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“The provocation is titillating.” Sven Wernström in Iceland

Abstract: The article discusses the reception and impact of Sven Wernström's views and works in Iceland. In particular, it retraces the controversy which surrounded the 1978 translation of his book Kamrat Jesus (1971) and recounts the heated debate over the book which took place both in the press and in the Icelandic parliament. Wernström's prose and critical voice is also considered within the context of the so-called social realist movement in Icelandic literature for children and young adults.

Keywords: Icelandic translations, reception, social realism, neorealism, Icelandic children's literature, Þórarinn Eldjárn, controversial books

It comes as no surprise that any publication of Sven Wernström's work causes something of a stir. But when *Kamrat Jesus* (1971), translated by Þórarinn Eldjárn (b. 1949) under the title *Félagi Jesús*, came out in Iceland in December 1978, it caused more than just a stir. The controversy the book generated reached the proportions of a large-scale political earthquake that reverberated across the newspapers throughout the pre-Christmas season. For a moment, the foundations of the churches and the stone walls of the Icelandic Parliament trembled with indignation. Expectedly, the heads of all the denominations in Iceland united in denouncing “the Swede's Fifth Gospel”,¹ as one of the papers heralded the book while the Parliament was split. The predictable consequence of this controversy was that the book sold better than anyone could have anticipated and, although intended for a younger audience, it was avidly read by adults who wanted to check for themselves whether the “much ado” was not about nothing after all. This paper will recount the heated debate over *Félagi Jesús* and provide a brief insight into how Wernström's works and views were represented within the context of literature for young readers published in Iceland in the 1970s.

The appearance of Sven Wernström's novels in Icelandic was not a singular incident but an integral part of a much bigger wave

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of Scandinavian writing (Aðalsteinsdóttir, "Icelandic Children's Literature", 596–98). Before Disney books began dominating the children's books market, the 1970s had been a decade when a significant number of Nordic authors had been regularly translated into Icelandic and enjoyed great popularity (Kristjánsdóttir, *Öldin öfgafulla*, 183). It was not without significance that some of them participated in the Congress of Children's and Youth Literature that took place in Reykjavík in 1972 and 1978 (see e.g. Bergmann, "Miðlun, fordómastríð ...", 5). It has been argued that this Scandinavian wave of translated novels and, more generally, the influx of discussions and ideas had a beneficial influence on the Icelandic literature for young readers and in particular, on the type of teenage novels written at that time ("Frá hlýðni ...", 180–81; cf. Aðalsteinsdóttir, "Icelandic Children's Literature", 601). Books by Anne-Cath. Vestly, Astrid Lindgren, Jens Sigsgaard, Gunnel Beckman, Tove Jansson, Robert Fisker, Maria Gripe, Gunilla Wolde and Ole Lund Kierkegaard, to name just a few authors, were translated into Icelandic during this period. Some of their books are still republished and read today but they do not seem to have as much collective impact or prominence as they did forty years ago. The case of Wernström, however, is altogether different in the sense that in comparison to his exceptionally prolific *oeuvre* in Swedish, the writer's Icelandic career seems relatively short-lived, being confined primarily to the period between 1974 and 1981. In fact, his literary presence in Iceland was limited to a specific mode of writing with a set function and critical reception, namely social realism. His name appeared regularly in the discussion of Scandinavian literature for young readers, not least on its political aspects, and his views on what kind of literature should be written and published were commented upon.

In 1971 the left-wing newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* reprinted from the Danish *Information* an article about the wave of political Swedish children's books. It focused primarily on two of Wernström's 1970 novels, namely *Skatten i de fattigas by* and *Olle och fabriken*, both of which were shown as examples of writing that had been undeniably political but did not compromise on literary quality ("Alda pólitíska barnabóka", 5). Another article quoting Ove Kreisberg presents *Hemligheten* (1971) as an example of the successful use of the thriller form which, while passing an expected line of criticism on society, simultaneously offers a subversive version of the genre, particularly in its portrayal of criminals. It is thus set in opposition to the predictable thriller template followed by the Icelandic teenage novels

at that time (“Hvenær er barnabók góð?”, 15). None of these books, however, have been translated into Icelandic. Wernström’s utopian Robinsonade *Ævintýraleg útilega* (*De hemligas ö*) was published only in 1974. The breakthrough came in 1978, in a sense, the year of Wernström in Iceland, which began with the episodes of *Max bragðarefur* (*Max Svensson Lurifax*) read on the morning children’s show on National Icelandic Radio (RÚV). During the debate over *Félagi Jesús* later that year, *Max bragðarefur* was referenced to illustrate the type of writing and ideological preaching Wernström was said to stand for. As a matter of fact, one of the newspapers introducing the book with the headline “Political children’s book or not?” had already predicted that the Public Broadcaster might expect complaints from more conservative listeners even before the reading commenced. The same year saw the publication of two novels, both in Þórarinn Eldjárn’s translation. One was *Félagi Jesús* and the other *Leikhúsmorðið* (*Mordet på Lillan*), which came out in the Scandinavian collection that also included *Tvíbytnan* (*Katamaranen*) by Bent Halles and *Gúmmi-Tarsan* by Ole Lund Kirkegaard. Eldjárn also translated *Þrælarnir* (*Trälarna*, 1979), and only one more volume of the *Trälarna* books was published in Icelandic, namely *Synir Þrælanna* (*Trälarnas söner*, 1981). This also happened to be the last of Wernström’s novels ever published in Iceland.

The four titles mentioned above received good reviews. Wernström was considered a skilful writer and a good story-teller, even if some of the critics found his “preaching” too blatant and his realism too “stringent” (H. Pálsson, 13). *Ævintýraleg útilega* was used as a pretext for discussing the legitimacy of the social realist stance within the context of literature for children and young adults. The reviewer argued that books with all kinds of implicit indoctrination (e.g. promoting gender inequality and stereotypes) were published and discussed without much fuss, while any presence of a political agenda immediately drew negative criticism. Young readers, she concluded, would most likely bypass the political message and simply enjoy the plot and it was better to read an actually well-written book than one that pretends to be devoid of any agenda (Kristjánsdóttir, “Ævintýraleg útilega”, 8). The 1970s were indeed dominated by the realist mode, imported to Iceland from Scandinavia and represented locally by works of writers such as Jenna Jensdóttir (b. 1918), Hreiðar Stefánsson (1918–1995), Guðjón Sveinsson (b. 1937), Andrés Indriðason (b. 1941) and Guðrún Olga Árnadóttir (b. 1953) and also the early books by Vilborg Dagbjartsdóttir (b. 1930). Guðrún Helgadóttir’s (b. 1935) novels

about the twins Jón Oddur and Jón Bjarni, published between 1974–1980 and written in the social realist mode, have remained some of the most popular Icelandic children’s books of all time. None of the Icelandic titles, however, attracted as much controversy as *Félagi Jesús*, possibly because despite introducing rather progressive ideas and challenging the social status quo, they were never as flagrantly ideological. The Icelandic authors tended to pose questions rather than propose social revolution (Aðalsteinsdóttir, *Íslenskar barnabækur* . . . 337). Much more radical and subversive at that time were in fact plays and also song lyrics from albums that remained popular for decades (see Kristjánsdóttir, *Öldin öfgafulla*, 184).

Significantly, the 1970s were also a decade in which children’s literature began to receive serious critical and academic attention and, as noted, Wernström’s name tended to appear in that context on regular basis. Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir’s history of Icelandic children’s literature, published in 1981, marks a milestone in this field of literary criticism. The book ends with a thorough analysis of the then relatively new trend in literature which makes foreign writers such as Wernström stand out as inspiring, thought-provoking, even though often uncompromisingly radical in their attitude and address. In the final chapter of her book, Aðalsteinsdóttir refers to the “recipes” for literature inspired by social realism as they were formulated by Jørgen Døør, H.J. Christensen, Wernström, and others in their 1976 collection of essays entitled *Børnelitteratur – klassekultur*. In short, the social realist writers were expected to describe and explain reality, raise children’s consciousness of class struggle and arm them with radical and ideological language (Aðalsteinsdóttir, *Íslenskar barnabækur* . . . 336). Some of these views were expressed during the Congress of Nordic Authors of Children’s and Youth Literature which took place in Iceland in June 1978. In her book Aðalsteinsdóttir quotes from Wernström’s speech that originally inaugurated the Congress and was subsequently published under the title “What is good and what is bad?” Predictably, Wernström’s address is an unapologetically political piece and valuable primarily as a document of its time, but there are moments where the views he articulates transcend uncompromising political engagement and arguably have not lost their pith, such as when he says: “I’ve been considering for some time what we can learn from children that we write for. We should be able to learn the need to keep the sense of wonder awake. The sense of wonder and curiosity . . . We should look at all the material we use for the story with wonder and curiosity” (Wernström, “Hvað er gott . . .”, 213). His speech,

however, ends on a strong (and somewhat familiar) note: “That’s good – so we all are socialists! Then each book that we write will be a political act. Then our work will at last begin to acquire meaning. The provocation is titillating. Let’s get started!” (214).

Félagi Jesús was not the first literary provocation which originated in Sweden and flared up in Iceland. In 1973 a children’s author Olga Guðrún Árnadóttir read her translation of Dr. Gormander’s (pseudonym of Gunnar Ohrlander) *När barnen tog makten* (1969), initially translated as *Börnin taka til sinna ráða* (The children seize power), on the National Icelandic Radio’s morning show for children. She self-published the book later that year under the title *Uppreisnin á barnaheimilinu* (The revolt in the nursery). Even the two versions of the title must have been enough to disquiet any parent and, indeed, while in Sweden Dr. Gormander’s book was not considered particularly well-written and did not generate much attention, in Iceland it provoked a feverish reaction. The book tells a story of a group of children who get bored and rebel by bullying their kindergarten teachers. Although the parents are forced to make deals with the young rebels, the revolt continues to spread. When the book was read on the air, the radio station’s phone system collapsed under the astounding number of complaints, the reading was suspended, and the translator started receiving hate calls while the debate continued in the press. In order to appreciate why these readings on the radio had such a significance and impact, one needs to be reminded that until 1983 there was only one radio channel in Iceland and the entire nation listened to it. “Upset parents,” says Dagný Kristjánsdóttir summing up the whole controversy, “said enough was enough when the innocent little children were to be fed communist propaganda” (Kristjánsdóttir, *Öldin öfgafulla*, 183).

Summarizing *Félagi Jesús* in an interview for an Icelandic newspaper in 1972, Wernström says: “This book talks about a revolt that fails because its leader’s political consciousness isn’t clear enough” (Bergmann, “Miðlun, fordómastríð . . .”, 5) and elsewhere he explains his approach: “I have just removed all the miracles and marvels from the story” (Wernström, “Um féлага Jesús”, 27). It is, indeed, the gist of the novel, which attempts to portray the life of Jesus the carpenter in a realistic manner. The cover art by illustrator Mats Andersson shows an adult Jesus playing with children (Fig. 1). From this opening scene, the book then goes on to describe his life in Nazaret, first meetings with his “comrades”, the attempted revolt and finally his arrest and trial. When standing before Caiaphas the

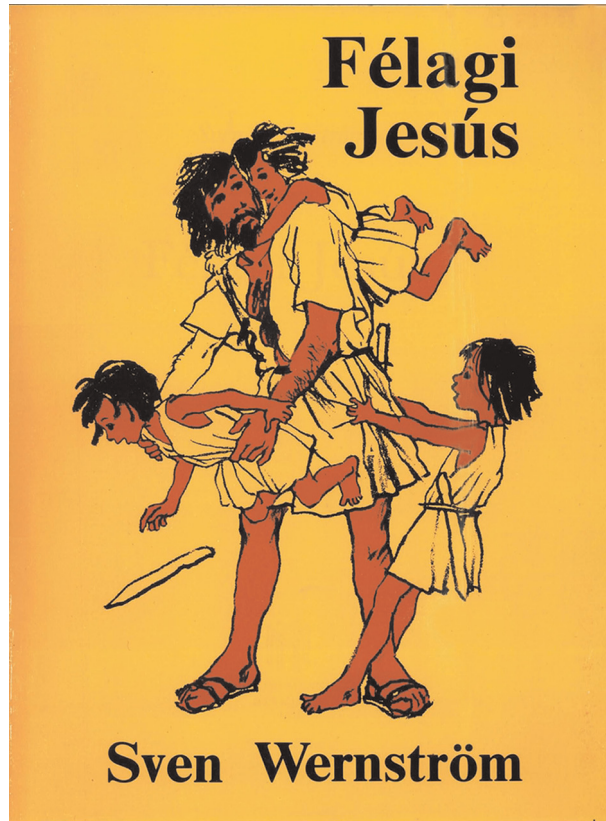


Fig. 1

High Priest, Wernström's Jesus says: "I have conducted a revolt. And the people will conduct another revolt! The great superpowers of the world will fall! The rich will disappear! Long live the revolution!" (Wernström, *Félagi Jesús*, 73–74). The last chapters only briefly state that "it was surmised" (74) that Jesus was given a death sentence and that "perhaps" he was hung on the cross and left to die but he might have also escaped (75). The final chapter sums up the events that followed, including the collection of the stories about Christ in a book "called The Bible" (77) and the spread of the Christian faith. "Of such boring things," the closing sentence of the book says, "we won't be telling here – you will certainly get to hear them in school or when you start learning about religious studies and the history of mankind" (77). *Félagi Jesús* is written in a very accessible way, filled with dialogue and from the first pages aims to create spontaneous contact with a young (teenage) reading audience.

Wernström is one of those writers, noted the writer and journalist Árne Bergmann, who "wants to indoctrinate children with socialist

agenda" (Bergman 1972, 5). These statements did not seem to get much attention when the book was simply discussed by Wernström and Bergmann during the Congress of Nordic Authors that took place in Reykjavík that year. But the Swede's political agenda in his version of the story of Christ were not easily accepted when *Félagi Jesús* finally came out during the pre-Christmas season of 1978. When the whole debate was recalled almost four decades later, it was pointed out that the most contested aspects of the book were not only its explicit Marxist agitation but the fact that Jesus was portrayed as too human and too occupied with his earthly needs. The most frequently quoted scene from the book was the one showing Jesus and half-naked Mary Magdalene sitting together in bed (Fig. 2). This illustration was the key example of crossing the line of propriety (see e.g. Gísladóttir; "Félagi Jesús").

The first long review of *Félagi Jesús* which appeared in the conservative newspaper *Morgunblaðið* was a withering piece by Sigurður Pálsson, teacher and theologian, who considered the handling of the sources highly inappropriate and the political propaganda unacceptable. He describes Wernström's using the figure of Jesus in the role of "Marxist revolutionary and insurgent leader" as "overwhelmingly worthless" (S. Pálsson, 12) and the writer's modus operandi as simply "foul" (13). "Under the pretence of science and



Fig. 2

knowledge,” argues the reviewer, “he rambles and uses the limited knowledge he acquired in order to subvert, distort and falsify the stories about Christ in the most ingratiating manner” (12). Such an approach is particularly inappropriate because the book is intended for children who, as Pálsson repeats twice in the article, are “defenceless” (12, 13). The author also points to what became one of the cruxes of the subsequent debate, namely the fact that the book’s translation was supported by the Nordic Translation Fund, and he thus makes it clear that the money had been misappropriated. It was indeed the main argument that one of the MPs used only a few days later when she argued in the parliament that the publication of *Félagi Jesús* was against the Icelandic Constitution and blatantly exploiting public money to “de-Christianize” Icelandic children. In a later article about the fund and the foreign books it misguidedly co-financed, *Félagi Jesús* is bluntly described as “obscenity and falsification of history” (Björnsson, 12).

Asked to compare Wernström’s version of the story with the Biblical account, a professor in theology lists the key discrepancies in order to conclude that the book is “shameless propaganda against the truth of the Christian faith and truths of other kinds” (Sigurbjörnsson, 6). His article, illustrated with the earlier mentioned picture of Jesus and Mary Magdalene from *Félagi Jesús* (possibly to emphasise the book’s inappropriateness), strongly advises parents against reading such a distorted account of the life of Jesus to their children. This was also, as a matter of fact, the gist of the statement issued jointly by the heads of all the denominations in Iceland who warned parents and teachers against this and similar “poison” offered them by the publishers. In their view *Félagi Jesús* “was written with the purpose of vaccinating children against the influence of Christian beliefs . . . It contradicts scientific findings about the life of Jesus. It is a shameless provocation against the most hallowed feelings of the Christians” (Einarsson et al., 6). This statement was followed by letters signed by priests who protested against this “misleading calumny and fabrication”. “Junk literature,” as one of the MPs referred to any writing of this type, by an otherwise “fine writer” who is not, however, coy about being a communist (*Alþingistíðindi* . . ., 1368). Calling upon people to boycott the book could not have been a better encouragement. The exact figures were not mentioned, but if one were to judge by the newspaper headlines alone, the engagement of the clergy and not least of the Parliamentarians proved to be the best advertisement

and spurred sales (“Jesús að verða ...”, 1; Sigurdórsson, “Selur Félaga Jesúm ...”, 1; Sigurdórsson, “Frú Ragnhildur ...”, 4). Considering the amount of attention this book received and the scale of indignation, one is tempted to read Wernström’s words about provocation as almost prophetic. For a moment, *Félagi Jesús* ceased to be a novel. It became a political act.

A sense of wonder, but of a rather different nature than what Wernström considered to be crucial in writing fiction, was detectable among some Icelandic MPs who found themselves discussing a children’s book in the Parliament while, as some suggested, the press seemed a more appropriate forum in which to decide questions relating to quality of literature. “This is one of the strangest debates that have been conducted here,” said one MP, during the special session allocated to *Félagi Jesús* after the main parliamentary session. He added that the direction the discussion was taking made him wonder whether he was still in Reykjavík in the year 1978 or perhaps had been transported to the time of the Holy Inquisition in southern Europe (*Alþingistíðindi ...*, 1372). Altogether a lot was said on the subject, which one is indeed surprised to find among the parliamentary records of that period. Nine MPs took the floor to comment on the controversial publication but the majority of them were left to take a stance over the arguments that had passed between the first two speakers: Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, representing the right-winged Independent Party and later the Minister of Education, and the writer Svava Jakobsdóttir, who sat in the Parliament for the left-winged People’s Alliance. It was Helgadóttir who initiated the debate and who argued that the publication of *Félagi Jesús* was against the Icelandic constitution, more specifically, the Article which says that the government shall support and protect the Evangelical Lutheran Church. She called for appropriate actions to be taken against the parties involved in misappropriation of public money, i.e. supporting the grant from the Translation Fund.

Svava Jakobsdóttir interpreted Helgadóttir’s words as a call for censorship or even a ban on publication. More importantly perhaps, she attempted to approach the book in a different manner, pointing out that it was a historical fiction (with an emphasis on fiction) and not a textbook in Christian doctrine and drawing attention to the fact that other books which had come out in Iceland and which featured Jesus as the main character, had been defined as stories or novels. “This per se can hardly be punishable,” argued Jakobsdóttir (*Alþingistíðindi ...*, 1366). Subsequently, her speech raised the

questions of poetic licence, writers' methodology when dealing with history, the nature of historical fiction, and research on medieval literature in order to reach two conclusions with regard to *Félagi Jesús*. "It is greatly questionable," she said addressing Helgadóttir's speech, "to stand up here and maintain that a book depicting a historical figure in a different way to that which the reader herself might have wished for is disgraceful and revolting." What Wernström does, argued Jakobsdóttir, is to endow Jesus with human attributes which one does not find in the Gospel since this is a subject that the Apostles might not have been interested in or did not want to write about.² "If this is revolting," she concluded, "then of course, the book will be revolting. If the way in which Christ is depicted in the book causes revolt, then sex is also revolting . . . The truth," she tried to explain, "is that the author of this novel has embedded the events in a political context which his contemporaries will understand" (*Alþingistíðindi* . . ., 1367). As the debate progressed, other examples of works based on the life of Christ were called upon and the subjectivity of literary tastes was emphasised, the translator was defended, and the quality of his translation (and the general command of language) was attested to. Furthermore, the audience was reminded of Wernström's political sympathies ("he is a fierce communist") as well as the controversy the reading of *Max Bragðarefur* on the radio had caused earlier that year. Finally, the MPs were encouraged to acquaint themselves with the work in question and eventually the last speaker admitted that the whole discussion certainly raised his curiosity and the first thing he was going to do the following morning was to buy the book and read it.

Interestingly, amidst the discussions over Wernström's portrayal of Jesus, his other novel, *Leikhúsmorðið*, published just a few days before *Félagi Jesús*, went almost unnoticed, although it was considered much more noteworthy and it later received the award for the best translated book of 1978. Svava Jakobsdóttir's speech in the Parliament is worth recalling, not least because it was one of the few voices in defence of Wernström's novel and one that actually focused on literature rather than social indecorum and alleged attempts at de-Christianisation. Arguably, it was easier to castigate Wernström's "Gospel" than to defend it. While the book was an easy source of juicy political quotes which could be picked to illustrate its highly tendentious emphasis and iconoclastic premise, not much heed seemed to have been given to its actual value as literature. This particular novel is not even mentioned in

Aðalsteinsdóttir's history of Icelandic literature for children. Characteristically, most articles defending *Félagi Jesús* followed a similar line of argument as the one presented by Jakobsdóttir, i.e. the book became a pretext for a more general discussion of freedom of interpretation and censorship. The earlier quoted critic and writer Árni Bergmann became, unwittingly perhaps, another advocate of Wernström's works. He had already written about Wernström's untranslated books and interviewed Wernström about *Félagi Jesús* in 1972. At the peak of the *Félagi* debate, Bergmann and Sigurður Pálsson, the author of the first withering review, were asked to debate their views on national television. Worth stressing is the fact that Bergmann, like Jakobsdóttir, polemicized against the novel's (as in "work of fiction") detractors but at the same time did not seem wholly convinced about its merits. In an article published as a riposte to the critics, he gives numerous examples showing that each period in history produced its own more or less controversial interpretation of the story of the Christ. Admitting that Wernström is a "skilful writer", Bergmann nevertheless conceded that his approach was "both narrow and not particularly inventive" (Bergmann, "Um helga dóma", 8) when compared to much more worthwhile reworkings of the Gospel.

After the Christmas holidays of 1978, however, the debate slowly subsided until *Félagi Jesús* reached the Faroe Islands where it came out under the title *Javnlíkin Jesus* in 1979 and followed a familiar trajectory. As was the case in Iceland, the bone of contention became the fact that the Nordic Translation Fund supported the publication of the book. In an article published in the Faroese newspaper *14 September* and reprinted in Icelandic *Tímann* in May 1979, Wernström explains his approach to the Gospel (the New Testament minus the miracles), the motives (making the story relevant to the present reality that children understand) and views on the reception of the book (he expressed his surprise that his novel caused an uproar in every country it has been published in). "I don't claim," said the author, "that my account is 'the true one'. I have simply written a story which is more credible than the standard ones that we all know. And this was not difficult." In the conclusion Wernström admits that although he was not able to follow the discussion in the Faroe Islands, from what he had heard, it all sounded very familiar: "the use of power, censorship, oppression of freedom" (Wernström, "Um féлага Jesús", 27). One more response to this article was published a couple of weeks later but there it was clear that Wernström's treatment of the Biblical sources created the

whole debate (Sveinbjörnsson, 17). In this whole, surprisingly long-lasting debate, the intended audience of *Félagi Jesús* as well as the book's literary quality (or lack thereof) seemed secondary. Asked about his opinion one "young reader" was quoted as saying "this perhaps wouldn't have been a bad book, if he just hadn't named the main character Jesus" (H. Pálsson, 18).

When *Félagi Jesús* was published in Iceland, the book's translator, Þórarinn Eldjárn was living in Sweden and his voice was conspicuously absent from the debate. At that time a young poet, he later went on to become one of Iceland's most popular children's authors. Asked to comment on the whole controversy, he simply suggested that it was "much ado" about not too significant a book. He also pointed out that *Ævisaga Jesús frá Nazaret* by the Icelandic writer Gunnar Benediktsson which came out in 1930 was in many ways reminiscent of Wernström's book but no one considered it scandalous. It seems that the key ingredient in controversy was the "defenceless" intended audience. "Calumny" was the most recurrent word in an article that attacked both Wernström and Eldjárn and accused the latter of "suffering from malice and bad influences caused by his long stay in Sweden" (Blöndal, 11).³

Leikhúsmorð, possibly the most appreciated of Wernström's works in Iceland, partly passed the test of time as it was read on the radio in 1989. *Félagi Jesús*, on the other hand, has never been reprinted and has been remembered mostly by the controversy that surrounded its publication and it is only in this context that the book has been mentioned (see e.g. Gísladóttir; "Félagi Jesús"). One could argue, however, that it did have a role to play. When Olga Guðrún Árnadóttir talked about the controversy surrounding *Uppreisnin á barnaheimilinu*, she argued that this novel "broke the ice" in the sense that it encouraged parents to be more liberal in their choice of books for their children and to look for more versatile material ("Börnin taka völdin"). The same perhaps holds true about Wernström's novels, including *Félagi Jesús*.

One is tempted to ask why Wernström's career in Iceland was so short-lived. This may or may not be attributed to the fact that his name was mostly associated with controversy. More relevantly, however, this could be due to two other, more general factors. Firstly, the 1980s marked a U-turn in children's literature in Iceland when the social realist mode gradually became replaced by fantasy and, simply put, this type of writing fell out of fashion. Secondly, and as noted above, after the certainly conspicuous wave during the 1970s, fewer Scandinavian books have been translated and their

impact on Icelandic writing for young readers has waned, becoming a matter of individual writers or books rather than a specific, definable trend. It certainly is interesting to speculate whether *Félagi Jesús* would have reached such a wide audience if it had not had received all this free publicity. Far more ink was spent on this one title than all the other Christmas books published that year, some of which are still read today. Equally, one is tempted to compare the reception of this book with other fiction for young readers featuring this particular character. In 2010 Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, which came out as part of the Canongate Myth Series, attracted some controversy in Britain. It would certainly be interesting to see whether it would generate as much scandal, if it came out in Iceland today, as *Félagi Jesús* did over three decades ago. Comrade Jesus, Scoundrel Christ – is provocation still possible?

Biographical information: Olga Holownia holds a PhD in English and Icelandic Studies. Her research interests include contemporary poetry, children's literature, nonsense and elves. She is currently involved in a joint-project hosted by the University of Iceland, leading to the publication of a New History of Icelandic Literature for Children. Contact: olga@hi.is

Notes

¹ All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

² Svava Jakobsdóttir's words might have carried more weight because she was a daughter of one of the most distinguished priests in Reykjavík, Jakob Jónsson.

³ Eldjárn's poetry book *Disneyrímur* (Disney Rhymes) which also came one in 1978 was influenced by the writings of, among others, Ariel Dorfman, Armand Mattelart and Göran Palm. *Disneyrímur* became a best-seller.

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