

**GUÐRÚN H. FINNSDÓTTIR:**  
**TRANSLATION THEORY IN PERSPECTIVE**  
**AND**  
**ITS APPLICATION**

**By**  
**Árný Huguín Hjaltadóttir**

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

Department of Icelandic  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

© October, 2005



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**Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir: Translation Theory in Perspective and its Application**

**By**

**Árný Huguín Hjaltadóttir**

**A Thesis Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree  
of  
Master of Arts**

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## Abstract

The following creative thesis is primarily an English translation of five short stories by the Icelandic writer Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. Since the underlying purpose of this work is to get the reader to step into the shoes of the translator, one will find discussions and demonstrations on the process of translation and the technical and ethical difficulties that come with it. The first chapter consists of an overview of the history of translation theory. The second chapter is a discussion of the translation model I have chosen to use for the analysis of the short stories translated in this thesis. I have chosen William Frawley's theory of recodification, which is a strong contemporary method. In this chapter, excerpts from some of the Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir short stories are used to demonstrate how this translation theory works. The third chapter is a brief biographical sketch of Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir's life as well as analysis of her stories. Chapters four to eight are translations of five short stories by Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir, *A Dream*, *The Tree of Knowledge*, *Duty to One's Country*, *The Thrift Shop*, and *From Generation to Generation*, all with comments in the footnotes regarding some of the difficulties encountered during the translation process, for example the transfer of semiotic elements, cultural and religious codes between languages.

## Acknowledgements

I have come to an end of a long journey; it has been interesting, frustrating and a fascinating process. Many people have helped me to arrive at my destination.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Birna Bjarnadóttir for having taken me under her wing this past academic year for the last leg of this travel into the process of translation and translation theory. She has been superbly supportive and a fantastic facilitator, always ready to give advice and very positive in her approach. I won't forget that without her I would not be writing these acknowledgements.

Without the help of Dr. David Arnason I wouldn't have finished at all. He took me on when I had nowhere else to go for advice and in the end was instrumental in seeing to it that I could complete this journey. He introduced me to translation theory and its many facets. He gave me many valuable suggestions for the setup of the academic requirements of the thesis.

I thank Dr. Dennis Coolie for his many useful suggestions and corrections on my final copy as well as his many interesting questions during my oral examination. Since I am a visual person I love to find written remarks in the margins of any work I submit to a professor.

Dr. George Toles gracefully chaired my oral examination. Thank you for your time and interest in my thesis.

During the 1990-1991 academic year I worked with Dr. Kirsten Wolf, then Chair and Head of the Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba on a translation project. We translated short stories by various Icelandic-Canadian authors from Icelandic to English, which was published as the book *Western Icelandic Short Stories* in 1992 by

the University of Manitoba Press. Thus initially I have to thank Dr. Kirsten Wolf for having been instrumental in introducing me to the art of translation.

Last, but not least, I give thanks to my daughter, Ísól Michelle Levesque, whom I taught to read at the age of three. She has read and reread all my work and given me many great suggestions and comments. Without her support and encouragements the road would have been tougher to travel. Ísól, you are the greatest.

Over the years I have received the following scholarships: University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship, Thorsteinn J. Gislason Memorial Scholarship, Heidmar Bjornson Memorial Scholarship and H. V. Larusson Price. I am grateful for this financial support.

**For my father**

**Hjalti Jónsson**

**1909 – 1984**

who taught me to read at the age of four  
and introduced me to the world of books



## Union

“Union is the fusion of two divinities to create a third one; the binding together of two strong in their love against an adversary weak in its hating.

‘Tis the casting away by two spirits of discord and their oneness with unity.’”

Kahlil Gibran's, *A Tear and a Smile*  
Translated by H. M. Nahmad  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf (1978): 100

Hávamál

76.

Deyr fé,

deyja frændr,

deyr sjalfr it sama;

en orðstírr

deyr aldregi,

hveim er sér góðan getr.

*Eddukvæði (Sæmundar-Edda)*

Fyrri hluti Guðni Jónsson (bjó til prentunar)

Akureyri: Prentverk Odds Björnssonar h.f. (1980): 41-42

## Chapter 1.

**“Translation is one of the most difficult task that a writer can take upon himself.”<sup>1</sup>**

### Translation Theory in Perspective

In the past, translators have received little recognition and much criticism for their hard work. Although translations and studies of the said discipline have been practiced for centuries, Translation Studies as a discipline on its own is relatively new. As translation is explored through the ages, one finds many theories emerge and when combined they form the modern discipline of translation theory.

Translation and translators have been around for centuries, and according to Eric Jacobsen it is a Roman invention.<sup>2</sup> The Romans practiced many forms of translating and it was an important part of their educational system, taught along with grammar and rhetoric. Both Cicero and Horace discuss the difference between *word for word* and *sense for sense* translations. Cicero stresses the importance of creating balance between imitation and reason. “If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order of wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.”<sup>3</sup> Cicero and Horace emphasize that the artistic measure of the Target Language (TL) creation is more important than being faithful to the Source Language (SL) text.<sup>4</sup> The art of translating was important to the Romans and the translator’s duty was to the TL readers. Horace, in his *Art of Poetry*, advises the translator to be bold and take liberties with the source language text:

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<sup>1</sup> Quirk, Randolph. *The Linguist and the English Language*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1974) 97.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobsen, Eric. *Translation, A Traditional Craft*. (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Cicero. *De optimo genere oratorum*, Loeb Classical Library, transl. H. M. Hubbell (London: Heinemann, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> The abbreviations TL-Target Language, SL-Source Language will be used throughout the text.

A theme that is familiar can be made your own property so long as you do not waste your time on a hackneyed treatment; nor should you try to render your original word for word like a slavish translator, or in imitating another writer plunge yourself into difficulties from which shame, or the rules you have laid down for yourself, prevent you from extricating yourself.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Roman translators took great liberties with the SL text since they felt being accurate was not as important as keeping the poetic sense intact.

To the Romans, translation was a way in which their literature, as well as their language, could be enriched. The borrowing of words was so common that Horace, on the one hand, advised the writer to use new words sparingly, and on the other, to avoid the danger, which the 'slavish translator' might encounter. Horace and Cicero both saw the art of translating to be a careful, sensible process, where the interpretation of the SL text "produced a TL version based on the principle *non verbum de verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu* (of expressing not word for word, but sense for sense),"<sup>6</sup> and the translator's duty was to the TL reader.

Greek, being the language of culture, enabled the educated Roman to read the Greek text and therefore to compare the TL text to the SL text. This wouldn't be available to the monolingual reader whose only access to the SL text would be through the TL translation. This fact makes the position of both the translator and reader in the Roman period somewhat different than if the translation would have been rendered for a monolingual audience. It gave the translator more freedom and the opportunity to use it

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<sup>5</sup> Horace, *On the Art of Poetry*, in *Classical Literary Criticism*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965) 77-97.

<sup>6</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. *Translation Studies*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1994) 44.

“as an exercise in comparative stylistics, since they were freed from the exigencies of having to ‘make known’ either the form or the content per se, and consequently did not need to subordinate themselves to the frame of the original.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, being good at his work, the translator assumed that his readers would know the SL and would judge his work on the basis of how creative he was in rendering the SL text into the TL and not necessarily on how accurate he was.

The uniqueness of Roman translation lies in the fact that they saw translation as a literary production, which followed a fixed canon when dealing with linguistic boundaries.

According to T. R. Steiner, a theory of translation did not exist in the Middle-Ages and the early Renaissance periods. The main purpose of translation was didactic, and moralistic overtones were considered more important than style. Although translation theory was first formulated by the French humanist Etienne Dolet (1509-46); in his paper *La Maniere de bien traduire* (1540), and Steiner thinks that “Jacques Peletier included some sophisticated remarks in his *Art Poétique* (1555), no theory in any true sense was developed.”<sup>8</sup> It was not until George Chapman (1559-1634), the great translator of Homer, who first mentioned his concern for translation theory in his introduction to the *Seven Books of the Iliad* (1589), that translation theory began to be developed. In the complete *Iliad* (1611) he developed his theory to a much greater extent than in 1589 and his theory became the foundation for future theorists. As T. R. Steiner put it: “Chapman’s

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Steiner, T. R., *English Translation Theory 1650-1800*. (Assen; Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975) 8.

were the most important of the new ideas available to Denham, Cowley, and their contemporaries, who were to form Neoclassical principles.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapman surpassed his contemporaries, such as Ben Jonson, Holiday, and others, who adhered to a literal theory. He shunned word for word translation and strove to maintain the spiritual intercourse between the translator and the author of the original work and to keep the poetics and all of the creative energy of the original. He also attempted to “inhabit the consciousness capable of this particular work.”<sup>10</sup> According to T. R. Steiner, Jonson praised Chapman’s translation of Hesiod and Homer, and even though other translators in Jonson’s time (1610-1635) did not demonstrate their support for Chapman, they did not denounce him either. Jonson and his followers were perhaps not so different from Chapman in their approach to translation as one might think. Jonson, who used poetic metaphor, in his praise of Chapman's translation of Hesiod and Homer, suggested that the original and the translation should be equal in every way and not just focused on the words. To him literal translation was not the way to achieve a proper translation. Chapman went one step farther than his contemporaries by striving to bring the spiritual and the poetic sense of the original into the TL text.

In the early seventeen century there existed, side by side, two important theories: The interpretative tradition of Cicero, Horace; as well as the orthodox education in rhetoric, where theorists argued that there should be an absolute equivalence between the SL text and the TL text. “The other strain demanded - apparently under pressure from the developing ideas of the sublime - artistic attitude and spoke in cloudy metaphor about

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 11.

it."<sup>11</sup> Although the 16<sup>th</sup> century French had put a lot more thought into translation theory than the English had, they had not brought forth a great theorist such as Chapman. Steiner says that the French translation theorists:

Dolet, Jacques Peletier, and Joachim du Bellay demonstrate the independent and self-conscious artistic tendency of French statements on translation in the later Renaissance. In some places they merely echo Cicero and Horace; in others they express, perhaps for the first time, the obvious platitudes that the translator should know thoroughly both his author and the two languages with which he deals. But none had developed a theory to the extent Chapman had.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore according to what Steiner espouses the French theorists could perhaps be labeled inferior to the English ones even though they were the ones that recognized that the translator should have an extended knowledge of both the SL and the TL languages, which today is considered a necessity.

The seventeenth century saw a great increase and interest in translation theory by both English and French scholars. Translators had begun to take notice of their audience and to please that same audience and theories were being developed, discussed and disputed by various scholars.

In 1616, the same year as Chapman's *Whole Works* were published, the translation of the thirty-third book of Livi by the French translator, Malherbe, was published. His main concern was to make his translations clear and to satisfy his readers.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Malherbe concern for his reader's pleasure was what set him apart from his contemporaries and made him the forerunner of future developments. After Malherbe (1625-1660), translation became even more important in France and translations of the classics increased considerably. In this period one translator and theorist stands out from the rest: Perrot d'Ablancourt was a French translator who was considered influential in the development of translation theory. His translations were "free" and he was, like Malherbe, very concerned about the reader. In fact, pleasing the reader was one of the primary factors of his translation. "The original when translated "existed" only in that reading, and therefore it becomes to some degree subject to the linguistic and literary field of the culture receiving it. This is inevitable: any recognition of the "claims on the original" must be for a literary audience in this culture."<sup>13</sup> Malherbe took many liberties with the original to please his readers. Pleasing the reader was paramount; anything else was secondary.

Perrot d'Ablancourt's translation theory made its way into England in the 1640's and other French ideas concerning translation continued to do so from then on. Sir John Denham, Abraham Cowley, Sir Richard Fanshawe, Sir Edward Sherburne, and Thomas Stanley were at the core of a group of English translators who were very active. Their greatest tribute to translation theory was between 1647 and 1656, when Denham in his preface to *The Destruction of Troy* and Cowley in his preface to *Pindariques* "made major restatements to the ideas of contemporary translation."<sup>14</sup> Steiner also states that: "Fanshawe's version of *Il Pastor Fido* (1647) was the first instance of the 'new way' of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 18.

translating, although it was Denham, not the poet who characterized it as such.”<sup>15</sup>

Denham expected translation to be poetic and sublime. Cowley like d’Ablancourt stresses the time difference, literary language, and cultural differences that make word for word translation impossible. Despite the many liberties they take, both of them also want to be able to say that theirs was still a translation of sorts. Cowley took d’Ablancourt ideas and freely expanded on them and more than likely defined or invented the “Neoclassical genre of imitation.” Denham was much more moderate than Cowley in his views on translation, though Denham and Cowley both recognize that translation requires creativity. With Denham and Cowley the era of free translations emerges where poetics and spiritual sense is more important than accurate translation of the original.

In his introduction to *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), John Dryden (1631-1700) opposed the theories of Denham and Cowley and became the “lawgiver” of English translation. T. R. Steiner commenting on John Dryden’s theory says: “His rules were designed to create a balance between crabbed verbal “faithfulness” and inaccurate, though perhaps spirited license.”<sup>16</sup> Dryden’s three basic types of translation put forth in the preface to *Ovid's Epistle* are:

- (1) *metaphrase*, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language to another;
- (2) *paraphrase*, or translation with latitude, the Ciceronian ‘sense for sense’ view of translation;

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 28.



(3) *imitation*, where the translator can abandon the text of the original as he sees fit.<sup>17</sup>

Dryden chose paraphrasing as the middle path of translating, but as a prerequisite the translator has to be a poet, a master of both languages, and must understand the characteristics of the original author. The translator should keep the spirit of the original but shouldn't improve on it. He should also keep closely to the principles of beauty and art of the canon of his time. Dryden "uses the metaphor of the translator/portrait painter, that was to reappear so frequently in the eighteenth century, maintaining that the painter has the duty of making his portrait resemble the original."<sup>18</sup> In his later works of translation he changed his attitude and became more moderate. He began to please the audience more and his rules became less strict, but he kept the poetics intact. T. R. Steiner made the following statement about Dryden in his book *English Translation Theory 1650-1800*:

Dryden's seeming license in some later prefaces should be distinguished, however, from the self-aggrandizing licentiousness of the typical followers of Cowley and Denham; the end of his freedom was not only to please the audience but also to gain greater aesthetic accuracy – to communicate what he felt to be the essence of the original.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, Susan: *Translation Studies*. (London; New York: Methuen, 1994) 60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Steiner, T. R., *English Translation Theory 1650-1800*. (Assen; Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975) 30-31.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) followed Dryden's ideas of translation theory quite closely. He, like Dryden, choose the middle way, keeping as close to the style of the original as possible while maintaining the feel of the emerging poem. The eighteenth-century translator was concerned with the moral duty to his contemporary reader as well as the freedom to paint or imitate the original. Many major changes were made as translators looked for ways to set standards and record the methods of literary creation.

Goethe's (1749-1832) three phases of translation are example of this change. He argues that all literature passes through each phase and that all can happen at the same time within the same language system. The first phase introduces us to "foreign countries on our own terms,"<sup>20</sup> and Goethe describes this by using Luther's translation of the Bible in German. In the second phase the translator assimilates the original and writes it in his own style, as the French translators did. The third phase, which he holds in highest regard, is the phase where there is "perfect identity between" the original language text and the target language text. To achieve this model of translation one must create "a new 'manner', which fuses the uniqueness of the original with a new form and structure."<sup>21</sup> Voss, says Goethe, has achieved this in his translation of Homer.

In his essay, "The Principles of Translation" (1791), Alexander Fraser Tytler puts forth three basic principles:

- (1) The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work.

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<sup>20</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, *Susan. Translation Studies.* (London; New York: Methuen, 1994) 62.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

- (2) The style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original.
- (3) The translation should have all the ease of the original composition.<sup>22</sup>

Tytler opposed Dryden's idea of the paraphrase claiming that the result had been overly loose translations, on the other hand he thinks that the translator should make any obscurities in the original clear even though this might result in omissions or additions. The translator should be true to both the original text and its author. Personally I think Tytler makes a good point here, I think that the translator should try to stay as close as possible to the original text as well as keeping the spirit of the author intact.

All through the eighteen-century translation theory stressed the concept of the translator as a painter or imitator, but by the end of the century translation theory had moved away from idea of the artist as a moralist, towards a discussion of theories of originality.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the question of how to define translation became a topic for discussion: Was translation a creative or a mechanical enterprise? Those who followed the creative theory of translation saw it as a category of thought and the translator as a creative genius in his own right who is able to bring forth the genius of the original, and therefore enriches the literature and language into which he is translating. The latter conceives translation as a more mechanical function of 'making known' a text or an author. In her book *Translation Studies*, Susan Bassnett-McGuire discusses this subject:

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

In England, Coleridge (1772-1834) in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) outlined his theory of the distinction between Fancy and Imagination, asserting that Imagination is the supreme creative and organic power, as opposed to the lifeless mechanism of Fancy. This theory has affinities with the theory of the opposition of mechanical and organic form outlined by the German theorist and translator August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845) in his book *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809) translated into English in 1813.<sup>23</sup>

Translation theorists had begun to debate the issue of how to define translation. Was it a creative or a mechanical process? Perhaps it is both.

A. W. Schlegel felt that any form of writing and speaking was a translation since the foundation of language is to interpret and define sounds and symbols. He also maintained that the form of the original should be kept intact. On the other hand Friedrich Schlegel (1777-1829) saw “translation as a category of thought” rather than an “activity related only to language and literature.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Susan Bassnett-McGuire: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) thought it would be beneficial to invent a sub-language to aid in the translation process. In contrast Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) was bound to the original writing’s forms and language. Both theories are an attempt to cope with the problems of translation i.e., how can one accurately translate the entire original.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 65.

Many translators shared the separate translation language theory of Schleiermacher. Three men will be mentioned here, F. W. Newman, Thomas Carlyle and William Morris. Newman insisted that the translation should keep all of the peculiarity of the original wherever feasible, especially when the text is more foreign to the TL culture. Moreover, G.A. Simcox, in his review of Morris' translation of "The Story of the Völsungs and Niblungs" (1870) gives an explanation of the role of peculiarity when he stated that the use of archaic English was beneficial in masking the original work's deficiencies in fluency and completeness.<sup>25</sup> Morris deliberately uses archaic language in his translations and fills them with peculiarities of language which make them difficult to read and often ambiguous. The following passage from *Book VI of the Aeneid* shows the awkwardness of his style:

What God, O Palinure, did snatch thee so away  
From us thy friends and drown thee dead amidst the watery way?  
Speak out! for Seer Apollo, found no guileful prophet erst,  
By this one answer in my soul a lying hope hath nursed;  
Who sang of thee safe from the deep and gaining field and fold  
Of fair Ausonia: suchwise he his plighted word doth hold!<sup>26</sup>

His style is very archaic and the reader is left to wonder at the meaning of almost every word.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), who used complicated Germanic structures in his

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 68 [based on a quote from Simcox, G. A review in *Academy II*, (Aug. 1890): 278-279.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, W. *The Aeneid VI*. (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1879) 146.

translations from the German language, claimed that the Germans studied other countries in a true way where they took time to appreciate the beauty other cultures had to offer. He felt this was an important factor in translation.<sup>27</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti also conveys this message in the preface of his book *Poems and Translations* (1861, translations of Italian poetry) when he says: “The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty.”<sup>28</sup> To Carlyle and Rossetti to keep the beauty of the original is the most important aspect of translation.

Schleiermacher, Carlyle, Newman and others who followed the separate sub-language model of translations viewed the original text as a thing of beauty to be shared only with the few, the intellectual, cultivated reader who could understand the archaic language they used in their translations. Clearly they did not believe in universal literacy. Moreover, since the intellectual reader represented a very small percentage of the overall reading public, which increased in numbers as the century moved on, this was the cause of translations being seen as a topic that only a few people found interesting.

Matthew Arnold (1822-68) also translated for the few. His advice to the aspiring translator is that one should not think of how others view him, not the Greeks, nor the laymen readers, or himself. These roads lead to inaccuracy in translation. Instead he should listen to his peers who also know Greek and consider their opinion. He also tells the general reading public to put their trust in scholars, because they are the only ones

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<sup>27</sup> Carlyle, Thomas ‘The State of Germanic Literature’ in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. I. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905) 55.

<sup>28</sup> Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Preface to his translations of Early Italian Poets, *Poems and Translations 1850-1870*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 176.

who can judge whether the translation will generate the same effect as that of the original.<sup>29</sup> To Arnold the SL text was of utmost importance and the translator was to serve that text with utter devotion. His translations were not meant for the general public, but for the scholar who was able to read the original.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-81) takes the role of the translator a step farther than Arnold. In his view the translator should only try to restate what the author says, but not try to explain the meaning of the author's work. In Longfellow's translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, he decided to translate it into blank verse and defends that decision by saying that: "while making it rhythmic, I have endeavored to make it also as literal as a prose translation. [...] In translating Dante, something must be relinquished. Shall it be the beautiful rhyme that blossoms all along the line like a honeysuckle on the hedge? It must be, in order to retain something more precious than rhyme, namely, fidelity, truth, - the life of the hedge itself."<sup>30</sup> He has opted to lose some of the beauty of the poetry to preserve what he sees as "fidelity, truth, - the life of the hedge itself." One has to wonder whether he became too mechanical in the process.

Edward Fitzgerald (1809-63) viewed the role of the translator in absolute opposition to Longfellow. In his version of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1858) he "declared that a text must live at all costs 'with a transfusion of one's own worst Life if one can't retain the Original's better'."<sup>31</sup> Fitzgerald's belief that it is better to use "a transfusion of one's own worst Life if one can't retain the Original's better", indicates

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<sup>29</sup> Arnold, Matthew. "On Translating Homer", Lecture I, in *Essays* by Matthew Arnold. (London: Oxford University Press, 1914) 247.

<sup>30</sup> Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, quoted in William J. De Sua, *Dante into English*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964) 65.

<sup>31</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. *Translation Studies*. (London; New York: Methuen, 1994) 70.

that the translator must bring the eloquence of the SL text into the TL text. This method of translating is a bit excessive, as it shows a superior attitude of yet another elitist system, where a translation from one language to another is manipulated to the extreme. His translations could perhaps be called adaptations or, in Dryden's term, imitations rather than translations, since he took great liberties with the original, using it only as a model for the TL text.

Let us consider then the five categories of translation which were developed in the nineteenth century, those being:

- (1) Translation as a scholar's activity, where the pre-eminence of the SL text is assumed *de facto* over any TL version.
- (2) Translation as a means of encouraging the intelligent reader to return to the SL origin.
- (3) Translation as a means of helping the TL reader become the equal of what Schleiermacher called the better reader of the original, through a deliberately contrived foreignness in the TL text.
- (4) Translation as a means whereby the individual translator who sees himself like Aladdin in the enchanted vaults (Rossetti's imaginative image) offers his own pragmatic choice to the TL reader.
- (5) Translation as a means through which the translator seeks to upgrade the status of the ST text because it is perceived as being on a lower cultural level.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 71.



Type one and two of the above categories tended to produce literal translations, geared for the educated few. Type four and five produced translations, which were much too free, because the SL text might be completely altered by the individual translator. In the third category the translator would use archaic language, making the SL text strange and unfamiliar. To sum up, none of these methods are credible due to their failures.

In the first half of the twentieth century, there were not many changes in translation studies; it more or less adopted the theories of Victorian translation, which focused on word for word translation into ancient English. This style catered to the preferences of few well-to-do educated men. Still, according to Nida, translations underwent a fundamental change during the twentieth century. As a result of the rapid speed of structural linguistics during the 30s, 40s, and 50s. In Europe, Ferdinand de Saussure and “the work of Hjelmslev (1953) as well as the members of the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen has been very important.”<sup>33</sup> The Summer Institute of Linguistics or Wycliffite Bible Translators began to use structural linguistics in Bible translations as early as 1935. Also, the Linguistic Circle of Prague brought forth theories linking translation to the study of languages in a very inventive way under the early guidance of Trubetskoy (1939). This led to artistic translation by Bob Havránek, Jirí Levý, Valdimir Procházka, and Jan Mukařovský. Thus translation theory was being discussed all over Europe and was developing at a great speed.

There are difficulties in translation when one looks at not only language, but also culture. American linguists such as Edward Hoijer, Martin Joos, Joseph H. Greenberg and Uriel Weinreich were concerned about this. Hilaire Belloc, in his “Taylorian Lecture On

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<sup>33</sup> Nida, Eugene A. *Toward a Science of Translating*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964) 21.

Translation,” which he gave in 1931, addresses the problems of translating and gives a systematic solution to these problems. He came up with six rules for translators to follow:

1. The translator should [...] ‘always “block out” his work.’ By ‘block out’, Belloc means that the translator should consider the work as an integral unit and translate in sections, asking himself ‘before each what the whole sense is he has to render’.
2. The translator should render idiom by idiom ‘and idioms of their nature demand translation into another form from that of the original’. Belloc cites the case of the Greek exclamation ‘By the Dog!’, which, if rendered literally, becomes merely comic in English, and suggests that the phrase ‘By God!’ is a much closer translation. [...]
3. The translator must render ‘intention by intention’, bearing in mind that ‘the intention of a phrase in one language may be less emphatic than the form of the phrase, or it may be more emphatic’. [...]
4. Belloc warns against *les faux amis*, those words or structures that may appear to correspond in both SL and TL but actually do not, e.g. *demandeur* – *to ask*, translated wrongly as *to demand*.
5. The translator is advised to ‘transmute boldly’ and Belloc suggests that the essence of translating is ‘the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body’.
6. The translator should never embellish.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. *Translation Studies*. (London; New York: Methuen & Co., 1994) 116-17.

Belloc's theory is quite extensive and touches on many things that I consider important when translating, such as the translation of idioms. More often than not idioms cannot be translated verbatim and therefore one needs to find an equivalent in the TL. On the other hand sometimes embellishment cannot be avoided, but it should only be used when the meaning of the original text would otherwise be lost in translation.

In the 1930s Eugene A. Nida developed the technique of componential analysis to gauge the degree of equivalence between words and to ensure their satisfactory translation. He split words up into their components. An example of this is "bachelor = male + unmarried. "In fact, it is one of a few linguistic-based concepts that have proved to be of immediate relevance for both the production and the study of translations."<sup>35</sup> Nida also brought forth the concept of dynamic equivalence, which has proven to be very controversial. He adheres to structural linguistics where faithfulness to the original is all-important.

The hermeneutic approach to translations also surfaced in the 1930s. George Steiner is the best known of the scholars who advocated this approach. The scholars of the hermeneutic approach believe that "translation means interpretation, and the translator is the mediator between two texts, no longer the finder of equivalences."<sup>36</sup> Hermeneutic scholars conclude that there is no such thing as a perfect translation. This approach to translation study is rather vague. It gets stuck in the psychological process of translation and is caught up in its theological origins, and therefore does not necessarily adhere to common sense.

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<sup>35</sup> Lefevere, André. *Translating Literature, Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*. (New York. 1992) 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 10-11.

Another important figure in the field of translation is Ezra Pound who translated many works and who was not only a skilled translator but also a great critic and a theorist. For him linguistic closeness between the SL and TL was not a primary concern, but stating his case for translation making sense he advocated that evaluating the text in a practical, rather than grammatical way. Or as he said: “more sense and less syntax” would suffice.<sup>37</sup> In other words get the essence of the original text translated into the target language.

In the preface to *Literature and Translation* James McFarlane's article “Modes of Translation” (1953) is described as ‘the first publication in the West to deal with translation and translations from a modern, interdisciplinary view and to set out a program of research for scholars concerned with them as an object of study’.<sup>38</sup> This then sets the mood for many changes in translation studies in the case of the twentieth century. In 1965 J. C. Catford in his study *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* follows with his discussion of the problems of non-translatability, of which there are two categories, linguistic and cultural. He proposes that:

In translation, there is substitution of TL meanings for SL meanings: not transference of TL meaning into the SL. In transference there is an implantation of SL meanings into the TL text. These two processes must be clearly differentiated in any theory of translation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Pound, Ezra. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1954.) 273.

<sup>38</sup> Holmes, James, Lambert, José and van den Broeck, Raymond (editors). *Literature and Translation*. (Louvain: ACCO, 1978) VIII.

<sup>39</sup> Catford, J. C. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) 48.

With his statement he opened a new way for debating translation, which has since developed and moved along with great speed.

Translation studies are moving into new territory, connecting the large areas of stylistics, literary history, linguistics, semiotics and aesthetics. Yet one shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the essence of this discipline is its usefulness. André Lefevere believed the focus for translation studies should be to meld the act of translating with the theories themselves. This is important, for theories are more easily understood when practiced. One should focus on producing good translations, not just good theories.

In the 1970s functional theorists came to the forefront. Katharina Reiss built her work "on the concept of equivalence" she saw the whole text, rather than words and sentences, as the place where communication is achieved and equivalence must be found. She borrowed Karl Bühler's three-way categorization of the functions of language, and added to it. "The concept of equivalence" means that the translator finds the equivalent meaning in the TL for a word in the SL sometimes this might mean that more than one word is needed in the TL to translate the meaning of a single word from the SL. The four main principles Reiss suggests are:

- 1 The TT of an informative text should transmit the full referential of conceptual content of the ST. The translation should be in 'plain prose' without redundancy and with the use of explicitation when required.
- 2 The TT of an expressive text should transmit the aesthetic and artistic form of the ST. The translation should use the 'identifying' method, with the translator adopting the standpoint of the ST author.

- 3 The TT of an operative text should produce the desired response in the TT receiver. The translation should employ the ‘adaptive’ method, creating an equivalent effect among TT readers.
- 4 Audio-medial texts require the ‘supplementary’ method, supplementing written words with visual images and music.<sup>40</sup>

The three text types she uses are: informative, expressive and operative. To these she adds the audio-medial texts as a supplement to the other texts. Her work is important because it moves translation away from the words on the page to the real purpose of translation, communication. By moving the focus of translation from the word on the page to communication, she started a new trend, which generated further thoughts from other theorists in the study of translation theory. For example, some critics asked why there should be only three types of language function, their interrogation leading to changes in functional theory. “C. Nord, although working in the same functionalistic tradition as Reiss, perhaps implicitly accepts this criticism by feeling the need to add a fourth ‘phatic’ function, covering language that establishes or maintains contact between the parties involved in the communication.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, translation theory keeps developing and changes are ever coming to the forefront, as theories are expanded and new ones developed.

An important figure in translation studies, Anton Popovic, published a *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (1976), which leaning towards the linguistic

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<sup>40</sup> Munday, Jeremy. *Introducing Translation Studies, Theory and Applications*. (London; New York, 2001) 75. [Bühler’s categorization are: *Darstellungsfunktion* (the informative function), *Ausdrucksfunktion* (the expressive function) and *Appellfunktion* (the appellatic function). (TT=Target Text. ST=Source Text).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 76 (Nord 1997:40).

approach is a how-to-do book for studying translation. Popovic stresses the importance of studying existing translation styles – the paraphrase, review and summary, to name a few. These methods are all means to the same end or translation.

Itmar Even-Zohar, another scholar of translation studies who is influenced by literary theory, deems translation to be a process of negotiation between two cultures: translation is acculturation.<sup>42</sup> According to André Lefevere both Jeri Levy and Itmar Even-Zohar's agree that translation is not just the process of using and obeying rules. Rather they feel translators should make their own decisions regarding the how, whys, and wherefores of bringing a text across to a specific culture at a specific time. The translator must have knowledge of "linguistics and literary history, literary theory, and cultural history" in both SL and TL to be a competent translator.<sup>43</sup> He needs to be proficient in both languages and know the cultural values of both languages. Translations are the open door to other cultures and give the reader an opportunity to have a look at cultures other than his own.

Still, translations can be used as tools to show only certain aspects of a culture and might not give an accurate picture of that culture. In his book, *The Scandals of Translation*, Lawrence Venuti, while discussing the formation of cultural identity, says:

In creating stereotypes, translation may attach esteem or stigma to specific ethnic, racial, and national groupings, signifying respect for cultural differences or hatred based on ethnocentrism, racism, or patriotism. [...] A calculated choice of foreign text and translation strategy can change or consolidate literary canons, conceptual

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<sup>42</sup> Lefevere, André. *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*. (New York, 1992) 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

paradigms, research methodologies, clinical techniques, and commercial practice in the domestic culture.<sup>44</sup>

The choice of a particular literary text makes a considerable difference in how a certain culture might be represented in the domestic one. One of the examples Venuti uses to argue his point of cultural identity or misrepresentation of a cultural identity is found in the translation of modern Japanese fiction into English. According to Venuti, the American publisher Fowler set up a canon of Japanese fiction in English which was both “unrepresentative” and based on a “well-defined stereotype that has determined reader’s expectations for roughly forty years.”<sup>45</sup> This canon was geared to a small group of people, mostly academics, who specialized in Japanese literature and their publishers. The writing looked familiar to the American University professors, resembling those within the Anglo-American canon with which they were trained, and not necessarily representative of the larger body of Japanese writing. It seems that this canon was Americanized and therefore did not necessarily give a true picture of Japanese culture.

Venuti goes on to say that in such a case, when special interest groups collaborate to translate and publish a canon, the result doesn’t give a true picture of the foreign culture, therefore does have a great influence on the awareness of a foreign culture (Japanese in this case). Other novels that would have given readers a wider view of Japanese culture were either not translated or, if translated, were not noticed for more or less the same reason and left outside of English-language literature. At the same time there was not a great deal of change in the canon of translated Japanese literature in the

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<sup>44</sup> Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1998) 67-68.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 72.



1970s and 1980s.<sup>46</sup> This example shows how a literary project can shape the preference of publishers, translators and readers while simultaneously giving a narrow view of another culture.

How could this problem be eliminated? It can only be eliminated if translators and publishers are willing to include samples of a wide range of literature in their mediations. Then again, perhaps the difficulty might never be eliminated altogether since it is not always possible to translate culture across codes.

In his book on translation theory, *Tvímæli: Þýðingar og bókmenntir* (“Dispute: Translations and Literature”), Ástráður Eysteinnsson writes about the importance of translations as a medium for cultural exchange. Both translators and writers of original compositions, he says, have an “obtrusive” desire to renew the language. They like to validate the language through their writings and their creations lead to the discovery of new ways to express themselves. These discoveries are quite helpful in aiding the translation of culture, transforming the tradition of the SL text into the TL. Walter Benjamin, thinking of some such process refers to imagery of rebirth of the text in the “Task of the Translator” in his book *Illuminations*. Ástráður similarly uses the short story “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” by Jorge Luis Borges as an example of this need to renew or give rebirth to a text. In the story reading and translation are discussed in a clever way. “At the same time this process is obscure since the author presumably expected that the mystique would never be completely obliterated from any reading experience that really matters.”<sup>47</sup> The story is however not a traditional allegory since it

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>47</sup> “jafnframt torræðan, enda taldi höfundur væntanlega að dulúðinni yrði aldrei fullkomlega svipt af lestrarreynslu sem skiptir mann verulegu máli.” Ástráður Eysteinnsson. *Tvímæli, þýðingar og bókmenntir*. (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun háskólaútgáfan, 1996) 203.

contains many references to translation theory. The narrative is about the translator's longing for the translation to be exactly the same as the original. At the same time it seems to show how the original text has become another during the course of time even though the words themselves haven't changed. The translator is a foreigner, even to some extent in his own language. Furthermore, the story is about creative anachronism that we have to deal with when reading interesting texts, which in translation can easily be emphasized and worked out, "namely the moment when we "stop" recognizing the translation as a traditional work and perceive it as a new text"<sup>48</sup> which consists of no more than a shift in ownership.

In the story Jorge Luis Borges makes Pierre Menard, the author of the Quixote. He became the owner of the text in a different way than Cervantes (who is the original author of the Quixote). In effect Menard creates the same text but he does so under different circumstances. While the translation is taking place, the form of the text is in a constant flux between writing and reading. "Perhaps Benjamin's "surrender" refers to this allotment; because the translator has to give up both the original text, his conventional perspective and therefore his work hovers between the two."<sup>49</sup>

When translating a text many things play a role in how it will turn out in the TL. Firstly, of course, is the original text itself, the time period when the text was written, and the time period when the text was or is being translated, but mostly the result depends on the translator. As the text is being read and translated it is constantly fluctuating and the formation of the TL text is in an in-between state of being, constantly moving between

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<sup>48</sup> "nefnilega andartakið þegar við "hættum" að bera kennsl á hefðbundið verk og skynjum það sem nýjan og ferskan texta." Ibid. 204.

<sup>49</sup> "Ef til vill á "uppgjöf" Benjamins við um þetta hlutskipti; þýðandinn verður í senn að gefa eftir frumtextann og sitt vanabundna samhengi og verk hans svifur þarna á milli." Ibid. 205.

reading and writing. Eventually the translation emerges and the ownership of the work is the translator's. Or is it? The status of the translator is often dubious, and his claim on the translation even more shaky in the modern western world. In his book *The Translator's Invisibility* Lawrence Venuti laments: that "translators receive minimal recognition for their work."<sup>50</sup> He goes on to say that reviewers of translations more often than not barely mention the translator in their reviews. Furthermore, the legal rights of the translator, in private or copyright law, work more against than for the translator, for they are always vague in their wording. Despite the fact that the original text wouldn't exist in the TL if it hadn't been for the translator's work, he receives little recognition and fewer legal rights to his work. Most translators work as contractors and therefore, even though he or she might have copyright to the translation, he/she is excluded from the legal protection that authors enjoy as citizens of the UK and US. In the eyes of the law, the author has more rights than the translator, presumably because translator's work is secondary to the literal production. Even though the translator has a copyright on the translation the author controls the original text as well as the translator's publication during the term of the copyright, which today is during the authors lifetime plus fifty years.

In this day and age, when migrations between countries is on the increase and multicultural societies are being established, many educated people and refugees or disposed people are moving to other countries for some reason or another and as a result are looking for work. The need to be aware and to understand other people's cultures becomes paramount in increasing multicultural societies. The translator's role is even more important than ever before. Therefore it would be beneficial for translators to stand

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<sup>50</sup> Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translators Invisibility: A History of Translation*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1995) 8.

up for their rights in order to gain an equal standing, not only in the legal world, but also in the cultural and economic worlds. The time for misusing translators needs to end. Furthermore, translators should work towards being recognized as authors by creating new ways of translating so that the readers can clearly see the importance of their work, and offer logical explanations for their procedures in prefaces, essays, lectures, and interviews. “Such self-perservations will indicate that the language of the translation originates with the translator in a decisive way, but also that the translator is not its origin: a translator’s originality lies in choosing a particular foreign text and a particular combination of dialects and discourses.”<sup>51</sup>

It is time that translators gain more control over their translations and be recognized as authors in their own right, since the translator does in essence create a new text for the TL readers. A translation is in effect “a double writing” says Venuti, engaging in rewriting a foreign text “according to domestic cultural values” and taking into consideration the time at which the original foreign text was written (the past) and the time in which the new domestic text is created (the present). According to Vanuti, “Evaluating a translation as a translation means assessing it as an intervention into a present situation.”<sup>52</sup> Since the translator has to satisfy both the author and the reader, the one evaluating a translation must recognize and understand the juggling act involved in order to grade it fairly and provide appropriate feedback.

During the translation process the translator is bringing together two cultures, foreign and domestic. Thus the work of the translator is to blend together both cultures and in essence create the work anew. This is not easy to do because a new cultural

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 311.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 312.

identity has to be created. Let us take as an example Eva Hoffman's feelings about words and their meaning in Polish and their meaning in English as she struggled to create a new identity for herself in America. She says:

The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue, "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. "River" in English is cold – a word without an aura. It has no accumulative associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke.<sup>53</sup>

The problem lies in one's ability to translate not only the word but also the feelings that the word evokes in a person. How does one translate this into another language? Most likely "the radiating haze of connotation" is not possible to translate and is therefore lost in translation.

On the other hand going back to Benjamin, in his claim of translatability says that the translatability of an original text lies in the very nature of the language itself. Further, in translating a text one brings out "the kinship of languages."<sup>54</sup> He also states: "The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."<sup>55</sup> One can agree with both ideas – Hoffman's in the sense that some things are not translatable, Benjamin's in the sense that all languages are related in some way or another. In the

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<sup>53</sup> Hoffman, Eva. *Lost in Translatio, A Life in a New Language*. (London: Penguin Books, 1989) 106.

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "The task of the Translator." *Illuminations*, ed. Arendt, Hannah, translator Zohn, Harry. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968) 72.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 76.

struggle with translating from one language to another, the translator therefore has to recreate the text for those points at which certain cultural and personal values are untranslatable. The greatest challenge for the translator is to rewrite or re-codify the original work and try to minimize the loss of original meaning.

William Frawley sees translation as “recodification,” that is as a transfer of codes. It involves at least two codes – the code of origin or matrix code, and the target code or the language it is translated into. He also advocates that there is no exact translation and that no translation can easily be termed bad or good. He states:

Translation as recodification immediately eliminates two problems with so-called translation theory. First, translation now subsumes the question of inter-lingual transfer: it is not solely the question of crossing languages. [...] Second, translation is not solely the question of identity or synonymy. In fact, the validity of recodification is completely independent of whether or not an element of one code is synonymous with a correlated element in another code, [...] <sup>56</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the structural linguistic approach was the dominant translation theory, coexisting with the hermeneutic approach. Later on translators adapted a more contemporary approach, which Frawley clearly shows in his recodification. Frawley's theory provides a contemporary view on translation, one of rather broad perspectives. It gives the translator freedom to experiment with and to add

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<sup>56</sup> Frawley, William. "Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation." *Translation, Literary, Linguistic, and Philosophical Perspectives*. Ed. William Frawley. (Newark: University of Delaware Press. London; Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984) 160-161.

his/her own creativity to the translation. His theory, which I intend to use for the analysis of the translations in this thesis, will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

## Chapter 2.

**“A pun is a play on two of the meanings a word can have.”<sup>57</sup>**

### **A Model for Translation**

Frawley deems translation a “recodification. Hence, a theory of translation is a set of propositions about how, why, when, where (...) coded elements are rendered into other codes. As such, translation is nothing short of an essential problem of semiosis: it is the problem of the transfer of codes.”<sup>58</sup> At least two codes are needed for translation to take place – the code of origin, which Frawley calls the *matrix code*; and the code of destination, which he calls the *target code*. While the translation is going on there is a process of “*perpetual shuffling*” between the two codes. In other words, the translator takes the information from the matrix code and renders it into the parameters of the target code, thereby creating a third code which is the final product of the translation. Translation as recodification is the rendering of one code into another. This process not only includes translating one language into another, it also includes the rendering of many other codes, such as religious and/or cultural codes. But according to Frawley, close identity across codes is not crucial, since translation theory supposes that recodification does occur regardless of “whether or not a code is synonymous with a correlated element in another code.”<sup>59</sup>

The fact that identity across codes is not paramount to translation does not mean that identity does not occur across codes, however Frawley is very skeptical of what he

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<sup>57</sup> Lefevere, Andre. *Translating Literature: Practice and theory in a Comparative Literature Context*. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992) 51.

<sup>58</sup> Frawley, William. “Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation.” *Translation, Literary, Linguistic, and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. William Frawley: (Newark: University of Delaware Press. London; Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984) 160.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 161.



calls *sufficient universals*, such as “adverbial constructions, ... sentence-initial adverbs,” and that in “phonology all languages have /iau/. These sorts of universals are sufficient universals. That is, all languages seem to partake of them, but they are not required for defining language as a human capability [...] and if they are eliminated from the language, no harm would be done to the status of that language as a human language.”<sup>60</sup> Frawley stresses what he calls *necessary universals* that have “characteristics, which all languages must share.” That is to say: “all languages must have a negative operator; all languages must express agentivity; all languages must conjoin and embed.”<sup>61</sup> Both sufficient and necessary universals show that identity across codes does occur. These identities are point-by-point identities. Using these point-by-point identities in translation changes them “into copying across codes: one looks at a certain semiotic element of the matrix code, sees the same element in the target code (say, a sentential adverb), and thus the translation is forced to contain, in this case, a sentential adverb.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, because this identity does “not capture the surrounding code structure of the elements” it is “useless in translation.” Moreover, for Frawley, what makes translations interesting is the fact that a translation is “an uncertain act, and the uncertainty results from the inevitable structural mismatch of the codes, though single semiotic elements may be identical.”<sup>63</sup>

There is no such thing as exact translation, because the semiotic elements of the matrix code and the target code are not the same. “Thus in interlingual translation, for example, the matrix code provides the phonological information, the morphological information, the syntactic information, and so on, to be bound by different semiotic

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 167.

constraints.”<sup>64</sup> In translating only the semantic essence from language to language, then, the translator translates only a small part of the information given in the matrix code and therefore loses the battle before he has begun. Universals and identity across systems are just a small part of translation and not even necessary in order for the translation to take place.

Now, as I have already stated, when a translation takes place a third code emerges as a code in its own right. The matrix code provides the information and the target code provides the parameters for the new code and therefore both are a part of the new code. Nevertheless, the third code, says Frawley, “emerges as *new information* derivative of the matrix and target redundancy, but further establishing its own predictability as an individuated code. Were it not for the emergence of the third code, the translation would carry no information: it would be accountable and reducible to the matrix and target codes.”<sup>65</sup> If there were no change in the matrix code when it was being translated into the target code then it could be translated word for word back into the matrix code and would look exactly the same as it did before. Since there are always some changes made as the translation goes through the process of perpetual shuffling, the target code text is indeed a new creation.

To illustrate the emergence of the third code Frawley uses poetry as his model for inter-lingual translation. He states:

In this case the matrix code is the text in the original language; the target code is a virtual text in the language in which the translation will be couched. This latter

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 169.

point is worth slight amplification: the target code consists of virtual codes (texts, in this case) never realized in themselves, but which serve as the parameter for the realized translation. Thus literary translation is the mediating between a tangible text and a virtual text.<sup>66</sup>

Since the facts I have chosen are not poetry, I will illustrate the emergence of the third code by looking at the process of inter-lingual translation of prose. For this purpose I will use an example from one of the following translations, which I have done. Let's consider the opening sentence in the story, "The Thrift Shop," by Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir:

Ég man altaf eftir því, hvað ég hlakkaði til sunnudaganna, hér fyr á árum, -- hlakkaði til að eiga heilan dag frá morgni til kvölds til eignar og umráða, vera sjálfri mér ráðandi og þurfa ekki að standa með auðmýktarsvip og segja já, já og nei, nei eftir því sem yfirboðurunum þóknaðist.<sup>67</sup>

Here is my version of the text, now in English:

I'll always remember how much I looked forward to Sundays in years gone by, looked forward to having a whole day, from morning to night to do with as I pleased, to be my own boss, and not having to humbly stand and say yes sir and no sir to please my superiors.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. "Skriflabúðin." *Hillingalönd*. (Reykjavík: Félagspretsmiðjan, 1938) 145. All further reference to this volume will be to HL and to this edition.

According to Frawley's theory the matrix code supplies the input information, in this case the linguistic information of the Icelandic text. Although the text is not in the form of poetry the phonological information is nevertheless present: the alliteration in the few first lines, the repetition of the "h" sound giving the text the illusion of alliteration. There is also a repetition of certain words to lend emphasis and stress the importance of the message the words convey. There is the syntactic information: the topicalization of Sunday, embedded in a main clause and a relative clause. There is the literary pragmatic information, the connection between Sunday and the allusion of being independent and having to please one's superiors, because on Sunday one can please oneself. Then there is the semantic information: there is the implication of Sunday being owned by someone (the author in this case).

Now, looking at the target code, the English text. Does it have the parameters to accommodate this information? The alliteration or repetition of the "h" sound is lost in translation, but the repetition of "hlakkaði til" (looked forward to) is still intact. In this case the repetition of "já, já," (yes, yes,) "nei, nei," (no, no,); has been replaced by the more traditional Canadian reply, yes sir, and no sir. The syntactic topicalization of Sunday is retained, as well as the main clause and the relative clauses. The pragmatic information is present, but the implication that Sunday can be owned, by someone, is lost in my translation. In Icelandic, due to the structure of the grammar one does not merely *have* something, one does in fact *own* it. Such is the case here where the words "til eignar og umráða" have been translated "to do with as I pleased". The literal meaning of "til eignar og umráða" is "to own and to have at (one's) disposal."

Although the pragmatic information is intact, some may question why “vera sjálfri mér ráðandi” [to be (myself) independent] has been translated “to be my own boss”. This was done to stress the importance of the independence, which is emphasized by the words “sjálfri mér” (myself) in Icelandic and which would otherwise have been left out in translation. This is one of the problems of translation i.e., how to bring not just the meaning of the words into the target language but also their implication. The repetition of “yes, yes” and “no, no” has been lost in the translation and could therefore be questioned by some as not being properly translated. I felt that the more traditional Canadian (English) reply to a boss, “yes sir and no sir”, would better retain the emphasis that the repetition of “já, já, og nei, nei” give in Icelandic. Another choice, which might be questioned, is that “auðmýktarsvip” has been translated as “humbly” and not “humble countenance”. This was a matter of preference since the latter would be rather cumbersome and the former conveyed the meaning equally well. The adverbial phrase “eftir því sem yfirboðurunum þóknaðist” (“according to the pleasure of one’s superiors”) has been changed into a verbal clause in translation, “to please my superiors”. I opted for the latter because of its simplicity, as well as the fact that it still conveys the essential meaning of the original. Exact translation of both words and phrases can often be awkward and therefore an alternative is needed. In my estimation simplicity serves better than complexity so long as the meaning is not completely lost.

The above changes and/or omissions, according to Frawley, do not invalidate nor demean the translation. Rather it is a question of taste and “the fact that every text has its own set of semantic presuppositions and entailments accountable to neither those of the

matrix nor those of the target code.”<sup>68</sup> He says that the text doesn't suffer from these “breaches of fidelity” and then elaborates further on that point by saying:

It should be evident, then, that the new code (text) actually individuates itself in the translation. In a sense, the new text gets away from the translator by dictating its own necessities and logic. But it is, of course, this separate logic that makes the new code interesting at all. Without it, the translation would border on copying: no new information would be produced.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, as the translation is happening the new text takes on its own identity within, which the essential information is derived from the original or the matrix code by the translator who may add to or delete from that information according to his own discrimination.

Frawley argues that “The establishment of a third text as a fully individuated unit with its own logic naturally leads to questions of good and bad translation and radical and moderate recodification.”<sup>70</sup> There is no exact method whereby a translation can be judged to be good or bad, says Frawley. He sees it rather as a question of preference. A translation that is exact or that keeps fidelity to the original text is considered by many to “be ‘better’ than any other translation. But could we truly call a text that is ‘overmatricized’ better than another simply because of this strict adherence?”<sup>71</sup> No, says

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<sup>68</sup> Frawley, William. “Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation.” *Translation, Literary, Linguistic, and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. William Frawley: (Newark: University of Delaware Press. London, Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984) 172.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 172-173.

Frawley, fidelity of that kind would produce translations, which would be clumsy rather than interesting. Furthermore, if exact translations are better than any other then machine translations which make the “most unreadable, the most uninteresting, the most unsuccessful”<sup>72</sup> translations, would have to be considered to the “best” translations. In fact the question of good and bad translations must be abandoned by any “respectable theory of translation” as promptly as it “abandoned identity and the ridiculous insistence on ‘preservation of meaning.’ The closest that a theory of translation can come to an evaluative judgment is to label translations as moderate or radical and let the critics judge whether or not the moderate/radical translation is worth the effort to be considered.”<sup>73</sup>

The new code Frawley considers to be moderate when “it adheres closely to either the matrix code or the target code.”<sup>74</sup> When the translator follows the matrix code closely, then the translation is called “close translation”, but it is called “free translation” when there is close adherence to the target code. In either case the translation could be considered good or bad with arguments, and arguments can readily be found to support either case, they are still moderate translations.

Radical translations or innovations happen when the new code starts to “break away” from both the matrix and target codes. As the new code creates its own rules, it begins to rely less on itself and the possibility of new information from the new code increases as well. This new code is a production of a sign that can radically change our knowledge. Frawley points out that, “it is the radical innovation, in inter-lingual translation at least, that has often been viewed as “bad” since it evidently disregards fidelity for the sake of saying something new and internally coherent. In actuality, the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

radical innovation carries the most semiotic information and probably more intrinsic interest...”<sup>75</sup> He doesn't elaborate on this point because it comes too close to the concept of evaluation, which he prefers to disregard.

I have chosen Frawley's model of translation theory of recodification because of its simplicity. I can make use of it to show the reader the complexity of translating words and phrases from one language to another. His article doesn't include an example of all of the concerns I want to cover in the following translations, such as the use of idioms, which “are culture bound” and therefore constitute cultural differences. These often create a problem for the translator in recodification. To do such idioms justice, one needs to find its equivalent in the target language. Let's take an example of such an idiom from the first paragraph in the story “The Thrift Shop”: “... mega um frjálst höfuð strjúka,” which is a phrase that literary means to “be able to stroke a free head”.<sup>76</sup> In the translation this phrase simply becomes “to be free...” In Icelandic the meaning of the phrase “be able to stroke a free head” is perfectly clear, but when translated into English, word for word, the real meaning of the phrase is lost. Therefore an English phrase that equates the meaning of the Icelandic phrase should be used or, as in this case, a simplification will suffice.

It is difficult to convey in translation some other cultural differences such as the idea that the “hidden people or elves” (huldufólk eða álfar), spoken of at some length in the story “From Generation to Generation,” are not elementals or elves which English-speaking people usually depict as little people. There is a similar word that covers the idea of an elemental in Icelandic, which is “búálfur”. In Iceland the word “álfur” depicts

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>76</sup> Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. "Skriflabúðin." (HL 145).



a person who is like you and me but is usually not seen by most people, only those with second sight will see them. Further, those who see clearly what is hidden reap the rewards. Where those who are hidden from sight visit and “are received with courtesy, most things work out well, all year around.”<sup>77</sup>

It is interesting to see how religion and folklore are intertwined in the story “From Generation to Generation.” In that story old Rannveig looks back on her youth and recalls a time when she is with her grandmother in Iceland on New Years Eve, when they are discussing the hidden people and the old custom of leaving food out in the open for them as they might come by on their way to their new abode, usually they might, for they had a custom of relocating on that very night. When Rannveig complains: “You can’t believe that the hidden people actually do exist,” her grandmother answer:

“Eg læt það liggja á milli hluta. Eg hef aldrei séð huldufólk, en eg hefi heldur aldrei séð engla guðs, sem sendir eru niður til jarðarinnar til að vernda okkur, en eg trúi því, að þeir séu til, og það veit eg, að þú efast þó ekki um. Er það óhugsanlegt að á jörðinni séu líka til einhverskonar verur, sem ekki eru sýnilegar?”<sup>78</sup>

This is my version of the text in English:

“I do and I don’t. I have never seen the hidden people, but neither have I seen God’s angels, who are sent down to earth to protect us. I believe that they exist,

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<sup>77</sup> Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. “From Generation to Generation.” *Dagshriðar spor*. (Akureyri: Árni Bjarnason, 1946) 130. All further reference to this volume will be to DS and to this edition.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 129.

and I know that you don't doubt that. Is it impossible that there could also be some kind of invisible beings that exist on the earth?"

Here religious and cultural codes are intertwined. God's angels, who are hidden to ordinary sight, are being used to show that it isn't quite so impossible for other invisible beings to exist on this earth. What Guðrún is telling us is that if one can believe in one type of invisible beings why and is it so hard to believe there are others as well? Why is one belief defined as superstition and the other not? Is it superstition that prevails in folklore or is there no value in the wisdom that is hidden in stories? Daisy L. Neijmann says:

It is striking how often, in her presentation of old Icelandic folklore, Guðrún almost hastens to explain the hidden meanings and truths behind the tales, beliefs and customs, as if to reassure her readers that Icelanders really are not superstitious.<sup>79</sup>

One would have to ask oneself, who is Guðrún writing for? Is she reassuring her readers that Icelanders are not superstitious or is she just making certain that the old beliefs and values of past generations will be passed on to the younger generation? She does "explain the hidden meanings and truths behind the tales, beliefs and customs," but isn't that what parents generally do for their children? She is writing for an Icelandic speaking reader, not an English-speaking one. Still, the following statement by Neijmann may have some value:

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<sup>79</sup> Neijmann, Daisy L. *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters*. (Amsterdam: Vrije University, 1994) 176.

It is not unlikely that the West Icelanders, who nurtured and guarded their reputation among the Canadian majority, had come to feel self-conscious about something so prone to outside ridicule as folk-beliefs, especially when based on supernatural features. Moreover, the West Icelanders might have sensed that certain folk-beliefs which were very much rooted in the Icelandic environment, such as beliefs in ghosts, seemed out of place in the new environment.<sup>80</sup>

In the story “A Dream,” the main character Ragnhildur sits in “the high seat” the seat of the god Óðinn, the seat of kings and queens, the seat of the person who is in charge, and looks “out over the hall.”<sup>81</sup> This is her domain, where she can be her real self. She is meditating on the past: and dreams of what was, is and should be, the poetry and hymns, the old legends and beliefs in the supernatural powers of the very earth itself, the elves, the ghosts, the souls of sleeping people that wander about. In her dream Ragnhildur travels into the realm of magic, the place where reality is created by souls of light. There she meets up with her old friend and mentor, Ingveldur, who introduces her to the realms of Icelandic folklore. Ragnhildur says:

“Já, en þetta land er ekki Ísland, Ingveldur – og þó er samskonar svipur yfir umhverfinu.”

“Draumar verða að veruleika,” svaraði Ingveldur. “Þetta er Ísland, þetta er landið, sem þjóðina dreymir, þetta er landið, sem skáldin kveða um, þetta er

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 176-177.

<sup>81</sup> Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. “A Dream.” (DS 14).

landið, sem birtu leggur af út um heim, þetta er landið, sem þeir hafa litið, er varið hafa kröftum sínum og lífsstarfi í þarfir þjóðarinnar.” Ingveldur benti til austurs og sagði: “Horfðu á fjöllin þarna, þau eru bygð úr eldi hugans, af þeim, sem ekki brast vitsmuni, lífskraft og stórhug til að sjá fram úr myrkrinu á þyngstu stundum þjóðarinnar. Líttu á árnar er streyma áfram silfurtærar, þær eiga uppsprettu í Mímisbrunni. Þeir, sem hafa klætt landið því græna andans skruði, sem þú sérð, hafa fengið að dreypa á þeim heilögu vötnum. Þetta er Ísland, Ísland fortíðarinnar, Ísland framtíðarinnar, landið, sem tilheyrir okkur öllum.”<sup>82</sup>

In my words:

“Yes, but this country isn’t Iceland, Ingveldur, and yet the surroundings appear to be similar.”

“Dreams become a reality,” answered Ingveldur. “This is Iceland, this is the country which the nation dreams about, this is the country which the poets profess to, this is the country which reflects light out into the world, this is the country seen by those who have given all their energy and dedicated their lives to the needs of the nation.” Ingveldur pointed east and said: “Look at the mountains over there, they are created by the minds of those who had the intellect, the vital force and the large mindedness to see beyond the darkness during the nation’s heaviest moments. Look at the rivers, which flow forth silver clear. They come forth from

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 19.

Mímisbrunnur.<sup>83</sup> Those who have clad the land in the glorious green vestment, which you see, have been allowed to taste these holy waters. This is Iceland, of the past, of the future, the country which belongs to all of us.”

Anyone who hasn't been raised and submerged in Icelandic culture isn't likely to fully understand Guðrún when she has her female characters, like Ragnhildur and Ingveldur, pass on the wisdom of past generations to the new. One would have to have been exposed to the same or similar conditions as Ragnhildur to fully understand the power of these folklores, sagas, ghost stories, poems and hymns and to appreciate the wealth of information they are passing on. How does one translate the meaning of the word “Mímisbrunnur”? Not only does it mean a spring or well of wisdom, it is the very place where the high god Óðinn went to gain his wisdom and become omniscient. The symbolism of “Mímisbrunnur” is not easily transferred into the English language and those reading about it would have to be familiar with Icelandic history and culture to understand the implication of its use. Guðrún has given omniscient powers to those who carried the nation through its darkest hour. They are gods in their own rights. They have created their own realm, the luscious green earth, and the mountains, which is the Iceland of the past and the future – the inheritance of all Icelanders wherever they live.

Translation is not a simple process. While the translation is taking place, there is a perpetual shuffling of information between the matrix and the target codes, and the new information, or the final translation, emerges as a third code in its own right. Translations

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<sup>83</sup> “Mímisbrunnur” is the spring of wisdom, the place where all wisdom abides. In Old Norse Mythology, the god, Óðinn drank from the waters of “Mímisbrunnur” and therefore he became omniscient. He had to give one of his eyes for the privilege of drinking from the spring of wisdom and it lies at the bottom of the spring to this day.

can be either moderate or radical. As I have shown, idioms and phrases that are culturally bound are often difficult to translate and therefore it may be necessary to replace those with equivalent idioms or a phrase in the target language. Omissions are sometimes necessary as well as additions, and at times it can be difficult to transfer cultural and religious codes.

The translation of five of Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir's short stories which follow are meant in part to raise issues in translation and to illustrate some choices. To give the reader a better understanding and insight into the process of translation, I use footnotes to give examples of the difficulties one encounters while translating. This will include some of the discrepancies that occur in the translations when I think that phrases, idioms and other cultural and religious codes have not been fully transferred across codes.

### Chapter 3.

**“Charity is the pinnacle of life and it is passed on from generation to generation.”<sup>84</sup>**

#### **Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir in Retrospect**

Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir was born 6 February 1884 at Geirólfsstaðir, in Skriðdalur, Suður-Múlasýsla, Iceland. She was the middle child of three, born to Bergþóra Helgadóttir and her husband, Finnur F. Björnsson, who then farmed at Geirólfsstaðir.

Her mother, Bergþóra, the daughter of Helgi Hallgrímsson farmer at Geirólfsstaðir, was born and brought up there. Her grandfather, Hallgrímur Ásmundsson, was a poet, the district administrative officer, and a farmer at Stóra Sandfell in Skriðdalur. According to Stefán Einarsson, the mother's side of Guðrún's family boasted many poets and educated men. In his article about her, “Vestur-íslensk skáldkona”, Stefán Einarsson made the following statement about her mother's side of the family: “It is especially remarkable to see how many of the descendants of Ásmundur and Jón Helgason have become learned men or good authors.”<sup>85</sup>

Her father's side of the family came from Flugustaðir, in Flugustaðadalur, Suður-Múlasýsla, Iceland. There were also many poets and learned men in his family. According to Einarsson, Finnur Björnsson was “a thinker and a quiet man, and of course always held an office concerning the affairs of his district.”<sup>86</sup> He was a man worthy of trust and well liked by his contemporaries.

Guðrún was brought up in a home of learning, where many rare Icelandic books along with books written in many Scandinavian languages were read. Her maternal

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<sup>84</sup> “Kærleikurinn er hámark lífsins og gengur í erfðir frá kyndlóð til kyndlóðar.” (DS 144-145).

<sup>85</sup> “En sérstaklega er merkilegt að sjá, hve margir af afkomendum þeirra bræðra, Ásmundar og Jóns Helgasona, hafa orðið fræðimenn eða góðir rithöfundar.” Stefán Einarsson. “Vestur-íslensk skáldkona.” Eimreiðin 53 (1947): 12.

<sup>86</sup> “djúðhygginn maður, enda ávallt gegnt trúnaðarstörfum fyrir sveitunga sína, og hægur í lund.” Ibid.

grandmother “was especially well versed in history and genealogy. She compiled genealogical records for many people and had her granddaughter write those records down for her.”<sup>87</sup> She learned much from both her parents and her grandmother, and, as was common in well-to-do homes at that time in Iceland, a teacher was hired for part of each winter to teach the children.

When Guðrún was sixteen, she went to Akureyri in the north of Iceland to attend a women’s college. There, at the home of her maternal aunt, Helga Helgadóttir, she met Gísli Jónsson from Háreksstaðir, Jökuldalaheiði, Norður-Múlasýsla, Iceland. He was a printer who worked for her uncle, Björn Jónasson, who was the editor of the periodical Stefnir.

Gísli and Guðrún married on 8 November 1902. A year later Gísli immigrated to Winnipeg “leaving his wife and new born son, Helgi, at Geirólfsstaðir, with her parents. Helgi was fostered there until he was eight years old. Guðrún went to America to join her husband the following summer in 1904, and neither one of them saw Iceland again until their visit on their wedding anniversary in 1927.”<sup>88</sup> They had five children, Helgi, Bergþóra, Gyða, Ragna, and Una, all of who grew to adulthood except for Una, who died in 1918, at the age of three.

Gísli and Guðrún were known for their hospitality and the whole family loved music and singing. He was a poet and a musician, as well as a composer and conductor (for two years) of the choir of the Icelandic Unitarian Church in Winnipeg. Stefán

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<sup>87</sup> “var sérstaklega minnum og fróð á sögu og ættfræði. Samdi hún ættartölur fyrir marga og lét dótturdóttur sína skrifa þær upp fyrir sig.” Ibid. 13.

<sup>88</sup> “skildi eftir konu sína og nýfæddn son á Geirólfsstöðum hjá foreldrum hennar. Þar óx Helgi upp þar til hann var átta vetra. Afrur á móti fór Guðrún vestur um haf að vitja manns síns sumarið eftir, 1904, og sá hvorugt þeirra Ísland aftur fyrr en þau sóttu það heim á giftingarafmæli sínu 1927.” Stefán Einarsson. “Gísli Jónsson half-níræður.” *Haugældar*. (Akureyri: Árni Bjarnason, 1962) 10.



Einarsson, in his article in *Tímarit hins íslenska þjóðræknisfélags* (1946), says that Guttormur J. Guttormsson “counts Gísli among the best singers in Winnipeg after the turn of the century.”<sup>89</sup> They were both active members of the Icelandic community in Winnipeg. She was involved with the Icelandic National League as well as a member of the women’s organization of her church and one of the founders and a member of the Jón Sigurðsson’s chapter of the I.O.D.E.<sup>90</sup> They were also members of the Icelandic Unitarian Church in Winnipeg. Her last contribution to the women's organization of the church was to edit a part of their annual periodical *Brautin* (1944-1946). In his article “Minningarorð” (“Memorials”), published in *Brautin* (1946), Rev. E. J. Melan made the following comments about Guðrún’s character and her contribution to the Icelandic-Canadian society:

Her intelligence and kindness manifested itself in all of her work. Her suggestions were always appropriate, thoughtful and aimed to direct matters in the right direction for the good of the cause. She loved books and read a lot and wrote a fair amount herself [...] <sup>91</sup>

Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir was an avid reader. Not only did she read Old Norse literature, she also knew modern Icelandic and Scandinavian literature. She was also well versed in Canadian, English and American literature. Professor Richard Beck said that Guðrún had good knowledge of literature and “it was a special pleasure to speak with her

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<sup>89</sup> “telur Gísla í hópi beztu söngvara í Winnipeg frá því um aldamót.” Ibid. 20.

<sup>90</sup> I.O.D.E. The Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire.

<sup>91</sup> “Í öllum þessum störfum komu í ljós vitsmunir hennar og alúð. Tillögur hennar voru ætíð vel hugsaðar og miðuðu í rétta átt málefnum til heilla. Hún unni bókum og las mikið og ritaði talsvert [...]” Melan, E. J. “Minningarorð.” *Brautin* 3:1 (1946): 78.

about that subject.”<sup>92</sup> This knowledge of both Icelandic and foreign literature stood her in stead when writing her own stories.

Guðrún was a prolific writer in her native language, Icelandic. Her short stories were published in Icelandic-Canadian periodicals, magazines and newspapers, such as *Tímarit* of the Icelandic National League, as well as in *Heimskringla* and *Lögberg*, the two weekly Icelandic newspapers, and the periodical *Saga*, between 1920 and 1946. Two books of her short stories were published, the first, *Hillingalönd* (“Mirage Lands”), in 1938, the second, *Dagshríðar spor* (“Tracks of the Day’s Struggle”), in 1946. In 1950, her husband, Gísli Jónsson, published her essays and speeches as well as obituaries and commemorative poems in *Ferðalok* (“Journey’s End”).

Her stories were well received by her contemporaries both in Iceland and in North America. An article about *Hillingalönd* published in *Alþýðublaðið* 14 October 1938 stated this about her book: “The style and language of the book is pure and flows smoothly. There is no trace of foreign influence, which is remarkable for an author who lives in America, for it is said that the Icelandic language has become somewhat corrupt over there in recent years. I predict that this book will be widely read.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, her book was read both in North America and in Iceland and increasingly in English. In recent years, some of her stories have been translated into English and are being read anew by the generations of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren in North America.

In an article about *Hillingalönd* in the periodical *Nýjar kvöldvökur* Benjamín

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<sup>92</sup> “svo að sérstök ánægja var að ræða við hana um þau efni; [...]” Richard Beck. “Skáldkonan Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir.” *Ferðalok. Fyrirlestrar, ræður, æviminningar, erfljóð*. (Winnipeg: Gíli Jónsson, 1950) 162. All further references to this volume will be *Ferðalok* and to this edition.

<sup>93</sup> “Stíll og mál bókarinnar er hreint og áferðafellegt. Hvergi vottar fyrir erlendum áhrifum og má það merkilegt heita um höfund, sem dvelur í Vesturheimi, svo mjög sem íslenzkan kva vera farin að spillast þar á síðari árum.” Re-published in *Lögberg*, Nov. 10, 1938: 4.

Kristjánsson spoke glowingly about Guðrún: “Her stories bear witness to a woman of remarkable intelligence. Each one is better than the next, written in an astoundingly expressive and picturesque language, portraying a wise and passionate personality. While the language of our countrymen in North America is like this we need not despair about the fate of the Icelandic language there.”<sup>94</sup> These are strong words of praise that indeed support the statement that Guðrún was an accomplished writer in her native language.

Her popularity as a short story writer continued after her death. In 1946, a short promotional article was published in *Heimskringla* titled *Dagshríðar spor* praised her ability as a writer: “Guðrún’s stories have been very popular here. [...] Many of them are about the Icelandic community in North America and some of the descriptions are considerably well written. She often describes people’s psychological state rather well.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Guðrún’s descriptions were true to life. Most of her stories reflect the immigrant experience, the duality between the old and the new, which is the struggle to keep one’s identity as an Icelander and yet create a new life and new identity in a new country. In her book *Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters*, Daisy L. Neijmann explains the precarious timing of Guðrún’s work:

She lived in a time when Icelandic as a first language was quickly losing ground and Canadian values, view points and loyalties were taking over. In her fiction, we find her own sadness over these developments as she describes the pioneer

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<sup>94</sup> “Er hún kona fljúgandi gáfuð eins of sögurnar hennar bera með sér. En þær eru í stuttu máli sagt hver annari betri, sagðar á furðulega svipmiklu og þróttauðugu máli og lýsa skapriku og djúpúðgu lundarfari. Meðan orðfæri landnna vestan hafs er líkt þessu, er ekki ástæða til að örventa um afdrif íslezkunnar þar.” Re-published in *Lögberg*, 23 June, 1938: 5.

<sup>95</sup> “Sögur Guðrúnar heitinnar hafa átt hér miklum vinsældum að fagna. [...] Margar af þeim fjalla um líf þjóðbrotsins íslenzka hér vestra og eru sumar lýsingarnar af því afbragðs góðar. Lýsa þær oft sálarlífi manna og gera það vel.” *Heimskringla*, 11 Dec. 1946: 4.

achievements and their costs of a generation that is now left to see the heritage of their native country greatly endangered. On the other hand she understands the younger generation, which knows Iceland only from stories. For them, Iceland is far away and in the past, whereas Canada is their reality and their future.<sup>96</sup>

She managed to balance and unite the ideals of both the old and the new generations by having her characters play out the drama of life as they struggle to adjust to new life and customs that are different from what they are used to. The solution to their dilemma is always the same says Neijmann: “a reunion of the polarized selves through affection, understanding and tolerance taught by life and through faith in the future.”<sup>97</sup>

Most of her stories revolve around female characters, and in those stories where the main characters are male the female voice is always heard as well. Usually a wise older woman is the main character. This woman, more often than not, is the oral storyteller within the story, as the majority of Guðrún's stories are based on the form of telling a story within a story. The woman has knowledge of the world and of the folklore of her people and she is the person who moulds future generations through her role as a mother or a grandmother. In effect, “The preservation of the Icelandic cultural heritage thus depends largely on women.”<sup>98</sup> In most of Guðrún's stories the link with Iceland is through this older woman who passes the old tradition on to the younger generation more often than not through the use of folklore and Old Icelandic literature.

Guðrún evidently began to write at an early age, but it seems, she burned all

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<sup>96</sup> Daisy L. Neijmann. *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters*. (Amsterdam: Vrije University, 1994) 172.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 174-175.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 181.

traces of those early stories before leaving Iceland.<sup>99</sup> The first years in Canada didn't offer her much time for writing, since her duties as a wife, mother, and hostess of a busy household were priorities she didn't shun. Yet, according to her husband, Gísli Jónsson, as recorded by Stefán Einarsson in his memorial article about Guðrún, her story, "Utangarðs" ("Beyond the Pale"), was written during her first few years in Winnipeg, edited in 1937 and published in *Hillingalönd* in 1938.<sup>100</sup>

In 1920 "Duty to One's Country" ("Landskuld") published in *Tímarit* (II.113-119) marked the beginning of the publication of her stories, which continued to be published until the year she died, 1946. All her stories are centered on Icelandic-Canadian culture, except for the story "The Tree of Knowledge" ("Skilningstréð", 1945). That story retells the account of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, in a humorous, yet serious way. It is a delightful narrative, showing the writer to be far more liberated than perhaps one would have expected from a woman of her time. She has Eve outsmart both Satan and Yahweh after Satan has convinced her to eat of the forbidden apple in the Garden of Eden:

At once, she became a perceptive being, able to pick and choose for herself, determined, free and daring. It was as if a newborn source of power emerged from her soul and currents of warmth and happiness flowed through her. Her first thought was to have Adam share this wondrous feeling. On the wings of love she flew with the apple to him. As he was swallowing the first or second bite,

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<sup>99</sup> As noted by Stefán Einarsson. "Vestur-íslensk skáldkona." *Eimreiðin* 53 (1947): 15.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

Yahweh's thundering voice boomed in their ears, and Satan realized that Eve had slipped from his grasp.<sup>101</sup>

“The Tree of Knowledge” is most likely the last story she wrote and perhaps never finished to perfection. Gísli Jónsson indicated in his short introduction to *Dagshríðar spor* that it was almost not published, but because “The story was too far along and too precious to be left on the shelf,”<sup>102</sup> he realized it should be published. What a loss it would have been for readers if it hadn't been printed.

Even though “The Tree of Knowledge” is different from Guðrún's other stories, it has one element in common with all of her other stories. It is an account of new beginnings and a brighter future. In that narrative immigrants leave their country, sometimes like Adam and Eve out of necessity, who were exiled from the garden of Eden, but as they enter the new world they look towards the future with courage, determination and optimism:

The settlers' courage and desire for achievement seized them both, and they burned with desire for victory. That desire has been passed on from generation to generation and has grown and matured on the long road down through the centuries.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. “The Tree of Knowledge.” Translated by Árný Hjaltadóttir. *The Icelandic Canadian* 49:2 (1990): 31-34. Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>102</sup> “Sagan var of langt leidd og of dýrmæt til þess, að stinga henni undir stól.” Gísli Jónsson. “Stutt greinargerð.” (DS 7).

<sup>103</sup> Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir. “The Tree of Knowledge.” Translated by Árný Hjaltadóttir. *The Icelandic Canadian* 49:2 (1990): 31-34. Winnipeg, MB.

This courage and desire is reflected by the characters of her other stories as well. In “Trusty Timbers” (“Traustir máttviðir”1938), the main character in the story, Þórhildur, optimistically and “without being quite conscious that she was thinking aloud,” reassures her husband, after all their crops have been destroyed by a hail storm: “The harvest will be good next year, every storm must come to an end.”<sup>104</sup> This strength and perseverance, which has been passed on from Eve and Adam from one generation to the next, can weather any storm life may put in a person’s path. As Kirsten Wolf states in her introduction to *Writings by Western Icelandic Women*: “Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir is optimistic, for she firmly believes in the reunion of the polarized selves through love and understanding and through faith in the future.”<sup>105</sup> Her positive outlook on life shines through in all her stories as well as her public lectures.

Guðrún has recorded the story of the immigrant as she and her contemporaries experienced it, including moments of conflict with English culture. One of the most controversial issues she writes about is the differing attitude the Icelanders in Canada had towards the two World Wars. In “Duty to One’s Country” (“Landskuld”, 1920), “she shows us how bitterly divided her compatriots were in facing the First World War, the faction of pacifists remaining true to Icelandic traditions and counting Stephan G. Stephansson in its ranks, being pursued and despised by the nationalistic War party.”<sup>106</sup> She handles this delicate issue with kid gloves when she has Sigfríður and Ingibjörg, the two main female characters, debate the issue. Sigfríður’s fiancé has decided to join the

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<sup>104</sup> “Það verður góð uppskera næsta ár, öll él birta upp um síðir.” (DS 33).

<sup>105</sup> Wolf, Kirsten. *Writings by western Icelandic Women*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996) 24.

<sup>106</sup> Stefán Einarsson. *A History of Icelandic Prose Writers*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948) 249.

army and go to war but she does not want him to go and therefore jilts him. Speaking to her former fiancé's mother she says:

No, I hate the War and I dread it, dread the misery and the agony, and the destruction, [...] Imagine those poor soldier's! They are propped up like pawns on a chessboard. They are carried on death spears, but in reality they have no quarrel with one another. They must bow to the powers of war without grumbling, which at the same time they are told to fight against.<sup>107</sup>

Then she goes on saying that both sides will “fervently” pray for victory and that “God is everywhere”, only to be interrupted by Ingibjörg who says:

I won't allow such talk in my house, [...]. Tell me, what are the Icelanders to do? So far they haven't fallen behind other nations in being good citizens of this country. Should they lose their reputation by retreating?<sup>108</sup>

The answer Sigfríður gives is: “If they were men, then they wouldn't go to war.” And the old lady replies:

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<sup>107</sup> “Nei ég hata stríðið og mig hryllir við því, hryllir við eyndinni og kvölunum, og tortímingunni, [...] Hugsaðu þér þessa vesalings hermenn! Þeim er raðað eins og peðum á skákborð. Þeir berast á banaspjótum, en eiga þó í raun og veru ekkert sökótt hverjir við aðra. Þeir verða möglunarlaust að lúta hervaldinu, sem þeim er þó sagt að þeir séu að berjast á móti.” (HL 145).

<sup>108</sup> “Ég líð ekki svona skraf í mínum húsum, [...]. Viltu segja mér – hvað geta Íslendingar gert? Hingað til hafa þeir ekki staðið öðrum þjóðum að baki sem góðir borgarar þessa lands. Ættu þeir að gerast þau ómenni nú, að draga sig í hlé?” Ibid. 145-146.



They offer this land their life and limbs when it needs support because they are men, Sigfríður; the land which opened its arms to them when they had little other choices. It is their duty to Canada, because they are men.<sup>109</sup>

Guðrún manages to show both sides – the pacifist and the nationalist views – but the reader is left with the feeling that “duty to Canada” must come first even though the payment may be lives. There is nothing wrong with dying honorably; it is an old Icelandic tradition very much present in the Icelandic sagas and clearly shown in “Duty to One's Country” as well as in the story “The Voice of the Caller” (“Rödd hrópandans”), 1935). In that story, Guðrún has one of her characters say: “I would consider it unfortunate for the Icelanders to have moved here, if the tracks they leave behind won't show that those who traveled here were men, or do you think I exaggerate?”<sup>110</sup>

Icelandic heritage is strongly reflected in such stories as “The Door of the Heart” (“Dyr hjartans”, 1942), “From Generation to Generation” (“Frá kynslóð til kynslóðar”, 1944), and “The Voice of the Caller” (“Rödd hrópandans”, 1935), “a heritage passed on from parent to child, whether the parties approve of it or not.” And in her two last stories, “Appearances Deceive” (“Ekki er allt sem sýnist”, 1945) and “Footsore People” (“Sárfættir menn”, 1945), “she shows how the specific Icelandic-Nordic heritage can still assert itself, even in people who would not have minded getting rid of it long ago.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> “Ef þeir væru menn, þá mundu þeir neita að fara í stríð.”

“Af því þeir eru menn, Sigfríður, þá bjóða þeir nú þessu landi líf sitt og limu, þegar því liggur á liðveizlu; landinu sem tók þeim opnum örmum, þegar þeir áttu lítills úrkosta. Það er landskuldin, sem þeir gjalda Canada, af því að þeir eru menn.” Ibid. 146.

<sup>110</sup> “En illu heilli hafa Íslendingar hingað flutt – eða finnst þér það of djúft tekið í árinna – ef sporin, sem þeir skilja hér eftir, sýna ekki, að þar hafi þó verið menn á ferð.” (HL 201).

<sup>111</sup> Stefán Einarsson. *A History of Icelandic Prose Writers* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1948): 249.

In the stories, "Footsore People" and "Appearances Deceive," Guðrún gives an account of her fellow countrymen who have become separated from their own kind, those who have cut their cultural roots and have become absorbed into the Anglo-Canadian culture. Since, spiritual death is certain for those who lose their identity, "it is even more pressing to hear the 'voice of the caller', that one which 'calls to us from our own songs and sagas, and has given us strength, understanding, and humanity'. It is the clever voice of the Icelandic-Nordic heritage which Guðrún hears, not only in the ancient sagas and folklore, but also in Ibsen's plays and Sibelius' symphonies."<sup>112</sup> These voices echo through her stories and give them the flavor which makes them distinctly Icelandic, yet simultaneously universal.

Guðrún succeeded in transferring the deeper values of Icelandic folklore and sagas to the public through her stories and her public lectures:

Ibsen knew how to describe those dangers, which confront people and their ideals, knew how to tell stories that had a meaning to them. The old women in Iceland, our foremothers and grandmothers, also knew how to tell stories which had a hidden meaning--the stories about poor cottagers' sons who always gained a victory in their dealings with kings; because the cottagers' sons exceeded the kings in cleverness and human virtues. They told stories, like Ibsen, about people who got into troll's hands, lost their freedom and were all put in the same chains

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<sup>112</sup> "Þess vegna er það meira en áriðandi að daufheyrast ekki við "rödd hrópandans", þeirri er "til okkar kallar úr eigin söngvum og sögum, og öldum saman hefir talið í okkur orku, vit og mannlund." Það er hin snjalla rödd norrænunnar, sem Guðrún heyrir eigi aðeins úr fornum sögum og þjóðfræðum, heldur líka úr leikritum Ibsens og hljómkviðum Sivelíuasar." Stefán Einarsson. "Vestur-íslensk skáldkona." *Eimreiðin* 53 (1947): 22.

and tortured. The trolls had the powers and the strength; the people the cleverness and bravery-- and they won.

The old women, who told the children these stories in the dusk, while others slept, were moulding the children's soul--the future of the nation--teaching them admiration and respect for cleverness and human virtues, teaching them to watch over good heredity. Thus, good people watch over the future hopes and the future good of the nations.<sup>113</sup>

Guðrún clearly shows that one's heritage is important and must be passed on from generation to generation, regardless of whether one emerges into Anglo-Canadian culture or adheres to Icelandic-Canadian culture. This comes about because

the cultural inheritance accompanies the generations, whether the older generation tries to deprive the younger one of that inheritance, or the younger one refuses to accept it. The inheritance is like an unbreakable fetter of a living bloodstream.

Through this bloodstream, more or less, run temperament, appearance and nature.

The generations join hands regardless of what people believe.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> "Ísben kunni að lýsa þeim hættum, er mæta mönnum og hugsjónum þeirra, kunni að segja sögur, sem höfðu meiningu. Gömlu konurnar á Íslandi, formæður okkar og ömmur, kunnu líka að segja sögur, sem höfðu dulda þýðingu – sögurnar um fátæku kotungssynina, sem ætíð báru sigur úr bítum í viðskiptum við konunga; því kotungssynirnir báru af konungunum af viti og mannkostum. Þær sögðu sögur, eins og Ibsen, af mönnum, sem lentu í tröllahendur, töpuðu þar frelsi sínu og voru allir settir í sama mót, hlekkjaðir og kvaldir. Tröllin höfðu bolmagnið og kraftana; mennirnir vitið og hugprýðina – og þeir sigruðu.

Gömlu konurnar, sem sögðu börnunum svona sögur í rökkrinu, á meðan að aðrir sváfu, voru að móta sálarlíf barnanna – framtíð þjóðarinnar – kenna þeim aðdáun og virðingu fyrir viti og mannkostum, kenna þeim að gæta góðra erfða. Þannig vaka góðir menn yfir framtíðarvonum og framtíðarheill þjóðanna." "Erasmus frá Rotterdam," lecture, (*Ferðalok*: 64). Translation by Daisy L. Neijmann. *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters* (Amsterdam: Vrije University, 1994) 177.

<sup>114</sup> "erfðirnar fylgja kynslóðunum, hvort sem eldra fólkinu kemur til hugar að reyna að svifta þá yngri erfðaréttinum, eða þeim yngri að neita arfinum. Erfðirnar eru óslítandi bönd lifandi blóðstrauma. Með

This quote is from the story “The Door of the Heart” (“Dyr hjartans”, 1942) but this same problem of a pull between the generations occurs in “Lost Tracks” (“Fýkur í sporin”, 1921), “The Voice of the Caller” (Rödd hrópandans, 1935), as well as in “From Generation to Generation” (“Frá kynslóð til kynslóðar”, 1944). In the latter story Guðrún concludes that: “Charity is the pinnacle of life and it is passed on from generation to generation.”<sup>115</sup> Stefán Einarsson discusses this point in his article about Guðrún, “Vestur-íslensk skáldkona”: “Guðrún knew what she was talking about, because all her children married into English speaking homes, who didn’t only keep their ties to their heritage with unbroken devotion, but also continued to be good Icelanders.”<sup>116</sup>

Guðrún’s stories give us the perspective of the woman’s role in the pioneering experience, the sacrifices she had to make, the small victories and their ability to pass on the values of the older generation to future generations. The feminine perspective is firmly rooted in Icelandic folklore and sagas. These women are strong and independent and as mothers and grandmothers they pass on the culture, wisdom, and knowledge of their Icelandic heritage to the future Canadian Icelandic generation.

The following five stories, “A Dream,” “Duty to One’s Country,” “The Tree of Knowledge,” “The Thrift Shop” and “From Generation to Generation,” were chosen to give the reader a sample of Guðrún’s work. Each one is unique in its own way, but the immigrant theme runs through them all.

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þeim straumi fljóta skapgerð, útlit og eðli að meiru eða minna leyti. Kynslóðirnar haldast í hendur, hvað sem menn segja.” (DS 118-119).

<sup>115</sup> “Kærleikurinn er hámark lífsins og gengur í erfðir frá kynslóð til kynslóðar.” Ibid. 144-145.

<sup>116</sup> “Guðrún vissi hvað hún söng, því öll börn hennar giftust inn í enska heiminn, en héldu þó eigi aðeins órofa tryggðaböndum við æskuheimilið, heldur héldu þau líka áfram að vera góðir Íslendingar.” Stefán Einarsson. “Vestur-íslensk skáldkona.” *Eimreiðin* 53 (1947): 22-23.

## Chapter 4

### Translation

**“We are in the world of the soul, in those bright lands, where all dreams become reality and reality becomes dreams.”<sup>117</sup>**

### A Dream

The women’s association always looked after the gathering, which was held in the church on the first day of summer. The first day of summer is an Icelandic holiday. For centuries, Icelanders have composed countless poems, songs and psalms of praise and glory about this celebration of spring and sunshine, of long days and bright nights.

Old Ragnhildur hurried westward towards the church. It was a beautiful day, sunny and bright, but the cold northern breeze worked enthusiastically against the sunshine.

Ragnhildur was in high spirits; first of all it was the first day of summer, and then she was looking forward to the celebration and the preparation preceding it. She saw to it that everything would be done properly, at least in the kitchen. There, she had worked for many years and supervised the women and there she felt like a queen in her own domain. With her common sense, her willingness to please, and her practicality she managed the women and divided the work among them.

On days of celebrations, like this one, when preparations for gatherings and the banquets that followed them were needed, Ragnhildur was always the first to arrive at the church to begin the work, and the last to leave. So, as usual, she arrived first and then the other women who had agreed to help began to drift into the church. They had many a small job to do for the evening. They began bringing spring into the church by decorating

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<sup>117</sup> “Við erum staddar í heimi hugans, út í björtum löndum, þar sem allir draumar verða að veruleika og veruleikinn að draumum.” (DS 18).

it with flowers and the first spring-crop, red pine branches and budding silver coloured hops. Those of the women who had men available to them, that is to say the ones who had husbands and cars, usually got the ones who liked to please and accommodate the women's association to drive out to where the red pine grew to fetch this spring vegetation for the gathering. The men began to return, often with cold hands, but in high spirits because they had been able to do this for the women.

When the women had finished decorating the church, they began to work diligently on the banquet hall itself. Tables were put up, the women divided the work among them; some put table clothes on the tables, others set the tables, a few arranged flowers in vases, and a group of them worked in the kitchen preparing the food. Everything was ready in a much shorter time than one would expect such work to take. A festive atmosphere prevailed, the hall was ready for the feast, the tables decorated with flowers and filled with food; covered with all kinds of Icelandic dishes.

Ragnhildur stood in the doorway of the kitchen and looked into the hall. It made her feel good to see how comfortable, amiable and attractive everything had turned out.<sup>118</sup> The women were getting ready to go home because most of them had a house and children to look after. They also needed to change their clothes for the evening except for Ragnhildur because they didn't come dressed in their best clothes for such work; but

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<sup>118</sup> "Henni var hlýtt í skapi við að sjá hvað alt var orðið vistlegt, vinsamlegt og aðlaðandi þarna inni." Translated word for word or sense for sense this sentence would be like this in English: "She was warm in mood with to see how everything had become comfortable, amiable and attractive there inside." Translated in this way all the words in the sentence are accounted for, but does it make sense in English? Of course it doesn't. Firstly, even though the reader may be able to understand the words the structure of the sentence is incorrect. Changing the word order and omitting some words the sentence might look like this: "Her mood was warm as she saw how everything had become comfortable, amiable and attractive." Secondly in English one's mood isn't usually "warm," though it could be "good" or "happy." On the other hand one can "feel warm." To make the sentence readable in English and still keep the essence of the meaning within it I opted to translate it thus: "It made her feel good to see how comfortable, amiable and attractive everything had turned out." I have omitted some words and added some as well, but kept the meaning intact.

Ragnhildur was always dressed in a linen coat to protect her black silk dress, which she had used as her best dress for many years. Some of the women smirked over how old fashioned it was. Ragnhildur didn't mind, she liked her old dress and it looked good on her.

She was the only one left because she took it upon herself to guard the place and arrange a few things in the kitchen to make certain that everything was in order for the evening. Large kettles of boiling water stood ready for the coffee and the shining, disinfected coffee pots stood in long rows on a side table waiting to be carried by beautiful waitresses back and forth between the guests. Ragnhildur walked between the tables to make certain that nothing had been forgotten and everything was as it should be. Here and there she arranged flowers, which she felt didn't look quite right, or moved a plate which she thought would look better in a different place. These small changes sometimes make a difference as to whether the overall look is beautiful or indifferent.

Her feet and back were somewhat sore, but she had plenty of time to rest before the assembly began. She stopped in front of the platform and looked at the background prop of an Icelandic mountain scene, a beautiful painting, and the curtains in front of the platform were open enough that the guests could imagine themselves at home, in Iceland. On the platform, close to the front, stood a table with a large vase filled with red pine. Ragnhildur was satisfied with the view. She knew that there was a comfortable armchair up on the platform to one side where she could get a good rest. She walked up to the table and stopped there. She stroked the hops softly with her fingertips, took one head and touched it to her cheek – the children of spring. Nothing was so delicate and soft to the

touch, except for the head of a baby, and so she whispered softly: “Spring – gentle spring, balmy spring.”

The singers, who were supposed to entertain tonight, were upstairs in the church practicing. Ragnhildur heard the music clearly. A beautiful silvery soprano voice sang Björgvin’s Evening Prayer somberly and seriously. “Now I close my eyes...” The words and the tones descended peacefully on one’s ears and mind. An unusually high and clear tenor voice now sang “Ólafur road along the cliffs...” and the sound of hoof beats was clearly heard in Sveinbjörn’s accompaniment. Old Ragnhildur swayed from sheer joy, swayed with the rhythm of the music, and in her mind’s eye she saw into the home, the towering cliffs of the hidden people and their beautiful women who tried to tempt Ólafur. The same voice now began to sing Sigfús’ tune, *The Fiddle*, sang it immensely well and one could clearly hear the pronunciation and emphasis on the words. The singer did his best to do justice to Gröndal’s poem as well as the tune. Ragnhildur crooked her ears, as she didn’t want to miss the beauty of the song. “The golden string of a fiddle makes a sound, and often shines on unending summer eves... there a sword is never blushed by blood of slaying... The harp quivers high up in the realm of spirits, by weak hands touched in a time of darkness...” The singer continued the warm clear colourful tones. “I compel you still, my fiddle to full joy...” The verse was sung to the end and then silence, this phlegmatic silence, when people wanted to listen longer and hear more.

The singers were probably leaving because she could hear them walking about and talking – no, someone started to play the piano again and the prelude to “Længsel” by Kerulf sounded gentle and musical. The tenor voice cut in and sang the verses by Jónas. “I am not content out in Moon Island” he sang with all the melancholy and



feelings of restlessness which abides in the tune and verses. As Ragnhildur listened it was quite evident that she had a lump in her throat. Now she heard the people walk over the floor in cheerful conversation, go down the stairs and slam the door shut.

Everyone had left and she was all alone, yet not alone; the tunes and the poems were hovering around her. Maybe the dream she had last night had come true. This last hour she had heard sounds, which had sent her mind into amazing worlds. The prayer that had been composed by the poet and the great intellectual who prayed most ardently on behalf of the Icelandic youth through his influence and his life's work at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The national anthem, songs and poems, which lived in the minds of the people and each generation, taught the other. The romantic splendor and flight of Gröndal – Jónas who always composed "in the most beautiful voice."

A dream is sometimes a prediction of what is to come! "I am not content out in Moon Island." Ragnhildur had been discontent for a long time in the first years after she came to America. She had arrived here, with her heart full of sorrow, here to this church, many, many years ago, alone and broken-hearted. Here, she had gained courage and strength to walk upright with joy in her heart. Here, her soul had matured and she had learned to have faith, here she had become accustomed to fairness, kindness and spiritual tolerance. In her desolation and her homeless state of being she had found a home here because the little room she rented could hardly be called a home and every day she worked in other people's homes serving them. Here, she was able to work in a different way and her desire for this type of work could be satisfied.

Old Ragnhildur made herself comfortable in the chair, smiled to herself and looked out over the hall. Here, she sat alone in the high seat and the phrase from the old

troll story came to mind: “A bride is seated on a bench, tables covered, pitchers of ale overflowing...” She desired that now they were on their way to her, not trolls, but rather lost friends and family members; perhaps they were all around her celebrating the coming of summer. She loved and almost believed the Icelandic legend said that the first day of summer generated so much vital power that the dead were allowed to look out from their graves to celebrate the coming of summer. Who knows? Legends conceal experiences of centuries, centuries of compressed truths, which each person understood in his or her own way. Legends, how she had literally believed them when she was a child and youth living with her parents, and her friend, old Ingveldur, had had her hand in it too.

Ingveldur had been a servant of her parents as long as Ragnhildur could remember, and Ragnhildur had been her favorite. Old Ingibjörg was never too busy to show Ragnhildur affection when she came to the old lady with her childish afflictions. With her rough-work worn hands she stroked the tears away. As a result Ragnhildur had been more than willing to help Ingveldur with those chores that were considered fitting only for children and old people. Under Ingveldur’s guidance time passed quickly and the work was easy because her mind was travelling through lands of adventures and legends. She travelled into the cliffs of the hidden people, out into the splendid fields of adventures, and into the terrible mysterious dark lands of ghost. Ingveldur told her about these wonders long since past with such convictions and seriousness that Ragnhildur understood all of this to have happened in reality, for Ingveldur knew all kinds of advice, herbs and stones which helped and protected those who were sick and helpless against the great power of elves, trolls, monsters and ghosts – those hoards of darkness which plagued the human race.

Ragnhildur had now forgotten most of it and didn't believe in such superstitions, but perhaps it was hidden deep in her subconscious, this cluttered part of the mind, where men busily rummaged through picking out things that are no longer needed.

The earth, she thought, was not habitable because of psychology; research of dreams and the subconscious mind by psychological quacks that didn't have the faintest idea as to what they were talking about.<sup>119</sup> One could hardly eat a bite or drink a drop of coffee without it being a research matter of some terribly repressed passion and violence of the flesh. "This complex" haunted men as had ghosts in days of old, until Ragnhildur almost considered it easier to defend oneself against a few ghosts than to face all that horror which people thought lurked in the subconscious of their neighbours. Oh, well, the poor souls were perhaps not all dressed the same and therefore they were dragged forth like itchy sheep, for cleaning and healing, the people claimed. Freud was made responsible for all the complex syndrome trouble.

The greatest monster was the dream. Nobody with any sense talked about his dreams or asked anyone to interpret those dreams, either in jest or earnest, because this

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<sup>119</sup> "Það var ekki orðið líft á þessari jörð fyrir sálfræði, undirvitund og draumarannsóknunum andlegra skottulækna, sem ekki báru minsta skynbragð á hvað þeir voru að þvælast með." Translated word for word this sentence would read thus: "It was not become livable on this earth for psychology, subconscious mind and dreams research (by) psychological quacks, who not carry smallest knowledge about what they were to babbling about." For one thing, translating the sentence word for word the structure of the sentence is wrong in English. By changing the word order and omitting and or adding some words, the sentence might read like this: "It wasn't livable on the earth for psychology; research of the subconscious mind and of dreams by psychological quacks, who didn't have the smallest knowledge of what they were babbling about." When translating this sentence I wanted to bring forth the implication that comes with the words, "Það var ekki orðið líft á þessari jörð," which to me means that the earth is not "habitable." Thus the translation became: "The earth was not habitable..." The middle part of the sentence has more or less been kept intact, although I use "because of" instead of "for" and have changed the word order by putting the word "research" before the words "of the subconscious mind and of dreams" added in "of the" and "of" to complete the English sentence structure. The last part of the sentence has been changed to somewhat greater extent. The phrase, "...sem ekki báru minsta skynbragð á hvað þeir voru að þvælast með," has been translated thus: "...who didn't have the faintest idea of what they were talking about." Here one can see how the matrix code of the sentence has gone through the process of perpetual shuffling as it was being rendered into the parameters of the target code to emerge as a new code, the third code which is the final product of the translation.

eager voluntary research began right away. Those who listened to dreams sharpened their hearing half closed their eyes, put on their poker faces, ready to thoroughly figure out what kind of filth would surface from the mind of the one who told the dream. It reminded one of when ravens hop around a load of garbage, looking for intestines. The one who told the dream unraveled his intestines out of his own soul for the audience to sharpen their beaks on and tear apart.

Old Ingveldur's explanation was more interesting than those of the psychological quacks and from now on Ragnhildur was going to hold to them. It was still fresh in her mind when she began to watch over the home field.<sup>120</sup> At that time Ingveldur had deemed it too difficult for her to do at that tender age, but Ragnhildur felt she had gained respect and virtue. There, alone in the magical world of the Icelandic spring nights, she became content, had the leisure and the liberty to give her childish thoughts and imagination free reign. Many a night, when she had been up and about when everyone else was sleeping, even the birds were quiet, and the earth itself lay silent and remote in the obscure darkness of the night, she had been fearful and lonely. She had looked, trembling with fear, into every crook and nook for elves and ghosts, but never saw a thing. One of the many good pieces of advice old Ingveldur had given her was that if she saw or came across blue half transparent columns of smoke, the size of a person, to leave them alone, she was never to speak to them nor in any other way pry into their affairs. She told Ragnhildur that these were the souls of people who were asleep, who were allowed to wander about in their sleep in those places where they longed to be when they were awake. If these beings were in any way disturbed or startled, then the one who became

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<sup>120</sup> It was common practice in Iceland (before barbwire fences were invented) to have children as young as seven years old watch over the home fields at night, to keep the domestic animals out so that they wouldn't graze on the fields that needed to be harvested for winter feed.

agitated would die in his sleep. Because the soul was sleepwalking when she was disturbed, she wasn't able to find her right home, but rather roamed around restlessly. To provoke this state was the greatest misfortune of all. Ragnhildur had never met Ingveldur's dream beings, and had forgotten all about them. These stories had likely been kept somewhere in the secret compartments of her mind.

Last night she had dreamt that she was alone in nature.<sup>121</sup> It was around nightfall<sup>122</sup> and in the final salutation of the day, the sun's crimson rays crowned the mountain peaks in a golden red glow; below, the slopes and the lowlands were clothed in the violet hue of the evening dusk. A solitary peace covered the whole countryside. Quickly and lightly and without any effort she moved forward. She knew that she had traveled an immense distance, but she didn't feel tired nor was she surprised at the distance she had covered.

The landscape was familiar, but still she couldn't figure out where she was. The country was exceedingly beautiful. The mountains rose tall and looked as if, they had been chiseled by the hand of a master. Silver clear rivers and streams fell from ledge to ledge, creating waterfalls and rapids, and down on the plains the rivers twisted through the greenery like silver coils. Ragnhildur had never seen such blue lakes or shining oceans. A strange whistling sound echoed in her ears, not unlike the feel of a faint groan from a distant storm. The sound of whistling winds and the murmur of water were so far away that it was more like a memory than reality. Ragnhildur looked around and tried to

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<sup>121</sup> The literary meaning of the phrase, "úti á víðavangi," is "out of doors" or "out in the open countryside." I have translated it "in nature" because to me "out in the open countryside" doesn't connote the meaning of the phrase properly. That is to say as it is being used here.

<sup>122</sup> The word "náttmálaskeið" is somewhat misleading: it literally means 9 pm. In the story Ragnhildur is speaking about the time of night when the sun is setting or when night is falling, and whether it might be at 9 pm or not is debatable therefore I used the word "nightfall."

collect her thoughts. All of sudden she realized that she was not alone. All around her were troops and legions, some strange beings, vague vapour-like human forms. Each and every one of them seemed to be alone, isolated. She longed to join them, but nobody seemed to recognize or heed her longing.

Ragnhildur stretched out her hand and tried to touch them, but came up empty handed. Indescribable longing to overcome this suspense filled her mind, but all of sudden she felt faint, exhausted and unable to move. Ragnhildur knelt down in the satin soft grass and knew that she belonged to this earth and vegetation. Her tears, hot and heavy, ran down her cheeks and joined the dew. Only in a dream could one feel such helplessness and abandonment as she now felt.

She felt a rough, warm hand stroke her cheek. This touch belonged to only one person. Ragnhildur looked up, relieved, and there beside her in the grass sat Ingveldur, smiling. In her dream, Ragnhildur remembered that Ingveldur had died a long time ago, but regardless, there she sat looking like herself and she felt the same trust and good will from her presence as always. When Ragnhildur took a closer look it seemed to her that Ingveldur was more majestic, bigger, and that radiance shone from her countenance that Ragnhildur didn't remember having seen in her youth.

“Where are we, Ingveldur?” Ragnhildur asked.

Calmly, Ingveldur answered: “We are in the world of the soul, in those bright lands, where all dreams become reality and reality becomes dreams.”

In her dream, Ragnhildur thought this was a simple and natural explanation and didn't inquire any further about this land; but she asked Ingveldur about her fellow

travelers, what kind of beings they were. Ingveldur answered: “The same kind as you, they travel in their dreams where their souls long to be when they are awake.”

“Where do these warm currents and this beautiful resonance come from, which fill the air like as if one were listening to a majestic orchestra?” asked Ragnhildur.

“Don’t you know, child? The currents are the thoughts of the Icelanders who have lived abroad and are on their way home, soundless, sincere and warm. The resonance, which fills the air, is the poems and the hymns that the Icelandic poets have composed during their global journeys throughout the centuries. On these strong cords Icelanders have expressed their love for their motherland from distant shores. These resonance’s live and will continue to resound in the ears of future generations.”

“Yes, but this country isn’t Iceland, Ingveldur, and yet the surroundings appear to be similar.”

“Dreams become reality,” answered Ingveldur. “This is Iceland, this is the country which the nation dreams about, this is the country which the poets profess to, this is the country which reflects light out into the world, this is the country seen by those who have given all their energy and dedicated their lives to the needs of the nation.”

Ingveldur pointed east and said: “Look at the mountains over there, they are created by the minds of those who had the intellect, the vital force and the large mindedness to see beyond the darkness during the nation’s heaviest moments. Look at the rivers, which flow forth in clear silver. They come forth from Mímisbrunnur.<sup>123</sup> Those who have clad the land in the glorious green vestment, which you see, have been allowed to taste these

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<sup>123</sup> Mímisbrunnur is a spring of wisdom. There, the high god Óðinn gained his wisdom and became omniscient.

holy waters. This is Iceland of the past, of the future, the country which belongs to all of us.”

Ragnhildur stared at Ingveldur while she spoke and asked herself, who is this woman who speaks with such power?

Ingveldur looked at Ragnhildur smiling and said: “I am the old woman who has told the Icelandic children stories, rigmaroles, adventures and poetry from the beginning of Icelandic settlement. I have awakened the imagination of Icelandic youth and taught them how to use their wings. Look towards the east and see the radiance over our country!”

Ragnhildur looked where Ingveldur directed her, and awoke to the morning sun shining in her face...

The dream had followed her throughout the day; likely, the dream was about the events of the coming day, the summer celebration, the Icelandic worship of the sun. Maybe it was just a foolish dream, the foreboding of an old woman, old memories, called forth from the hidden places of the mind. Maybe there was a third interpretation of the dream.

Ragnhildur looked at her watch. It was time to begin the celebration and now she heard people waking about and talking. The people were gathering.



## Chapter 5.

### Translation

**"At once she became a perceptive being, able to pick and chose for herself, determined, free, and daring."<sup>124</sup>**

### The Tree of Knowledge

Out in the lands of light and summer, on the borders of dawn and aurora, the Garden of Eden was situated. When Yahweh had finished the Creation, He gave the garden to Adam and Eve to dwell in and to take care of. This was to be something of a trial farm, because Yahweh was still uncertain about the outcome. He remembered that He had made a mistake concerning some of the angels. He had given them a bit too much of his own investigative spirit, and He firmly resolved that this experiment must turn out with better results. Therefore, He immediately set down strict rules concerning what they were and were not allowed to do.

In the beginning, everything was peaceful and quiet and uneventful. The husbandry was very simple, because just about everything was provided for them.<sup>125</sup> Adam's main pastime was to roam about and study the plants and animals on his farm and give each one of them a distinct name. The grass grew, the tree branches swayed in the breeze, and the animals were meek and mild and played with each other. Everything appeared to be going as planned.

But Yahweh had not, for the moment, remembered Satan. Neither had He considered how big and strong Adam was and what a big appetite he had. Generally speaking, the food was rather poor in Eden, endless berries, vegetables and apples, which

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<sup>124</sup> "Hún varð allt í einu skynjandi vera, fær um að velja og hafna sjálf, ákveðin, frjáls og djörf." (DS 192).

<sup>125</sup> The idiom "lagt upp í hendurnar á" (DS 189) literally means "put up into the hands of" since the word for word translation will not make sense in English it has been translated as "provided for" which is in essence the meaning of the idiom in English.

sometimes were sour, unripe and hardly edible, for Burbank and other botanists had not yet appeared in history with their improved vegetation. Sometimes Adam would have a stomachache and other discomforts and blamed it on Eve's cooking. Eve cried, but bore the burden with composure and patience, which since then has been inherited by all her newlywed daughters. She was very fond of Adam as of an elder brother or a father and firmly resolved to care for him as best she could to keep him happy and comfortable.

One night Adam suffered very badly from internal disorders. He suffered from indigestion and was bad-tempered as well. Eve was distressed over his condition. She had been sleeping in the branches of one of the trees and was awakened by Adam's groans. She dashed off at the break of dawn to look for some kind of remedy for him, but she was not the only one who was up early that morning in Eden. As usual, Satan was hovering close by. Ever since she had come to the Garden of Eden, he had followed her like a shadow. He burned with the desire to poison Adam and Eve's relationship and to get her into disfavor with Yahweh. It should not be too difficult, to get this smiling blond lass in his power. He had previously succeeded in making the charming, dark-browed Lilith the enemy of all first fruits and youth, so that Yahweh had to put Adam to sleep to take a rib out of him for a new wife.

So far Satan had not been able to do anything, and, to be honest, he was getting both tired of and bored with Eve's innocence and simplemindedness. He stood in the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge and looked at her with lustful eyes. Yet, he made a wry face and rolled his eyes with contempt. In reality, such a silly girl was not worth the humiliation one suffered from pursuing her. But he knew that of all Yahweh's creations Eve was his favorite, and to her was given the responsible job of being the mother and the

protector of the young emergent life of the future generations instead of Lilith, who had failed Yahweh so terribly.<sup>126</sup>

Satan watched Eve closely, as she was gliding beautifully and light-footed back and forth between the trees, looking for something. He gloated,<sup>127</sup> for he saw Eve unhappy for the first time since she came to the garden. Because Satan was a man, he immediately guessed the reason behind it. He had made up the proverb that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. There the opportunity to gain favor with the girl came to him. He stepped forward out of the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge, which stood in the middle of the garden and was covered with beautiful leaves and loaded with fruits. As he approached Eve, he held in his hand a ripened, amber red, scented apple. He quickly put on gentlemanly manners, donned a modest, holy look, and offered his help. But Eve was sad and said that she did not know where it would all end for poor Adam. Satan showed her the apple and told her that this kind of apple was an unfailing remedy for indigestion. He said that it was a proverb in his district that an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Eve, who was only recently created, didn't know the difference between good and evil, and beside, she was so innocent and trusting, that she believed Satan's every word. She thanked him for his help and sympathy. Satan said that it would be best for her to

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<sup>126</sup> Lilith is mentioned in various ancient eastern texts, including those of Babylon. There she is portrayed as some kind of evening vacillator or nightmare attacking men at night. She is mentioned once (Isaiah 34:14) in the original text of the Old Testament, but in the Icelandic translation her name is omitted and replaced with "night hag." In other ancient Jewish manuscripts there are many tales about Lilith. There she is thought to have been Adam's first wife, amazingly beautiful and skilled in sorcery, but she soon sided with the forces of darkness, so Eve was given to Adam as a replacement. Lilith is a grave danger to children, and therefore they are equipped with all sorts of charms to prevent the accidents and misfortunes she might cause them. (DS 191).

<sup>127</sup> The phrase: "Og nú hlakkaði heldur en ekki í honum görnin" (DS 191), literally translates thus: "And now gloated rather than not in him the gut (or intestine)." Here I have omitted quite a few words and instead of using the word gut or intestine I simply translated the essential meaning of the phrase: "He gloated."

taste the apple, so that she could judge for herself how good and wholesome it was. He knew that Yahweh's thundering voice would fall upon him as soon as she had eaten of it, and then it would be easy for him to gain control of her. He had no intentions of letting Eve take the apple back to Adam.

Suddenly everything changed. Eve was quicker than Yahweh's violent temper and Satan's hate and cunning. When she swallowed the first bite, it was as if her soul was freed from a spell she had been under and had thrown off the slough. At once she became a perceptive being, able to pick and chose for herself, determined, free, and daring. It was as if a newborn source of power emerged from her soul, and currents of warmth and happiness flowed through her. Her first thought was to have Adam share this wondrous feeling. On the wings of love she flew with the apple to him. As he was swallowing the first or second bite, Yahweh's thundering voice boomed in their ears, and Satan realized that Eve had slipped from his grasp.

It is unnecessary to repeat here how Yahweh showered his anger over those ungrateful and disobedient children of his. Not only was he angry with them, but he was also disappointed with this experimental husbandry and told them harshly that from now on they were on their own.

That same evening, the gates of the garden closed behind them forever. There they stood, castaway and forsaken, with one half-eaten apple between them, and a heavy feeling of guilt on their shoulders – en route to an unknown world with the pitch-dark night ahead. Behind them, radiating fire flashed from the cherubim's' swords, who from now on stood guard at the gate. Out from the dark vast space came the voices of the night, mean and mysterious, the howling of wild beasts, the din of the sea and the

whistling of a thousand winds.<sup>128</sup> Terrible fright penetrated their hearts. They did not know where to go and searched for shelter. Adam felt his way about in the dark and took Eve's hand. She fell trembling into his arms. That night, for the first time on this earth, love between man and woman was kindled.

A new day was already rising out of the east, and rosy fingers of the morning glow announced the sun's arrival; the earth, swaddled in the first of the morning sun, lay open before their eyes. Young and beautiful and rich in vegetation, the earth welcomed them. The voices of the night had taken on a different hue, because now they blended with the joyous songs of the morning, the harmony of a thousand voices, which brought new vigor and peace to the minds and hearts of these future children of the earth. They looked shyly at each other for the first time and found that between them a new mystery had opened, which made them unafraid of work, trials, or suffering. A settlers' courage and desire for achievement seized them both, and they burned with a longing for victory. That desire has been passed on from generation to generation and has grown and matured on the long road down through the centuries.

From the seed of the apple, which fell from Adam's hand where they had their first night's lodging grew a new Tree of Knowledge, which ever since has seeded itself all over the world. The spirit of each new generation is enriched by its fruits until finally, the spirit of man will have no limit; that spirit which Yahweh automatically breathed into the bosom of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden at the dawn of time.

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<sup>128</sup> Utan úr myrkurheimnum bárust raddir næturinnar, geigvæglegar og leyndardómsfullar, ýlfur villidýranna, gnýr hafsins og þytur þúsund vinda (DS 193). This sentence translated word for word would be: "Out of the dark outer space came the voices of the night, menacing and mysterious, howling of wild beasts, din of the sea and the whizzing of thousand winds." I have made minor adjustments to polish the sentence. "Out of the dark vast space came the voices of the night, mean and mysterious, the howling of wild beasts, the din of the sea and the whistling of thousand winds."

## Chapter 6.

### Translation

**“Were they men, they wouldn't go to war.”**

**“They offer this land their life and limbs when it needs support because they are men, Sigfríður. This land which opened its arms to them when they had little other choices. It is their duty to Canada because they are men.”<sup>129</sup>**

### DUTY TO ONE'S COUNTRY

Baneful fate bothers many

Bloke to early death does send.

Thus is usually the end

Of Old Icelandic sagas.

P. E.

On the last Sunday in August 1916, the memorial service for Einar Branson was to be conducted in one of the Icelandic churches in Winnipeg. It had rained earlier in the day, but had now ceased and it was cold and cloudy. We who lived with old Ingibjörg Ólafsson were also gloomy.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> “Ef þeir væru menn, þá mundu þeir neita að fara í stríð.” “Af því að þeir eru men, Sigfríður, þá bjóða þeir nú þessu landi líf sitt og limu, þegar því liggur á liðveizlu; landinu, sem tók þeim opnum örmum, þegar þeir áttu litils úrkosta. Það er landskuldin, sem þeir gjalda Canada, af því þeir eru menn.” (HL 146).

<sup>130</sup> In chapter two the process of translation is explained in some detail. The following footnotes are designed to give the reader a better understanding and insight into the process of translation by explaining some of the problems the translator encounters. The sentence, “We who lived with old Ingibjörg Ólafsson were also gloomy”, has been simplified. In the original the sentence reads thus: “Það var líka dauft í huga okkar heimilisfólksins, sem bjó hjá Ingibjörgu gömlu Ólafsson.” A word for word translation would be: “There was also gloom in our minds, the inmates, who lived with old Ingibjörg Ólafsson.” Although the sentence can be understood in English, translated thus it is cumbersome. The word “inmates” has been omitted in the translation. By turning the sentence around, beginning with “We who lived...” and ending with “were also gloomy” makes the sentence simple and clear.

We had all loved Einar, and all of us felt compassion for the old woman. How hard it was for her when the news came that he had been killed in action. She, who had always met us with a smile and a kind word on her lips every evening when we came home tired and sometimes in a bad mood after a hard day's work, now walked around quiet and serious, her steps heavy. She had developed a great affection for Einar. He had been with her since his youth and all of us felt that he had been like a son to her, even though they weren't related. And it had been obvious to all that the home had changed after Einar left to join the army. These days, Ingibjörg seldom invited us into her sitting room in the evenings. It was always warm and bright in there and strangely old-fashioned, as if entering another world. We always felt it was a little festive. "My dear Einar, sing us a song and afterwards we will have some coffee," the old woman always said. Einar had a beautiful voice, played the piano nicely, and was the life and the soul of the home.

However, this Sunday everyone was melancholy and silent. We knew that Ingibjörg had asked the pastor to conduct a memorial service at the church in the evening, and we all intended to be present.

We thought that the day would never end. The old lady slept upstairs. It was the first time she hadn't made the Sunday afternoon coffee for us when we were at home. Therefore we, the girls, decided to make coffee,<sup>131</sup> but nobody seemed to have the courage to bring it to Ingibjörg. I summoned all my courage and went upstairs with a cup, but my

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<sup>131</sup>This sentence has an idiom in the original, which is almost untranslatable. The original sentence reads thus: "Svo að við stúlkurnar tókum okkur til og hituðum kaffið." A word for word translation would be: "So that we, the girls took us to (the task) and heated the coffee." The idiom "tókum okkur til" (took us to [the task]) has been translated "decided to". Again, "hituðum kaffið" (heated the coffee) has been translated here "to make coffee". Obviously by translating the semiotic essence (word for word) of the matrix code into the target code the sentence becomes difficult to understand. The way it is translated preserves the essential meaning of the sentence in the original language (Icelandic) as well as making it simple.

heart was pounding. I opened the door quietly. The old lady sat by the window in a rocking chair and gazed outside with a sad and hopeless look in her eyes. It was as if all joy and life had died and would never come back. She accepted the cup in silence. I stood by her chair while she drank the coffee. I wanted to say something, which would ease her pain because she had so often soothed me with warm hands when I had faced problems. But all I could say was: "It moved us deeply to hear that Einar was killed in action."

"Yes, dear Rúna, I know. I have been thinking others too, loved one's who have died and the hopes I had for them. My husband died long time ago and it is even longer since I lost our little boy, who was also named Einar. Perhaps it was the name I was faithful to. We humans can sometimes be so peculiar and can't even understand our own state of mind. But sometimes I felt that their characters had some similarities, although one was a child when he died and the other was a grown man when I first came to know him. It doesn't really matter what happens to us elderly people because we are so close to death; but sometimes one cannot escape life's hard blows, many things can happen on a long journey, dear Rúna. Once I would have denied that I would ever be able to come to terms with having lost my little boy, come to terms with the fact that he died before he had a chance to grow and mature and enjoy all the good things life has to offer. If people only knew how to live righteous lives.<sup>132</sup> Now, I wonder if it wasn't best for both of us that he died young. God help all the mothers who lose their boys in this perilous war, yes, God help all those who lose their loved ones."

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<sup>132</sup>Omission of a word or a phrase is sometimes necessary because if translated it would only serve to make the English version flow less smoothly. This case is one such example. In the phrase, "ef fólkið kann að lifa rétt, gagnvart sjálfum sér og öðrum." ("If people only knew how to live righteous lives towards themselves and others") has been shortened by omitting "towards themselves and others." Since the essential meaning of the sentence is preserved nothing is lost.



Ingibjörg sighed and dried her tears, which had run without restraint down her cheeks. She patted me warmly on the head and said, “Dear Rúna, it was kind of you to come to me. I felt as if I was all alone standing in the wasteland of human existence. It is wrong to allow such thoughts to take over one’s mind because when adversity knocks, people are good to you. Poor Sigfríður, I wonder how she is feeling, if she has heard the news yet.”

“What, wasn’t everything finished between them, Ingibjörg?”

“Well, finished and not finished. ‘A blade separates the back and the edge, but not even eternity can separate souls who love one another.’ And it wouldn’t surprise me that if they had both been able to come back alive from this war, they would have thought this matter over in a calmer and more reasonable way than they did before they left.”

“What was it that came between them all of sudden? Why did Sigfríður break their engagement?” I asked.

“Don’t you know, child – that it was because of the war?”

“Would you mind telling me about it?” I asked with hesitation. It occurred to me that it might do her good to talk about Einar as if he was alive; it would sooth her for a while as if he were not dead.

Old Ingibjörg was silent for a moment, then she looked at me and said: “I shouldn’t speak of it, least of all now, but if something similar would happen to you on your way through life and this could teach you that rigidity and inflexibility towards those who are nearest to you seldom bring desired results, then I don’t mind telling you about it as it happened. It all happened because Einar joined the army, and Sigfríður was passionately opposed to the War.”

“You remember how people split into groups, some for and others against the War. The excitement was so great that it almost ended in fistfights and unrest wherever people gathered together. And here in town, some Icelanders even ended up in fistfights over this. Truth be told, I thought Icelanders didn't have it in them to become so violent.”

I was one of those who thought it was unnecessary for Icelanders to join up, even though it was hard for me to defend my position when I spoke with Einar about it because he always brought forth two reasons against my single one. I now know that this is how it is, that it isn't easy for men to stand by since Canada joined the war.

I realized that Einar was often anxious, for instance when he read the news about the War, the list of names of those from Winnipeg who had been killed or wounded, or anything of that nature. I had a hunch it would end with him volunteering for the army. I was on pins and needles; one never knew what kind of disaster would happen the next day.

Then it was one evening early in June last year that I was at home alone sitting on the veranda, both to rest and to enjoy the beautiful evening and the peace which heaven and earth breathe towards one, despite the warring among the human race. I happened to look south down the street and saw Einar and Sigfríður coming, walking slowly; how young and beautiful they both were and in absolute harmony with the balmy spring evening.

“What fun it would be to be young and engaged like you, my children, I said as they came up the stairs towards me. But was I ever surprised when neither one of them smiled nor uttered a word. All of sudden I saw that Einar looked depressed and withdrawn; he was in a very bad mood. And Sigfríður, whose face is always pale, had red

spots on her cheeks. Her eyes were unnaturally shiny and sharp and her lips pressed together so hard that her mouth looked almost grim.”

They had obviously been fighting, but I pretended not to see anything and cheerfully said, “I was just wishing that some of you would come home, I was bored sitting here alone, and was just beginning to feel like having the evening coffee. Come inside and tell me some news.”

Einar sat down at the piano right away and played a bit, but it was disjointed and incoherent. How obvious people’s emotions can become, even in silence.

I went into the kitchen to make coffee. After a while Sigfríður joined me. I saw that she was agitated and almost in tears.

“I don’t feel like coffee right now, Ingibjörg. Good night.” And before I could collect my thoughts, she had disappeared through the door and gone home alone without Einar accompanying her. What could have happened between them? Could it have been something to do with the War, I thought, since it already was a subject of dispute between friends and family, even between parents and children. Should I speak with Einar or pretend that I hadn’t noticed anything?

Sometimes interference makes things worse, but I didn’t like to see them unreconciled so I went in to Einar.

He sat at the table deadly pale with agitation. I sat down and fixed my gaze on him and said, “Dear Einar, I hope you and Sigfríður love one another enough that you don’t let any misunderstanding come between you. She was upset when she left just now.”

Einar seemed to be having difficulty speaking; he stood up and walked across the floor twice, thrice, then stopped by the window and stared outside for a long time. Finally he came back over to the table and sat down tiredly on the chair opposite me. He leaned over the table and said in a low, dull voice, "Everything is finished between me and Sigfríður. I think she should have been more reasonable and tried to see that because of my honor I couldn't do anything else."

I was overcome by a strange paralyzing fear as I asked, "What have you done? You haven't joined the army?"

"Yes, I joined yesterday."

"And you didn't tell Sigfríður about it?"

"Oh, we had discussed it back and forth, and I have tried to make her see that I can no longer stand by without losing all self-respect and manhood. If I meet my friends, especially if they are wearing a uniform, I blush and want to hide under a rock.<sup>133</sup> That isn't the worst of it, but rather the injustice of seeing older family men and youth come forth, when healthy men in the prime of life, like myself, stay back. This I tried to tell her, but I must have failed. How do you think she responded? She claimed that it would show greater courage and self-reliance to refuse to go to war and partake in that bloodbath and I should rather suffer the disapproval of the masses. I told her that if she was absolutely opposed to it, then of course I wouldn't go, even though I felt I would be a less of a man because of it."

"I put no fetters on you, Einar," she answered. "As far as I am concerned you can do whatever you want, but if you join the army we go our separate ways." It hurt me that

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<sup>133</sup> Here the idiom "sökva ofan í jörðina" ("to sink into the earth") has been replaced with the equivalent English idiom "to hide under a rock."

she should set up such unfair terms and then I truly felt that I must join the army so that I could continue to keep my self-respect towards her. I saw no other way, and deep down I hoped that she wouldn't think me to be less of a man for it, and that she had just said this in the heat of the moment without really meaning it, but it turned out differently. I felt a bit apprehensive about telling her that I had joined the army, yet I didn't want her to hear it from someone else, so I phoned her late today and asked her to walk with me down to the river. "Yes!" came her gentle, joyful answer over the phone, "walk with you to the end of the world." Human nature is strange. This answer made me suddenly happy and hopeful that everything would turn out fine. I dressed and primed myself as if I was going to sit upon the bridal seat and then I went to meet her. She came towards me, tall and slim, her every movement graceful. I wanted to take her in my arms, but instead I grasped her hand tightly and she answered with a smile. We walked along and talked about everything under the sun. Enjoying the moment, I still hadn't told her my business.

We sat on the south side of the riverbank, under a big tree, pretending it was ours. Sigfríður had propped one hand under her cheek and her other hand I held in the palm of my hand beneath my cheek.

"Sigfríður, would you repeat what you said on the telephone today, that you are willing to walk with me to the end of the world?"

She looked up suddenly and answered, "Yes, as long as you don't expect me to walk with you on the wrong road."

"My love, I have followed my conscience and my sense of honor until now. I joined the army yesterday. I had to do it, or endure the loss of my manhood, as I see it."

"You ... joined ... the ... army ... yesterday?"

She uttered the words one by one, and it was as if she wasn't addressing me, but looked straight out onto the river, yet seemingly without seeing anything. She slowly withdrew her hand, which had lain warm and willing in my palm and pulled her clothing away from me, as if I was something unclean. This small movement revealed her thinking. Of course, she didn't say a word, but rose and looked around as if she had lost something.

"We should go home. It is getting late and chilly," she said as we walked onwards. Neither one of us spoke a word all the way home. Just now, when you left, she came to me and drew the ring off her finger and laid it on the table in front of me and left."

I began to disagree, but Einar jumped up from the chair, waved his hand impatiently and said that he trusted me because he had always viewed me like the best of mothers, and that he didn't want me to get the wrong impression of what had happened.

I didn't get any sleep that night. I saw that I wouldn't be able to do anything. They were both overbearing, stubborn, and each one was absolutely convinced, as youths are prone to be, that he or she was right. Thinking about it, I see that I turned against Sigfríður. I felt that she should have thought more carefully about things, and I decided that some day I would speak to her.

Then Einar went to the army camp and never came to see me all summer long, and I didn't want to ask him. Sigfríður came once in a while, but never stayed long. It was as if she avoided being alone with me.

This fall, late in October, she came by one evening and told me that she had been hired by the Red Cross and would soon leave for France, as soon as she had learned the

necessary regulations for nursing. She said that she had been thinking about what she could do to compensate in some way for the pain she had caused Einar, and it would most likely be by reducing the pain of others.

“So you aren't mad at Einar any more,” I said.

“Mad at Einar? No, I am not. But each of us has our own beliefs and he mustn't expect me to change mine.”

“Would you have liked him better if he had given in and stayed at home? Would you have thought him to be a better man ... loved him more?”

“No, I have never loved him more nor thought better of him than at that moment. I realized right then it would have been a shadow between us if either one of us had given in. We had been caught in the net, which everyone seems to be entangled in these days, wherever one looks.”

“Are you beginning to change your opinion of this war?”

“No, I hate the War and I dread it. Dread the misery and the agony, and the destruction, spiritual and physical, which are caused by it. I mustn't think about the destruction and the reduction of the beauty and the congruence of the whole human race. Imagine those poor solders! They are propped up like pawns on a chessboard. They are carried on death spears, but in reality they have no quarrel with one another. They must bow to the powers of war without grumbling, which at the same time they are told to fight against. May God grant that it won't be a disappointment to optimistic and good people, that it won't be the law of the fist that prevails when everything is finished. We pray fervently and solemnly, in churches and in our homes, to God for victory. The enemy nations do so also. The mother's heart is just as sensitive there and the prayers just

as fervent. We are taught that God is the Infinitely Good Father of all men, God is everywhere.”

I interrupted her angrily. “I won't allow such talk in my house. Is it not enough for you to have been the cause of Einar going off to war? Do you also have to turn against your own nation? You go beyond reason when you start to slander the word of God without respect in this matter. Tell me, what are the Icelanders to do? So far they haven't fallen behind other nations in being good citizens of this country. Should they loose their reputation by retreating?”

“Were they men, they wouldn't go to war.”

“They offer this land their life and limbs when it needs support because they are men, Sigfríður. This land which opened its arms to them when they had little other choices. It is their duty to Canada because they are men.”

“Almost a year has passed since we had this conversation. Einar has been killed and Sigfríður is somewhere in France. However, I who would have caused the least amount of destruction, sit here at home alone. This is how fate sometimes turns out. Anyhow, how late is it? Rúna would you please go and see if it isn't time to go to church?”



## Chapter 7.

### Translation

**“The holy mother stepped slowly and solemnly out of the frame, wrapped the child in her cloak, and with an indescribable look of anguish upon her face disappeared from the church.”<sup>134</sup>**

### The Thrift Shop

I'll always remember how much I looked forward to Sundays in years gone by, looked forward to having a whole day, from morning to night to do with as I pleased, to be my own boss and not to have to stand humbly and say yes sir and no sir to please my superiors. And there were others of my fellow countrymen who had this same habit, looking forward to Sundays, looking forward to throwing off the workers yoke, to be free to visit friends and acquaintances. It was therefore not without a reason that Sunday became the main visiting day among the Icelanders here in America. Not that it should be understood as if Icelandic hospitality has ever been limited to one visiting day a week.

During the first few years such a visiting day grew out of a spiritual need because there was almost no social interaction through the churches or other assemblies among my countrymen here. At that time it was the poorest Icelandic homes that ignited the brightest beacon for Icelandic culture. There people gathered together to speak with one another in Icelandic, drink coffee and enjoy Icelandic hospitality because it wasn't left behind in Iceland by those who moved here. Likewise the family ghosts, the Lalli's, the Skotta's and the Móri's who appeared everywhere like a bright fire throughout the countryside<sup>135</sup> at home and made life miserable for many, weren't left behind.

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<sup>134</sup> “Hægt og hátíðlega steig hin heilaga guðsmóðir út úr umgerðinni, sveipaði barnið skikkju sinni, og með óutmálanlegum angistarsvip hvarf hún út úr kirkjunni.” (HL 36).

Of these old immigrant homes there are now only a few left standing. I am a friend of one of those families. The couple who live there are now both elderly and their hair has turned white, but they are still young at heart and fun to be with, and the atmosphere in their home is warm and friendly. Unassuming hospitality reigns there, and in their minds shine, sunshine and spiritual light that attract and allure people of all ages to their home.

The old lady in particular has about her an air of adventure; this probably arises from the fact that she is a wise woman when she chooses to give advice. We often call her Scheherasade in jest after the famous story queen from the book, *Arabian Nights*. She moved to America in her youth and had to leave her parents right away, as was then common for young girls to do, to earn her keep as a domestic servant. She has told me many stories of how hard her first job was, but that is another story. Soon she was fortunate enough to become a nursemaid to the children of a wonderful couple, an event she considers to be the beginning of her good fortune. She stayed with them for many years until she married.

This couple, were educated and very wealthy. They were constantly traveling back and forth through America and sometimes to Europe as well. On many of those trips they took her and the children along, and thus it happened that she became a well-educated and learned woman, though she has never been to school. And there are many things in their home, which show their great understanding and love of fine art.

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<sup>135</sup> The literary meaning of the phrase “er gengu ljósum loga um sveitirnar” is “who walked like bright fire throughout the country site”. Here it has been translated as “who appeared everywhere like a bright fire throughout the country site”, which in essence is the real meaning of the phrase.

They held fast to many old and strange customs, and one of them was to chat in the dark, which they did even when guests were present. They insisted that people enjoyed the conversation better, and besides, it was a good Old Icelandic custom. And one thing was for certain – in the twilight there was always something to talk about.

I remember one of those Sunday evenings particularly well. There were quite a few of us gathered together and many things were being discussed. The conversation centered mostly around religion as so often happens. We had discussed the religions of East and West, old and new, and the many churches and religious beliefs, and what a great part religion has played in molding the psychological framework and thought patterns of the nations. Even the belief in ghosts – how much influence it has had on people's thoughts – and from there the conversation lead to psychology and dreams. In the end, each person had to recite a dream, which was the strangest of any dream he/she had dreamt.

The mistress of the house hadn't been participating for a while in the conversation because she had been busy offering people refreshments, but when she had finished she came and mingled with the group. Now, we all urged her to tell us about something she had dreamt. She said that all of her dreams had been of little or no consequence, and of course forgotten. Yet there was one dream, which she would always remember and she didn't mind telling us about it, but first she had to tell us what preceded it.

"As I have so often told you," she began, "the couple I worked the longest for, traveled often. One summer, my boss needed to take a business trip home to England. At that time his wife took the opportunity to travel to eastern Canada to visit her relatives

and her old hometown. She took the children and myself with her, and we stayed there for most of the summer.

I had little to do and a lot of leisure time away from the children. I used the time to explore and become familiar with this old-fashioned town. You can hardly imagine how old-fashioned and strange these Catholic towns are in the east.

There was one place I especially enjoyed visiting. It was an old church made of red diamond-shaped bricks and which had for a long time been a thrift shop and a place for auctions. It was full of all kinds of old junk and discarded furniture. Sometimes I thought that all of the good and bad discarded furniture of the whole country was assembled there. It was all mixed together. There stood side by side rare things: elaborate furnishings for a living room carved and hand-made of the most expensive wood, old rickety chairs and tables, creels and tubs, all kinds of imaginable and unimaginable junk. Along the walls were rows of old paintings of disproportional quality; noteworthy old copper-plated and litho-graphic pictures as well as poor pastel pictures. Those who had painted them and the models for them were of were gone and forgotten.

I often wished that some of those old things could talk, that they would tell their stories in a similar way as Queen Matthildur's table runner, which so clearly recalled her husband's famous travels. It has been proven by that tablecloth that some things retain a part of the soul of those who make them, and the greater the beauty and the better the design the more is retained.

The owner of this thrift shop was a bald old man with a long white beard and black eyes who read people to the core of their being and saw surprisingly quickly who the good customers were. He himself was in many ways the most peculiar relic in the

shop. He was born and bred in this town and had lived there all his life, and therefore he knew nearly every person and each one's story as well, and among them was my mistress and her relatives.

By chance he found out that I was her servant, and that was the main reason for our acquaintance. At first it was hard for him to believe that I was an Icelander because I was in no way different from other people. I teased him by saying that it would have been easier for him to believe I had horns, hoofs, or some such peculiarities. The old man never tired of asking me about Iceland and Icelanders, and it never occurred to me then that he was doing it for any particular reason. On the other hand, he told me all kinds of strange legends and folk tales from his hometown. And of course, the ability to tell stories about strange things is a trait of those who live by the sea.<sup>136</sup>

Once my mistress sent me to him on an errand and I was to wait for an answer. However when I arrived, he was busy serving customers and therefore couldn't attend to me for a while. The old man directed me to a corner of the church where he had arranged some comfortable chairs. Nearby were rows of bookcases full of books that of course were for sale, and indeed many of them were excellent books. Some of them were old and rare editions. There, the old man usually sat and read or chatted with his acquaintances when there was nothing to do, for it was seldom busy in his shop.

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<sup>136</sup> The literal translation of the phrase “Enda fylgir það þeim, er búa við hafið, að kunna að segja frá mörgum undarlegum hlutum” would be: Therefore it follows them, who live by the sea, to know how to tell about many strange things.” Obviously by translating the semiotic essence (word for word) of the matrix code into the target code the sentence becomes difficult to understand. The way it is translated here preserves the essential meaning of the sentence in the original language (Icelandic). “And of course, the ability to tell stories about strange things is a trait of those who live by the sea.”

I was tired. There was a suffocating stifling heat outside and a thunderstorm approaching. Therefore I was glad to sit down and rest. I must have fallen asleep because all of a sudden the junk had disappeared and the church had changed.

It was a bright and beautiful spring morning. The rays of the sun streamed in through the stain glass windows and scattered throughout the church in a rainbow colored hue. The atmosphere was holy and peaceful. The church was full of people and the scent of incense filled my nostrils. Before the high altar choir deacons moved in a blue mist and I heard as from afar the sweet sound of "Gloria in Excelsis." The mist disappeared and my vision became crystal clear. My sight became sharper and I had a much greater discernment than when I was awake. All of a sudden I saw people's faces, and one face became quite clear to me. It was a tall woman, beautiful and noble. The strangest of all was that I knew instantly she was Icelandic. I happened to look toward the door, and saw a large handsome well-dressed man enter. He had a high, narrow forehead and a sharp-edged brow, his hair and beard were flecked with gray and his beard was pointed. What I noticed the most were his eyes because they were the eyes of a beast, hollow and greedy. It all seemed so natural to me.

This man sat down in the last pew at the back of the church and stared down the aisle. I then looked in the same direction as he, down towards the altar. It was magnificent and on it stood silver candlesticks with lighted candles, which cast a glow upon the altarpiece. Thereafter I didn't see anything besides the altarpiece because before my eyes I saw the most beautiful piece of art I have ever seen. The picture was of mother Mary with the child Jesus in her arms, and they were so gentle and so beautiful that I lack the words to describe them. From the child there emanated a godly radiance of youth,

beauty and innocence. He was the very image of eternal youth and future hopes and the mother was the personification of perpetual charity, cuddling the baby to her breast with such indescribable affection and gentleness, yet a kind of anxious look in her eyes, as if she had a foreboding knowledge of what lay in store for him later in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. The picture was such a masterpiece that I felt for a moment as if she would come alive, move and address me, and all of sudden I realized that in the picture lived the soul of the Church.

All this disappeared and suddenly my dream changed. I was still in the same church, but now it was no longer a sunny spring morning. It was fall and everything was gray, dark, crisp and cold both outside and inside. Outside the sky was gray and misty; inside gray shadows and clouds cried from every corner and glided beneath the high vault of the church. They appeared to be lost souls in silent lamentation, who nobody felt sorry for. The church was filled with agitated angry people who rushed back and forth. They looked at one another with malice and the atmosphere throbbed with hatred. The people changed into different shapes. Some writhed and wriggled forward like snakes, while others strutted around with great pride, swinging back and forth something that resembled a great big tail, and still others crawled on all fours.

The man with the beast-like eyes stood farthest inside the church and towered over all other men. He held onto a large purse, which he dangled in front of the people. More and more people thronged around him but others stood back. It wasn't quite clear to me what the argument was about, but the crowd around the big man with the beast-like eyes became increasingly thicker. And the few who didn't want to join him now prepared to leave.

Then I happened to look at the altarpiece and to my amazement I saw the image of Mary move. The holy mother stepped slowly and solemnly out of the frame, wrapped the child in her cloak, and with an indescribable look of anguish upon her face disappeared from the church.

Nobody noticed that the picture had vanished and that the frame was empty above the altar. The light became less ardent; the shadows deeper, and the tall man with the beast-like eyes had become so tall that he touched the vault of the church. Around him dark phantoms danced. Suddenly everything disappeared and I was engulfed in utter darkness. A terrible fear fell over me. I tried to run outside, but my feet became as heavy as lead and I couldn't move.

Then a great clap of thunder startled me as if the sky was caving in on the earth, and every timber in the church creaked and moaned. I jumped up, hardly aware if I was awake or asleep. At that moment the old man arrived, looked at me and asked if I was ill. "No," I replied, "but I am afraid that the air in here has become stifling. I fell asleep for a moment and dreamt such a strange dream." He looked at me with an odd expression and said: "Are you certain that you were dreaming? According to legends, some strange things have happened here." My curiosity had been aroused, so I asked him whether it was believed that the church was haunted.

He adjusted the glasses on his nose as he said: "Hum – haunted – not really, but rumor has it that things are not all what they seem. That is probably because of the old folk tales which have been passed on to explain the reason for the abandonment of the church."



I pressed the old man to tell me everything he knew about the old church. He smiled at my curiosity, stroked his beard a few times and stared into space as if he were contemplating something before he began:

"This church, as so many other old houses, has its own story. The older they are, the more varied the story – just like people. I have often wondered whether there was any vestige left behind by all of the services, prayers, and hymns sung here. Whether people who came here, some with a pure heart who therefore came because of a special need, others out of habit and hypocrisy as is common even today. Yes these people who came here for daily confession, to pray and pour out their hearts and to receive peace and forgiveness through various means such as the mediation of priests and those monies which they sacrificed upon the Lord's altar, whether they did not leave behind a hue, a spirit or an atmosphere. Sometimes I have felt that they have.

Long ago this was the biggest and the richest church in town, which then, compared to now, was a flourishing and lively town. Since the completion of the railway from coast to coast, the town has slumbered and become overgrown with moss like Rip van Winkle.

In those days many large ships sailed from here, both commercial and fishing vessels. One of the richest ship owners was your mistress' ancestor. He was a man to be reckoned with; a heroic sailor and a great big man, disliked by the common people, stern and unyielding, but honorable in his dealings and an ardent Catholic. Most of his life he sailed his own ships and it was rumored that his ships never met with any accident. One autumn when he came home, the whole town was in turmoil because he had married a beautiful young woman. The story goes that he had found her and fallen in love on some

deserted island in the North Atlantic, which is all covered with snow and ice, where the sun never sets in the summer and is never seen in the winter. Now, since speaking to you, I know that she must have been Icelandic. Many rumors have circulated about how proud and beautiful this foreign woman was, and about the merry way they lived and how little belief she had in the Catholic religion. It is even said that the priests had admonished her husband for the fact that she never came to confession, and it is said that he silenced them with large monetary gifts to the church.

She herself had never given anything to the church except for an altarpiece, which she had brought back with her from a trip to Europe; the story goes on to describe how magnificent the picture was, and from that day forward she was often seen in church with her husband. But it was this same altarpiece that had caused the disagreement.

Much later, after they were both dead, it was discovered that the altarpiece was the work of an artist who had then become famous around the whole world. Every art gallery and every rich man competed for his work and offered a phenomenal price for them. But nobody was able to get this painting.

After repeated arguments and upheaval it was finally agreed to sell the painting, but that same evening a fire ignited close to the altar. Everyone worked hard together to extinguish the fire, but when it was finally put out and the damage estimated it became apparent that the painting of Mary had burned.

It is likely that the candles on the altar had started the fire yet it was never known for certain how the fire began. Some thought that someone had stolen the painting and started a fire to cover the crime. But many others believed that it was a punishment from the Lord for the greed and disrespect the people showed for the altarpiece.

It was rumored that the church was doomed. The superstition became so strong that the church was abandoned. But then, after a long time, it was refurbished<sup>137</sup> as a thrift shop and has remained a thrift shop ever since.

When the old lady had finished her story, we were all silent for a while. It was as if nobody wanted to break the silence. The effect of the story, the moonlight, and the twilight had all helped to put us, as it were, in another world. The old lady stood up and turned on the lights and then all of us came to our senses, rose from our seats and quickly said our goodbyes, because it was getting late in the evening.

On my way home many things passed through my mind as was usual when I left that house. It is strange how one can become lost and quite unable to hold a conversation with some people, but on the other hand, listening to others, awakens, sharpens and stimulates one's thoughts, and with them one is ready to spread one's wings and let one's thoughts fly out over strange lands, allowing them to travel as far and wide as they possibly can.

Yes, it stirred the apathy and the oppressiveness of the mind to visit the old couple. Had she really dreamt this or was she giving us a sign? That question I have never been able to answer. I have often thought about the dream, the old man and the thrift shop, especially when I have visited a church.

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<sup>137</sup> The idiom "dubbed upp" literally means to "clean up, groom, trim, spruce up, dress up." I have chosen to use the word "refurbished," which in essence means to renovate, to change something into something else. The church was changed into a thrift shop.

## Chapter 8.

### Translation

**"And now abided Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity."<sup>138</sup>**

#### From Generation to Generation

An echo of young people's voices, singing to honor the departure of the old year, blended with the deadly sound of the north wind, howling outside. The voices of youth, the voices of life, competed with the death chant of the dreadful winter weather.

Except for those echoes of life and death, which played like an accompaniment to Rannveig's thoughts, silence prevailed in her bedroom. The old lady rested in her bed with a pillow behind her shoulders and lay with her eyes closed, absolutely still. The lampshade on the lamp, which stood on the table beside her bed, had been arranged in such manner that a shadow fell on her face. The expression on her beautiful assertive face was so peaceful, that nobody looking into her room would have doubted that she slept. Although old age had placed its mark upon her, her forehead was still high, her brow arched, her nose straight, her cheekbones prominent and her chin elegant. But the old lady was not sleeping because her mind was too busy. She was thinking about the World War and the lot handed to the youth these days. The earth, the inheritance of the new generation, was now covered with blood, the air stifled with hatred. The youth called to sacrifice their lives and their strength, for ideals which the older generation had not cared enough about but had bought and sold and even abandoned in various lands. She thought about what her grandmother had told her a long time ago about people's lack of insight.

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<sup>138</sup> "En þá er þetta þrent, trúin, vonin og kærleikurinn varanlegt, en af þessu er kærleikurinn mestur." (DS 144).

She had been reading her old diary off and on all day, recalling the past. She was going to burn the old diary soon, because there her story was written, there her thoughts and inner life were inscribed. Memories from her youth, happiness and sorrows, belonged to the past and had no business passing into the hands of others. Her small ideal world and experiences would be rather comical, compared with the quick-paced trend of the modern world. And yet, it was her experience and the reading of the old diary, which had in some way made her more tolerant towards Veiga's spur-of-the-moment betrothal than her parents were able to be. Of course it had been a surprise to them when she came home with a total stranger last night and announced that they were betrothed. This morning Veiga had added insult to injury<sup>139</sup> by announcing to her parents that she was going to marry him within the next three or four days. And for the first time as far as she could remember, young Rannveig's father had disapproved of her behavior. He had always been the first to support her independence. In this instance the old lady doubted whether Veiga's parents had a right to make a decision for her.

Veiga's mother, Rannveig's daughter-in-law, had come to see her today and told her that Veiga's father had spoken to Veiga that morning and told her that he hadn't expected her to be one of those people whose life would be caught up in the excitement of the war and its influence on people's love life. He also said that she could postpone the wedding until after the war. Veiga's only answer had been that she didn't have time to talk about this right now because she was late for her date with her fiancé, and then she had left. Later she had phoned her mother and asked her to be ready for a few guests who would arrive that evening.

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<sup>139</sup> The idiom "bætt gráu ofan á svart" literally means to "add gray on top of black" which doesn't make much sense in English and therefore I have used a substitute, a familiar English idiom "added insult to injury" which covers the essential meaning of the original phrase.

The atmosphere had been heavy in the house all day, but old Rannveig hadn't made any comment regarding this matter yet. She was thinking. She knew full well that Veiga was the apple of her father's eye, and she understood why he wanted to postpone the wedding. He was thinking of Veiga's future security. But wasn't everything insecure because of the utter confusion in the world right now? And of course Veiga wasn't thinking about what this marriage would bring her, but rather, that she was losing the man she loved to this war and there was no guarantee that he would come back. But the scales have continuously tilted in favor of love rather than towards profit and security; fortunately love wasn't for sale.

The old lady sighed wearily. She knew that if a rift were created in the relationship between Veiga and her father, it would be hard for both. Could she unravel this problem? She had quit interfering with things, she was halfway to eternity, but she didn't like that the New Year would begin with strife between family members.

Tired and perplexed she let her thoughts wander and listened for a while to the wing-like beating of the storm outside. All of sudden it was as if the curtains of time had been whisked away and a different song from another storm sounded in her ears. Old Rannveig had entered the domain of the past. In a flash her mind recalled pictures and memories, which rose pure and clear from the depths of time. And of all those countless memories, the memory of her husband was foremost; she heard the sound of his voice and the roar of the storm from the evening she first laid her eyes upon him.

She was at home in Iceland in the living room at Fell in the dusk on New Year's Eve more than 60 years ago. The day had been gray and gloomy. The snow was coming down faster while the sound of the storm whistled in the mountains. The young maiden

was depressed because she knew that at any moment a snowstorm would be roaring outside and the young people from the neighborhood, whom she had invited to her home this New Year's Eve, would have to sit at home snowed-in. She had been looking forward to this New Year's merry-making with great anticipation and had worked very hard to get permission from her elders to have the feast. Her parents and grandmother considered that frivolity among young people was on the increase in the country, and wanted to keep festive celebrations in the style of an 18th century prayer-book. When the older generation had finally agreed to her plan the weather moved against her. She walked over to the window and looked out. The weather was getting worse, the snow had begun to whirl around and the storm whistled through the gables of the house. It was rapidly becoming darker outside, the blinding snowstorm covered the countryside, the house shook and the storm grated on the living room windows and the walls of the house.

The maiden at Fell knew that her friends wouldn't be coming tonight, there would be no singing, no games or dancing this New Year's Eve in the living room at Fell. Dispirited, she lit the beautiful lamp, which was the most recent model available, and the living room became illuminated with a bright light. The lamp glided on thick brass chains and it was possible to pull it down, close to the living room table, and make it work like a table lamp, or to slide it up towards the ceiling if there was a need for a thoroughfare. She pulled the lamp almost all the way down to the table, and the large porcelain shade cast a soft glow over the living room.

Tears of disappointment appeared in the young girl's eyes. Everything was ready, she had cleaned and polished every piece of furniture in the living room and had arranged all doilies and other small decorations to her liking. The old bureau, which was still

named after her grandfather, shone like silk. Her mother's beautiful, large chest of drawers, and the sofa and the chairs which she had polished and brushed carefully, also shone. The floral drapes, which her mother had recently bought, were very decorative. The oven, which her parents had bought last fall, heated the living room in no time at all. Many people had admired its great comfort and warmth the oven gave. Now the living room could be used throughout the year. She let the warmth from the oven encircle her and thought about what she could do for fun this New Year's Eve; she would probably have to play "púkk"<sup>140</sup> with the older generation in the family room, but she would rather sit here alone and read. She looked longingly at the bookcase, which was built into the middle of the gable wall and was full of books.

She walked over to the window again, listened to the whistling of the wind and silently wished that nobody would be traveling in this weather. She happened to look into the mirror, which hung over the sofa and was appalled at the scowl on her face. She couldn't let anyone see herself so joyless on this great festive day, so she smiled happily into the mirror. At that moment the living room door opened and her grandmother came in, clad in her best clothes with a jovial expression on her face, an inner glow of peace and contentment, which was in itself, a special spiritual garment worn at major celebrations.

The old lady glanced at her and smiled pleasantly as she said, "Well, my lamb, I am glad to see that you don't show your disappointment. Nobody will go out in this weather tonight, except perhaps those guests who can't be seen."

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<sup>140</sup> A card game.



The young maiden laughed as she answered, "There isn't any point in quarrelling with the weather, grandmother, and I don't think that the invisible guests will come tonight either." She looked playfully at the plate full of goodies, which the old lady held in her hand, and asked, "Is this for the hidden people? I am surprised that you adhere to such an old superstition because in many ways you aren't old fashioned at all."

The old lady answered in a slow, firm voice, "This is a good, old custom. If you like, you may prefer to examine the plate which is the symbol of hospitality." As she spoke she walked over to the bureau and took a key chain from the pocket of her skirt, opened one of the doors of the cupboard, and put the plate on the shelf, and closed the door but didn't lock it. Then she moved one of the chairs over by the oven, sat down on it, warmed her hands and kindly said. "I am amazed at such progress like this oven, the beautiful bright lamp, the drapes and other such things, which is the accomplishment of your mother, to improve the living conditions in our home and make it more beautiful. I don't blame my daughter-in-law for wanting to increase the beauty and the comfort of the house with these new-fashioned gadgets. I love all essential progress and am happy to see that the nation is becoming aware that poverty is not a condition of the future. However, it would be a mistake to throw away all the good and beautiful customs and folklore we have. Icelandic hospitality is one of the good customs, but in that category I don't include invitations and banquets like you were going to have tonight, but rather it is the ability to receive hungry and tired travelers from any class whatsoever graciously and feed them well. I tried to uphold that custom while I was mistress here, and I continue the old custom to begin the New Year by leaving a bite of food for those travelers who may visit on New Year's Eve, even though men aren't aware of them. These days your mother takes

good care of all guests, and all of my hospitality has become this one plate on New Year's Eve."

"You can't believe that the hidden people actually do exist!"

The old lady smiled and said: "I do and I don't. I have never seen the hidden people, but neither have I seen God's angels, who are sent down to earth to protect us. I believe that they exist, and I know that you don't doubt that. Is it impossible that there could also be some kinds of invisible beings on the earth?"

"I think that is impossible, and people don't believe such stories any more except as a fiction, when the authors use their imagination and amuse themselves by telling us of people who lived in hidden worlds of enchantment and wonder, because anything can happen in fairytales."

"Well, I won't argue about it. When I was a child, the stories about the hidden people were told to me as truths and not as if they were fairytales. I found these stories fascinating and without a doubt they have been an influence on my life-long belief or superstition. How the whole year turns out depends on whether things turn for or against one on New Year's Eve."

"The coming year should be entertaining for me, here I sit alone, sorely disappointed, as none of my guests can come tonight," the young maiden answered, laughing.

"One can't quite rule out the possibility of somebody coming here tonight. Don't you know that New Year's Eve is the night when wonderful events happen? Supernatural beings, spirits and fairies travel on that night, and the hidden people change their place of residence and visit farms, which are on their route. In homes where these travelers are

received with courtesy, most things work out well all year round. On the other hand, where the hidden people are met with disrespect, where there is no sign that guests are expected, that's when most things go wrong all year long and all kinds of adversity sets in. The hidden people are reliable and passionate, loyal to their friends, but very cold-hearted and cunning towards their enemies. You understand the expectation of hospitality in these stories?"

"Yes, but don't you see people's fear of the magic power and the arrogance of the hidden people and what must be given in return for this hospitality. Men are such cowards in these stories. It would have behooved them to learn to use some of this marvelous power of the hidden people, when they cohabited so closely with them in days gone by."

"God help us!"<sup>141</sup> the old lady said earnestly. "How do you think people would have used such power? It would have turned them into raving lunatics of greed and ambition. Man's desire is such that he is never satisfied with anything he has, but rather he yearns for something greater. The greater power he gains the greater his ambition. Few are given enough reasoning power to be considered to be truly good men, and who could safely be entrusted with limitless power."

"You have little trust in the reasoning power and the nobility of the masses, Grandmother, but where would we be if men were happy with everything and never questioned anything. Weren't the authors who wrote those disguised stories of the hidden people in ages past, encouraging the nation to act, telling people that Icelandic gallantry, fortitude, manliness and magnificence had for the most part been spirited into the crag?

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<sup>141</sup> I decided to use the common English idiom "God help us!" for the Icelandic idiom "Ja, guð sé oss næstur!" which means "Yes, God be near us!" I think it contains the essence of the original and fitted the occasion better than "God be with us!"

Today our poets are awakening the nation from the enchantments of centuries, calling forth the gallantry of the Middle Ages out of the crag. Now people dare to think, speak and live like free men. We, the young people, intend to work at rebuilding the nation."

The old lady waved her hand impatiently and said: "Oh, quit my dear lamb, don't turn our legends into modern politics. It is almost as bad as if you took the Bible and told me that those things that are written there mean something else than the words say. Our legends tell of many things which people today have a hard time understanding, and these things are various. From them much can be learned, including this, those who have greater desire for material things than for the spiritual ones and sell their soul for gold receive stones for bread."

The old lady stood up and walked over to the table, paused there and passed her hand a few times over the table cloth which was free of any wrinkles and then she said slowly and carefully: "Do you mind if I ask you if you like the new pastor, who has recently started to visit?"

"The pastor is of course a likable man, but I don't like how often he visits because people find it amusing how much my parents encourage him."

"Your father gives the pastor the respect his office is worthy of, but I am certain that your mother thinks more of his profession than his virtues. I think she isn't very particular in her choice of a husband for you, not to mention family honor. Paltriness can become a family ghost."

"Grandmother, what imagination you have," the young girl quickly said. "The pastor doesn't come here because of me, he comes because ... he comes because he is made to feel welcome and I ... I don't know why he comes."

"You have a good idea as to why he comes. Everyone knows that he is laying a net to catch you. Your mother was caught in it right away, but your father moves a bit slower. Since you aren't in love with the pastor, don't let anyone trick you into a marriage you don't want. This man isn't suitable for you and it is time that slavery of this type be abandoned."

She stared at her grandmother enraptured because strong feeling of security and happiness flowed through her words, which penetrated every nerve in her body and warmed her heart. She felt that the living room had become brighter and warmer, and for a moment her grandmother became a glorious being who radiated light and warmth. And all of sudden she realized that she was afraid of the pastor! He lay like a nightmare on her mind. She had been perplexed because of this fear which was like the fear which had beset her when she was a young child, traveling alone in the dark or in a blinding fog. Her grandmother's words had brought light and strength to her mind. Of course, she was a free human being, free to choose of her own will. These invincible paralyzing fetters, which lately she had felt tightening around her, seemed to fall away.

She felt herself radiate with happiness and joy as she almost shouted, "You have a strange mixture of outdated beliefs and modern ideals. Rest assured grandmother, I won't let anyone push me into marrying anyone I dislike."

The old lady looked at her, smiled serenely and said: "Well, my child, then my business is finished. I can now greet the New Year without carrying the burden of guilt concerning your future with me, for the time being."

At that moment someone knocked vigorously at the front door and she dashed off to open it. Outside she caught a glimpse of a man and a restless horse, which would have

walked inside without an invitation, if the man hadn't held onto the bridle and stroked his head to calm him down.

The man greeted her and asked for a night's lodging, but at that moment her father arrived and greeted the guest, and one of the farm hands lead the horse to the barn. When the stranger had taken off his snowsuit her father brought him into the living room, and she had never seen a more promising man walk through that door. Besides being a handsome man, he appeared to be noble and outgoing. He was well dressed and polite, and she smiled inwardly when the idea entered her mind, that he was probably one of her grandmother's hidden men. But her father cut those thoughts short by telling them that this man was Erlingur Árnason, a carpenter, who had been hired to build the new church, which was to be built in the spring. The pastor at Hlíð had hired him to do some carpentry work inside the rectory until it was possible to begin the construction of the church. She recognized the man easily from other people's description because the new church was one of the things the young people were interested in. She hurried into the pantry to help her mother and Halla, the old cook, prepare the food for the festivities. Later in the evening, after the meal and evening prayers had been read, people played "púkk" and "alkort."<sup>142</sup> New Year's Eve had been very enjoyable and the presence of the guest contributed to it.

The carpenter stayed for a week at Fell because the weather was so terrible that no man could venture outside. Her father had long talks with the guest and seemed to enjoy himself in the company of this young man. But it wasn't until he had left that she realized how much she had enjoyed his company because the house became so strangely empty.

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<sup>142</sup>Card games.

She hadn't realized that a lad from the hidden people had visited her on New Year's Eve. When she opened the door for the carpenter, the god of love had entered along with him and had slipped uninvited into the house at Fell.

Old Rannveig smiled and opened her eyes and at that moment the young maiden, the carpenter, and the living room at Fell disappeared into the hidden world of the past.

What had caused her to return so far back into the past, to relive past moments and to begin to think of stories about the hidden people? Yes, of course. Her thoughts regarding Veiga's future, the diary, New Year's Eve, and the fun and frolic of the young people who were Veiga's guests. The young people these days resembled the hidden people in the old stories in many ways. Joy and gallantry accompanied them, and they played with all the magic of the modern age with ease. Machines, modern working tools, and technology, which seemed to be taking over the world, were imprisoning the minds of men. Technology was in reality the religion of the modern world and the dreams of the future, more technology. Human life was becoming such that illusions seemed to be reality and in many ways reality had become illusion. In the race the people were running, running after all the machinery, some of their ideals had been left behind. But it was the belief in spiritual life, which made men worthy to be called men. And it is their reasoning power, which controls their actions.

A while back when she had come down with a bad flu, she had asked Veiga to bring in the pastor so that she could receive the holy Sacrament, but Veiga had called a doctor who gave her antibiotics which made her even more sick. The fact that she had survived proved that her time hadn't come yet. She had been given another chance to improve her actions and attitude. But despite all of that she should only think well of

Veiga. This blessed, beautiful child had brought more joy and love into her life than anyone else had done in the last few years, and had brightened the twilight zone of her old age. And besides, she was so much like her grandfather in appearance and in character that it was an inexpressible joy to see her husband's personality live on in Veiga. Therefore she loved Veiga more than any of her other living relatives.

Sometimes she worried that Veiga had perhaps inherited a bit too much of her grandfather's boldness and honesty and besides she was being raised to enjoy unlimited freedom. Sometimes she was afraid that Veiga would become one of those crazy mechanized people who lose their soul to the elements.

Veiga disregarded the idea when she spoke of such things to her and tried to point out various things, which old Rannveig felt to be out of place and clash with acceptable customs. However Veiga was outspoken and sometimes the old lady had to admit the truth in her statements. Last summer they had argued because Veiga had undertaken to drive a large truck over the summer holidays and drove it at a rather fast pace all over town in a white work shirt and blue jeans.

The summer before she had taken a job, working at an automobile repair shop where she washed cars and even did some repairs as well. Although the lack of manpower was great, she had felt that it was unnecessary for Veiga to take on such a job, and that she could have worked at something else which would have been more suitable for her and more feminine for a girl of her station. But Veiga had stood up to her and finally said: "Sometimes I think that you want to make me into some mixture of a 19th century pompous prude and an Oriental harem houri, who have lost their freedom and have each in their own way been sold to the highest bidder like a beautiful animal.



Women from those countries can't offer their help any more than the soldiers who weren't asked if they found it convenient to leave their jobs and join the army, fight and be killed all over the world."

She hadn't waited for an answer, but ran out of the house nimble footed, tall and slim, a beautiful woman in blue jeans.

Old Rannveig had been upset; she couldn't stand having the 19th century criticized, the century, which had raised the torch of freedom so high that its light reached the furthest corners of the earth. Yes, she had become upset with Veiga, but when she thought about it calmly, she secretively agreed that marriages had sometimes been conducted like business deals. It had been a close call for herself that she hadn't been given, against her will, to the highest bidder.

Again the old lady's thoughts traveled back to the past. She saw her province, wide and beautiful, spread before her eyes, bathed in sunshine on a lovely summer day. Groups of people came riding from all directions, heading home to Hlíð. It was the first Sunday that a service was to be held in the new church, which had just been built and painted, inside and out. She was among the churchgoers and her fellow travelers were riding fast. Everyone was in a good mood because this was an important affair in the lives of the country folk, change and progress, a common interest, and people looked forward to seeing the new church finished, and so did she. But she was mainly thinking of the carpenter as she so often did. Time and again she had determined that she wouldn't think about him, but he was always foremost in her thoughts. She was angry at herself for being in love with him, contrary to her own wishes. She was a poor wretch, to be thinking

about a man who obviously avoided her and had done so since spring. But she still had enough self-respect to pay him back in kind. She had avoided him all summer long.

Late in the last months of winter, after most of the snow had thawed, traveling conditions had been good and everything sparkled. He had come, once in a while, riding on Skjóni, his beautiful brown horse. He had been happy, outgoing and kind toward his friends. She had felt as if emotional currents flowed and vibrated in the air between them, and twinkled like a flash of light, mostly resembling the reflection of a sunbeam on whirling water.

At the beginning of summer he had come once more with the pastor, but after that he never came to Fell. They had seen each other a few times at gatherings in the summer. He had been courteous, but had always managed to be busy, speaking to someone or having fun anywhere except where she was. She knew this ploy he played because she used it to keep the pastor away. Once in a while she had noticed him watching her when he thought she didn't notice, and something in his eyes made her think that to him she was an unpleasant puzzle. The sunshine had disappeared, and she had been silly enough to warm herself by St. Elmo's fire. In the future she was going to find a way to show the carpenter that she was as tired of him as she was of the pastor.

And finally she allowed Bleikur<sup>143</sup> to amble a short distance ahead of her traveling companions, but soon she slowed him down because she didn't want to be the first to arrive at the pavement in front of the house at Hlíð.

After the service everyone was invited inside the rectory for coffee. The older people soon disappeared into the house, but the younger people stayed outside for a while to chat. She was with a few of her girl friends that crowded together and joked around

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<sup>143</sup> Bleikur meaning Pale is a name of a horse.

about things that came up during the conversation. They all admired the church and the young carpenter and lamented the fact that such a nice man was leaving today for a distant place. They knew that his luggage had left already. She chatted and laughed, chatted and joked around, and appeared to be the happiest of all the girls, but in her mind echoed, amidst all the noise, like a refrain: he is leaving... he is leaving ... She had to laugh and chat like the other girls, he was leaving, what did it matter to her? It didn't matter to her at all. It was none of her business where he went. She saw her father coming and heard him call her, and was glad to have an excuse to leave the lively group, who mainly talked about the carpenter. She hurried to meet her father. He had come to tell her that the pastor had asked her parents permission to marry her in the fall and he wanted to announce their engagement this very day for he had already bought the rings.

She stared at her father, and her heart was beating so fast that it felt as if it had moved up into her throat and the fear at defying her parents overcame her for a second like a paralyzing force and she was unable to speak. Her father continued speaking and said that he knew that she was being offered a prestigious position as the wife of the pastor of Hlíð, but that she had to decide for herself whether to marry the pastor or not and that was the reply her father had given him. She was so relieved that she was able to answer, "It is impossible for me to marry this man and I hope that you and mom won't be disappointed."

Her father smiled as he replied: "Not I, but I don't think your mother was offended that the pastor had arranged everything beforehand and spoke as if this was an honor for us and that he was being modest. What devilish arrogance and self-glorification. It didn't seem to enter his mind that you had anything to say about this, or had he spoken to you?"

"Not a word, but he knows that I don't care about him and considers it enough to have your, my parents' permission, and of course I must obey you."

Her father's answer was sarcastic, "I am afraid that the pastor thinks that your upbringing has been rather lax in that area because he said that he knew you were rather young, not serious enough and hardly able to take on such a dignified position, but by living with him you would soon learn humility, submissiveness and feminine devotedness. Well, are you going to come inside and refuse this offer?"

"No, but tell the pastor at Hlíð, that I humbly refuse his honorable offer and..." she couldn't continue as she trembled with rage and tears rolled down her cheeks. She struggled with anger and grief, she felt anger toward the pastor and she grieved because something, which was hidden from her, had separated them, the young carpenter and her, because she knew that they had a meeting of minds and then had become separated again. Therefore, she now wept uncontrollably.

Her father stroked her cheek and said: "Don't take this to heart, child. It will all work out and the pastor will find another woman for his wife."

She told him that she had to go home, because she didn't want people to see that she had been crying and she asked her father to fetch Bleikur from the enclosure where the horses were kept and bring him to the south side of the graveyard, where she had left her saddle and riding outfit.

Now that everyone had disappeared into the house she could put her riding outfit on without arousing attention. Her father was somewhat delayed in bringing Bleikur around the house, so she wandered into the graveyard and saw that the door to the church was half open. She entered the church, as she wanted to take a look around while nobody else

was in it. This was the most beautiful church she had ever seen, and everything in it was so bright and cheerful. The peace, the purity, and the holiness of the church seemed to subdue her agitation. She walked slowly up the aisle and stopped beside the chair, which was her mother's seat, placed her right hand on the arm of the chair and looked around.

All of a sudden the door to the vestry opened and the carpenter emerged, carrying some tools in his hands. He stood still for a moment looking at her, and then walked slowly down the aisle and stopped in the doorway to the choir and said casually, "You are looking at the church, are you pleased with it?"

She answered in like manner, saying that the church was elaborate and admirably beautiful.

She noticed that he glanced at her hand which rested on the back of the chair, and without looking up he replied, "It is better than the old church, and I am pleased if it increases the beauty of the place in your eyes, but I made certain that the work on the woman's seat was carefully done, so that it would be as comfortable as possible for the pastor's future wife. It was done in gratitude for the hospitality I received at Fell this winter."

So, he was reciprocating her hospitality as the pastor's woman! Putting all the contempt she could muster into her voice she answered scornfully, "Regardless of your calculations, I am not aware that the woman's seat in the church at Hlíð and the hospitality at Fell have any connection." Then she turned around and walked quickly down the aisle and locked the door behind her. Her father was saddling Bleikur and she ran to him quickly and speedily mounted the horse. Her father looked at her and quietly

said, "Don't let this affect you because it is a trifle." And then he walked off along the west side of the graveyard in the direction of the house.

When she turned the east corner of the graveyard she saw that the carpenter stood by the window watching her go. She was glad to be escaping from everything that had happened to her in the church. She gave Bleikur free reign and allowed him to go as fast as he could through the northern headlands, which lay south of the river. She couldn't control her emotions, she cried and cried, and on this lovely summer day she could hardly see anything through her tears, and finally when she arrived at the river, Bleikur slowed down. It occurred to her when she reached the grassy plains south of Fell, not to go home. The people there would be curious and ask what the new church looked like, and about the people who had come to the church and everyone would see that she had been crying. All of a sudden it dawned on her that the best place to go to calm her emotions would be the dell of the hidden people. It couldn't be seen from the farmstead and perhaps there would be a greater peace in the church of the hidden people than in the new church at Hlíð. When she arrived there, she allowed Bleikur to feed to his heart's content on the abundance of grass in the dell and washed her eyes in the warm spring, which flowed from beneath the crag. Then she sat down inside a kind of vault, which looked like a gigantic door in Kirkjufell<sup>144</sup>. Wood crane's bills, reeds, and violets grew there among the grass. Here she had played when she was little, and sometimes she had looked for the hidden people and listened for their songs. But only the voices of nature could be heard, and now they brought her peace of mind.

At this moment she was one of the women of the hidden people who didn't want humans to see her, nor reveal her thoughts to them. She thought about those strange

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<sup>144</sup> Kirkjufell meaning church crag is the church of the hidden people.

stories, about the hidden world and the fact that everybody lives more or less in a secret world of the mind, and conceal there either a bright and spacious world or a dark and sorrowful one. The poets, who had composed the charming love poems on behalf of the hidden people, had composed them to ease their own conscience because the poems were enchantingly beautiful, balmy in timbre like the sounds from a string instrument luring people into a beautiful secret world. These love poems about the children of nature sounded gentle in one's ears.<sup>145</sup> If she could have composed even just one poem about a woman of the hidden people, it would have lifted her spirits, but it wasn't to be and now she could at least smile. She was able to calm her troubled mind and it had been a comfort to her to come to the crag-church and listen to the voices of mother earth.

Now she trusted herself to go home and tell the news to the people. As she stood up, she happened to look into a small hole on the ledge; there lay a broken cockleshell, which at one time she had thought to be a lovely decoration, and she had cried bitterly when the shell broke, but then had forgotten all about it. She took the shell and held it in her hand and thought: the same thing will happen to the carpenter, one day I will have totally forgotten him. But at that very moment he stood in the door of the crag-church and

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<sup>145</sup> "Skáldin, sem kveðið höfðu ásta- og ljúflingsljóð fyrir munn huldufólksins, höfðu ort sér til hugarléttis, því ljóðbrotin voru seiðandi og fögur, hreimþýð eins og strengleikar og töfrðu menn inn í dulkenda fegurðarveröld. Þessi ástarljóð barna gróandans létu ljúft í eyrum." A literal translation of these two sentences would be: "The poets, who had composed love- and charming poems on behalf of the hidden people, had composed to ease their minds, because the poetic fragments were enchanting and beautiful, balmy sounding like a playing of strings and charmed men into a secret beautiful world. These love poems (of the) children (of the) growing season sounded gentle in ears." By changing the word order of the sentence and adding and omitting a few words the sentences would read thus: "The poets, who had composed the charming love poems on behalf of the hidden people, had composed them to ease their own minds because the poetic fragments were enchantingly beautiful, balmy in timbre like the playing of strings that lured men into a beautiful secret world. These love poems of the children of the growing season sounded gentle in ones ears." As I worked on translating these sentences I adjusted some of the wording so as to make it flow more freely in English and adjusted the wording here and there. "The poets, who had composed the charming love poems on behalf of the hidden people, had composed them to ease their own conscience because the poems were enchantingly beautiful, balmy in timbre like the sound from a string instrument luring people into a beautiful secret world. These love poems about the children of nature sounded gentle in one's ears."

from the expression in his eyes she read in a flash the nature of his errand. And she stood like a statue, on the same spot, with the cockleshell in her hand and her heart began to beat so quickly that she had to lean up against the crag. Their eyes met and he said in a low voice which shook a little: "Rannveig, I have come to apologize for what I said to you in the church today, about the woman's seat and the hospitality at Fell. If there is no connection between the two, then the gossip and the many things which the pastor hinted at concerning your betrothal has no foundation. I have behaved like a fool all summer and deserved the look you gave me in the church a short while ago." In the church of the hidden people all wrongs between them were settled.

That evening when Veiga came into her grandmother's room and introduced her boyfriend to her, their eyes radiated and Veiga looked at this young man in the same way as her grandfather had looked at Rannveig in the doorway of the crag-church. She didn't want anyone to deliberately extinguish the light in Veiga's eyes.

Then old Rannveig happened to look at the clock. It was almost twelve, and at that moment the city's steam-whistles began to blow. The year had ended and another had begun. She took the New Testament from the table by her bed, opened it and selected a passage at random. It was an old custom of hers on New Year's Eve, and now she read the first words she saw, "And now abided Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity."<sup>146</sup>

The old woman thought to herself: There is the answer. Charity is the pinnacle of life and is passed on from generation to generation. She was going to try to speak with Veiga's father.

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<sup>146</sup>Thompson, Frank Charles, D. D., PHD, ed. The New Chain-Reference Bible, Fourth Improved Edition. B. B. Kirkbride Bible Co., Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana. USA. 1964. I Co. 13:13



She heard someone running effortlessly up the stairs, the door to her room opened and Veiga entered, beautiful like a fairy maiden in a fairy tale and wished her a Happy New Year. She had on an evening gown made from a material, which seemed to be damask, her necklace and armlet appeared to be mother-of-pearl and in her hair she had a mother-of-pearl colored wreath. But old Rannveig knew that Veiga was clad in the delusion and magic of the present, because in reality she was wearing a dress made of wood shavings, had milk rings around her neck and wrist and fish scales in her hair. This was the decoration of the present, the old lady thought, but aloud she said: "I don't have anything handy my dear Veiga to give you for a New Year's gift, but open the drawer and find my old gold brooch. It is yours and it is what it appears to be."

Veiga smiled and said, "No grandmother, I won't take the brooch until after you are gone, but there is another New Year's gift I would like you to give me. Do you like Stigur?"

"Judging by his appearance, you have chosen the best. He is a valiant and intelligent looking man."

"Do you then give us your blessing?"

"I have done that already, my child; your future happiness was my New Year's wish this night."

"Why do you believe in New Year's Eve?"

"It is probably the remains of an Icelandic superstition."

"Is there any connection between this superstition of yours and the fact that my father always tries to do something to please you on New Year's Eve?" Veiga asked, smiling.

"Yes, he began that tradition after your grandfather died. Your father is a kind hearted man and he wants the best for you, my dear Veiga."

"Then you know that he was in a foul mood this morning, when I told my parents that I intend to marry. Dad's reaction was strange to me for in the past he always supported my decisions. I left in a hurry, because I didn't want any argument between us, because of my decision. I was with Stigur all day long and invited guests home tonight so there wouldn't be any time to talk about my private affairs. I was thinking how this matter could be solved in a peaceful way because I am going to marry, and it occurred to me to ask you to talk to my parents, especially to my father, tonight."

"Yes, I shall speak with your father, but I won't force him to make me any promises as a New Year's Eve gift. That would be like cheating him of his goodwill, but if he volunteers to make me happy by giving his consent, then that is another matter. I partially agree with you parents. You are rushing this wedding of yours. From your parents point of view, you came home yesterday newly betrothed to a stranger, this morning you have decided to marry right away without getting to know the man at all, never mind your parents who have never seen the man before."

"Never seen him before! I thought they would recognize him. It is the same old thing, the clothes and the job is what men are respected for. I didn't think about it. You remember, two years ago I went with my parents on a holiday west to the mountains. The hotel we stayed at rented cars so that the guests could go sightseeing. Stigur drove one of the cars. That young man was a university student, and was working to earn his tuition fees over the summer holidays. As you know grandmother, I do so many things that aren't proper, and I came to know this driver better than my parents knew. We separated sort of

engaged; he had one year left at the university in the west. After he graduated, he enlisted in the army, and soon he will graduate from that school. This last summer he came here and stayed for one hour, while waiting for the next train which was moving the soldiers from one camp to the next. Then we parted engaged to one another and agreed that the future was so uncertain that perhaps we'd better not say anything. Yesterday, when he came to see me on his day off, we agreed to pick up where we left off, which these days is common among young people, and spend what little time we have together until he goes overseas. I know full well why my father is against this marriage, he is afraid that Stígur will perhaps be one of those who won't come back, or that he will come back a crippled man. I have thought about it from all angles and the more I think about it the more certain I become. While we are together, the days are long and happy and the memory will be a contribution to the future if we don't see each other again. And if he comes back maimed, then I am healthy and strong and my parents have seen to it that I have a good education, which in any circumstances will be helpful. I place my trust in our love and in providence."

There were tears in Veiga's eyes, and she stood up and paced the floor.

The old lady said quietly, "Tell your father that I wish to speak with him."

Veiga walked to the bed, kissed her grandmother on the forehead and whispered, "You pray with such passion, pray for Stígur's life."

After all the guests had left, Veiga's father came to her and put his arm around her shoulder and gently said, "My dear Veiga, we must hasten your wedding, because your grandmother wants to see you in your wedding dress."

But the wedding was postponed for a few days because that night, just before dawn, old Rannveig Anderson changed her place of residence and moved on to the hidden world of eternity.

“Ein hugsun getur burtrímt öllum efa”<sup>147</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Translations have been practiced for centuries. They can be traced to the Romans and the Roman culture where translations were looked upon as a way to enrich literature and language. Translations during the Roman period were underdeveloped for they were only meant for the few, those who could read the original text as well as the translation and therefore focused on a comparison of the SL and TL texts. Although the practice of translating had been around for ages, translation theory was not recognized as a discipline until the French humanist, Etienne Dolet (1509-46), attempted to formulate it. Yet, it wasn't until George Chapman (1559-1634) wrote *The Seven books of the Iliad* in 1589 that translation theory began to develop. He further expanded on it in the complete *Iliad* in 1611. His work became the foundation for future theorists.

In the seventeenth century there are a number of theories that were important in the development of theory of translation. The interpretative theory of Cicero, Horace, orthodox education in rhetoric, comprised the first theoretical style. Here, theorists argued that there should be absolute equivalence between the SL and the TL text. Another strain taught in metaphors and expected much artistic input from the translator, where translations were free and much liberty was taken with the SL text. Also, John Dryden (1631-1700) was the “lawgiver” of English translation, for in his introduction to *Ovid's Epistles* (1680) he opposed Denham and Cowley who were very liberated in their views of translation theory. Dryden chose paraphrasing as the middle path of translation. In his view the translator had to be a poet, a master of both languages and must

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<sup>147</sup> “A single thought can eliminate all doubt” by Valdimar Briem. *Gullkorn dagsins: Fleyg orð og erindi*. ed. Ólafur Haukur Árnason. (Reykjavík: Hörpuútgáfan, 1990) 88

understand the characteristics of the original author. Drydon's theory would be the most beneficial to the modern translator. His use of metaphor when paralleling translation to painting gives the student a lesson in how the TL text must resemble the SL text, not only sentence by sentence, but as a whole text.

At the start of the eighteenth century, translation theorists stressed the concept of the translator as a painter or an imitator, but by the end of the century translation theory had moved toward a discussion of theories of originality.

The question of how to define translation became a topic of discussion at the beginning of nineteenth century. One theory supported inventiveness where the translator was a creative genius. Another was more mechanical where an author or a text was made known. Many theorists also supported Schleiermacher (1768-1834) sub-language theory where the original text was to be shared only with the intellectual few, as they did not believe in universal literacy. A balance between the creative genius and the mechanical translator is needed for direct translation is not possible and inventiveness is required. Schleiermacher's theory has no grounds in modern translation for it does not cater to the masses. However, it is important for the translator to always understand the needs of the reader.

During the first half of the twentieth century there were not many changes in the study of translation theory. Translator's commonly catered to the educated few. Regardless, translation theory went through a fundamental change during this century. Structural linguistics spread rapidly during the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Systematic solutions to translation problems were developed, such as equivalence between words. The

hermeneutic approach also surfaced where faithfulness to the original was all-important. The translator was a mediator between the two texts but equivalence was not sought.

In 1953 James McFarlane in his article "Modes of Translation" sets the tone for modern translation theory. He opened a new way of debating translation, which developed and moved along with great speed. By the 70s, functional theorists such as Katherina Reiss had come to the forefront. She moved translation away from the word on the page to its real purpose, communication. Theorists began to emphasize the importance of the translator's knowledge of literary theory, linguistic and literary history, and cultural history of both languages. By the 1990s translators and theorists such as Lawrence Venuti and Ástráður Eysteinnsson, for example, wrote about the importance of the transfer of cultural codes as well as fair representation of literary works. Venuti discussed translation of Japanese literature in the 70s and 80s in America. He felt that a true picture of Japanese culture had not been given. Since it is difficult to translate culture across codes, an accurate representation of another culture may perhaps never be totally accomplished. Eysteinnsson emphasized the need of the writer and of the translator to renew or restore the language, which leads to new ways of expressing themselves, which in turn became an aid to the translator when translating cultural values across codes.

Venuti also discussed the role of the translator. The translator to this day more often than not receives little recognition for her or his work and legally she or he has little control over his translations. As a rule, translators work as contractors who are paid by the hour or for individual work and even though they might hold copyrights to the translation, the author supersedes them in any rights to their work. Venuti says that translation is a double writing where the foreign text has to be rewritten with

consideration for the cultural beliefs of the TL reader and emerges as a new text. The translator must blend the two cultures together as he makes the new text, creating a new cultural identity. This is no easy task and cultural values are therefore often lost in the translation.

As Eva Hoffman pointed out in her book, *Lost in Translation*, the words she learned to use in English do not evoke the same feeling as the words in her native language, Polish. It is often nearly impossible to translate feelings into another language and therefore the essence of the word is not properly expressed in the TL. On the other hand, Benjamin says that all languages are related in some way or another and the task of the translator is to create a close imitation of the original text. Both have merit to what they say. Every translator knows that when translating a text one loses some of the original meaning in the process. The goal, therefore, is to lose as little as possible.

The transfer of codes from one language to another is, in essence, what the translator must achieve. It is not enough to just translate the words on the page; one must in effect translate the essence of the words, the real meaning. For the purpose of demonstrating how inter-lingual translation occurs, I chose William Frawley's contemporary method. He sees translation as a recodification where the translator takes the information from the matrix code and renders it into the target code. This creates a new code, which is the final product of the translation. Frawley thinks identity across codes is not paramount in translation. He is quite skeptical of what he calls *sufficient universals*: For instance, adverbial constructions and sentence-initiated adverbs. These he says, are not needed to define human language. All languages share *necessary universals*, such as negations, agentivity, conjoining and embedding. Both *sufficient* and *necessary*



universals show that identity does occur across codes, however, those are not the most important factors when translating. What is vital is that the codes of the SL are transferred into the TL.

Frawley does not go into great detail about cultural or religious codes in his paper but I chose his theory because it is simple in its complexity. Like Frawley, I believe that translation is a transfer of codes from one language to another. It is not only the meaning of the word that has to come across, but the feelings it evokes. Sometimes it is difficult or almost impossible to bring across the hidden meanings of a SL word into the TL text. Personally, I try to keep fairly close to the original text and only deviate from it when absolutely necessary.

In chapter two, I have demonstrated how the process of translation works by taking examples of text from the translated stories in this thesis and explaining the procedure of translation step-by-step. By going through the step-by-step transfer of codes it is evident that some things are retained and others are lost. For instance the pragmatic information is present, when speaking about the ownership of Sunday, but the implication of ownership is lost in translation because the English language does not express itself to show ownership in the same way Icelandic does. Sometimes omissions or addition of a word is necessary to clarify the original meaning. Idioms are either simplified or an equivalent idiom in the TL is used. Cultural and religious codes are often very difficult to translate and are sometimes partially lost in the translation. Footnotes with explanations for certain cultural codes are one way of giving the reader an idea of the meaning behind it, but even so one has to ask oneself if the reader can grasp the real meaning behind the words.

I have given further examples, especially of religious and cultural codes, in footnotes throughout the five short stories. These examples are just that, one could take just about every sentence and explain the difficulties one encounters while translating it but it would be a tedious and unnecessary process here. I hope the reader will find the aforementioned examples helpful and give the reader a partial, if not full insight, as to how the process of translation works.

I chose Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir's short stories as the bases for my thesis because she brings forth the female voice in her writings and gives the reader an insight into the affairs of the Icelandic-Canadian community during her lifetime. She was an accomplished writer in her native language and was able to bring her characters and events to life on the page. In her stories, she demonstrates knowledge of both Icelandic and other literature. Although her stories are mainly about the Icelandic-Canadian community they have a universal appeal and could have been written about and for any nationality.

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## Appendix

### CRONOLOGICAL LIST OF GUÐRÚN H. FINNSDÓTTIR'S SHORT STORIES

<u>Name</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
Landskuld (Duty to One's Country)	Tímarit <sup>148</sup> 2 (1920): 114-119 HL: 9-26 <sup>149</sup>
Fýkur í sporin I (Lost Tracks I)	Tímarit 3 (1921): 89-92 DS: 195-205 <sup>150</sup>
Að leikslokum (At the End of the Game)	Tímarit 4 (1922): 85-94 HL: 147-165
Skriflabúðin (The Thrift Shop)	Tímarit 5 (1923): 88-94 HL: 27-40
Jólagjöfin (The Christmas Gift) 132	Heimskringla (1924 Dec. 17): 4-5 HL: 115-132
Undir útfalli (At Low tide)	Heimskringla (1926 Dec. 22): 2 HL: 85-92
Á vegamótum (At the Crossroads)	Saga 6 (1930-31): 21-30 (Kveðjur) HL: 41-54
Stríðsskuldir (Debts of War)	Tímarit 13 (1931): 43-47 HL: 167-176
Jólaeldar (Christmas Fires)	Heimskringla (1935 Dec. 18): 1, 5 HL: 177-186
Rödd hrópandans (The Voice of the Caller)	Tímarit 17 (1935): 65-72 HL: 187-202
Í ljósaskiptunum (In the Twilight)	Lögberg (1936 Dec. 22): 42-43 HL: 187-202
Draumur (A Dream)	Tímarit 19 (1937): 37-43 DS: 9-20
Bálför (Cremation)	Heimskringla (1937 Dec. 22): 1 HL: 203-214
Utangarðs (Beyond the Pale)	Hillingalönd (1938): 9-26
Enginn lifir sjálfum sér (Nobody lives for Himself Alone)	Hillingalönd (1938): 55-84
Bæjarprýði (Farm Embellishment)	Hillingalönd (1938): 93-114
Traustir máttviðir (Trusty Timbers)	Tímarit 20 (1938): 85-91 DS: 21-34

<sup>148</sup> Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga í Vesturheimi (The Periodical of the Icelandic National League)

<sup>149</sup> HL Hillingalönd (Mirage Lands)

<sup>150</sup> DS Dagshriðar spor (Tracks of the Days Struggle).



Salt jarðar (The Salt of the Earth)	Tímarit 21 (1939): 40-52 DS: 35-58
Úr þokunni (Out of the Fog)	Tímarit 22 (1940): 75-84 DS: 59-68
Dyr hjartans (The Door to the Heart)	Heimskringla (1942 Dec. 16): 1-3 DS: 99-120
Án kjölfestu (Without Ballast)	Heimskringla (1944 Dec. 20): 4-5 DS: 79-98
Frá kynslóð til kynslóðar (From Generation to Generation)	Tímarit 26 (1944): 99-112 DS: 121-148
Ekki er alt sem sýnist (Appearances Deceive)	Heimskringla (1945 Dec. 19): 4 DS: 149-160
Sárfættir menn (Fointsore People)	Tímarit 27 (1945): 85-98 DS: 161-186
Fýkur í sporin II (Lost Tracks II)	Dagshríðar spor (1946): 207-230
Skilningstréð (The Tree of Knowledge) <sup>151</sup>	Dagshríðarspor (1946): 187-194

#### Published Translations:

“Ekki er alt sem sýnist.” (“Hunger Has Many Faces”). Translated by Caroline Gunnarsson. *The Icelandic Canadian* 26:2 (1967): 26-32

“Fýkur í sporin” (“Lost Tracks” or “Forgotten Footsteps”). Translated by Geppert, M. *The Icelandic Canadian* 31: 4 (1973): 31-35.

“Skilningstréið” (“The Tree of Knowledge”). Translated by Árný Hjaltadóttir. *The Icelandic Canadian* 49:2 (1990): 31-34. Winnipeg, Manitoba

“Undir útfalli” (“At Low Tide”). Translated by Árný Hjaltadóttir. *Western Icelandic Short Stories*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press (1992): 35-39.

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<sup>151</sup> Skilningstréð (The Tree of Knowledge). In the foreword to DS Gísli Jónsson, Guðrún Finnsdóttir’s husband, who published DS after her death in 1946, indicates that the story, which he “found by accident on loose papers,” (rakst á af hendingu á lausum blöðum) could easily have been lost.