

What does it mean to be an Icelandic novelist?

I guess it means more or less the same as being a novelist of any other nationality. I guess every novelist has his own purpose. My fate is that I was born on an island named Iceland and I have lived there all of my life. Those are the surroundings I know the best and when I have a story to tell the location is usually in this area. Being an Icelander is not an important issue for me. I am happy if I can introduce some aspects of the Icelandic culture to a wider international audience through my novels, not because it is Icelandic, but because it is worth something.

What does motivate an author to use a language like Icelandic which is spoken by approximately 300000 people? While you are writing in Icelandic, are you already thinking about an international audience who will read your work in translation?

When the late Icelandic author Thor Vilhjálmsson (also published by Iperborea) was asked this question he answered: "In Iceland today the population is the same as in Florence in Dante's time."

My answer is; If you have the need to tell a story you don't think about the size of the audience. Perhaps you sit down with a friend and a glass of wine and you tell your friend about a recent journey. You enjoy your friend's smile and laughter when you say something funny. You don't think, this audience is only one person, I am not going to waste my time telling my story to such a small audience.

When I write my stories my audience are the readers who can read the original Icelandic text. I never think about translations or international success. That would destroy the essence of the story. To make the story readable in other languages is an assignment for the translators, bless their souls.

In your opinion, is it possible to assert crime stories as a peculiar Nordic literary genre?

There is no doubt that the Nordic crime story is today somewhat of a specific genre. For its popularity if not for anything else. It is considered, by many, that it originates from the Martin Beck series by the Swedish authors Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. They wrote the 10 books in 10 years, 1965 to 1975. What makes these stories special is the social realism, a good plot and sometimes a very clever humour. That can also be said about the Nordic crime writers who are the most successful today.

Could you define an Icelandic crime story?

I was once asked this question on a discussion panel in Germany. Instead of admitting that I hadn't read that many Icelandic crime stories and wasn't able to come up with a meaningful answer, I said: "An Icelandic crime story is a crime story written in Icelandic." After more reading, I think this answer is not that stupid.

In your novel *Flateyjargáta* a prominent role is played by one of the most important Icelandic manuscripts, the *Flateyjarbók*. What is the importance of the medieval cultural tradition on Icelandic life today?

The Icelandic Sagas have been the fundamentals of Icelandic culture for many centuries. Today some of them are mandatory reading material in schools and many Icelanders grow up to enjoy them. The readers have their favorites stories and favorite characters. At the University of Iceland, the Continuing Education program offers courses where the Sagas

are read and analyzed. These courses are extremely popular and always fully booked by people of all ages. Many enthusiasts become quite involved in these studies and I have heard people argue about the medieval politics like it was the next election. In recent years many Icelandic novelists have revisited this period and written books that are based on the Sagas and the characters in them.

In the novel *Flateyjargáta* the choral presence of the people of Flatey is due to typical the way of life in the Icelandic countryside just a few decades ago or does it reflect the Icelandic soul in its depths?

The setting of the story in Flatey 1960 is mostly practical and the reader should not look for a hidden agenda in it. I had this idea for a story and had to find the location. Going to Flatey was logical because I knew the place very well. My grandparents lived in Flatey in this period and I used to spend the summers with them when I was very young.

In *Flateyjargáta* nature still plays a dominant role on Icelandic life. There is something romantic in this - perhaps linked to the concept of sublime - or is nature a sign for other meanings?

As before the reader should not look too deep into the story for different meanings, unless he or she has the urge to do that. My only intention for the nature's role was to create an authentic atmosphere for the story, but any reader can experience the story in a different way and there is no reason to interfere with that.