

A Study of Names Used in Halldór Laxness' Iceland's Bell

INTRODUCTION

Names provide a component of depth in fiction literature. They are important because there are not sources outside of the work from which the reader can extrapolate information about the characters. Names describe characters to which they are assigned and reveal qualities and traits of the name-givers. They can also supply information of the political and cultural settings during which they were written. Halldór Laxness was one author who frequently explored the concepts of names and lack of names in his works. For example, in Paradise Reclaimed, his protagonist becomes so confused with his names that that he does not know his own name. Similarly, in Iceland's Bell, his characters seldom have one name ascribed to them throughout the story. In this report, I am investigating the diversity and trends of names in Iceland's Bell. Several themes will be identified and expanded upon here: name types and choices given by the author, family names, word-choice of name-givers, unfounded names, narrative irony through names, names changing, name use abroad, the function of diminutives, and the relation between a narrator naming a character and the amount of speech or action with which they character is associated.

DATA COLLECTION AND STORAGE

See Supplemental Data: Excel Chart- Name Location_31410

To look at these trends, data was collected on the frequency and types of names given to two prominent characters: Jón Hreggviðsson and Snæfríður Björnsdóttir. Jón is a man accused of

killing the Danish king's hangman and sent to do errands while evading punishment after being freed by Snæfríður. She is the magistrate's daughter who is enamored by Arnas Arnæus, a scholar whose sole goal in life is to preserve Iceland's sagas. While Jón and Arnas are historical figures, Laxness' characters are more interpretations than literal replicas of these individuals.

Any time one of these characters was referred to, the part of the book, chapter, page, name and who said it, was recorded on an excel sheet. The version of Iceland's Bell which was used was translated by Philip Roughton and published by Vintage Books in New York in 2003. A code used to differentiate who uses which name is present on the "Code" tab. Individuals are differentiated based on the color, size (font 10 or 12) and presence or absence of italics. Several numbers have notes after them. A question mark signifies that the name-giver is using that name in a question, usually asking the validity of that name. The word "not" following the number means that the character clearly negated that name in the sentence (i.e. Snæfríður is not a girl). If "indirect" is present, then the name-giver is implying that reference regarding the character but avoiding reference through generalizations. While this component of the data collection has the most subjectivity involved, most cases in the work are apparent.

If the narrator summarizes what one character stated, the name used in that text is considered given by the character mentioned, not the narrator. If the name was given in a possessive context (example, the lady's box), the number is underlined. Finally, if a name is used more than once on the same page by the same character the number of occurrences is placed in parentheses following the page number (example, 121(2) signifies that on page 121 a certain name used twice by character A). If this project were to be expanded, this data system

would be double-checked and further developed. One aspect I would like to include is to whom each character is talking when they refer to Jón or Snæfríður.

CAVEATS

There are several limitations for this project. The work used is translated text. Being a translated work means, the translator has taken at least one if not more liberties in changing the language. For example, translators have different ways to approach the text, they can either translate verbatim and risk the audience missing figures of speech or the translator can interpret the work stylistically and potentially add their own style on top of the author's. This change in language structure also hinders this project. The use of feminine and masculine terms and the differences in name choices (Latin and Icelandic names) are lost in translation.

With this database generated, there are seemingly limitless ways to interpret and analyze such data. This paper will only address a handful of these approaches. Most importantly, the capabilities of the reader limit the project. The reader may be ignorant to references present in the work, for example allusions to certain sagas, and not be able to identify the cultural and literary depth; however, the utmost care was given when approaching this project, with the intentions of minimizing such error.

PREDICTED TENDENCIES

Family and relations

When family members address their relative, there is a significant emphasis on using terms which enforce that the named is related to them. Seventeen of the thirty-one times Jórunn refers to her sister Snæfríður, she uses a sister term. No other individuals, aside from Snæfríður and the narrator use this term and no other characters share a sisterly connection. Snæfríður's

father most frequently identifies her as “child” (twenty-seven out of thirty-three references).

Using this name has two purposes. It emphasizes the point that she is his child. Additionally as Jurafsky points out, it is the type of diminutive used as a term of endearment (538). Similar terms of endearment are similarly shared between Snæfríður and other people she is close to throughout this work. Through these terms, Laxness builds a sense of intimacy.

This trend is also observed in Jón’s family. His mother primarily identifies him as “son” and the only way his second daughter identifies him is as “Papa.” One view which can explain this observation and many other trends in this work is that characters identify other characters based on the context through which they know them. These unofficial names “include an assessment from the point of view of the name-giver.” (Bertills, 36). The family members strongly identify the characters based on the major category in which they know them, the familial category.

Speech to action naming ratio

Snæfríður is referred to 576 times, 243 times by the narrator (approximately 40% of references). Jón is referred to 834 times, 652 times by the narrator (approximately 80% of the references). There is a noticeable difference in how many times the narrator refers to these characters. What is interesting is that when this data is compared to the proportion of direct speech and utterances by each character. In all three parts, Snæfríður speaks 511 times and says 10,809 words. In contrast, Jón only speaks 267 times and says 5,303 words (Hallberg, 37). There is an inverse correlation between the frequency the narrator refers to them and the amount the characters speak. Jón is prominent in the parts “Iceland’s Bell” and “A Fire in Copenhagen,” Snæfríður is mostly in “The Fair Maiden” section. Jón is more frequently engaged in an activity

than talking with others and the converse is true of Snæfríður. These findings show that the narrator is less frequently distinguishing or referring to the characters when they are speaking to others. On the other hand, when a character is more active and requires description, the narrator more frequently differentiates to them by a common or proper name.

Narrator and Author Name Choice

Most frequently the narrator refers to Snæfríður using neutral and literal terms such as lady, girl, woman, and wife. For Jón, the narrator primarily refers to him by his full name Jón Hreggviðsson. This discrepancy can be linked to a trend observed socially. References to individuals of upper-class society tended to not include their baptismal name, rather they were called by more general terms, just as Snæfríður is being called. On the other hand, individuals of low socio-economic standing were more commonly referred to by their given name. This polite naming system has been adopted by the narrator. Other tendencies observed in narrator name-choice that do not fit this norm will be discussed later.

Designating names for characters can be an important task for authors. Kaplan and Bernays express well this ordeal, “For the author, finding names like these is a complicated process involving sound, emotion, and association as well as an awareness of social and political choreography.” (182-183). The names the characters carry for the whole story convey messages to the reader. Jón’s baptismal name is the same name as the historical figure he embodies. While this is a satisfactory meaning, there is more meaning to his name. The name Jón was the most popular male-name in Iceland during the setting’s time-period. The author donned him, like other characters, what Bertills defines as a conventional name (45). This is a common name which can be found in a name registry. In Iceland’s Bell, at least four characters have the first

name Jón. Choosing this name is suiting because Jón is frequently portrayed as someone who is insignificant compared to the image of Iceland, as Arnæus points out to him. Bertills observes that conventional names, such as Jón, strongly tie the character's identity to their social and cultural environment (46). In that way, his name enhances the image of him being *just* an ordinary farmer in Iceland who lacks agency and uniqueness. If this project were continued, the meaning of Snæfríður's name would also be assessed.

IMPLICATIONS of WORD-CHOICE of the NAME-GIVERS

When characters name other characters, they can only give them a name which is within the scope of their knowledge. Additionally, names tend to reflect the name-givers' understanding of the named, whether it be based on the named's physical features, previous activities, social standing or other similar qualities (Nuessel, 5). Names portray what name-givers associate with or identify in the named. Since the names are based on their knowledge, by looking at the names these characters give, one can see what type of characters the name-givers are.

It should be noted that names given by characters can be problematic. Assuming characters are not omniscient (and they are not revealed to be so in this work), they are capable of inaccurately labeling other individuals (Margolin, 527). The only way to confirm names is for the narrator to distinguish between false and true names (522). However, there is a caveat that this all relies on the narrator being reliable. Different characters (A and B) may refer to the same character (C) differently, and when A and B meet and talk about C, confusion may arise if neither of them understands the other's reference (528). All of these situations occur in this work and will be discussed in this section.

Educational standing

The archpriest calls Snæfríður madame or mademoiselle fifteen of the forty-six times he refers to her. This character is someone who is fluent in Latin and the Bible. Using these French terms in Iceland is unique in this work. The only other characters who use such terms are the baron in Denmark, who uses such terms three out of the eight times he refers to her and Jon Jonson, Jón Hreggviðsson's guard at the Althing, who calls Snæfríður madam once. On almost all occasions, the men are of high social standing (archpriest or baron). Using such terms suggests that these characters were likely well educated for this time period.

Coreferential conflict

Each character lives in a personally-defined sphere of knowledge. Sometimes these spheres overlap and other times the spheres of knowledge are completely independent. In Iceland's Bell, Snæfríður and Jón have 182 and 134 names respectively. These names are given by a variety of characters and the only individual is privy to all of these names is the narrator because he is omniscient (Margolin 522). When Jón is talking with Arnæus' wife about Snæfríður a coreferential conflict occurs. In chapter eleven of the "Fire in Copenhagen" part, the wife asks about the "whore of Babylon" with whom she mildly suspects her husband is having an affair. When Jón realizes that she is referring to Snæfríður in a derogatory sense, he disagrees with her choice of references. Instead of agreeing with Arnæus' wife, he beautifully describes Snæfríður as a slender reed which refuses to break in the wind and attributes positive names to Snæfríður such as "elf-wife" and "good woman". This conflict illustrates the subjectivity of names in this work. Also present in this scene is the hostility between Denmark and Iceland. Arnæus' wife comments that an Icelandic husband should never cheat on his Danish wife. Because this idea was breached, although it cannot be proven, the woman projects negative views onto a woman

she does not know. This tension between Denmark and Iceland is further projected onto Jón when he spends some time in Denmark as a soldier. The disagreements over references highlight conflicts present in the work.

Name diversity and agency given through names

Arnæus primarily calls Snæfríður by her first name (eight of eighteen times) and a variety of more neutral terms over the course of the novel (i.e. maiden and woman). In contrast, Magnús her husband calls Snæfríður many different types of names ranging from derogatory terms (a hussy, a whore) to endearing terms (my Snjóka) to abstract terms (a color, a mirage). Both men play a pivotal role in her life. Arnæus acts as a catalyst for most of her actions, including her choices to marry Magnús and release a prisoner behind her father's back. He sees she is a powerful individual who can release a prisoner to send him a message, and that she single-handedly get the Danish legal system to give her papers against Arnæus.

On the other hand, Magnús ruins her social standing and reduces her potential. By the third part, she has to visit the archpriest for money so that she can travel to Denmark because all of her fortune was spent paying off Magnús' debt. Unlike Arnæus, Magnús does not see Snæfríður as a competent character. Throughout the work, he complains because she cannot give him access to the estates her father gave her as a dowry gift. He sells her for his beloved Brennivín. Magnús uses a series of insults and diminutives to describe her. He also possessively refers to her as his wife (ten out of forty references). He clearly alludes to Snæfríður being an immature female because she is barren: "A girl who falls in childhood never ripens." (140). In Jurafsky's paper, he notes of the differentiation that mothers are viewed as superior to female

children (i.e. girls who never ripen); this is one of the many ways Magnús belittles Snæfríður (546). All of these actions and terms limit Snæfríður.

There is a trend that name-givers who use more types of names, especially abstract names, view Snæfríður as incompetent. The converse is also present. It appears that the abstract and broad range of names serve to objectify her. She shifts from being Snæfríður, the magistrate's powerful daughter to "a mirage" or "a soulless woman". In contrast Arnæus does not need to build her character through names because she is already well-defined as an individual, which is clear through her actions. The references these two men give for Snæfríður show that names can reveal how much agency they attribute to the named.

Narrator's subjective name choices

Iceland's Bell has a narrator who does not describe the inner-thinking of the characters but otherwise appears omniscient. One role of the narrator is to connect the three spheres of communication present in a work: the characters, the narrator and narrated and the read and text (Margolin, 538). Problems arise when the narrator fails or evades doing so. The narrator of Iceland Bell tends to evade identifying characters and labeling characters with unsubstantiated names. For example, when Jón's mother goes to beg for her son's forgiveness, the narrator does not clearly identify her for more than a chapter. He alludes to her as a woman who recites penitential hymns composed by Reverend Halldór from Presthólar. When we are reintroduced to Snæfríður in the first chapter of the Fair Maiden, she is not clearly identified for three pages. Anonymity has several effects upon the reader. By not naming the character initially, the character is distanced from the reader. There is a sense of uncertainty as to who this person is and what their purpose in the work is. When characters have proper names, readers more

strongly sympathize with the character (Bertills, 48). Without a name, a character lacks an established place in the cognitive sphere of the reader. What is interesting about this work is that the anonymous characters appear in the beginning of chapters but after being already introduced in prior scenarios. Through anonymity, character traits, uniqueness and types of conversations are emphasized (Reinhartz, 188). There is a detective form that arises when characters lack names. With this investigative mood, the reader analyzes all actions and interactions the unnamed character has. This anonymity technique expands the view of a character; however, it only works if the narrator later affirms that the mystery character is a character that was already presented (Margolin, 540). The way that the narrator uses anonymity after introducing a character enables that character to be reintroduced in a less biased manner.

When the narrator identifies Snæfríður, he tends to use neutral terms, whereas for Jón he uses many negative terms: lice-ridden Icelander, villain from Iceland, savage, wretched devil, etc.... He calls Jón a murderer even though there is no substantial proof of this in the story. What is the function of this? Is he revealing the truth? What I as the reader has noticed is that although Jón is cast as a criminal, through his speech and actions he is developed into a sympathetic character. The narrator tends to use derogatory and negative terms whenever Jón is in the presence of other characters who scorn him or misunderstand him and conversely praiseworthy terms when the characters are viewing him positively. There are also situationally amusing names given by the narrator. For example, the narrator calls Jón the hangman's friend at the end of the first chapter after the hangman verbally abused Jón. Based on the information given to that point, the hangman and Jón are not friends. The fact that the hangman refuses to give Jón some snuff while they are resting supports this. The narrator in Iceland's Bell is an

ironic and sarcastic one. He achieves this by exaggerating the mood characters are embodying through the names he gives to Jón. For example, after men on Danish cutter find out Jón killed the king's hangman and become angry about Jón working on the boat, the narrator shifts from neutral names Jón Hreggviðsson (used four times in one page) and the farmer to "this wretched devil" (96). Furthermore, it is only after Jón is labeled as a murderer that the narrator includes the name in his name collection. Whether or not Jón killed the king's hangman cannot be solved given the information in the novel. Also, the narrator is not explicit enough to be trusted. With this in mind, I believe the inclusion of the reference "murderer" by the narrator is more a labeling tool used to develop irony rather than a legitimate name. The narrator's name choice reflects what other characters feel and inflates those views to exaggerated proportion.

NAMES CHANGING

Name changes can indicate a change in identity for characters (Bertills, 169). They can arise due to events or changes in personality or physique of the named.

Temporally

As the plot progresses, there is an increase in references and reference imagery relating to aging. Starting in the later part of the section Iceland's Bell and progressively increasing onward are images and reference of Jón becoming old with gray and then white hair. Similarly, Snæfríður gain physical aging references and marital signs of aging (old pox-scarred widow). She is not referred to as a girl much after the beginning of The Fair Maiden section. These references help emphasize progress in the work.

Abroad

Nationality is important abroad. For foreigners, it sets them apart from the natives. When Jón is abroad his name is changed to become more similar to those of the land he is visiting. In Holland he becomes van Hekkenfeld because Jón tells them he lives near this mountain which is rumored to be the opening of hell. In Denmark his name is changed to Johann Reckwitz. Aus Ijsland buertig and Regvidsen. As Nuessel writes, name-givers give names as a sign of control (3). During this timeframe, Denmark controlled Iceland and the Dutch were commercially thriving, making them an equivalent super-power. There is a colonial domination occurring when characters from these lands change Jón's name. Through name giving, these people clumped together as the Danish and the Dutch strengthen their image by defining who Jón is when he is visiting them. Names serve as controlling tokens in this set.

AVOIDING REFERENCE

These occurrences in the excel sheets are labeled as "indirect". For Jón, characters including himself tend to evade calling him harsh terms, such as criminal and "one who sells his soul to the devil" by avoiding reference. When Snæfríður is being admonished characters also evade directly using her name. In these cases, the indirect terms ease judgments by making them less personal and offensive. Another case when reference is avoided is when Arnæus and Snæfríður reminisce on their summer romance. The whole scene is saturated in intense emotions and sentimentality. By not using each other's names, Snæfríður and Arnæus are able to contain some of their emotions and detach themselves (Hallberg, 43).

ICELANDIC PRIDE

There are ten Sneafriður references which relate to elves and twelve other terms which depict her as a woman from Icelandic sagas (this is a positive association). A major reason she is

attributed to being elf-like is her clothing. When she visits the baron she is wearing a blue dress with a gold band around her waist. This and other similar imagery, such as when she visits the Althing to see Magnús, resemble the imagery of the elves in the ballad of “Olaf and the Fairy Maiden” (Poem included at end). The elves in this story kill a man after he refuses to stay with them and take up their seemingly heathen practices. Similarly, Snæfríður destroys Arnæus after he betrays her and Iceland by diminishing the power of her father, the magistrate.

The elfin imagery makes Snæfríður appear supernatural, but it also has a more contemporary stylistic effect. Traditionally, elves were Otherworldly creatures which lived during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and they looked and lived like Icelanders, only separately. In literature from this time period, elves acted as nature spirits which hindered rural development in Iceland (Hafstein, 89). However, in contemporary work elves have shifted from nature spirits to ancestral spirits (99). Snæfríður embodies this change with the elfin names she is given. She becomes a national figure who seeks to preserve Iceland’s historic systems, such as the Althing. Hallberg also notes this function of Snæfríður: “But they [Snæfríður and Arnas] are also, and to a very large extent, representatives of Iceland, of the Icelandic nation, its history, its state of existence at the time of the story, and its dreams of the future.” (44). The elf imagery ascribed to Snæfríður, develops her into a supernatural individual and national symbol in Iceland’s Bell.

CONCLUSION

As illustrated in this paper, references have numerous functions in Iceland’s Bell. Names show how characters view each other and themselves. They illustrated class differences and reveal the irony employed by the narrator. The diversity and types of names also reflect how

competent characters find each other. The use of multiple names gives a layer of complexity to the work.

If this project were to be continued, there are several topics that would be more thoroughly investigated, some of which have already been mentioned. Name choice for multiple characters, including Snæfríður would be analyzed. Also, it would be interesting to see if different characters are referred to with different ratios of proper, common and pronouns. A part of the research would be devoted to comparing the multiple Jón's present in the book. Finally, Jurafsky cites Hasselrot's observation of an increase in Latin suffixes with feminine suffixes causing a conflation of feminine diminutive terms throughout Romance (545). For someone fluent in the Icelandic language, it might provide interesting results to take note if and where this pattern occurs (or does not) in the original text.

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Olaf and the Elf-Maid (translated from *Kvæði Oláfi Liljurós*) from *The Northmen talk*;: *A choice of tales from Iceland*. (261-262)

Over the rocky crags Olaf rode,
 A-wandering he did go;
There he came to an elf's abode,
 Where red fires flow.
Down from the rocky crags the fair winds blow.

An elvish maid came there,
Gold twined about her hair.

The second who came there
A silver cup did bear

The third who came our there
A golden belt did wear.

The fourth who came out there
Spoke in words so fair:

‘Welcome Olaf Lily-and-Rose,
Come in the crag and dwell with us.’

‘I’ll not dwell with any elf,
I’ll place my faith in Christ Himself,’

‘A little while now wait for me,
While I go to the greenwood tree.’

She took from out her chest
Her sharpest knife and best.

‘You cannot mean to ride off thus,
And never spare one kiss for us.’

Olaf stooped from the saddle-bow,
Kissed the maiden, loath and slow.

She stabbed him under the shoulder-blade,
To the roots of his heart a way it made.

Olaf watched the his own heart's blood,
Down to the horse's hoof it flowed.

Olaf rode with whip and spur
Homeward to his mother's door.

Beat with his fist upon the door:
'Mother, dear mother, draw back the bar!'

'Where have you been now, O my son?
Why are your cheeks so grey and wan?

'You are as pale, as deathly blue
As if elves have played their play with you.'

'It would not help me if I lied;
By an elvish maid I was beguiled.

'Mother, make my bed soft and wide;
Sister, bind up my wounded side.'

She led her son up to his bed;
When she kissed him, he was dead.

I'll turn my verses to the Cross,
A-wandering he did go;
Holy Mary, be thou with us,
Where red fires flow.
Down from the rocky crags the fair winds blow.