Facing the Heartbeat of the World

Elías Mar, Queer Performativity and Queer Modernism

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Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Iceland
School of Humanities
Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies

University College Dublin
College of Arts and Humanities
School of English, Drama and Film

November 2019

The Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies
at the University of Iceland
has declared this dissertation eligible for a defence
leading to a Ph.D. degree in Icelandic Literature

25 July 2019
Torfi Tulinius
Head of Faculty

The thesis is submitted to University College Dublin,
School of English, Drama and Film,
in fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD degree

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UCD Student No: 10275452
Reykjavík 2019

ISBN 978-9935-9491-1-0

Printing: Háskólaprent

I hereby certify that the submitted work is my own work, was completed while registered as a candidate for the degree stated on the Title Page, and I have not obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of the research presented in this submitted work.

Abstract

In the late 1940s an Icelandic writer, Elías Mar (1924–2007), wrote and published novels that were set in Reykjavík and dealt with young men's same-sex desire and sexual identity crisis. Later he became quite outspoken about his bisexuality and a well-known participant in one of the earliest queer subcultures in Reykjavík, a crowd that gathered at the café Adlon on Laugavegur 11 in the 1950s. This thesis discusses Elías's published and unpublished texts, fictional as well as personal, from the 1940s and his transformation from a frustrated teenager to a young bisexual man and one of the best known Icelandic writers. In addition to literary analyses of the texts in question the thesis studies how writing and publishing them affected Elías's personal and professional development; how becoming a published writer enabled him to travel, explore his sexual identity and express in his writings queer feelings and thoughts that rarely entered public discourse in Iceland at the time.

The dissertation is the first comprehensive study of queer themes in Elías Mar's work and the first dissertation on queer Icelandic literature. It also includes an examination of how homosexuality was 'brought into discourse' in Iceland in the early and mid-twentieth century and the role Elías – and his idol, the writer Halldór Laxness – played in that process. The findings show that while it was rarely addressed in the first half of the twentieth century, public discussion of homosexuality increased significantly around 1950 and included for the first time concerns regarding the existence of male homosexuals in Reykjavík. This suggests that (male) homosexuality was in this period becoming a more prominent part of Icelanders' vocabulary and conception of the world. This development went hand in hand with other social and cultural changes generally referred to as modernisation. Homosexuality was, at least from the 1920s onward, often portrayed as a particularly modern phenomenon, both in writings that expressed concerns about modernisation and its impact on Icelandic society, culture and independence – often highly influenced by nationalist ideology – and in texts that dealt with modern life in a less condemnatory way, such as Halldór Laxness's articles on culture and society and his novel *The Great Weaver from Kashmir* (1927). Such associations moreover often included links between homosexuality and homosexuals on the one hand, and 'modern' or 'unconventional' art and artists on the other; an idea that was materialised in Elías Mar and his companions at Laugavegur 11.

The literary analysis focuses primarily on Elías's first two novels, *Eftir örstuttan leik* (1946) and *Man eg þig löngum* (1949) but also on *Vögguvísa* (1950) and Elías's short stories, poetry, notebooks, essays and other published and unpublished texts from the

1940s. It builds on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theoretical framework of queer performativity; a term which refers to a way of being and producing meaning in relation to sex, gender, sexuality and shame that escapes notions of homo- and heterosexuality. None of Elías's characters 'comes out' or accepts a homo- or bisexual identity but queer performativity is manifested for example in their identity crises, narcissistic self-centredness and shame, failure or refusal to become normative hetero-masculine men, and their desire for other men. The narratives are also narcissistic in the sense that they are highly self-conscious and full of intertextual connotations; they are fiction about fiction. Art and fiction are, in fact, a queer symbolic system in Elías's work; reading and writing, listening to music and watching films are queer performances that have transformative potentials and help the characters living with their shame and queer desires. The link between art and homosexuality, manifested in Icelandic public discourse, thus plays a central role in Elías's fiction from the 1940s and this thesis suggests that for him, like his characters, artistic experience and expression was an essential part of being a queer man.

Elías often emphasised the importance of writing what he called *aktúel* books, texts that actively engaged with contemporary times and in that he was under the influence of Halldór Laxness and socialist thought. Elías's prose is rarely categorised as modernist but this thesis argues that his writings from the 1940s, like for example Halldór's novels *The Great Weaver from Kashmir* and *The Atom Station* (1948), are *aktúel* and modernist in the sense that they are responses to the experience of modernity, explore and raise questions about modern society and underline the paradoxes and incoherences of modern life. The queer performativity in Elías's work is seen here as a particularly modern and modernist theme, intertwined with his personal story, socialist political stand and aesthetic vision and with the modernisation of Icelandic society. His queer modernism is a performative response to the experience of bearing a marginalised sexual identity in mid-twentieth century Iceland; a period characterised by growing public awareness of and hostility towards homosexuality.

Ágrip

Á síðari hluta fimmta áratugar síðustu aldar samdi rithöfundurinn Elías Mar (1924–2007) skáldsögur um unga karlmenn í Reykjavík, kynferðislegar sjálfsmyndarkreppur þeirra og samkynja langanir. Síðar tjáði hann sig nokkuð hreinskilnislega um að hann væri tvíkynhneigður og á sjötta áratugnum var hann meðal annars þekktur fyrir að vera hluti af einum af fyrstu hinsegin menningarkimunum í Reykjavík, hópi fólks sem safnaðist saman á kaffihúsinu Adlon á Laugavegi 11. Þessi ritgerð fjallar um verk Elíasar frá fimmta áratugnum, útgefna texta jafnt sem handrit, skáldverk og persónuleg gögn, og það hvernig hverflyndur unglingur umbreytist í tvíkynhneigðan ungan mann og einn af þekktustu rithöfundum þjóðarinnar. Auk bókmenntagreiningar á verkum Elíasar er sjónum beint að því hvaða áhrif það hafði á hann, persónulega og faglega, að skrifa og gefa út þessa texta; hvernig það gerði honum kleift að ferðast, þreifa fyrir sér á kynferðissviðinu og tjá hinsegin tilfinningar og hugsanir sem rötuðu sjaldan inn í opinbera orðræðu á Íslandi á þeim tíma.

Ritgerðin er fyrsta ítarlega rannsóknin á hinsegin hliðum höfundarverks Elíasar og jafnframt fyrsta doktorsritgerðin á sviði íslenskra hinsegin bókmennta. Í henni er einnig gerð grein fyrir því hvernig „kynvilla“ – en það var orðið sem þá var oftast notað um það sem í dag kallast samkynhneigð – varð hluti af opinberri orðræðu á Íslandi á fyrri hluta 20. aldar og um hana miðja. Horft er til þáttar Elíasar í því ferli og einnig Halldórs Laxness, sem segja má að hafi verið átrúnaðargoð Elíasar á þessum tíma. Niðurstöðurnar sýna að sjaldan var rætt opinberlega um kynvillu á fyrri hluta aldarinnar en um og eftir 1950 jókst slík umfjöllun umtalsvert og áhyggjur af kynvilltum karlmönnum í Reykjavík voru viðraðar að því er virðist í fyrsta sinn. Það bendir til þess að kynvilla (karla) hafi um þetta leyti orðið veigameiri þáttur í orðfæri og hugarheimi Íslendinga en áður. Þessi þróun átti sér stað samhliða öðrum samfélags- og menningarlegum breytingum sem oft eru kenndar við nútímavæðingu. Frá því á þriðja áratugnum að minnsta kosti var oft fjallað um kynvillu sem nútímafyrirbæri, bæði í skrifum sem létu í ljósi áhyggjur af áhrifum nútímavæðingar á íslenskt samfélag, menningu og sjálfstæði – oft undir sterkum áhrifum þjóðernishyggju – og í textum sem fjölluðu um nútímann á frjálslyndari nótum, svo sem greinum Halldórs Laxness um menningar- og samfélagsmál og skáldsögu hans *Vefaranum mikla frá Kasmír* (1927). Slík orðræða fól enn fremur oft í sér samband milli kynvillu og kynvillinga annars vegar og „nútímalegrar“ eða „óhefðbundinnar“ listar og listamanna hins vegar. Sú hugmynd raungerðist enn fremur á Laugavegi 11 þar sem Elías og félagar hans komu saman.

Í bókmenntagreiningarköflunum er einkum fjallað um fyrstu tvær skáldsögur Elíasar, *Eftir örstuttan leik* (1946) og *Man eg þig löngum* (1949), en einnig *Vögguvísu* (1950) og smásögur hans, ljóð, minnisbækur, ritgerðir og ýmis handrit frá fimmta áratugnum. Greiningin byggir á kenningum Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick um hinsegin gjörningshátt (e. *queer performativity*) en hugtakið vísar til veruhátta og merkingarbærra athafna sem tengjast kyni, kynverund og skömm en falla ekki að hugmyndum um sam- og gagnkynhneigð. Engin af skáldpersónum Elíasar „kemur út úr skápnum“ eða tekur upp sam- eða tvíkynhneigða sjálfsmynd en í sjálfsmyndarkreppu þeirra, narsískri sjálfshverfu, skömm, samkynja löngunum og því hvernig þeir forðast eða mistekst að tileinka sér normatífa gagnkynhneigða karlmennsku er fólginn hinsegin gjörningsháttur. Frásagnirnar eru einnig narsískar að því leyti að þær eru afar sjálfsmeðvitaðar og fullar af textatengslum; þær eru sjálf-sögur. Skáldskapur og listir eru raunar hinsegin táknkerfi í verkum Elíasar; það að lesa og skrifa, hlusta á tónlist og horfa á kvikmyndir eru hinsegin gjörningar sem fela í sér umbreytingarmöguleika og hjálpa persónunum að lifa með skömm sinni og samkynja löngunum. Tengslin milli listar og kynvillu, sem koma fram í opinberri orðræðu, eru því einnig í lykilhlutverki í skáldskap Elíasar frá fimmta áratugnum. Í þessari ritgerð er þeirri kenningu slegið fram að í hans augum, líkt og persónanna sem hann skapaði, hafi listræn reynsla og tjáning verið mikilvægur hluti af því að vera hinsegin.

Elías lagði mikla áherslu á það sem hann kallaði „aktúelar“ bækur; að skrifa verk sem tækjust á virkan hátt á við samtímann. Í því var hann undir augljósum áhrifum frá Halldóri Laxness og sósíalískri hugsun. Bækur Elíasar eru sjaldan taldar til móderníska verka en hér er því haldið fram að prósaverk hans frá fimmta áratugnum, líkt og til dæmis skáldsögur Halldórs, *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* og *Atómstöðin* (1948), séu aktúel og módernísk verk, því þau eru viðbrögð við nútímanum, rýna í og gagnrýna ýmsar hliðar á nútímasamfélögum og draga fram þversagnir og ósamræmi í lífi nútímamannsins. Hinsegin gjörningsháttur inn í verkum Elíasar er nútímalegt og móderníst þema sem tengist einkalífi höfundarins, sósíalískum skoðunum hans og fagurfræðilegri sýn og nútímavæðingu íslensks samfélags órjúfanlegum böndum. Slíkur hinsegin módernismi var þannig viðbragð Elíasar við því að tilheyra kynferðislegum jaðarhópi á Íslandi um miðja 20. öld, á tímum sem einkenndust af aukinni meðvitund um tilvist samkynhneigðra og fjandskap í þeirra garð.

Contents

Preface

In *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011) – in a chapter titled "The Trouble With A Book …" – Jeanette Winterson describes beautifully, yet painfully, how literature was to her, a sexually confused and frustrated teenager in England in the 1970s, both dangerous and life-saving. Her adoptive mother, a devout Pentecostal Christian, abusive and homophobic, forbids Jeanette to read fiction and burns books she finds hidden under her mattress. She wants to protect the girl from 'corruptive' secular influence but it is too late – the sixteen-year-old Jeanette has discovered the reparative and transformational effect of poetry and prose. They are medicines, she says; they heal the rupture reality makes on the imagination. Jeanette's life seems unbearably difficult but she finds strength in reading and creating fiction; after her books have been burned she memorises texts and makes up her own stories instead of counting on physical books. "I had lines inside me – a string of guiding lights. I had language," she says (42):

> A tough life needs a tough language – and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers – a language powerful enough to say how it is.
>
> It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place. (40)

When I read these lines a few years ago I realised what exactly I wanted with my PhD project; what I wished to put my finger on. This may seem a strange realisation, since my subject was an Icelandic male writer, 35 years older than Winterson, who probably never read her books. Yet I came to the conclusion that the repeated interest in books, reading and writing I had identified in Elías Mar's fiction from the mid-twentieth century was grounded on this idea, and presumably on Elías's own experience: That literature is a powerful language that can make tough lives – young queer lives – more bearable and help them finding whatever they need in order to survive in a heteronormative world. This, I thought, was a beautiful idea that I wanted to explore.

The following chapters are the result of my yearlong wandering in a place we can call 'queer literature and queer history in Iceland'; an academic field that was largely unexplored when I first visited it in 2010. It was, in other words, an enormous finding place but also a place where you can easily get lost (and hide, if you will). I realised that my study of queer themes in Icelandic twentieth-century literature would have to begin with Elías Mar; a self-identified bisexual writer who became a public queer figure in Reykjavík in the 1950s and whose publications manifest a persistent interest in male same-sex desire. Almost nothing had been written about queer history in Iceland in the early and mid-twentieth century, however, which meant that I had to explore it on my own. The thesis, which in the beginning was meant to be a literary analysis first and foremost, thus

became a much larger and more historical project and after countless detours and long breaks, periods of excitement and desperation, I have probably found more than I can ever fully comprehend. The following discussion is therefore not *the* result of my wandering in this queer place but one of many; recently I have been fortunate to participate in several queer academic projects and I look forward to continuing my journey.

This dissertation was written under joint supervision at the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Iceland, and the School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin. The first people who deserve my gratitude, and to whom I will be eternally thankful for their contribution, are my supervisors, Dr. Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir and Dr. Anne Mulhall. Their patience has been tested and it would not surprise me if they had, at times, thought I was forever lost. Thanks to their professional and inspirational criticism and support I am not. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to the doctoral committee, Dr. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir and Dr. Sharae Deckard, and the transfer panel, Dr. Daisy Neijmann and Dr. Fionnuala Dillane. All these women have read and critically engaged with my work and improved it greatly. The Icelandic Research Fund for Graduate Students (now Icelandic Research Fund) funded this project for three years and for that I am extremely grateful. A special thanks to the Centre for Research in the Humanities (UI) and UCD Humanities Institute for providing me with work facilities and invaluable support. I also thank the offices at the two universities for their assistance.

Several people have earned great thanks for giving me advise and information. Guðjón Ragnar Jónasson realised before many others that Elías's oeuvre deserved to be a analysed from a queer perspective and his ideas and enthusiasm continue to inspire me. The staff at the manuscript department of The National and University Library of Iceland gave me invaluable support and Þorsteinn Antonsson generously granted me access to various documents. Þorvaldur Kristinsson has been an inexhaustible source of information and support and I also thank him for reading and reviewing parts of my work. María Helga Guðmundsdóttir assisted me with translations from Icelandic to English and for that I am very thankful. Jón Karl Helgason is due thanks for generous advice on academic writing and discussions about Elías Mar. I would moreover like to thank Andrea Jónsdóttir, Lára Marteinsdóttir, Árni Bergmann, Ásdís Kvaran and all the other people who have told me stories about Elías and the 'bohemian' life in Reykjavík in the mid-twentieth century.

Writing this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and company of friends and colleagues in Dublin and Reykjavík. I thank Ibolya and Helga, and Helga's family, for their invaluable support. I also wish to thank all those who shared the PhD life and office spaces with me, especially Trudy, Gavin, Sinéad, Maria, Katie, Izzy,

Denise, Elaine, Treasa, Michael Paye and Michael Reilly; Sigrún, Kolfinna, Helga, Auður, Ásdís, Haukur and Gunna. Last, but not least, my historians, Hafdís and Íris, have earned very special thanks for appearing at the right time and making me believe in my project, and in all our projects that are yet to come.

Growing up with kind and modest people who made me believe in myself and never doubted or criticised my life choices was my greatest fortune in life. This thesis is dedicated to them; to my mother Þórgunnur and my grandparents, Halldóra and Eysteinn, who all passed away too early, and to my aunt Bergþóra.

Notes on the text

The general use of first names, rather than family names or last names, is an Icelandic convention. This thesis generally employs Icelanders' first names, although full names are sometimes required for the sake of clarity. Icelandic authors are listed according to first names in the list of references.

None of Elías Mar's texts have been translated to English and a large number of sources and texts used in this dissertation are only available in Icelandic. All translations from Icelandic to English are mine unless other is noted.

1 Introduction

In September 1945 a young and inspiring Icelandic writer, Elías Mar (1924–2007), sat at his desk in a small flat in Reykjavík and wrote about his restlessness and frustration. He had published a few poems, short stories and articles and was working on a novel – later published as *Man eg þig löngum* (1949, 'I remember you always') – but it was not going well. He could not fully concentrate on writing, especially because he was working full-time at a local newspaper, and his productivity was far below his expectations. On 10 September he wrote in a red notebook he called "Skálda" ('Poeta') that he had no alternative: "I have to do something," he wrote; "I have to."[1]

As strange as it may seem Elías's answer was to start writing another novel. On 14 October he described his new project:

> The most ludicrous aspect of this story is that I am using methods that I have not tried before, and I despise them. They are as follows: I write three large pages of dense text every day, – but never more or less. By this means I intend to finish a draft of the whole novel before the end of the year, and even work on it and finish transcribing a third of it before the New Year. I do not take pains with it since I am only writing it as a part of a financial plan. When I have finished it, I will approach a publisher and try to get three thousand [kroner] for the draft. That should be done by the end of January at the latest. Finding a publisher will be the hardest task, – the second hardest typing the story. Then I will get down to 'Man eg þig löngum.' […] I will do that with approximately ten times more care, literally speaking.[2]

Elías thus decided to postpone his main project, *Man eg þig löngum*. Instead he started writing what became his first published novel, *Eftir örstuttan leik* (1946, 'After a short play'), and he was confident that it would only take him a few months to finish it and sell

[1] "Ég verð að taka til einhverra andskotans bragða til þess að fá mig til að vera eins og maður. […] Ég verð að taka til einhverra bragða. Ég verð." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. CA. Diaries and guestbook, box no. 5. "Skálda," 10 September 1945. Elías's private archive is held at The National and University Library of Iceland (Lbs. 13 NF). It contains a large number of manuscripts, letters, notebooks and other personal documents, and gives invaluable insight into Elías's work and personal life.

[2] "Það hlægilegasta við þessa sögu er það að við samningu hennar nota ég vinnubrögð, sem ég hefi ekki áður reynt, og sem ég hefi andstyggð á. Þau eru þannig að [ég] skrifa þrjár síður þéttletraðar og stórar á hverjum degi, – en hvorki meira né minna. Með þessu móti ætla ég mér að vera búinn að skrifa uppkast skáldsögunnar allrar fyrir nýár og jafnvel vinna að henni og ljúka við hreinritun þriðjungs hennar fyrir áramótin. Ég vanda mig ekkert með hana, enda er tilbúningur hennar einungis liður í fjárhagsplani. Þegar ég hefi gengið frá henni, ætla ég að reyna til við einhvern útgefanda og reyna að fá þrjúþúsund fyrir handritið. Það ætti aldrei að verða síðar en í lok janúar. Erfiðasta verkið verður að fá útgefanda, – það næsterfiðasta að vélrita söguna. Síðan ætla ég að taka til við "Man ég þig löngum", sem ég geri ráð fyrir að ljúka við í ágúst eða september í fyrsta lagi og senda svo í verðlaunasamkeppni Menningarsjóðs og Þjóðvinafélagsins. Ég mun vanda mig ca 10 sinnum meira við þá sögu, – bókstaflega séð." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 14 October 1945. See also Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 36; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði. Þættir úr höfundarsögu Elíasar Mar*, 66.

it to a publisher. He also planned to earn enough money by the beginning of July 1946 to leave the country and go on "an aimless journey."[3] His primary goal was thus twofold: To have the time, money and peace of mind to finish *Man eg þig löngum,* and to leave Iceland. Remarkably the plan worked; *Eftir örstuttan leik* was proofread in June 1946 and published eight months later, Elías received 3000 kroner from his publisher and on 29 June he quit his job, left on a ship to Copenhagen and did not return until October 1947.[4] His most precious project, *Man eg þig löngum,* was not published until 1949, but the bold plan he made in the fall of 1945 was nevertheless a turning point in his writing career.

Elías Mar is one of the few Icelandic twentieth-century writers whose oeuvre manifests a persistent interest in queer desire and homoeroticism. Such interest is prominent in the two books mentioned in the previous paragraph and also in Elías's third novel, *Vögguvísa* (1950, 'Lullaby'). The protagonists in all three books are young men who are having an identity crisis and struggling with understanding their sexuality. Elías's fictional and non-fictional, published as well as personal, writings suggest that he was himself coming to terms with his same-sex desires in the 1940s;[5] he later identified as bisexual and claimed that he had been with a man for the first time in Copenhagen in the summer of 1946, shortly after he finished writing *Eftir örstuttan leik.*[6] This thesis argues that not only is queer sexuality an important theme in Elías's writings from the 1940s; writing and publishing his first books also enabled him to travel, dwell in big cities, act upon his queer desires for the first time and explore his sexual identity, and – perhaps most importantly – express queer feelings and thoughts that rarely entered public discourse in the mid-twentieth century.

This project seeks to outline how male same-sex desire and queerness is represented in Elías Mar's work from the 1940s and how that representation reflects upon Elías himself and the society he lived in. As such it is the most comprehensive study of queer sexuality in Icelandic literature conducted to date. Queer theory became a part of the academic landscape in Iceland by the end of the 1990s, most significantly through the work of two literary scholars, Dagný Kristjánsdóttir and Geir Svansson, whose queer analyses of Icelandic novels and discussions of queer theory's foundational writings laid the ground

[3] "[…] ferðalag út í bláinn […]." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar, "Skálda," 17 October 1945.
[4] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. CB. Notebooks, cassettes and various papers, box no. 1. Notebooks 1939–1980, here 1946 and 1947. *Eftir örstuttan leik*'s copyright page shows the year 1946 but the novel was not officially out until 27 February 1947. See *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 27 February 1947 and an advertisement on page 4 in *Morgunblaðið* the same day.
[5] See e.g. Jón Karl Helgason, "Þrautreyndur nýgræðingur. Fyrstu skrif Elíasar Marar"; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*.
[6] Ásgeir Þ. Ingvarsson, "Elías Mar! Hvað erum við að gera?"

for queer studies in the humanities in Iceland.[7] In 1999 Dagný expressed her hope that the discussion would continue and "many exciting literary analyses [were] anticipated,"[8] but it would be an overstatement to say that many scholars answered her call. The majority of the academic writings that deal with queer themes in Icelandic literature are in fact written by Dagný herself and the interest in this subject that was manifested around the millennium has not yet developed into a strong field of research.[9]

A similar claim can be made about academic interest in the history of homosexuality and queer sexuality in Iceland. Until recently few scholars had shown interest in Icelandic queer history and it is still a relatively unexplored field, although a number of projects are now underway or have been published in the past two years.[10] The most important scholarly writings that deal with the period under consideration here, the early and mid-twentieth century, are Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir's chapter on homosexuality and criminal

[7] Geir Svansson, "Ósegjanleg ást. Hinsegin sögur og hinsegin fræði í íslensku samhengi"; Geir Svansson, "Kynin tvö / Kynstrin öll. Um kynusla, kyngervisútlaga og efni(s)legar eftirmyndir"; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, *Undirstraumar. Greinar og fyrirlestrar*, 290–96; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Hinsegin raddir. Um sannar og lognar lesbíur í bókmenntum og listum"; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Út úr þögninni. Um Þögnina eftir Vigdísi Grímsdóttur"; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Hvað er á bak við dyrnar þröngu? Um skáldsögur Kristínar Ómarsdóttur"; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Tómið og tilveran. Um skáldsögur Kristínar Ómarsdóttur." Geir also gave public lectures about queer theory and Judith Butler, see various advertisements in Icelandic newspapers in November 1998.

[8] "Umræðan er […] opnuð og ég treysti því að hún haldi áfram og margar og spennandi bókmenntagreiningar séu framundan." Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, *Undirstraumar*, 296.

[9] In 1994 Þorvaldur Kristinsson wrote an overview of the representation of homosexuality in Icelandic literature and a similar discussion appeared in Samtökin '78's (the National Queer Organisation of Iceland) 30 year anniversary magazine in 2008. See "Skýrsla nefndar um málefni samkynhneigðra," 78–81; Árni Heimir Ingólfsson, "Með pennann að vopni. Hinsegin bókmenntir á Íslandi." Guðrún Elsa Bragadóttir's recent publications are also an important contribution to queer studies in literature and the humanities: ""Að kjósa að sleppa því." Olíuleit, aðgerðaleysi og hinsegin möguleikar"; "Af usla og árekstrum. Sálgreining í ljósi hinsegin fræða." Sexuality in medieval literature, including same-sex desire and homosociality, has moreover received considerable attention in the past decades; see e.g. Ármann Jakobsson, "Ekki kosta munur. Kynjasaga frá 13. öld"; Jenny Jochens, "Triangularity in the Pagan North. The Case of Bjorn Arngeirsson and Þórðr Kolbeinsson"; Gunnar Karlsson, "Karlmennska, drengskapur, bleyði og ergi."

[10] For an overview of academic publications on queer history and historiography in Iceland, see Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir, ""Forsenda fyrir betra lífi"? Tilraun til skilgreiningar á hinsegin sögu," 45–51. They include, in addition to the studies discussed later in this thesis, Íris Ellenberger, "Lesbía verður til. Félagið Íslensk-lesbíska og skörun kynhneigðar og kyngervis í réttindabaráttu á níunda áratug 20. aldar"; Íris Ellenberger, "Að flytja út mannréttindi. Hinsegin paradísin Ísland í ljósi samkynhneigðrar þjóðernishyggju og sögulegra orðræðna um fyrirmyndarsamfélög í norðri"; Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir, ""Sögur af mér – eða því sem ég gæti orðið." Þekkingarmiðlun og sexúalpólitík á bókasafni Samtakanna '78"; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Att ta sin plats." Kristín's book on pornography and obscenity in the 1960s and 70s, *Stund klámsins. Klám á Íslandi á tímum kynlífsbyltingarinnar*, moreover includes a study of queer sexuality. See also grassroot articles on the 'gay liberation' movement and history of the National Queer Organisation, e.g. Guðni Baldursson, "Iceland: From Sexual Aberration to Sexual Inversion"; Þóra Kristín Ásgeirsdóttir, "Þrjátíu ára stríðið"; Veturliði Guðnason, "Úr grasrót í griðastað"; Böðvar Björnsson, "Alnæmisfaraldurinn. Þröngi vegurinn til sigurs." Considerable work has been done on sexuality and same-sex desire in the medieval North, including Iceland, which lies outside the scope of this thesis.

law in *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia 1842–1999* (2007) and Þorvaldur Kristinsson's article on the case of Guðmundur Sigurjónsson in 1924 and Icelanders' ideas about homosexuality in the early twentieth century.[11] Other writings include studies of romantic friendship and non-normative gender and sexuality in the nineteenth century by Þorsteinn Antonsson, Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, Sigrún Sigurðardóttir, Þorvaldur Kristinsson, Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson and Soffía Auður Birgisdóttir; Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson's article on the reception and translations of Sappho's poetry in Iceland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir's dissertation in folkloristics on tales about gay men during the Second World War; Hilmar Magnússon's article on gay clubs in Reykjavík; and a number of interviews with people who remember the 1940s and 1950s.[12]

The dearth of research on the history of queer sexualities in Iceland is a challenge that has influenced, inspired and shaped this project in various ways. Elías Mar's background and socio-cultural context shed interesting light on his fiction and vice versa. This dissertation thus includes, in addition to queer literary analyses of Elías's work from the 1940s, a primary study of public discourse on (male) homosexuality, how Icelanders conceived and spoke of homosexuality in the early and mid-twentieth century and Elías Mar's performances in that context.[13]

[11] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992. From Silence to Rainbow Revolution"; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli. Réttvísin gegn Guðmundi Sigurjónssyni 1924."

[12] Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Vaxandi vængir. Aftur í aldir um ótroðnar slóðir*, 103–9; Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Menntun, ást og sorg. Einsögurannsókn á íslensku sveitasamfélagi 19. og 20. aldar*, 252–55; Sigrún Sigurðardóttir, "Tveir vinir. Tjáning og tilfinningar á nítjándu öld"; Soffía Auður Birgisdóttir, "Hið "sanna kyn" eða veruleiki líkamans? Hugleiðingar spunnar um frásögn af Guðrúnu Sveinbjarnardóttur"; Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson, ""Að hafa svo mikið upp úr lífinu sem auðið er." Ólafur Davíðsson og hinsegin rými í Lærða skólanum á nítjándu öld"; Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson, "Gyðjunafn, skólastýra, vörumerki sjúkdóms. Saffó á Íslandi á 19. og 20. öld"; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Loksins varð ég þó skotinn!"; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Maður stendur með sínum ef maður getur. Spjallað við Þóri Björnsson"; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Tea for two – og tvíbökur með. Herder Andersson um ástina og lífið á árum áður"; Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir, "Hommar eða huldufólk? Hinsegin rannsókn á sögnum og samfélagi að fornu og nýju"; Hilmar Magnússon, "Drottningar á djamminu. Molar úr skemmtanalífi hinsegin fólks á Íslandi"; Þóra Kristín Ásgeirsdóttir, "Elsta lesbían. Hinsegin veröld sem var."

[13] This project focuses predominantly on male same-sex desire since the queer characters in Elías's work under consideration here are all men. (One exception is to be found in his novel *Sóleyjarsaga* (1954–59) which lies outside the scope of this thesis.) The currently available sources on the socio-cultural context and Icelanders' conception of homosexuality in the mid-twentieth century are also primarily on men. This male bias in research and archives has for example incited the project "Hidden women: queer women's sexuality in the archives," conducted by Íris Ellenberger, Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir and myself, which aims to find sources on queer women in Iceland before 1960 and make them available to scholars, students and the public. See www.huldukonur.is.

1.1 Elías Mar and queer modernism

Elías Mar is probably best known as one of the first 'Reykjavík writers,' that is, for writing poems and stories about the life in Reykjavík during and after the Second World War. Most discussion of Elías and his work mentions his status as an urban writer who dealt with the war and post-war atmosphere; this is underlined for example in *A History of Icelandic Literature* (2006), the fourth volume of *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* (2006, 'Icelandic literary history'), and Hjálmar Sveinsson's book *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi* (2007, 'New pen in a new republic'), which is based on interviews with Elías.[14] The war/post-war urban setting was the world Elías lived in; he was born and raised in Reykjavík and a teenager during the war. He started writing poems and stories at an early age, his first texts appeared on print in the early 1940s, and most of his prose works were published when he was in his twenties and early thirties; between 1946 and 1960.[15] In addition to *Eftir örstuttan leik, Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa,* Elías wrote and published another novel in that period, *Sóleyjarsaga* (1954–1959, 'The story of Sóley'), a short story collection, *Gamalt fólk og nýtt* (1950, 'Old and new people'), a collection of poetry, *Ljóð á trylltri öld* (1951, 'Poetry in a wild age'), several short stories and articles for newspapers and magazines, and the short story *Saman lagt spott og speki* (1960, 'Mockery and wisdom') which was published independently in a limited edition. After 1960 Elías's stories and poems continued to appear in magazines and he published a short story collection, *Það var nú þá* (1985, 'That was then') and three collections of poetry: *Speglun* (1977, 'Reflection'), *Hinumegin við sólskinið* (1990, 'On the other side of the sunshine') and *Mararbárur. Úrval ljóða 1946–1998* (1999, 'A selection of poems, 1946–1998'). A few of Elías's short stories have been translated, to for example Norwegian and Estonian, but only one novel; *Vögguvísa* was published in the German Democratic Republic in 1958 as *Chibaba, chibaba: Bruchstück eines Abenteuers*.

The scope of this dissertation is limited to Elías's writings in the 1940s. It focuses primarily on *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* but also *Vögguvísa,* first and foremost because of these texts' interrelated queerness and because they shed light on how a young man comes to terms with his same-sex desires while writing and publishing novels about young men dealing with similar issues. As such the writings under consideration here belong to a period in Elías's life that came to an end around 1950; in the early 1950s he was quite open about his bisexuality and had become a part of a subculture in Reykjavík that was associated with homosexuality in the minds of many

[14] Ástráður Eysteinsson, "Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–1980," 410–17; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 470–76; Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi.*
[15] See ch. 3.1.

Icelanders. This is the first comprehensive queer study of Elías's writings, which is not to say that the 'homosexual theme' in his oeuvre has gone unnoticed. It was pointed out in 1994 by Þorvaldur Kristinsson who argued in an official report on 'the concerns of homosexuals' in Iceland that Elías's short story, *Saman lagt spott og speki* was "most likely" the first example of an Icelandic literary text "about homosexuals and written by homosexuals."[16] The homosexual theme in Elías's other texts, however, did not receive attention from critics until 2006 when Hjálmar Sveinsson stated in an article in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* that the protagonist in *Man eg þig löngum* was homosexual, and claimed that the novel was the "Icelandic republic's first "gay novel.""[17] Jón Karl Helgason's analysis of *Eftir örstuttan leik*, "Deiligaldur Elíasar. Tilraun um frásagnarspegla og sjálfgetinn skáldskap," was published a few months later, by the end of which Jón suggests that the novel's protagonist is also struggling with his homosexuality.[18] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir took up this thread in 2009 in another article on *Eftir örstuttan leik*, "Sýnt en ekki gefið. Um skáldsöguna Eftir örstuttan leik eftir Elías Mar," which focuses on the protagonist's existential crisis and attempts to handle his homosexual desires.[19] Last, but not least, Þorsteinn Antonsson's book on Elías Mar, *Þórðargleði* (2011), as well as his articles and introductions to compilations of Elías's previously unpublished work, *Elíasarbók* (2011) and *Elíasarmál* (2014), discuss same-sex desire and sexual themes in Elías's fiction and poetry.[20]

Statements about the 'first' individual work of a certain kind are always questionable and likely to be proved wrong, and no declarations about the gay or queer pioneer status of Elías and his works in the history of Icelandic literature are made here. It is safe to state, however, that at least between the publication of *Eftir örstuttan leik* in 1946 and the early 1960s, male same-sex desire and sexual existential struggle were recurrent themes in his published prose, and they are also evident in his manuscripts that either remain unpublished or were included in Þorsteinn Antonsson's publications after Elías's death. Writing and publishing books about same-sex sexuality was not an easy or common task in the mid-twentieth century, neither in Iceland nor other Western countries, and Elías had

[16] "Fyrstu dæmi um slíkan skáldskap [um samkynhneigða og eftir samkynhneigða] er líkast til að finna í smásögu eftir Elías Mar, *Saman lagt spott og speki* […]." "Skýrsla nefndar um málefni samkynhneigðra," 80.
[17] "*Man eg þig löngum* er fyrsta bindið í fyrstu "gay-skáldsögu" lýðveldisins." Hjálmar Sveinsson, "Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi," 5. See also Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 14.
[18] Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar. Tilraun um frásagnarspegla og sjálfgetinn skáldskap," 126–28. See also Jón Karl Helgason, "Maður dagsins, seint og um síðir."
[19] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið. Um skáldsöguna Eftir örstuttan leik eftir Elías Mar."
[20] Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*; Þorsteinn Antonsson, "Sú leynda ást"; Þorsteinn Antonsson, introductions to *Elíasarmál* and *Elíasarbók*. See also Örn Ólafsson, *Guðbergur – Um rit Guðbergs Bergssonar*, 23–31.

few Icelandic models from which he could seek inspiration. As chapter two outlines issues regarding same-sex desire and homosexuality were treated with silence rather than public condemnation in the first half of the century, and people's knowledge about homosexuality was presumably limited – although it is difficult to make assumptions about the latter due to lack of research and available sources. This project's findings suggest, however, that in the late 1940s this was about to change – that homosexuality was becoming a part of Icelanders' vocabulary, public discourse and conception of the world. This development went hand in hand with other social and cultural changes generally referred to as modernisation – a process that started in Iceland in the late nineteenth century but reached a point of no return in the 1940s.

The following chapters claim that Elías Mar and his writings played a significant role in bringing homosexuality into discourse in Iceland in the mid-twentieth century. The same can be said about another writer, Halldór Laxness (1902–1998), who won the Nobel prize in literature in 1955.[21] In this thesis Halldór's writings are used to shed light on Elías's texts and political and cultural stance, as well as how Icelanders' ideas about homosexuality developed from the 1920s to the mid-twentieth century. The association between the two writers is no coincidence; Halldór was Elías's favourite writer in the 1940s and had significant influence on him, as chapter three outlines.[22] Literary critics have pointed out similarities between their work and even criticised Elías for imitating Halldór, and Elías's notebooks, letters and other writings, in turn manifest that he identified decisively with Halldór, both as a writer and socialist.[23] Halldór's name is for example mentioned in almost every letter Elías wrote to his friend Guðmundur Pálsson in 1943. Elías tells Guðmundur that he believes Halldór has been an instigator for young writers in Iceland against the power of conservative leaders; a true socialist who has seen the world and is not afraid to fight for what he believes in.[24] He discusses various aspects

[21] Halldór Laxness may or may not have been interested in men but from 1930 and until he died in 1998 he was in long-term relationships with women. His sexual orientation or personal life is not under consideration here, however; the focus is on his novels and other writings in which he discussed homosexuality and various other issues in relation to modern life and literature.

[22] Elías's friend, Guðmundur Pálsson, wrote an essay in 1943 where he said that Halldór Laxness's books were Elías's favourite and that Elías had been more influenced by Halldór than any other thinker. *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Documents from childhood. "Mannlýsing." See also Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 43.

[23] See ch. 3. Many reviewers mentioned for example the similarities between *Vögguvísa* and Halldór's novel *The Atom Station* (1948). Some simply noted that the two novels dealt with similar issues while others, such as Erlendur Jónsson, saw *Vögguvísa* as a cheap imitation of Halldór's novel. Erlendur even argued that Elías had been so dependent on Halldór, an older writer, that his books were already 'outdated' when they were published. Erlendur Jónsson, *Íslenzk skáldsagnaritun 1940–1970*, 45–46.

[24] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. BA. Letters – Icelanders. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 24 July 1943.

of Halldór's oeuvre and says he is waiting impatiently for his next novel. He also claims to be planning to "read The Weaver thoroughly" in the fall, but according to his notebooks he had already read Halldór's novel, *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* (1927; *The Great Weaver from Kashmir*, 2008), several times – a novel which played a significant role in bringing homosexuality into public discourse in Iceland and influenced Elías in various ways.[25]

Elías was passionate about writing books that dealt with contemporary issues and both negative and positive aspects of society.[26] This passion was an integral part of his political views and life principles; he was a dedicated socialist and believed the writer's role was to write about social reality and speak to contemporary readers. In this regard, and many others, Elías was inspired by Halldór Laxness. Like countless other writers and artists, Elías and Halldór dealt with what can be referred to as the 'modern life' – the experience of modernity and modernisation[27] – without necessarily challenging traditional form and use of language to the extent that their works were categorised as 'modernist.' Halldór certainly wrote texts, poetry, plays and prose, that have been referred to as modernist work, such as *The Great Weaver* and *Kristnihald undir Jökli* (1968; *Under the Glacier*, 1972/1990), but his relationship with modernist form experiments was shifty and many of his most famous books are generally categorised as realist novels.[28] Elías's contribution to the first significant 'wave' of modernist poetry in Iceland around 1950 has been acknowledged,[29] but his prose is rarely associated with modernism, although the prominence of modern life and modernity in his books is often emphasised, as noted earlier.

[25] "Nú mun vera að koma út í Rvk. saga eftir Laxness, Íslandsklukkan, – saga um leitina að réttlætinu. Ég hefi beðið eftir þeirri bók í marga mánuði – og bíð enn. Í haust ætla eg að lesa Vefarann rækilega." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 29 August 1943. See also *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1940–1943. Elías notes when he borrows *The Great Weaver from Kasmir* in libraries on 5 July 1940, 19 April 1941, 11 August 1941, 7 November 1941 and 6 November 1942. On 27 October 1943 he also notes that he has read the novel.

[26] See ch. 3.

[27] In the following chapters the terms *modernisation* and *modernity* describe various political, economic, social and cultural processes that interact and overlap in complex ways in the history of the West. The fundamental processes that led to the formation of modernity are for example major advances in technology and sciences, such as the discovery of steam power, electricity and print; various kinds of machinery and transportation and the industrial revolution; the Enlightenment; the decline of the religious world and rise of a secular and materialist culture; the rise of capitalism – that is, large-scale production, consumption of commodities for the market, extensive ownership of private property and systematic, long-term accumulation of capital; international trade and globalisation; expansion of European colonial powers; and the making of the nation-state. The articles in the book *Formations of Modernity* (ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben), for example, build on this wide understanding of the terms.

[28] See ch. 2.2.3.2.

[29] See e.g. Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, "Icelandic Poetry Since 1940," 478.

Recent reevaluation and rethinking of the concept *modernism* has given way to a broader scope that includes not only so-called high modernism; the works of a (limited) number of Western artists and writers from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, who challenged or rejected traditional form, use of language, harmony and structure, experimented with form and representation and emphasised 'inner reality,' subjectivity and a fragmented world-view.[30] Many scholars now assume that modernisms – in the plural – are a "diverse field, characterized by an aesthetic and ideological challenge that goes beyond a narrow canon of writers and works";[31] responses to modernity, manifested in various ways in different geographical and historical contexts. Some of these new perspectives have argued for the inclusion of texts and modes of expression that explore and raise questions about modern society and modernisation and may, or may not, be radically challenging or diverge from a traditional use of language. Jessica Berman suggests for example that modernist narrative

> might best be seen as a constellation of rhetorical actions, attitudes, or aesthetic occasions, motivated by the particular and varied situations of economic, social and cultural modernity worldwide and shaped by the ethical and political demands of those situations. Its rhetorical activity exists in constant and perpetual relationship to the complex, various, and often vexing demands of the social practices, political discourses, and historical circumstances of modernity and the challenges they pose to systems of representation – even as its forms and attitudes sometimes hide this fact.[32]

Other scholars point out that such an approach risks becoming so broad that the term *modernism* loses its meaning and merges with *modernity* or *modern*. The editors of the critical volume *Modernism* (2007), Ástráður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska, for example, agree that modernism should include socio-historical factors and they want to "open up the concept of modernism to recent inquiries into cultural politics" – but they also wish to preserve "its force as a term for a major aesthetic phenomenon of our recent history."[33] In a recent PhD dissertation on the Icelandic modernist journal *Birtingur* Þröstur Helgason similarly points out that a wide-open definition of modernism, like the one Jessica Berman describes, would even encompass Halldór Laxness's novels from the 1930s, *Salka Valka* (1930–1931; *Salka Valka*, 1936) and *Sjálfstætt fólk* (1934–1935; *Independent People*,

[30] Such 'highbrow' understanding of modernism is evident in e.g. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930* and Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, see 81–82.
[31] Ástráður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska, "Introduction: Approaching Modernism," 6.
[32] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments. Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism*, 7–8.
[33] Ástráður Eysteinsson and Liska, "Introduction," 7.

1945), that are usually categorised as realist novels, and as such it would be an impracticable tool for distinguishing modernist works from other kinds of texts.[34]

The following chapters seek to illustrate the advantages of using a broad definition of modernism, and thus to resist distinguishing between the so-called 'aesthetic' modernism and other critical literary engagements with modernity, when it comes to Elías Mar and his work. In that respect the discussion builds on Marshall Berman's claim in *All that Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) that modernism should be seen as a

> variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own.[35]

Modernism, in Marshall Berman's terms, is thus a response to modernity that underlines the paradoxes and incoherencies of modern life and resists its demands, and it is not just manifested in art and literature but also people, their thoughts and actions. As chapter three outlines Marshall Berman's reading of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* as a modernist text even enables him to build a bridge between 'orthodox' modernists and Marxists, give "modernist art and thought a new solidity, and invest its creations with an unsuspected resonance and depth. It would reveal modernism as the realism of our time."[36] This thesis similarly argues that Elías was, in (Jessica and Marshall) Berman's terms, a modernist writer.

The queerness in Elías's texts is seen here as a particularly modern and modernist theme, intertwined with his personal story, socialist political stand and aesthetic vision, and with the modernisation of Icelandic society in the mid-twentieth century. His modernism is *queer modernism*; a response to his experience of bearing a marginalised sexual identity and to his "forced exile," as Heather Love puts it in her discussion of queer modernism and the writings of the novelist Walter Pater.[37] Love points out that there are various resonances between modernism, the term *queer* and queer experience; *queer* is for example, like modernism, closely linked to the concept of the margin, exile and alienation, indeterminacy and the experimental.[38] She emphasises however that while modernism is often preoccupied with marginal experience and with going to the limits – and although such modernist 'rebellion' has been celebrated and idealised – there is a significant difference between self-exile and forced exile; between choosing transgression and being excluded and marginalised:

[34] Þröstur Helgason, "Tímaritið Birtingur og íslenskur módernismi," 25–30.
[35] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, 16.
[36] Ibid. 122.
[37] Heather K. Love, "Forced Exile. Walter Pater's Queer Modernism."
[38] Heather Love, "Introduction: Modernism at Night," 745.

> If one has not departed under one's own steam, being on the margins looks less like heroic sacrifice and more like *amor fati*. Such a modernism cannot easily be recuperated as good: in recording the experience of forced exile, it undermines the heroism of modernist transgression, revealing the uneven terrain of twentieth-century modernity.[39]

The queer modernism Love is interested in, and which this thesis explores, is rooted in social discrimination and marginalisation of modern sexual identities such as homosexuality. The modernism under consideration here is thus not just an image of rebellion and resistance but also of refusal, passivity and withdrawal – what Love refers to as "aesthetics of failure"[40] – a response to the particularly modern experience of being seen and treated as sexually deviant in a society that assumes heterosexuality is the norm.

1.2 Homo or queer? A few words on perspective

Same-sex desire has presumably always been a part of human existence; yet ideas, conceptions and vocabularies related to such longings and sexual activities vary significantly between cultures and periods. Scholars of gay, lesbian and queer history have, at least since the 1980s, debated and disagreed on the relevance and accuracy of using words like *gay*, *lesbian* and *homosexual* to describe societies and individuals outside the modernised West and before modernisation; that is, if homosexuality should be seen as an ahistorical (genetic) fact, or as a particularly modern Western phenomenon, shaped and constructed by cultural and social factors.[41] This dissertation is firmly located among the latter; its approach is constructivist and builds on writings by Michel Foucault and other scholars who have studied how conceptions of and discourses on same-sex desire take different forms in different places and periods.[42] This project presumes, in other words, that homosexuality is a modern concept – a set of ideas, discourses and practices of

[39] Love, "Forced Exile," 21.
[40] Ibid. 26.
[41] See e.g. Judith Schuyf, "Hidden from history? Homosexuality and the historical sciences"; Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir, ""Forsenda fyrir betra lífi"? Tilraun til skilgreiningar á hinsegin sögu." John Boswell was criticised for speaking of 'gay sexuality' in his book on same-sex erotic desires in ancient and medieval Europe; desires he claimed were "associated with a conscious presence" and an essential part of people's identity. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. Gay People in Western Europe From the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, 44. As Carolyn Dinshaw has noted the importance of Boswell's work for many gays and lesbians and their fight for political and social recognition in the 1980s should not be diminished but his use of modern terms such as *gay* is nevertheless misleading. Late-twentieth-century ideas about homosexuality are projected onto historical figures, she says, with the result that "[t]he gay relationships in Boswell's gay history resemble those of urban gay males in the United States." Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval. Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*, 30.
[42] In Foucault's writing the term *discourse* is not used primarily as a linguistic concept but refers to 'system of representations,' or the practice of representing knowledge about a particular topic. See Stuart Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse," 72–73; Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*.

subjectivation that are coextensive with the emergence of distinctly modern forms of power/knowledge – rather than something (some) Icelanders have always practised or identified with.

Medical and psychiatric discourses that were concerned with human sexuality, including same-sex desire, emerged in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and sexology became an academic and scientific discipline. Among the pioneers in this field were Magnus Hirschfeld and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in Germany – men who were academics as well as activists and agitated for the rights of people who desired the same sex – and the Hungarian journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny who introduced the term *Homosexualität* in 1869.[43] Scholars and clinicians such as Richard Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Carl Westphal followed in their footsteps and sought to understand and explain human sexuality, especially 'abnormalities' and variations from what was considered healthy or normal. Krafft-Ebing, for example, analysed in great detail the sexual physiology of humans and various abnormalities and perversions, such as sadism, masochism and homosexuality, as well as sexual neuroses, mania, hysteria and paranoia. In the early twentieth century, moreover, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud argued that sexuality, including what he described as aberrations, was not only inherent to all people but the driving force behind the development of the human psyche.[44] Western societies, in other words, developed "a whole machinery for specifying, analyzing, and investigating" sex,[45] as Foucault argues in the first volume of his history of sexuality, *La Volonté de savoir* (1976; *The Will to Knowledge*, 1978), where he also maintains that such 'production of knowledge' about sexuality (and various other aspects of the world and human existence) was an inherent part of the modernisation of Western societies.

At the same time great restrictions were also put on people's sexual behaviour and discussion of sex. Criminal justice had been occupied with sexuality for a long time, Foucault says, especially the so-called 'crimes against nature,' but now the jurisdiction also included

> petty offences, minor indecencies, insignificant perversions; and lastly, all those social controls, cropping up at the end of the [nineteenth] century, which screened the sexuality of couples, parents and children, dangerous and endangered adolescents – undertaking to protect, separate, and forewarn, signalling perils

[43] See e.g. Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin. Birthplace of a Modern Identity*, 3–41.
[44] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis. With Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct. A Medico-Legal Study*; Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. For an overview of scientific research on homosexuality in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see e.g. Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 1–21.
[45] Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 32.

> everywhere, awakening people's attention, calling for diagnoses, piling up reports, organizing therapies.[46]

Sodomy, or intercourse 'against nature,' was a criminal act in many Western countries – including Iceland – but as the influence of scientific research on homosexuality grew the idea that the homosexual was not a criminal, but sick, malformed, underdeveloped, or at least abnormal, gained ground. Sexologists sought to explain this abnormality or sickness, the reasons for it and hence often possible ways to 'fix' it, and their findings and theories were used to control and regulate individuals and populations. Sexuality became a field of particularly rich and manifold knowledge because it was believed to be important to keep it under control, and in order to control it, Foucault says, "one had to speak of it as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum."[47] Every abnormal sexual behaviour was thoroughly examined and theorised, medical and psychiatric treatments and institutions were established in order to deal with sexual deviations and pedagogical controls were adopted to prevent children and youth from developing abnormal sexual desires. Foucault moreover argues that these new techniques and methods used to repress and control sexuality were enabled by the emergence of new modes of power. In modern societies, he says, power is not just juridical or sovereign power but also 'power over life,' which focuses on disciplining bodies, optimising their capabilities and administrating and regulating populations in order to improve their condition and productivity. Power over life relies on the creation of a 'normalising society' underwritten by discourses and knowledge that distinguishes what is 'good' or 'bad' in terms of the flourishing of the optimal population, dividing populations into the 'normal' and 'abnormal,' and based on such operations of the norm the 'sexual aberrations' were brought into discourse and discussed openly but at the same time pathologised and condemned.[48]

This led to 'a new specification of individuals,' Foucault argues, and the emergence of new sexual identities, such as homosexuality. In his now famous remark he states that while sodomy had for a long time been a category of forbidden sexual acts,

> [t]he nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went

[46] Ibid. 30–31.
[47] Ibid. 24.
[48] Foucault's most significant writings on modern power include *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, lecture 11 in *"Society Must Be Defended." Lectures at the Collége de France, 1975–76*, 239–64, and the chapter "Right of Death and Power over life" in *The Will to Knowledge*, 133–59.

> into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. […] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[49]

Foucault suggests, in other words, that even though some people have always been attracted to, and had sex with, individuals of the same sex a new understanding of what it meant to be attracted to the same sex emerged in the late nineteenth century – an understanding that was very different from for example the ancient Greek and Roman ideas about sex and pleasure Foucault later discussed in the second and third volumes of the history of sexuality.[50] Same-sex desire was, from the late nineteenth century onward, seen as an inherent part of an individual's personality; people were categorised according to their sexual orientation, homosexual or heterosexual identity could be ascribed to them and they could take it up willingly.[51] Since then, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), the binary opposites heterosexual/homosexual have structured and regulated Western thought to the same extent as for example the categories of gender, race and class.[52]

Foucault's writing on the emergence of homosexuality as a concept and identity have had extensive influence on queer history and historiography since the late 1970s. He has, however, been rightfully criticised for focusing for example primarily on male homosexuality in France and England while dismissing issues related to race and gender, and for ignoring early conceptions of homosexual identity in Germany and the part homosexual activists played in producing knowledge about homosexuality.[53] The process and timeline he describes in *The Will to Knowledge*, moreover, is not fully descriptive of all societies nor can it be projected onto all contexts without critical consideration. While the homosexual may have been a known 'species' in England and continental Europe by 1900, for example, the situation in Iceland – a small, rural and largely not-yet-modernised society – was different. Þorvaldur Kristinsson has pointed out that official discourse in Iceland was silent about homosexuality (although public awareness of it may have been

[49] Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 43.
[50] In the second and third volumes, *L'Usage des plaisirs* (*The Use of Pleasure*) and *Le Souci de soi* (*The Care of the Self*), published in France in 1984, Foucault focused on ancient Roman and Greek conceptions of sex, pleasure and self-care. The fourth and final volume, *Les aveux de la chair* ('Confessions of the Flesh'), which deals with the first centuries of Christianity, was left incomplete when Foucault died in 1984 and published for the first time in February 2018.
[51] Krafft-Ebing spoke for example of 'hetero-sexual' and 'homo-sexual instinct' and thereby became one of the first to make this distinction. See also Jonathan Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, 19–32.
[52] Sedgwick also argues that the homo/hetero binary and other binary oppositions that are central to modern thought, such as knowledge/ignorance, public/private, masculine/feminine and health/illness, are closely interrelated. See *Epistemology of the Closet*, 11.
[53] See e.g. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*; Beachy, *Gay Berlin*; Peter Edelberg, *Storbyen Trækker: Homoseksualitet, prostitution og pornografi i Danmark 1945–1976*.

more comprehensive) until the 1920s when the first scholarly articles on the subject appeared and a man was sentenced to jail for same-sex sexual activity for the first and only time in Icelandic history.[54] A study of homosexuality in Iceland in the mid-twentieth century can thus not simply presume that the concept was a part of Icelanders' world-view. This dissertation seeks to explore how it was 'brought into discourse' and became an identity and category that people in Iceland relied on when they made sense of the world and themselves. In that respect, this project is inspired by various similar studies that have built on Foucault's writing and approach when researching same-sex sexuality in Iceland's neighbour countries in Northern Europe.[55]

The literary texts under consideration in this dissertation are not 'gay' or 'homosexual' in the sense that they represent full-fledged homosexual identity or characters that are gay in the twenty-first century understanding of the term. Very few, if any, of Elías's characters think of themselves as homosexual or 'come out,' and same-sex desire is rarely spelt out. It lies between the lines, however; in symbolic language, intertextual references and the unsaid. It is also questionable if Elías thought of himself as bisexual or homosexual in the 1940s, although his notebooks and letters manifest that he was aware of his same-sex desires and thought much about sexual matters. Using terms like *homosexuality* and *gay* about Elías and his characters is thus problematic; it can easily become inaccurate and exclusive.

To avoid such anachronism and inaccuracy the approach chosen in this thesis is a *queer* one. It asks questions such as those formulated by Judith Butler in the essay "Critically Queer" in 1993:

> As much as identity terms must be used, as much as "outness" is to be affirmed, these same notions must become subject to a critique of the exclusionary operations of their own production: For whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the demand for universal "outness"? Who is represented by which use of the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation and sexual politics? What kinds of policies are enabled by what kinds of usages, and which are backgrounded or erased from view?[56]

Butler does not argue against the use of sexual identity terms but when they may be inaccurate or exclusive she proposes a queer approach. Unlike terms like gay, lesbian and

[54] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli."
[55] See e.g. Jens Rydström, *Sinners and Citizens. Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880–1950*; Dag Heede, *Hjertebrødre. Krigen om H.C. Andersens seksualitet*; Edelberg, *Storbyen Trækker*.
[56] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, 173. The essay was originally published in the first issue of *GLQ* in 1993.

homosexual, *queer* is also a deconstructive and radical concept that is, in fact, more telling about what it is not than what it is[57] – it is a "resistance to the regimes of the normal," as Michael Warner puts it.[58] It refers to people, practices, discourses and other phenomena that resist or do not conform to *heteronormativity* – a term, popularised by Warner, which designates a set of norms regarding heterosexuality, including normative ideas about gender, bodily sex, the family, consumption and social display and behaviour in general. Queer is thus not necessarily a 'sexual' term since its scope is much wider than that; it is directed against social and cultural structures and modes of thinking that privilege and idealise 'the heterosexual way of life.' Any subject can be analysed or criticised from a queer perspective – a queer approach is a critical stand towards normative ways of thinking. Butler notes that instead of focusing on and describing stable and manageable identity categories a queer inquiry may, for example, explore the formation of identities without taking their stability for granted or analyse the "deformative and misappropriative power" the identity term enjoys.[59] This is also the objective of the current project: To explore certain aspects of the formation of homo- and bisexual identity in Iceland, via public discourse, what role Elías Mar played in that process, and – building on a theoretical framework developed by Sedgwick – how his texts express and deal with queer sexuality without necessarily suggesting a stable homo- or bisexual identity.

1.3 Queer performativity

> But of course it's far easier to deprecate the confounding, tendentious effects of binary modes of thinking – and to expose their often stultifying perseveration – than it is to articulate or model other structures of thought.[60]

Much of Sedgwick's scholarly work from the 1990s seeks ways to deal with the problem she identified in *Epistemology of the Closet*; that Western culture has been structured and fractured by the dualistic definition of homosexuality and heterosexuality since the late nineteenth century. Determined to find new and useful modes of thinking about sexuality and sexual identity she turned towards studying emotions and performativity, as manifested for example in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003).[61] In

[57] In a non-academic context the word *queer* is used in various ways, for example as an identity term or an umbrella for an ever-growing number of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities. The usage of the term in this thesis, however, is grounded on the deconstructive anti-normative meaning and function of the concept as practiced in queer theory.
[58] Michael Warner, "Introduction. Fear of a Queer Planet," 16.
[59] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 174.
[60] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 2.
[61] *Touching Feeling* is a collection of Sedgwick's writings from the 1990s, some of which had previously been published, partly or as a whole. Sedgwick also edited *Performativity and*

the book she builds on theoretical frameworks developed by four scholars: Foucault's history of sexuality, Butler's theory of gender performativity, the psychologist Silvan Tomkins's work on affect, published as *Affect, Imaginary, Consciousness,*[62] and J. L. Austin's lectures on performative utterances and speech act theory, published as *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962. All these texts deal with issues regarding gender, sexuality, identity, emotions or language without presupposing binary modes of thinking, which is why Sedgwick chose them as a ground for her analysis of art, literature and sexuality.

One of the most important concepts Sedgwick employs in *Touching Feeling* is *queer performativity*; a term she uses when analysing Henry James's critical prefaces to the New York edition of his work in 1909.[63] Sedgwick notes that although James's sexuality and the nature of his relationships with men and women remains a matter of speculation, and despite the fact that he does not discuss or deal with homosexuality directly, the prefaces express certain narcissistic – and queer – eroticism, which does not necessarily make James homosexual but not heterosexual either. In *Tendencies* (1993) Sedgwick notes that she often uses the term *queer* to denote same-sex object choice without defining it as 'lesbian' or 'gay,' but the word also has a much broader reference since it can mean

> the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.[64]

This is the kind of queerness Sedgwick identifies in James's prefaces. It is a resistance to fixed identity which bears many similarities to Gilles Deleuze's anti-confirmatory emphasis on becoming rather than being; on desires, affects and intensities and the continuous transformation of the self.[65] "The thing I least want to be heard as offering here

Performance (1995) (with Andrew Parker) and *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995) (with Adam Frank).

[62] *Affect, Imaginary, Consciousness* was published in four volumes in 1962, 1963, 1991 and 1992. Sedgwick builds on the first three volumes.

[63] James's prefaces were later published as *The Art of the Novel* (1934). Sedgwick originally wrote three articles about queer performativity and James's prefaces: "Queer Performativity. Henry James's The Art of the Novel"; "Inside Henry James. Toward a Lexicon for The Art of the Novel"; "Shame and Performativity. Henry James's New York Edition Prefaces." All references to Sedgwick's work on queer performativity in this thesis are to the first chapter in *Touching Feeling*, which is a rewritten version of the third and last article. See Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, xii.

[64] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8.

[65] Although Deleuze's decisive departure from identity and subjectivity and towards the ontology of becoming collides with the works of many queer theorists, such as Butler, his radically anti-normative and anti-capitalist philosophy has much in common with queer theory. See e.g. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies*; Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, *Deleuze and Queer Theory*. Sedgwick does not build directly on Deleuze's work but her approach is, like his, focused on the becoming of identity rather than the identity itself or its components.

is a "theory of homosexuality"," Sedgwick says in her conclusion; "I have none and I want none."[66] She is not interested in sexual repression or the construction of homosexual identity but rather in the possibilities and meaning that arises through queerness – through not 'fitting' in a binary system of identity categories. She focuses on sexuality in relation to emotions, shame in particular, and performativity – how queerness is expressed, acted and performed rather than seen as the ground for an identity category. James's writing in the prologues is, Sedgwick argues, a prototype of queerness and queer performativity, which is, in this context, "*the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma.*"[67] Queer performativity is, in other words, a way of being and producing meaning in relation to sex, gender and sexuality but which escapes notions of homo- and heterosexuality and binary ideas of sexual identity.[68]

As the following chapters outline many of Elías Mar's writings from the 1940s are not only full of queerness and homoeroticism; they are also saturated with shame. The characters fail to conform to heterosexual norms and as a result they feel ashamed and humiliated. Sedgwick's theory of queer performativity thus suits the subject of this thesis well and offers analytical tools that enable a study of various kinds of acts and performances without necessarily linking them to homosexual identity.

1.3.1 Shame and identity

Sedgwick's writings on queer performativity and shame in the mid-1990s were not just important contributions to queer studies but also to what is now known as affect theory; approaches to for example literature, history and politics that focus on affect as a physical, rather than linguistic, capacity that influences various aspects of human life.[69] She

[66] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 61.
[67] Ibid. 61. Italics added.
[68] Sedgwick's work on shame, queerness and performativity has inspired a great number of scholars and activists who have explored the dynamics of queer shame. See e.g. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (eds.), *Gay Shame*.
[69] See e.g. Patricia T. Clough and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn. Theorizing the Social*; Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*. Sara Ahmed has, like Sedgwick, brought together affect theory and queer theory, e.g. in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and *Queer Phenomenology*. The meaning and usage of terms such as *affect*, *emotion* and *feeling* varies between disciplines and scholars, some of whom like to distinguish between the unconscious or non-cognitive physicality of affect (or emotion) and the cognitive, socio-cultural nature of emotions and/or feelings. Tomkins, for example, considered affect to be a primary biological motive. See Silvan Tomkins, "What are Affects?" 33–34. Other scholars, such as Ahmed, have pointed out that it is problematic to distinguish between bodily sensation and conscious emotion. She chooses not to the make such a distinction. Instead she speaks of emotions that can be both within and outside the individual; they are impressions, both physical and social. See Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 1–19. See also Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments. The Cultural Politics of Shame*, 4–11. In this thesis, *emotion* refers to a whole range of affects/emotions/feelings without

revisited Tomkins's work on affect and introduced it as an alternative to binary thought; Tomkins's ideas appealed to her because unlike for example Freud, whose model for 'normal' psychosexual development was the heterosexual family, Tomkins was neither dualistic nor heteronormative in his approach.[70] He criticises Freud, when writing about sexuality and the Oedipus complex, for not distinguishing between drives and affects and therefore confusing the child's love and affection for its parents with its sex drive. Freud also dismissed the part excitement plays in sexual pleasure, Tomkins says, and points out that the sex drive is different from other drives in that – because of excitement – it is pleasant even before it is satisfied: "It is much more exciting and rewarding to feel sexually aroused than to feel hungry or thirsty."[71] Tomkins holds that the sex drive is, in fact, the most affect-like of all drives, and since for him any affect can have any object, sexual desire is not limited to heterosexual object choice.[72]

Shame is central to Sedgwick theory of queer performativity because it marks queer people in a particular manner. The powerful and wide-ranging mechanism of heteronormativity induces shame in those who cannot conform to it and such shame, Sedgwick says, becomes an integral part of queer people's identity. For her, in fact, queerness has just as much to do with shame as with sexuality. In her previous work, as noted earlier, she emphasised that the word queer refers to an 'open mesh of possibilities' in relation to gender and sexuality but in *Touching Feeling* she adds another dimension to it. Queer, she concludes,

> might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to this group or an overlapping group of infants and children, those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame.[73]

In order to outline the diverse components of shame Sedgwick builds on Tomkins but he considers shame to be one of the basic human affects, along with surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress, disgust, contempt and interest. He argues that the relationship between shame and

defining their bodily or socio-cultural, cognitive or non-cognitive nature. If the context requires such a distinction, for example when building on Tomkins's writings, *affect* means a biological and non-cognitive motive. On a similar note, the word *feeling* generally refers to a conscious cognitive phenomenon.

[70] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Reading Silvan Tomkins," 4–11. All references to Tomkins's work in this thesis are to chapters in *Shame and Its Sisters. A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Freud's theory of the subject's psychosexual development is under discussion later in this thesis, see e.g. ch. 4.3.3. His theories are often somewhat contradictory; although his Oedipal model is heteronormative he also argued that same-sex desire was an essential part of human sexuality. See e.g. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*; Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism. An Introduction"; Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, "Introduction: Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis"; Guðrún Elsa Bragadóttir, "Af usla og árekstrum."

[71] Tomkins, "What are Affects?" 60.

[72] Ibid. See also Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 18–22.

[73] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 63.

affect is very close and that shame operates only after interest, enjoyment or excitement has been activated. Shame is provoked, in other words, when a subject has become interested in someone or something but the interest is not returned or confirmed.[74] Shame thus requires an 'other' – someone in whom the subject is interested but whose presence or response makes the subject ashamed. Charles Darwin detected this social characteristic of shame already in 1872 in his writing on blushing in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* when he noted that shame, which induces blushing, is enacted when the person's attention is turned towards their own appearance and influenced by the opinions of others. "It is not the simple act of reflecting on our appearance, but the thinking what others think of us, which excites a blush," he says: "In absolute solitude the most sensitive person would be quite indifferent about his appearance."[75] Jean-Paul Sartre later similarly pointed out that shame shows how humans exist both for themselves and others. My own gesture, Sartre says, does not make me ashamed until I become aware of others who see me:

> But now suddenly I raise my head. Somebody was there and has seen me. Suddenly I realize the vulgarity of my gesture, and I am ashamed. […] I am ashamed of myself as I *appear* to the Other.[76]

Through the gaze of the other we form a relationship with ourselves and recognise us as we are in the eyes of the other, Sartre says. We become, in other words, social beings and shame is an integral part of that process.[77]

Sedgwick emphasises the role shame plays in the formation of identity and the individual's sense of self. Tomkins's work is important here but his study of infants led him to conclude that a proto-form of shame appears in infants when they begin to learn to distinguish themselves from their primary caregiver and the face of the caregiver from the faces of strangers.[78] He notes that when infants have begun to see themselves as separate from other people they become vulnerable to shame because they do not always get the positive feedback they want or expect from the other – and with this interrupted communication the child's sense of self begins to develop.[79] Sedgwick also refers to work

[74] Silvan Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 134–35.
[75] Charles R. Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 326–30, here 326–27.
[76] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, 221–22.
[77] Ibid. 221–23.
[78] That the moment when infants learn to distinguish between themselves and others is an important moment in the development of subjectivity has, of course, been emphasised by for example Freud and Jacques Lacan. Lacan argues that this moment marks the beginning of the mirror stage; the phase in which the ego is formed via processes of identification with self and others, and a split between the ego and the Ideal-I – the idealised primary self-image the infant sees in the mirror – emerges. See "The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience."
[79] Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 139–40.

by the psychotherapist Michael Franz Basch who notes that "[t]he shame-humiliation reaction in infancy of hanging the head and averting the eyes does not mean the child is conscious of rejection, but indicates that effective contact with another person has been broken."[80] The primary source of shame is thus, according to Tomkins and Basch, not the other person's condemnation or prohibition but the subject's inability to arouse the other's positive reactions, which makes the subject reflect on themselves and look inward in search for possible reasons for this failure.[81]

Shame has thus much to do with identification – interrupted identification. Sedgwick notes that the moment shame floods into being is a disruptive moment "in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication."[82] But even though the subject's affective investment in the other is ruptured this same identification failure also plays a part in the making of identity. In fact, Sedgwick says, "shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once constituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating."[83] Shame is a dynamic link between the subject and the outer world and thus raises important questions about identity.

1.3.2 The script of normative existence

Elías Mar's writings from the 1940s, his fiction, notebooks and other personal documents, often focus on young men in emotional and existential crisis – Elías himself or his fictional characters. This thesis draws attention to how these men are marked by shame, affected by the opinions of others and concerned with how they can, or cannot, change themselves and their behaviour in order to be acknowledged. Other people's gazes shape their relationships with themselves and the texts are often deeply engaged with questions about identity and identity formation processes. Moreover, sexuality is of central importance in this context. The men feel ashamed because they are queer; because their identifications with other people are ruptured but, perhaps more importantly, their identifications and relationship with social and cultural *norms*.

Despite Darwin's claim that a person would feel no shame in absolute solitude shame is often experienced even when the subject is alone – it can be induced by merely thinking about the view of others. Sara Ahmed notes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) that if subjects feel shame when they are alone "it is the imagined view of the other that is

[80] Michael Franz Basch, "The Concept of Affect. A Re-Examination," 765–66, quoted in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 37.
[81] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 35–38. Recent empirical psychological research confirms that shame plays an important part in the development of a sense of self. See e.g. June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, especially 52–77.
[82] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 36.
[83] Ibid.

taken on by a subject in relation to itself."[84] This other is in many cases not even a person but the views, rules, moral codes and norms of a given culture or society. Foucault deals with such matters in many of his writings; the way subjects are shaped by, and in relation to, social norms and power. Late in his career he even stated that the primary theme in his academic writing had always been the subject, not power, and that his goal had been "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."[85] In "The Subject and Power," published in 1982, Foucault attacks the humanist understanding of the subject as self-constructed and argues that the modern human subject is shaped, and even constituted, by power. The modern form of power, he says,

> applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.[86]

Individuals thus become subjects through their encounter with power over life when they are placed, and place themselves, within or outside identity categories such as gender and sexual identity.

Although Foucault does not directly discuss shame it is clear that shame plays an essential role in the way subjects are formed in relation to power and normative regulation. In *Discipline and Punish* he describes how discipline is a particularly individualising, as well as normalising, type of power. A central element in maintaining discipline is surveillance, actual or imagined, and the internalisation of social norms by subjects who discipline and shape themselves to avoid punishment.[87] "The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions," Foucault says, "compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes.*"[88] The punishment for not conforming to norms is often disapproval or lack of positive feedback from the collective – and internalised – normative gaze of society, which makes the subject ashamed. Shame thus "performs culturally to mark out certain groups," as Sally Munt emphasises in her book *Queer Attachments* (2007); groups that do not, or cannot, conform.[89] In order to avoid shame, Ahmed similarly says,

[84] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 105.
[85] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 777. Foucault admits that he certainly became "quite involved with the question of power" but claims that the reason was primarily his realisation that the human subject was placed in, and shaped by, complex relations of power.
[86] Ibid. 781.
[87] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135–228.
[88] Ibid. 183.
[89] Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 2.

> subjects must enter the 'contract' of the social bond, by seeking to approximate a social ideal. Shame can also be experienced as *the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence.*[90]

This attachment to social and cultural ideals makes shame particularly important to moral development and social norms; the fear of shame and of betraying the social ideal urges subjects to act according to moral codes and norms. When a subject identifies with the norm it is difficult to move beyond shame, and this is the power of normative regulation in a nutshell: It is based on love and identification – the individual's desire to connect and reconnect to the other.[91]

1.3.3 Shame and performativity

Last, but not least, Sedgwick claims that shame is performative. First of all, it is a performance in the sense that it enacts bodily movements and 'acts' on the surface of the body of the shamed person; it generates bodily responses, such as blushing and strong heartbeat, and movements like covering the face and eyes and lowering the head. The shamed person turns the body away, especially the face, and tries to avoid the gaze of the other. Or as Darwin noted: "Under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment."[92] Tomkins similarly emphasises that hiding the face and the eyes are central elements of shame. The shame response "is an act which reduces facial communication," he says; the individual "calls a halt to looking at another person, particularly the other person's face, and to the other person's looking at him, particularly at his face."[93] This happens because, as we have seen, shame is concerned with the evaluation of the self and the face and the eyes are perhaps the body parts where the individual's personality is most visible. Tomkins even argues that "the self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes."[94] Subjects permit themselves to look into the eyes of those they love but at the same time they become vulnerable because if they are not loved in return the gaze makes them ashamed – and then they look away.

Sedgwick also notes that shame is performative in the sense that it is 'produced' by shame – being ashamed is shameful in itself[95] – and because it *does* something in relation to the subject's identity and social relations. In this respect she builds on the so-called

[90] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 107. Italics original.
[91] Ibid. 101–21.
[92] Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 321–22.
[93] Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 134.
[94] Ibid. 136.
[95] On how shame response, such as blushing, is both a cause and consequence of shame, see e.g. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 103–4; Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 136–37.

deconstructive line of performativity theory, shaped by Austin, Jacques Derrida and Butler. Austin formulated the term performativity in his lectures at Harvard University in 1955 in which he argued that certain utterances, to which he referred as performative utterances, were actions rather than descriptions or statements; that saying 'I promise,' for example, means that a promise is made.[96] He eventually concluded, however, that performativity was a facet of language in general – that all utterances 'do something.'[97] This idea has inspired scholars such as Sedgwick, Derrida and Butler and the term performativity has become a tool in various anti-essentialist projects whose focus is on both verbal and non-verbal acts and communication, where the primary thesis is that language itself can be productive of reality – also when it is not embodied in actual words.[98]

Butler's theory of gender performativity, presented primarily in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), is concerned with the construction of normative gender and sexuality.[99] Building on Foucault's theory of sexuality as a discursive construction she argues that gender is an apparatus through which normative ideas about sex, gender, sexual practice and desire are established. Gender identity is a part of what she refers to as the 'heterosexual matrix';[100] the network of unwritten rules, grounded on ontological claims about the essence or nature of sexual difference, about sex, gender and sexual desire that assumes that there are two sexes, two corresponding genders and that sexual attraction to the opposite sex/gender is the natural mode of desire.[101] Butler opposes such 'metaphysics of substance' and argues that gender identity is, like sexuality, a discursive construction. Moreover, she argues that it is *performatively* constructed and that gender is

[96] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 6. For an overview of 'Austinian performativity' and its influence on philosophy, linguistics and literary studies since the mid-twentieth century, see e.g. James Loxley, *Performativity*.

[97] Austin's reassessment begins in lecture eight and is clearly spelt out in the twelfth and final lecture: *How to Do Things with Words*, 147–63. See also Loxley, *Performativity*, 6–21.

[98] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 3–5.

[99] Butler's early writing on performativity is primarily focused on non-linguistic phenomena, that is, the performativity of acts and gestures rather than utterances. In the last chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, however, she discusses the linguistic performativity of the term *queer*, and in her later work, especially in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), she explores performative speech acts such as hate speech. Her theory of gender performativity was inspired by Derrida's essay "Before the law," which is an analysis of a short story with the same title written by Franz Kafka, Derrida uses Austin's concept performativity to shed a light upon the 'law' that defines texts as, or makes them, literature. He suggests that literature itself creates the law that defines it; that it is, in other words, performative. Derrida's essay was originally a lecture presented to the Royal Philosophical Society in London in 1982 and an extended version was presented at the 1982 Colloque de Cerisy on Lyotard.

[100] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 208.

[101] Ibid. 1–46.

produced by regulatory practices – practices that are generally seen as the effect of gender. Regulated acts and gestures that signify gender are performed on and through bodies, Butler says, and through a repeated process of signification an illusion is created "of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality."[102]

Performativity, for Butler, is "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names."[103] Her theory maintains that there is no beginning or an end to this process; no essence or identity behind the expressions of gender or bodily sex and no subject prior to signification. There is, in other words, no "doer before the deed" because the 'doer' is constructed in and through the deed; we become gendered subjects when we perform gender.[104] Identities and subjects are thus neither determined by 'nature' nor by social and cultural regulation; the fact that the 'law' is performatively constructed means that it is fragile and inconstant. Gender norms, like other kinds of 'law,' are first and foremost grounded on repetition, Butler says; a public and collective performance which is temporal and varies between social and cultural contexts. Like linguistic acts the performative acts of gender are citational – repetitions of previous acts – and thus never singular or original. They can be modified, however; gender identity is constituted through "a stylized repetition of acts" and within this process lies the subject's agency and possibilities for a subversive transformation:

> The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.[105]

This is what Butler calls *resignification*; subjects can neither have an agency outside the discursive territory of the 'law' nor fully reject it, but they can turn the power of the 'law' against itself and alter gender norms by *repeating differently*.[106]

All identity is, from this perspective, performative in the sense that we become subjects when we perform 'as ourselves' in relation to other people and social norms. Sedgwick emphasises, as we have seen, the role shame plays in such formation and re-formation of identity. Shame is both individuating and relational, she notes; the shamed person turns inward, away from the other, in narcissist obsession with themselves, but also

[102] Ibid. 175–93, here 186.
[103] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xii.
[104] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 194–203. Butler is referring to Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (45) where he says that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything."
[105] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.
[106] Ibid. 194–203.

feels a strong desire to reconnect and fix the interrupted identification, or "to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge."[107] Tomkins discusses this ambivalence and notes that it is for example evident in the shy child who covers their face but peeks through their fingers to see if they are seen. The shamed subject is not willing to renounce the other permanently but hopes for a positive reaction. Such reconnections often occur and shame can quite easily turn into pride or excitement. Or as Tomkins says, "excitement may break through and displace shame at any moment."[108] This is perhaps the core of Sedgwick's view of shame as performative; whenever shame floods in, the subject can either 'be flooded' in it, or mirror the shame response back to where it came from and let it transform into pride, excitement or joy.[109]

This ambivalent inward/outward performance of shame is, in Sedgwick's theory, related to two different aspects of the term performative; on the one hand deconstructive performativity and on the other a more general use of the word in relation to theatre. That is, performativity refers to words or acts that create their own meaning at the moment they are performed, and also to people's performances on and off stage.[110] Shame resembles a performance on stage in the sense that the actor/subject is under a spectating eye and consequently becomes self-conscious – reflects upon their individual performance – and yet they also reach out and seek to build a connection with the audience. The shamed subject turns away from others and examines and obsesses with their own performance in solitude; this performance starts to shape and influence the subject's identity and simultaneously becomes shameful in itself. The theatrical shame performance, on the other hand, reaches out towards the other – a person or societal norms – and tries to reestablish the broken or failed identification, which also shapes and forms the subject's sense of self. Shame is thus both a theatrical and deconstructive performance in relation to the formation of identity and a meeting point between the two aspects of the term. For Sedgwick shame is therefore "the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, […] between performativity and – performativity."[111]

[107] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 36.
[108] Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 137.
[109] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 36–38.
[110] On performativity and performance theory – the Austinian and theatrical aspects of the performative – see e.g. Loxley, *Performativity*, 139–66; Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction: Performativity and performance"; Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," 521–22.
[111] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 38. In order to articulate the difference between these aspects of performativity Sedgwick builds on a distinction made by Michael Fried who in *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* distinguishes between two tendencies or modes in works of art: Theatricality and absorption. According to Fried art which represents figures that seek to connect to the spectator is theatrical while works that seem to ignore the

But what is queer about performativity? The relationship between performativity and queerness has, of course, a long history – for example the use of various symbols to signify same-sex desire – and it has much to do with the link between act and identity; homosexual conduct and homosexual identity.[112] The question when saying something is doing something, or when doing something means something, is highly important in this context; 'coming out' is a performance which links acts to an identity but there are also several ways of performing queerness that do not connect the subject to a stable and monolithic homosexual identity.

The queer performativity Sedgwick sees in James's prefaces evolves around two relationships; firstly between him and his audience/readers and secondly between the James who is the author of the prefaces and younger versions of himself, such as fictional characters in the stories that are being republished and the young James who wrote the texts in question. Sedgwick outlines how these relationships are saturated with shame. James suffered from depression generated by what he experienced as his failure as a playwright and writer and when he wrote the prologues he had recently recovered from a tough episode of shame which had led him to stop writing. His "theatrical self-projection was sufficiently healed" by the time he wrote the prologues, Sedgwick says,[113] and he started writing plays again – reconnecting with the audience, readers and critics. Later, however, he had another difficult period of depression, when the New York edition failed to sell, and his connection to his audience was interrupted again.[114] The relationship between the writing James and his younger selves is also marked by shame; James's representation of the younger and fictional versions of himself are often embarrassing and he seems to dwell on their shameful acts and character. Importantly – because this is where the queerness enters the picture – Sedgwick also outlines how this relationship is erotic, flirtatious and loaded with sexual imagery such as anal penetration. The author of the prefaces does not express his longing to become young again, she says. On the contrary, the distance between him and the younger self-figures is underlined and eroticised. He flirts with and loves the shameful figurations of his younger self and this love is shown to occur despite, and through, shame.[115]

audience – such as those that picture people who are absorbed in reading or other activities – are characterised by absorption. In Fried's terms deconstructive performativity is thus absorption and theatrical performativity is theatrical.

[112] Parker and Sedgwick, "Introduction: Performativity and performance," 4–6.

[113] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 38.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid. 40.

Sedgwick argues that James's prefaces are a prototype of queer performativity – and this thesis suggests that Elías Mar's writing from the 1940s are also excellent examples thereof. The prefaces, Sedgwick notes, say nothing about James's sexual identity but they represent and express queerness through shame – performative shame. Moreover, the intro- and extrovert aspects of shame meet in an obvious manner in the prefaces; in James's narcissistic and homoerotic relationship with his younger selves on the one hand, and his dramatic relationship with his readers and audience on the other. Through the playful "authorial narcissism,"[116] James displays his introverted and shamed subjectivity, which he perhaps could not express otherwise, Sedgwick suggests, and he does so in a creative and productive way. She notes that in the prefaces James uses "reparenting or "reissue" as a strategy for dramatizing and integrating shame, in the sense of rendering this potentially paralyzing affect narratively, emotionally, and performatively productive."[117] This performance, however, appears only in the context of theatricality; in James's relationship with his audience and the reception of his work. Sedgwick thus argues that in the prologues, James tries to negotiate the intersection between the inward and outward movement of shame; "between the subjectivity-generating space defined by the loved but unintegrated "inner child," on the one hand, and on the other hand the frontal space of performance."[118]

1.4 Thesis outline

The primary aim of this dissertation is to explore how Elías Mar wrote about same-sex desires and queerness in the 1940s, and the role these writings played in Elías's personal life as well as in bringing homosexuality into public discourse in Iceland. In the period between Elías's birth in 1924 and what was arguably the peak of his career in the early 1950s quite significant changes occurred concerning how Icelanders addressed issues in relation to homosex and same-sex sexuality. While the general idea of homosexuality was sometimes mentioned, especially in relation to foreign countries and medical science, Icelandic media hardly ever – with one important exception – mentioned Icelandic homosexuals or the possibility that homosexuality might exist in Iceland before the 1950s. After 1950, however, the number of media reports on homosexuality – male homosexuality first and foremost – in Reykjavík grew considerably and the discourse simultaneously became more harsh and homophobic. Chapter two discusses this process and seeks to outline, based primarily on a discourse analysis of newspapers, journals,

[116] Ibid. 39.
[117] Ibid. 44.
[118] Ibid.

magazines and selected books, how homosexuality was 'brought into discourse' and became a more prominent part of Icelanders' conception of the world. It pays special attention to how these changes went hand in hand with other aspects of the modernisation of Icelandic society, urbanisation, diverse cultural turmoil and 'gender crisis' during and after the Second World War, and how discourses on male homosexuality were throughout the period associated with modernity and modern influence, for example 'modern' and modernist literature and art. Such associations were often, although not always, negative and highly influenced by nationalist ideology. Homosexuality was then portrayed, along with for example American pop culture and experimental literature, as one of the modern 'evils' that had a corrupting influence on the Icelandic nation, especially the young generation. The chapter seeks to outline how the idea of 'Young Iceland,' a common metaphor for the Icelandic nation or Icelandic society which underlined its 'young age' and immaturity in comparison to other Western countries, was central to various debates about social and cultural matters, and how one of the supposedly corrupt and dangerous modern influences that posed a threat to Young Iceland was homosexuality. Last, but not least, chapter two explores associations made between homosexual men and 'bad' or 'idle' artists and how these two character types merged, both in public discourse and at the café Adlon on Laugavegur 11 in Reykjavík.

The artist and the homosexual met in Elías Mar but he was one of the queer patrons on Laugavegur 11 in the 1950s. Chapter three discusses his first steps on the literary field and the various processes that led to the publication of his first three novels in 1946–1950, *Eftir örstuttan leik*, *Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa*. It builds primarily on Elías's private archive which contains a large number of fictional and personal writings, drafts, manuscripts, notebooks and letters, and seeks to outline how he became an established, published writer in the late 1940s and simultaneously came to terms with his same-sex desires and started to live a relatively open life as a bisexual man. The chapter also contains a literary analysis of Elías's poetry and prose from the 1940s, most of which remains unpublished or appeared in print for the first time in the twenty-first century, after Elías's death. Certain themes that run through these texts are identified; complicated and sensitive issues such as class division, generation gaps and tension between rural and urban culture; same-sex desire, homoeroticism and anxiety in relation to gender and sexuality norms. Special attention is paid to the term *aktúel* which Elías often used; *aktúel* books, for him, actively engage with the times they are written in and thus 'face the heartbeat of the world.' The chapter suggests that the emphasis Elías placed on writing *aktúel* books, and the way such 'actuality' is manifested in his writings, can be referred to as queer modernism; modernism which entails not only innovative use of language and

form but capturing the impact and essence, complications and paradoxes, of social modernity; modernism which is a response to social marginalisation and rooted in an experience of not conforming to gender and sexuality norms.

Elías's novels that are under discussion in the final chapters are similarly, this dissertation suggests, *aktúel* and queer modernist work. The protagonists are young men in Reykjavík who face various obstacles in the process of becoming hetero-masculine subjects, and the analyses focus on how they perform queerness in various ways and how their performances are driven by shame. Chapters four and five discuss queer performativity in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum*, paying special attention to how shame is an integral part of the characters' identity but also how it induces various queer performances; acts of resistance as well as personal transformation. In this context, moreover, intertextual references and the role literature (fiction and non-fiction) and music play in the characters' lives is of central importance. The chapters thus seek to outline how the characters find relief and pleasure – and even answers – in reading, writing and listening, and how references to books, writers, artists and music carry queer connotations and become keys to queer interpretations and understanding of the novels.

While building on the same theoretical framework of queer performativity chapter six shifts the focus to narcissism, understood variously as a myth, a psychoanalytic term, literary self-consciousness, a general reference to self-love or self-centeredness – and a particularly queer phenomenon. *Vögguvísa* is read in this context and discussed in relation to the first two novels, but its protagonist, like the characters in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum*, is a narcissist in the sense that he is highly self-conscious, self-centred and has same-sex desires. The chapter also examines links between Elías's novels and the Greco-Roman myth about Narcissus; it seeks to outline how the young protagonists resist, reject or fail to conform to various social norms and expectations and eventually either transform or have the potential to do so – like Narcissus who in the myth refuses to love the 'right' people and eventually transforms into a white flower. The queer characters in Elías's novels, it is suggested, can be seen as symbolic representations of Narcissus but also of Young Iceland; a new generation of Icelanders who live in a paradoxical and rapidly modernising world and cannot, or refuse to, identify with normative ideas about Icelandicness, capitalist bourgeois family life, masculinity and sexuality. Finally, all three novels are discussed as 'narcissistic narratives' – that is, as metafiction – and their textual self-consciousness is linked to themes analysed in the previous chapters: Associations between art and same-sex sexuality; artists and homosexuals; the performances of reading, writing, listening and watching (films) and queerness and queer performativity. At the core

of this discussion, moreover, is Elías Mar and his own queer writing performances: Aktúel texts that express the paradoxes of modern times and the experience of being marginalised in an increasingly heteronormative society; texts that played a significant role in the formation of Elías's writer and bisexual identity in the late 1940s and contributed to bringing homosexuality into discourse in Iceland.

2 Sódó Reykjavík: Homosexuality and modernisation

One of the words that best describe the history of same-sex sexuality in the first half of the twentieth century in Iceland is *silence*. We know very little about 'homosex' – sexual acts between people of the same sex – and the lives of the people who performed it, and homosexuality is rarely mentioned in the printed media before the 1950s.[119] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir's study of homosexuality and criminal law in Iceland reveals that the judiciary sources are also limited; the number of convictions for same-sex sexuality in the Icelandic court is so low that few statistical conclusions can be drawn from it and hardly any court documents discuss such incidences in detail.[120] Þorvaldur Kristinsson points out in his article on Guðmundur Sigurjónsson, who was convicted and sentenced to prison for homosex in 1924, that unlike most countries in Europe no public debates, media discussion or moral panic concerning homosexuality had taken place in Iceland in the 1920s. He notes that the documents connected to Guðmundur's court case – juridical, medical and personal documents and brief reports in the media – are a rare exception. They reveal for example that the court wanted to keep a low profile in relation to the case and preferably disallow it; they considered the man's acts to be the result of an individual vice and no attempt was made to inspect the possibility of a homosexual community or network in Reykjavík. The response was, in other words, silence.[121]

Headlines such as "An Icelandic homosexual caught with a negro" and "Is homosexuality becoming more common in Iceland?" appeared in newspapers in the early 1950s and manifested a new, predominantly negative, interest in male homosexuality and Icelandic homosexuals.[122] Men who were interested in other men were more visible in Reykjavík than before and a 'queer' subculture had caught people's attention; a group of notorious bohemians, students and writers, some of whom were queer men, met regularly at a certain café on Laugavegur in the city centre. One of them was Elías Mar who was then in his late twenties and one of the most promising writers of his generation. He had published three novels and several short stories, poems and articles since 1945, when he wrote anxiously in Skálda about his plans to debut as a writer, and he had also become

[119] Matt Houlbrook uses the word *homosex* to refer to sexual activities between two men. See *Queer London. Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957*, xiii. In this thesis *homosex* refers to same-sex sexual acts in general but the people in question were usually men, hence the lack of available sources and research on queer women in Iceland in the period.
[120] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992."
[121] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli."
[122] "Íslenzkur kynvillingur að verki með Negra," *Tíminn*, 24 April 1952, 12; "Er kynvilla að aukast á Íslandi?" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 4 April 1955, 1. Lesbians and female homosexuality did not become a media subject until the 1960s and 70s. See e.g. Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson, "Gyðjunafn, skólastýra, vörumerki sjúkdóms," 96–100.

quite open about his same-sex desires. The late 1940s were thus a watershed period in Elías's personal life and writing career – and also a turning point in terms of public discourse on, and visibility of, homosexuality in Iceland.

This chapter explores how homosexuality was 'brought into discourse' in Iceland in the mid-twentieth century and argues that this new public awareness and formulation of male homosexuality was an integral part of the modernisation of Icelandic society. Urbanisation is a key issue in this regard; Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir and Þorvaldur Kristinsson both note that the limited size of the Icelandic society and its rural character contributed significantly to the invisibility of homosexuals well into the twentieth century.[123] In 1920 the country's inhabitants were 95.000, out of which only 17.600 lived in Reykjavík, but the city expanded rapidly; in 1960 the population was 177.000 in the whole country and 72.000 (roughly 40%) lived in Reykjavík.[124] In the period under consideration in this thesis the capital was thus becoming a proper, yet small, modern city. Scholars often emphasise the role urban environment plays in the development of homosexual identity and subcultures; cities offer anonymity as well as the opportunity to find like-minded people. They are sites of pleasure, Robert Aldrich says, because they provide venues where people can have non-heteronormative sex.[125] "The city is the social world proper of the [male] homosexual," Henning Bech moreover argues, because there he can meet others of his kind but at the same time go unseen in the crowd.[126] Hence a lack of urban environment limits, or at least affects, homosexual subcultures and homosexual identity and it is indisputable that the rapid growth of Reykjavík in the mid-twentieth century played a crucial role in the process which led to increased visibility and awareness of homosexuality in Iceland.

In his study of homosexuality in Sweden and other Nordic countries Jens Rydström has paid special attention to the differences between rural and urban areas.[127] He looks in a Foucauldian manner at the development from what he refers to as the 'sodomy paradigm' to the 'homosexual paradigm' in people's understanding of same-sex acts and the people

[123] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 117–18; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli," 132.
[124] "Mannfjöldi í einstökum byggðakjörnum og strjálbýli eftir landsvæðum ár hvert 1889–1990," *Hagstofa Íslands* [Statistics Iceland].
[125] Robert Aldrich, "Homosexuality and the City. An Historical Overview," 1720–21.
[126] Henning Bech, *When Men Meet. Homosexuality and Modernity*, 85–159, here 98. Bech argues that the 'homosexual form of existence' is a particularly modern way of being, interconnected with the city and urbanisation.
[127] His primary work on this topic is *Sinners and Citizens. Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880–1950*. The differences between rural and urban areas are also prominent in many of the articles in *Criminally Queer* (2007), edited by Rydström and Kati Mustola, and Rydström discusses them in his introduction to the book: "Introduction: Same-Sex Sexuality and the Law in Scandinavia 1842–1999."

who performed them; that is, between the general understanding of same-sex sexuality as centred on individual acts on the one hand, and of homosexuality as a sexual identity on the other.[128] His focus is thus on the emergence and development of the homo/hetero binary. In most of the Nordic countries this paradigm shift took place in a relatively short period in the first half of the twentieth century, he says, first in big cities and later in rural areas, and it went hand in hand with other aspects of modernisation. Knowledge of homosexuality, such as mutual masturbation and other types of homosex than anal penetration, the personality traits of homosexual individuals and the possibility of female homosexuality, became public in urban centres, such as Stockholm and Copenhagen, at the beginning of the twentieth century. It formed the ground for juridical regulation, moral condemnation and social hostility but also self-recognition and the formation of homosexual subcultures.[129] Studies of rural parts of Sweden and Finland show that the idea of homosexuality, like other aspects of modernity, spread from cities to the countryside but there was still often a significant difference between urban and rural ideas in this regard in the mid-twentieth century.[130] This dissertation similarly suggests that the homosexual paradigm emerged and changed people's way of thinking later in Iceland than in many larger countries, for example because of its rural character and position on the periphery of Europe.

The following sections explore the emergence of the homosexual paradigm in Iceland as it appears in public discourse and other sources, paying particular attention to various links between homosexuality and other aspects of modernity, such as 'modern' or unconventional art and literature. The discourse analysis is primarily based on a word search in the digital archive *Timarit.is,* conducted in January 2016, which shows a significant increase in media discussion of homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s.[131] Other

[128] Rydström defines the term *paradigm* as "a pattern of possible interpretations of discursive knowledge, a pattern which is also a bearer of a certain explanatory power." *Sinners and Citizens*, 14.
[129] Ibid. 159–88.
[130] Ibid. 316–31. On rural Finland see e.g. Tuula Juvonen, "Shadow Lives and Public Secrets. Queering Gendered Spaces in 1950s and 60s Tampere"; Kati Mustola, "Finland 1889–1999. A Turbulent Past."
[131] The web archive *Timarit.is* is a collaborative project between the national libraries in Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. It gives online access to more than 1100 periodicals published in the three countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to find texts that dealt with, or simply mentioned, homosexuality I searched for the following words (the asterisk means any possible inflectional ending or suffix): kynvill*, hómósex*, homosex*, sódóm*, sodom*, samkynhneigð*, homm*, lesp* and lesb*. The results show that before 1920 homosexuality is mentioned less than 20 times. In the 1920s it is mentioned around 40 times and around 50–60 times in the 1930s and equally often in the 1940s. In the 1950s, however, words referring to homosexuality occur over 200 times and almost 600 times in the 1960s. It should be noted that these results are neither definite, since not all periodicals have been added to the archive, nor infallible. The word search option on *Timarit.is* does not read all letters nor words that are divided

important sources include books on sexual matters, published in Icelandic in the early and mid-twentieth century, an ethnological data collection on homosexuality, executed by the Icelandic National Museum in 2013, and various articles and interviews with people who visited the café Adlon at Laugavegur 11 in the 1950s. The findings of this chapter manifest that Icelanders' awareness of (predominantly male) homosexuality and the existence of homosexual men was becoming more public and vocalised in the 1940s and 1950s – and queer men like Elías Mar were beginning to publicly act and speak out about same-sex desire in unprecedented ways.

2.1 The 1920s: Modern symbol

While the media in many European countries reported extensively on the Oscar Wilde trials in 1895, the Great Morality Scandal in Copenhagen 1906–1907, where several male prostitutes and bourgeois men were sentenced for sodomy or indecent conduct with minors,[132] and the Eulenburg affair in Germany, in which several members of the kaiser's cabinet and his close friends were accused of homosexual conduct,[133] the Icelandic media did not pay much attention to such matters. *Kynvilla*, the most common Icelandic word for homosexuality until the 1980s, probably appeared in print for the first time in a short report about the Eulenburg affair in *Huginn* in 1908.[134] A few newspapers mentioned briefly a homosexuality scandal in Denmark in 1911 but they did not seemingly discuss the Wilde trials or the Great Morality Scandal.[135] Public discourse about homosexuality seems, in fact, to have been almost non-existent before the 1920s and other available sources about same-sex sexuality in the first half of the twentieth century are also very limited. The first signs of homosexuality – or the homosexual paradigm – in public discourse in Iceland, however, appear in the 1920s in relation to a court case, medical discourse, and what can be referred to as modern or modernist fiction.

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between lines. Moreover, the words sometimes have other meanings than 'homosexuality' (sódóm* often refers to the Bible and the city of Sodom and *kynvilla* can refer generally to 'wrong gender,' including grammatical gender). The results do, however, give an idea of how often homosexuality was discussed in the media and provide a ground for discourse analysis.

[132] See e.g. Wilhelm von Rosen, *Månens Kulør. Studier i dansk bøssehistorie 1628–1912*, vol. 2, 719–60; "Denmark 1866–1976. From Sodomy to Modernity," 64–70.

[133] See e.g. Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 120–39.

[134] "Fréttir," *Huginn*, 24 January 1908, 1. There are earlier examples of words that refer to homosex and homosexuality; the magazine *Fjallkonan,* for example, listed sodomy (*sódómí*) among various crimes on 9 February 1892 ("Kirkjublaðið," 21–22). *Sodomy* and related words (*sódómisti, sódómískur* etc.) have appeared in texts in Icelandic at least since the seventeenth century but they can refer to various other acts and 'sins' than homosex. See "Ritmálssafn Orðabókar Háskólans" [University of Iceland Dictionary – Written Language Collection].

[135] *Ísafold* reports for example on "yet another homosexuality scandal in Copenhagen" on 22 March 1911 ("Ýms erlend tíðindi," 81), but debates on legislation and the moral impact of homosexuality had been prevailing in Denmark at least since 1906. See Rosen, *Månens Kulør*, 761–78. Wilde's homosexuality and the trials were often mentioned later, in the 1950s and 1960s, in articles about Wilde and his work in Icelandic magazines and newspapers. See ch. 2.5.4

2.1.1 Court case

According to section 178 of the Icelandic Penal Code from 1869, which was valid until 1940, sexual intercourse "against nature" – *samræði gegn náttúrlegu eðli* – including sexual intercourse between men, anal sex between man and woman, and sex with animals, was punishable by hard labour.[136] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir notes that it is difficult to ascertain how many were prosecuted for violating this law since statistical information is both scattered and unreliable and information about same-sex sexual acts and the people who performed them is similarly very limited. There is one important exception, however. The first recorded court case, and presumably the only time a man was convicted for violating section 178, was the case of Guðmundur Sigurjónsson in 1924. Þorvaldur Kristinsson has pointed out that without the personal, juridical and public documents related to this case we would know almost nothing about the ideas Icelanders had about same-sex sexuality in the early twentieth century. Þorvaldur's study of the case thus offers a unique insight into this period which, when it comes to same-sex sexuality, is first and foremost marked by silence.[137]

Jens Rydström argues that in the course of the first two decades of the twentieth century, following homosexual scandals in for example Denmark, Sweden and Germany and the corresponding media discussion, the public in the Nordic countries became aware of the concept 'male homosexuality.' He notes that the "extensive press coverage" on Guðmundur Sigurjónsson's case shows that this also applied in Iceland.[138] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir similarly says that the case "became very public and controversial at the time" and that *Morgunblaðið*, one of Iceland's biggest newspapers, "regularly published an update on the case, which became known as "*kynvillumálið*," or the "homo-case.""[139] Yet Þorvaldur Kristinsson points out that even though *Morgunblaðið* reported on Guðmundur's case five times the accounts are very brief and show little or no signs of moral panic.[140] On the contrary, the reports seem to try to silence any gossip on the matter and they can thus hardly be referred to as extensive press coverage. Judging from juridical

[136] The wording in the Penal Code was gender neutral but the word *samræði* refers to penetrative sex. It was thus presumably not illegal for women to have sex with each other and there are no known cases of prosecution of women under this section. Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 119–22; Kati Mustola and Jens Rydström, "Women and the Laws on Same-Sex Sexuality," 45.
[137] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli." See also Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 119–25.
[138] Rydström, "Introduction," 13–40, here 31.
[139] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 125.
[140] *Morgunblaðið* reported on the case five times (28 February, 1 March, 19 March, 3 April and 4 April 1924). Two other newspapers, *Tíminn* (5 April) and *Lögrétta* (21 March) mentioned the case very briefly but added nothing to *Morgunblaðið*'s reports.

documents and letters sent by officials Þorvaldur concludes that the court seems to have wanted to make as little of the case as possible and preferably dismiss it.[141]

The reports on Guðmundur's case are nevertheless the first known instances where homosexuality is mentioned in the media in relation to Icelanders and Icelandic reality. They manifest an awareness of homosexuality and suggest that there was some talk about the matter in Reykjavík at the time. *Morgunblaðið* states for example on 19 March that "rumours [about the homo-case] have been spreading around town."[142] Þorvaldur moreover notes that Magnús Magnússon, who was in charge of the hearing, later stated that Guðmundur's case had evoked "tremendous talk and curiosity" and concludes that public awareness of same-sex acts was thus probably more extensive in this period than the media discourse suggests.[143] Rydström's suggestion that the Icelandic public was generally aware of the existence of homosexuality in the 1920s is thus not necessarily wrong but we do not have sufficient evidence to support it either.

2.1.2 Medical discourse

The first scholarly articles on homosexuality, written by Icelandic physicians, appeared in the early 1920s in academic journals, *Skírnir* and *Læknablaðið*. They all discuss the Austrian physiologist Eugen Steinach and his research, but one of his goals was to 'cure' or 'fix' homosexuality by transplanting testes into a female individual and ovary systems into males. His experiments and findings, that inspired for example Magnus Hirschfeld's sex reassignment treatments in Germany, were widely known around 1920 and reported on in science journals as well as popular media and film, although they were ethically problematic and eventually cancelled.[144] The Icelandic physicians Steingrímur Matthíasson and Guðmundur Hannesson were thus reporting on recent European medical discoveries when they wrote in 1920 that the reason why

> hermaphrodites or homosexual animals are born lies in abnormal development of the reproductive glands. Both male and female hormonal tissues have developed, one after the other. This shows that homosexuality is a kind of malformation, but not a crime.[145]

They outline how one of Steinach's research subjects, a 30-year-old 'passive homosexual,' who also suffered from tuberculosis of the testes, 'became heterosexual' only twelve days

[141] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli," 132–36.
[142] "Dagbók," *Morgunblaðið*, 19 March 1924, 4.
[143] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli," 134.
[144] See e.g. Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 173–79.
[145] "Orsök þess að viðrini eða homosexual dýr fæðast, liggur í óeðlilegum þroska á getnaðarkirtlunum. Bæði karl- og kvenlegur hormónavefur hefir náð að þroskast, fyrst önnur tegundin og hin síðar. Má af þessu sjá, að homosexualitet er nokkurskonar vanskapnaður en ekki glæpur." Steingrímur Matthíasson and Guðmundur Hannesson, "Ellibelgnum kastað," 150.

after his sick testes were removed and a new, healthy one was implanted in him.[146] In an article published in *Skírnir* in 1922 Stefán Jónsson also explains that the reproductive glands decide a person's 'true' biological sex but notes that sometimes individuals are born with both male and female genitals and assigned the wrong sex at birth. These people, Stefán argues,

> feel that they are not like other people, their desires are different, but their love life, in particular, is abnormal and disgusts other people. These people only love their own sex. They are so-called *homosexuals*.[147]

He notes that people can suffer from homosexuality without showing any external symptoms but the reason is nevertheless to be found in the reproductive glands. Then he introduces Steinach's experiments on transplanting testes in guinea pigs and expresses his hope that in the future human homosexuals can be cured in the same way.[148]

This discourse is in line with many other medical writings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century where 'abnormal' biological sex and 'abnormal' sexual object choice are seen as two aspects of the same phenomenon. Richard Krafft-Ebing says for example:

> In so-called contrary sexual instinct there are degrees of the phenomenon which quite correspond with the degrees of predisposition of the individuals. Thus, in the milder cases, there is simple hermaphroditism, but limited to the vita sexualis; in still more complete cases, the whole psychical personality, and even the bodily sensations, are transformed to correspond with the sexual perversion; and, in the complete cases, the physical form is correspondingly altered.[149]

In this period same-sex desire and gender variance were, as Susan Stryker has pointed out, closely associated and the distinctions between sexuality and gender identity or physical sexual characteristics were far from clear. "[O]ne common way of thinking about homosexuality back then," Stryker says, "was as gender "inversion," in which a man who was attracted to men was thought to be acting like a woman, and a woman who desired women was considered to be acting like a man."[150] The scholarly articles on homosexuality that appeared in the Icelandic journals in the early 1920s did not make a distinction between sexual orientation, gender and sex; they emphasised issues regarding biological sex and the homosexual's hormonal function while also noting that these

[146] Ibid. 151. Steingrímur also mentions Steinach's research in an article in *Iðunn* in 1925, "Ynging manna og dýra."
[147] "Það finnur, að það er ekki eins og fólk er flest, kendir þess eru aðrar, en sjerstaklega er þó ástalífið óeðlilegt og öðru fólki viðbjóður. Þessar manneskjur elska aðeins sitt eigið kyn. Þær eru það sem kallað er *kynvillingar*." Stefán Jónsson, "Um kynrannsóknir," 96.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 187.
[150] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*, 31–41, here 34

individuals had 'abnormal' sexual desires, and they saw homosexuality as a physical malfunction rather than a crime.

Among the most interesting sources Þorvaldur Kristinsson builds on in his article on Guðmundur Sigurjónsson's case are letters from two physicians, Guðmundur Thoroddsen and Guðmundur Björnsson, Director of Health, to the Ministry of Justice in 1924 where they defend the accused. They argued that section 178 was outdated and that homosexuality should not be punishable by law, and as a result Guðmundur Sigurjónsson was released after three months in prison instead of eight. Their arguments did not, however, appear on print and thus never entered public discourse.[151] The medical discourse on homosexuality, published in the 1920s, was only available to a relatively small group of Icelanders – physicians, academics and educated people – and, although it is difficult to make any conclusions, its influence on public ideas about homosexuality may thus have been of rather little significance.

2.1.3 The Great Weaver

'The Roaring Twenties' were, especially in European metropoles such as Berlin, Paris and London, a period of increased visibility of homosexuality and homosexuals, with the formation of homosexual movements, expansion of liberal tendencies and a certain degree of tolerance. Yet this was also a period marked by harsh condemnation of homosexuality in public discourse. Certain visual styles – such as the stylings of camp, dandy men and the 'New Woman' (who typically wore short hair, a shirt and a tie) – moreover became an integral part of homosexual identity and culture.[152] Homosexuality became a symbol of modernity, as will be outlined in more detail later in this chapter; it was associated with avant-garde art and other modern currents and often appeared as a theme in literature and art. Florence Tamagne notes that "[w]riters, artists, caricaturists all used homosexuals and lesbians (as eccentric, decadent sensualists) symbols [sic] of the Roaring Twenties:"[153]

> Homosexuality had become synonymous with the rejection of conventions; it was a means for artists to express their rejection of traditions, middle-class values, and the world from before 1914. It was associated with revolt, vital energy, pure sex, and also with intellectualism, vice, and a way to erase the memory of the horrors of the war in a burst of pleasure.[154]

Among those writers and artists was Halldór Laxness who travelled around Europe in the interwar years and lived for example in Copenhagen, Luxembourg and Paris. In 1925 he

[151] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli," 136–38.
[152] See e.g. Florence Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality. Berlin, London, Paris, 1919–1939*, especially chapters 1, 2 and 5.
[153] Ibid. 239.
[154] Ibid. 250.

dwelled in Taormina in Italy, a place known as a homosexual retreat, while writing his novel *The Great Weaver from Kashmir*.[155] One of the earliest remarks in the Icelandic media that indicate an awareness of homosexuality and homosexuals in Iceland is a statement written by Halldór while he was in Taormina where he says that "Reykjavík has now suddenly obtained everything that suits a cosmopolitan city, not only a university and cinemas, but also football and homosexuality."[156] What the twenty-three-year-old writer meant by this statement and to whom he was referring is not fully known,[157] yet his words manifest an important association between homosexuality and modern life.

In *The Great Weaver* Halldór also portrayed homosex and homosexuality as an integral part of the modern world.[158] The novel is now generally considered to be among the greatest Icelandic literary works of the twentieth century and one of the first modernist texts. It tells the story of a self-centred and unstable young man, Steinn Elliði, who travels between European cities in search for his place in the modern urban world of the interwar years and focuses on his 'inner life,' paradoxical longings and desires. Such foregrounding of an Icelandic cosmopolitan's mental struggles was a novelty in the Icelandic context and so was the novel's fragmented narrative where letters and monologues appear among third-person accounts. Last, but not least, Steinn Elliði's blunt talk about non-marital and non-heterosexual sex caught the attention of many readers who had not often seen words like homosexuality on print:

> When I was seventeen years old I took part in Spanish and French nighttime debauchery in which naked women, painted from the crowns of their heads to the soles of their feet, performed fancy lesbian dances in between running to giant Negroes tied down to couches, while the audience lay in each other's arms on the floor. The gratification of sexual demands is man's highest pleasure, and justifiable only when it is gratified in such a way that no new individuals are born. Homosexuality is the highest level of sexual satisfaction. Of all the paths of gratification, that one is lowest and most brutish, most blind and imperfect, which leads to such a fatal consequence as the birth of new people. The goal of man is to

[155] In Halldór Laxness's biography Halldór Guðmundsson outlines how Laxness made friends with homosexual men in Taormina and was interested in diverse aspects of gender and sexuality. He also outlines how the first draft of the novel *Salka Valka* was a film script called "A Woman in Pants," where the protagonist Salka is much more masculine and her sexuality more ambiguous than in the novel. Halldór Guðmundsson, *Halldór Laxness. Ævisaga*, 174–86 and 229–30.

[156] "[…] þá hefir Reykjavík í skjótri svipan eignast hvað eina, sem heimsborg hentar, ekki að eins háskóla og kvikmyndahús, heldur einnig football og hómósexúalisma". Halldór Kiljan Laxness, "Af íslensku menningarástandi II," 2.

[157] Halldór was probably referring to Guðmundur Sigurjónsson but Þorvaldur Kristinsson has also suggested that he may have been thinking of his friend Þórður Sigtryggsson, who was a rumoured homosexual – and a good friend of Elías Mar. See Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Att ta sin plats," 112. On the relationship between Þórður and Elías, see ch. 3.4.

[158] The novel was published in English translation in 2008. All references to the novel in this thesis are to the English translation unless other is noted.

> destroy man. The goal of culture is to destroy man. The goal of wisdom is to destroy man. "Der Mensch ist Etwas das überwunden werden muß." "Satan conduit le bal!" Homosexuality, drug addiction, and suicide are the joyful extirpation of the final and highest beings on Earth. The deepest desire of lovers is to be reminded of death in their embraces. Only death gratifies love.[159]

Even though Steinn Elliði's chastity vow and complicated relationship with Diljá, his (female) childhood love, is foregrounded in the novel he speaks of his sexual experiences with both men and women in a letter to his friend Alban, from which the paragraph on homosexuality is taken. He also has a male companion; in London he lives with a wealthy Englishman named Carrington and although their relationship is not described in detail, and never from Steinn's point of view, it is clear that Steinn's mother thinks their friendship is 'abnormal.' In a letter to her niece she says:

> But who do you think it is that took him away from me? What do you think captivated my boy so in the most splendid city in England, and made him turn his back on his mother? What but a decrepit old fellow in a white lined suit, rust brown in the face. It's incredible, but true: several days after Steinn met this detestable ghost at the Hotel Metropole, where we were staying, he became an entirely different child. Imagine it, when I went out alone with my maid in the mornings I could expect to meet them on the coach road where they rambled along absorbed in palaver and walking arm in arm! It was simply grotesque![160]

Carrington is described here as a dandy (wearing a white, fancy suit) and racial other (rust brown in the face) and his intimacy with Steinn (walking arm in arm) can easily be interpreted as homoerotic – or 'grotesque' as Steinn's mother puts it. Steinn is perhaps not homosexual but he is indisputably queer; normative heterosexuality is one of the many bourgeois roles he refuses to adopt and he even idealises same-sex attraction and homosex. He is a controversial character, however; homosex for him is associated with pleasure as well as death and destruction.

The Great Weaver was, not surprisingly, disputed from the day it came out. While some critics celebrated its novelties and the fresh breeze it brought into the Icelandic literary field, others censured it – not least because of its 'immoral' use of language. One of them was a parliamentarian, Jónas Jónsson, who published a letter in the newspaper *Tíminn* on 23 April 1927 and criticised the current government for supporting Halldór and the publication of this scandalous book. In order to show how corrupt Halldór's "so-called novel, or rather incoherent thoughts" was Jónas quoted the before-mentioned paragraph and printed the phrase "homosexuality is the highest level of sexual satisfaction" in bold

[159] Halldór Laxness, *The Great Weaver From Kashmir*, 169–70.
[160] Ibid. 84–85.

letters to emphasise its outrageousness.[161] This book may seem like a great novelty to some people, he said, but he did not appreciate it. Neither did Guðmundur Finnbogason who wrote a famous review in the journal *Vaka*, consisting of only two words: "Vjelstrokkað tilberasmjör."[162] The phrase is difficult to translate but expresses the opinion that the novel is a "modern mechanical monstrosity."[163] Another review that appeared in the same issue of *Vaka* expressed a very different opinion. It is a wordy praise, written by the writer and scholar Kristján Albertsson, beginning with words that are now equally famous as Guðmundur's short remark: "Finally, finally an impressive work of fiction that rises like a rocky hill above the flatness of recent Icelandic poetry and prose writing."[164] Kristján is, in other words, very impressed by the novel and he also uses the paragraph about homosexuality to support his argument, which is that Halldór's style is remarkable, energetic and refreshing and Steinn Elliði's story is unique, sad and beautiful.[165]

Tamagne notes that the European media did not often mention homosexuality in the interwar years but that some of the earliest debates about homosexuality in the press appeared in reviews of literature and theatre.[166] The same implies to the Icelandic context; the reviews of *The Great Weaver* were among the few public texts that mentioned homosexuality. The reviewers often emphasise the novel's modernness and innovative nature and two of them take Steinn Elliði's words about homosexuality as an example thereof. Halldór himself also emphasised the connection between homosexuality and modern or contemporary issues, for example in a reply to Jónas Jónsson in the magazine *Vörður*:

> The Great Weaver is a novel that faithfully describes all the prevailing theories and views of life in the modern world, regardless of whether they are 'ugly' or 'beautiful.' The purpose of the book is to try and evaluate their value in life. […] I personally do not idealise homosexuality, or rather, I do not take a stand on such matters, nor on countless other views and theories I describe in The Great Weaver.[167]

[161] Jónas Jónsson (frá Hriflu), "Bækur og listir," *Tíminn*, 23 April 1927.
[162] Guðmundur Finnbogason, "Halldór Kiljan Laxness. Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír."
[163] Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson comments, in English, on this problematic phrase: "The word *tilberasmjör* refers to butter stolen by a ghost conjured up by women for that particular purpose, and in Finnbogason's formulation it is butter fabricated by a machine (*vjelstrokkað*). The two words together therefore connote theft, black magic, and an allusion to the nonorganic nature of the work; *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* is, in other words, a modern mechanical monstrosity." Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Realism and Revolt," 373.
[164] "Loksins, loksins tilkomumikið skáldverk, sem rís eins og hamraborg upp úr flatneskju íslenzkrar ljóða- og sagnagerðar síðustu ára." Kristján Albertsson, "Halldór Kiljan Laxness. Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír," 306.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality*, 212.
[167] "Vefarinn mikli er skáldsaga, þar sem lýst er sem samviskusamlegast öllum þeim lífsskoðunum og kenningum, sem ríkja í heimi nútímans, án tillits til þess hvort þær eru "ljótar" eða "fallegar".

The Great Weaver was thus meant to be a challenge to various Icelandic traditions and in Halldór's eyes homosexuality was a part of that challenge and an integral part of European modernity.

From a queer historical perspective *The Great Weaver* is a landmark text in the Icelandic context, firstly because it uses words referring to homosexuality, secondly because this wording caught people's attention and led to an increase in the usage of the word *kynvilla* in the public media, and thirdly because of the role queer sexuality plays in the life of the protagonist. It even mentions women who perform "fancy lesbian dances" and thus includes female as well as male homosexuality.[168] The novel moreover manifests a strong connection between homosexuality and modernism – understood here as an 'aesthetic and ideological challenge' as well as social critique in response to the modern world. The reviews and discussions following its publication also associated the novel with modern influence and modernity, including homosexuality. Such linkage between homosexuality and various aspects of modernity or the modern life repeatedly appeared in fiction and public discourse in the following decades, especially in writings expressing concerns about the future of the Icelandic nation and its culture.

2.2 Contested modernity

Halldór Laxness's statement about homosexuality in Reykjavík appeared in a series of articles where he discussed the modern transformation Icelandic society and culture was undergoing, pointed out some of the paradoxes that arise when an agricultural society is industrialised and instructed his fellow Icelanders on how to become civilised. The society has changed very rapidly, he says, and Icelanders do not know how to handle this transformation; they are like a confused teenager from the countryside, "in adolescence, neither a nature child nor an educated man; half-formed and marked by chaos and inconsistency."[169] This adolescent metaphor, which we can call 'Young Iceland,' was not invented by Halldór; on the contrary, it was quite common in discussions and debates about Icelandic society and culture in the early and mid-twentieth century. It was a part of a popular and wide-ranging discourse on the Icelandic nation as an organism or a living

Tilgangur bókarinnar er sá, að prófa og meta gildi þeirra fyrir lífið. […] Jeg hef persónulega enga dýrkun haft á kynvillu, eða rjettara sagt, jeg tek sjálfur enga afstöðu til slíkra mála, fremur en svo ótalmargra af skoðunum þeim og kenningum, sem jeg lýsi í Vefaranum […]." Halldór Kiljan Laxness, "Vefarinn mikli. Athugasemd."

[168] Halldór Laxness, *The Great Weaver From Kashmir*, 170. In the original edition the phrase is "naktar konur […] léku sódómiska skrautdansa" (192) but in the second edition, published in 1948, the word *sódómiska* has been exchanged for *lesbiska* (128).

[169] "[…] á gelgjustiginu milli náttúrubarns og mentamanns; hálfleikinn, glundroðabragurinn og ósamræmið má sín þar mest." Halldór Kiljan Laxness, "Af íslensku menningarástandi II," 2.

whole, which was inspired by German nationalism, for example the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and his theory of nations as 'organic entities' that had certain personalities and a unique spirit, preserved in the language, history and culture of a certain group of people.[170] The Icelandic nation-state's 'young age' was often mentioned in the media and other writings on national issues and so was the opinion that Icelandic society and culture was 'immature' compared to other Western countries. The nation/society was often depicted as an in-between-figure, standing on the crossroads between tradition and modernity, neither an infant nor a fully mature adult. Like an adolescent it was believed to be full of contradictions and inconsistency, not fully able to control its acts and emotions, clumsy and a little bit foolish, impressionable and therefore in need of guidance.[171]

The Young Iceland metaphor can be seen as a response to the fact that Iceland was a small rural society in the midst of the whirlwind of Western modernisation. The industrial transformation took place relatively late in Iceland in comparison to its neighbours in Northern-Europe – but it was rapid. The fishing industry expanded considerably in the first decades of the twentieth century, towns and villages grew and urban life replaced the rural world for a large part of the population; in 1880 around 74% of Icelanders lived by agriculture but 30% in the late 1930s and 26% in 1950.[172] The middle class gradually became the most powerful and influential class and the gap between the bourgeoisie and the working classes widened.[173] The Second World War was moreover a turning point in economic terms. Iceland did not fight in the war but Britain occupied the country in 1940 and the United States set up a military base there in 1941. After the outbreak of the war

[170] In *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791) Herder argues that within nations, individual and collective identity become one and that nations are united because of essential spiritual elements, or organic forces, shared by people who speak the same language. For Herder the nation is a complex of individual units that share the same roots, yet not necessarily the same genes, and are interconnected by cultural and historical traditions. See Johann Gottfried Herder, *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, 253–326; F. M. Barnard, "Introduction", 29–32. Herder's ideas had great influence on Icelandic nationalist discourse, see e.g. Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Arfur og umbylting. Rannsókn á íslenskri rómantík*; Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur. Þjóðerni, kyngervi og vald á Íslandi 1900–1930*, 41–73; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið. Uppruni og endimörk*, 15–42.

[171] See e.g. Ólafur Rastrick, *Háborgin. Menning, fagurfræði og pólitík í upphafi tuttugustu aldar*, 27–44; Benedikt Hjartarson, "Af úrkynjun, brautryðjendum, vanskapnaði, vitum og sjáendum. Um upphaf framúrstefnu á Íslandi." Young Iceland appears in various kinds of writings, see e.g. 'Hávarður,' "Útlendingar og innflutningshöft," *Alþýðublaðið*, 2 April 1924, 3–4; "Afstaða atvinnuveganna," *Morgunblaðið*, 4 June 1924, 3; Páll Ísleifsson, "Listdómar," *Vísir*, 12 November 1931, 3.

[172] Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years. The History of a Marginal Society*, 287–97 and 357; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið*, 99–109.

[173] On the development of a modern class system in Iceland, see Jón Gunnar Grjetarsson, "Upphaf og þróun stéttskipts samfélags á Íslandi."

demand for export of fresh fish to Britain increased and the occupation provided both men and women with jobs, such as construction and laundry work. In the post-war years Iceland moreover received financial support from the Marshall Plan, even though the country had not been deeply affected by the war and was not in ruins.[174] This economic boom incited modernisation processes and the transportation from rural areas to towns, as noted earlier, and the population in Reykjavík almost doubled in the 1940s and 1950s.[175]

Such extensive and rapid social, economic and political changes were, in the eyes of many who employed the Young Iceland metaphor, comparable to adolescence; excessive and sometimes out of control, exciting but also frightening. The image was used in various contexts in the early and mid-twentieth century to describe different aspects of Icelandic society and culture and at its core was anxiety in relation to the effects of modernisation and uncertainty about the future – the future of Icelandic society and culture, the nation and the nation-state, and a new generation of Icelandic teenagers.[176] The following sections discuss some of the most prominent debates about modern social and cultural influence in the period and briefly introduce the main elements of Icelandic nationalism.

2.2.1 Nation

The modernisation of the Icelandic economy and the urbanisation process went hand in hand with a growing nationalist sentiment. Iceland had been under Norwegian, and later Danish, control since 1262 and the idea that Iceland should be an independent nation-state received increasing support in the nineteenth century from both politicians and the public. A nationalist movement, under the influence of European nationalism, was formed and the fight for independence began. Icelanders' demands were met with considerable understanding on the part of the Danish government and a significant step was taken in 1918 when the Act of Union between Iceland and Denmark was signed. Iceland thereby became a free and sovereign state that shared a king with Denmark and both states had an equal position within the kingdom. The Republic of Iceland was eventually founded on 17

[174] The reason why Iceland received Marshall support was political; the United States needed support from Icelandic politicians and voters in the years leading to the Cold War. See e.g Valur Ingimundarson, *Í eldlínu kalda stríðsins*, 149–52.
[175] On Icelandic economic and political history in the early and mid-twentieth century, see e.g. Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*, 285–365; Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. öld*; Ólafur Ásgeirsson, *Iðnbylting hugarfarsins. Átök um atvinnuþróun á Íslandi 1900–1940*; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "'The Beloved War.' The Second World War and the Icelandic National Narrative."
[176] See e.g. Ólafur Rastrick, *Háborgin*, 27–44; Benedikt Hjartarson, "Af úrkynjun, brautryðjendum, vanskapnaði, vitum og sjáendum."

June 1944 while Nazi Germany occupied Denmark.[177] Icelanders' fight for independence did not lead to any violent conflicts or oppression and Guðmundur Hálfdanarson argues that it was "non-violent almost to the extreme."[178] The idea of national sovereignty never met any opposition in Iceland and the Danish authorities found it difficult to argue against it because they respected the Icelandic cultural heritage and even believed it to be a part of their own origins, history and culture. The Danish government thus did their best to meet Icelandic demands and never tried to suppress the national movement.[179]

The establishment of the Republic of Iceland did not abate the nationalist sentiment – quite the contrary. The island was occupied by the British army in May 1940, as noted earlier, and in 1941 the U.S. Army replaced the British troops and provided Icelanders with military defence until 2006, with the exception of a five-year-period between 1946 and 1951. Despite a close collaboration between Icelandic and American authorities during the war Icelanders generally assumed that when the war was over the army would leave and Iceland would regain its neutrality. After the war, however, Icelandic governments made controversial decisions that integrated Iceland into the Western Alliance; a defence agreement – the Keflavík Treaty – was made with the United States, the U.S. army returned in 1951 and Iceland became one of the founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1949. This meant that while Icelanders were cutting the political ties with Denmark they became engaged in a long-lasting and complicated relationship with another, and considerably more powerful, country: The United States. The fact that Iceland was, through the occupation, forced to participate in the war moreover manifested that Icelandic authorities were unable to stay true to the intention of eternal neutrality in times of war that had been declared by the Act of Union in 1918. Neutrality was a crucial element in Icelandic foreign policy and also very important for Icelandic national identity – and the occupation and the military cooperation with the

[177] When Germany invaded Denmark in April 1940 the Icelandic parliament, Althingi, declared that the Icelandic government would take over constitutional duties, foreign affairs and protection of territorial waters, which meant that Iceland had detached itself from Danish authority. The dissolution of Iceland's relationship with Denmark was then approved in a referendum in May 1944 by approximately 97% of the electorate. Iceland's rights to dissolve the union were not questioned but many, especially the Danes, thought the timing was unfortunate and inconsiderate. See Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*, 319–323. For more information about the process that led to the foundation of the Republic of Iceland, see e.g. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Icelandic Nationalism. A Non-Violent Paradigm?"; Sólrún B. Jensdóttir Harðarson, "The 'Republic of Iceland' 1940–44. Anglo-American Attitudes and Influences."

[178] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Icelandic Nationalism," 2.

[179] Gunnar Karlsson, "The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland"; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Language, Ethnicity and Nationalism. The Case of Iceland."

Western Allies was therefore a highly sensitive matter that fuelled nationalist sentiment for decades.[180]

Icelandic nationalism – understood here as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of an existing or potential "nation""[181] – was both a political project and a set of discourses about 'Icelandicness,' aimed at creating a collective Icelandic identity. Étienne Balibar notes that the fundamental problem of every national project is to produce "the people" or "the effect of unity by virtue of which the people will appear, in everyone's eyes, "as a people","[182] and nationalism plays a vital role in this production – it promotes knowledge about the nation and refers to shared historical memory, for example by means of national symbols, such as anthems, flags, statues and monuments. The cornerstones of Icelandic national identity, that were shaped and promoted by the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, were first and foremost Icelandic language, cultural heritage and history. Icelanders spoke their own language, which was believed to be the oldest and most original of the Nordic languages; they had a large corpus of medieval literature of significant cultural value in an international context – the sagas and Eddic poetry – and they had once been a 'free nation' during the Commonwealth era (930–1262), often referred to as Iceland's 'Golden Age.' The belief that Icelanders were essentially different from other nations because of their medieval past was very influential in the early twentieth century and the myth about the glorious Golden Age was highly popularised and promoted in journals and newspapers, it became a part of children's education and affected ideas of national identity in the minds of a majority of the nation. The Icelandic 'national character' was seen as an innate quality which could be traced back to the Golden Age; it was believed to be in the nature of every member of the nation to be free and Icelanders had no choice but to reclaim their independence. History was thus used as a political tool to link modern times and the

[180] See e.g. Þór Whitehead, "Hlutleysi á hverfanda hveli"; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "'The Beloved War'"; Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing Against the American Other. Racism, Nationalism, and Gender in U.S.-Icelandic Military Relations During the Cold War."

[181] Anthony D. Smith, "The Origins of Nations," 108. *Nationalism* is a controversial term which has been defined in various ways. Scholars such as Ernest Gellner suggest that it is primarily a political principle while others, such as Étienne Balibar, focus on the nationalist ideology and knowledge about what the nation is. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1; Étienne Balibar, "The Nation Form. History and Ideology." The focus in this thesis is primarily on the ideological aspect and it builds on Benedict Anderson's understanding of nationalism as a mechanism which "invents nations." See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections and the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 6.

[182] Balibar, "The Nation Form," 138.

medieval past and support the claim that Icelanders were different from other nations and deserved to be independent.[183]

2.2.2 Society

One of the most important and controversial issues in the early and mid-twentieth century was the question to what extent the Icelandic society should be modernised; if Young Iceland should become an urban, industrialised, cosmopolitan nation – like Halldór Laxness argued in his articles in *Vörður* in 1925 – or hold on to old customs and the rural, pre-industrial ways of life. In the nineteenth century, when the ideological grounds for the fight for independence and Icelandic nationalism were laid, Icelanders were a rural nation and the interests of the peasant class became national interests. Hence in the nationalist ideology Icelanders were essentially a rural, agricultural nation like they had been during the Golden Age.[184] As Icelandic society became more industrialised and modernised in the first decades of the twentieth century, however, the old agricultural society and rural traditions gradually lost their place as the everyday reality of the majority of the nation. These changes were of great concern to many Icelanders and the tension between rural and urban life became a major issue, especially in nationalist discourse and politics.

The first decades of the century were times of growing 'intellectual production,' as Halldór Guðmundsson has outlined; a publishing industry emerged in Reykjavík, several journals and newspapers were published and educated intellectuals, who were greatly influenced by European culture and had travelled and lived in European cities, returned home and wanted to apply their knowledge and experience to the Icelandic context.[185] This intelligentsia, Halldór argues, developed and promoted a conservative utopian vision of the future of Iceland, built on rural and traditional Icelandic values, where the old agricultural society was idealised and it was argued that the nation would thrive best in the countryside. Conservative nationalists fought against urbanisation, foreign influence and

[183] For general discussion of the main ideological elements of Icelandic nationalism, the role and influence of the Golden Age etc., see e.g. Gunnar Karlsson, "Icelandic Nationalism and the Inspiration of History"; Gunnar Karlsson, "The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland"; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið*; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Language, Ethnicity and Nationalism"; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick, "Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries"; Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*; Loftur Guttormsson, "Frá kristindómslestri til móðurmáls. Hugmyndafræðileg hvörf í lestrarefni skólabarna um síðustu aldamót."

[184] See e.g. Gunnar Karlsson, "Icelandic Nationalism and the Inspiration of History"; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Social Distinctions and National Unity. On Politics of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Iceland."

[185] Halldór Guðmundsson, *"Loksins, loksins." Vefarinn mikli og upphaf íslenskra nútímabókmennta*. See also Árni Sigurjónsson, "Den politiske Laxness. Den ideologiska och estetiska bakgrunden till Salka Valka och Fria män."

labour politics and wanted the nation to unite in the creation of a rural utopia, based on the glorious image of the Golden Age – which was also seen as the Golden Age of agriculture and rural culture.[186] This vision was for example evident in the policy of the Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) – which was also known as the 'farmers' party.' Hermann Jónasson, who was Prime Minister on behalf of the Progressive Party from 1934 to 1942, said for example in 1939 that he considered the 'flight from the countryside' – the urban development of Icelandic society – to be yet another symptom of a national teenage crisis:

> My opinion is that this is just a period of adolescence in the life of the nation, which it will overcome. This will change when people have gained more extensive knowledge about the ways of living in this country and what the land has to offer. Then more people will choose […] to live in the countryside.[187]

At the same time, however, Icelandic politicians and intellectuals knew that Icelandic society needed to be modernised, in terms of for example economics and welfare, to become comparable to other Western countries. This is where the more liberal political views clash with the conservative policy. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir has pointed out that there were important paradoxes inherent in the idea of the rural utopia, because although rural values were idealised the goal was to build a centre of culture, economics and politics – a real modern city – in Reykjavík.[188] Ólafur Rastrick has also suggested that the conservative nationalists' emphasis on traditions should not be thought of as anti-modern but rather as one representation of the modernisation of Iceland. The rural past was not just the past in this discourse; it became a part of the present and the vision of the future – a part of the new modern Iceland.[189]

The question of how the Icelandic society and economy should be modernised was a much-debated and controversial political issue.[190] Socialists criticised the rural utopia harshly in the 1920s and argued that only through modernisation and cultural transformation, enhanced by foreign (Marxist) influence, could Icelandic society rid itself of capitalist power and political stagnation. Industrialisation and urban development was in their eyes a prerequisite for a socialist revolution and they were thus generally more liberal

[186] Halldór Guðmundsson, *"Loksins, loksins,"* 46–61. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir also notes that "[t]he opinion that modern Icelanders should build their identity on the medieval Iceland gradually became almost unquestioned in public debates on national issues." Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 67.
[187] "Ég lít svo á, að þar sé aðeins um visst gelgjuskeið að ræða í lífi þjóðarinnar, sem hún muni komast yfir. Þegar menn hafa fengið meiri yfirsýn yfir lífið í þessu landi og það, sem landið hefir að bjóða, þá mun þetta breytast. Þá munu verða fleiri, sem kjósa […] að lifa í sveit." Hermann Jónasson, "Ræða forsætisráðherra á afmælishátíð Hvanneyrarskólans," *Tíminn*, 1 July 1939, 300.
[188] Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 139–53.
[189] Ólafur Rastrick, *Háborgin*, 75–111.
[190] See e.g. Ólafur Ásgeirsson, *Iðnbylting hugarfarsins*.

when it came to foreign influence and modern ideas than other parties – although many of them cared deeply about Icelandic national values.[191] In the mid-1930s and during the Second World War, however, following a general change in Comintern's policy, and empowered by a communist opposition against the British and American army and capitalist influence in Iceland, many Icelandic socialists adopted a strong nationalist policy.[192]

Examples of the difference between the socialist view of nationality and nationalism in the 1920s on the one hand and after the mid-1930s on the other can be seen in the writings of Einar Olgeirsson, a politician, scholar and the editor of the journal *Réttur*. In 1926 he criticises the emphasis on independence and the rural past. He laments that Iceland has not been properly industrialised and expresses his shame over how 'backward' it is compared to other European countries. The poor road system, primitive housing, and the lack of great architecture and visual arts are a disgrace, he says and adds:

> We certainly have to cultivate our language. We must certainly make ourselves acquainted with the best things that have been created in Iceland, things that can educate and ennoble us. But we must not forget either, that it is just as important that we learn about the most beautiful and best things foreign nations have created, and try to achieve the knowledge and art they have obtained, because we are […] first and foremost men – citizens of the world, and secondly – Icelanders.[193]

In 1944, however, Einar wrote an article for the socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* on the occasion of the independence celebrations and emphasised the need to protect Icelandic nationality, culture and independence. He states for example that Icelandic national freedom will always be under threat as long as superpowers rule the world; the Danes were once the greatest threat to Iceland's independence, the current threat is German Nazism, and in the years to come American capitalism and military will presumably become the

[191] Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir has outlined how Icelandic communists and socialists tried to coordinate Marxist internationalism and Icelandic nationalism already in the first decades of the twentieth century. She argues that Icelandic communism and labour politics before 1930 were meant to lead to general social progress that would benefit the whole nation and that references to Icelandic national legends were common. The main argument was that a communist revolution would lead to national freedom. See Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, *Nýtt fólk. Þjóðerni og verkalýðsstjórnmál 1901–1944*, 171–220.

[192] On national and international emphases and changes in communist politics in the 1930s and 40s, see e.g. Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism. Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List*; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, 148–49.

[193] "Vissulega þurfum vjer að leggja rækt við tungu vora. Vissulega þurfum vjer að kynnast því, sem best hefir verið skapað á Íslandi og mest má oss menta og göfga. En það má engu síður gleymast, að jafn nauðsynlegt er oss að kynna oss alt það fegursta og besta, er erlendar þjóðir hafa skapað, og reyna að öðlast þekkingu þá og list, er þær hafa náð; því að […] fyrst og fremst erum vjer menn – heimsborgarar, í öðru lagi – Íslendingar." Einar Olgeirsson, "Erlendir menningarstraumar og Íslendingar," 11.

main enemy of Icelandic freedom.[194] Many socialists thus became more conservative in their view of certain aspects of modernisation than before. They were still critical of the rural utopia but their nationalism was based on the will to free Iceland from foreign capitalist powers and cultural influence. For them 'foreign' or 'modern' was not necessarily bad; it depended on what it was and where it came from. Some writers and scholars on the left wing started working with international socialist movements whose goal was to bring together liberal bourgeois and socialist writers and protect cultural heritage against capitalism and fascism – which they saw as one of the products of capitalism – and in the late 1930s and 40s Icelandic literature and culture became central to socialist, as well as conservative, nationalism and cultural politics.[195]

2.2.3 Culture

The mixed response *The Great Weaver from Kashmir* received is in many ways descriptive of the controversy concerning 'modern' art and literature – or any innovative or non-traditional art – in the early and mid-twentieth century. 'Traditional' Icelandic art – especially literature – played a key role in twentieth-century nationalism and any deviation from such traditions was a highly sensitive issue. The medieval Golden Age was seen as a period of great cultural production and literary achievements, such as the Eddic poetry and the sagas that were acknowledged in the Western context as important parts of the world's literary heritage. The anonymous saga writers and their epic prose, like the Viking heroes, was idealised and literature became, as Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick have pointed out, "the Icelandic cultural field *par excellence,* because it was in literature that Icelanders had excelled in the past, and the general opinion was that future cultural products had to reflect that legacy."[196] 'Good' Icelandic literature was traditional in terms of form and content, rooted in the Icelandic cultural heritage and comparable to the medieval sagas and poetry as well as nineteenth-century romantic and patriotic poetry.

[194] Einar Olgeirsson, "Hlutur vor."

[195] When the Icelandic Radical Writers' Association (Félag byltingarsinnaðra rithöfunda) was formed in 1933, for example, it became a member of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW) which was based in Moscow and cooperated with Comintern. When IURW was disbanded in 1935 many of its Icelandic members joined the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture (IAWDC). See Kristinn E. Andrésson, *Enginn er eyland. Tímar rauðra penna*, 34–35 and 138–49. On IURW and international conferences of proletarian and revolutionary writers, see e.g. James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment. The Controversy Over Leftism in Literature*. For more information about Icelandic communists and socialists in the first half of the twentieth century, see e.g. Jón Ólafsson, *Kæru félagar. Íslenskir sósíalistar og Sovétríkin 1920–1960*; Kristinn E. Andrésson, *Enginn er eyland*; Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, *Nýtt fólk.*

[196] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick, "Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries," 89.

Poetry was expected to have regular metre and rhyme and in prose writing two characteristics were considered particularly desirable: Conventional form and style and (positive) representation of the old agricultural society and rural life.[197] *The Great Weaver* was, as we have seen, a provocative challenge to such traditions.

2.2.3.1 Rural-realist novel

Halldór Guðmundsson has outlined how, according to conservative intellectuals in the 1920s, the rural-realist novel – which was traditional in terms of form, dealt with life in the old, non-industrialised, agricultural Iceland and was critical towards urban development and foreign influence – was believed to represent good Icelandic morality. Such literature was moreover seen as a weapon that could be used in the battle against the 'extremes' of modernisation or bad modern influence.[198] The rural-realist novel became the hegemonic literary genre in Iceland and its influence was both strong and long-lasting. Rural life was a prominent theme in prose literature and even in the post-war years most Icelandic novels were set in the countryside, idealised the idyllic rural world of origins and close connection to nature and lamented the 'flight from the countryside.' Few novels dealt with urban life and the city was often portrayed – if represented at all – as a corrupt place.[199] Experiments with representation, form and use of language were also relatively rare. Poets such as Jóhann Sigurjónsson, Jóhann Jónsson, Jón Thoroddsen and Sigurður Nordal composed experimental poems in the 1910s and 1920s that are now often considered the predecessors of modernist poetry and Sigurður's prose text 'Hel' from 1919 has also been listed among early avant-garde or modernist innovations.[200] *The Great Weaver* and Þórbergur Þórðarson's *Bréf til Láru* (1924, 'A Letter to Laura') are often described as the first Icelandic modernist novels, based on for example their experiments with form, language and representation of subjectivity – although it is questionable if *Bréf til Láru*

[197] See e.g. Halldór Guðmundsson, *"Loksins, loksins"*; Árni Sigurjónsson, *Laxness og þjóðlífið. Bókmenntir og bókmenntakenningar á árunum milli stríða*.

[198] Halldór Guðmundsson, *"Loksins, loksins,"* 45–61. Halldór notes that writers were nevertheless expected to take the best from world literature, for example the works of Knut Hamsun, and adjust it to the Icelandic context. Árni Sigurjónsson has also outlined the great influence Hamsun had on intellectual thinking as well as nationalism in Iceland and how the idea that Icelandic culture should be based on rural values was inspired by Hamsun's work. Árni Sigurjónsson, *Laxness og þjóðlífið*, 29–101, especially 52–56.

[199] Elías Mar's novels were in many ways important exceptions from this as the following chapters outline. On Icelandic prose writing in early and mid-twentieth century (before the 'modernist wave'), see e.g. Guðni Elísson, "From Realism to Neoromanticism"; Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Realism and Revolt"; Halldór Guðmundsson and Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Lausamálsbókmenntir á fjórða áratugnum"; Árni Sigurjónsson, "Sagnagerð á þriðja áratug aldarinnar"; Ástráður Eysteinsson, "Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–1980."

[200] See e.g. Guðni Elísson, "From Realism to Neoromanticism"; Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, "Harpan skiptir um róm"; Árni Sigurjónsson, "Sagnagerð á þriðja áratug aldarinnar", 69–77.

falls into the novel genre.[201] Despite the effort of single works and writers, however, Icelandic poetry generally had regular metre and rhyme until the 1940s and the short story was, like the novel, for the most part unaffected by modernist form experiments until the 1950s.[202]

Ólafur Rastrick has emphasised the importance of what he refers to as reformative social and cultural agendas – components of cultural conservatism and nationalism – in this context. He notes that one of the goals of the intelligentsia in the early twentieth century was to make Icelanders a 'cultural nation' and an inherent part of that mission was to work strategically towards social and cultural improvement by teaching the nation to appreciate good art and develop good aesthetic taste. Art thus became an instrument in various reformative social programs where it was meant to improve the lives and morality of Icelanders and thereby, we can add, the future of Young Iceland. Ólafur outlines how this idea was built on so-called aesthetic moralism; a bourgeois discourse in which 'good' aesthetic taste is linked to 'good' behaviour and morality.[203] Such discourse, which became very influential in the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, considered fine or high art to be the result of an aesthetic genius and associated with special pleasure as opposed to the ordinary pleasures that people were believed to gain from popular art. Fine art was moreover thought to have a transcendent, spiritual function while popular art had a 'lower' and more bodily function.[204] Finally, fine art was believed to give access to 'higher truth,' heal the soul and improve people in various ways, whereas popular art was 'bad for you.'[205] In this discourse, in other words, art was seen as having a direct moral impact on people, artists were expected to serve the interests of their society by creating 'good,' 'beautiful' or 'high' art that would lead to social improvement – and in the Icelandic context the rural-realist novel was one of the ideal forms of such art.

[201] See e.g. Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Realism and Revolt," 368–74.
[202] In the 1950s writers such as Thor Vilhjálmsson, Geir Kristjánsson and Ásta Sigurðardóttir found a platform for innovations and modernist attempts in short story writing. Their stories manifest a radical turn away from naturalism and objective representation – a turn towards a representation of inner life and consciousness, dreamlike narratives and poetic language, and, in Ásta Sigurðardóttir's stories, a unique account of the urban life and a troubled view of the bourgeois life from the point of view of an outsider. See e.g. Ástráður Eysteinsson, "Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–1980," 419; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 640–62.
[203] Ólafur Rastrick, *Háborgin*, especially 75–134. On aesthetic moralism, see e.g. Robert Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism*, 26–28.
[204] Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art. A Cultural History*, 6.
[205] See e.g. Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History*, 21 and 124–25.

2.2.3.2 Modern challenges

Ólafur notes that the antipathy towards modernisation, which was inherent to the conservative nationalist discourse, had significant influence on discussion and debates about art. 'Too much' foreign or modern influence in arts and literature was not just seen as 'bad' art but as corrupt, immoral and a threat to social and national well-being.[206] In this context the response to *The Great Weaver* in 1927 is understandable; the novel and its content and form violated against the idea of 'good' art and thus against morality and the well-being of Young Iceland. Benedikt Hjartarson has noted that avant-garde art and literature was seen as a radical manifestation of European cultural modernity in the interwar years and therefore depicted as a severe threat by Icelandic conservative critics. The very idea of avant-garde evoked anxiety and harsh response, he says:

> [S]imply referring to European "isms" amounted, in the eyes of the general public, to a declaration of the intent to radically modernise Icelandic culture and reject traditional views pertaining to cultural heritage and propriety.[207]

Halldór Laxness certainly challenged his nation in such a way when he published *The Great Weaver*. His novels from the 1930s, *Salka Valka*, *Independent People* and *Heimsljós* (1937–1940; *World Light*, 1969), were less explicitly experimental in terms of form and representation and they have often been described as realist, or social-realist, novels.[208] They were nevertheless radical and controversial in many ways, highly influenced by the author's political stance – Halldór became a dedicated socialist around 1930 – and critical towards conservative politics and the rural utopia. Halldór's critical, and modern, take on various social and cultural matters challenged conservative views and made him a highly disputed figure.[209]

A new generation of poets emerged around 1950, often referred to as the 'Atom Poets.' They were not an organised or coherent movement but rather a collection of individual poets who used irregular form, experimented with free verse, sometimes

[206] Ólafur Rastrick, *Háborgin*, 113–34.

[207] Benedikt Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-garde in Iceland," 621. See also Benedikt Hjartarson, "Af úrkynjun, brautryðjendum, vanskapnaði, vitum og sjáendum."

[208] See e.g. Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Realism and Revolt"; Ástráður Eysteinsson, *Umbrot. Bókmenntir og nútími*, 13–29. See also ch. 1.1.

[209] Sigríður Matthíasdóttir has pointed out that some of the main spokesmen of modernity in the 1920s were radical intellectuals and writers like Halldór and Þórbergur Þórðarson and she suggests that they can be seen as the predecessors of modernists, and even of post-modernists and feminists, as they did not accept the nationalist discourse that took for granted the idea of the Icelandic nation as an organic entity. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 134. Þröstur Helgason has moreover suggested that in the 1920s modernism, or a modernist stand, was first and foremost manifested in Icelandic intellectuals' critique of nationalism and cultural conservatism. Þröstur Helgason, "Vaka og Vaki, upprisa og uppreisn – "svo náskyld orð". Sigurður Nordal og módernisminn," 80.

expressed an incoherent, fragmented view of life and introduced Reykjavík and urban life as a significant theme in Icelandic poetry. They were, in other words, representatives of the post-war Reykjavík youth; they lived in a changed world and sought new ways to express their experience of it. The most prominent poets were Hannes Sigfússon, Sigfús Daðason, Stefán Hörður Grímsson, Jón Óskar and Einar Bragi but the 'atom generation' also included Elías Mar, Arnfríður Jónatansdóttir and other young writers, as well as their predecessors, such as Steinn Steinarr and Jón úr Vör.[210] As could be expected the poets and their 'atom poetry' was controversial. In 1952, for example, a public meeting about 'cultural matters' was held in Reykjavík where debates about atom poetry were prominent. The writer Kristmann Guðmundsson supported these aesthetic novelties and argued that "[p]oets must express themselves in a way they believe suits them best,"[211] while another writer, Hendrik Ottósson, had a very different opinion. He emphasised that Icelanders must protect their culture and fight against the decadence of the language, both foreign influence and general lack of ambition to speak and write good Icelandic. An example of such dangers, he says, is

> the so-called 'modern poetry,' but it has no content and no form; nothing which is rooted in Icelandic society. It is either composed by men who want desperately to become poets, but lack both necessary knowledge and skills, or it is the worthless pottering of men who can compose poems but are too lazy to follow Icelandic rules about poetry. They are even more dangerous. In order to protect the language, the culture and our life as a nation, we must quell these men and everything that accompanies them in this field.[212]

In Hendrik's eyes, therefore, 'traditional' Icelandic poetry is beautiful, native and unspoiled whereas 'modern' poetry is foreign, corrupt, formless and meaningless – the opposite of 'true' art. Many critics agreed with him and Eysteinn Þorvaldsson notes that the Atom Poets were often criticised for being under corruptive foreign influence and undermining Icelandic national culture with their poetry.[213] The debates on modernist novelties and form experiments in the 1950s, like the response to *The Great Weaver*, were

[210] See e.g. Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, *Atómskáldin. Aðdragandi og upphaf módernisma í íslenskri ljóðagerð*; Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, "Formbylting og módernismi," 41–87; Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, "Icelandic Poetry Since 1940," 471–80; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, *Kona verður til. Um skáldsögur Ragnheiðar Jónsdóttur fyrir fullorðna*, 363–79.

[211] Kristmann Guðmundsson, "Bréf frá Kristmanni."

[212] "Ein hættan, sem að utan hefur flækzt er svonefnd "nýtísku ljóðagerð", en í henni er ekkert efni og ekkert form, ekkert sem á rætur í íslensku þjóðlífi. Annað hvort er hún framin af mönnum, sem fyrir hvern mun hafa viljað gerast skáld, en skort til þess bæði kunnáttu og getu, eða hún er fánýtt dundur manna, sem geta orkt, en nenna ekki að fara að ísl. lögum um ljóðagerð. Þeir eru jafnvel hættulegri, sem þannig er farið. Til þess að vernda tunguna, menninguna og þjóðartilveru vora, verðum vér að kveða niður þessa menn og allt sem þeim fylgir á þessu sviði." Jón Jónsson (úr Vör), "Ungu ljóðskáldin og íslenzk tunga og menning," 4.

[213] See e.g. Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, *Atómskáldin*, 163–93.

thus centred on the idea of modernity and modern foreign influence; to what extent it should be accepted and integrated into the Icelandic cultural field.

2.2.3.3 Youth and popular culture

Films, music and popular literature also challenged the idea of Icelandic culture and created deep controversy in the early and mid-twentieth century, especially during and after the Second World War when Anglo-American cultural currents hit the shores of Iceland with more force than ever before. Icelanders watched Hollywood films, listened to jazz and read popular literature before 1940 but during the war new trade connections were made with the United States, thousands of British and American soldiers brought various aspects of their culture and the English language became a part of many people's everyday life. Before the war there were two cinemas in Reykjavík (and several more in towns and villages around the island) and the films that were screened were both European and American, usually imported from Denmark. In 1950, however, there were seven cinemas in Reykjavík and most of the films were produced in, and rented from, Britain or the United States. The yearly number of cinema visitors in Reykjavík similarly grew from 321.000 in 1938 to almost 1.6 million in 1950.[214] The soldiers brought gramophones and records and jazz and swing took over the clubs in Reykjavík, especially the dances organised by the army.[215] American comics became very popular among the young generation and were sold in most bookstores, and the economic upswing during and after the war led to a boom in the Icelandic book market, especially in the publication of popular literature.[216] Ástráður Eysteinsson notes that while 240 books by Icelandic authors came out in the 1940s more than 700 translated titles were published in the same period – almost three times more than in the 1930s. Among them were works by many of the world's leading writers but a large part of the translated material was popular fiction; thrillers, romances and adventure stories.[217]

At the same time a new generation of urban children and teenagers emerged in Reykjavík – Elías Mar's generation. The population in the city grew so rapidly that in 1960 approximately one-third of Reykjavík's population was fourteen years old or younger, or almost as many as the city's whole population in 1925.[218] The gap between childhood and adulthood was more extensive than before, urban teenagers spent more time outside the home and on the streets and their everyday life was different from the rural world their parents' generation had grown up in. Many of them had jobs and thus more

[214] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, "Íslenskur texti og erlendar kvikmyndir. Brot úr bíósögu," 5–12.
[215] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, ""Eru þeir orðnir vitlausir!" Djass, dægurlög, Kaninn og Völlurinn 1940–1963," 16–24. On jazz in Iceland in early and mid-twentieth century, see Tómas Einarsson, "Fyrsta blómaskeiðið í íslensku djasslífi (1947–1953)."
[216] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, *Saga Reykjavíkur. Borgin 1940–1990*, 129–31.
[217] Ástráður Eysteinsson, "Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–1980," 409–10.
[218] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, *Saga Reykjavíkur*, 129–95, here 50.

money to spend than the previous generations and like in many other Western countries they became one of the most valuable target groups in the marketing of popular culture.[219] The impact of mass culture and 'bad' literature was an issue of concern in Iceland as elsewhere. "This disgusting literature," a columnist writes in *Alþýðublaðið* on 7 November 1946, referring to American comics sold in bookstores in Reykjavík, is full of blood, violence, naked women and wild beasts, and "all kinds of devilish filth of the worst kind."[220] Some thought jazz was too 'physical' and were concerned that it would increase immoral behaviour and endanger classical music and Icelandic folk music; and Hollywood films were believed to induce violent, sexual and immoral behaviour and thoughts.[221] The publication of popular translated books for children and teenagers, like other translated fiction, exploded during the war and they were also believed to have a bad influence on Icelandic youth.[222] Young people were said to be in exceptionally grave danger and concerns about the future of Young Iceland were raised frequently, for example in a letter from the Democratic Federation of Culture and Education (Menningar- og fræðslusamband alþýðu) in 1943, where the importance of good books for the preservation of Icelandic national culture is emphasised:

> A generation that would only read popular thrillers and other imported literary filth, and would moreover only see immoral films and listen to jazz and savage squall, would become intellectually poor and degenerate and soon largely indifferent to matters regarding nationality and independence.[223]

This harsh and condemning view, Eggert Bernharðsson says, manifests that the world the urban youth lived in around the mid-twentieth century was becoming ever more distant from the rural world the older generations knew from their youth.[224] Concerns about the future of Young Iceland were thus, in the mid-twentieth century, concerns about the future of Icelandic culture as well as the future of actual teenagers who were growing up in a changed world – and among the modern phenomena that were believed to endanger the youth was homosexuality.

[219] On teenage culture in Reykjavík during the war and in the post-war years see e.g. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 564–69; Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, *Saga Reykjavíkur*, 129–95.
[220] Hannes á horninu [pseud.], "Börnunum selt eitur," *Alþýðublaðið*, 7 November 1946. Comics were criticised harshly in Iceland, as in many other countries, in the 1950s, often on the grounds that they were pornographic. See Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir, *Stund klámsins*, 113–15.
[221] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, *Saga Reykjavíkur*; Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, ""Eru þeir orðnir vitlausir!""; Ólafur Rastrick, *Háborgin*, 123–30.
[222] Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, *Íslenskar barnabækur 1780–1979*, 242; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 580–82.
[223] "Kynslóð, sem aðeins læsi eldhússreyfara og annan sora aðfluttra bókmennta, sæi auk þess aðeins siðspillandi kvikmyndir og heyrði enga aðra hljómlist en jazz og villimannagarg, mundi verða andlega snauð og úrkynjuð og fljótlega sljóvgazt fyrir því, sem varðar þjóðerni og sjálfstæði mestu." "Menningar- og fræðslusamband alþýðu," *Alþýðublaðið*, 27 May 1943, 4.
[224] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, ""Eru þeir orðnir vitlausir!"" 26.

2.3 Foreign vice

One of the most notable results from this project's analysis of public discourse in the early and mid-twentieth century is how often the idea of homosexuality is associated with various negative (in the eyes of the person who writes) aspects of modern life and culture and represented as non-Icelandic.[225] The link between homosexuality and (foreign) modernity, manifested in relation to *The Great Weaver* in the 1920s, was thus confirmed in the following decades. When it comes to public discourse on homosexuality it is crucial, however, to distinguish between references to *homosexuality in Iceland*, *homosexuality abroad* and the general *idea of homosexuality*. When the reviewers in the 1920s mentioned Halldór Laxness's take on homosexuality in *The Great Weaver,* for example, they were referring to the idea of homosexuality, which should not be fused with references to 'actual' homosexuals, even though Halldór may have had certain individuals in mind when he created Steinn Elliði. The brief media reports on Guðmundur Sigurjónsson's case in 1924 were references to *homosexuality in Iceland* but they were a rare exception; the Icelandic media was almost entirely silent about the possibility that homosexual individuals existed in Iceland until the 1950s.

The idea of homosexuality appears in an article which was written by Styrmir Víglundarson in 1937 and appeared in *Mjölnir*, a fascist journal published by the Nationalist Student Association (Félag þjóðernissinnaðra stúdenta). Styrmir denounces Halldór Laxness and Marxist writers in general for "filling their books with lustful obscenity" and takes the discussion of homosexuality in *The Great Weaver* as an example of their sickness and perversions.[226] Styrmir's writing is heavily influenced by right-wing nationalism and in another article, written later that same year, he argues that "mob culture and Marxism, this gruesome modern barbarism, has run through the body of the nation and poisoned it."[227] He also states that foreign urban culture is the opposite of the 'nature' of the Icelandic nation and that "crimes, homosexuality, gambling and other vices are the fruits and foundations of this mob culture, which is driving a large part of our nation's youth towards destruction."[228] The nationalist discourse that echoes in these articles thus

[225] It should be noted that 'often' in this context does not refer to a very high number of texts. The search on *Timarit.is* revealed that in the 1950s words related to homosexuality appeared roughly 200 times in the media which is four times more than in the 1940s. Many of the texts who mention homosexuality, however, associate it with some kind of modern influence or cultural products.

[226] "[…] fylla bækur sínar lostakenndu klámi […]" Styrmir Víglundarson, "Ljós heimsins – ber litla birtu," 5–6, here 5.

[227] "[…] hefir múgmenningin og marxisminn, þessi viðurstyggilega villimennska nútímans, streymt út um þjóðarlíkamann og eitrað hann." Styrmir Víglundarson, "Menningarbarátta þjóðernissinna," 20.

[228] "Glæpir, kynvilla, fjárhættuspil og aðrir lestir eru ávextir og uppistöður þessarar skrílmenningar, sem nú er að keyra mikinn hluta æskulýðs þjóðarinnar í helgreipar sínar." Ibid. 19.

represents the idea of homosexuality – rather than actual homosexuals – together with Marxism and Halldór Laxness's writings, modernity and foreign 'mob' culture, as a threat to the Icelandic nation and national culture.

Two decades later Guðmundur Gíslason Hagalín associated comics and popular magazines with homosexuality and foreign cultural influence in a similar fashion. In an article in *Eimreiðin* he discusses the corrupt influence of 'trash magazines' (sorprit) on Icelandic youth and Icelandic literature. When children and teenagers read such trash, he says, their judgment and sense of responsibility are damaged, they become idle and absent-minded and they are in much higher risk of getting in trouble and committing crimes. This development poses a threat to Icelandic literature because the Icelandic youth now reads

> stories of ridiculous film figures and episodes about promiscuity, homosexuality, sadism and various crimes, stories and episodes written in vulgar and filthy language which is full of obscenity, fallacies and tasteless and incorrect words.[229]

Homosexuality is here, in other words, listed as one of the dubious and dangerous sides of modernity that comics and popular literature represent. It is linked with idleness, immorality and unsophisticated language – the opposite of 'good' Icelandic literature and culture.[230]

Such view of homosexuality as essentially non-Icelandic was not limited to right-wing nationalists or conservative cultural discourse; it seems, in fact, to have been the most common way of representing homosexuality in the media at least until the 1950s. Reports on homosexual scandals in other countries – *homosexuality abroad* – appear in the media, for example. As noted earlier, the word *kynvilla* first occurs in a brief report on the Eulenburg affair in 1908 and in the 1930s and 1940s such notions occasionally appeared in the Icelandic newspapers. Many papers mention for example the execution of the supposedly homosexual Nazi leader Ernst Röhm and Hitler's arrests of hundreds of homosexuals in 1934,[231] and in 1936 a report with the headline "200 monks accused of moral crimes in Germany" appeared on *Alþýðublaðið's* front page.[232] In the 1930s homosexuality was linked more clearly with politics than in the previous decades and it is striking how often the newspapers mention homosexuality scandals among the Nazis in Germany and make an association between the

[229] "[…] frásagnir af skrípiskepnum kvikmyndaheimsins og þætti um lauslæti, kynvillu, kvalalosta og hvers kyns glæpi, frásagnir og þætti á sorpþrungnu og sóðalegu máli, þar sem klúryrðum, rökvillum, hugsanavillum, smekkleysum og málleysum ægir saman." Guðmundur Gíslason Hagalín, "Mammon menntar þjóðina," 121.
[230] 'Immoral' or 'indecent' sexual content in literature and art in general was often represented as foreign or under foreign influence. See e.g. Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir, *Stund klámsins*, 104–7.
[231] See e.g. "Kynvillingum Hitlers kastað í fangabúðir," *Alþýðublaðið*, 21 December 1934, 1; "Sundrung í Þýzkalandi meðal Þjóðernissinna," *Morgunblaðið*, 29 December 1934, 2.
[232] Stampen, "200 munkar ákærðir fyrir siðferðisbrot á Þýzkalandi," *Alþýðublaðið*, 27 May 1936, 1.

scandal and the political stand of the person involved. In the eyes of Icelandic fascists like Styrmir Víglundarson, as we have seen, homosexuality was similarly a symbol of socialist corruption.

Þorvaldur Kristinsson has also outlined how the image of homosexuality as a foreign phenomenon, or at least something that had to be kept outside the borders of Iceland, appears in the context of Guðmundur Sigurjónsson's case in 1924. He refers to a letter which the city magistrate, Jóhannes Jóhannesson, sent to the Ministry of Justice before the trial, where Jóhannes suggests that it would be best if the case was cancelled and Guðmundur was made to leave the country instead. Magnús Magnússon, who was in charge of the hearing, furthermore stated in his biography that Guðmundur had begun to have sex with men when he was a volunteer in the Canadian army during the First World War in Germany. Nothing in the court documents supports this statement, Þorvaldur says, but it manifests a tendency to view homosexuality as a foreign vice.[233]

2.3.1 Homosexuality and nationalism

The portrayal of homosexuality as a foreign phenomenon was not limited to Iceland. Tamagne notes that the urge to 'make homosexuality foreign' was strong in Europe in the interwar years:

> The homosexual was always seen as being different. Since the Eulenburg affair, homosexuality in France had been called "the German vice" while the Germans called it "the French malady." Each side defended the morality of its own country, saying things like: "Homosexuality is rare in France." To admit that there were homosexuals at home would mean casting the whole population under suspicion. By contrast, accusing a neighboring country on this ground was an easy way to strengthen national unity.[234]

Tuula Juvonen outlines how in post-war Finland newspapers and magazines often focused on homosexuality in Sweden with the result that a permanent, negative connection was established:

> Notions of Swedish disease, Swedish love, and endless jokes and references to effeminate Swedish men who were all "like that" started their never ending circulation in popular media and in general conversation. Such proliferation of talk about homosexuality after World War II suggests an increased exposure to the striking idea and practice of same-sex sexuality over the war years also in Finland,

[233] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrulegu eðli. Saga Guðmundar glímukappa," 59. Guðmundur Sigurjónsson was released after serving only three of eight months. His social status may have influenced that decision but he was in many ways an ideal national citizen; a respected Good Templar and a sport coach and he went to the Olympic Games in London in 1908 as a part of the Icelandic wrestling team. See also Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Glæpurinn gegn náttúrlegu eðli. Réttvísin gegn Guðmundi Sigurjónssyni 1924."

[234] Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality*, 236.

> […] and accordingly the Swede-talk can be read as a means of displacing disturbing homosexuality safely somewhere over the Gulf of Bothnia.[235]

Kati Mustola also notes that the post-war atmosphere in Finland was saturated with nationalist sentiment and a feeling of bitterness towards Sweden, who had managed to stay outside the war; old inferiority complexes towards Sweden helped with creating the notion that Swedish men were homosexuals and the epidemic spread of the 'Swedish disease' was feared in Finland.[236]

In her monograph on gender, sexuality and Irish nationalist discourse, *Locked in the Family Cell* (2004), Kathryn Conrad outlines how homosexuality has not been accepted as a part of the idea of Irishness or the Irish nation.[237] The main reason why homosexuality is excluded and often condemned in nationalist discourse, she argues, is that nationalisms are built on and organised around heterosexual family values – what Foucault called 'the family cell.'[238] Foucault argues that the multiple discourses and intensified regulation of sexuality in the nineteenth century developed in close affiliation with the family organisation. The role of the family was not to repress but rather to "anchor sexuality and provide it with a permanent support,"[239] and within the family cell the main elements of the apparatus of sexuality were regulated: Women's bodies, the sexual activity of children, birth rates and perversions. Normative heterosexuality, based on the structure of marriage and family, was idealised as the proper social form. Women, whose bodies were seen as saturated with sexuality, were firmly situated within the family as mothers, and children were taught to restrain their sexuality and avoid masturbation. Individuals and couples were furthermore believed to carry the responsibility of the social body as a whole and they must thus only have sex with their married partner. Finally, the role of the family was to represent normal sexuality as opposed to perversions.[240] If sexuality was kept within this family structure it was not seen as bad or corrupt but rather as one of the foundations of society. This is for example manifested in the writings of Krafft-Ebing. For him, sexuality was

> the most powerful factor in individual and social existence; the strongest incentive to the exertion of strength and acquisition of property, to the foundation of the

[235] Juvonen, "Shadow Lives and Public Secrets," 51.
[236] Mustola, "Finland 1889–1999," 216.
[237] On Irish nationality, nationalism and queer sexuality, see also Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 55–77.
[238] Kathryn A. Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell. Gender, Sexuality, and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse*, 3–19.
[239] Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 108.
[240] Ibid. 104–5.

> home, and to the awakening of altruistic feelings, first for a person of the opposite sex, then for the offspring, and, in a wider sense, for all humanity.[241]

Conrad argues that not only did the family cell shape normative heterosexuality and what falls outside it, it also defined nations and national identities. She notes that within nationalist discourses it became a widespread belief that "maintaining and containing the heterosexual family is the most effective way to control borders, to reproduce the nation and state, to ensure "stability," and thus to prevent further terror."[242] Homosexuality, however, troubles the notion of national identity, Conrad says, because

> it threatens the reproduction of the heterosexual family cell that serves as the foundation of the nation-state. This threat is perceived to be literal, insofar as homosexuals are seen not to reproduce; but just as important, homosexuals and homosexual unions challenge the inevitability and security of the notion of the family cell as the only "natural" and fundamental unit group of society.[243]

Homosexuality thus threatens the family cell and the nation by suggesting that heterosexual and national identities and national borders are unstable. This often evokes anxiety and induces regulation of gender and sexuality – and a part of such regulation is depicting homosexuality as a foreign phenomenon. Conrad takes as an example Irish and British nationalist discourses where homosexuality is often excluded except when it is seen as a sign of foreign corruption and disintegration – first and foremost as a foreign threat. When national identity is being shaped or contested, Conrad says, such as during wars or when nationalist movements are working towards establishing a nation-state, the idea of a nation is especially vulnerable to perceived attack. She holds that in this context fear of homosexuality intensifies, as happened in Ireland in the 1910s when the diaries of one of the Irish patriots, Roger Casement, were found and revealed his homosexuality. "For Irish nationalists to accept that Casement was an "Irish patriot," Conrad says,

> required that his homosexuality be pushed back into the closet or denied. Both the British and the Irish made his sexuality foreign, either by denying it and accepting his patriotism (the Irish nationalist response) or by accepting both his Irish nationalism and his sexuality as evidence of the same treasonous problem.[244]

A similar example of how non-heterosexual sexuality does not conform to national identity is the debate in Denmark on the writer Hans Christian Andersen's sexuality. Andersen became a national symbol and within Danish nationalist discourse his heterosexual

[241] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1. Krafft-Ebing argued that men had stronger sexual desires than women and normal women were sexually passive. His work shows that great restrictions were put on women's sexuality and that they carried responsibility, not only to protect their families but also the whole human kind from immorality.
[242] Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell*, 3–4.
[243] Ibid. 21–22.
[244] Ibid. 21–69, here 27.

masculinity was usually underlined – even though he never had a successful relationship with a woman and his fairy tales and diaries represent sexual struggles and misery in relation to love. Dag Heede outlines how the first essays that implied Andersen was homosexual were published in Germany, not Denmark, and he points out that the research tradition that focuses on Andersen as a homosexual writer has always been – and still is – predominantly done by non-Danish scholars. The heterosexual image of Andersen, on the other hand, has been held up in Denmark, influenced by nationalist ideas about 'real' Danishness.[245]

The tendency in the Icelandic media in the early and mid-twentieth century to represent homosexuality as foreign was undoubtedbly incited by the widespread and deep-rooted influence of nationalism. Icelandic national identity was being shaped and contested in the period and it was therefore, as Conrad points out, vulnerable to both real and imagined attacks. As we have seen, the very idea of modernity was a highly controversial and sensitive subject and as a particularly modern phenomenon homosexuality was associated with mass culture and modernist experiments – phenomena that were, like homosexuality, not only modern but also foreign in the sense that their influence came to Iceland from Europe and the United States.

2.4 The 1940s: Gender trouble

The 1940s were in many ways a paradoxical, yet crucial, period in the history of sexuality in Iceland. In some respect it may have been a period of (limited) liberation for (some) men who desired other men. The following sections outline, for example, how the arrival of thousands of male soldiers entailed new opportunities and possibilities. The complete ban on sexual intercourse 'against nature' was also lifted in 1940 when a new Penal Code was legalised; consensual sex between two adult men was thereby decriminalised and female homosexuality was included in the legislation for the first time. Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir outlines that the Icelandic Penal Code was to a large extent modelled after the Danish Penal Code of 1930 but while the decision to decriminalise consensual adult homosexuality in Denmark was preceded and influenced by ongoing debates about the nature of homosexuality and same-sex sexual acts – if it should be considered a crime, physical abnormality or sickness – the Icelandic sections on the matter went through the parliament without much discussion.[246] The silence concerning homosexuality thus continued, at least in the parliament and the media.

[245] Heede, *Hjertebrødre*, 16–22.
[246] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 127–28; Rydström, "Introduction," 31.

References to homosexuality in Iceland never appear in the media in the 1940s, with one exception which seems to have been a 'false alarm.' On 3 April 1940 a report with the headline "Two men convicted for homosexuality" appeared in *Morgunblaðið* and the same report appeared in other newspapers, *Alþýðublaðið*, *Tíminn* and *Þjóðviljinn*, the next day, stating that two men had been convicted to eight months in prison for homosexual conduct.[247] *Morgunblaðið*, however, corrected this the following day and said the report had been a misunderstanding; the two men involved had been found guilty of sexually harassing a young girl.[248] No further reports on this 'case' can be seen in the media. Þorgerður notes that two cases were brought before the Supreme Court in 1940 for violating the sections on same-sex sexual acts in the new Penal code. The same twelve-year-old boy was the main witness in both but he admitted that he had received payment for having sexual intercourse with the men who were charged. One more case, which involved the same boy, was dropped for lack of evidence but the two men were convicted to eight months in prison.[249] These cases did not seemingly catch the attention of the media, although it is not impossible that they incited or influenced the newspaper reports in April. No other people were brought before the Supreme Court for same-sex acts in the 1940s.[250]

The war and post-war upswing in the Icelandic publishing industry, however, had a significant influence on the distribution of knowledge and representations of homosexuality and sexual matters in general.[251] A number of books about sexuality and sex were published in Icelandic translation and at least three of them included a quite detailed discussion of both male and female homosexuality. *Raunhæft ástalíf* (1945; *The Technique of Sex*, 1939) by Anthony Havil (Elliot Philipp), for example, is an overview of the anatomy, physiology and psychology of sex and includes chapters on contraception, abortion and prostitution.[252] It is quite liberal and heavily inspired by Freud, especially his early writings about sexuality where he argued that all people desire both men and women, although healthy 'normal' individuals learn to direct their sexual desires towards the

[247] "Tveir menn dæmdir fyrir kynvillu," *Morgunblaðið*, 3 April 1940, 3.
[248] "Dagbók," *Morgunblaðið*, 4 April 1940, 7.
[249] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 130–31.
[250] Þorgerður notes (131) that the statistical information on sexual crimes brought before the District Courts in Iceland are scattered and filled with gaps and thus not reliable. District Court documents on same-sex conduct thus await further research.
[251] Popular magazines were imported in the 1950s and 1960s, including sexually explicit publications. Icelandic popular magazines were also published in the post-war years and often included explicit stories and pictures. See Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir, *Stund klámsins*, 107–118.
[252] Anthony Havil, *Raunhæft ástalíf. Handbók með 11 litprentuðum myndum*.

opposite sex.[253] Havil portrays homosexuality somewhat sympathetically, in a Freudian manner, as a psychological aberration. "We know that people are differently influenced by their sex instincts," he says:

> Some are homosexual or Lesbian, whereas others, though they are not homosexual, are misogynists or woman-haters. One writer [Freud] has advanced a very ingenious theory which deals in one fell swoop with all these people. This is the theory of bisexuality, which states that we are all born with a certain amount of sex feeling for both sexes. In the normal individual the sex feeling for the opposite sex dominates, but the sex feeling for the same sex does not altogether disappear.[254]

Kynferðislífið (1946; *Kønslivet*, 1944), a collection of lectures by the Danish surgeon Johannes Fabricius-Møller, and *Kynlíf: Leiðarvísir um kynferðismál* (1948; *Unser Geschlechtsleben*, 1937) by the German physician Fritz Kahn also discuss the physiology of sex and various social, psychological and moral aspects of sex – and these two authors are, like Havil, relatively positive towards homosexuality.[255] Fabricius-Møller's lecture on "Deviant sexuality" includes a long list of various forms of sex and sex life, such as fetishes, sado-masochism, anal sex, necrophilia and voyeurism, but the most detailed discussion is on homo- and bisexuality. "We have to be understanding in regard to homosexuality," he says: "The homosexual, a man or a woman, is naturally attracted to an individual of the same sex, just like the rest of us are attracted to the opposite sex."[256] Kahn also argues that "homosexuality is not immoral, but a sexual variant."[257]

These three books were written by physicians and Icelandic physicians translated or published them.[258] Unlike the medical writings on homosexuality in the 1920s these texts were published for the public and advertised in the papers. "No father or mother needs to be hesitant to give this book to their young son or daughter," the publisher of *Kynferðislífið* wrote in an advertisement in *Morgunblaðið*,[259] and *Raunhæft ástalíf* was marketed as "the first modern handbook in Icelandic about the cohabitation of man and

[253] See ch. 4.3.3.
[254] Anthony Havil, *The Technique of Sex. Towards a Better Understanding of Sexual Relationship*, 33–34. Icelandic edition, 27.
[255] Johannes Fabricius-Møller, *Kynferðislífið. Sex háskólafyrirlestrar*; Fritz Kahn, *Kynlíf. Leiðarvísir um kynferðismál*.
[256] "Við verðum að sýna skilning gagnvart kynvillunni […]. Kynvillingnum, hvort sem hann er karl eða kona, er það jafn eðlilegt að verða hrifinn af einstaklingi samkynja sjálfum sér, eins og okkur hinum að verða hrifnir af hinu kyninu." Fabricius-Møller, *Kynferðislífið*, 246–48.
[257] "Kynvilla er ekki ósiðsemi, heldur afbrigði af ástafari." Kahn, *Kynlíf*, 232.
[258] The translator of *Raunhæft ástalíf*, Ásbjörn Stefánsson, may have published the book himself but the information available on the registered publisher, "Fræðsluhringurinn" ('The education cycle'), is very limited. Árni Pjetursson translated *Kynferðislífið* by Fabricius-Møller and Jón M. Nikulásson was in charge of the translation and publishing of Kahn's book.
[259] "Þetta er bók, sem enginn faðir eða móðir þarf að hika við að gefa ungum syni sínum eða dóttur […]." *Morgunblaðið*, 8 December 1945, 11.

woman."[260] The primary emphasis in the books is on normative and 'healthy' sex life and the advertisements suggest that the publishers have sensed that the Icelandic public wants reliable and up-to-date medical knowledge about sexuality, perhaps to guide their teenagers in a confusing and rapidly changing modern world. Yet the influence of the liberal attitude towards homosexuality in these texts should not be underestimated – they were presumably the first open and honest discussions of same-sex desire and sex life to appear on print in Icelandic and unlike the medical writings from the 1920s many of them portrayed homosexuality as a sexual orientation rather than physical 'hermaphroditism.'[261] Importantly for this thesis, moreover, they address the possibility of bisexuality – an idea that meant much to Elías Mar in the late 1940s.

A few similar articles appeared in magazines and papers; in September 1948, for example, a detailed discussion of Alfred Kinsey's study of male sexual behaviour in the United States appeared in *Þjóðviljinn.* The journalist, Magnús Torfi Ólafsson, concludes that the study is of great importance and that he hopes it will lead to a more open and tolerant view of various kinds of sexual behaviour.[262] In February 1949, moreover, an article titled "What is homosexuality?" was published in the entertainment magazine *Heimilisritið*. The text, which was translated from the Canadian *Magazine Digest*, discusses scholarly work on homosexuality in a relatively non-judgmental manner; outlines many possible reasons for this abnormality and underlines the importance of public education and acceptance. The homosexuals cannot be saved, it says, but their lives can become more bearable if people learn more about them.[263]

Despite the silence about homosexual conduct in Iceland in the media and the legal system many Icelanders were thus able to read about the *idea of homosexuality* in Icelandic in the late 1940s. To what extent they were aware of the existence of *homosexuals in Iceland* – that homosexuality was a part of their social reality – however, is difficult to say. Sjöfn Helgadóttir recalled being prescribed female hormones after she told her family she was a lesbian in the 1940s,[264] which shows that female homosexuality was a known phenomenon at the time but treated as pathological sexual inversion. Memoirs, for example by Sigurður A. Magnússon,

[260] "[…] fyrstu nútíma handbókinni á íslenzku, um samlíf karls og konu." *Útvarpstíðindi* 8, no. 12 (1945): 288.
[261] Kahn portrays homosexuality as a physical aberration as well as a sexual orientation. He seems to build on Hirschfeld's theory of 'sexual intermediacy' in which human sexuality was seen as a scale ranging from 'absolute man' to 'absolute woman,' in which genitalia, other physical characteristics, emotions and sex drive were equally important factors. See e.g. Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 88. This emphasis is also evident in Kahn's book *Der Mensch gesund und krank* (1939) which was published in Icelandic translation in 1946 as *Bókin um manninn*.
[262] Magnús Torfi Ólafsson, "Kynhegðun karlmannsins," *Þjóðviljinn*, 17 September 1948.
[263] "Hvað er kynvilla?" *Heimilisritið*, February 1949, 39–42, here 39.
[264] Þóra Kristín Ásgeirsdóttir, "Elsta lesbían. Hinsegin veröld sem var."

manifest that at least some teenagers in Reykjavík were aware of the existence of 'sodomites' in the 1930s,[265] but the results from an ethnological data collection on homosexuality, executed by the Icelandic National Museum in 2013, suggest that public awareness of homosexuality in Iceland was very limited in the 1940s. Hardly any participants recalled having heard of homosexuality before 1950 but many of them stated that their first memory of the concept, or homosexual people (predominantly men), was from the early and mid-1950s, usually in Reykjavík.[266] A list of neologisms, or a 'slang dictionary,' composed by Elías Mar in the late 1940s, includes the words *hommi*, *hómó*, *sódó* and *sódari* that all mean 'homosexual' ('kynvillingur'), which shows that the phenomenon had entered the Icelandic language – but Elías rarely used these words in published texts.[267] The silence about homosexuality in Iceland in the media was lifted in the 1950s, as the final part of this chapter will outline, and the 1940s and early 1950s thus seem to have been a watershed period. In that context, moreover, the influence of the war was of significant importance.

2.4.1 Regulation of women's sexuality

The silence in the media concerning homosexuality in Iceland in the 1940s is especially striking when it is compared to public talk and debates about heterosexual relationships in the same period – that is, the moral panic in relation to Icelandic women and soldiers. During the Second World War, as noted earlier, a large number of British and American soldiers were stationed in Iceland; the number had reached 25.000 a few weeks after the British troops arrived in the spring of 1940 and it is estimated that around 50–60.000 soldiers were in Iceland in 1942, most of them in Reykjavík.[268] In comparison the whole Icelandic population was 121.000 in 1940. This highly unusual situation stirred and shook the Icelandic society in various ways and concerns were raised about foreigners and their relationships with Icelandic women. One of *Alþýðublaðið's* reporters stated already the day after the troops arrived, on 11 May 1940, that the police had complained about a few girls who had approached British soldiers and noted that it was "unbearable if a few

[265] Sigurður A. Magnússon, *Undir kalstjörnu*, 65–70; Sigurður A. Magnússon, *Möskvar morgundagsins*, 57–58. It is noteworthy that all the stories Sigurður tells about homosexuals are about foreigners, which supports the claim that in the minds of Icelanders homosexuality was often a non-Icelandic phenomenon.

[266] Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, "Samkynhneigð á Íslandi. ÞMS Spurningaskrá 2013-1." See e.g. 2013-1-15; 2013-1-18; 2013-1-29; 2013-1-40, 2013-1-51, 2013-1-58, 2013-1-67 and 2013-1-69. A woman, born in 1939, recalls that people called a certain man 'sodomite' in the 1940s and the context confirms that this man was Guðmundur Sigurjónsson. See 2013-1-50.

[267] Elías Mar, *Vögguvísa. Brot úr ævintýri*, 149–58. See ch. 6.

[268] Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, "Blórabögglar og olnbogabörn. "Ástandskonur" og aðrar konur í Reykjavík í seinna stríði," 12. During the 'second phase' of U.S. military defence in Iceland, starting in 1951, the number of soldiers was no more than 5000. See Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing Against the American Other," 71.

immoral women give the soldiers a wrong idea about Icelandic women."[269] Some media called for governmental action and suggested for example that women who had relationships with soldiers should be "transported to a deserted place, where work and strong discipline will teach them self-respect," as *Morgunblaðið* put it on 12 May.[270] Any relations between locals and the army were in fact seen as controversial, at least during the first months of the occupation, and soon a term was coined to refer to relations between Icelanders and the army: *Ástandið* or 'the situation.' The usage of the term changed, however, and it was first and foremost used to refer to relations between women and soldiers, usually in a highly negative manner, and the women were blamed much more harshly than the soldiers.[271] The possibility that the soldiers could have sexual affairs with Icelandic men, however, was not under discussion until decades later.

'The situation' was not just a matter of public concern, it also became an issue of the state. To make a long story short Hermann Jónasson, prime minister and minister of justice, started what was presumably the most thorough governmental intervention and regulation of Icelanders' sexuality in the twentieth century when he hired a police officer, Jóhanna Knudsen, to investigate relationships between Icelandic women and soldiers. The officer gathered information about hundreds of women and in the following months the government established a 'morality committee' whose job was to write a report on 'the situation' and suggest solutions. The report concluded that the situation was very serious and that the government needed to act.[272] As a result a provisional law on juvenile supervision was issued, which allowed the authorities to supervise young people up to the age of 20 and establish reformatory institutions to deal with promiscuity and other problems.[273]

[269] "Það er óþolandi, ef nokkrar siðlausar stúlkur verða til þess að gefa hermönnunum ranga hugmynd um íslenzkar konur." "Afstaða almennings," *Alþýðublaðið*, 11 May 1940, 4.
[270] "Best væru þessir aumingjar komnir á afskektan stað, þar sem vinna og strangur agi kendi þeim sjálfsvirðing." "Úr daglega lífinu," *Morgunblaðið*, 12 May 1940, 6.
[271] Several publications discuss the media discourse, governmental action and public reaction to relationships between soldiers and Icelandic women during the Second World War. See e.g. Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir, ""Hún var með eldrauðar neglur og varir, en að öðru leyti ekkert athugaverð í útliti." Skjalasafn Ungmennaeftirlitsins og ímynd ástandsstúlkunnar"; Þór Whitehead, "Ástandið og yfirvöldin. Stríðið um konurnar 1940–1941"; Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, "Public View and Private Voices"; Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, "Blóraböggglar og olnbogabörn"; Bára Baldursdóttir, ""Þær myndu fegnar skifta um þjóðerni." Ríkisafskipti af samböndum unglingsstúlkna og setuliðsmanna"; Bára Baldursdóttir, "Kynlegt stríð. Íslenskar konur í orðræðu síðari heimsstyrjaldar"; Herdís Helgadóttir, *Úr fjötrum. Íslenskar konur og erlendur her*; Herdís Helgadóttir, "Konur í hersetnu landi. Ísland á árunum 1940–1947"; Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing Against the American Other"; Gunnar M. Magnúss, *Virkið í Norðri. Hernám Íslands*; Bjarni Guðmarsson and Hrafn Jökulsson, *Ástandið. Mannlíf á hernámsárum*.
[272] "Athugun á siðferðislegum vandamálum Reykjavíkur," *Morgunblaðið*, 28 August 1941, 5.
[273] See e.g. Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir, ""Hún var með eldrauðar neglur og varir, en að öðru leyti ekkert athugaverð í útliti""; Þór Whitehead, "Ástandið og yfirvöldin."

The report played a crucial role in strengthening a public consensus on 'the situation.' It was published in most of the newspapers by the end of August 1941 and became a matter of heated discussion in the media. In the report the statistics from Jóhanna Knudsen's investigation were interpreted as if there were up to 2500 Icelandic prostitutes on the streets of Reykjavík, many of whom were teenage girls, and the committee was concerned that if nothing was done to prevent it Iceland might see the emergence of "a large class of prostitutes, who refuse to participate in moral society."[274] The committee concluded that strict bans were in many ways risky; what mattered the most was that every individual 'did his duty' and a strong public consensus would be galvanised that would aim towards protecting Icelandic nationality, culture and language. The youth played a key role in this respect and the future of the nation was said to rest on their shoulders – they must not forget their civic duty to protect their blood and motherland.[275] 'The situation' was thus a sexual and moral issue but at the same time a matter of national identity in which sexuality and nationality were intertwined – and at its core was, yet again, deep anxiety about the future of Young Iceland.

Feminist studies of 'the situation' have underlined how it manifests the gendered nature of Icelandic nationalism.[276] Like Conrad, scholars such as Anne McClintock have pointed out that nations are frequently figured through family-related metaphors, such as 'motherland' and 'homeland,' and that within imperial and nationalist discourses the social function of the family is often projected onto the nation. Hierarchies within the family – subordination of woman to man and children to adults – are used to justify and guarantee social difference within the nation and also in the global 'family of nations.' Regulation of women's sexuality is seen as especially important, as they are the guardians of the national genes and symbolic representatives of the nation, and it is thus crucial that their sexuality is kept within the national family cell.[277] Bára Baldursdóttir has similarly outlined how the attitude towards women, expressed in the dominant discourse on 'the situation,' corresponds to Nira Yuval-Davis's argument that women serve as guardians of the race and national honour in nationalist discourses. Icelandic women were believed to have failed in their roles as protectors of the nation by having relationships with foreign

[274] "[…] stór vændiskvennastjett, sem segir sig úr lögum við siðað þjóðfjelag […]." "Athugun á siðferðislegum vandamálum Reykjavíkur," *Morgunblaðið*, 28 August 1941, 5.
[275] Ibid.
[276] See Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, "Public View and Private Voices"; Bára Baldursdóttir, ""Þær myndu fegnar skifta um þjóðerni""; Bára Baldursdóttir, "Kynlegt stríð"; Herdís Helgadóttir, *Úr fjötrum*; Herdís Helgadóttir, "Konur í hersetnu landi"; Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir, ""Hún var með eldrauðar neglur og varir, en að öðru leyti ekkert athugaverð í útliti."
[277] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, 352–58.

soldiers.[278] Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir suggests that the reaction to 'the situation' was so strong because of the double role women played within the nationalist ideology as wives and mothers on the one hand and symbolic representatives of Iceland on the other. When Icelandic women were involved with soldiers it was as if the national symbol *Fjallkonan* (The Mountain Woman) had given up her independence in return for a relationship with another country. "Women were seen as the very embodiment of the nation expressed by the symbol of *Fjallkonan*," Inga says:

> As wives and mothers, women were believed to play a role that was crucial for the independence of the nation. It was within this ideological context that the relationships between Icelandic women and the soldiers were regarded as dangerous and polluting and, consequently, they posed a major threat to Iceland's existence as an independent nation.[279]

There are important similarities between the reaction to the women 'in the situation' during and after the war and the portrayal of homosexuality as a foreign vice in the Icelandic media. Both discourses express a wish to free Icelandic society and nationality – Young Iceland – from 'immoral' sexuality and both manifest the power of gendered and heteronormative values in the mid-twentieth century. Yet there are also significant differences. First of all, the voices that condemned homosexuality and portrayed it as immoral and foreign were scarce in comparison to the public outrage about the women 'in the situation' – it is not justifiable to speak of moral panic in relation to homosexuality in the mid-twentieth century, not even in the 1950s. Secondly it is important to note that there was never any doubt that the women were a part of the Icelandic nation – they were not condemned as 'racial outsiders' but as 'marginalised insiders,' as Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford put it.[280] Their sexuality threatened the nation and national ideals *from within*; they were seen as traitors who had betrayed their nation by acting irresponsibly. Homosexuality, on the other hand, was represented in the media as 'other'; as either something that happens in other countries or something that should be kept outside the borders of Iceland and Icelandic nationality.

2.4.2 Men 'in the situation'

Other sources suggest that the 1940s were times of changes in Iceland for men who desired other men. Þórir Björnsson, a gay man born in Reykjavík in 1926, has outlined how exciting the arrival of the British troops was for him when he was a fourteen-year-old boy in 1940. He was fascinated by the soldiers and their uniforms and soon met his first

[278] Bára Baldursdóttir, "Kynlegt stríð."
[279] Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, "Public View and Private Voices," 115.
[280] Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford, "Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World," 6.

love, a twenty-three-year-old British officer. When the officer left Iceland Þórir had learned to "find his way around in this world."[281] He recalls that he and his friends, both girls and boys, often went to parties and dances with soldiers and that they were all 'in the situation.' The girls sometimes found husbands among the soldiers, Þórir says, but the boys usually had shorter relationships. The soldiers had to hide their same-sex desires, just like the Icelanders, and many of them had wives and children at home.[282] Þórir has also noted that a certain hotel in Reykjavík, Hótel Borg, became a place where men who desired other men met during the war and that many men met in the public toilets by the harbour at night, hidden in the dark.[283] Tales that Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir collected for her study of homosexuality during the war also include stories about men who went to parties and dances with soldiers and had love affairs with them; men who 'had the opportunity' to act upon their same-sex desires during the war but many of them were either married or got married later and never 'came out.'[284]

The fact that Icelandic men were also 'in the situation' never became a media-case, however, and went largely unnoticed until the twenty-first century.[285] Þór Whitehead notes that three men, who were rumoured to be homosexual, were on Jóhanna Knudsen's list in the investigation on 'the situation' because they had been seen with soldiers or at army dances, but Jóhanna seems to have been uninterested in sexual relations between men and soldiers.[286] Þórir Björnsson has also said that such relationships did not evoke attention during the war and even though a few men went with groups of women to the army dances "nobody mentioned it, because it did not occur to them, nobody was thinking about it."[287] Men who desired other men thus seem to have had certain 'freedom' during the war to act upon their desires without being denounced and labelled as 'homosexuals' – a freedom that in the following decades was much more limited. Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir suggests that the military presence offered men who were attracted to other men a temporary 'utopian

[281] "[…] þá var ég farinn að rata betur um þennan heim […]." Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Maður stendur með sínum ef maður getur," 40.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Hilmar Magnússon, "Drottningar á djamminu," 52–53.
[284] Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir, "Hommar eða huldufólk?" One of her interviewees is Þórir Björnsson who speaks of the war as "an opportunity" for men, many of whom were married and always hid their same-sex desire (59).
[285] In the past few years, especially following Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir's dissertations on homosexuality during the war and magazine interviews with Þórir Björnsson, the Icelandic media and scholars have shown more interest in this hitherto unknown side of 'the situation.' See Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir, ""Hættiði þessu fikti strákar!" Rannsókn á "hinsegin" sögnum frá hernámsárunum"; Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir, "Hommar eða huldufólk?"; Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Maður stendur með sínum ef maður getur."
[286] Þór Whitehead, "Ástandið og yfirvöldin," 114.
[287] "[…] þá var það ekkert nefnt […] því það datt engum neitt í hug, það var enginn að hugsa um það." Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir, "Hommar eða huldufólk?" 65.

realm' or an in-between space, similar to the carnival Mikhail Bakhtin describes in *Rabelais and His World*,[288] where they could experiment with sex and intimate relationships without identifying as gay or being treated as such. Þórir says that although he knew of other Icelandic men who were with soldiers during the war they did not seek each other's company; gay groups or subcultures did not emerge until after the war.[289] The war nevertheless opened doors for men who were attracted to other men, Særún suggests, and created conditions for the formation of communities and subcultures around 1950.[290]

This general disinterest in possible or actual sexual relationships between men in the 1940s calls for speculation. Was it based on acceptance, ignorance or wilful silencing? It is difficult to know with any certainty, due to lack of sources and research on the subject, to what extent homosexual identity was available to men and women in Reykjavík in the 1940s or if Icelanders generally conceived of people in terms of the hetero/homo binary. The limited sources available, mostly from public discourse, suggest that people did not talk about homosexuality as a part of Icelandic reality but they do not tell the whole story.

2.4.3 Crisis in the gender order

The final part of this chapter focuses on the 1950s; a period of intensified regulation of homosexuality as well as increased visibility of men who desired other men. Before we move on to explore how the media discourse changed around 1950, however, issues in relation to gender and sexuality in the 1940s need further discussion. This was, as we have seen, a complex and paradoxical period in terms of public discourses and regulation of gender and sexuality in Iceland. The concerns that were raised in relation to women and their relationships with soldiers expressed, as many scholars have pointed out, deep anxiety in relation to masculinity and Dagný Kristjánsdóttir has spoken of 'a masculinity crisis' in which 'the situation' became "an emotional and "narcissistic" wound" to Icelandic men's pride as heterosexual lovers.[291] Raewyn Connell suggests that in times of changes in power relations, production relations or relations of cathexis (libidinal energy), certain crisis tendencies often become prominent within the gender order in patriarchal societies. In other words, anxiety around gender is often unleashed when the legitimacy of patriarchal power is challenged, the proportion of men and women's contribution to production changes and when ideas about sexuality and sexual agency alter[292] – and

[288] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.
[289] Særún Lísa Birgisdóttir, "Hommar eða huldufólk?" 66.
[290] Ibid. 65–68.
[291] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Karlar í krapinu. Um kynjamyndir og karlmennsku á eftirstríðsárunum," 192.
[292] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 84–85.

building on Connell's model a crisis in the gender order can easily be identified in Iceland in the 1940s.

First of all, the patriarchal power of Icelandic men – and, by extension, the hegemony of Icelandic culture – was threatened by the arrival of thousands of British and American soldiers who represented foreign military power and cultural currents. The soldiers spoke English and taught the locals to speak their language, brought cultural influence into the country and they also represented foreign and exotic masculinity – a rival and alternative to Icelandic masculinity. Describing 'Icelandic masculinity' is perhaps an impossible task, yet the term can be used to refer to certain traits and values that were considered to be Icelandic and characterise men. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir has for example discussed normative ideas about gender that took shape within the conservative nationalist discourse in the early twentieth-century and described what she calls 'the true Icelander'; ideas that were based on the image of the Golden Age hero. The true Icelander was strong and handsome, she says, did not obey foreign power, had full self-control, was brave and heroic and conformed to similar masculine stereotypes in other modernised Western countries, such as those described by George L. Mosse.[293] The stereotypical modern man, Mosse argues, corresponds to the modern society's need for order and progress; he has a strong and beautiful body, powerful mind and is in full control of both bodily movements and emotions. This manly ideal, which was also predominantly bourgeois and white, was adapted by many nationalist movements and "not only played a determining role in fashioning ideas of nationhood, respectability and war, but it was present and influenced almost every aspect of modern history."[294]

Mosse argues that this manly stereotype dominated the Western world throughout the twentieth century, but it was also challenged, for example by new versions of masculinity represented in American mass culture. He notes that the youth culture that emerged in Western countries during and after the Second World War pressed for a change in manners and morals and challenged many traditional ideas. Media such as film, dominated by the United States, he says, "introduced new dimensions into the quest for change, popularizing competing images that in the varieties of manliness they projected had not existed before the war."[295] Mike Chopra-Gant also notes that many of the most popular Hollywood films in the post-war years dealt with masculine performances; soldiers fighting in battle, ex-servicemen returning home to a changed world after the war, and the pleasures as well as

[293] Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, *Hinn sanni Íslendingur*, 75–112.
[294] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, 4.
[295] Ibid. 184.

anxieties related to the all-men war milieu.[296] Tough and violent heroes, played by stars like Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne, appeared among the softer, almost unmanly, types such as the actor James Dean, who, as Mosse points out, was not afraid to cry in public.[297]

Icelanders thus knew, through media such as film and magazines, certain images of American men and the soldiers that appeared on the streets in the early 1940s often merged with Hollywood stars in their minds. During the occupation it became clear that in the eyes of many locals the soldiers were different from Icelandic men. All the women in Herdís Helgadóttir's research on women during the occupation, for example, claimed that the soldiers' politeness made them interesting in the eyes of girls and women.[298] Herdís also says that she and her girlfriends thought the soldiers were handsome, exotic and exciting.[299] A woman, interviewed by Bjarni Guðmarsson and Hrafn Jökulsson, said the American soldiers "looked like they had been copied from Hollywood films; they wore nice uniforms with golden buttons and had plenty of money."[300] Unlike the Icelandic man, the American was not of rural origin or a descendant of great medieval vikings and he was not concerned with Icelandic traditions and history. Quite the opposite; he was a representative of modernity and the 'land of opportunities.' Many Icelandic men identified with this image and began to take after the soldiers, acting and dressing like them. Herdís and the women she interviewed note for example that some Icelandic men became politer towards women, stopped using snuff and started smoking instead, kept tidy and shaved and dressed in nice clothes.[301] Other Icelanders despised and criticised such behaviour, like one of the socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn*'s readers in 1946:

> There are too many young men here in Reykjavík whose appearance is so strange that one might almost think they went to primary school in Hollywood, high school with 'cowboys' in Texas, and finally passed a final exam in manners with some 'smart guys' in New York. This needs to be looked into and corrected, because

[296] Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America. Masculinity, Family and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir*.
[297] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 184–87.
[298] Herdís Helgadóttir, "Konur í hersetnu landi," 160. It should be noted that the soldiers in Iceland were, of course, not a homogenous group; they were also feared and among them were men who raped women and behaved violently. See e.g. Þorvaldur Kristinsson, *Veistu ef vin þú átt. Minningar Aðalheiðar Hólm Spans*, 117–24.
[299] Herdís Helgadóttir, *Úr fjötrum*, 168.
[300] "Þeir voru eins og klipptir út úr Hollywoodmyndum; í fallegum einkennisbúningum með gylltum hnöppum og áttu nóg af peningum." Bjarni Guðmarsson and Hrafn Jökulsson, *Ástandið*, 285.
[301] Herdís Helgadóttir, *Úr fjötrum*, 181–83.

> people who are disconnected from their origins are no longer people in the best sense of that word.[302]

Like other modern influence American masculinity was thus contested and sometimes associated with immorality and foreign corruption; something from which Young Iceland needed to be saved.

The other two factors Connell discusses in relation to crises in the gender order also apply to the Icelandic war and post-war years. Production relations changed during the war; before the occupation women's participation in the labour market was around 30% and their wages were much lower than men's.[303] When the army arrived the need for workforce grew significantly, women could get jobs in coffee shops, restaurants, and sewing rooms and wash the laundry for the army. As a result, they became more financially independent than before and Herdís Helgadóttir argues that this was the most positive influence the occupation had on the life of women.[304]

More importantly for the context of this thesis, however, relations of cathexis changed; the soldiers were sexual competitors and women – and men – now had much more options when it came to male lovers. Bára Baldursdóttir emphasises the effect this had on women and their sexuality; she notes that the 'woman in the situation' was "an alien sexual being who had sexual agency, which until then had predominantly belonged to Icelandic men, and what was worse, Icelandic women chose soldiers over Icelandic men."[305] Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir similarly believes that one of the reasons for the harsh governmental reaction to 'the situation' was that "[t]he women's involvement with soldiers posed a threat to the sexual power of Icelandic men."[306] As this chapter has suggested, moreover, the sexual agency of men who desired other men also increased in the 1940s and the presence of the soldiers opened a new world of possibilities for them. Like many women they were attracted to American masculinity and the image the soldiers represented; Þórir Björnsson recalls for example that he was fascinated by the soldiers' uniforms, their generosity and

[302] "Hér í Reykjavík eru alltof margir æskumenn, sem hafa á sér svo annarlegan blæ, að maður gæti næstum haldið, að þeir hefðu gengið á barnaskóla í Hollywood, unglingaskóla meðal "cowboys" í Texas og loks tekið fullnaðarpróf í framkomu, hjá einhverjum "smart guys" í New York. Hér er nokkuð sem þarf athugunar og lagfæringar við, því það fólk, sem hefur tapað tengslunum við uppruna sinn, er ekki lengur fólk í þess orðs beztu merkingu." "Bæjarpósturinn," *Þjóðviljinn*, 3 December 1946, 4.
[303] Herdís Helgadóttir, "Konur í hersetnu landi," 151.
[304] Ibid. 164–65.
[305] "Hér var um að ræða framandi kynveru, sem tók sér kynferðislegt forræði (sexual agency), sem hingað til hafði oftast tilheyrt íslenskum karlmönnum og ekki bætti heldur úr skák að íslenskar konur völdu setuliðsmenn umfram íslenska karlmenn." Bára Baldursdóttir, "Kynlegt stríð," 71.
[306] Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, "Public View and Private Voices," 106.

politeness[307] – and homoerotic American male figures play a significant role in Elías Mar's fiction as the following chapters will outline.

2.5 The 1950s: Homosexuals and artists

Diverse sources suggest that the homosexual paradigm was more advanced in the 1950s than the previous decades; that the Icelandic public was becoming aware of the possibility that people, at least men, could be homosexual. Many participants in the ethnological data collection conducted in 2013 recall for example that they heard people talk about homosexuality and homosexuals in Iceland in the 1950s, often concerning men in Reykjavík who were 'notorious sodomites.' One participant describes how boys from Reykjavík, who dwelled and worked at his farm in East Iceland during the summer, often told stories of certain men in Reykjavík who were nicknamed "sódó" (sodomite).[308] Two men, born in Reykjavík in 1941 and 1944, note that in the mid-1950s "everybody knew" certain men called "sódó" and recall that they were not well liked.[309] A woman born in 1938 says she never heard of homosexuality until the mid-1950s when she "got acquainted with gay men" at the café Adlon at Laugavegur 11 in Reykjavík. "They were respected there, most of them were intelligent artists," she adds.[310] A woman born in 1931 moreover says that "nothing was more ignominious than going to Laugavegur 11, the gay place," in her youth in the 1950s.[311]

The media discourse manifests an increased interest in (male) homosexuality and it also confirms that homosexual men were associated with Adlon on Laugavegur 11. The frequency of words referring to homosexuality in the printed media is four times higher in the 1950s than in the previous decades, as noted earlier, and the words are also used differently. During the first half of the century it was quite common to see the word *kynvilla* – 'sexual aberration' – used to describe a general confusion about sex or gender, including grammatical gender.[312] Such usage almost disappears in the 1950s, which suggests that a definite link between the word *kynvilla* and homosexuality had been established. Headlines that expressed concerns about the number of homosexuals in Reykjavík also started to appear in the newspapers and *homosexuality in Iceland* thus

[307] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, "Maður stendur með sínum ef maður getur," 40.
[308] Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, "Samkynhneigð á Íslandi," 2013-1-51.
[309] Ibid. 2013-1-58 and 2013-1-18.
[310] "Á menntaskólaárunum '55–'59 kynntist ég hommum á kaffihúsinu "Ellefu" – Adlon á Laugavegi 11. Þar nutu þeir virðingar, voru flestir gáfaðir listamenn." Ibid. 2013-1-40.
[311] Ibid. 2013-1-57.
[312] The word *kynvilla* literally means 'wrong sex/gender' or 'misplaced sex/gender,' and it is formed the same way as *trúvilla*, 'heresy' ('wrong religion'). See Guðni Baldursson, "Iceland: From Sexual Aberration to Sexual Inversion," 59.

became a media subject for the first time since Guðmundur Sigurjónsson's case in 1924. This public discourse was predominantly negative and manifests that this change entailed both increased visibility of homosexual men and intensified homophobia. Last, but not least, one of the most striking results from the discourse analysis outlined in the following sections is that the media often mentions male homosexuals and artists in the same context, especially those who gathered at Laugavegur 11 – and one of the patrons there was Elías Mar.

2.5.1 The Western context

The gender crisis of the 1940s was indeed not a unique Icelandic phenomenon. In many Western countries the post-war years were a period of anxiety around non-normative sexuality, incited by extensive social and cultural changes. During and after the war family life and traditional gender roles were often disrupted as women frequently entered the workforce when the men had joined the army.[313] John D'Emilio notes for example that dislocations of young Americans during the war, who were sent away from their families and often into gender-segregated situations, "freed millions of men and women from the setting where heterosexuality was normally imposed."[314] Allan Bérubé has furthermore outlined how many Americans discovered and acted upon their same-sex desire during the war.[315] Concerns about changed gender patterns and the anxiety around homosexuality and its widespread effects also intensified following the publication of Kinsey's study of sexual behaviour in the United States in 1948 and 1953. The Kinsey reports stated for example that over a third of American men had had at least one homosexual experience and that four percent were exclusively homosexual.[316] This meant that if Kinsey was right homosex could no longer be considered a very rare vice, nor exclusively foreign, but a part of everyday life and many people's identity.

Such changes and concerns were often met with campaigns for the reinforcement of traditional family values. Women were encouraged to return to the homes, get married and have children and the media was filled with images of happy housewives and well-equipped kitchens – and restrictions and condemnation of homosexuality similarly got more severe.[317] In the United States, for example, a ban on the employment of homosexuals by the government and its contractors was imposed, homosexuals were fired

[313] On gender and family structures in the post-war years, see e.g. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound. American Families in the Cold War Era*.
[314] John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble. Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University*, 10.
[315] Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire. The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*.
[316] Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 650–51.
[317] D'Emilio, *Making Trouble*, 67–68. On homosexuality and the heteronormative family model, see 3–16.

from the army and the police raided gay bars. Homosexuality also became a part of a witch hunt against communism; gay men and lesbians were believed to be a national threat, first of all because they were seen as a threat affecting the health and morality of others and secondly because their sexuality was believed to make them susceptible to blackmail – they were likely to choose to spy for the enemy rather than to risk having their sexuality revealed.[318] Similar voices were heard in Britain in the same period, which saw a significant increase in cases of homosexual offences, and homosexuals were often associated with spying and thus seen as a threat to national security.[319] The anti-homosexual campaigns, however, also encouraged people who desired the same sex to seek each other and form communities, which led to the formation of homophile associations and later gay liberation movements.[320] Bérubé notes for example that, ironically,

> the screening and discharge policies, together with the drafting of millions of men, weakened the barriers that had kept gay people trapped and hidden at the margins of society. Discovering that they shared a common cause, they were more willing and able to defend themselves, as their ability to work, congregate, and lead sexual lives came under escalating attack in the postwar decade.[321]

Regulation of homosexuality also grew considerably in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland in the 1950s. Police intervention got more common and so did prosecution of same-sex sexual acts – even though homosexual acts between consenting adults had been legalised in Denmark and Sweden. The press similarly frequently reported on homosexual scandals in a condemning manner and emphasised the importance of heteronormative family values.[322] The influence of Kinsey's report was also considerable and wide-spread. Homosexual identity was available to more men than before, they could speak of themselves as homosexuals and the first homosexual associations emerged; the Federation of 1948 (Forbundet af 1948) was founded in Denmark in 1948 and its Norwegian and Swedish branches became independent associations two years later.[323] The homosexual paradigm was quite advanced – at least in bigger cities – in the 1950s, Jens Rydström says; homosexual

[318] Ibid. 59–60.
[319] Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell*, 33–41; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 221–40.
[320] D'Emilio, *Making Trouble*, 67–68.
[321] Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 255.
[322] Rydström, "Introduction," 32–34; Edelberg, *Storbyen Trækker*, 121–62. See also e.g. Karen-Christine Friele, "Med regnbuen som våpen. Fragmenter av norsk homohistorie gjennom 50 år," 45–46; Rosen, "Denmark 1866–1976," 72–77; Jens Rydström, "Sweden 1864–1978. Beasts and Beauties," 202–4; Mustola, "Finland 1889–1999," 229–32.
[323] Rydström, "Introduction," 33.

men had become a 'species' and an acknowledged, yet condemned and marginalised, social minority.[324]

As was noted earlier in this chapter there was, in terms of awareness and regulation of homosexuality, an important difference between rural and urban societies. The Second World War incited the transformation from a rural to urban society in the Nordic countries and many cities expanded significantly in the 1950s. Countries such as Finland and Iceland were, however, predominantly agricultural societies during the first half of the twentieth century and even though both countries went through rapid and extensive modernisation they still had a strong and definite rural character in the mid-century. Tuula Juvonen and Kati Mustola have pointed out that social control of homosexuality in Finland was in many ways different than in the neighbour countries, especially urban centres such as Copenhagen and Stockholm. "In the predominantly rural culture homosexual behavior was often met with ridicule but it seldom led to involving the police, though the law offered that possibility," Mustola says: "There was no need for it. In village communities and small towns people knew each other and also the village fools would fit it, people who were either mentally ill or otherwise behaved eccentrically."[325] This changed during and after the Second World War, however:

> When Finland was modernized and urbanized, forms of social control changed. In growing towns the control exercised by the community did not function any longer so one had to resort to police control. This is reflected in the criminal statistics. The high rate o[f] homosexual convictions during the 1950s and 1960s is a sign not only of urbanization and changing forms of social control but also of a change in the regulation of gender and sexuality, and of an increasing interest in policing their limits.[326]

No evidence suggests that the rate of convictions for same-sex sexual acts in Iceland was higher in the 1950s than before, but due to lack of statistics and research on District Court documents it is difficult to make any conclusions. Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir outlines that only two cases, where men were prosecuted for homosex, were brought before the Supreme Court in the 1950s; in both cases the men were sentenced to prison for having sex with or raping ten- to fifteen-year-old boys. Þorgerður managed to trace four similar cases tried by Reykjavík District Court from the early 1950s but there is a gap in the statistics from 1953–1965. Therefore we have no information about the number of court cases related to same-sex behaviour in the Icelandic District Courts in that period.[327] Like in

[324] Rydström, *Sinners and Citizens*, 159–292; Rydström, "Introduction," 32–34.
[325] Mustola, "Finland 1889–1999," 232.
[326] Ibid. See also Juvonen, "Shadow Lives and Public Secrets."
[327] Þorgerður Þorvaldsdóttir, "Iceland 1869–1992," 129–32.

Finland and other Nordic countries, however, the public discourse in the Icelandic media manifests a significantly changed attitude towards homosexuality and an intensified regulation of gender and sexuality norms in the 1950s.

2.5.2 Modern evil

In *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* Henning Bech discusses the relationship between male homosexuality, masculinity and Western modernity and concludes that homosexuality has been an essential factor in the development of modernity and the modernisation of the West.[328] Inspired by Foucault he argues that the homosexual emerged as a 'species' in the context of the modernised, urbanised West and developed special characteristics and manners, "a homosexual form of existence,"[329] as an answer to the modern living conditions. The homosexual form of existence is inseparable from the city, Bech says, but in Western discourses cities have often been associated with excessive or perverse sexuality and various 'dark' or negative aspects of modernity. Krafft-Ebing argued for example that "[t]hose living in large cities, who are constantly reminded of sexual things and incited to sexual enjoyment, certainly have more sexual desire than those living in the country," and held that rape, masturbation and perversions were more common in cities than in other places.[330] Like Conrad, Bech points out that in modern societies homosexuality is often believed to threaten and challenge the stability, progress and well-being of individuals and societies – and national identity. Like the city – his "social world proper"[331] – the homosexual is thought to have a particularly destructive character, and he has, Bech argues, become a scapegoat who is blamed for a wide variety of things that go wrong. The homosexual is, in other words, often depicted as one of the *incarnations of evil* in modern societies.[332]

The following discussion suggests that Bech's approach can shed important light on the portrayal of homosexuality in the Icelandic media in the 1950s. Although he does not use Foucault's vocabulary Bech's writings on the phenomenon of *evil* can easily be discussed in terms of power over life. Bech notes that evil is – or has – power, and this power is the reason why evil is a threat. Evil "lurks everywhere," takes on many different shapes and challenges individuals and societies in various ways, Bech says, and there are

[328] Bech's book was originally written in Danish and published as *Når mænd mødes* (1987). All references here are to the English translation from 1997 which is based on the revised Danish text.
[329] Bech, *When Men Meet*, 85–159.
[330] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 49.
[331] Bech, *When Men Meet*, 98.
[332] Ibid. 160–193.

many forces at play within it.[333] Evil can therefore be seen as a network of power relations and knowledges that urge people and societies to act and behave in a certain way – to avoid evil and seek its opposite, the good, with the goal to improve their life. Knowledges about what counts as evil differ between cultures and periods but Bech argues that in the modern "universe of evil, the [male] homosexual plays a leading role."[334] He notes that even though many other figures have served as the evil incarnate in modern thought, such as people of other races and religions, criminals and drug addicts, the homosexual is in many ways better suited for the role than others. His invisibility, in particular, makes him dangerous in a different way than for example racial others. "You never quite know where you have him," Bech says; "he can be lying in wait anywhere – just like evil."[335] He points out that Kinsey's studies suggested that homosexuality was much more widespread than was generally acknowledged in the 1940s and 1950s and Freud's writings moreover showed that everyone could be homosexual, even without being conscious of it.[336] Homosexuality is thus always a potentiality and it affects relations between people, especially of the same sex – even if it is not visible.

According to Bech *evil* is, within modern Western discourses, whatever threatens or undermines the following six dimensions of modern societies:

1) the individual's life and well-being;
2) the group's biological ability to reproduce;
3) the external material conditions for the group's existence (food, soil, etc.);
4) the group's norms values institutions, forms of power;
5) the group's identity or the symbolic representative of this (e.g. the People, the Queen, the Nation, etc.);
6) the cosmic order.[337]

The male homosexual challenges all these factors, Bech argues.[338] This chapter has already outlined how homosexuality challenged – or at least was not compatible with – Icelandic *national identity* (5) in the first half of the twentieth century and such depictions of the homosexual evil continued to appear in the media in the 1950s. Numerous articles report on homo-scandals in Europe, and a strong tendency to associate homosexuality with other

[333] Ibid. 181.
[334] Ibid. 182.
[335] Ibid. 187.
[336] Ibid. 29–31.
[337] Ibid. 181.
[338] The focus here is on items 1, 2, 4 and 5. Items 3 and 6 await further research in the Icelandic context.

countries is evident.[339] The 'foreign nature' of homosexuality is also striking in reports on homosexuals in Iceland, for example in an article that appeared in *Tíminn* on 24 April 1952 under the headline "An Icelandic homosexual caught with a negro." The reporter states that the police has caught an Icelandic man having sex with a black sailor; that the Icelander undressed the foreigner and had him serve his 'deviant urges.'[340] Although the Icelandic man is represented as the active party it is clear that what makes the case especially morally corrupt is the fact that he was involved with a black foreigner.[341] A striking example of how the homosexual is portrayed as a foreign enemy can moreover be found in the socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* on 15 September 1953, where the paper claims that "an American sodomite" at the naval base in Keflavík has been charged for having sex with an Icelandic teenager, but released without serving his sentence. The emphasis in this article is more on criticising the American and Icelandic authorities than on homosexuality, and the reporter blames the U.S. Army, as well as Icelandic authorities, for this "horrible moral corruption that has been imported by the American military and their followers."[342] In this report, homosexuality is, in other words, strongly associated with the 'evil other' – the United States, their politics and leverage in Iceland that challenged *Þjóðviljinn's* socialist and nationalist politics.

The image of the homosexual as a threat to *the life and well-being of individuals* (1) and *the society's ability to reproduce* (2) also appears in the Icelandic media. *Mánudagsblaðið* – a weekly paper that practised 'yellow journalism' – repetitively expressed its concerns about the increased visibility of homosexuality and the negative influence it might have. On 23 November 1953, for example, an article titled "Homosexuality in Iceland" appeared on the paper's front page and stated that "groups of homosexuals, who do not try to hide their misdeeds," have appeared in Iceland and are

[339] Reports on the Haijby affair in Sweden where Kurt Haijby maintained that he had had a sexual relationship with King Gustaf V appeared in *Tíminn* on 30 April, 16 May and 10 June 1952. Haijby was eventually convicted for blackmail. See also reports on the case of Ian Harvey, a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the British Foreign Office, in *Þjóðviljinn* and *Morgunblaðið* on 25 November 1958.

[340] "Íslenzkur kynvillingur að verki með Negra," *Tíminn*, 24 April 1952, 12.

[341] There are also examples of a more accepting and less homophobic and racist discourse on homosexuality in the media. A reporter that worked for the newspaper *Vísir* was for example shocked by the headline about the Icelander and the negro in *Tíminn* and said it was obvious that the journalists at *Tíminn* did not know that homosexuality was a disease. The *Vísir* reporter also criticised the racist discourse and asked the *Tíminn* reporter to explain if it was more sick or deviant to have sex with a black man than a white man. See "Kvöldþankar," *Vísir*, 26 April 1952, 5.

[342] "[…] enn eitt dæmi um þá hryllilegu siðspillingu, sem hingað flyzt með bandaríska hernámsliðinu og fylgifiskum þess." "Bandarískur sódómisti, sekur um mök við íslenzkan pilt, sleppur nær við refsingu," *Þjóðviljinn*, 15 September 1953, 3.

"causing trouble."[343] The reporter notes that physicians have informed the paper that "weak-minded teenagers can become homosexuals" if they are seduced by other men who got the "disease" during puberty and have never been "normal."[344] He moreover states that the Icelandic society cannot approve of this sexual anomaly and such behaviour must be considered a serious moral offence. The article ends with a warning to homosexuals in Reykjavík – and the public: "This article is not meant to accuse any man or institution, but to emphasise that they have been seen and people are aware of them. […] Be careful – my dears."[345]

Two years later, on 4 April 1955, another article with a headline asking: "Is homosexuality becoming more common in Iceland?" appeared on *Mánudagsblaðið*'s front page. The reporter, who writes under the pseudonym 'Ajax,' argues that homosexuality did not exist in rural and pre-modern Iceland but that urban culture has now created a context where homosexuality can thrive:

> The few men in Reykjavík who carried this vice were well known, and most of their hunting attempts evoked laughter and sympathy but were not perceived as dangerous. This has been changing in the past 10–15 years. There is no doubt that the number of homosexuals in this town has grown rapidly in this period.[346]

Then he notes that one of his informants, "who knows most people in this town," has claimed that there were no more than 10–12 homosexuals in Reykjavík in 1940 but that they are now more than 200.[347]

The articles in *Mánudagsblaðið* manifest an awareness of, and concerns regarding, growing visibility and influence of homosexuality in Iceland. The paper was run by one man, Agnar Bogason, who wrote most of the material himself but also published texts by unknown individuals who wrote under pseudonyms, such as 'Ajax.'[348] *Mánudagsblaðið* was one of the first yellow presses in Iceland but neither its publishing policy nor the fact that most of the articles were written or planned by the same man reduces the paper's

[343] "Svo er nú málum háttað hér, að skapazt hafa hópar kynvillinga, sem ekki fara með nokkurri leynd með villu sína og eru á sinn hátt orðnir vandræðamenn […]." "Kynvilla á Íslandi," *Mánudagsblaðið*, 23 November 1953, 1.

[344] "[…] veikgeðja unglingar geta orðið "homosexuals", ef þeirra er freistað á þessu sviði af eldri mönnum eða jafnöldrum sínum, sem tekið hafa "sjúkdóminn" beinlínis jafnframt kynþroska sínum og aldrei verið það sem kalla má "normal"." Ibid.

[345] "Grein þessi er ekki rituð sem ákæra á neinn sérstakan mann eða stofnun, en aðeins undirstrikað, að til þeirra sézt og um þá er vitað. […] Farið varlega – elskurnar." Ibid.

[346] "Þeir fáu menn í Reykjavík, sem voru haldnir þessum lesti voru alkunnir bæjarbúum, og flestar veiðitilraunir þeirra vöktu frekar hlátur og meðaumkvun, [en] að hætta stafaði af þeim. Þetta hefur verið að breytast núna 10–15 síðustu árin. Ekki er minnsti vafi á því, að hómósexualistum bæjarins hefur farið hraðfjölgandi á þessu tímabili." "Er kynvilla að aukast á Íslandi?" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 4 April 1955, 1.

[347] Ibid.

[348] Bragi Sigurðsson, "In memoriam: Agnar Bogason," *Morgunblaðið*, 6 October 1983.

value as a source; it was popular and widely read and expressed opinions that were without doubt shared by many of its readers.[349] Its writings in the 1950s manifest that by then homosexuality could no longer be seen and treated solely as a foreign phenomenon and although the numbers Ajax' informant mentions should not be taken too seriously it is clear that homosexuals – men first and foremost – were more visible in Reykjavík than before. They had become subjects of gossip and entered public discourse. The writings on homosexuality share many elements with the discourse on 'the situation'; the main problem is believed to be the immoral behaviour and nature of homosexuals, both foreigners and Icelanders, and the need for installing a public consensus against homosexuality is emphasised.[350]

One of the most striking aspects of this discourse is how the articles represent homosexuality as a contagious disease or a plague – an evil force that is spreading and threatening the life and well-being of the Icelandic population. Bech notes that the idea that homosexuals can seduce and impair others, especially vulnerable individuals like teenagers, has been very influential since the nineteenth century and that the mere presence of homosexuals – or even knowledge of their existence – was often believed to be sufficient to contaminate.[351] This image of the contagious homosexual derives from nineteenth-century medical writings and the question about the 'real' cause of homosexuality; if it should be seen as a genetic fault or induced by external conditions. Krafft-Ebing, for example, described different types or stages of homosexuality and argued that it was sometimes congenital and sometimes acquired, and Havelock Ellis also emphasised that homosexuality was influenced by both nature and nurture.[352] The books on sexuality that appeared in Icelandic translations in the late 1940s similarly claimed that homosexuality could be both congenital and acquired, and that heterosexual individuals could 'become' homosexual if they were for example victims of sexual violence or other traumatic experience in childhood, or exposed to and influenced by older and more experienced homosexuals.[353] Echoes from such scientific writing can easily be pointed out in for example *Mánudagsblaðið*'s statement that "weak-minded teenagers can become

[349] Agnar Bogason studied journalism in Chicago and founded *Mánudagsblaðið* in 1948, shortly after he returned to Iceland. He later said that he had modelled it after papers such as *Daily News* and *Chicago Sun*. See Eiríkur Jónsson, "Með sakavottorð upp á 3 síður – án þess að hafa framið glæp."

[350] *Mánudagsblaðið*'s take on sexual and moral issues was often paradoxical. Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir has for example pointed out that while the paper condemned homosexuality and 'hippie orgies' it also published nude pictures of women. See ""Sögur af mér – eða því sem ég gæti orðið,"" 183–86.

[351] Bech, *When Men Meet*, 182–83.

[352] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*; Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*. See also Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 1–21.

[353] Havil, *Raunhæft ástalíf*, 27; Fabricius-Møller, *Kynferðislífið*, 252; Kahn, *Kynlíf*, 229.

homosexuals" if they are tempted by older homosexual men. In April 1955 *Mánudagsblaðið* also stated that one of the main reasons for the 'homosexual plague' was the chaos during and after the Second World War; many foreign soldiers had this vice, the reporter says, and they seduced Icelandic men and had corruptive influence on teenagers who became "sex-confused" (*kynruglaðir*) after working for the army.[354] The image of homosexuality as a plague is moreover striking in some of the writings in *Þjóðviljinn*, such as this letter from 1953, published as a response to criticism from other newspapers following the report on 'the American sodomite':

> Icelanders are entitled to know the moral level and behaviour of the men who are here to "defend Western culture", and vigilance against their crimes and disgusting acts is vital disease prevention for Iceland […]. Þjóðviljinn's writings about this case, and others that would never have been found out if not for the paper's instigation, are done for the sake of Icelandic cleanliness […].[355]

Here the plague metaphor is used to underline that homosexuality threatens not only the well-being of Icelandic individuals but also the racial and moral purity of the population and Icelandic national identity.

2.5.3 Homosexual gatherings

In late October 1958 two papers reported on a 'homo-scandal' in Reykjavík. *Alþýðublaðið* stated in a headline on 25 October that a man had been charged for seducing a teenage boy and *Mánudagsblaðið*'s front page headline on 27 October was: "Yet another homo-case coming up!" Both discuss the same case and argue that a young man has brought a charge against an older companion who tried to approach him sexually. The charges seem to have been dropped a few days later and no further reports appeared in the newspapers.[356] The discussion of homosexuality in the two articles in *Alþýðublaðið* and *Mánudagsblaðið*, however, deserves closer examination.

[354] "Er kynvilla að aukast á Íslandi?" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 4 April 1955, 1.

[355] "Íslendingar eiga heimtingu á því að fá að vita um siðferðisstig og framferði þeirra manna sem hingað eru komnir til að "vernda vestræna menningu" og það er mikilvæg íslensk sóttvörn að staðið sé á verði gegn öllum glæpum þeirra og andstyggðarverkum […]. Skrif Þjóðviljans um þetta mál og önnur sem aldrei hefðu komizt upp nema fyrir atbeina hans eru unnin í þágu íslenzks hreinlætis […]." "Hafa Bandaríkjamenn brotið hernámssamninginn?" *Þjóðviljinn*, 17 September 1953, 11.

[356] Guðlaugur Rósinkranz, the director of the National Theatre, wrote an announcement in *Mánudagsblaðið* where he claimed that the charge had been based on a misunderstanding and thus dropped by the court. See "Athugasemd," *Mánudagsblaðið*, 3 November 1958, 7. *Alþýðublaðið* moreover notes that the two men arrived together at the police station where the younger man filed the charge against his companion, and that they were both drunk, which suggests that the charge may have been a mistake or an impetuous decision. See "Maður kærður fyrir að tæla unglingspilt til kynvillu," *Alþýðublaðið*, 25 October 1958, 8.

Both papers portray homosexuality as an evil force that is operating and spreading at an alarming speed. *Alþýðublaðið*'s report begins by stating that

> [a] strong rumour has recently been circling town about homosexual trouble-makers being more conspicuous than before. That they even had their gatherings where they satisfied their filthy inclinations, and what is worse – some of these men tried to seduce young boys.[357]

Mánudagsblaðið also emphasises the danger, especially because homosexuals are becoming more visible in public places in Reykjavík:

> One dingy bar at Laugavegur, a haunt of successful and unsuccessful artists, students and rabble, has become a renowned meeting place for homosexuals. The word is also spreading that various "clubs" for such men are operating, and moreover that some of these men have "mistresses."[358]

He moreover argues that "one official institution is known for violation of decency in relation to these matters"; later in the article it is revealed that he is referring to the National Theatre and that one of the men involved in the 'homo-case' works there. Interestingly, these two public places where *Mánudagsblaðið* argues homosexuality is thriving, the café at Laugavegur and the National Theatre, were places where artists and bohemians often met.

Mánudagsblaðið had discussed this link between artists and homosexuals before 1958 and taken a particular interest in homosexuality within the National Theatre. On 23 November 1953, for example, a reporter argued that a group of homosexuals were working at "one of the state institutions." These men are a nuisance, he says, and although he does not want to say to which institution he is referring he notes that the article is written to let the men know that they are being watched.[359] On 19 December 1955 *Mánudagsblaðið* writes again about a homosexual scandal in "an official company" and notes that this is a cultural institution, and that the men are "high-ranking" in a particular art genre. This institution is a dangerous hotbed for homosexuals, the reporter says, because many young men work there and they are vulnerable and susceptible to bad influence from artists who

[357] "Sterkur orðrómur hefur að undanförnu gengið um það hér í bænum, að kynvilltir vandræðamenn létu nú meira á sér bera en áður. Hefðu jafnvel sínar eigin samkomur, þar sem þeir þjónuðu hinum soralegu hneigðum sínum og það sem verra er – nokkrir þessara manna reyndu að tæla unga drengi til fylgilags við sig." "Maður kærður fyrir að tæla unglingspilt til kynvillu," *Alþýðublaðið*, 25 October 1958, 8.

[358] "Sjoppa ein við Laugaveginn, aðseturstaður mislukkaðra og lukkaðra listamanna, skólakrakka og lýðs, hefur fengið á sig orð sem stefnumótsstaður kynvillinga. Þá er mjög haft í orði, að ýmsir "klúbbar" slíkra manna sé við lýði, og ennfremur að einstaka menn haldi "fryllur."" "Enn eitt kynvillumálið í uppsiglingu!" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 27 October 1958, 1.

[359] "Kynvilla á Islandi," *Mánudagsblaðið*, 23 November 1953, 1. The reporter's identity and gender is unknown, but most journalists at the time were men and it is thus relatively safe to use male pronouns, especially since Agnar Bogason wrote most of the material in *Mánudagsblaðið* himself.

even believe that abnormal sexual intercourse is "among the highest commandments of art!"[360] Finally, in the report on the 'homo-case' in 1958, the reporter states that rumours of homosexuality within the theatre have been thriving for a long time[361] – and it is relatively safe to assert that the 'official institution' in the previous reports was also the theatre. Þorvaldur Kristinsson, who is conversant with the matter, confirms that there were many same-sex loving men among the theatre's employees in the 1950s and that same-sex sexuality was generally tolerated if it was kept within the institution. He moreover notes that Agnar Bogason was quite hostile towards the National Theatre and that his hostility is apparent in his reviews of the plays staged in the theatre and also in *Mánudagsblaðið*'s emphasis on homo-scandals among the theatre employees.[362]

Mánudagsblaðið also discussed the relationship between artists and homosexuals more directly. In April 1955 'Ajax' states that one of the reasons for the 'homosexual plague,' in addition to the chaos during and after the Second World War, is

> the artist life that is now practised in this town. Here are now hundreds of men who call themselves artists. Many of them are serious idealists who deserve full respect, but this group also includes several idlers who just cannot be bothered to get a proper job, and call themselves artists and use that as an excuse for doing nothing. […] These fellows ramble along the streets or sit in cafés from dawn till dusk, cocky and always chattering, full of conceit and arrogance and unbridled contempt for those who have honest jobs. These artists think they are too good for such things, and quite a few decent ordinary people take them seriously and believe they are very intelligent. It is among this entertaining rabble that homosexuality has recently spread like wildfire.[363]

He makes an association between 'serious idealists,' or 'good' artists, and the 'so-called' artists who do not make 'real' art. He does not, however, differentiate between homosexuals and 'idle' artists, and by the end of the article he urges the police to guard

[360] "[…] að villa í eðlilegum kynmökum, sé ein af æðstu boðorðum listarinnar!" "Kynvilla í opinberu fyrirtæki orðin þjóðarhneyksli," *Mánudagsblaðið*, 19 December 1955, 4.
[361] "Enn eitt kynvillumálið í uppsiglingu!" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 27 October 1958, 1.
[362] Þorvaldur Kristinsson, discussion with the author, 11 January 2014.
[363] "Önnur orsök er það listamannalíf, sem nú er lifað hér í bænum. Hér eru nú hundruð manna, sem kalla sig listamenn. Margir þessara manna eru alvarlegir idealistar og allrar virðingar verðir, en í þessum hópi eru líka fjölmargir slæpingjar, sem hreinlega nenna ekki að vinna neina skikkanlega vinnu, og kalla sig listamenn og nota það sem átyllu til þess að gera ekki neitt. […] Þessir náungar reika um götur eða sitja á sjoppum frá morgni til kvölds, síblaðrandi og bíspertir, fullir af monti og hroka og taumlausri fyrirlitningu á öllum, sem vinna heiðarleg störf. Þessir listamenn þykjast of fínir til alls slíks og til er ekki svo fátt af skikkanlegu alþýðufólki, sem tekur þá alvarlega og heldur, að þeir séu ósköp gáfaðir. Það er meðal þessa skemmtilega lýðs, er kynvilla hefur geysað undanfarið eins og eldur í sinu." "Er kynvilla að aukast á Íslandi?" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 4 April 1955, 1.

"the so-called artists who wander along the streets and try to seduce young boys."[364] He emphasises that the public must be aware that this is happening and in the report in 1958 he similarly argues that a strong public consensus must be created that condemns "these homosexuals, who even believe that it is smart or artistic to have sex with other men."[365]

Based on these reports a few conclusions can be made. First of all, both *Mánudagsblaðið* and *Alþýðublaðið* – two very different papers[366] – maintain that homosexual subcultures have emerged in Reykjavík. Homosexual men thus seem to have been more visible in the city than before and the reports also manifest a new awareness of the existence of male homosexuality as a part of Icelandic reality. Moreover, the harsh condemnation of homosexuals in this writing and the emphasis on public consensus shows that male same-sex sexuality was, in the mid- and late 1950s, regulated by the media in a similar manner as the sexuality of heterosexual women – promiscuous women and homosexual men were a threat to the well-being of Icelandic society and nationality. Finally, the link between artists and homosexuals manifested in *Mánudagsblaðið* brings this discussion back to the association between the homosexuality and modern or 'bad' literature and cultural influence – only now the association does not just apply to the idea of homosexuality but also actual people in Reykjavík.

2.5.4 The artist/homosexual

The association between homosexuals and artists was not an Icelandic idea – quite the contrary. Links between artists and homosexuality in interwar Europe were discussed earlier in this chapter and Christopher Reed has also outlined how ideas about the homosexual and the artist as personality types or identities have merged and overlapped in various ways, especially since the late nineteenth century. In *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (2011) he notes that various links between same-sex sexuality and art can be identified in earlier periods but a special relationship developed between the two when the idea of the artist-genius – the artist as an individual whose art is the result of innate genius and gifted character rather than practice and training – had gained ground. Reed builds on Foucault's theory of the 'birth' of the homosexual and maintains that "[w]ith a few key nouns changed, much the same story could be told about art." Just as sexual acts developed into a sexual identity, he says, "what might be called art acts (the processes of

[364] "[…] þeim svokölluðu listamönnum, sem randa hér um göturnar til að reyna að tæla drengi á fermingaraldri eða yngri." Ibid. 4.
[365] "[…] sem jafnvel halda að það sé fínt eða listamannslegt að hafa mök við kynbræður sína." "Enn eitt kynvillumálið í uppsiglingu!" *Mánudagsblaðið*, 27 October 1958, 1.
[366] *Mánudagsblaðið* was, as noted earlier, a yellow press, edited and run by Agnar Bogason. *Alþýðublaðið*, on the other hand, was an established paper run by the Social Democratic Party (Alþýðuflokkurinn).

painting and sculpture, for example)" became manifestations of the personal identity of the artist.[367]

Reed suggests that the association between the artist-genius and homosexuality, however, first became significant in the late nineteenth century with the increased visibility of radical artists and the avant-garde. The avant-garde artists of the *fin de siècle* period, such as the aesthetes in Britain and the French decadents, revolted against bourgeois culture and aesthetics, rejected the claim that art should lead to social improvement and argued that art should be autonomous, separated from morality and only judged in terms of its intrinsic value and 'inner beauty' (art for art's sake). They also "wilfully violated the norms that defined both good art and proper behavior," Reed notes.[368] Mosse similarly outlines how they, like homosexuals, challenged normative masculinity in various ways, for example the idea of restraint and self-control; they were often passionate, sensational and rebellious and provoked harsh criticism and condemnation.[369] One of the most famous aesthetes and the prototype of the 'artist/homosexual' was Oscar Wilde – who was also a convicted homosexual. His literary works sometimes represent male homoeroticism in connection to art, the most famous example being the close relationship between the artist and the young male model who eventually becomes his own portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/1891). All this became known to those who followed the news reports from the trials in 1895 where Wilde was convicted of 'gross indecency' and sentenced to two years of hard labour. The image of the artist/homosexual, and the idea that art and homosexuality merged and overlapped in various ways, was reinforced in the first decades of the twentieth century and became widespread in the West. Reed notes that it often followed nineteenth-century patterns, which means that it built on the 'Wildeian' model and was linked to high culture and high social class.[370] Many of the most visible homosexuals in Europe around 1900 were of high social class – such as Wilde – and the homosexual subcultures that emerged in the period, especially in England and France, were often elitist. High class status gave access to certain social privilege and, as Reed has pointed out, many of the most prominent avant-garde artists around 1900 were white, middle or upper-class men whose social status was strong enough to allow them to deviate from the heterosexual norm without being punished severely.[371]

[367] Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*, 2.
[368] Ibid. 76–77.
[369] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 79–82.
[370] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 107.
[371] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 79.

The artist/homosexual also became a subject of scientific writing – and such texts in turn enhanced the fusion between homosexuality and art in the public imaginary. In one of the most famous scholarly works that dealt with the supposed degeneration of Western societies, *Entartung* (1892; *Degeneration*, 1895), Max Nordau listed and described forms of pathological abnormalities that he believed were signs of the decline of the human race. Like his contemporary, Krafft-Ebing, Nordau sought to analyse with scientific methods both physical and psychological signs of degeneration.[372] Krafft-Ebing believed that homosexuality was a degenerate abnormality:

> This constitution, as far as its anatomical and functional foundation is concerned, is absolutely unknown. Since, in almost all such cases, the individual subject to the perverse sexual instinct displays a neuropathic predisposition in several directions, and the latter may be brought into relation with hereditary degenerate conditions, this anomaly of psycho-sexual feeling may be called, clinically, a functional sign of degeneration.[373]

Nordau, on the other hand, focused primarily on aesthetics and artists. He argued that one of the main symptoms of the degeneration of the human race was a physical and mental irregularity and concluded that most of the cases in his research – the majority of whom were artists – showed both 'physical irregularities' such as "asymmetry of face and cranium" and moral disorder. The degenerates, according to Nordau, lack "the sense of morality and or right and wrong. For them there exists no law, no decency, no modesty,"[374] and they are excessively emotional, pessimistic and weak-minded.[375] Most importantly, perhaps, their degenerate faults are mirrored in the art they create. Nordau criticises for example the works of the aesthetes, the decadents and the French symbolists harshly for lacking form, being too sentimental and self-centred and presenting bad morals. The symbolists, he says, have "in common all the signs of degeneracy and imbecility: overweening vanity and self-conceit, strong emotionalism, confused

[372] Theories of degeneration often focused on issues regarding race and sexuality. Siobhan Somerville has for example outlined how ideas of sexuality and race were closely linked in medical, sexological and psychological discourses in nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many sexologists drew upon the techniques of comparative anatomy and Darwinism when they were trying to position the homosexual body as distinguishable from the 'normal' body, and in comparative anatomy the racial difference of the African body, for example, was often located in the sexual anatomy of African women, such as an unusually large clitoris. Both lesbians and African women were characterised by sexual excess and thereby depicted as sexually less developed than the white heterosexual woman. See Siobhan Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body."
[373] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 187.
[374] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 18.
[375] Ibid. 20.

disconnected thoughts, garrulity […] and complete incapacity for serious sustained work."[376] Moreover, Gautier and Baudelaire's

> description of the state of mind which the 'decadent' language is supposed to express is simply a description of the disposition of the mystically degenerate mind, with its shifting nebulous ideas, its fleeting formless shadowy thought, its perversions and aberrations, its tribulations and impulsions.[377]

There are many striking resemblances between Nordau's portrayal of the degenerate artist and Krafft-Ebing's descriptions of sexual perverts; both express their concerns about societal changes and urbanisation, both seek to explore the degenerate artist/homosexual as a particularly modern and urban phenomenon from a scientific perspective, and both portray the artist/homosexual as a social defect and a morally and physically sick individual who poses a threat to the population. Nordau's *Degeneration* thus shows that, like the homosexual, the radical and rebellious artist was seen as the incarnation of evil; a particularly modern figure who threatened the life and well-being of individuals, as well as whole societies, and challenged various norms.

A more direct association between homosexuals and artists can be seen in Freud's writings, for example in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, first published in 1910, where he analysed the connection between "the peculiarity of [da Vinci's] emotional and sexual life"[378] – or his homosexuality – and his intelligence and artistic nature, and argued that creating great art was an expression of repressed sexuality.[379] Havelock Ellis also discussed 'famous homosexuals' who were artists, such as Michelangelo, Jerôme Duquesnoy, Christopher Marlowe, Paul Verlaine and Walt Whitman.[380] He concludes that the majority of his cases – people who are attracted to the same sex – show 'artistic attitudes.' Following these results he argues that 'artistic tendencies' and inversion are caused by the same 'abnormal' predisposition of the nervous system. Ellis holds that inverts – or people whose sexual instinct is primarily turned toward the same sex – may

> be looked upon as a class of individuals exhibiting nervous characters which, to some extent, approximate them to persons of artistic genius. The dramatic and artistic aptitudes of inverts are, therefore, partly due to the circumstances of the invert's life, which render him necessarily an actor, […] and partly, it is probable,

[376] Ibid. 101.
[377] Ibid. 300.
[378] Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 20.
[379] Ibid. See also ch. 4.
[380] Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 18–27. The book was written by Ellis and John A. Symonds and first published in German in 1896. The first English edition came out in 1897, after Symonds' death, and the book became widely known under Ellis' name only.

> to a congenital nervous predisposition allied to the predisposition to dramatic aptitude.[381]

In other words, Ellis suggests that the 'abnormalities' of both inverts and artists are partly innate and partly encouraged by a hostile social environment. Although Ellis certainly saw inverts as abnormal and underdeveloped he was more positive towards homosexuality than for example Krafft-Ebing, argued for the decriminalisation of homosex and criticised the social hostility inverts had to face – the attitude that forced them to 'act.' The connection he saw between inverts and artists was not an attempt to shame or condemn them and it is even possible to read his association with artistic genius as a compliment – because although the genius had a 'nervous character' he also produced great works of art.

Wilde was, not surprisingly, criticised by conservative scholars such as Nordau who argued that his literary works "exhibit[ed] all the features which enable us to recognise in the '*Æ*sthete' the comrade in art of the Decadent."[382] The texts bear witness to Wilde's egoism, idleness and adoration of "immorality, sin and crime,"[383] Nordau says, and manifest his "anti-social ego-mania."[384] Wilde was, in other words, a perfect example of the degenerate artist in Nordau's eyes. Other critics were more positive towards Wilde's homosexuality. In *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis says:

> In the opinion of some [homosexuality] has become a much more conspicuous element in our midst during recent years, and this is sometimes attributed to the Oscar Wilde case. No doubt, the celebrity of Oscar Wilde and the universal publicity given to the facts of the case by the newspapers may have brought conviction of they perversion to many inverts who were before only vaguely conscious of their abnormality, and, paradoxical though it may seem, have imparted greater courage to others.[385]

At least two of Ellis' cases moreover noted that Wilde was an inspiration to them, or that they first heard of homosexuality in relation to Wilde.[386] Ellis' writing shows that Wilde – and presumably the idea of the artist/homosexual in general – was not just a marginalised or condemned figure but also a role model for queer men who sought courage and inspiration in his character. Regardless of whether people saw Wilde's aesthetics or sexuality in a positive or negative light, however, Reed believes that Wilde played a crucial role in the merging of homosexuality and art in public thought and discourse. His writings were

[381] Ibid. 174–75.
[382] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 319.
[383] Ibid. 320.
[384] Ibid. 318.
[385] Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 30.
[386] Ibid. 70–71, 212–13.

associated with homosexuality but also with aestheticism, radical aesthetics and high culture, which, Reed concludes, "made the artist-genius the paradigm of homosexual identity."[387]

2.5.5 Laugavegur 11: A queer time and place

"By the mid-twentieth century, associations of homosexuality with artists were firmly rooted in middle-class consciousness" in the West, Reed argues[388] – and the Icelandic media discourse suggests that Iceland was no exception. The books on sexuality, published in the late 1940s, associate homosexuality with art and artists; Fabricius-Møller notes that "many exceptional men [and women] in cultural history" were homosexuals, for example Oscar Wilde,[389] and Kahn similarly argues that many of the greatest artists and writers in the history of the world have been homosexuals.[390] It is important to note, however, that the artists/homosexuals in *Mánudagsblaðið*'s discourse were not 'great' artists but 'idle' and 'unsuccessful' – they did not live up to the reporter's expectations or definition of 'proper' or 'good' artist.

In that context it is worth considering Wilde's status in Iceland in the first half of the twentieth century. His works were well known but his homosexuality did not receive much attention. The trials were not mentioned in the media when they took place in 1895 but later, in the early and mid-twentieth century, brought up in articles on his life and work.[391] These articles do not condemn Wilde but celebrate his literary works, often mention his flamboyant and luxurious appearance and lifestyle and his homosexuality is framed as an 'unfortunate' fault or a misunderstanding. *Tíminn*'s reporter, for example, praises Wilde highly in an article in October 1954 and even though he mentions that Wilde was convicted for homosexuality the main focus is on the unfairness of the trials and how much Wilde suffered in jail.[392] Guðmundur Kamban also discusses the trials and Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas in a lengthy article in the magazine *Iðunn* in 1929. He praises Wilde, argues that the trials were unfair and that he was convicted without proof; his sexuality was first and foremost sick but not a crime.[393] Unlike the artists at Laugavegur 11 Wilde was thus – probably due to his high status in terms of class and literary canonisation – portrayed primarily as a great artist in the Icelandic media and his

[387] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 93–94, here 94.
[388] Ibid. 106.
[389] "Í menningarsögunni eru margir afburðamenn, sem við vitum um, að hafa verið kynvilltir, bæði karlar og konur." Fabricius-Møller, *Kynferðislífið*, 248.
[390] Kahn, *Kynlíf*, 232.
[391] See e.g. "Gátur, fyndni, frumleiki og stílfegurð gera nafn hans ódauðlegt. Aldarafmæli Óskars Wilde," *Tíminn*, 17 October 1954, 2; "Frægir verjendur II: Edward Carson og Oscar Wilde," *Vísir*, 19 February 1958, 3–4, 9.
[392] "Gátur, fyndni, frumleiki og stílfegurð gera nafn hans ódauðlegt," *Tíminn*, 17 October 1954, 2.
[393] Guðmundur Kamban, "Oscar Wilde."

homosexuality was either ignored or seen as an unfair misfortune. He was nevertheless one of the most famous personifications of the artist/homosexual in the early and mid-twentieth century and without doubt influenced and enhanced the fusion of homosexuality and art in the minds of many Icelanders.

Mánudagsblaðið's statements about the café on Laugavegur which was a meeting place for homosexuals and artists was no nonsense – it did accommodate one of the first visible queer subcultures in Reykjavík. The café Adlon, often referred to as 'Laugavegur 11' or simply '11' (*Ellefu*), operated at Laugavegur 11 from 1950 until 1960. It soon became popular among American soldiers, perhaps because its interior design was in an American 'Hollywood' style; there were tables made from thermoset, deep seating booths and mirrors on the walls. The soldiers were not the most popular customers, however, and in 1952 the newspaper *Nýi tíminn* stated that the café had put up a sign at the door saying (in English): "We regret that, due to restricted accommodation we can not accept the patronage of the foreigne [sic] defence force. Hence members of the force can not be served hereafter."[394] The reporter believes, however, that lack of space is not the real reason why the café has closed its doors to the soldiers but rather that the soldiers and their 'girl-hunting' is not wanted there.

Some Icelanders sought the company of American soldiers, however, and one of them was Elías Mar who was preparing to write the novel *Sóleyjarsaga*. Elías later said that he started visiting Laugavegur 11 in 1951, partly to get acquainted with soldiers and gather references for his book, but also because the place was close to his home. He liked the café and told his friends about it; it soon became popular among artists, writers, intellectuals and students.[395] Many of the patrons were men who desired other men although they did not necessarily identify as homosexual – at least not publicly. Among them were Elías, his friend and mentor Þórður Sigtryggsson, the writer Guðbergur Bergsson (Elías's lover in the mid-1950s), poet Dagur Sigurðarson, violinist Sturla Tryggvason, pianist Ásgeir Beinteinsson, artist Alfreð Flóki, and Haraldur Björnsson, an actor who worked at the National Theatre.

Reed argues that as the twentieth century progressed the association between artists and homosexuality became more general and crossed borders between social classes. In the interwar years, for example, European urban subcultures of radical artists on the one hand, and homosexuals on the other, often merged and centred around bars, restaurants, cafés and nightclubs that became meeting-places for young radicals – artists, intellectuals,

[394] "Laugaveg 11 lokað fyrir bandaríska hernámsliðinu," *Nýi tíminn*, 17 January 1952, 8.
[395] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 118.

students, queers and so on – of different nationalities and social classes.[396] Groups of writers and homosexuals merged and overlapped; sexual identity was an important factor in the artistic creation of many avant-garde writers and art similarly played a role in the identity formation of many homosexuals.[397] Many Icelandic students, artists, intellectuals and men who desired other men had lived or stayed in European cities, such as Copenhagen and Paris, and were familiar with such subcultures and their vibrant atmosphere. It was perhaps thus to be expected that they found a place in Reykjavík where they could meet and discuss various cultural and social matters, and even express their same-sex desires and develop a homo- or bisexual identity.[398] Elías Mar, for example, knew such bohemian culture from Copenhagen, Stockholm and London, as chapter three outlines.

The patrons at Laugavegur 11 were a diverse collection of people who shared an interest in art and culture and often had radical opinions and many of them had a marginal social status. Bragi Kristjónsson, who was a frequent guest at the café, states for example that among the people who spent much time there were

> artists, intellectuals, students, and other successful and unsuccessful intellectuals, enthusiasts about arts and education, snitchers and eccentrics, editors and journalists, and slightly unhinged people.[399]

In an article on Laugavegur 11, published in *Tíminn* in 1981, Illugi Jökulsson moreover notes that the café was

> a refuge for all kinds of artists, toughened commoners and decrepit old people, and last but not least students. Grammar school students. For them, Laugavegur 11 was the centre of the universe.[400]

Guðrún Helgadóttir says that the young people at Laugavegur 11 referred to themselves as "the lost generation" and were absorbed in existentialist matters and philosophy.[401] In "Ellefu," a radio program aired in 1974 which focused on the café at Laugavegur 11, Ólafur Jónsson recalls that what made the café appealing for him and other students were

[396] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 110–20. See also Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality*, 36–58.
[397] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 105–32.
[398] See e.g. Bragi Kristjónsson, "Listarinnar umhverfi," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, 28 November 1992. Bragi's article was originally a chapter in Nína Björk Árnadóttir's book on the artist Alfreð Flóki: *Ævintýrabókin um Alfreð Flóka*, 27–40.
[399] "[…] samastaður fjölmargra listamanna, mennta- og háskólanema og annarra heppnaðra og misheppnaðra menntamanna, áhugafólks um listir og mennt, smáþjófa og sérvitringa, ritstjóra og blaðamanna og hálfruglaðs fólks." Bragi Kristjónsson, "Listarinnar umhverfi," 10.
[400] "[…] samastaður listamanna af öllu tagi, harðnaðra alþýðumanna og útslitinna gamalmenna og síðast en ekki síst skólakrakka. Menntaskólanema. Í þeirra augum var Laugavegur 11 miðpunktur tilverunnar […]." Illugi Jökulsson, ""Árla kem ég á Ellefu ...." Af frægu kaffihúsi og kunnum gestum," 4.
[401] Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, *Stríð og söngur. Sex skáld segja frá*, 9–36, here 28–29.

the people and the liberal atmosphere. At Laugavegur 11 people from different social spheres met and talked as equals, he says. Other interviewees tell the same story and underline that the people at Laugavegur 11 were generally interested in each other, liberal in thought and opinion and that men and women were treated as equals. They also note that the guests had a liberal attitude towards same-sex sexuality.[402] The 'gay clique' at Laugavegur 11, as Bragi Kristjónsson puts it – men who were relatively open about their same-sex desires and sexual issues in general – was a natural part of the community at the café.[403] Yet another patron, Hörður Arinbjarnar, has moreover said that the people who visited the café were

> a cross-section of the society. Bankers and ministry employers, artists, homosexuals and chronic alcoholics. Everyone had conversations with everyone, and people shared tables.[404]

As many of the patrons have confirmed – and this is also manifested in the before-mentioned responses to the ethnological data collection – the bohemian and rebellious reputation brought the café into disrepute in the eyes of the general public.[405] In 'Ellefu' an unknown interviewee notes that "people believed that [the café] was a particular corruption den. That […] sick ideas were preached there, both about [strange sex life] and politics."[406] The writer Þorsteinn Jónsson (frá Hamri) also outlines how 'the petty bourgeois' had specific ideas about the café, especially the artists and the homosexuals that were said to dwell there. In those years, he says,

> [t]he attitude towards those who did art was rather tedious and prejudices were common. People imagined that their appearance was different, they must have beards and above all long hair. If someone was thought to be an artist, he could hardly even wear glasses without being the target of abuse.[407]

[402] Páll Heiðar Jónsson and Jökull Jakobsson, "Ellefu." See also Þóra Elfa Björnsson, discussion with the author, 24 September 2016.
[403] Bragi Kristjónsson, "Listarinnar umhverfi," 11. On the queer men at Laugavegur 11, see also Jón Óskar, *Kynslóð kalda stríðsins*, 275–77; Páll Heiðar Jónsson and Jökull Jakobsson, "Ellefu."
[404] "Þessi hjörð sem sótti Laugaveg 11 var þverskurður af þjóðfélaginu. Menn sem störfuðu í bönkum og ráðuneytum, listamenn, samkynhneigðir og króníska alkóhólistar. Þarna töluðu allir við alla og menn settust hver við annars borð […]." Steingerður Steinarsdóttir, "Fyrirmyndarfólk sem sótti Laugaveg 11," 16.
[405] See e.g. Ibid.
[406] "Það hélt að þetta væri alveg sérstakt spillingarbæli. Bæði væri þarna undarlegt kynlíf að finna, eða uppruna undarlegs kynlífs og þarna væru boðaðar óheilbrigðar skoðanir, bæði á þeim sviðum og hinu pólitíska sviði." Páll Heiðar Jónsson and Jökull Jakobsson, "Ellefu."
[407] "Andinn í garð þeirra sem fengjust við listir, var heldur leiðinlegur og töluvert um fordóma. Fólk ímyndaði sér að þeir litu öðru vísi út en aðrir, þeir þurftu að vera skeggjaðir og umfram allt síðhærðir. Léki grunur á að einhver væri listamaður þá mátti hann varla ganga með gleraugu án þess að sæta hálfgerðu aðkasti." Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, *Stríð og söngur*, 167–96, here 186.

Exaggerated rumours about the gay clique also spread in the small city and "one feather became five" very easily, as an unknown patron notes.[408] A few men who were known or rumoured for having same-sex desires were frequent guests at the café and hence the café became an infamous 'homosexual den.' "The gay clique at Laugavegur 11 was," Bragi Kristjónsson says, "the kind of mystery only ignorance and prejudice can create in a small, semi-hysterical environment"[409] – and this mystery also found its way to the pages of *Mánudagsblaðið*.

Laugavegur 11 was thus a space where both respected citizens and marginal figures gathered and the atmosphere was relatively liberal, openminded and radical. Þorsteinn recalls that the young generation at Laugavegur 11 idealised a bohemian lifestyle, and "pretended to feel antipathy to the bourgeois ways of life and despise the petty bourgeoisie, as we called them."[410] The 'petty bourgeoise' sometimes visited the café to gratify their curiosity, Þorsteinn says, not least to see the homosexuals. The patrons, however, enjoyed being a challenge to bourgeois morality: "We often smirked when they came to take a look around."[411] Such spirit and rebellious attitude towards bourgeois norms and lifestyle attracted attention and contributed to the controversy of the café and its patrons.

The guests at Laugavegur 11 can readily be said to have been "in a queer time and place," as Jack Halberstam describes in his book with the same title from 2005. 'Queer time and place' refers to uses of time and place that "develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction," Halberstam says; and they also "develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification."[412] While normative time evolves around capitalist productivity and reproduction, bourgeois norms concerning marriage and a daily schedule which is centred on child-rearing, the notion of queer time offers alternative ways to think about time and various life processes. Similarly, queer places are spaces that queer people create or claim for themselves; places to which heteronormative logic does not apply. A 'queer way of life,' for Halberstam, is thus a life free from the conventions of family, child-rearing and normative development from childhood to adulthood – a way of life which is often depicted as a threat within

[408] Páll Heiðar Jónsson and Jökull Jakobsson, "Ellefu."
[409] "Hommaklíkan á Laugavegi 11 var sveipuð þeirri dulúð, sem vanþekking og fordómar einir fá skapt í litlu, hálf móðursjúku umhverfi." Bragi Kristjónsson, "Listarinnar umhverfi," 10–11.
[410] "Við þóttumst líka hafa andúð á borgaralegum lífsháttum og fyrirlitum smáborgarana, sem við kölluðum svo […]." Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, *Stríð og söngur,* 185.
[411] "Við glottum oft við tönn þegar þeir voru að koma til að gá, skoða." Ibid. 186.
[412] J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, 1.

modern normative societies.[413] The regulars at Laugavegur 11, regardless of their sexual orientation, resisted and challenged bourgeois capitalist norms in various ways. Instead of having a 'normal' job, providing for their family and spending time with their partners and children they sat in the café for hours, sometimes many days a week, and talked about art, literature, politics or whatever their hearts desired. They were not necessarily the most radical or controversial artists in the period, yet there was a strong association between the people at the café and 'bad' or 'degenerate' art. Their 'idleness' and lack of talent – in the eyes of the bourgeoisie – was a queer way of life in a society based on capitalist production that required people to participate in the work market. Adult men sitting in cafés for hours did not conform to bourgeois norms – even if they claimed it was for research that would eventually become the basis for a novel.

Bech argues that *evil* in modern societies can also be whatever threatens *the group's norms, values, institutions, and forms of power* (4). What is particularly threatening about homosexuality in this context is the disorder it brings and how it crosses traditional lines and constantly evades classification and division. The homosexual is excessive, unbridled, debauched, dissolute and dissipated, Bech notes, and he is associated with lasciviousness – lust and temptations, passions, drives and desires that are not contained within the family cell.[414] The male homosexual poses a threat to particularly precarious norms in Western societies – norms regarding gender, sexuality and the family. He is therefore often represented as evil in times when such norms are contested or under attack and as we have seen the 1940s and 1950s were a period of crisis in the gender order in Iceland. The harsh response to idle, radical and unconventional artists as well as homosexuals in the 1950s can thus, at least to some extent, be explained by the challenge they posed to fragile and contested norms – heterosexual family norms and norms regarding Icelandic nationality – and as a result they merged into the same character in *Mánudagsblaðið*'s condemning discourse: The evil and dangerous artist/homosexual.

2.6 Conclusion

In November 1958 Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson, Elías's colleague and friend who wrote in *Alþýðublaðið* under the pseudonym Hannes á horninu ('Hannes on the corner'), reflected upon the 1920s when he was a young writer. He noted that if he would have published a journal with his friends they would have written about very different topics than the young generation was doing in 1958. "We would have described basement cubby-holes, small attics, hunger and misery," he says, "but never thought of mentioning homosexuals, because we had no idea that

[413] Ibid. 1–6.
[414] Bech, *When Men Meet*, 184–85.

such things existed."[415] This chapter has sought to elucidate this development and the difference between the 1920s and 1950s – how homosexuality became a part of Icelanders' vocabulary and public discourse and a more prominent part of their conception of the world.

A comparison to other Nordic countries suggests that the process that led to the emergence and increased influence of the homosexual paradigm followed a similar track in Iceland as in for example rural Finland and Sweden. It coincides with other aspects of modernisation, such as urbanisation and extensive changes in population distribution; homosexual subcultures emerge first in cities and their visibility incites discourse. In Iceland the conditions that enabled such visibility first emerged in the 1940s and 1950s; Reykjavík had become big enough, the presence of thousands of young soldiers created new possibilities and Icelanders who had travelled and lived abroad, and participated in bohemian and queer subcultures, returned home during and after the war. The awareness of homosexuality that developed in this period was also influenced by medical and psychological knowledge which was made accessible in Icelandic in the late 1940s – not in the media but by means of independent book publication – and various other discourses on homosexuality that Icelanders read or heard of in the media and books.

Rydström notes that in small communities people often know each other well and social control can be firm, yet people who are 'different' are often allowed to live in peace if they do not harm others or speak out about their abnormal characteristics. "Due to the tight social control in the small community, queers were tolerated, provided they did not name their desire," he says, referring to findings from various studies of rural and small-town societies.[416] If they evoked too much attention, however, the queer individuals often had no other option but to leave. The typical traits of rural same-sex sexuality in the twentieth century were thus, according to Rydström, "complete discretion and/or exile."[417] The limited sources available that can inform us about the experience of same-sex sexuality in Iceland in the early twentieth century suggest that the same can be said about the Icelandic context until the 1950s. The silence was concealing, and could even offer limited freedom to act upon same-sex desire without being defined or condemned as homosexual, but when same-sex loving men had become visible in public spaces in Reykjavík the silence could no longer continue – the 'sódós' were a part of Reykjavík and could not be ignored. The shift between silence and discourse was neither total nor did it happen overnight, however; it was an

[415] "Við hefðum lýst kjallarakompum, hanabjálkaloftum, hungri og vesöld, en ekki dottið í hug að minnast á hómósexualista, því að við höfðum ekki hugmynd um að slíkt og þvílíkt væri til." Hannes á horninu [Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson], "Vettvangur dagsins."
[416] Rydström, *Sinners and Citizens*, 6. See also e.g. Juvonen, "Shadow Lives and Public Secrets."
[417] Jens Rydström, "Greenland and the Faroe Islands 1866–1988. Nordic Peripheries," 145.

ongoing process and presumably much more advanced in Reykjavík than the countryside in the 1950s.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion of this chapter is that there is a strong and significant link between public discourses on homosexuality on the one hand and modernity or modern influence on the other. In the first decades of the twentieth century homosexuality became a label that could be attached to various subjects – films, popular literature, modernist literature, socialist politics, capitalism, the United States and in fact anything foreign or 'modern' – in order to emphasise its innovative or radical character and often negative and dangerous influence. In the 1950s this discourse also included actual people in Reykjavík, not just the idea of homosexuality, and associating artists with homosexuality became a way to degrade them and their work. Such portrayal of homosexuality and the homosexual as evil was incited by deep and wide-spread anxiety in relation to various fragile and contested norms and ideas, such as gender norms and national identity. Young Iceland was in a vulnerable position in the early and mid-twentieth century, the ground under its feet was shaken by modernisation in various forms and the inherently modern phenomenon homosexuality was portrayed as one of its evil enemies. The fusion of artists and homosexuals in the 1950s was not merely an idea or discourse, however. Laugavegur 11, one of the first queer subcultures in Reykjavík, was indeed a space where artists and homosexuals merged – and Elías Mar was a key figure in that context.

3 Elías Mar: Facing the heartbeat of the world

In May 1950 Elías Mar wrote a letter to his publisher, Ragnar Jónsson, and he tried to convince him to publish Elías's new novel, *Vögguvísa*. The letter is an apology for Elías's work and as such it is an invaluable source; it includes descriptions of how the texts came into being and the author's intentions with them. *Vögguvísa*, for example, was meant to be what Elías calls an *aktúel* novel – a text which manifests fervent interest in the current moment.[418] Elías tells Ragnar that he wanted to "represent a cross-section of the life in Reykjavík" and adds that it is not his fault if that picture is not pretty.[419] He moreover says he wished to write an original novel and experiment with style, form, subject and use of language. In a short introduction to a chapter from *Vögguvísa*, which appeared a few months later in the magazine *Líf og list*, Elías also says that he wished to "depict a cross-section of the influence of new cultural currents and the residue of war madness, as they can be manifested in the acts of a few teenagers."[420] He underlines that he did not experiment with form and style and represent negative aspects of the contemporary life in Reykjavík just to violate against morality or conventions. He does not spell out what the reason was but adds: "Something similar should be kept in mind when one comes across works of art that claim to be ascribed to the modern man […]."[421]

Twenty-three years earlier Halldór Laxness said a similar thing about *The Great Weaver from Kashmir*, as we saw in the previous chapter; he argued that his novel described "all the prevailing views and theories of life in the modern world, regardless of if they are "ugly" or "beautiful"," and that its purpose was to "try and evaluate their value in life."[422] Like Elías, Halldór refused to be held responsible for representing controversial phenomena, such as homosexuality, in his fiction since he neither favoured them nor opposed to them. His intention was, in other words, to represent and describe the modern world rather than judge it as good or bad. Halldór often discussed this relationship between the writer and the modern times, for example in a talk at the first Artists' Congress (Listamannaþing) in Reykjavík in 1942, titled "The author and his work" ("Höfundurinn og verk hans," published in *Vettvangur dagsins*, 1942). There he argues that writing good

[418] On the concept *aktúel*, see ch. 3.2.
[419] "Í þeirri sögu geri ég tilraun til að sýna einskonar "þverskurð" af reykvísku lífi. Og það er ekki mér að kenna, ef myndin er eitthvað annað en falleg í sárið." *Lbs*. 9 NF. Ragnar Jónsson í Smára. AA. Letters from Icelanders. Box C–F. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950. See also Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 99.
[420] "[…] að bregða upp þverskurðarmynd af áhrifum nýrra menningarstrauma og eftirstöðva stríðsbrjálæðis eins og slíkt getur birzt í athöfnum nokkurra unglinga." Elías Mar, "Kafli úr skáldsögu," 9.
[421] "Eitthvað svipað þessu má maður jafnan hafa í huga, þegar á vegi manns verða listaverk, sem gera kröfu til að kenna sig við nútímamann […]." Ibid.
[422] Halldór Kiljan Laxness, "Vefarinn mikli. Athugasemd." See ch. 2.1.3.

books is not about grammatical order or so-called 'good language' but a sense for what is happening in the world. "Fiction is a language written on human hearts by the spirit of contemporary life,"[423] Halldór says. Good writers and artists are voices of their times, defenders as well as critics of society and therefore often disputed, and the society they live in sometimes forces them to deal with subjects they would rather avoid. Fiction is thus destined to develop and adapt to its context, which is both local and international; good books are influenced and inspired by their past and present as well as diverse cultural currents.[424]

In a letter to his friend Guðmundur Pálsson in 1943 Elías says he knows "The author and his work" by heart,[425] and on the first page in his notebook from 1942 he writes a sentence which can both be seen as an echo from Halldór's essay and Elías's writer manifesto: "*The writer must claim a territory where he faces the heartbeat of the world.*"[426] Elías's and Halldór's statements about their work and the role of literature express a clear and determined wish to engage with modern life in the early and mid-twentieth century; a vision which was a part of their socialist politics as well as writer ambitions. They do not, however, specify the aesthetic means of this engagement. Halldór's stance towards modernist experiments and novelties in the mid-twentieth century was ambiguous and sometimes rather critical, at least in relation to poetry; he argued for example that "variants and compliance from the strict [poetic] form will lead to resolution and corruption" and that Icelanders had only composed good poems in traditional form.[427] The phrase 'Atom Poet' moreover originates in Halldór's novel from 1948, *Atómstöðin* (*The Atom Station*, 1961), where it is disparaging and refers to a rather unsympathetic character who composes poor free verse poetry. The engagement with social modernity through literature and art that Elías and Halldór call for in the early 1940s is thus not about a conventional 'realist' representation or the radical or non-conventional use of form, language and representation often referred to as modernism; their focus is rather on influencing their readers and participating in discussions of urgent current matters. This chapter discusses Elías's writings and personal performances from the 1940s and throughout the year 1950 – the period before and during the publication of the three novels

[423] "Skáldskapurinn er mál sem lífsandi samtíðarinnar skrifar í mannleg hjörtu." Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Vettvangur dagsins*, 468.
[424] Ibid. 465–74.
[425] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 30 June 1943.
[426] "Skáldið á að marka sér svæði, þar sem það stendur andspænis hjartslætti tilverunnar." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1942, front page. The entry is dated on 23 September. Elías is quoting a man named Árni Sigurðsson, whose relationship with Elías is unknown.
[427] Halldór Kiljan Laxness, "Stuttar ádrepur," 31. See also Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, "Formbylting og módernismi," 19–22.

that are under consideration in chapters four, five and six: *Eftir örstuttan leik, Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa*.[428] It seeks to outline how Elías dealt with contemporary issues but pays particular attention to how writing about queer desires and struggles became an inherent part of his intention to write *aktúel* books – to actively engage with the times in which he lived.

3.1 A writer is born

"My career as a writer begins," Elías Mar writes in his notebook on 7 May 1944 after announcing the publication of his first article in the newspaper *Þjóðviljinn*.[429] A few weeks earlier he had quit the Teachers' College (Kennaraskóli Íslands), where he had studied since 1942, because he could not afford to finish his studies.[430] He had also realised that he did not want to become a teacher – he wanted to be a full-time writer.[431] Judging from the entries in his notebooks he seems to have turned decisively towards writing and related projects in the spring of 1944 after he abandoned his studies. On 28 April he says he has started to write "the story about Halldór Óskar," which later became *Man eg þig löngum*, and in the same week he notes that he has translated a short story by Guy de Maupassant for the magazine *Dvöl*.[432] A few days later he receives his first payment for a writing project; an article he wrote for the newspaper *Tíminn*.[433] At least five more articles and a poem by Elías appeared in 1944 and his first short stories were printed in *Dvöl* and *Þjóðviljinn* in September and December.[434] In November he moves temporarily to Hveragerði where he works on his projects and translates a novel for Kristmann Guðmundsson, *Fru Marta Oulie* (1907) by the Norwegian writer Sigrid Undset.[435] Finally,

[428] Jón Karl Helgason and Þorsteinn Antonsson have also discussed Elías's writings from the 1940s and the following sections are in many ways indebted to their work. See Jón Karl Helgason, "Þrautreyndur nýgræðingur. Fyrstu skrif Elíasar Marar"; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, especially 61–80.
[429] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 7 May 1944.
[430] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 29.
[431] Pétur Blöndal, *Sköpunarsögur*, 246–89, especially 249.
[432] Guy de Maupassant, "Óþægilegt rúm." Elías translated many articles and stories in the 1940s, mostly for *Alþýðublaðið* but also for other papers and magazines. None of these texts seemingly discusses same-sex desire or homosexuality and they are not under consideration in this thesis, although they presumably influenced Elías in various ways.
[433] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 3 May 1944.
[434] These texts are: "Gamalt fólk," "Saga um jólatré," "Kvikmyndirnar og æskan," "Bindindishreyfing á fyrrihluta 19. aldar," "Símon Dalaskáld," "Réttindi unga fólksins," "Nokkur þankastrik" and "Morgunn." For more information on Elías's publications in the 1940s, mentioned and discussed in this chapter, see a section on Elías's work in the list of references.
[435] Elías also wrote a review of Snorri Hjartarson's collection of poetry, *Kvæði*, which appeared in *Dvöl*.

by the end of this productive year, the twenty-year-old Elías Mar proudly writes in his notebook that he has received the first letter on which he is titled 'writer.'[436]

Elías's ambition and determination to become a writer in the 1940s were remarkable. Already in 1940, when he was fifteen years old, he started transcribing his collected works of fiction; unfinished drafts as well as published and unpublished texts. In 1944 he had filled seven 'volumes' – hand-written copy books – with his poetry from 1930–1943 and started collecting and re-writing his short stories (volumes IX–XXII, 14 in total) while simultaneously writing his most recent poems in volume VIII: 'Poetry collection, 1944–1945.'[437] The original motivation behind this project was Elías's "childish wish" to preserve the texts; to "occasionally dip into them."[438] In the course of time, however, he wrote various authorial comments in the copy books, for example about the origins of the texts, different versions, his inspiration and reflections, and in 1944 he came to the conclusion that his collection might be of literary and historical value; a source "about the development and procedures of a young poet and writer in Iceland in the twentieth century."[439]

In October 1944 Elías started writing about his life as an aspiring writer in Skálda, a notebook which spans precisely one year, from 21 October 1944 to 20 October 1945. Like Elías's transcriptions of his collected works Skálda is a fairly remarkable document. In it Elías locates himself in the literary field, both spatially and socially; on the title page he outlines at which desk in the National Library he sits when he starts writing in the notebook and the first entry is a list of writers he knows personally. These two dimensions merge in the following entries where Elías describes whom he meets, where they meet and what they do; in other words, whom of his fellow writers he drinks coffee with, listens to music or talks with, at which café or whose house they meet and what they talk about. He carefully notes, both in Skálda and his other notebooks, when he sees famous and respected writers for the first time and gets a chance to talk to them. In January 1945, for example, he meets his idol, Halldór Laxness, on the street: "I get an opportunity to take my hat off to H.K.L. where he is walking with my acquaintance Kristinn Pétursson painter (in Austurstræti, at 3:30 pm.)"[440] In February he notes that Halldór turned around and looked at him when they

[436] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 18 December 1944.
[437] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. AA. Collected Works.
[438] "[…] af barnalegri þrá til að geyma þau; – líta í þau við og við." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. I, epilogue, 12 May 1940.
[439] "[…] þroska og starfsaðferðir upprennandi skálds og rithöfundar á Íslandi á 20. öldinni." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XV, epilogue, 26 August 1944.
[440] "Fæ tækifæri til þess að taka ofan fyrir H.K.L. þar sem hann er í fylgd með kunningja mínum Kristni Péturss listmálara (í Austurstræti, kl. 15,30.)" *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 13 January 1945.

passed each other on the street and adds: "H.K.L. probably knows who I am these days." Elías's admiration is obvious and Halldór's influence is also manifested in the title of the notebook; Skálda is the name of the precious manuscript in Halldór's novel *Íslandsklukkan* (1943–1946; *Iceland's Bell*, 2003). The writers Elías mentions most frequently in Skálda, however, are his friends and peers, such as the (atom) poets Hannes Sigfússon, Sigfús Daðason, Jón Óskar, Jón úr Vör and Arnfríður Jónatansdóttir, the painter Kristján Davíðsson and Ásgeir Magnússon, a poet and Elías's friend from childhood. Elías, Hannes, Jón Óskar and Jón úr Vör were also among the founding members of Ungir pennar ('Young Pens'), an association of young writers established in November 1940. The sixteen-year-old Elías made a good impression when he gave a speech at the society's first meeting and (at least) from that day he was an integral part of a vibrant society of young writers and artists in Reykjavík.[441]

Skálda documents the weeks and months before Elías debuted as a novelist and the process behind *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* – a period which at times was characterised by simultaneous excitement and desperation. Elías had decided to become a full-time writer but making a living by writing and translating was difficult, not least because he was bereft of family. His mother died when he was a baby, his grandmother Guðrún, who raised him, died in January 1942 and he was thus on his own from the age of seventeen.[442] By the end of December 1944 he was offered a full-time job at the newspaper *Alþýðublaðið* and for the next 18 months he proofread and translated articles for the paper while also focusing on his writing career.[443] The entries in Skálda show that as the year 1945 progresses Elías becomes more concerned about his lack of concentration and how little time he has to write his most important project, *Man eg þig löngum*. He also desperately wants to leave Iceland and travel because he firmly believes that in order to become a good writer one has to see the world, study languages and learn about other cultures – but he cannot afford it.[444]

In the fall Elías gets restless, and at times slightly depressed, and many of the last entries in Skálda are full of frustration. He is ashamed of not being able to finish his writing projects and blames himself. "I feel that my working habits are too senseless, I

[441] See Jón Óskar, *Fundnir snillingar*, 74; Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 30–32; *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 24 November 1940.
[442] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 21–29.
[443] Ibid. 42.
[444] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 22 June 1945. Elías wrote in a letter to Guðmundur Pálsson that he needed to go abroad, learn about other nations and cultures: "Everyone needs to do that, especially an aspiring writer." ("Slíkt er öllum nauðsynlegt, ekki sízt höfundarefni.") *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 29 August 1943.

work during the night and defer the most boring tasks as long as I can," he says and admits that he is very lazy.[445] He lists all the tasks he needs to finish before the end of the year:

> This is not hard labour in the eyes of a fair worker. But to me this is a steep hill with many sandy slopes. […] I read little, – and spend little time outside. But worst of all is how little progress I make.[446]

An essay Elías wrote almost two years earlier described similar self-blame or shame but there he argued that his worst fault was that his everyday life was "not purposeful and organised enough"; that he drank too much coffee, slept irregularly and spent too little time writing. He also wrote that he felt like two men who had merged into one; a man who is shy and feels inferior and a successful, confident man who has been lucky and learned how to make the most of his opportunities.[447] In September and October 1945 Elías again resembles these two men; sometimes depressed and ashamed, sometimes energetic and positive.

"I have to do something. I have to," he writes on 10 September,[448] and two weeks later he says he thought of a new novel, *Eftir örstuttan leik*, that he is going to "scribble" quickly and then sell to a publisher.[449] "After that I will write "Man eg þig löngum," later this winter. I will do that with great care."[450] The following entries are extremely energetic and ambitious but also anxious; Elías has made a plan that can make his dreams come true but it is also very likely to fail. He describes how he is planning to earn and save 14.000 kroner before the beginning of July; he needs to sell the new novel, translate one book and a short story and publish at least four short stories and a few short translations, while working full-time for *Alþýðublaðið*.[451] "I feel dizzy, not just because of the uncertainty but also because of my imagination," he writes:

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[445] "Ég finn, að ég starfa allt of heimskulega, vinn um nætur og geymi leiðinlegustu verkin þangað til í rassgati […]." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 10 September 1945.

[446] "Í augum sæmilegs vinnumanns eru það ekki stór átök. En í mínum augum er það brött brekka með fjölda af sandskriðum. […] Ég les lítið, – og er lítið úti. En það sem verst er, er það, hversu lítið mér verður úr verki." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 10 September 1945.

[447] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. CC. Documents from the college years. "Dægurhugleiðingar," 15 December 1943. See also ch. 5.

[448] "Ég verð að taka til einhverra bragða. Ég verð." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 10 September 1945.

[449] See ch. 1.

[450] „Svo ætla ég að skrifa „Man ég þig löngum", seinna í vetur. Hana ætla ég að vanda mig við." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 29 September 1945.

[451] At least two short stories, one article, three translated short stories and poems and one literature review by Elías appeared on print from November 1945 to February 1946: ""Heldurðu, að ég hafi aldrei átt móður?"," "Sumum vex fiskur um hrygg," "Rabb um færeyskar bókmenntir" and "Brimar við Bölklett. Skáldsaga eftir Vilhjálm S. Vilhjálmsson." Translations: William Norman, "Uppskurður"; Agnes von Krusenstjerna, "Freisting á gamlárskvöld"; Grethe Risbjerg Thomsen, "Húsbóndalaus hundur." See the section on Elías's publications in the list of references.

> But I do have to work quite hard if I want to succeed. I have estimated that before the New Year I need to write the equivalent of 700 pages, printed in the same size as Salka Valka, but that corresponds approximately to writing a book of a similar size in two and a half months. Get a move on, Elías![452]

Again Halldór Laxness appears in Elías's notebook as a role model and standard; to emphasise the extent of his workload Elías compares it to one of Halldór's novels from the 1930s, *Salka Valka*. Elías is also painfully aware of the fact that when Halldór was his age he had already published his first novel and been abroad and that in 1945 Halldór had published more than 20 books in his career.[453]

Quite miraculously Elías succeeded and his plan worked. When he had finished writing *Eftir örstuttan leik* his colleague at *Alþýðublaðið*, Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson, saw the manuscript and showed it to Ragnar Jónsson, the owner of the publishing house Helgafell who had published, among many others, Halldór Laxness's books. Ragnar liked the novel and decided to publish it as a part of a series of works by unknown writers called 'New Pens.' He paid Elías 3000 kroner for the book in June 1946 and shortly after that Elías was on his way to Copenhagen.[454] A few months later the novel was available in the bookstores in Reykjavík and Elías was thereby officially a published novelist.[455]

3.1.1 Eventful times

The entries in Elías's notebook from the first weeks in Copenhagen in July 1946 are loaded with excitement; he goes on a train for the first time in his life, visits a zoo and an entertainment park and buys new clothes, a cane and a hat. There are many other Icelanders in the city so Elías is not lonely – his friend Jón úr Vör, several students and professor Jón Helgason, who assists Elías and sometimes invites him to dinner. Elías settles in the city, writes, translates and takes classes in Danish literature, meets new people and travels.[456] In September and October he visits Norway and Sweden where he attends a journalist congress and writes three 'letters from Copenhagen' about his journey that are published in

[452] "Mig sundlar, ekki einungis við hinum óvissu möguleikum, heldur hugmyndaflugi mínu. […] En ég þarf líka að leggja á mig allmikla vinnu til þess að þetta takist. Ég hefi áætlað, að fram að áramótum næstu, þurfi ég að skrifa sem svarar ca. 700 síður prentaðar á stærð við þær sem eru í Sölku Völku, en það samsvarar nokkurnveginn því, að ég þurfi að skrifa upp svipað verk að stærð á hálfum þriðja mánuði. Hertu þig, Elías, minn!" *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 17 October 1945.
[453] See e.g. *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, date unknown, 1943.
[454] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 48–49. See also *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook June 1946. In the interview with Hjálmar Elías says that Ragnar paid him 5000 kroner but according to the notebook he received 3000 in June and the rest of the payment later.
[455] *Eftir örstuttan leik* is registered with the publication year 1946 but it was first available in bookstores in February 1947.
[456] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1946, especially July.

Þjóðviljinn.[457] In July 1947 he attends a young writers' congress in Helsinki but when he returns to Copenhagen he gets typhoid fever and lies in a hospital for more than seven weeks.[458] He recovers from this severe sickness but decides to go home and on 10 October he is back in Reykjavík.[459]

Elías went to Copenhagen to expand his world view but also to write *Man eg þig löngum*. Within a week after he arrives he notes that he has again started to write "the story about Halldór Óskar Magnússon."[460] He finishes the draft in December, sends it to his friend Ásgeir Magnússon in Reykjavík and asks him to submit it to a writing competition.[461] In March 1947, however, he writes to Guðmundur and says that he does not know what happened to the manuscript because he has not heard from Ásgeir since November. It probably arrived too late, he says, and admits that he does not have high hopes. He does not make any further plans for publishing *Man eg þig löngum* in 1947.[462] He translates a few articles and stories, but only one of his short stories appears on print, "Á bekk með skáldum á hvítu torgi" in *Þjóðviljinn*'s Christmas edition. He had saved enough money before he left Reykjavík to relax for a while but as the months go by his financial situation gets worse. Vilhjálmur is a mediator between Elías and the publisher and he tries to persuade Ragnar to buy translations from Elías and give him projects to proofread, without much result.[463]

When Elías returns to Reykjavík in October 1947 his status in the literary field has changed; he is a published writer and known as one of Helgafell's 'New Pens.' The books in the series were advertised extensively and slogans such as "Get to know the nation's younger writers" and "Buy good and cheap books"[464] appeared in the newspapers in January. Helgafell moreover promoted *Eftir örstuttan leik* by saying that it was "perhaps the most splendid debut in decades."[465] Some of Elías's friends were sceptical and did not

[457] *Þjóðviljinn*, 17–19 October 1946.
[458] Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 68–70; Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 126–28.
[459] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1946 and 1947. While Elías was recovering he set himself the goal to read all the books Halldór Laxness had published, which underlines the influence Halldór had on him. See *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 10 August 1947.
[460] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 10 July 1946.
[461] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 20 December 1946.
[462] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 13 March 1947.
[463] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. BA. Letters – Icelanders. Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson to Elías Mar, 7 August, 16 October and 24 November 1946. Before Elías goes to Finland in the summer of 1947 Vilhjálmur exerts himself trying to get Elías a foreign exchange licence and persuade Ragnar to pay Elías the rest of the payment for *Eftir örstuttan leik.* For Vilhjálmur, at least, it was thus a certain relief when Elías returned in October. See letters from Vilhjálmur on 22 February, 15 April and 23 June 1947.
[464] "Kynnist hinum yngri rithöfundum þjóðarinnar" – "Eignist góðar og ódýrar bækur." See e.g. *Vísir*, 13 January 1947, 3.
[465] "[…] ef til vill glæsilegasta frumsmíð, sem komið hefur út í tugi ára." See e.g. *Morgunblaðið*, 27 February 1947, 4.

think much of the book, partly because they knew it had been written carelessly as a part of a financial plan, and Elías himself also knew it was flawed.[466] The fact that the novel was set in Reykjavík and dealt with the life of a young urban man caught people's attention, however, and it received critical, yet also encouraging, reviews. Guðmundur G. Hagalín and Guðmundur Daníelsson both criticised it for tedious characterisation and tiring philosophical speculations, but they also complimented Elías for developing a unique style and said he was indeed a promising young novelist.[467]

With his 'letters from Copenhagen' Elías had presented himself as a writer who had seen the world and he supports that image by writing an article about his trip to Helsinki.[468] The voice in these texts is fundamentally different from Elías's personal writings in Skálda and his letters; it is the voice of a writer performing publicly, not a becoming-writer who writes for himself. Elías's writer identity has developed and bolstered during his time abroad and after the publication of his first book. In Reykjavík he is reunited with his 'old gang,' Jón Óskar, Hannes, Sigfús, Jón úr Vör and others, they sit in cafés such as Hressingarskálinn and Hótel Borg and drink coffee – and liquor, which is a novelty for Elías who had been a Good Templar since he was a teenager.[469] He also joins the Writers'Association of Iceland and no longer has to settle with watching the nation's most famous writers from a distance – he gets to know them personally.[470] Perhaps most importantly, Elías does not have to wonder if Halldór Laxness knows who he is. During his last weeks in Copenhagen he stayed with professor Jón Helgason while recovering from his sickness and Halldór was at the time a regular guest in Jón's house.[471] Halldór and Elías became acquainted and after that Elías proudly notes in his notebooks the occasions when he and Halldór have conversations as colleagues.[472]

[466] See e.g. Jón Óskar, *Gangstéttir í rigningu. Líf skálda og listamanna í Reykjavík*, 82–84. In 1950 Elías wrote about *Eftir örstuttan leik* in a letter to Ragnar Jónsson and said that it had been a "typical debut" and flawed in many ways because it was never properly transcribed. *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950. See also Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 97.
[467] Guðmundur Daníelsson, "Reykjavíkuræskan hefir orðið," *Vísir*, 6 August 1947; Guðmundur G. Hagalín, "Bókaflokkur."
[468] Elías Mar, "Jónsmessunótt í Grankulla." Elías also wrote several articles about his travels in Iceland and Europe in the 1950s.
[469] On 24 February 1948 Elías notes that he has left the Good Templar order, "Verðandi nr. 9," of which he had been a member since 1938. On 22 April he moreover says he has tasted a "substantial amount" of liquor for the first time in his life. *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1948.
[470] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 7 March 1948.
[471] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 127.
[472] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks, e.g. 17 November 1947, 11 March 1948, 10 June 1948, 26 March 1949 and 13 May 1949.

Elías is still recovering from his illness in the winter 1947–1948 and is not allowed to work,[473] which may explain why three of the four short stories he publishes in 1948 are 'old' texts, originally written in 1937–1946.[474] He soon thinks of writing a short story about teenagers in Reykjavík, however, and a part of that project is collecting and documenting their slang and neologism.[475] He eventually concludes that the story will become a novel; on 1 April 1949 he notes that he has started to write the first chapter and that he will call the novel "Vögguvísa."[476] In 1948 he moreover persuades Ragnar to publish *Man eg þig löngum*; a chapter from the novel appears in the journal *Unga Ísland* and by the end of March 1949 it is available in bookstores.[477] It receives rather negative reviews, yet the critics are quite optimistic about Elías's future as a writer. Kristmann Guðmundsson writes that he had heard that the novel was "exceptionally bad," although in his opinion it is not worse than many other books,[478] and Bjarni Benediktsson says he does not feel he needs to be more satisfied with the book than the author himself – "and he has said that he is sick and tired of it."[479] This was at least partly true; Elías later said that he always meant to write a sequel but that by the time *Man eg þig löngum* was published, more than two years after he wrote it, he had lost interest in it and found it quite dull – at least compared to his new project, *Vögguvísa*.[480]

Elías earns his living by translating and proofreading but he does not have a permanent job and is often broke. Yet he wants to travel more and is planning to study literature in London; he applies for a scholarship and receives 2000 kroner from the Education Commission (Menntamálaráð),[481] and in the summer of 1949, while he is waiting for an answer from University College in London, he takes a loan and visits Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In Finland he writes the first draft of *Vögguvísa* and prepares his short story collection for publication. In November he finally gets an answer from the college, books a ticket and less than two weeks later he is on his way to London. Before he leaves he gives

[473] See *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 89–99.
[474] "Fjölskyldan í þakherberginu," "Endurminning" and "Stúlka miðar byssu." The fourth story is "Hinn ríki unglingur." Elías also published three poems in 1948: "Hún, sem alltaf bíður," "Stríðsótti" and "Ljóð."
[475] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 28 October 1947.
[476] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1 April 1949; *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950. See also ch. 6 and Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 98–99.
[477] Elías Mar, "Halldór Óskar Magnússon í flugvellinum."
[478] Kristmann Guðmundsson, "Bókmentir," *Morgunblaðið*, 15 July 1949.
[479] Bjarni Benediktsson, "Elías Mar. Man eg þig löngum," *Þjóðviljinn*, 12 April 1949.
[480] *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950; Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 57–58; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 98–99.
[481] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 21 February 1949. See also November and December 1948.

the manuscript of *Vögguvísa* to Ragnar and asks him to publish it.[482] By the end of 1949 Elías is thus again exploring a new world, broke but happy, excited and hopeful that he can sell *Vögguvísa* and his short story collection to Ragnar. He spends New Year's Eve in Paris where he writes in his notebook: "And so ended one of the most eventful years in my life."[483]

3.2 *Aktúel* books

Elías Mar was a very productive writer in the 1940s; he wrote and published two novels – three if we include *Vögguvísa* – at least 13 short stories, over 20 articles on various subjects, poems and a few literature reviews. By the end of 1949 his collected works filled 32 notebooks; poems, stories and plays that were carefully transcribed but most of them had never been published. These writings share certain characteristics; they manifest for example a persistent interest in Reykjavík and urban life, relations between Icelanders and soldiers, and the struggles of the working class, seniors, children and teenagers. From the very beginning of his writer career Elías thus dealt primarily with contemporary issues in his poetry and prose; the life in Reykjavík he knew firsthand. This interest was both personal and political; Elías was genuinely interested in people and the world around him and also a dedicated socialist.[484]

The writers Elías respected the most were socialists like Halldór Laxness and Þórbergur Þórðarson and he was under considerable influence from them, especially Halldór as the following chapters outline. It is also worth considering if Halldór may have been inspired by Elías, for example by *Eftir örstuttan leik,* when he wrote *The Atom Station* – one of the most famous Reykjavík novels.[485] Like Elías's novels *The Atom Station* deals with various contemporary issues; politics as well as societal and cultural debates and currents. The narrator-protagonist, Ugla, is a young woman from an isolated rural area who comes to Reykjavík with the intention to learn to play the organ so she can serve the church and congregation in her parents' valley. She works as a maid at the home of a parliamentarian, Búi Árland, who is involved in political decision-making which

[482] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 17–18 November 1949.
[483] "Og þar með lauk einhverju viðburðaríkasta ári í mínu lífi." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1949, note written on 1 January 1950. In 1949 Elías published one short story, one article and one poem: "Fyrirgefning," "Um hvað á að skrifa?" and "Ljóð."
[484] In March 1941, when he was sixteen years old, Elías gave his first speech about politics at a public meeting. See *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 2 March 1941; Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 27–29. Elías sometimes discusses politics in Skálda and claims to be a communist. See e.g. *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 9 February 1945.
[485] Elías later told Hjálmar Sveinsson that Halldór had said, while he was writing *The Atom Station*, that his current project could just as well have been written by Elías Mar, since it was a contemporary novel set in Reykjavík. See Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 49.

entails building a U.S. military base in Iceland, and temporarily takes responsibility for his children when their mother leaves the country. The novel is perhaps best known for its sharp criticism of American political powers and controversial decisions made by Icelandic governments, such as the Keflavík Treaty from 1946 which entailed that the United States would withdraw their troops from Iceland but an American aircraft company would run the Keflavík airport. The politicians in *The Atom Station* are portrayed as traitors who sell their country, which is what Halldór and many other Icelanders – including Elías – felt Icelandic politicians had done when they signed the treaty.[486]

The Atom Station is much more than a political polemic, however; it is a story of a young woman's maturity and existential dilemmas but also conflicts and tension between rural and urban values in the post-war years.[487] In Reykjavík Ugla is introduced to modern bourgeois lifestyle and habits as well as various ideological and political currents – socialist politics, electricity and other luxuries, for example – and the reader experiences these phenomena from her somewhat naive, yet critical, rural perspective. She helps Búi's older daughter when she is pregnant with a soldier's baby and has an illegal abortion; Ugla herself also gets pregnant after a one-night affair, goes home to her valley to have the baby but returns to Reykjavík by the end of the novel and decides to start a family with the baby's father. The novel thus deals with sensitive current issues and Halldór's take on abortions, for example, caused a stir just like the novel's political critique.[488]

The following sections argue that Elías's emphasis on the concept *aktúel* around 1950, and his earlier claim that the writer must face the heartbeat of the world, is descriptive of the majority of his writings from the 1940s. In this respect he was under strong influence from Halldór Laxness – and presumably many other writers. Both *The Atom Station* and *The Great Weaver from Kashmir*, for example, are *aktúel* in the sense that they take part in contemporary debates and discuss various sensitive and paradoxical aspects of Icelandic society and culture. *Aktúel* is not an Icelandic word; Elías probably took it from Danish or Swedish, where *aktuel* means 'current,' 'present day,' or 'topical.' The reference to what is 'real' or 'not imaginary,' which is inherent to the English word *actual*, however, is also meaningful; Elías's emphasis on *aktúel* books as 'cross-sections of society' shows that

[486] On post-war politics and *The Atom Station*, see e.g. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 457–66; Giuliano D'Amico, "The Whole World Is One Atom Station. Laxness, the Cold War, Postcolonialism, and the Economic Crisis in Iceland."
[487] See e.g. Peter Hallberg, *Hús skáldsins. Um skáldverk Halldórs Laxness frá Sölku Völku til Gerplu*, 139–45; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 457–66.
[488] Peter Hallberg, *Hús skáldsins*, 139–45; Halldór Guðmundsson, *Halldór Laxness. Ævisaga*, 523–31. See also ch. 6.5.

such texts, in his mind, represented contemporary reality. *Aktúel* is thus also a reference to a 'real' or 'true' representation of the world.

The following discussion also outlines how the film medium influenced Elías's writings and their 'actuality' – that is, their critical engagement with the current times. It has similarly been noted that *The Atom Station*'s engagement with the current moment is for example manifested in its film-like characteristics. Jakob Benediktsson noted in a review already in 1948 that Halldór's novel was a reflection of the contemporary times and under strong influence from modern art; "its technique resembles a film," he says and points out that the events are not described in a continuous order but are more like snapshots that are lined up.[489] Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir has noted that 'film-like' narrative technique, such as objective descriptions and montage arrangement of narrative units, is evident in Halldór's *Iceland's Bell*, *The Atom Station* and *Gerpla* (1952; *The Happy Warriors*, 1958).[490] Halldór was fascinated by the film medium and went for example to Hollywood in the late 1920s with the intention to write screenplays,[491] and Bergljót suggests that the changes that are evident in his use of narrative mode in the mid-twentieth century are inspired for example by films. Björn Þór Vilhjálmsson has similarly discussed the influence of films in Halldór's work and argued that cinema "spoke to Laxness in a way similar to that of the progressive art movements"; that it represented something radically non-Icelandic and exciting possibilities concerning how one deals with the modern world.[492] Bergljót also argues that in his novel-writing in the 1940s Halldór was inspired by an oral story-telling tradition and the medieval sagas' figurative and objective use of language. *The Atom Station* is independent and modern processing of the Icelandic cultural heritage, she says – inspired by both sagas and cinema. As such it is an example of the realism Halldór agitated for in "Höfundurinn og verk hans" and other essays – that writers must be 'voices of their times' and deal with current, and often disputed, issues.[493] It manifests, in other words, that Halldór's ideas about realism were not bound to naturalism or pictorial realism but focused on finding appropriate methods to express and deal with the reality in question.[494]

Elías's and Halldór's commitment to representing and describing both negative and positive aspects of the modern world they live in also resembles in many ways the writings

[489] Jakob Benediktsson, "Halldór Kiljan Laxness: Atómstöðin," 77.
[490] Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, ""að skrælast áfram á makaríni." Um afstöðu Halldórs Laxness til bókmennta um miðja öldina."
[491] See e.g. Halldór Guðmundsson, *Halldór Laxness. Ævisaga*, 215–61; Björn Þór Vilhjálmsson, "Modernity and the Moving Image. Halldór Laxness and the Writing of 'The American Film in 1928.'"
[492] Björn Þór Vilhjálmsson, "Modernity and the Moving Image," 138.
[493] Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Vettvangur dagsins*, 465–74.
[494] Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, ""að skrælast áfram á makaríni.""

of nineteenth-century writers and thinkers Marshall Berman discusses in *All that is Solid Melts into Air* and refers to as modernist. Berman explores how these writers engaged with modernity, that is, the paradoxical experience of finding ourselves

> in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.[495]

Modernism, as Berman understands and uses the term, is a response to this experience:

> [A] variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own.[496]

In Berman's eyes modernism is thus not an aesthetic vision but a way to actively deal with and make sense of the modern life. It is not the opposite of realism, moreover, but rather "the realism of our time"[497] – and the same can be said about Elías's concept *aktúel*. *The Atom Station* and Elías Mar's writings from the 1940s can be seen as simultaneously realist and modernist. In *Vögguvísa* Elías experiments with style, form, use of language and representation and he composes poetry in both free verse and traditional form.[498] The 'actuality' of his writings is not bound to form or use of language, however; it entails capturing the impact and essence, or rather the complications and paradoxes, of social modernity and the rapid changes Icelandic society was going through in the 1940s.

3.2.1 The city

Reykjavík was the primary setting in Elías's work from the day he started to write. The city was his home and the world he knew best and it was therefore perhaps to be expected that he used it as a frame of reference – yet, as chapter two outlined, an urban setting was not common in Icelandic literature in the 1940s. Þórunn Elfa Magnúsdóttir wrote about the life in Reykjavík, for example in *Dætur Reykjavíkur* ('Daughters of Reykjavík,' 1933–1938) and *Snorrabraut 7* (1947), and *The Atom Station* became in the eyes of many the exemplary Reykjavík novel, but relatively few other writers wrote urban prose in this

[495] Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 15.
[496] Ibid. 16.
[497] Ibid. 122.
[498] Elías's participation in the 'modernist transformation' of Icelandic poetry is rarely acknowledged. Eysteinn Þorvaldsson mentions his first collection of poetry, *Ljóð á trylltri öld*, only briefly when discussing the Atom Poets: Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, *Atómskáldin. Aðdragandi og upphaf módernisma í íslenskri ljóðagerð*, 155; "Icelandic Poetry Since 1940," 478. Elías later told Hjálmar Sveinsson that the reasons why he was hardly ever referred to as a modernist poet were firstly that he never fully abandoned the traditional form and secondly that he was primarily known as a prose writer. Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 97.

period.[499] Writing about the everyday life in Reykjavík, without portraying it as the corrupt opposite of the idealised countryside, was thus an unusual act but for Elías it came naturally; he did not know the countryside and did not feel the urge to write about rural life. In 1948, for example, he writes in one of the volumes of his collected works, commenting on a draft he wrote in 1940: "The volume begins with a rural novel, – dear Lord, how did it occur to me to write a rural novel?!"[500]

Various aspects of the city appear in Elías's writings and he is not afraid of representing its 'ugly' sides and the paradoxes of urban life. His poems from 1939 and 1940, for example, sometimes portray the city as a dear and precious childhood home: "And yet you are my childhood memory. / You are my dream, – my first acquaintance of life."[501] In other poems Reykjavík is a setting for poverty and hardship, such as "Drengurinn í Öskjuhlíð" ('The boy on Öskjuhlíð hill') from 1939 that portrays a young, poor and miserable boy who sits on the hill in a freeze, looks over the city and eventually falls asleep, perhaps for the last time.[502] At times Reykjavík resembles a corruption den, for example in "Heimsósómi" ('Indecency') from 1943 where it is a cold and wet place with filthy shops, drunk people and promiscuous women who keep themselves warm by visiting American soldiers.[503]

In Elías's prose Reykjavík is often a background against which stories, especially about young, elderly and poor people, unfold. *Eftir örstuttan leik, Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa* all focus on young men in Reykjavík in the mid- and late 1940s. The protagonists feel somewhat depressed, frustrated and lost; they do not fit in, cannot live up to the expectations of other people and the society and they are marked by post-war uncertainty and fear of atomic bombings – an atmosphere Elías experienced himself and later described as 'tiredness' and scepticism about the future.[504] The influence of existential philosophy is prominent, especially in *Eftir örstuttan leik* whose protagonist,

[499] Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Lausamálsbókmenntir á fjórða áratugnum," 264–68; Ástráður Eysteinsson, "Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–1980," 411.
[500] "Bindið hefst á sveitasögu, – drottinn minn dýri, hvernig gat ég látið mér koma til hugar að skrifa sveitasögu?!" *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XXXI, a comment on a draft titled "Sakramentin."
[501] "Og þrátt fyrir allt ert þú mín æskuminning. / Þú ert minn draumur, – fyrsta lífsins kynning." "Reykjavíkuróður" ('An ode to Reykjavík'), composed in 1939. This poem, like many others, was never published while Elías was alive but later appeared on print in books edited and published by Þorsteinn Antonsson. See Elías Mar, *Elíasarbók. Sögur og ljóð*, 147. See also *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. IV. Volumes II and III include more poems on Reykjavík that have never been published, such as two texts titled "Um Reykjavík" ('About Reykjavík') from 1939 and 1940.
[502] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. II. Elías Mar, *Elíasarbók*, 150.
[503] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. II. Elías Mar, *Elíasarbók*, 163–64.
[504] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 47–48.

Bubbi, resembles characters in existential novels by writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.[505] Elías's friend Jón Óskar admitted in his memoir from 1971 that he and the other young pens in the 1940s had been unfair when they criticised *Eftir örstuttan leik*; he believes the novel was in fact highly original and relevant because it captured "a feeling of vacancy" – or existential gloom – that was prominent in Reykjavík in the late 1940s.[506] The reviewer Guðmundur Hagalín also said, as was noted in a previous section, that *Eftir örstuttan leik* had a 'look of tiredness and irresolution,' and when he wrote about *Man eg þig löngum* roughly two years later he also mentioned Elías's special 'tone.' Both Guðmundur and Kristmann Guðmundsson note in their reviews of *Man eg þig löngum* that even though the text itself is flawed Elías has developed his own voice and created a depressive and passive atmosphere which in fact describes many young people in their society – a tone that is "dull and inscrutable, but a look which is shaped by our times."[507] It is not easy to put the finger on what precisely this tone, voice or feeling is, but it is an essential part of the 'actuality' Elías sought to bring into his writings – a part of contemporary Reykjavík.

3.2.2 Marginal people

Elías's prose from the 1940s also manifests his ambition to criticise class division and discrimination through fiction. He often focuses on people on the margins of society and issues related to upbringing and death – topics that in 1950 inspired the title of his first short story collection: *Gamalt fólk og nýtt* ('Old and new people'). "Snæfríður er ein heima" (1946, 'Snæfríður is home alone'), for example, portrays an old widow who leaves her farm and visits a place loaded with memories and emotions, a canyon where she sat with her loving husband, watched her children play and felt the presence of elves – and she cries because she is lonely, feels alienated from the life on the farm and her children and grandchildren treat her with disrespect. This is one of the very few rural stories Elías wrote but he addresses similar issues in an urban setting in texts such as "Sumum vex fiskur um hrygg" (1945, 'Some people gain momentum'). It is a story of an old man who buys a toy for the first time in his life; a ball he wants to give to a six-year-old boy. This is a meaningful act for the old man, who never had any toys when he was a child, but when the time comes he realises that the boy already has much more exciting toys than the ball, such

[505] Ibid. 43–46; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 470. See ch. 4.
[506] "[…] heldur sá tómleikablær sem höfundur hefur náð í söguna […]." Jón Óskar, *Gangstéttir í rigningu*, 83–88, here 88.
[507] "[…] daufan og lítt ræðan, en svip, sem er mótaður af þessum tímum." Guðmundur G. Hagalín, "Daufur svipur, en þó sérstæður," *Alþýðublaðið*, 13 July 1949, 7. See also Kristmann Guðmundsson, "Bókmentir," *Morgunblaðið*, 15 July 1949.

as war aeroplanes that can carry atomic bombs. Eventually the old man leaves without giving the gift to the boy. These stories are written with deep compassion for old people and ask urgent questions about how we value people and their lives. They also underline problems that accompany extensive societal and cultural changes – the gap between children and old people sometimes seems impossible to bridge.[508]

The gap between social classes is underlined in "Saga um jólatré" ('A story of a Christmas tree') in *Þjóðviljinn's* Christmas issue in 1944. The narrator is a blue-collar man who meets a merchant on the street and starts talking to him. The merchant tells the narrator that he despises Christmas trees because when he was a boy he lived in great poverty and felt ashamed because he did not have a tree, nor nice clothes like the other children. Now he feels proud, because he is independent and has worked hard to make his way up to his current social status, and triumphantly talks about his victories and how he has risen against the powers who "crushed his heart" as a child.[509] The merchant is portrayed as arrogant and ignorant, especially compared to the narrator who enjoys the small joys of Christmas – the smell of oranges, coffee and hot chocolate and other luxurious goods that are rarely available to poor people. The merchant does not notice this smell; he left his frugality and kindness behind when he climbed up the class ladder and became a capitalist. "Heldurðu að ég hafi aldrei átt móður?" (1945, 'Do you think I never had a mother?') is also set in Reykjavík during Christmas. A bourgeois family is about to have Christmas dinner when a drunk man, Bubbi, knocks on the door asking for money.[510] The husband, Magnús, opens the door and sympathises with Bubbi when he cries and tells him how he used to have a family but drove them away with his drinking, especially when he talks about how he hurt his mother. The wife refuses to let Bubbi in or give him money but calls the police but when the police come and pick him up Magnús is sad and thinks about his own mother who is somewhere alone on Christmas Eve. The story thus underlines the individualism of bourgeois lifestyle and how people often ignore those who are in a difficult social position – even their own parents.

[508] The characters in Elías's first published short story, "Gamalt fólk" ('Old people') from 1944, are also an old couple who discuss what will happen after they die. Elías grew up with his grandmother, which may explain his interest in issues related to elderly people, and he dedicated *Gamalt fólk og nýtt* to her memory. See Jón Karl Helgason, "Þrautreyndur nýgræðingur," 102–3.
[509] Elías Mar, "Saga um jólatré," 6.
[510] Jón Karl Helgason suggests that this character may be an early version of the protagonist in *Eftir örstuttan leik*, whose name is also Bubbi. Both have lost their mothers and are struggling with the consequences of their unrestrained behaviour. See "Þrautreyndur nýgræðingur," 105–6.

3.2.3 'The situation'

Scholars such as Gerður Steinþórsdóttir, Dagný Kristjánsdóttir and Daisy Neijmann have explored how post-war Icelandic literature dealt with 'the situation' and the gender crisis discussed in the previous chapter. Their findings show that tension in relation to sexuality, Icelandic masculinity and sexual relationships between women and soldiers became a major theme in post-war literature, especially by male authors. Neijmann concludes that male characters in novels by for example Jóhannes úr Kötlum, Theodór Friðriksson and Guðmundur G. Hagalín are often somewhat impotent; writers who cannot write, men who cannot form or maintain heterosexual relationships, physically and mentally disabled men, ineffectual men or men who crawl before the occupiers.[511] Dagný similarly points out that like in for example England and the United States post-war novels by young Icelandic men are often characterised by anxiety and uncertainty concerning masculinity and masculine performance. The protagonists of novels written by for example Agnar Þórðarson, Jóhannes Helgi, Jökull Jakobsson and Elías Mar are indecisive and lost, she says; they rebel against or have problematic relationships with their fathers, are unsure about their sexual performances and role as fathers, and the books often end in dissolution, violence, death, or separation.[512] All the above is telling about *Eftir örstuttan leik*, *Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa*, as chapters four, five and six will outline, and from that perspective they are typical post-war texts; written in times of occupation and 'crisis in the gender order.'

Another typical reoccurring theme in Elías's work from the 1940s is 'the woman in the situation' – sexual relationships between Icelandic women and soldiers. Gerður Steinþórsdóttir's analysis of four post-war novels written by men, including *The Atom Station* and Elías's *Sóleyjarsaga*, revealed that the 'woman in the situation,' or the 'Yankee whore,' is a strikingly common character in these works, especially when they are compared to novels written by women.[513] Dagný and Neijmann also emphasise the prominence of women who have relationships with soldiers in post-war literature and how female characters often symbolise the Icelandic nation who offers her body to a foreign power.[514] Neijmann even notes that sometimes the relations between Iceland and the U.S. army seem to be "completely sexualized":

> [A] male protagonist, who has lost all purpose and power over his life, looks on in profound frustration and humiliation as the American army, supported by its

[511] Daisy Neijmann, ""A fabulous potency." Masculinity in Icelandic occupation literature."
[512] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Karlar í krapinu," 191–95.
[513] Gerður Steinþórsdóttir, *Kvenlýsingar í sex Reykjavíkurskáldsögum eftir seinni heimsstyrjöld*.
[514] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Karlar í krapinu"; Daisy Neijmann, ""A fabulous potency.""

> Icelandic puppets, is in complete control, and its soldiers systematically entrap, abuse and rape Icelandic girls who, without the control of their male guardians, allow themselves to be turned into army whores. In other words, with the complete breakdown of national patriarchy authority and with a foreign army in control, Mother Iceland has become a whore, and the source and future of Icelandic manhood is severely threatened.[515]

Many of these findings – but not all – apply to Elías and his work from the 1940s. His first published article, "Einn dagur hjá Steindóri" (1944, 'A day at Steindór's'), for example, describes a day at Steindór's taxi and bus station where Elías worked in the summer of 1941; his tasks at the office, impatient and rude customers, strange requests and interesting characters. The text gives the reader an insight into the life in Reykjavík during the war and underlines the city's paradoxical character; taxi drivers are asked to deliver barrels of salted meat while the police intervene in a fight in front of a fish and chips restaurant; a drunk Icelander orders a car because he cannot walk along the streets in the sun while black British soldiers drop by at the station and ask if they can "get some girls." Elías writes, in an ironic manner, that the soldiers probably belong to "the exceptional troops that are supposed to protect us," and outlines how he explained, "firmly but without arrogance, – because we Icelanders are friendly towards our guests," that they could not 'get girls.'[516] There is no obvious racist judgment in Elías's article, nor direct criticism of the presence of foreign military troops, yet the ironic undertone in the article as a whole suggests that he is somewhat critical of the everyday life in Reykjavík – the people he meets and the events he witnesses at Steindór's station – including the soldiers who want to hook up with Icelandic girls.[517]

Elías's first poem on print, "Hamingjuóður ungrar Reykjavíkurstúlku" ('A young Reykjavík girl's ode of happiness'), which appeared in the school magazine *Blysið* in 1940, also deals ironically with the relations between Icelandic women and soldiers. The speaker is a 'Reykjavík girl' who expresses her love of William, a British soldier, and outlines how they kiss and caress and that he visits her at night. This is a happy carefree poem that ends with a question: "Why should we not enjoy the fortune and joy of life / since luck itself is always following me around?"[518] The irony in these lines is rather obvious; the almost boundless carefreeness suggests that the speaker does not fully agree

[515] Daisy Neijmann, ""A fabulous potency,"" 165.
[516] "Líklega er þetta úrvalsliðið, sem á að vernda okkur […]. Við neitum því mjög ákveðið, án nokkurs hroka þó, – því við Íslendingar erum vanir því, að vera frekar almennilegir við gesti okkar." Elías Mar, "Einn dagur hjá Steindóri," 2.
[517] Ibid.
[518] "Hví skyldum við ei lánsins og lífsgleðinnar njóta, / fyrst lukkan sjálf er stöðugt á hælunum á mér?" Elías Mar, "Hamingjuóður ungrar Reykjavíkurstúlku."

with, nor approve of, the girl and her choices.[519] The context in which the poem was published moreover supports this interpretation. The previous issue of *Blysið*, published in the spring of 1940, included a debate on how Icelandic girls should act, dress and behave, especially around boys. An unnamed girl wrote an article claiming that girls should decide themselves how they act,[520] while the editorial team – consisting of three boys – argued that the main problem was that girls used too much make-up.[521] This debate continues in the issue where Elías's poem appears – published seven months after the arrival of the British troops. Another unnamed girl criticises the discourse on 'the situation' where Icelandic women are judged and condemned for being seen with soldiers: Icelandic men never consider their own role in this situation, she says, but they ought to treat women better. By the end of the article, however, she argues that women should not be with soldiers because then they "give more than love alone. [They] lose Icelandic dignity and Icelandic national ambition."[522] None of the debaters thus approve of the idea of a love affair between an Icelandic woman and a foreign soldier, not even the girls who protest against their male schoolmates' attempts to regulate their behaviour. It is therefore doubtful that the poem about the happy girl and 'her William' was meant seriously – it should be seen as an ironic critique of such behaviour and the sixteen-year-old Elías Mar's contribution to the debate on 'the situation' in his school.

The short story "Stúlka miðar byssu" ('A girl points a gun'), which was written in 1942 but published in 1948, is also a 'situation story' but it does not take a stand against the girl who has an American boyfriend. The story underlines a sad, almost tragic, situation where a young woman moves away from home to escape her mother who condemns all women who behave somewhat 'immorally' and desperately seeks to control her daughter's behaviour. The mother shows no compassion when the young woman finally comes to her looking for support after she has been kicked out of a taxi station, called a whore and denied service because she was with her soldier. By the end of the story both mother and daughter are alone, lonely and miserable. This story, like the texts discussed in the previous section, thus deals with the complications and problems that can occur in a society where the older and younger generations do not understand each other and people cannot talk about their problems.

[519] Jón Karl Helgason also points out the irony in the poem and notes that it deals with similar issues as the article "Einn dagur hjá Steindóri." Jón Karl Helgason, "Þrautreyndur nýgræðingur," 97, 101.
[520] Skólastelpa [pseud.], "Reykjavíkurpilturinn."
[521] Jón Emils, Björn Helgason and Sigurjón Ingibergs, "Stríðsráðstöfun."
[522] Imba tindilfætta [pseud.], ""Ástands"-stúlkan," 14.

Women who have sexual relationships with soldiers appear in all four novels Elías wrote and published in the 1940s and 50s. In *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* a girl turns to a soldier after she has given up on the male protagonist or been betrayed by him, a woman who sleeps with a soldier also appears in *Man eg þig löngum*, and in *Vögguvísa* the 'Yankee whores' are background characters but do not play a significant role in the life of the protagonist.[523] In *Sóleyjarsaga*, on the other hand, the protagonist, Sóley, is a young woman 'in the situation.' Gerður Steinþórsdóttir has criticised the novel for portraying 'female nature' as a constant without raising questions about social gender roles; Sóley is submissive, sincere and lacks independent personality, Gerður says and notes that Sóley only finds purpose through her relationships with men and children.[524] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir argues however that *Sóleyjarsaga* is the most detailed description of 'the situation' in Icelandic literature and points out that it portrays the women as belonging to a marginal subculture in which factors such as class and age are important; educated girls from higher classes are with officers and men in superior positions while the lower-class girls are with private soldiers.[525] The novel was written in 1954–1959 and thus lies outside the scope of this thesis but Elías's early writings manifest that relationships between Icelandic women and soldiers were not only addressed in *Sóleyjarsaga* – they were common topics in his work from the beginning of the war. These texts also show that Elías's stance concerning 'the situation' was neither simple nor firm; he expresses both sympathy and moral judgment and writes about it from different perspectives. 'The situation' is thus a good example of his engagement with the paradoxes of modern life and within himself – a highly complicated and sensitive matter he deals with and seeks to represent in his writings from various perspectives.

3.2.4 The youth

Last, but not least, the paradoxes of modern life appear in Elías's writings about youth culture and issues related to young people in Reykjavík. Chapter two outlined how concerns were raised in the 1940s and 50s about the influence of mass culture, idleness and urban growth and how these changes affected teenagers – and Elías took these matters very seriously. His writings manifest a decisive socialist emphasis on protecting national identity and culture from foreign capitalist influence and power, yet Elías's personal documents manifest that he was himself under strong influence from the supposed corrupt American culture.

[523] See ch. 5.4 and 6.3.
[524] Gerður Steinþórsdóttir, *Kvenlýsingar í sex Reykjavíkurskáldsögum*, 101–21.
[525] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 472–76.

In 1944 he wrote three articles that appeared in *Þjóðviljinn*'s 'youth section,' which served as an organ for the Association of Young Socialists (Samband ungra sósíalista). The first text, published on 17 June – the day the Republic of Iceland was established – deals with voting age and if people younger than 21 should be allowed to vote in public elections. The conservatives fear the change, says Elías, because they know that young people have turned away from conservative politics, except a few teenagers who have been taught to fear socialism and idealise America, participate in capitalist rhetorics and enjoy the taste of Coca-Cola. Elías does not believe there is any reason to worry about the latter group because the future of Iceland is in the hands of the former: "It is in the hands of every teenager who works as a part of the whole, who neither kisses the rod nor sleeps by the execution block where the plutocracy intends to cut him the next day."[526]

In October Elías writes an article on the war and how it has changed Icelanders' view of the world. The young people now understand international issues and politics better than before, he says, and they see that things are not always simple or painted in black and white:

> We Icelanders may no longer see ourselves as mere spectators to what is happening in the world around us. Our newly gained independence should encourage us to understand that we are a link in a long chain, in many fields we are dealing with the same problems as most other nations.[527]

People should not underestimate the youth, he continues, the future depends on them and Icelanders must thus teach teenagers to think critically and make sure that "the upbringing of the youth is aimed in the right direction" – that is, towards socialist politics.[528]

Elías's choice of words and metaphors in these articles draws on the discourse on Young Iceland outlined in the previous chapter; he is concerned about the future and believes the youth must be taught to think in a certain way so the world will not be taken over or destroyed, for example by capitalist powers. It is important to underline, however, that Elías does not blame the teenagers for being led astray or influenced negatively; his emphasis is predominantly on how adults are obliged to create a better society for the youth. The last article he wrote for the youth section in *Þjóðviljinn* in 1944 shows this very clearly. The topic is films and the influence frequent visits to the cinema can have on

[526] "Hún er í höndum hvers þess unglings, er vinnur sem brot af heildinni, en sem hvorki kyssir á vöndinn né sefur við þann höggstokk, sem auðvaldið ætlar sér að höggva hann á næsta dag." Elías Mar, "Réttindi unga fólksins," 19.
[527] "Við Íslendingar megum ekki lengur álíta okkur vera áhorfendur að því, sem gerist umhverfis okkur í heiminum. Hið nýfengna sjálfstæði okkar ætti að hvetja okkur til þess að skilja, að við erum hlekkur í stórri keðju, við eigum við sömu erfiðleika að etja á mörgum sviðum og flestar aðrar þjóðir." Elías Mar, "Nokkur þankastrik," 5.
[528] "[…] að uppeldi æskulýðsins beinist í rétta átt." Ibid.

children and teenagers. The film is an excellent media, Elías says, and it has great potential – if it is used wisely. Films can be of great educational value and actors can be powerful role models. Yet he argues that the films that are being screened in Reykjavík are of poor value because it is not healthy for young people to watch violence: "But I want to point out that it is a dangerous act on behalf of the administrators of the film associations to encourage children to become mischievous, or even sadistic."[529] It is, therefore, in Elías's eyes, not the children's fault that they are exposed to violence – the people who run the cinemas, choose the films and run the industry must be seen as responsible. The political goal with this article is clear: The society must resist capitalist power and take collective responsibility for the upbringing of the youth.

Educating the youth is also a central theme in a speech that Elías gave at his old high school and was published in *Eining* in 1945. Elías was an active member of the Good Templar order from 1938 to 1948 and in February 1944 he was asked to talk to students about temperance. Alcohol addiction is harmful to everyone, he says and argues that teachers and other role models for children and teenagers should not drink. Young people need to focus on being good and useful citizens and it is important that they avoid drinking; "it goes without saying that if we consume alcoholic drinks we can never become able social citizens," he says.[530] He underlines the importance of creating conditions for teenagers where they can thrive and are not led into situations where they are tempted to drink; a teenager who can only seek entertainment

> at cafés, bars, cinemas, not to mention billiard rooms like the ones here in Reykjavík, – that teenager has more opportunities to consume alcohol than the one who has a job to do, to occupy himself with.[531]

Elías says that the school system needs more support because in order to create healthy conditions for teenagers the society needs better schools and facilities. He also mentions the importance of building a Youth Hall (Æskulýðshöll) and thereby refers to a project that had been in preparation since 1943 and aimed at building a large centre for sports,

[529] "En ég vil vekja athygli á því, að það er hættulegur leikur af hálfu forráðamanna kvikmyndafélaganna, að ala upp í börnum löngun til óknytta og hrekkja, svo maður leyfi sér ekki að nefna sadisma." Elías Mar, "Kvikmyndirnar og æskan," 3.
[530] "Það leiðir af sjálfu sér, að neytum við áfengra drykkja, getum við aldrei orðið nýtir borgarar í þjóðfélaginu." Elías Mar, "Bindindisræða flutt í Gagnfræðaskóla Reykjavíkur, 1. febrúar 1944," 2.
[531] "Það segir sig sjálft, að unglingur, sem hvergi getur skemmt sér, eða eytt tímanum nema á kaffihúsum, í spilaklúbbum og bíóum, svo að eg tali nú ekki um billiardstofur, eins og þær eru hér í Reykjavík, – sá unglingur fær ósjálfrátt fleiri tækifæri til þess að neyta áfengis, heldur en hinn, sem eitthvert verkefni hefur með höndum, til þess að hugsa um." Ibid.

meetings, film screening, libraries and various activities that would improve youth culture in Reykjavík.[532]

In these texts Elías expresses his concerns about the current situation in which young people in Reykjavík find themselves and encourages them to make sensible choices; watch good films, stay away from alcohol and not be fooled by the charm of Coca-Cola and other American influence. The Young Iceland metaphor often functioned as a regulative discourse in the Icelandic media as chapter two outlined – by making the individuals responsible for the well-being of the nation and encouraging them to choose 'good' art, for example – but Elías underlines that the responsibility is instead on the hands of politicians, the people in power and the society as a whole.

In this context it is important to note that Elías was young when he wrote these articles, 20–21 years old, and he had a personal experience of the temptations in question; he was a teenager during the war, knew the streets and cafés in Reykjavík very well and he was an enthusiastic film consumer. He seems to have followed his own advice regarding alcohol consumption, since he did not drink until 1948, but when it comes to films things get more problematic. One of the things Elías carefully documents in his notebooks is when he goes to the cinema, with whom and which film they see. In the mid-1940s he often goes to the cinema 2–3 times a week and sees everything from European documentaries to Hollywood thrillers.[533] In his letters to Guðmundur Pálsson in the summer of 1943, while Elías is working with a road construction team outside the city, he describes how problematic and paradoxical his relationship with the film media is; he feels that he spends way to much time in the cinemas but at the same time he cannot hide how fascinated he is by Hollywood stars like Peter Lorre. "But God save me from the cinemas!"[534] he writes and tells Guðmundur that he has nightmares about being back in Reykjavík watching films; he wakes up feeling like he has wasted precious time and money. In another letter from the same summer he tells Guðmundur that he has decided to avoid cinemas. "My cinema visits last winter were the escape of a teenager who is fleeing reality. I came home from school, tired and sad, and nobody was there to greet me," he says: "And I sought refuge in a distant world that did not concern me or even interest

[532] See e.g. Guðmundur Vigfússon, "Æskulýðshöll í Reykjavík"; "Æskulýðshöll í Reykjavík," *Tíminn*, 18 March 1943, 125, 128; "Stofnkostnaður, rekstur og stjórn æskulýðshallarinnar," *Morgunblaðið*, 13 July 1943, 4. The Youth Hall was never built.
[533] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1944 and onward.
[534] "En guð forði mér frá bíóunum!" *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 4 September 1943.

me."[535] Elías thus sees films as an interruption or a route to escape reality; they stand in his way when it comes to writing and induce a feeling of shame when he has not been diligent enough. His notebooks manifest, however, that films were and continued to be a prominent part of his life; he was not able to keep his intentions. He visits a cinema the day after he returns to Reykjavík in September 1943 and in the next few months he sees up to seven films a week, mostly Hollywood comedies and action films.[536] His relationship with cinemas and the film medium remains paradoxical throughout the period under consideration in this thesis; he was a film enthusiast but at the same time sceptical about the negative influence that films, especially Hollywood films, could have on the Icelandic audience. These controversies moreover appear in his novels, especially in *Vögguvísa* as chapter six outlines, and the film medium influenced Elías's writings in the 1940s substantially.

3.3 Same-sex desire

The themes in Elías's writings from the 1940s under discussion in this chapter are *aktúel* – current, topical, modern, real – and the same can be said about the primary theme of this thesis: Same-sex sexuality. As an old man Elías Mar talked quite freely about his same-sex desires and bisexual identity in past and present. "Already as a kid, or at least around the age of confirmation, I had started telling my friends that I thought some boys were beautiful just like girls," he says in an interview in 2003; "I said I had a crush on some of these boys and wanted to sleep with them."[537] He also confirms that he was equally attracted to boys and girls – men and women – from the age of ten or eleven; "I was bisexual," he says.[538] Elías does not discuss same-sex desire in his notebooks and other personal writings in the late 1930s and 1940s, however, and he rarely mentions sexual matters in general before 1945. These sources are thus not telling about his sexual identity before he went to Copenhagen at the age of twenty-two. Yet as Jón Karl Helgason and Þorsteinn Antonsson have pointed out Elías's poetry and prose – especially texts that were not published while he was alive – deal with sexual attraction to both men and women and

[535] "Bíóferðir mínar síðastl. vetur voru úrræði heimsflótta unglings. Eg kom heim úr skólanum, þreyttur og leiður og við mér tók einginn. […] Og eg leitaði á náðir hins fjarlæga, þess sem kom mér lítið við og sem eg hafði í raun og veru eingan áhuga." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, date missing, 1943.
[536] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 27 September 1943 and onward.
[537] "Strax sem krakki, eða að minnsta kosti um fermingu, var ég farinn að segja við vini mína að mér þættu sumir strákar fallegir eins og stelpur. […] ég sagðist vera skotinn í sumum þessum strákum og að mig langaði til að hátta hjá þeim." Ásgeir Þ. Ingvarsson, "Elías Mar! Hvað erum við að gera?" The age of confirmation in Iceland is generally fourteen.
[538] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 51–53, here 52. See also Pétur Blöndal, *Sköpunarsögur*, 275–77.

may be somewhat telling about the author's desires, although such autobiographical reading of fiction should not be done without reservation.[539]

Depression and death are recurring themes in Elías's poems in the early 1940s.[540] His grandmother died in February 1942 and the first poem he composes after her death describes inner torment and pessimism: "The sun will fade, / the earth will sink, / the bright stars will fall / from the sky" – "Such is the future!"[541] Around the same time Elías's poems begin to express feelings that can be interpreted as homoerotic and a year later he composes his most obvious and honest queer poem, "Sálrænt kvæði" ('A psychological poem') – which is also marked by heaviness and depression. It describes an identity crisis – or perhaps more specifically, a gender or sexual identity crisis. The speaker expresses his uncertainty about himself and his future: "I don't know where I come from / and even less where I am going […] Am I alone or a part of a crowd?" and finally asks: "Am I a man or a woman? / Do I know how to live like a proper man? / Is there anyone who pays attention and judges? / Does it make any sense to think this way?"[542] The poem does not express same-sex desire but as chapter two outlined questions related to sex and gender were intertwined with the concept of homosexuality in the early twentieth century and the speaker's problems can easily be seen as a part of a sexuality crisis. He describes uncertainty in relation to his masculinity but also wonders if his failure to perform as a man will make other people judge him – and if there are other people like him or if he is the only one who is different from the norm. If we approach this poem as an autobiographical text it is an important queer performance which suggests that Elías was struggling with coming to terms with his same-sex desires in the early 1940s – and that writing was a way to deal with that struggle. If the poem is not based on Elías's personal experience it nevertheless shows that he was thinking about problems and dilemmas concerning sexuality and gender.

[539] Jón Karl argues that Elías's writings in the early 1940s manifest that he had already started to deal with many themes that were later prominent in his novels, such as 'the situation,' the death of his mother, sex and sexuality. Þorsteinn moreover suggests that Elías's "search for sexual identity" is represented in his writings from 1941 and even earlier. Jón Karl Helgason, "Þrautreyndur nýgræðingur"; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 70–71.

[540] See e.g. *Lbs* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. VI; Elías Mar, *Elíasarbók*, 139–45.

[541] "Sólin mun sortna, / sökkva fold í mar, / hrapa af himni / heiðar stjörnurnar." – "Slík er framtíðin!" *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. VI, "Heimsumbreyting og helstefna."

[542] "Hvaðan eg er kominn veit eg ekki. / Hvert eg fer eg síður veit sem stendur. […] Er eg einn eða er eg meðal fjölda?" – "Hvort er eg heldur karlmaður eða kona? / Kann eg að lifa eins og manni sæmir? / Er nokkur til sem aðgætir og dæmir? / Er nokkuð vit í því að hugsa svona?" *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. VII; Elías Mar, *Elíasarbók*, 156.

3.3.1 Queer gazes

Among Elías's early unpublished writings are a few love poems, for example two poems to a girl named Helga, composed in 1940. "It was you who received my first love […] I love you in joy and in sorrow," sixteen-year-old Elías writes.[543] A girl called Hanna also appears in his poems and stories after 1941 but she was Elías's teenage love. She went to his school and although they were never friends and hardly ever spoke to each other he admired her from a distance for many years. In 1945–1946 he even dedicated a special notebook, "Blá bók" ('Blue book'), to his feelings and thoughts about Hanna. "I realise that by writing [in this book] I am describing myself the way I am deep inside, especially my love life,"[544] Elías says and in the following weeks he describes his unrequited love for Hanna and documents his unsuccessful attempts to reach out to her. "Your glance is printed on my soul," he says; "I have never seen such eyes in any other girl; I cannot find words to describe them."[545]

With these words Elías underlines the significance and erotic meaning of eye contact and glances – which is a reoccurring theme in his oeuvre. A good example is one of his unpublished stories, "Eg skrifta" ('I confess'), written in December 1941, which is also inspired by Hanna. It is, as the title suggests, the narrator's confession and description of how much he loves a certain girl. He recalls the first time their eyes met when she cycled past him. "I imagine that my eyes were full of shame," he says, but her eyes were both reproachful and questioning.[546] This was the moment when my childhood innocence was replaced by desire, he continues, and from this day he secretly watches the girl and admires her but avoids looking into her eyes: "I only watch her when she is not aware of it, when I get the chance."[547]

This emphasis on the possible consequences of eye contact is especially interesting if "Eg skrifta" is compared to another unpublished story Elías wrote in December 1941: "Eftirför" ('Pursuit'). There a male narrator outlines how he once watched and followed a man on the streets and describes the stranger's appearance and behaviour in detail. The

[543] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. IV, "Helga" and "Hrifning af Helgu."
[544] "En mér er ljóst, að með því að skrifa hana er ég að gefa lýsingu á sjálfum mér eins og ég er innst inni, einkum í ástamálum mínum […]." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. CC. Documents from the college years. Box 3, uncategorised. "Blá bók," 29 December 1945; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 55.
[545] "Augnaráð þitt hefur brennt sig inn í sál mína. Ég hefi í engri stúlku séð önnur eins augu; mig brestur orð til að lýsa þeim." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Blá bók"; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 58. On Elías's love for Hanna, see Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 54–60.
[546] "Eg get ímyndað mér að augu mín hafi verið full blygðunar." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XIX, "Eg skrifta."
[547] "[…] horfi eg aðeins á hana, án þess hún viti, þegar mér gefst tækifæri til." Ibid. In 1944 Elías comments on the draft and confirms that it was inspired by his first memories of Jóhanna Þorgilsdóttir.

man caught his attention "because he did not look like other people," the way he walked and carried his head was somehow different, especially his glance. The narrator recalls that the man looked at him with narrow eyes and then opened them suddenly as if he were surprised:

> I felt a sense of inferiority. He looked at me. He certainly did. I had become another man's spectacle. – – Perhaps he was a writer with a keen eye for character, who could criticise me and write a story about me. Horrific![548]

This moment has a profound influence on the narrator, just like the narrator in "Eg skrifta" when he meets the girl's eyes. He decides to follow the stranger and find out if he really is a writer. Eventually the stranger notices that he is being followed, turns around, faces the narrator and asks: "Do you know about Helga and me?" The narrator tells him that he knows nothing about a girl named Helga; the stranger then smiles and leaves.[549] The narrator follows him home and sees him disappear into a basement flat. He feels relieved: "All fear of being ridiculed had disappeared from my mind and I no longer assumed that the man was a writer. Yet I could not stop thinking about him; – how he walked and carried his head and his glance."[550]

Gazes play a vital role in the formation of identity and subjectivity as chapter one outlined; knowing or imagining that another person is looking at and judging your appearance and behaviour encourages self-discipline, self-punishment and self-awareness. The narrator in "Eg skrifta" experiences such self-consciousness when he meets the eyes of the girl; he is afraid that she will disapprove of him and therefore avoids her and watches her from a safe distance. In "Eftirför" the narrator similarly fears the man's glance and prefers watching him without being seen but he is especially worried about being documented or 'captured' in the man's writing because that would expose him to the multiple 'gazes' of (possible) future readers.[551] These two stories thus focus on male narrators who are very self-conscious – their identity is being shaped and contested by the girl and the mysterious man and their gazes.

[548] "Eg fann til vanmetakenndar. Hann horfði á mig. Alveg ábyggilegt. Eg var orðinn að augabragði annars manns. – – Ef til vill var þetta skáld og mannþekkjari, sem gat margt sett út á mig og samið um mig sögu. Hræðilegt!" *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XIX, "Eftirför." The word *augabragð,* which is translated here as 'spectacle,' can both mean 'object of ridicule' and 'object of attraction.'

[549] Elías notes that the original name of the girl was Hanna but that he changed it to Helga before he read the story at a school event to avoid rumours about him and Jóhanna Þorgilsdóttir. See ibid., comment from Elías.

[550] "Öll spéhræðsla var horfin úr huga mér og eg var hættur að halda manninn skáld. Samt sem áður gat eg ekki hætt við að hugsa um hann; – göngulagið, höfuðtilburðina og augnaráðið." Ibid.

[551] The fear of becoming the subject of another man's writing also appears in *Man eg þig löngum,* where it is clearly associated with fear of one's same-sex desires being exposed. See ch. 5.3.

At the same time, however, both narrators return the gaze and are erotically invested in what they see. The stories emphasise visual pleasure rather than physical intimacy and in that sense they are like films; the reader watches the girl and the man from a distance through the narrator's eyes. In the article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Laura Mulvey explores, through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, gender difference and the pleasure in looking in narrative films. She argues that mainstream films echo and manifest the patriarchal structures of the society that creates them; they assume the roles of an active spectator, who is a man, and a passive female object.[552] One of the most important observations in Mulvey's essay is that people experience two different kinds of pleasure when they watch films: Erotic pleasure and recognition – desire and identification. Freudian psychoanalytic theory as well as patriarchal normative societies, however, require or demand that a clear line is drawn between the two – that people identify only with the same gender and desire the other. Male figures in mainstream films therefore "cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification," Mulvey says, and they are reluctant to be the ones who are looked at.[553] "Eg skrifta" – and in fact Elías's Blá bók as well – follows such a normative script; the male narrator wants to be in the active spectator role where he can experience erotic pleasure by watching the girl without being seen himself.

Several scholars have noted that the heteronormative premises in Mulvey's essay make it problematic, to say the least, to build on it when discussing same-sex desire and homoerotic pleasure – like in "Eftirför." D. A. Miller notes for example that even though films often reduce and replace homoerotic themes they never manage to erase them or prevent the audience from experiencing erotic pleasure. The "male bearer-of-the-look" is never invisible, Miller says; he is a "potential implied in that offer to capture the screen or captivate our own look, with his bodily presence or its sexual objectification.[554] Same-sex desire is rarely distant from identification, Miller points out; the line between wanting to be and wanting to have someone is far from clear – especially when it comes to watching films. In "Eftirför" the stranger is at first the bearer of the look; the object of the narrator's – and by extension, the reader's – visual pleasure. The question if this pleasure is identification or desire is, however, left unanswered. There is an obvious tension between the two men; when they switch roles the narrator panics because he cannot bear being objectified and thereby put in a passive (feminine) position. This tension is relieved, however, when the stranger has 'heterosexualised' the situation by bringing a woman into the picture, which suggests that the narrator's pleasure is loaded with anxiety around same-

[552] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 14–27.
[553] Ibid. 20.
[554] D.A. Miller, "Visual Pleasure in 1959," 109.

sex desire. Even though "Helga" is absent she thus functions as a "homosexual closet," as Miller puts it in his analysis of the film *Suddenly, Last Summer*; the homosexual fantasy is dressed up in heterosexual disguise.[555] "Eftirför" is a highly significant queer performance in the sense that it expresses homoerotic interest, shifting identifications and a deep feeling of inferiority or shame. The line between identification and desire is open for interpretation and in that regard the characters' eyes and gazes are of central importance; the shame and insecurity the narrator feels is related to his queer sexuality which is not spelt out but indicated in the pleasure he experiences when watching the stranger.

The association between homoerotic interest on the one hand, and a male writer figure on the other, is also interesting when put in context with a poem Elías composed in April 1942, "Einginn sérstakur" ('Nobody in particular'). The speaker talks about a young man with "a holy secret" in his heart; a man the speaker has misunderstood and mistreated because he did not know about this secret. By the end of the poem the man looks at the speaker with "sparkling eyes" and says that he forgives him because they are both poets – and after that the speaker sees him in a new light.[556] The men's eyes and meaningful looks are again associated with secrets that are not revealed and although the speaker's interest in the other man is not necessarily erotic the fact that they are both writers is significant and supports a queer analysis of the poem – as the remaining chapters of this thesis will explain in more detail.

The homoerotic aspect of watching another man from a distance and following him along the streets of Reykjavík is underlined more clearly in yet another draft in Elías's manuscript collection; an unfinished short story, or beginning of a novel, without a title from 1943.[557] This story also manifests the influence films and the film medium had on Elías. Again the reader experiences visual pleasure through the narrator; a poor and solitary man who claims to avoid people, mostly because of his "innate mystic inclination and a spark of homosexuality."[558] One day he walks into a tall and slim man on the street and is immediately impressed: "I turned around at the corner where I met him and watched him go with deep curiosity. Looking at him from behind was nothing special per se – but

[555] Ibid. 99.
[556] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. VI.
[557] *Lbs* 13 NF. Elías Mar. CC. Documents from the college years. Box 3. The draft begins with the words "1. kafli. Hár maður og grannur" ('Chapter 1. A tall and thin man.') It was never published while Elías was alive and he presumably never finished it. It appeared on print in 2014, however, under the title "Einn" ('Alone') in Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál. Sögur og greinar Elíasar Mar*, 75–83. The printed version, referred to here, differs slightly from the original manuscript but mostly in terms of punctuation.
[558] "Veldur þessu meðfædd mystisk tilhneiging og vottur af kynvillu." *Lbs* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Hár maður og grannur"; Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál*, 75. This is one of the earliest examples of direct use of words referring to homosexuality in Elías's writings.

the face! – Such eyes, dear Lord!"[559] The narrator follows the man and discovers that he is up to something strange but the draft is unfinished and the reader never learns who the man is or how the men's relationship develops. The draft was probably meant to become a detective story; the narrator is not just interested in the stranger's appearance but also his mysterious actions and his glance reminds the narrator of Peter Lorre.[560] Lorre was, as noted earlier, one of Elías's favourite Hollywood actors and he had appeared in many mystery and crime films, even in the role of a queer villain in *The Maltese Falcon* as Richard Dyer has pointed out.[561] A famous scene from that film pictures Lorre's character making intense eye-contact with another male character while fondling a cane – a homoerotic gesture that was vague enough to elude the Hollywood Production Code which put restrictions on homosexual representation, among other things.[562] *The Maltese Falcon* was screened in Reykjavík in the summer of 1943 and it is not impossible that Elías saw it, although he never mentions it in his notebooks. The influence from America and the film medium is, at any rate, apparent in his unfinished story from 1943; American masculinity is eroticised and represented as exotic and exciting via the narrator's camera-like point of view.[563]

3.3.2 Awakening

Perhaps the frankest deliberations of same-sex desire in Elías's early writings appear in an unpublished story from 1945 which consists of three letters. The first is from a man called Mar to a girl named Randí.[564] Mar forbids Randí to be with other men and orders her to wait until he comes home – "I want you to be with me when I want, […] you are just a

[559] "Ég snéri við hjá horninu þar sem ég mætti honum og horfði á eftir honum eins og furðuverki. Að sjá hann aftanfrá var útaffyrir sig ekkert einkennilegt, – en andlitið! – Hvílík augu, drottinn minn!" *Lbs* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Hár maður og grannur"; Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál*, 77.

[560] *Lbs* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Hár maður og grannur"; Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál*, 82. Strange or mysterious glances are unquestionably queer erotic symbols in Elías's writings; see e.g. ch. 5.1.3.

[561] In *The Maltese Falcon* Lorre plays Joel Cairo who according to Dyer is one a film noir queer male stereotypes who are over-elaborately dressed, coiffed, manicured and perfumed, have bitchy wit and love art, jewellery and cuisine. Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 90–115, especially 96. See also Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images. Essays on Representation*, 50–70. Queer noir men also appear in Elías's novels, see ch. 4.5 and 6.2.2.

[562] See Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, "The Celluloid Closet," 19:35.

[563] In Skálda Elías describes how he and his friend once followed Halldór Laxness along the streets of Reykjavík and sought to catch his attention. This pursuit resembles Elías's short stories in many ways and although there is no reason to suggest that Elías had erotic interest in Halldór the entry shows that it is often difficult to draw a line between identification and desire in Elías's writings – and that he was very fond of the 'pursuit' theme. See *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 20 February 1945.

[564] Kristmann Guðmundsson's daughter was called Randí. Elías had a crush on her when he was working with Kristmann in Hveragerði. See Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 39.

woman, who is only useful in distress, when a man has nothing else to have"[565] – and the letter ends with an obscene violent promise that he will show her a real cock when he comes home. The second letter, which is from a guy called X to a girl named Hanna, is also sexual and quite graphic but less violent. The setting is a fantasy; X asks Hanna to borrow a plane and a parachute and visit him in his skyscraper; he is listening to a song by Mar and promises to write a book about one of her body parts if she wants. The third and final letter is from Elías Mar to X; a love letter without graphic sexual messages: "I don't know if you believe me, but I have been up all night thinking about you. I can hardly forgive myself for being so spellbound by your beauty, which has captivated me so that I cannot think of anything else."[566] This text thus deals with a network of sexual and erotic relations between five characters, male and female, who are all to some extent based on – or at least named after – Elías himself and his love interests. The outcome is a playful, metafictional and autoerotic text in which the male characters are creative and beautiful, sometimes loving, sometimes misogynistic and violent, while women are merely sexual objects.

The story draft from 1943 – about the man with an 'innate mystic inclination' and a 'spark of homosexuality' – and "Sálrænt kvæði" suggest that by then Elías had started to think about same-sex desire and express it through writing, even though he never mentioned such thoughts in his notebooks or letters. The letters from 1945 moreover manifest that his interest in sexual matters and homo- and bisexuality had developed and he had become more confident in his writing – although he did not yet dare to publish texts that discussed same-sex desire. The first entries in his notebooks that manifest an interest in sexual matters, and may indicate that he knows he is not heterosexual, are from 1944, around the time he starts writing Skálda. Then he starts documenting when he has "interesting conversations" about sexual matters and "personality" with his friends and noting that he reads books and booklets about sexuality.[567] He has for example read *The Technique of Sex* by Anthony Havil (the English version), whose deliberation of Freud's theory of bisexuality – that all people desire both sexes in early childhood but later learn to repress or sublimate same-sex desires – was presumably of great importance to Elías.[568]

[565] "Ég vil að þú sért með mér þegar ég vil, – annars máttu bara eiga þig, því þú ert nú einu sinni ekki nema kvenmaður, sem eingöngu er ert [sic] brúkleg í viðlögum, þegar maður hefur ekki annað til að hafa." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XXII, "Þrjú sendibréf."
[566] "Eg veit ekki, hvort þú trúir mér, en í alla nótt hefi ég ekkert getað sofið, vegna þess að ég hefi stöðugt verið að hugsa um þig. Ég get tæplega fyrirgefið sjálfum mér, hversu gagntekinn ég er af fegurð þinni, er svo mjög hefur hrifið mig, að ég hugsa ekki um annað." Ibid.
[567] He notes for example that he has had long talks about "sexual matters, personality and fiction" with Hannes Sigfússon and others. *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 14–15 September 1944.
[568] See chapters 2.4 and 4.3.3.

He also reads booklets by Karl Evang in Icelandic translation and texts by Icelandic intellectuals such as Katrín Thoroddsen and Vilmundur Jónsson.[569] In November he writes in Skálda that he has been at the National Library and read *Heilsufræði hjóna* (1927, 'Couples' hygiene') by Kristiane Skjerve, and that while he sat there with the book in his hands he noticed a man looking at him: "He is always staring at me, everywhere he sees me, and sometimes seems quite nervous. I suspect he knows who I am."[570] Elías's obsession with gazes, watching others and wondering how they see him is a reoccurring topic in Skálda and some of his short stories, as we have seen, and there is also a strong sexual undertone in this scene: Elías is reading a book about sexual matters while he feels the other man's gaze resting upon him. Unlike the narrators in his stories discussed in the previous chapter, moreover, he seems to enjoy the attention.

3.3.3 The story about HÓMÓ

The previous sections have sought to show how Elías's writings from the early and mid-1940s were not just writing performances but also queer performances; they express homoerotic interest and pleasure as well as anxiety in relation to same-sex desire. As such they were unquestionably important for Elías's personal development and sexual identity, even though we do not know to what extent they were built on his own life and experience. Through his poetry and prose Elías expressed paradoxical and complicated thoughts and feelings that he perhaps did not fully understand or could not write about in his notebooks. At the same time these texts are also a part of Elías's modernism – his engagement with contemporary issues – and manifest that queer sexuality was, from the very beginning of his career, a part of the modern life he expressed and dealt with in his fiction.

Elías's most important queer writing performance in the early and mid-1940s, however, is a novel about a boy in Reykjavík; a story he thought about for many years and revised several times. The original working title was "Karlmenni" ('A masculine man'). Elías explains in a comment in volume XXIX of his collected works, transcribed in 1948: "The story is a funny and sad description of the life in Reykjavík," the protagonist is a nine-year-old boy who is lonesome and sad, his father is an alcoholic who ends up in

[569] In 1944 and 1945 Elías notes that he reads the following books: Havil, *Raunhæft ástalíf*; Karl Evang, *Heilbrigði og högun kynferðislífsins*; Kristiane Skjerve, *Heilsufræði hjóna*; Katrín Thoroddsen, *Frjálsar ástir. Erindi um takmarkanir barneigna*; Vilmundur Jónsson, *Afkynjanir og vananir. Greinargerð fyrir frumvarpi til laga um að heimila í viðeigandi tilfellum aðgerðir á fólki, er koma í veg fyrir, að það auki kyn sitt*; R. Y. Hoptons and Anna Balliol, *Rekkjusiðir*.

[570] "Hann starir alltaf á mig, hvar sem hann sér mig og virðist stundum vera nokkuð nervös. Ég hugsa að hann viti, hver ég er." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 2 November 1944. *Heilsufræði hjóna* does not discuss homosexuality but includes a paragraph which states that for the sake of genetic quality homosexuals should not be allowed to have children. See Skjerve, *Heilsufræði hjóna*, 85.

prison and dies and his mother is very poor. Elías started writing "Karlmenni" in 1938 but never finished it; instead he rethought it and continued writing it with new titles.[571] In "Baldur" ('Baldur') the boy is twelve years old and lives in a small village,[572] but in "Börnin á mölinni" ('The urban children'), a draft from 1941–42, the protagonist is called Jón Hansson and lives in Reykjavík. In 1944, however, Jón had become Halldór Óskar Magnússon and Elías began to refer to the novel as "Man eg þig löngum." Elías explains that all these drafts are

> the same story, at least they all have the same theme: a lonesome boy of little consequence, either an orphan or far away from his parents, sometimes living with his sick mother; he grows older with the author, is a part of him – but certainly not really him, least of all in "Man eg þig löngum," at least with regard to origins and conditions; other factors may be somewhat related.[573]

In 1950 Elías discusses *Man eg þig löngum* in a letter to Ragnar, his publisher, and says that it was a very personal and important novel for him – a book he needed to publish not only to debut as a writer but also for personal reasons:

> [It] was in many aspects a settlement with my teenage years, although I only willingly based the character Halldór Óskar Magnússon on one part of myself, perhaps the poorest part, the passive and purposeless *ljósvíkingur*-boy I was until I turned twenty.[574]

Elías was relieved when he had finished the draft and sent it home from Copenhagen by the end of 1946:

> I felt like I had confessed. I felt like I could calmly lie down without writing anything ever again. Not because I thought the story was so good, but because I felt I had passed a necessary stage. I knew I would never again write a story that was disconnected from the whole, the people, the times. I would never again spend paper on thoughts about myself without connecting them to the crowd. This story

[571] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XXIX.
[572] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XXX.
[573] "Raunverulega eru skáldsögur mínar "Karlmenni", "Baldur", "Börnin á mölinni" og "Man eg þig löngum" allar sama sagan, a.m.k. er í þeim öllum sama temað: umkomulítill, lítilsmegandi drengur, ýmist foreldralaus eða fjarri foreldrum sínum, í bezta falli hjá veikri móður sinni; hann eldist með höfundi sagnanna, er þáttur af honum – en alls ekki hann í verunni, sízt af öllu í "Man eg þig löngum", a.m.k. ekki hvað snertir uppruna og kjör; annað er kannski eitthvað skylt." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Collected works, vol. XXIX, notes on "Karlmenni."
[574] "Ég gerði uppkastið að henni, þegar ég var innan við tvítugt; og það var að miklu leyti uppgjör við unglingsár mín, endaþótt ég vitandi vits tæki aðeins einn þáttinn af sjálfum mér í persónuna Halldór Óskar Magnússon, ef til vill lakasta þáttinn, hinn passíva, ljósvíkingslega og stefnulausa dreng, sem ég sjálfur var allt fram til tvítugs." *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 97. "Ljósvíkingur" refers to a character in Halldór Laxness's novel *Heimsljós*; Ólafur Kárason, a poor man who wants nothing more than to become a poet.

> was therefore a turning point in my maturity, a turning point that "Eftir örstuttan leik" could never be.[575]

A short note, written by Elías in May 1944, also sheds light on the novel's personal value and his relationship with the protagonist. There he says that he feels more connected and related to Halldór than ever before:

> I am physically and mentally exhausted, failed an exam, mired in bottomless debt, so that I can barely breathe, I see no light in this foggy darkness of uncertainty and helplessness, so I begin to write the story of Halldór Óskar Magnússon, my friend and mental kinsman, weakling and intellectual, who still never wished to become a writer. […] Never before have I been such a weakling, as I am now, – and I anticipate to sink even deeper. I anticipate misery, hunger, sickness, both mental and physical. I anticipate a moment when I am entirely lone in the world, like Halldór Óskar Magnússon in the last days of his service.[576]

Elías does not directly address sexuality or sexual issues in the letter to Ragnar or other documents where he discusses *Man eg þig löngum*. His sexuality was, however, unquestionably one of the aspects of his teenage years he settled with, or at least dealt with, by writing the novel. As will be outlined in chapter five the protagonist Halldór Óskar Magnússon is dealing with a severe existential crisis in which his masculinity and sexuality are of central importance. In the eyes of many twenty-first century readers it may seem evident that Halldór is homosexual but Elías's contemporaries either did not see it or willingly ignored it.[577] By the end of the book Halldór meets a man who shows him homoerotic pictures and touches him. His reaction is fear and panic; he runs off and on the last page he leaves Reykjavík with no money or support and his future is an unwritten page. He thus never accepts his same-sex desires. Elías later said that he meant to write a

[575] "Þegar ég hafði lokið henni um miðjan desember, fannst mér ég hafa skriftað. Mér fannst ég geta rólegur lagzt út af án þess að skrifa meir. Ekki vegna þess, að mér þætti sagan svona góð, heldur vegna hins, að ég fann, að ég hafði lagt að baki nauðsynlegan áfanga. Ég vissi, að ég myndi aldrei skrifa sögu framar, sem væri laus við allt samband við heildina, fólkið, tímann. Ég myndi aldrei framar eyða pappír í þankabrot um sjálfan mig, án sambands við fjöldann. Þar af leiðandi markaði sagan tímamót í þroska mínum, tímamót, sem "Eftir örstuttan leik" hafði enga aðstöðu til að marka." *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 97–98.

[576] "Þreyttur á sál og líkama, fallin [sic] á prófi, sokkinn í botnlaust skuldafen, svo að ég næ varla andanum, eygjandi enga minnstu ljósglætu í þokumyrkri óvissu og vanmáttar, byrja eg að rita söguna um Halldór Óskar Magnússon, vin minn og andlegt skyldmenni, aumingja og gáfumann, sem þó hafði aldrei nokkra minnstu löngun til þess að verða skáld. […] Ég hefi aldrei verið slíkur aumingi, sem eg er nú, – og ég horfi fram á það, að sökkva ennþá dýpra. Ég horfi fram á eymd, hungur, sjúkdóma bæði andlega og líkamlega. Ég sé fyrir mér þá stund, þegar ég stend algjörlega einmana í heiminum, rétt eins og Halldór Óskar Magnússon varð, seinustu daga hervistar sinnar." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. CC. Documents from the college years. Box 3. "Þreyttur á sál og líkama."

[577] None of the reviewers mention Halldór's sexuality, although Bjarni Benediktsson suggests that his crisis and misfortune can maybe be explained by something that happens by the end of the book. Bjarni may thus have understood that the book was really about the boy's homosexuality but not dared to discuss it. Bjarni Benediktsson, "Elías Mar. Man eg þig löngum," *Þjóðviljinn*, 12 April 1949.

sequel in which it would be revealed that Halldór was homosexual, he would become a writer, take the pen name Ómar and go by the name Halldór Óskar Magnússon Ómar, aptly abbreviated to HÓMÓ.[578] This book remained unwritten, however, because Elías had lost interest in Halldór's story – perhaps because he had himself matured and learned to deal with the sexual issues and crisis that Halldór represented.

The novel Elías wrote and repeatedly rewrote in 1938–1946 – when he was fourteen to twenty-two years old – thus eventually became a story about a young man who desires other men but is not ready, or willing, to accept his same-sex desire or identify as homo- or bisexual. The earlier versions of the novel do not focus on sexuality, perhaps understandably since the protagonist is young – in "Baldur" and "Börnin á mölinni" he is eleven to fourteen years old. They do, however, deal with various issues that are also apparent in the final version of the novel and create a setting for *Man eg þig löngum*: A working-class environment in Reykjavík in the early 1940s. "Börnin á mölinni," the longest and most thoroughly processed draft, manifests Elías's early determination to take Reykjavík seriously as a setting for contemporary fiction; the title suggests that it is a text that will contradict the idealisation of the rural novel and 'healthy upbringing' in the countryside. The story directly addresses the differences between growing up in the city and the countryside in a chapter where Jón and his friend Láki are playing outside; the narrator notes that urban boys "show vigour and largely create their environment, just like the boys in the countryside, who round up horses and cows and save lambs from high cliff ledges."[579] Rural children are more innocent and happy when they play and their games are directly related to their work in the future, the narrator says, but their childhood ends too early. Urban children, on the other hand, often play simply to make time pass and their games are diverse, which can be both good and bad; they are exciting but sometimes turn into small crimes and pranks. Neither rural nor urban life is idealised, however; the narrator points out positive and negative aspects of both worlds.[580]

Man eg þig löngum was Elías's first published text that indisputably dealt with same-sex sexuality – although the protagonist in *Eftir örstuttan leik* is also queer as chapter four outlines. Writing and publishing *Man eg þig löngum* was thus a radical and epochal performance although Elías handled Halldór's sexuality in a careful and inscrutable

[578] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 57; Kolbrún Bergþórsdóttir, "Er ekki færibandahöfundur," 24. See ch. 5.
[579] "Því drengirnir á mölinni sýna hreysti sína og skapa umhverfi sitt að miklu leyti, alveg eins og drengirnir í sveitinni, sem sækja hesta og kýr og bjarga lömbum ofan úr svimandi háum klettastöllum." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. CC. Documents from the college years. "Börnin á mölinni"; Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál*, 47.
[580] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar, "Börnin á mölinni"; Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál*, 17–74.

manner and thereby avoided homophobic criticism. The novel may also have helped Elías in the process of coming to terms with his same-sex desires; shortly after its publication he started to openly identify as bisexual and became one of the most notorious queers in Reykjavík.

3.3.4 Erotic triangles

Elías was never known as a playwright but in 1949 and 1950 he wrote at least two play drafts, "Nóttin" ('The Night') and "Þrír vegir" ('Three Ways'). They do not discuss homosexuality directly but yet again there are important queer elements in Elías's texts. The two plays share certain characteristics; both focus on intense or emotionally charged male friendships and conflicts between men who are, or have been, romantically involved with the same woman. Among the most prominent themes are, in other words, erotic triangles and male bonding that may, or may not, be interpreted as sexual. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) Sedgwick discusses male homosocial desire – a term which covers the entire continuum between social and sexual male bonds – and pays special attention to erotic triangles that consist of two men and a woman.[581] The main passion in such triangles is often between the men, rather than a man and a woman, she notes. The triangle manifests the "routing of homosocial desire through women"[582] and a patriarchal social structure where men fight for power and women are mere objects. Yet it is also a (heterosexual) frame through which homosocial desire – including homosexual desire – can be expressed and Elías's plays certainly explore the possibilities of such framing.

The most intense relationship in "Nóttin" is between Þráinn, a young physician and son of a district magistrate, and Heiðbjartur, an artist and labour leader in a small village in Iceland. The two young men grew up in the village but have not met since they were boys. Heiðbjartur has feelings for a woman, Snót, but she starts an affair with Þráinn who has just returned home after studying abroad. Þráinn has strikingly strong opinions on Heiðbjartur; he despises his labour activism, art and what he refers to as his lack of masculinity and he claims that Heiðbjartur is sick and underdeveloped – "stagnated in the embryonic stage of development."[583] Þráinn describes himself, however, as healthy and normal. Heiðbjartur is very passionate about the strike he is organising but feels misunderstood and lonely. He identifies strongly with an old man, Blindi-Gvendur, or Gvendur the blind, an outsider who has served time in jail. Gvendur is not really blind but

[581] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, 1–2.
[582] Ibid. 49.
[583] "En það er kallað, að maðurinn standi kyrr á hinu embryonicska þroskastigi." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. AF. Plays. "Nóttin."

lives in symbolic darkness; he claims to be 'committed to the night' – the world of those who are socially marginalised. By the end of the play Heiðbjartur also 'chooses the night' and leaves the village, his family, Þráinn and Snót: "The night awaits me. […] The night awaits us all. – Me, who am not able to live. You, who do not know your time has come."[584] In "Nóttin" 'the night' and 'darkness' are thus strongly associated with social exclusion and deviancy. Gvendur and Heiðbjartur are marginalised because of their political actions or crimes and also because of their supposed sickness and lack of masculinity – they are 'abnormal.' The play's queerness consists first and foremost in these associations and Heiðbjartur's and Gvendur's decisions to choose the world of the abnormal rather than normative society. Yet the relationship between Þráinn and Heiðbjartur also has queer connotations, especially as they are joined in an erotic triangle. Snót 'heterosexualises' Þráinn's and Heiðbjartur's relationship and simultaneously ties them together; Þráinn's extremely negative reaction to Heiðbjartur is represented, or disguised, as jealousy and rivalry but can easily be seen as his emotional struggle in relation to same-sex desire.

Homosocial desire is also central in "Þrír vegir" where a young man, Þórir, meets Tryggvi, his old primary school teacher. Both are very happy to be reunited and express how much they appreciated each other when Þórir was in school. It turns out, however, that Þórir is now seeing Tryggvi's ex-wife, Jarþrúður, and Tryggvi reacts with anger and frustration – not because he is still in love with Jarþrúður but because he does not want Þórir to be with her. He warns Þórir that Jarþrúður will "trap him" and claims that she is unfeminine because she seeks to maintain power over men. After this conversation Þórir goes home to Jarþrúður and tells her that he feels conflicted:

> There has even been more than one occasion where I have left you feeling disgusted by myself. […] A few hours later I have returned – and felt, that I have one friend, just one, and that friend is you. […] But two powers are fighting over me. I don't know which one of them is better. I think they are both evil.[585]

Tryggvi then arrives and starts fighting with Jarþrúður; he wants Þórir to leave with him and says he has a job for him, but Jarþrúður begs Þórir to stay. Þórir eventually leaves on his own, however, and tells them that he chooses "the third way" – neither Tryggvi nor Jarþrúður.

[584] "Mín bíður nóttin. […] Nóttin bíður okkar allra. – Mín, sem ekki er fær um að lifa. Ykkar, sem ekki þekkið ykkar vitjunartíma." Ibid.
[585] "Það hefur jafnvel komið fyrir oftar en einu sinni, að ég hefi farið héðan frá þér með viðbjóð á sjálfum mér […]. Nokkrum stundum síðar hefi ég svo komið hingað aftur – og fundið, að ég hefi átt einn vin, aðeins einn, og sá vinur ert þú. […] En það eru tvö öfl sem togast á um mig. Ég veit ekki hvort þeirra er betra. Ég held þau séu bæði ill." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. AF. Plays. "Þrír vegir."

The power struggle in this play differs in some significant ways from "Nóttin." Jarþrúður has much more agency than Snót as she actively participates in the triangle dynamic; Þórir has intense relationships with both Tryggvi and Jarþrúður, feels trapped between them and eventually rejects them both. The 'frame' is heterosexual – a love triangle – but all three characters are queer in the sense that they violate against normative gender and sexuality; Jarþrúður is assertive and conceived as masculine, Tryggvi has strong feelings for Þórir, and Þórir is disgusted by himself when he is in the heterosexual relationship with Jarþrúður. The play's queerest performance, however, is when Þórir chooses the "third way"; an alternative to heterosexual and homosocial/sexual desire. He and Heiðbjartur both choose 'something else' – neither the heterosexual relationship nor the male friend – and the two plays thus end with uncertainty; the queer characters walk into the unknown and their future is a blank page. Such (queer) uncertainty and open endings are also important characteristics in Elías's novels from the late 1940s as chapters four, five and six will outline.

3.4 An artist/homosexual

In August 1950, shortly after Elías returned home from London, he published an article in the magazine *Líf og list* titled "Einn þáttur úr Lundúnaveldi" ('A story from London'), where he – as the title suggests – tells his fellow Icelanders about the life in London. This text is not a glorification of the cosmopolitan city; Elías addresses the readers and tells them about urban people who live in the shadows and appear after dusk; people full of pain, guilt, shame, hopelessness and suspicion. These people are a part of the city although most people do not want to see them, Elías says and emphasises that there are many other sides of London than the museums and other sites tourists visit in bright daylight. You cannot know London, he says, if you have

> never bothered to take a walk during the night, leave your nice clothes behind for a while, and take on the image of the pauper; never known the life of the thief, the black marketeer, the sexual invert, the drug addict, the whore, the gambler or the beggar. The cosmopolitan city is not a magnificent building, royalty or a park. The cosmopolitan city is the yellow-blue, limpid face of the night, the face that never sees the sun, the face of those who live in the underworld.[586]

[586] "Og samt hefurðu ekki hina minnstu hugmynd um Lundúnaborg; vegna þess að þú hefur aldrei lagt það á þig að ganga úti að nóttu til, segja um stund skilið við betri fötin þín og tekið á þig mynd fátæklings; aldrei kynnzt lífi þjófsins, svartamarkaðsbraskarans, kynhverfingsins, eiturlyfjaneytandans, skækjunnar, fjárhættuspilarans eða betlarans. Heimsborgin er ekki glæsileg bygging, konungafólk eða trjágarður. Heimsborgin er hið gulbláa, tæra andlit næturinnar, andlitið sem aldrei lítur sólina, andlit þess sem byggir undirheima." Elías Mar, "Einn þáttur úr Lundúnaveldi," 21.

Elías argues that those who do not want to get to know the underworld or try to understand its inhabitants ignore the reasons why some people are in an unfortunate situation – and they also ignore "the love that dare not speak its name."[587] The main virtue in the underworld is silence; an understanding of human nature and "the liberality and open-mindedness of those who **do not judge.**"[588]

With this article Elías brings homosexuality into public discourse; he becomes one of the few Icelanders who publicly addresses the issue in the media in a non-condemning manner. He does indeed associate homosexuality with a foreign country and 'outcasts' such as drug addicts and thieves, which was a common practice, especially later in the 1950s as chapter two outlined, but his conclusion is quite radical: That the society must learn to appreciate and accept marginal people instead of judging them. Hjálmar Sveinsson has also argued, most convincingly, that this article can be seen as Elías's writer manifesto; that writers must treat their subject with respect and understanding and write about the 'hidden' and marginal parts of the society as well as the world of the bourgeois and idealised countryside.[589] It expresses, in fact, an idea which is very similar to Elías's articulation of *aktúel* novels in his letter to Ragnar and the introduction to *Vögguvísa* which was published in *Líf og list* a month after the publication of the London article: He wants to represent the 'ugly' sides of the modern world and introduce his readers to people in marginal and often complicated situations. Yet the article differs from Elías's previously published writings in that it addresses homosexuality directly – it manifests, in other words, that Elías has become confident enough to discuss the topic publicly.

The 15 months Elías spent in Copenhagen in 1946–1947 were a watershed period in his life. Not only did he finish *Man eg þig löngum* and publish his first book – he presumably had his first sexual acquaintances with men while he was there.[590] His reading list suggests that he was thinking about sexual matters but among the books he reads while he is abroad are Havelock Ellis's *Study of the Psychology of Sex* and a Danish book about

[587] "[…] er hvergi getið um ástina sem ekki þorir að nefna nafn sitt […]." Ibid. 22.
[588] "Í þeim hópi er þögnin höfuðdyggð, skilningur og þekking á mannlegu eðli nauðsynlegur hæfileiki, ásamt afleiðingum þessa alls, sem er: frjálslyndi og víðsýni þess sem **ekki dæmir**." Ibid. Emphasis original.
[589] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 68–71.
[590] Elías never mentions lovers or discusses homosexuality in his notebooks in 1946–47, but he later talked about his first same-sex sexual experience in Copenhagen. See Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi,* 51–53; Ásgeir Þ. Ingvarsson, "Elías Mar! Hvað erum við að gera?" He also said, however, that he had been with a man once before he went to Copenhagen. See Pétur Blöndal, *Sköpunarsögur*, 276.

young men's sexuality.[591] He also mentions women more often in his notebooks than before and in Copenhagen he has intimate relationships with at least two women.[592] Elías thus returns to Reykjavík in October 1947 with a new sexual and romantic experience.

The word "homosexuality" appears for the first time in Elías's notebooks in March 1948 in relation to his friend and mentor Þórður Sigtryggsson. "I had a long conversation with Steinn Steinarr about Þórður Sigtryggsson's homosexuality," Elías writes, and the next day he notes that he has started to read *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Krafft-Ebing.[593] Elías and Þórður had known each other for a long time; Elías's grandmother, Guðrún, paid Þórður for teaching Elías to play the organ when the boy was eight years old.[594] Þórður introduced Elías to classical music which became one of Elías's passions; in his notebooks from 1944 and onward he documents the classical music pieces he listens to in the same manner as the films and plays he sees, the books he reads and whom he visits. Þórður was homosexual and quite outspoken about sexual matters but he was also a respected organist and intellectual and Guðrún does not seem to have been worried about him spending time with Elías. Elías later noted, however, that Þórður approached him sexually when he was seventeen, without result.[595] After Elías comes home from Copenhagen he and Þórður become good friends[596] and in 1948 Elías sometimes notes when Þórður tells him about his own sexuality and other homosexuals and shows Elías books about sexual matters.[597] In December 1950 Þórður moreover writes a letter to Elías and expresses his regrets about the fact that their relationship was never sexual when Elías was younger: "But that was your fault, not mine. You did not know your time had come."[598]

In 1948–1950 Elías gradually becomes more honest about his sexual relationships in the notebooks, for example about the women he sees in Reykjavík, Finland and London. He sometimes writes that he has had "a very good time" with them, that he spends nights

[591] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1946–1947. 2 August 1946 he notes that he has started reading "Den unge mands kønsliv" by a writer named "H Olsen", and on 2 May 1947 he begins to read *Kønslivets Psykologi*, a Danish translation of Ellis's work.
[592] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1946–1947. Elías later confirmed that he had had two girlfriends in Copenhagen, see Ásgeir Þ. Ingvarsson, "Elías Mar! Hvað erum við að gera?"
[593] "Tala lengi við Stein Steinarr um hómósexúalitet Þórðar Sigtryggssonar." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 29–30 March 1948.
[594] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 24; Þorsteinn Antonsson, "Sú leynda ást," 23.
[595] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 58; Pétur Blöndal, *Sköpunarsögur*, 275–76. This incident became an inspiration for a scene in *Man eg þig löngum*, see ch. 5.1.3 and 5.4.
[596] Guðjón Friðriksson, *Reykjavík bernsku minnar. Nítján Reykvíkingar segja frá*, 41–53, here 52.
[597] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 26 June and 3 September 1948.
[598] "En það er þín sök, en ekki mín. Þú þekktir ekki þinn vitjunartíma." *Lbs.* 952 NF. Þórður Sigtryggsson. Box 1. Þórður Sigtryggsson to Elías Mar, 3 December 1950.

with them, that he "likes them very much" and has "intimate conversations" with them.[599] The first time he says similar things about men, however, is in June 1950, while he is in London. On 10 June he writes in his notebook that he has met "a young negro" and walked with him, a few days later they have lunch together and Elías says that he is "a wonderful boy."[600] In a draft titled "From The Underworld" – a three-page-long journal, dated on 8 June 1950, which seems to be an early version of the London article – Elías discusses his acquaintance with the city's nightlife, especially homosexual men he sees. He describes their appearance in detail, including a man's strikingly large genitalia and feminine movements. Another man tells Elías that he has been watching him and invites him to a club – and Elías is quite excited because he has never been to such 'special clubs' in London. A week later, on 16 June, he concludes the journal with these words:

> My entries in this journal have been delayed, when I think twice I feel that it is my obligation not to continue with it – for the time being. It would also take too much time from my other projects, if I would write it in necessary detail.[601]

These days in mid-June 1950 were thus quite eventful in terms of Elías's sexual encounters with men and for the first time – as far as we know, based on his preserved personal archives – he writes directly about his same-sex desire. He is careful, however; in "From The Underworld" he notes that the police might be entertained if they found the draft and he eventually decides not to continue writing it. He is, in other words, aware of the fact that his actions are illegal in London and that journals are readily used as evidence in criminal cases.

The months Elías lives in London thus seem to have been another watershed period; it is at least striking how open and honest he becomes about sexual matters after he returns to Reykjavík in the summer of 1950. According to his notebooks his sex life is blooming and he has sexual relationships with people of both genders – sometimes two or more individuals at the same time.[602] By the end of 1950, in other words, Elías has started to

[599] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1948–1950. See e.g. 18 May 1948, 25 July 1949, 3 December 1949 and 11 March 1950.
[600] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 10 and 13 June 1950.
[601] "Það hefur dregizt, að skrifaði meira í þennan dagbókarþátt, þegar ég hugsa mig um finn ég, að það er skylda mín að halda honum ekki áfram – að svo stöddu. Enda myndi hann taka of langan tíma frá öðrum störfum mínum, ef ég skrifaði hann svo nákvæmlega sem þyrfti." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. AE. Essays, articles, reviews and memoirs. 1943–1958. "From The Underworld."
[602] In October 1950 Elías starts using gendered symbols and numbers in his notebooks to indicate his sexual partners.

write about his bisexuality in his notebooks and same-sex sexual activity has become a part of his everyday life.[603]

3.4.1 Writer struggle

The months in London were, like the time in Copenhagen, an important time in Elías's writing career as well as his personal life. In these cities – London in particular – he had opportunities to hide in the crowd, explore homosexual subcultures and develop his sexual identity; expand his world-view and familiarise himself with new cultures and currents.[604] When he left Iceland in November 1949 to study literature at University College London he was twenty-five years old and had already published two books, which was more than most of his friends had done.[605] Yet he was thirsty for more and felt hopeful that his new novel, *Vögguvísa*, and the short story collection would soon be published. That process was more difficult than he anticipated, however.

Elías had left the manuscript of *Vögguvísa* with his publisher but Ragnar later claimed that he had never promised to publish it. As the weeks in London pass Elías becomes more concerned about not hearing from Ragnar, not least because he needs the money. He received a scholarship and the Icelandic government paid for his flight but letters from Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson manifest that Elías's financial situation in London is difficult. Vilhjálmur assists Elías with his finances and foreign currency permits, like he did when Elías was in Copenhagen and Finland, but his letters from February to June 1950 show that he cannot send money to London because Elías does not have any – he is broke. Vilhjálmur takes great pains to help his friend; he even sells a story he finds in Elías's desk and applies for a writer's grant in his name.[606] In March he writes in a tired tone: "You have prepared your trip like a child. You have to deal with the consequences yourself." In

[603] Elías continues to read books about sexual matters. He reads the Kinsey report while he is in Finland in June 1949 and a few months later *Sexual Anomalies* by Magnus Hirschfeld. *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 22 June 1949 and 12 January 1950.

[604] On queer culture, politics and identities in London in the early and mid-twentieth century, see e.g. Houlbrook, *Queer London.*

[605] Hannes Sigfússon's first book, *Dymbilvaka*, was published in 1949 and Jón Óskar and Sigfús Daðason published their first books in 1951–52.

[606] The application was rejected and Elías did thus not receive a writer's grant in 1950. The story Vilhjálmur sold to the journal *Samvinnan* was "Á bekk með skáldum á hvítu torgi," which had already been published three years earlier in *Þjóðviljinn*. Vilhjálmur did not know that and presumably did not care either; his main concern was to earn money for Elías. See *Lbs.* 13 NF. Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson to Elías Mar, 28 May 1950.

June he finally asks Elías to come home and take care of his own matters and by the end of July Elías is back in Reykjavík.[607]

Elías probably never registered at the university; he never received the payment for *Vögguvísa* he expected from Ragnar and could thus not pay the fees.[608] Vilhjálmur, who had been a mediator between Elías and Ragnar when *Eftir örstuttan leik* was published, refused to talk to Ragnar and ask him about *Vögguvísa* or payments in a letter to Elías written by the end of December 1949.[609] Two weeks later Elías writes a dry letter to Ragnar where he says that he "assumes" that Ragnar will want to publish *Vögguvísa* "as soon as possible," and requests, rather than asks, that Ragnar will send him 3000 kroner so he can pay the university fees and continue his studies.[610] Ragnar never replies, perhaps because he thinks the young writer has become somewhat too arrogant and demanding.[611] In April 1950 Elías writes another letter to Ragnar asking for money. This time Ragnar replies, rather annoyed, and says that he has not decided what he will do with the manuscript. He tells Elías that his "boring book" – referring to *Man eg þig löngum* – has not sold well, and explains that he cannot afford to publish non-profitable books. If I ever become so wealthy, he says, I will publish your "Þjóðvísa," that is, if you have not found another publisher "who does not publish books to make other people buy them, but rather for himself, like a painting that no-one except the owner is ever allowed to see."[612]

For the first time in his career Elías has to fight to get his book published. *Eftir örstuttan leik* was a somewhat successful debut, which presumably made it easier for Elías to get Ragnar to publish *Man eg þig löngum*, and Vilhjálmur's assistance should not be underestimated – he was Ragnar's childhood friend.[613] Now, however, Elías is on his own, and *Man eg þig löngum* has made Ragnar sceptical. It has not sold well and Ragnar is not the only one who thinks it is 'boring'; a similar view is expressed in Kristmann Guðmundsson's and Bjarni Benediktsson's reviews, as noted earlier. Elías's confidence and nerve may also have had a negative impact on Ragnar. Last, but not least, it is not

[607] "Þú hefur undirbúið för þína út eins og barn. Þú verður að taka afleiðingunum af því og þú ert einn um það." *Lbs.* 13 NF. Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson to Elías Mar, 30 March 1950. See also letters from 22 April, 28 May and 12 June and *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 27 July 1950.
[608] Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 94.
[609] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson to Elías Mar, 29 December 1949.
[610] "[…] ég geri ráð fyrir, að þú munir vilja sjá um útgáfu hennar við fyrsta tækifæri […]." *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 14 January 1950.
[611] See Jón Karl Helgason, *Mynd af Ragnari í Smára*, 96–102.
[612] "[…] og þá kemur Þjóðvísan þín á prent, nema þú hafir áður kynnst öðrum útgefanda, sem ekki gefur út bækur til að prakka þeim inná annað fólk, heldur lætur gera þær handa sjálfum sér eins og málverk, sem enginn utan eigandinn fær nokkurntíma augum litið." *Lbs.* 9 NF. Ragnar Jónsson to Elías Mar, first day of summer (20 April) 1950. See also Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 95; Jón Karl Helgason, *Mynd af Ragnari í Smára*, 97–98.
[613] Jón Karl Helgason, *Mynd af Ragnari í Smára*, 77–78, 97–98.

impossible that Ragnar was not in every respect content with the homosexual theme in *Man eg þig löngum* and thus became wary of publishing another book by Elías. He never says this directly, yet his letter to Elías includes references to homosexuality that suggest that he was at least aware of Elías's interest in men.

First of all, as Jón Karl Helgason has pointed out, Ragnar calls the novel "Þjóðvísa," which may simply be a miswriting but could also be a reference to a famous poem with the same title by Tómas Guðmundsson – also published by Ragnar.[614] The speaker of the poem is (seemingly) a girl who describes her love affair with a young man, yet the first line evokes questions about who the speaker really is: "I thought I was a young girl and intended to exist." The speaker's gender, and consequently their sexuality, is undermined here – the speaker *thinks* they are a girl. The poem can thus be interpreted as homoerotic as Guðmundur Andri Thorsson has suggested.[615] Secondly, Ragnar's words about the publisher, who behaves like a man who owns a painting but does not allow anyone else to see it, is a rather obvious reference to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – to Basil who paints a portrait of the beautiful and charming Dorian but cannot exhibit the painting because he has put too much of himself into it, and to Dorian himself who hides the painting because it contains his secret. Both Basil's and Dorian's secrets have been interpreted as same-sex desire and Ragnar's reference to the publisher and the painting, as well as to the gender-ambiguous speaker in "Þjóðvísa," may thus point to the homosexual theme in *Man eg þig löngum*, or even to Elías's own sexuality. The question if Ragnar resisted publishing *Vögguvísa* because he disliked the homosexual theme in *Man eg þig löngum* remains unanswered but Elías later asserted that Ragnar would never have published the sequence in which Halldór Óskar Magnússon Ómar was supposed to 'come out.'[616]

Demanding that Ragnar would publish *Vögguvísa* within a year from the release of *Man eg þig löngum* was perhaps a bold move. It says much about Elías's confidence, however, and so does the next letter he sends to Ragnar. In May 1950 he writes a long reply, referred to earlier in this chapter, in which he defends himself and his books and explains why he thinks Ragnar should publish *Vögguvísa*. He tells him how personal and important *Man eg þig löngum* was for him and says that it was not just the book's fault that it did not sell – Ragnar never advertised it properly. But such things should not matter, he says, because books by young and aspiring writers rarely make profit; the publishers need to be patient. Elías moreover assures Ragnar that

[614] Ibid. 100.
[615] Guðmundur Andri Thorsson, "Orðlausir draumar."
[616] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 58.

> [t]here will be a day when "Man eg þig löngum" will be considered to be a more noteworthy novel than it is now. People will read it from other perspectives then they have done so far. […] The time will come when you will not be blamed for publishing it, but rather the opposite.[617]

It is tempting to suggest, as Jón Karl Helgason has done, that with these words Elías is referring to the novel's focus on homosexuality and that he is predicting that it will be read differently in the future when same-sex desire is not repressed, hidden or ignored.[618] Elías assures Ragnar that *Vögguvísa* is a different kind of novel but implies that Ragnar has not realised that because he has not even read the manuscript, hence his miswriting of the title. Elías convincingly argues that the book deserves to be published and says that he thinks a fair price would be at least 10.000 kroner, but that he is willing to let Ragnar publish "the first edition without paying me anything, on the condition that it will be out by Christmas the latest."[619] This last offer shows that Elías is desperate to publish the book and values money less than publication but it also shows his confidence and faith in *Vögguvísa*; by referring specifically to a 'first edition' he seems to be hopeful that the novel will sell well and be reprinted.

Whether it was the result of Elías's convincing arguments or his offer to take no payment Ragnar eventually gave in. Soon after Elías returns from London in July 1950 they come to an agreement; if Elías can collect subscribers Ragnar will publish both *Vögguvísa* and the short story collection *Gamalt fólk og nýtt*. The books are proofread in October and November and on 15 December they are both available in bookstores in Reykjavík.[620] That day the editor and literary scholar Kristinn E. Andrésson invites Elías to a party and the young man who five years earlier fantasised about being a published writer thus celebrates the publication of his third and fourth book in the company of Halldór Laxness, Þórbergur Þórðarson, Jón Óskar, Jóhannes úr Kötlum and many other respected figures in the literary field.[621] The London article is published in the midst of the publication process which shows that Elías's ambition and struggle to get his writings published goes hand in hand with his effort to publicly address homosexuality. A few months later, moreover, Elías has become a patron at the controversial café, Adlon, at

[617] "'Man eg þig löngum" mun einhverntíma verða talin merkilegri bók en hún er talin nú. Fólk mun lesa hana út frá öðrum sjónarmiðum en hingað til. […] Sú stund mun koma, að þér verður ekki legið á hálsi fyrir að hafa gefið hana út, heldur hið gagnstæða." *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950.
[618] Jón Karl Helgason, "Maður dagsins, seint og um síðir."
[619] "[…] þá gef ég þér hér með leyfi til að gefa skáldsöguna út í fyrstu útgáfu, án endurgjalds til mín, þó með því skilyrði, að hún komi á markað ekki síðar en fyrir næstu jól." *Lbs.* 9 NF. Elías Mar to Ragnar Jónsson, 7 May 1950; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 101.
[620] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1950, August–December.
[621] *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 15 December 1950.

Laugavegur 11 and one of the notorious artist/homosexuals that *Mánudagsblaðið* later condemned. He has, in other words, become a famous writer as well as a notorious homosexual.

3.5 Conclusion

Elías Mar's writing performances in the 1940s are quite remarkable and his published as well as unpublished texts – personal and fictional – manifest a strong ambition and persistent endeavour to become an acknowledged writer. These writings also show that Elías was from the beginning a political writer who above all wanted to make a difference with his work; to deal with complicated and sensitive contemporary issues, such as class division, generation gaps and the tension between rural and urban culture, and encourage his readers to think critically about the world around them. Last, but not least, Elías clearly saw same-sex desire as one of the aspects of modern life that contemporary fiction should deal with and in that respect he was inspired by for example Halldór Laxness whose take on homosexuality is unquestionably one of the factors that make *The Great Weaver from Kashmir* a modernist novel in Marshall Berman's understanding of the term – and an *aktúel* novel in the eyes of Elías Mar.

Berman's broad approach to modernism is useful in this context, not least because it shares important characteristics with Sedgwick's theory of queer performativity. At the core of Berman's argument is firstly how modernism seeks to point out and deal with the *paradoxes* inherent to capitalism, bourgeois norms and other aspects of modernity, and secondly that modernism is *performative* – modernist writings do not simply describe the modern condition, they seek to act and make a change.[622] Elías underlines the paradoxical nature of issues such as 'the situation' and the urban life in Reykjavík in his work, rather than for example idealising or condemning the city or the women, and he also exposes paradoxes inherent in himself, such as in relation to films and American pop culture. Such complications are also prominent in his writings on same-sex desire. He does not write about homosexuality as a stable or fixed identity in the 1940s but rather about the fusion of identification and desire. He writes about homosocial desire and the pleasures and fears associated with not knowing the true meaning of another man's gaze resting upon you, or if you want to *be* that man or *have* him, watch him or having his gaze resting on you. These writings are responses to sexual marginalisation and 'forced exile' and thus queer modernist work, as Love underlines;[623] they deal with life and the experience of not

[622] Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 15–37.
[623] Love, "Forced Exile."

conforming to heterosexual norms in times when modern sexual identity categories were becoming ever more influential and regulative in Iceland.

Elías's texts from the 1940s are performances in themselves but they are also performative in the sense that they 'create' a writer and through them Elías develops a writer identity. His published works often have a political purpose and are meant to incite social change. Yet his queer writing performances, published as well as unpublished, are perhaps his most important performances; performances that helped him on his journey towards accepting his same-sex desires, developing a bisexual identity and eventually becoming confident enough to speak publicly about queer sexuality. Moreover, with the London article in 1950 Elías brings homosexuality into public discourse. The novels he wrote in the 1940s do not address homosexuality directly in the sense that they use words like *kynvilla*, but as the next three chapters outline the texts also manifest Elías's will to express and discuss male same-sex desire in books that other people – not just himself – would read. This is particularly prominent in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum*, the novels Elías wrote almost simultaneously in 1945–1946.

4 *Eftir örstuttan leik*: Queer self-creation

It was perhaps to be expected that Elías Mar's first novel would be under strong influence from his favourite writer, Halldór Laxness. When Elías wrote *Eftir örstuttan leik* he had read *The Great Weaver* several times, as noted earlier, and he was later quite honest about its influence and that his protagonist, Bubbi, resembled Steinn Elliði:

> I [was] of course not attempting to write a new Weaver and the boy is not Catholic, but I feel now that there is something in him that came about under the influence of The Great Weaver.[624]

The intertextual links between those two novels are indeed striking. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir and Jón Karl Helgason have pointed out that like Steinn Elliði Bubbi is dealing with an existential crisis and searching for the meaning of life, and that he considers entering a monastery although he does not take vows like Steinn.[625] This chapter discusses, among other things, how the queerness in *The Great Weaver* is also present in *Eftir örstuttan leik*; how Bubbi, like Steinn, resists and struggles with normative bourgeois ideas and conventions, marriage, heterosexual love and family life. Elías's fascination with *The Great Weaver* was, after all, hardly a coincidence; Steinn Elliði's talk about sex with both men and women and revolt against heteronormative morality must have struck and inspired Elías as a young queer reader.

Eftir örstuttan leik is set in Reykjavík in 1945 and tells the story of a few months in the life of the character-narrator, Þórhallur, who goes by the nickname Bubbi. He is a twenty-year-old student and lives in a big house with his father who works as a teacher. Bubbi's mother died of childbirth when he was seven years old and the household has since then been operated by his aunt, Sigurbjörg, and maids who work and live in the house. In the novel Bubbi tells his readers about how he met, and was separated from, the love of his life, a girl named Anna. Yet the novel is not a love story but rather Bubbi's account of his own emotional, mental – and sexual – problems and how he deals with them.

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[624] "Ég er að sjálfsögðu ekki að reyna að skrifa nýjan Vefara og pilturinn er ekki kaþólskur en það er eitthvað í honum sem mér finnst núna að hafi orðið til vegna áhrifa Vefarans mikla." Kolbrún Bergþórsdóttir, "Er ekki færibandahöfundur," 24.

[625] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 470; Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 122. See Elías Mar, *Eftir örstuttan leik*, 186–87. References to *Eftir örstuttan leik* are hereafter abbreviated: (EÖL 186–87). Halldór Laxness dwelled in a monastery in Clervaux, Luxembourg, in 1922–23 and was baptised there. See Peter Hallberg, *Vefarinn mikli. Um æskuskáldskap Halldórs Laxness*; Halldór Guðmundsson, *Halldór Laxness. Ævisaga*, 119–43. Elías took lessons from pastor Boots in Reykjavík in 1944 and considered visiting a monastery but eventually decided not to get baptised. See *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 15 January and 1 April 1944; *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar to Guðmundur Pálsson, 4 September 1943; Elías Mar, "Litið til Landakots."

Bubbi is restless and unhappy even though he may seem to have everything a young man could want, such as money and good looks. His main concern is his sexuality and relationships with women; he has been sexually active from a young age but when the novel is set he has become utterly disgusted by sex. He decides to fight his desires and solve his crisis by abstaining from sex and women but his chastity vow is challenged when he falls in love. Unlike other women Anna makes him happy and for a few weeks he believes she will lead him out of his crisis. Their relationship does not last, however, because Anna's mother separates them after finding out about Bubbi's sexual behaviour in the past. Bubbi is again alone and depressed but instead of returning to the chastity vow he decides to deal with his problems by writing a book about himself, and this book is *Eftir örstuttan leik*. The novel is thus a Bildungsroman as well as a story about its own creation; a therapeutic process driven by Bubbi's sexual crisis.

There are no blunt discussions or representations of same-sex desire or homosexuality in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and yet there are, as Jón Karl and Dagný have outlined, indications that suggest that Bubbi's fear and frustration in relation to same-sex desire cause his sexual crisis.[626] The following discussion is inspired by Jón Karl's and Dagný's analyses but seeks to shed new light on Bubbi's sexuality by approaching it from the point of view of Sedgwick's theory of queer performativity. This is thus not an analysis of Bubbi's hidden or suppressed homosexuality but rather of how he performs queerness and how those performances are driven by his feeling of inferiority, self-disgust and shame. One of the advantages of Sedgwick's theory is that it allows us to think about various textual elements as performances that represent or express queerness but at the same time play an important role in the making and shaping of the character's identity. Such an approach is particularly feasible when reading *Eftir örstuttan leik* because Bubbi's crisis is not just sexual; it is a masculine identity crisis. He is disgusted by his desires and desperate to find out why he feels this way, who he is and how he can control his desires and become the man he wants to be – or feels he should become.

4.1 Sexual crisis

The first section of the novel's second chapter, titled "Dansleikur" ('Dance'), contains Bubbi's chaotic and somewhat paradoxical monologue where he tells his readers that he has known for a long time that he is "not in every respect" in good mental health.[627] He has been depressed, restless and mentally unstable and despite his young age he has faced much hardship which, in his opinion, has made him more experienced and mature than his

[626] Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar"; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið."
[627] "[…] að ég er ekki alls kostar heilbrigður unglingur andlega." (EÖL 26)

friends and contemporaries. He feels different from other people and has isolated himself because he does not believe his friends can understand him. "It has been very long since I took delight in the fellowship of a companion," he says and adds that he has turned to reading and studying a variety of psychological writings on the human drives and personality in expectation of understanding himself and learning how to deal with these issues.[628] Bubbi envies his friends and other young men who, unlike him, are "healthy and happy": "They have not taken on a yoke. They have enjoyed youth in a different way than I have. They have been lucky." Then he defends his behaviour and longings:

> I have tried to enjoy life. Is that a sin? – I ask. – No. It is not a sin. That is all. It cannot be sinful to act upon your healthy desires. Yet I have had to bear the consequences of allowing myself to enjoy life differently – and more fully – than they have. I have in certain ways been more unfortunate than them. But has that been my fault? I do not believe so.
>
> And yet I have now started to struggle so hard against my healthy desires that I am close to complete derangement. I have started to fear myself, – both my urges – and the wish to repress them. I'm revolted by myself, – and at the same time I admire myself. And my only goal is to overcome the imbalance in my psyche, – let my drives merge with the healthy meaningful life, which has always been available to me, and for which people have tried to make me aim, but to which I have not yet been able to conform.
>
> And yet that is the goal.
>
> I am an individual. – And I aspire to be an individual. All my life is headed towards being an independent personality. God knows, if he exists, if I will ever manage to reach that goal.[629]

[628] "Það er orðið langt síðan ég hef haft yndi af samveru við nokkurn einstakan félaga, – tiltölulega langt síðan." (EÖL 27) It is very hard, if not impossible, to capture the ambiguity of the phrase *nokkurn einstakan félaga* in English translation. *Félagi* ('companion') can refer to both men and women but it is more commonly used about men, and in this context – used by Bubbi who generally dislikes women – it seems likely that the companion is a man. *Einstakan* can mean 'one' – which suggests that Bubbi has been with one companion in particular – or 'special'; that he has been with a special companion. *Nokkurn einstakan félaga* can thus suggest that Bubbi has been with a (special) male friend, which in a queer reading would be meaningful, but it can also refer more generally to 'any companion.' In the latter case the sentence does not refer to close or special male bonding; Bubbi is then simply saying that it has been a long time since he has enjoyed being with any of his friends.

[629] "Þeir eru víst allir mjög heilbrigðir unglingar og hamingjusamir. Þeir hafa ekki bundið sig á neins konar klafa. Þeir hafa notið æskuáranna á annan hátt en ég. Þeir hafa verið lukkunnar pamfílar. – Ég hef reynt að njóta lífsins. Er það synd? – Ég spyr. – Nei. Það er ekki synd. Það er allt og sumt. Það getur ekki verið synd að hegða sér samkvæmt heilbrigðum löngunum sínum. Samt er því þannig farið með mig, að ég hef mátt súpa seyðið af því að hafa leyft mér að njóta lífsins á annan hátt – og í fyllra mæli – en þeir. Ég hef á vissan hátt verið ólánssamari en þeir. En hefur það verið mér að kenna? Því trúi ég ekki. […] Þó er ég nú orðið farinn að streitast svo mjög á móti heilbrigðum löngunum mínum, að ég nálgast algjöra sturlun. Ég er farinn að hræðast sjálfan mig, - bæði hvatir mínar – og löngunina til þess að bæla þær niður. Ég hef andstyggð á sjálfum mér, – og ég dýrka sjálfan mig jafnframt. Og ég keppi að því takmarki einu að sigrast á ójafnvæginu í sálarlífi mínu, – sameina hvatir mínar hinu heilbrigða, tilgangsríka lífi, sem jafnan hefur staðið mér til boða og reynt er að láta mig keppa að, en sem ég hef enn ekki fundið mig mann

This section evokes several questions: What are, in Bubbi's opinion, healthy and sick desires? What is the 'healthy meaningful life' he cannot live? What is it that he has done more of, or differently, than other young men? And what does he mean when he says that he wants to be 'an individual' and 'an independent personality'? As Dagný points out, it is evident that Bubbi desperately wants to tell the readers a big secret.[630]

In the remainder of the chapter Bubbi tells his readers about a night when he went to a dance and talked to Anna for the first time. He meets Anna in the ballroom, asks her to dance with him, they talk and enjoy each other's company and after the dance they walk half-way home together. When Bubbi comes home, however, he meets the housemaid, Lovísa, who is drunk and starts flirting with him. He reacts belligerently, brings her to tears and throws her out of the room. "I had resisted the temptation," Bubbi says and adds: "In the past months, I had been striving toward the goal. Now I had conquered yet another obstacle on my passage. […] I *had* to resist any kind of temptation, if I were to reach my goal and not give up."[631] The goal Bubbi has set for himself, as noted earlier, is to 'overcome the imbalance in his psyche' and live 'a healthy meaningful life' – and here he makes it clear that in order to reach that goal he needs to deny himself the company of women, especially sexual relations with them.

The mere thought of sexual encounters terrifies Bubbi and he finds memories of his "first experience of love" deeply humiliating (EÖL 47). What these memories entail is not spelt out but Bubbi implies, by adding that since he was twelve years old he has "instinctively despised all the housemaids in my father's house,"[632] that he has been having sex with the maids in his house since he was twelve. This implication is supported by his statement that by the time he was fourteen he had "learned more than enough" about sexual matters and that when he was a teenager he enjoyed the pleasures of sex so excessively that it became a habit.[633] Later in the book the reader also learns that he has conceived a baby with a girl named Bíbí. He is not, however, interested in being a father or participating in his son's life. His sexual relationships with women have had a very negative effect on him and he is disgusted by his own sexual behaviour and lack of self-

til að ganga upp í. […] Það er þó takmarkið. […] Ég er einstaklingur. – Og ég þrái að vera einstaklingur. Allt mitt líf stefnir að því að vera sjálfstæður persónuleiki. Það veit guð, ef hann er til, hvort mér mun nokkru sinni takast að ná því marki." (EÖL 27–28)

[630] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið," 116.

[631] "Ég hafði staðizt freistinguna […] Undanfarna mánuði hafði ég keppt að takmarkinu. Nú hafði ég sigrazt á enn einni hindruninni á leið minni. […] Ég *varð* að standast hvers kyns freistingar, ef ég ætlaði ekki að snúa við á leiðinni að takmarkinu." (EÖL 46)

[632] "En síðan ég var tólf ára gamall, hef ég ósjálfrátt fyrirlitið allar vinnukonur, sem verið hafa á heimili föður míns." (EÖL 47)

[633] "Öll vitneskja mín um sexúela hluti æsti upp í mér forvitni og löngun; og innan skamms hafði ég fengið að vita meira en nóg." (EÖL 47)

control (EÖL 28). Moreover, he notes that this is the reason why he started writing the book about himself – in other words, the core of his crisis (EÖL 47). Bubbi says that his friends were jealous of him when they were younger because he was confident around girls and knew how to approach them but that the careless and wild days of his youth are now over. He is trying to be independent and therefore chooses either to be alone or prefer "one girl over all the others"[634] – and this one girl is Anna.

It is possible that Bubbi is referring to masturbation – that he has masturbated excessively – but his words can also be interpreted so that the 'yoke' he has taken on is the consequences of excessive heterosexual sex – of having too much sex with too many women. Following that line of interpretation the healthy meaningful life he wants to live is a life where he is in control of his sexual desires and does not have too much sex – or any sex at all. For a few weeks, when he is with Anna, he manages to live such a life; he feels like he is "in close touch with the normal man's healthy life" and is not bothered with "seeking the abnormal," but this relief is only temporal.[635] Yet, like Jón Karl and Dagný have pointed out, the extreme fear and frustration Bubbi experiences in relation to his sexuality, and the fact that he sees himself as different from other 'healthy' young men, suggests that something is left unsaid – that same-sex desires might at least be a part of the problem, perhaps the core of his sexual crisis. Bubbi tries to convince himself and his readers that his desires are healthy and not sinful, but simultaneously fights and resists them, which suggests that he in fact sees them as sick and sinful. Same-sex desire is certainly not the only part of human sexuality that has been considered sinful, and Bubbi never explains what he means by 'healthy desire,' but in this context one of the possible interpretations – and the one this chapter builds on – is that his 'unhealthy' desire is a desire for men.

4.1.1 Nausea and self-disgust

Both Bubbi and Steinn Elliði in *The Great Weaver* are looking for true meaning in life and both believe celibacy will help them on that journey – women and sex gets in their way and disturbs them. Like Steinn, Bubbi searches for answers in philosophy and literature, as the following sections outline; yet he is not religious like Steinn who seeks comfort in God and the Catholic Church. In that respect Bubbi is perhaps more related to another existential anti-hero: Roquentin in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *La Nausée* (1938; *Nausea*), a

[634] "[…] tilraunum mínum til að ganga upp í einverunni, – "sjálfstæðinu", – eða einhverri einni stúlku fram yfir allar aðrar." (EÖL 67)
[635] "[…] nána snertingu við hið heilbrigða líf hins eðlilega manns og kærði sig ekki um að leita hins abnormala í hvers konar mynd sem það birtist." (EÖL 100)

depressed historian who has lost interest in his work and sees no purpose with his existence.[636]

The most striking trait Bubbi and Roquentin share is nausea. In Sartre's novel physical disgust manifests and underlines the protagonist's mental state; nausea is his bodily reaction to 'bad faith,' or people's ignorance towards the fact (according to Sartre's existential philosophy) that man is only what he chooses to be and nothing else.[637] James Wood thus notes that Roquentin

> is filled with revulsion. These pompous civilians imagine that their lives have meaning, and they believe that these paintings solemnize and preserve their imperishable achievements. They are merely examples of what Sartre would later call '*mauvaise foi*', or 'bad faith': they have concealed from themselves the awful dilemma of their existences.[638]

Disgust is similarly prominent in *Eftir örstuttan leik*; Bubbi's attitude towards the world around him is generally negative, he repetitively recalls being disdainful or disgusted by other people, food and sex. In the first chapter, for example, he experiences similar repulsion towards 'pompous civilians' as Roquentin; he goes to a restaurant and orders food but loses his appetite while waiting and eventually starts feeling sick. It is not just the food that disgusts Bubbi but also the surroundings; "middle-aged men dressed in grey with tie-pins, cuffed pants and well-groomed hair, fat bald men with a watch chain attached to the front of their vest,"[639] as well as "stupid" and "ignorant" waitresses (EÖL 21). His dislike of these people – bourgeois men and young women, fat, snobbish, stupid people – enhances his disgust of the food. But Bubbi is also full of *self*-contempt and *self*-disgust. As noted earlier he is revolted by his own sexual behaviour and he also says that he despises both the wild days of his youth and his current attempts to gain control over his sexual behaviour (EÖL 67). He is moreover disgusted when he realises how awkward he is on one of his first dates with Anna and the filth under his fingernails makes him feel self-disdain (EÖL 56). Bubbi's attitude towards his own body and personality is thus very negative and cannot simply be described as bad faith.

[636] Jón Karl Helgason, Dagný Kristjánsdóttir and Hjálmar Sveinsson have pointed out similarities between *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Nausea*: Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 118–19; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 470; Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 44. Elías did probably not read French and *Nausea* had not been published in English, Danish or Swedish translation when he wrote *Eftir örstuttan leik*. He may nevertheless have read about it and perhaps seen parts of it in magazines or 'home-made' translations.
[637] See e.g. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*.
[638] James Wood, "Introduction," xiii.
[639] "[…] miðaldra menn í gráum fötum og með nælu í bindinu, brot í buxunum og vel greitt hár, feitir menn með skalla og með úrkeðju framan á vestinu […]." (EÖL 21)

Issues concerning masculinity and sex are a prominent part of Roquentin's crisis; he tries to get back together with his ex-girlfriend, Anny, hoping that she will save him from his misery, but she does not want him.[640] Scholars such as Lawrence R. Schehr and Lawrence D. Kritzman have discussed same-sex sexuality in *Nausea*; Schehr notes that even though Sartre's philosophy emphasises the will of man and his freedom to choose his own faith homosexuality is only portrayed in *Nausea* as "guilty behavior."[641] Kritzman suggests that Roquentin desires men and that his despair – and hence his nausea – is incited by the fact that same-sex desire does not conform to the aggressive, self-made, "phallonormative" model of masculinity proposed by Sartre.[642] "If Roquentin's masculinity is in question," he says, "it is because he perceives an alternative model of relationality, a type of identification that both reifies the terms self and other and simultaneously defies the stability of identity and difference."[643] Bubbi's struggles are also related to masculinity issues, as the following sections outline, and his contempt is similarly seen here as a response to a hetero-masculine social ideal to which he cannot conform.

Sedgwick's and Tomkins's theories on shame are helpful when it comes to Bubbi's identification with the idea of a happy, healthy, normal life and his condemnation of himself and others who do not conform to that ideal. Although shame and disgust are not identical affects Tomkins's discussion of them is concurrent. In a chapter titled "Shame–Humiliation and Contempt–Disgust" he outlines that unlike shame, disgust and contempt focus on the object, the source of the affect, rather than the experiencing self. Yet sometimes the self becomes the object of its own disgust and in such cases the line between the two affects is very blurred: "Shame is often intimately related to and easily confused with contempt, particularly self-contempt; indeed, it is sometimes not possible to separate them."[644] The following discussion of Bubbi's sexuality supposes that his self-contempt can be analysed on the same main premises as shame; as an emotion that is prominent in Bubbi's life and which affects and shapes his relationship with social ideals and norms as well as with his inner self and personal identity. His self-disgust, confessions and speculations about his sexual crisis – about being different, mentally unhealthy and

[640] Jón Karl Helgason points out that Roquentin's and Bubbi's girlfriends carry the same name: Anny/Anna. They are thus yet another intertextual link between the two novels. Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 119.
[641] Lawrence R. Schehr, "Sartre's Autodidacticism," 45.
[642] Lawrence D. Kritzman, "To Be or Not to Be. Sexual Ambivilance in Sartre's La Nausée," 81.
[643] Ibid. 79.
[644] Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 133–36, here 134.

unstable and wondering if his desires are sick or healthy, normal or sinful – are moreover good examples of what Sedgwick describes as queer performativity.

Bubbi responds with disgust when he faces sexual women, heterosexual sex and bourgeois masculinity – and his contempt is directed towards himself as well as other people.[645] Tomkins discusses how self-contempt is often a response to contempt from others, or self-defence mechanism. Children, for example, often learn to expect a disgust or contempt response from their parents in certain contexts, such as when they behave in a way they know has provoked contempt from the parent before. Instead of feeling ashamed they sometimes respond with aggression or fear but they also often internalise the contempt and punish themselves for their own behaviour. Whether or not such self-contempt restrains the repetition of the particular behaviour, Tomkins says, "it provides a type of punishment for norm violation which is to be distinguished from an expectation of being shamed again."[646] Like with shame, however, the 'other' who shows contempt or disgust can be the view, imagined or real, of unspecified others and the norms of a given culture. Like Ahmed points out the power of normative regulation lies in the individual's desire to identify with the norm, to connect and reconnect with the social ideal, and Bubbi's contempt can be seen as self-punishment for not conforming to hetero-masculine bourgeois norms he both resists and identifies with.[647] His paradoxical relationship with these norms is also evident when a strong wave of disgust hits him as he is confronted with male intimacy. Shortly after the dance where he talks to Anna for the first time he goes to a party and among the guests are two American soldiers. As the evening progresses and the guests get drunker the soldiers start "hugging each other, saying 'sweetheart' and other lovely things" (EÖL 77), and soon after that Bubbi gets sick and throws up. His body thus rejects homoeroticism which indicates that he has a problematic and paradoxical relationship with homosexuality – he is afraid of identifying with it and thus reacts with intense disgust and tries to eliminate it rather than accepting it as a part of his identity.

The role shame plays in shaping and reshaping identity is of primary importance here. *Eftir örstuttan leik* is a product of such a process; Bubbi's self-contempt is the driving force behind the narrative. He writes because he feels miserable and putting thoughts and feelings into words offers him relief – and the text in turn becomes a part of his identity.

[645] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir notes that Bubbi is constantly running away from food and fighting his own bodily needs, including his sexual drives, and she suggests that his misogyny is grounded on this problematic relationship he has with his own body; that he wants to draw a clear line between himself and sexual women and thus renounces the food that they (the housekeepers and, by extension, other women who are potentially sexual) give him. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið," 117–19.
[646] Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 144.
[647] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 101–21.

The same in fact applies to Roquentin who is arguably the author-narrator of *Nausea*; the novel is his journal and self-therapy. The next section focuses on the queer potential of such writing.

4.2 Writing

Bubbi's most significant queer performance is writing the novel about himself, *Eftir örstuttan leik*. The story he tells leads up to the moment when he begins writing and the novel is thus an account of the events and feelings that eventually make Bubbi pick up the pen and start expressing himself with words. "This is why I am now writing this story,"[648] Bubbi says by the end of the second chapter, after having told the readers about his sexual crisis, of how he met Anna and about his hostile responses to Lovísa the housemaid, and in the last section of the novel he reflects upon the purpose of the writing process and what he has gained from it:

> I have […] tried to forget, – or not to forget, – reviewed the events of the past few months, preferably as if I were a poet writing about somebody else rather than himself. This is how impersonal I have tried to be, – however well I may have managed to do that. The memories are perhaps my only possession that cannot be taken away from me, as long as I don't lose my reason. It has been a pleasure writing these memories down on these sheets of paper. It has been a task for me. It has simultaneously given me some rest and action. And now I have in front of me a pile of yellow papers, containing a story nobody would have believed I would ever write – about myself. – – – –[649]

He adds that this has been a difficult process and that he often considered giving it up, but what urged him to continue was that writing made him feel better: "I have been able to enjoy life somewhat better than before."[650] The writing process thus consolidates contrasts and paradoxes, such as rest and action, forgetting and remembering, truth and fiction, with the result that Bubbi's crisis is perhaps not solved but at least relieved. Earlier in the novel he composed a poem about his feelings for Anna, but it did not make him happy, proud or relieved: "But I am not a poet," he says and throws the pen away.[651] Writing the novel, however, helps him overcome the 'imbalance in his psyche' and it is also a step towards

[648] "Þess vegna er nú svo komið, að ég skrifa þessa sögu." (EÖL 47)
[649] "Og undanfarnar vikur hef ég snúið mér að henni eingöngu, reynt að gleyma, – eða gleyma ekki, – rifjað upp atburði síðustu mánaða, helzt þó eins og ég væri skáld, sem ekki væri að skrifa um sjálft sig, heldur um einhvern annan mann, svo ópersónulegur hef ég reynt að vera, – hvernig svo sem mér kann að hafa tekizt það. Minningarnar eru kannske eina eignin mín, sem ekki verður frá mér tekin, svo lengi sem ég held óskertu viti. Þessar minningar hefur mér fundizt nautn að skrifa niður á þessi blöð. Það hefur verið mér verkefni. Það hefur veitt mér einhverja hvíld og athöfn í senn. Og nú liggur hér fyrir framan mig gulur blaðabunki með sögu, sem enginn mundi að líkindum trúa, að ég mundi nokkru sinni rita – um sjálfan mig. – – – –" (EÖL 206)
[650] "[…] ég hef getað unað lífinu nokkuð betur en áður […]." (EÖL 206)
[651] "En ég er ekki skáld." (EÖL 71)

becoming 'an individual' or 'an independent personality,' because through writing Bubbi shapes and forms his own (queer) identity.

In his article on metafictional self-consciousness in *Eftir örstuttan leik* Jón Karl Helgason argues that Bubbi's need for self-expression through writing is his way of dealing with various difficult emotional issues, such as the paradoxical attitude towards his own same-sex desires. Jón Karl concludes that when Bubbi starts writing the novel about himself he succeeds for the first time "to express the controversial feelings he experiences as simultaneously healthy and sinful"[652] – the writing process is a recreational process and thus an essential part of Bubbi's journey towards understanding his same-sex desires.

Jón Karl argues that *Eftir örstuttan leik* is a 'self-begetting novel,' which is, according to Steven G. Kellman,

> an account, usually first-person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading. Like an infinite recession of Chinese boxes, the self-begetting novel begins again where it ends. Once we have concluded the central protagonist's story of his own sentimental education, we must return to page one to commence in a novel way the product of that process – the mature artist's novel, which itself depicts the making of a novel […] The final line […] returns to the beginning.[653]

The last pages of *Eftir örstuttan leik* are Bubbi's account of the day he started writing the novel about himself and the following weeks, and the novel's form and frame thus manifest that it is a self-begetting novel – like Sartre's *Nausea* to which Kellman dedicates a whole chapter.[654] Building on Kellman, Jón Karl discusses the general thematic traits of self-begetting novels and how they apply to Bubbi's story, and concludes that Bubbi is a very typical self-begetting character narrator. Kellman suggests that the self-begetting novel is a continuation of a long tradition of myths and narratives about autonomous men who have been abandoned by their families or are 'self-created' through for example virgin birth, such as Jesus and Superman. Self-begetting character narrators are often single and lonely and have a problematic and obsessive relationship with sex and related issues, such as conception and birth.[655] By writing they manage to recreate themselves and make themselves immoral and the result is both a twin self and a novel.[656] All this also describes Bubbi quite accurately, as Jón Karl outlines; Bubbi's sexual crisis is closely linked with the lack of loving relations with his parents since his mother is dead and his

[652] Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 128.
[653] Steven G. Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel*, 3.
[654] Ibid. 32–48.
[655] Such characters can also be read within Lee Edelman's frame of 'sinthomosexuality' – an alternative to heteronormative 'reproductive futurism,' grounded on the death drive rather than the pleasurable fantasy of survival. See Lee Edelman, *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 33–66.
[656] Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel*, 1–11.

relationship with his father is problematic. Bubbi's refusal to father his son and thereby acknowledge the consequences of his sex life also contributes to his sexual crisis. By writing a novel about himself he creates a twin self and conceives a book – an offspring which is more important to him than his son. Through writing he thus finds an outlet for paradoxical and painful emotions that are a part of his identity crisis and centred around issues concerning for example same-sex desires.[657] In this context it should also be noted that the self-begetting process can be seen as a 'queer alternative' to heterosexual life. It avoids, and even rejects, women, marriage and heterosexual sex and as such it is a queer performance – a highly problematic one, however, hence its masculinist and misogynist premises.

From the perspective of queer performativity Bubbi's writing process is first and foremost an excellent example of "a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame."[658] He reflects upon previous events, his own emotions and personality and embraces these memories, even though they are painful. Through this process he learns to know and understand himself better – produces both meaning and being – and even though he has not yet reached the point by the end of the book where he feels 'whole' or 'complete,' he is happier, calmer and feels less self-contempt and shame. Sedgwick argues that shame performances are both relational and individuating and Bubbi's writing is precisely that.[659] As an autobiographical account it is individuating because Bubbi explores his own personality and experience of past events, but it is also relational since he reaches out to his readers and seeks to (re)connect with other people from whom he has isolated himself. Writing the novel is thus simultaneously a movement inwards and outwards; an identity-shaping performance.

Last, but not least, Bubbi carefully places clues in the narrative that suggest that same-sex desires are at the core of his sexual crisis. He does not, or perhaps cannot, speak bluntly about homosexuality but he discusses it indirectly by referring to books, writers, artists and music that carry queer connotations. The following discussion focuses on these clues and how they are significant queer meta-performances – performances within a writing performance – that lead the readers, if they pay good attention, towards a queer understanding of Bubbi's story.

[657] Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar."
[658] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 61.
[659] See ch. 1.3.3.

4.3 Reading

Bubbi enjoys reading, both fiction and academic work, and in the first chapter of *Eftir örstuttan leik* he describes the contents of his bookcase to his readers:

> The poetry collections were there, the novels by Icelandic authors were there, and over there were novels by foreigners. There was Freud in two or three languages, and Adler in German. Then there was the Bible, and I was sure the red ribbon was placed where Ezekiel is most entertaining. I put it there the last time the book was touched.[660]

These lines would perhaps seem irrelevant were it not for the fact that by the end of the novel Bubbi repeats this description, word for word (EÖL 185–86), and discusses the significance of reading such books:

> I speculated about how much happier the world would be if some of these books had never been written. What was the use of reading Freud, after all? – Or Adler? – – Even Nietzsche, – my God. I wish I had never acquainted myself with some of these men's works, never made some of their opinions my own. Why had I burdened myself with reading "Also sprach Zarathustra" and so many other works?[661]

Such a repetitive act on behalf of a character-narrator inevitably calls for speculation and so do his words about how reading books can affect people. Next sections focus on the writers and books in Bubbi's bookcase – the Bible, Freud, Adler and Nietzsche – and how they are telling about Bubbi's sexuality and identity crisis.

4.3.1 Book of Ezekiel

First of all, the Book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament is God's announcement of the judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, its destruction and eventual restoration. It includes, as Jón Karl Helgason has pointed out, verses that have been used in the debate on homosexuality and if it should be seen as a sin or not, but according to Ezekiel:49–50 the sins of people of Sodom, that led to the destruction of the city, were not sexual but greed, idleness and inhospitality.[662] These verses can thus be used to support the claim that

[660] "Þarna voru ljóðabækurnar, þarna skáldsögurnar eftir íslenzku höfundana og þarna eftir þá erlendu. Þarna var Freud á tveim eða þrem tungumálum og Adler á þýzku. Svo var biblían þarna, og ég var viss um, að rauða bandið var sett í opnuna, þar sem Esekíel er hvað skemmtilegastur. Þar setti ég það, þegar bókin var snert síðast." (EÖL 19)

[661] "Mér varð hugsað til þess, hversu sælli heimurinn væri, hefðu sumar þessara bóka aldrei verið skrifaðar. Hvaða gagn hafði maður haft af því að lesa Freud, eftir allt? – eða Adler? – – Jafnvel Nietzsche – guð minn góður. Ég vildi gjarnan, að ég hefði aldrei kynnt mér sum verk þessara manna, aldrei helgað mér sumar skoðanir þeirra. Hvers vegna hafði ég verið að burðast við að lesa "Also sprach Zarathustra" og svo fjölmargt annað?" (EÖL 186)

[662] God says: "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw *good*." Ezek. 16:49–50 (Authorised (King James) Version). See Jón Karl

homosexuality was not a sin in the eyes of God – an argument which is directly linked to Bubbi's internal debate on whether his desires are sinful or not. Bubbi's very particular reference to the part of the Bible where Ezekiel is 'most entertaining' is thus hardly a coincidence – it is a reference which supports his claim that his desires should not be considered sinful.[663]

4.3.2 Adler: Inferiority complex

Bubbi's references to the Austrian psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, together with his before-mentioned claims that he is not in good mental health and that he wants to 'overcome the imbalance in his psyche,' suggest that he considers his sexual problems to be a mental illness or personality disorder. Bubbi desperately wants to overcome this and become 'an individual' and 'an autonomous personality' who can control himself and his desires, and he has read and studied psychological writings on the human drives and personality in the hope that he will understand himself and learn how to deal with his issues. Importantly for this context, both Freud and Adler discussed homosexuality in their studies on the human mind and its development, and as the following sections outline, both considered it to be, at least to a certain extent, a pathological condition.

One of the great paradoxes inherent to Bubbi's existential crisis is the fact that he both despises and admires himself; he is full of arrogance and self-admiration as well as self-contempt. He tells his readers that he worships himself "like a saint" (EÖL 46), but he also has strong negative feelings towards other people, as noted earlier. He has isolated himself because he feels different from his friends but it is not always clear if he believes he is better or less than them. "Sometimes I almost think my estrangement from my friends is a kind of superiority complex," Bubbi says but adds: "Or I conclude that it is caused by a feeling of inferiority and nothing else. Yet I do not fully understand this. Why should I be inferior?"[664] The answer to the last question is, in fact, to be found in one of the psychology books on his bookshelf: The writings of Adler.

Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 126, footnote 42. On homosexuality and the sins of Sodom, see e.g. Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 36–39, 136–39; Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, 10–28.

[663] Shame and sexuality are closely connected in Judeo-Christian societies and ideology. Shame is, as Sally Munt has for example noted, central to the story of the origin of man and how Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise: "What we see in the Creation Myth is that the origin of human experience, individuation and desire resides in a locus of shame, and it is out of that shame, separation and loss that sexual differentiation occurs." Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 80.

[664] "Stundum liggur mér við að halda, að fráhvarf mitt frá vinum mínum sé tegund af mikilmennskubrjálæði. Eða ég kemst að þeirri niðurstöðu, að þetta stafi af minnimáttarkennd og

As Freud's colleague Adler was one of the founders of the psychoanalytic movement at the beginning of the twentieth century but he later departed from Freud's circle and developed his own school which focused on what he called individual psychology. He placed more emphasis on social relations and how they shape the individual and their personality than Freud, and while Freud considered the sex drive to be of central importance for the development of the subject Adler focused primarily on the feeling of inferiority.[665] He saw inferiority – the feeling of being small, weak and less than others – as an integral and original feeling among humans. All children feel inferior to adults because they need to rely on them but in order to become independent individuals they have to learn social skills, set life goals and strive for them, and thereby overcome their weaknesses and rid themselves of the feeling of inferiority. Adler thus considered the inferiority feeling to be

> the driving force, the starting point from which every childish striving originates. It determines how individual children acquire peace and security in life, it determines the very goal of their existence and it prepares the path along which this goal may be approached.[666]

Some children, however, experience an intensified feeling of inferiority, even to the degree that they fear they will never be able to overcome their weaknesses. Then the danger arises, Adler says, that they set their goals so high that they will never be satisfied with the outcome:

> They will seek to tip the scales in the opposite direction. In such cases the striving for power and dominance may become so exaggerated and intensified that it must be called pathological, and the ordinary relationships of life will never be satisfactory. The urges in these cases are apt to have a certain grandiose quality about them and are well adapted to their goal. Individuals with a pathological power-drive seek to secure their position in life with extraordinary efforts, with exceptional haste and impatience, with violent impulses, and all without the slightest consideration for others.[667]

This is what Adler calls 'the inferiority complex' – a pathological condition which leads to an illusional feeling of superiority and various kinds of anti-social behaviour, such as pride, vanity, the desire to be better than others – and it often includes distancing or isolating oneself from other people.[668]

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engu öðru. Ég get þó enganveginn gert mér það fyllilega ljóst. Hvers vegna ætti ég að vera minnimáttar?" (EÖL 66)

[665] Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature*, especially 59–76.

[666] Ibid. 59.

[667] Ibid. 64.

[668] Ibid.

It almost goes without saying that according to Adler's psychology Bubbi suffers from an inferiority complex. He feels inferior because he cannot live a 'healthy meaningful life' like his friends and the weakness he fears he will never overcome is his abnormal or excessive sexual drive. His frustration in relation to this problem has made him seek to 'tip the scales in the opposite direction'; he has set himself a goal which is presumably too high for him to reach – sexual abstinence – and he is unable to maintain ordinary relationships with other people because he is too self-centred. The contempt he feels towards both himself and others is moreover the result of this complex; he feels simultaneously inferior and superior to others. Bubbi has read Adler's psychology and his talk about how he feels both inferior and superior to others suggests that he has analysed himself and concluded, or at least suspected, that he is dealing with an inferiority complex. The problem is that he does not know how to deal with his problems and the imbalance in his mind. "I have learned that none of these [psychology] books can tell me exactly what I need to do to become a man," he says.[669]

Yet there is more to Adler's psychology that is telling about Bubbi's crisis; Adler's discussion of the character traits typical among homosexuals are also a quite accurate description of Bubbi. Adler saw homosexuality as an acquired, pathological, psychological condition where an individual fixates the homosexual experiences most normal people have at some point in their lives, usually in childhood.[670] According to Adler's theory normal people let go of these experiences but homosexuals convince themselves that they are inevitable. He argued, in fact, that homosexuality was self-deception; a manner "in which such an individual in question hypnotizes himself step by step and forces upon himself violently the concept that he is not adapted for normality."[671] This process requires tremendous energy, Adler says, because great difficulties await homosexuals in the society, and one of the main character traits of homosexuals is therefore "inordinate ambition" but also "extraordinarily pronounced caution or fear of life."[672] The homosexual has, in other words, a severe inferiority complex and Bubbi's complex can thus easily be seen as a part of his same-sex sexuality.

[669] "Og ég hef komizt að raun um, að engin þessara bóka getur sagt mér til fulls, hvaða tökum ég á að taka mig, til þess að ég verði að manni […]." (EÖL 27)
[670] Alfred Adler, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, 184–96, here 184–86. The lecture on homosexuality in this book was originally delivered before the Jurististisch-Medizinische Gesellschaft of Zurich in 1918.
[671] Ibid. 187.
[672] Ibid.

According to Adler's theory the reason why some people have inferiority complexes is usually to be found in their childhood and upbringing. He concludes, based on his research on homosexuals, that if

> the existence of impoverished and bad pecuniary family conditions, or of disorganized relations between the parents, gives the child additional difficulties, they are likely to suggest to him the thought of looking for the consummation of his ambition by a very narrowly circumscribed method.[673]

In other words, children are more likely to fixate their ambitions on homosexual desires if they come from split families or have had limited or difficult relationships with their parents. Moreover, Adler believed that the same could be said about pampered children; those who have been "so petted that a very early desire for being protected in the future against every rough blast of wind, of always occupying first place, takes on an intensive form."[674] The petted children long to remain entirely untouched by the difficulties of life, Adler says, but their extreme fear of not succeeding sometimes results in a pathological condition such as homosexuality. These conclusions are especially interesting in relation to *Eftir örstuttan leik* because they describe Bubbi's family situation and upbringing quite accurately. Since his mother died Bubbi has been pampered by his father and aunt who have treated him "like a lap dog."[675] His relationship with his father is moreover troublesome and cold; he is embarrassed in his father's presence (EÖL 59) and feels distant from him:

> I have been told that I am related to this man – yes, even that he is my father. But whether this is true is none of my business. The only thing that matters to me is I, myself. Perhaps I think surprisingly much about myself, and maybe I am what the bookworms call an "introvert" teenager.[676]

This is Bubbi's inferiority complex in a nutshell; he has never overcome his feeling of inferiority in relation to his father and instead of developing an adult relationship with him on an equal basis he cuts the ties between the two of them and thinks primarily of himself. Adler emphasises that not only do homosexuals suffer an inferiority complex but that they usually have a "hesitating" attitude toward life; they are often anti-social and primarily interested in themselves, and also more likely to find their occupation later than normal people.[677] Again Adler's theory fits Bubbi's life and personality because he – as will be

[673] Ibid. 189.
[674] Ibid.
[675] "Og þó hef ég fram til þessa verið meðhöndlaður eins og kjölturakki." (EÖL 63)
[676] "Mér er sagt, að ég sé skyldur þessum manni, – já, að hann sé meira að segja faðir minn. Hvort það er satt, kemur mér heldur ekki við. Það eitt, sem skiptir mig máli, er ég sjálfur. Ég hugsa kannske furðu mikið um sjálfan mig, og er ef til vill það, sem bókabéusar kalla "innhverfur" unglingur." (EÖL 65)
[677] Adler, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, 190.

outlined in more detail in the following sections – does not have a job and does not want one.

The majority of what has been said here about Bubbi's inferiority complex also applies to Steinn Elliði in *The Great Weaver* who is pampered and idealised by his family, especially the women; he seeks to secure his position in life with 'extraordinary efforts, exceptional haste and violent impulses,' without thinking about the effect his actions have on others but never finds the stability or perfection he is looking for. It is important to note, however, that one of the fundamental differences between *The Great Weaver* and *Eftir örstuttan leik* is that Bubbi writes his own story and has placed the references to Adler and inferiority complexes in the text on purpose. Even though he cannot directly address the issue of homosexuality he thus gives his readers important clues when he tells them twice that Adler's books are to be found on his bookshelf.

4.3.3 Freud: Disorder of psychosexual development

Bubbi's awareness of psychoanalytic theory also encourages a Freudian analysis of his sexual crisis. Mentioning Freud is, like citing Adler, a queer performance on his behalf; a suggestion to his readers to make sense of Bubbi's crisis in terms of what Freud had to say about homosexuality and psychosexual development.

According to Freud's Oedipal model of character development the child's libido is originally invested in both itself – hence the same sex – and its mother; in the symbiotic existence of the child and its caregiver. A 'normal' individual overcomes this stage of primary narcissism and the formation of the ego requires such a departure. The child realises that it is an individual, separated from the mother, and invests its libido in an ego ideal – an idea of a perfect version of the ego by which the individual measures themselves – and also in other people of the opposite sex. During the phallic stage the boy is sexually attracted to his mother and rivals his father but later learns to identify with the father and direct his sexual interest towards other women. Freud was more ambiguous concerning female sexuality but his model supposes that girls are first emotionally attached to their mothers but turn to the father as a love object when they realise that neither they nor the mother have a penis. Eventually they direct their sexual interest towards other men and fantasise about having a baby which will substitute a penis. The 'normal' outcome of Freud's model is thus inevitably a heterosexual adult.[678]

[678] Freud, "On Narcissism"; Sigmund Freud, "Femininity."

Bubbi has not finished this process successfully, like Jón Karl Helgason and Dagný Kristjánsdóttir have pointed out, and he seems to realise this himself.[679] "I only enjoyed my mother's affection for a short while," he tells his readers and adds: "I have sought it with other women, but found something entirely different."[680] He associates, in other words, the loss of his mother with his sexual crisis and suggests that the reason why he started having sex with the housemaids at an early age was that he was looking for a mother-substitute. The fact that he makes this connection, along with his repeated references to Freud's books in his bookshelf, suggests that he is applying Freudian psychoanalysis to himself. Such an analysis would argue that Bubbi has never managed to leave the phallic stage; that he is still looking for his mother in the women he sleeps with and, as will be outlined later in this chapter, that he refuses or is unable to identify with his father. His crisis is thus both sexual and an identity crisis like he emphasises himself; he is struggling with becoming 'an individual' and 'overcoming the imbalance in his psyche,' and according to Freud's developmental model such 'becoming' includes identifying with his father and desiring and loving other women than his mother or her substitutes.

4.3.3.1 Madonnas and whores

One of the results of Bubbi's arrested psycho-sexual development is what Dagný Kristjánsdóttir analyses as his Madonna-whore complex, or what Freud referred to as psychical impotence; when men are impotent in a heterosexual relationship because they see women as either saintly Madonnas, whom they can love but not desire sexually, or as prostitutes whom they desire but do not love. This complex is a result of the man's attempt to deal with his Oedipal complex – to hold on to his primary love relationship, that is, with his mother whom he idealises as a saint.[681] Dagný points out that Bubbi has replaced his dead mother with a number of housekeepers who are like prostitutes to him, and even though he has sex with them he is also disgusted by them. This is for example obvious when he meets Lovísa after the dance and she flirts with him. He is "revolted by her whole being", describes her smile as "loathsome and sensual" and her eyes as "squinty,"[682] and tries to throw her out of his room: "I meant to grab her and make her leave the room, but I

[679] Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 116–26; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið," 116–17.
[680] "Ástríkis móður minnar naut ég aðeins skamma stund. Ég hef leitað þess hjá öðrum konum, en fundið allt annað." (EÖL 47)
[681] Sigmund Freud, "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life"; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið."
[682] "[…] og mér bauð við henni allri. […] Hún var ótrúlega rauð og óhrein framan í, – það sá ég bezt í ljósinu. Og hún brosti andstyggilegu, nautnþyrstu brosi, eins píreygð og nokkur mannskepna getur verið […]." (EÖL 43)

was so revolted by her that I evaded touching her, and stopped for a moment in front of her disgusting face."[683] Then he calls her a slut and a whore, she starts to cry and he finally manages to lock her out. Bubbi's negative attitude towards women is not limited to the housekeepers; Bíbí, the mother of his child, is in his mind also primarily a sexual woman – a 'prostitute.' He notes that everyone, including himself, disgrace her (EÖL 181), presumably for being promiscuous and getting pregnant, and he also learns that she is 'in the situation' – that she has been with soldiers.[684] Contempt marks Bubbi's opinion of women in general and he associates them with sex and immorality:

> Women are generally so stupid. They are the stupidest creatures on Earth. Girls are only lovely in their stupidity. Men truckle to these creatures, crawl, humiliate themselves, cry, laugh like idiots, stay silent, speak, – everything to be favoured by these sexual beings, – often risk their lives or willingly kill themselves.[685]

The misogyny in these words is striking and shows that Bubbi's relationship with women, and ideas about them, is very troubled. It is also, moreover, apparently inspired by Steinn Elliði whose letters in *The Great Weaver* describe extreme misogyny and fear of women – "I discovered early that woman appealed only to what was evil in by being"[686] – and a distinction between whores and wives.[687]

Dagný points out the character who stands for the other extreme – the Madonna – is Anna. She is the only woman Bubbi loves, adores and idealises.[688] He thinks she looks like Lana Turner, the American actress and pin-up model, he is impressed by her beautiful figure and how feminine and "motherly" she is (EÖL 34), and says she reminds him of everything he likes about women (EÖL 41). Dagný points out that Anna is the motherly feminine goddess who Bubbi admires but does not desire sexually – there are at least no explicit references to their sex life in the book. Bubbi and Anna's affair is the ideal heterosexual relationship; Bubbi's dream of a healthy meaningful life where sexuality is kept under firm control and contained within the family cell. Anna and Bíbí/the housekeepers thus represent the opposite poles of Bubbi's paradoxical Madonna-whore complex; the pleasure of love and the humiliating consequences of sex; heteronormative

[683] "Ég ætlaði að grípa í hana og fá hana út fyrir dyrnar, en mér bauð svo við henni, að ég veigraði mér við að snerta hana og nam staðar eitt augnablik fyrir framan andstyggilegt smettið á henni." (EÖL 44)
[684] See ch. 6.3.
[685] "Kvenfólk er yfirleitt svo vitlaust. Það eru vitlausustu lífverur jarðarinnar. Fyrir það eitt eru stúlkur yndislegar, hvað þær eru vitlausar. Svo liggja menn í duftinu fyrir þessum verum, skríða, auðmýkja sig, gráta, hlæja eins og fífl, þegja, tala, – allt til þess að komast inn undir hjá þessum kynferðisverum, – leggja oft líf sitt í hættu eða drepa sig viljandi." (EÖL 21)
[686] Halldór Laxness, *The Great Weaver From Kashmir*, 153.
[687] Ibid. 163–65.
[688] Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið," 116–17. Peter Hallberg has outlined how Steinn Elliði's ideas about women and marriage are inspired by e.g. Otto Weininger, August Strindberg and Bernhard Shaw. Peter Hallberg, *Vefarinn mikli. Um æskuskáldskap Halldórs Laxness*, 61–97.

family life and deviant sexuality; the life Bubbi wants to live and the life he wants to leave behind. Bubbi's problem is that he is not able to reconcile these extremes and is thus stuck in arrested development.

4.3.3.2 Masculinity issues

Bubbi has problems with identifying with his father, which is, according to Freud, what a healthy hetero-masculine man does after going through the stages of psychosexual development. We have already seen that Bubbi's crisis is a masculinity crisis and a psychoanalytic perspective confirms that. First of all, Bubbi loathes everything his father stands for, especially his bourgeois lifestyle and values. Bubbi does not have a job and he despises physical labour and people who are not interested and invested in their job. Instead he lives at home and lets his father support him and give him pocket money, and he sees his father first and foremost as a financial sponsor (EÖL 62–63). His refusal to identify with his father is also a revolt against bourgeois capitalist masculinity norms. Bubbi is terrified of becoming a "fat snob" like his father, and getting a job would in his opinion bring him dangerously close to such a lifestyle. But he also knows that being financially dependant upon his father is problematic and he fears that he will eventually need to give in and adapt himself to bourgeois life:

> I have started to worry that someday I will become some kind of moralist. That my prediction will come true, that with time, maybe sooner than I think, I will become one of the fat guests at the hotel bar, who visit such places out of habit and snobbery. I will have to accept that. But one thing is certain, that I fear greatly my inclination to become an "honest" petty bourgeois – and also that I will sink even deeper into idleness and eventually have no shelter, like my father has so often mentioned while threatening me.[689]

This situation intensified when Bubbi became a father himself because his father pays the child maintenance. Bubbi does not care much for the little boy but he nevertheless tells his readers that the birth of the baby was a turning point in his relationship with his father, who then had to admit that Bubbi was not a child anymore. Bubbi feels that he is more mature than his father and having a baby has helped him prove that (EÖL 62–63). However, the birth of the child has also made Bubbi more reliant on his father. The child maintenance and financial issues in general are a very sensitive matter to Bubbi, and when his father brings it up Bubbi almost punches him (EÖL 132–33). Bubbi thus both

[689] "Ég er farinn að óttast, að ég eigi einhverntíma eftir að verða nokkurs konar siðapostuli. Að spádómur minn rætist um það, að með tímanum, kennske fyrr en mig varir, verði ég einn af feitu hótelgestunum, sem koma á slíka staði af vana og snobbshætti. Þá er að taka því. En svo mikið er víst, að ég hræðist mjög mikið í aðra röndina þá tilhneigingu mína að verða "heiðarlegur" smáborgari – og í hina röndina að sökkva ennþá lengra í iðjuleysi án þess að eiga jafnvel að lokum nokkurt athvarf, eins og faðir minn hefur mest haft orð á, þegar hann hefur ógnað mér." (EÖL 180)

renounces his father and makes himself dependant on him, just like he both loves and despises women, and this paradoxical relationship is inflammatory.

Another sign of Bubbi's struggle with adapting a normative masculine role is that he refuses to be a father to his son. When he meets Anna he has never seen the baby and does not speak of him, but Anna encourages Bubbi to go and visit him. By the end of the book Bubbi thus goes and visits his son for the first time. At first he is overwhelmed with emotion when he looks at the baby, but eventually he leaves and has seemingly no intention of going back (EÖL 191–201). He thus both refuses to be a father and to have a father – to grow up and to be a child. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir draws on this and points out that Bubbi often refers to himself as 'a teenager' although he is twenty years old:

> He thereby locates himself between adulthood and childhood like Peter Pan, and refuses to change, does not want to grow up, because only by such means can he stay in a kind of in-between-state and renounce his gender. If he is a boy he is not (yet) a man.[690]

Bubbi also often refers to other young men as teenagers,[691] however, and it is questionable to say that he renounces his 'gender' because he does not show any signs of gender dysphoria. Dagný's point is nevertheless important when it comes to Bubbi's gender expression and masculinity. He is hesitant towards normative bourgeois masculinity and he also describes himself with quite feminine words and compares himself to women or female figures. This is for example evident in his account of the night when he comes home from the dance and Lovísa approaches him. When he throws her out of his room she cries and asks him: "Are you a man?" He does not reply but when she is gone he locks the door "like a young maiden who is afraid of the covetousness of satyrs."[692] Later in the book he says he is "like a spinster in her fifties" because he needs to take pills to calm down.[693] Last but not least, as both Jón Karl and Dagný have noted, Bubbi describes how he gets in the mood for going to the dance by listening to boogie-woogie and dancing "like Ann Sheridan" – another American actress and singer – waving his hands and swinging his hips (EÖL 29).[694] Bubbi does thus not renounce his gender in the sense that he wishes to be something else than male, but he renounces certain normative ideas about masculine

[690] "Hann staðsetur sig þannig á milli fullorðinsára og bernsku eins og Pétur Pan og vill ekki breytast, vill ekki verða fullorðinn, því aðeins þannig getur hann haldið sér í einhvers konar millibilsástandi og afneitað kyngervi sínu. Ef hann er drengur er hann ekki (enn orðinn) karlmaður." Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið," 115.
[691] See for example EÖL 29, 62.
[692] "Ég aflæsti hurðinni að herbergi mínu eins og ungmey, sem óttast ásælni satýra, og tók að afklæða mig." (EÖL 45)
[693] "[…] eins og fimmtug piparmey." (EÖL 192)
[694] Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 126–28; Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Sýnt en ekki gefið," 119–20.

social roles and gender expression. His paradoxical attitude towards both women and conforming to normative bourgeois masculinity is at the core of his sexual identity crisis, and both are – according to Freud – symptoms of arrested psychosexual development.

4.3.3.3 Narcissism

Finally, Bubbi's self-centeredness, how he has withdrawn from his friends and idealised himself, can readily be seen as signs of narcissism – a term which is closely linked to male homosexuality in Freud's writings. As noted earlier, all individuals go through a developmental stage Freud referred to as primary narcissism, where the child's libido is invested in the symbiotic whole, which is itself and the mother, but normal character development requires the child to develop an ego, let go of self-love and direct its libido first towards the mother and later towards people of the opposite sex. Some individuals, however, fixate these desires during the stage of primary narcissism and continue to take themselves, and by extension people of the same sex, as a love object. Or as Freud outlines in his essay "On Narcissism":

> We have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts and homosexuals, that in their later choice of love-objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves. They are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic'.[695]

Such 'secondary' narcissism is Freud's way to explain male homosexuality and various other 'perversions.' Like the Madonna-whore complex it is an aberration from normal psychosexual development – not an innate fault but an object-choice preference for which there are psychological explanations.[696] In Bubbi's case the reason for his problems is – again – that is not able to identify with his father and desire his mother, which for Freud is necessary in order for a boy to develop sexually and eventually desire other women, and could thus not finish a normal psychosexual development process.

Bubbi does not show erotic interest in other men – at least he does not tell the readers about them. His narcissism is first and foremost manifested in self-obsession. Freud did, however, discuss various other manifestations of 'perverted instincts' than the 'perverted acts' themselves. For example, when individuals' development arrests in the stage of primary narcissism, but they repress their self-love or same-sex desires instead of acting upon them – renounce them and contain them in the unconscious – they can become

[695] Freud, "On Narcissism," 88.

[696] Freud's concept of narcissism only applies to male homosexuality. Women can also suffer from secondary narcissism but Freud discusses female narcissism first and foremost in terms of women's obsession with their own looks, love of their children and their need for being loved (by a man). Ibid. 88–89.

paranoid. In one of his papers on paranoia Freud argues that individuals who have fixated upon narcissistic object-choice, but repressed this instinct, are always exposed to the danger that an "unusually intense wave of libido" will burst through and sexualise their social relations with the same sex, for example if a man suffers disappointment from his relations with women or experiences difficulties in his social relations with other men.[697] Paranoia can thus be a reaction to such possible, and unwanted, sexual 'waves.' There are several indications in *Eftir örstuttan leik* that Bubbi is repressing same-sex desires. He is severely disappointed with his sexual experience with women in past and present and seeks to repress his sexuality completely by practising abstinence. His fear of sex and disgust of sexual women is a paranoid reaction and he has also isolated himself from his male friends, which may be a result of his fear that his same-sex desires will break free from the unconscious.

Finally, Freud's term *sublimation* can also shed interesting light on Bubbi's queer sexuality. Sublimation is, for Freud, an unconscious transformation of unacceptable or unwanted sexual instincts into non-sexual and acceptable actions or behaviour. The best result comes from sublimation into intellectual or psychical work, such as seeking knowledge and creating art, but such actions are only accessible to few people and presuppose special talent.[698] This is the ideal way to deal with intensified sexual instincts, Freud says, because "there is no attachment to the original complexes of infantile sexual research, and the instinct can operate freely in the service of intellectual interest."[699] He also believed that works of art could be analysed, like dreams, in order to reveal the artists' sublimations and the sexual instincts behind them, as can be seen in his study of Leonardo da Vinci.[700] *Eftir örstuttan leik* can similarly be seen as a result of Bubbi's sublimation of his same-sex desires; a story of a man who represses his same-sex desires but eventually sublimates them through creative writing.

4.3.4 Nietzsche: The Übermensch

Last, but not least, Bubbi seeks answers in Friedrich Nietzsche's novel *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–1891; *Thus spoke Zarathustra*), in which Nietzsche's philosophy of the 'overman' is elaborated.[701] The *Übermensch* is an ideal Nietzsche argued man should

[697] Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," 62.
[698] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 26–27.
[699] Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 29.
[700] Ibid.
[701] Elías was probably, at least to some extent, influenced by his friend Þórður Sigtryggsson, who was in his writings somewhat inspired by Nietzsche and *Zarathustra*. See Svavar Steinarr

strive towards instead of idealising gods and relying on religion. Man must overcome himself and his 'animal-like' nature, such as unrestrained sexual lust, and aim to assimilate the *Übermensch*: An idea of an independent and self-cultivated man with full power over himself and who rises above traditional morality based on Christian values.[702] *Thus spoke Zarathustra* tells the story of Zarathustra who seeks to teach his fellow humans about the *Übermensch* – the new man. He talks about diverse issues, such as joys and pleasures, virtues, friendship, women, chastity and marriage, portrays women as sexual and dangerous, argues that they are closer to animals than men are, not capable of friendship because their love is blind and irrational, and that they only want one thing: To get pregnant. The true man wants danger and diversion, says Zarathustra, which is why he desires women – they are "the most dangerous plaything."[703] "Is it not better to fall into the hands of a murderer than into the dreams of a lustful woman?" Zarathustra asks and says that what people usually call marriage is filthy and pitiful.[704] Marriage can be helpful on the man's journey towards self-cultivation but the ideal marriage is centred on the man's longing and love for the *Übermensch* – for an ideal beyond himself. Chastity can be a virtue, he says, but it does not always work when fighting against "doggish lust," in fact it can intensify it. Yet those who are chaste, Zarathustra argues, are happier and gentler than other men.[705]

From what has been said here it should be clear that Bubbi is on a quest towards the *Übermensch* – he has read *Thus spoke Zarathustra* and shares the attitude towards women and sex represented there. He fears women and their sexual love as well as their desire for getting pregnant and having babies; he has no interest in marriage or children. He wants to master his 'doggish lust' and the only solution he sees is chastity. He wants to become a new man – an individual who is in control over himself and his desires and does not need other people – and even though he fails to remain chaste and control his sexual desires he manages to create a book-version of himself, like a character-narrator in a self-begetting novel. Zarathustra emphasises that the journey towards becoming the *Übermensch* is ongoing and never-ending, full of obstacles and failures, and he embraces those who fail:

Guðmundsson, ""Enginn maður hér á landi, annar en ég, hefur rétt til að lesa Der Tod in Venedig." Þórður Sigtryggsson, Mennt er máttur og íslenzk menning á tuttugustu öld," 84–90.

[702] For Icelandic scholarly writing on Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* and the reception of Nietzsche's philosophy in Iceland, see e.g. Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, introduction to *Svo mælti Zaraþústra*; Davíð Kristinsson, "Íslenskur Nietzsche við aldamót"; Haukur Ingvarsson, ""Að fortíð skal hyggja, ef frumlegt skal byggja." Um afstöðu Einars Benediktssonar til einstaklinga og sögu."

[703] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for Everyone and No One*, 91. See especially "Of the Friend," 82–84, and "Of Old and Young Women," 91–93.

[704] Ibid. 81.

[705] Ibid. See "Of Chastity," 81–82, and "Of Marriage and Children," 95–96.

> Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss.
>
> A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still.
>
> What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down–going*.
>
> I love those who do not know how to live except their lives be a down-going, for they are those who are going across.
>
> I love the great despisers, for they are the great venerators and arrows of longing for the other bank.
>
> I love those who do not first seek beyond the stars for reasons to go down and to be sacrificed: but who sacrifice themselves to the earth, that the earth may one day belong to the Superman.[706]

Bubbi is one of 'the great despisers,' as we have seen; he is disgusted by women and himself and rejects the bourgeois masculine norms his father exemplifies, isolates himself from his friends and seeks a different kind of masculinity which emphasises individuality and misogyny but also homosociality; the *Übermensch* does not need other people but male friendship is the only helpful and acceptable model of social relations on man's journey towards his goal.

The *Übermensch* in Nietzsche's writings is strictly speaking gender neutral – a human ideal – but its reception and popularisation was centred on men and masculinity – and sometimes on male homoeroticism. The masculine quest of self-moderation is deeply rooted in Western culture, as Mosse has outlined; willpower is central to modern Western masculinity and it was for example influenced by Greco-Roman culture and sculptures portraying beautiful male bodies – bodies that were shaped by the power of the mind.[707] Moderation was the greatest masculine virtue in ancient Greece; a battle every man had to fight against himself and his desires, sexual as well as desires for food and drink. It was thus a measure for masculinity – if a man could not master his desires he would be considered effeminate.[708] Mosse moreover notes that in the late nineteenth century "willpower became almost an obsession when it came to describing true manliness," not least under the influence of Nietzsche and the *Übermensch*.[709] In the early twentieth century, as Robert Beachy has discussed, Nietzsche also became one of the philosophical guides of the homosexual rights movements in Germany, especially the 'masculinist' movement lead by Adolf Brand. The masculinists promoted a revival of Greek love – erotic relationships between adolescent boys and adult men – in which self-moderation

[706] Ibid. 43–44.
[707] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 19–40.
[708] See e.g. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure. The History of Sexuality: Volume 2*; David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love*.
[709] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 100.

was a key virtue. Nietzsche's rejection of Christian morality was interpreted and understood as endorsing non-normative sexuality and excerpts from *Thus spoke Zarathustra* appeared regularly in the movement's magazine, *Der Eigene*. Beachy notes moreover that popular rumours about Nietzsche's homosexuality influenced the homosexual movements in Germany.[710]

Citing Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is thus yet another queer performance by which Bubbi seeks to explain and support his emphasis on self-control and abstinence, and hence on rejecting heterosexual norms. Inspired by Nietzsche he has practised self-moderation in the hope that he will find peace of mind and become the man he wants to be, but without result. He does not find solutions in Nietzsche's work nor in Adler's and Freud's psychoanalytical writings; even though he can analyse himself and his sexuality he does not know what to do or how to deal with his desires. Eventually, however, Bubbi discovers that the most satisfying way to deal with his problems is not to read but to write – and the spark that motivates him and encourages him to start writing is music.

4.4 Listening

In *Nausea* Roquentin finds relief from nausea and despair when he listens to the jazz song "Some of these Days" and the music eventually contributes to his decision to start writing.[711] Music also plays a significant role in *Eftir örstuttan leik* but the novel begins with Bubbi's thoughts while he is listening to the prelude to Richard Wagner's opera – or music-drama, as Wagner chose to call his work[712] – *Tannhäuser* (1845), which is "the most wonderful prelude" Bubbi has ever heard.[713] He talks about pilgrims that are on a journey and imagines himself as one of them. They have only one goal: To get to the promised city which marks the end of their pilgrimage. In *Tannhäuser* the city is Rome but in Bubbi's narration it does not have a name: "There is the holy city, there are the lands of sunrise, – life, – the eternal promise."[714] The narration begins in the early morning when the pilgrims set off and describes their difficult journey through deserts, plains, lava fields and forests, in the burning sun, cold wind, fog and rain, and finally up a hill to the point from which they can see the promised city. Then the music stops, Bubbi's gramophone makes sounds to indicate the record is over and he wakes up from his thoughts.

[710] Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 101–6.
[711] See e.g. Mark Carroll, "'It is.' Reflections on the Role of Music in Sartre's 'La Nausée'"; Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel*, 40–48.
[712] See e.g. Mark Berry, "Richard Wagner and the Politics of Music-Drama."
[713] "Þetta er forleikur, – dásamlegasti forleikur, sem ég hef nokkru sinni heyrt." (EÖL 9) The title of the musical piece is never specified in the novel but Elías Mar later confirmed that he had built the chapter on Wagner's prelude. See Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 49.
[714] "Þar er borgin helga. Þar eru lönd sólaruppkomunnar, – lífsins, – fyrirheitsins eilífa." (EÖL 9)

The core of Bubbi's recapitulation of the prelude is that if you set yourself a goal and overcome all the obstacles on the way towards it you will be rewarded – or with his words: "If on your journey you are seeking forgiveness, you will undoubtedly receive it, because you have overcome the temptations of the night and seen the sunrise as a conqueror."[715] This reflects Bubbi's intention to gain control over his own sex life and obtain the 'healthy meaningful life.' Jón Karl Helgason points out that the prelude is a clear example of a *mise en abyme*, or what Lucien Dällenbach refers to as an internal duplication or a mirror in the text; a work of art contained within another work of art which reflects upon the latter, for example its plot, characters, creation, reception or symbolism.[716] The prelude gives the readers a clue about the theme of the narrative that follows – like the pilgrims Bubbi sets himself a goal and tries to overcome temptations on the way towards his promised city (the healthy meaningful life). He makes a promise to himself that he will stay abstinent but loses his track and it seems as if he has failed to reach his goal. Yet Jón Karl notes that by the end of the novel Bubbi shows that he has not given up but found an outlet which may work better than abstinence: Writing. Moreover, the novel ends with another textual mirror; a repetition of two sentences from the overture: "Then who are those who turn back? Does any man turn back, who walks onto the road in the early morning, steps barefoot in a frozen puddle and sets himself a goal?"[717] This repetition underlines the self-reflectivity of the novel as well as Bubbi's continuing journey towards his goal through writing – inspired by music.

4.4.1 Zarathustra and Tannhäuser

Bubbi's stream of thoughts while listening to the prelude and its role in the novel's structure and thematic must be put in context with Wagner and the prelude itself, as well as to Nietzsche's philosophy. First of all the prelude chapter is under the influence from *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Like Nietzsche's novel it describes the protagonist's journey towards a goal and both Bubbi 'the pilgrim' and Zarathustra climb hills or mountains until they find peace of mind. Moreover, the narrative style in Bubbi's prelude chapter, which is very different from the narrative in the remainder of the novel, shares certain characteristics with *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra often speaks to the people he lectures: "Behold, I teach you the Superman […]." – "I entreat you, my brothers […]."[718] Bubbi similarly

[715] "Leitirðu fyrirgefningar á þessari reisu þinni, mun þér eflaust veitast hún, því þú hefur jafnan sigrazt á freistingum næturinnar og litið sólaruppkomuna sem sigurvegari." (EÖL 16)
[716] Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*; Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 111–16.
[717] "Hverjir eru það svo, sem snúa við? Snýr nokkur maður við, sem árla dags gengur út á þjóðveginn, stígur nöktum fæti á hem pollanna og á takmark fyrir höndum?" (EÖL 12, 207)
[718] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 42.

addresses his (male) readers in plural and speaks of himself, the pilgrims and the readers as one whole – as a group of (presumably male) travellers on their way towards the goal: "Onward, – onward, my friends, – onward"[719] – "Slip the shoes off your feet and fall on your knees! – – – Cry! Laugh! – – –."[720] Like Zarathustra he also uses formal exclamations: "And, behold, – this is the goal."[721] – "And this we have felt; – behold, I have lead you to great joy."[722] Furthermore, like Zarathustra's lectures, Bubbi's prologue chapter includes philosophical speculations:

> The traveller opens his haversack and gives to the passing wayfarer. Both men have set off along the same road, – only heading in opposite directions. Does that matter? Both have a goal; there may be a several days' journey to the goal, – countless days. People would never cross paths if everyone walked in the same direction. – Isn't that strange, my beloved ones?[723]

This message, that people are different and should therefore be allowed to set themselves different goals, may seem to somewhat contradict Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch,* and surely Bubbi's stream of thoughts is not entirely built on Nietzsche. There is nevertheless a strong Nietzscheian atmosphere in *Eftir örstuttan leik'*s opening chapter which sets the tone for the following chapters.

Secondly, the fact that Bubbi's novel begins and ends with this particular musical piece is highly significant, even though he states that he only wants to listen to the prologue, not the opera as a whole (EÖL 9). *Tannhäuser* is set in Germany in the thirteenth century and tells the story of the knight Tannhäuser who has spent a year in Venusberg, the kingdom of Venus, where he was the goddess's lover. He has had enough of the lustful pleasures of Venus and her city and decides to return to his former life; at first Venus refuses to let him go but eventually she sends him away when he invokes the name of Virgin Mary. In Germany Tannhäuser is reunited with his former (virgin) love, Elisabeth, but their blissful moment together comes to an end when Tannhäuser performs in a singing contest and sings an ode to Venus and the pleasures of the senses, which shocks and horrifies the audience and puts him in danger. He joins a group of pilgrims on their way to Rome and seeks redemption from the pope, which he is not granted because those who have enjoyed the pleasures of Venus are not to be forgiven. The story ends in tragedy;

[719] "Áfram, – áfram, vinir mínir, – áfram." (EÖL 12)
[720] "Dragið skó af fótum ykkar og látið fallast á knén! – – – Grátið! Hlægið!" (EÖL 15)
[721] "Og, sjá, – þetta er sjálft takmarkið." (EÖL 16)
[722] "Og þetta höfum við skynjað; – sjá, ég hef leitt ykkur í mikinn fögnuð." (EÖL 17)
[723] "Förumaðurinn leysir frá mal sínum og gefur vegfarandanum, sem hann mætir. Þessir menn hafa báðir lagt út á sama veginn, – fara aðeins í andstæðar áttir. Skiptir það nokkru máli? Báðir eiga takmark; kannske eru margar dagleiðir að takmarkinu, – óteljandi dagleiðir. Ef allir færu í sömu átt, myndu engir mætast. – Er það ekki skrítið, mínir elskanlegu?" (EÖL 10)

Elisabeth dies of grief while waiting for Tannhäuser's return and he also dies when he sees her coffin. The following morning the pilgrims arrive with the pope's ultimate redemption but it is too late for Tannhäuser. The opera thus deals with tension and conflicts between Christianity and Greco-Roman mythology and, more importantly for this context, between spiritual and sensual love. Tannhäuser has, like Bubbi, enjoyed the pleasures of sex excessively and decided to seek spiritual love instead, and like in *Eftir örstuttan leik* there are two extreme representations of femininity in the opera, the dangerous sexual woman and the idealised virgin – the whore and the Madonna. Both stories end in dissolution and tragedy, the protagonists find happiness with their virgin lover for a short while, but are then punished for their sexual past, and neither sensual nor spiritual love 'wins' in the end. Unlike Tannhäuser, however, Bubbi's writing project, inspired by Wagner's music-drama, offers him at least some degree of hope for a better and happier future.

Wagner and Nietzsche were contemporaries, knew each other quite well and were inspired and affected in various ways be each other's work. Like Nietzsche, Wagner placed great emphasis on masculinity, self-overcoming and male-suffering, and in his so-called 'pro-Wagner period' Nietzsche celebrated his friend's work. Later, however, he turned against him and criticised him harshly, not least his positive representation of Christianity and Christian values which Nietzsche rejected.[724] This is interesting in relation to Bubbi's prelude chapter because the promised city in his narrative is not Rome but "the lands of sunrise, – life, – the eternal promise,"[725] and the final landmark on the pilgrim's journey is a tower with a non-religious symbol:

> The symbol rises on the top of the highest tower. It does not matter if it is the cross of Jesus Christ, or the hammer and sickle, or something else. – It makes no difference. It is our symbol, – everyone's symbol, – the symbol of all those who have striven for this goal.[726]

Religion is thus not an important factor in Bubbi's prelude and neither is politics – and in this respect he disagrees with Steinn Elliði in *The Great Weaver* who searches first and foremost for answers with God. Bubbi's primary goal is to finish the journey – to prove to yourself that you can achieve your goal – and it does not matter what the goal is. In the prelude Bubbi is thus not as fixed on the 'one and only goal' – abstinence – as in the following chapters. The prelude marks the beginning and the end of the novel and links

[724] On the relationship and mutual influence between Nietzsche and Wagner, see e.g. Bernard Wills, "The Case of Nietzsche. A Wagnerian Riposte"; Mitchell Morris, "Tristan's Wounds. On Homosexual Wagnerians at the Fin de Siècle," 278–83.
[725] "Þar eru lönd sólaruppkomunnar, – lífsins, – fyrirheitsins eilífa." (EÖL 9)
[726] "Á efstu turnspírunni rís táknið. Það skiptir ekki máli, hvort það er kross Jesú Krists, eða hamar eða sigð, eða eitthvað annað. – Það skiptir engu máli. Það er táknið okkar, – allra, – allra, sem höfum keppt að þessu marki." (EÖL 16)

two phases in Bubbi's life – the phase in which he seeks answers in psychoanalysis and Nietzsche's philosophy, and the phase when he has started writing, inspired by Wagner's music. As such it is a meeting point for different goals and currents in Bubbi's mind. The goal that Bubbi 'the pilgrim' strives to reach is two things at once, as Jón Karl has noted, self-cultivated masculinity and self-creation in the form of a novel.

4.4.2 Queer Wagner

The prelude chapter represents two important performances, firstly Bubbi's decision to listen to this particular music piece which inspires him to write, and secondly his writing while listening to the prelude. What has not yet been outlined, however, is if and how these performances are *queer*.

There are no references to, or representations of, homosexuality in *Tannhäuser* and yet the opera and Wagner's work in general – like Nietzsche's philosophy – has since the nineteenth century appealed strongly to many queer men and male homosexual culture. As Mitchell Morris has pointed out Krafft-Ebing noted in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that one of his homosexual 'patients' had been inspired by Wagner's operas. The man also suggested that this was common among men who desired other men:

> While I have but little interest in politics, I am passionately fond of music and an inspired follower of Richard Wagner. I have noticed this preference in the majority of us [homosexuals]; I find that this music is perfectly in accord with our nature.[727]

A similar stance can be seen in the novelist Oscar Panizza's essay from 1895, "Bayreuth and Homosexuality," where he says that Wagner's *Parsifal* "offers spiritual sustenance for pederasts,"[728] and in Hanns Fuchs's book *Richard Wagner und die Homosexualität* (1903) where he interprets Wagner's work and characters freely as positive homoerotic images, for example because of their androgynous character and restraint towards sex, and argues that Wagner was homosexual "in spirit."[729] Morris argues that among Wagner's fans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century was "a group of listeners who understood their devotion to *der Meister* and his works as a way of making sense of their own transgressive sexual desires and gender identifications"[730] – and correspondingly a homosexual stereotype was formed: The man who listens to Wagner. Tim Pursell moreover notes that in the following decades several writers and artists embraced this stereotype and references

[727] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 291.
[728] Quoted in Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*, 185. See 175–217 for Dreyfus's discussion of Wagner and homoerotics.
[729] Hanns Fuchs, *Richard Wagner und die Homosexualität*. Fuchs speaks of "die geistige Homosexualität." See also Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*, 188–96.
[730] Morris, "Tristan's Wounds," 272.

to Wagner's operas and motifs frequently appeared in homosexual publications in the early twentieth century.[731]

But why did Wagner's work appeal to men who desired other men? Bernard Wills notes that even though Wagner's operas generally idealise dramatic heterosexual love they also portray art, love and religious ecstasy as an answer to the disease of life and emphasise the liberation which comes with willpower and self-overcoming. "Tannhäuser is redeemed by the love of Elizabeth *from* the delights of Venusburg," Wills says and adds: "Indeed, the notoriously lecherous Wagner had a lifelong fascination with ideals of chastity. Yes to the freedom of the spirit seems, on its face, a kind of no to natural and biological life."[732] The love story in Wagner's operas often ends in a tragic death and "[s]exual satisfaction is not achieved naturally or even physically but against and beyond nature in death."[733] Wagner's work thus portrays heterosexual sex as dangerous and destructive, which appealed to many listeners whose sexual desires were generally believed to be abnormal. Wagner's answer to the problems of heterosexuality was not homosexuality but chastity – an idea which, in a world increasingly affected by heteronormative regulation, may have seemed liberating to people who desired the same sex.

In his deeply personal study of a homosexual man's attraction to opera Wayne Koestenbaum has outlined how he was attracted to Wagner's emphasis on dramatic heterosexual love. "I don't participate in the heterosexual system and yet I worship schematic and artificial representations of it," he says and takes certain scenes from *Tannhäuser* as an example of such high heterosexuality.[734] He is fascinated by Elisabeth's joy while she is waiting for Tannhäuser and feels that her joy is queer because it surpasses reason and because she desires a place within a system that punishes her for her female sexuality.[735] In societies where same-sex desires are not easily expressed or made public, operas, as well as other works of art, offer an opportunity for symbolising desires and thereby expressing what the artists and writers cannot state clearly in words, Koestenbaum notes, and readers and listeners similarly seek representations of their desires in art, even though the artworks do not consciously deal with such desires. This is why operas have become so important for many queer people:

> Forbidden sexualities stay vague because they fear detection and punishment. Historically, music has been defined as mystery and miasma, as implicitness rather

[731] Tim Pursell, "Queer Eyes and Wagnerian Guys. Homoeroticism in the Art of the Third Reich," 124.
[732] Bernard Wills, "The Case of Nietzsche. A Wagnerian Riposte," 34.
[733] Ibid.
[734] Wayne Koestenbaum, The Queen's Throat. Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire, 201.
[735] Ibid. 188–202.

> than explicitness, and so we have hid inside music; in music we can come out without coming out, we can reveal without saying a word. Queers identify with shadow because no one can prosecute a shadow.[736]

Like Koestenbaum, and so many queer men before them, Bubbi finds relief in listening to Wagner's prelude and is at the same time inspired and motivated by it when he writes his own novel. The role the prelude plays in his novel can readily be seen as a result of Bubbi's identification with the rejection of heterosexual sex and idealisation of non-sexual heterosexual love in *Tannhäuser* – the shadow of homosexuality. He also finds relief in listening to music and hides inside it; music is Bubbi's "best-tried and most durable means of comfort."[737] As Koestenbaum says about gay men's fascination with operas in general, many of them love opera without necessarily knowing why or being able to explain it: "[I]t was enough just to listen, the point was *not* to draw the connection between homosexuality and opera, but to pass into opera as into a safe silence."[738]

Listening to the prelude and using it as an inspiration and motivation for self-expressive writing is thus clearly a significant queer performance on Bubbi's behalf. Yet again he uses fictional or academic work to express what he cannot say directly – that same-sex desires are the core of his sexual crisis. Moreover, the prelude chapter is perhaps the novel's most suggestive homosexual text, but as Jón Karl Helgason has pointed out it carries connotations to same-sex sexual acts. The title of the chapter is "Forleikur," which means 'prelude' but it can also mean 'foreplay' in a sexual context, and it describes a journey which, slowly but steadily, gets more intense and eventually reaches a blissful climax. The form of the chapter bears, in other words, striking resemblances to sex – it begins with foreplay and ends with an orgasm. Moreover, Bubbi addresses his readers repeatedly as "my loved ones" and "my dear friends," not just in the prelude chapter but also later in the novel, and as Jón Karl points out this is perhaps Bubbi's most promising love affair – his relationship with his implied male readers[739]: "These addresses remind us that the self-begetting novel, like all literature, is in fact the offspring of two individuals, author and reader, regardless of their gender and sexual orientation."[740] Bubbi's addresses

[736] Ibid. 189–90. Queer identification with shadows, or the night, is a theme in Elías Mar's play "Nóttin," see ch. 3.3.4.
[737] "[…] þrautreyndasta og haldbezta sefjunartæki mitt […]." (EÖL 28)
[738] Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 41.
[739] Masculine gender is the default grammatical gender in Icelandic, and the fact that Bubbi only uses masculine grammatical endings when he speaks to his readers does thus (technically) not exclude female readers. Yet the overall atmosphere in the chapter, and the novel in general, is so masculine and misogynist that it is tempting to argue that the implied reader in Bubbi's novel is male.
[740] "Þessi ávörp minna á að sjálfgetna skáldsagan, eins og aðrar bókmenntir, er í rauninni afkvæmi tveggja einstaklinga, höfundar og lesanda, óháð kyni þeirra og kynhneigð." Jón Karl Helgason, "Deiligaldur Elíasar," 128.

to his readers are important queer performances, not only because they refer to same-sex sex but also because they are theatrical – by speaking to his readers Bubbi transforms his self-contempt and shame into acts of connecting and relating. From the perspective of Sedgwick's theory of queer performativity Bubbi's relationship with his readers, which is most intense in the prelude and established there, is thus an identity-building process through which he starts to express his same-sex desires.

4.5 The artist

The discussion of Elías Mar's early writings about male same-sex desire in chapter three suggested that a link between queer sexuality and being an artist or writer can be identified in "Eftirför" from 1941 and the poem "Einginn sérstakur" from 1942.[741] In *Eftir örstuttan leik*, moreover, this association is in a lead role; not only is Bubbi a writer who sublimates his same-sex desire through artistic creation but he also seeks inspiration and outlet in music and fiction. Again intertextual links between Elías's novel, *The Great Weaver* and *Nausea* are evident; Steinn Elliði is a poet and his relationship with Carrington is centred around the creation and publication of Steinn's books, and Roquentin – like Bubbi – finds an 'aesthetic solution' to his existential problems when he starts writing.[742]

There is also another (arguably) queer artist in *Eftir örstuttan leik*: Mr. Skerfirs, a middle-aged pianist and friend of Anna's mother who, despite playing a minimal role in the novel, is responsible for much of Bubbi's trouble. Bubbi meets him at Anna's house one evening when they are invited to listen to him play the piano (EÖL 101–6). Shortly after this visit 'the artist,' as Bubbi calls him, tells Anna's mother about Bubbi's irresponsible behaviour in the past and encourages her to separate the young couple. The mother then decides to send Anna to Copenhagen (EÖL 145–48). The artist does not seem to be in love with Anna and the reason why he gets in their way is in many ways unclear. He does, however, seem to be interested in Bubbi; they meet a couple of times and the artist encourages Bubbi to become a "man of spirit," take "art as a friend,"[743] use his time well and not be tempted by women or other temptations (EÖL 116–20). Such references to 'art' as a friend that a man should prefer to the company of women suggest a queer reading – and seen from that perspective the artist is an important queer agent. Not only does he ruin Bubbi's heterosexual relationship and hope for a healthy meaningful life; his physical appearance and behaviour also has strong queer connotations. He is a flamboyant and exotic figure, educated and has lived and studied abroad, wears neat long coats, tight suit, hats and silk

[741] See ch. 3.3.1.
[742] See e.g. Peter Ruppert, "The Aesthetic Solution in Nausea and Malte Laurids Brigge."
[743] "Þetta yfirstígur allt sá, sem á listina að vin, – sem er maður andans." (EÖL 117)

scarfs and has a broad and sophisticated "cosmopolitan smile."[744] His pomposity is almost comical, especially his name, but 'Skerfirs' is an ironic neologism; a surname derived from a place name in Reykjavík, Skerjafjörður. The artist moreover resembles a film character and readily fits into Dyer's description of gay iconography in American film noir from the 1940s; the features that indicate their queerness are for example bitchy wit, love of art, fastidious dress style and tailored suit.[745] These characters are often the villains, Dyer notes; they delay or spoil the progress of the story and stand in the way of a happy ending, for example by threatening the heterosexual union.[746] Associating the artist with this particular film character type is not as far-fetched as it may seem because – as chapter three has suggested and will be outlined in more detail in chapter six – Elías was a film enthusiast and inspired by film noir in his portrayal of the Reykjavík life in his fiction, especially in *Vögguvísa*.[747]

Bubbi does not return the artist's interest; he finds him tiring and dull. His disinterest then transforms into annoyance when he finds out the artist revealed the truth about his past. Yet Bubbi is a dandy himself and takes pleasure in dressing neatly and his interest in attire and appearance seems to increase after he meets the artist. Shortly after the piano night at Anna's house he buys a new coat, hat, bow tie and braces and puts on a black suit (151–2), seemingly to impress Anna, but this performance can also be seen as Bubbi's response to the fracture in his heterosexual union – as an (perhaps unconscious) identification with the artist and queer noir villains and yet another queer performance.

4.6 Conclusion

Eftir örstuttan leik is fictional, not an autobiography, and yet the resemblances between Bubbi and Elías Mar can hardly be ignored by those who have read Elías's notebooks from the mid-1940s. The Elías who appears in Skálda, for example, is a self-centred dandy in his early twenties who expects much of himself and oscillates between feeling superior and inferior – between self-confidence and deep anxiety. The novel is set in the period it was written, the months after the end of the Second World War in the fall and winter 1945–1946,[748] and both Bubbi and Elías are experiencing post-war existential uncertainty and affected by the gender crisis of the 1940s – they do not know what kind of men they want to

[744] The artist's appearance is described on pages 116 and 135–7.
[745] Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 90–115, especially 96.
[746] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 50–70, here 62–64.
[747] See ch. 3.3.1 and 6.2.2.
[748] Elías Mar started writing *Eftir örstuttan leik* in October 1945 and finished the first fair copy in April 1946. See *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Skálda," 14 October 1945; *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 10 April 1946. Bubbi starts writing in early December 1945 and finishes in January 1946, but the story he tells begins in August 1945.

or can become.[749] Both moreover find relief and solutions in writing and Elías's notebooks suggest that he was also inspired by Wagner's prelude to *Tannhäuser* – he listened to it repeatedly before and while he was writing *Eftir örstuttan leik*.[750] The novel's remarkable richness and variety of intertextual references manifests that Elías himself was under the influence from various films, books and other writings; he read much, both fiction and academic work, and in his job as a journalist at *Alþýðublaðið* he was in touch with post-war politics and ideological currents, such as existential philosophy.[751] Last, but not least, the novel is a queer performance and a part of an identity-forming process, regardless of whether we think of Bubbi or Elías as the author. Chapter three outlined how Elías was coming to terms with his same-sex desires in the mid- and late 1940s; he had started reading books about sexuality and presumably had his first sexual affair with a man shortly after he finished writing *Eftir örstuttan leik*. The novel-writing was thus a part of the process that eventually enabled Elías to claim a bisexual identity and live relatively openly as a queer man. He was not there yet in 1946, however; *Eftir örstuttan leik* does not deal with homo- or bisexual identity but first and foremost struggles and uncertainties concerning masculinity and same-sex desire.[752]

The queer reading of *Eftir örstuttan leik* in this chapter has underlined the paradoxes that characterise Bubbi as well as the importance of intertextuality and books. He is in many ways an incarnation of the paradoxes of modern life; he has so many options in life but is unable to find a path that suits him, he is simultaneously enchanted and disgusted by sex and women, and the mid-twentieth-century hetero-masculine norms and expectations overwhelm him. References to books, films and authors are never coincidental in this novel; they always add a perspective to the text – often a particularly queer one – and help the reader understanding what Bubbi is either unable to say directly or does not fully comprehend. These queer performances are moreover highly paradoxical. The ideas about masculinity and same-sex desire represented in the Bible and the works by Freud, Adler, Nietzsche, Wagner, Sartre and Halldór Laxness contradict each other in various ways, which corresponds to the fact that none of them can give Bubbi any final answers or a solution to his problems. Even the novel-writing is a never-ending process since the book begins where it ends; a loop in which Bubbi's identity is always in-the-making. His multiple quests – the Nietzscheian journey towards abstinence

[749] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 43–50.
[750] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebooks 1945–1946. See 1 April 1945, 7 July 1945, 1 January 1946, 17 January 1946, 20 February 1946 and 27–28 March 1946.
[751] Elías translates more than 200 texts about European politics, art, philosophy, fashion etc. for *Alþýðublaðið* in 1945, mostly from English and Scandinavian newspapers. *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 1945.
[752] See ch. 6 for more discussion of autobiographical aspects of *Eftir örstuttan leik.*

and masculine self-cultivation, Freudian and Adlerian self-psychoanalysis, Wagnerian inspiration and finally the writing process – are performances that represent and manifest the protagonist's search for himself and his identity. None of them has a finish-line or ends with success or solutions and yet these performances form and shape Bubbi's identity; they are individuating because they help him explore and understand himself, and relational because they refer to texts and people outside the text and thus link Bubbi to other people – thinkers, artists, works of art and various other queer performances.

5 *Man eg þig löngum*: The queer art of failure

In December 1943 Elías Mar wrote an essay titled "Dægurhugleiðingar" ('Momentary reflections') in which he discussed his life and feelings. He says his life is full of sadness but that he is standing on crossroads where "the roads lead in many directions."[753] His main concern is that he is not industrious enough but he is also full of existential gloom: "But is it enough to work, if it is done without a definite purpose, without a goal?"[754] Such feelings of purposelessness and problems concerning choosing one's future and faith are prominent in *Eftir örstuttan leik*, as we have seen, and the same can be said about *Man eg þig löngum*. That novel is also set in Reykjavík in the 1940s and focuses on a distressed male protagonist: Halldór Óskar Magnússon, a teenage fisherman's son from a small village in West Iceland. Halldór is unsure of himself and unhappy and even though sexual frustrations are not as prominent as in *Eftir örstuttan leik* Halldór's sexuality is indisputably one of the novel's most important themes. Unlike Bubbi, however, Halldór is a reserved character who does not tell the readers about his frustrations or write his own story. *Man eg þig löngum* is narrated by a third person narrator and the point of view is primarily Halldór's; the narrative mostly consists of his thoughts, communicated through the narrator. Halldór is very shy and does not speak many words; his conversations with other characters are usually short, he answers questions with one syllable words and often has to "make himself talk"[755] – that is, consciously force himself to speak. Unlike Bubbi's story Halldór's characterisation is thus based on thoughts rather than verbal performances.

In "Dægurhugleiðingar" Elías writes that he often feels like he is two different men. First he describes a man who is "sensitive to ridicule and feels inferior because he did not become what he intended, mostly because he did not strive for it himself. Then he lost faith in himself – and others – and now everyone considers him a weakling." The other man, however, has "out of sheer luck become the ablest man"; he is successful, confident and knows how to make the most of his options in life and he does not care about the opinions of others.[756] These two types are in many ways descriptive of the extremes Bubbi oscillates between – inferiority and superiority – and in *Man eg þig löngum* they take the

[753] "Ég er á miklum tímamótum. […] eg finn, að eg er staddur á krossgötum, og það liggja vegir í ýmsar áttir." Lbs. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Dægurhugleiðingar." The essay was never published. See ch. 3.1.
[754] "En er nóg að starfa, ef starfað er án ákveðins tilgangs, án einhvers takmarks?" Ibid.
[755] "[…] komið sjálfum sér til að tala […]." Elías Mar, *Man eg þig löngum*, 11. References to *Man eg þig löngum* are hereafter abbreviated: (MEÞL 11).
[756] "Ég þekki mann, sem í dag er spéhræddur og fullur vanmetakenndar vegna þess að hann varð ekki það sem hann ætlaði sér að verða, mest vegna þess að hann vann ekki nóg að því sjálfur. Svo missti hann traust á sjálfan sig – og aðra – og nú er hann ræfill í allra augum. Annan mann veit eg um, sem af einskærri hepni [sic] hefur orðið hinn nýtasti maður […]." *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Dægurhugleiðingar."

form of two characters: Halldór and his friend Ómar. The story begins in the fall when Halldór arrives in Reykjavík; he rents a small attic room and is planning to go to school. He has good intentions but soon loses interest in his studies, sinks deeper and deeper into depression and eventually fails his exams. Halldór's idleness is almost overwhelming and in that sense he resembles the shy man in Elías's essay; almost all his intentions seem to fail or dissolve – writing a letter to his mother, doing his homework, getting a summer job, approaching the girl he has a crush on, and so on. As a result the novel is marked by heavy gloom and passivity; the reader is waiting for Halldór to take action and hoping for him to succeed but the happy ending never comes; by the end of the book a whole year has passed and Halldór is wandering outside Reykjavík, alone, depressed, poor and homeless.

Halldór makes two friends in Reykjavík; Ómar and a poor, disabled, middle-aged man named Bóas. Ómar is the incarnation of the successful man in Elías's essay: A young, good-looking, middle or upper-class man who seems to get all his wishes fulfilled. Halldór's relationships with Bóas and Ómar are apparently non-sexual and same-sex desires are never discussed directly in relation to their friendship, but as this chapter argues all three characters have queer dimensions. By the end of the novel it is strongly implied that Halldór has same-sex desires but that he is not able to, or never dares to, acknowledge them. As was noted in chapter three the relevance of interpreting Halldór as a character whose desires are directed towards other men is supported by Elías Mar's statement, more than 50 years after *Man eg þig löngum* was published, that he meant to write a second volume in which it would be revealed that Halldór was "a homosexual."[757] Elías also planned to let Halldór become a writer and take his friend's name as a pen name: Halldór Óskar Magnússon Ómar, aptly abbreviated to HÓMÓ.[758] His intention was, in other words, to let the two men he described in the essay in 1943 merge into one. Yet the sequel remained unwritten and Halldór neither became a writer nor a self-identified gay man. *Man eg þig löngum* is thus not a 'gay novel' in the sense that the characters identify as homosexual but like *Eftir örstuttan leik* it is full of queer performativity. The following sections outline how the queerness in this novel is constructed, not through the protagonist's therapeutic writing but rather through various character performances that become meaningful when they are thought of in relation to sexuality, individual identity and shame.

5.1 Shame and failure

It is difficult to imagine a better example of a fictional character "whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame" – that is, a queer character

[757] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 57.
[758] Ibid. See also Kolbrún Bergþórsdóttir, "Er ekki færibandahöfundur," 24.

according to Sedgwick[759] – than Halldór. He is, as noted earlier, very shy and insecure, and he believes that he is not like other people – not as he ought to be. "He has always been told that he was different from all the others," the narrator says and adds: "He has believed for a long time that he is – and always will be – different from all the others."[760] This conviction has marked Halldór's identity since he was a child and the shame he consequently experiences hangs like a black cloud over him throughout the novel.

Halldór's shame is prominent already in the novel's first sentence, marking the beginning of a chapter in which the boy, who has just arrived in Reykjavík, meets his landlady, Emilía: "He sits on a stool at the old woman's kitchen table, hanging his head, and sips coffee from a saucer."[761] The body language described in this sentence suggests that Halldór is avoiding the woman's gaze. Tomkins emphasises that the face, especially the eyes, are central in the shame experience, because the "self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes," and he adds: "Shame turns the attention of the self and others away from other objects to this most visible residence of self, increases its visibility, and thereby generates the torment of self-consciousness."[762] Therefore, people who feel ashamed turn their faces away from others, look down and avoid eye-contact. Such situations are described repetitively in *Man eg þig löngum* as Halldór often avoids looking at other people and blushes frequently.[763] His shame is thus very physical and visible on his body and it is also expressed through Halldór's social behaviour and his dwelling places. He spends hours and days alone in his room or in his friend Bóas's small basement flat, where he feels safe (MEÞL 51), avoiding other people; often sitting or standing in the same position without speaking or acting, as the opening of the second chapter shows:

> He sits motionless on the chair she brought him, a nice brown-painted chair. He has stretched his left hand out on the table but put the right hand on the back of the chair behind him. He has maintained this position for a long time when the clock on the ground floor strikes seven. Four hours have passed since he came up to the room.[764]

[759] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 63.
[760] "Honum hefur alltaf verið sagt að hann væri öðruvísi en allir hinir. […] Hann er fyrir löngu farinn að trúa því að hann sé – og verði alltaf – öðruvísi en allir hinir." (MEÞL 33)
[761] „Hann situr niðurlútur á kjaftastól við eldhúsborð gömlu konunnar og sötrar kaffi af undirskál." (MEÞL 7)
[762] Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 136.
[763] See e.g. MEÞL 35, 42–43, 72, 111–12, 115, 150, 174, 180.
[764] "Hann situr hreyfingarlítill á stólnum sem hún kom með, góðum stól brúnmáluðum. Vinstri höndina hefur hann fyrir löngu teygt fram á borðplötuna en lagt þá hægri aftur fyrir sig á stólbakið. Í þessum stellingum hefur hann setið lengi þegar klukkan á hæðinni slær sjö högg. Fjórir tímar eru liðnir frá því hann kom upp í stofuna." (MEÞL 15)

Ahmed notes that because shame works "on and through bodies" it "also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces, as bodies 'turn away' from the others who witness the shame."[765] Halldór's stillness and passivity is a part of his shame performance which seeks to minimise the space his body occupies – it is almost as if he wants to disappear from the world, or at least from the view of other people. His shame also affects, or forms, the spaces he chooses to spend the most time in: The attic room and Bóas's basement flat. Both spaces are small, scanty and marginal, either above or below the ground floor and unquestionably below bourgeois living standards, and thus underline Halldór's feeling of being an outsider.

As was outlined in the introduction, the gaze which induces shame can be both 'real' and imagined. Sartre emphasises that when the subject feels shame "somebody was there and has seen me,"[766] but as Ahmed points out this 'somebody' is often the imagined view of an 'ideal other' – the normative view of society.[767] Since the narrator in *Man eg þig löngum* mostly follows Halldór's point of view and rarely sees into the minds of other characters it is often difficult to know if, or to what extent, they judge Halldór. He is for example deeply ashamed of his body and appearance but no one ever describes his physical traits except himself. Early in the book he sees his reflection in a window and the following paragraph is the narrator's description of Halldór, from the boy's point of view: He is dressed in old and out-worn clothes, his face is long and pale, he has small eyes, large ears and nose, uncut ginger hair, a long neck with a large Adam's apple, and the torso is long with "massive" arms and legs (MEÞL 19). This image is strikingly negative and bears witness to Halldór's low self-esteem but the reader cannot know if or to what extent other characters confirm it. The reader is thus often in a similar situation as Halldór – trying to figure out what others think of him. Halldór frequently interprets other people's looks and responses to him as critical and judgmental, for example when he, after anxious preparations in front of the mirror and an awkward attempt to shave his face for the first time, goes to a school dance:

> Soon he notices that people are looking at him. Yet nobody approaches him. But he knows why they are looking. He reads the answer from the glances of the people standing next to him, and he only needs to read the most obvious answers. The ambiguous glances can be left aside. He does not know if he is looking at his schoolmates and others nearby or something else. Everything is blurred before his eyes. He only knows that he does not belong here. Why did he allow himself to be

[765] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 101–21.
[766] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 221–22.
[767] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 101–21.

> lured into this place? Here he stands, as if it were his only option, red-haired with red scars in his face after the first shave.[768]

None of the people at the dance talk to Halldór, however, and it is impossible to tell if their judgmental gazes are Halldór's imagination – internalised ideas of how he should look – or not. Sometimes, however, other characters respond to him, for example when Ómar comments on the bad state of his teeth by telling him that he has often wanted to give him a toothbrush (MEÞL 235). This remark shows that Halldór's social position and bourgeois norms influence his feeling of being different; he cannot afford to buy clothes,[769] getting a hair cut is a luxury he presumably cannot allow himself (hence his thoughts about his uncut hair) and neither is dental care. His class position is written on his body and unavoidably boosts his shame. Last, but not least, Halldór's feeling of being different and unattractive in the eyes of others is enhanced when he overhears a girl saying that she finds him "disgusting" (MEÞL 191). His negative view of himself and his appearance is thus, at least to some extent, confirmed by other characters' responses and the gaze which judges him is both 'real' and imagined.

5.1.1 Masculinity

Halldór's shame can be seen as the "affective cost" of failing to approximate social ideals and follow "the scripts of normative existence," as Ahmed puts it[770] – especially norms related to masculinity. His masculinity crisis is significantly different from Bubbi's paradoxical contempt of bourgeois heterosexual norms and values, however, because Halldór does not renounce hetero-masculine norms – he wants to conform to them but fails to do so.

First of all, Halldór has failed to become like his father, the hard-working fisherman, because he is frail and incapable of physical labour. It is not revealed what kind of physical limitations he is dealing with but he has a medical certificate stating that he cannot do gymnastics in school (MEÞL 34). Halldór's shame and belief that he is different from others are rooted in his childhood (MEÞL 33) and it is strongly implied that the reason is that he is unable to do labour and has therefore disappointed his father. He remembers that as a child he played with the workers' tools, but he has not touched them after he was old

[768] "Hann verður fljótt var við að ýmsir horfa á hann. Enginn gefur sig þó að honum. En hann veit af hverju verið er að horfa. Hann les svarið út úr augnaráði þeirra sem næstir honum standa, og hann þarf ekki að lesa nema auðveldustu svörin. Tvíræðu augnaráðin liggja milli hluta. Hann veit ekki hvort hann lítur á skólasystkini sín og aðra sem þarna eru nærri eða hann horfir á eitthvað allt annað. Allt rennur í móðu fyrir augum hans. Honum er það eitt ljóst að hér á hann ekki heima. Hvers vegna lét hann ginna sig hingað inn? Hér stendur hann eins og hann geti ekki annað, blóðrauður í framan, rauður á hár og með rauð ör á vöngunum eftir fyrsta raksturinn." (MEÞL 72)
[769] Halldór seems to be wearing the same clothes throughout the book.
[770] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 107.

enough to be expected to use them and become a labourer himself. “He has never been considered able to exert himself, never been put through labour,” the narrator says. Instead, the boy has been “allowed to bury himself in history books, academic books, also collections of poetry. Then it was decided that he should get an education.”[771] Halldór’s parents have thus built their hopes on the boy’s intelligence and want him to “become someone” – an educated man – but Halldór does not share that dream. He has always felt that his parents’ expectations of him and his future connote “a judgment, some kind of threat, which he avoids – first and foremost a confirmation of his special status among other children, a status he has by no means wanted, – in itself an exclusion from others.”[772] Halldór is, in other words, not interested in studying and does not build any hopes of a better future on his education; he is first and foremost deeply ashamed because he has failed to conform to fisherman and blue-collar masculinity.

After failing the exams in the spring Halldór does not return home to the village but lies to his parents that he did well in school and tells them that he is going to work in Reykjavík during the summer. Twice he makes an effort to work as a labourer, first at the airport and later for the city. These attempts to prove his manhood and earn money that he desperately needs are not successful, however; he gives up and quits after a few days. At the latter workplace he is moreover deeply humiliated and suffers physical violence. While digging a ditch Halldór’s co-workers challenge him and try to provoke him to anger, without result as Halldór gradually becomes more ashamed and afraid but does not dare to answer. Eventually they attack him, hustle him down on the ground, call him a loser and rip his clothes:

> Quick grasps, firm, and yet so raging, sometimes like nightmarish fumblings, like when the weaker ones have to fight for their lives in battle, like gratification at a moment of sick relish, such is the conduct of those who attack the boy. He can no longer hold back a scream, scream, a loud scream. The other men’s hissing wheezes blend with his screams.[773]

Afterwards the boy is partly naked and has to fasten his trousers. It thus seems, although it is not stated directly, that the workers rape him – at least they go very far in violating his privacy and masculinity.

[771] „Hann hefur aldrei verið álitinn fær um að reyna á sig, aldrei verið látinn vinna, en lofað að liggja í sögubókum, fræðibókum, einnig ljóðabókum. Svo var hann settur til mennta.“ (MEÞL 198)
[772] „[…] einhver dómur, einhver ógnun sem hann forðast – fyrst og fremst viðurkenning á sérstöðu hans meðal annarra barna, sérstöðu, sem hann enganveginn hefur þráð, – í sjálfu sér útilokun frá öðrum.“ (MEÞL 33)
[773] “Hröð handtök, viss, og þó svo æðisgengin, stundum líkt og fálm í martröð, líkt og í baráttu hinir óstyrkari [sic] að vinna sér til lífs, líkt og á augnabliki sjúkrar nautnar fullnæging þess er þarf útrás, þannig eru aðfarir þeirra sem pilturinn finnur veitast að sér. Hann getur ekki lengur stillt sig um að æpa, æpa, æpa hátt. Saman við óp hans blandast sogandi hvæs hinna.” (MEÞL 222)

In *Man eg þig löngum* physical labour is decisively associated with Halldór's shame, humiliation, pain and lack of masculinity. His incapability to work is particularly painful because of his class position and the context he grew up in; an environment where efficiency and rigour are among the most important masculine traits. Moreover, given the fact that by the end of the novel it is quite clear that Halldór has same-sex desires, it is tempting to analyse his deep-rooted feeling of being different, especially his lack of masculinity, as a sign of queerness. Although Halldór's sexuality is never mentioned in relation to his childhood and masculinity issues there is something left unsaid in that context. One of the boy's most painful memories, for example, is from the year he was fourteen and an old man in the village said something about him to his father:

> The old man then came to see his father, Magnús. The boy still remembers what he said, what the old man asserted, how he asked, he also remembers his father's silence, a silence which Halldór then thought was worse than if his father had agreed with old Valdi.[774]

The context of this memory is Halldór's incompetence at manual labour, but the unsaid is a key component here and it evokes more questions than can be answered: What did old Valdi say? Why did Halldór's father respond with silence? Why is this particular memory so painful for Halldór? And why does the narrator not reveal what Valdi said? Is it possible that the unsaid here is Halldór's sexuality; can it be that Valdi was implying that the boy was homosexual? Such an analysis is not incontestable but same-sex desire, as this chapter will outline, can be seen as the most prominent unsaid, and yet ever-present, theme in *Man eg þig löngum*. The silence and deep sensitivity surrounding Halldór's memory of Valdi's words indeed suggests that it is a memory of queer shaming.

Halldór's inability to conform to hetero-masculine norms is emphasised in his relationship with a female schoolmate, Helga, or rather lack thereof, because even though he likes her and they exchange a few looks he only admires her from a distance. She seems to like him too, and for a while the novel has the potential to become a heterosexual love story, but the romance dissolves since Halldór never dares to talk to Helga. For him the girl is a fantasy; something he simultaneously wants and fears. Similar themes can be seen in other texts Elías wrote in the early 1940s as chapter three outlined; girls named Helga appear there repeatedly and the eroticism and potential danger associated with eye-contact are underlined.[775] Like the narrators in "Eg skrifta" and "Eftirför," for example, Halldór

[774] "Þá kom gamli maðurinn að máli við Magnús föður hans. Drengurinn man það enn, sem hann sagði, það sem gamli maðurinn sló föstu, hvernig hann spurði, man einnig þögn föður síns, þögn sem Halldóri fannst þá verri en þótt hann hefði tekið undir með Valda gamla og verið honum sammála." (MEÞL 203)

[775] See ch. 3.3.1.

cannot bear being observed – becoming the object of another person's gaze. He is terrified that Helga will learn something about him that he is not willing to face:

> And yet he now knows that she has read from his glance something which no-one has ever been allowed to read, which he has kept from everyone up until this day, which he does not want to tell anyone, even not her. But why not her? No, not even her. He is imperfect. He has nothing but desire, a lone teenager's desire. And what he desires, that he does not want to receive. He knows it is not enough to receive. A gift must be repaid someday. He has nothing to give in return. Since he was a child he has known that he is not made like other teenagers, but it has always been his secret. To be made differently than other teenagers is to be wrongly made.[776]

Nowhere in the novel, except in the final chapter, is it implied more clearly that Halldór is homosexual. He fears the desire he may see in Helga's gaze since he knows he has nothing to offer in a heterosexual relationship, but he is not ready to acknowledge that he desires the same sex and thus sees no other option than keeping his desires for himself and hide them from others. In the eyes of other characters, however, Halldór's failure to approach the girl is a sign of effeminacy or failed masculinity. One of his classmates, Gissur, knows about Halldór's crush on Helga and encourages him to approach her, but when Halldór never dares to take the first step Gissur makes fun of him and calls him a coward (MEÞL 153). Moreover, when Halldór tells Ómar about Helga, his friend says he has "almost been unmanly, – in fact the victim in this game," and Halldór agrees.[777] His failure to perform heterosexuality is also a failed attempt to perform masculinity.

5.1.2 Failure

The difference between Bubbi and Halldór's masculinity crisis lies not least in their attitude towards normative society and masculine norms. Bubbi is full of contempt and defensively renounces bourgeois values (although he, paradoxically, also seems to want to conform to them); Halldór, however, identifies with the norms but fails to live up to them and is therefore flooded with shame. The performativity of Halldór's shame is primarily individuating; he turns inward and focuses on himself, the shame incited by unrequited identifications with social norms and other people paralyses him and most of his attempts

[776] "Og þó veit hann það nú að hún hefur lesið úr augnaráði hans eitthvað sem enginn hefur áður mátt lesa, sem hann hefur leynt alla til þessa dags, sem hann æskir ekki að tjá fyrir neinum, jafnvel ekki henni. En því ekki henni? Nei, jafnvel ekki henni. Hann er ófullkominn. Hann á ekkert nema þrá, þrá unglings sem er einn. Og það sem hann þráir, því vill hann ekki taka á móti. Hann veit að það er ekki nóg að taka á móti. Gjöf heimtar einhvern tíma endurgjald. Hann á ekkert til endurgjalds. Honum hefur verið ljóst frá barnæsku að hann er ekki skapaður sem aðrir unglingar, en það hefur alltaf verið leyndarmál hans. Að vera ekki skapaður sem aðrir unglingar það er að vera ekki rétt skapaður." (MEÞL 62)

[777] "[…] þú hefur nánast verið ókarlmannlegur, – raunverulega þolandinn í leiknum […]." (MEÞL 235)

to "reconstitute the interpersonal bridge," as Sedgwick puts it, fail.[778] Halldór's primary queer performance seems in fact to be failing to perform – or not performing at all.

Failure is a central aspect of shame, as Ahmed points out:

> Shame may be restorative only when the shamed other can 'show' that its failure to measure up to a social ideal is temporary. Shame binds us to others in how we are affected by our failure to 'live up to' those others, a failure that must be witnessed, as well as be seen as temporary, in order to allow us to re-enter the family or community.[779]

If the failure to conform to the norm is not temporary but repeated or permanent, however, the subject's identificatory relationship with the norm or other people is not restored. The shame still binds the subject to other people and the norm, but not in an affirmative way; exclusion from, or at least marginalisation within, the community is unavoidable. Yet Sedgwick emphasises that such shame is also performative and meaningful and plays a central role in the forming and re-forming of the subject's identity. Even though some shamed individuals, like Halldór, do not transform their shame into pride or manage to restore the relationships with the normative society, the meaning and functionality of their shame should not be dismissed or seen as purely destructive. Halldór's passivity and inertness may seem to be anything but performative – a non-performance – but from Sedgwick's point of view it is a profoundly meaningful shame performance. Being flooded with paralysing shame and not trying to cast it off is a significant act; a self-reflective performance. Halldór spends most of his time thinking about himself, how he should and could be, and his relations with others, and this self-obsessed introversion shapes his identity. Halldór's shame is *queer* shame, moreover, and his self-reflective thoughts are often centred on his gender and sexuality; he does not come to a queer self-understanding or identify as homosexual but his shame and passivity is unquestionably a queer performance.

Linking failure with queerness is not a far-fetched idea, as scholars such as Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz have pointed out. Failing is integral to the capitalist emphasis on success, progress and reproduction, and it is "something queers do and have always done exceptionally well," as Halberstam says.[780] Failing in itself is also a performance. Both Halberstam and Muñoz note that failure is not simply the opposite, or erasure, of success; it offers alternatives. Muñoz outlines how queer failure is performative in that it suggests that "something else" is being said or done; it implies that there are other options than what is considered to be either a successful outcome or the absence of success: "The misfire, this

[778] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 36.
[779] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 107.
[780] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, introduction, loc. 66.

failure, is intrinsic to how the performative illustrates the ways different courses are traveled in contrast to what heteronormativity demands."[781] Halberstam also underlines the rewards of failure:

> [F]ailure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes into the toxic positivity of contemporary life.[782]

Seen from this perspective Halldór's failure to conform to hetero-masculine norms and cast off his shame is not merely a defeat. By failing to follow the 'script of normative existence' he lives differently and chooses 'something else'; a life which is not heteronormative yet not homosexual either, a life which is not happy, not successful but still a life – a painful and challenging queer alternative outside the definitions of heteronormativity.

5.1.3 Queer potential

By the end of *Man eg þig löngum* Halldór finds himself in a situation where he is provoked to face and acknowledge his same-sex desires. At this point in the story his life has become almost unbearable; he has been assaulted and humiliated at work and given up the dream of ever talking to Helga, he has failed his exams, is unemployed and has no money to pay the rent, Ómar has left the city and Bóas is dead. Halldór is, in other words, miserable and very lonely.

> He wanders around, aimlessly. Maybe he has no house to return to when the night falls. But then he suddenly meets a man he has seen before, but he cannot place him. This is a fat man with a big bag, well-groomed, smiling broadly when he sees the boy. And now Halldór knows who the man is. He remembers him well. They greet each other.[783]

[781] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 154. In his discussion of queer failure and the performative Muñoz builds e.g. on Shoshana Felman's writing on Austin and performativity in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (2003).
[782] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, introduction, loc. 69.
[783] "Hann reikar í stefnuleysi. Kannske á hann ekkert hús að flýja í þegar líður að nóttunni. En þá verður allt í einu á vegi hans maður sem hann hefur séð einhvern tíma áður, en kemur ekki fyrir sig hver hann muni vera. Þetta er feitur maður með stóreflis tösku, vel til fara, brosandi út undir eyru þegar hann kemur auga á piltinn. Og nú veit Halldór hver maðurinn er. Hann man vel eftir honum. Þeir heilsast." (MEÞL 268)

The man Halldór runs into on the street is a missionary who travels around the country and sells religious books. On his first day in Reykjavík Halldór met him at a restaurant and had a short chat with him; the man was friendly, showed interest in the boy and gave him a glossy picture of Jesus. Halldór was shy and yet interested in the man whose facial expressions caught his attention: "He seems to be around fifty years old, bold, well shaved and neat. A vague smile is on his lips and his eyes cast an inscrutable glance."[784] When Halldór meets the missionary again he is relieved to see a friendly face but notices again "the glance in his eyes, this strange mixture of provocative reference and naive happiness."[785] The words 'inscrutable glance' and 'provocative reference' suggest that Halldór is both interested in and suspicious of the man, but more importantly that there is something mysterious about him; a secret which Halldór may want to learn more about. Moreover, the missionary catches the boy's attention by giving him money and finally inviting him to visit his apartment. "I enjoy talking to you," he says before he leaves: "You are an unusual teenager. You are not like everyone else. – – Such teenagers always catch my attention."[786] Halldór, who is in a very vulnerable position, feels he has made a new friend – a friend he really needs and who can offer him both money and positive and affirmative attention.

The next day Halldór goes and visits the missionary who greets him happily and starts showing him books and pictures and talking about Jesus:

> Yes, my friend. There is a picture of Jesus Christ. This is a divine picture of a divine body. I have often dreamt about being with him. I am sure you know the other pictures too, the ones of Socrates and Plato. – They were also distinguished men, and yet, merely men. Christ was not a man. – But some of the things these two men said and still exist, that was not so stupid. – Hahaha! – No. It was not.[787]

The boy looks into the man's eyes and sees again "the strange referential look."[788] The missionary continues and talks about how much Jesus wanted men to love each other: "The Greek, my friend, they had a similar theory; and their theory was both precept and

[784] "Þetta virðist vera maður um fimmtugt, sköllóttur, vel rakaður og vel til fara. Um varir hans leikur dauft bros, og í augum hans er ókennilegur glampi." (MEÞL 21)
[785] "[…] glampanum í augum hans, þessu merkilega samblandi af ögrandi skírskotun og barnslegri gleði." (MEÞL 268)
[786] "Þú ert dálítið sérstæður unglingur. Þú ert ekki eins og flestir. – – Svoleiðis unglingar vekja alltaf athygli manns." (MEÞL 269)
[787] "Já, vinur minn. Þarna er mynd af Jesú Kristi. Þetta er guðdómleg mynd af guðdómlegum líkama. Mig hefur oft dreymt ég væri með honum. Hinar myndirnar þekkirðu víst líka, þessar af Sókratesi og Platoni. – Þeir voru einnig merkir menn, en aðeins menn, reyndar. Kristur var ekki maður. – En sumt af því sem þessir tveir menn sögðu og enn er til, það var ekki svo vitlaust. – Hahaha! – Nei. Það var það ekki." (MEÞL 276)
[788] "[…] þann undarlega skírskotunarsvip […]." (MEÞL 277)

practice."[789] The reference to male same-sex desire in the man's words is of course obvious; not only does he talk about Jesus's body in an erotic manner but also refers to the practice of male love in Ancient Greece. The strange glance in his eyes is a queer erotic symbol which also appears in Elías's earlier writings, such as "Eftirför," "Einginn sérstakur" and the unfinished story draft from 1943.[790] The missionary has, in other words, invited Halldór to his apartment with the goal to seduce him. Halldór seems to realise to some extent what is happening; he feels uncomfortable and tries to leave but the missionary invites him to dinner, which is an offer the hungry and poor teenager cannot refuse. After the meal they chat and the missionary continues to show the boy books and magazines and tell him stories. Eventually he opens a drawer and takes out a pile of magazines, sits down beside Halldór and talks about the pictures. They halt at a picture of a young man wearing high-fashion clothing in bright and shiny colours; Halldór sees and hears that the missionary is smiling a mysterious smile and breathing heavily:

> How do you like this, my friend? How do you like it? Is this not beautiful? Is this not wonderful? This is how I picture *you*, – much smarter, happier, more bright-eyed, – enjoying all the best things life has to offer while you are young. I have, since the first time I saw you, envisaged you as the most elegant teenager on the streets, – like this picture shows, – yes much more elegant – –[791]

Then the missionary begins to touch the boy, stroke his back, shoulder and neck and tells him he is beautiful. Halldór sits still at first, although he feels uncomfortable, but eventually jumps up, feeling confused and disappointed, and runs out of the house.

Halldór's thoughts while he is visiting the missionary are paradoxical. When he starts realising what is happening he feels uncomfortable and wants to leave, but there is also something holding him back: "Yet he also feels that he has finally found the man who both wants and can help him overcome a difficult obstacle, give him strength. Finally, the boy sees the clouds begin to part."[792] A moment later he feels like he is living a nightmare and is deeply disappointed that "what he first thought was an interesting adventure"[793] is turning into circumstances that terrify him. Halldór has hoped that the missionary could provide him with what he needs the most, friendship, money and security, but it is also

[789] "Grikkir, vinur minn, þeir áttu til sams konar kenningu; og þeir áttu hana ekki einungis í orði heldur og á borði." (MEÞL 277)
[790] See ch. 3.3.1.
[791] "Hvernig finnst þér vinur? Hvernig finnst þér? Er þetta ekki fallegt? Er þetta ekki dásamlegt? Svona sé ég *þig* fyrir mér, – miklu fínni, glaðari, bjarteygari, – njótandi þess bezta sem lífið hefur að bjóða meðan maður er ungur. Ég hef frá því fyrsta séð þig fyrir mér sem glæsilegasta unglinginn á götunum, – þannig sem þessi mynd sýnir, já miklu glæsilegri – –" (MEÞL 280)
[792] "Þó finnst honum einnig sem nú loksins hafi hann fyrirhitt þann sem bæði vilji og geti hjálpað honum yfir örðugan hjalla, veitt honum styrk. Loksins sér pilturinn rofa til." (MEÞL 281)
[793] "[…] vonbrigðum mitt í því sem hann hélt fyrst vera nýstárlegt ævintýri." (MEÞL 281)

implied that he has hoped the man could help him overcome "a difficult obstacle," which could be facing his desire for men. At the same time, however, Halldór fears the idea of male sexual intimacy so intensely that he loses control and flees. Out on the street Halldór comes to himself and realises that he has

> freed himself from magazines, books, promises, everything except himself, not thanked for anything, not said good-bye to the missionary, and he only knows that he is free and has no place to return to.[794]

Yet again Halldór is alone. He thinks about what would have happened if he had stayed: "Should he have waited until he was certain [about the missionary's intention]? No. He would not have been able to resist it."[795] He thus seems to realise that if he had allowed the missionary to continue he would have given in to his same-sex desires. This thought frightens him so much, however, that he associates escaping same-sex desire with being free; a state which he is thankful for although it means that he is again alone, broke and homeless.

After this incident Halldór starts wandering around the streets again without a plan or a purpose, neither happy nor sad; he does not want to return to his attic room and neither will he go home to his parents. The last person he meets is one of the guys who assaulted him at the workplace. He is drunk and starts apologising to Halldór and offers him money but the boy refuses to accept the gift and leaves. He wanders out of the city and simultaneously out of the novel, which ends with these words: "He has hardly any intention with this walk, and he is not yet sleepy, nor is he tired or hungry. Over the mountains in the East, a rising sun appears."[796] Like *Eftir örstuttan leik*, *Man eg þig löngum* thus ends in uncertainty and without solving the characters' problems. Yet both novels also leave their queer protagonists with possibilities; transformation, a new life, queer self-understanding, more failure, or something else. Halldór's walk into the sunrise outside Reykjavík is, like Bubbi's writing process, perhaps his most significant and promising queer performance. Driven by shame – and the confrontation with his own same-sex desires and the possibility of acting upon them – he leaves the city and its people, norms and values behind, refuses to accept his attacker's money or apology and walks into the unknown. He is not heading towards promises of a better life or homosexual identity but towards a new day full of difficulties, pain and failure – and queer potential.

[794] „[…] slitið sig lausan frá blöðum, bókum, fyrirheitum, öllu nema sjálfum sér, ekki þakkað fyrir neitt, ekki kastað kveðju á trúboðann, og veit það eitt að hann er frjáls og á í engan stað afturkvæmt." (MEÞL 281–82)
[795] "Hvernig hefði verið að bíða unz hann hefði fengið vissu um það? Nei. Hann hefði aldrei staðizt það." (MEÞL 283)
[796] „Hann hefur varla fyrirætlun með þessari göngu, og hann er ekki syfjaður ennþá, heldur ekki þreyttur eða svangur. Yfir austurfjöllunum bjarmar fyrir hækkandi sól." (MEÞL 286)

5.2 Reading

One of the most significant queer performances in *Man eg þig löngum* is carried out by Bóas. Halldór meets him shortly after he arrives in Reykjavík and the two men bond instantly, perhaps because they share a strong feeling of being social outsiders; both are poor introverts who have physical limitations and feel that they do not belong in bourgeois society. Their friendship is close but not seemingly erotic, yet there are clues in the text that suggest that Bóas is attracted to the same sex and that he knows Halldór is too, and moreover that Bóas tries to help his young friend understand his own desires. Like when Bubbi repeatedly mentions the books in his bookcase, Bóas's queer performance is based on reading and understanding fictional texts. He has a 'life philosophy' that he takes firstly from the science fiction novel *Urania* (1890) by a French astronomer, Camille Flammarion,[797] and secondly from an old Icelandic folk song that begins with the words forming the novel's title: "Man eg þig löngum." Bóas makes untiring efforts to make Halldór read and understand these two very different texts. The queer message they carry is perhaps not overt but an in-depth analysis reveals that Bóas's philosophy is a vision of a world where same-sex love and desire is accepted.

Urania is "common astronomy shaped as fiction," wrote the Icelandic translator, Björn Bjarnason, in an introduction to the novel when it was published in Icelandic in 1898.[798] It tells the story of two astronomers, the character-narrator who carries the author's name, and his friend George Spero. Both are fascinated by ideas about the relationship between psychology, philosophy and astronomy, and by the possibility of an afterlife on other planets; that is, the idea that when people die their souls can be transferred to other parts of the universe. Both men travel to other solar systems and planets, either in dreams, with help from mediums or after their death, where they learn that compared to other societies in the universe the people on Earth are underdeveloped and overly reliant upon material needs, such as money, power and physical desires. There are societies, they find out, where spiritual matters are more important than physical matters and where the inhabitants' sense and understanding of the world is completely different from the way most earthlings think

[797] Elías Mar wrote in his notebook in 1945, while he was writing *Man eg þig löngum*, that he had read *Urania*. *Lbs.* 13 NF. Elías Mar. Notebook 5 July 1945. Flammarion's novel was originally published in French as *Uranie* in 1889 and came out in English translation as *Urania* in 1890. The Icelandic translation, *Úranía,* was published in 1898. All references in this thesis are to the English translation unless other is noted.

[798] "[…] alþýðleg stjörnufræði í skáldsögubúningi." Björn Bjarnason, "Formáli," vi. Flammarion was an astronomer who worked at the Paris Observatory and devoted many years of his life to research on the moon and other planets, especially Mars and Venus. He argued that Mars was inhabited, and believed in personal immortality, the plurality of worlds and that life was universal and eternal, all of which are ideas illustrated in *Urania*. See Hector MacPherson, "Camille Flammarion."

about their environment and other people. Last, but not least, the narrator and George learn that the whole universe is connected in time and space, and that after their death people can leave the Earth and upgrade to a higher level of existence on other planets – but only if they have shown and proved they are sufficiently mentally and spiritually mature. Most earthly souls are attached to the Earth and unprepared for the spiritual or 'Uranian' life, George explains to the narrator after he has died and started living an afterlife on Mars:

> To sum up, justice reigns in the moral world as equilibrium does in the physical world; and the destiny of souls is but the perpetual result of their capabilities, their aspirations, and consequently of *their works*. The Uranian way is open to all; but the soul becomes truly Uranian only when it has entirely shaken off the weight of material life. The day will come, even on your planet, when there will be no other belief, no other religion, than the knowledge of the universe and the certainty of immortality in its infinite regions, in its eternal domain.[799]

George has tried this on his own skin but he died a tragic death when trying to save his fiancée, Icléa, who in turn died while attempting to save him. They sacrificed themselves for each other and both were reincarnated on Mars because

> [t]heir love was, from its very nature, very far removed from all those common-place unions founded, some on gross sensual pleasure, others on motives of interest more or less disguised, which represent the greater part of human love. Their cultivated minds kept them isolated in the loftier regions of thought; their delicacy of feeling kept them in ideal atmosphere where all material burdens were forgotten; the extreme impressibility of their nerves, the exquisite refinement of all their sensations, brought them delights whose enjoyment seemed to have no end.[800]

George and Icléa are, in other words, Uranian souls who, unlike most earthlings, are not attached to the material life but mature and cultivated and thus capable of enjoying the true wonders of the universe.[801]

Bóas has taken *Urania* as his existential and philosophical bible and he believes that people can, after they die, have their souls transferred to another planet where they will live a better and happier life. Most importantly, he believes that in the afterlife unrequited love

[799] Flammarion, *Urania*, 252.
[800] Ibid. 130–31.
[801] *Urania* is not 'simply' science fiction; it is based on scientific studies, performed e.g. by Flammarion himself, and theories about human souls and existence beyond the limits of death and time. It was written into a tradition of occultism that was influential, yet disputed, both in France and Iceland around 1900. See e.g. David Allen Harvey, "Beyond Enlightenment. Occultism, Politics, and Culture in France from the Old Regime to the *Fin-de-Siècle*"; Benedikt Hjartarson, ""Magnan af annarlegu viti." Um strangvísindalega dulspeki Helga Pjeturss." The Icelandic translation of the novel was criticised for promoting irrational and unscientific nonsense but also celebrated. See e.g. "Bókmentir vorar," *Nýja öldin*, March 1899, 117–33, especially 123–25; "Bókasafn alþýðu," *Þjóðviljinn ungi*, 30 September 1898, 11.

and desire will be fulfilled. "And everything we desire here but cannot have," he says to Halldór;

> sometimes we can only blame ourselves when we do not get everything we want, – but anyhow, – everything we do not obtain here, we attain later. We just have to remember to desire, not to forget the things we have once been captivated by and not enjoyed.[802]

The importance of waiting and persisting, of eternal love and desire that must never be forgotten, is central to Bóas's philosophy, which he often discusses with Halldór, especially after Halldór tells him about his feelings for Helga. In that context Bóas also recites a folk song, "Man eg þig löngum":

> I remember you always
> beautiful woman.
> I saw you by the blue ocean
> this one time.
> You will never leave my mind.[803]

Late in the novel the reader learns that Bóas once had a girlfriend who died, and that since then he has been "strange," as lady Emilía says to Halldór (MEÞL 249). The message Bóas draws from *Urania* and the folk song, and which he believes in so firmly, may thus be about heterosexual love: That men like Bóas and Halldór should be persistent, even if the girls they love disappear from their lives or the relationships do not work out, because if their love is strong and spiritual it will be fulfilled in the afterlife. There is, however, also a queer dimension to Bóas's philosophy.

Urania is a key to recognising and understanding Bóas's queer sexuality. First of all, although this is neither mentioned in *Urania* nor *Man eg þig löngum*, the term 'urania' refers to late nineteenth-century ideas and theories on same-sex sexuality. In his writings in the 1860s and 1870s the German human rights activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs used the terms *Urning* and *Urningin* about individuals who desired the same sex.[804] An *Urning* was a man who was born with decisive feminine inner qualities and who was sexually attracted

[802] "Og allt sem við þráum hér en ekki fáum, – stundum er það sjálfum okkur að kenna að við fáum ekki hvaðeina sem við viljum, – en hvað um það, – allt sem við öðlumst ekki hér það fáum við síðar. Við megum aðeins ekki gleyma að þrá, ekki láta líða úr huga okkar það sem við höfum einu sinni látið heillast af og ekki notið." (MEÞL 108)

[803] "Man eg þig löngum / menja fögur hrund. / Eg sá þig við æginn blá / um eina stund. / Muntu seint úr mínum huganum líða." (MEÞL 132)

[804] The English terms *uranian* or *uranian love* were also used frequently and appeared for example in Edward Carpenter's book *The Intermediate Sex* (1908). Terms such as 'uranian poets' and uranian poetry' moreover came to refer to radical Western-European poets and their work in the late nineteenth century and throughout the 1920s, but a significant theme in their work were references to and celebration of ancient Greek history and culture, especially emotional and sensational relationships between adult men and young boys. See e.g. Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest. Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1880–1930*.

to men, and *Urningin* was similarly a 'masculine' woman who desired women.[805] Ulrichs built this terminology on Greek mythology and Plato's *Symposium*, more specifically Pausanias's speech where he discusses the two types of Eros, 'common' and 'heavenly' Eros, in relation to the two distinct origin tales of the birth of Aphrodite. While common Eros, desire for both women and men, is associated with the 'common' Aphrodite who is the daughter of Zeus and Dione, heavenly Eros – desire for boys – derives from the Aphrodite who is the daughter of Uranus – and only Uranus. The heavenly or 'uranian' Aphrodite is thus a goddess in whose birth the female has no part; her Eros is the adult man's love of a young boy. The difference between common and heavenly Eros is not simply based on the gender of the love object, however. The common Eros, according to Pausanias, is vulgar; "such men love women no less than boys; next, they love their bodies rather than their souls; again, they love the stupidest they can find, looking only to act, careless of whether or not it is done beautifully." Heavenly Eros, on the other hand, is the love of boys only and the men who love heavenly "delight […] in what is by nature stronger and possessed of more intelligence."[806] Uranian love is thus, if we follow Plato's writings, male same-sex love, but also love that is intelligent and spiritual, as opposed to common material and 'physical' love. This is also the kind of love that is idealised in Flammarion's novel and which gives the characters access to 'the Uranian way,' or eternal afterlife free from the restrictions of the material life on Earth.

Moreover, the novel *Urania* challenges the idea of innate sex and compulsory heterosexuality. In some of the societies the narrator and George explore, souls and bodies, gender and sex, are not an impenetrable whole but fluid and interchangeable. In the first part of the novel, for example, the goddess Urania shows the narrator (in his dream) a planet where the inhabitants are androgynous, which in her opinion is a great advantage: "The three passions which absorb the greater part of earthly life – eager greed for fortune, political ambition, and love – are unknown to them, because they require nothing to live on." Being androgynous is "different," she says, but it "is a great deal of trouble saved to a humanity."[807] Later it appears that the people on Mars are not bound to the same bodily sex as they were on Earth. George has reincarnated in a female body, for example, and Icléa in a male body, but that does not alter their love for each other: "He has become she, the woman; she is now the man, – and they love each other more than ever."[808] George also explains to

[805] Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of 'Man-Manly' Love. The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality*.
[806] Plato, *The Symposium*, 121.
[807] Flammarion, *Urania*, 28.
[808] Ibid. 155.

the narrator that on Mars bodily sex and gender does not matter; the souls are neither male nor male and they are not bound to bodily sex, because on Mars the existence is spiritual but not physical.[809] The ideas and speculations about sex, gender and sexuality in *Urania* are therefore quite radical and queer. The novel is critical of the restrictions of binary sex and gender, gender roles and gendered definitions of love and desire, and even though there are no blunt discussions of same-sex love the text emphasises that ideal happy love is not gendered. Like the Greek heavenly Eros, such love is first and foremost spiritual and intelligent.

The afterlife Bóas fantasises about is therefore not just a place where everyone is free to be themselves; it is also a world where sex and gender are infinite and interchangeable and where sexuality is not defined or restricted by gender. It is, in other words, a world where same-sex desires and love is possible and not marginalised. Importantly, however, the idealised love in Bóas's fantasy is also inherently non-physical and non-sexual – it does not include sexual intercourse. Bóas's emphasis on *Urania*, its philosophy and 'message,' can thus easily be interpreted as a queer fantasy; as his wish to leave the Earth and live an afterlife in a society where non-sexual same-sex love can flourish, and where his physical limitations do not matter because soul and love is not bound to bodies. Bóas has, like Halldór, been socially marginalised and shamed because of his body and lack of masculinity. This shame has marked his life and identity but he has found a way to live with it – reading and believing in *Urania* and its message is a queer performance by which Bóas transforms the energy of his shame into hope and belief in a better future.

Bóas tries to connect to Halldór through *Urania* and get him to read the book; to understand the message and at the same time himself, his desires and thereby what he has in common with Bóas. "This book is undervalued, but it contains what every man should read," says Bóas about *Urania*. "It is not just a scientific work, a story and exceptionally well written; it also carries the message, the revelation that –"[810] He never finishes the sentence but adds that he doubts that any book could be more beneficial for Halldór to read, even if he may not believe everything it says. Building on the discussion of *Urania* in this chapter, the sentence can be completed for Bóas: The novel carries with it the revelation that people can desire and love whomever they want to, regardless of their gender. Bóas's attempt to make Halldór understand this fails, however; Halldór begins to

[809] Ibid. 239–40.
[810] "Þessi bók er lítils metin. En hún geymir samt það sem hverjum manni er gott að lesa. […] hún er ekki aðeins vísindarit, saga og listaverk í frásögn, heldur ber hún þann boðskap, þá opinberun sem – " (MEÞL 49)

read the book but never gets it, loses interest and eventually gives up on it. He does not understand *Urania* and thus fails to acknowledge Bóas's queer message.

5.3 Writing

Not only is a fictional text a key to a queer understanding of *Man eg þig löngum*; when it comes to the relationship between Halldór and Ómar, books and fiction are also loaded with erotic meaning. Unlike Bóas and Halldór, Ómar is handsome and self-confident, as noted earlier, he comes from a relatively wealthy family and Halldór thinks he is one of those who "probably have never had to be ashamed of themselves."[811] Importantly for this context, moreover, Ómar is a writer. Bóas has known Ómar since he was born and introduces him and Halldór. The first time the three men meet neither Bóas nor Halldór can keep their eyes off Ómar (MEÞL 136). After this meeting Halldór is full of unexpected excitement and later realises that he is anxious about meeting Ómar again. That same night the three of them go to a café and the cinema together, and when Halldór goes to sleep he cannot stop thinking about Ómar:

> The image in his mind is clear, even every small detail in the writer's attire: the white cuffs below the deep-blue jacket sleeves, the deep-blue necktie on the white shirt, the sharp cuffs on his pants, the shiny shoes Halldór was constantly afraid he would step on while sitting at the table with him, the curl in the golden hair, his blue eyes, the ring on his finger with a red stone embedded in a thick frame, the watch on his white slender wrist – – –[812]

"Has a man ever been described with more obvious erotic care by another man in an Icelandic novel?" Hjálmar Sveinsson asks in his discussion of *Man eg þig löngum*,[813] and this is indeed a very valid question. The description and other comments about Ómar in the novel, all from Halldór's perspective, are detailed and sensual and Halldór's admiration of Ómar grows stronger as the novel progresses. The two of them seek each other's company and often meet without Bóas, and even though their relationship is not explicitly sexual it is indeed close and meaningful.

Again the association between homoeroticism and artists appears in Elías Mar's writings. Halldór is very impressed by the fact that Ómar is a writer and admires him deeply. He is also fascinated by books and other things in Ómar's premises; luxuries the

[811] "[…] sem líklega hefur aldrei þurft að skammast sín fyrir sjálfan sig […]." (MEÞL 140)

[812] "Fyrir honum stendur þessi mynd skýr, jafnvel hvert smáatriði í klæðaburði skáldsins: hvítar mansétturnar fram undan dökkbláum jakkaermunum, dökkblátt þverbindið framan á hvítu skyrtubrjóstinu, egghvöss brotin í buxunum, gljáfægðir skórnir sem Halldór var sífellt smeykur um að stíga ofan á þegar hann sat til borðs með honum, sveipurinn í gullnu hárinu, blá augu hans, hringurinn á baugfingrinum með rauðum steini greyptum í þykka umgerð, úrið á hvítum grönnum úlnlið hans – – –" (MEÞL 144)

[813] "Skyldi karlmanni nokkurn tímann hafa verið lýst af jafn augljósri erótískri alúð af öðrum karlmanni í íslenskri skáldsögu?" Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 57.

poor fisherman's son has rarely seen. The first time Ómar invites Halldór to his house he gives his friend canned fruit with cream; a delicacy the boy has never tried before in his life. While they sit and eat they talk about writing and fiction and Ómar allows Halldór to look at some of the books in the living room:

> There is a large number of books, more than Halldór has ever seen in one room. Ómar Dúason opens the bookcase, places a few books on the small table, offers Halldór to take a look at the ones he likes the most. Halldór has never touched such marvellous and carefully made things, and he hardly feels he is worthy of touching them.
>
> – If you want, you can borrow some of them, says Ómar.[814]

With these words the chapter ends. On the next page Halldór wakes up the morning after and "can still taste the delicious fruit he ate in the writer's living room. He rises like a new man, decides to go to school, combs his hair, which he rarely does […]."[815] He is unusually happy and confident and even thinks the coffee tastes differently: "The aftertaste of the warm coffee evokes the memory of tasty exotic fruit and other delicacies his friend Ómar the writer gave him last night."[816] These descriptions of sweet exotic fruit and the texture of book covers are strikingly sensual and erotic. Ómar's appearance, personality and class position charm Halldór, make him happy and help him cast off his shame for a little while – and Ómar's writings and the books in his bookcase are central to this erotic fascination.

Late in the book Halldór and Ómar go camping in Þingvellir together, lie in the sun after a long walk and Halldór watches his friend's hands touching a mossy rock (MEÞL 231). He is yet again charmed by Ómar: "He looks at his friend, full of surprise and admiration, more frequently than the writer realises. There is something about Ómar's personality he feels he can simultaneously respect and trust."[817] Halldór cannot help but "associating [Ómar's] face with something perfect"[818] – something more perfect than

[814] "Þarna er mikill fjöldi bóka, svo mikill fjöldi að Halldór hefur aldrei séð annað eins í einni stofu. Ómar Dúason tekur hurðirnar frá hillunum, setur nokkrar bækur á smáborðið, býður Halldóri að skoða það sem hann vilji helzt. Halldór hefur aldrei snert við svo dýrlegum hlutum og vel frá gengnum, og honum finnst varla að hann sé þess verður að snerta á þeim.
– Ef þú vilt máttu fá einhverjar að láni, segir Ómar." (MEÞL 160)

[815] "Þegar Halldór vaknar daginn eftir finnur hann enn í munni sér ljúffengt bragðið af ávöxtunum sem hann borðaði í stofu skáldsins. Hann rís á fætur sem nýr maður, ákveður að fara í skólann, greiðir hár sitt sem hann sjaldan gerir […]." (MEÞL 161)

[816] "Bragðið eftir heitt kaffið vekur þægilega endurminninguna um gott bragð af nýstárlegum ávöxtum og öðrum sætindum, sem vinur hans Ómar skáld veitti honum í gærkvöldi." (MEÞL 163)

[817] "Hann lítur oftar til vinar síns, fullur undrunar og aðdáunar, heldur en skáldið veit af. Við persónu Ómars finnst honum eitthvað sem hægt sé að bera í senn virðingu fyrir og sýna traust." (MEÞL 232)

[818] "[…] kemst hann enn ekki hjá því að setja það andlit í samband við eitthvað fullkomið […]." (MEÞL 232)

Halldór has ever seen in any man – and he is overwhelmingly grateful to be with him in Þingvellir. Earlier that day Halldór has confided in Ómar and "told him everything – confessed" (MEÞL 232). What exactly this "everything" is is unclear. Ómar indicates that they have talked about Halldór's feelings for Helga and about "Halldór himself,"[819] but he also mentions that Halldór has told him about "a very serious problem" he is dealing with.[820] Like Halldór's memory about old Valdi's words this conversation between Halldór and Ómar, which is one of the rare occasions in the novel where Halldór expresses himself and says more than a few words, is full of gaps; the narrator only reveals part of the truth and several questions are left unanswered. Yet given their erotic and sensual friendship it is tempting to suggest that they were talking about sexual issues and same-sex desires.

The trip to Þingvellir is the last time Halldór sees Ómar, because Ómar soon leaves the city with "his girl." A few days after Halldór returns to Reykjavík the thought suddenly hits him that Ómar may use the personal things he told him as a writing material, but Ómar has told him that he is going to focus on writing while he is away. Like the narrator in "Eftirför," discussed in chapter three,[821] Halldór is terrified and wonders if Ómar only spent time with him so that he could write a book about him:

> He received the material where I told him all my secrets. Or why has this man made so much effort to get to know me? – Why, if not because of this, if not because of what he has now succeeded to achieve – to analyse me and gain control over me so he can write about me? – –[822]

Halldór is, in other words, afraid of being exposed and that his secrets will be revealed. His most important secret is arguably that he desires other men and even though the reader never learns what exactly Halldór told Ómar the possibility that they discussed sexual matters remains open. Halldór is deeply afraid of his same-sex desires and the thought of someone else putting them in words, let alone publishing them, is frightful. Halldór's fear that his personal matters will become book material is in a way rational, of course, because although Ómar presumably did not write this book, Elías Mar did. Ómar's potential book, or work in progress, is a work within a work and can be interpreted as a mirror in the text, similar to the prologue in *Eftir örstuttan leik.* It reflects upon the making of the novel, *Man eg þig löngum*, as well as the second volume that was never written but would have dealt with Halldór accepting his homosexuality.

[819] "Um þennan draum þinn, ef svo má segja, um þessa stúlku, um sjálfan þig." (MEÞL 233)
[820] "[…] þitt mjög svo alvarlega vandamál […]." (MEÞL 235)
[821] See ch. 3.3.1.
[822] "Hann hefur fengið efniviðinn þar sem ég sagði honum allt í trúnaði. Eða hvers vegna hefur þessi maður gert sér svona mikið far um að kynnast mér? – Hvers vegna ef ekki vegna þessa, ef ekki með það fyrir augum sem honum hefur nú tekizt – að kryfja mig til mergjar og hafa mig á valdi sínu til að geta skrifað um mig? – –" (MEÞL 239)

In this context it is worth noting that there are certain resemblances between Ómar and Bubbi; unlike Halldór they are well off financially, handsome and self-confident – and they write. Writing seems in fact to be a key to living a relatively happy life with queer desires in both *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* – a queer performance that enables the characters to release tension and feelings that cannot be channelled otherwise and transform their queer shame and self-contempt into fiction or artistic creation. Through writing Bubbi and Ómar sublimate their same-sex desires and thus survive without coming out or identifying as homosexual. Halldór, however, never takes this step. He is indeed fascinated by the fact that Ómar writes and admits that he has always wanted to write himself. He plans to write down Bóas's 'aphorisms' – his philosophical thoughts and theories (MEÞL 125–26) – but never makes a real attempt to start writing. Yet shortly after Halldór meets Ómar for the first time he discovers the advantages of creative self-expression. He is alone in a classroom and draws a big detailed picture on the blackboard, puts great effort and ambition into the drawing and forgets his surroundings. When he is done he is very proud of his work, and for a moment he feels relieved, happy and confident. This euphoria does not last long, however, because he hears the other students laughing and making fun of him and again he feels deeply ashamed and self-conscious (MEÞL 146–49). This scene shows that for Halldór too, even though he never starts writing, creating art offers relief from shame. Moreover, in the sequence to *Man eg þig löngum* that was never written, he was supposed to become a writer and face his desires and 'become' a homosexual. Halldór's potential transformative queer performance was thus never realised – only in the mind of Elías Mar.

5.4 Conclusion

The creative process behind *Man eg þig löngum* spans more than a decade, as chapter three outlined, or from 1938 to 1949. It should thus perhaps not come as a surprise that several themes appear in the novel that are also under discussion in Elías's earlier work. It expresses for example strong sympathy with people who are marginalised because of their class position or disability, such as Halldór, Bóas and Bóas's mother, and underlines the differences between lower and upper-class homes and lifestyles. 'The situation' is not a prominent theme in the novel but it is implied that Helga starts seeing a soldier after she has given up on Halldór (MEÞL 227–30, 265–66). A woman named Dísa also sometimes uses Halldór's room when he is not at home; Emilía tells him that she cleans the room but he later finds out that she meets soldiers there – and probably sleeps with them for money. At first Halldór is judgmental and disgusted but Emilía tells him that he should not

condemn others and eventually he starts caring about Dísa.[823] An earlier version of Dísa appears in the draft "Börnin á mölinni," where it is Jón's mother who, after losing her husband and dealing with economic struggles, starts drinking and selling sex; Jón is ashamed of her but he also loves her and wants to understand her.[824] The woman in 'the situation' does thus not appear in these writings as a one-dimensional or predominantly negative character but as a person with a background story, marked and limited by her social status.

Halldór represents characteristics Elías recognised in himself and wanted to overcome, such as shyness, idleness and inferiority, as he suggested himself in a letter to his publisher.[825] Elías's notebooks and other writings from the early 1940s, especially 1941–1943, often remind the reader of Halldór; sadness, uncertainty and loneliness are prominent feelings and Halldór's relationship with Helga bears strong resemblances to Elías's descriptions of his unreciprocated love of Jóhanna Þorgilsdóttir (Hanna). He later stated that he had used that experience as a reference when he wrote *Man eg þig löngum*.[826] Like Elías Halldór frequently visits cinemas, especially when he feels miserable, but the films he sees are never under discussion; only the time and money he spends on them.[827] Such a view of films and cinemas, as a waste of time, energy and money, is evident in Elías's letters to Guðmundur Pálsson in 1943, and his essay "Dægurhugleiðingar" clearly manifests that he considered idleness and lack of self-discipline to be among his greatest faults that prevented him from being a good and productive writer.[828] Last, but not least, Halldór's sexual crisis is without doubt to some extent based on Elías's own experience and he later said that the missionary was based on Þórður Sigtryggsson, the organist who had approached him sexually when he was seventeen years old.[829]

Man eg þig löngum deals with same-sex desires in a prudent manner. The novel appears to focus on heterosexual love and problems associated with such desire, but as this chapter has outlined several clues suggest that the sexuality at the centre of this novel is far from heterosexual. Halldór, Ómar and Bóas perform various queer performances – acts that are meaningful in relation to their non-heterosexual sexuality, identity and the shame

[823] See e.g. MEÞL 112–14, 122–23, 171.
[824] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar, "Börnin á mölinni"; Elías Mar, *Elíasarmál*, 17–74.
[825] See ch. 3.3.3.
[826] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. CA. Diaries and guestbook, box no. 5. "Njóla," 24 April 2000; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 41–60.
[827] See e.g. MEÞL 75, 87, 119.
[828] *Lbs*. 13 NF. Elías Mar. "Dægurhugleiðingar."
[829] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 58; Pétur Blöndal, *Sköpunarsögur*, 275–76. This probably happened in the summer of 1941.

that comes with being different. Spiritual love and close male friendship are idealised in the novel, as in *Urania*, but male physical intimacy is associated with fearful tension. Whenever Halldór is in actual physical contact with other men – that is, when men touch him – he responds with panic and fear, first when he is attacked and perhaps raped at work, and secondly when he is in the missionary's apartment. The novel's stand towards same-sex love and desires is thus paradoxical and ambivalent – just like the protagonist's emotional life. Halldór's queer shame is overwhelming and paralysing and he fails to perform in almost all aspects of his life, but this failure is in fact one of his most significant performances. While *Eftir örstuttan leik* is from the first page to the last Bubbi's self-creative writing performance, Halldór's primary queer performance is his constant failure to conform to normative ideas about what it is to be a man; resistance to heteronormative regulation and expectations about normative subjectivity. His walk into the unknown on the novel's last page also underlines the potentiality of not-conforming, and the fact that the second volume was never written opens up a creative space for the readers in which they can continue to explore various possibilities for Halldór.

This novel is, like *Eftir örstuttan leik*, a very self-conscious text in which queer performances are intertwined with intertextuality and fictional self-consciousness. *Urania* and the folk song "Man eg þig löngum" are textual mirrors that reflect upon and underline the encoded theme in *Man eg þig löngum*: Same-sex desires. Both are 'works within works' that symbolise the theme through disguising it; *Urania*'s title refers directly to homosexuality and the fact that the first line in the folk song is also the title of the novel underlines its importance. Moreover, in *Man eg þig löngum*, fiction is both homoerotic – reading, writing and touching books helps the characters to understand and express themselves and gives them hope in living with their queer desires and their shame – and a symbolic system which enables the readers to identify same-sex love and desires in the novel. The queer performativity associated with fiction, creative writing and being an artist in Elías's first two novels is, in other words, striking.

6 Narcissism and queer transformation

When Elías Mar wrote and published *Vögguvísa* in 1949–1950 he had become an established writer and his intention with the novel was clear: To analyse and engage with youth culture and the post-war atmosphere in Reykjavík. This was an ambitious project and Elías prepared it well; he collected for example slang and neologism used by young people and used this 'slang dictionary' as a reference when he was writing the book.[830] The result was different from most prose that had been published in Icelandic at the time; a short novel with rapid progress and film-like scenes in which urban teenagers, who speak 'bad' Icelandic and drink much liquor, commit a crime and try to get away with it. American cultural influence is also prominent; the characters use English slang and idealise American jazz, film stars and action heroes. These novelties caught the attention of many readers and reviewers and Ragnar Jónsson had no reason to regret publishing *Vögguvísa*; it was quite well received and now, almost 70 years later, it is indisputably Elías's best known and most popular work. It has been republished twice, in 1979 and 2012, and is the only book by Elías that has been translated; in 1958 it was published at Aufbau in East-Berlin as *Chibaba, chibaba: Bruchstück eines Abenteuers*.

Vögguvísa is famous for its representation of American cultural influence and its effect on post-war teenagers. The characters' use of language was contested and the novel was both praised and criticised for it; the reviewers often noted that the language was an important part of the novel's portrayal of corrupt youth but they were also sceptical and sometimes even outraged. "Vögguvísa is the most Reykjavíkian story written so far, not least because it is the first attempt to describe the life in the city using its own turns of phrase,"[831] Helgi J. Halldórsson writes in *Tímarit Máls og menningar* in 1951. Helgi Sæmundsson says in *Alþýðublaðið*:

> The author makes the characters speak a ridiculous language, which must be seen as a part of the weeds that grew on the fields of occupation and relations with occupational forces from the South and the West.[832]

He adds, however, that this language is too excessive in *Vögguvísa* and in fact inexcusable. Sveinn Bergsveinsson says in *Líf og list* that Elías's choice of words is "at times almost not

[830] The slang dictionary was published in *Vögguvísa*'s third edition in 2012, 149–58. See ch. 3.1.1. and Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 72–77.
[831] "Vögguvísa er reykvískasta saga, sem enn hefur verið skrifuð, ekki sízt fyrir það, að hér er í fyrsta sinn reynt í alvöru að lýsa lífi borgarinnar með hennar eigin tungutaki." Helgi J. Halldórsson, "Elías Mar. Vögguvísa," 101.
[832] "Höfundurinn lætur sögufólkið tala skrípamál, sem teljast verður til illgresisins, er spratt á akri hernámsins og samskiptanna við setuliðin úr suðri og vestri." Helgi Sæmundsson, "Nýtt aflamið og drjúgur fengur," *Alþýðublaðið*, 23 January 1951.

fit to be printed,"[833] and Sveinn Sigurðsson asks in *Eimreiðin*: "Is this the new Icelandic language of the future, and is it too much to ask of our writers, that they warn readers of this nuisance?"[834] The tone in these comments moreover shows that many reviewers read the novel as a polemic against American cultural and social influence – especially since it does not end well for the young criminals. "The author portrays images from the shadowy side of Reykjavík, describes the chaos and corruption of misguided youth,"[835] Helgi Sæmundsson says and Sveinn Bergsveinsson argues that Elías's description of the youth in *Vögguvísa* is delicate but important; "the sharpest criticism we have seen, but the time is ripe."[836] Kristinn E. Andrésson praises the novel and states that it is a warning to the Icelandic nation and "a polemic that strikes home."[837] In the epilogue to the German translation *Vögguvísa* is read into a broader cold war-context. Moral chaos, crimes and corruption among teenagers is described as a Western problem, caused by war and "American culture barbarism," and small nations like Iceland, that have just begun to stand on their own feet after centuries of foreign rule, are said to be particularly vulnerable to such Americanisation.[838] The only solution is socialism and *Vögguvísa* is in the epilogue located within the frame of a socialist polemic. In the Icelandic post-war context, however, *Vögguvísa*'s take on American influence did not only appeal to socialists but to a broad range of readers who were concerned about the nation's 'cultural independence.'

Yet a one-sided political interpretation of *Vögguvísa* risks becoming too simplistic. Hjálmar Sveinsson has for example argued that *Vögguvísa* is a classic work of fiction, not because of its criticism of American influence but first and foremost because it captures so brilliantly the world view of misfit teenagers in the late 1940s and the post-war atmosphere.[839] The following discussion similarly seeks to outline how a queer reading of the novel brings forth paradoxes and complexities that challenge common interpretations

[833] "Tilsvör hans nálgast stundum að vera ekki prenthæf […]." Sveinn Bergsveinsson, "Bókmenntir – Vögguvísa," 21.
[834] "Er þetta sú nýíslenzka, sem koma skal, og væri til of mikils mælzt af rithöfundum vorum, að þeir vöruðu við þeim ófögnuði, sem hér er á ferðinni?" Sveinn Sigurðsson, "Vögguvísa, brot úr ævintýri, eftir Elías Mar," 246.
[835] "Höfundurinn bregður upp myndum úr skuggalífi Reykjavíkur, lýsir upplausn og spillingu úrkynjaðrar og afvegaleiddrar æsku […]." Helgi Sæmundsson, "Nýtt aflamið og drjúgur fengur."
[836] "Lýsingin á þessari æsku "ævintýrisins" er harðorðasta ádeilan, sem fram hefur komið og eru það þó orð í tíma töluð." Sveinn Bergsveinsson, "Bókmenntir – Vögguvísa."
[837] "[…] hún er ádeila sem hittir í mark." Kristinn E. Andrésson, "Vögguvísa eftir Elías Mar," *Þjóðviljinn*, 7 January 1951.
[838] "[…] Einflüssen der amerikanischen Kulturbarbarei […]." "Nachbemerkung" in Elías Mar, *Chibaba, chibaba. Bruchstück eines Abenteuers*, 129–31. See also Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 86–88.
[839] Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 81. See also Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 475–76.

and shows that *Vögguvísa* is, like Elías's first two novels, a queer performance as well as an *aktúel*, modern and modernist text.

This final chapter continues the discussion of queer performativity in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* and seeks to locate *Vögguvísa* within that frame. The focus is primarily on queer self-consciousness, or *narcissism*, understood here broadly as a cultural, literary and psychoanalytic term as well as a general reference to self-love. The chapter thus discusses egocentric protagonists and their identity crises and shame, as well as narrative self-consciousness (metafiction) and what Sedgwick calls 'authorial narcissism' – an intensely charged relationship between an author and (queer) characters.[840] The previous chapters identified a strong relationship between fiction and art on the one hand and same-sex desire on the other in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* – between being queer and enjoying or creating art – and the following sections continue to explore such associations and how they become points of queer resistance and transformation.

6.1 Queer Narcissuses

In Greek mythology Narcissus is the son of the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope; a beautiful youth who has many admirers but rejects all of them. In *The Metamorphoses* Ovid writes that when Narcissus was born a prophecy predicted that he would live a long life "if he does not discover himself." When he, at the age of sixteen, sees his reflection in a pool there is no turning back; he falls in love with his own image but is overwhelmed with sorrow when he realises that he cannot kiss or caress his lover. Eventually he dies or dissolves and in his place grows a white flower.[841] This story of the consequences of taking oneself as a love object has been a popular inspiration and source in Western literature, thought and culture; the term narcissism has become a general reference to self-love or excessive interest in oneself – and it has also been strongly associated with (male) homosexuality.

The first scholar who referred to Narcissus in relation to homosexuality was probably Ellis who in the 1890s spoke of a Narcissus-like tendency among people, especially men, who desired their own image – their own sex.[842] Freud then developed his theory of narcissism in the early twentieth century, inspired for example by Ellis, and his psychoanalytic model, in which homosexuality is a form of narcissism and as such a state of arrested psychosexual development, has shaped Western thought ever since with the result

[840] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 39.
[841] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, 91–92.
[842] See e.g. Havelock Ellis, "Auto-Eroticism: A Psychological Study."

that the term often has pathological connotations.[843] Yet narcissism has never become a model in which heterosexual and homosexual desires are clearly distinguished from each other, as Steven Bruhm outlines in *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic* (2001).[844] In Freud's essay "On Narcissism," for example, homosexuality is only one of many manifestations of narcissism. Children, according to Freud, are narcissistic in their self-contentment and women – especially if they are good-looking – develop a certain self-satisfaction and love themselves "with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them."[845] Such narcissism is not only common, says Freud, but attractive; children are charming in their self-absorption and self-loving women "have the greatest fascination for men," not just because they are beautiful but because "another person's narcissism has a great attraction for those are in search of object-love."[846] Neither women nor children are fully developed subjects in this formulation, however, since they are not capable of object-love. Finally, Freud notes that individuals who are in pain are narcissistic since they are neither able to show love nor interest in others; illness and hypochondria entail "a narcissistic withdrawal of the positions of the libido on to the subject's own self."[847] Narcissism is therefore, like shame, characterised by broken or absent identifications with others. All these examples manifest that in Freud's essay narcissism is, as Bruhm notes, "less the demarcating signifier between the hetero and the homo than a phantasm that structures all desire."[848]

Chapter four outlined how *Eftir örstuttan leik* invites its readers to utilise Freudian theory and Bubbi is indeed a psychoanalytic narcissist prototype; incredibly self-centred and unable to love women and become a fully developed masculine subject. Halldór's problems in *Man eg þig löngum* can also readily be discussed as narcissism; he is stuck in arrested development, arguably because he has not learned to sublimate his same-sex desires. Both characters are also in (mental) pain and their libidinal energy is first and foremost directed towards themselves; they suffer because they are not who they should be, or because they are not acknowledged by others, and the pain they feel pulls their attention toward the self. They are, in other words, neither able to identify with nor desire other subjects in a way that makes them happy or fulfilled. All the above also applies to the

[843] Freud, "On Narcissism," 92–102; Steven Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus. A Queer Aesthetic*, 1–19. See ch. 4.3.3.3.
[844] Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 1–19.
[845] Freud, "On Narcissism," 89.
[846] Ibid.
[847] Ibid. 83.
[848] Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 6. For discussion of Freud's problems with maintaining the division between genders and identification and desire, see e.g. Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 1–19; Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*; Michael Warner, "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality."

protagonist in *Vögguvísa*, the fourteen-year-old Björn, often called Bambínó; a working-class boy who is deeply ashamed of his smallness and childish appearance and wants nothing more than to be accepted as one of the *stælgæjar* ('style-guys,' 'cool guys') in Reykjavík. In the novel's opening chapter he breaks into an office with two other guys and steals a large sum of money. The following pages describe the consequences of the crime and how Bambínó enjoys the thrill of having money while trying to avoid being caught. He drinks, parties and carries out a series of hetero-masculine performances or 'rites of passage'; has sex with a girl and tries to prove himself to the older guys and earn their respect. Once again, however, Elías Mar leaves the protagonist in a problematic situation; Bambínó makes several mistakes and by the end of the novel he is lying in the mud on Austurvöllur in the city centre, drunk, desperate and alone. One of the main reasons for his downfall is his self-centeredness and the fact that he betrays his friends, but he is also, as this chapter argues, struggling with same-sex desire and becoming a hetero-masculine subject.

When Elías's novels are analysed in relation to the Greek and Roman sources of the Narcissus myth, rather than to nineteenth- and twentieth-century formulations of it, an even queerer picture arises. Bruhm points out that in the early Greek sources Narcissus is loved by young men, not women, but the stories are neither moral tales about the consequences of vanity or self-love nor centred around sexuality;

> [they] make no ethical distinction between rejected male or female lovers or between masculine or feminine reflections in the pool. Rather, the stories demonstrate the angry play of the gods, the seductive traps of specular beauty, and the gorgeous poignancy of metamorphoses into nature.[849]

Ovid was the first to add the dimension of heterosexual desire to the tale; in *The Metamorphoses* Narcissus is loved by both men and women and the story of Echo – the nymph who can only repeat words spoken by others and who falls in love with Narcissus and dies of sorrow – is added.[850] This "sets up a queerly disruptive paradigm," Bruhm says,

> in which Narcissus's love for another man is replicated in the desire of a woman doomed to the same doubling imperative, a replication that is dazzling and confusing in the way it both conflates and separates desiring subjects, desiring objects, objects and subjects of desire.[851]

[849] Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 13. Other versions of the myth include the story of Ameinius, Narcissus's most insistent suitor, who kills himself on Narcissus's threshold. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 286.
[850] See also e.g. Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*.
[851] Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 13.

In other words, although the Narcissus myth was later simplified into a moral allegory against vanity and self-love, and its implication of same-sex desire was often erased, decried or described as abnormal or pathological, the early Greek and Roman versions are much more complex and paradoxical – and queerer.

The protagonists in Elías's first two novels can easily be seen as modern versions of the Greco-Roman Narcissus; self-centred young men whose desires and identifications are paradoxical and confusing, and this chapter outlines how the same can be said about Bambínó in *Vögguvísa*. In that context it is important to note, as Bruhm underlines, that Narcissus refuses to love the way that is expected of him. He rejects Echo and the boys who want him and thereby rejects both the social expectations that require him to desire another person and "the drive to stabilize a range of binarisms upon which gender in Western culture is founded."[852] Narcissus is neither hetero nor homo and he is not 'simply' egoistic:

> Ovid's Narcissus evinces neither a universalizing equation of sexual object-choice and egoism nor a minoritizing celebration of the love of beauty, but rather both simultaneously. The tale holds up a mirror within itself that allows a shuttle between oppositions, a shuttle that begins to demarcate the "queerness" of Ovid's text.[853]

Narcissus's tale, seen from this perspective, is about queer performativity – a mode of being which entails desires and identifications that escape heteronormativity and other binary regimes. "[A] politically aesthetic resistance – a queer reading – of Narcissus needs to begin by reconsidering Narcissus as the figure who *rejects*,"[854] Bruhm argues and the queer reading of Elías's novels conducted here similarly underlines the importance of rejection and resistance in relation to various manifestations of narcissism.

Sedgwick emphasises that queer performativity is not merely a way to express shame or get rid of it but is a strategy for the *production of meaning and being* in relation to it. Central to her theory is the claim, as we have seen, that shame is not a toxic emotion but an essential part of shaping and re-shaping subjectivity and identity. She is thus sceptical about therapeutic or political strategies that aim to get rid of shame because shame is not a distinct part of individual or group identity that can be thrown away. Quite the contrary, it is

> integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed […] available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, *trans*figuration,

[852] Ibid. 15.
[853] Ibid. 12.
[854] Ibid. 15.

> affective and symbolic loading and deformation, but perhaps all too potent for the work of purgation and deontological closure.[855]

Shame has, in other words, a powerful productive potential which is especially meaningful in relation to sexuality and queerness because, as Sedgwick points out, for queer people "shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity."[856] Her discussion of the creative and transformative potential of shame has inspired scholars such as Munt who suggests, in a section on 'aesthetics of shame,' that:

> Remembering that shame is the most embodied of emotions, and that shame is also intrinsically relational, correlative, and associative, perhaps we can imagine an aesthetics or technology of the self that reinscripts the bio-power of bodies, that builds ethical futures out of shame, that perceives shame as a sort of muscle, an energy that can make things happen.[857]

Shame is performative, as we have seen; it makes individuals turn inwards but also towards others, propels relationships, identifications and various other performances. In Elías Mar's first two novels it certainly has such energy; a queer, creative, transformative potential. If we, yet again, discuss the novels in relation to the Narcissus myth we moreover see that the tale does not end with conclusive death but with metamorphosis. Narcissus cannot touch his reflection and cries of agony, and when he sees his loved one dissolve and vanish when his tears touch the water he "can bear it no longer." He is "melted by love," changes shape and eventually transforms into a flower "with white petals surrounding a yellow heart."[858] Bruhm notes that the result of this transformation is "a metaphor, a displacement, perhaps a work of art" and points out that the story of Narcissus

> is most suggestive in the way it gathers up significations – gender transformations, homo-othered desire, self-other identifications, self-knowledge that is self-destruction/self-apotheosis – and attempts to contain them within an artistic signifier, a signifier that all too readily betrays its overdeterminations.[859]

He suggests, in other words, that Narcissus's fate is not merely a punishment for immorality but a beginning of a new life in the form of a flower, or a work of art. Narcissus transforms and the result is a queer signifier that eludes cultural binarisms and determinations. The endings of Elías's first two novels can be interpreted along similar lines; Bubbi picks up the pen by the end of *Eftir örstuttan leik*, starts recreating himself through writing and transforms into another life form. *Eftir örstuttan leik* is thus, like the

[855] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 63.
[856] Ibid. 64.
[857] Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 220–21.
[858] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, 91–92.
[859] Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 17–18.

white flower, a queer signifier; a work of art which is the result of Bubbi's transformation, incited by his queer shame and identity crisis. By the end of *Man eg þig löngum* Halldór walks out of Reykjavík into the unknown world of potentiality and if we accept Elías's claim that he intended to write a sequel in which Halldór would become a writer and accept his queer sexuality this ending also entails a transformation; the reader can envisage that Halldór will, like Ómar and Bóas, write and read and thereby transform his queer shame into other ways of being.

6.2 Narcissistic narratives

While moving on to a discussion of how Bambínó, like Bubbi and Halldór, rejects, transforms and performs queerness, this section also explores yet another dimension of the Narcissus phenomenon. In *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980) Linda Hutcheon discusses metafiction; fiction about fiction or textual self-awareness, fiction in which books, films, reading, writing and other creative performances are of central importance. Such texts are narcissistic in a general understanding of the term, as they are self-conscious and self-obsessed, but Hutcheon also discusses them in relation to the Narcissus myth and Freud's formulation of narcissism. Her objective, among others, is to argue that metafiction and its popularity in the 1970s do not mark the 'death of the novel,' as many reviewers and critics were arguing at the time. She points out, as for example Robert Alter had done before her, that *Don Quijote* by Miguel de Cervantes was not only arguably the world's first novel but also the first metafictional novel, and narrative narcissism is thus, like primary narcissism in Freud's theory, "not an aberration, but the "original condition" of the novel as a genre."[860]

Hutcheon's primary objective, however, is to explore textual self-consciousness. She notes that there are many forms of narcissistic narratives and metafictional references are not always obvious:

> Overt forms of narcissism are present in texts in which the self-consciousness and self-reflection are clearly evident, usually explicitly thematized or even allegorized within the "fiction." In its covert form, however, this process would be structuralized, internalized, actualized. Such a text would, in fact, be self-reflective, but not necessarily self-conscious.[861]

Eftir örstuttan leik is, as we have seen, an overtly narcissistic narrative in the sense that its self-consciousness is constantly underlined when Bubbi writes his story, addresses his readers and talks about the writing process. The *mises én abyme* and references to reading

[860] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox,* 1–8, here 8; Robert Alter, *Partial Magic. The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*.
[861] Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative,* 23.

and writing in *Man eg þig löngum* and *Eftir örstuttan leik,* such as the books in Bubbi's room and Bóas's *Urania*, are more covert narcissistic characteristics. Hutcheon would perhaps describe them as self-reflective rather than self-conscious but they are nevertheless forms of what she calls narrative narcissism.

Other scholars, such as Brian Stonehill, are not hesitant to refer to novels similar to *Man eg þig löngum* as self-conscious. In *The Self-Conscious Novel: Artifice in Fiction from Joyce to Pynchon* (1988) he discusses a wide range of characteristics that manifest textual self-consciousness and lists them in what he calls a "Repertoire of Reflexivity."[862] This repertoire includes features that belong to the domains of *narration* (the reader is reminded of the author, direct address to the reader, the narrator is visibly engaged in the act of composition, etc.), *style* (use of non-referential or polysemous language, incongruous styles, etc.), *structure* (*mise én abyme*, conspicuous subordination of the plot to artificial generative principles, etc.), *characterisation* (dehumanisation, characters aware of their fictional status, etc.), and *theme* (concern with the relations between fiction and reality, literary criticism within the text, etc.) A text does not have to be self-reflective in all these aspects to be self-conscious, Stonehill says, and a text can also have one or more of these features without being self-conscious:

> This list makes it clear that only those narratives that are in some sense about *themselves* as well as about their ostensible subjects will be endowed appropriately by the features we have identified. Fictions that tell their stories without directly confronting their own ontology will not draw extensively from this repertoire.[863]

Eftir örstuttan leik's self-consciousness is most prominent in the domain of narration but also in the novel's structure, style and characterisation. Yet in both *Man eg þig löngum* and *Eftir örstuttan leik* the most important self-conscious domain is arguably the theme that has been analysed in the previous chapters – that reading and writing can lead to self-understanding and enable characters to live with their same-sex desire. Both novels thereby directly confront their own ontology, as Stonehill points out. The metafictional elements in these texts are central to their queerness – keys to a queer reading – and the narrative narcissism in Elías's first two novels is thus intertwined with other 'kinds' of narcissism, or dimensions of Narcissus and his legacy, represented in the texts.

6.2.1 Ævintýri

The first, and perhaps most visible, signs of narrative narcissism Elías's novels are located on the front covers – and before that in advertisements and discussions about the books:

[862] Brian Stonehill, *The Self-Conscious Novel: Artifice in Fiction from Joyce to Pynchon*, 30–31.
[863] Ibid. 31.

The titles are (or refer to) lines from poems and lyrics. "Man eg þig löngum" is, as we have seen, a line from the old folk song Bóas reads to Halldór when he is trying to help him understand his queer sexuality, and "Eftir örstuttan leik" ('After a short play') is from a well-known Icelandic poem by Þorsteinn Erlingsson, often referred to as "Ég vitja þín æska." Þorsteinn's poem is a tribute to the speaker's youth, days of love, joy, innocence and carelessness, warm kisses and beautiful girls. In the last verse, however, "the most beautiful flowers" have become dull and meaningless, and finally, "after a short play […] all the goblets are empty."[864] The young speaker thus loses interest in his lovers when he has become acquainted with them and his moments of joy are brief. All this reminds the reader of Bubbi and the consequences of his sexual relationships with women in the past, and the novel's title, like "Man eg þig löngum," is thus a *mise én abyme* that reflects and underlines one of its main themes: Bubbi's sexual crisis.

Vögguvísa's title is also a *mise én abyme* but this time a very different kind of text appears in the mirror. While "Eftir örstuttan leik" and "Man eg þig löngum" are lines from poetry that is unquestionably Icelandic, "Vögguvísa" ('Lullaby') refers to an American song, "Chi-baba, Chi-baba" or "My Bambino go to sleep," made popular by Perry Como in 1947:

> All the stars are in the skies
> Ready to say good night;
> Can't you see your doll is sleepy too?
> Close your drowsy little eyes,
> Mam will hold you tight
> While she sings a lullaby to you.
> Chi-baba, Chi-baba, chiwawa,
> Enjalawa cookala goomba.
> Chi-baba, Chi-baba, chiwawa,
> My bambino go to sleep.[865]

This song is played everywhere around Bambínó and the 'bambino' to whom it is sung is the source of his nickname. The *mise én abyme* in *Vögguvísa*'s title thus underlines Bambínó's young age, his decisive identification with American pop-culture and perhaps, as some reviewers and critics have argued, how American culture brainwashes Icelandic youth and lulls them to sleep.[866] As such it mirrors the novel's main theme – teenagers and American cultural influence in the late 1940s – as well as the primary 'model' on which the novel's narrative narcissism is centred: American films and the film medium.

[864] „[…] en hin fegurstu blóm / urðu alslaus og tóm, / ef þau urðu mjer dálítið kunn; / eftir örstuttan leik / var hver blómkróna bleik / og hver bikar var tæmdur í grunn." Þorsteinn Erlingsson, *Rit I. Ljóðmæli*, 108–9. See Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 45.
[865] Lyrics by Mack David. Elías Mar, *Vögguvísa. Brot úr ævintýri*, 34. References to *Vögguvísa* are hereafter abbreviated: (V 34).
[866] See e.g. Kristinn E. Andrésson, "Vögguvísa eftir Elías Mar"; Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, "Um Vögguvísu."

One of the reviewers of *Vögguvísa*, Helgi Sæmundsson, pointed out shortly after the book was published that its form and structure was significantly inspired by the film medium:

> "Vögguvísa" resembles a film, and the story is much more American than the author would admit. Its structure is technical, it is fast-flowing, the plot is continuous from beginning to end, and the writer is neither speculative nor long-winded, which is a welcome novelty in these times of gabbling.[867]

The narrative is indeed centred on plot and character action, and although the narrator sometimes briefly comments on events or Bambínó's behaviour he is reserved and primarily follows the protagonist and his point of view. When Bambínó is sleeping the narration pauses; it continues when he wakes up and never seems to omit many hours of the day. The novel is set in only four days and its structure is 'technical' in the sense that the text is divided into four chapters, "Thursday," "Friday," "Saturday" and "Sunday," and the division takes place at midnight, regardless of what is happening, even in the middle of a sentence.[868] The novel thereby draws attention to itself and its structure, and such self-reflection has a defamiliarising effect, Stonehill says; it underlines the novel's status as fiction.[869]

Bambínó is a frequent guest in the cinemas in Reykjavík and they influence his world-view to the extent that he sometimes feels like he is a character in an action film. The novel begins with a burglary, which in Bambínó's mind is like a film scene. "[A]ll the streets are vacant like in a film,"[870] the narrator says, mediating the boy's thoughts, and Bambínó is ready to do everything Baddi Pá, his role model and leader in crime, tells him to do; "everything a good friend and a smart guy would do in an action film."[871] The day after the burglary Bambínó goes with Baddi to see *A Walk in the Sun* (1945); a war film, starring Dana Andrews, about a group of American soldiers during the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943. Bambínó's experience in the cinema is almost spiritual:

> Red curtains; and the sunlight never reaches this room. Several benches; this is today's temple. Here one comes close to God, whoever he is and whatever his name, I do not care, I am just waiting for the curtains to rise. Meanwhile the program explains the film, raises one's curiosity perhaps, maybe not, and yet one is more convinced than ever of how divine those men are who make all this, act in

[867] ""Vögguvísa" minnir á kvikmynd, og sagan er miklu amerískari en höfundurinn fengist til að viðurkenna. Hún er tæknilega byggð og hraðstreym, söguþráðurinn er órofinn frá upphafi til enda, og höfundurinn viðhefur hvorki vangaveltur né málalengingar, en það er blessunarleg nýbreytni á þessari öld kjafthátta rins." Helgi Sæmundsson, "Nýtt aflamið og drjúgur fengur."
[868] See e.g. the division between Friday and Saturday (V 63–64.)
[869] Stonehill, *The Self-Conscious Novel*, 25.
[870] "[…] allar næstu götur mannauðar eins og í kvikmynd […]." (V 10)
[871] "[…] allt það sem góður vinur og klár gæ myndi leggja á sig í hasarmynd […]." (V 11)

> these films and live in beautiful cities and paradise gardens. I guess the place is called Beverly Hills, but it doesn't matter, really, it's just somewhere in America.[872]

Bambínó's God is Hollywood and the actors and film producers are divine figures in his eyes; this fictional world is his utopia. He identifies strongly with male actors and characters in war and action films like *A Walk in the Sun,* and his involvement in the burglary is a step towards becoming like them. This day in the cinema, however, he experiences a new feeling. The soldiers face various obstacles and many of them die but eventually they take over a farm after a strategic and heroic battle. During the final battle, Bambínó, to his great surprise, starts identifying with the enemy soldiers who are trapped inside the house. "Could they not escape?" Bambínó thinks and grabs his seat, and afterwards he feels surprised and ashamed for thinking like this – for empathising with the enemy or the weaker side (V 31–32). Later in the novel, Baddi admits to Bambínó that he felt the same way:

> We are trapped, Bambínó. There are enemies all around us. But the only difference between us and the soldiers in the hut is that our enemies, the police and the public, do not know about us, they do not know where we are hiding. Not yet.[873]

Both Bambínó and Baddi thus identify with film characters, not just the heroes but also the soldiers who are about to be defeated, because they have themselves taken a risk that might lead to defeat. Hollywood films thus reflect upon and influence their view of their own lives and surroundings.

The film references make *Vögguvísa* a particularly narcissist and self-reflective novel and direct the readers' attention towards its ontology as well as to questions regarding reality and fiction. The line between fiction and reality, Reykjavík and America, is often blurred in Bambínó's mind and in this regard the phenomenon *ævintýri* is of central importance. The word appears in the novel's subtitle – "brot úr ævintýri" – and repetitively in the main text.[874] It has at least a double meaning in Icelandic; it means 'adventure' or 'dangerous journey' but also, in a narrower sense, 'story' or 'fairy tale.' Bambínó often

[872] "Rautt tjald; og inn í þennan sal berst aldrei sólarljós. Margir bekkir; þetta er musterið í dag. Hér nálgast maður guð sinn, hver svo sem hann er og hvað sem hann heitir, mér er alveg sama, ég bíð bara eftir því, að tjaldið sé dregið frá. Á meðan er það prógrammið, sem skýrir fyrir manni myndina, vekur forvitni manns kannske, kannske ekki, og þó sannfærist maður betur en áður um það hversu guðdómlegir þeir menn geta verið, sem búa þetta allt saman til og leika í þessu og eiga heima í fallegu umhverfi stórborga og paradísargarða. Beverly Hills heitir það víst, annars er sama hvað það heitir, það er bara einhversstaðar í Ameríku." (V 29–30)

[873] "Við erum lokaðir inni, Bambínó. Það eru óvinir allt í kring. En munurinn á okkur og hermönnunum í kofanum er aðeins sá, að óvinir okkar, lögreglan og fjöldinn, veit ekki um okkur, veit ekki hvar við leynumst. Ekki ennþá." (V 103)

[874] *Brot* means 'fragment'; 'fragment of adventure or story,' It is also possibly a word game; *brot* could refer to the word *afbrot*, 'crime.' The subtitle would then refer to a crime adventure or story about a crime.

refers to the crime and the following events as *ævintýri*: "This was the *ævintýri*, and the *ævintýri* demands that one performs well,"[875] he says while they are breaking into the office. After the burglary when Bambínó is running away with Baddi and Einar, their fellow in crime, the narrator also comments that "the *ævintýri* has taken over the teenager's life,"[876] referring to the adventurous event of committing a crime and trying to get away with it. But Bambínó also thinks of *ævintýri* in the context of action films and America itself is a world of *ævintýri*: "He saw a milkshake glass upside down and thought of a tower in a faraway city of *ævintýri.*"[877] In Bambínó's eyes *ævintýri* is thus the crime he commits, his reality in Reykjavík, his daydreams about America as well as the fictional world of films. Hence *Vögguvísa*'s subtitle – 'fragment of *ævintýri*' – is, like the main title, a narcissist reference to the novel itself and underlines its fictional status; that it is an adventurous story, like a fairy tale or an action film. The phenomenon *ævintýri* thus combines *Vögguvísa'*s plot and self-consciousness and as such it is, along with the film references, the novel's most important metafictional component. It emphasises the blurred line between reality and fiction in the minds of Bambínó and his friends, and through this narrative narcissism *Vögguvísa* thus allows the every-day life in Reykjavík and the world of film, Icelandic and American culture, to merge, overlap and contradict each other.

6.2.2 Homo noir

The narrative narcissism in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum* is, as has been outlined, a key to queer analyses of the novels and intertwined with other queer and narcissistic dimensions of the texts. The queerness in *Vögguvísa* similarly lies in the novel's self-consciousness; the homoeroticisation of American film masculinity and the *ævintýri*. The previous chapters have revealed that Elías Mar's writings were inspired and affected by films and the film medium from the very beginning. Mysterious film-like male characters are associated with homoeroticism in for example the unfinished draft from 1943, where a strange man reminds the narrator of Peter Lorre, and in chapter four it was suggested that the artist in *Eftir örstuttan leik* plays the role of a queer film noir villain who stands in the way of a happy heteronormative ending. In *Vögguvísa*, moreover, such noir-like characters play the leading roles.

Vögguvísa's last pages are a continuous recollection of the events that lead to Bambínó's defeat and failure. This scene functions as a flashback, as Anna Lea Friðriksdóttir, Sigrún Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, Svavar Steinarr Guðmundsson, Þorsteinn

[875] "Þetta var ævintýrið, og ævintýrið krefst þess alltaf að maður standi sig." (V 10)
[876] "Þannig er ævintýrið tekið við í lífi unglingsins, og eftirvæntingin rík." (V 14)
[877] "Hann sá milksjeikglas á hvolfi og kom til hugar turn í fjarlægri ævintýraborg." (V 98)

Surmeli and Þórunn Kristjánsdóttir point out in their publishers' epilogue to the third edition of *Vögguvísa*:

> It is as if these fragmented images from the past are being cast from a cinema projector, and Bambínó sees before him memories from the history of Iceland, his own childhood and the fateful weekend.[878]

The publishers note that such flashbacks were a common device in film noir and they argue, most convincingly, that *Vögguvísa* is influenced by the noir genre in particular.[879] Like film noir the novel is set in a city during or after the Second World War and most of the scenes take place in darkness, during the night, on the streets or in cafés and clubs, but Bambínó spends most of his time in cafés, at parties, in cinemas or wandering along the streets of Reykjavík. "Isolation, fear and brutality follow Bambínó throughout the story," they note; "the pavements that in film noir are glistening with rain are covered with Icelandic sludge in *Vögguvísa*; ill-lit streets, dingy bars and measly parties are his refuge."[880] The first scene, where Bambínó and his friends break into the house, is also a typical film noir scene; it is set in a dark alley and depicts a gang of men committing a crime.[881] Dyer argues that one of the main characteristics of film noir is that, unlike in standard detective stories, the hero's quest – solving a mystery, getting away with a crime, becoming a hero – is full of detours and not always successful. Its structure is "like a labyrinth with the hero as the thread running through it," he says.[882] The same can be said about *Vögguvísa* like the novel's publishers outline in the epilogue. Bambínó's mission is to avoid being caught and Baddi tells him he needs to keep quiet and sober, go home to his family and avoid parties, but Bambínó is repetitively lead astray; he is drunk or hungover throughout the novel, parties every night and eventually makes a complete botch of his adventure.

War and post-war Hollywood films were highly occupied with the performance of masculinity. Masculinity and the role of men were under scrutiny in the United States as

[878] "Engu er líkara en þessum myndbrotum úr fortíðinni sé varpað af sýningarvél þar sem renna fyrir hugskotssjónum Bambínós minningar úr sögu þjóðar, eigin æsku og frá helginni örlagaríku." Anna Lea Friðriksdóttir et al., "Svingpjattar og vampírfés. Um Vögguvísu eftir Elías Mar," 142.
[879] Ibid. 137–43. On film noir and its main characteristics, see e.g. Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 50–58. Dyer notes that film noir is hard to define and not indisputably a specific genre. Yet he argues that the films in question, that were made from the early 1940s until the mid-1950s, share a certain structure, iconography, visual style and history which justifies that they should be seen as a "discrete film kind." (51)
[880] "Einangrun, ógn og hrottaskapur vofir yfir Bambínó alla söguna, glitrandi gangstéttir rökkurmyndanna eru í *Vögguvísu* votar af íslensku slabbi; illa upplýstar götur, sóða(legir) barir og vesældarleg samkvæmi eru athvarf hans." Anna Lea Friðriksdóttir et al., "Svingpjattar og vampírfés," 139.
[881] Ibid. 137.
[882] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 51.

elsewhere; concerns were raised about the social and economic influence of the war and the servicemen's return to 'normal' life. Mike Chopra-Gant notes that films dealt with masculine representation in different ways; war and action films often emphasised heroic hetero-masculinity, soldiers in uniforms and the importance of male comradeship.[883] The film Bambínó and Baddi see in the cinema, *A Walk in the Sun,* is a good example. The plot revolves around the soldiers and their situation, they wait for orders, move between places, try to avoid getting killed, see others get killed, and eventually win the final battle. No woman appears on the screen and even though the soldiers occasionally mention their wives and girlfriends such notions have little significance – the primary goal and driving force behind the soldiers' actions is solidarity and endurance, fighting and surviving together. The men are tough and deep or complex emotions are not under discussion, although some of them are traumatised by the war.[884] Chopra-Gant notes that many of the most popular post-war films explore relationships between men in a positive manner without hinting at homoerotic undercurrents or anxieties around intimate relationships between men.[885] They often represent a masculine identity with a clear purpose, contrasting various complications concerning gender roles and identities that occurred when the soldiers returned to their families and everyday life after the war. These films provided "a space in which the pleasures of male companionship could be celebrated,"[886] Chopra-Gant says; they represent male friendship which is not 'too close' and yet close enough so that queer spectators could be influenced and inspired by its potential. There are no obvious homosexual or erotic references in *A Walk in the Sun,* but its heavy focus on male comradeship and the total absence of women invites spectators, such as Bambínó, to enjoy the pleasures of male relationships and even fantasise about what could happen between the characters.[887] The fact that Bambínó watches the film with Baddi moreover underlines the intimate bond between the two of them.

Noir films, on the other hand, often represent a troubled and disrupted image of American wartime and post-war culture and masculinity and thus emphasise anxieties concerning the stability of normative masculinity and heterosexuality. Chopra-Gant notes for example that the noir hero is typically a complicated, unheroic and faulty character and the male characters are often criminals, violent, drink excessively and spend much time

[883] See e.g. Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America*, especially ch. 4–6.
[884] Lewis Milestone, "A Walk in the Sun."
[885] Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America*, 121–45.
[886] Ibid. 121–22.
[887] The relationship between the machine gun soldier Rivera and his assistant, Friedman, in *A Walk in the Sun* is especially interesting in this context, since they spend hours lying side by side while they wait for orders to use the gun, a phallic symbol.

away from their families.[888] Dyer has outlined how male homosexuality is a common theme in film noir. The queer characters are represented in a particular 'effeminate' way and ideologically linked with luxury and decadence, he says; they are fastidious about clothes, smell of perfume, with manicured hands or fussy hairstyles and they often love art, music and cuisine. They are often in the role of the villain and frequently "constitute one of the blind alleys of the labyrinth, lengthening the process of solving the mystery or threatening the heterosexual union."[889] Claude J. Summers similarly notes that film noir often represents young queer characters – "criminally minded dandies" – who are tamed or guided by an older and more masculine man. These relationships are, like noir male friendship in general, associated with tension and anxiety around masculinity and sexuality.[890]

Most of what has been said here about film noir applies to Bambínó and his friends, which yet again underlines the 'noirness' of *Vögguvísa*. They are criminals and rebels who drink excessively and spend little time with their families, although Baddi emphasises that in order to get away with the crime they need to 'act normal' – perform as well-behaved young men who go to work and sleep at home. Bambínó is unheroic, even anti-heroic, and Baddi is a mentor who gives him advice and leads him into the world of crime and manhood.[891] Baddi is older than Bambínó and speaks to him in a fatherly tone, especially when he emphasises that Bambínó must be careful, quiet and avoid trouble. The crime is Bambínó's major rite of passage; a performance which proves his courage, disrespect of the law and society and his loyalty to Baddi, and provides him with money and respect. "This was to be a man, not a child […] to conquer infantility,"[892] Bambínó thinks while he follows Baddi into the house – and for a while he enjoys the thrill of having proved his courage and masculinity. Both moreover readily fit into the role of the young, criminal dandy; Bambínó chooses his clothes and hairstyle carefully to resemble the brave, tall, dark-eyed Baddi (V 9, 76–77) and thereby 'become a man.' The masculinity he wants to achieve is also exemplified in the drummer Páll Pálsson, called Kjuði, who in Bambínó's eyes is

> one of those cool guys whose clothes are always pristine, at least not until he has become too drunk to play the drums; one of those who owns a whole pharmacy of hair products and cosmetics, buys magazines directly from the cosmopolitan city itself, and orders fancy clothes from America and gets them delivered to his friends

[888] Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America,* 156–73.
[889] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 62.
[890] Claude J. Summers (ed.), *The Queer Encyclopedia of Film and Television*, "Film noir."
[891] See e.g. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 471–72.
[892] "[…] þetta var að vera maður, ekki barn […], þetta var að sigrast á barnaskapnum […]." (V12)

> in Keflavík; he who, with the exception of Baddi Pá, Bambínó respects more than any other non-filmed human beings, oh, how cool and smart he is. Here he comes walking, and swings his hands to both sides, free and easy as if he were John Payne; and even though his chin is shaped in a way that makes one feel the urge to punch it, it must be admitted that he knows how to carry himself – and live.[893]

This masculine ideal is violent, rebellious and hard-boiled but also dandy and neat – and intimately linked to noir films and Hollywood stardom, via for example John Payne.

Dyer notes that portraying queerness and homosexuality was a risky and delicate matter in the times of the Hollywood Production Code and noir films do thus not address queer issues directly but through various 'unusual' or excessive portrayals of gender and symbolic iconography. There is much uncertainty surrounding the queerness of the characters and Dyer argues that this uncertainty is an integral part of the film's noirness – their shady and dismantling atmosphere.[894] Excessive emphasis on masculine performances and constant uncertainty in relation to hetero-masculine identity is also prominent in *Vögguvísa*. Although Baddi is described as handsome and says at one point that he "wants girls" (V 33), he is not portrayed as a womaniser and the reader in fact never 'sees' him with girls. Even though 'getting girls' is an inherent part of the masculinity Bambínó wants to achieve there are no successful heterosexual unions in the novel, except perhaps Bambínó's parents who belong to a world in which the boy is not interested. The novel's visual pleasure is primarily homoerotic; the characters whose physical appearance is described most positively and in most detail are Kjuði and the men on the cinema screen. The relationship between Bambínó and Baddi, moreover, is based on hetero-masculine performances but also open to a homoerotic interpretation. It is not overtly sexual but Bambínó's admiration of Baddi is unreserved, they spend much time together and homoerotic signs are carefully encoded in the text. Early in the novel, for example, the narrator states that while Baddi is usually just called *Baddi*, girls call him *Baddi Pá*, because they think he resembles the Hollywood film star Tyrone Power.[895] Yet

[893] „Páll Pálsson, Kjuði, einn af þessum stælgæjum, sem ekki láta sjá blett á fötunum sínum, að minnsta kosti ekki fyrr en hann er búinn að drekka sig undir trommuna; einn þeirra sem á vandað apótek af hárvötnum, kremi og dufti, kaupir tískublöð millilíðalaust frá sjálfri heimsborginni og lætur meika sér flotta dressa í Ameríku og senda þá gegnum vini sína í Keflavík; hann sem að undanskildum Badda Pá einum manna nýtur meiri virðingar hjá Bambínó en nokkur mennskur maður ókvikmyndaður, mikið er hann svalur og flott. Nú kemur hann gangandi, og göngulag hans er handasláttur til beggja hliða, frjálslegt eins og það væri John Payne; og endaþótt haka hans sé þannig, að mann langar öðru fremur til að gefa manninum undir hana, þá ber að viðurkenna það, hversu vel hann kann að bera sig – og lifa." (V 78)

[894] Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 90–115, here 90. See also Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 50–70.

[895] V 10 and 85. *Pá* is pronounced 'pow.' Tyrone Power visited Iceland in November 1947, while Elías was still thinking about *Vögguvísa*, and caused quite a stir, especially among young women who wanted to get his autograph. The Icelandic newspapers specifically commented on Power's

the narrator, who primarily follows Bambínó's point of view and seems to use his mode of expression and choice of words, always calls him Baddi Pá, which can be seen as a subtle indication that Bambínó has 'feminine' erotic interest in Baddi.

The most intimate scene between Baddi and Bambínó, and perhaps Bambínó's most significant queer performance, is when they break into the house – a scene which also adds a queer dimension to the phenomenon *ævintýri*. Before they start the operation Baddi orders the third partner, Einar, to stand on guard while he and Bambínó climb through the window. Bambínó is scared but excited, doubts if he can or should follow Baddi but eventually decides it is safe:

> This was an *ævintýri*; Bambínó was having an *ævintýri*, and then maybe money, perhaps even all the things you can buy with money, and the street is empty, all the nearest streets empty like in a film, yes, this was safe, at least it was safe to go a little bit further. Baddi Pá was in charge.[896]

The break-in can easily be seen as a symbolic sex scene: Baddi invites the young, innocent and unexperienced Bambínó to follow him, and Bambínó's obedience is absolute – "he was now ready to do everything Baddi Pá wanted."[897] Einar is not happy with staying behind but eventually smirks at the others, lights a cigarette and wishes them a "good time," and Baddi and Bambínó start their two-men journey:

> They did not say a word to each other. Baddi Pá reached up towards a hook that kept the window open, grabbed hold of it with a fine and confident grip that the boy will remember for the rest of his life, unhooked it and lowered it down towards the window frame, silently and carefully, because there was no rush.[898]

Baddi then climbs through the window, Bambínó follows him and the tempo, excitement and pleasure rise:

> And he reached up, grabbed Baddi Pá's hands, this was as easy as drinking water, he was up on the window ledge, stepped inside, had overcome law and order, conquered all fear, yes, he had never been more sure and confident, never prouder, more excited, no, never lived before now, this was to be a man, not a child, this floor under one's feet, and the night, this was conquering infantility, being

good looks and popularity among women. See "Unga fólkið varð ekki fyrir vonbrigðum af Tyrone Power," *Vísir*, 24 November 1947, 1, 8.

[896] "Þetta var ævintýri; Bambínó var lentur í ævintýri, og svo kannske peningar, jafnvel allt þetta sem fæst fyrir peninga, og gatan mannauð, allar næstu götur mannauðar eins og í kvikmynd, jú þetta var óhætt, að minnsta kosti alveg óhætt að fara svolítið lengra. Baddi Pá réði ferðinni." (V 10)

[897] "[…] og nú var hann reiðubúinn að gera allt sem Baddi Pá vildi […]." (V 11)

[898] "Þeim fór ekki orð á milli. Baddi Pá teygði sig upp með veggnum, náði í krók sem hélt glugganum opnum, greip um hann þessu fína og örugga taki, sem drengurinn á eftir að muna svo lengi sem hann lifir, brá honum úr lykkjunni og lét hann síga niður að gluggakarminum, hljóðlaust og varfærnislega, því ekkert lá á." (V 12)

> confirmed; and Baddi Pá: fearless, brave, – a friend who had trusted him; Bambínó took a deep breath.[899]

They enter the office and find an open safe and several bundles of cash notes:

> [T]he game has reached its climax, and then one follows orders and runs, slides down from the window ledge, lands a bit too roughly on the concrete yard […]. That is how the *ævintýri* takes over the teenager's life, and the excitement is high.[900]

With these words the scene ends. Later Bambínó thinks of Baddi's grip with great affection; "a strong hand that once helped a foolish teenager up to a window ledge in a dark alley and inaugurated him with the experience of his very first *ævintýri*."[901] The thrill Bambínó experiences during this symbolic penetrative act is thus not just incited by completing a masculine task; it is also very sensual and saturated with erotic potential. It is moreover an essential part of the *ævintýri* in which the line between fiction and reality, hetero- and homosexual performances, is blurred.

6.2.3 Bambínó's narcissism

Bambínó is a narcissist in a multiple understanding of the term. He is self-centred and acts without thinking about the consequences for others. He also fits within the Freudian model of narcissism since he fails to become a hetero-masculine subject, perhaps because he does not know how to separate his desires for other men and identifications with them. Like Bubbi and Halldór, moreover, Bambínó is deeply ashamed because he is not the man he feels he should be. The primary motive behind his masculinity quest, and hence the plot in *Vögguvísa*, is the fact that he is small and young – at least smaller and younger than he wants to be. His nickname continually reminds him of the fact that he is smaller than most of his friends and at home his parents call him 'little Bjössi.' Being so unmanly is almost unbearable:

> Only if he, this little boy, had become tall and slim, for example like the guys in the film he just saw, and even with a black moustache, carefully cut but not too much,

[899] "Og hann teygði sig upp, tók við gripum Badda Pá, þetta var eins og að drekka vatn, hann var kominn upp í gluggakistuna, steig innfyrir, hafði lög og rétt að baki, sigurvegari yfir allri hræðslu, já, hann hafði aldrei verið vissari og öruggari, aldrei stoltari, eftirvæntingarfyllri, nei, aldrei lifað fyrr en nú, þetta var að vera maður, ekki barn, þetta gólf undir fótum manns, og nótt, þetta var að sigrast á barnaskapnum, vera fermdur; og Baddi Pá: öruggur, djarfur, – vinur sem hafði treyst honum; Bambínó dró andann djúpt." (V 12)

[900] "[…] leikurinn hefur náð hámarki, og þá fylgir maður skipuninni að flýja staðinn, rennir sér niður úr gluggakistunni, kemur óþarflega hart niður í steinsteypt portið […]. Þannig er ævintýrið tekið við í lífi unglingsins, og eftirvæntingin rík." (V 14)

[901] "Pilturinn finnur hönd Badda á öxl sér, sterklega hönd, sem einusinni lyfti fávísum ungling upp í gluggakistu í dimmu porti og vígði hann reynslu hins fyrsta ævintýris." (V 78)

> but above all not so small; it was so unmanly to be small, he knew that better than most others.[902]

This shame drives him to action; he tries relentlessly to prove that he is a man, not a child, and transform himself by dressing and behaving like his masculine role models – in other words, by performing American masculinity.

The queerness in *Vögguvísa* lies not least in how American masculinity is both eroticised and idealised; in the uncertainty and confusion that is associated with Bambínó's admiration. 'American masculinity' is of course not a homogeneous phenomenon. Chapter two outlined how, during and after the Second World War and under the influence of army presence as well as imported pop-culture, it became in the minds of many Icelanders a modern, foreign and exotic alternative – or threat – to 'Icelandic masculinity.'[903] In *Vögguvísa* American masculinity is a diverse and paradoxical idea, in fact everything that has to do with masculinity and America: the heroic soldiers Bambínó and Baddi admire in *A Walk in the Sun*; hard-boiled noir criminals and actors like John Payne; American soldiers and other men who live or dwell in Iceland; the army base in Keflavík; images of men in imported fashion magazines and films; and comic heroes such as Tarzan. All these images are fascinating in Bambínó's eyes and his obsession is loaded with (noir) uncertainty; it is not clear if he desires these men more than he identifies with them, or vice versa. When he is invited to a party at Kjuði's place, for example, he is intrigued by an American guy and his Icelandic friend who "looks like a real American"; they bring booze and chewing gum, speak English and thus embody American masculinity. The two men hook up with girls at the party, yet their friendship is associated with queerness because the Icelandic guy is wearing a silver bracelet which is a gift from the American – a sign of something more than 'just' friendship (V 86). Bambínó's admiration of Baddi and Kjuði is also highly influenced by their 'Americanness'. Kjuði is his idol because he has friends in Keflavík and thus access to American magazines, clothes and other exotic things. He is "one of those we look up to with unlimited respect and wish to resemble when we grow up,"[904] Bambínó thinks, but he also likes the way Kjuði smells, a mixture of perfume and alcoholic drinks, his broad shoulders and how he walks[905] – he is "a cool

[902] "Bara að hann, þessi litli drengur, væri orðinn hár og slank, til dæmis eins og strákarnir í myndinni áðan, og jafnvel með svart yfirskegg vel klippt og ekki mikið, en umfram allt ekki svona lítill; það var svo ókarlmannlegt að vera lítill, það vissi hann best sjálfur." (V 32)
[903] See ch. 2.4.3.
[904] "[…] einn af þeim sem við lítum upp til með ótakmarkaðri virðingu og þráum að líkjast þegar við stækkum […]." (V 79)
[905] See e.g. V 79 and 118.

guy, hot stuff and man of *ævintýri* […] like an embodied advertisement for foreign fashion producers, cosmetics and action comics."[906]

Bambínó's transformation process, moreover, reminds us of the Narcissus myth and its intertextual relations with Elías's novels. Bambínó's story, like Bubbi's and Halldór's, ends in dissolution. Throughout the novel the boy tries to transform himself into an American cool guy and his life into an *ævintýri* – a homoerotic concoction of reality and film, Iceland and America – but his mission fails. Bambínó does not want to become an artist or writer and the ending includes no signs of artistic or creative transformation. Yet perhaps *Vögguvísa* itself is a metamorphous Bambínó; this chapter has outlined how the title and the subtitle – a fragment of *ævintýri* – mirror the novel's narrative narcissism, its obsession with films, confusion concerning identifications and desires and dissolution of margins between reality and fiction.

6.3 Resistance

If a queer reading of Narcissus must focus on him as a figure who rejects, as Bruhm argues,[907] a queer reading of Elías's novels similarly needs to pay attention to how Bubbi, Halldór and Bambínó all reject, or at least seek to escape or fail to conform to, norms and societal expectations; heterosexual norms, normative masculinity, bourgeois life and 'Icelandicness.' Failure, as chapter five outlined, is not simply the opposite of success but a performance and act of resistance in itself; failing to conform to norms and expectations opens up potentials and possibilities of 'something else,' as Muñoz says.[908] Through their reluctance to become what they 'should be' Elías's Narcissuses similarly resist and reject – sometimes quietly, sometimes decisively – and this resistance is an inherent part of their queerness.

Firstly they all fail or resist being heterosexual, although they simultaneously wish to be 'normal' subjects. We have seen how Bambínó, Halldór and Bubbi all arguably have homoerotic desires and their resistance to heterosexuality is even more striking when the novels' portrayal of women is analysed. Sexual women are destructive figures in Elías's texts, especially in *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Vögguvísa* where all female characters except Anna are either mothers (or children) or femme fatales – sexual and vicious. The publishers of *Vögguvísa*'s third edition note for example that one of the novel's noir characteristics is the negative portrayal of women, especially its emphasis on femme

[906] "[…] stælgæinn, hottstöffið og ævintýramaðurinn Páll Pálsson, öðru nafni Kjuði, herðabreiður og snyrtur, líkastur holdtekinni auglýsingu fyrir erlend tískufirmu, smyrslafabrikkur og hasarblöð." (V 118)
[907] Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*, 15.
[908] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 154. See ch. 5.1.2.

fatales.[909] There are few female characters in the novel; Bambínó meets and communicates only with his mother, his little sister and three girls he meets in a party held by Kjuði. One of the girls, Gabriella, is a 'Yankee whore' and described in a very graphic and negative manner; she is drunk, "hoarse, dressed in fur, smelled of perfume, unnaturally blonde, and her feet were so copiously out-turned that one could hardly see if she was coming or going."[910] Bambínó, who profoundly enjoys the smell of Kjuði and the American guy, is suffocated by Gabriella's perfume and experiences it as a heavy stench (V 88), and to him she is neither arousing nor appealing – quite the opposite. He is generally not attracted to women; in the cinema he sees images of half-naked "negro girls" singing "úala and húala" and unlike the American men he sees on the screen he finds them ugly (V 31). He talks about girls because he knows he is supposed to show interest in them, yet he is mostly anxious and afraid of them (V 48).

Bambínó's heterosexual debut is a disappointing and destructive experience which does not confirm his masculinity, as he had hoped, but instead dissolves his *ævintýri*. On the Saturday he goes to Kjuði's party although Baddi has told him to lay low and stay sober. He is excited when he hears that there will be girls at the party and deeply offended when Kjuði suggests that he is too young for skirt-chasing (V 82). Yet he wonders if Kjuði may be right: "Wasn't he too much of a child, like Kjuði just said? Couldn't it be that he was making an ill-fated move, which would bring the *ævintýri* to an end?"[911] Everything that happens in the following hours supports Bambínó's foreboding; he gets drunk, Kjuði's girlfriend, Addí, starts flirting with him and persuades him to stay at the party instead of going to the cinema with Baddi, and he eventually goes home with her while Kjuði is sleeping. When they are alone together he is scared – "kisses that no one sees are much more serious than kisses at parties," he thinks and wishes he were not so small, young and inexperienced.[912] When the sex is about to happen he thinks of his mother and her eyes merge with Addí's eyes, and his mind is full of anxious uncertainty:

> But the girl's eyes, the warm, the deep, eyes of the night, are they not the ones we wish to enjoy in the end, when we are eternally lost and everything is eternally lost?[913]

[909] Anna Lea Friðriksdóttir et al., "Svingpjattar og vampírfés," 139–41.
[910] "[…] kvenpersóna á ungum aldri, hás, pelsklædd, vellyktandi, óeðlilega ljóshærð, og svo rækilega útskeif að vart mátti sjá hvort heldur hún var að koma eða fara […]." (V 86)
[911] "Var hann ekki of mikið barn, eins og Kjuði var að segja? Gat ekki skeð, að hann væri að stíga eitthvert óheillaspor, sem yrði til þess, að ævintýrið fengi slæman endi?" (V 83)
[912] "Kossar sem engir sjá eru svo miklu alvarlegri en kossar í partíum." (V 95)
[913] "En þessi augu stúlkunnar, hin heitu, hin djúpu, augu næturinnar, skyldu það ekki vera þau sem við þráum að njóta að lokum, þegar við sjálfir erum að eilífu glataðir og allt er að eilífu glatað?" (V 95)

Again, like in *Man eg þig löngum* and Elías's writings from the early 1940s, a girl's glance causes the male protagonist deep anxiety – perhaps because he knows they can reveal his queerness or hetero-masculine impotence.[914] The desperation Bambínó experiences is in sharp contrast with the excitement and joy he feels when he is with Kjuði and Baddi, and this is underlined when the narrator notes that the only thing the boy notices in the room is a poster of Tyrone Power – the image of Baddi Pá even accompanies Bambínó during his heterosexual debut.[915] Sleeping with Addí can moreover be seen as Bambínó's attempt to get intimate with Kjuði – that instead of approaching him sexually he sleeps with his girlfriend – but such erotic triangles are prominent in Elías's plays from 1949 and 1950.[916] The chapter ends abruptly, however, and on the next page Bambínó wakes up, hungover, miserable and disappointed: "Why wasn't this better? The thing everyone had told him was the best of all, the most desirable, the peak of all pleasure," he asks himself and looks at the girl beside him who sleeps with her mouth open.[917] He is revolted by both her and himself, goes to the toilet, throws up and leaves (V 96–97). The consequences of this night are grave; Kjuði takes revenge by claiming that he will inform on Bambínó for the burglary and the novel ends in uncertainty about the boy's future. He has also betrayed Baddi and presumably ruined their friendship. Bambínó's disobedience, his lack of self-control and loyalty as well as his unpleasant heterosexual debut have thus brought his *ævintýri* to an end and confirmed his failure to perform hetero-masculinity.

Like Narcissus rejected those who loved him, Elías's protagonists reject sexual women and hence resist becoming heterosexual subjects. The anxious portrayal of potential or actual heterosexual experience in *Eftir örstuttan leik*, *Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa* is strikingly queer. Bubbi and Bambínó are disgusted by the women they sleep with and Halldór is both terrified of and humiliated by girls – perhaps first and foremost because these girls and the possibility of heterosexual sex threatens to expose the same-sex desires the protagonists are struggling with. In these novels it is not the 'Yankee whore' who is necessarily the femme fatale but the women who approach the protagonists sexually. Women who have relationships with soldiers appear in all three novels, as we have seen, but choosing a soldier over an Icelandic man is not condemned harshly; neither Bíbí nor Helga can be blamed for seeking the company of soldiers, for example, because Bubbi and Halldór have ignored or betrayed them. The anxiety around sexual women in these texts is

[914] See ch. 3.3.1.
[915] V 94. Thanks to Guðrún Elsa Bragadóttir for pointing this out to me.
[916] See ch. 3.3.4.
[917] "Af hverju var það ekki betra? Þetta sem allir höfðu sagt honum, að væri best af öllu, eftirsóknarverðast, hámark alls unaðar." (V 96)

thus not centred on 'the situation' or relationships between women and soldiers but the women's intimacy with the queer protagonists. The contrast between this anxiety and the pleasure associated with male homosocial relationships is striking, especially in *Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa* where Halldór and Bambínó thoroughly enjoy spending time with their male buddies and experience intimate and erotic moments with them. Bubbi does not have male friends, and is in fact disgusted by male same-sex intimacy, but eventually, after his relationship with Anna has been destroyed, he turns towards his (male) readers and forms with them perhaps the most intimate relationship in the novel. Heterosexual performances do not lead the protagonists anywhere except towards failure, however, and women are obstacles rather than objects of love or desire.

An important part of the protagonists' struggles with becoming masculine subjects is their problematic relationship with their fathers – men who represent different versions of Icelandic manhood. Bubbi is disgusted by his father, who is a bourgeois teacher, and Halldór cannot become a hard-working fisherman like his father. In *Vögguvísa* the primary representative of Icelandic masculinity and values is Bambínó's father, a diligent and responsible worker who lives a normative family life, takes care of his wife and children and practices self-control and frugality. But like Bubbi, Bambínó has no interest in becoming like his father or other Icelandic blue or white collar men, and he does not want to be noticed or acknowledged for being kind, diligent or a family man – his masculine role models are, as we have seen, American film characters, action heroes and cool guys.

The protagonists' rejection of their fathers is a part of their resistance to heterosexuality but also more broadly to normative ideas about Icelandicness, masculinity and capitalist bourgeois family life. Bubbi is disgusted by bourgeois values and lifestyle and his father is the incarnation of everything he resists becoming: A petty bourgeois, heterosexual family man. Halldór will neither become a fisherman like his father nor an educated man and thus resists both physical and intellectual work. All three protagonists resist participating in the capitalist economy; instead of having a job and earning money they either live off their parents, steal money or live in poverty. They are inclined to 'queer time and place,' as Halberstam puts it; to alternative time and places that do not follow the logic of family life and capitalist productivity.[918] They sleep in, wander along the streets of Reykjavík and go to cinemas; Halldór spends most of his time in a basement flat with Bóas or in his room in the attic, hidden from sight, and Bambínó operates mostly at night when the 'good' citizens are sleeping. None of them is moreover concerned with or interested in Icelandic nationality or national values. Their parents belong to a generation of Icelanders

[918] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1–6. See ch. 2.5.5.

who are rooted in the old, rural and less modernised Iceland but who have witnessed rapid social and cultural changes – urbanisation, occupation, the presence of thousands of British and American soldiers and a wave of English and American cultural influence. The boys, however, are a new generation of modern teenagers who have lost the connection with the old life and its values.

Bambínó and the cool guys, in particular, do not identify with the Icelandic traditions and values that are being forced on them by their parents, but rebel against them. What is respectable and masculine in their eyes is everything American, even chewing gum. They speak a language that is heavily influenced by English; they say 'ókei,' 'næs,' 'bissí,' and 'teikadísí' (okay, nice, busy, take it easy), make grammatical errors and their careless pronunciation is underlined in the narrative by means of colloquial spelling such as 'mar' (maður), 'aunmitt' (einmitt) and 'mikjandskoti' (mikill andskoti). Bambínó suffers because he does not understand or speak English properly and he believes learning it will make him more masculine:

> He thought [that] he would become just like the boys in the films, thrillers and comics if he would only bother to learn English. And he intended to learn English. But he had deferred it, and even forgotten to be American, but occasionally he felt the urge again, usually when he had been in the cinema. And then he felt so extraordinarily good and thought he was a man among men, not a little boy like usual.[919]

He admires and idealises the soldiers who live in the army base and Keflavík even becomes a substitute for America in his eyes:

> He thought about Keflavík. If only he could go there sometime. […] He also intended to go to America someday, even join the U.S. army and travel around the globe to the occupied countries. He had heard about some cool guy who did that last year. But first he had to get to the airport and meet Americans, trade with them if he could, learn how to talk to them like Kjuði, become a man.[920]

He wants, in other words, to escape Iceland and become a part of an American *ævintýri*.

It is easy to see Bubbi, Halldór and Bambínó as symbolic representations of the Icelandic nation in the mid-twentieth century – an embodied Young Iceland who, like

[919] "Honum fannst [að hann myndi] verða að öllu leyti eins og strákarnir í myndunum, reyfurunum eða hasarblöðunum, aðeins ef hann nennti að leggja það á sig að læra ensku. Og hann ætlaði sér að læra ensku. Svo hafði þetta farist fyrir, og hann hafði jafnvel gleymt því að vera amerískur, nema annað slagið kom þetta upp í honum, oftast þegar hann hafði farið í bíó. Og þá leið honum eitthvað svo óvenju vel og fannst hann vera maður með mönnum, en ekki lítill patti eins og endranær." (V 88)

[920] "Honum varð hugsað til Keflavíkur. Bara að hann gæti fengið að komast þangað suður eftir einhverntíma. […] Einhverntíma ætlaði hann sér líka að komast til Ameríku, jafnvel ganga í bandaríska herinn og fara um hálfan hnöttinn til þeirra staða sem Bandaríkin hafa hernumin. Það kvað einhver svalur náungi hafa gert í fyrra. En fyrst var að komast suður á flugvöll og kynnast einhverjum kana, versla við þá, ef hægt væri, læra að tala við þá eins og Kjuði gat, verða að manni." (V 89)

Halldór Laxness said in 1925, is "in adolescence, neither a nature child nor an educated man; half-formed and marked by chaos and inconsistency."[921] They do not know who they are – but they know that they are not what their parents/the society expect them to be. Bubbi's relationship with his father, for example, can be seen as a symbolic representation of the struggle between Iceland and Denmark or the United States. Bubbi himself compares the tension between them to international political struggles when he quotes a book his father borrowed from him, titled *I Saw Poland Suffer*: "Thus, the Germans were hitting the Italians, and hitting them hard in two of their most sensitive spots: National Pride and Personal Purse […]."[922] The father provides Bubbi with money, food and accommodation and in turn wants to control his behaviour; Bubbi hates to be under his father's rule and his pride is hurt, but he is too dependent on him economically to become independent. When *Eftir örstuttan leik* is read along these lines Bubbi thus represents the Icelandic nation that wants to be independent and free but neither manages to cut the cords that tie it to foreign paternal and economic powers nor take responsibility for and nurture the republic it has founded. The protagonist's crisis is thus also a national identity crisis.[923] Bambínó can also be seen as an incarnation of a national identity crisis. He is foolish, impressionable and not fully in control of his acts and emotions and he stands on the margins between cultures and periods; his future is an unwritten book but his actions and mistakes have grave consequences. His parents – like so many others who voiced their concerns about Young Iceland in the media in the early and mid-twentieth century – try to regulate his behaviour and steer him towards becoming a responsible, diligent worker who loves and respects his family. "I know it can be very difficult, little Bjössi, to become an adult man,"[924] his mother says when he comes home late on Thursday night, tired and annoyed, and when the boy has not shown up at the warehouse, where he has a job, for several days, his father is worried and sad rather than angry:

> You will probably find it difficult to grow up, little Bjössi. Perhaps you are too unfamiliar with poverty. Luckily, we have had enough for our family in the past years. What would happen to you if you had to live a worker's life as it was when I was young? How would you manage if you had to sign up for unemployment work

[921] Halldór Kiljan Laxness, "Af íslensku menningarástandi II," 2. See ch. 2.2.
[922] EÖL 61. The book was written by an anonymous Polish doctor during the German occupation of Poland in the Second World War. It was translated and published in English in 1941.
[923] Hjálmar Sveinsson has also suggested that Bubbi's child, who was conceived in Þingvellir during the Republic celebrations on 17 June 1944, can be read as a symbol for the Icelandic republic; an innocent offspring to whom the nation has great expectations but who is left unattended in a harsh world when the party is over. See Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 45.
[924] "Ég veit það getur verið ósköp erfitt Bjössi litli að verða fullorðinn maður." (V 35)

> day after day in the hope of getting a job during years of depression? Little Bjössi, listen to what I am saying.[925]

But Bambínó does not remember the Great Depression and is not interested in capitalist productivity. He wakes while others sleep and steals money instead of earning it, and the queer time he lives in is underlined in the film-like narrative technique discussed earlier, such as chapter division at midnight and action-based narration.

The only time Bambínó considers listening to his parents is on the Sunday when he is very hungover and finds temporary comfort in letting his mother wash his clothes, tuck him in and give him food. Following his father's advice he then visits an old friend called Leifur instead of going to meet the cool guys (V 104–7). Leifur is Bambínó's childhood friend, a kind, hard-working, promising teenager – perhaps the ideal version of Young Iceland that Bambínó could have become had he followed his parents' guidance. His name is moreover highly symbolic; *leifar* means 'remains' or 'leftovers,' and Leifur can thus readily be seen as a representative of the old Iceland and the life Bambínó has rejected: Innocent childhood, normative Icelandic masculinity, Icelandic culture and traditions, and 'good' or decent normative life.[926] When Bambínó arrives, Leifur is occupied with tools and busy curving letters in a wooden board. Bambínó tries to persuade him to go to the cinema but Leifur is not interested – he prefers curving wood. Bambínó is tired and wishes for a brief moment he could free himself from the consequences of the break-in and become like Leifur:

> Oh, Leifur, if you only knew. I wish I were you. Young, innocent, a bit scared, more scared than curious about the future, only adequately free, – and childish enough to lock me in with carpentry and pottering about.[927]

Eventually, however, Bambínó gives up, accepts that he has nothing in common with Leifur anymore and leaves. Bambínó has said good-bye, the narrator says, and "perhaps permanently parted with the last remains of his childhood, days of simplicity and childish pottering."[928] He has, in other words, chosen the *ævintýri* – an Americanised fusion of

[925] „Líklega ætlar þér að veitast erfitt að vaxa upp, Bjössi litli. Má vera, að þú þekkir of lítið fátæktina. Sem betur fer höfum við haft nóg fyrir okkur undanfarin ár. Hvernig færi fyrir þér, ef þú þyrftir að lifa lífi verkamannsins eins og það var þegar ég var ungur? Hvernig værir þú undir það búinn að láta skrá þig á atvinnuleysingjalista dag eftir dag í von um að fá atvinnubótavinnu á kreppuárum? Bjössi litli, hlustaðu á það sem ég segi.“ (V 106)

[926] "Leifur" can also be a reference to Leifur Eiríksson; the Norse (Icelandic-born) man who discovered North America around year 1000.

[927] "Ó, Leifur, ef þú vissir. Ég vildi að ég væri þú. Ungur, saklaus, dálítið hræddur, meira hræddur en forvitinn andspænis því ókomna, ekki nema mátulega frjáls, – og nógu mikið barn til þess að geta lokað mig inni yfir smíðum og dútli." (V 108–9)

[928] "Og innan stundar er Bambínó farinn; hefur kvatt; og kannske skilist við hinstu leifar bernsku sinnar fyrir fullt og allt, daga einfeldni og barnslegs dundurs." (V 110)

reality and fiction, identifications and desires – and to continue his rebellion against his parents' expectations, heteronormativity and 'good' Icelandic values.

6.4 Irony and paradoxes

A few hours after Bambínó says good-bye to Leifur and the remains of his childhood he goes to a party in a house in the city centre called "Sjálfstæðishúsið," or 'The House of Independence.'[929] The boy is hungover and disappointed after Kjuði's party and the night with Addí and has good intentions to stay sober so he can go to work in the morning and "be an independent man, like would be appropriate in this beautiful and fine house."[930] He intends, in other words, to be a good kid and lay low as Baddi told him. Yet again, however, he drinks too much and makes fatal mistakes; he meets Kjuði who threatens to denounce him, Bambínó punches him and is immediately kicked out of the building into a pool of snow and mud where the novel ends. This ending is central to many common readings of *Vögguvísa*; the house where Bambínó's story ends, the House of Independence, is often seen as a key to a political interpretation and the boy's defeat as a clear message about the corrupt and destructive influence of American culture on Icelandic youth.[931] The contrast between Bambínó and Leifur is also a key component of such readings; Leifur is an exemplary Young Iceland while Bambínó is the youth who betrays his nation and culture.

But is *Vögguvísa* a political, anti-American polemic? The irony in the text undermines such a reading but irony is, as chapter three outlined, a common stylistic element in Elías Mar's early fiction. *Vögguvísa*'s portrayal of the cool guy world and Bambínó's idealisation of America and his role models is hyperbolic and at times comical, and although the reviewer Sveinn Bergsveinsson, for example, seems to have seen this irony as an essential part of the novel's criticism it can also be interpreted differently; perhaps the novel's anti-American message is not entirely serious.[932] Tómas R. Einarsson has argued that the scene when Bambínó visits Leifur is overly dramatic and laughable and he considers the following description of Leifur to be the novel's weakest point:[933]

[929] The Independence Party owned the building from 1941 and ran a restaurant and dance hall there in 1946–1963. See Freyja Jónsdóttir, "Thorvaldsenstræti 2: Kvennaskólinn," *Dagur – Íslendingaþættir*, 28 October 2000.
[930] "[…] vera sjálfstæður maður eins og við ætti í þessu fallega og ágæta húsi." (V 113)
[931] See e.g. Sveinn Bergsveinsson, "Bókmenntir – Vögguvísa"; Kristinn E. Andrésson, "Vögguvísa eftir Elías Mar."
[932] See e.g. Sveinn Bergsveinsson, "Bókmenntir – Vögguvísa," 21.
[933] Tómas R. Einarsson, "Ámáttlegt djassvein og höfðaletur í rauðviðarfjöl. Tónlistin í Vögguvísu."

> A reserved boy wearing a sweater on a Sunday, carving *höfðaletur* into a redwood board, – perhaps he is a small nation's biggest hope. Maybe nothing is further removed from the original and the good than being unable to understand him.[934]

Portraying *höfðaletur* – an ancient Icelandic wood-carving practice – as a real alternative to going to the cinema in the mind of a post-war teenager in Reykjavík is contrived, Tómas says and argues that it shows that Elías did not honestly believe in *Vögguvísa*'s 'ideology,' that is, the anti-American polemic.[935] Following that line Leifur can be seen as an ironic portrayal – the sad leftovers – of a lost world and values that belong to the past, and *Vögguvísa* then becomes a highly paradoxical text which ironically criticises both Icelandic traditions and American influence – or rather points out the tension between them. Such paradoxes marked Elías himself in the 1940s, as chapter three outlined; he was critical of the influence of Hollywood films but simultaneously a big consumer of American culture himself. In his opinion teenagers like Bambínó should not drink alcohol, watch violent films or drink Coca-Cola, but he also knew that the times had changed and the distance between generations was growing. Bambínó is lead astray and makes mistakes but it is not his fault that he lives in a society where teenagers feel like misfits. Like in Elías's short stories, such as "Stúlka miðar byssu," "Sumum vex fiskur um hrygg," and "Snæfríður er ein heima," the generational gap is extensive and it cannot seemingly be bridged; the teenagers do not, and cannot, identify with their parents' generation and the adults do not understand their children either.[936]

The queer reading of *Vögguvísa* conducted in this chapter, moreover, resists a decided anti-American polemic interpretation. Just like the Narcissus myth is much more complex and queer than allegorical versions of it suggest Bambínó is not 'simply' symbolic representation of the Icelandic nation or its youth. He both desires and identifies with American masculinity while rejecting Icelandic manhood, which can be interpreted as a critique of Icelandic masculinity but also as a (queer) ironic portrayal of Icelanders' idealisation of American culture. Bambínó's actions are first and foremost driven by contradictory and confusing queer feelings and desires; shame and the will to transform into the world of *ævintýri*. From the perspective of Sedgwick's theory of shame and queer

[934] "Fálátur drengur í peysu á sunnudegi, og sker höfðaletur í rauðviðarfjöl, – kannski er hann stærsta von lítillar þjóðar. Kannske er ekkert jafn fjarri því upprunalega og góða sem það að geta ekki skilið hann […]." (V 109)

[935] Tómas R. Einarsson, "Ámáttlegt djassvein og höfðaletur í rauðviðarfjöl." 'Höfðaletur' is a specific Icelandic ornamental lettering that was mostly used for carving in wood. It is presumably the only Icelandic letter type and carving it was considered to be a national art form. See Freyja Hlíðkvist Ómarsdóttir, "Hvers konar letur er höfðaletur? Hvað má segja um uppruna þess og notkun gegnum tíðina?"

[936] See ch. 3.2.4. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir also underlines the importance and significance of the generational gap in *Vögguvísa*: "Árin eftir seinna stríð," 475.

performativity the primary motive behind Bambínó's acts, and hence the events in *Vögguvísa*, is not a longing to rebel against good Icelandic values, but Bambínó's identity crisis and feeling of shame. He suffers because he feels he is too young, small and unmanly, not just in the eyes of the cool guys but also because the older generation does not understand or acknowledge him. He recalls that when he was younger "people did not notice him. No. Rarely. He suddenly realised […] that people ignored him. […] This was his first disappointment with people. For them he did not exist."[937] Bambínó thus feels that his identifications with his parents' generation, and, by extension, with Icelandic society, are not acknowledged or mutually experienced. Sedgwick argues that such ruptured identifications evoke shame but at the same time they play an important part in the development of the subject's identity. *Vögguvísa* can similarly be seen as a story of how Bambínó's identity – and Icelandic national identity – is shaped and challenged by the tension between two different cultures and generations that are unable to identify with each other. Bambínó is ashamed because he is not a man – not a proper subject – in the eyes of his parents' generation. He has lost interest in trying to reconnect with them and instead of seeking their approval he rejects them and their values and makes other identifications – with the *ævintýri*, the cool guy culture that understands him, and narcissistic identifications with himself and other young men. The critical attitude towards American cultural influence, which indisputably is prominent in *Vögguvísa,* is thus not merely a socialist polemic or a critique of individuals or their behaviour but a critical reflection on the state of Icelandic society in the post-war years where rapid societal and cultural changes have separated generations. Seen from this perspective *Vögguvísa* is first and foremost an *aktúel* novel.

Finally, another important component of *Vögguvísa*, which has not yet been discussed, eludes an anti-American polemic interpretation: The character Arngrímur, a wholesale merchant whose office Bambínó and Baddi break into. He is the only (upper) middle-class character in the novel; he believes all men must work and produce and does not fear warfare because he believes it will bring him, and Icelanders in general, economic profit. He is, in other words, an outspoken capitalist who hates communists and blames them for everything that goes wrong, including the break-in at his office. He is a patriot, in the sense that he does not want socialist influence in Iceland, but at the same time he does not mind American influence; he prefers jazz over classical music and makes money from selling goods imported from the United States (V 49–57). He is thus a highly paradoxical

[937] "Og fólkið leit ekki við honum. Nei. Sjaldnast. Hann uppgötvaði það allt í einu, að fólkið leit ekki við honum. […]. Það voru fyrstu vonbrigði hans með fólkið. Því fannst hann ekki vera til." (V 27)

and ironic character. If *Vögguvísa* were 'simply' a socialist polemic, Arngrímur would be the bad guy, or at least a very unsympathetic character, and from a certain perspective he is – he is Bambínó's, Baddi's and Einar's main enemy since he can send them to jail if he finds out they stole his money. At the same time, however, Bambínó, Baddi and Einar are the criminals in the novel and Arngrímur is the victim of their crime. He is thus, like the teenagers, both faulty and sympathetic, villain and victim.

More importantly, moreover, Arngrímur is queer. This is revealed when Bambínó and Einar go to a party at a student residence on the Friday night; in a long scene (27 pages) which may appear to be an irrelevant digression, since it has little or no significance for the plot, but becomes highly relevant when read from a queer perspective.[938] At the party Bambínó, Einar and Arngrímur meet a theology student called Jósafat and an anonymous bum. Jósafat tells his guests that he does not "care about bloody women, or anything at all. Ich bin ein Onanist,"[939] and Bambínó and Einar have heard that he has no sexual desires (V 47). The bum, on the other hand, proudly announces that he is "the only man in Iceland who has killed a woman in a very original way,"[940] and tells the others that he once had an affair with "a fat, promiscuous widow," but eventually got sick of her and decided to kill her. One day he tied her up and put her in a closet: "And afterwards I felt like I had finished for the first time. With good conscience."[941] Arngrímur, moreover, turns out to have beastly desires. Before the party starts the narrator notes that Arngrímur is a peculiar man and tells a story of him: One day he had a fight with his wife, drove off with a bottle of strong liquor and fell asleep behind the wheel in the countryside. When he woke up he saw a ram – the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. He wanted to catch the ram and pet him but the sheep ran away and Arngrímur settled with buying another ram at a nearby farm and take him to Reykjavík (V 42–46). This story, however ridiculous and fictitious it may seem, is given increased value at the party when Arngrímur suddenly leaves but returns with a horse:

> May I introduce you, said Arngrímur. This is my friend, Pegasus. […] We understand each other. Finally, I have found Pegasus. […] We have often been together – in spirit, said Arngrímur and patted his friend on the tail.[942]

[938] V 46–73. The novel is only 120 pages.
[939] "Uss, mér er sama um allt helvítis kvenfólk, og yfirleitt allt. Ich bin ein Onanist." (V 66)
[940] "[É]g held ég sé eini maðurinn hér á Íslandi sem hefur drepið kvenmann á verulega frumlegan hátt." (V 67)
[941] "Og á eftir fannst mér sem ég í fyrsta skipti á ævinni væri búinn að ljúka mér af. Með góðri samvisku." (V 67)
[942] "Má ég kynna ykkur, sagði Arngrímur. Þetta er vinur minn Pegasus. […] Við skiljum hvor annan. Loksins hefi ég fundið Pegasus. […] Við höfum oft verið saman – í anda, mælti Arngrímur og klappaði vini sínum á stertinn." (V 70)

Arngrímur thereby introduces Pegasus to the other men as if the horse were his good friend or lover, leans up against him and shows him endearment, and his intimate petting on the horse's rear end underlines the reference to bestiality. All three men at the party are thus queer; the bum is a sadistic sexual criminal and Jósafat's and Arngrímur's sexual desires – masturbation and bestiality – also belong, or have at some point belonged, to the sphere of sexual aberration. Their 'perversions' can thus be read as coded representations of same-sex desire. The party is therefore, like the café at Laugavegur 11 discussed in chapter two, a queer time and space; a self-created space to which normative logic does not apply and in which three adult men with queer sexual desires speak freely without being judged.

From a certain perspective *Vögguvísa* is an anti-American polemic but it is also too paradoxical, ironic and queer for an allegorical interpretation – and too narcissistic. The party at the student residency confirms this; it may seem ridiculous and pointless but when the novel is read from a queer perspective it becomes vital – a key to the novel's queerness. It is not just a scene in which queer sexuality is discussed, moreover, it is also a narcissistic narrative. Jósafat and Arngrímur are writers; Arngrímur talks about his dream to publish a collection of poetry about "animals and nature" (V 51) and Jósafat is introduced as a poet (V 47). The name of Arngrímur's horse, Pegasus, also refers to the white winged horse in Greek mythology – a friend of the muses and symbol of poetry – and yet again a connection between male same-sex desire and the act of writing thus appears in Elías Mar's writing. Bambínó is not a writer and he does not read books but *Vögguvísa* nevertheless represents, like *Eftir örstuttan leik* and *Man eg þig löngum*, fiction as a transformative queer potential via the queer party.

6.5 Conclusion

> So that whenever the actor, or the performance artist, or, I could add, the activist in an identity politics, proffers the spectacle of her or his "infantile" narcissism to a spectating eye, the stage is set (so to speak) for either a newly dramatized flooding of the subject by the shame of refused return, or the successful pulsation of the mirroring regard through a narcissistic circuit rendered elliptical (which is to say: necessarily distorted) by the hyperbole of its original cast. As best described by Tomkins, shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side out; shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove. Shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, is performative.[943]

[943] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 38.

In this paragraph, one of the most important parts of her chapter on James and queer performativity, Sedgwick discusses the influence narcissism has on the subject's life from infancy – from the moment the child first realises it has failed to arouse another person's positive reactions and the cycle of returned identifications is broken. The attention is on the subject itself, what it has done wrong and what it can do to fix the situation; it is flooded with shame which is simultaneously paralysing and arousing and motivates the subject to perform and, conscious about previous performances, perform again. Sedgwick argues that James's prefaces are heavily marked by such shame and "a productive and almost promiscuously entrusted or "thrown" authorial narcissism."[944] His project is narcissistic in itself, since he is writing prefaces to, and reviewing and revising, his own collected works, Sedgwick says, and the texts also manifest his narcissistic need for approval from his readers and his narcissistic relationship with his own past, represented as an author's relationship with younger versions of himself or characters that resemble him.[945]

Authorial narcissism is also characteristic of Elías Mar's writings in the 1940s. "None of them is about me," Elías said in an interview in 1999 where he repudiated the idea that his novels were personal texts.[946] He was of course right in that the novels are indisputably fiction, not autobiographies or memoirs, yet this claim somewhat contradicts his letter to Ragnar Jónsson five decades earlier where he described the personal value of *Man eg þig löngum* and how Halldór was based on the "passive and purposeless" teenager Elías himself was.[947] His protagonists in fact all resemble the author in one way or another; they are teenagers who live in Reykjavík in the late 1940s, they are marked by post-war uncertainty, rapid modernisation and societal changes, they have none, little or troubled relationships with their parents, and they are struggling with coming to terms with their same-sex desires and masculine identity. They also find relief in reading, writing and watching films and for them these performances are ways to deal with and live with same-sex desire. Elías personal writings, discussed in chapter three, suggest that he felt the same way; that he was ashamed and insecure about his masculinity and sexuality as well as about his status as a writer and writing performances, that he loved reading and watching films, and that gradually, while writing the novels under consideration here, he became more confident, both as a writer and a man who desired other men.

[944] Ibid. 39.
[945] Ibid.
[946] Kolbrún Bergþórsdóttir, "Er ekki færibandahöfundur," 25.
[947] See ch. 3.3.3.

The characters in Elías's novels are narcissists in a multiple understanding of the term; they are self-conscious, queer and full of shame, they resist and reject social expectations and seek to transform their lives into something else. The narratives underline this theme via their own narcissism; they constantly blur the line between reality and fiction, include countless intertextual references and links and remind the reader of the ontological status of the work they are reading, and most importantly, this narrative self-consciousness is inherently queer and emphasises that in Elías's oeuvre same-sex desire and fiction are inseparable phenomena. The texts' authorial narcissism and Elías's personal writings moreover suggest that the same can be said about him; that fiction, art and artistic experience and expression was for Elías, like his queer protagonists, an important part of being a queer man and living with same-sex desire. Writing and publishing *Eftir örstuttan leik*, *Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa* were transformative performances for Elías; he became an established and well-known writer, travelled the world, and his personal writings show that he started to identify as a bisexual man and act upon his same-sex desire in the same period, in 1945–1950. The novels are thus indisputably a part of his 'queer transformation.' They are not 'coming-out' novels, however; and they do not deal with fixed or stable homo- or bisexual identity. Like the metaphor, which is the result of Narcissus's transformation, they elude cultural binarisms, betray over-determinations and express and portray queer feelings and performances that resist the power of heteronormativity.

7 Conclusion: *Aktúel* writings, or Elías's queer modernism

Two years before *Vögguvísa* was published, in March 1948, *The Atom Station* by Halldór Laxness came out. Elías Mar read it and was impressed[948] – and perhaps inspired; many critics have at least pointed out similarities between the two novels. "Vögguvísa's narrative mode resembles The Atom Station by Halldór Kiljan Laxness substantially," Sveinn Bergsveinsson says in his review and adds that the two books have similar missions, by which he probably means that they are both anti-American polemics.[949] Eysteinn Þorvaldsson later argued that the use of street language in *Vögguvísa* was under the influence from Halldór, but some characters in *The Atom Station* use slang and careless language.[950] Other similarities between the novels are the urban setting (Reykjavík), discussions of the impact of American cultural and political powers, film-like narrative mode and the fact that the protagonists are young people who are trying to find their place in a confusing and paradoxical modern world. The style in *Vögguvísa* also sometimes resembles Halldór's texts; especially the queer party which consists mostly of character monologues and conversations rather than the narrator's account or Bambínó's thoughts. The three queers at the party have quite unusual and extreme opinions and tastes, and their speeches are philosophical and pompous, which is a common feature in Halldór's books. The bum's statement that the "height of civilisation is feeling the rush of drugs in a fancy living room"[951] is for example a rather obvious echo from Steinn Elliði's letters in *The Great Weaver*.

Both Halldór and Elías saw homosexuality and same-sex desire as a part of the modernity their books represented and dealt with, as the previous chapters have outlined, and *The Atom Station* is no exception. Although it neither mentions fancy lesbian dances nor same-sex couples it includes a queer character; the organist who becomes Ugla's mentor is – or was at least meant to be – homosexual. Peter Hallberg has pointed out, in his study of the conception of *The Atom Station*, that in the first draft of the novel from 1946 Halldór describes the organist as "a self-educated eccentric and a homosexual."[952] Originally the organist was intimate with young men and rejected Ugla when she sought

[948] *Lbs*. 2017/32. Thor Vilhjálmsson. B2. Thor Vilhjálmsson to Elías Mar, 25 May 1948.
[949] "Að frásagnarhætti minnir Vögguvísa nokkuð mikið á Atómstöðina eftir Halldór Kiljan Laxness, hefur enda hliðstæðu hlutverki að gegna." Sveinn Bergsveinsson, "Bókmenntir – Vögguvísa," 22.
[950] Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, "Um Vögguvísu," 7.
[951] "Hámark siðmenningarinnar er eiturlyfjanautn í fínni stofu." (V 68)
[952] "Hann er sjálfmentaður sérvitringur og kynvillingur." Peter Hallberg, "Úr vinnustofu sagnaskálds," 149–51, here 150.

his affection but in the final version of the novel most of his 'homosexual characteristics' have been erased. Peter suggests that the main reason why Halldór changed his mind about portraying homosexuality as one of the organist's most prominent characteristics was the death of his friend Erlendur Jónsson in 1947; that Halldór decided to dedicate the novel to Erlendur and build the organist on him, which meant that he became 'less queer.'[953] In 1965 Elías Mar moreover wrote an obituary, following the death of Þórður Sigtryggsson, and argued that Þórður was the original (queer) inspiration behind the organist. Þórður and Halldór were friends and Elías writes that anyone who knew Þórður can confirm that the organist resembles him.[954] Whatever the reason was, Peter Hallberg notes that the only remaining sign of the organist's homosexuality in the final version is Ugla's description of the organist by the end of the novel:

> This organist, whom men considered above gods, and gods above men, he who was in actual fact most remote from women and yet the only man where a woman could ultimately find refuge – before I knew it he clasped my head with his slender fingers, bent over it, and kissed my hair at the parting, right on the crown.[955]

There are more signs of the organist's disinterest in women, however; Ugla notes for example that his hand is "very soft to touch but somehow quite neutral and uncharged with electricity, so that I did not blush even when he fondled the joints of my fingers […]."[956] The organist is perhaps not explicitly homosexual in the novel's final version but he is queer in the sense that he challenges heterosexual norms and expectations. Moreover, he is the character who has the most radical influence on Ugla; he introduces her to modern art, classical music, philosophy and politics. His house is also a meeting place for various 'eccentrics'; characters who challenge sexual and bourgeois norms and have certain absurdist traits that deviate from the social realism that dominated the Icelandic literary field in the mid-twentieth century.[957] In that respect they are, broadly speaking, queer.

Halldór Laxness had more influence on the discourse on homosexuality in Iceland than many would perhaps have anticipated; he was never a gay or queer spokesman or activist and yet his writings had, as we have seen, significant influence on public discourse on homosexuality as well as on Elías Mar and his work. The idea of homosexuality was often 'attached' to other modern phenomena and aspects of modernisation – urbanisation,

[953] Ibid.
[954] Elías Mar, "Minningarorð: Þórður Sigtryggsson kennari." Þórður also seemed to be convinced that Halldór had built the organist on him. See Þórður Sigtryggsson, *Mennt er máttur. Tilraunir með dramb og hroka*, bls. 86–87; Svavar Steinarr Guðmundsson. ""Enginn maður hér á landi, annar en ég, hefur rétt til að lesa Der Tod in Venedig,"" 14–20.
[955] Halldór Laxness, *The Atom Station*, 199.
[956] Ibid. 13.
[957] See Ástráður Eysteinsson, "Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–1980," 411.

foreign influence, jazz, unconventional art and literature – and Halldór's writings spoke to that context. His take on homosexuality was celebrated by some and condemned by others, depending on for example their view of social and cultural modernisation and how, or if, it should be allowed to affect and shape the future of Young Iceland. Moreover, the association between writers, fiction and homosexuality, that appeared for example in relation to Halldór and *The Great Weaver*, developed into a discourse on artist/homosexuals in the 1950s when the 'sick' homosexual and the 'bad' or 'idle' artist merged into one, especially in *Mánudagsblaðið*'s writings. Such negative response to homosexuality and 'bad' art must be understood in relation to its social and cultural context. The rapid social changes in the interwar years and during the Second World War, fight for independence, gender crisis and the rise of mass-culture caused moral panic and anxiety about the future of the Icelandic nation, and it became ever more important to define what was 'normal' and 'Icelandic' and what was not – to guard and define the borders of the nation and the population. Homosexuality and non-traditional art – modernism or avant-garde as well as anything that could be seen as 'too' foreign or modern – challenged such norms and the harsh response to Halldór's writings, the Atom Poets and the bohemians and artists who gathered at Laugavegur 11 in the 1950s is, in that context, perhaps understandable.

Elías Mar was one of the artist/homosexuals *Mánudagsblaðið* grumbled about, but in his writings the artist and the homosexual, fiction and same-sex desire, merge on very different premises than in the media discourse. In one of the interviews he took part in as an old man in the early 2000s he said: "I think being homosexual is somewhat a sign of intelligence. And it is noteworthy how many good artists have been homosexual, or at least bisexual."[958] This idea seems to have stayed with him for 60 years; the prose he wrote in the mid-twentieth century also represents same-sex sexuality and artistic creativity and experience almost as two sides of the same coin. Being an artist or a writer in Elías's writings from the 1940s is often – although not always – a symbol for queer sexuality and intertextual references are frequently keys to a queer interpretation. The young queer men in his stories do not identify as homosexuals or think of themselves in such terms and they often struggle with their same-sex desire. Their shame drives them to action and inaction; they perform queerness by failing, resisting and rejecting heterosexual relationships and hetero-masculine norms, bourgeois life and national ideals, but those who read books, listen to music and express themselves through writing are considerably more confident, successful and less

[958] „Ég held það sé svolítið greindarmerki að vera samkynhneigður. Og það er athyglisvert hvað margir góðir listamenn hafa verið samkynhneigðir, eða að minnsta kosti tvíkynhneigðir." Elías Mar, interviews by Hrafnhildur Gunnarsdóttir and Þorvaldur Kristinsson.

ashamed than those who do not. Writing and reading are thus meaningful queer performances that incite transformation and enable queer characters to become 'something else.'

Queer performativity is also at the core of Elías's concept *aktúel* and his intention to 'face the heartbeat of the world' with his writings.[959] Elías's personal and fictional writings in the 1940s are energetic, enthusiastic and particularly in touch with the times and setting in which they are written; they deal with the modern turmoil in Reykjavík during and after the war and see it from the perspective of young people who cannot, and will not, identify with their parents' generation and their values – including Icelandic hetero-masculinity and bourgeois capitalism.[960] The shame felt by the young characters is incited and bolstered by societal changes and the generation gap; the society does not understand them and they therefore feel marginalised. In the novels this shame is also inherently queer, which underlines the modernness of same-sex sexuality in Elías's writings, and this is Elías's queer modernism in a nutshell; a political, personal and aesthetic response to the paradoxes of modernity, the emergence of modern sexual identities and the experience of sexual marginalisation. *Eftir örstuttan leik, Man eg þig löngum* and *Vögguvísa* are typical Icelandic post-war texts in the sense that they deal with young men and masculinity crises but their special status among other works from the mid-twentieth century is their queerness; how they represent same-sex desire and the problematisation of heterosexual desire as an integral part of the modern Reykjavík in the mid-twentieth century.

For Elías, unlike Halldór Laxness, writing about queerness was also a personal objective; the 1940s were not just the decade when he became a writer but also when he came to terms with his same-sex desires and started identifying as a bisexual man. The fusion of same-sex desire and fiction, queers and writers, in his writings thus reflects upon and mirrors his own life while he was writing the texts in question. His prose may not be autobiographical, strictly speaking, but it is indeed narcissistic; the young queer characters represent certain aspects of Elías and for him, like them, writing seems to have been a way

[959] Elías's emphasis on the importance of writing *aktúel* books was persistent, also in the 1950s. In 1957 he wrote a review of Halldór Laxness's novel *Brekkukotsannáll* (1957; *The Fish Can Sing*, 1966) and criticised it for being unrelevant – not *aktúal* enough. The novel is well written but "untimely" ("ótímabær"), he says and encourages Halldór to write another book like *The Great Weaver* – "a book of our times." See Elías Mar, "Halldór Kiljan Laxness: Brekkukotsannáll," 181–82. The difference between the young Elías who dreamt about Halldór Laxness's recognition in the 1940s and this Elías, who has become confident enought to order his idol about, is striking.

[960] Elías criticised the idealisation of masculinity and heavy emphasis on 'masculine' values, including violence and war, in modernised Western societies in an article published in *Birtingur* in 1953. Many interesting references to his earlier writings can be identified in this text; he discusses for example how Christianity has idealised celibacy, self-discipline and sexual restrictions and thus encouraged ignorance and intolerance. Elías Mar, "Ofdýrkun karlmennskunnar."

to deal and live with same-sex desire – a transformative potential. His novels leave the protagonists in uncertainty and without definite answers but with endless possibilities, and this thesis similarly leaves Elías where he walks into the 1950s with four books published in his name but no certainty about the future. Like the sequel to *Man eg þig löngum,* the second volume of this project, which would discuss Elías's queer performances and writings in the 1950s, remains unwritten (for now), but various sources and studies suggest that it would discuss for example love and heartbreak, dramatic friendships, travelling and economic struggle, disappointment and expectations in relation to writings and publications, and tension between having a writing career and a permanent job – but first and foremost fusion and overlapping of writing and sexuality, being an artist and a bisexual man.[961]

The London article, which Elías wrote and published in the fall of 1950, is presumably his first public performance where he participates directly in bringing homosexuality into discourse in Iceland; that is, unlike his fiction this article mentions homosexuality and homosexuals by their name. Shortly after that he participated indirectly, via for example his visits to the café at Laugavegur 11, in the development of the media discourse on evil artists/homosexuals. Yet although Elías's writings from the 1940s do not address homosexuality directly or represent full-fledged gay characters they manifest a persistent interest in various aspects of being a young queer man in a heteronormative world, and as such their status in the history of Icelandic literature is unique. Their queer themes may have gone unnoticed, but they show that same-sex desire and homosexuality was not just brought into discourse in plain-spoken public debates and medical publications, but also – although in different forms – in fiction.

Writing *aktúel* books was, as we have seen, a personal and political project for Elías. The texts' queerness is a narcissistic projection of his own experience and at the same time a social critique of heteronormativity and bourgeois masculinity; by portraying and drawing out various paradoxes without embedding them in a binary system or giving definite answers Elías invites his readers to think critically about the society they and the characters live in. This critical engagement with modernity and contemporary issues is not bound to use of language or narrative form, but if any narrative style can be said to be

[961] Elías's most significant queer text after 1950 is *Saman lagt spott og speki*; a short story he wrote for Þórður Sigtryggsson on his birthday and published in company with Ragnar Jónsson. The story is very frank about same-sex desire and shocked many readers (see ch. 1.1). On Elías's life and writings in the 1950s, see e.g. Hjálmar Sveinsson, *Nýr penni í nýju lýðveldi*, 97 and onward; Þorsteinn Antonsson, *Þórðargleði*, 74 and onward; Þorsteinn Antonsson, "Sú leynda ást"; Þorsteinn Antonsson, "Um hughvörf á höfundarferli"; Örn Ólafsson, *Guðbergur – Um rit Guðbergs Bergssonar*, 23–31; Árni Bergmann, "Hinsegin bækur og menn"; Guðmundur Andri Thorsson, "Brot úr lífsbókinni. Eftirmæli: Elías Mar"; Pétur Blöndal, *Sköpunarsögur*, 244–87.

characteristic of Elías's *aktúel* books it is self-consciousness or narrative narcissism; a feature which has sometimes been associated with modernism or post-modernism but has in fact been a part of novel-writing for centuries, as Hutcheon points out.[962] Distinguishing between modernism and realism, or 'aesthetic' modernism and other kinds of critical engagements with modernity, makes in fact little sense in this context, however; Elías's texts are both modernist and realist, radical and focused on capturing the reality in question, personal and political, their language is both experimental and conventional. His queer modernism is first and foremost engaged in the current moment.

[962] Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, 1–8.

Útdráttur

Á síðari hluta fimmta áratugar 20. aldar samdi rithöfundurinn Elías Mar (1924–2007) skáldsögur um unga karlmenn í Reykjavík, kynferðislegar sjálfsmyndarkreppur þeirra og samkynja langanir. Síðar tjáði hann sig nokkuð hreinskilnislega um að hann væri tvíkynhneigður og á sjötta áratugnum var hann meðal annars þekktur fyrir að vera hluti af einum af fyrstu hinsegin menningarkimunum í Reykjavík, hópi fólks sem safnaðist saman á kaffihúsinu Adlon á Laugavegi 11. Þessi ritgerð fjallar um verk Elíasar frá fimmta áratugnum, útgefna texta jafnt sem handrit, skáldverk og persónuleg gögn, og það hvernig hverflyndur unglingur umbreytist í ungan tvíkynhneigðan mann og einn af þekktustu rithöfundum þjóðarinnar. Auk bókmenntagreiningar á verkum Elíasar er sjónum beint að því hvaða áhrif það hafði á hann, persónulega og faglega, að skrifa og gefa út þessa texta; hvernig það gerði honum kleift að ferðast, þreifa fyrir sér á kynferðissviðinu og tjá hinsegin tilfinningar og hugsanir sem sjaldan rötuðu inn í opinbera orðræðu á Íslandi.

Ritgerðin er fyrsta ítarlega rannsóknin á hinsegin hliðum höfundarverks Elíasar og jafnframt fyrsta doktorsritgerðin á sviði íslenskra hinsegin bókmennta. Í henni er einnig gerð grein fyrir því hvernig „kynvilla“ – en það orð var þá oftast notað um það sem í dag kallast samkynhneigð – varð hluti af opinberri orðræðu á Íslandi á fyrri hluta 20. aldar og um hana miðja. Horft er á þátt Elíasar í því ferli en líka Halldórs Laxness, sem segja má að hafi verið átrúnaðargoð Elíasar á þessum tíma. Niðurstöðurnar sýna meðal annars að sjaldan var rætt opinberlega um kynvillu á fyrri hluta aldarinnar en um og eftir 1950 jókst slík umfjöllun umtalsvert og áhyggjur af kynvilltum karlmönnum í Reykjavík birtust reglulega í blöðum að því er virðist í fyrsta sinn. Það bendir til þess að kynvilla (karla) hafi um þetta leyti orðið veigameiri þáttur í orðfæri og hugarheimi Íslendinga en áður. Þessi þróun átti sér stað samhliða öðrum samfélags- og menningarlegum breytingum sem oft eru kenndar við nútímann og því er hér haldið fram að hún hafi verið hluti af nútímavæðingu íslensks samfélags. Reykjavík óx hratt á þessum árum og þar myndaðist vettvangur fyrir hinsegin fólk, menningu og sjálfsmyndir sem ekki var til við upphaf aldarinnar. Svipuð þróun átti sér stað víða á Vesturlöndum nokkuð fyrr, undir lok 19. aldar og við upphaf þeirrar tuttugustu, en rannsóknir frá öðrum Norðurlöndum hafa sýnt að sú hugmynd að flokka mætti fólk eftir kynhneigð (fyrst og fremst sam- og gagnkynhneigð) festi rætur seinna í litlum sveitasamfélögum eins og Finnlandi og dreifbýli Svíþjóðar en í þéttbýli og stærri borgum. Niðurstöður þessarar rannsóknar benda til að það sama hafi átt við um Ísland.

Frá því á þriðja áratugnum að minnsta kosti einkenndist orðræða um kynvillu í íslenskum fjölmiðlum af því að litið var á hana sem sérstaklega nútímalegt fyrirbæri, ekki

síst í skrifum sem létu í ljósi áhyggjur af áhrifum nútímavæðingar á íslenskt samfélag, menningu og sjálfstæði, oft undir sterkum áhrifum frá þjóðernishyggju. Oft var skrifað um helstu ógnirnar sem Íslendingar stæðu frammi fyrir, ekki síst yngsta kynslóðin, og algengt var að fjallað væri um íslensku þjóðina sem ómótaðan og áhrifagjarnan táning í miðju umróti nútímavæðingar hins vestræna heims. Þau fyrirbæri sem talin voru ógna „Unga Íslandi“ voru gjarnan af erlendum uppruna eða tengd við útlönd og erlenda menningarstrauma og meðal þessara ímynda „hins illa“ var kynvilla og hinn kynvillti einstaklingur. Sterk tilhneiging var til að útmála kynvillu sem erlendan löst en slík orðræða var einnig algeng víðar á Vesturlöndum. Síðast en ekki síst fólu tengsl milli nútíma og kynvillu sem birtust í opinberri orðræðu á Íslandi gjarnan í sér samband milli kynvillu og kynvillinga annars vegar og „nútímalegrar“, „óhefðbundinnar“ eða „vondrar“ listar og listamanna hins vegar. Kynvilla var þannig oft sett í samhengi við spillta borgarmenningu, úrkynjun og glæpi en einnig þýdda og innflutta afþreyingu á borð við teiknimyndablöð og bíómyndir, ýmiss konar nýjungar í skáldskap og listum og listafólk sem ögraði umhverfi sínu á margvíslegan hátt.

Í skrifum sem fjölluðu um nútímann á frjálslyndari nótum, svo sem greinum Halldórs Laxness um menningar- og samfélagsmál og skáldsögu hans *Vefaranum mikla frá Kasmír* (1927), má einnig sjá tengingu milli kynvillu annars vegar og nútíma og nútímavæðingar hins vegar, svo og við listir og listamenn. Halldór var einn af þeim fyrstu sem tjáðu sig opinberlega á nokkuð frjálslegan hátt um kynvillu á fyrstu áratugum aldarinnar og aðalpersónan í *Vefaranum*, Steinn Elliði, er hinsegin í margvíslegum skilningi þess orðs: hann er róttækur andstæðingur borgaralegrar hugmyndafræði, fullur af þversögnum, á í nánu sambandi við karlmenn og stundar kynlíf með fólki af báðum kynjum – og þar að auki er hann ljóðskáld. Halldór var talsmaður nútímavæðingar og taldi samkynhneigð sjálfsagðan hluta af þeim nýja veruleika sem við blasti en margir voru á öðru máli; þeir ritdómarar sem voru gagnrýnir á *Vefarann* rökstuddu mál sitt oftar en ekki með því að vísa í umfjöllun bókarinnar um kynvillu og pólitískir andstæðingar Halldórs notuðu skrif hans um kynvillu gegn honum langt fram eftir öldinni.

Á fyrri hluta 20. aldar varð kynvilla því merkimiði sem hægt var að festa á og tengja við ýmislegt, svo sem kvikmyndir, bókmenntir, pólitískar skoðanir, þjóðir og hvaðeina sem talist gat nútímalegt, í þeim tilgangi að undirstrika til dæmis róttækni, nýbreytni og tengsl við erlenda menningu. Hugmyndin um tengsl kynvillu, nútíma og lista birtist bæði á jákvæðum og neikvæðum forsendum í opinberri orðræðu og hún raungerðist enn fremur á Laugavegi 11 þar sem Elías og félagar hans komu saman. Þar myndaðist það sem kalla má hinsegin

rými – rými fyrir ýmiss konar fólk, skoðanir og hegðun sem samræmdist ekki borgaralegum kapítalískum viðmiðum, til dæmis hvað varðaði fjölskyldulíf, kynverund og listir.

Elías Mar dáði Halldór mjög á fimmta áratugnum, las *Vefarann* og önnur verk hans margoft og deildi með honum pólitískum skoðunum; báðir voru sannfærðir sósíalistar. Skrif Elíasar frá þessum tíma eru oft undir augljósum áhrifum frá Halldóri og það er því engin hending að hér er fjallað um þá samhliða. Í þessari ritgerð er kastljósinu einkum beint að fyrstu tveimur skáldsögum Elíasar, *Eftir örstuttan leik* (1946) og *Man eg þig löngum* (1949) en einnig *Vöggуvísu* (1950) og smásögum hans, ljóðum, minnisbókum, ritgerðum og ýmsum handritum frá fimmta áratugnum. Bókmenntagreiningin byggir á kenningum Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick um hinsegin gjörningshátt (e. *queer performativity*) en hugtakið vísar til veruhátta og merkingarbærra athafna sem tengjast kyni, kynverund og skömm en falla ekki að hugmyndum um sam- og gagnkynhneigð. Skömm er miðlæg í umfjöllun Sedgwick um hinsegin gjörningshátt því hún telur að sú tilfinning marki hinsegin fólk sérstaklega. Sá hinseginleiki sem hún beinir sjónum sínum að er með öðrum orðum ekki sjálfsmynd heldur gjörningar, tilfinningar, tjáning og athafnir þeirra sem eru í jaðarstöðu í samfélagi þar sem gagnkynhneigð er ríkjandi viðmið. Slík nálgun á einkar vel við verk Elíasar því engin af skáldpersónum hans „kemur út úr skápnum“ eða tekur upp sam- eða tvíkynhneigða sjálfsmynd en verkin fjalla engu að síður um margs konar hinsegin gjörninga. Aðalpersónurnar í skáldsögunum eru ungir karlmenn í tilvistarkreppu sem eru þjakaðir af skömm, einkum vegna þess að þeir eiga erfitt með eða mistekst algjörlega að tileinka sér normatífa gagnkynhneigða karlmennsku. Þeir eiga enn fremur allir í nánum samböndum við aðra karlmenn en hræðast kynferðisleg samskipti við konur. Líta má á þessa ungu menn sem birtingarmyndir Unga Íslands; nýrrar kynslóðar Íslendinga sem vex úr grasi í þversagnakenndum og síbreytilegum heimi nútímavæðingar um miðja 20. öld og fjarlægist sífellt ýmis hefðbundin gildi og viðmið íslensks samfélags. Bilið á milli ungu mannanna og eldri kynslóða er breitt og jafnvel óbrúanlegt; þeir geta og vilja ekki samsama sig hugsjónum og gildum foreldranna, til dæmis um karlmennsku, fjölskyldulíf, ábyrgð og skyldur. Sá samtími sem Elías fjallar um í þessum fyrstu verkum sínum er þannig ekki bara markaður af tilvistarkreppu og kjarnorkuógn eftirstríðsáranna, áhrifum stríðs, hersetu og borgarvæðingar, heldur er hinseginleiki einnig miðlægur og mikilvægur hluti af þessum veruleika – hinu nýja nútímavædda Íslandi.

Tengslin milli listar og kynvillu, sem koma fram í opinberri orðræðu, gegna einnig veigamiklu hlutverki í skáldskap Elíasar frá fimmta áratugnum. Skáldsögurnar hans og margar af smásögunum eru fullar af textatengslum og afar sjálfsmeðvitaðar; þær eru sögur um skáldskap og listir. Ungu mennirnir lesa og skrifa, hlusta á tónlist og horfa á

kvikmyndir og allt hjálpar þetta þeim á margvíslegan hátt að lifa með skömm sinni og samkynja löngunum. Skáldskapur og listir eru auk þess hinsegin táknkerfi í textum Elíasar; verkin sem persónurnar lesa, hlusta og horfa á eru oftar en ekki lyklar að hinsegin túlkun. Allar skáldsögurnar sem fjallað er um hér enda í óvissu um afdrif aðalpersónanna en þótt ekki sé boðið upp á lausnir eða farsælan endi felst von í óvissunni – von um að þeir geti umbreytt skömm sinni í „eitthvað annað“. Þessi von tengist ekki síst listrænni sköpun; að með því að taka upp penna og byrja að skrifa geti ungu mennirnir endurskapað og mótað sjálfsmynd sína og haft áhrif á eigin tilveru. Listræn sköpun og það að njóta lista er þannig í skáldskaparheimi Elíasar hinsegin gjörningur sem felur í sér umbreytingarmöguleika. Svipaðar hugmyndir má sjá í persónulegum skrifum hans frá fimmta áratugnum og hér er þeirri kenningu slegið fram að í augum Elíasar, eins og persónanna sem hann skapaði, sem margar líkjast höfundinum á ýmsan hátt, hafi listræn reynsla og sköpun verið mikilvægur hluti af því að vera hinsegin og lifa af í gagnkynhneigðarmiðuðum heimi.

Elías Mar var gríðarlega metnaðarfullur og afkastamikill ungur höfundur á fimmta áratugnum eins og sjá má á ritaskrá hans og skjalasafni sem varðveitt er á handritadeild Landsbókasafns. Hann lagði frá upphafi mikla áherslu á það sem hann kallaði „aktúelar“ bækur og að höfundar stæðu „andspænis hjartslætti tilverunnar“ – þ.e. að skrifa verk sem tækjust á virkan hátt á við samtímann og samtímamálefni. Í því efni var Elías undir augljósum áhrifum frá Halldóri Laxness og sósíalískri hugsun. Í þeim textum sem fjallað er um í þessari ritgerð fjallar Elías meðal annars um borgarvæðingu, málefni kynjanna, stríðið, hersetuna, kynslóðabil og samfélag og menningu ungs fólks í Reykjavík, bíómyndir, teiknimyndasögur, sjoppur og billjardstofur. Allt var þetta hluti af hans eigin veruleika og á persónulegum skrifum hans má sjá að hann glímdi sjálfur við ýmsar þær þversagnir, vandamál og viðfangsefni sem birtast í verkum hans. Bækur Elíasar eru sjaldan taldar til móderníska verka en hér er leitað í smiðju fræðimanna sem vilja víkka út módernismahugtakið og því haldið fram að prósaverk Elíasar frá fimmta áratugnum, líkt og til dæmis skáldsögur Halldórs, *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* og *Atómstöðin*, séu aktúel og módernísk verk, því þau séu viðbrögð við nútímanum, rýni í og gagnrýni ýmsar hliðar á nútímasamfélögum og dragi fram þversagnir og ósamræmi í lífi nútímamannsins. Módernismi Elíasar er enn fremur hinsegin módernismi; viðbragð hans við því að tilheyra kynferðislegum jaðarhópi á tímum sem einkenndust af aukinni meðvitund um tilvist samkynhneigðra og fjandskap í þeirra garð. Skáldsögur hans eru á margan hátt dæmigerðar eftirstríðsárasögur, þar sem pólitísk og hugmyndafræðileg átök, tilvistarkreppa og brotnar karlmennskuímyndir eru áberandi, en það sem markar þær sérstaklega og greinir þær frá öðrum samtímatextum er hinseginleikinn og hvernig þær fjalla um samkynja langanir og

ýmsar flækjur í tengslum við kyn, kynverund og samfélagsleg viðmið. Með því að skrifa um þessi málefni tók Elías þátt í að færa samkynja langanir inn í opinbera umræðu á Íslandi, þótt hann væri hikandi við að fjalla um sam- eða tvíkynhneigða sjálfsmynd og tala beinum orðum um kynvillu. Hinsegin gjörningsháttur sem birtist í verkum hans er þannig nútímalegt og móderníst þema sem tengist einkalífi höfundarins, sósíalískum skoðunum hans og fagurfræðilegri sýn órjúfanlegum böndum, svo og nútímavæðingu íslensks samfélags um miðja 20. öld.

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