

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

- Xʷsepsəm (pronounced ko-sap-sum)
- Ləkʷəŋən (la-kwang-gen)
- W̱SÁNEĆ (wa-sane-itch)

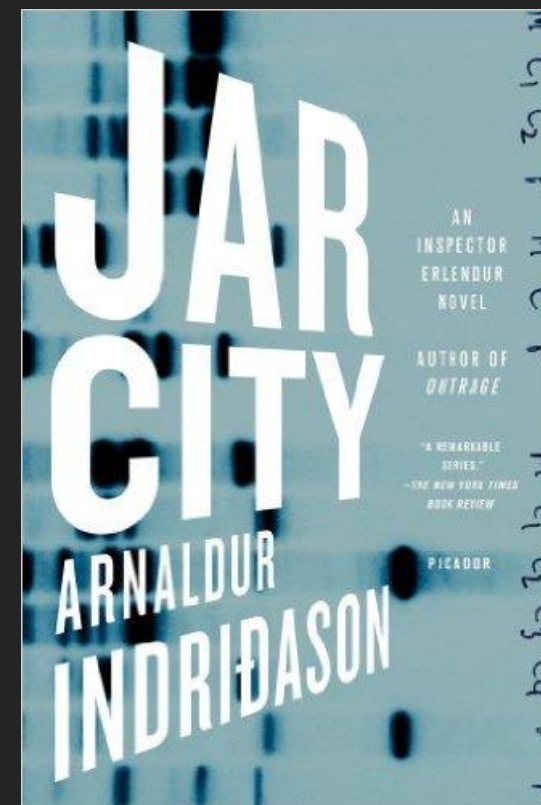
Við viðurkennum og virðum Ləkʷəŋən þjóðirnar (Songhees og Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) en háskólinn er byggður á landsvæði þeirra. Við virðum og viðurkennum einnig sögulegt og núverandi samband Ləkʷəŋən og W̱SÁNEĆ þjóðanna við landið.





The Stranger. Who is the Criminal in Arnaldur Indriðason's novels?

Torfi H. Tulinius
Richard and Margaret Beck
Lecture
Sunday March 16th 2025



Scandinavian crime fiction

- Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö
 - The Story of a Crime series
 - Martin Beck
 - 1960's and 70's
- Henning Mankell
 - Kurt Wallander series
 - 1991-2013
- Camilla Läckberg
- Jo Nesbø
- Jussi Adler-Olsen



Scandinavian noir: principal characteristics

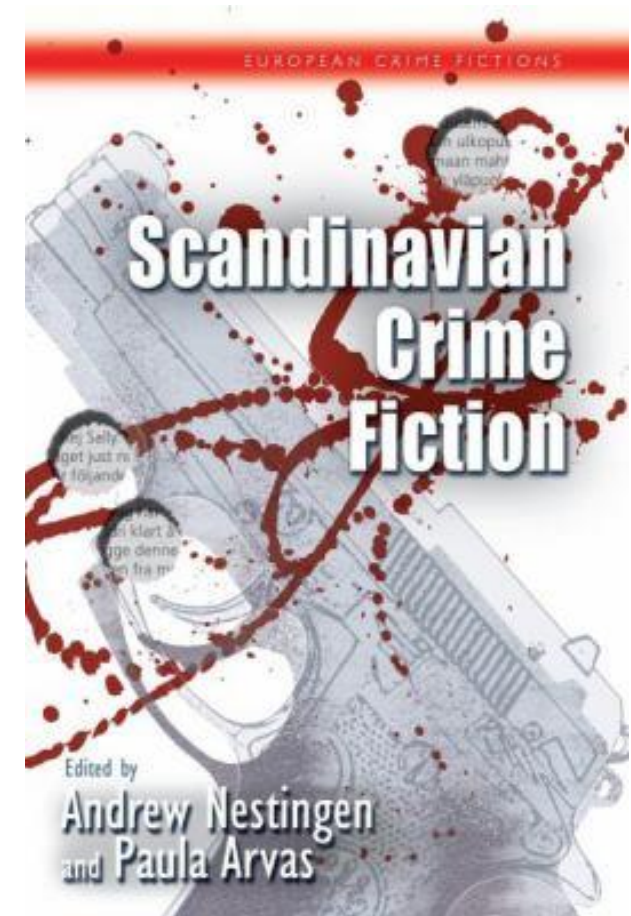
- Henning Mankel: “Crime is the truest reflection on our times.”
- Andrew Nestingen: *The burned out policeman*
- Socially aware.
- Blending together of crime conceived as a result of social dysfunctioning, both national and international, and the existential difficulties of the policeman dealing with the crime.



CRIME and FANTASY in Scandinavia

FICTION, FILM, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Andrew Nestingen



History of crime fiction in Iceland:

The beginnings

- Jóhann M. Bjarnason (1910)
- Valur Vestan (1948-1950)
- Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson (1978-...)
- Gunnar Gunnarsson (1979-2000)
- Birgitta Halldórsdóttir (1983-...)
- Léo Löwe (1989-1991)
 - ➔ **Timid beginnings, but momentum is gathering from the late 70's.**
 - ➔ **Main reason: extensive readership.**



Take-off in the late 90's

- Arnaldur Indriðason (1997-...)
- Árni Þórarinnsson (1998-...)
- Stella Blómkvist (1997-...)
- Ævar Örn Jósepsson (2002-...)
- Jón Hallur Stefánsson (2004-...)
- Yrsa Sigurðardóttir (2005-...)
- Ragnar Jónasson (2010-...)
- Lilja Sigurðardóttir (2009- ...)
- Eva Björg Ægisdóttir (2018-...)



Crime fiction: a stranger in the family?

- Importance of literature for national identity.
 - Literature preserved the language and kept it distinct from other nordic languages.
 - Eddas and Sagas as basis for claim to independence.
 - The more these works were acclaimed abroad, the more Icelanders felt they should be independent.
- Literary value ascribed to „serious literature“:
 - Poets of the independence struggle
 - Their epigones.
 - Prose:
 - Gunnar Gunnarsson
 - Þórbergur Þórðarson
 - Halldór Laxness
- **Crime fiction: marginal and unimportant literature**

Who is Arnaldur Indriðason?

- Born in Reykjavík 1961.
- Son of a prominent writer, journalist and public figure, Indriði G. Þorsteinsson (1926-2000).
- Author of 28 novels, 14 of which belong to the so-called Erlendur series.
- Unparalleled commercial success for Icelandic writer, national and international.



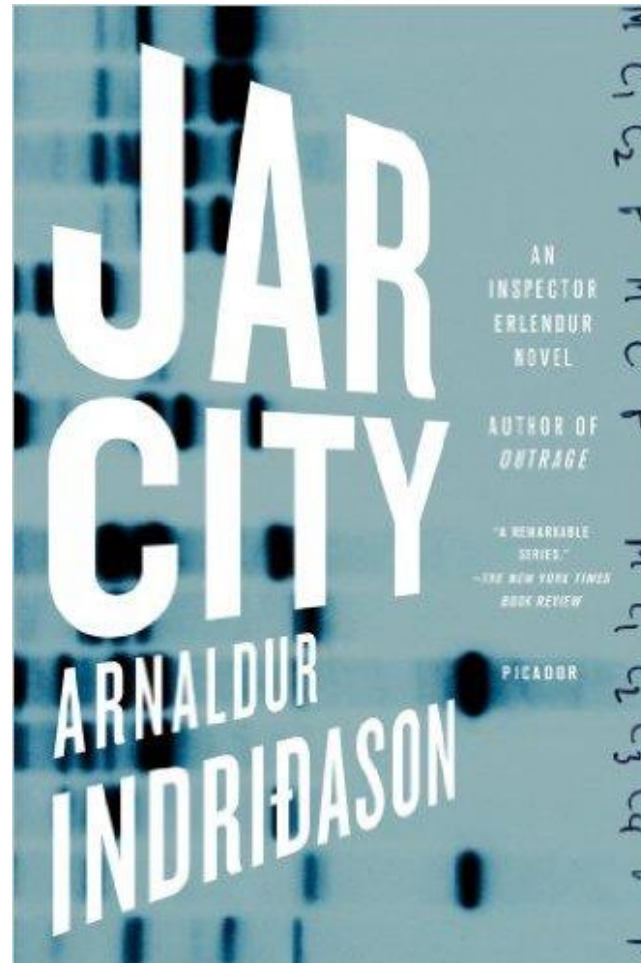
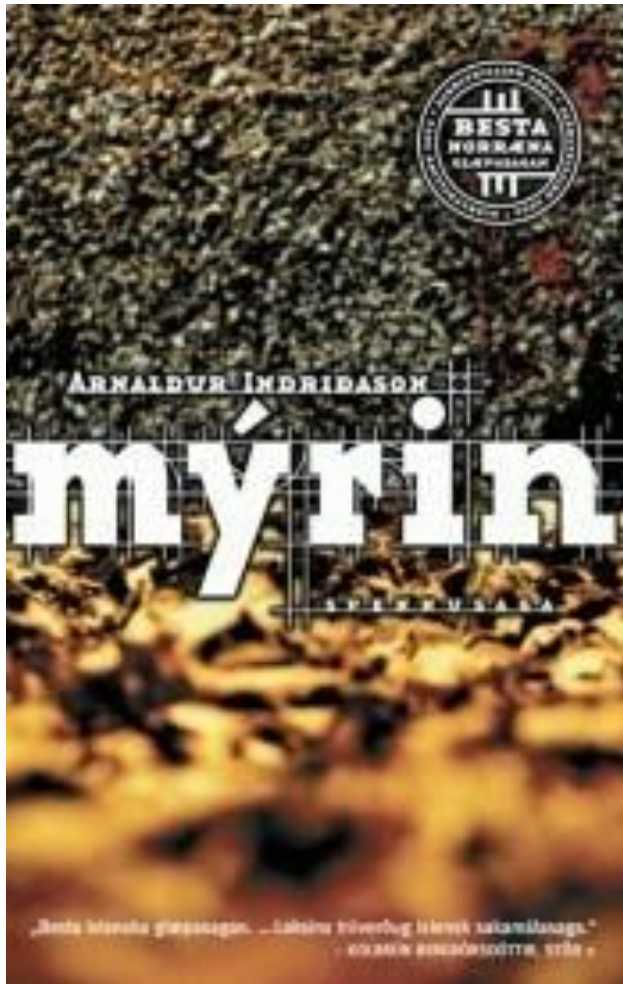
What's in a name?

- „Erlendur“ means „foreign“, „from a different country“, „stranger“.
- Erlendur could not be more Icelandic:
 - Habits
 - Upbringing
 - Values
- **Bringing a foreign genre into Iceland.**
- Erlendur / Arnaldur
 - Same final syllable
 - Same syllable count
 - Almost an anagram.



Erlendur played by Ingvar E. Sigurðsson in Baltasar Kormákur's *Jar City*

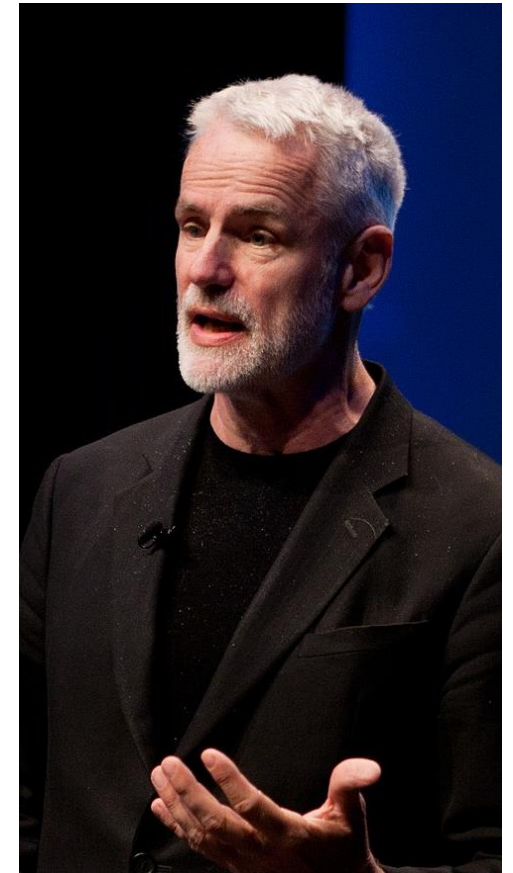
Jar City (Mýrin) 2000



- Erlendur and his co-workers investigate a murder in a neighbourhood called Mýrin (marsh).
- Typical Icelandic crime: sordid and uninteresting.
- Mysterious message (I am him!) and photo of the grave of a little girl.
- Investigation of the victim's, Holberg's, computer shows a taste for hardcore pornography.

The DECODE affair

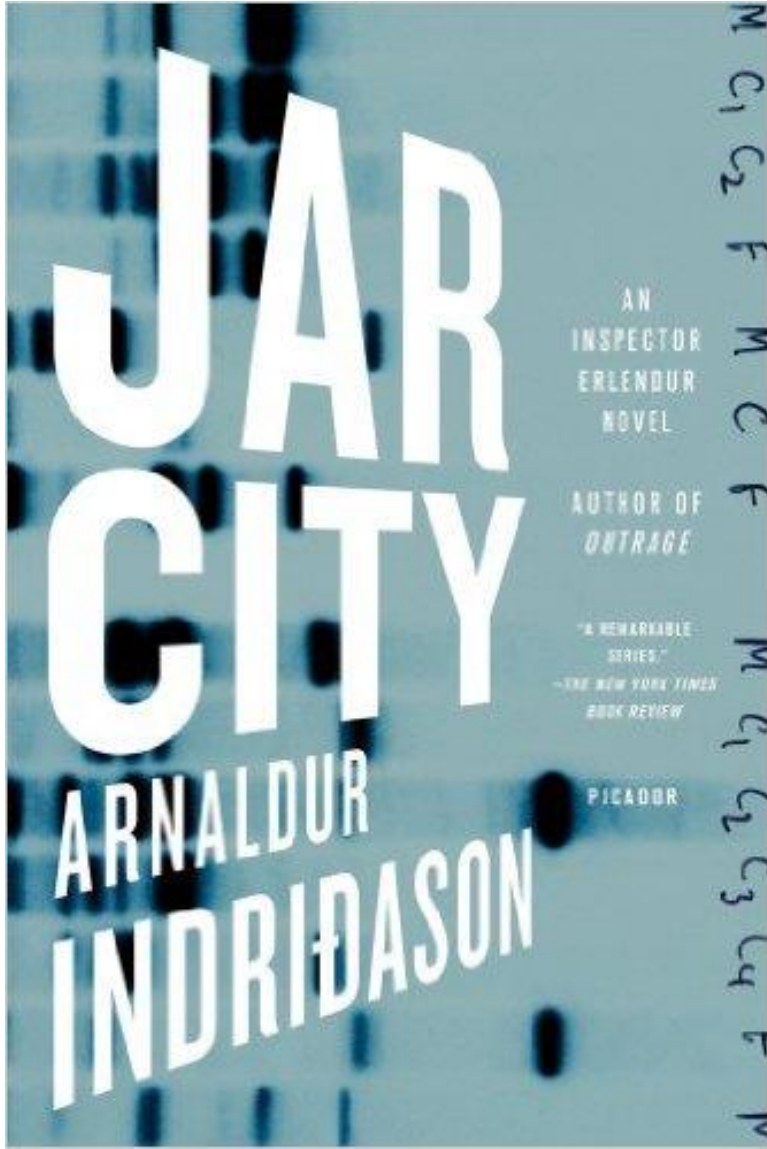
- The 90's: the Human Genome Project.
 - DNA sequencing thanks to super-computing.
- Innovation and global capitalism
- Icelandic medical doctor left Harvard to found a company in Iceland based on:
 - Small and relatively homogeneous Icelandic population.
 - Extensive and rather precise knowledge of genealogy.
 - Excellent health records extending back by several generations.
 - Availability of large collection of tissue samples.
- Government wanted to support this company.
- Hype attracted Icelandic investors.
- Scientific community very much against the idea:
 - Ethical issues concerning privacy and commercialisation of national heritage.
- Went public on NASDAQ and investors lost a lot of money.
- Has produced a lot of scientific knowledge but not generated much revenue.



Living in the world of the dead



- Erlendur the shaman?
- Increasingly salient theme in Arnaldur's work: Erlendur lives half his life with the dead.
- A stranger to his own life?



2000

First major success.

- Erlendur murder mystery.
- Begins with a sordid crime.
- Mysterious note on body attracts Erlendur's attention.
- The victim was in fact an unpunished criminal:
 - Rapist
 - One of his victims commits suicide.
 - Bearer of genetic disease
 - Murderer is the rapist's son.
- Background: DeCode controversy.
- Erlendur's family problems: daughter is a drug addict, estranged from his son.
- The roots of the crime lie in the past.
- The origins of Erlendur's difficulties also.

Strong poetic image

- The message tree.
- Subplot of the bride who disappeared from her wedding.
 - „He is horrible. I can't go through with this.“
 - Victim of paternal incest.
 - Erlendur is taking care of his wayward daughter.
- Iceland's genetic heritage is also a message tree: carrying information and illness from the past to the present.



The illness from the past: I am HIM!



Understanding the “stranger” in the family

- And his long-term aim is a simple one: "I want to really understand Erlendur." Part of that process means understanding his father and Iceland's recent history. Over the past 60 years Iceland has been transformed from a poor, essentially peasant country to an extremely affluent modern society. It is a process that has not been without national and individual pain.
- "My father was of the generation that moved to the city and he wrote about characters who had too. Erlendur comes from the country and never felt at home in the city. His domestic life is either difficult or just bleak. A good-looking man in his 30s with a happy home life and good at his job is a happy ending of a story, not a beginning. The study of family life lets you raise all kinds of questions." Indridason lives in Reykjavik with his wife and three children and says there are few other things so important in our lives, "and few that have so many possibilities in drama and humour."
 - Nicholas Wroe, Interview in The Guardian, June 16th 2006.



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Erlendur / Arnaldur

- Disruptive, destructive, out-of-control fathers.
- Mothers as victims, trying to keep things together, endless love for their children.
- Sons who kill their criminal fathers and lose their lives and/or their minds.
- Main character filled with guilt and rage.
- Oedipus / Schmoedipus?



The Oedipus complex

- A theory of the development of the human psyche.
- Excessive love of the mother.
- Excessive hatred of the father.
- The child imagines castration by the father of the mother.
- Fears own and bows to authority.
- Identifies with the gender it corresponds biologically.
- Represses the oedipal drama.
- The return of the repressed causes anxiety.



Original scene?



- Indridason says his earliest exposure to the genre came at age three. "One night I couldn't get to sleep and I went into the living room where my father was watching a film on television. It was Little Caesar. That was my introduction to crime and for a long time it was my favourite movie." That he should first have come across film, rather than books, was not inevitable. His father was the prominent Icelandic novelist Indridi Thorsteinsson. "He was also an editor and wrote for newspapers so the 'tap tap tap' of his typewriter was always there," recalls Indridason. "I kept my writing secret from him for quite a time. And when I did show him a manuscript he was at first astounded. But after that he gave me wonderful support."

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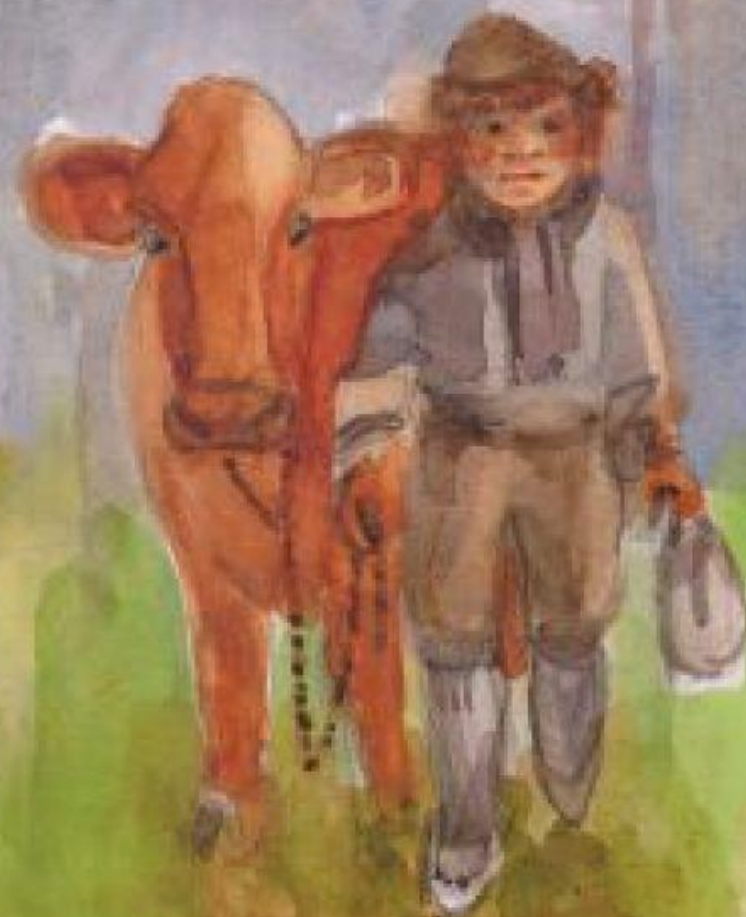
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Bukolla



Cow disappears. Boy sent away by his parents



The boy, the cow, the troll-women



My father's big bull



My father's big drill



Disappears into the mountain



Why tell this story to a 3 year old?

- Why does a 3 year old want to hear it, again and again and again....?
 - Displacement and condensation
 - Feminity / Masculinity
 - Love / Not love
- Parental love is not unconditional.
- The child must be socialized.
 - Submit to the rules of society.
 - Of a masculine dominated society?
- Teaching the child to live with its conflicting emotions.



What are the dream-thoughts in Búkolla?

- Look for basic elements of signification that are at play in the story:
 - Male vs. female
 - Love vs. non-love
- Speaking to the little child that has to reconcile its own conflicting feelings towards his parents.
- Learning to deserve love.
- Making peace with the ambiguities of one's own feelings.
- Repressing the destructive urges.



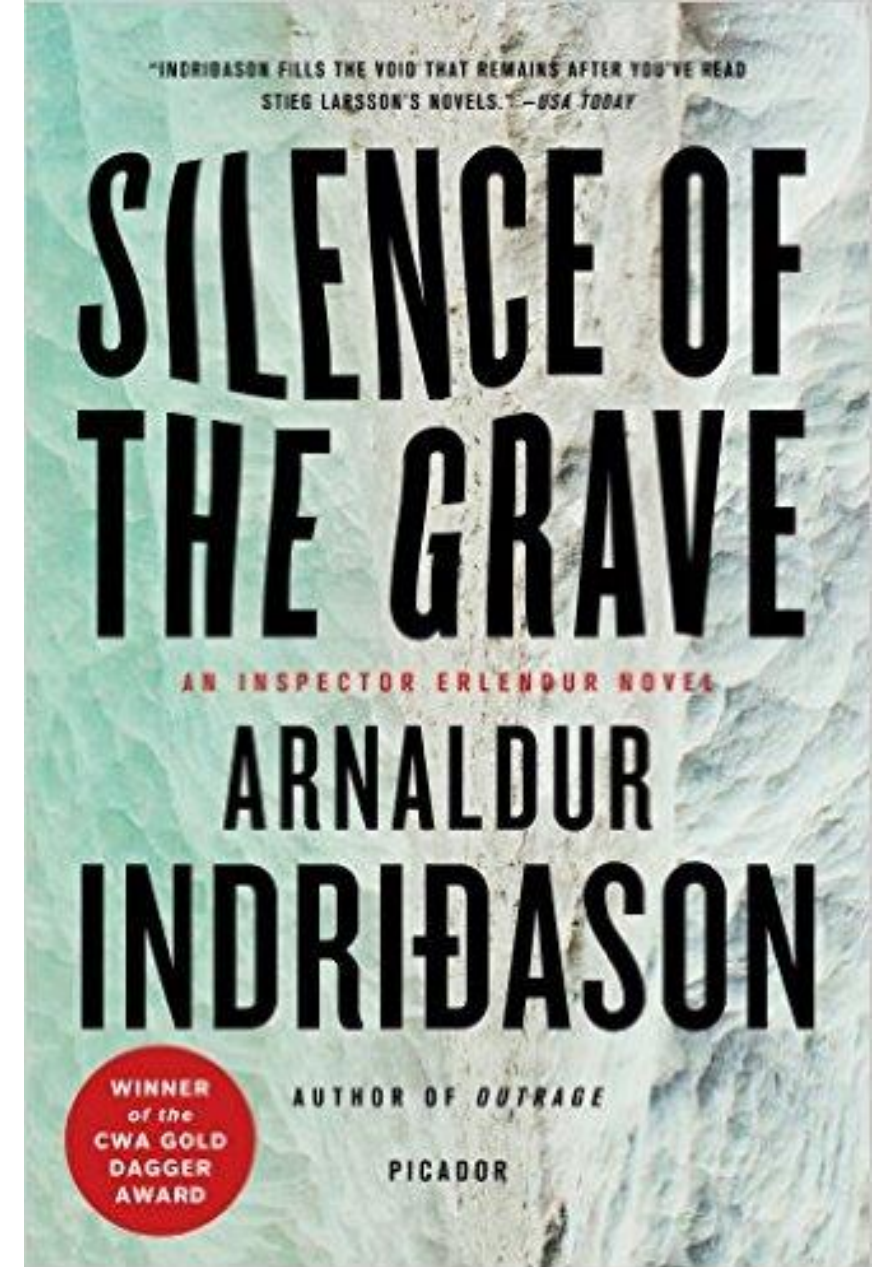
The Uses of Enchantment

The Meaning
and Importance
of Fairy Tales

Bruno
Bettelheim

Arnaldur's finest work?

- A human rib is found by boys playing on a building site in a new neighbourhood of ever expanding Reykjavík.
- Archaeologists carefully and very slowly excavate a body while Erlendur tries to find out what happened so many years ago.
- A family lived there, isolated by poverty, ignorance and domestic abuse.



2001



Historical background

- The crime novel always has two temporalities:
 - The commission of a crime
 - The criminal investigation.
- In this novel, the author fully develops each temporality, as the crime is set in a past more than fifty years earlier
 - The rapid growth of Reykjavík in the war and post-war era
 - The arrival of the British and then the American occupying forces.
 - What it meant for Icelandic men and women.
- A time of origins:
 - Societal
 - Familial
 - Connection between the past and the Unconscious

Iceland in World War II



- Population: 120.000
- Reykjavík: 45.000
- May 10th 1940: Arrival of the British Army.
- July 17th 1941: Arrival of American forces.
- In 1943 there are around 50.000 allied troops in Iceland.
- Economic boom helped Iceland out of a decade-long recession.
- Housing crisis in Reykjavík.
- Icelandic males were worried.
- For many Icelandic women it was an opportunity.
- A lot of shaming of women was done in the period.
- <https://yourfriendinreykjavik.com/the-so-called-circumstances-in-iceland-during-world-war-ii/>

“Protecting” females in WWII Iceland

- The “Ástand” or “Situation”.
- Imposing rules on Icelandic young women.
- Shaming girls who “go with” foreign soldiers.
- Nevertheless opportunity for them.



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**➔ “Protection or
possession?”**



Sigga and the “situation”

- Sixteen or seventeen-year-old grammar student.
- Works as a waitress in a roadside inn.
- Often serves soldiers who stop by on their way between southern and northern Iceland.
- She speaks English.
- Loves literature.
- Witty and charming young woman.



Sigga and Bill Stapleton from Bristol

- Bill is a young soldier who also loves literature.
- They strike up a conversation.
- Both have read *Citadel* by A.J. Cronin.
- Continue to write each other.
- Did they ever meet again?
- Bill is killed in North Africa. His father writes Sigga to inform her of his death.

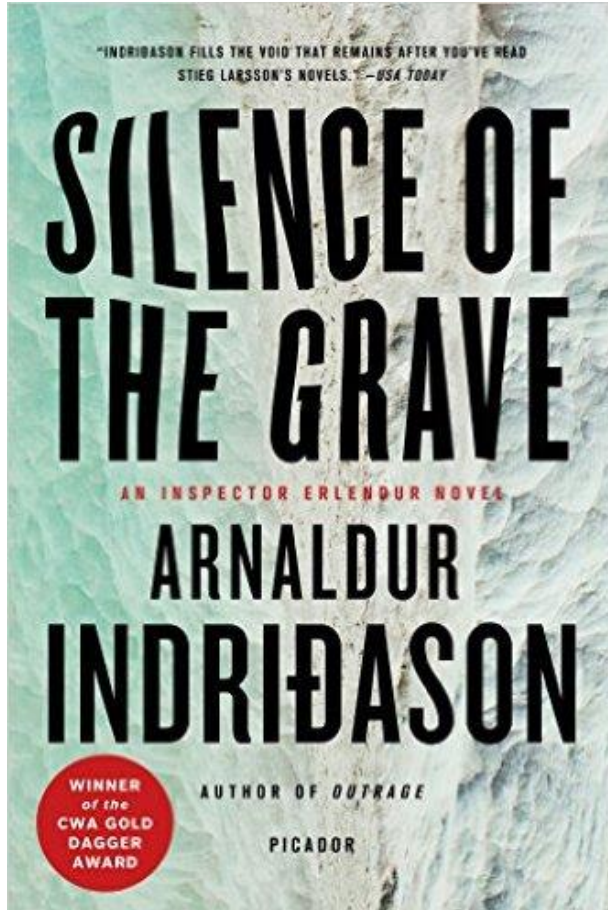


1941

L. Branscum
K. A. V. A. V.

- “Me and the “Situation”.
- Was not in the photo album.
- Was found in Sigga’s father’s briefcase, long after both’s death.
- Letters burned in the early stages of Sigga’s marriage to Villi.
- Another fire brought it to light.

World War II years in Iceland



- A significant but to some extent repressed past
- A time of origins
 - Iceland became rich.
 - Republic proclaimed in 1944.
- Family past of Arnaldur's generation.
- A semi-mythical time.

Plot moves in two different time periods

Past

- The dramatic story of the family of the past:
 - Attempts to escape tyrannical father.
 - Living description of mother and three children.
- Father engaged in black market sales of army property. Sent to jail. Happy time for family.
- Mother falls in love with American soldier.
- Father comes back. Soldier sent away.
- Elder son kills father: he is the body.
- Mother smothers newly born infant.

Present

- Erlendur and his collaborators investigate the crime.
- Excavation takes a very long time.
- Erlendur is also dealing with the consequences of his daughter's terrible addiction.
 - She is in a coma at the hospital.
- Erlendur reveals what happened and why he can never be satisfied:
 - His little brother was swept away in a terrible storm.
 - Their father was unable to help.



Another tree metaphor

- Battered mother plants red currant bushes.
 - Don't grow naturally in Iceland.
- Continue to grow after the house has disappeared.
- The daughter (the woman in the green coat) comes to harvest them.
- Love and care leave a trace.
- Connect past and present.



Narrative techniques

Two parallel time-lines

The story of the family in the summer house outside Reykjavík before and during World War II

The discovery of the skeleton and the long excavation that also parallels the length of the investigation.

Playing with the readers

Leading them astray with the story of the disappeared fiancée, allowing also to re-introduce the theme of rape.

Giving room for Erlendur to develop as a character

Monologue at his comatose daughter's bedside.



Main themes

- Rape and shame.
 - Children born through rape.
- Pedophilia
- Addiction
 - Its effects on un-born children
- Long-term effects of trauma.
- Domestic violence.
 - Its root causes?
 - Its effects on victims and other family members
 - Hatred for the perpetrator.



The return of the repressed

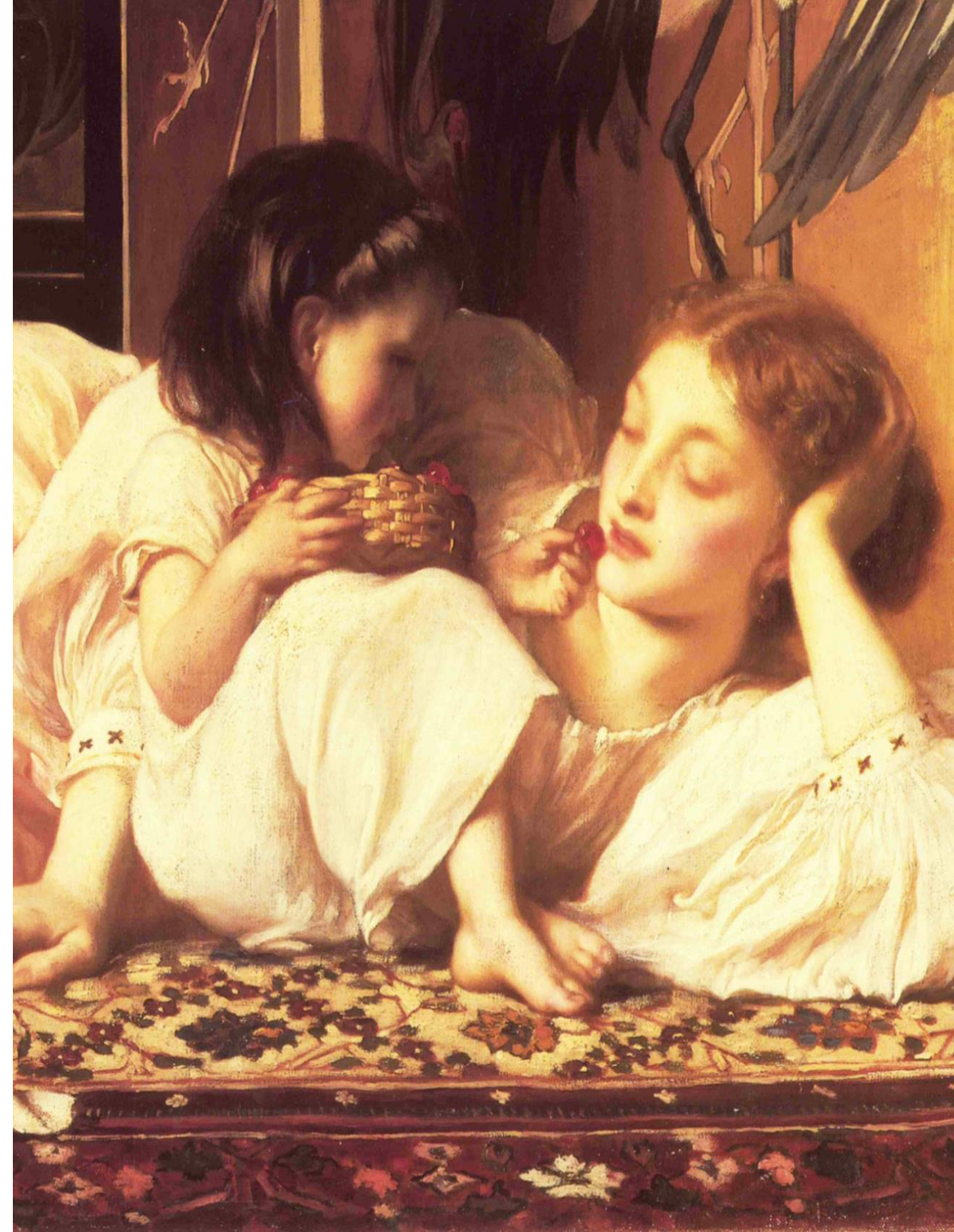
- Repetition and the return of the repressed.
 - The story of Freud's grandson who plays with the toy, making it disappear and reappear again and again.
 - Beyond the Pleasure Principle
- Repetition and the death drive.
 - The repressed trauma repeats itself in:
 - In obsessive behaviour
 - Self-defeating behavioural patterns
- The death drive and cycles of violence.
 - Civilization and its Discontents (1929)
 - Das Unbehagen in der Kultur
 - Civilization curbs our search for pleasure but also our destructive tendencies.
 - Keeping the death-drive in check is a never-ending struggle.

“Possessing” the female body

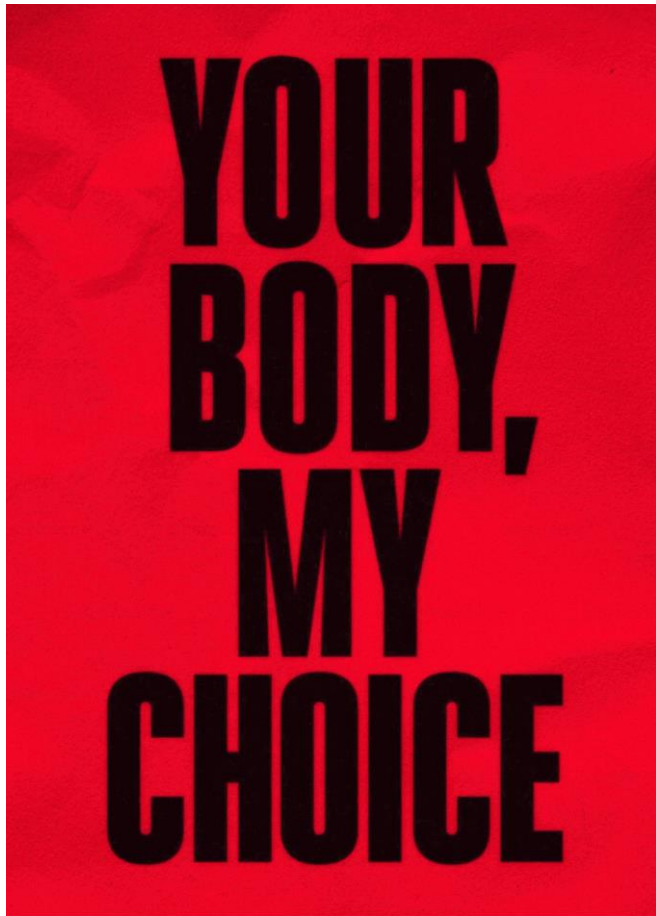
- Before the Oedipal phase, the child does not distinguish between itself and objects.
- The mother's body, is the first object and the infant is attached to it, as it is to itself.
- A successful maturation process allows the child to understand the mother's body as Other and that she has agency and individuality.
- Repressing the urge to “own” it.

→ Deep psychological roots of possessive behaviour of men.

→ Toxic but human.



“Your body my choice. Forever.”



- November 2024: Nick Fuentes, Incel activist.
- Echoed by many male supremacists.
- Trump and the MAGA movement has allowed a “return of the repressed”.
- Article in The New Yorker:
 - <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/your-body-my-choice-a-new-rallying-cry-for-the-irony-poisoned-right>

I am HIM!

- How can anybody identify with Donald Trump?
 - The showman knows his moment.
 - Performing masculinity in the face of danger.
- But he also appeals to our repressed destructiveness.
 - Regressing to the stage of possessing the female body.
 - Not acknowledging the agency and individuality of the other.
- Identifying with the sexual offender.

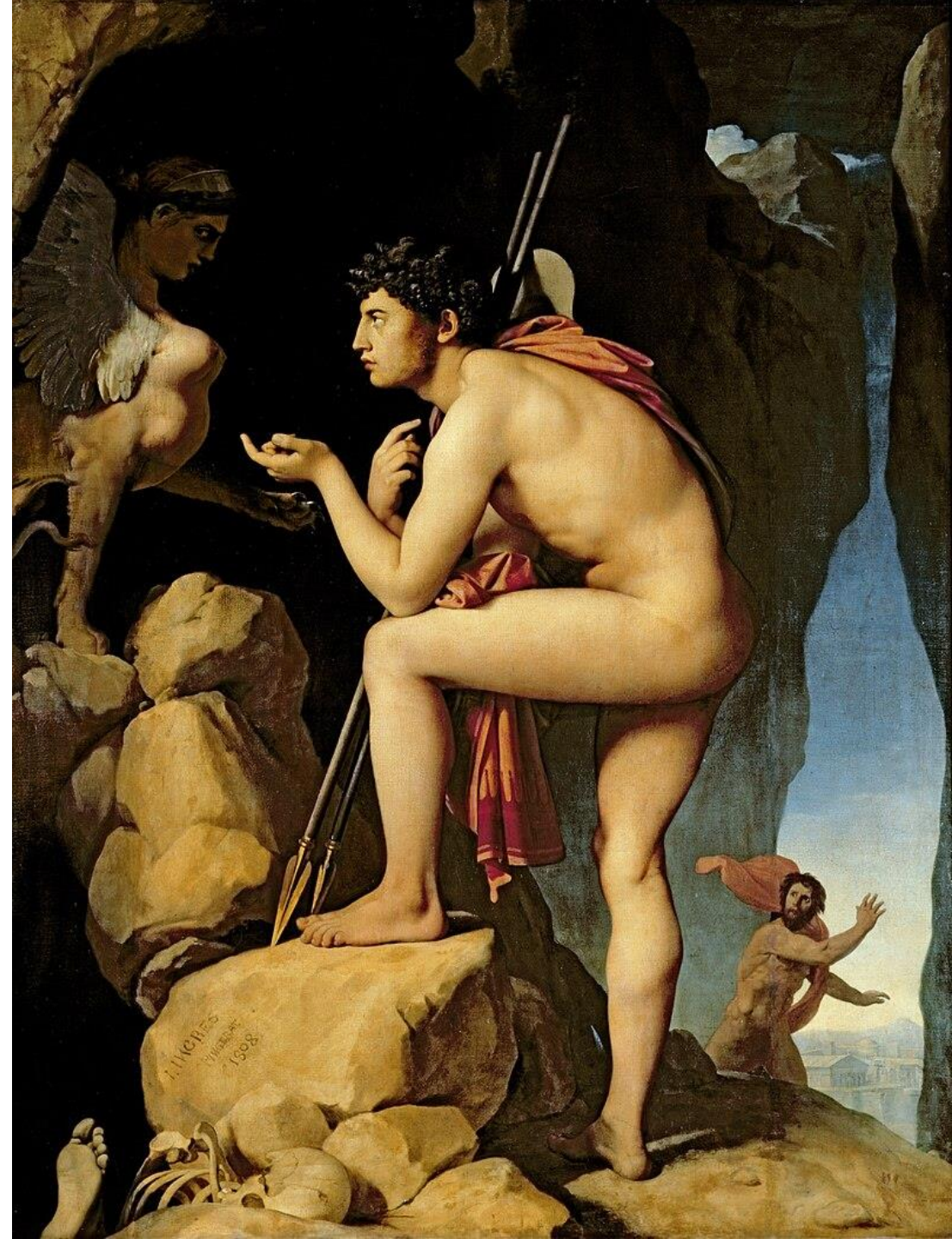


Who is the Criminal in Arnaldur's Novels?



Who is the Criminal in Arnaldur's Novels?

Man



Who is the Criminal in
Arnaldur's Novels?

WE ARE!

