaðan lista yfir eiginleika Íslendinga „sem útskýrði“ – svo ég noti orð Guðna Th. í *Sögu Íslands* – „hvers vegna íslenskir frumkvöðlar höfðu ítrekað betur en andstæðingar sínir. Eiginleikarnir voru byggðir á sögu landsins og snerust meðal annars um rótgróinn vinnukúltur, áhættusækni, aðdáun á ævintýramönnum á borð við víkingana og landnámsmenn, og orðstír og heiður.“
- b. T Then, Ólafur appeared one day with a fully-fledged list of characteristics of Icelanders, ‘that explained’ – using the words of Guðni Th. in *The History of Iceland* – ‘why Icelandic entrepreneurs repeatedly beat their competitors. With deep roots in the country’s history, these attributes were said to include a strong work ethic, a will to take risks, admiration for adventurers like the Vikings and settlers of old, and the belief in personal trust, honor and reputation.’

Lokaorð

Þessi ritgerð var lokaverkefni til BA-prófs í íslensku sem öðru máli við Hugvísindadeild Háskóla Íslands. Í ritgerðinni hefur verið rætt um þýðingar almennt, ýmsa fræðimenn á sviði þýðinga, um höfund bókanna (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns*, Birki Blæ Ingólfsson, um verkið sjálft og um þau þýðingavandamál sem komu upp í þýðingarferli bókanna. Viðfangsefni ritgerðarinnar var þýðing úr íslensku yfir á ensku á allri bókinni (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns* og um leið var markmiðið að gefa lesendum innsýn í menningarheim Íslendinga.

Ritgerðin skiptist í þrjú kafla og lauk á þýðingu bókanna. Í fyrsta kafla var sagt frá Birki Blæ og bók hans (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns* sem var gefin út árið 2017. Í öðrum kafla var stuttlega fjallað um þýðingar almennt, ýmis hugtök fræðimanna og þýðingaraðferðir sem þeir lögðu fram. Í kaflanum var stuttlega sagt frá sérfræðingum eins og Roman Jacobson, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Eugene Nida, Hans Vermeer og Katharina Reiss. Þriðji kafli var tileinkaður helstu vandamálum sem komu upp í þýðingarferlinu og hvernig þau voru leyst. Í þessum kafla voru tekin dæmi um menningarleg, setningafræðileg og málfræðileg atriði. Í lok ritgerðarinnar var ensk þýðing á allri bókinni (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns*.

Vinnan við þýðingu bókanna var krefjandi en á sama tíma var hún mjög áhugaverð, skemmtileg og lærdómsrík. Í gegnum verkefnið lærði ég mikið, bæði um frummálið, íslensku, og um markmálið, ensku. Þótt þýðingavinnan væri mjög tímafrek, var hún einnig afar gagnleg í ferð minni inn í heim íslenskrar menningar og tungumáls.

Í lok ritgerðarinnar langar mig að þakka öllum sem hjálpuðu mér með því að skrifa og klára ritgerðina, sér í lagi konunni minni sem las yfir þýðinguna, nágretta mínum sem las prófarkir og lagfærði málfar greinargerðarinnar og leiðbeinanda mínum, Þóru Björk Hjartardóttur, sem leiðrétti og endurskoðaði ekki bara ritgerðina nokkrum sinnum, heldur hvatti hún mig af og til að halda áfram að skrifa jafn og þétt og senda henni textann þótt hann væri ekki mikill. Hvatningin var mjög hjálpleg þar sem ég vann samfellt frá upphafi og þurfti ekki að klára allt í einu í aprílmánuði.

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Ensk þýðing á allri bókinni (*Þjóðar*)*sálin hans Jóns míns* eftir Birki
Blæ Ingólfsson

The (National) Soul of My Dear Jón

1

The funniest character from the annals of Icelandic literature is probably Jón's wife, who went up to heaven with the soul of her husband in a bag in order to smuggle the deceased into paradise. Along the way, she insulted all the saints and told the Virgin Mary that she was a deceiving tramp, thank you very much. And when Jesus Christ came to the doorway in person to request her to leave in his solemn tact, she did not make much of it and slung Jón's soul past him through the door, as if the Son of Man was the goalkeeper on a losing team in the Pepsi league²³.

She was impolite to everyone, particularly to the Almighty.

As mentioned, an old woman from the Icelandic countryside goes to heaven and teaches God the following lesson, 'No one closes the door to heaven to an Icelandic cottage farmer, even if he was "unfriendly, ill-reputed and in addition to this, lazy and useless at home.'" In other words, a hopeless individual, who had no business in heaven.

There is something peculiarly Icelandic about this.

2

There is something distinctively Icelandic about Leifsstöð²⁴. Personally, I consider it to be an excellent airport. In fact, many are of the same opinion as it has repeatedly been chosen as one of the best in Europe. The last time I passed through it, I came across an enormous billboard advertisement covering the entire wall, with a text in a loud font, 'One of the best.' It may certainly not pass anyone by as to how great Leifsstöð is and how wonderful Iceland is.

I was myself once invited to the fortieth birthday of a lawyer, who had printed a picture on the invitation of two gold medals he had received for running a marathon abroad. He could also have written, 'I want to invite you to rejoice with me. I am the object of celebration and do not forget how wonderful I am.' I still remember this as I found it so inappropriate. A short while later, I got the feeling that one would be able to see an inferiority complex here with his bare eyes, as he inadvertently managed to print it on the invitation.

Enough about that. As I newly walked past the banners at Leifsstöð, the theme soon became apparent. First, there was a magnificent picture of Icelandic nature

²³ The highest level men's football league in Iceland, also known as *Besta deild karla*.

²⁴ Keflavik International Airport, or Leif Erikson Air Terminal

advertised by Landsvirkjun²⁵, ‘Who needs coal if he has fire? Welcome to the land of reusable energy sources.’ This was followed by northern lights, snowfall, or something along these lines and above all of this was written, ‘Experience Iceland – its magnificent nature is an inspiration for various types of products’, and so on. Most advertisements centred around Iceland, the Icelandic nation, the nature, or the uniqueness of Icelanders. The directors of operation had sensed a need to cover the interior walls of the airport with praise for the country.

The flagship at Leifsstöð was the skyr²⁶-advertisement which, at least, sat the longest with me; a backlit billboard with a picture of two beautiful women, blue sky in the background, pure nature, underneath which was written, ‘Skyr, the secret behind the well-being of Icelanders.’

I would like to stop here for a moment. First of all, skyr is probably not the secret behind the well-being of Icelanders. Secondly, it is questionable to assume so shamelessly that Icelanders are particularly healthy since we, for instance, hold the record among the Nordic countries for childhood obesity and we drink more than other nations according to studies. What is then left of the advertisement? Nothing but SKYR and ICELAND.

The lack of content is fascinating, but on the other hand, a compelling question surfaces as well; why do we always have to pretend as if skyr is something special? I am aware that this is just an advertisement and that all of these sugared dairy products have to be sold in some way. This is, nevertheless, a fact, ‘We are the nation that considers skyr to be remarkable. Furthermore, we have faith in Icelandic vegetables and nothing equals the Icelandic tomato.’

I was in deep contemplation when I sat down in the plane. On the flat screen in the seat, it was written, ‘The most unbelievable fact about Iceland...is not the clean and pure water that pours out of our taps. Rather, it is the fact that over Christmas, we mix the carbonated appelsín drink²⁷ with distilled malt in order to acquire the one and only Christmas flavour.’ On my paper cup, it was written, ‘In Iceland, there are hot springs everywhere. They form when hot water rises from the bowels of the earth. The nation has utilised them to cook and bathe in for centuries.’ Endless national chauvinism. However, I felt a somewhat uncomfortable sensation. Something was fake; a sensation

²⁵ The National Power Company of Iceland

²⁶ An Icelandic cultured dairy product. Similar to a thick, creamy yoghurt.

²⁷ Carbonated orange drink, similar to Fanta.

not very different to someone laughing unnecessarily at a joke and you sense that the laughter is not real, but you sympathise with the person in question as it is sad to fake laughter.

I was on the way to Belgium and when the airplane landed, I started speculating as to what kinds of advertisements were awaiting me at the Belgian airport. I was certainly expecting a firework display since there is so much that Belgians can brag about. The headquarters of the European Union are in Brussels which, as a result thereof, is in a sense the central point of Europe. Belgium is the world's Mecca of chocolate, the best beer in Europe is brewed there, they have Belgian waffles, invented the saxophone, *The Communist Manifesto* was written in Brussels and I can carry on endlessly. After all, it is a country in the middle of Europe, where various main chapters of human history have been penned.

I walked across the jet bridge, not having slept well and numb in the body after a prolonged period of sitting. However, I was somewhat excited to experience Belgium in its true essence. I do not know what I was expecting; something, at least the slogan 'Inspired by Belgium'.

The first advertisement I saw was from an innovative company. It said, 'We use technology to save human lives.' The next advertisement was about coffee. Thereafter was a car advertisement and this was followed by an advertisement from Norway about oil. No matter where I looked, I did not find any advertisement which celebrated Belgium, or tried to capture a distinctive Belgian characteristic.

I stood there alone and soon became ashamed on behalf of my nation. All of a sudden, it dawned to me how remarkably tactless we are by welcoming Iceland's guests with turbo-charged self-righteousness, which is based on (among other things) phenomena such as skyr, without thinking about the fact that most guests come from the continent that discovered yoghurt.

Why are we so proud of nothing? The answer may be hidden in the heart of Jón's wife, as she watches over her dear Jón while he is on his deathbed, 'and when her husband became rather weak, she realised that he was not very well prepared for his death and that there was no doubt whether he would gain entry into heaven.' She knows, as it were, full well that he does not deserve to go to paradise, but this thought is unbearable. This is indeed her husband and he should deserve a place in heaven – 'do not pretend as if we are irrelevant, we are the central point!' And then she sets off towards God.

Does, perhaps, a similar fear reside in the heart of this small nation? That before the great court of law, we are not considered a nation among nations? Is this perhaps the reason we overemphasise ourselves? To assure the world – particularly ourselves – that we belong!

The wives of those who have a guaranteed place in heaven do not have to travel there to protest their partners in. Nations that are secure in their own skin and know for certain that they are considered nations, do not have to jump to their feet out of pure joy every time they are mentioned by name in the international press.

They do not have to pretend that skyr is remarkable. They do not have to ask, ‘How do you like Iceland?’, and produce the majority of their advertising campaign in order to assure the world that the nation in the country is ‘spunky’ and ‘inspiring’.

I beg your pardon, but skyr tastes like stale yoghurt that has been sitting in the sun for several weeks and hardened to a texture reminiscent of wood shavings – you need three times more milk to make skyr compared to yoghurt. The reason for this to have been adopted here is probably that we were used to eating spoiled food. Making skyr was commonly known across all of Scandinavia during the period of settlement, but it discontinued everywhere except here; perhaps because others learned to make yoghurt, which tasted better – everyone but us. The reason for this is that we were too isolated. And today we are doomed to wallpaper the hallway of the country with praise for skyr, simply because one of the things that truly affirms that we are a nation is skyr.

3

‘Once, a man and an old lady lived together. The man was rather unfriendly and ill-reputed and on top of that, he was lazy and useless at home. His wife disliked this very much. She scolded him often and said that he was good for nothing but spending what she brought to the house.’ This is how the story of *Sálin hans Jóns míns*²⁸ begins and I immediately sympathise with the wife, having to struggle through life with this impossible old man, slaving and grinding endlessly in order to provide for them and seeing him spend everything at once. Despite this, it is he who is actually given a name in the story. She is not given a name just like other women in Iceland in the old days. Yet, she maintains everything at home and is the hero of the story.

²⁸ *Sálin hans Jóns míns* (e. My dear Jóns soul) is an Icelandic folktale upon which this book and translation are based.

I imagine them sitting in the baðstofa²⁹ in the evening, with nothing between them but a silence that screams at them, ‘He is extremely hopeless. Can’t he just bloody kick the bucket?’ She naturally thinks about this half-heartedly, but is not hopeful that fate would answer her request. Subsequently, the husband falls ill and is finally going to die. The old lady then naturally becomes remorseful, as she cannot bear the thought of losing him. After all, they live alone on a distant farm and she feels how lonely she will be without him. He was perhaps not only a good-for-nothing lazybones, but also an important companion, as well as the backbone of her life. The reason for this is that in the end, Jón needed her and now, no one needs her any longer.

Then comes the moment I consider to be extremely fascinating, when Jón’s wife contemplates over what she can do for her beloved boor. Once the common people had wept enough at the funeral and sincerely prayed for the person in question, she thought to herself that it would be best for her to personally try and deliver the soul of her farmer. She does not beat about the bush and captures Jón’s soul in a bag.

This is a story about mania, about a woman who believes in something far from reality; that she can tread any path she pleases, even the one that leads to heaven.

The story of *Sálin hans Jóns míns* is particularly Icelandic – if [one] considers Terry Gunnell, Professor in Folkloristics at the University of Iceland – contrary to most folktales, which tend to be widely distributed and found in many similar publications. As such, Gilitrutt³⁰, for example, is in reality Rumputuski from the Grimms’ Fairy Tales. The story of Sæmundur the Learned and the seal initially revolves around Gerbert of Aurillac and comes from English Royal Tales. *The Deacon of Myrká* is not at all from Myrká, but an international wandering ghost. On the other hand, *Sálin hans Jóns míns* is completely Icelandic. We seem to be the only nation that has created a story about an old woman from the countryside, who goes to heaven with the intention of arguing with God Himself.

The story of *Jack and the Beanstalk* is, in fact, somewhat similar. A little boy climbs up into the clouds and there, he steals a precious treasure from a strange giant and kills him on top of that. However, it has certainly drawn the attention of many as to how immoral the story is. Personally, I find that there are two aspects in particular that distinguish these stories.

²⁹ This was a sort of living room in the olden days, where people would eat, sleep and do some handiwork. Stories would also be told and read out in the baðstofa, also known as *kvöldvaka*.

³⁰ The name of an ogress from an Icelandic folktale.

First of all, Jack has a fair reason to climb the beanstalk and steal the hen that lays golden eggs; his mother is poor, money is running out and they anticipate shortages, while the giant has more than enough. On the other hand, Jón's wife has nothing that resonates with justice to excuse her trip to heaven. She is merely rude in order to take a rather phoney [individual] into heaven. To hell with justice, to hell with the truth, to hell with whether or not he deserves it.

The other [aspect] is that Jack is only fighting with some giant, whereas Jón's wife is fighting with the Godhead Itself, the highest court of law, the ultimate truth.

The Godhead is a heavy concept and it takes various shapes in the world. However, I believe that the basic idea is rather simple, if one strips off its dogmas and politics; something exists in this world, which is higher than ourselves. Although we consider ourselves irreligious, or sceptics, this is a beautiful concept as it infuses our hearts with serenity. We develop humility, we sense our insignificance in the world, we acknowledge our weakness, we understand that we are not the centre of the world and we relinquish our vanity and egoism.

Note that Jón's wife does not doubt that God exists. It simply never occurs to her to mention Him in her own peculiarities. She does not think twice before she marches off towards heaven and insults all the workers in the courtyard of paradise before tossing Jón's soul through the door, against the will of Jesus Christ, and tramples the Godhead – and justice on top of that – under the soles of her own fancy.

‘A stone was then lifted from the old woman's heart, for Jón had entered heaven. And with that, she gladly returned home’, under the thunderous applause of the Icelandic general public, since Jón's wife is a hero in our literary heritage and the nation's entire compassion is with her. We adore her so much that the poet Davið Stefánsson saw a reason to compose an epic poem about her and on top of that, write a play, in full length, about the trip.

World literature boasts of a similar character, who considered himself above God and did not know how to admit his insignificance before the Godhead. This character is called Lucifer, who fell from heaven and now lives in the underworld, as the world knows that arrogance of this level is a cardinal sin.

Why is this? Are we in Iceland such staunch anarchists? I do not think so. I suspect this to be rooted in the national [identity] complexes. We have difficulties with

the concept that something can be greater than us. Few things are as toxic to the Icelandic nation as the concept of its own insignificance and pettiness.

This is, at least, my take from the gist of the story. However, as I was writing these pages, I discovered the fact that most people interpret the story as a criticism against the church and the authorities as such. In other words, it teaches us not to submissively accept everything the authorities order. Rather, to stand firm and not allow everything to trample over us. This is, as it were, an attempt to make Jón's wife like our Icelanders' Robin Hood. Everything would then have been good and blessed, if it wasn't for the unfortunate fact that Jón's wife is the villain of the story and not the chiefs in heaven.

There are many stories that are considered to be a criticism against the authorities, but what is common in most of them is that the authorities are corrupt and oppress their subjects. Therefore, one can shamelessly side with the hero as he refuses to follow the rules and turns on the authorities, armed with equity. Does it not sound funny to turn this around, where the authorities are with fair rules that apply equally to everyone, but the hero, nevertheless, refuses to follow them?

We then naturally face the question whether God in heaven has just rules and I do not trust myself to get to the bottom of this. I understand the criteria to be demanding and that it would be easier to put a camel through the eye of a needle than to enter paradise. As such, heaven is probably empty. However, one thing I can claim with rather certainty is that the rules, in principle, are standard and universal and people are not discriminated against. Additionally, it is absolutely clear in the story that Jón did not deserve to go to heaven and it was not because the rules were unfair. Rather, it was because he was 'unfriendly, ill-reputed and in addition to this, lazy and useless at home.'

Despite this, Jón's wife travels to heaven and her behaviour demonstrates a unique self-centredness. When Saint Peter answers, 'In fact, I have heard your Jón being mentioned, but never in a good way', she rudely replies, 'You have forgotten what happened to you a long time ago, when you disowned your master.' She then criticises the Virgin Mary, who also does not want to let him in [saying], 'I do not dare to do this, because your Jón was so immoral.' Jón's wife immediately answers back, 'I thought you knew that others could be frail like you, or do you no longer remember that you birthed a child without being able to name its father?' This continues in the same manner and from everything she says, one immediately sees that she has absolutely no grounds to

stand on; neither objective reasoning, nor impassioned prayers. One sees rays [of light] in some twisted idea that general rules do not apply to this couple.

Peculiarly Icelandic, or what? In any case, I will not agree that this is a compelling criticism of the authorities as such, similar to the criticism of the authorities, for example, when the department of analysis and research of the investment bank, Merrill Lynch, pointed towards the dire state of the Icelandic banks right before the crash. And Iceland's Minister of Education replied that those at the department of analysis and research probably had to re-educate themselves. This was not a criticism of the authorities. It was merely foolish, an echo of the same disrespect Jón's wife shows the workers in heaven in the folktale.

But why repeat this one pointless story to such an extent? 'Yes, folktales are only an innocent joke that people have concocted in half-heartedness in order to disseminate one's mind, when the Icelandic winter darkness threatened to crush the farm', is what someone probably says. This, in itself, is correct, but they are also a guide for the human soul.

Some fairy and folk stories evolved out of myths; others were incorporated into them. Both forms embodied the cumulative experience of a society as men wished to recall past wisdom for themselves and transmit it to future generations. These tales are the purveyors of deep insights that have sustained mankind through the long vicissitudes of its existence, a heritage that is not revealed in any other form as simply and directly, or as accessibly, to children.

This is what the child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim writes, who has researched the emotions and mental state of children, as well as folktales.

Let us take a closer look. Folktales are 'the legitimate daughters of the national ethos', writes Jón Árnason in the preface to *Icelandic Folk and Fairy Tales*. He continues, 'It can be argued that oral traditions were formed in and with the nation; they are the prose of the nation, its spiritual offspring for centuries on end and they describe its mentality and customs better than most other things.'

The concept of collecting folktales did not spontaneously pop up in Jón Árnason's mind. Rather, he imitated foreigners, especially the Brothers Grimm. When they started collecting German oral traditions, people were contemplating what it meant to be German. The brothers believed the answer to be hidden in folktales, that they expressed

the core values of the German nation and that the collection of stories would be the primary source of the nation's morals, values and traditions.

As mentioned, it has often been claimed that the essence of every nation is expressed in folktales; polished by thousands of tongues, chiselled into simple events, prepared for children on an unbreakable plate, which is passed on from person to person so that each subsequent generation is able to feed its young ones with the same fundamental truth.

These ideas are, in fact, controversial and many who dismiss all this as romantic tales, consider it absurd to read the characteristics of entire nations through various stories. They even consider it doubtful that such nations exist and that it is merely an old myth that people of the same nation do, in actuality, have something in common that can be called 'the national soul'. The kernel of truth is probably hidden in both perspectives, but we shall leave such discussions alone for now and presume that the Icelandic national soul exists.

In addition to this, I believe that most agree that folktales have some form of pedagogical value. Although the stories are simple on the surface, a metaphorical reality is hidden behind the simple plot; a hidden meaning that sinks in and reverberates in the unconscious mind. This is the reason for certain folktales to have been preserved for centuries on end, as they contain knowledge that people need to hear.

Icelanders are now a micro nation that lives on a bare rock, in cold darkness, just north of nowhere. It has long lived in such remarkable misery and wretchedness that it actually is a testament to the lack of initiative that people have not died. It is obviously quite evident why such a nation created a story about a controlling and temperamental old lady, who steamrolls over God. This is what people needed to hear; that they matter to some extent, despite their insignificance and misery.

The other question is more interesting; why is the main character of the story in reality a cheater, who does not contemplate over fairness, or justice, before she sets off on this tactless trip to Bjarmaland³¹. Could it be that this little nation does not have any self-determination? Or do we have to permit ourselves to make broader inferences? We should bear in mind that the nation could easily have created a story where Jón was wronged. It could have been so simple. He could have been diligent, hard-working and

³¹ Bjarmaland is a territory mentioned in Norse Sagas, generally referring to the southern shores of the White Sea. People travelled there in order to collect fur products. The journey was extremely dangerous, but those who returned home safely, became rich and famous.

loved and admired by all, but by mistake, they had forgotten to baptise him and due to this, he had to burn for eternity, or whatever. Instead, Jón was a scoundrel and generation after generation, it occurred to no one to change the story somewhat when it was read out in the twilight of the baðstofa, so that justice would be on Jón's side. One wonders, 'Was it because for generations on end, Icelanders wholeheartedly did not care about fairness?'

The best part about folktales is that they appeal to children. I personally remember how captivating the magical world of fairy tales was when I was younger, but then my imagination was better compared to today and I sat flabbergasted in the lap of my grandmother, listening to the story of *Sálin hans Jóns mín*s. When the wife held the pouch in front of her husband's nose and grabbed his soul as he passed away, I asked, 'How did she know that the soul leaves through the nose?' My grandmother replied, 'She just knew it.' I asked again, 'Does the soul always leave through the nose when a person dies?' And my grandmother replied. 'Yes.'

Little has a stimulating impact on the imagination of children that equals this enchantment of fairy tales. The story continues as 'the old lady closes the bag. She then goes to heaven and has the bag in her apron', and *voila!* Jón's wife has reached heaven in a single sentence and I sat absolutely astonished in my grandmother's lap [saying], 'How did she actually go to heaven?' My grandmother thought about this for a moment [and said], 'You can answer that yourself. She obviously walked, or do you think she had a helicopter? I shall tell you that at that time, they had not even invented wellies.' We then carried on reading and I wanted to read the story of *Sálin hans Jóns mín*s again and again and I was always as surprised when his wife went to heaven just like that.

The aforementioned Bruno Bettelheim wrote a book about the impact of folktales on the psychology of children. In English, it is called *The Uses of Enchantment* and can be translated as *Nytsemd töfra* in Icelandic. Bettelheim tackled questions such as what the best [method] is to help children find a purpose and meaning in life, neither more, nor less. In short, he believes that little is more suitable for this purpose than folk and fairy tales. '...it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions...while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality—and this without ever belittling...' Bettelheim believes that it is possible to learn more about human psychology from folk and fairy tales than from various other

stories that children can understand. ‘...[F]airy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind...’

And there I sat in the lap of my grandmother and listened to the story of *Sálin hans Jóns míns* open-mouthed. But in my unconscious mind, the following echoed like a hypnotising mantra, ‘Although you are just an ordinary old woman from the countryside, you are as powerful as God Almighty and you can go to heaven if you wish. And if the saints in heaven will create some obstacles then you should not hesitate to insult them and be impolite.’ In exactly this manner has the story resounded in the unconscious mind of the Icelandic nation for centuries on end, similar to a prescribed medicine for this deeply rooted inferiority complex that rests deep inside the national soul and spills over into everything we do.

4

‘Once, the man fell ill and was in a critical condition.’ We shall once again sit at the bedside of Jón’s wife, and watch over her husband. The air is unpleasant and damp on the farm, the wooden ceiling is mouldy, it has probably already gone dark, the husband finds it hard to breathe and his body is in death throes. At that moment, ‘she realised that he was not very well prepared for his death and that there was no doubt whether he would gain entry into heaven.’

We can certainly imagine the terror. She envisages him squirming in purgatory for eternity, just like an earthworm on a frying pan, only because he made the mistake of being a bully and a scoundrel while he was alive. She is heartbroken and we understand her; after all, it is her husband. Even when the most evil people die, there is someone somewhere who cries. However, Jón’s wife is a hardworking person and does not let it suffice to cry. Rather, ‘She thinks to herself that it would be best for her to personally try and deliver the soul of her farmer’, and then marches to heaven.

In this short incident, which fits in a few sentences, the [following] perspective becomes rather crystal clear: Jón’s wife is certain that general rules do not apply to her. First of all, she does not consider herself bound to the laws of nature and does not think twice before going to heaven. Secondly, she does not consider it an issue to ignore the general rules of heavenly justice and tramples them into the mud, like a rusty barbed wire, on her way to heaven – where she is determined to put her own version of the truth on paper.

This is fascinating about Jón's wife, but disturbing at the same time. She is just a farmer's wife and cannot walk to heaven, let alone overturn the verdict of the Heavenly Father. She must be aware of this deep down, but she does not give it any consideration and never takes a look within. 'This will be fine', she thinks, 'shit, this will just be fine.'

There is a simple word that describes such a mentality: exceptionalism. This is, as it were, the idea that a particular individual (or nation) is particularly remarkable and therefore, does not need to follow general rules. In principle, the folktale of *Sálin hans Jóns míns* speaks of an isolated, controlling and temperamental lady from the Icelandic countryside, who is in a rather bad state of exceptionalism. And I think that there, the story recaptures the essence within the Icelandic national soul. Are we not of the opinion that it is best to be here? [Where] the water is purest, the nation is healthiest, the food is most wholesome, the nature is most beautiful, the language is most sacred, [where it is] most liberal, [where] the quality of life is best and the skyr is most protein-rich? At least Bjarni Benediktsson, the Prime Minister, recently said that people must be insane not to be able to see how good it is to be in Iceland. And I believe this is Jón's wife speaking, standing at the threshold of heaven, shooting her mouth off.

There are many nations that consider themselves to be unique and the United States is perhaps the first that comes to mind, because the concept of exceptionalism was initially connected to the United States. After all, they like to look at themselves as the leaders of the free world. They can, in fact, find various matters to rationalise an idea like this, such as its unique history and regime, which marked epochs at their time. Philosophers and scholars have written scores of books about American exceptionalism and many articles as to whether it is factual, or fictitious. However this, at least, is a fairly defined concept.

What about the farmer's sympathetic wife, who neither looked to the right, nor to the left before she set off on foot towards heaven? How did it occur to her that she was exceptional and could reprimand God?

An attempted answer: Was it because she had long lived with merciless natural forces and was, therefore, able to do anything? Was it due to unique Icelandic characteristics, inherited from the Vikings? Are these strange answers? Possibly, but these are the explanations Icelanders present for their own superiority.

Last year, the Icelandic Ambassador to France was asked why Iceland performed so well in the European Football Championship. She pretty much answered word for word that much of it had to do with coming from Iceland; that its pure air and water and the Icelandic lamb and fish played a huge role and that the circumstances in the country had hardened us and moulded us in a way that we never give up.

This is such a poor explanation of our success in football that it is, in fact, difficult to come up with something worse. This is, nevertheless, a typical example of the discourse that permeates the society; a calm undercurrent in the depth of the society and we wobble on the surface like little paper boats, knowing that the Icelandic atmosphere is ‘fab’, the water is unique, as well as the Icelandic lamb and fish. Similarly, the vegetables are incredible and the Icelandic milk is without match. The Icelandic language is so ancient that it is essential for the world. Iceland is absolutely wonderful, it is inspirational to visit and priceless to grow up here and so on. All of us are familiar with this. This is the oft-repeated Icelandic theme that is played on a bent trumpet deep inside your head.

After Icelanders suddenly started doing well in the world in the 20th century, men pushed to explain this and discovered questionable results that were played like broken records on the nation’s gramophone for decades on end. President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson described this in a vigorous manner in his book, *The History of Iceland*.

‘...[T]he relatively harsh climate is habitually said to have shaped the Icelanders by exterminating weak individuals while those who endured became stronger through an endless fight with nature’, he writes and this is some of the classic explanation as to why Jón’s wife is able to reach heaven.

Believe me, this essay should not have discussed the crash. It should have discussed the Icelandic horse, Icelandic vegetables, Eurovision and the Icelandic Gleðibankinn³², Icelandic manuscripts and the Icelandic blade of grass, which sounds more beautiful than all other blades of grass. In other words, the essay should have been enjoyable. Many essays have already been written on the Icelandic financial crash. We have analysed it plentifully and drawn plenty of lessons from it. We have forgotten about it plenty of times and I do not want to discuss it. Unfortunately, however, as I was collecting material, I

³² Translated as *The Bank of Joy*. This is the name of the song the Icelandic band ICY played on the Eurovision contest of 1996, the first year Iceland took part in the competition.

realised that in an essay like this, it is impossible to ignore the crash and the state of the nation's soul just before the crash. The reason for this is that there, the epitome becomes manifest; there, the condition of Jón's wife becomes crystal clear without any contamination. Prior to the crash, we were all Jón's wife, halfway to heaven with a dead scoundrel in a bag, willing to ride roughshod over the saints and God. After all, he has to re-educate himself if he is not dead already.

Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, the President at the time, marched at the forefront of the party, as is explicitly mentioned in the Parliament's research report, and presented a flawless theory on the superiority of Icelanders, which he based on, 'unique Icelandic characteristics, inherited from the Vikings', and proclaimed it across the entire world. 'The key to the success, which the international expansion has left behind, is concealed in the culture, in the heritage the new generations have been endowed with since birth, in the society that the struggle for existence of the past centuries gave us and in the views and traditions that are the essence in the culture of Icelanders', he said in a speech.

The working culture from the era of seafaring and farming in previous centuries, when there was a struggle to save the catch and the hay yield, regardless of the time, has clearly transformed into an entrepreneurial spirit in the difficult field of international trade. The roots of Icelandic culture now form the determination of an innovator and spirit of enterprise, which fit well with the needs of the international market. As such, the sparse population of the past benefits us in the era of globalisation,

he said in the next [speech].

Then, Ólafur appeared one day with a fully-fledged list of characteristics of Icelanders, 'that explained' – using the words of Guðni Th. in *The History of Iceland* – 'why Icelandic entrepreneurs repeatedly beat their competitors. With deep roots in the country's history, these attributes were said to include a strong work ethic, a will to take risks, admiration for adventurers like the Vikings and settlers of old, and the belief in personal trust, honor and reputation.'

One can almost say that it is a magnificent experience to read this list, because they [the characteristics] are extremely insane. For example, the ability to create [something] is one of the unique qualities of Icelanders and according to the former President, 'Icelanders had always admired their poets and their creation. This ability would now be 'the creation of the poets', who enjoyed respect.'

I do not want to sound like a know-it-all, but poets are not a phenomena unique to Iceland. While Icelanders were writing *Konungsbók*³³, Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy*. When Jónas wrote, ‘Snemma lóan litla í³⁴’, more than 200 years had passed since Shakespeare wrote, ‘To be or not to be.’ As such, I do not know if Icelanders have admired their poets more than other nations. Here, everyone died of starvation, drank themselves to death in isolation, or fell down the stairs. Therefore, it is silly, at best, to mention the respect for poets in order to support the superiority of Iceland in the global community.

More philosophers added to the fire when Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson appeared on *Ísland í dag*³⁵ in order to discuss the Icelandic financial crisis and scientifically explain how Viking expansions generated capital, which was previously not in use and blah, blah, blah. ‘Think about the fact that the banking system has increased between seven and tenfold in around four, or five years. And think about how wonderful it would be if we just continue and push forward’, he said, excited like a little boy on Christmas, and wanted to sell [his] knowledge abroad.

It is tempting to imagine these same scholars in panel discussions, talking about Jón’s wife’s stroll to heaven. ‘There is naturally no doubt’, says one of them with a philosophical look, ‘that Jón’s wife has a lot of experience in walking. She has walked since she was little and not only that, she has walked through tussocks, marshes and particularly on mountains. She has walked across heathlands in order to collect sheep. It is in her DNA to walk uphill and it is but natural that she then walks to heaven.’ The next one enters [the conversation] and is babbling due to his eagerness. ‘Just think about how wonderful it would have been if she had just carried on, pushed forward, stormed straight past these old jumping jacks in the skies, crossed the atmosphere of the earth to examine space and shoot Iceland right to the top in astronomy.’ The third one explains that she thought very highly of poets. ‘After all, a poet lived on the next farm, who wrote a number of poems and she had read them all. Nevertheless, poets are stargazers and mostly compose into the sky, ‘up, up my soul’, and all that. Due to this, it is natural that Jón’s wife had gone to heaven and not any place else.’ The fourth adds that consider this well

³³ *Konungsbók*, or *Codex Regius*, is an Old Norse manuscript, containing the 29 poems that scholars generally designate as the Poetic Edda. It is considered an Icelandic treasure and is the best-known of all Icelandic books.

³⁴ First stanza of *Heiðlóarkvæði*, a poem written by Jónas Hallgrímsson.

³⁵ Icelandic TV programme, discussing various contemporary issues, translated as *Iceland today*.

that Jón's wife had killed God long before Nietzsche did (and we agree with him and we also know that Leif Erikson discovered America before Cristopher Columbus, without speculating about the meaning of 'discover' and whether something can be found if it continues to be lost). In this manner, the scholars endeavour to concoct scientific explanations that the wife of a farmer goes to heaven, without considering that she has no ground to stand on.

Before we depart from the time prior to the crash, we have to dive into the report the Icelandic government had prepared about the image of the country and the nation. This report was submitted in March, 2008. In the report, it was boldly summarised on the very first page, 'It is important to ensure that Iceland continues to remain "the best in the world" – the land that offers its nation the best quality of life possible.' This was approximately six months before the nation collapsed. This document must be considered as one of the treasures of Iceland's history; the offspring of the nation in a mania, the essence of the time compiled in a report and honourable clerks getting together, placing the stamp of the nation on fallacies.

One of the first things they do is make out the image of the nation in the eyes of foreigners; yes, they are going to pimp up the ship of state and it is important to know where one should start. 'The image of Iceland is generally positive, but [regarded] very weak and small abroad if the data at hand is considered. For the most part, Iceland seems to be an unknown mass', says the committee. And now, I am just going to be so bold [and say that] we are a small nation on the edge of the world. As such, it is perhaps just natural for us not to be extremely large in the perception of the world. The committee that wrote this report was not of the same opinion and wanted to immediately 'form a positive and strong image of people, economic life, culture as well as nature.'

In and of itself, I find it a dubious idea to form an image. In my mind, an image should form by itself and reflect who you are, rather than how you want others to experience you. The one who puts his energy into forming an image could personally end up believing something that is not quite true. But I know that I am on a slippery slope here. Where do I find the true colours of Iceland? These are endless thoughts, especially in the era of smartphone adoption, where everyone is on social media and where reality takes place online. Everyone polishes their own image with a nail file and which is more realistic, reality or the digital appearance? I do not dare to answer this. We are an animal

species that lives in a fiction and for the last six months, have we Icelanders concocted compelling prose about us being an unusually tough and inspiring nation that loves nature and so on. And we believe this with a childish sincerity, exactly as Jón's wife believed that she could match God.

Back to the committee and the image it decided to paint of Iceland:

A constructive image formation must be built on characteristics of the country and nation that are real, or 'authentic' and have deep roots. The research that was conducted over the past weeks, brought to light a great consensus of the nation in relation to these characteristics. People believed that a desire for freedom and joy to work had accompanied Icelanders ever since its settlement. The ability to adjust and perseverance are considered to be in the DNA of Icelanders and have allowed the nation to survive in an inclement land, with harsh natural forces. These characteristics were reflected in the great joy of creation, the unshakeable optimism and the belief in the ability of tenacious Icelanders in order to produce the impossible.

Now, I do not believe that many out there would be willing to undersign this description today as did on that day and I do not want to quarrel with people without any solid arguments. Therefore, it is not useless to have *The History of Iceland* by Guðni Th. on hand. There, he proficiently criticises the report [saying], 'Academic historians protested or shook their heads over this "outdated" and nationalistic view of history.'

There is that, but the committee continues and is just starting. The report is lengthy, only 88 pages and therein, one absurdity follows the other.

The untamed forces of nature have a counterpart in the lack of discipline and in the oftentimes bold and unpredictable behaviour of Icelanders. But these qualities are not to be feared, since they have played a significant role in the nation's struggle for existence. They are to be celebrated and utilised.

I repeat, this lack of discipline and unpredictable behaviour is perhaps amusing at a party, but this was six months before the nation collapsed into a financial sewer.

Early in the summary of the report appears one of the main conclusions of the group, which suggests, 'It is necessary to underline the special characteristic that distinguishes Iceland and Icelanders from other nations and which others cannot so easily claim to possess. Natural power is a distinction of Iceland. It distinguishes the country and nation from others and gives Iceland a unique status.' This idea seems to be so

fundamental that the group sees a reason to illustrate it particularly, with a two-dimensional picture of a volcano, which symbolises the image of Iceland; erupting volcanoes in the bowels of the nation and the natural power, the solitary property of Iceland, neither more, nor less, which distinguishes us from the others.

Iceland sits on a hot spot. There, the magma flows up from the axis of the earth, hotter than almost everywhere else. Hawaii also sits on a hot spot. In fact, so do the Galápagos Islands and Yellowstone in the United States. I do not know how many hot spots there are in the world, although I have spent a good time googling this. However, after a short perusal through the internet, I know that there is a phenomena by the name Ring of Fire, which is some form of a fracture zone of the earth, in the shape of an upside down horseshoe, encircling the Pacific Ocean. More than 75% of the world's volcanoes are located there and approximately 90% of the world's earthquakes take place there. And Iceland is not situated in the Ring of Fire. There are hot spots in many places of the world, for example, across the western coast of the United States and South-America.

As mentioned, the goal was to build on 'real' and 'authentic' characteristics of the nation and the committee concluded that natural power is Iceland's distinguishing quality; speaking of a breach of reality. And from this point on, Jón's wife sets off towards heaven, because the office decides, 'to close this report with the "boldest" ideas which, among other things, are even considered compatible with the ideology that has been proposed and they are a way to receive positive attention from the world press.' They are, among other things, eradicating illiteracy in the world, which the committee considers a worthy task for the great historical nation. And they are inviting children from conflict areas on a week-long visit to Iceland and making them Icelandic representatives of peace in our war-torn world.

This report was in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office and someone could, perhaps, describe it as state-sponsored mania on steroids. Not me, I have a sense of propriety. But I still find it funny how naturally the authors believed that Iceland took the lead in these various fields. 'Iceland is the best in the world', we believed and did not have to deliberate over it any further; just decide where the superiorities would come to light.

Then came the crash and humbled us for a moment.

In the summer of 2016, the Icelandic men's national team went to the European Football Championship and performed extremely well and everything accelerated again, just as Jón Trausti Reynisson wrote, 'Due to the success of our national team in the European Football Championship, we have once again started talking about the unique "nature" of Icelanders. We have also once again started talking about how it is better here than elsewhere, in explanation of how we are better than others.'

There is, in fact, yet another characteristic of Jón's wife that becomes crystal clear in the Icelandic nation's reaction to the national team's success in the EM. That is, we set the Icelandic record in trips abroad in this month of June and Umboðsmaður Skuldara³⁶ said after the tournament that there was a crazy amount to do, because a sizable number had emptied their cards and flown after the national team in order to take part in the miracle. And as a result, they had become bankrupt. An incredible amount of people seemed to have shrugged off that they did not at all have the means to jaunt to France.

Yes, Jón's wife lives a good life in the nation's mind, despite us having fallen to the ground not more than nine years ago. She is such a sneaky devil. She nestles in the back of the head and whistles in a soft voice, 'You can reach heaven if you wish. You do not have to listen to God. Who in fact is this God? Does He have any knowledge of the world? At least you have been in it. He should much rather have bowed down to you.' It is so nice to listen to her, especially if a person lives in a cold and dark country on the edge of the world, which is so little that it is not actually counted among the community of nations.

Most of us are well enough mannered to pretend that she is not there and not proclaim her words directly into society. However, some do not have a sense of propriety. Sigmundur Davíð, for example, held a speech in the central committee meeting of the Progressive Party, where he mentioned the autocracy of the financial system and asked whether it would be possible to change this and ensure younger generations a better quality of life. He then answered himself,

Yes, it is possible. This has been successful in one country. In one country, a party challenged the international financial system, in fact, its grimmest manifestation, and prevailed. We, the members of the Progressive Party and we, Icelanders, are

³⁶ Debtors' Ombudsman, a non-governmental organization in Reykjavik, Iceland, providing assistance to those in financial difficulties.

a role model for the world in the sense that it is possible to challenge this most powerful system and subdue it.

This is, of course, only Jón's wife, fresh out of heaven, explaining to a full room of party members how she outwitted God, 'the most powerful being' in the world.

The beauty of all this is that we believe him. Deep down, we agree, because there is always someone saying this; that Iceland has been exceptionally successful in dealing with the consequences of the financial crisis. Iceland let the banks collapse, which was brilliant. Iceland could drop the exchange rate of the krona in order to support the financial system and so on. This echoes in the society. This is in the milk. The wind hums this continuously and Sigmundur is just a spokesperson for us all, who dares to say this without hesitation and without censoring himself. Is this true? I do not know. I am not a specialist of comparative financial affairs. I just hear this indirectly like a silent chorus and do not know if this is true, but have long started believing it.

Jón's wife is the core of our composition, the composition *Iceland*; this intricate symphony. Another form of this theme becomes manifest in the special treatment culture that permeates the society. Since Jón's wife goes up and asks for special treatment, nothing seems more obvious than bending God's universal rules so that Jón can enter paradise. And Icelanders often seem to respect rules to the same extent.

In the year 1935, for example, the Icelandic authorities sold, 'salted fish to Italy in abundance, gladly ignoring the League of Nations (predecessor of the United Nations) trade embargo, which was imposed after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.' This is what President Guðni writes in *The History of Iceland* and still sympathises with the Icelandic nation because, 'the self-interest was of course understandable. The new state was struggling to stand on its own feet.' And this is exactly how we conceive rules; they are nice as decoration, a nice guideline, but as soon as someone has to stand on his own feet and the burden of rules stand in the way, they are disregarded.

A memorable example of the essence of Jón's wife manifested itself when Europe placed collective rules on pollution from incineration plants. The Icelandic authorities considered the threshold too strict and believed that the incineration plants here in Iceland did not have the financial means to fulfil the requirements. As such, Iceland asked to be exempt from these pan-European rules and emphasised 'the unique circumstances of

Iceland'. If the report of Ríkisendurskoðun³⁷ from the year 2011 is considered then people believed that due to the situation of the country, 'the impact of acidic gases on its surroundings would be little and investments into fulfilling the directives would be unnecessary.' Of course, an exception was granted and instead, Icelandic incineration plants had to keep a close eye on emissions and be mindful of regular recordings, which they did not do, of course. Rather, they violated the agreement over and over again. Meanwhile, Umhverfisstofnun³⁸ did not take a stand and pretended as if nothing had happened. Thus, a shocking disregard for rules on all avenues of this matter was displayed, which ended by having to kill an entire livestock in Skutulsfjörður, because the incineration plant Funi had contaminated the entire fjord with dioxide, which is counted among the most poisonous substances that can be found in the environment.

I can mention many such examples in addition. Once, Ölgerðin Brewery was exposed for selling industrial salt for food production and it had done so for 13 years. When the case found its way to Matvælastofnun³⁹, the institution made little of it and agreed to sell the remaining salt, despite it being a breach of food laws. Or the cadmium case in relation to Skeljungur⁴⁰. Or the brown egg case where one chicken farm decided to place organic eggs on the market without thinking about what is required for an egg to be considered organic. And the authorities knew for years that the chicken farm had disregarded all rules regarding food production and did nothing in this case.

Thus, it seems to be in our DNA to ignore general rules, just as MP Smári McCarthy points towards when he writes that the brown egg case revolves 'not around an egg, but around stories that we tell ourselves about the society we live in', where 'special treatment is the rule and a whole bunch of people truly believe that everything would be better only if special treatment would be meted out to them personally as well. If we want to change this then we have to depart from this culture of special treatment.' However, this is something we will probably not do, because special treatment is completely inherent to us. We even read folktales about this to our children.

Nevertheless, the most outstanding manifestation is probably the Icelanders' ownership of offshore companies because, considering the population, no other country in the world had as many representatives in the Panama papers as Iceland. Not only did

³⁷ The Icelandic National Audit Office

³⁸ The Icelandic Environment Agency

³⁹ The Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority, also known as *MAST*

⁴⁰ Icelandic oil company, previously known as *Shell á Íslandi* (e. Shell in Iceland)

they set the record based on population, Icelanders also clearly set the record for Nordic countries in terms of the number of individuals and companies in the papers. 600 Icelanders appear there, only 500 Swedes (even though 30 times more people live in Sweden compared to Iceland) and about 200 Norwegians. This is nothing strange, because an ‘offshore company’ is but a synonym for special treatment, which became the national sport after Jón’s wife set the Icelandic record by evading God’s general rules.

This is not a full-blown evaluation, just a drafted list, which you may enjoy filling out, because Jón’s wife is far and wide and she knows that there is some chap up in heaven, having stacked a pile of rules, standardised scales and all sorts of requests. However she, of course, considers it most natural to ram her beloved past the system. And this is the Icelandic government, the Icelandic society and the Icelandic authority of acquaintances in a nutshell.

How did one nation manage to convince itself so thoroughly that it is outstanding, unique and lives in the ‘largest’ country of the world? This is a natural question, which one does not have to try to answer. It is too complicated, way too many parts in the equation and the outcome will inevitably be built on sand.

However, I think to know why Jón’s wife arrives at the same result. And I particularly state that here, the intention is not to formulate a theory that withstands criticism, or applies equally to the Icelandic nation. I just want to present the idea, similar to a silhouette playing on the wall for a moment before it disappears. The answer is ‘isolation’. Jón’s wife lives in a remote valley with her farmer, chickens, a few sheep and perhaps some buttercups. And when misconceptions take root, there is no one nearby to remove them. She might have been recognised once from the farmers’ association for her exceptional sheep farming and the certificate of recognition is her honour and pride, framed and hanging on the wall in the baðstofa. She takes a look at it every day and thinks to herself, ‘I am the best farmer’s wife in the world’, and have reached halfway to heaven. However, if there were farms in the neighbourhood, she would soon discover that there too is an exemplary farm and that perhaps there too a [certificate of] recognition hangs on the wall.

As such, the isolation becomes the basis of her self-image. She easily reaches the conclusion that she is exceptional, because she has no comparison anywhere.

There is one thing I have intentionally ignored until now: Jón's wife reaches heaven and enters her farmer into paradise despite it being impossible. Exactly when the man she loves is lost, she captures him in a bag and takes him to heaven for eternal bliss. And we love her for this.

The nation in this country knows what it is like to take on an impossible task, to be crushed by the winter darkness, but still remain in hope for spring to come at some point. It knows what it is like to eke out a living, century after century, in this wretched hell, to eat manuscripts in order to prolong one's life for a few more days, to stand face to face with the mountains and feel truly how less they could care, although the entire nation is starving to death. Let us just take a look at the century of disaster when all European nations were blooming, while the mist hardships shook Iceland. Every fifth individual died and it was proposed to relocate the nation to Jutland, because it was hopeless to stay here. In other words, hopelessness was the daily bread of Icelanders and therefore, Jón's wife is a saint. She was the Icelandic hero, probably the most Icelandic hero of all time. If we were to run into her, we would bow down and thank her, because she might be the reason for making it possible to live here these approximately thousand years since the Norwegian nomads came here by mistake.

It is also possible to interpret the story in a different way. This is, for example, a gender-political story. Or is this not the story of many Icelandic women, having borne the heat and burden of domestic life, raising children and in addition to that, having become a maid for their husbands, encouraging them through the ranks of society when they were unable to do so on their own account? In relation to Jón's wife, this devotion goes beyond the grave. Helgi Seljan, a television personality, held an interesting speech at the Fisherman's Festival in the year 2010. And instead of praising fishermen, he spoke about the wives of fishermen and their heroic acts who, for one reason or the other, seem to have never found their way into the annals [of history], despite the fact that they have carried the world on their shoulders in the absence of their husbands – who sometimes never returned home. 'They have composed their poem in the mist on the windows of the laundry rooms, while they lulled [their children] to sleep with the other [hand]', said Helgi and pointed out that despite this, no one had bothered to erect a memorial for them, or compose an ode for them. However, the story of Jón's wife is perhaps a memorial for the plight of Icelandic women throughout the centuries. Here, she laughs in the face of

the Almighty and defies the laws of nature to keep her domestic life in order and gets nothing in return, not even her own name.

The legacy of Jón's wife lives on today, even though Icelanders have moved out of mud huts and are occupying the first place in terms of living standards. We are a small nation that just about exists. Yet, we went to the EM and beat England. We are prepared to win the Eurovision every year. We are the world champions in CrossFit and have won silver in the Olympic Games of 2008. We have had the world's strongest man for years on end, various Miss Worlds, Nobel Prize authors and musicians on an international scale. We run the public healthcare system, the educational system, seven universities, a symphony orchestra and who knows how many banks. None of this is possible, but we do it nevertheless, without particularly thinking about it. This is, of course, due to Jón's wife – all of this is as absurd as the farmer's old wife laying the law down for God.

The magic of Jón's wife is hidden in the fact that she never lets doubt get in her way, not even for a split second. She decides to go to heaven, immediately sets off and like that, she has reached the gates of paradise and started hurling insults at Saint Peter before it occurs to her that this could be a bad idea. She is then done insulting Virgin Mary and throwing her husband past Christ before we know it. She is never critical of herself and this is the exact same mentality that enables the Icelandic nation to be a nation.

Mark Twain has said that to succeed in life, you need two things: ignorance and confidence. Jón's wife is nothing but ignorance and confidence in their purest form, intertwined into one person – or better said, one nation.