

# Reykjavík

UNESCO CITY OF LITERATURE



City of Reykjavík



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## Literature trail



You can trace literature in Reykjavík by following the literary trail through this publication. The trail gives a few samples of Icelandic literature from different times, connected to the city in various ways. The numbers indicate the page number for each stop.



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## Letter of Endorsement

Reykjavík, August 18, 2010

*Reykjavík is the northernmost capital in the world. It is a small city but with big ideas. The community is open minded and culturally active. One of the main objectives of the City of Reykjavík is to play a leading cultural role as the capital of Iceland.*

*We see culture as an increasingly important factor in the city's economic life and vision for the future.*

*Many of the projects we are proposing involve spreading knowledge and inspiring more passion for literature. Our aim is especially to inspire children and young people. Furthermore, the City of Reykjavík is committed to starting a Centre for Literature in Reykjavík in cooperation with our key partners involved in this application. By doing so, we will be making our heritage and modern literature more visible and accessible in the city.*

*I firmly believe that Reykjavík as a City of Literature can both inspire and communicate valuable lessons. We are dedicated to cultural exchange and the dissemination of ideas between different creative cities. We will use this opportunity to form partnerships and to be an active member of the international network of Creative Cities.*

*If Reykjavík were to be designated the status of UNESCO City of Literature, it would open up new and valuable opportunities for the benefit of Icelanders, Icelandic culture and literature in general.*



A handwritten signature in dark ink, which reads "Jón Gnarr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

JÓN GNARR  
Mayor of Reykjavík

## Introduction

*Iceland is often referred to as the Saga Island, and Icelanders have long defined themselves as a literary nation. Literature is without a doubt the strongest aspect of the cultural history of the people that settled this northerly island in the ninth century and immediately started recounting its story and committing it to calfskin two centuries later. This great emphasis on the art of articulation has followed the nation ever since and is one of the cornerstones of its identity and history, not least because of the status of Icelandic medieval literature at home and abroad.*

Reykjavík has a lot to offer as a UNESCO City of Literature. The city is the capital, and in fact Iceland's only city, and as such, it plays a vital role in all cultural life in the country. The city is home to Iceland's main cultural institutions, boasts a flourishing arts scene and is renowned as a creative city with a diverse range of cultural happenings and dynamic grassroots activities. Most of the country's writers live in the city, and it also provides the setting for the majority of contemporary Icelandic literature – a development that has gone hand in hand with the rapid expansion of the city in the past 100 years or so. Book publishing is going strong, with more titles published per capita in Iceland than in any other country, and public participation in literary events and life is also considerable compared to other countries. The city has a number of cultural institutions, such as the National Theatre of Iceland and the Reykjavík City Theatre as well as the Icelandic Opera, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Reykjavík Art Museum, the National Gallery, the National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík City Museum and the National Centre for Cultural Heritage. Reykjavík has a robust public library, and statistics show that Reykjavík City Library is extremely well-utilized by the public. Circulation has steadily increased in recent years, with Reykjavík inhabitants frequenting the library and actively using its diverse services.

Reykjavík is home to the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, the centre of the Icelandic Sagas, the Eddas and other medieval literature that established Iceland as one of the most renowned literary nations of the world. The institute preserves manuscripts, conducts research and publishes texts for the public, in addition to providing research facilities and tutoring to foreign scholars and students. The Arnarnaglean Manuscript Collection was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register on July 31, 2009. Reykjavík is also home to numerous other institutions and organizations operating in the literary sector, such as the University of Iceland – which has the country's most extensive academic literature programs, the country's principal publishing houses, writers' associations, and the National Library of Iceland.

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# July 31, 2009

The Arnarnaglean Manuscript Collection was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register

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The Reykjavík International Literature Festival has been a biennial event since 1985. In addition, Reykjavík has presented a biennial international children's literature festival since 2001, a yearly international poetry festival, and the annual Reykjavík Arts Festival. These festivals are an important factor in promoting Icelandic and international literature to the people and visitors of Reykjavík, in addition to establishing ties between Icelandic and international writers, translators and publishers. Translation of foreign works has always been an integral part of Icelandic literary life, and works by Icelandic writers are published with increased frequency abroad. In October 2011, Iceland will be the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and has launched the most extensive promotional campaign for Icelandic literature to date. Immense work has gone into this project, both in Iceland and in Germany, and that groundwork will benefit Reykjavík as a UNESCO City of Literature, should it be awarded the status.

Literary culture in the city is vibrant and diverse. It spans energetic literary activities with children and youths, which can for instance be seen in various literature-related work in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and libraries, to events for all ages such as the Week of the Book, several readings and recitals in cafés and other venues and popular literary walks, just to name a few. Even though there are many tried and tested events on offer, constant renewal and new happenings pop up all the time, such as the very successful Poetry Slam hosted by Reykjavík City Library, where young people fuse poetry with music, dance, and other arts, the H2 Creative Summer Groups run by Reykjavík City, and popular lunch-time lectures hosted by the new Writing Department at the University of Iceland, where writers discuss their works and the creative process. Digital media and preservation grows ever more prominent within literature, as in other areas, and the city's public and academic libraries are at the forefront of this development, along with institutes such as The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

Reykjavík's main ambition behind becoming a UNESCO City of Literature is to further support the city's literary culture, not least by coordinating the efforts of those who

operate within the sector – everyone from writers to all the different parties that promote literature to the public. In order to successfully coordinate these efforts in an effective and powerful way, Reykjavík City will establish a Centre for Literature in Reykjavík together with its key partners in the field. Reykjavík wants to celebrate its literary heritage by promoting literature and public literary discourse in a diverse manner, creating new projects to increase reading among all age groups and making literature a visible feature in the city landscape.

The City of Reykjavík places great importance on international collaboration, and associations that work within the literary sector in the city are all a part of an international network and partake in international collaborations in the area of writing and book culture. The City has already established a relationship with Edinburgh, the first UNESCO City of Literature, and closely follows developments in the ambitious work underway there. One of the two point persons for this bid attended the Cities of Literature Conference in Edinburgh in 2008, and Reykjavík intends to partake in the Creative Cities Network conferences in the future. The City of Reykjavík looks forward to working with other Creative Cities on a variety of projects in the fields of literature and culture, as the city already has a lot to offer and believes that dialogue across countries and cultures is vital to cultivating a vibrant and progressive cultural life.

Reykjavík's main strengths with regard to becoming a part of the Cities of Literature Network are a strong literary tradition and continuity in a small linguistic community, with a robust book culture and general public participation in contemporary cultural life. Reykjavík can pass on this knowledge and experience to other cities. The bid has the full support of both Reykjavík City and the Icelandic State, is backed by the Mayor of Reykjavík, and Reykjavík's Department of Culture and Tourism handles all preparation work in collaboration with The Icelandic Literature Fund and other institutions and organizations in the field. The Icelandic National Commission for UNESCO has been following the bid with interest and is willing to submit a letter of support at any time.

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# October 2011

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Iceland will be the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and has launched the most extensive promotional campaign for Icelandic literature to date

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# Reykjavík – History and Culture





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## History and Language

According to historical tradition and existing written sources, the Norwegian Ingólfur Arnarson and his crew were the first permanent settlers in Iceland. They are said to have built their homestead in Reykjavík around 870 AD. Archaeological finds confirm that the first settlements in the country were around this time, and the oldest remnants are found in Reykjavík city centre as can be seen in the Reykjavík City Museum's Settlement Exhibition on location. As the story goes, Ingólfur settled in the bay after throwing his chieftain's pillars overboard, asking the gods to direct him to good farmland and vowed to raise a farm where the pillars washed ashore.<sup>1</sup> These pillars can be seen in the City's coat of arms, and this old legend of the settlement, whether it is fact or fiction, is an inherent part of Reykjavík's image and identity. In all probability the place was chosen for its natural qualities, such as a mild climate, good moorage, geothermal water, abundant fishing grounds, good grazing land, offshore islands that could be cultivated and salmon rivers. These first settlers named the place Reykjavík (literally Smoky Bay) on account of the billowing steam rising from the area's hot springs, and in fact such hot springs provide energy to heat houses and swimming pools in modern day Reykjavík.



*Reykjavík City's coat of arms rests on the story of Iceland's first settlers from the Book of Settlements. The blue background represents the ocean, with white waves and the high-seat pillars on top.*

It is interesting that after Ingólfur, several hundred years pass without Reykjavík being especially mentioned in stories and written sources. It is not until the middle of the eighteenth century that this changes, even though the town was granted exclusive trading charter in 1786. Reykjavík was however still just a village growing at a snail's pace. Over the next decades the country's main institutions and offices were moved to Reykjavík, schools were established, the population started to grow and in the end the town started to live up to its trading-town status. Copenhagen remained the country's capital city until 1904, at which time Iceland was granted Home Rule and partial autonomy from Denmark, after having first been a subject of Norway from 1262 and later of Denmark. Home Rule gave Icelanders their own minister answerable to Parliament, government offices were established in Reykjavík, and consequently, Reykjavík took over from Copenhagen as the capital of Iceland. This development led to full autonomy in 1918 and concluded in independence and the founding of the republic in 1944.

For centuries Iceland was a very isolated place, and in fact it was not until after WWII that the isolation broke; the old, Icelandic farming society was transforming into a modern urban and industrial society of which Reykjavík was the main hub. People flocked to the town, and there was a steady increase in the population throughout the twentieth century. Around the turn of the century in 1900 just under 80% of the population lived out in the country, but 100 years later the situation is completely reversed, with only around six percent of the nation living in rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

*A poem by Max Jacob tells of a man who came from Paris to another city because there were not enough physicians in Paris to deal with all the ailments that affected him. But it's not only people that suffer illness and need help. The ailments of the young city of Reykjavík are so manifold – and so complex – that her poets and novelists need outside help to reach a proper diagnosis.*

BRAGI ÓLAFSSON, writer (b. 1962)

Iceland is one of the smallest linguistic areas in the world, counting only around 320.000 inhabitants and very few speakers outside the country. Icelandic is very close to the language that was spoken by Norse men in the Middle Ages in most of the Nordic countries and in certain areas in northern Europe. The language is one of the nation's most distinguishing characteristics. It has changed relatively little since the time of settlement compared to the other Nordic languages, and in fact Icelanders today can still read the original medieval texts with relative ease. Nowhere in Europe is the history of literature as continuous in this respect as in Iceland. Therefore, the language is particularly precious and vulnerable at the same time, and that is why Icelanders have been more aware than many neighbouring nations to systematically cultivate and cherish their native tongue. Literature plays a vital role in this, as the language undergoes constant renewal and development within fiction and other forms of literature,



*Reykjavík City Lake in central Reykjavík with a view toward the Old Harbour and the surrounding mountains.*

Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson



both with regard to original works and translations, which could explain the centralized position of literature within all cultural dialogue in Iceland. Icelandic is furthermore almost free of dialects, and it is quite rare for such a large and sparsely populated country to be so homogenous in this respect.

In 2009, the Icelandic parliament Althingi approved a new language policy for Icelandic, which is in two main parts. One part focuses on the preservation of the language and the other deals with its development. This involves for instance making sure there is sufficient vocabulary to use Icelandic in most fields of discourse. One of the tools in place to fulfil this demand is the official policy that all computer user interfaces in primary, secondary and upper secondary schools must be in Icelandic.

Looking at literature, it can be said that Icelandic is the key to the old Norse religion. Iceland was a haven for paganism when Christianity spread in Scandinavia and Europe. The island was isolated, resulting in Christianity reaching its shores relatively late, and it was only in 1000 AD that the religion was put into law. The law, however, permitted paganism as long as it was practiced in private, and pagan customs thus lived on for quite a while. With Christianity came literacy, and people started writing in their native tongue, especially religious and legal texts, but also narratives and poetry from pagan times, and this literal legacy is what Icelanders are known for today.

It is however safe to say that the major part of the nation was not literate until the late seventeenth century, but the strong oral tradition ensured that Icelanders knew their origins and the stories of their forefathers.

## The “Icelandic Alphabet”

The Icelandic alphabet is based on the Latin one, but also has a few letters that are unique to Icelandic. The letters c, q, w and z are however not used in Icelandic. Vowels are either stressed or without stress, the former ones are considered letters in their own right and not variants of their derivative vowels. The old letters Þ/þ and Ð/ð represent the voiceless and voiced “th” sounds, as in the words “thin” and “this” in English. These two letters will not be used in this publication, instead of Þ we will use Th, and instead of Ð we will use D.

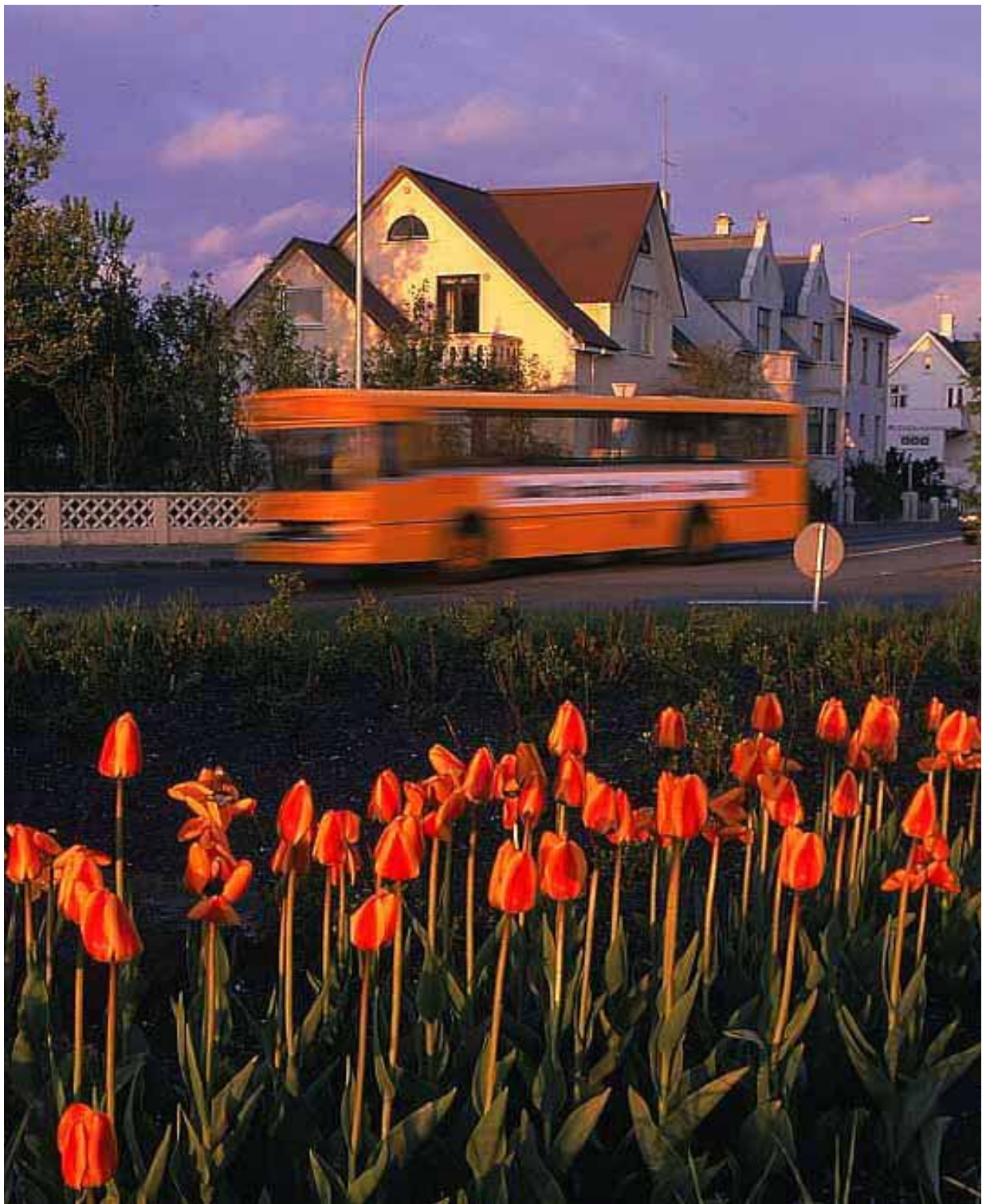
Aa Áá Bb Dd Ðð Ee Éé Ff  
Gg Hh Ii Íí Jj Kk Ll Mm  
Nn Oo Óó Pp Rr Ss Tt  
Uu Úú Vv Xx Yy Ýý Þþ  
Ææ Öö

80 %

of the population lived in  
rural areas in 1900

6 %

of the population lived in  
rural areas in 2000



*Reykjavík bus and spring flowers in the western part of Reykjavík.*

Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson

## The Place

Iceland is the most sparsely populated country in Europe, with only around three inhabitants per square kilometre. The largest part of the country is uninhabitable, and the villages and towns are mostly scattered along the coastline, with the most densely populated areas in the south-western part of the island, in and around the capital. The country lies in the North Atlantic, around a three-hour flight away from London and a five to six hour flight from New York. Reykjavík is located on a long cape embraced by two little fjords and the city is surrounded by mountains. The highest one is Mt. Esja at 914m, one of the city's main landmarks and a hiking area for the inhabitants, as well as an inspiration for the city's poets who have written numerous poems about it. The Greater Reykjavík Area consists of Reykjavík and seven other smaller municipalities, and in many ways they work as one as many people look to Reykjavík, whether it is for work, commerce or business.

Reykjavík is different from many other capital cities in the sense that it is spread out with mostly low-rise buildings. The Greater Reykjavík area is 237 km<sup>2</sup>, and there are 430 inhabitants per square kilometre, which means that Reykjavík is one of the most sparsely populated cities in the world. Reykjavík is a harbour city and its old harbour has been going through renewal in recent years. The former fishermen's huts now house cafés, restaurants, shops and other services that appeal to locals and visitors alike. There are various sailing trips on offer from the old harbour, such as whale-watching tours, and the dock is used by local boats and foreign cruise ships alike. Each year, around the Icelandic Sailor's Day, the harbour area hosts the Festival of the Sea, and there are many opportunities in the area for events of all sorts, such as the literature walks offered by Reykjavík City Library, with a focus on poetry and prose about the sea and the harbour life.

The city centre is a stone's throw away from the old harbour and is home to both the city's oldest buildings, and



**OLD HARBOUR** *The Old Harbour in Reykjavík was once the centre of transportation and shipping. In the autumn of 1874, the Scottish steamship Lára waited in the channel for goods and passengers to be ferried aboard. Most of the passengers were Icelanders on the way to North America in search of a better life. Among them were Ólafur “the fiddler” Jensson and his family; they are the main characters of Bödvar Guðmundsson’s historical novel Híbýli vindanna from 1995 (Where the Winds Dwell).*

*From Where the Winds Dwell* The Lára had arrived to pick up corned mutton in barrels along with live horses, mail and superfluous people. Earlier in the summer, part of the Danish navy ships had to lay anchor outside the harbour, because despite the thousand years that had passed since Norwegian refugees had settled in Iceland, the soon-to-be capital still lacked a serviceable pier for larger vessels. Both king and constitution therefore had to be brought to shore in a rowboat.

TRANSLATED BY KENEVA KUNZ

the remains of the first settlements in the country, as was mentioned earlier. All the main government and art institutions, of both the capital and the country, are found in the city centre, such as Althingi, the Supreme Court, City Hall, Reykjavík Art Museum, the National Gallery of Iceland, the National Museum, the Living Art Museum, Reykjavík City Library and the National Theatre, in addition to numerous shops, cafés and restaurants. A new music hall is being built by the harbour – the first of its kind in Reykjavík, and the project is vast. The building, which will open in May 2011, will house the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and the Icelandic Opera, but also serve as a venue for other art events and happenings, conventions and meetings. The renowned artist Ólafur Elíasson designed a glass front that will surround the building and is meant to reflect the majestic, Icelandic landscape.

The city centre is a very mixed area of residential and industrial buildings. The centre is densely organized but outside the city hub, the areas are more dispersed. One of the largest transport arteries, Miklabraut, lies east of the centre and connects the neighbourhoods. Large suburbs have risen in recent years and decades, and within them new centres have formed with shops, businesses, and recreational areas. Public transport in Reykjavík is limited to buses, as there are no trains of any kind in Iceland, even though ideas thereof do surface every now and then.

Cycling and hiking paths line the shore, which frames a large part of the city. They offer the locals a chance to enjoy the outdoors and beautiful views of the mountains and the sea. One of the small islands just offshore is Lundey – Puffin Island, so named after the large groups of puffin settled there. Another is Videy, which is the only island in the area that used to be populated, although there are

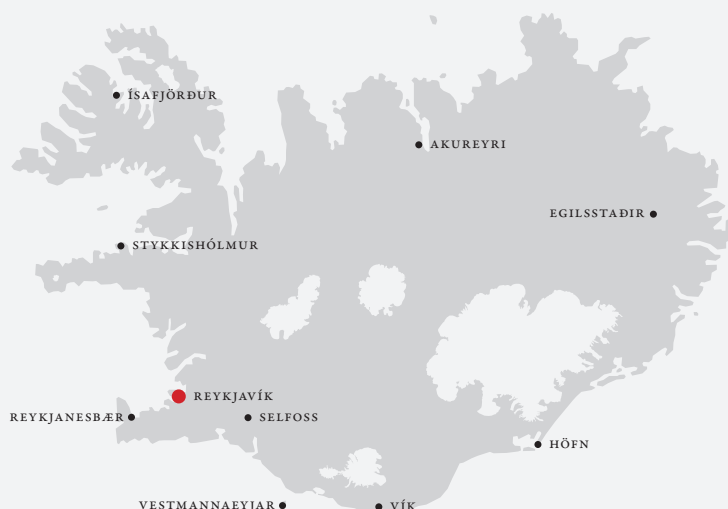
### *The Mysteries of Reykjavík*

*Icelandic literature was for a long time limited to the countryside, but as the capital grew so did its role in literature. One aspect of the urban image in literature appears in Icelandic crime novels that in the beginning of the century even tended to be named for the city – Leyndardómar Reykjavíkur (The Mysteries of Reykjavík) and Allt í lagi í Reykjavík (A-OK in Reykjavík) – and have in past years mostly taken place in different parts of the city. Each neighbourhood has its own crime novel: Grafarholt, Nordurmýri and the City Centre – but fortunately the number of crime novels does not reflect the number of real-life crimes. When the day is spent it is therefore a good idea to take a walk and trace the steps of fictional criminals and measure fact against fiction.*

KATRÍN JAKOBSDÓTTIR, Iceland's Minister for Education, Science and Culture and literary scholar

no inhabitants there today. Videy's history is an interesting one; an Augustine monastery was built on the island in 1225, which was a great seat of culture and learning up until the sixteenth century, and in the nineteenth century Videy boasted a printing press that for a period of time was the only one of its kind in the country. Today the people of Reykjavík visit the island for outings and cultural events. Videy is a venue for various happenings and home to works by both Icelandic and foreign artists, such as the Imagine Peace Tower by Yoko Ono, created in the memory of her husband, John Lennon. The tower was inaugurated in 2007.

*Iceland is the most sparsely populated country in Europe, with only around three inhabitants per square kilometre. The Greater Reykjavík area is 237 km<sup>2</sup>, and there are 430 inhabitants per square kilometre, which means that Reykjavík is one of the most sparsely populated cities in the world.*







Top: *Cycling and walking paths line the city's waterfront.*  
Bottom: *The people of Reykjavik enjoy their outdoor thermal pools all year round.*

Photographs: *Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson*

## The Green City

Another characteristic of Reykjavík is its close relationship with nature, not only on account of the proximity to the sea, but also because of the wild nature surrounding the city. Outdoor activities are very popular among the people of Reykjavík – many go on regular hikes up nearby mountains and in unpopulated areas; swimming in the cold sea is growing in popularity, and Icelanders have a special love affair with their outdoor swimming pools, which are heated year round with geothermal water from the depths of the Earth. Writers have on occasion had readings for swimmers in the pools in Reykjavík, and publishers and libraries have planted floating poems in the hot tubs so people can stimulate the mind while they relax the body.

There are many open green spaces within the city that are used for outdoor activities and recreation. One of the most popular areas is in Laugardalur valley, which is located east of the city centre. Laugardalur is home to one of the largest outdoor swimming pools in the city, the Reykjavík Botanical Garden, and the Reykjavík Zoo and Family Park. One of the country's prime salmon rivers runs through the city and is good for both trout and salmon fishing. The valley through which the river runs is a lovely outdoor recreational area. As mentioned, geothermal heat is used to heat houses and buildings in Reykjavík, and this environmentally and eco-friendly energy makes Reykjavík one of the cleanest cities in the world. One of Reykjavík City's slogans is "Pure Energy", and refers both to this form of clean energy and the creativity in the city and its citizens. In recent years, Reykjavík City has systematically worked towards making an eco-friendly city even more environmentally friendly by various means, such as laying cycling paths, improving sorting and recycling of garbage, and policy making for services to eco-cars, to name a few. Quality of life in the city is thus high, which is also due in part to how safe and child-friendly the city is, even though there is always room for improvement.

### Literature trail

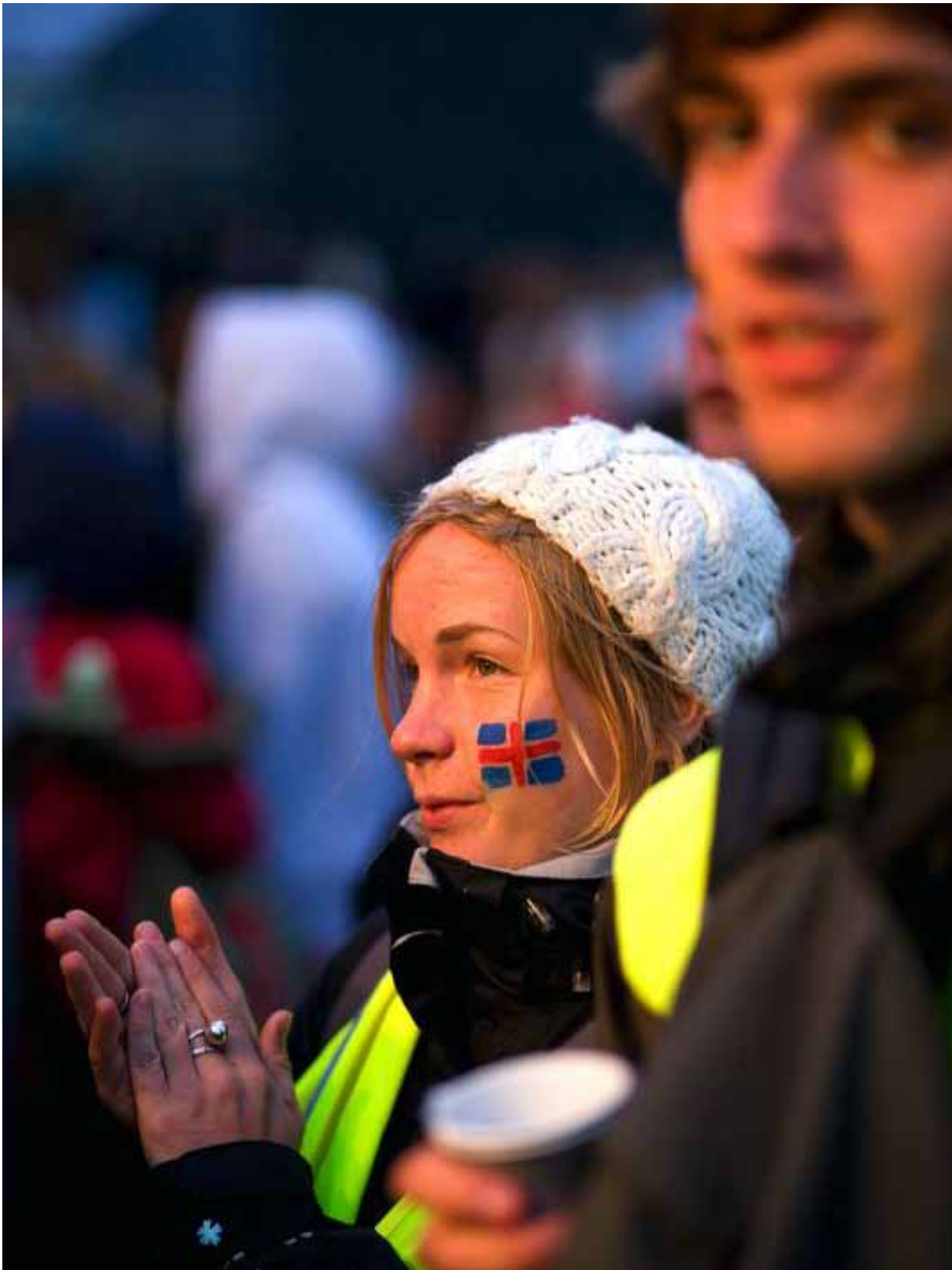


**AKRAFJALL** *Reykjavík is surrounded by mountains. Those that stand to the north and west have become landmarks for the city and are especially dear to its inhabitants. Numerous poems have been written about these mountains and they also appear in popular lyrics, the most famous one likening them to "violet dreams" on a spring night. Here is a poem by Sigurbjörg Thrastardóttir from the year 2000 about the mountain Akrafjall.*

### Mt. Akrafjall

*Don't I keep telling you  
to go easy  
with the pastels  
it could be considered  
overdone  
especially if  
the moon and the mountain  
are in the frame  
I mean  
who do you reckon would believe  
those theatre-pink shadows  
that elf-blue sky?*

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD SCUDDER



*Not only is Reykjavík a young city, so is its population.*

Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson



## The People

Today the city counts 120.000 people, but there are over 200.000 people living in the Greater Reykjavík Area, which is over two-thirds of the nation. Other urban areas have fewer than 20.000 inhabitants, and most of them considerably fewer than that. Not only is the city itself young, so is its population – according to Statistics Iceland, the mean age in Reykjavík is 33 years, 20 percent are under the age of 15, and 17 percent are in their twenties. Without doubt, the renowned vibrancy of the city stems in part from all these young people, and one of the things that Reykjavík as a City of Literature aims to do is to focus on the younger generation and tap into their creative energy.

Icelanders are descendants of Nordic and Celtic settlers. Research has shown that the majority of Icelandic male settlers' DNA can be traced to Scandinavia while the majority of the women's DNA is traced to the British Isles.<sup>4</sup> Immigrants were few in number for the longest time, but during the economic boom and well into this decade, their numbers grew substantially although recently these numbers have dwindled. Today foreign nationals are only 6.8 percent of the Icelandic population, in Reykjavík the number is 8.1 percent. This does not count immigrants that have subsequently taken up Icelandic citizenship, but between the years 1991 and 2009 around 6.000 people of foreign origin became Icelandic citizens. It is safe to say that the nation is quite homogenous, though it has steadily grown more diverse in recent years and decades, and Reykjavík has been taking on a more multicultural hue. Reykjavík City welcomes new residents and has recently adopted a policy in matters pertaining to immigrants. Emphasis is for instance placed on multicultural activities at all school levels and Reykjavík City Library runs various multicultural programs.

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# 200.000

people live in the Greater Reykjavík Area

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# 33 years

is the mean age in Reykjavík

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### **Icelandic names**

The Icelandic name system is unusual in many ways. People for instance use their first names and not their surnames in day-to-day relations, and we will follow this tradition in this document. It is rare for people to have family names in Iceland, instead Icelandic surnames are patronymic or matronymic, reflecting the name of the person's parent. That is to say that the surname is made up of the father's or mother's first name and the suffix – son 'son' or –dóttir 'daughter', depending on whether the person is male or female. It is more common for the surname to reflect the father of the person, although it is increasingly common to use the mother's name. It is extremely rare for a woman to take on her husband's surname.

Examples: *Stefán Árnason & Vigdís Jónsdóttir* have a daughter called *Soffía Stefánsdóttir*. *Stefánsdóttir* literally means that *Soffía* is the daughter of *Stefán*.

*Kristján Ólafsson & Helga Úlfisdóttir* have a son called *Thór Helguson*. *Helguson* literally means that *Thór* is the son of *Helga*.

Icelanders have one of the highest life expectancies in the world, 80.7 years at birth (which is the mean life expectancy of men and women), with only Japan scoring higher.<sup>5</sup>

The level of education in Iceland is high. In 2009, 6.2 percent of secondary school graduates in Reykjavík started school in upper secondary schools (junior college). Seven schools offer university degrees in Iceland, three of which are in Reykjavík. The Icelandic educational system is largely run by the state and the municipalities.

### **Literature trail**



**NÝLENDUGATA** *Gyrdir Eliasson is a poet and writer of short stories and novels. His writing often carries with it a sense of fantasy in a subtle and uncanny way, or even terror behind a smooth surface. He is one of the Icelandic writers who has made good use of folk tales and folklore in their work, and dreams are a recurrent theme. So is death, as in this poem from 1992 that takes place on a street in the western part of Reykjavík.*

### **Nocturne**

*I dream a man  
who is dead,  
he is driving a new  
car and invites me  
for a long journey.  
Thinking I  
understand his  
drift I decline  
cautiously. We  
are on Nýlendugata;  
the car doors open  
and I look in,  
at my dead  
friend. 'Thanks all the  
same, I'll join you  
later', I say,  
but none the less get in  
and we follow  
the road,*

*in the dusk north  
to where  
the graves are  
deeper than coalmines*

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD SCUDDER

# 20%

are under the age of 15

# 17%

are in their twenties

# 8%

are foreign nationals in  
Reykjavík



*Austurvöllur Square and Parliament House on a December night.*

Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson



*Reykjavik City Hall is located at the City Lake in the heart of Reykjavik.*

Photograph: *Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson*

## Economy and Administration

The Icelandic Althingi is one of the oldest national parliaments in the world. It was founded at Thingvellir, close to Reykjavík, in 930 AD and revived in its present form in Reykjavík in 1844. Thingvellir has now been declared a national park and the area was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2004. The place holds a special meaning for the Icelandic nation and it is frequented by the people of Reykjavík, as well as by people from other parts of the country. Parliamentary elections are held every four years, and 63 members of parliament are elected. All Icelandic citizens, 18 years of age and older, are eligible to vote. The Althingi is responsible for legislative authority, the government and the president of Iceland responsible for executive power, and the courts the judicial power. Reykjavík citizens elect a city council of fifteen every four years. The council then elects a mayor who is the executive head of the City of Reykjavík for a term of four years. Reykjavík City Council meetings are open to the public.

The foundations of the Icelandic economy are sustainable resources, rich fishing grounds, and geothermal energy. The fishing industry has long been one of the pillars of the Icelandic economic sector and played a huge part in transforming the nation from being one of the poorest in Europe to one of the richest. In the past few years and decades, though, the importance of tourism and various service industries has grown, innovative developments have taken place in the fields of biotechnology and energy, and the number of jobs in high-tech and software companies has grown. Some of these companies are game and software companies that have become internationally renowned. Reykjavík is becoming a popular tourist destination as the city has a great deal to offer and is seen as an exciting destination for people who are interested in nature and the outdoors as well as culture. In addition to the literature scene, the city has an abundance of musicians, designers, and visual artists. Art life in Reykjavík is truly flourishing and artists increasingly interact with one another across art forms.

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# 61.2 %

of Icelanders visited historical sites in 2009

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*... in an instance, Reykjavík has gained all that a cosmopolitan city needs; not only a university and cinemas, but also football and homosexuality.*

HALLDÓR LAXNESS: “Af íslensku menningar-  
ástandi” (On Icelandic Culture). Article from 1925

Iceland experienced a great economic boom in the wake of the privatization of the state-owned banks in the beginning of this century, which came to an abrupt halt with the crash of the entire banking system in October 2008. This has led to the economic crisis that Icelanders are now finding a way out of. The pillars of Icelandic society: good educational and health care systems, natural resources, and a rich cultural heritage, will undoubtedly help make this journey easier. Culture has a big part to play in the revitalization of the economy, making its importance even more clearly evident. Attendance at cultural events is for instance high, as can be seen in the following chapter, and publishers have not held back despite circumstances. The supply of books has in fact remained steady. It is worth mentioning that Reykjavík City Council was unanimous in working towards achieving UNESCO City of Literature status, and in doing so it stresses the value of literature and the cultural heritage in the restoration work that lies ahead.



**GARDASTRÆTI** *Unuhús is a small house in the oldest part of Reykjavík. It was built in 1896 and is famous from the works of two major Icelandic authors: Halldór Laxness and Þórbergur Þórðarson. Both regularly visited Unuhús, which was a refuge for writers and other intellectuals during the first decades of the twentieth century. The house was named after its mistress, Una Gísladóttir, but later her son, Erlendur, who is the prototype for the organist in Laxness's novel Atómstöðin (The Atom Station), took over as head of the house.*

*Þórbergur Þórðarson's autobiographical novel Ofvitinn (The Eccentric) from 1940–1941, tells of how mother and son, who were then strangers to Þórbergur, saved him from hunger and cold, and of his first introduction of Unuhús.*

*From Ofvitinn I had never seen such a pleasant room before. It was bright and gleaming, all its colours were clean and pure and it seemed that every board of the panelling and ceiling and every object inside spoke like a living thing and breathed a warm and friendly welcome. It was like a luminous world that existed irrespective of the greyness and rain in the country. No object inside spoke of private property. It was as if the room belonged to no one. It was as if it just stood here on the world's highway and all of humanity could walk in uninvited. I liked it here. I felt like I should always have a home here.*

TRANSLATED BY LINGUA

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59 %

of Icelanders attended a concert in 2009

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75.6 %

of Icelanders went to the cinema in 2009

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Top: *The Sun Voyager*. A steel sculpture by Jón Gunnar Árnason, made to resemble a Viking ship. The sculpture is located at the north waterfront in downtown Reykjavík.

Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson

Bottom: An adventurous tale of a giant princess and her father unfolded on the streets of Reykjavík in June 2007, when French street theatre Royal de Luxe visited the city.



## The Cultural Landscape

Even though Reykjavík is not a large or populous city, it is, as mentioned, known for its creative energy and a vibrant cultural scene. Furthermore, the small size of the nation means that the city in fact caters to the country as a whole and plays a vital role in all dissemination of culture. One of the goals in the City's Culture Policy 2009–2012 is that Reykjavík shall play a leading cultural role as the capital of Iceland. The policy also stresses that culture should be acknowledged as a vital part of the city's economy and business life.<sup>6</sup> According to a first time statistical study, published in December 2010, culture and creative industries are among Iceland's biggest economic sectors. The study also shows that around 6 percent of the labour force is employed in the creative industries, which makes the creative class one of the most populous in the country. This is the first time this sector has been analyzed properly in Iceland. The statistical study, which was carried out by the University of Iceland in collaboration with well-known British expert Colin Mercer, is based on UNESCO's framework of the creative industries. The data is based upon VAT-taxable turnover in Iceland as well as public cultural expenditure as a basis for the research.

Results show that the creative industries had a turnover of 191 billion ISK, or EUR 1,25 bn, in the year 2009, which makes these industries among the biggest in Iceland. This is a far greater turnover than that of the agricultural and fisheries sectors combined. The VAT-taxable turnover in the creative industries is higher than that of the construction sector and comparable to that of metal manufacturing.



*The movie Gauragangur, based on a novel by Ólafur Haukur Símónarson, is being filmed on location in Reykjavík in 2010. This scene takes place at one of the city's primary school grounds. Directed by Gunnar Björn Gudmunsson. Courtesy of Zik Zak Filmworks.*

The creative industries experienced constant growth in annual labour units during the years 2005–2008, with a small decrease in 2008–2009, but less than in other sectors. In the other Scandinavian countries and in Europe in general, the creative industries have truly become an independent economic sector, as research demonstrates a constant and even growth in spite of the economic recession. The survey confirms that this is also the case in Iceland. The state and municipal share amounted to 13 percent which is comparable to that in other countries.

The study is initiated by the consultative forum of creative industries and financed by five ministries, including the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Promote Iceland.

A working group will be established by the government and its task will be to determine how to improve the working conditions of the creative industries and how to make the most of the available opportunities, as well as to strengthen research, education and policy development, and support export activities. The group will include representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Promote Iceland and the consultative forum of the creative industries.

The group shall submit proposals for action and improvement as its work progresses, but a final report, along with an action plan shall be submitted no later than March 2011.

Reykjavík was a European City of Culture in 2000 together with eight other cities. This acknowledgement was important to Reykjavík and had a widespread impact on the urban and cultural landscapes. The title is thought to have boosted tourism and enhanced the city's image, in addition to offering a valuable lesson in collaboration, both at home and with other Cities of Culture. One of the fruits of Reykjavík as a City of Culture is the Icelandic Literature website run by Reykjavík City Library, which plays an important role in promoting contemporary Icelandic literature at home and abroad.

Creative jobs are on the rise in Iceland, and culture contributes four percent of the GDP. In comparison agriculture contributes one percent and the fishing industry around

*Culture, arts and history can be conducive to a sense of solidarity, and a constructive curiosity about the life and culture of others. It is important to be on the alert for opportunities of this nature, and to make use of them in the interests of the community, which is based upon reciprocal understanding, respect and equality. A key factor here is collaboration, i.e. that people from different cultures, art forms and generations should be encouraged to come together, share their experiences, and provide insight into each others' lives.*

From the City of Reykjavík Culture Policy  
2009–2012

six percent.<sup>7</sup> According to a survey done by The Social Science Research Institute (hereafter referred to as SSRI) for the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in the autumn of 2009, over half of the nation attends cultural events.<sup>8</sup> The theatre, for instance, is thriving – 60 percent of respondents had attended a theatre production in the previous 12 months, and a comparative study from 2007 revealed that the number of theatre visits in Iceland was 83 per 100 inhabitants as opposed to 35–62 per 100 in the other Nordic countries. The same study proved that there were 39 shows per 10,000 inhabitants to 20–32 in the other Nordic countries.

In addition to the two large professional theatres, The Reykjavík City Theatre and The National Theatre of Iceland, the city is home to numerous independent theatre companies. Icelandic theatres actively stage plays based on Icelandic literature; this season The National Theatre for instance produced two new theatre pieces based on novels by Nobel Prize winner Halldór Laxness – *Gerpla* (*Happy Warriors*) and *Íslandsklukkan* (*Iceland's Bell*).

The theatre company with the highest attendance, is probably the invisible one, so to speak – the Radio Theatre of RUV, the National Broadcasting Service, which has operated since the early days of RUV in the 1930's. The main objective of the Radio Theatre is to reflect Icelandic reality and to introduce new and classic international works to Icelanders.

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60 %

of Icelanders attended a theatre production in 2009

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64.5 %

of Icelanders bought one or more books for themselves in 2009

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*The culture and arts of the city contain potential for development and a resource that will be the basis for future growth. Cultural life in Reykjavík springs from the initiative and creativity of residents and visitors, and is powered by a multitude of individuals, organizations, and bodies of various kinds, which make their own contributions. The cultural life of the city is diverse, and a key factor is to nurture that diversity, as it lies at the core of the city's cultural self-image.*

From the City of Reykjavík Culture Policy  
2009–2012.

The reputation of Icelandic musicians has gone far and wide in the past decade, and Reykjavík has become known for its vibrant music and nightlife scene. Artists, such as Björk and the band Sigur Rós, have played a huge role in turning the spotlight on Iceland. There are several concerts each week in Reykjavík, and the annual Iceland Airwaves music festival, held each October, has attracted a large number of tourists and foreign artists. The classical music scene is also lively, with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra at the forefront. It has been one of the leading orchestras in the Nordic countries for a long time and gives around 60 concerts each season. The aforementioned SSRI survey demonstrates the nation's appetite for music, as 59 percent of respondents attended a concert in the past 12 months. The Icelandic Opera has operated for over 30 years in an old movie theatre and its shows are habitually sold out. It will be a monumental change for the Symphony and the Opera to move into the aforementioned modern Harpa Music Hall in 2011.

There are numerous art museums in Reykjavík, the largest being the National Gallery of Iceland, the Reykjavík Art Museum, and the Living Art Museum. In addition to these, there are several smaller museums and galleries in the city. Attendance at museums and galleries is good; according to the SSRI survey over half of the population attended an art exhibition in the past year.

Icelandic filmmaking struggled until the introduction of public funding in the seventies. With the establishment of

the Icelandic Film Fund in 1978 there was finally an environment for Icelandic filmmaking to thrive. This marked the beginning of the so-called Spring of Film that spawned many movies that drew incredibly large attendance, making evident the nation's thirst for local films. Icelandic filmmaking has in recent years placed Iceland and Reykjavík firmly on the map with movies like *101 Reykjavík*, based on the novel by Hallgrímur Helgason, *Angels of the Universe*, based on the novel by Einar Már Gudmundsson, and *Jar City*, based on Arnaldur Indridason's crime novel. Icelanders are great film enthusiasts and have the highest per capita movie theatre attendance in the world. According to the SSRI survey, three of every four respondents had been to the movies in the past 12 months. Film festivals in the country are numerous and vary in size and form, the largest being the Reykjavík International Film Festival (RIFF), which developed out of the Reykjavík Film Festival that was first held in 1978. RIFF has been held annually each September since 2004 and has acquired esteem and special status.

The aforementioned SSRI survey also demonstrates how strong a position literature holds in Iceland. It reveals that 82 percent of Icelanders read a book for their own pleasure in the previous 12 months. This number was even higher in 2010, when 90 percent of Icelanders sixteen years and older read one or more books for their pleasure.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, an annual survey conducted on behalf of the Icelandic Publishers' Association divulged that 64.5 percent of Icelanders bought one or more books for themselves last year. Book publishing in the country is truly flourishing; according to Statistics Iceland, there are about five titles published per 1,000 Icelanders, but similar statistics over the other Nordic countries show two to two-and-a-half per 1,000 inhabitants. The Icelandic Publishers' Association now counts 37 companies, which has to be considered quite numerous for such a small nation, and yet there are several other businesses outside of the Association that also publish books. Six-hundred-seventy-eight new titles were announced by 127 publishers in the Icelandic Publishers' Association's Annual Book Registry in 2010, most of which are situated in Reykjavík. The average print run of fiction is 1,000 copies, which, per capita, corresponds to a million copies in the United States. These statistics clearly depict what a vibrant, modern book culture has grown from the nation's cultural heritage.

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# 82 %

of Icelanders read a book purely for pleasure in 2009

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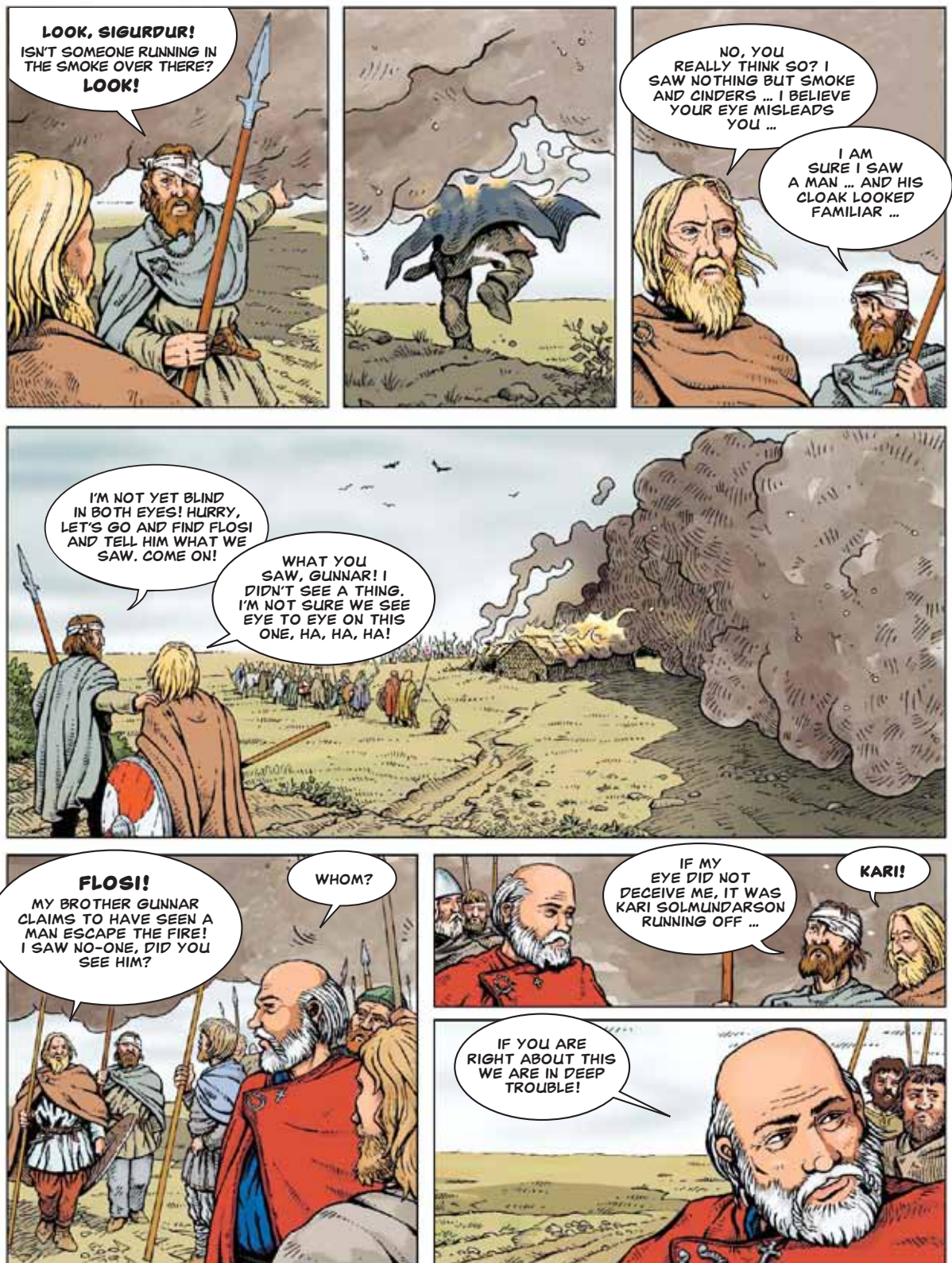
# 52.6 %

of Icelanders visited a museum or an art exhibition in 2009

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Embla Ýr Bárudóttir and Ingólfur Örn Björgvinsson: Blóðregn (Blood Rain). Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 2003. Part of an award-winning and popular comic book series based on Njál's Saga.



*A young woman reading in solitude.*

Photograph: *Stefán Karlsson*

*Courtesy of the University of Iceland*

## NOTES

- 1 See for instance the Reykjavík City Museum website *History of Reykjavík – Farm to City* [http://www.anok.is/arb/saga\\_Reykjavíkur/rvk\\_c/](http://www.anok.is/arb/saga_Reykjavíkur/rvk_c/)
- 2 Eggert Thór Bernhardsson: *Borgarbylting á 20. öld – Théttbýlisthróun og sögu-sýningar*, Heimtur 2009, p. 122–135
- 3 Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2001, *Íslenska – í senn forn og ný*
- 4 Agnar Helgason, Sigrún Sigurdardóttir, et al: *Estimating Scandinavian and Gaelic ancestry in the male settlers of Iceland*. American Journal of Human Genetics 67: 2000, p. 697–717
- 5 OECD, 2009, *Health at a Glance 2009 – OECD Indicators*
- 6 The City of Reykjavík, 2009, *City of Reykjavík Culture Policy 2009–2012*.
- 7 According to research by Dr. Ágúst Einarsson
- 8 The Social Science Research Institute, 2010, *Íslensk menningarvög – Könnun á menningarneyslu Íslendinga*
- 9 Capacent Gallup, January 2011.

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*Even though Reykjavík can rightly be called the starting point of Icelandic history as it was home to the first settler, there is curiously little mention of it in the following centuries. Reykjavík is for instance wholly absent in the great bulk of the Sagas of the Icelanders where every part of the country has its Saga, some more than one: the South has Njál's Saga, the West Laxdæla Saga, The Saga of the Sworn Brothers takes place in the Western Fjords, Saga of Grettir the Strong in the North, the East has Hrafnkell Freysgodi's Saga, etc. – but Reykjavík seems to be off the map in Storyland.*

*It is not until the middle of the eighteenth century that Reykjavík returns to the storyboard when Skúli Magnússon establishes an industrial village on the site, which is the first sign of urban development in Iceland. This newly founded town had its share of the normal growing pains of pests, fires, and accumulated grime that made Reykjavík an unattractive dwelling place, and in fact it is typical that the largest employer in town was the city jail, which contracted manpower to companies.*

*This changes at the turn of the century in 1800 when the bishop's seats in Skálholt and Hólar are merged and moved to Reykjavík with their respective Latin schools. This provides Reykjavík with a brain and intellectual assets, which are*

*enhanced when a revived Althingi is established in Reykjavík in 1845, with all the accompanying cerebral activity, such as publishing of books, newspapers and magazines. In 1900 all the nation's main writers live in Reykjavík – even though none of them make the town their subject. Reykjavík has still not developed its own aesthetics.*

*It is not until the second decade of the twentieth century kicks in that the walls come tumbling down: Icelandic writers start setting their stories in Reykjavík and Icelandic poets find inspiration in the city. Thórbergur Thórdarson in Letters to Lára (1924), Halldór Laxness in The Great Weaver from Kashmir (1927), Tómas Guðmundsson in Beautiful World (1933), Steinn Steinarr in The Red Flame Burns (1934) ... and so on and so forth until things are quite reversed and Reykjavík rules almost supreme as the topic of choice. It is not least through these works of literature that Icelanders acquire their city. Because a city that lives up to its name is something else and more than just streets and houses; it takes place in the heads of its citizens. Headquarters – a capital city.*

PÉTUR GUNNARSSON, writer  
Former President of the Writer's Union of Iceland



# Summary of Icelandic Literary History

„Nei, hann er í gólli. Hanna glötu

“segir Bergur. Undir

“tæskir siar, rétt e  
bil fyrir okkur. Síðan háttaði ég þig up

“ert þú  
Hrop d

“tala þegar þetta nærðir takið

meira sagt?“ Sölvi fórinn lenbro

þarna hittust þau fyrst, hana uppáta

“amall Yaris. I  
leggja til hliðar svo

Ísafjarðar sama ár og Sölvi hætti í

liós

“dala dalityð full. Vilt

það er samt óþarfi að vera með einhverri

Edda tekur þegjandi við bol

fimmtíu metna færir sér gæolli

„Einmitt.“ Sigurður sest aftur, ýtir s

vera með þeim í skóla í

drukkna í öllum

frá ef

Hann röltir yfir gólfið oltu ekki  
nin svo enginn fái þá hugdettu að h

ltir seyr



Við elskum þu, heitan deigur að ráðast  
og sama þog ekki alltaf orðið

hendi, rekjunaut.

mei þvi rukkustandi

öllu öðru eftirsóknarverðar

að e, sv, áhug hugann dró,

— sæ, — greyma.

ad devðar skvinnir í lófann  
í faðmi mínum um hri var ekki gert  
dre, faldi sann, minni vitund lióset  
faora, seinna rifjaði  
í augum tilvenja var,

fara kvað eldrauðan —

með luktum augum  
hverf hverf oft a og hann lætur í  
rökkursvip á sv kunnugt. Þá dul  
í svef kossum Á næstu árum  
fengi ég ríku: Þá opnuðust  
dag, F  
vi líf í sorta.  
hlustanda“.

hertók nuga m  
pú stýrandi  
í kosta ko  
titranu

- 38 Middle Ages
- 43 The Árni Magnússon Manuscript Collection
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- 47 Folklore and Folk Poetry
- 50 Romanticism and the Struggle for Independence
- 52 Contemporary Prose
- 58 Contemporary Poetry
- 60 Literature for Children and Young Adults
- 64 Translations

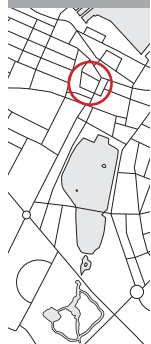
*This chapter gives a short summary of Icelandic literature, and as is to be expected, there is just room to touch on the chief points.*

Reykjavík literature will not exclusively be the topic of discussion – on account of the small size of the nation it is difficult to distinguish between the city and the country in this regard. There was however a very clear shift from rural to urban culture in Iceland in a relatively short space of time, and the turning point came during WWII. Icelandic literature today is therefore predominantly from Reykjavík, but that development only goes back to the middle of the last century or so. Earlier, the setting was usually anywhere but Reykjavík, and at the start of urbanization Reykjavík was first and foremost regarded and portrayed as a place of corruption and vice. Today, however, most Icelandic authors live in the Greater Reykjavík Area and the city has become the setting for most fiction, especially in novels, and its image in literature has changed considerably.

*Icelandic literature has a long and uninterrupted history that goes back long before the golden age of writing. Icelandic literature is the tradition that Icelandic artists tend to refer to when discussing their roots, and those who discuss Icelandic arts frequently use Icelandic literature as a benchmark.*

Excerpt from the Icelandic Literature Fund manifesto

#### Literature trail



**GRJÓTATHORP** *In a novella by Sján, Skugga-Baldur (The Blue Fox), the protagonist Fridrik comes back to Iceland after studying abroad. Upon his arrival he visits a house in the old part of Reykjavík where he meets a young girl with Down syndrome. The girl has been locked up, and Fridrik ends up taking her with him out of town where the story takes a new direction after they meet the pastor Baldur. The novella, which won the Nordic Council's Literature Prize in 2005, takes place in the nineteenth century, and Sján creates both an atmos-*

*phere and a style of language that renders poetic depth and a feel for the era, while also depicting a timeless story of greed and struggle.*

**From The Blue Fox** *She sat on the earthen floor with her legs straight out in front of her, hunched over the tray like a rag doll. In one small hand she held a strip of potato peel that she was using to push together fish-skin and bread, which she then pinched, raised to her mouth and chewed conscientiously. She took a sip from the tin cup and heaved a sigh. At that point Fridrik felt he had seen enough of the unhappy creature. He fumbled for the cover to close the hatch, bumping his hand on the wall with a loud knock. The figure in the corner became aware of him. She looked up and met his eyes; she smiled and her smile doubled the happiness of the world.*

TRANSLATED BY VICTORIA CRIBB



*Iceland's Bell, a play based on Halldór Laxness's novel from 1943–1946, was the 60 year anniversary show at the National Theatre of Iceland in 2010. Directed by Benedikt Erlingsson.*

Photograph: Eggert Þór Jónsson

## The Middle Ages

The first settlers in Iceland are believed to have come ashore in Reykjavík in the late ninth century, as already mentioned, and archaeological evidence suggests that the first settlement in the country was at the heart of the city centre, a stone's throw from Reykjavík City Lake. In the *Book of Settlements*, usually attributed to Ari Thorgilsson the Learned (1067–1148), Ingólfur Arnarson is named as the first settler and the legend of his high-seat pillars told. The *Book of Icelanders*, also attributed to Ari, is the oldest Icelandic history book and it recounts the country's history from the time of settlement to the third or fourth decade of the 12th century, when the book was written. These texts are written in Icelandic even though it was customary at the time to write in Latin, and so from the very beginning Icelandic literature was written in the national language. Icelanders wrote considerably more in their own tongue in the Middle Ages than their neighbours did, and the preserved medieval manuscripts are only a fraction of the texts produced in the country at the time. This way with words later brought the country fame and is also at the core of the nation's identity.

The settlers had to create a new way of life in an uninhabited country: give names to the land and the environment, write laws and create a society that little by little grew and spread around the island. Among the necessities people brought with them from their former homes were words and stories, and in a new land they created new tales. In the first centuries, stories and poetry were passed on through oral tradition but with the dawning of the Age of Writing, right after the period when the Icelandic Sagas are supposed to have taken place – the so-called Saga Age – these stories and poems were written on skin, and later on paper. The oldest manuscripts of Njáls Saga are from around 1300 AD and the *Codex Regius*, which is one of the most famous Icelandic medieval manuscripts, dates back to around 1270, though the oldest, preserved fragments are from the late 12th century. The Edda poetry is mostly preserved in this one manuscript, a collection of poems that had lived for centuries in oral tradition. These are mainly epic poems but also poems about the pagan Norse gods, such as gnomic poems Hávamál, attributed to Odin, and Völuspá that describes the pagan world view. As the Sagas, the Edda poems originate in oral literature and they have continued to live with the Icelandic nation and have in fact become an inherent part of the language as sayings and proverbs.

*From the very beginning Icelandic literature was written in the national language.*





Vellum manuscript Möðruvallabók (on top) from 1350, containing *Njáls Saga*, *Egil's Saga* and other Sagas of the Icelanders. The largest collection of the Sagas in one book. The bottom manuscript is from the fifteenth century, with stories of knights and other heroes. The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

#### Literature trail



**ADALSTRÆTI** Jónas Hallgrímsson started working on one of his best known poems, “*Hulduljóð*” (“*Lay of Hulda*”), when he resided in Adalstræti, the oldest street in Reykjavík, in the winter of 1840–1841. The house no longer stands, but a replica of the old facade is part of the current building. The original became the home of Reykjavík's first cinema in 1906, but today the new buildings on the lot house a hotel and restaurant, as well as Reykjavík City's Settlement Exhibition. Here is the first stanza from this 16-stanza-long romantic poem, which evokes the beauty of Icelandic nature and also serves as a wake-up call to the poet's fellow Icelanders.

#### From “*Lay of Hulda*”

No poet I. Yet here is Hulda calling,  
hailing me gently, urging me to sing,  
to share my song with shadows gently falling  
and shepherds driving flocks from pasturing,  
while tumbled waters wash the hill's foundations  
and wake the elves to nighttime occupations.

TRANSLATED BY DICK RINGLES

The Sagas are preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth century, though most existing manuscripts date back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and they describe events that supposedly took place during the time of settlement until the middle of the 11th century. All in all there are around 40 stories preserved, in addition to shorter narratives, all written by anonymous authors. The Sagas are based on oral, domestic narrative skills and the narrative methods taught in the schools of the monasteries of the Catholic church, which developed during the writing of contemporary biographies: the Kings' Sagas, the Bishops' Sagas, and the Sturlunga Saga. They are realistic on the surface and only relate what someone could have seen or heard. Many of the Sagas revolve around struggles and blood feuds and the tricky business of honour. Some recount the history of many generations, others the biography of one person, or the history of a whole region, or a group of people.

The writing of the Sagas started in the beginning of the thirteenth century and to a certain extent they reflect the struggles and the ideology of that era, but they are also rooted in an old tradition. Blood feuds, murder and mayhem are the most sensational topics of the Sagas, violence and tension having always made a better read than accounts of peace and prosperity. The Sagas form the very core of the nation's literary heritage and the time of their writing is often called the golden age of Icelandic literature. For the longest time they were almost untouchable in the sense that artists shied away from tampering with them for any sort of recycling, but at the same time they were the benchmark against which everything was measured, and all later literature stood in their shadow. This did not change in any substantial way until last century.

Icelandic medieval literature creates a window into the lost world of Nordic paganism, and preserves the history and social profile of that era. This is partly the reason for the great demand for Icelandic manuscripts that arose in Europe when collecting ancient material became popular; towards the end of the sixteenth century, scholars in Denmark and Sweden discovered that there were manuscripts to be found in Iceland that told the stories of these countries. Some of the manuscripts that were collected and sent abroad are still in museums in these countries, and thus Icelandic manuscripts can be found all over Europe. It was however the Icelandic, Árni Magnússon, who was the greatest collector of manuscripts at the time, and his collection is now preserved in Reykjavík and Copenhagen.

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*The Sagas are not the private property of Icelanders but the cultural heritage of the entire world. In Japan, Chile, Rumania and Tanzania there are people who have a special relationship with characters from the Sagas. These people have never been to Iceland and yet they possess another Iceland that they know from the Sagas. Therefore it is safe to say that the Icelandic Sagas are in fact more famous than Iceland itself.*

*The Sagas were created in a certain cultural context. They weren't the only medieval literature written in Iceland, Icelanders also told stories of Norwegian kings and Icelandic bishops. They translated tales of the Knights of the Round Table, Charlemagne, the Trojan War, and Alexander the Great. They translated stories of church fathers and holy maidens. They also created their own stories of fictional knights in distant lands, and of Germanic, ancient heroes like Sigurd the Volsung. The Sagas are a part of this great literary effort of the Middle Ages but they address more recent events, they revolve around the first generations of settlers in Iceland and the struggles they had with their neighbours and chieftains.*

*The Sagas are first and foremost about the Icelandic chieftain class. Their protagonists are by and large great heroes and poets, though more common characters loom in the background, workers – maids, slaves, children, old and disabled people. Even though we can not be certain that all the events in the Sagas happened exactly as they are described in the stories, they are believable and that explains their popularity with very different audiences: they are a way of getting in touch with ordinary people.*

*Before the days of television and movies, the Sagas had the role of entertainment for Icelandic children and young people. Egill Skalla-Grimsson and Gunnlaugur Snake's Tongue were to them the same heroes as the modern silver-screen heroes are to teenagers today. In this regard the Sagas have, over the last century, lost a certain role they played in Icelandic culture. However they continue to be read the world over, in Iceland and abroad, and come to life with each new reader every day, just like Hamlet, Don Quixote, and Voltaire's Candide.*

ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON Ph.D., Senior Lecturer in Medieval Studies at the University of Iceland



*The National and University Library of Iceland.*

Photograph: Helgi Bragason

#### Literature trail



**THE SETTLEMENT EXHIBITION** *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlements) from the twelfth century, recounts that Ingólfrur Arnarson was the first settler in Iceland, together with his family and servants, and that they established a residence in Reykjavík in the ninth century. Archaeological research indicates that the first settlement was in and around Adalstræti in downtown Reykjavík, which is also the city's oldest street in modern times. The Settlement Exhibition Reykjavík 871±2 at the site is based on the archaeological excavations of the ruin, be it Ingólfrur's house or not, and findings from other excavations in the city centre.

*From The Book of Settlements* As soon as Ingolf caught his first glimpse of Iceland he threw his highseat pillars overboard, hoping for a good omen, and declared he'd settle wherever the pillars happened to be washed ashore. [...] In the spring Ingolf travelled west across the moor. He made his home at the spot where his highseat pillars had been washed ashore, and lived in Reykjavík. The highseat pillars can still be seen in the hall there.

TRANSLATED BY HERMANN PÁLSSON AND PAUL EDWARDS





One eyed Odin from Snorra Edda, paper manuscript, written and illustrated in 1765–766 by Jakob Sigurdsson. The other eye Odin traded for a sip from Mimir's Well of Wisdom. The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.



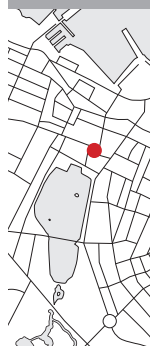
## The Árni Magnússon Manuscript Collection

Árni Magnússon (1663–1730) started collecting manuscripts in 1685 and continued to do so for the next four decades. He was born and raised in Iceland but left for Copenhagen around the age of 20 to study, and lived and worked there for the rest of his days, though he did return to Iceland for shorter and longer periods of time. Part of his collection was lost in the Great Fire of Copenhagen in 1728, but Árni and his assistants managed to save much of the collection, among it most of the valuable vellum books. Árni bequeathed his collection to the University of Copenhagen after his death, and that is where the manuscripts were kept for the next centuries. Icelanders fought long and hard to reclaim the manuscripts and in 1961 Denmark and Iceland brokered a deal, which was finalized in 1986, to divide the collection between them. The manuscripts were transferred little by little to Iceland, and the last ones were handed over in a formal ceremony at the University of Iceland on the 20th of June 1997. The Arnarnaganaean Institute in Copenhagen still preserves a part of the collection and collaborates with the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík on various projects. These two institutes preserve the Arnarnaganaean Manuscript Collection that was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2009, and is said “to preserve priceless manuscripts on the history and culture of the Nordic Countries, and in fact a large part of Europe, from the Middle Ages to the new age.”<sup>1</sup> The collection is now being digitalized and on the 21st of April 2010, the Icelandic Minister for Education, Science and Culture officially opened the website, [handrit.org](http://handrit.org), which provides access to each and every available manuscript and information about it. This project, which is a collaborative effort of the Árni Magnússon Institute, the National Library of Iceland and the Arnarnaganaean Institute in Copenhagen, will be discussed further in the chapter on digital media.

## Hallgrímur Pétursson and Religious Texts

Lutheranism was firmly set in place in Iceland when the last Catholic bishop, Jón Arason, was beheaded with his sons in 1550. The church, under the Danish king, ruled Iceland over the next centuries, and religious literature was dominant even though folk art also thrived under the surface. The official literature could be found in catechisms and sermon books that were collections of religious texts. Translations were also significant; the New Testament was translated into Icelandic in 1540, in accordance with the popularity of primary sources and literature in the national language in Europe that came with Humanism. One of the greatest religious poets of the time was Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674) and Reykjavík's most famous church is named for him. The building is one of the city's landmarks as its spire looms over the city and can be seen from near and far. It is a popular tourist destination, standing on top of a hill in the centre of town and offers spectacular views over the city. Hallgrímur Pétursson's *Passion Hymns* have been broadcast by the National Radio at Easter for more than half a century, read by a new person each year. Past readers have, for example, been writers Halldór Laxness, Ingibjörg Haraldsdóttir and Pétur Gunnarsson, as well as former President of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir.

### Literature trail



**AUSTURVÖLLUR** *Austurvöllur square is at the centre of Reykjavík and several important buildings stand along it, including the Parliament House. In the centre of the square there is a statue of the leader of the Icelandic independence movement, Jón Sigurdsson. The square can therefore be seen as a symbol of independence for the Icelandic nation. Austurvöllur has also been the site of massive political protest in Iceland, most recently in 2008 and 2009 after the country's economic collapse. Here in Einar Már Gudmundsson's novel Englar alheimsins (Angels of the Universe), the focus is on another protest in 1949 when Iceland joined NATO. The novel, which won the Nordic Council's Literature Prize in 1995, tells the story of a mentally disturbed young man, from his own point of view after his death.*

### From Angels of the Universe

*There's no denying that my birthday made history.*

*I was welcomed with rocks and tear gas. Civilians fought with the police. The windows of Parliament House were smashed. Eggs and rocks flew through the air.*

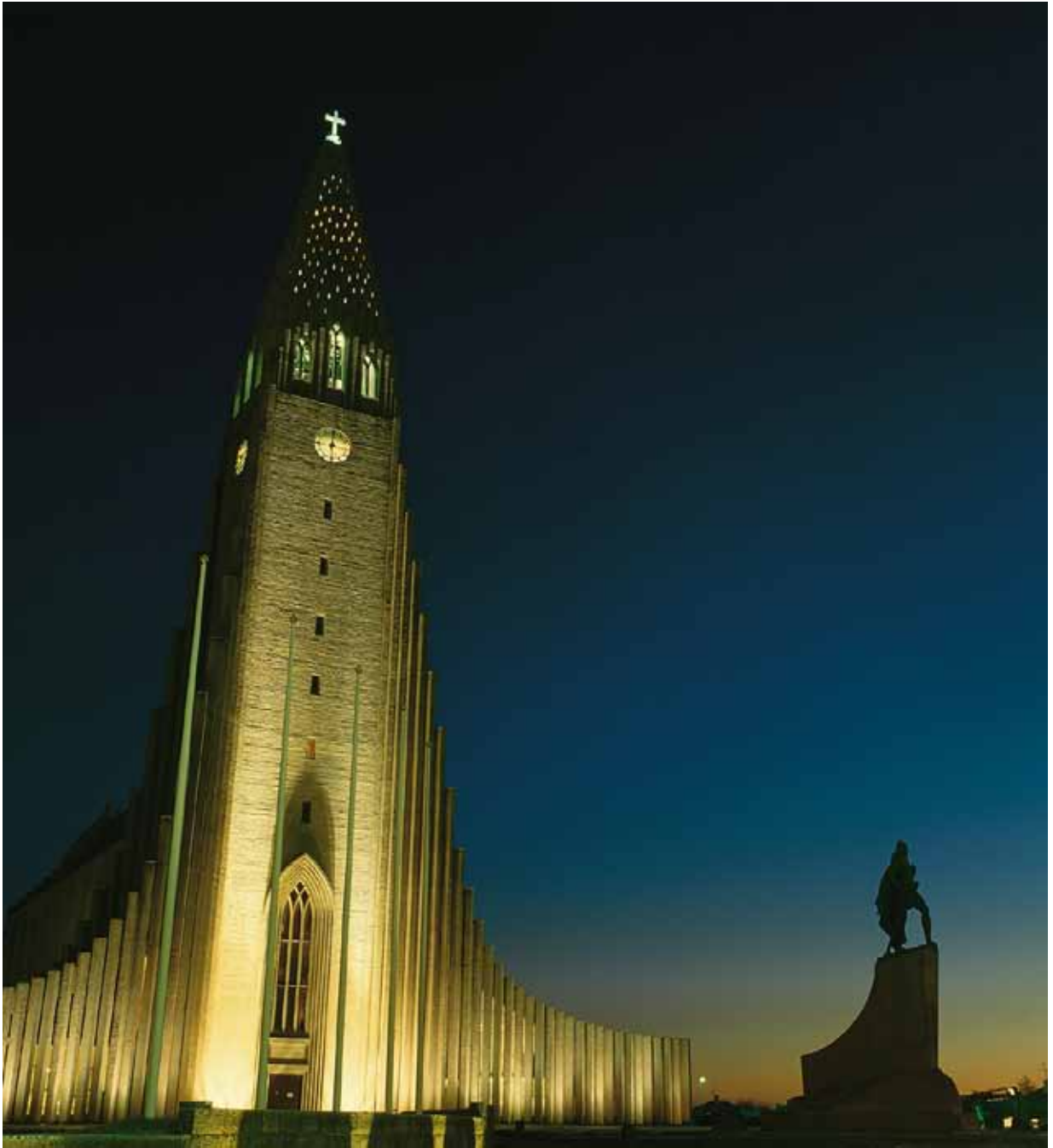
*One member of parliament grazed his arm.*

*Another got a piece of broken glass in his eye.*

*When the police felt they had lost control, despite the reserves they had called in and powerful bands of volunteers, they threw tear gas into Austurvöllur Square.*

*Clouds rose into the air like those seen by the first settler, Ingolfur Arnarson, when he scouted around for landmarks to give this place a name.*

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD SCUDDER



*Hallgrímskirkja church, one of Reykjavík's landmarks, is named for poet Hallgrímur Pétursson. In front of the church is a statue of the explorer Leifur Eiríksson, the first European to land in North America, according to Eiríkur the Red's Saga.*

*Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson*



*Ásmundur Sveinsson: Black Clouds (1947). Reykjavík Art Museum.  
Ásmundur is one of many Icelandic artists drawing upon folklore in  
their work.*



## Folklore and Folk Poetry

### FOLKLORE

Systematic collecting of folktales started around the middle of the nineteenth century in Iceland. Like elsewhere, an interest in folk culture and oral tradition went hand in hand with Romanticism but was also connected to the struggle for independence. The first collection *Íslensk ævintýri* (*Icelandic Fairy Tales*) was published in 1852 by the collectors Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson. Jón's renowned, extensive collection (six books) was not published until 1954–1961.

It has often been pointed out that folk stories are a feminine genre of literature; it was first and foremost women that preserved and told these stories, though men later collected them and committed them to print.<sup>2</sup> In fact, folktales were shunned by the church and the elite, and during the height of pietism they were banned but thrived despite the church's efforts. Icelandic folktales have lived an extraordinarily strong life within the nation, and writers were much freer with using them as material in contemporary literature than the 'sacred' medieval literature. Numerous writers have sought inspiration in this heritage for all types of literature: poetry, prose and plays, both for children and adults. An example of this are collections of tales for children by some of the best-known children's authors in the country, which have been used for Icelandic lessons in primary schools. Another example is an amusing collection of short stories from 1991 called *Tröllasögur* (*Tall Tales*), where Gunnar Hardarson, Magnús Gestsson, and Sigfús Bjartmarsson transfer various folktales to modern Reykjavík, and the outcome is both a novel view of the old tales and the contemporary time in the stories. Some of the best examples of folktale material in contemporary literature can be found in the works of poet and novelist Gyrdir Elíasson (b. 1961), who regularly taps into folklore in a unique and original way.

Folktales are possibly the genre of literature that is most interwoven with the country itself, many place names derive from them, as from the Sagas, the environment and the land itself has conjured up stories that have lived on through the generations.

## FOLK POETRY

Folklore is first and foremost the literature of the people. Folk poetry and narrative has always been an inherent part of Iceland's culture, as mentioned earlier medieval literature traces its origins to oral tradition, and the poetry tradition is still going strong today. Self-publishing of poetry is common in Reykjavík and has increased with cheaper and more accessible printing, and occasional verse is also widespread as there are numerous poets, bards and skalds in the country.

Icelandic epic poetry, called *rímur* (lit. rhymes) is preserved in old manuscripts, such as the work of Steinunn Finnsdóttir (1641–1710) who was one of the few women who took on this form of poetry. Her work is the oldest example of women's poetry that has survived in any quantity to speak of.

The association Kvædamannafélagid Idunn was founded in Reykjavík in 1929 with the aim to maintain, preserve and introduce the *rímur*. The association collects folk poetry, old and new, “this folk art that through the ages has been one of the critical aspects of Icelandic folk culture”<sup>3</sup>, as it says on the association's website. It also hosts monthly events during winter, at which members intone and teach the art of doing so, as well as introducing the form itself. This poetry is sung or intoned in a specific way, and in addition to teaching the method the association keeps recordings of people chanting or singing the rhymes. At the association's 80th anniversary in September 2009, it handed its manuscript collection over to The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies for safekeeping, and its Department of Folkloristics now preserves the manuscripts and makes them accessible to scholars and the public. Steindór Andersen, one of the country's prevailing *rímur* singers, is the president of Kvædamannafélagid, and he has collaborated with the renowned band Sigur Rós, to international acclaim. One of these collaborations resulted in the music piece Hrafnagaldur Óðins (Odin's Raven Magic), together with composer Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson. They performed the piece at the Barbican Centre in London in April 2002 and again at the Reykjavík Arts Festival in the same year.

*Ríma (plural: rímur) is a traditional form of narrative Icelandic epic song chanted or intoned in a specific manner called “ad kveda”. The inner structure and content can partially be traced to Eddic and Scaldic poetry of the Viking Age. The rímur rely on the complex metaphors called “kenningar” (singular: kenning) and the poetic synonyms called “heiti”. The Scaldic poetic stanza was an extremely intricate construct with a unique poetic vocabulary and syntax, frequently employing metaphors within metaphors in a manner reminiscent of the cryptic crossword.*

HILMAR ÖRN HILMARSSON, Chief Godi of the Icelandic Pagan Society



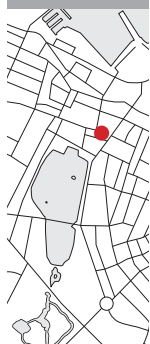
*Singing is popular at public gatherings in Iceland and the country's choirs are innumerable. Many Icelanders know folksongs and -poetry by heart.*

Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson

## Romanticism and the Struggle for Independence

One of the main writers associated with Romanticism in Iceland is the poet and natural scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1845). Jónas lived for a spell in Reykjavík and attended Bessastadir School, the official residence of the President of Iceland today, but moved to Copenhagen like many intellectuals at the time. Jónas was one of the poets and scholars who took an active part in Iceland's struggle for independence, literature having played a big part in that struggle. This group of people wanted to inspire the nation to great things and looked to the glories of the past and the golden age of literature. They were also interested in folklore and folk art, even though Jónas and friends criticized the aforementioned *rímur* harshly on aesthetic grounds. Jónas's poetry expresses great love for his country, and he was also a champion of the Icelandic language and found it imperative to ensure its constant renewal and preservation at times when Danish was becoming ever more influential in official discourse. For this reason, the annual Icelandic Language Day is held on the 16th of November to coincide with the poet's birthday. Many words that have now become an integral part of everyday language were created by Jónas, such as the word “sjónauki” (binoculars – literally: sight-enhancer). He is responsible for numerous such simple and transparent words that some people say characterize the Icelandic language. Many songs have been composed to Jónas's poetry and these songs are very popular with choirs, song groups and the public, and his poetry is taught in all schools. Jónas was an avid translator as well, translating poetry and stories from other languages into Icelandic, as he and his contemporaries believed it to be important to bring new trends from abroad to Iceland and give people the opportunity to read great, foreign literature in their own tongue. Reykjavík City Library offers a popular literary walk, tracing the steps of Jónas through the oldest part of Reykjavík.

### Literature trail



**HÓTEL BORG** *One of the buildings at Austurvöllur is Hotel Borg, built in 1930. The hotel's café has always been a popular meeting place for various groups, including writers and politicians. Vigdís Grímsdóttir's 1994 novel, Grandavegur 7, tells of Frida, a clairvoyant girl who lives in the western part of Reykjavík in the 1950s and 60s. Frida's alcoholic father abandons the family after the death of her younger brother and has rented room 212 in Hotel Borg, along with his mistress.*

*From Grandavegur 7 I knock two times twice but the music drowns out the sound. Dad can't hear my signals. I knock again, harder, but still nobody answers. Then I rattle the doorknob and beat the door with my flat hands. Five times and my palms start to sting. Finally, the door opens a little. Dad looks out into the corridor and our eyes meet. He stares at me and I know he doesn't want to invite me in right now. He just wants to lie under the warm sheets next to the woman and listen to the song “Hraustir menn” [Strong Men].*

TRANSLATED BY LINGUA



The poet and entrepreneur Einar Benediktsson (1864–1940) was also a prominent figure in the struggle for independence. He was a neo-romantic poet and also translated foreign poetry into Icelandic, works by British and American poets, and *Peer Gynt* by Henrik Ibsen. Einar was the editor of Iceland's first newspaper, *Dagskrá*, which was first published in 1896. He travelled extensively and brought ideas and ideologies back home with him and had grandiose dreams for his country. Einar's home in Reykjavík was Höfði House, which Reykjavík City Council uses for receptions today. Höfði House stood at the centre of international attention in October of 1986 as the meeting place of Soviet and U.S.A. leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan. Both Jónas Hallgrímsson and Einar Benediktsson are buried in the national burial grounds in Thingvellir National Park, the ancient gathering place of the Icelanders. The idea of burying famous sons and daughters of the nation at this place has since been abandoned, so these two beloved poets only have each other for company.

*Jónas was one of the poets and scholars who took an active part in Iceland's struggle for independence, literature having played a big part in that struggle. This group of people wanted to inspire the nation to great things and looked to the glories of the past and the golden age of literature.*



*Höfði House.*

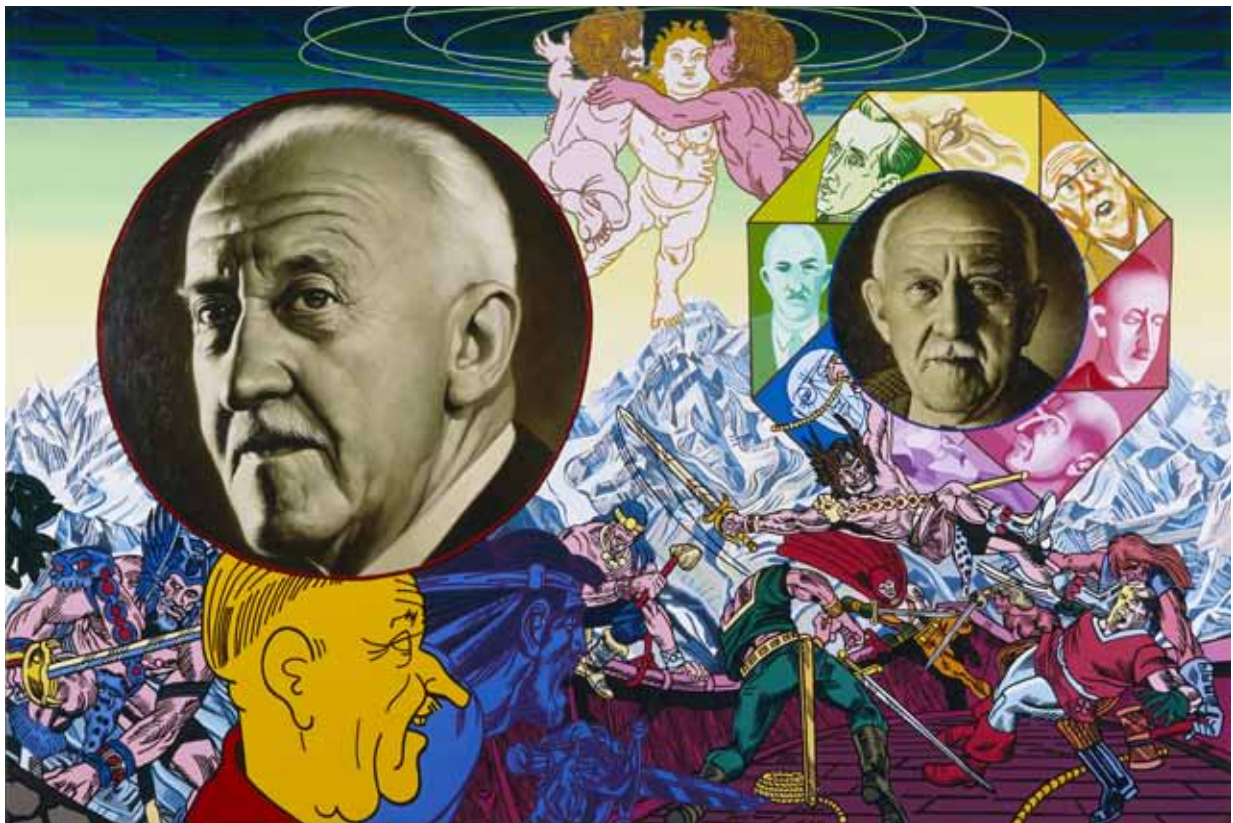
Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson

## Contemporary Prose

When summarizing Icelandic contemporary literature, Halldór Laxness (1902–1998) is bound to be the first name that springs to mind. Halldór was born in Reykjavík on the 23rd of April 1902, which happens to be UNESCO World Book Day. The day is celebrated in Reykjavík with various happenings and events, and is in fact stretched out over a whole week. Halldór was an incredibly productive and ambitious writer, publishing his first novel in 1919 at the tender age of seventeen. His first major novel though was *The Great Weaver from Kashmir* (1927), which is considered one of the starting points of Icelandic modernism in literature. Almost as famous as the book is a review from the time, which started out with the words: “Finally, finally a magnificent work of fiction that rises like a cliff from the banality of Icelandic poetry and narrative of recent years! Iceland has acquired a master novelist – it is our duty to acknowledge that with joy!”<sup>4</sup> The novel, which was first published in parts and sent on a monthly basis to subscribers, partly takes place in Reykjavík and revolves around the existential crisis of the young Steininn Ellidi, who seeks truth and meaning in a chaotic and fleeting world, while fighting his own demons, desires and doubts.

Halldór Laxness wrote fifteen novels, some published in more than one volume, including *Independent People* (1934–46), which is possibly his most famous work on an international level, *World Light* (1937–40), *Atom Station* (1948) and *Gerpla* (1952). With *Gerpla* he taps into the Sagas, basing the novel partly on the *Saga of the Sworn Brothers* and writing in that style. The tone is ironic and Halldór makes fun of the hero worship and violence of the period, a satire with tragic undertones. Halldór was criticized for mistreating the literary heritage when the book came out, but this was not the first time his work sparked controversy, in fact the reception was rather typical for the times. He also worked with medieval heritage in another way, publishing the Sagas with modern spelling in an attempt to make them more accessible. This endeavour that started with *Laxdæla* in 1942 was so controversial that Halldór and the other two publishers were charged and the matter taken up in parliament.

*Halldór Laxness was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955 for “vivid epic power which has renewed the great narrative art of Iceland.”*



Erro: Halldór Laxness (2009). Reykjavík Art Museum.

Today Halldór is anything but controversial. In fact writers who followed were often said to write in his shadow, though that hardly applies to the youngest generations of Icelandic writers today. His works have been translated into more than 40 languages and have been published in over 500 editions abroad. Halldór Laxness was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955 for “vivid epic power which has renewed the great narrative art of Iceland.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to all his novels, Halldór wrote plays, memoirs, poems, articles, and short story collections. Most of his novels have been adapted to the stage or filmed, and two new dramatizations, *Gerpla* and *Iceland’s Bell*, are being staged at the National Theatre upon the theatre’s 60-year anniversary in 2010. His work has also been used in other art forms, such as music, the latest manifestation being a requiem first performed in May 2010.

As is to be expected, academics have written extensively about Halldór’s work and his biography by his namesake Gudmundsson, from 2004, has been published in translation in several countries, such as England, Denmark and Germany.<sup>6</sup>

Another breakthrough novel in the first part of the 20th century was Thórbergur Thórdarson’s *Bréftil Láru* (*Let-*

*ters to Lára*), published in 1924. The form was unusual and difficult to categorize into a genre and the same can be said for Thórbergur’s other novels. *Bréftil Láru* challenges convention, and the book demonstrates the author’s provocative wit and style. Thórbergur was one of the most prominent writers in the city in decades that followed. He was born on a farm in south-east Iceland but moved as a young man to Reykjavík and is one of the first writers to write about the city. He lived the rest of his days in Reykjavík and died there in 1974. Many of Thórbergur’s books are a hybrid of autobiography and novel, where he makes fun of himself as a fantastic persona while describing the zeitgeist, ideologies and his contemporaries. His books are humorous, and Thórbergur was one of the most original writers of his day, and in a way, he still is. Halldór Laxness said that Thórbergur had “become a Dadaist before Dadaism was known in Iceland [...]; and an Absurdist forty years before the Absurdist.”<sup>7</sup> His novel *Sálmurinn um Blómíð* (*The Flower Hymn*) (1954–55) depicts the novel and unique view that characterizes Thórbergur’s works; here the mentality of the child leads the way and the style and language reflect that. Thórbergur took the idea of writing a book from the child’s point of view further than had been done before, and writer Pétur Gunnarsson says in his recently published

*Both Halldór and Thórbergur played a huge part in recreating the city's image, and moulding it in the minds of their contemporaries and the generations that followed.*

biography on Thórbergur that he identifies “with the child and recreates the world through the child's eyes.”<sup>8</sup> Even though Thórbergur is without a doubt one of Iceland's most remarkable writers, his books have not been translated into other languages to any great extent.

Both Halldór Laxness and Thórbergur Thórdarson belonged to a group of writers and artists that gathered in a small house in downtown Reykjavík called Unuhús, named after Una Gísladóttir, who lived there with her son, Erlendur Gudmundsson. They opened their home to all kinds of people, and Erlendur, who was a self-educated man, became a kind of patron of artists. This was a time when Reykjavík was turning into a city that was worth putting into books and art, and both Halldór and Thórbergur, among others, played a huge part in recreating the city's image, and moulding it in the minds of their contemporaries and the generations that followed.

*Wise men tell me that I was not born in the wooden backhouse at Laugavegur 32 where the girl dropped me out the window, but rather in the stonehouse close to the street where the cat jumped into the cradle and dug its claws in the baby's face while it slept; and was hanged for it.*

HALLDÓR LAXNESS: Í túninu heima (1975)

Another writer who is closely connected to the city's history is Ragnheidur Jónsdóttir (1895–1967), who wrote for both children and adults. Her stories about the fictional character Thóra from Hvammur (1954–1964) describe the inner and outer struggles in the life of a woman in these times of great social change in Iceland. Thóra moves from the country to the capital, and her story is both a coming-of-age story of an individual and a portrayal of a society from 1927 to 1960, e.g. describing the occupation of Reykjavík in WWII.

Fresh winds in 20th-century literature came with Ásta Sigurdardóttir (1930–1971) and Svava Jakobsdóttir (1930–



*Gerpla, a play based on Halldór Laxness's 1952 novel premiered at the National Theatre of Iceland in 2010. Directed by Baltasar Kormákur.*

Photograph: Eggert Thór Jónsson



2004), and their short stories offered a new and challenging view into the world of women in the city, amazing and shocking readers at the time. Ásta's output was not large; her collection of short stories *Sunnudagskvöld til mánudagsmorguns* (*Sunday Night to Monday Morning*), which she dedicated to the people of Reykjavík, was published in 1961 but she had published the stories a decade earlier in magazines, a practice she kept doing after the publication of her book. Her collected stories that often go by the name Ásta's Reykjavík Stories, were published along with a few poems in *Sögur og Ljód* (*Stories and Poems*) in 1985, 14 years after her death. In her fiction, Ásta often focuses on those who are outside or on the fringe of society, and the darker side of life provides her with material in powerful stories that depict existence and the dilemmas of a growing city.

Svava Jakobsdóttir is also among the first modernists in Icelandic fiction and in her first book, the 1965 short story collection *12 konur* (*12 Women*) the new, Icelandic city plays a big part, "the new settlement", as Ástráður Eysteinsson puts it in an article about Svava. "This settlement is marked with danger [...] and that danger also lurks in everyday life."<sup>9</sup> Svava turns the spotlight on the world of women and writes about their self-image and freedom. In the story "Kona með spegil" (A Woman with a Mirror) the protagonist goes around the city with a mirror that reflects her and the environment in such a way that both the woman's inner life and her lot in life is exposed to the reader in a revealing way. Svava published more collections of short stories and novels, one of these being *Gunnladar Saga* (1987), in which she uses the old legend of Gunnlöd, who was the keeper of the Mead of Poetry that Odinn stole. In the novel, the power of fiction is in the foreground, and Svava also questions the myth itself and the way it is told in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. She proposes her own version of the story of Gunnlöd, quite different from the traditional one, emphasizing the strong heroine. Svava had a degree in medieval Icelandic literature and worked as a scholar in that field alongside writing.

A decade before Ásta's and Svava's short story collections were published, Thor Vilhjálmsson (b. 1925) had published

*Fresh winds in 20th-century literature came with Ásta Sigurdardóttir (1930–1971) and Svava Jakobsdóttir (1930–2004), and their short stories offered a new and challenging view into the world of women in the city, amazing and shocking readers at the time.*



*Ásta Sigurdardóttir was a colourful figure in the city's art life. This photograph by Jón Kaldal from 1951 has become almost as famous as the writer herself. National Museum of Iceland.*

a collection of prose called *Madurinn er alltaf einn* (*Man is Always Alone*). Thor is one of the most important modernist writers in Iceland, and his work has been translated into numerous languages. His writing is probably the most international fiction of Icelandic literature, but at the same time Thor is one of the greatest masters of the Icelandic language and his work is also innovative with regard to subject matter and form. It is often difficult to narrow Thor's work into a single category of literature; it lies on several perimeters and plays with them, as the author does with language and the reader's expectations. Thor Vilhjálmsson has written a number of different books – novels, short stories, collections of poems and travel books, in addition to translating work by other authors into Icelandic and writing articles and essays on literature and culture.

Looking at the literary scene today, it is difficult to single out a few writers. A vast majority of Icelandic writers live and work in the city, and it is easy to name several interesting and different writers who have made a name for themselves both at home and abroad. Gudbergur Bergsson (b.1932) writes intricate, and at times grotesque stories, and his work also counts a two-part autobiographical novel

*Thor is one of the most important modernist writers in Iceland, and his work has been translated into numerous languages. His writing is probably the most international fiction of Icelandic literature, but at the same time Thor is one of the greatest masters of the Icelandic language and his work is also innovative with regard to subject matter and form.*

about growing up in a small fishing village just outside Reykjavík. Childhood and coming-of-age are also common topics in the works of Einar Már Guðmundsson (b. 1954), Pétur Gunnarsson (b. 1947), and Einar Kárason (b. 1955), who has written interesting historical novels as well, one of which is based on *Sturlunga Saga*. In recent years more writers have tapped into the literary heritage of the golden age, such as Vilborg Davídsdóttir (b. 1965), who has written several novels set in the time of settlement, focusing more often than not on the women of that time.

Steinunn Sigurðardóttir (b. 1950), Vigdís Grímsdóttir (b. 1953), and Gyrdir Elíasson (b. 1961) all possess a lyrical style with a tendency for the fantastical, but fantastic and adventurous traits are also apparent in the works of Kristín Ómarsdóttir (b. 1962) and Sjón (b. 1962), who both started out as progressive poets but have in recent years turned towards novel writing. Steinar Bragi (b. 1975) is another writer who has worked with fantasy and dark and mysterious inner worlds, and the same can be said of the aforementioned Gyrdir Elíasson. His topics of choice tend to be the countryside and the past, and the same goes for Jón Kalman Stefánsson (b. 1963), who is one of the few writers who writes almost nothing about the city. His dreamlike and almost nostalgic stories mostly take place in unnamed villages or on farms. Andri Snær Magnason (b. 1973) has made a name for himself in recent years with his fiction and other writings with an emphasis on controversial social and environmental issues. Social criticism is also apparent in the works of Audur Jónsdóttir (b. 1973) and Hallgrímur Helgason (b. 1959). Hallgrímur uses his sharp wit to write about the present, which Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir (b. 1976) has also done, though these two writers have very different styles. Hallgrímur often uses satire, playful humour and puns while Guðrún's style tends to be more introverted, so to say, and many of her books have lyrical and philosophical undertones. Another note-

*Even though we can debate the historical value of the treasured medieval literature of the Icelanders, and they have played a huge role in the making of the national identity ever since the days of the independence struggle, their value for the modern writer is indisputable and manifold. To me, who writes historical novels set in the Middle Ages, they are an invaluable source of ideas and inspiration, and documentation of a world view that has disappeared in the sands of time, information about the daily lives of our forefathers and foremothers, about their concerns, religion – pagan and Christian, the importance of the oral tradition, narrative skill and poetry. Fatalism and various attitudes that are reflected in the Sagas seem to be so rooted in us still that quotes from the Sagas have become an intricate part of the nation's language.*

*Icelandic writers have by and large let the heroes of the Sagas be; to meddle with them is almost taboo: as there is nothing more to be said or done to improve them. Those of us who have tapped into this narrative treasure of the golden age have done so with a different approach: drawing out little-known characters and giving them wings or writing into the background of the Sagas. I have written about the Gaelic-Nordic slave girl who has no name in the medieval narratives, though no one questions her existence, and also about the only woman said to have commanded a settlement journey to Iceland in the ninth century, Audur the Deepminded. She was of Norse lineage but sailed to Iceland from the Viking settlement in the British Isles. She does not have her own Saga with a capital S, any more than her fellow women who came with fathers, husbands and sons to the volcanic island up north; short legends are found here and there that only make up ten pages or so in compilation, and yet that is sufficient to describe a magnificent woman and an interesting life story like no other. There is much to be deciphered from the texts themselves, and in fact just as much can be learned from reading between the lines. I'm not only referring to the Icelanders' Sagas, the Bishop's Sagas, and the Eddas, but also to the remarkable Book of Settlements, where the fate of many is told in a few lines, in between genealogical tables and descriptions of the settlement, and call to mind images and stories of the people who risked everything in search of a new home across the open ocean.*

VILBORG DAVÍSDÓTTIR, writer

*The most well-known Icelandic name on an international level today is without doubt the crime writer Arnaldur Indridason who has received numerous awards for his novels at home and abroad.*

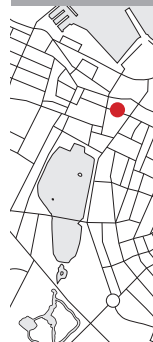
worthy author who writes understated but manifold works is Bragi Ólafsson (b. 1962), a master of subtle wit and the absurdities of everyday life and whose books therefore tend to be tragicomic and unpredictable. Another master of wit is Thórarinn Eldjárn (b. 1949), who has written numerous short stories full of humour and wordplay, in addition to a number of novels. Speaking of wit, one could also mention the comic writer Hugleikur Dagsson, who has been at the forefront of this new but very popular genre in Icelandic literature.

Most of these writers are primarily novelists, but many of them have also published short stories, poems and plays. Five of them have had their work adapted to the screen: the French movie by Yves Angelo, *Voleur de Vie* (1999) is based on the novel *The Thief of Time* by Steinunn Sigurdardóttir, and Icelandic movies have been made based on the works of Hallgrímur Helgason – *101 Reykjavík*, Vigdís Grímsdóttir – *Cold Light*, Einar Már Gudmundsson – *Angels of the Universe*, and Einar Kárason – *Devil's Island*. There has been a steady increase in translations of Icelandic writers in recent years, and books by writers from Reykjavík are now published all over the world.

Many novelists, in addition to Guðbergur Bergsson and Thórbergur Thórdarson who were already mentioned, have written memoirs and biographies and several biographies of Icelandic writers have been published by academics and other writers. Biography is a large and very popular literary genre in Iceland, and one of the best-known contemporary biographical writers is historian Guðjón Fridriksson (b. 1945), who has also written extensively on the history of Reykjavík.

The most well known Icelandic name on an international level today is without doubt the crime writer Arnaldur Indridason (b. 1961) who has received numerous awards for his novels at home and abroad. The past ten years or so have been a productive period for the crime novel in Iceland, whereas the genre was almost non-existent before and was in fact somewhat looked down on in Icelandic literary debate. Currently, several writers exclusively write within the genre and few books boast the number of sales that the crime novel generates. In addition to Arnaldur, works by Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson (b. 1955), Yrsa Sigurdardóttir (b. 1963), Árni Thórarinsson (b. 1950), Ævar Örn Jóseppsson (b. 1963) and thriller-writer Stefán Máni (b. 1970) have made it onto publishing lists of foreign publishing houses. The Icelandic crime novel is in line with the Scandinavian tradition, the so-called Nordic Noir, where social problems are highlighted while telling a story of a crime.

#### Literature trail



**AUSTURSTRÆTI** *Austurstræti is one of the main streets of the old town. It used to be part of the so-called "strip", a walking route for young people who went out to see others and be seen, giving the street both the image of romance and colourful nightlife. It has also been the home of several banks and financial institutions for many decades. The poet Dagur Sigurdarson (1937–1994) was frequently seen on the downtown streets in his time, a bohemian and eccentric who both amused and shocked his fellow citizens. His poetry is stark and almost brutal at times, with frequent references to popular culture.*

#### Cheers to you Reykjavík

*cheers reykjavík cheers  
hard-boiled half-digested toytown cheers*

*mount esja sports its cap of snow  
but the weatherman forecasts a thaw  
tomorrow coins will emerge beneath the snow*

*worthless coins from beneath the snow cheers  
for the smell of money in austurstræti cheers  
I'm smothered on my north side*

*cheers bottoms up cheers*

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD SCUDDER

## Contemporary Poetry

The poet whose name is most interwoven with the city in the minds of its inhabitants is probably Tómas Guðmundsson (1901–1983). He is often referred to as the Reykjavík Poet and Reykjavík City's poetry award is named for him. Tómas wrote about the city in a way that had never been done before; he saw beauty in day-to-day life, in the urban bustle and cityscapes that had previously been depicted as bleak and dreadful in Icelandic literature. His poetry was accessible, which made it popular, as it still is today in fact. In the book *Fagra Veröld* (*Beautiful World*) from 1933 the poet describes his immediate surroundings in the city, the coal crane down by the harbour and the streets of the city centre, and he sings the city's praises with words like these: "Rising out of the rain, the young city, / rosy and fresh as if stepping out of her bath." Verses by Tómas, including the one these lines are taken from, are displayed for the public's enjoyment on the windows of Reykjavík City Hall.

Another poet closely linked with Reykjavík is Steinn Steinarr (1908–1958), who was both a radical, political writer and one of the poets who shook loose the restraints of traditional poetry and made way for modernism. His poetry was philosophical, and he was among the first poets to compose poetry about the existential dilemmas of the modern man in Iceland.<sup>10</sup> The so-called Atom Poets emerged in the 1950s, poets who revolutionized the form and brought fresh trends from foreign cities to the country. This period is often referred to as the Atom Age, meaning first and foremost of course that traditional Icelandic society was finally truly giving way to the modern age.

Matthías Jóhannessen (b. 1930) was one of the poets starting to write at this time, and he often finds inspiration in the city. He was born and raised in Reykjavík, and the city is the framework around many of his poems about childhood and memories. An article on Matthías's poetry claims that it gives the very first example of a positive view of an urban youth in Icelandic literature.<sup>11</sup>

Childhood is also beautifully portrayed in the poetry of Vilborg Dagbjartsdóttir (b. 1930), one of the few women modernists. She moved to Reykjavík as a young woman and worked for decades as a teacher in one of the city's elementary schools, and was also active in the women's rights movement from the beginning of the 1970s. Her poetry bears witness to this, as does the poetry of Ingibjörg Haraldsdóttir (b. 1942), Steinunn Sigurdardóttir (b. 1950), and Gerdur Kristný (b. 1970). They are all among Iceland's most prominent contemporary poets, as are Thorsteinn frá Hamri (b. 1938), Hannes Pétursson (b. 1931), the aforementioned Gyrdir Elíasson and Sigurdur Pálsson (b. 1948). Like Steinunn, Sigurdur belonged to a group of poets in the 1970s who called themselves the "Bad Poets", and who

*The poet whose name is most interwoven with the city in the minds of its inhabitants is probably Tómas Guðmundsson (1901–1983). He is often referred to as the Reykjavík Poet and Reykjavík City's poetry award is named for him.*





*The stained glass work Beautiful World (2000) by Leifur Breidfjörð got its name from Reykjavík Poet Tómas Guðmundsson's collection of poetry from 1933. Reykjavík City Library.*

Photograph: Bára Kristinsdóttir

organized one of the largest poetry events ever held in Reykjavík, filling the city's largest cinema with 1,400 poetry fans in 1976. These poets wanted to write for the public, they were radical and progressive, and this generation of writers has sometimes been called "The Funny Generation" because they cut loose from convention and ceremony and often used humour and irony in their works. Among others who partook in the program were Pétur Gunnarsson (b. 1947), Thórarinn Eldjárn (b. 1949) and the poet and musician Megas (b. 1945). Strong links between the poetry and music scene were forged around 1980 with artists like Megas, the surrealist group Medúsa, and many more in the lively punk scene. One of these artists is Sjón (b. 1962) who started out as a poet and has, in addition to writing

*There is active regeneration in the Reykjavík poetry scene today, especially with the grassroots organization Nýhil that publishes both poetry and prose and hosts all sorts of poetry events.*



*The grassroots organization Nýhil regularly hosts Open Mike evenings at local cafés and bars.*

Design: Jón Örn Lodm fjörð

novels and poetry, composed music and lyrics, most notably in collaboration with singer Björk. He was awarded the Nordic Council's Literature Prize in 2005 for his novella *Skugga-Baldur* (*The Blue Fox*).

There is active regeneration in the Reykjavík poetry scene today, especially with the grassroots organization Nýhil that publishes both poetry and prose and hosts all sorts of poetry events. Nýhil is a non-profit organization that publishes books by many progressive and interesting writers of the youngest generation who might not otherwise make it to print, but also brings out works by more established writers. Among the organization's books of poetry are works by Kristín Eiríksdóttir (b. 1981), Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir (b. 1985), Eiríkur Örn Nordahl (b. 1978), Thórdís Björnsdóttir (b. 1978), Valur Brynjar Antonsson (b. 1976) and Hermann Stefánsson (b. 1968) some of which have also published novels, short stories and non fiction.

## Literature for Children and Young Adults

Many writers writing for children and young adults in Reykjavík today have specialized in writing for these age groups, though that is not always the case. When the history of children's literature in the city is looked at, it is striking how many of the authors were also primary school teachers, such as Ragnheidur Jónsdóttir (1895–1967) and Stefán Jónsson (1905–1966), who both taught at one of the city's oldest primary schools. Their stories mark a new era in children's literature; despite their roles as teachers, their writing does not have dogmatic tones. Rather, a narrator stands by the child and looks at the world through his/her eyes.<sup>12</sup>

The countryside was the conventional setting of children's literature to begin with, but little by little Reykjavík becomes more prominent as the twentieth century wears on. Yet it is interesting when children's literature of today is looked at, that the countryside seems to live a better life there than in fiction for adults, often as some sort of exciting land of adventures, but also as a haven and rehabilitative place for city kids who have lost their way. This is especially true of the 1980s, and can for instance be seen in books by Idunn Steinsdóttir (b. 1940), Kristín Steinsdóttir (b. 1946) and Thorgrímur Thráinsson (b. 1959).



Young reader at the Reykjavík City Library.

Photograph: Bára Kristinsdóttir

*The city's most prominent writer of children's fiction with the longest career today is Guðrún Helgadóttir. Her books are realistic and adventurous stories that describe the life of children in the capital area.*



Top: *Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir*: Örlög gudanna (Norse Mythology) Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 2008. The book received the Icelandic Illustration Prize, Dimmalímm, in 2008.

Bottom: *Áslaug Jónsdóttir*: Eggid (The Egg). Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 2003.





Preschool children with Reykjavík City Library balloons, welcoming the library's new Story Van.

Photograph: Kristín Bogadóttir

The city's most prominent writer of children's fiction with the longest career today is Guðrún Helgadóttir (b. 1935). Her books are realistic and adventurous stories that describe the life of children in the capital area. Guðrún's first work, a trilogy about scheming twin brothers and their family in Reykjavík, has been a beloved classic for a long time, and the same can be said for another trilogy of hers that she bases on her post-war childhood memories. Another renowned writer of children's fiction is Kristín Steinsdóttir (b. 1946), who was recently elected the president of the Writer's Union of Iceland, and who has written both for children and teens, in addition to having pub-

lished material for adults. One of her best-known books is *Engill í Vesturbænum* (*An Angel in the Neighbourhood*), created in collaboration with illustrator Halla Sólveig Thorgeirsdóttir (b. 1970). It has been translated into several languages and received numerous awards, such as the Nordic Children's Literary Prize in 2002. Kristín Helga Gunnarsdóttir (b. 1963), Ragnheidur Gestsdóttir (b. 1953), Gerður Kristný (b. 1970) and Adalsteinn Ásberg Sigurðsson (b. 1955) are all writers of interesting and entertaining literature for children and teens; Gerður and Adalsteinn are also poets and write for both children and adults. Adalsteinn tends to write adventurous books that take place in a fictional world and has sought material in Icelandic folklore, as has Kristín Helga in her memorable books, the 2003 *Strandanornir* (*The Witches from Strandir*) and *Draugslód* (*Ghost Trail*) from 2007. Kristín Helga and



Gerdur are known for a lively style and humour, although Gerdur's first young-adult novel, *Gardurinn (The Garden)* from 2008 is different. The story takes place in two different periods in the history of Reykjavík, in the present and in the time of disease and recession in the beginning of the twentieth century, during the Spanish Flu.

Adalsteinn Ásberg has also written poetry for children and taps into the Icelandic nursery rhyme tradition in his books *Romsúbókin* (2005) and *Segdu mér og segdu ...* (2009). Þórarinn Eldjárn's children's poems have been published in several books since 1991 along with illustrations by his sister, Sigrún Eldjárn (b. 1954) and have been extremely popular with children and adults alike. Þórarinn often uses rhyme and traditional metric forms and says that in fact he 'poestrates' his sister's pictures in their collaborations, rather than that she illustrates his books of poetry. Sigrún is one of Iceland's best-known writers of children's fiction, writing for children of all ages, and usually illustrates her own work.

Picture books have been published in increased numbers in recent years, and Áslaug Jónsdóttir (b. 1963) is another popular author who both writes and illustrates. Among her work is a series about the Big Monster and the Small Monster, which she writes with Swedish author Kalle Güettler and the Faeroese author Rakel Helmsdal. This collaboration has resulted in five fantastic children's books that were published simultaneously in all three countries in their respective languages.

### **Children and children's fiction in Reykjavík**

*The old farming society took a dim view of Reykjavík and didn't believe it was good for any child to be raised on "the gravel". But people flocked there and children not only filled the streets and yards, but were also among the working grownups all over town in the first decades of the 20th century. The first children's books in Reykjavík often revolved around the relationships between adults and children, and more and more described the society of children in comparison to the adults that grew up in the country, and often there was a breakdown in communication.*

*The boys' books by Henrik Ottóson and Stefán Jónsson, and girls' books of Ragnheidur Jónsdóttir and Margrét Jónsdóttir mapped out the reality children lived in Reykjavík around the middle of the century. In recent years, authors like Gerdur Kristný have emerged, who use the city's characteristics and history to evoke excitement and interest among young readers. Ragnheidur Gestsdóttir makes rebellious teens take off and seek shelter in the half-built, vacant houses of the economic recession. Thus the city has become both an active and passive participant in the lives of children and teenagers, as described in books by Icelandic children's fiction writers, whom I do not hesitate to call world-class.*

DAGNÝ KRISTJÁNSDÓTTIR, Dr. Phil., Professor at the University of Iceland

### **Literature trail**



**LÆKJARTORG** *Svava Jakobsdóttir is one of the modernists of Icelandic literature. Her short stories often deal with questions about the self-image and freedom of women, as in the story "Kona með spegil" ("A Woman with a Mirror") from 1967. The woman and her husband's newly made home is supposed to become her sanctuary, to the extent that she plans to lock herself in and throw away the key. The haven she expects is symbolized in a mirror that is put up on her wall – but instead of reflecting her whole self with her perfect garden as a background, the image is distorted. The woman sets out on a bewildering journey to return the mirror, finally getting off the bus at the Lækjartorg terminal.*

**From "A Woman with a Mirror"** *"As far as I can see, the bus is driving backwards," she said to the girl, amazed.*

*"You got on at the back, perhaps."*

*"No ... I don't think so."*

*"Anyway, you never know which is forwards and which is backwards unless you turn your head around."*

*And the girl turned her head one hundred and eighty degrees so that the nape of her neck faced forwards and her long hair covered all the three buttons on her red coat and fell onto her hands in her lap. She continued to turn her head in a complete circle until her face returned to the front once more. But on her neck a coil appeared like a twisted thread.*

*"Isn't that difficult?" asked the woman.*

*"It's worse when there comes a double knot in it," said the girl. "Some people lose their composure completely when they see a double knot and want to cut it immediately."*

*The girl's friendly answers gave the woman more courage and she now leaned towards her and whispered. "I'm afraid I've got onto the wrong bus."*

TRANSLATED BY JULIAN MELDON D'ARCY

## Translations



World literature in Icelandic translation.

*Don Quijote* by Miguel de Cervantes, translated by Gudbergur Bergsson. Paperback edition, Reykjavík.

JPV, 2006 (originally translated in 1981–1984).

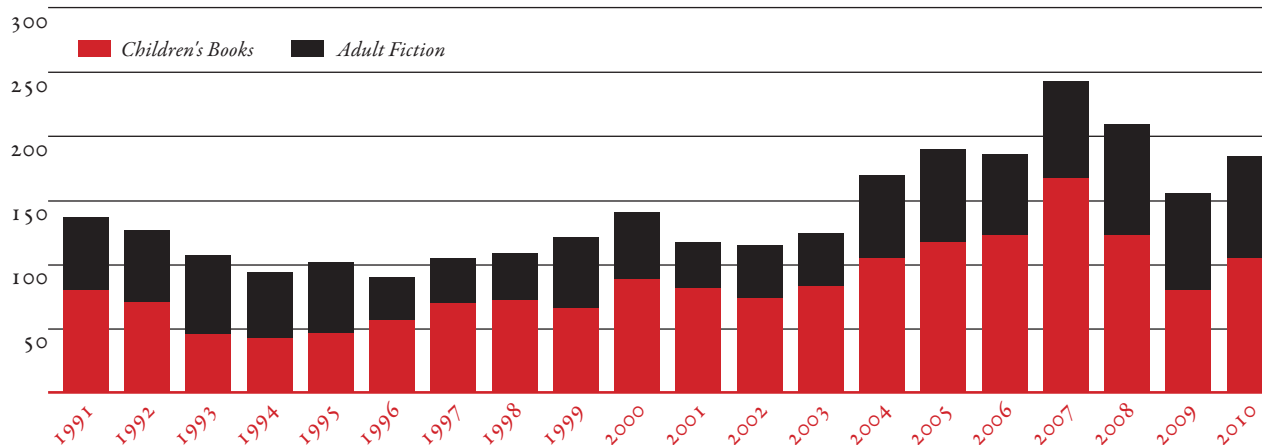
*Ovid's Metamorphoses*, translated by Kristján Árnason. Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 2009.

Translations have always enriched Icelandic culture and played a big part in the nation's cultural growth. It is vital for such a small nation and linguistic area to form a dialogue with other nations, and that is where translations of literary works from other countries and cultures play a critical role. The Bible was printed in its entirety in Icelandic in 1584, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by Homer were translated in the nineteenth century by Sveinbjörn Egilsson, poet and schoolmaster, and all of Shakespeare's chief work has been translated into Icelandic, some in more than one version. All the Shakespearean plays were translated by Helgi Hálfdanarson in the twentieth century, and Helgi also translated other renowned works of literature, such as Ibsen's plays, the Greek tragedies, the *Qu'ran*, and poetry from various parts of the world. Other important translations are Ingibjörg Haraldsdóttir's translations from Russian of Dostoyevsky's works and other classics, Gudbergur Bergsson's translations of Spanish literature, most notably *Don Quixote*, Einar Bragi's translations of Strindberg's and Ibsen's plays, Ástráður Eysteinnsson's and Eysteinn Thorvaldsson's translations of works by Kafka, Rúnar Helgi Vignisson's translation of *Light in August* by William Faulkner, *Ulysses* by James Joyce translated by Sigurdur A. Magnússon, Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*, translated by Sölvi Björn Sigurdsson, and Kristján Árnason's newly published *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, for which he was awarded the DV Culture Prize for Literature in 2010 as well as the Icelandic Translator's Prize. Translations of contemporary literature count works by authors such as Milan Kundera, J.M. Coetzee, Günter Grass, Isabel Allende, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Alaa al-Aswany, Doris Lessing, Ian McEwan, Nadine Gordimer, Naguib Mahfouz, Umberto Eco, Gabriel García Márques, Jhumpa Lahiri – and the list could go on. Children's literature has also been translated, most of Astrid Lindgren's work has been published in Icelandic and the same goes for other classics like Tove Jansson's Moomin books, *Alice in Wonderland*, and C.S. Lewis's Narnia books.

### NUMBER OF TRANSLATED WORKS OF FICTION

As can be seen in this chart, the number of translated works of fiction has been growing in the past two decades.

Information from the Icelandic Publishers Association.



The Icelandic Literature Fund is one of the funds that subsidizes translations from other languages and in the coming years the focus will be on promoting literature from Asia, the Arabic world and Sub-Saharan Africa. The fund also emphasizes literature for children, and translations from languages other than English, although English is not excluded. Another source of support for translations is the Nordic Council of Ministers' Translation Fund, which task is to encourage translations of valuable literature between Iceland, Denmark, Faeroes, Finland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and the Sami area.

In 1991, 56 titles of adult fiction were published, whereas the number is 77 in 2010. The peak year is 2008, with 86 titles followed by a slight decrease in 2009 which in turn is on the rise again in 2010. The fluctuation is greater when it comes to literature for children, in 1991 79 titles were published, but 105 in 2010. The years of the economic boom show an increase in translated children's books, with a significant fall in 2009 – from 166 titles in 2007 to 78 in 2009. The latest number however shows that the country is rising again, so to speak, as the number goes up to 105 in 2010. A list containing some examples of translated titles from the past five years, both children's books and fiction for adults, together with information about the publishers, can be found in the appendix.

A number of foreign authors visit Reykjavík every year, both as guests at literary festivals and for other occasions, such as publications of their work, staging of plays, etc. A list of visiting authors that have taken part in public events in the past two years can also be found in the appendix.

The University of Iceland has increased its focus on translation research and theory in the past years, both by establishing Translation Studies within the Department of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies in 2001 and a Translation Centre in 2000 (see further on page 103).

*It is vital for such a small nation and linguistic area to form a dialogue with other nations, and that is where translations of literary works from other countries and cultures play a critical role.*

## NOTES

- 1 The Arnarnagnaean Manuscript Collection on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. See: [http://www.arnastofnun.is/page/arnastofnun\\_hand\\_unesco](http://www.arnastofnun.is/page/arnastofnun_hand_unesco)
- 2 Helga Kress, Professor of Literature at the University of Iceland, has been at the forefront of feminist literary research in Iceland and has written extensively about medieval literature, folktales and contemporary literature. See for example her newly published collection *Ótharfar unnustur og adrar greinar um íslenskar bókmenntir*. Reykjavík: Bókmennta- og listfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2009.
- 3 See [http://www.gerduberg.is/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3471/5840\\_read-14958](http://www.gerduberg.is/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3471/5840_read-14958) and [www.rimur.is](http://www.rimur.is) (in Icelandic only)
- 4 Kristján Albertsson: "Ritdómur. Halldór Kiljan Laxness: Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír." *Vaka*, 1927.
- 5 [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1955/](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1955/)
- 6 Halldór Guðmundsson: *The Islander: a Biography of Halldór Laxness*. Translated from the Icelandic by Philip Roughton. London. Maclehouse, 2008.
- 7 Halldór Laxness: *Úngur eg var*. Reykjavík, Helgafell 1976.
- 8 Pétur Gunnarsson: *Þú í förheimskunarlandi*. Reykjavík. JPV útgáfa, 2009, p. 175.
- 9 Ástráður Eysteinnsson: "Herm thú mér. Skáldverk Svövu Jakobsdóttur." *Bókmenntavefurinn*, [http://www.bokmenntir.is/hofundur.asp?cat\\_id=903&module\\_id=210&element\\_id=1176&author\\_id=87&lang=1](http://www.bokmenntir.is/hofundur.asp?cat_id=903&module_id=210&element_id=1176&author_id=87&lang=1)
- 10 See Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson: "Realism and Revolt: Between the World Wars." Daisy Neijmann (ed.): *A History of Icelandic Literature*. Lincoln & London. University of Nebraska Press, 2006.
- 11 Eysteinn Thorvaldsson: "Ósýnileg hönd við gamla vindhörpu, Um ljód og önnur ritverk Matthíasar Johannessen." *Bókmenntavefurinn*, [http://www.bokmenntir.is/hofundur.asp?cat\\_id=703&module\\_id=210&element\\_id=950&author\\_id=64&lang=1](http://www.bokmenntir.is/hofundur.asp?cat_id=703&module_id=210&element_id=950&author_id=64&lang=1)
- 12 See Silja Adalsteinsdóttir's discussion in the article "Íslenskar barnabækur. Sögulegt yfirlit." Silja Adalsteinsdóttir (ed.): *Raddir barnabókanna*. Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 1999.



# Reykjavík – A City of Literature



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## Literature in the City Landscape

Throughout much of Reykjavík's cultural history, literature has been by far the most common term of reference for artists of all genres. Examples of such artwork in the city landscape are works by sculptors Einar Jónsson (1874–1954) and Ásmundur Sveinsson (1893–1982). Both were inspired by the Icelandic sagas, Norse mythology and folktales. Einar's sculpture *Útlagar* (Outlaws) for instance draws on motifs from Icelandic folk tales about people living outside society in the harsh Icelandic nature.

This sculpture of a man carrying a woman on his back and a child in his arms, made such an impression on writer Halldór Laxness when he first saw it that he decided to use it on the cover of the second volume of his novel *Sjálfstætt fólk* (*Independent People*), published in 1935. One of Ásmundur Sveinsson's better known works, *Sæmundur á selnum* (Sæmundur on the Seal's Back) is based on a folk story known to most Icelanders to this day. The sculpture is situated in front of the University of Iceland's main building, a fitting location, as the story centres around the use of wisdom and thought to overcome what could be seen as insurmountable obstacles. One of the newest elementary schools in the city, Sæmundarskóli, is named for this same Sæmundur "the Wise". Another work by Ásmundur, *Fýkur yfir hæðir* (Snowdrift) draws upon a poem by Jónas Hallgrímsson; a statue of a mother clasping her child in her arms. The poem tells the tragic story of a mother that dies from exposure in the Icelandic winter, but saves her child by protecting it with her body.

Statues of poets in Reykjavík include Einar Benediktsson (1864–1940) and Thorsteinn Erlingsson (1858–1914) in Klambratún Park and aforementioned Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1845) in Hljómskálagarður Park by the City Lake. The newest addition is a statue of poet Tómas Guðmundsson, sitting on a bench overlooking the Lake. The statue was unveiled in December 2010.

Tómas Guðmundsson is commonly referred to as the Reykjavík Poet, since he was one of the first to depict Reykjavík and the city life in a positive light, and it does justice to his popular appeal that passers by can sit on the bench next to the poet, instead of looking up at him on a pedestal as is the case with many older monuments. A profile sculpture has also been made of this Reykjavík Poet, situated in Reykjavík City Library's main library, and stanzas from his poetry decorate windows in the City Hall (see on p. 58).





*Einar Jónsson: Outlaws (1901).* Photograph: Jóhann Smári Karlsson



*Ásmundur Sveinsson: Semundur on the Seal's Back (1926).*  
Photograph: Jóhann Smári Karlsson



*Halla Gunnarsdóttir: Tómas Guðmundsson (2010).*  
Photograph: Hermann Karlsson

Some buildings in the city are named for writers, and one of them is the former home of Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889–1975), now the headquarters of the Writer's Union of Iceland. The house, which is not only valuable for its connection to the writer but also for its place in Icelandic architectural history, was bought by the City of Reykjavík in 1991. In addition to housing the Writer's Union's offices, Gunnarshús or the Writers' House, serves as a reception- and get-together place for writers, a place for literary events and also supplies meeting facilities. An apartment for visiting writers has been available in the Writer's House since 1999 and foreign writers and translators can stay there for periods of one to eight weeks at a time. Gunnar, who is one of Iceland's best known novelists from the twentieth century, lived most of his adult years abroad and was for a time a popular writer both in Denmark and Germany, as well as in Iceland. He moved back to Iceland in 1939, built Gunnarshús in 1950 together with his wife and lived there for the rest of his life.

Another building is Hallgrímskirkja (Church of Hallgrímur), one of Reykjavík's main landmarks. The church is named for poet Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674), best known for his Passion Hymns, a collection of 50 hymns based on the Passion of Christ. More information on Hallgrímur, and other poets mentioned above, can be found in the Literary History section of this document. As is also pointed out there, Reykjavík City's reception house, Höfði, is the former home of poet Einar Benediktson and narratives about his time in the house are an integral part of the building's history and image. Einar's birthplace is also preserved in its original state, an old stone cottage in El-lidaárdalur valley, one of the city's nature spots. The house is owned by Reykjavík Forestry Association, which has hosted events in honour of the poet in the rooms where he was born and lived for the first part of his life.

Nobel Prize winner Halldór Laxness was a widely travelled man and stayed for long spells abroad, but his home for over half a century was the house Gljúfrasteinn in Mos-fellsdalur valley, a short distance from the city. The house opened to the public as a museum in 2004, unchanged from when the writer lived and worked there. The Icelandic State owns and runs Gljúfrasteinn, which is a popular destination for Icelandic and foreign tourists, as well as students of all educational levels in Reykjavík. The Reykjavík City Library and the Writer's Union of Iceland had a plaque placed on Laxness's birthplace in Reykjavík city centre on the writer's 100th birthday in 2002 (see the excerpt from the shield on page 54 in this document). At the same occasion, a group of more than Icelandic writers ran a relay from the birthplace to Gljúfrasteinn.

Reykjavík City has in recent years made an effort to preserve buildings that are important for its cultural history. One of them is the so called Gröndalshús, named for yet another writer, Benedikt Gröndal (1826–1907) who lived and worked there. The renovations are part of a program run by the City that aims to preserve such buildings, while also keeping alive old building skills and handiwork that otherwise run the risk of dying out. The house, which the City bought in 2006, will be relocated close to its original location in the old town in the coming months.

As a young city, Reykjavík is however not particularly rich in historical architectural monuments. The main building style up until the eighteenth century was turf houses that do not stand the test of time very well and therefore the oldest preserved building in the city is relatively new, dating back to 1755. This is a stone house on Videy, a small island off the shores of Reykjavík that is now owned and run by Reykjavík City. Videy has a history of literature and learning as stated earlier in this document (p. 17), it



*The Settlement Exhibition.* Photograph: Guðmundur Ingólfsson

Courtesy of Reykjavík City Museum



was home to an Augustine monastery from the thirteenth century and for some time possessed the only printing press in the country. The oldest house in the city itself is from the same period, a small wooden house built in 1762, now owned by Reykjavík City. It reopened it after extensive renovations in 2007. The house stands in Adalstræti, the oldest street in Reykjavík that also happens to be the location of what is believed to be the first settlement in Iceland, dating back to the ninth century. Reykjavík City's Settlement Exhibition, which opened on location in 2006, displays these ruins and tells the story of the settlement and early life in the country – the time of the Sagas. The exhibition received the NODEM award ([www.nodem.dk](http://www.nodem.dk)) in 2006, for best design of digital experiences in museums.

One of the buildings that plays a role in the city's literary history is an old theatre by the City Lake, Tjarnarbíó. The house was originally built as ice storage in 1913, but became a cinema in 1942 and later a theatre. Reykjavík City owns Tjarnarbíó, and decided to renovate it in its original style as a theatre in 2008. It reopened in October 2010, and now houses various cultural happenings, as well as being the home of the city's independent theatre groups, many of which are an important venue for new Icelandic plays and playwrights. Another old theatre in the city centre is Idnó, which is also owned by Reykjavík City. This building, which used to house the City Theatre until it moved to its current location in 1989, is still used as a theatre but it is also the home of The Federation of Icelandic Artists.

The National Centre for Cultural Heritage, or the Culture House, is situated next to the National Theatre of Iceland. The Culture House was built during the period 1906-1908 to house the National Library and National Archives of Iceland and was opened to the public in the spring of 1909. The building was also home to Iceland's National Mu-

seum and Natural History Museum for several decades. The Museum Building, as it soon came to be called, thus safeguarded for a long time all the main treasures of the Icelandic nation under the same roof. Today the Culture House is mainly a venue for diverse exhibitions that reflect Icelandic national heritage, such as *Medieval Manuscripts – Eddas and Sagas*. This exhibition includes medieval vellum manuscripts such as the Sagas of Icelanders, as well as law codices and Christian works, and artefacts related to the manuscripts, illustrating the rich and diverse history of this literature. Important paper manuscripts from later centuries are also displayed.

The exhibition is curated by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. In the near future the Institute will be better positioned to mount exhibitions within its own walls as it is working towards building a new centre for its operations, the House of Icelandic Studies. The building, whose outer walls will be decorated with inscriptions from the manuscripts it safeguards, will bring all of the Institute's operations under one roof, as well as housing the University of Iceland's Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies.

The building will without doubt become a landmark in the city, and will make the country's literary heritage plainly visible to citizens and visitors alike.

Yet another important building is set to be built in the near future: the Vigdis Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages' World Language Centre, also at the University of Iceland campus. These two buildings, together with the Centre for Literature mentioned at the beginning of this application, represent the key players of Reykjavík as a City of Literature.



*The House of Icelandic Studies.*

*Courtesy of Hornsteinar Architects*

It is however not only official buildings that play a role in the cultural landscape. On the contrary, private homes, together with cafés and bars, are noticeable in the city's literary history, and Reykjavík City will honour this legacy by putting up signs with information on the literary connections and excerpts from relevant texts, both in Icelandic and English. The new signs will commemorate poets and writers by marking places where they lived, wrote, gathered, etc., but settings from literary texts, both poetry and prose, will also be pointed out. This project will take off in 2011. Examples of such noticeable places are for example Unuhús, a small house located in the old town. As stated in the Literary History section, Unuhús served as a salon for artist and writers in the early twentieth century, and many of these guests wrote about the house and its owners in their work, or referred to them in other ways. An example of this can be seen in the literature trail excerpt by Þórbergur Þórdarson on page 26. Unuhús was put on the statutory list of buildings of special historic interest in 2008.

Next to Unuhús lies a small path called “Skáldastígur” (Poet's Path). In 2010, the Reykjavík City Council ruled that the path shall be preserved and kept open to the public and signs will be put up at both ends of it to mark its significance in Reykjavík's cultural history.

The Poet's Path is more of a place name than an official street name, but literature also plays a role when naming streets in the city. For instance, in a neighbourhood east of the city centre streets bear the names of characters from the Icelandic Sagas. Guðrúnargata, Kjartansgata and Bollagata are thus streets named after the players in the famous love triangle of Laxdæla Saga, which is believed to have been written in the mid-thirteenth century. Reykjavík City Library dedicates one of its literature walks to this neighbourhood, taking people through the Sagas while walking the streets that carry these well known names of their heroes. Closer to the downtown area, Þórsgata, Týsgata, Freyjugata, Óðinsgata and Lokastígur are among the streets named after gods from Norse mythology, all of whom are depicted in Völuspá, one of the poems of the Poetic Edda. Völuspá is one of the primary sources of study for Norse mythology. This neighbourhood is often referred to as the neighbourhood of the gods and in 2007, the Norden Association in Reykjavík published a walking guide of the neighbourhood in Icelandic, English and Danish.



*Street signs. Photograph: Hermann Karlsson*

Both these areas are close to the city centre, the former was built in the 1930s and the latter earlier in the twentieth century. When naming streets in one of the newer residential areas in the city, Grafarvogur, poems by another well known Icelandic poet, Bjarni Thorarensen (1786–1841), were kept in mind. Bjarni, who belonged to the romantic movement, lived on land in the area, then outside the town of Reykjavík, and wrote many of his poems there. Street names and whole neighbourhood parts refer to his poetry, as well as the bridge leading into the area. Its name, Gullinbrú (Golden Bridge), is taken from Bjarni's highly romantic poem “Veturinn” (Winter), starting with the question:

Who rides so fast  
on golden bridge

The answer is of course winter itself.



Gullinbrú. Photograph: Katrín Axelsdóttir

#### Literature trail



**LÆKJARTORG SQUARE** *Vilborg Dagbjartsdóttir is a poet and also well known as a teacher and storyteller in one of the children's schools in the city, where she taught for decades. She was one of the founders of the feminist Redstocking movement in Reykjavík and some of her poetry has strong feminist leanings. The Redstockings first appeared in the May first celebrations in downtown Reykjavík in 1970. The same location was the scene of the “women's day off” in 1975, when Icelandic women decided to go on a one-day strike to mark the beginning of the United Nations Women's Decade, showing up in massive numbers. In Vilborg's prose poem “Dream”, a female poet meets Odin, keeper of the Mead of Poetry.*

#### Dream

*I seemed to be on a spit of land or headland. A road lay from the end of the spit along the eastern shore, and an escarpment rose above it. (Never in sleep or awake have I seen such a knob of landscape). I walked straight on northwards along the point with the ocean on one side and the cliff face on the other. Then I saw someone walking towards me some distance away. When he drew closer I saw it was a man, well-built, wearing a short, grey tunic and a dark hat, with one brim turned down covering half his face.*

*The track was so narrow that I brushed against him when we met and at once it struck me like a flash of lightning who he was. I called out to him then, feeling I had so much to talk to him about.*

*He stopped in his tracks, turned his head, and beneath the brim of his hat I could just make out his eye, ablaze with lust.*

*Then I realized that even Odin himself has only one motive for dealing with women. And I who thought I was a poet – I managed to shake myself out of sleep and reach the waking state – my soul burning with rage.*

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD SCUDDER

## Festivals, Events and Awards

*The key players in the promotion of literature and literacy in the city are Reykjavík City Library, Reykjavík schools at all levels, publishers and bookshops, city festivals, culture centres and writer organizations, together with the University of Iceland and its institutes. In this chapter, we will give a short summary of events and literary culture in Reykjavík, focusing on collaboration and cooperative projects between the City of Reykjavík and its main partners on the literary scene.*

One of the main reading promotions is however not really an organized program, but one that has grown out of tradition – the Icelandic habit of publishing books primarily in the months leading up to Christmas. This is called the Book-Flood-Before-Christmas, which may sound strange and even horrific in English, but the Icelandic word “jólabókaflód” is a term familiar to every Icelander. It is no exaggeration to say that in Reykjavík, the time from early October until Christmas is dedicated to books in a massive way, publishers put out new books in large numbers, bookstores, libraries, cafés, bars, schools, workplaces and the media promote them in various ways and the public takes part by flocking to events, discussing what the books of choice might be this year, which one to get for their loved ones for Christmas, and so on. Writers become shop assistants in bookstores for the occasion, help customers pick out books by different authors and gift-wrap them, and readings take place all over town. Books are the single most popular Christmas gift item in Iceland, and everyone who has a role in the book industry and the promotion of literature taps into this. This is the time of year when books are quite literally the talk of the town.

Several things have been done in recent years and decades to extend this atmosphere to other seasons, such as increased publishing in the spring and adding new festivals and events to the Reykjavík culture scene. The City of Reykjavík has also decided to start an organized city-wide literary campaign and Reykjavík City Library will be leading this new program for the first time in 2012, in cooperation with schools, publishers, writers and others. The preparations are still at the early stages when this is written, but this will be a program for all ages in the spirit of One City – One Book campaigns, and is meant to become a steady part of the literary life in the city.

### LITERATURE FESTIVALS

Literature is celebrated at several festivals to which Reykjavík plays host and have become central to the city's cultural life in the past decades. The most prestigious book festival is the Reykjavík International Literature Festival, which has been a biennial event since 1985. The festival is respected both at home and abroad and can boast a remarkable guest list, counting Kurt Vonnegut, Günter Grass, J.M. Coetzee, Paul Auster, A.S. Byatt, Isabel Allende, Haruki Murakami, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Seamus Heaney and Taslima Nasrin, just to name a few. In addition to these fine international writers, most of Iceland's greatest writers have taken part in the festival. All the events are free and attendance has always been high; the readings and other events are held in an old theatre in the city centre and at the Nordic House, and the venues have been packed with people almost without exception. The





*Poet Sigurdur Pálsson welcomes guests to his home. Reykjavík Arts Festival, Readings at writer's homes, 2009. Photograph: Guðfinna Magnúsdóttir*

atmosphere surrounding the festival is vibrant with publishers publishing Icelandic translations of the works of the foreign guests, bookstores and libraries promoting the writers in various ways, and the media turning the spotlight on literature. The festival is also a chance for local and visiting translators and publishers to meet, sometimes with a parallel seminar held for these groups. It is thus an important venue for foreign literature of all sorts into the local literary scene and market and also highlights Icelandic writers and gives them a chance to meet their colleagues from around the world. The City of Reykjavík is one of the festival's main sponsors and Reykjavík City Library and its literature website take part by introducing the participating authors in various ways and making sure the library has a good selection of their work.

The Reykjavík Arts Festival, which started in 1970 and took place every other year until 2000, when it became an annual event, has always included literature in its program. One of the new additions to the festival in recent years is an event where participating authors invite guests into their homes and read to them from their own works. This is reminiscent of the old, Icelandic tradition of “húslestur”, or house-reading, where a member of the family, usually the master of the house, would read excerpts from the available reading material to the entire household. Such

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*Although Reykjavík is a small city by world standards, it is blessed with a population that loves the written word and takes literature seriously.*

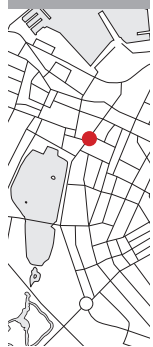
J.M. COETZEE, Nobel Prize Winner for Literature



Reykjavik City Library Poetry Slam, 2008.

Photograph: Thorsteinn Cameron

#### Literature trail



**LÆKJARGATA** *Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík* (Reykjavik Secondary Grammar School) is the city's oldest educational institution. The Icelandic Parliament met in the building from 1845 until Parliament House was opened in 1881. Steinunn Sigurdardóttir's novel from 1986, *The Thief of Time*, later adapted for the screen in France as *Voleur de vie*, describes a brief affair between the female teacher, Alda, and her younger, married co-worker; a short period of happiness and her long and deep despair after he abandons her. In the following scene, the self-assured Alda, who is used to controlling both her emotions and her life, is about to start her long journey of loss and emotional turmoil.

*From The Thief of Time* Off he goes with a heavy tome under his arm through the door of the common room, the room in which I invented him and acquired the letters patent. I created this man as if I were God. I oversaw the work with but a glance of the eye, and perfected it by stroking him on the forehead, the hands, the chest, the feet, the back, the stomach. This man is my handiwork. What happens to those who flee from their creator? And what happens to the creator deprived of his handiwork?

Well, I'll give you a lift at two.  
What can that mean?  
He's breaking it off.  
Is he breaking it off?

TRANSLATED BY RORY MCTURK

intimacy with the authors has proved both popular and successful, making this event a regular part of the festival. A similar program has taken place at Reykjavík Culture Night in the past and authors have also been called upon in Reykjavík City Library's literary walks, as these visits seem to have a special appeal to guests.

The International Children's Literature Festival has been held in Reykjavík every other year since 2001, and it has attracted numerous writers and scholars from different countries. The festival is organized by the Nordic House, Reykjavík City Library, IBBY Iceland, The Writer's Union of Iceland, SÍUNG (Association of Writers of Children's and Young Adult's Fiction) and the University of Iceland's School of Education. The festival caters to children and offers all sorts of events with Icelandic and foreign authors, readings, workshops, performances and exhibitions, but also hosts an academic program on children's literature for professionals and enthusiasts at the same time. There is a theme each time, examples are illustrated children's books, fantasy and myth in children's books and poetry and rhymes for children. The City of Reykjavík supports the festival and Reykjavík City Library is one of its hosts. Reykjavík primary schools and daycares take an active part by hosting programs with the writers at the schools and taking students to festival events. Writers visit schools in mixed groups of Icelandic and foreign authors, making the interaction with students across language barriers more fun and easy. Publishers also take part by sponsoring writers and publishing work by them, and bookstores promote their work with special offers, book-signings and other activities.

The International Poetry Festival, hosted by the grassroots movement Nýhil, has been a welcome addition to the festival landscape of Reykjavík in the past six years. This annual event has been making a name for itself during this time and seems to have already taken root, as the seventh festival is due to take place in the fall of 2010. The main objective of the festival is to support dialogue between Iceland and other countries, and to introduce progressive, contemporary poetry to Icelanders, and Icelandic poetry to foreign guests. The writers within Nýhil often work with

other artists and fuse literature with different art forms. An example of this fusion is when Nýhil and the grassroots Crymo Gallery in Reykjavík collaborated on a program called What is Poetry? in 2010, where poets and visual artists switched roles and the result was a kind of poetry performance.

All these festivals are subsidized by The City of Reykjavík, but the City also presents its own annual festivals, organized by the Visit Reykjavík office. The biggest ones are Reykjavík Culture Night in August and the Winter Lights Festival and Museum Night in February. Even though Reykjavík City officially hosts these festivals, they are in fact grassroots festivals in which many individuals, institutions, and organizations contribute. Literature is always a part of the programs, with various events on offer by different parties, such as the Reykjavík City Library, local bookstores, publishers, writer associations and individual writers. Culture Night is the largest and best attended festival in the country, and in recent years it has attracted as many as 100.000 visitors to the city centre.

Reykjavík City held a Children's Culture Festival for the first time in April 2010, and the goal is to make this an annual event. Iceland's official First Day of Summer is celebrated at this time and so is the Week of the Book, but both events are traditionally dedicated to children and reading. The Children's Culture Festival focuses on all sorts of cultural activities with children and youths, and the city's daycares and primary schools systematically participate, along with cultural institutions. Among the events on offer this year was a cooperative program between the festival organizers, Reykjavík primary schools, publishers and Reykjavík City Library, where school classes "adopted" a writer. Six writers took part, each working with a class for a few weeks and at the end a joint exhibition was put up at Reykjavík City Hall.



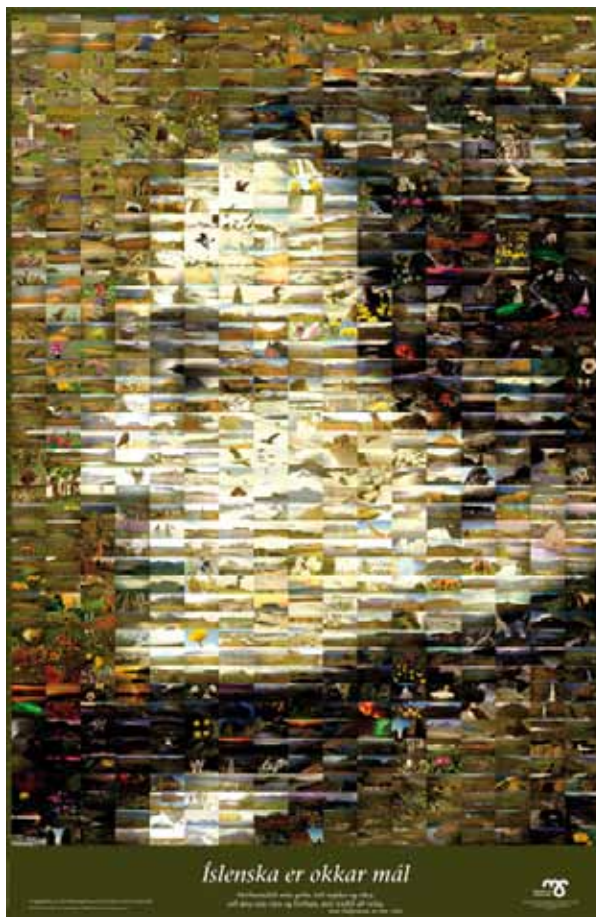
*Local writers walk the streets and town squares of Reykjavík, the settings of their stories. We, the readers of Reykjavík, follow in their footsteps and make the characters come to life.*

ANNA STEINUNN VALDIMARSDÓTTIR,  
primary school teacher

#### OTHER EVENTS

Primary schools in Reykjavík run a number of ongoing projects to encourage reading, often in collaboration with other parties. The Writer's Union of Iceland has for instance collaborated with schools on the project *Writers in Class* for a few years now, which is meant to create a bond between writers and students and encourage interest in literature by offering a literary programme for students of all ages. The writers work in pairs, and the programs are varied and adjusted according to age group. The city's preschools also work systematically with literature and one example is a project called *Writer of the Month*, where children get to know a new writer each month, reading his/her work with their teacher, followed by a visit from the writer. Yet another entertaining project is the so called *Message Bag*, a collaborative effort of a few preschools and one primary school, where students and the teacher choose a poem or story to work with and take the assignment around the participating schools, where it develops and changes until a joint exhibition is held to display the end result.

The Great Recital Competition is one of the biggest undertakings of the primary schools in the country. This is an annual event supported by many parties, including the Icelandic Publishers' Association, Reykjavík City, public libraries in Iceland and The Icelandic Language Commission. Seventh grade students throughout the country take part in the project, which is meant to call attention to and evoke an interest in reading and recital of literature. The competition always starts on the Icelandic Language Day in November, there are preliminary rounds in each school where students read poetry and other texts by



An interactive profile of poet Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1845). MS Icelandic Dairies website, [www.ms.is](http://www.ms.is)

Design: Hvíta húsið

Icelandic writers, and closing celebrations are held in the spring where the winners from each school perform. These celebrations are popular events and the participants are subsequently often asked to read at various other occasions. Even though this is a competition, emphasis is placed primarily on the great work that takes place in each school during preparations. Reciting fiction has always been interwoven with Icelandic culture, and this program is a part of sustaining an interest in recitation among the youngest generations while also calling to mind the theatrical roots of poetry.

*The Writer's Union of Iceland has for instance collaborated with schools on the project Writers in Class for a few years now, which is meant to create a bond between writers and students and encourage interest in literature by offering a literary program for students of all ages.*

Icelandic Language Day is celebrated to coincide with the birthday of one of Iceland's most beloved poets, Jónas Hallgrímsson. The day is dedicated to the Icelandic language, its status and its value for the nation and its culture. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture launched a special campaign in conjunction with Icelandic Language Day in 1995 and has encouraged schools at all levels to partake in it, together with libraries and other literature and culture institutions and associations, as well as private companies. One of the projects that sprung from this campaign is run by the Reykjavík based company MS Icelandic Dairies. The company has made the support of the Icelandic language and literature its trademark and has worked on various projects to that end, often in cooperation with local schools. One is printing poems and other texts by primary and secondary school students on the company's milk cartons, making these writings a daily companion at the nation's breakfast tables. The company has also published texts on the cartons about Icelandic grammar, figures of speech and expressions, often with amusing illustrations by children and teens. Furthermore, MS had a databank of Icelandic poetry made in honour of poet Jónas Hallgrímsson. The databank contains nature poetry by various contemporary and bygone Icelandic poets, each poem connected to a certain place in the country. The site's key feature is a mosaic picture of Jónas's profile, made up of these different places, and by clicking on each place users access the relevant poetry. Thus the poet, the country and its literature are directly linked in one picture, reminding the user of the value of poetry and the important status of this particular poet in Iceland's history.

Another project that the city's schools are involved in, in collaboration with several others, is the Week of the Book, which is organized around World Book Day every April. The week is packed with book- and writing-related events organized by libraries, bookstores, schools, the Writer's Union of Iceland, and many more. Furthermore, the Icelandic Publishers' Association encourages reading and book sales by sending a reading voucher to every home in the country during this week. The voucher is a 1,000 ISK discount off all books, but this occasion has been an increasingly important publishing time in Iceland in recent years, as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In 2010, the Association decided to donate a percentage of every voucher to the newly founded School Library Fund to support and call attention to school libraries, and emphasize their importance in encouraging Icelandic children to read.

Reykjavík City Library celebrates literature every single day of the year in various ways. The library organizes several literary events, including readings and writer visits, writing workshops, lectures, exhibitions, poetry slams for young adults and various projects in collaboration with schools and preschools to encourage reading. In recent years the library has systematically increased services to immigrants with various projects, such as the Story Circle for Women, in cooperation with W.O.M.E.N. – Women of Multicultural Ethnicity Network. The women, who are both of Icelandic and foreign descent, meet up once a month and exchange stories, both formally and informally, in addition to working together on artistic projects. They share their cultural backgrounds and support each other, and even though the project has only been running for little more than a year, it has already proved its importance. One of the Story Circle's objectives is to collect stories from women from different backgrounds and commit them to print, as immigrant literature is thus far an almost

*The Icelandic Publishers' Association encourages reading and book sales by sending a reading voucher to every home in the country during this week.*

unknown genre in Iceland. The Story Circle also provides an opportunity for women of foreign descent to practice their Icelandic and to learn about Icelandic culture, literature and traditions from their Icelandic sisters.

The library has hosted literary walking tours for several years, both in Icelandic and English. These are guided walks around areas of literary significance, and they have been extremely popular ever since the first walk in 2001, when 100 people participated. The library has designed several, differently themed walks, such as “Poems in the Garden” that takes participants around the Old Cemetery in downtown Reykjavík, paying visits to the numerous poets resting there, the “Gay Walk”, which focuses on the history of homosexual literature in the city, and the “Pub Crawl” with pit stops at cafés and bars frequented by writers and fictional characters. There have also been crime-fiction walks, children's literature walks, poetry walks, folklore walks, ghost-story walks and many others. To begin with, the walks were limited to the city centre but recently there have been walks through other neighbourhoods and the library has even organized literary bus tours in order to cover a greater area. Work is underway to make some of these walks digitally available so that locals and visitors can access them online and download them onto a phone, MP3 player or iPod. The library offers weekly walks in English for foreign visitors to the city during the summer months, and these walks can also be booked for groups at other times of the year. The library cooperates with publishers, bookstores, cafés and other local businesses when organizing these walking tours, and often gets writers to

*Reykjavík City Library has designed several, differently themed walks, such as “Poems in the Garden” that takes participants around the Old Cemetery in downtown Reykjavík, paying visits to the numerous poets resting there, the “Gay Walk”, which focuses on the history of homosexual literature in the city, and the “Pub Crawl” with pit stops at cafés and bars frequented by writers and fictional characters.*

*The Nordic Translation Fund was recently placed under The Nordic House in Reykjavík and furthermore, it hopes to secure the administration of The Nordic Literary Prize in the near future.*

come along to talk to guests and read from their work on location. In the past five years, the library has also worked with Reykjavík History Museum, Reykjavík Museum of Photography and Reykjavík Art Museum on a joint walking program in the summer time.

These walks, along with others that are offered by various private companies, contribute greatly to the city's vitality and street life. So does the H2 Creative Summer Group program, run by Hitt Húsid – Reykjavík City's Culture and Information Centre for Young People. Groups and individuals aged 17–25 can apply to work for the City for eight weeks during summer, developing and acting out their own creative assignments. These groups make their mark on summer in the city by organizing all kinds of artistic events. There is always at least one group working in the field of literature; in 2010 for instance, two young men organized “Poetry Attacks” on people in the city centre. This is what they called various peaceful performances intended to get people to see their environment in a different light and “challenge people's lack of perception in a busy modern society”, as they put it themselves. They distributed poems in unexpected places, got permission from shop keepers on the main shopping street to exhibit poetry in their windows, popped up at street corners performing poetry, and encouraged people to write in notebooks that they left all over town. Another group wrote and performed stand-up comedy in the streets, in workplaces and elsewhere. This group was made up of university students studying creative writing, drama and film. A third group worked with folklore, developing graphic stories from selected tales with the aim of collecting them in a book near the end of summer. The strips have also been sporadically distributed around town for people to enjoy. All in all there are 15 Creative Summer Groups operating in 2010, in addition to the Street Theatre, which is the largest group and the only one that remains a permanent feature from one year to the next.

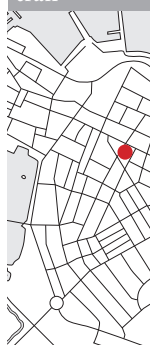




Poetry reading by the City Lake in one of Reykjavík City Library's literature walks. The Nordic House in the distance.

Photograph: Kristín Hauksdóttir

#### Literature trail



**BERGSTADASTRÆTI** *The popular bar and café Kaffibarinn is frequented by diverse groups and considered exceptionally lively. It is depicted in Hallgrímur Helgason's 1996 novel 101 Reykjavík, and Baltasar Kormákur's 2000 movie adaptation. The novel describes the existential crisis in the mind of a young man living in the city centre with his mother and her girlfriend. He has hardly left the area of his postal code except through the media of television and computers, which connect him to the outside world, but often visits this small downtown bar where he feels quite at home.*

*From 101 Reykjavík* We're in a queue in front of the K-bar. There's a new bouncer who obviously hasn't done his homework. Doesn't know us. I've never seen him before, apart from the tattoo on his neck. "A little bit more originality, please!" The time is almost 200 and we're stuck out here in some kind of Ice Age. This is what's called going out. I'm in black jeans with my pocket full of fingers, a white polo neck, and leather jacket. Difficult to make out what shoes I'm wearing – in the crush – but I think it's those black ones. A girl (30,000) in front of us in the queue says hi. I just nod. She works at the video rental store in Skólavörðustígur and I've rented some porn from her. Marri passes me a cigarette and we try to heat up on it, feel a slight warmth in our lungs ... like the heat of a Primus stove in the North Pole. The Amundsen brothers. Takes us at least twelve years to get in.

TRANSLATED BY BRIAN FITZGIBBON



*The Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje at the Reykjavik International Literature Festival in 2009.*

Photograph: Stella Soffía Jóhannesdóttir

*Like so many nations that historically stand on the cultural and geographical fringe of globalized society, Iceland has in recent years seen tremendous growth in its presence on the international arts scene.*

*Icelanders have written stories and poetry ever since they first laid hands on feather-pens and calfskin. Today, Reykjavík is the centre of culture in the country and the city plays a vital role in sustaining and carrying on this priceless literary heritage.*

SNORRI RAFN HALLSSON and MÁR MÁSSON  
MAACK. H2 Creative Summer Group, 2010

The Nordic House in Reykjavík is one of the city's main cultural centres. It hosts numerous literary events – international, Nordic, and Icelandic, and runs a public library that focuses on literature by writers from the Nordic countries in the original languages. The Nordic House intends to extend its commitment to literature even further and make it the core of the institution's operations. In line with this, it hosted lunch hour programs with writers in the winter of 2009–2010, which turned out to be a success. The Nordic House is a venue for both The Reykjavík International Literature Festival and The International Children's Literature Festival and Nýhil's International Poetry Festival has been held there in the past two years. The Nordic Translation Fund was recently placed under The Nordic House in Reykjavík and furthermore, it hopes to secure the administration of The Nordic Literary Prize in the near future. Iceland is one of the Nordic countries, which have a long-standing tradition of extensive cooperation in various fields, frequently under the supervision of The Nordic Council of Ministers, that contributes significant funding to cultural projects and events, as do several other Nordic cultural funds. The City of Reykjavík and The Nordic House collaborate on a number of projects every year, both literary ones and other cultural programs and events.

#### CONFERENCES AND SYMPOSIA

Reykjavík hosts several conferences and symposia each year, both international and local. There will be no attempt made to give an extensive overview of this field but instead here are a few recent and interesting examples. The Gerduberg Culture Centre, which is run by The City of Reykjavík, is located in one of the city's suburbs and hosts all sorts of exhibitions and events. One of the Centre's regular events, dating back to 1999, is the Writers' Symposium, each of which focuses on a selected writer and his/her career. The symposium explores the writer's work in detail, three interviewers ask the writer about his/her life and work in an informal chat, and actors read excerpts. These symposia are extremely well attended, and the resulting



*Writer Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir puts herself in the shoes of one of her characters, painter Karítas from her two-volume novel from 2004 and 2007.*

Photograph: Kristín Hauksdóttir

material is published in a book in order to reach more readers and to create permanent documentation of the event. The National Broadcasting Service has also documented many of these programs. The last symposium was dedicated to the writer Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir; alongside it was an art exhibition in honour of the fictional artist Karítas, the protagonist in a two-volume novel by Kristín. The related two-week seminar for the public on this renowned novel was fully booked. Gerduberg Culture Centre also plays host to numerous other literature happenings and events, often in cooperation with the Reykjavík City Library branch, which is housed in the same building.

*Reykjavík City Library is currently collaborating with six other libraries in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway on a three-year project for developing new ideas and an intricate vision for the future for public libraries in these countries.*



Among other regular seminars on literature and academic studies is the Annual Conference of the Humanities at the University of Iceland; an annual seminar on children's fiction hosted by Gerðuberg Culture Centre, Reykjavík City Library, IBBY Iceland and other parties in this field; public lunch hour programs with authors hosted by the University of Iceland's Creative Writing program; various seminars hosted by the Reykjavík Academy – a non-profit institution of independent scholars; and the Writer's Union's literary conference on World Book Day.<sup>1</sup> In February 2010, Reykjavík City's Preschool Division hosted the conference *Stories and Fairy Tales*, which was attended by 200 preschool teachers from all over the country. The focus was on the value of folklore and fairytales in working with children, and emphasis placed on how to use different forms of art, such as visual art, music, dance, drama, and storytelling, when introducing literature to children. Literature is one of the main tools used in Reykjavík daycares, when working with language development and literacy.

Conventions and conferences on translation have been on the rise in recent years. For example, there were two international conferences on translations held in Reykjavík in the spring of 2010. In May, the University of Iceland and the Nordic House in Reykjavík hosted *Art in Translation – International Conference on Language and the Arts*. The objective was to shed light on how discourse on art affects the whole process of art, whether it involves visual art, music, movies, or literature. The focus was on smaller language communities and the problems and choices their artists must deal with when participating in international discourse. Like so many nations that historically stand on the cultural and geographical fringe of globalized society, Iceland has in recent years seen tremendous growth in its presence on the international arts scene. And like artists and scholars from other small language communities, many Icelanders have – whether by choice or necessity – embraced English as an integral aspect of the creation of and discourse on the arts, sometimes parallel to their native language, sometime not. Such practice may be incapable for these small language communities in order to present their art and theory on the world stage, and participants pondered what the implications of this trend are for artists, scholars, and audiences in any country and all language communities. The conference was a success, one participant described it as an art performance where artists and scholars joined efforts. Participants came from

*Five books are nominated for The Icelandic Translator's Prize every year, and thus the spotlight has been cast on excellent translations of different works of fiction from around the world since the prize was founded in 2005.*

21 countries, from all continents, and approached the subject through sound, video, song, dance, and various performances in combination with conventional lectures. Because of this great start, the organizers have decided to make it a biennial event, alternating focus between translation in the widest sense of the word, and creative writing and its teaching.

In June, the University of Iceland held a conference called *Translation, History, Literary Culture* with participating lecturers from Denmark, Finland, Faeroe Islands, Norway, Sweden, Galicia, Scotland and Iceland. The conference discussed individual translations, the significance of translation in literary history and cross-cultural translation.

Library staff in Iceland convenes annually, and Icelandic librarians also have good relations with their foreign colleagues. There are many interesting things happening in the library sector today; developments and changes happen fast in digitalization and libraries have taken on a broader cultural role in recent years. The “Next Library” has been the focus of discussion lately – speculations on how libraries can develop their services with regard to new times and technology. Libraries in the Nordic countries, including Iceland, have been at the forefront of this debate, and Reykjavík City Library is currently collaborating with six other libraries in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway on a three-year project for developing new ideas and an intricate vision for the future for public libraries in these countries. The end result will be available on interactive websites, videos, research reports and articles. The first camp, with seventy participants from all five countries, took place in Reykjavík in June 2010 and was spearheaded by Reykjavík City Library. The next session will be in Stockholm in the summer of 2011, followed by the last one in Helsinki a year later.

## LITERARY AWARDS

Reykjavík is home to numerous literary awards and prizes. The City of Reykjavík presents two annual prizes: one is named for the city poet Tómas Guðmundsson and presented for an unpublished manuscript of poetry. It has proven to be a vehicle for new poets, since the books have subsequently been published by local publishers. The other is the Reykjavík Scholastic Prize, awarded by Reykjavík City's Department of Education for two published children's books, one original in Icelandic and another in translation.

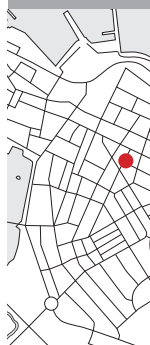
The Icelandic Publishers' Association administers The Icelandic Literature Prize, nominating ten books in two categories: five works of fiction and five works of non-fiction. The nominations are presented in November each year and the President of Iceland awards the prize in January to one work in each category. The President also presents The Icelandic Translator's Prize, which is administered by the Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters and handed out on World Book Day. Five books are nominated for the award every year, and thus the spotlight has been cast on excellent translations of different works of fiction from around the world since the prize was founded in 2005.

The Jónas Hallgrímsson Prize is awarded on Icelandic Language Day. The award is presented to an individual who is considered to have "promoted the Icelandic language in speech or print through fiction, academic work or teaching, and worked towards its advancement, development, and dissemination to a new generation."<sup>2</sup> On this same day, Reykjavík City's Department of Education awards an Icelandic Language Prize to students nominated for excellent proficiency in Icelandic by the city's schools.

Other prizes awarded in Reykjavík by various parties are The Icelandic Children's Literature Prize, The Bookseller's Prize, The Women's Literature Prize, and the DV Culture Prize for Literature, hosted by a local newspaper. Furthermore, Reykjavík City Library administers the Children's Choice Book Prize; IBBY Iceland presents the award Sögusteinn biennially to a writer for his or her life-long contribution to children's literature, in addition to nominating writers for the international IBBY Honour List. The Dimmalímm Award is presented for illustrations in children's books, *Blóddropinn* (the Blood Drop) is an award granted for crime fiction, and Hagthenkir – Association of Writers of Non-Fiction and Educational Material – presents awards for academic works, as does The Icelandic Library and Information Science Association. Iceland also takes part in Nordic prizes in the field of children's literature, fiction, playwriting, and crime fiction.

Several contemporary Icelandic writers have received international awards and prizes for literature. Thor Vilhjálmsson, Sjórn, and Einar Már Guðmundsson have, for example, been awarded the Nordic Council's Literature Prize; Andri Snær Magnason was recently presented with the esteemed international Kairos Prize; Guðbergur Bergsson received the Nordic Prize of the Swedish Academy in 2004; Kristín Steinsdóttir has received the Nordic Children's Literature Prize; Arnaldur Indriðason has been presented with several awards for his crime novels, such as The Gold Dagger Award, and as was mentioned earlier, Halldór Laxness received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955.

### Literature trail



**VEGAMÓTASTÍGUR** *Folktales are an important genre in Iceland. Among them are tales of elves and hidden people that have followed Icelanders into modern times. In this tale, the focus is on crossroads, and if we take the story literally, we may want to be careful when passing the street Vegamótastígur in Reykjavík, which translates as Crossroad-trail.*

*From "Crossroads" If a man watches at the crossroads, elves will come to him from all directions and crowd round him, bidding him come with them; but he must not heed them. They will then bring him all kinds of jewellery, gold and silver, clothes, food and drink, but he must accept nothing. Elf-women will then appear to him in the shape of his mother or sister, and bid him come, and use every device to persuade him. But when day dawns, he must stand up and say, "God be praised, it is now broad daylight." All the elves will then vanish, leaving their treasure behind, and he may have it.*

*But if a man answers the elves, or accepts their offers, he will be bemused and lose his wits, and never be himself again.*

TRANSLATED BY ALAN BOUCHER

ICELAND GUEST OF HONOUR AT FRANKFURT  
BOOK FAIR 2011

The 2011 Frankfurt Book Fair offers a unique opportunity for promoting Icelandic literature on an international level, as the limelight will be on Iceland as the Guest of Honour. Immense work has gone into its preparation, and the project has called for the cooperation of numerous parties working in the field of literature in the city.

An office under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has supervised this vast project, and to mark the occasion several books by Icelandic authors will be published in Germany in 2010 and 2011. Thus far, around 120 publication rights have been sold. Programs on Icelandic literature and culture will be held all over Germany from the beginning of autumn 2010 to the end of the Frankfurt Book Fair a year later.

The Frankfurt Book Fair is one of the largest and most important book fairs in the world. Around 300.000 guests attend the fair each year, 7.000 exhibitors from 100 countries participate and promote over 400.000 book titles. Each year the Frankfurt Book Fair invites one country or language community to be Guest of Honour, and the chosen country tends to have a rich literary heritage. The Guest of Honour has its own pavilion, and there is an extensive program of events and lectures on offer to promote the country's literature in a wide, cultural context. In addition to this, art institutions, museums, music venues, and film houses all over Germany organize all kinds of events featuring artists from the guest country. German and international media profile the Guest of Honour from various viewpoints, writers and their works are covered extensively in literary publications, news and current affairs programs. The Frankfurt Book Fair offers a unique opportunity for Iceland to promote its literature and culture to millions of people.

One of the things that Iceland wanted to achieve is to have all of the Icelanders' Sagas translated and published in Germany. An agreement has already been reached with one of Germany's leading publishing houses, Fischer, for publication in 2011. A similar project was done by Penguin for the English-speaking market several years ago. Efforts are also being made to encourage translation and publication of Icelandic literature from the nineteenth century to this day, as this period has not been readily available abroad. Last but not least, systematic efforts will be made to promote and distribute Icelandic contemporary literature and art on the international book market, as the Frankfurt Book Fair has always been a good launch pad into other markets.

Preparation for this project has led to the accumulation of valuable information, intense networking, and the creation of significant projects that will come in good use, should Reykjavík be awarded UNESCO City of Literature status. Reykjavík hopes to receive UNESCO's conclusion by spring 2011. Should Reykjavík be awarded City of Literature status, it will be important to use the international clout gained from the Frankfurt project to efficiently promote the City of Literature and the Creative Cities Network.





*Promotional posters for Sagenhaftes Island – Iceland Guest of Honour,  
Frankfurt Bookfair 2011.*

Design: Fiton

## Libraries and Digital Media

### LIBRARIES

Reykjavík offers a wide range of libraries, such as public, school and research libraries. All schools and universities in the metropolitan area run school libraries that serve students and staff, and all primary and secondary school students receive tuition in the use of libraries, with library staff supporting the teaching of literature and literacy. The Education Act requires all schools to run a library, and all municipalities are required to offer their inhabitants the use of library facilities, in accordance with the Public Libraries Act. Public and school libraries cooperate in various ways, for example, all fourth-year students in Reykjavík schools visit the City Library, and the same library receives school visits from all age groups for a range of purposes. School librarians all over the country work together in organizing various projects, such as short story and poetry competitions for children and teenagers, conferences on issues relating to children's libraries and larger projects, such as the Children's Choice Book Prize. This prize was initiated by the Reykjavík City Library but has now become a yearly event aimed at promoting reading, and most public and school libraries participate under the guidance of the City Library.

The Reykjavík City Library is the largest public library in Iceland, with a main library, five branches, a bookmobile, and a story van. The library is well-utilized and book loans are high, with 700,000 people visiting the library in 2009 and book loans totalling just under 1.2 million. According to a survey conducted by the Social Science Research Institute in 2007 and 2009 respectively, over 70 percent of Reykjavík inhabitants aged 16–80 had visited the Reykjavík City Library over a 12-month period. From 2007 to 2009, attendance went up by 22 percent and borrowing by 25 percent. Visitors to the library website also increased by 46 percent over the same period.

The City of Reykjavík defines library services as part of its basic and fundamental services to the inhabitants and therefore the current economic situation has not resulted in significant cuts. The annual budget for the library was 511,000,000 ISK in 2007 (3,338,000 EUR), going up to 550 million ISK in 2009 (3,593,000 EUR). Reykjavík City had

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# over 70 %

of Reykjavík inhabitants aged 16–80 had visited the Reykjavík City Library over a 12-month period

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*Students at the University of Iceland*

Photograph: Kristján Maack

to revise all operational costs in the year 2010, but a witness to the City's ongoing commitment to library services is the fact that the City Library was among institutions that suffered the lowest cut (541 million ISK or 3,534,000 EUR). To meet this, the library has shortened the lending time of books from 30 to 21 days, in order to make more efficient use of the stock. Services, such as library visits, story-hours, literature walks, poetry slam, literature website, multi-cultural services and other events at the libraries have not been affected.

The library's youth programs are particularly effective, with preschoolers attending the library and story-telling sessions. The Story Van visits the city's kindergartens and introduces the youngest generation to the wondrous world of books. The children visit the van and listen to stories and adventures, and the service has proven to be extremely popular since its introduction in 2008. The van is decorated with pictures by a well-known artist and designed in such a way that children can enjoy a cosy and adventurous time with the storytellers. Plans are underway to offer fairy tales and folktales read in English during the summer months for foreign children visiting the city.



The library also lends book chests to kindergartens in order to encourage parents to take books home and read to their children. Similar book chests have also been prepared for primary and secondary schools, with a particular theme each time. The library's bookmobile visits 40 sites within the city each week. The bookmobile is a full-size bus and is particularly important for children who live beyond walking distance of a nearby library, as it gives them the opportunity to approach books on their own terms.

The library participates in the International Children's Literature Festival in Reykjavík and collaborates with various groups concerned with children's literature and culture. The library has, for several years, run writing workshops for children over the summer months, which have proven to be very popular. The children get the opportunity to work with authors and artists, as well as librarians, and the end result of the workshop is presented to parents and other visitors during a children's reading at the end of the workshop. The workshop is free, as are all of the events offered by the library. Further library events are detailed in the chapter on festivals and events.

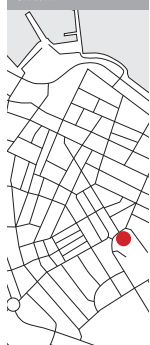
Another important library in the capital is the Icelandic Library for the Blind, located in the municipality of Kópavogur. The library is run by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and serves the entire country. The library provides and produces audio books for the blind and visually impaired, as well as for people with dyslexia. A large group of elderly citizens also makes use of the library's services. Plans are underway to convert the entire library into digital form, with the library consisting of various educational and teaching materials, as well as a wide range of fiction. The choice of available material is dictated by

popular titles, for example, thrillers, biographies and popular titles for children and teenagers, both original Icelandic ones and translations. The library works with numerous voice artists, although some authors specifically request to read their own titles. The library does not lend material to individuals who are not visually impaired or dyslexic, although interest in audio books has grown considerably in recent years, with publishers responding by increasing the production of such materials.

The National and University Library of Iceland are located in a building called Thjóðarbókhlaðan, a site that has housed both libraries since 1994. The National Library houses, conserves, records and categorizes all Icelandic materials that have to be submitted to the library by law. The library also provides services for the teaching and research undertaken by the University of Iceland and maintains a library and information service for the professional sectors, administrative organizations and research institutions in Iceland. The library places considerable emphasis on the collection of materials from all disciplines and in making them available for visitors, as well as offering various educational and cultural activities. The National Collection of the library contains several research collections, commonly used by researchers working on research projects in their relevant fields. Amongst these collections are the Laxness Collection and the Icelandic Women's History Collection.

The Manuscript Collection of the National Library preserves approximately 15,000 manuscripts, ranging from unique thirteenth-century vellum manuscripts to twentieth-century diaries and letters. The majority of manuscripts are paper manuscripts, mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also numerous seventeenth

#### Literature trail



**SKÓLAVÖRDUHOLT HILL** *In 1805 the King of Denmark confirmed the sentences of the lovers Steinunn Sveinsdóttir and Bjarni Bjarnason for the murder of their spouses. Bjarni was transported to Norway and executed there, whereas Steinunn died in the Reykjavík prison (now Government House). Her fellow prisoners were asked to cover her corpse with rocks, and the piled-up grave was southeast of where the statue of Leifur Eiríksson now stands by Hallgrímskirkja church. In 1913, when stones were taken from the hill for harbour construction in Reykjavík, it was decided to remove the coffin and lay Steinunn to rest in the Old Churchyard. Gunnar Gunnarsson's novel Svartfugl (The Black Cliffs) from 1929 recounts these events.*

*From The Black Cliffs I asked him what had become of Steinunn. He looked up quickly and stared at me: "Steinunn – you don't know? ... She's dead. Didn't you pass by a piled-up grave alongside the road?"*

*"Yes ... I threw a stone on it myself." "You couldn't know whose it was ... it's already got a name. They call it Steinka grave cairn."*

TRANSLATED BY CECIL WOOD

and eighteenth-century manuscripts. New materials are received on a regular basis and library employees monitor opportunities for new acquisitions and contact possible donors. Amongst the library's collections are the manuscripts of poets and authors, as the National Library has received numerous manuscripts donated by authors in recent years.

#### DIGITAL MEDIA

Cultural material in digital form has increased considerably in recent years in Iceland, as in other countries. In 2008, the Icelandic government set forth a policy on the information society, Iceland, the e-nation, which has an end date of 2012. Amongst its goals, the policy sets out to offer "access at a single site to libraries, local heritage museums and art galleries, archives and other collections of material".<sup>3</sup> Audio and visual material from the National Broadcasting Service shall also be made accessible electronically, as this institution possesses a considerable treasure trove of Icelandic cultural material, e.g., in the field of literature. The collection contains, amongst other materials, interviews with authors, literature readings by authors and others, both of original works and translations, and plays and programs about literature and art. During the summer of 2010 the Icelandic government implemented a special program where students and other unemployed people were hired to work on this task.

Iceland's libraries have made considerable progress regarding electronic access to their collections. The National Library and Reykjavík City Library have played a key role in this process, together with other libraries. A central catalogue, Gegnir.is, is employed in Iceland to give access to the records of nearly every library in the country. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, together with over 40 municipalities, maintains the catalogue, which was established in May 2003. Since its inception, citizens can perform a search from one site for materials held in numerous libraries all over the country, and it is now also possible to access electronic versions of student theses from the University of Iceland through the same system, as well as through the website of the National and University Library of Iceland. The Consortium of Icelandic Libraries, which runs the Gegnir catalogue, is currently working on a joint project with the Royal Library in Copenhagen that will establish a single web portal for accessing Icelandic cultural materials. This will include both the catalogues of libraries and other cultural institutions, and the Reykjavík City Library and National Library are also involved in the project. The project bears the title PRIMO, and a test version of the portal is planned to go online towards the end of 2010.

Both libraries also participate in the Icelandic countrywide access portal to electronic databases, [www.hvar.is](http://www.hvar.is), together with other libraries in the country. This unique project gives every Icelander free access to numerous domestic and foreign databases, newspapers and magazines from any computer in the country. It is safe to say that such country-wide access is unique, being funded by the government and local municipalities. The National Library is also working towards the digital preservation of manuscripts and books, and this ambitious project aims to preserve all Icelandic material in digital form, making it available to users in accordance with copyright laws and in cooperation with authors and publishers.

The aforementioned project is a collaboration between the National Library and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, and one of the guiding principles of the latter is open access to all materials. Manuscripts have been registered electronically and photographed with the final goal of having open access to all primary data stored at the institute. Primary sources, that is, photographs of manuscripts and audio files, together with lexicographic and place name archives will become accessible online. On the 21st of April 2010, the Minister for Education, Science and Culture, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, opened the website [www.handrit.is](http://www.handrit.is). This site gives access to historical manuscripts and is a collaborative project between the Árni Magnússon Institute, the National Library of Iceland and the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen. The site can be used to search for manuscripts housed in the three institutions, e.g. Icelandic medieval manuscripts, such as the complete collection of the Sagas of Icelanders and the short tales of Icelanders. The site also gives access to the majority of Norse mythology, Bishop's Sagas, Legendary Sagas and Sagas of Knights. Numerous manuscripts also contain various stanzas and epic and skaldic poetry. Users can also access digital photographs of manuscripts so that researchers and the public can view each manuscript page in high resolution, allowing users to browse the manuscripts from anywhere in the world. The site gives academics and amateurs worldwide access to the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection, which was included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2009.

Over the last two years, these three institutions have participated in the ENRICH project (European Networking Resources and Information Concerning Cultural Heritage). The aim of this project is to provide access to digital photographs and descriptions of manuscripts housed in various libraries and museums via a single digital interface, [www.beta.manuscriptorium.com](http://www.beta.manuscriptorium.com). Eighteen European

institutions and businesses participate in the project and numerous bodies have become associated partners, opening access to their data collections.

Another electronic language and literature project run by The Árni Magnússon Institute is the website Bragi, which is an important research tool for Icelandic poetry and prosody. The institute also runs an Icelandic word bank that shows relationships between words and expressions, and the Folkloric Sound Archive website provides access to the folkloric material housed by the institute. The website allows users to view printed materials and to listen to audio recordings of storytellers and recitals of poems. Materials from the Folklore Department are also released on CDs, and the Árni Magnússon Institute has collaborated with the Bad Taste record label in this respect. Finally it should be mentioned that the *Codex Regius* manuscript will be published in digital form towards the end of 2010, with the CD containing a dedicated user interface. Considerable effort has been invested in digitizing this important manuscript, and a lot of work has been put into finalizing the electronic version of the text and the concordance.

A project that promotes modern Icelandic literature is the Icelandic Literature website run by Reykjavík City Library ([www.bokmenntir.is](http://www.bokmenntir.is) / [www.literature.is](http://www.literature.is)). This website has been up and running since the year 2000 and provides information on modern authors and their works, both in Icelandic and English. It constantly grows in size, as it is regularly updated with new material and now contains information on over 100 Icelandic fiction writers. There are articles about authors written by literary scholars, reviews on new books, essays on writing by the authors themselves and extracts from various works. The site also contains detailed bibliographies for each author that list published works in Iceland and abroad, information about awards and honours that the authors have received and provides information on magazine articles that have been written about their works. There is also a news column about literary events in the city, publishing and other relevant happenings. Users can comment on books as the site is interactive. It is currently being revised and will be opened with a new interface and features, such as audio files and an online reading group, in the fall of 2010. Material from the site is also used on the Sagenhaftes-Island ([www.sagenhaftes-island.is](http://www.sagenhaftes-island.is)) website, which is a growing marketing site for Icelandic literature in Icelandic, English, and German. This website is part of the Iceland, Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair project. Both of these websites are important tools for introducing literary culture in the city, and would be invaluable for Reykjavík as a UNESCO City of Literature.

*Having access to the Icelandic medieval story world in the original language and being able to read these stories nearly as easily as the daily newspapers, is a treasure that I can never admire or research enough. I get to know people that lived eight hundred or a thousand years ago, and realize that these people were exactly like us: they possessed the same humour, the same joy of the spectacular, manifold or beautiful, the same emotions and ambitions; all the good and bad things we see in our fellow citizens today. The generations that lived in this land back then walked the same hills as we do, heard the same bird-song, looked at the same mountains and saw the waves that have been forever breaking on the shores. Their circumstances were in many ways different from ours, transportation and tools more primitive, clothes and houses of another sort – but they spoke the same language as we do – in times that were more dramatic, more dangerous, bringing forth a more direct thirst for life. And above all, they wrote books as we do and told stories of the sort that people at all times want to enjoy and learn from. These tails give us modern day story-tellers access to a universe of untold stories that first and foremost help us understand our position in the world and in life – why we are, here and now – dealing with the modern mess of all times.*

EINAR KÁRASON, writer

All of the websites and databases mentioned above are open, and anyone can access the materials they contain free of charge.

It is impossible to close this chapter on digital media without mentioning the Snara web portal ([www.snara.is](http://www.snara.is)), which is owned by Forlagid, the largest publishing company in Iceland. This portal offers a collection of web books where users can search for words and expressions, e.g., from the Sagas of the Icelanders and the works of Halldór Laxness, as well as offering dictionaries and other reference titles. The portal offers academics and amateurs invaluable access to these works. Searches can be made for any words or word forms, and they can be viewed in context. This allows one to view literary works in a new light in terms of content and language use. As an example, quotes from the Sagas can be quickly retrieved, definitions of words and expressions can be accessed and repeated usage of a literary style can be compared.





Top: *The Reykjavík City Library Bookmobile is especially important for children who live beyond walking distance of a nearby library.*

Photograph: Bárð Kristinsdóttir

Bottom: *Preschoolers listen with anticipation to stories in the Story Van, run by Reykjavík City Library.*

Courtesy of Icelandic Student Services Preschools

## Education, Literacy and Literature

*Literature and literary heritage is the kingpin of the nation's cultural life. Therefore it is a vital aspect of Icelandic education and culture to know Icelandic literature, to be able to enjoy it, disseminate it and to create new works of fiction.*

National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School

Iceland has a public school system and education is free for all its inhabitants at the primary and secondary level. Equal access to education can in fact be said to be one of Iceland's core values. Compulsory schools (first through tenth grade) are run by the municipalities and upper secondary schools by the state. There are also five small private elementary schools in Reykjavík, and they are subsidized by Reykjavík City, which covers 75 percent of their operation cost. The rest comes from parents in the form of school fees. The University of Iceland, which is the largest university in the country and the one that offers the most extensive literature and language programme, is a state school with minimal school fees (around 300 EUR registration fee per year). Schools in Reykjavík that teach literature and languages are thus almost fully funded by Reykjavík City and the Icelandic State. Iceland does not have a tradition for private funding in the school system, and educational literary programs therefore do not rely on private sponsorships. This could be seen as a blessing in the current economic situation in Iceland, since the difficulties the country has been going through in the past two to three years have not resulted in any loss of such fluctuating funds, and both city and state define language and literature as core programs that should not be cut.

Language, literature and mathematics are allocated the greatest share of the reference time table in primary education, or approximately 36 percent of the total hours of compulsory school instruction. These subjects are defined as core subjects due to their importance as the basis for study in other subjects. Emphasis is also placed on training in Icelandic in all subjects and all students' school work. In a draft of a new Compulsory School Act, now under construction, Icelandic and language arts are still defined as the basis for other studies, and the time given for these subjects will likely be increased further. In the past few years, an emphasis has been put on reading comprehension, as international studies indicated that Icelandic students were scoring lower than they had done before. These efforts seem to have been rewarded, since the newest research (PISA 2009) show that Iceland is back on track. Only ten of the 68 countries taking part in the research showed better results than Iceland, and the country was one of the top nine among the thirty-three OECD countries.

Icelandic language and literature is also one of the core subjects in upper secondary schools and academic lines include a language program, focusing mainly on modern languages and literature. In the National Curriculum Guide for this level, issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, all students must study Icelandic language and literature, which is the biggest core program. All students must study Danish and English language and literature as well, togeth-



*Þórarinn Leifsson: Bókasafn ömmu Huldar (Grandmother's Library). Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 2009. The book won Reykjavík City's Scholastic Prize in 2009.*

er with a third language. The funding for these programs has been steady, as they are viewed as core programs. Most upper secondary schools in Reykjavík also offer different literature courses by choice, such as pleasure reading programs, where students read Icelandic and foreign works of literature and discuss them with their teachers.

At the University of Iceland, new literature programs have been established in the past few years, in addition to the older ones. Creative Writing has been taught as a major since 2008 and will be offered as a graduate program from

autumn 2011. A graduate program in Practical Editorship and Theory of Publication has been offered since 2006, and part of the studies is an internship at local publishing houses. Translation Studies have been available as a graduate program since 2002. The number of students enrolled in literature and language programs within the School of Humanities has been steadily increasing – in 2010 the number of students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literature and Linguistics, and the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies was 1,760, as opposed to 1,074 in 2002.

In the same period, man-years at the University have gone from 954 in 2002 to 1,269 in 2009, of those, 1,44.9 were within the School of Humanities (up from 139.7 in 2008).



The University of Iceland celebrates its 100 anniversary in 2011 and the publication of a new mission for the university for the years 2011 – 2016 kicked off the celebrations on January 7th. The mission states a continued dedication to excellence, as the University strives to be among the best at an international level. Since 2005, when the previous mission was set, important goals have been reached. The number of articles published in international publications by U.I. faculty members went from 260 up to 350 (in 2009); the University's own funding went up by 78 percent and grants from international competitive funds tripled. In the same period, the number of PhD students went from 166 up to 440, thirty-five students received a PhD degree in 2010, whereas thirteen graduated with the degree in 2005. No grants were available at the university for PhD students in 2005, but 106 such grants have now been given out. Although the University of Iceland has been going through temporary cutbacks in public funding (5.3 percent between the years 2009 and 2010), it has not resulted in any setbacks in its literature and language programs.

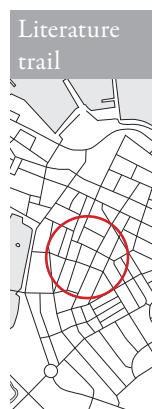
### PRESCHOOLS

Preschools are the first educational level. They are not compulsory, and thus it is in the hands of parents whether their child attends such a school or not. Most children in Reykjavík do, usually from the age of two until they start primary school at the age of six. Most preschools in Iceland are operated by the municipalities, but there are also a few privately operated schools at this level in Reykjavík. The preschool system is ambitious and professional; teacher training is at university level and each school compiles its own curriculum, based on the National Curriculum Guide, that reflects the school's ideology and methodology. Reykjavík preschools are encouraged to develop uniqueness by emphasizing a certain policy or special aspects of activities, such as art, movement, science, nature, and

environmental protection. Books are used in all of the city's preschools in both play and teaching, and in many schools, written language is used in free play and organized activities. The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools demands that language stimulation shall be integrated into as many aspects of school activities as possible, and that literature and storytelling should be used in day-to-day activities to encourage the overall development of children. Preschool teachers have, for instance, visited the Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, and certain teachers have specialized in storytelling. Many preschools have focused on working with folklore and fairy tales, local writers visit the schools and some of them take part in workshops with the children. As already stated, Reykjavík preschools frequently collaborate with Reykjavík City Library on various projects. They also cooperate with artists of all forms, for instance paying regular visits to the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, where the oldest children learn about music while being told a story and listening to the orchestra play, in addition to receiving a book as a gift to take home. Many preschools work with an educational tool called *Story Base*, which helps children to tell stories by using pictures and play. This method can also be used in a diverse way to stimulate language development and literacy, and to teach Icelandic to multilingual children. Among the numerous ongoing projects in the field of literature and writing is a project where elementary school students visit pre-schoolers and read to them, which is not only meant to promote reading but also to form a link between the educational levels. As mentioned earlier, Reykjavík preschools take an active part in various literature and culture festivals in the city.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The first indication of a public school system in Iceland was late in the nineteenth century, and in 1880, a law was passed to the effect that all children should learn reading,



**SKÓLAVÖRDUHOLT** *Many of the streets on and around Skólavörðuholt hill are named after Norse gods, such as Freyjugata (street of Freya), Bragagata, Óðinsgata and Urðastigur (trail of Urður). Indeed, one could trace Norse mythology through this neighbourhood. Edda by Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) contains stories of Norse mythology that have their origin in pagan times, most of them based on poetry and oral stories but retold by this Christian author.*

*From Edda There is one called Bragi. He is renowned for his wisdom and especially for eloquence and command of language. Especially he is knowledgeable about poetry, and because of him poetry is called brag, and from his name a person is said to be a brag [chief] of men or women who has eloquence beyond others, whether it is a woman or a man.*

TRANSLATED BY ANTHONY FAULKES



*Young girls finding some interesting reads at Reykjavík City Library's Bookmobile. Photograph: Bára Kristinsdóttir*

writing, mathematics, and basic Christian studies. With the 1907 Education Act, school became compulsory for all children from the age of ten, and in 1936 from the age of seven. But even though there was no formal school system to speak of until the twentieth century, informal schooling had been practiced in Iceland for centuries. In the Middle Ages, literacy seems to have been higher in Iceland than in neighbouring countries, which may possibly be due to the popularity of the Sagas and traditional rímur poetry, and as has been mentioned before, house readings were an integral part of Icelandic households. People would gather round at the end of the day and work on their handicrafts while someone in the household read aloud from available

texts or recited poetry and rímur.<sup>5</sup> Literature can be said to have been the main pastime in Icelandic homes for centuries, with people reading, listening to and reciting stories, poetry and all sorts of knowledge.

Elementary school is now compulsory from the age of 6-15. Icelandic is the most extensive subject on the curriculum and is divided into reading, the spoken word and articulation, listening and watching, writing, literature, and grammar. The city's elementary schools are active in the field of literature and literacy, and have been increasing this focus. All schools had to put forth a reading policy by the autumn of 2010, a three-year plan on stimulating language development and literacy, in accordance with the City's educational policy.

Literacy today requires more proficiency than before, and at the same time demands are harder. Reykjavík's Department of Education has thus added various plans to its policy; new teaching methods have for instance been developed to improve reading comprehension on different levels, literature is used to improve students' understanding of day-to-day life, and courses are held for teachers on how to ignite students' interest in reading, and how to increase proficiency and general literacy. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, these efforts already seem to have made a difference. The department also currently works on implementing the OECD Framework for International Student Assessment on basic, individual proficiency at the completion of elementary education, including reading skill levels. This is a collaborative project between Reykjavík City and the University of Iceland School of Education that will reach its conclusion in March 2012. The Department of Education also collaborates with the University of Akureyri on a developmental project on the first stages of reading, using children's literature to develop skills in reading, writing, and listening. Schools also cooperate with senior citizens' associations on projects where senior citizens visit schools and read to the children and vice versa. Elementary school students also visit pre-schoolers and read to them, as was mentioned earlier.

School libraries are operated in every elementary school in Reykjavík under the supervision of the Reykjavík School Library Centre, and all students receive training in using the library and working within it on various projects relating to literature. One collaborative project with the Reykjavík School Library Centre and the Reykjavík School Media Centre is the making of videos on literature by intermediate- and secondary-level students.

#### UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Both Icelandic and foreign literature play a significant role in upper secondary school education. Icelandic is taught with great emphasis on the historical, social, and cultural significance of the Icelandic language and literature. The studies are divided into grammar, writing, speaking and articulation, listening and watching, reading and literature. Icelandic literary history is studied, and both old and contemporary works read. Every school at the upper secondary level promotes the literary heritage, and the objective is to introduce pupils to the different genres of Icelandic literature of all times. Many schools apply novel and creative teaching methods, for instance by stressing links to other art forms and pupils get to work with and express literary texts in different ways. Examples of this are for instance an assignment where students compose music and dance

to ancient ballads and then have their fellow students and teacher dance in class; creating comics or graphic stories based on literary texts, or performing dramatized versions of narratives. In this way students can relate to both old and new texts on their own terms while making them memorable for both themselves and their fellow students.

It has been pointed out that the so-called "latter development phase" of language development and reading comprehension, the teenage years, could be used more efficiently, and this is one of the things that Reykjavík as a City of Literature would like to encourage, in collaboration with upper secondary schools and other parties. Reykjavík City Library has strived to reach teenagers and young adults in the recent years, with new programs such as the Poetry Slam, comic workshops, competitions and exhibitions, as well as more traditional library visits, writer talks, readings and literary programs. All of these have proven their value, making the libraries a more popular spot for this age group than before.

#### ICELANDIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Recently, provisions were added to the National Curriculum for Compulsory School on the rights of pupils whose native language is not Icelandic to have instruction in Icelandic as a second language. The objective with teaching Icelandic as a second language is to make pupils capable of participating fully in Icelandic society as bilingual individuals with roots and insight into two or more cultural worlds, thereby enriching Icelandic society. The implementation and nature of such instruction in Icelandic also takes into account international conventions that Iceland is part of, such as the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29, which states that the education of all children should promote the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. The objectives demonstrate a belief that Icelandic as a second language is the key to Icelandic school activity, Icelandic society, active bilingualism and two cultural worlds.<sup>6</sup> Icelandic instruction for adults is also on the rise and is increasingly on offer with both public and private educators.



## ADULT LEARNING

Education is a lifelong project that is not limited to a certain age. People of all ages attend courses whether it is to maintain vocational knowledge, obtain new skills and information, or for the sake of interest. There are several continuous education centres in Reykjavík that offer shorter and longer courses, in addition to studies alongside work. Literary courses are always popular, and as the theatres often produce plays based on Icelandic novels, courses based on reading and scrutinizing novels with regard to the play have been popular.

The University of Iceland runs the Faculty of Continuing Education, which is open to the public and offers diverse courses relating to literature and culture. There are for instance very popular, annual courses on selected, recently published fiction, all kinds of courses relating to medieval literature, both Icelandic and foreign, creative writing workshops, and the aforementioned courses relating to dramatizations of books in collaboration with the city's professional theatres. The Continuing Education University of Iceland is the largest continuous education centre in the country, and its main goal is to be a vehicle for knowledge.

Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur or the Adult Study Groups of Reykjavík is another institution that provides adult education and is operated under the Reykjavík Department of Education. The Adult Study Groups are especially aimed at those with little formal education, offering for instance special education services in reading and writing, elementary education for people over 16 years of age, preparatory education for upper secondary levels, and various shorter and longer educational projects that are mostly in collaboration with other parties. The Adult Study Groups also provide Icelandic lessons to immigrants in collaboration with other institutions. One example of courses taught in the Study Groups is Kvennasmiðjan – Women's Workshop, an 18-month effort aimed at single mothers. One of the things that participants in the workshop did was to write plays under the supervision of writer Audur Jónsdóttir. The plays were performed at The Reykjavík City Theatre, read by actors to a full house.

### Literature trail



**HLJÓMSKÁLAGARDUR** *Hljómskálagardur park, by the city lake Tjörninn, is one of the city's green areas. It is a popular destination for families with children, particularly in the summer time. Halldór Laxness's 1967 novel Brekkukotsannáll (The Fish Can Sing) recounts the story of a young boy growing up with his grandparents on a little turf farm by the lake around 1900, when Reykjavík was only a small town.*

*From The Fish Can Sing [...] to the south of the churchyard in our future capital city of Reykjavík, just where the slope begins to level out at the southern end of the Lake, on the exact spot where Guðmundur Guðmúnsen (the son of old Jón Guðmundsson, the owner of Guðmúnsen's Store) eventually built himself a fine mansion-house – on this patch of ground there once stood a little turf-and-stone cottage with two wooden gables facing east towards the Lake; and this little place was called Brekkukot. This was where my grandfather lived, the late Björn of Brekkukot who sometimes went fishing for lumpfish in springtime; and with him lived the woman who has been closer to me than most other women, even though I knew nothing about her: my grandmother. This little turf cottage was a free and ever-open guest-house for anyone and everyone who had need of shelter. At the time when I was coming into this world, the cottage was crowded with people who would nowadays be called refugees – people who flee their country, people who abandon their native homes and hearths in tears because conditions at home are so desperate that their children cannot survive infancy.*

TRANSLATED BY MAGNUS MAGNUSSON

## Literature and Academics

### THE UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

The University of Iceland is the oldest and largest university in Iceland. It was established in 1911 and was housed in the building that is now home to the Icelandic Parliament – Althingi. In its first year, the university only counted 45 students, one of whom was a woman, but in 2008–2009 there were almost 14,000 students, with women making up more than half of the student body. The university was transferred to its current main building in 1949 and since then more buildings have been added to the university campus, which is just a stone's throw away from the city centre.

In the anniversary year 2011, the university will be visited by a number of foreign specialists, some Nobel laureates among them. The university will also host open web-lectures, visit educational institutions around Iceland, students will organize programs about youth culture, and professors will become guides in various public walking tours, to name but a few events.

The University of Iceland offers undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate studies in five academic schools. It is the only university in Iceland to offer all three degrees in the humanities, and the academic program is diverse and has been broadening further in recent years. The School of Humanities comprises four faculties, two of which relate strongly to literature: the Faculty of Language, Literature and Linguistics, and the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies. These faculties offer studies in Icelandic Literature and Language, Icelandic as a Second Language, Creative Writing, Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, Practical Cultural Exchange, Practical Editorship and Theory of Publication, and Medieval Icelandic Studies, in addition to literature in foreign languages. In 2009, 274 students graduated from the School of Humanities.

Creative Writing is now taught as a major at the University and will be available as a graduate program from autumn 2011. The program is divided into writing workshops and literature courses, and students are given insight into

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*Literature is a source of light to Icelanders in the cold, long nights of winter, whether it is a seven-hundred-year-old novel or a two-day-old pop song. It is an intricate part of the culture and is intended for everyday use, like mouth tobacco or a pair of shoes.*

SVERRIR NORLAND, Creative Writing student at the University of Iceland



*From the University of Iceland.*

Photograph: *Kristján Maack*

the main forms of literature, both as readers and writers. The graduate program spans two years, and students can also take courses in related subjects on the graduate level, such as Journalism, Translation Studies, and Cultural Dissemination. The final thesis is a creative piece of writing, such as a collection of poetry, short stories, articles, a novel, a play, or a film script. The program is still in development, as it is a new addition to the School of Humanities, but has already shown itself to make a difference on the public literary scene in Reykjavík. It conducted a very popular lecture series in 2009–2010 with writers who talked about the creative process and the making of particular works, and these lectures are now also available online. It is safe to say that this new addition is off to a good start in other ways too, as four of the five people awarded the New Voices Grants from the Icelandic Literature Fund in 2010 were Creative Writing students at the University of Iceland.

The School of Humanities operates three research centres: the Centre for Research in the Humanities, the Institute

of Research in Literature and Visual Art, and the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages. All of these centres publish academic material, host various conferences and events, and participate in international collaborations. A few examples of conferences and regular events organized by the School of Humanities are the Annual Conference of the Humanities, the aforementioned lecture series, a conference held in relation to *Ritid* – a journal published by the Centre for Research in the Humanities, and two international conferences on translation and literature in the summer of 2010. A triennial Iceland-Faeroe Islands Academic Summit is also held in turn in Reykjavík and Tórshavn in the Faeroes.

The Centre for Research in the Humanities operates *Míðaldastofa*, which is a collaborative platform for scholars in Medieval Studies working within and outside of the University of Iceland. The Centre also collaborates with the Thórbergur Centre of Culture in South Iceland, which was the birthplace of the writer Thórbergur Thórdarson (see the summary of literary history), and is dedicated to his works.



## THE ÁRNI MAGNÚSSON INSTITUTE FOR ICELANDIC STUDIES

The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies is an independent academic research institute within the University of Iceland answering directly to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.<sup>7</sup> It conducts research on Icelandic Studies and related scholarly topics, especially in the field of Icelandic language and literature, disseminates knowledge in these fields, and preserves and augments the collections within its care. The institute is composed of five divisions, International Outreach, Manuscript Studies, Language Planning, Place Names and Name Studies, Word Studies and Lexicography. Its policy is guided by four ideas: open access, collaboration, research and innovation, and joined effort, which refers to the collaboration of the institute's five divisions. A new house, Hús íslenskra fræða – House of Icelandic Studies, will be built in the near future to house the institute, bringing all its operations finally under one roof, so public educational activities and research can be in one place. The University's Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies will also be housed in the new building.

Among the numerous projects that the institute has a hand in is Icelandic courses for foreigners, and organizing an international summer school in manuscript studies. The manuscript school is operated in collaboration with the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen, the National and University Library of Iceland, and the universities in Zürich in Switzerland, Tübingen in Germany, and Cambridge in England. Icelandic is now taught at about forty universities all over the world, such as the University of Zagreb in Croatia, Charles University in Prague and Waseda University in Japan. The Icelandic State financially supports seventeen of these programs. The institute also offers summer courses in Icelandic at the University of Iceland for pupils from the other Nordic countries, in addition to international summer courses in Icelandic in collaboration with the University's School of Humanities. These courses have now been taught for twenty-three years. Last summer twenty-eight people from twelve countries participated in the course. Icelandic Online I and II are self-instruction courses and the website receives around 600 hits every day (statistics from 2009) from all over the world.

The Árni Magnússon Institute's scholars take part in various international collaborations. They collaborate on research with overseas colleagues, in addition to lecturing at universities abroad. The institute is one of the pillars of Icelandic studies in the world and as such attracts foreign scholars and therefore is a very international research

*"Language is the tool by which we define ourselves" as a wise saying has it.*

*From the settlement of Iceland in the ninth century the nation's love of storytelling - our treasured Sagas and poetry have conveyed a clear expression of our sense of self and our place in the world. The art of the word is therefore the oldest of arts in Iceland and a strong basis for a vibrant modern culture. It is with great pleasure that I declare my support for Reykjavik's application to become a UNESCO City of Literature and look towards a meaningful collaboration between the City of Literature and The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages.*

*I firmly believe that Reykjavik as a City of Literature, dedicated to cultural exchange and the dissemination of ideas between different creative cities, can both inspire and communicate valuable lessons. This is not least drawn from the fact that knowledge of foreign languages for a sparsely-populated nation, with its own unique language and culture, is an absolute necessity. Such knowledge is the key to a greater understanding and a broader vision of a world in which everything and everyone is becoming increasingly interrelated.*

VIGDÍS FINNBOGADÓTTIR, former President of Iceland and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages.

society. In 2009, over 60 foreign guests used the institute's available research facilities for shorter or longer periods of time, and foreign students worked on research and were instructed by the institute's staff. The institute keeps information on scholars working within the field of Icelandic studies and stores it in a databank that is available online. In addition to this, the institute keeps a list of translators working from Icelandic into other languages. It also supervises Icelandic courses at foreign universities and keeps tabs on collaborations between Icelandic scholars and these universities, and this information is also available on the institute's website. Furthermore, the institute administers the Snorri Sturluson Fellowships, which are granted to foreign writers, translators and scholars in the field of Icelandic literature to enable them to stay in Iceland for a period of at least three months, in order to improve their knowledge of the Icelandic language, culture and society.

#### THE VIGDÍS FINNBOGADÓTTIR INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages is a research centre within the University of Iceland. The institute is named for Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland, who was the first woman in the world to be elected the head of state in democratic elections. Vigdís now serves as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages and was awarded an honorary degree from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literature and Linguistics at the University of Iceland in April 2010. The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute is a venue for academic discourse on language, language studies, and cultural studies. Among its projects is investigation of foreign languages from different angles, such as language acquisition, semiotics, translation, grammar and literature, as well as advancing research in translation studies, and developing teaching materials for language learning. The institute hosts conferences and seminars on a regular basis, and hosted for instance the international conference Preserving the Future: Sustainability of Language, Culture and Nature in April 2010 on the occasion of Vigdís's 80th birthday. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, was scheduled to be one of the speakers but Icelandic nature intervened, with volcanic ash from Eyjafjallajökull Glacier grounding flights in Northern Europe for a while, resulting in the cancellation of some of the conference's events. It must be said that this turn of events was in a way appropriate with regard to the conference headline topic – Mother Nature made a memorable display of power, reminding Icelanders and others of our unbreakable bond to her.

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute is currently working towards establishing a World Language Centre. Koichiro Matsuura, former Director General of UNESCO, recommended the initiative and lent the project support on behalf of the organization. The objective is to create an international centre of languages and culture with all available facilities for teaching and research, and for disseminating knowledge of languages and culture. By establishing such a language centre in Iceland, The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute for Foreign Languages wants to encourage language skills and cultural literacy in Iceland, and to call international attention to the value of such an education. The institute also wants to expand knowledge of languages and increase general awareness of the importance of language for the culture of individual language communities, and world culture in general. The World Language Centre will be one of the key partners of Reykjavík as UNESCO City of Literature, if it is granted the title.

#### *The World Language Centre's Vision*

*Iceland's position in the world, at the crossroads of cultures, has always maintained the need for knowing foreign languages and the appreciation of the diversity of world cultures. At the same time Icelanders have always emphasized the preservation of the heritage of their language and literature. We have the vision to build upon the dedicated work of former president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for languages. We want to gather and archive electronic samples of as many as possible of the world's languages and of available cultural resources. We want to create a platform and a forum for academic research and dialogue. The World Language Centre will be located in the heart of Reykjavík, at the centre of the University of Iceland campus. The centre's facilities will consist of a huge database, international conference facilities where scholars and international societies from all around the world can meet and organize their own conferences, a virtual reality space dedicated to scholarly and artistic representations of language research, which will be open to the public. A special honorary lecture hall, dedicated to the first democratically elected female president in the world, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, will be available for international conferences.*

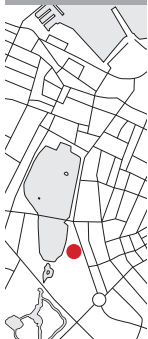
#### THE UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND TRANSLATION CENTRE

The University of Iceland Translation Centre was established in 2000 and is an interdisciplinary research centre within the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages. The University has offered a graduate program in translation studies since 2002, and translation studies courses are also available at the undergraduate level. The Translation Centre conducts research and oversees practical translation projects, and supports education in translation and translation studies, both within and outside the University. The Translation Centre has worked on various projects on multilingual translations, provided consultation and services, and contracted specialized projects in the field of translation. It has for instance worked on projects in collaboration with various companies in different sectors, in addition to collaborating with the University of Iceland and the Nordic Council of Ministers.



*Illuminated tree at Reykjavik Winter Lights Festival.*

#### Literature trail



**HLJÓMSKÁLAGARDUR** *The shaping of Hljómskálagardur park began in 1920 but was not completed until 1954. Since then it has been maintained with almost no alterations. The trees at the south end of the park remind one of a tiny forest, giving the street Bjarkargata (Birch Tree Road) its name. Adalsteinn Ásberg Sigurdsson, poet, musician and children's book writer published the poem "Retur" ("Roots") in his latest children's poetry book in 2009.*

#### Roots

*Trees have roots  
that branch into the ground  
twisting and wriggling  
into the dirt.*

*The sky above them  
the wind sways them  
the rain waters them  
and they soak up the sun.*

*I have roots  
that branch through genera-  
tions  
twisting and turning  
through a family tree*

*The sky above me  
the wind whispers softly  
the rain teases me  
and I'm warmed by the sun.*

TRANSLATED BY ÁGÚSTA  
FLOSADÓTTIR AND THE  
AUTHOR



#### CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Centre for Research on Language, Literacy and Development has been operating under the University of Iceland since 2008. It focuses on research on language development and development of literacy and writing. The centre is a member of the European Research Network on Learning to Write Effectively (ERN-LWE), and one of its main academic consultants is Catherine E. Snow, professor at Harvard University and one of the most esteemed specialists in the field of literacy in the United States. One of the centre's ongoing research projects is a long-term study into self-control, language development and literacy among children aged four to eight, conducted by Dr. Hrafnhildur Ragnarsdóttir, and the results of this study will undoubtedly benefit the development of teaching methods. Preschools and elementary schools in Reykjavík participate in the study. Three elementary schools in Reykjavík also collaborate with the centre on introducing effective pedagogy for teaching reading to the youngest pupils of elementary schools.

#### REYKJAVÍK ACADEMY

Reykjavík is home to an association of independent scholars called the Reykjavík Academy. The association was founded in 1997 and a non-profit institution was established around the Academy in 2006. It offers facilities to numerous scholars, most of whom work within the humanities and social sciences. The Reykjavík Academy has encouraged all sorts of academic collaborations in recent years, and one ongoing project of interest is a series of lectures organized in collaboration with Bifröst University and Icelandic Images of the North (INOR) on images and identities. The Academy is supported by The City of Reykjavík.

*Translation has always been an integral part of Icelandic literary life. Since the Latin alphabet was “translated” into Icelandic, translations have been a major part of writing in the country. Homilies, hymns, church liturgy and secular literature were translated from the beginning, even the Eddic poems are to an extent translations, and Icelanders have followed foreign trends in literature avidly for a thousand years.*

*After the reformation and the early translation of the Bible, several great texts appeared in the language by poets like Homer, Milton and Klopstock and many lesser known authors and this tradition has continued to this day, with many of the best Icelandic authors translating the works of their colleagues; Halldór Laxness translated Voltaire and Hemingway; Guðbergur Bergsson, both Cervantes and Márquez; Ingibjörg Haraldsdóttir, Dostoevsky, and the great translator of the twentieth century, Helgi Hálfdanarson, translated all of Shakespeare’s plays, almost all the Greek tragedies and a number of European classic dramas of the seventeenth century, in addition to collections of European, Chinese and Japanese poetry. Icelandic literature has, therefore, always been closely connected with the literatures of the world and contributed too with some of the most important European medieval works.*

*Translation has also been instrumental in conserving this thousand-year-old literary language. Through translations, Icelanders have been able to keep abreast of current trends in world literature and at the same time been able to enjoy it in their native language, thus giving their own authors a platform to create their own works. It is at the basis of the incredible strength of a literature that has fewer readers than a small city in Europe, and yet publishes more than many large ones.*

GAUTI KRISTMANNSSON, Dr. Phil. and Head of the University of Iceland Translation Centre



## Book Publishing, Bookstores and Media

### BOOK PUBLISHING

It is safe to say that World War II dragged Iceland into the modern world. People flocked to Reykjavík from the countryside, and the city gradually took on a more modern hue. But even if the war eventually brought the country economic prosperity, Reykjavík experienced a shortage of goods and products due to difficult transport between Iceland and the rest of the world during the wartime. An old saying in Iceland maintains that very few things are so bad that they don't bring about something good, and this proved to be the case for the Icelandic literary scene. Because of these shortages, books took on a new role as they became popular gifts, especially at Christmas, and both publishing and bookselling became an important part of the city's economy. In 1950, when the inhabitants of Reykjavík numbered 55,980, the city had twenty-three printing companies, over forty bookshops and twenty publishing houses. Over 1,000 people worked in the industry, or about 4.5 percent of all working people in Reykjavík.<sup>8</sup> This custom of giving a book for Christmas has remained popular, leading Icelandic publishers to focus on autumn for publishing new titles and sales peaking just before Christmas. This arrangement is quite unique to the Icelandic book market and has been given the aforementioned name of the Book Flood, which appropriately implies the mass of titles published in such a short time.

Even though publishing is at a near frenzy around Christmas, there has been a steady increase in recent years in publishing in the spring. The Week of the Book persuades publishers to publish new titles, and the Icelandic Publishers' Association marks the occasion by distributing 1,000 ISK vouchers to every home for buying books, as was mentioned earlier. This year 180 new books were published around this time, and there was a 28 percent increase in book sales from the previous weeks.<sup>9</sup> A considerable increase in paperbacks has also resulted in a shift in the nature of sales: people buy more books for themselves and the sale of books is spread throughout the year.

Nowhere else in the world are as many titles published per capita as in Iceland. According to Statistics Iceland there are five titles published per every 1,000 Icelanders, while similar statistics for the other Nordic countries are 2 to 2.5 per 1,000 inhabitants. The average print run of fiction is 1,000 copies, which would for example equal a million copies in the USA. Even though there are no official statistics about the number of people working in the sector today, it is clear that publishing houses and other parties that publish books are unusually many in Iceland. The Icelandic Publishers' Association currently counts thirty-seven publishing companies, and that has been the situation for several years. That only tells half the story though, because all

*The bookshops and the cafés are venues for launch parties, knitting evenings, readings, art exhibitions, signings and concerts, in collaboration with publishers, writers and others.*



*Northern Lights dancing in the sky above Hallgrímskirkja church. Hringbraut Road cuts off the University of Iceland campus, and the wetlands surrounding it, from the city centre. Photograph: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson*

kinds of companies, associations and individuals venture into publishing each year. The Icelandic Publishers' Association annually publishes the ICPA Annual Book Registry announcing most of forthcoming titles, and distributes it free of charge to every home in the country a few weeks before Christmas. It is worth mentioning that in the 2010 registry, 678 new titles were announced by 127 different publishers, most of which are situated in Reykjavík.

The following chart shows how the numbers of published titles have changed over the past twenty years. It is interesting to see that publishing seems to have held its course in

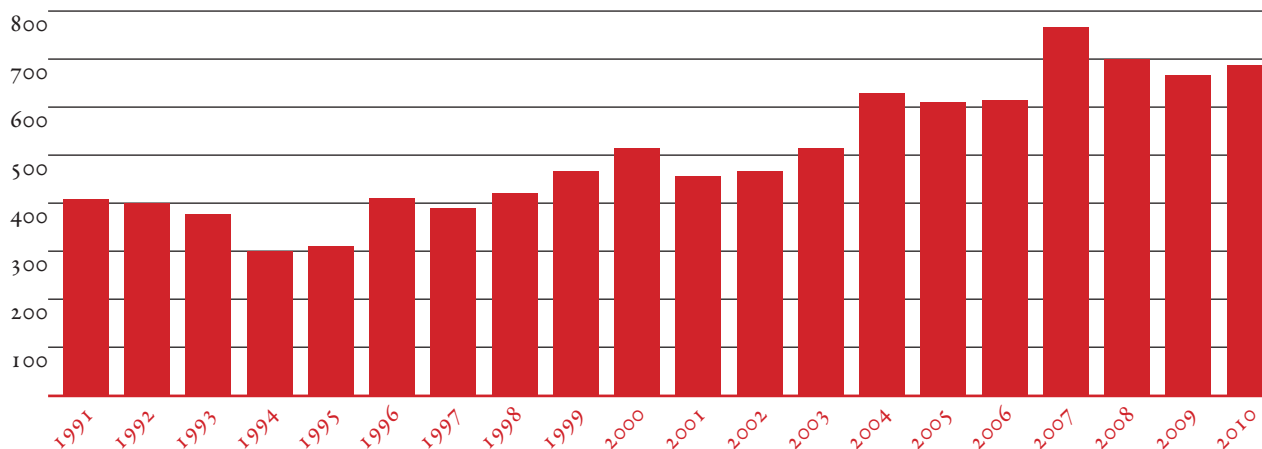
spite of the recession, with numbers only slightly falling in 2008, although not dropping below numbers before the peak year of 2007. The latest figures show that the course is going upwards again.

This development goes hand in hand with turnover figures for the book publishing industry over the past few years. The chart demonstrates how the turnover has been increasing steadily since 2003, reaching a peak in 2007 (32.216.124 EUR). Following the recession in 2008 the turnover goes down slightly from the previous year (3.8 percent), however in 2009 numbers are already on the up again (31.164.249 EUR). This gives cause to be optimistic on behalf of the book industry, as it seems to have a solid basis in the Icelandic economy.

## PUBLISHED BOOK TITLES IN ICELAND 1991–2010

Source: The Icelandic Publishers Association. These figures are based on ICPA Annual Book Registry, counting books that are meant for the public

market. Thus, they do not include all sorts of more specialized material, as well as some books published independently by authors, etc.



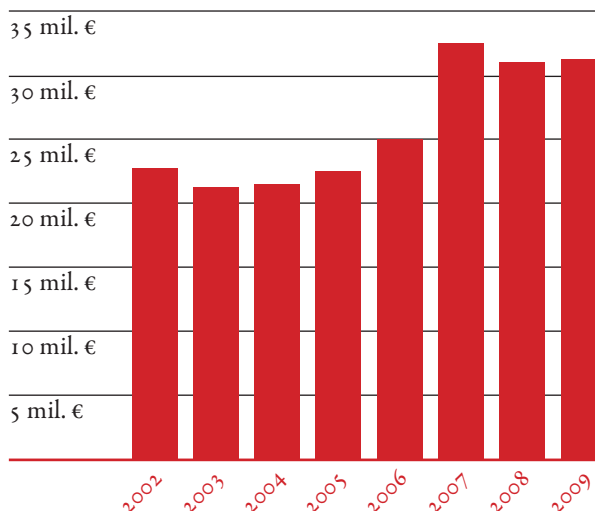
As stated before, the majority of Icelandic publishing houses are situated in Reykjavík, or over 90 percent.<sup>10</sup> The biggest publishing house by far is Forlagid, which has four imprints – Mál og menning, Vaka-Helgafell, JPV and Idunn. Bjartur/Veröld is the second biggest publisher. Smaller publishing houses with diverse publications include Uppheimar, Opna, Ormstunga, Sögur and Salka. Many more publishers also have their home in the capital, including more specialized publishers of grassroots and non-commercial literature like Nýhil and Ókeibæ(!)kur, visual arts and photography publishers such as Crymogea and Útúrdúr, educational and academic literature such as Námsgagnastofnun and University of Iceland Press, children's literature such as Æskan, Edda and Unga ástin mín, and so on. Independent publishing is also quite common in Reykjavík. For further information on publishing houses see appendix.

*According to Statistics Iceland there are five titles published per every 1.000 Icelanders, while similar statistics for the other Nordic countries are 2 to 2.5 per 1.000 inhabitants. The average print run of fiction is 1.000 copies, which would for example equal a million copies in the USA.*

*The Icelandic Publishers' Association market is immensely popular and seems to be unaffected by the economic crisis, actually it's quite the opposite – attendance reached a record high in 2010, the market has tripled in scale these past five years, and sales have never been higher.*

## TURNOVER IN BOOK PUBLISHING 2002–2009

Turnover (without VAT) according to VAT-returns. According to exchange rates 7th Jan. 2011. Source: Statistics Iceland



## BOOKSTORES

Four large bookstores operate in central Reykjavík; Mál & Menning on Laugavegur, Ida in Lækjargata and two Eymundsson stores at Skólavörðustígur and Lækjargata respectively.

The bookstores play an important role in the centre's vibrancy. They mostly sell Icelandic books, but also offer a good selection of books and magazines in English, and some in French, German, Spanish and the Scandinavian languages. Locals regularly visit their bookstores and spend a lot of time there. Books are one of the most popular choices for gifts in Iceland, whether it is for Christmas or other occasions, and Icelandic Sagas and contemporary literature in translations are popular with foreign visitors, in addition to photography books of Icelandic landscapes. These four bookstores also house popular cafés where customers can leaf through books and magazines, and all are open all week until ten o'clock in the evening. The bookshops and the cafés are venues for launch parties, knitting evenings, readings, art exhibitions, signings and concerts, in collaboration with publishers, writers and others. There are also a few smaller bookshops in the city centre; they tend to be more specialized, selling, e.g., exclusively art and design books. The city centre is also home to the largest antique and second-hand bookstore in the country, Bokin (The Book), which opened in 1964 and has become a cultural phenomenon in itself.

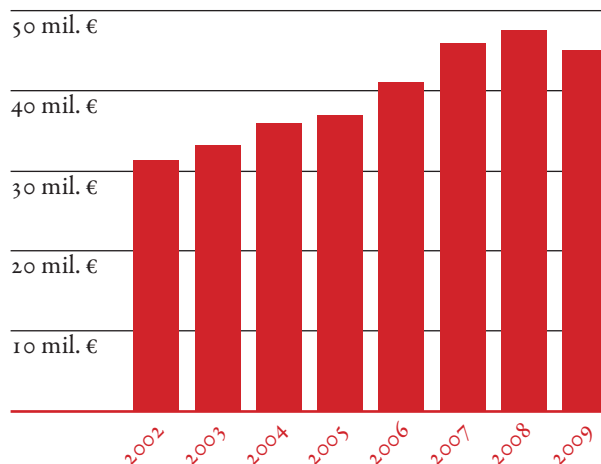
Turnover figures for the years 2001-2009 show that book-sales have consistently been going up, except for 2009 when sales dropped by 5.6 percent from the year before. Turnover figures for 2010 were not yet available at the time of writing. However, according to a survey conducted in January

2011, 74.4 percent of Icelanders received one or more books as a present at Christmas, a higher number than in the previous year.<sup>11</sup>

The Icelandic Publishers' Association organizes a book market that has taken place every year since the end of the 1950s. The market abounds with Icelandic books and translation of every possible genre and type; over 12,000 titles are stacked up high, academic books, children's fiction, novels, biographies, poetry, etc. Both new and old titles are on offer, often with huge discounts, and the market offers a great overview of the Icelandic publishing industry. This market is immensely popular and seems to be unaffected by the economic crisis, actually it's quite the opposite – attendance reached a record high in 2010, the market has tripled in scale these past five years, and sales have never been higher.

## BOOKSALES 2002-2009

Including retail sale of newspapers and stationery. Source: Statistics Iceland



## Literature trail



**HRINGBRAUT** *Hringbraut (Ring Road) is the name of one of the main roads of the city. It borders the city lake, Tjörnin, and on the other side are the University of Iceland campus, the National Museum, National Library and the Nordic House, as well as the Reykjavík airport. Despite the presence of all these buildings, this wetland area is still the home of birds and wild nature, and it is also quite open to the strong winds coming in from the ocean. Linda Vilhjálmsdóttir's poetry often deals with the extremes of Icelandic nature, and she projects a cool image. However, she can also write love poetry that goes straight to the heart, or combine the two as in this poem from 1992.*

## Weather II

*On the first day of the year I had some business in Skerjafjörður. The weather did not occupy my thoughts on my walk across the hillock though I could feel the breeze. Down by the ring road I saw a black cloud hanging over the university and higher in the air glittered purple ice-clouds. On the gravel road across the bog I had begun to smack my lips on the weather. I found it gruff and sneered at it with a few brave curses. I stood immobile in a violent storm when it occurred to me that I would meet my end and be found there stiffened midway between the vanished walls of the Winter Garden and the half-done globular turf-huts. I knew that ahead of me lay the air strip out to sea and I tried to sound like a major poet as I roared against the wind:*

*I love you!*

TRANSLATED BY SIGURDUR A. MAGNÚSSON



## MEDIA

For a long time there was only one radio station in Iceland, the state-run RÚV – the National Broadcasting Service founded in 1930. Broadcasting was off to a slow start, at first the broadcast was only four hours a day, and the first fifty years there was only this one channel, Channel 1. In 1983 RÚV opened the second channel for broadcast, Channel 2, focusing more on entertainment and music while Channel 1 specialized in programs and news. When new broadcasting laws lifted the state's monopoly on radio and television broadcasting, the first privately owned radio station opened in 1986 and soon others followed.

According to law, the National Broadcasting Service must foster the Icelandic language, the country's history and cultural heritage, provide general news services and be a platform for different opinions, in addition to providing diverse material for children. RÚV is the only mass medium that employs a language consultant to instruct staff in correct use of language, and has a language policy. Channel 1 broadcasts more literary programs than any other radio station, and programs dedicated to literature are at least a weekly event. Theatrical performances on radio have a long history and started almost as soon as RÚV began broadcasting, becoming a regular feature by 1937. Radio plays were an important part of Icelandic theatre well into the twentieth century, or until the arrival of television and later film. It was an opportunity to introduce the nation to numerous foreign plays, classic works, and contemporary plays, but Icelandic playwriting for radio didn't really take off until the 1950s and 1960s. The main objectives of RÚV's Radio Theatre is to create a progressive theatre of sound that reflects Icelandic reality in an exciting way and satisfies the audience's curiosity about new international trends, to sustain an interest in classical culture and continuous revaluation of the message it brings to new times. Many of the nation's most prominent writers and promising new talents have lent a hand, and around ten new plays are performed each year.

*One of Reykjavík City's and its partners aspirations with the City of Literature status is for book publishing and literary discussion in media to become more evenly dispersed over the year, and a permanent and constant feature in cultural debate.*

In 1966 RÚV started its first television broadcast, and as before took it slowly, only broadcasting two nights a week, and for many years there was no television on Thursdays nor during the whole month of July. In 1986 the first private television channel, Stöð 2, started broadcasting and since then smaller networks have come and gone, but in the past decade RÚV, and the private stations Stöð 2 and Skjár 1 have been regular features in the country's television landscape. In addition to these three, there are a few local television and radio stations in some parts of the country.

The main television program for literature is *Kiljan* on RÚV. Coverage of literature is rather poor in Icelandic television, and it is the unanimous hope and ambition of those involved in this submission that Reykjavík as a City of Literature could influence and put a pressure on broadcasters to change this.

Three daily newspapers are published in Reykjavík; *Morgunblaðið* and *DV* rely on subscriptions but *Fréttablaðið* is distributed free of charge. In addition, there is the weekly newspaper *Fréttatíminn*, weekly business paper, *Vísir*, and the English language paper *The Reykjavík Grapevine*, that is published once or twice a month. All of these papers feature literary reviews and discussion to some extent.

Several literary magazines are published in Iceland. The oldest publisher in Iceland, *Hid íslenska bókmenntafélag* (founded in 1816) has published the journal *Skírnir* since



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND *The collection of poems preserved in the medieval manuscript Codex Regius (King's Book) is often called the Poetic Edda. The manuscript is part of the collection preserved at the Arni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies at the University of Iceland. The long poem Hávamál (The Words of Odin) largely contains words of wisdom and advice, some of which are still part of common discourse, carrying meaning far beyond the simple words themselves.*

### From Hávamál

*Young was I once and went alone,  
and wandering lost my way;  
when a friend I found I felt me rich:  
man is cheered by man*

TRANSLATED BY LEE M. HOLLANDER

1827. It is dedicated to academic examination of literature and other studies and is published twice a year. *Tímarit Máls & menningar* was first published in 1938 and is a quarterly magazine dedicated to culture and reviews. *Stína* is a magazine on literature and art that is published twice a year; *Börn og menning* is a publication of IBBY in Iceland, dedicated to children's literature and culture; and *Ritid*, a journal published by the Centre for Research in the Humanities, is published three times a year and each edition is dedicated to a certain theme. In addition to the publications above there are academic journals, such as the translators' journal *Jón á Bægisá*, and *Skíma*, a periodical of Icelandic language teachers, just to name a few. The Reykjavík Academy published two series related to literature, *Atvik* and *Íslensk Menning*. These series are both extensive, academic publications; the former introduces ideas and research with translations and original texts in incisive booklets, and the latter discusses various aspects of history and culture. The Institute for Literary Research at the University of Iceland publishes several series in the field of literary study, such as the *Fræðirit Bókmenntafræðistofnunar*, *Studia Islandica* and *Afmalisrit* – dedicated to a selected scholar.

There are several Icelandic websites on Icelandic literature.<sup>12</sup> The publishing house Nýhil has for instance run the web magazine *Tíu þúsund tregawött* ([www.tregawott.net](http://www.tregawott.net)) since 2006, publishing poems and poetry translations, reviews and all sorts of literary discussion. *Rithringur.is* is a grassroots website on creative writing, open to all who want to publish their writing and receive feedback; *Ljod.is* is a similar site focusing on poetry; and *Kistan.is* is a forum for cultural and academic discussion. The Reykjavík City Library operates the *Icelandic Literature* site, as was discussed earlier, and various museums, libraries and institutes have specialized websites on selected writers. Finally there are numerous news and culture websites that feature book blogs and book reviews.

One of Reykjavík City's and its partners aspirations with the City of Literature status is for book publishing and literary discussion in media to become more evenly dispersed over the year, and a permanent and constant feature in cultural debate.

*It should be a matter of utmost importance to the Icelandic nation to ensure optimal, global distribution and circulation of this oldest and most comprehensive part of its cultural heritage.*

From the Icelandic Literature Fund policy



Clockwise from top left: Thor Vilhjálmsón, Gudbergur Bergsson, Vigdís Grímsdóttir and Vilborg Dagbjartsdóttir are among writers who receive Alþingi's Honorary Salary. Photographs: Jóhann Páll Valdimarsson except Vigdís Grímsdóttir by María Guðmundsdóttir.

#### SUPPORTING WRITERS

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture runs the Icelandic Literary Fund, whose role is to support and encourage literary events and incentives in Iceland in addition to promoting Icelandic literature abroad. In accordance with this, the fund sponsors translations of Icelandic literature into foreign languages, and also lends financial support for translation of foreign literature into Icelandic and publications of Icelandic books. One of the fund's roles is to enhance cultural identity that rests on the ability of the native language to prove its use as a powerful communication tool. The fund does not confine itself to supporting conventional forms of literature; rather it also calls for projects where other forms of media are used to promote texts. Innovative efforts are supported by the fund, which annually presents grants to selected writers for new literary works that have few or limited commercial prospects, but undeniable cultural value. Applications for these grants have been rapidly growing in number since they were first presented in 2008. At the time, the fund received nine applications for the five grants, but in 2010 there were thirty nine applicants.

The Icelandic State also fosters writers with stipends from the Writers' Salary Fund, and this year the fund allotted 64 writers grants to engage in their art, from three-month to two-year salaries, making a total of 505 monthly artists' salaries. A committee of professionals reviews the salary

*The Icelandic State also fosters writers with stipends from the Writers' Salary Fund, and this year the fund allotted 64 writers grants to engage in their art, from three-month to two-year salaries, making a total of 505 monthly artists' salaries.*

applications each year, and the salaries are granted on the basis of each writer's career and the proposed works presented with each application. Writers of all genres can apply for the Writers' Salary. Furthermore, parliament bestows the Althingi Honorary Salary to a few established writers, who have in a long career earned respect and esteem. This salary is a lifelong award. The National Broadcasting Service's Writers' Fund also honours writers with an annual grant, and the City of Reykjavík chooses a new Artist Laureate each year, who may be a writer. The National Theatre operates the Prologus Playwright Fund, intended to encourage and support domestic dramatists, and The Reykjavík City Theatre's Playwright Fund chooses a Playwright-in-Residence each year whose work is staged at the end of the year. The Icelandic Centre for Research runs a salary fund for academic writers, whose main role is to facilitate writing of books and works in digital format to enhance Icelandic culture. The salaries are presented annually and span between six months to a full three years. Hagthenkir – Association of Writers of Non-Fiction and Educational Material presents grants for writing, and making of educational and documentary films. Other funds are for instance, the Writers' Library Fund that annually allocates funds to writers, translators, filmmakers and other copy-right holders in accordance with the borrowing of their works in the country's libraries.

There are not many cash prizes in the literary field in Iceland, and the existing few do not allot large sums to writers. The Icelandic Literature Prize is a cash prize, and so is Reykjavík City's Tómas Guðmundsson Poetry Prize as well as The Icelandic Translator's Prize, but the largest cash prizes that Icelanders have a part in are The Nordic Council's Literature Prize and The Nordic Drama Prize administered by the Nordic Theatre Union. The Drama Prize in 2010 will be awarded for a play for children or teenagers, and Áslaug Jónsdóttir is nominated on behalf of Iceland for her play *Gott Kvöld (Good Evening)*, which was staged by the National Theatre of Iceland in 2007.

The City, the State and private parties combine efforts to support and nurture the city's literary scene financially and in various other ways. Reykjavík City for instance lends the Writer's Union the former house of writer Gunnar Gunnarsson for its operations, takes part in the "Writers in Class" project, where writers visit children and teenagers and invite them to entertaining literary programs, and collaborates with the Reykjavík International Literary Festival. The city also support the International Children's Literature Festival and other book-related events, in addition to regular festivals, such as Culture Night, the Winter Lights Festival, and the new Reykjavík Children's Culture Festival, all of which always feature literature. The largest project by far in the literary field that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is currently part of, aside from regular aspects of upper secondary and university educational levels, is the Guest of Honour Frankfurt Book Fair 2011 project, which was covered earlier in this application.

#### Literature trail



**BIRKIMELUR** *The western part of the city is not only the home of the University of Iceland, but mostly a residential neighbourhood with a mixture of condominiums and low-rise apartment buildings. Kristín Steinsdóttir's and Halla Sólveig Þorgeirsdóttir's illustrated children's book Engill í Vesturbænum (An Angel in the Neighbourhood) tells the story of a little boy who has just moved to the neighbourhood with his divorced mother, while his father lives in a different part of town with his new wife. The boy comes across many scary things in his new surroundings, but at the end he finds his own way of dealing with them. The book has won several prizes, both for text and illustrations.*

*From Engill í Vesturbænum One evening when I was brushing my teeth I looked in the mirror. The brush fell into the washbasin, and toothpaste leaked from my mouth. Behind me, I saw the angel. He was tiny now.*

*He sat on the bathroom cabinet, wearing the same white robe as usual.*

*The big wings were outspread. And on his head was the halo...*

*I hardly dared turn around, in case he disappeared, but then I did, super-quick, and he was still there. I carefully went over to the cabinet and put out my hand. The angel held his hands together on his chest, and smiled, with his eyes closed.*

*I carefully lifted him down. He was no bigger than my hand, light, with long golden hair.*

*I took him to Mum, and my hands were shaking when I handed her the angel.*

TRANSLATED BY ANNA YATES





Sigurdur Gudmundsson: *Mountain*, 1980–1982. Photograph, 93 x 115 cm.

## NOTES

- 1 See a more extensive list of conferences and seminars in the event calendar in the appendix
- 2 The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's website, April 2010, <http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/menningarmal/dit/nr/658>
- 3 *Iceland, the e-nation*. Icelandic government policy on the information society 2008–2012. Prime Minister's Office, May 2008
- 4 The National Curriculum for Compulsory School – General section, 1999
- 5 *Iceland – The Republic*, The Central Bank of Iceland, 1996
- 6 *National Curriculum for Compulsory School – Icelandic*, 1999
- 7 The chapter on The Árni Magnússon Institute is based on the Institute's Annual Report 2009
- 8 See Eggert Thór Bernhards-son: *Bókathjód í borg*. Reykjavík. University of Iceland, 1992
- 9 According to Bryndís Loftsdóttir, of Eymundsson Bookstores
- 10 Source: The Icelandic Publishers Association, <http://www.bokatidindi.is/index.php/felagatal>
- 11 Capacent Gallup, January 2011
- 12 See an overview of websites in Appendix



# Looking to The Future







*As a UNESCO City of Literature, Reykjavík would like to emphasize the central position of literature in the city's and nation's cultural life, its historical significance and contemporary value.*

As has been pointed out in this submission, Reykjavík already has a lot to offer as a literary city. The City of Reykjavík and its partners in this bid would like to further reinforce this infrastructure so that literature and writing continue being one of the pillars of creative activity. Emphasis will be on collaboration and innovation, both within the literary field and with other creative sectors. One of the City of Literature's main collaborators would be the new World Language Centre, which The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages intends to open in the near future. Both parties have expressed interest in collaborating and see great opportunities for cooperative ventures. The City of Reykjavík appreciates that the UNESCO City of Literature status not only entails respect and recognition, but also poses a challenge. The challenge is to leverage this status to constantly develop new ways towards the aforementioned goal and to actively participate in international collaborations.

#### CENTRE FOR LITERATURE

One of Reykjavík City's priorities is to see to the foundation of a bricks-and-mortar house of literature, a Centre for Literature, which will be a hub for those engaged in literature-based activity, both within the city and on an international level. The Centre will house offices of the City of Literature and other parties involved in literature, serve as a platform to oversee work in the field of literature in the city and design collaborative projects. It will also have facilities to welcome foreign guests, writers, translators and professionals, as Reykjavík is very interested in participating in the UNESCO Creative Cities exchange. Most of the parties involved in the preparation of this project are already involved in international collaboration and exchange in various undertakings - Icelanders have always ventured abroad for knowledge and experience, as well as invited foreign guests to their shores.

#### READING INCENTIVES

Looking to individual projects, Reykjavík City has a special interest in starting and participating in projects involving reading incentives and creative activity with children and young people. The City already has several such projects up and running, such as the Creative Summer Groups, various Reykjavík City Library programs for children and young adults, creative assignments in pre-schools and elementary schools, and the newly established Reykjavík Children's Culture Festival, but would also like to promote further cooperation between different parties in this area. Programs to encourage reading, such as One City – One Book, are an interesting choice for all age groups, and Reykjavík City Library will lead such a project





Yoko Ono's Imagine Peace Tower at Videy Island with Reykjavik City lights in the distance.

Photograph: Gudlaugur Ottesen Karlsson

#### Literature trail



**HÓLAVALLAGARDUR** *Hólavallagardur cemetery, or the Old Cemetery as it is usually called, is close to the city centre. Many poets and writers are buried there and so is Jón Sigurdsson, the leader of the Icelandic independence movement in the nineteenth century. The country's best known crime writer, Arnaldur Indridason, begins one of his novels in the cemetery, with the discovery of a body in front of Sigurdsson's grave. The novel, Daudarósir (Roses of Death) goes on to recount the investigation of the case, touching on many aspects of Icelandic history and contemporary issues.*

*From Daudarósir The body was lying on the grave of the hero of Iceland's struggle for independence. The hero's plot was girded with a low, wrought-iron fence, but the headstone – a brownish marble pillar – stood three metres tall. A copper shield displaying "President" Jón's profile was attached to the middle of the pillar. She had the impression that the President was looking down on them with disdain. The graveyard staff saw to it that the plot was always neat and decorated with flowers. This was shortly after June 17 and the big wreath that the President places on the grave early each Independence Day had not yet been removed. The girl lay white and naked on a bed of flowers that were starting to wilt. A delicate smell of sour decay hung in the air.*

TRANSLATED BY LINGUA



for the first time in 2012. The City also finds interesting the prospect of developing creative youth projects with other Creative Cities and Cities of Literature in the future.

#### ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Collaboration within the field of digital media is appealing, and with a growing number of Cities of Literature, a possible cooperative effort would be to create a web portal for these cities. Reykjavík City Library runs a literature website and has experience in collaborating with other cities in this sector, and is prepared to share those efforts and collaborate with other Cities of Literature on electronic presentation of writers from the respective cities. Iceland's promotional website for the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2011 can also contribute to this project.

#### INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

As Guest of Honour at the 2011 Frankfurt Book Fair, Iceland is gaining valuable experience in promoting its literature and culture internationally, and Reykjavík as a City of Literature can share this experience and knowledge with other cities. This is a new and fresh project, vast in size, and there is still no end in sight to the opportunities created for Icelandic writers, translators and other professionals within the literary scene. As the hometown of a majority of the nation's writers, and the largest venue of literary life in Iceland, Reykjavík also sees the Frankfurt project as a unique opportunity to promote the city as a creative destination for tourists, and one of Reykjavík's tasks as a City of Literature is to enforce that image. Iceland will also be in focus at Salon du Livre in Paris in March 2011, as one of the Nordic countries. The Reykjavík International Literary Festival is also open to collaborations with festivals in other Cities of Literature and the Creative Cities Network.

Furthermore, Reykjavík City is interested in becoming an International City of Refuge, a sanctuary for writers and

*Reykjavík is an algae-globe in the depths, collects light, without core, like the Sagas, the threads constantly split, entwine again, all by feeling, the streets write themselves, inked roundabouts, stroll through town, talk about freckled words, chiseled sentences, get sucked into the museum, touch the manuscripts, scripts in different writings, preserved away from the sun, deep down, turn up bits of knowledge, carried out in the wind, the asphalt a print-mold, boats full of new books.*

ODDNÝ EIR ÆVARSDÓTTIR, writer (b. 1972)

poets exiled from their own countries. Such a role would be in line with the strong emphasis on human rights that characterizes Icelandic society and is underpinned by Reykjavík City's clear human rights policy. An application has been sent to ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network), and Reykjavík is expected to become a formal member in March 2011. According to this plan, the first writer hosted by the city will be introduced at the Reykjavík International Literature Festival in September 2011.

On a more cheerful note, plans are underway of enforcing "sister-city" ties between Reykjavík and the Moomin Valley, depicted in Tove Jansson's renowned books. The City of Reykjavík will be working on this in cooperation with Moomin World in Naantali in Finland, and Reykjavík City Library and others will initiate literature programs on this occasion, focusing on the ties between Icelandic and foreign children's literature.

#### IN MOTION

Yet another project on the City's drawing board for 2011 is an effort to label literary spots in Reykjavík, and this would be one of the projects to kick-start the official status



**HÓLAVALLAGARDUR** *The old graveyard also plays an important role in Gerdur Kristný's teenage novel Gardurinn (The Garden) from 2009. The girl Eyja has just moved to a new home in an old house next to the churchyard, and before long, strange things start happening in her life. The story takes place in the present, but also reflects on the time of the Spanish Flu, that took a heavy toll in Reykjavík in 1918. Gardurinn is both a suspense novel and a young girl's coming of age story.*

**From Gardurinn** *A shiver ran through me when I looked out the window again and caught sight of something moving in the graveyard. Two women stood looking down at a grave. One looked very old and leaned on a walker, while the other tried to help her put something beside a white wooden cross. Perhaps today was the birthday of someone who was dear to her – or would have been if he or she were alive. Straightening up, the old woman looked directly at my window. I drew back from the window. For all I knew, she could be a ghost herself.*

TRANSLATED BY KENEVA KUNZ



*Vigdís Finnbogadóttir at her 80th birthday celebrations at the University of Iceland in April 2010.*

Photograph: Bjarni Grímsson

of Reykjavík as a UNESCO City of Literature. The labels, which will be in both Icelandic and English, symbolize the significance of literature in the urban landscape and they relate to its history and heritage, and by tracing the steps of writers, stories and poetry around the city, bridges are built between generations and over cultural boundaries. The intent is also to encourage general interest in literature and invite locals and visitors to see the city in a new light.

Another project in the pipeline is an exhibition at the Reykjavík Art Museum of art by international writers in collaboration with Reykjavík as a City of Literature. There is interest in organizing such an event as a travelling exhibition, for instance in collaboration with other UNESCO Cities of Literature. The works on display will be by renowned writers. Possible names are Jorge Luis Borges, Emily Brontë, Kurt Vonnegut, V.S. Naipul, William Heinesen, George Sand, e.e. cummings and many more.

#### IN CONCLUSION

From the outset, Icelanders have looked to their literary heritage, their stories and poetry, where the language has been preserved and developed and the nation's identity forged. It is imperative for Icelanders and other devotees of

Icelandic literature that the art of the word continue to be at the core of the nation's culture.

The City of Reykjavík hopes that it will be granted the opportunity to take on the ambitious task of becoming one of UNESCO's Cities of Literature. As a young city of roughly 200,000 people, that nevertheless boasts a diverse and vibrant cultural life, Reykjavík believes it has a lot to offer other cities in the network. Similarly, Reykjavík is keen to take advantage of the opportunities that come with the designation, learn from others and take part in creating and working towards projects in cooperation with creative people all over the world. Exchanging ideas, fostering communication between writers, translators and professionals, collaboration on electronic media and web portals – these are all projects that Reykjavík City and its partners are looking forward to taking part in. Reykjavík also sees great opportunities in working with other UNESCO Creative Cities, especially in the fields of music, film and design, all of which are budding art forms in Iceland.

It is the hope of the City of Reykjavík and those collaborating with it on this bid, that UNESCO will take Reykjavík's interest with goodwill and lend its support to the important task of safeguarding Icelandic literature and language, while enforcing dynamic international connections.



# Appendix

tók myrkrið að sortna.  
 í þeirri von og vissu að  
 og röðin komin að þeim  
 að g einkum konur, er mjög  
 varpað á beindu hi með brjóst-  
 sjonum  
 (Á því línú nálaði  
 af gæti hafist.  
 í þess vaku  
 s heyrir d gjálfraði vatnið  
 hrok, höfðu þörf fyrir  
 móþróat  
 öðru n var öll vo kemst að því  
 aðeins 15 vínglós, en aftur  
 var að beygja sig. Hann  
 öðlast nok í hugarlaund, lágu

122	Publishers in the Capital Area
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130	Event Calendar
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# Publishing Houses in the Capital Area

Bjartur – Veröld  
*Bræðraborgarstígur 9*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.bjartur.is  
www.verold.is

BF útgáfa – Bókafélagid  
*Grófin 1*  
101 Reykjavík

Codex Publishing  
*University of Iceland*  
*Lögberg*  
*Sæmundargata 8*  
101 Reykjavík

Crymogea  
*Barónsstígur 27*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.crymogea.is

Dimma  
*Skólavörðustígur 27*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.dimma.is

Edda Publishing  
*Síðumúli 28*  
108 Reykjavík  
www.edda.is

Forlagid Publishing  
*Bræðraborgarstígur 7*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.forlagid.is  
Imprints: JPV/Mál og menning/  
Vaka-Helgafell/Forlagid/Idunn

Háskólaútgáfan  
(University of Iceland Press)  
*Dunhagi 18*  
107 Reykjavík  
www.haskolautgafan.hi.is

Hid islenka bókmenntafélag  
*Skeifan 3b*  
108 Reykjavík  
www.hib.is

Hljódbók.is  
Hljóðvinnslan  
*Ármúli 7b*  
108 Reykjavík  
www.hljodbok.is

Hólar  
*Hagasel 14*  
109 Reykjavík  
www.holabok.is

IDNÚ  
*Brautarholt 8*  
105 Reykjavík  
www.idnu.is

Jentas  
*Austurströnd 10*  
170 Seltjarnarnes  
www.jentas.is

Námsgagnastofnun (National  
Centre for Educational Materials)  
*Víkurhvarf 3*  
203 Kópavogur  
www.namsgagnastofnun.is

Nýhil  
c/o Jón Bjarki Magnússon  
*Hringbraut 121*  
107 Reykjavík  
www.nyhil.org

Ókeibæ(!)kur  
*Leifsgata 23*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.okei.is

Opna Publishing  
*Skipholt 50B*  
105 Reykjavík  
www.opna.is

Ormstunga  
*Ránargata 20*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.ormstunga.is

Salka Publishing  
*Skipholt 50C*  
105 Reykjavík  
Imprints: Salka and  
Hörpuútgáfan  
www.salkaforlag.is

Sena  
*Skeifan 17*  
108 Reykjavík  
www.sena.is

Setberg  
*Frejjugata 14*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.setberg.is

Skálholtsútgáfan (National  
Church Publishing)  
*Laugavegur 31*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.skalholtsgafan.is

Skólavefurinn  
*Laugavegur 163A*  
105 Reykjavík  
www.skolavefurinn.is

Skrudda  
*Eyjarslód 9*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.skrudda.is

Steinegg  
*Mosarimi 37*  
112 Reykjavík  
www.steinegg.is

Sögufélag (Historical  
Society of Iceland)  
*Fischersund 3*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.sogufelag.is

Sögur Publishing  
*Vesturgata 19*  
101 Reykjavík  
www.baekur.is

Ugla Publishing  
*Hraunteigur 7*  
105 Reykjavík

Unga ástin mín  
www.ungaastinmin.is

Uppheimar  
*Stórhöfði 24*  
110 Reykjavík  
www.uppheimar.is

Útkall  
*Vesturblið 7*  
105 Reykjavík

Útúrdúr  
*Austurstræti 6*  
101 Reykjavík  
uturdur.blogspot.com

Æskan Publishing  
*Faxafen 5*  
108 Reykjavík  
www.aeskanbok.is

# Literature and Culture in Reykjavík – Websites

## LITERARY AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Association of Independent  
Theatres in Iceland  
[www.leikhopar.is](http://www.leikhopar.is)

The Culture House  
*National Centre for Cultural  
Heritage*  
[www.thjodmenning.is](http://www.thjodmenning.is)

The Federation of  
Icelandic Artists  
[www.bil.is](http://www.bil.is)

Gerduberg Culture Centre  
[www.gerduberg.is](http://www.gerduberg.is)

Gljúfrasteinn  
*House of Halldór Laxness*  
[www.gljufasteinn.is](http://www.gljufasteinn.is)

The Icelandic Association of  
Translators and Interpreters  
[www.thot.is](http://www.thot.is)

The Icelandic Dramatists' Union  
[www.leikskald.is](http://www.leikskald.is)

Icelandic Publishers Association  
[www.bokautgafa.is](http://www.bokautgafa.is)

The Icelandic Literature Fund  
[www.bok.is](http://www.bok.is)

International Theatre  
Festival Reykjavík  
[www.lokal.is](http://www.lokal.is)

National Museum of Iceland  
[www.natmus.is](http://www.natmus.is)

The National Theatre of Iceland  
[www.leikhusid.is](http://www.leikhusid.is)

The Nordic House  
[www.nordice.is](http://www.nordice.is)

The Reykjavík City Theatre  
[www.borgarleikhus.is](http://www.borgarleikhus.is)

Theatre in Iceland  
[www.griman.is](http://www.griman.is)

The Theatre Museum of Iceland  
[www.leikminjasafn.is](http://www.leikminjasafn.is)

Vesturport Theatre Group  
[www.vesturport.com](http://www.vesturport.com)

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir  
Institute of Foreign Languages  
[www.vigdis.hi.is](http://www.vigdis.hi.is)

The Writer's Union of Iceland  
[www.rsi.is](http://www.rsi.is)

## FESTIVALS

International Children's  
Literature Festival  
[www.myrin.is](http://www.myrin.is)

Reykjavík Arts Festival  
[www.listahatid.is](http://www.listahatid.is)

Reykjavík International  
Film Festival  
[www.riff.is](http://www.riff.is)

The Reykjavík International  
Literary Festival  
[www.bokmenntahatid.is](http://www.bokmenntahatid.is)

## EDUCATION AND LIBRARIES

The Árni Magnússon  
Institute for Icelandic Studies  
[www.arnastofnun.is](http://www.arnastofnun.is)

National and University  
Library of Iceland  
[www.landsbokasafn.is](http://www.landsbokasafn.is)

The Reykjavík Academy  
[www.akademia.is](http://www.akademia.is)

Reykjavík City Library  
[www.borgarbokasafn.is](http://www.borgarbokasafn.is)

University of Iceland  
School of Humanities  
[www.hi.is/hugvisindasvid/for-sida\\_hugvisindasvids](http://www.hi.is/hugvisindasvid/for-sida_hugvisindasvids)

## LITERARY WEBSITES

Fabulous Iceland  
*Guest of Honour, Frankfurt  
Book Fair 2011*  
[www.sagenhaftes-island.is](http://www.sagenhaftes-island.is)

Gegnir  
*National Catalogue for  
Libraries in Iceland*  
[www.gegnir.is](http://www.gegnir.is)

Handrit.is  
*Historical Manuscripts*  
[www.handrit.org](http://www.handrit.org)

IBBY Iceland  
*The International Board on Books  
for Young People*  
[www.ibby.is](http://www.ibby.is)

Iceland Consortia for  
Electronic Subscriptions  
[www.hvar.is](http://www.hvar.is)

Icelandic Literature  
*Reykjavík City Library's website  
about contemporary Icelandic fic-  
tion writers*  
[www.bokmenntir.is](http://www.bokmenntir.is)  
[www.literature.is](http://www.literature.is)

Kistan  
*A Culture Web Magazine*  
[www.kistan.is](http://www.kistan.is)

Ljód.is  
*A Poetry Web*  
[www.ljod.is](http://www.ljod.is)

Snara.is  
*Online Dictionary*  
[www.snara.is](http://www.snara.is)

Tíu thúsund tregawött  
*A Poetry Web Magazine*  
[www.tregawott.net](http://www.tregawott.net)

TMM  
*A Literary Web Magazine*  
[www.tmm.is](http://www.tmm.is)

## REYKJAVÍK CITY

The City of Reykjavík  
[www.Reykjavik.is](http://www.Reykjavik.is)

Visit Reykjavík  
*The Official Tourism Website  
of the Reykjavík Capital Area*  
[www.visitReykjavik.is](http://www.visitReykjavik.is)

# Translated Literature

## 2005 – 2010

### Some Examples

#### FICTION FOR ADULTS

2010

- *The Convent*  
PANOS KARNEZIS (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *La Solitudine dei Numeri Primi*  
PAOLO GIORDANO (ITALY)  
Bjartur
- *Ordinary Thunderstorm*  
WILLIAM BOYD (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Sous le Vents de Neptune*  
FRED VARGAS (FRANCE)  
Bjartur
- *The Road*  
CORMAC MCCARTHY (U.S.A.)  
Bjartur
- *Ballad of the Sad Café*  
CARSON MCCULLERS (U.S.A.)  
Bjartur
- *Die Welt von Gestern* (Reissued)  
STEFAN ZWEIG (AUSTRIA)  
Forlagid
- *The Gargoyle*  
ANDREW DAVIDSON (CANADA)  
Jentas
- *The Blue Notebook*  
JAMES A. LEVINE (U.S.A.)  
JPV
- *Mornings in Jenine*  
SUSAN ABULHAWA  
(U.S.A. / PALESTINE)  
JPV
- *Het Diner*  
HERMAN KOCH (HOLLAND)  
JPV
- *Six Suspects*  
VIKAS SWARUP (INDIA)  
JPV
- *Born Under a Million Shadows*  
ANDREA BUSFIELD (U.K.)  
JPV
- *Divina Commedia*  
DANTE ALIGHIERI (ITALY)  
Mál og menning
- *Arsenikktårnet*  
ANNE B. RAGDE (NORWAY)  
Mál og menning
- *Puhdistus*  
SOFI OKSANEN (FINLAND)  
Mál og menning
- *Invandrarna*  
VILHELM MOBERG (SWEDEN)  
Salka
- *Busters Öron*  
MARIA ERNESTAM (SWEDEN)  
Salka
- *Silas Marner*  
GEORGE ELIOT (U.K.)  
Ugla
- *Kayıp Gül*  
ZERDAR ÖZKAN (TURKEY)  
Ugla
- *The Jungle Book*  
(A new translation)  
RUDYARD KIPLING (U.K.)  
Uppheimar
- *Vintergata*  
KJELL ESPMARK (SWEDEN)  
Uppheimar
- *King Lear* (A new translation)  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (U.K.)  
Vaka-Helgafell
- *Schweigeminute*  
SIGFRIED LENZ (GERMANY)  
Æskan
- 2009
- *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*  
MARY ANN SHAFFER (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *The Other Hand*  
CHRIS CLEAVE (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *De Niro's Game*  
RAWI HAGE (CANADA)  
Bjartur
- *Shikagu*  
Alaa Al  
Aswany (Egypt)  
Bjartur
- *Laura y Julio*  
JUAN JOSÉ MILLÁS (SPAIN)  
Bjartur
- *Die Therapi*  
SEBASTIAN FITZEK  
(GERMANY)  
Bjartur
- *Feuchtgebiete*  
Charlotte Roche (Germany)  
Bjartur
- *Frankenstein* (Reissued)  
MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT  
SHELLEY (U.K.)  
Forlagid
- *Fuglane*  
TARJEI VESAAS (NORWAY)  
Forlagid
- *Master i Margarita* (Reissued)  
MIKHAIL BÚLGAKOV  
(RUSSIA)  
Forlagid
- *Moby Dick* (Reissued)  
HERMAN MELVILLE (U.S.A.)  
Forlagid
- *Der Vorleser* (Reissued)  
BERNHARD SCHLINK  
(GERMANY)  
Forlagid
- *The White Tiger*  
ARAVIND ADIGA (INDIA)  
JPV
- *La Catedral del Mar*  
ILDEFONSO FALCONES  
(SPAIN)  
JPV
- *Frida*  
BÁRBARA MUJICA (U.S.A.)  
JPV
- *The Book Thief*  
MARKUS ZUSAK  
(AUSTRALIA)  
JPV
- *Oliver Twist* (Reissued)  
CHARLES DICKENS (U.K.)  
JPV
- *Het Huis van de Moskee*  
KADER ABDOLAH  
(IRAN / HOLLAND)  
JPV
- *A collection of Portuguese Poetry from 1900-2008*  
VARIOUS AUTHORS  
(PORTUGAL)  
JPV
- *L'attendant*  
YASMINA KHADRA (FRANCE)  
JPV
- *Ma Vie Avec Mozart*  
ERIC-EMMANUEL SCHMITT  
(FRANCE)  
Lafleur Publishing
- *El Juego del Ángel*  
CARLOS RUIZ ZAFÓN (SPAIN)  
Mál og menning
- *Metamorphoses*  
OVIDIUS (ROMAN LIT)  
Mál og menning
- *Caitani Mutharabaini*  
NGUGI WA THIONG'O  
(KENYA)  
Múltikúltí



- *La Nuit*  
ELIE WIESEL  
(U.S.A. / ROMANIA)  
Ugla
- *L'étranger*  
ALBERT CAMUS (FRANCE)  
University of Iceland Press
- *Short Stories from Cuba*  
VARIOUS FEMALE WRITERS  
(CUBA)  
University of Iceland Press
- *Målarens Döttrar*  
ANNA-KARIN PALM  
(SWEDEN)  
Uppheimar
- *Tuntematon Sotilas*  
VÄINO LINNA (FINLAND)  
Uppheimar
- 2008
- *City of Thiefs*  
DAVID BENIOFF (U.S.A.)  
Bjartur
- *Ludmila's Broken English*  
D.B.C. PIERRE (AUSTRALIA)  
Bjartur
- *On Chesil Beach*  
IAN MCEWAN (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Half of a Yellow Sun*  
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI  
ADICHIE (NIGERIA)  
Bjartur
- *Mister Pip*  
LLOYD JONES  
(NEW ZEALAND)  
Bjartur
- *What is the What*  
DAVE EGGERS (U.S.A. / SUDAN)  
Bjartur
- *Como dio Comanda*  
NICCOLÓ AMMANITI (ITALY)  
Bjartur
- *Les Âmes Grises*  
PHILIPPE CLAUDEL (FRANCE)  
Bjartur
- *Briefan der Vater*  
FRANZ KAFKA  
(CZECH REPUBLIC)  
Forlagid
- *Prestúpslenje í Nakazanije*  
(Reissued)  
FJODOR DOSTOJEVSKÍ  
(RUSSIA)  
Forlagid
- *Midnight Children* (Reissued)  
SALMAN RUSHDIE (U.K.)  
Forlagid
- *A collection of Chinese Prose*  
VARIOUS AUTHORS (CHINA)  
JPV
- *The Book Thief*  
MARKUS ZUSAK  
(AUSTRALIA)  
JPV
- *The Diary of a Good Neighbour*  
(Reissued)  
DORIS LESSING (U.K.)  
JPV
- *Benim Adim Kirmizi*  
ORHAN PAMUK (TURKEY)  
Mál og menning
- *On the Road* (Reissued)  
JACK KEROUAC (U.S.A.)  
Mál og menning
- *El Corazón de Voltaire*  
LUIS LÓPEZ NIEVES  
(PUERTO RICO)  
Mál og menning
- *Salmon Fishing in Yemen*  
PAUL TORDAY (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *La Jeune Fille et la Cigarette*  
BENOIT DUTEURTRE  
(FRANCE)  
Skrudda
- *The Great Gatsby* (Reissued)  
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD  
(U.S.A.)  
Ugla
- *Short Stories from Cuba, Puerto Rica and the Dominican Republic*
- VARIOUS WRITERS (CUBA, PUERTO RICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)  
University of Iceland Press
- *La Héronniere*  
LISE TREMBLEY (CANADA)  
University of Iceland Press
- *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*  
JOHN BOYNE (IRELAND)  
Veröld
- 2007
- *La Mujer de mi Vida*  
CARLA GUELFENBEIN  
(CHILE)  
Bjartur
- *Hotel Borg*  
NICOLA LECCA (ITALY)  
Bjartur
- *L'marat Ya'qubyan*  
ALAA AL ASWANY (EGYPT)  
Bjartur
- *Rani Jadi, za Decu i Osetljive*  
DANILO KIS (SERBIA)  
Bjartur
- *Doppler*  
ERLEND LOE (NORWAY)  
Bjartur
- *Motherless Brooklyn*  
JONATHAN LETHEM (U.S.A.)  
Bjartur
- *Die Vermessung*  
DANIEL KEHLMANN  
(GERMANY)  
Bjartur
- *Flying at Night*  
TED KOOSER (U.S.A.)  
Brú
- *A Collection of Poetry*  
JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ  
(SPAIN)  
Brú
- *A Collection of Poetry*  
XAVIER GRALL (FRANCE)  
GB útgáfa
- *Ishi No Raieki*  
HIKARU OKUIZUMI (JAPAN)  
GB útgáfa
- *Short Story Collection*  
ÍVAN TÚRGENEV (RUSSIA)  
Hávallaútgáfan
- *Sharp Objects*  
GILLIAN FLYNN (U.S.A.)  
Jentas
- *Zert*  
MILAN KUNDERA  
(CZECH REPUBLIC)  
JPV
- *In the Country of Men*  
HISHAM MATAR (LIBYA)  
JPV
- *A Thousand Splendid Suns*  
HOSSEINI KHALED  
(U.S.A. / AFGANISTAN)  
JPV
- *Q and A*  
VIKAS SWARUP (INDIA)  
JPV
- *De Tweeling*  
TESSA DE LOO (HOLLAND)  
JPV
- *La Classe de Neige*  
EMMANUEL CARRÉRE  
(FRANCE)  
JPV
- *The Saffron Kitchen*  
YASMIN CROWTHER (U.K.)  
JPV
- *Vios Kai Politeia tou Alexe Zormpa*  
NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS  
(GREECE)  
Leshús
- *Hundehoved*  
MORTEN RAMSLAND  
(DENMARK)  
Mál og menning
- *The Red Badge of Courage*  
STEPHEN CRANE (U.S.A.)  
Ugla

- *Svermere*  
KNUT HAMSUN (NORWAY)  
Uppheimar
- *Wie der Soldat das Grammophon repariert*  
SASA STANISIC (BOSNIA)  
Veröld
- *Im Krebsgang*  
GÜNTER GRASS (GERMANY)  
Veröld
- 2006
- *The Brooklyn Follies*  
PAUL AUSTER (U.S.A.)  
Bjartur
- *Saturday*  
IAN MCEWAN (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Wuthering Heights*  
(A new translation)  
EMILY BRONTË (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Crímenes Imperceptibles*  
GUILLERMO MARTÍNEZ  
(ARGENTINA)  
Bjartur
- *Hebi mi Piasu*  
HITOMI KANEHARA (JAPAN)  
Bjartur
- *Father Said*  
HAL SIROWITZ (U.S.A.)  
Dimma
- *Thérèse Desqueyroux*  
FRANÇOIS MAURIAC  
(FRANCE)  
Hávallaútgáfan
- *Mirgorod*  
NIKOLAJ GOGOL (RUSSIA)  
Hávallaútgáfan
- *The Plot Against America*  
PHILIP ROTH (U.S.A.)  
Hólar
- *El Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (Reissued)  
MIGUEL DE CERVANTES  
(SPAIN)  
JPV
- *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*  
MARY SHELLEY (U.K.)  
JPV
- *O Zahir*  
PAULO COELHO (BRAZIL)  
JPV
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (Reissued)  
MARK HADDON (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Nostromo*  
JOSEPH CONRAD (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Pride and Prejudice* (Reissued)  
JANE AUSTEN (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Memoria de mis Putas Tristes*  
GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ  
(COLUMBIA)  
Mál og menning
- *Militärmusik*  
WLADIMIR KAMINER  
(GERMANY)  
Mál og menning
- *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*  
MARINA LEWYCKA (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Zwischen Winter und Winter*  
MANFRED PETER HEIN  
(GERMANY)  
University of Iceland Press
- *Skråninga*  
CARL FRODE TILLER  
(NORWAY)  
Salka
- *Omerta*  
MARIO PUZO (U.S.A.)  
Skjaldborg
- *My Sister's Keeper*  
JODI PICAULT (U.S.A.)  
Skrudda
- *The Time Traveller's Wife*  
AUDREY NIFFENEGGER  
(U.S.A.)  
Stílbrot
- *The Mayor of Casterbridge*  
THOMAS HARDY (U.K.)  
Ugla
- *An Unfortunate Woman*  
RICHARD BRAUTIGAN  
(U.S.A.)  
Uppheimar
- 2005
- *Asyl*  
LIZA MARKLUND (SWEDEN)  
ARI
- *Schachnovelle* (Reissued)  
STEFAN ZWEIG (AUSTRIA)  
Bjartur
- *Nove Noites*  
BERNARDO CARVALHO  
(PORTUGAL)  
Bjartur
- *Robert des Noms Propres*  
AMÉLIE NOTHOMB  
(BELGIUM)  
Bjartur
- *Out*  
NATSUO KIRINO (JAPAN)  
Bjartur
- *The Penelopiad*  
MARGARET ATWOOD  
(CANADA)  
Bjartur
- *Boyhood*  
J.M. COETZEE  
(SOUTH-AFRICA)  
Bjartur
- *Smert Postoronnego*  
ANDREJ KÚRKOV (RUSSIA)  
Bjartur
- *Pars Vite et Reviens Tard*  
FRED VARGAS (FRANCE)  
Bjartur
- *The People's Act of Love*  
JAMES MEEK (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Never Let me Go*  
KAZUO ISHIGURO (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Beton*  
THOMAS BERNHARD  
(AUSTRIA)  
Bjartur
- *Soldados de Salamia*  
JAVIER CERCAS (SPAIN)  
Bjartur
- *Der Tod in Venedig*  
THOMAS MANN (GERMANY)  
Hávallaútgáfan
- *O Alquimista*  
PAULO COELHO (BRAZIL)  
JPV
- *The Kite Runner*  
KHALEID HOSSEINI  
(U.S.A./AFGANISTAN)  
JPV
- *Zivot Je Jinde/La Vie est ailleurs*  
MILAN KUNDERA  
(FRANCE/CZECH REPUBLIC)  
JPV
- *Sombrero Fallout*  
RICHARD BRAUTIGAN  
(U.S.A.)  
Lafleur Publishing
- *Die Blechtrommel* (Reissued)  
GÜNTER GRASS (GERMANY)  
Mál og menning
- *La Sombra del Viento*  
CARLOS RUIZ ZAFÓN (SPAIN)  
Mál og menning
- *A Gyertyák Csonkig Égnei*  
SÁNDOR MÁRAL (HUNGARY)  
Mál og menning
- *Leviáfan*  
BORIS AKÚNIN (RUSSIA)  
Mál og menning
- *Juoksuhaudantie*  
KARI HOTAKAINEN  
(FINLAND)  
Mál og menning
- *Alturas de Machu Picchu*  
PABLO NERUDA (CHILE)  
Proxima

- *Bitter Grounds*  
SANDRA BENÍTEZ  
(U.S.A./EL SALVADOR)  
Salka
  - *Fleshmarket Close*  
IAN RANKIN (U.K.)  
Skrudda
  - *Poetry collection*  
PO CHÜ-I (CHINA)  
Uppheimar
  - *Tuck Everlasting*  
NATALIE BABBITT (U.S.A.)  
Uppheimar
  - *The Family Way*  
TONY PARSONS (U.K.)  
Vaka-Helgafell
  - *Kronprinsessen*  
HANNE VIBEKE-HOLST  
(DENMARK)  
Vaka-Helgafell
- CHILDREN'S LITERATURE  
2010
- *Tatu ja Patu*  
AINO HAVUKAINEN, SAMI  
TOIVONEN (FINLAND)  
Bjartur
  - *Werewolf Versus Dragon*  
MATTHEW MORGAN, DAVID  
SINDAN, GUY MCDONALD  
(U.K.)  
Bjartur
  - *Vampireology*  
NICKY RAVEN (U.K.)  
Bjartur
  - *Bert och Ryska Invasionen*  
(Series translated)  
SÖREN OLSSON (SWEDEN)  
Bifröst
  - *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*  
L. FRANK BAUM (U.S.A.)  
Edda
  - *Ulven er Lös* (Reissued)  
PETER MADSEN, HANS  
RANCKE-MADSEN  
(DENMARK)  
Idunn
  - *Artemis Fowl* (Series translated)  
EOIN COLFER (IRELAND)  
JPV
  - *Kiss*  
JACQUELINE WILSON (U.K.)  
JPV
  - *The Magician* (Nicholas Flamel  
Series translated)  
MICHAEL SCOTT (IRELAND)  
JPV
  - *The Cockerel, the Mouse and the  
Little Red Hen*  
JESS STOCKHAM (U.K.)  
Kjölur
  - *A Short Story Collection for  
Teenagers*  
VARIOUS AUTHORS FROM  
DENMARK, FINLAND, NOR-  
WAY, SWEDEN, GREENLAND,  
FAROES, SAMI-AREA  
Mál og menning
  - *Le Petit Prince* (Reissued)  
ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY  
(FRANCE)  
Mál og menning
  - *Picture Atlas*  
ANDREA PINNINGTON (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
  - *Kometen Kommer – Moomin*  
(Reissued)  
TOVE JANSSON (FINLAND)  
Mál og menning
  - *A Visit from a Turtle* (Reissued)  
GENE DEITCH, VRATISLAV  
HLAVATY (U.S.A./CZECK  
REPUBLIC)  
ÓkeiBæ(!)kur
  - *Duck Learns to Swim*  
GLENN JOHNSTONE (U.K.)  
Setberg
  - *Where's the Dragon?*  
JASON HOOK (U.K.)  
Skjaldborg
  - *Cuddle Me Happy*  
JULIE SYKES (U.K.)  
Steinegg
  - *What's that Noise, Little Mouse?*  
STEPHANIE STANSBIE (U.K.)  
Steinegg
  - *Dirty Bertie*  
DAVID ROBERTS (U.K.)  
Veröld
  - *Paddington at the Carnival*  
MICHAEL BOND (U.K.)  
Æskan
  - 2009
  - *Het Boek van alle Dingen*  
GUUS KUIJER (HOLLAND)  
Barnabókaútgáfan
  - *Lee Raven Boy Thief*  
ZIZOU CORDER (U.K.)  
Bjartur
  - *The House at Pooh Corner*  
A. A. MILNE (U.K.)  
Edda
  - *Return to the Hundred Acre  
Wood*  
A. A. MILNE (U.K.)  
Edda
  - *Katten Jaum*  
GUSTAV SANDGREN  
(SWEDEN)  
Hljóðbók.is
  - *Effraim Gråsparv*  
LARS ÅKE LUNDBERG  
(SWEDEN)  
Skálholtsútgáfan
  - *Book of Ocean Creatures*  
NICHOLAS HARRIS (U.K.)  
Sögur
  - *Don't be Afraid of the Dark,  
Little Bear*  
NORBERT LANDA (U.K.)  
Steinegg
  - *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*  
JEFF KINNEY (U.S.A.)  
Tindur
  - *Temeraire* (Series translated)  
NAOMI NOVIK (U.S.A.)  
Tindur
  - *A Christmas Carol* (Reissued)  
CHARLES DICKENS (U.K.)  
Ugla
  - *Les Fades end Parlem de  
l'autoestima*  
ROSA M. CURTO  
(CATALONIA)  
Unga ástin mín
  - *Big and Busy Body*  
ROGER PRIDDY (U.K.)  
Unga ástin mín
  - *Sovay*  
CELIA REED (U.K.)  
Uppheimar
  - *Tillbaka till Pompei*  
KIM M. KIMSELIUS (SWEDEN)  
Urdur
  - 2008
  - *Tunnels*  
RODERICK GORDON,  
BRIAN WILLIAMS (U.K.)  
Bjartur
  - *Titntenberz*  
CORNELIA FUNKE  
(GERMANY)  
Bjartur
  - *C'est Moi le Plus Beau*  
MARIO RAMOS (FRANCE)  
Bjartur
  - *Winnie-the-Pooh*  
A. A. MILNE (U.K.)  
Edda
  - *Grimm Fairy Tales* (Reissued)  
(GERMANY)  
Fjölvi
  - *Twilight* (Series translated)  
STEPHANIE MEYER (U.S.A.)  
JPV
  - *Extreme Dinosaurs*  
ROBERT MASH,  
STUART MARTIN (U.K.)  
JPV
  - *En Halv Tusenlapp*  
ULF NILSSON (SWEDEN)  
Mál og menning



- *Doktor Proktor*  
JO NESBÖ (NORWAY)  
Mál og menning
- *Den Døde Talar*  
ULF NILSSON (SWEDEN)  
Mál og menning
- *Gallop*  
*Rufur Butler Seder (U.S.A.)*  
Salka
- *Gå Aldrig fra Meg*  
IRMA LAURIDSEN  
(DENMARK)  
Skjaldborg
- *Linás Kvällbok*  
EMMA HAMBERG (SWEDEN)  
Skjaldborg
- *Wonders of the Natural World*  
DAVID BURNIE (U.K.)  
Skjaldborg
- *Every Day Ancient*  
NEIL GRANT (AUSTRALIA)  
Skjaldborg
- *A Giant Problem*  
(Series translated)  
TONY DITERLIZZI,  
HOLLY BLAKE (U.S.A.)  
Skrudda
- *The Amulet of Samarkand*  
(Series translated)  
JONATHAN STROUD (U.K.)  
Ugla
- *Pollyanna* (Reissued)  
ELEANOR H. PORTER (U.S.A.)  
Ugla
- *Milly, Molly* (Series translated)  
GILL PITTAR, CHRIS  
MORRELL (NEW ZEALAND)  
Útkall
- *Arcta, the Mountain Giant*  
ADAM BLADE (U.K.)  
Æskan
- *The Black Cauldron*  
(Series translated)  
LLOYD ALEXANDER (U.S.A.)  
Æskan
- *Ottoline and the Yellow Cat*  
CHRIS RIDDELL (U.K.)  
Æskan
- *Life in Rome Arcta*  
(Series translated)  
ADAM BLADE (U.K.)  
Æskan
- 2007
- *Albert* (Series translated)  
LANI YAMAMOTO (U.S.A.)  
Bjartur
- *Harry Potter and the Deathly  
Hallows* (Series translated)  
J.K. ROWLING (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Pirateology*  
DUGALD STEER (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *How the Ladies Stopped  
the Wind*  
BRUCE MCMILLAN (U.S.A.)  
Eplacyja
- *L'enfants des Étoiles*  
JEAN VAN HAMME (BELGIUM)  
Fjölvi
- *Aaricia*  
JEAN VAN HAMME (BELGIUM)  
Fjölvi
- *Ben und Lena im Kindergarten*  
MIRJAN PRESSLER  
(GERMANY)  
Fjölvi
- *Dansar Elias? Nejl*  
KATARINA KIERI (SWEDEN)  
Fjölvi
- *Skammerkrigen*  
(Series translated)  
LENE KAABERBØL  
(DENMARK)  
Jentas
- *The Wish List*  
EOIN COLFER (IRELAND)  
JPV
- *Charlotte's Web* (Reissued)  
E.B. WHITE (U.S.A.)  
Mál og menning
- *Pirates*  
JOHN MATTHEWS (UK)  
JPV
- *Emil i Lönneberga* (Reissued)  
ASTRID LINDGREN (SWEDEN)  
Mál og menning
- *Northern Lights*  
(Series translated)  
PHILIP PULLMAN (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Ein hundur, ein ketta og ein mús*  
BÁRDUR OSKARSSON  
(FAROES)  
Mál og menning
- *Pippi Långstrump – all the  
stories in one book*  
ASTRID LINDGREN (SWEDEN)  
Mál og menning
- *Kleine Leon* (Series translated)  
LINNE BIE (HOLLAND)  
Mál og menning
- *Så Blev Jag Till*  
KATERINA JANOUCH, MERV  
LINDMAN (SWEDEN)  
Mál og menning
- *Journey to the Center of the  
Earth* (Comic edition)  
JULES VERNE/FIONA MCDON-  
ALD, PENKO GELEV (FRANCE)  
Skrudda
- *Everyday Life of the Aztecs, Incas  
& Maya*  
NEIL MORRIS (U.K.)  
Skjaldborg
- *Monkeys*  
TOM JACKSON (U.K.)  
Skjaldborg
- *Everyday Life in Prehistory*  
NEIL MORRIS (U.K.)  
Skjaldborg
- *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*  
(Comic edition)  
CHARLES DICKENS/JOHN  
MALAM, PENKO GELEV,  
SOTIR GELEV (U.K.)  
Skrudda
- *Skulduggery Pleasant*  
(Series translated)  
DEREK LANDY (IRELAND)  
Skrudda
- *The Pirate Captain Logbook*  
SUE UNSTEAD (U.K.)  
Steinegg
- *Mule School*  
JULIA RAWLINSON (U.K.)  
Steinegg
- *Big Bear, Little Bear*  
DAVID BEDFORD,  
JANE CHAPMAN (U.K.)  
Steinegg
- *Pretties* (Series translated)  
SCOTT WESTERFELD (U.S.A.)  
Tindur
- *Raven's Gate* (Series translated)  
ANTHONY HOROWITZ (U.K.)  
Uppheimar
- *Sorceress*  
CELIA REES (U.K.)  
Uppheimar
- *Runemarks*  
JOANNE HARRIS (U.S.A.)  
Uppheimar
- *Taynikma* (Series translated)  
JAN KJÆR, MERLIN P. MANN  
(DENMARK)  
Vaka-Helgafell
- *Dragon's Fire* (Series translated)  
JANE JOHNSON (U.K.)  
Æskan
- *Ferno – the Fire Dragon*  
(Series translated)  
ADAM BLADE (U.K.)  
Æskan

2006

- *Dragonology*  
ERNEST DRAKE (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Molly Moon* (Series translated)  
GEORGIA BYNG (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *Slangens Gave*  
LENE KAABERBÖL  
(DENMARK)  
Jentas
- *Sunwing*  
KENNETH OPPEL (CANADA)  
Græna húsid
- *Shadowmancher*  
G.P. TAYLOR (U.K.)  
Hljóðbók.is
- *Princess in the Spotlight*  
(Series translated)  
MEG CABOT (U.S.A.)  
JPV
- *Barbapapa* (Part of series  
reissued)  
ANNETTE TISON, TALUS  
TAYLOR (FRANCE)  
JPV
- *Captain Underpants*  
(Series translated)  
DAV PILKEY (U.S.A.)  
JPV
- *Stormbreaker*  
ANTHONY HOROWITZ (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Harry the Wolf*  
DANIELA DE LUCA,  
VICKY EGAN (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *El Reino del Dragón de Oro*  
ISABEL ALLENDE (CHILE)  
Mál og menning
- *Max und Moritz* (Reissued)  
WILHELM BUSCH (GERMANY)  
Minningasjóður K.E.

- *Hjärtat Mitt*  
DAN HÖJER (SWEDEN)  
Skjaldborg
- *One Winter's Day*  
M. CHRISTINA BUTLER (U.K.)  
Steinegg
- *Spirit Walker* (Series translated)  
MICHELLE PAVER (U.K.)  
Sögur
- *Witch Child*  
CELIA REES (U.K.)  
Uppheimar
- *Terrible Times Eddie Dickens*  
PHILIP ARDAGH (U.K.)  
Uppheimar

2005

- *Lion Boy* (Series translated)  
ZIZOU CORDER (U.K.)  
Bjartur
- *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Part  
of series reissued)  
C.S. LEWIS (U.K.)  
Fjölvi
- *Tintin* (Part of series reissued)  
HERGÉ (BELGIUM)  
Fjölvi
- *Silverwing*  
KENNETH OPPEL (CANADA)  
Græna húsid
- *Appelsinpiken*  
JOSTEIN GAARDER (NORWAY)  
Mál og menning
- *Djur*  
TOVE APPELGREN (FINLAND)  
Mál og menning
- *Alfons och Hemlige Mållgan*  
GUNILLA BERGSTRÖM  
(SWEDEN)  
Mál og menning

- *Charlie and the Chocolate  
Factory* (Reissued)  
ROALD DAHL (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Stravaganza* (Series translated)  
MARY HOFFMAN (U.K.)  
Mál og menning
- *Omdat ik Zoveel van je Hou*  
GUIDO VAN GENECHTEN  
(BELGIUM)  
Mál og menning
- *The Miserable Mill*  
(Series translated)  
LEMONY SNICKETT (U.S.A.)  
Mál og menning
- *We All Went on Safari*  
LAURIE KREBS (U.S.A.)  
Mál og menning
- *The Akhenaten Adventure*  
(Series translated)  
P.B. KERR (U.K.)  
Veröld
- *Chasing Vermeer*  
BLUE BALLIET (U.S.A.)  
JPV
- *Eragon*  
(Series translated)  
Christopher Paolini (U.S.A.)  
JPV
- *Going Fishing*  
BRUCE MCMILLAN (U.S.A.)  
Salka
- *The Problem with Chickens*  
BRUCE MCMILLAN (U.S.A.)  
Salka
- *Spiderwick Chronicles* (Series  
translated)  
TONY DITERLIZZI (U.S.A.)  
Skrudda
- *Il Mistero d'ell'occhio di  
Smeraldo*  
GERONIMO STILTON (ITALY)  
Vaka-Helgafell

- *Så Blev Farfar et Spøgelse*  
KIM FUPZ AAKESON  
(DENMARK)  
Vaka-Helgafell
- *The Meanwhile Adventure*  
RODDY DOYLE (IRELAND)  
Vaka-Helgafell
- *Kejserens Ny Klæder* (Reissued)  
H. C. ANDERSEN (DENMARK)  
Veröld
- *Trüffel und Rosalie*  
KATJA REIDER, JUTTA  
BÜCKER (GERMANY)  
Veröld

# Visiting Writers 2009 and 2010

*Writers that participated in public events in Reykjavík in these two years – such as taking part in festivals, leading workshops, reading from and signing their books, launching their plays at theatres, and so on. Note that the list may not be complete.*

ALBERT FRANK MORITZ (CANADA)  
ANGELA RAWLINGS (CANADA)  
DIONNE BRAND (CANADA/ TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO)  
DON MCKAY (CANADA)  
JERAMY DODDS (CANADA)  
MICHAEL ONDAATJE (CANADA /SRI LANKA)  
ROBERT BRINGHURST (CANADA)  
HUANG NUBO (CHINA)  
LU YE (CHINA)  
LUO YING (CHINA)  
TIAN YUAN (CHINA)  
XIE MIAN (CHINA)  
YU JIAN (CHINA)  
ZANG DI (CHINA)  
BENN Q. HOLM (DENMARK)  
CIA RINNE (DENMARK/ GERMANY/FINLAND)  
EGON CLAUSEN (DENMARK)  
HELLE BRÖNNUM-CARLSEN (DENMARK)  
METTE MOESTRUP (DENMARK)  
MORTEN SØNDERGAARD (DENMARK)  
NAJA MARIE AIDT (DENMARK)  
PALLE SIGSGAARD (DENMARK)  
PETER LAUGESEN (DENMARK)  
PIJA LINDENBAUM (DENMARK)  
SARA BLÆDEL (DENMARK)

JUNOT DIAZ (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC/U.S.A.)  
BERGTHÓRA HANUSARDÓTTIR (FAROE ISLANDS)  
CARL JÓHAN JENSEN (FAROE ISLANDS)  
JÓANES NIELSEN (FAROE ISLANDS)  
OLE WICH (FAROE ISLANDS)  
AINO HAVUKAINEN (FINLAND)  
ELIAS LÖNNRITH (FINLAND)  
JYRKI IIVONEN (FINLAND)  
MARKKU PAASONEN (FINLAND)  
SAMI TOIVONEN (FINLAND)  
SIRRKU PELTOLA (FINLAND)  
SOFI OKSANEN (FINLAND)  
TEEMU MANNINEN (FINLAND)  
ANNA CASTAGNOLI (FRANCE/ITALY)  
BENOIT DUTEURTRE (FRANCE)  
JEAN-MICHAEL ESPITALIER (FRANCE)  
MARIE DARRIEUSSECQ (FRANCE)  
DAVID GIESELMAN (GERMANY)  
HENNING AHRENS (GERMANY)  
LINE HOVEN (GERMANY)  
WOLF ERLBRUCH (GERMANY)  
JULIE EDEL HARDENBERG (GREENLAND)  
LINDA RIBER (GREENLAND) 2010  
KADER ABDOLAH (HOLLAND/IRAN)  
VIVEK NARAYANAN (INDIA/U.S.A.)  
HACHIKAI MIMI (JAPAN)  
TAKAHASHI MUTSUO (JAPAN)  
NGUGI WA THIONG'O (KENYA)  
GINTARAS GRAJUSKAS (LITHUANIA)  
ANNE B. RAGDE (NORWAY)  
INGER ELISABETH HANSEN (NORWAY)  
JO NESBO (NORWAY)  
JOHAN HARSTAD (NORWAY)  
KARL OVE KNAUSGÅRD (NORWAY)

KEN OPPRANN (NORWAY)  
ODDBJÖRN BY (NORWAY)  
SVEIN NYHUS (NORWAY)  
VIDAR SUNDSTÖL (NORWAY)  
SUSAN ABULHAWA (PALESTINE)  
TARIQ ALI (PAKISTAN/U.K.)  
LUIZ LÓPEZ NIEVES (PUERTO RICO)  
DMITRY GOLYNKO (RUSSIA)  
ROBERT ROBERTSON (SCOTLAND)  
ANN JÄDERLUND (SWEDEN)  
JOHAN THEORIN (SWEDEN)  
KJELL ESPMARK (SWEDEN)  
PÅR THÖRN (SWEDEN)  
SVEN NORDQVIST (SWEDEN)  
UKON - ULF KARL OLOV NILSSON (SWEDEN)  
ANTHONY NEILSON (U.K.)  
LUCIE PREBBLE (U.K.)  
MICHAEL RIDPATH (U.K.)  
TRACEY COX (U.K.)  
ALLI WARREN (U.S.A.)  
PAULA VOGEL (U.S.A.)  
CAROLYN D. WRIGTH (U.S.A.)  
CAROLYN FORCHÉ (U.S.A.)  
DAVID SEDARIS (U.S.A.)  
JESSE BALL (U.S.A.)  
SHARON MESMER (U.S.A.)

# Calendar of Events

*The calendar shows examples of literary events from September 2009 to August 2010. Note that this is not a complete list. Titles have been translated to English, although most of these events are in Icelandic.*

## SEPTEMBER

- Reykjavík International Literature Festival (biennial)
- Knut Hamsun Weekend. *The Nordic House*
- Translation in Iceland. *Seminar hosted by The Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters*
- Sigurdur Pálsson (1948), writer. *Seminar to honour the author. University of Iceland*
- Út vil ek. *Conference about literature and the cultural connection between Iceland and the Scottish isles from medieval times to the present. University of Iceland and the Nordic House*
- Idunn Epic Poetry Club. *Anniversary weekend program. Gerduberg Culture Centre*
- Thórarinn Eldjárn, writer: “This I call Icelandic” *Lecture about Icelandic language and literature. The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies and the Nordic House*
- The Norwegian writer Anne B. Radge visits Iceland. *Reykjavík bookstores*



## OCTOBER

- Numerous readings and writer talks all over the city (cafés, bars, bookstores, libraries, culture centres, fish- and grocery stores, workplaces, swimming pools, etc.)
- Tómas Guðmundsson Poetry Prize. *City of Reykjavík*
- Focus on contemporary writer Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir. *One-day program at Gerðuberg Culture Centre*
- The World of Karitas. *Art exhibition inspired by Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir's novels about the fictional artist Karitas. Gerðuberg Culture Centre*
- Graphic Art from the book *Grandmother's Library (Bókasafn ömmu Huldar)* by artist and writer Þórarinn Leifsson. *Exhibition at Eymundsson bookstore*
- The Icelandic Children's Literature Prize

## NOVEMBER

- Numerous readings and writer talks all over the city (cafés, bars, bookstores, libraries, culture centres, fish- and grocery stores, workplaces, swimming pools, etc.)
- Icelandic Language Day. *Various programs in schools, libraries, bookstores, etc.*
- Jónas Hallgrímsson Literature Prize
- Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845) Wake. *The Culture House*
- The Revenge of Queen Olga. *Program on Russian literature. The Culture House*

- Translation Feast. *The Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters introduce translations that have been published during the year*
- Children's Literature Festival. *Forlagid Publishing and Reykjavík Art Museum*
- Seminar on Manga. *Reykjavík Art Museum and Reykjavík City Library*
- Seminar on Icelandic theatre research. *Iceland Academy of the Arts and The Icelandic Theatre Museum*
- Sarah Moss: "Eating Words: Towards a Theory of Literary Food." *The Open Art Academy*
- Nordic Library Week. *Reykjavík City Library and other libraries in the capital area and around Iceland*
- Impromptu Series. *Writing workshop with Angela Rowling. Nýhil*

## DECEMBER

- Numerous readings and writer talks all over the city (cafés, bars, bookstores, libraries, culture centres, fish- and grocery stores, workplaces, swimming pools, etc.)
- National Broadcasting Service Writer's Fund Award
- Nominations for The Icelandic Literature Prize
- Nominations for The Icelandic Translation Prize
- Bookseller's Literature Prize
- Bergsveinn Birgisson: "Culture and Metaphors." *Open lecture at the University of Iceland*
- Marathon reading of the novel *Advent (Adventa)* by Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889-1975). *Writer's Union of Iceland*
- Seminar on Ovid and Kristján Árnason's newly published translation of his classic work *Metamorphoses. Reykjavík Academy*
- What do we Know About Snorri Sturluson? *Seminar on a newly published book about Snorri. The Settlement Exhibition*
- Seminar on writer Einar Kvaran (1859-1938). *Reykjavík City Theatre*
- Finnish Culture Festival. *Kalevala, The Moomin books, new translations, Finnish films. The Nordic House*
- Dagný Kristjánsdóttir: "Julia Kristeva and the Dark Sun of Depression." *Open lecture at the University of Iceland*
- Illustrations from the book *In Plain Speech (Á mannamáli)* by Þórdís Elva Þórarinsdóttir. *Exhibition at Smáralind shopping mall*
- Nordic Council's Literature Prize. *Nominations from all countries announced. The Nordic Council*

## JANUARY

- The Icelandic Literature Prize
- Statue of Reykjavík poet Tómas Guðmundsson (1901-1983) introduced. *Competition result announced. City of Reykjavík*
- Dimmalimm, the Icelandic Illustration Prize
- What the Children Want to See. *Art exhibition from Icelandic children's books. Gerðuberg Culture Centre*
- My Swan is Singing. *Exhibition about the life and literature of Halla Eyjólfssdóttir (1866-1937). Gerðuberg Culture Centre*

## FEBRUARY

- Book Market. *The Icelandic Publishers Association*
- Reykjavík City Theatre Playwright of the Year introduced
- Poetry Slam. *Teenagers and young adults perform poetry with music, dance, visual art, etc. Reykjavík City Library*
- Reykjavík Museum Night. *Culture programs in various museums, libraries, galleries, shops, etc. throughout the city*
- Helga Kress: "I am an Icelander. Sagas of the Icelanders and their Reception." *Open lecture at the Reykjavík Academy*
- Playwright Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880-1919) – Classic or Not? *Open Seminar at Reykjavík City Theatre*
- Gerpla, a new play based on Halldór Laxness's novel premiers at the National Theatre

## MARCH

- Gudrún Nordal: “Twisted Places. Publications of poetry from Sturlunga Saga.” *Open lecture at Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies*
- Johanna Koljonen (Finland): “Submarines, Dragons and Hamlet in the Fortress.” *University of Iceland and the Nordic House*
- Program about the poet and scholar Jón Helgason (1899–1986). *The Culture House*
- Program about literature from Haiti. *Reykjavik City Library and Alliance française*
- The Association of Non Fiction Writer's Award
- Women's Literature Festival. *Kate Mosse gives a lecture on the history of the Orange Prize.*
- Fjöruverðlaunin, the Women's Literature Prize
- The Southern House. *Five day program about literature from Spain, France, Portugal, Italy and North-Africa. The Nordic House*
- Conference on Icelandic Children's Literature. *Gerduberg Culture Centre*
- Great-Grandpa the Prankster (Langafi prakkari). *A children's play, based on Sigrún Eldjárn's books. Gerduberg Culture Centre*
- Love Story from the Mountains (Ástarsaga úr fjöllum). *Caput music group and singer Egill Ólafsson perform music based on Gudrún Helgadóttir's children's book. Gerduberg Culture Centre*

- Poetry Performance. *Icelandic high school students of French perform original poetry in French. Reykjavik City Library and Alliance française*
- Nordic Translations. *Conference. University of Iceland and the Nordic House*
- Mimir Seminar. *Students of Icelandic and Reykjavik Academy*
- DV Culture Prize – Literature
- Con-Text. *Book-art exhibition. The Nordic House*
- Information and Europe. *Conference on copyright and digital media in a European context. Upplýsing, Association of Libraries and Information Science*
- Fíasól. *A children's play, based on Kristín Helga Gunnarsdóttir's books premiers at the National Theatre*

## APRIL

- International Children's Literature Festival (biennial)
- Reykjavik Children's Culture Festival. *City of Reykjavik*
- Adopt a Writer. *Reykjavik grammar schools*
- Week of the Book / International Day of the Book. *Various programs in libraries, bookstores, culture centres, etc. The Association of Icelandic Publishers sends a 1000 ISK check to every household in Iceland that can be used against a book purchase*
- School of Humanities annual conference. *University of Iceland*
- IBBY Iceland's Children's Literature Prize
- Program about the contemporary poets Vilborg Dagbjartsdóttir (1930) and Matthías Johannessen (1930). *The Writer's Union of Iceland*
- Reykjavik Children's Literature Prize. *City of Reykjavik, Department of Education*
- Children's Choice Book Prize. *Reykjavik City Library*
- Preserving the Future: Sustainability of Language, Culture and Nature. *International conference. The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages*
- Comics. Competition and exhibition of comics by Reykjavik young (10–30 year olds). *Reykjavik City Library and Reykjavik School of Visual Art*
- Friends of Káin. *Program about Icelandic epic poetry and rhymes. Idunn Epic Poetry Club, Baggalútur music group and Gerduberg Culture Centre*
- Icelandic Translation Prize
- Children's World Day. *Gerduberg Culture Centre*
- Program on the poet Einar Bragi (1921–2005). *The Writer's Union of Iceland*
- Haukur Sigurdsson: Lecture on Eyrbyggja Saga. *Gerduberg Culture Centre*

- Pétur Gunnarsson: “Life is Short, Oblivion is Long.” *Discussion on the writing of the biography of writer Þórbergur Þórðarson (1888–1974). Association of Icelandic Studies*
- In Light of the Following Day. *Exhibition dedicated to contemporary writer Sigurdur A. Magnússon (1928). The Culture House*
- The Bell of Iceland (Íslandsklukkan). *A new adaptation of Halldór Laxness's novel premiers at the National Theatre*

## MAY

- Literature and the Environment. *Conference. The Nordic House*
- Art in Translation. *International conference. University of Iceland and the Nordic House*
- Reykjavik Art Festival. *Among literary events are “living-room readings” – writers invite people into their homes*
- The Glass Key. *Scandinavian Crime Writer's Award*
- IBBY Iceland Awards
- Tintin Pub Quiz. *Forlagid Publishing House and Rósenberg Pub*
- In the Footsteps of W. G. Collingwood. *Photographic exhibition by Einar Falur Ingólfsson. Photographs taken at places from Icelandic Saga literature, the same spots as Collingwood painted and photographed on his travels in Iceland in 1897. The National Museum and Reykjavik Art Festival*

- Light of the World – An Icelandic Requiem by Trygvi M. Baldursson. *Premier of a music piece inspired by Halldór Laxness's novel Heimsljós. The Philharmonic Choir*
  - Reykjavík Intercultural Day. *City of Reykjavík and the Intercultural House*
  - Program in honour of poet Jóhannes úr Kötlum (1899–1972). *Forlagid Publishing and the Culture House*
  - Grannmetislög. *Singer Guðrún Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir and Caput music group perform music inspired and with lyrics from Þórarinn Eldjárn's children's poetry. Gerduberg Culture Centre*
  - Marie Novotna, Charles University, Prague: “Translating from Old-Norse.” *The Association of Translators and Interpreters*
  - Exhibition based on Icelandic folk stories. *National Museum of Iceland*
  - Slam Event. *Young poets from Iceland and Germany who work together on a project about Icelandic literary heritage perform at pub Næsti bar. Sagenhaftes Island – Iceland Guest of Honour, Frankfurt Bookfair*
  - Susan Abulhawa from Palestine talks about her book *Morgnarn í Jenín (Mornings in Jenin)*. *Forlagid Publishing and The Culture House*
- JUNE**
- Translation, History, Literary Culture. *International conference. University of Iceland*
  - New Voices Grant. *The Icelandic Literature Fund*
  - Next Library. *Library camp with participants from five Nordic countries. Reykjavík City Library*
  - Ocean City. *Literature walk in the old harbour area, literature related to the sea. Reykjavík City Library*
  - Gaddakylfan, a short story crime prize. *Crime Writers of Iceland and Mannlíf magazine*
  - Nordic Bookbinding. *Exhibition. The Culture House*
  - Writing workshops for children. *Reykjavík City Library*
  - Looking at Reykjavík. *Seminar on images of Reykjavík in culture and art. Reykjavík Academy and the Culture House*
  - Christina Sunley: The Tricking of Freyja. *Introduction of a novel about Icelandic immigrants in the U.S.A. followed by a panel discussion about Icelandic emigrants and immigrants in Iceland today. Reykjavík Academy*
  - Wordflunk. *Program by young poets and visual artists. Útúrdúr and Havarí – bookstore and gallery*
  - Literature Across Frontiers. *Poetry evening with three Icelandic and three Slovenic poets that have been working together and translating each other's poetry. The Culture House*
- JULY**
- Midsummer Festival. *A new four day festival, meant to become a platform for young artists from all artforms*
  - The Blood-Drop – The Icelandic Crime Fiction Prize. *Crime Writers Iceland and Reykjavík City Library*
  - Reykjavík Safari. *Downtown culture, museums, library and events introduced to non-Icelandic speaking inhabitants of Reykjavík. In Polish, Thai, English and Spanish. Reykjavík City Library, Reykjavík Art Museum, Reykjavík Museum of Photography, Reykjavík City Museum*
  - Writer Homes. *Literature walk in Heimar and Vogar neighbourhood in Reykjavík. Reykjavík City Library*
  - Fred E. Woods, Brigham Young University: “Laxness and the Latter-Day Saints: Facts Behind the Novel Paradísarheimt.” *Gljúfrasteinn – The House of Halldór Laxness*
- AUGUST**
- Reykjavík Culture Night. *Outdoor and indoor culture festival with events in museums, galleries, shops, theatres, on the streets, in private homes and gardens, at the City Library and basically all over the downtown area. The festival runs from morning to midnight. City of Reykjavík*
  - Sunday Night to Monday Morning. *Literature and history Pub Crawl in downtown Reykjavík. Reykjavík City Library, Reykjavík City Museum, Reykjavík Art Museum, Reykjavík Museum of Photography*
  - Viking Congress. *International conference. University of Iceland*
  - International Poetry Festival. *Nýhil*
  - In Search of Queer Literature. *Literature Walk. Reykjavík Gay Pride Festival*
  - ArtFart Performance festival. *This annual festival provides artists with a platform from which they can present innovative and experimental approaches to contemporary performance on an international stage. Three week program. The festival grew out of Reykjavík City's Creative Summer Group programme, but now caters to artists at all stages of their career.*
  - Bragathing. *Annual conference of versifiers. Grand Hotel Reykjavík*

## Seasonal Events

### YEAR ROUND EVENTS

- Medieval Manuscripts – Eddas and Sagas. *Exhibition of manuscripts and book making. The Culture House*
- Iceland – Film. *Exhibition that traces the development of Icelandic film making from 1904–2009, among them are several literature adaptations. The Culture House*
- Bedtime Stories. *Weekly literature hour in English with chat about Icelandic literature and readings from Icelandic contemporary literature. Hotel Nordica*

### SUMMER

- Summer Reading. *Program for children of all ages to encourage pleasure reading during the summer time. Reykjavik City Library*
- The Puppet Van. *Puppet shows for children in outdoor playgrounds throughout the city*
- The Story-Theatre. *Weekly puppet shows in English, based on Icelandic Sagas and other Icelandic literature. Hallveig Thorlacius and Reykjavik Maritime Museum*
- Reykjavik Literally. *Weekly literature walks in English in downtown Reykjavik. Reykjavik City Library*

- Creative Summer Jobs. *Young people from 16–25 work in groups at various creative projects, some of them connected to literature (as well as dance, music, visual art, etc.). Hitt húsið – Reykjavik City's Information and Culture Centre for Young People*

### WINTER

- Sundays are Children's Days. *Program for children and their families every Sunday – story hours, workshops, writer visits, etc. Reykjavik City Library*
- Reykjavik City Library Story Van
- How Does a Book Come Into Being? *Monthly lunch hour talks with writers, hosted by the Creative Writing program at the University of Iceland*
- Lunch Hour Chats. *Regular lunch hour programs with writers at the Nordic House*
- Literary evenings. *The Association of Icelandic Studies*
- Sunday programs on various aspects of Halldór Laxness's work with writers, scholars, actors and others. *The program takes place in the writer's living room. Gljúfrasteinn – The House of Halldór Laxness*
- The Great Recital Competition. *Grammar schools in Reykjavik and throughout the country*
- Author programs in grammar and secondary schools. *The Writer's Union of Iceland*

- Literature walks with various themes (poetry, crime fiction, newly published books, women's literature, graveyard walks, pub crawls, etc.). *Reykjavik City Library*
- Open Mike. *Poetry evenings at downtown pubs. Nýhil*
- Poet of the Month. *Monthly program and accompanying web-material. Seltjarnarnes Public Library and Hlusta.is*
- Lecture series on Njál's Saga. *Kópavogur Public Library*
- Women's Story Circle. *Women of foreign origin and Icelandic women meet each month and share stories. Reykjavik City Library*

## Literature Trail – Authors and Texts

ADALSTEINN ÁSBERG SIGURDSSON: “Rætur”. In *Segdu mér og segdu ...* Reykjavik. Dimma, 2009. “Roots”. Unpublished translation by the author and Ágústa Flosadóttir

ARNALDUR INDRIDASON: *Dauðarósir*. Reykjavik. Vaka-Helgafell, 1998. *Roses of Death*. Not published in English, excerpt translated by Lingua

BÖDVAR GUDMUNDSSON: *Hibýli vindanna*. Reykjavik. Mál og menning, 1995. *Where the Winds Dwell*. Winnipeg, Turnstone Press, 2000. Translated by Keneva Kunz

DAGUR SIGURDARSON: “Þína skál Reykjavík”. In *Milljónaævintýrid*. Reykjavik. Heimskringla, 1960. “Cheers to you Reykjavík”. Unpublished translation by Bernard Scudder

EINAR MÁR GUDMUNDSSON: *Englar alheimsins*. Reykjavik. Almenna bókafélagid, 1993. *Angels of the Universe*. London. Mare's Nest, 1995. Translated by Bernard Scudder

GERDUR KRISTNÝ: *Gardurinn*. Reykjavik. Mál og menning, 2008. *The Garden*. Unpublished translation by Keneva Kunz



- GUNNAR GUNNARSSON: *Svartfugl*. Translated by Magnús Ásgeirsson. Reykjavík. Mennin-gar- og fræðslusamband althýdu, 1938 (originally published in Danish in 1929). *The Black Cliffs*. Madison. University of Wisconsin Press, 1967. Translated from the Danish by Cecil Wood
- GYRDIR ELÍASSON: “Náttljód”. In *Mold í Skuggadal*. Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 1992. “Nocturne”. In *Brushstrokes of Blue. The Young Poets of Iceland*. London. The Grayhound Press, 1994. Translated by Bernard Scudder
- HALLDÓR LAXNESS: *Brekkukots-annáll*. Reykjavík. Helgafell, 1967. *The Fish Can Sing*. London. Methuen & Co., 1966. Revised edition. New York. Vintage International, 2008. Translated by Magnus Magnusson
- HALLGRÍMUR HELGASON: *101 Reykjavík*. Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 1996. *101 Reykjavík*. London. Faber and Faber, 2002. Translated by Brian FitzGibbon
- Hávamál*. Oldest manuscript from the 13. century. *The Sayings of Háv*. In *The Poetic Edda*. Austin. University of Texas Press, 1962. Translated by Lee M. Hollander
- JÓNAS HALLGRÍMSSON: “Hulduljód”. First published in 1847. See Páll Valsson (ed.): *Kvæði og sögur: Jónas Hallgrímsson*. Reykjavík. Íslensku bókaklúbbarnir, 2002. “Lay of Hulda”. Richard N. Ringler (ed.): *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist*. Madison. University of Wisconsin Press. Translated by Richard N. Ringler
- KRISTÍN STEINSDÓTTIR: *Engill í Vesturbænum*. Reykjavík. Vaka-Helgafell, 2002. *An Angel in the Neighbourhood*. Unpublished translation by Anna Yates
- “Krossgötur”. In *Jón Árnason: Íslenskar thjóðsögur og ævintýri 1. Ný útgáfa*. Reykjavík. Bókautgáfan Thjóðsaga, 1954. “Crossroads”. In *Elves, Trolls and Elemental Beings. Icelandic Folktales II*. Reykjavík. Iceland Review Library, 1977. Translated by Alan Boucher
- Landnámabók. The Book of Settlements*. Manitoba. University of Manitoba Press, 1972. Translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards
- LINDA VILHJÁLMSDÓTTIR: “Vedur – Tvö”. In *Klakabörnin*. Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 1992. “Weather II”. In *Mona Lisa*. Wellingborough. Greyhound Press, 1993. Translated by Sigurdur A. Magnússon.
- SIGRÚN ELDJÁRN: *Eyja Gullormsins*. Reykjavík. Mál og menning, 2006. *The Island of the Golden Worm*. Unpublished translation by Ólöf Eldjárn.
- SIGURBJÖRG THRASTAR-DÓTTIR: “Akrafjall”. In *Hnat-tflug*. Reykjavík. JPV, 2000. “Mt. Akrafjall”. In *To Bleed Straight*. Reykjavík. JPV, 2008. Translated by Bernard Scudder
- SJÓN: *Skugga-Baldur*. Reykjavík. Bjartur, 2003. *The Blue Fox*. London. Telegram, 2008. Translated by Victoria Cribb.
- SNORRI STURLUSON: *Edda*. (13. century). London. Everyman, 1987. Reissued in 2000. Translated by Anthony Faulkes.
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Cover work: SemSé by RAGNHILDUR JÓHANNSS

Graduation piece from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2010

[www.ragga.carbonmade.com](http://www.ragga.carbonmade.com)

The artist on the work:

*A book, as an object, has poetic possibilities and therefore I try to create poetry from books that come my way. I do not feel the poem has to be readable; it is enough that the poetic possibility is visible through the object. Each and every word taken out is carefully selected in order to create an incoherent whole in a romantic poem. The poems are pulled out of the books without abandoning them, making the book itself a part of the poem.*

*When looking at the work from the right, one can read the romantic poem, but from the left, a chaotic mix of words meets the eye. Therefore, the poems are characterized by an interplay of feelings and coincidence, and they also carry with them the look and era of the original text, as I do not rewrite anything. I only cut the excerpts into a new context.*

*The books come to me, so to speak. They come from different places, from people who have chosen not to own them anymore. We Icelanders think of ourselves as a book nation, which is right in many ways. Our books are dear to us, the words they contain, the memories they hold and the beauty they display on a shelf. The books I used in this work had been deprived of their purpose and were not on display on bookshelves anymore. I have tried to capture romanticism and beauty from all these different books and wanted to allow the book, as an object, as poetry, to shine as best I could.*

Photography: Rafael Pinho

[www.rafaelpinho.com](http://www.rafaelpinho.com)







City of Reykjavik