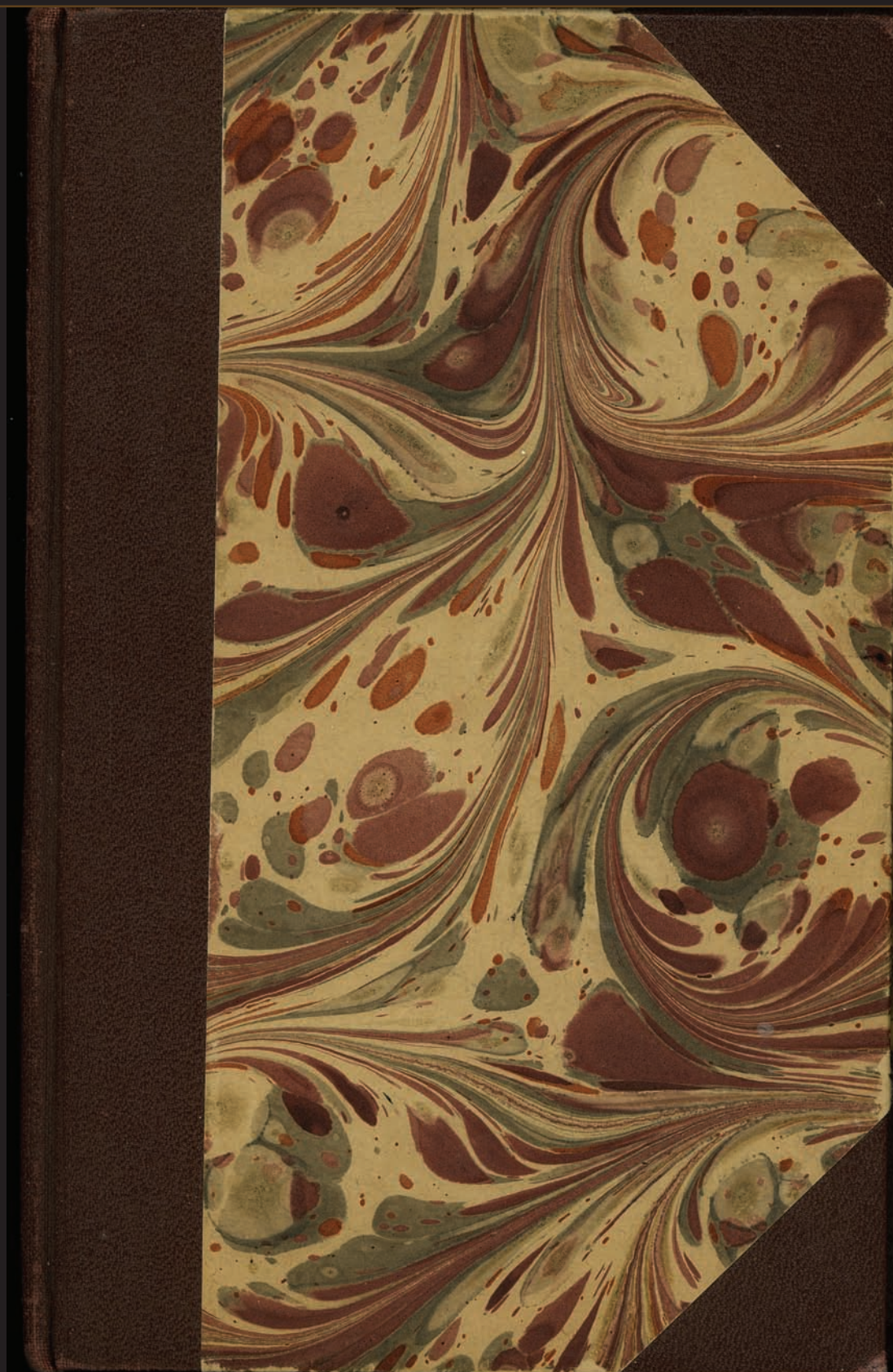


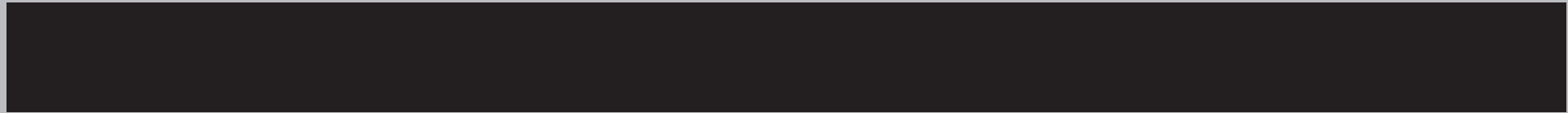
*a book of fragments*

**Birna Bjarnadóttir**





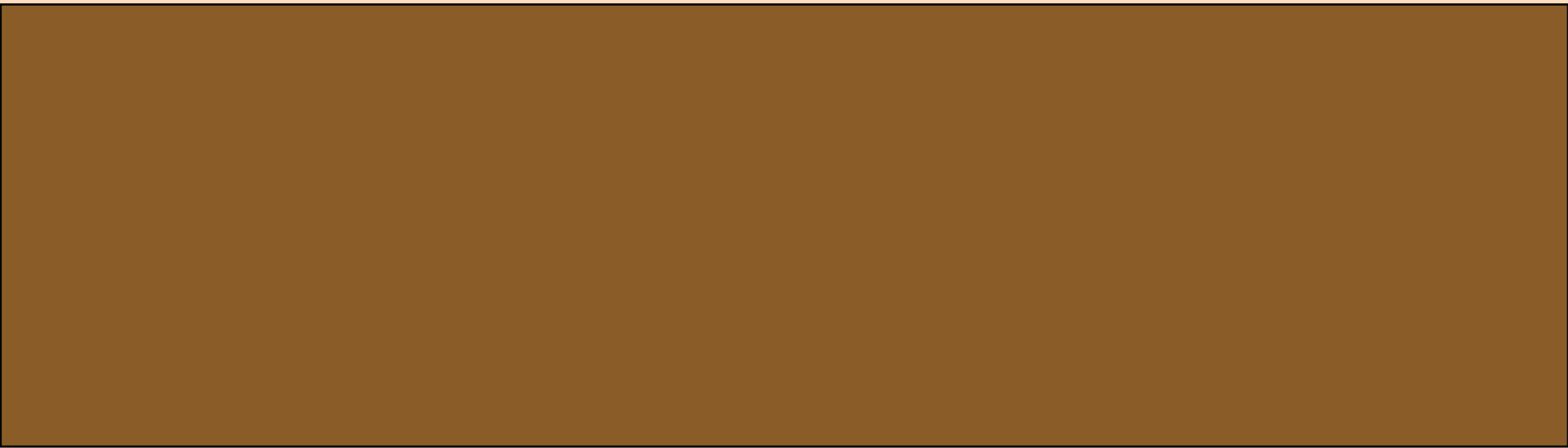
Guy Maddin





To the memory  
of my sister  
Berglind Bjarnadóttir  
1957-1986





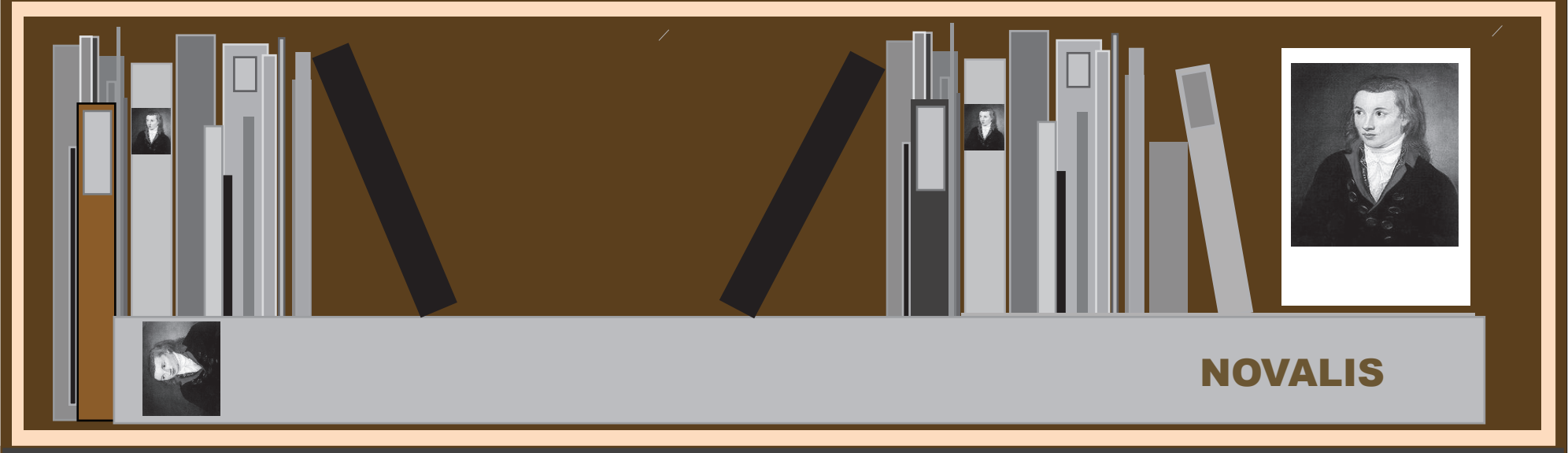
Birna Bjarnadóttir

# *a book of fragments*

Foreword by George Toles

Illustrations by  
Cliff Eyland, Haraldur Jónsson  
and Guy Maddin

Design: Klettaveggur Eyland



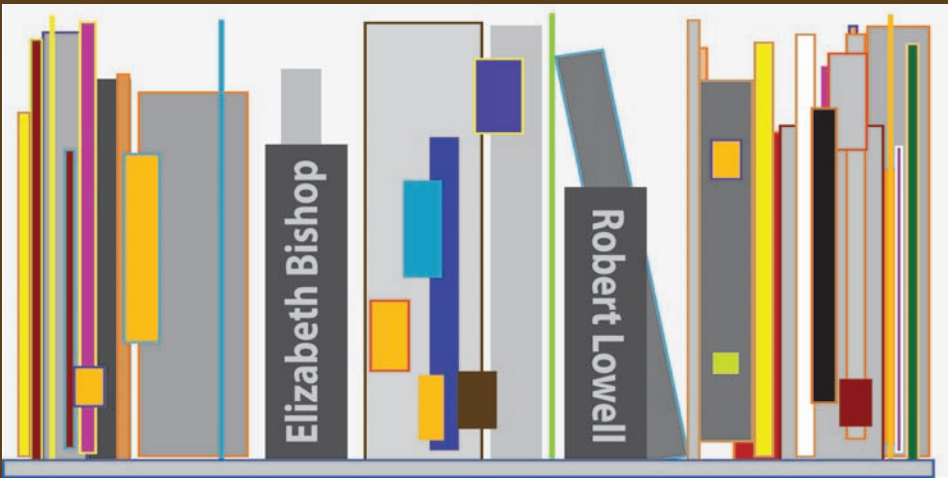
Be as good and as poetic as possible.  
-- Novalis.

Life does not need a prayer; it does  
what it wants and has no sympathy  
with the living.  
-- Guðbergur Bergsson.









### Foreword

“Since we do float on an unknown sea I think we should examine the other floating things that come our way carefully; who knows what might depend on it?”  
—Elizabeth Bishop, letter to Robert Lowell

As we grow older, fragments of every sort make more sense and exert a steadily deepening hold on the imagination. Complete structures, cohesive wholes, large-scale unity of purpose and effect do not lose their power to gratify and astonish, but they seem eerily separate from the conditions of our existence. The conditions to which fragments most intimately speak include the sense of arbitrariness overrunning our fantasies of order, the peeling away of memory, the reduction of even our completed projects to the status of inconsequential mental scraps, and, of course, the accumulating losses (of loved ones, of creative energy, of health, of time) which bedim our faith in decisive paths to meaningful goals.

Fragments, in their adriftness from an envisioned (or once-upon-a-time attained) fulfillment often have something forlorn about them, but they can just as readily convey a dispassionate immutability. After the pillages and effacings of time, these few pieces are all that have survived. But they now seem almost fated to be spared. It is easy to imagine that they have circumvented destruction once and for all, and stare back at time, an adamant, indissoluble remainder. Other fragments, from never completed works, appear to have proceeded just this far in anticipation of a larger, perhaps nobler form, and then stopped, broken off. The gesture of breaking off also feels immutable, like a partial statue in which a figure is still triumphantly pointing.

ROBERT HARBISON



As the Romantics well knew, the fragment suggests the constancy and magical stamina of ancient ruins. “Ruins,” Robert Harbison memorably observes, “are a way of seeing,” linking the threats to our own cherished past with dreams of persistence at the heart of oblivion (99). How much the serene residue of a picturesque former age seems to echo our protests against the malignancy of an always too noisy, diffuse and indifferently rushing present. We can entertain thoughts of lingering on after our official death as a happy, indecipherable sprig of history: a tiny, odd item within the ruin assortment that catches the eye of an occasional visitor, in spite of her inability to make sense of it.

Fragments make a compelling case for discontinuity and the primacy of the overdetermined moment or image in our memory of almost any work of art, even those we know best. When I think of Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, I move through a brief mental slideshow consisting of the convict appearing in the graveyard, Pip at Christmas dinner wedged between towering grownups, Miss Havisham’s rotting bridal gown and wedding cake, Estella’s haughty look as she says “boy”, Joe Gargery fumbling with his hat in Pip’s fine living quarters, and Wemmick’s tightly guarded domestic castle. Shakespeare’s Hamlet, even after innumerable readings and viewings, distills into a flurry of celebrated lines, the first appearance of the ghost, the presentation of the “mousetrap,” Ophelia’s watery grave, and Hamlet’s rash stabbing of Polonius hidden behind the arras, capping the prince’s equally deranged confrontation with his mother. With film, things are much the same. James Stewart finding Zuzu’s petals on the snowy bridge is all I need summon to mind to regain the entire experience of *It’s a Wonderful Life*. When an older James Stewart, now in torrential color, opens the rear door to the flower shop, or looks down the Mission Dolores staircase, or waits, shrouded in

green light, for Kim Novak to emerge from her bedroom as Madeleine restored, *Vertigo* in its totality seems to be upon me. I grab hold of stray phrases or refulgent words from a mostly forgotten poem as my sole, but seemingly sufficient reference points. (“My life will always leave unlatched/ a small green gate to let her in.” [48]) Where better for a poem to nestle than in a pair of insistent, warmly sequestered, orphan lines? If I think about Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony, I go instantly to the “softly crying flute-and-oboe line in the coda,” because I remember Alex Ross writing that it deliberately strives for a precise fit with Poe’s “Quoth the Raven, ‘Nevermore.’” [180].







Even with experiences as brief as a three minute recording of a popular song which I know, first note to last, by heart, there is mental pressure to condense it still further. Frank Sinatra’s version of “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” for example, is concentrated, whenever my auditory memory tunes into it, into a few peak pleasure points: first, the question “Don’t you know, little fool, you never can win?” with special emphasis on the beautifully stretched and slightly estranging vowel in “fool,” and second, the deliciously cumbersome “Use your mentality” which is the promised means of “waking up” to reality. “Wake up” is wittily repeated in Sinatra’s swing wrap-up (“Wake up, wake up”), as if to improve the singer’s chances of doing so, though it’s a foregone conclusion that he won’t succeed. In the Beatles’ “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” I find myself caught on the cunning opening phrase “Oh yeah, I’ll” which grants “I’ll” an invigorating extra syllable, a swift little kick of will power. Then I go on to ponder yet again how exhilaration instantly disarms insult in “I’ll tell you something/ I think you’ll understand.” And in Dinah Washington’s peerless rendition of “How Deep is the Ocean,” I unfailingly gravitate to the moment when she surmounts, with a mixture of freshly vanquished sorrow and ecstatic longing, all the obstacles that confront her imagined travel to a lover at firmament distance: “How far is the journey/ from here to a star?”



The displacement of the whole by the tingling particles that appear to hold the key to one’s sense of the whole is memory’s way of mitigating art’s too muchness, its power to overwhelm and confound. As we resolve to dwell more systematically on the particulars of a work, aiming for a slow, full encounter with its cumulative riches, more and more disparate pieces will come back to us and present themselves in an order that makes a larger comprehension and imaginative reclamation possible. But in our usual state of forgetful farawayness from the painting, story, or symphony, we rely on whatever tell-tale fragments memory casually retrieves for us.

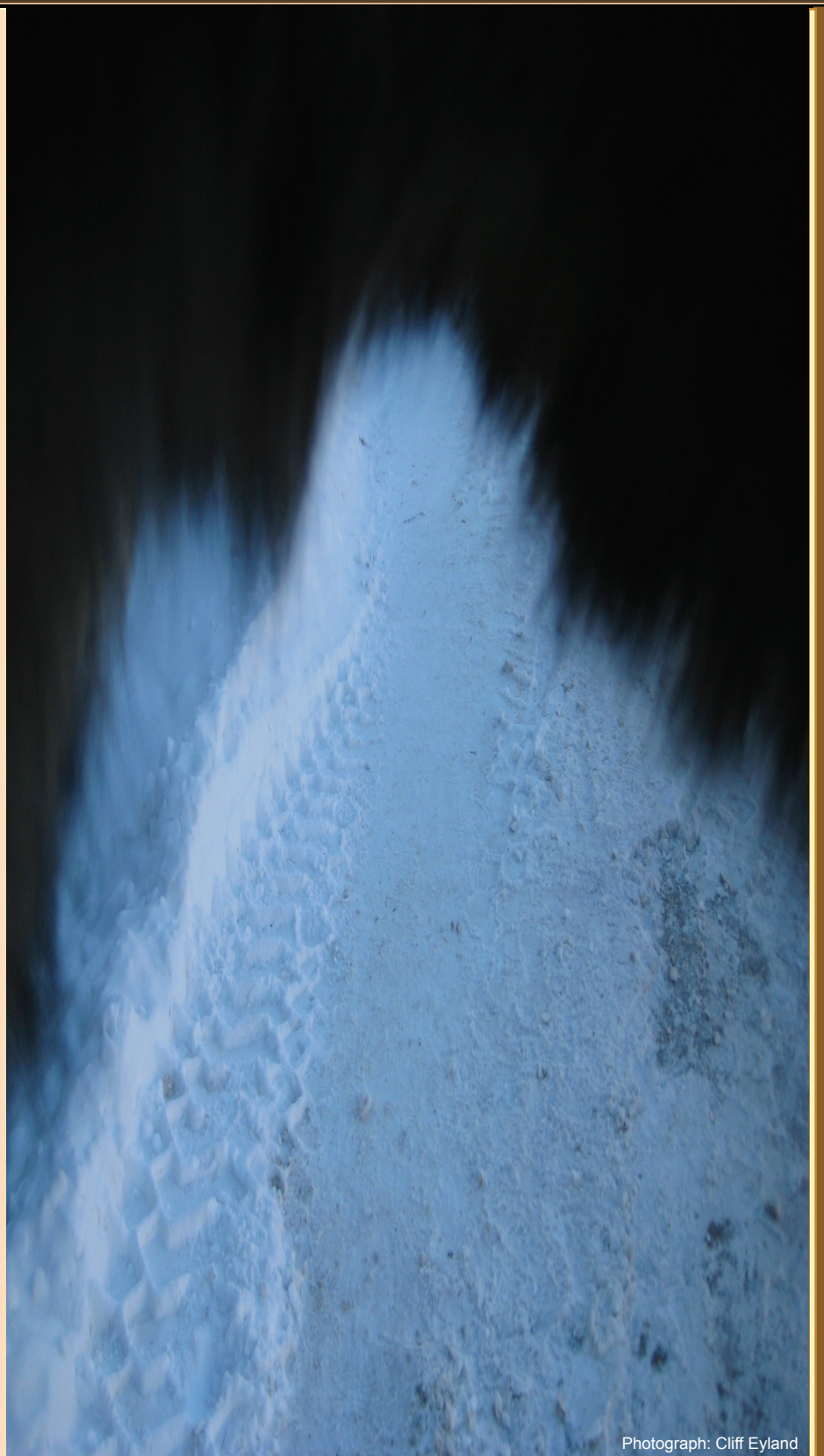
In the case of unfinished, half-obliterated, lost, or deliberately broken and “small” artistic testimony, we are more likely to respond by mentally expanding the vivid remnants rather than resting content with them. In a 1925 journalistic essay entitled “Cinema in the Harbor,” the novelist in exile Joseph Roth, newly arrived in France, offers a brief summary of *Red Wolves*, a movie that he chanced to see in Marseilles at the “Cosmos” Theatre. Roth relates how the hero, Cesare, in his effort to rescue Margot who has been kidnapped by the Red Wolves gang and hidden away in a high tower in the mountains, attempts to persuade the cutthroat band that he wants to join up with them. It proves no easy matter for Cesare to gain the robbers’ trust and be accepted for membership. “He is required to take a battery of tests, in wrestling, in knife fighting, and in arm wrestling. This series of tests makes up most of the film.” [64] Roth concludes his account by noting that *Red Wolves* is “screened eight times a day, from ten in the morning until midnight. Cesare passes his tests eight times a day, and eight times the audience gets enraptured, a third of them spending the entire day in the cinema.” [64-65]



## JOSEPH ROTH

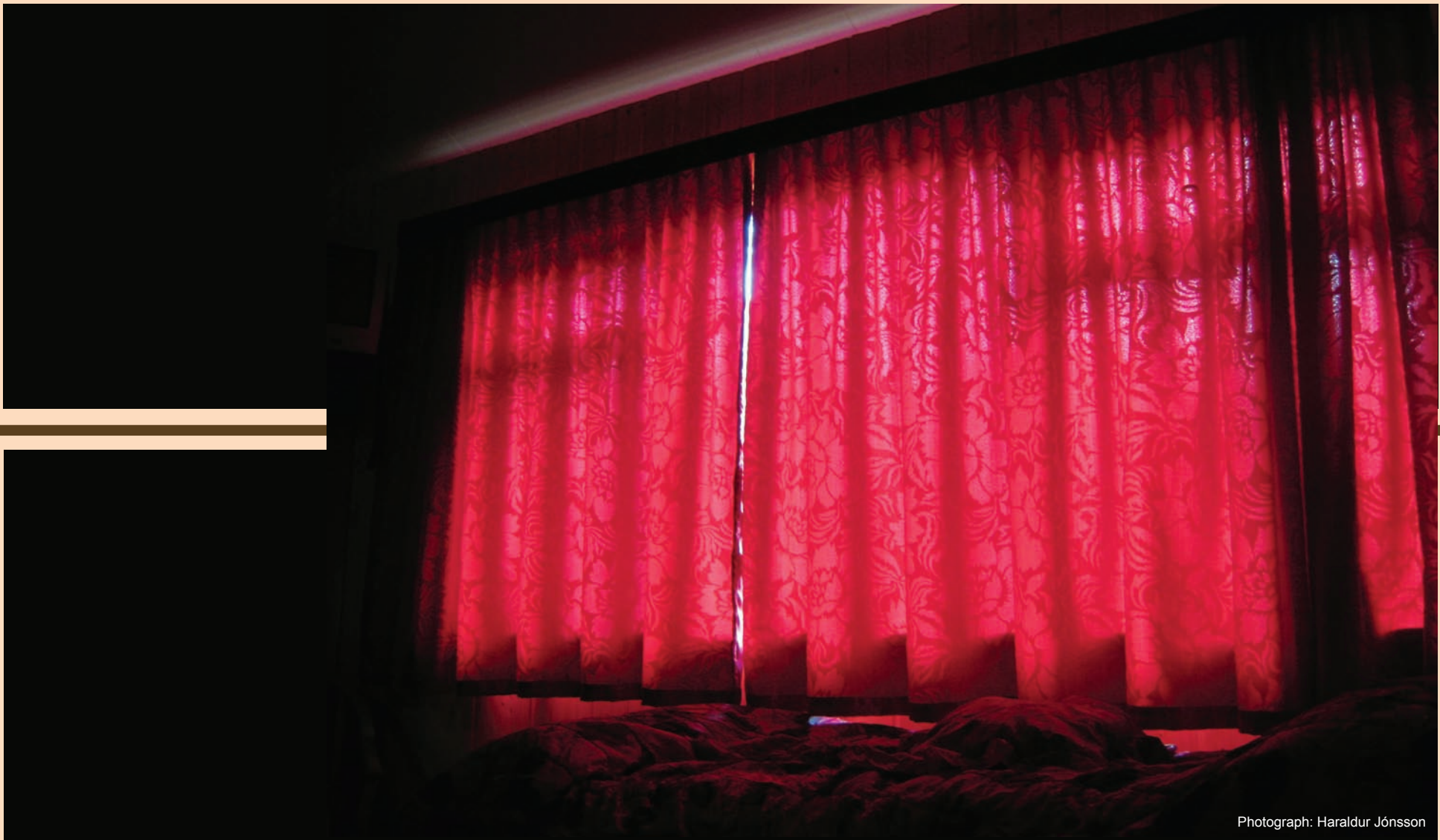
I can readily imagine being disappointed with this lost silent film, were I actually granted the opportunity to see it. Perhaps it would prove repetitive, visually prosaic, and tedious. But the evocative phrase “Red Wolves,” Margot’s Rapunzel-like imprisonment in a high tower in a tantalizingly hidden Abruzzi location, and the endless series of fearsome tests, whose over-and-overness comprises most of the story, excite my curiosity and induce a tranquil wonder. When Roth wrote about this fugitive entertainment, it was reliably playing “eight times a day” at the “Cosmos” and holding certain enchanted spectators captive from morn till a spell-releasing midnight. Now it is playing nowhere on earth; its cheery multitude of spectators is equally swept away, leaving nary a trace beyond Roth’s tossed-off report. Roth further informs us that the Cosmos faces the harbor, standing in close proximity to the ships briefly docking there. Sailors on deck, he surmises, can take out their binoculars and telescopes and gain a satisfying close-up view of the large, colorful movie posters lining the front of the cinema. He confidently declares that seamen fresh from strange voyages go to Red Wolves soon after touching shore and easily imagine themselves as Cesare, testing his mettle in the Abruzzi.

Roth’s combination of real world and movie-based fantasia affords me ample inducements to create an elaborate scenario of my own for this phantom movie. I can picture the locales—some in pastel hues, some in dappled gray—in what was once a consistent black-and-white backdrop for Cesare’s exploits. Cesare, combining the most palatable features of Valentino and Douglas Fairbanks, is dressed in a metamorphosing array of 1920s adventurer regalia. If I



Photograph: Cliff Eyland





Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

slow the projector down, his wardrobe becomes more tactile, rougher, memory-specific; I'd know that worn and ragged striped shirt of his anywhere. I also have a strict, pleasing order for the wrestling and knife competitions, with a bravura assortment of other challenges thrown in. I can smell the interior of the Cosmos Theatre, and can describe its smoky, cherub-infested painted ceiling. It is not hard for me to seamlessly integrate the spyglass glimpses of the cinema posters, the boisterous crowds roaring their approval of Cesare's triumphs, and the hero's perilous progress to Margot's tower. My creation of this at times immensely precise dream edifice out of a few paragraphs of Joseph Roth reportage arises from the same need that on occasion leads me to fill in the deaf and lightless spaces between the preserved one word lines of Sappho fragments; or to extend the grand, abortive reach of Keats's "The Fall of Hyperion"; or to listen past the posthumously-added orchestration for Mahler's tenth symphony to unearth the heavy-hearted silences the massive musical effects cover.

So, if the self-sufficient finished work can repeatedly turn into a ruin or fragment through our memory's sometimes careless, sometimes overdetermined, always partial way of holding onto it, the eroded statues and abandoned sketches we chance upon, if they contain but a single arresting detail, can entreat the viewer's imagination to make them whole, fashion them anew. Perhaps it is the too fully exposed pains of transience that necessitates such dream labor of restoration. As we bring the fragment within reach of a possible totality, the steady business of our own dissolving is thrown into reverse. An intent filling in of plausible, dense details of physiognomy, color, music, language, plotting counterbalances the immense, ever-looming fade-out of individual memory, as well as the daily defeats of our desire to be authentically awake and present in our lives.

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# CHAMFORT



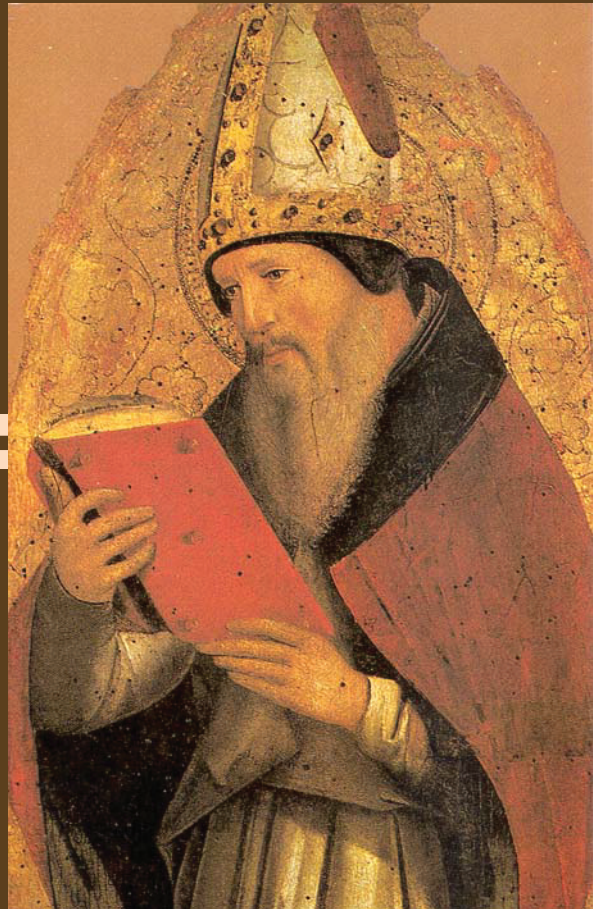
Birna Bjarnadóttir's collection, *a book of fragments*, is pleasurably haunted by the Jena Circle's experiments in "openness" and "becoming" in early 19th century German Romanticism. The concept of the fragment, for the poet-philosophers Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, was not about things standing in broken apartness from each other, and a resulting resigned acceptance of piecemeal isolation. They envisioned the fragment instead as a new "synthesizing" literary form. In this endeavor, they were inspired by the example of the *Maximes* and *Pensees* by the 18th century French aphorist, Sébastien Roch Chamfort. This collection was an artfully disorganized heap of literary fragments and anecdotes (1,266 short pieces, to be fussily exact), stored in boxes at the time of Chamfort's death and subsequently published. According to Schlegel, his self-appointed successor in fragment-making, the fragment's form is "rounded, complete in itself like a hedgehog." If approached in the right spirit, the fragment's brief, often irrational, quasi-mystical "sneak attack" would advance, in Novalis's phrase, the cause of "universal natural poetry." The Jena Circle Romantics pursued at all times, and certainly in all their published fragments, the spirit of relationship. This spirit has the power to overcome opposition and contradiction in favor of what Clemens Brentano termed the "joyous interconnectedness" of all things. Fragments, for the early German Romantics, are moments of thought or feeling or placement that are "underway." Their unfinishedness attests to the fact that the borders we might wish to secure for them are permanently, productively unsettled. By staying open to the "unexpected" that is always upon us, they do not cut themselves off from any possible development.

The fragment is uniquely suited to preserve the moment's integrity (what can be better than this punctual now which may rouse us to respond?) and

the discreteness of each thing perceived in its "exquisite 'suchness.'"<sup>1</sup> At the same time, as Dennis McCort points out, Novalis is determined that the fragment and the self that would absorb its "radiance" remain always in a "hovering" state: between the 'me' and the 'not me', between inside and outside, between extremes of isolation and fusion, necessity and freedom. The "productive power of the imagination" depends on ceaseless hovering (and the openness that it yields). From hovering in our moment-to-moment existence, we may avoid the betrayals and cultural conditioning spurred on by a ponderous, fixity-prone, often deadening reason. How much of our earthly trouble issues from taking seriously the firm categories we inherit and blithely reinforce, typically for our own security? Without these categories, we think our lives will be chaos. We need our boundaries, surely, and as the imagination is stifled within us we draw them ever more sharply. The Jena Circle urges its readers to give up their mechanical allegiance to rational methods and a saving organization. Suppose our sense of experience were permitted to collapse back into unsorted fragments. Perhaps it would allow us to discover with greater impact and consequence than ever before what "abides within the transitory." The being that we belong to and take part in, blindly or feelingly, narrowly or expansively, at every instant is in fact already ours. But though it stands before us always, open to us, and indeed ours for the taking, it is curiously difficult to acknowledge and freely enter into the spirit of relatedness. In order to find that spirit, we must paradoxically risk confusion and despair. We must be forever willing to lose our way.

Birna Bjarnadóttir has assembled for us in this "book of dreams" a nosegay of Novalis blue flowers, in each of which a "tender face" leans toward us. "Love is what this is all about," and "the Church is everywhere," she quotes in different sections. Her fragments in various ways seek to form a bridge between these assertions.





Saint Augustine

She proposes a religion without walls that finds its animating force in love. This love requires an acceptance of the imperfection of all human arrangements. It acknowledges without dismay the inescapability of sorrow and privation. It finds a sure ally in the bright and dark truths of the imagination that are art's truest offering. The testimony of the past, Bjarnadóttir reminds us, always comes to us "shattered," as it should. Why should there be strain then in moving without transition or warning from the pages of Augustine, to those of Edda and Cervantes and Kafka? We make our fragile gathering from these joyfully dissonant sources bearing in mind the "beauty" that, as Virginia Woolf tells us, "will continue, and...will flourish whether we behold it or not," and also bearing in mind the grave that awaits us. Disorientation is where we always begin in our search for stronger connection, fuller belonging. And disorientation, in our "hovering" existence, is where we must either willingly or involuntarily return. Our associations with art and the world ceaselessly vary and our feelings take turns dealing with them. The memory shedding that is one of death's eager heralds is always "at our heels." These fragments counsel us to ask, with the fervor of Sigurdur, the vacillating hero of the 13th century *Saga of the Volsungs*: "Teach me all the mighty things." But Bjarnadóttir knows better than Sigurdur that we are meant to forget them as soon as we begin to grasp what they are. Or if we are not meant to, that we almost surely will. Let us be forgiven each and every time for our need to know and our need to forget. With any luck we will come round upon these "mighty things" again, as though (always) for the first time.

1. The phrase is Dennis McCort's. I am indebted to McCort's illuminating account of the fragment's spiritual and aesthetic function in his essay, "Jena Romanticism and Zen." Many of the Schegel and Novalis translations I cite are his.

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***a book of  
fragments***



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

**the valley**

So this is the town of the romantics. The residence is on a hill; the walk down is breathtaking, as are all the colours of the late fall. It feels good to be an outsider, she thought, to be the visiting stranger in a deep valley. Sweet freedom, if only for a brief moment. And then: “The church is everywhere,” said the Mormons, speaking loud and clear, having also reached the top of the hill.

She had noticed that one of the guests in the residence used the name *silentio* when connecting to the wireless internet. There is no need for any extra fear and trembling; the knight is safe with her. She also thought about the moment when Kierkegaard died and people finally got the opportunity to peep into his shack. What they saw was a mountain of empty red wine bottles and the external arrangement of the man’s expression. As if entering a circus, there were several writing desks, allowing the thousand plateaus to jump from one to the other with death on the heels, always.

She knew there was to be a talk on Kierkegaard and materialism in a church back home. Were he still alive, Bergman would have dived into the pitch black ocean, capturing the glass-cut windows soaked in salt. “Any exciting conferences coming up?” the scholar on site will utter, his mouth full of crumbs.

Academics: Shape up and wipe the dust off your humanity!



**the deep forest**

It was Saturday morning in the residence. She heard a man and a woman shouting, and a child crying. She stood up from the desk and looked out the window. A black dog was caught in the middle, bewildered. A fire was loose.



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

## evolution

The Jena-circle lived in a place that has vanished. The so called Romantiker house is Fichte's, the philosophy professor's. At the time, shortly before the year 1800, professors sometimes invited their students into their homes and gave lectures. Two centuries later, the distance between a professor and a student is guarded like a front line. It is a shame. Apart from the gathering of human beings, academia is nonexistent.

Thanks to Fichte (who was later chased out of town by fellow academics), there is a romantic house in the valley referred to as the "green heart". She would not like to see a parking lot take its place. But what is the state of affairs on the saga island?

One fall night in Reykjavik at the beginning of the twentieth century, college students went marching with torches to a house at Vesturgata 16; the man in the house must have appreciated the beauty of it. A few years after he purchased the house he also acquired the garden in front of it. He did not want anything built in front of the house that would block the sunlight from him. This man was Benedikt Gröndal, the romantic poet, writer, critic and natural scientist, he who called himself a "philosophical aesthetician or an aesthetic philosopher," but by the night when the students came marching with torches he had turned eighty years old. A year later, in 1907, he died. The march with the torches was as extraordinary as he was himself. The man who wrote the first essay in Icelandic on aesthetics, who also wrote a world history in which blueberries

from the Svarfaðardalur valley in the north of Iceland play as great a role as the military feats of Napoleon Bonaparte, was not held in great regard by his contemporaries. This did not improve after he died, as the history of Vesturgata 16 shows.

A building was erected in front of the house and his memory was covered by a shadow. Now they plan to tear the house up from its location in the centre of the city of Reykjavik and move it. If one wants to understand why one of the most profound aestheticians of the nineteenth century in Europe is still a blank paper in the world, there is no need to look abroad for any explanation.

Benedikt was born and raised in Bessastaðir, where the only audible sound was the murmur of a stream. To him, youth was "mostly a vanished dream." But there he acquired his roots in the history of Western culture, the eccentric boy who would become as familiar with Icelandic medieval literature as he was with the Greco-Roman heritage. In Copenhagen he was introduced to other important elements of nineteenth-century aesthetics: contemporary literature, the natural sciences, philosophy and the status of theology. His mind did not, however, thrive within the walls of academia, he was suspicious of the refined surface of things in the state of Denmark and his melancholia started cropping up. He sailed back to Iceland penniless and without a degree, only to leave again after a few years, "torn by sorrow and misery." Like another poet from Iceland, he found peace of mind, and his own academia, for a while in a monastery on the mainland of Europe. Although he was not tempted



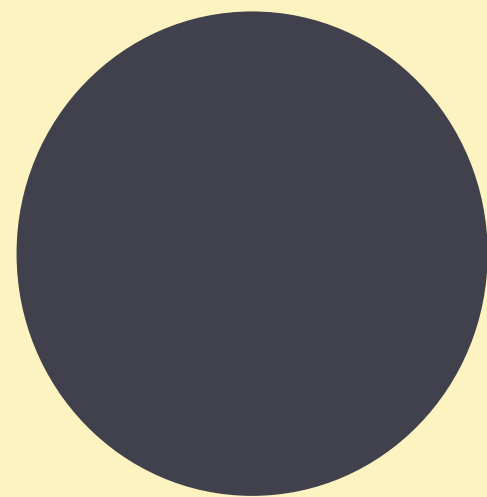


Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

by religion (like Halldór Laxness), Benedikt's creative powers were unleashed while staying there. In the monastery he drank less than usual and he was not constantly plagued with financial worries. But this was not the solution to the problems of life, only a pause in the struggle. He was to return again to Copenhagen and from there to Iceland.

Like the following fragment from Benedikt's autobiographical collection *Dægradvöl* indicates, we have here an artist of perception and thought. Benedikt takes this stance during his trips in Germany just after the middle of the nineteenth century, a time when Goethe and Schiller are no longer at the forefront and the industrial revolution is in full swing, centuries after tragedians died from heart attacks after winning poetry contests:

...I saw horses shaking their manes in the rays of the sun, as if they were trying to shake them off, but they were unable to – I thought we do this too, try shake off the good that we are given, but are not always able too – or we are not given the ability to do it. In some places very serious storks were walking and did not look back, but the train went by squeaking and whistling – how unpoetic it was.







Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

### **flying burials**

A man living in the residence starts singing around six o'clock in the evenings, and again, sometime between ten and eleven. Is there an Academie der Künste in town?

Café Einstein is in the green valley, with stairs that lead up to the second floor. She sits at a table next to the window, right next to a wall of blooming autumn. The high and thick wall is the home of a wild plant, covering everything with its brick-red leaves. She had never seen anything like it and thought instantly of ancient Rome, or how close the end feels.

Yesterday, after having written a few postcards, she opened the door to the balcony and saw a dead bird lying there. On the ground below, there was some wild growth. She gave the bird a flying burial and it landed softly in the beautiful wilderness. In the middle ages, people in the northern parts of Europe were pulled away from shore by loved ones and sailed to the other world in a ship set on fire.

By the time that the Jena-circle broke up, shortly after having pulled off the most remarkable poetic revolution in recent centuries, Novalis had died. The last Athenaeum appeared in the year 1800, and soon thereafter, clouds began to gather.



Photograph: Guy Maddin

**balconies**

That day on the balcony she thought about one of her favorite novels. There are several big questions to be found in Fontane’s *Effi Briest*. “Too big a subject” is the only answer given, repeated over and over again. The reader should be warned: You become the prey, haunted for life by the closely observed, beautifully perceived and brilliantly interpreted hell we call society. “Hell is other people,” the French philosopher said. “Hell is I,” someone else replied. For where to go? The hills are crowded with bleeding wolves.



**Faulkner on the island**

Once back home, she heard a recording of William Faulkner on the radio, lost but now found. Shortly after the Second World War, he visited the island and gave a public talk at the University of Iceland. His voice was soft and melancholic, ringing through as though belonging to an endangered species. “I have been observing the people in this country,” he said, “and they are like us. We are all the same.”

Still, a few decades later when a group of flawed alchemists transformed the grave of fire into a leaking raft, there were many who flocked to the island and allowed themselves the luxury to observe the people as being different. Thereby, one could observe the observers projecting their transparent need for a different kind of place here on earth. But why should Iceland be different from the rest of the neo-liberalized world? We are all citizens of the *Republic of the Kiosk*, the consumer empire.



**rivers full of gods**

She walked down the hill and the town was quiet. Evangelists celebrating, she discovered. Tomorrow, the Catholics will have their turn in another region. Where she comes from, the rivers are full of gods. When the conversion to Christianity took place, they threw the Nordic Olympus into a waterfall, knowing that whatever happened in life, the old religion would be passed around the table. Christianity was never a threat, nor was any other religion for that matter. Uncontrollable forces, fuelled by the global, capitalistic regime, are turning the planet into a wasteland.



Photograph: Guy Maddin



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

### the bridge

When she was a child, there was a garden they were drawn to on the other side of town. The garden was shaped like an open air cave, made of lava, grass, stones, wild flowers and a few trees. There was a staircase made of stones, leading down to a pond in the middle of the garden. The children knew that frogs from other countries would never be able to reach the pond. Not even the elves could change that. At the time, the garden had not become a tourist attraction, and the person who later specialized in elves, taking groups on tours, had not yet established her trade.

In fact, the elves have been seen elsewhere. Their indisputable gift to perceive the ebb and flow of human existence, resulting in their striking awareness of both the comic and the tragic aspects of human life, cannot be attributed only to elves in Iceland. A fragment or two originating from the land of German literature will break the spell. This, my friends, is the truth.

Jónas Hallgrímsson knew this; the nineteenth century farmboy from a northern valley, who later in life, and shortly before his death in Copenhagen, composed -- in the minds of some -- the most beautiful poem ever written in Icelandic. There, we have flower elves weeping. But why? "[T]hey knew we would need to part."

We thought it was drops  
of dew and kissed  
cold tears from the crossgrass.

Jónas was born in 1807 and was still a boy when his father, a country reverend, went troutng on a mountain lake and drowned. Many years later, in 1832, he sailed to Copenhagen to study law. Soon thereafter, he found himself on a different path. In 1839, he sailed back home with plans to write a description of Iceland. After three years of relentless travel more or less across the island, accompanied by a couple of physical breakdowns, row of serious depressive episodes, some heavy drinking, the constant lack of money, the loss of his close friend Tómas, some groundbreaking observations regarding the nature and geography of Iceland and the composition of several profound poems, on October 27, 1842, Jónas sailed to Copenhagen, never to return to Iceland. According to sources, a few Icelanders were happy to see him go. Back in Copenhagen at the age of 35, Jónas had three more years to live.

One should give credit to a Danish friend, the young student of natural science who Jónas met at the University of Copenhagen. No less gifted but more fortunate in life, it was Steenstrup who in 1843 invited Jónas to come and stay with him and his newly wed wife on the idyllic island of Sorø. Another of Jónas's friends, Þórður Jónasson, wrote the following in a letter to Steenstrup after Jónas's death: "Taken as a whole, his life was pretty bleak [...]. He confided to me once that his stay with you had been -- so to speak -- the one ray of light in his life."

Who was this farmboy, who after his death in 1845, shape-shifted into the Northern Lights in a poem by Benedikt Gröndal?



The world’s unaware  
while this ice cold isle  
mourns alone  
in the frozen north.  
The people in silence  
sit and grieve,  
in mourning draped  
through the autumn chill.

Briefly it burns in heaven on high  
the transient torch in its breadth of blue,  
beaming down on us from the northern sky  
and soon abates in a dark’ning hue.  
From whence it came, and where ‘twill go.  
we here on Earth can never know.

It was in Copenhagen when he and his friends  
Tómas Sæmundsson, Konráð Gíslason and  
Brynjólfur Pétursson wrote and published the  
annual periodical *Fjölñir*, the first issue appearing  
in 1835. What the authors envisioned was a  
cultural and economic revival for Iceland;  
Jónas’s poem “Ísland” embodying their vision:  
“Where are your fortune and fame, freedom  
and happiness now,” it reads.

Does it come as a surprise, that one of the most  
remarkable cultural achievements in the history  
of a country was met with considerable hostility?  
Most people misunderstood the *Fjölñir*-gospel,  
which was inspired by the still blowing wind of  
revolution and its legal offspring: Romanticism. In  
fact, Romanticism caused evensome of the most  
powerful literary minds in twentieth-century Iceland  
to make claims like: “Iceland is not well suited to

cradling sickly dreams.” Why the fear? After  
centuries of colonization, the literary popes may  
have wanted to protect Iceland’s passage into the  
world, the eddas and the sagas, its only treasures.

But a passage into the world is a bridge crossing  
oceans. Well versed in their own literary heritage  
as well as in the Greco-Roman one, Jónas and his  
friends dived into modern times resulting in a  
singular moment that can only to be compared with  
Iceland’s golden age, a moment when a bridge  
could be perceived between Iceland and foreign  
lands.

The “Fjölñismenn” (the men of Fjölñir) came perhaps  
closest to what might be called a group of romantics  
among Icelandic poets of the nineteenth century.  
Did they know that the Jena-circle considered  
naming its journal *Freyja*?



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson



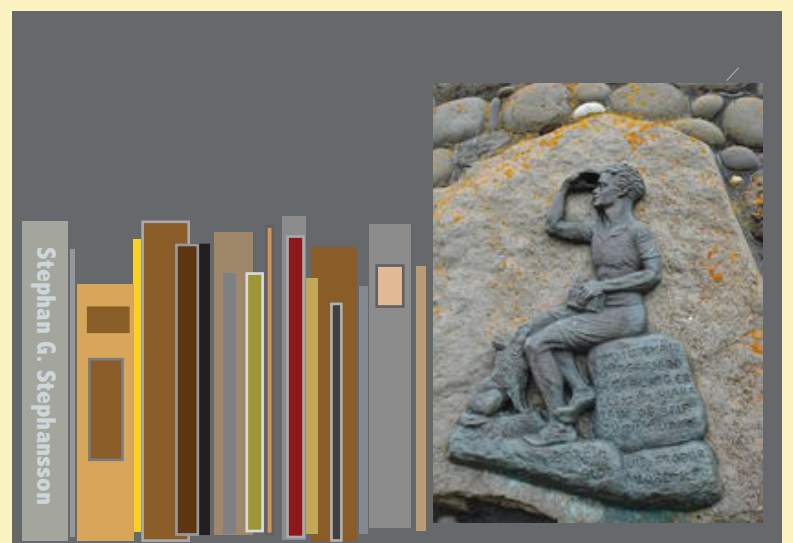
Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

### mountains casting imaginary shadows

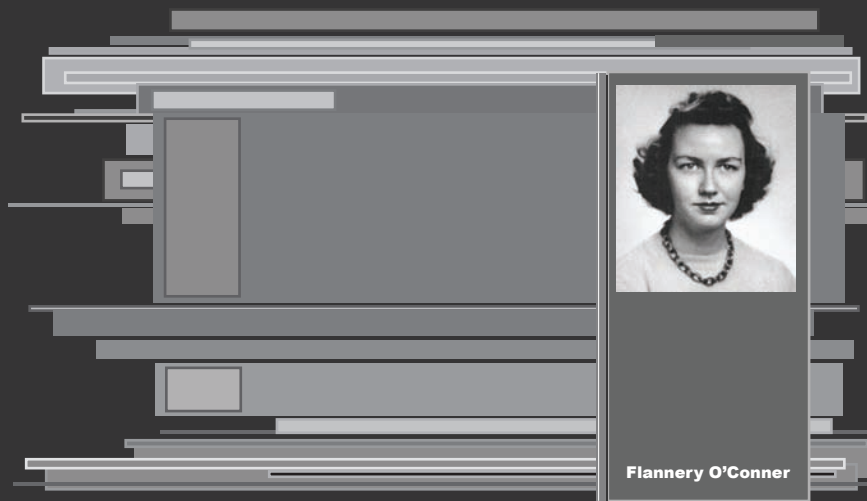
“I have acquired somehow no fatherland,” wrote Stephan G. Stephansson, Emerson’s disciple in the ranks of North American poets and philosophers, the farmer who emigrated from Iceland to Canada at the end of the nineteenth century and taught himself to travel in world literature and philosophy of man and nature. A somnambulist who worked in the field during the day and read and composed in the night, referred to as the “Mountain-poet” back home, although the mountains in Alberta would never cast a shadow over his farm, the distance between the two being far too great.

In addition to showering cultural seeds wherever they go and being the most reliable yardstick there is in how it feels to belong to humanity, immigrants are no different from other people.

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles.  
-- Emerson.







## literature

While rich in imagination, literature can appear “cold and empty,” being thus no different from the rationalized and civilized world, described so by Chateaubriand.

Should we blame the experts? Aesthetics, the former beauty queen has been discharged from the prolific and profitable scene of theory-making. However, unnoticed by the anti-aesthetic theory-makers, this shattered, yet curiously vital term may not have been abandoned by literature itself.

Have you forgotten that aesthetics originated in an eighteenth-century philosophical discipline centered around the question of art and beauty? Along side a fragmented modern art, aesthetics evolved into a shattered testimony, which in turn – along with valuable artistic, religious and philosophical remains from ancient times – laid the foundation for existential philosophy and modern literature.

Drawing from the following fragment, found in Iris Murdoch’s novel *The Sea, the Sea* (and setting aside the notion of its author being “completely hollow” in the words of Flannery O’Connor, the one who described herself as being “thirteenth century”), readers enter a considerable space. It is the character Rosina who says to Charles, the novel’s protagonist and Rosina’s former lover: “As it is you gave me a lot of misery over a long time, and I’m not going to let you off, you’re going to have

to pay for my tears, like people in the sagas pay.” In order to detect the remains of a pagan paying-game this close to the heart of the ‘Machine Age,’ a saga might do the trick.

Rosina would not have made Augustine happy, the man who tried to crush the paganism in his fellow contemporaries, crying out: “Listen to me, if your minds allow you to think sensibly, after they had been drunk so long on the liquor of nonsense!” But have the emotions been figured out? Freud acknowledged the challenge in his book *Civilization and its Discontents*, discussing the “oceanic feeling” that grounds all religion: “Feelings are an uncomfortable subject for scientific investigation,” the Vienna-man said.

There are things possible in literature that life cannot deliver and vice versa. “[W]ords bring us only the dust of the drumbeat,” as the protagonist in Guðbergur Bergsson’s novel [*The Mind’s Tortured Love*] claims. In life, our lot is different. In addition to be more or less caught up in life’s uncontrollable beat, the discrepancy between a person’s desire and its fulfillment is, arguably, a recognizable experience. Should we wish for a different condition? The same protagonist has this to say on the subject: “If we were to possess everything without a struggle, language would be lost and we would start roaming, and cursing like the animals do, especially the ox.”

For the longest time, Don Quixote was viewed as an escapist, gone wild by excessive reading of literature. A Romantic, we can see that. But what is Romanticism? When asked about his art,

Novalis replied: “I’m always going home.”  
August Wilhelm Schlegel, another member of the Jena-circle, had this to say: “The roots of life are lost in darkness”; “The magic of life rests on insoluble mystery.”

Dearest children,  
Try not to transform literature’s beautifully earthbound traits into aggressively cold and empty issues, appearing as if there is an immediate solution to the obviously unsolvable problems of mankind. Whatever you find in literature, you cannot profit from it by turning it into a life size cure and ferry it over to the other shore, making life less cruel or more just, be it on the personal, social or national level. The only route possible is the other way around: You cross the river from the side of life, and if the search goes well, you become rich in imagination and courageous in approaching what is yours to perceive and reflect upon.  
Your loving mother.



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson





### the gap, the wound.

There are those who view art as being separated from reality and artists as the true exiles. In the case of Haraldur Jónsson's art, one can easily make the opposite observation; viewing art as reality, or as the medium that brings about the only possible reflections of reality. Far from being in exile, the artist is here and now, his perception possessing a moonlike quality, stimulating the ebb and flow of the countless reflections of reality, as if reality itself gravitates towards this human attribute. Thereby, one would not wish to disregard the human condition. Reality is hard to grasp, in particular the one that can only be perceived from within, or the reality of inner experiences. One is separated from oneself on pretty much every significant front, ranging from love to beliefs.

Language is known to express the desire for a different condition. It is through language where the war against separation is fought. On rare occasions, language succeeds, creating a dreamlike state of belonging where I know who I am, what I feel and how to live, as if at home within myself. More frequently, though, words shine through as injured attempts, forever separating one's perception from the reality of all the most desired things. Still, without the failed attempts of language, the ocean of lost opportunities could not be perceived, moving constantly beneath its surface. What we have is language. It is true. But there is always more to the gap between perception and reality than language can account for.

Far from being in exile from the desired reality, the artist acknowledges the interplay between language and perception, allowing, as it were, the gap to express itself. "There are more things in heaven and earth than can be dreamt of in your philosophy." Was it Haraldur who said this? He might have. Being both a poet and an artist, the enterprise of the empty yet vital language is carefully drawn by the unspeakable force of his perception. In his artwork, the gap expresses itself in different forms and colors, often as fragile, fleeting glimpses of reality that cannot but be carried away, again and again, in the constantly moving ocean of the beautifully doomed opportunities. A little boy reading aloud in an alphabetical order the names of emotions; a person projecting the vast darkness inside onto a piece of crumpled, black paper; a set of drawings, framed under transparent film, hung on a wall in the form of a French window, allowing us to view the inner landscape of emotions and their immediate effect as a form of hypersensitivity.

"Experience is not to be searched for in a dictionary. It falls out of the range of language." "The gap," also in Haraldur's own words, "is the wound."

*Above: Crumpled Darkness by Haraldur Jónsson*





Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

### castles

It was up on the hill -- close to the residence -- where she noticed a group of men, all dressed in blue uniforms, jumping up and down and sounding ever so playful. The messengers, she realized.

“It was late evening when K. arrived. The village lay deep in snow. There was nothing to be seen of Castle Mount, for mist and darkness surrounded it, and not the faintest glimmer of light showed where the great castle lay. K. stood on the wooden bridge leading from the road to the village for a long time, looking up at what seemed to be a void.”

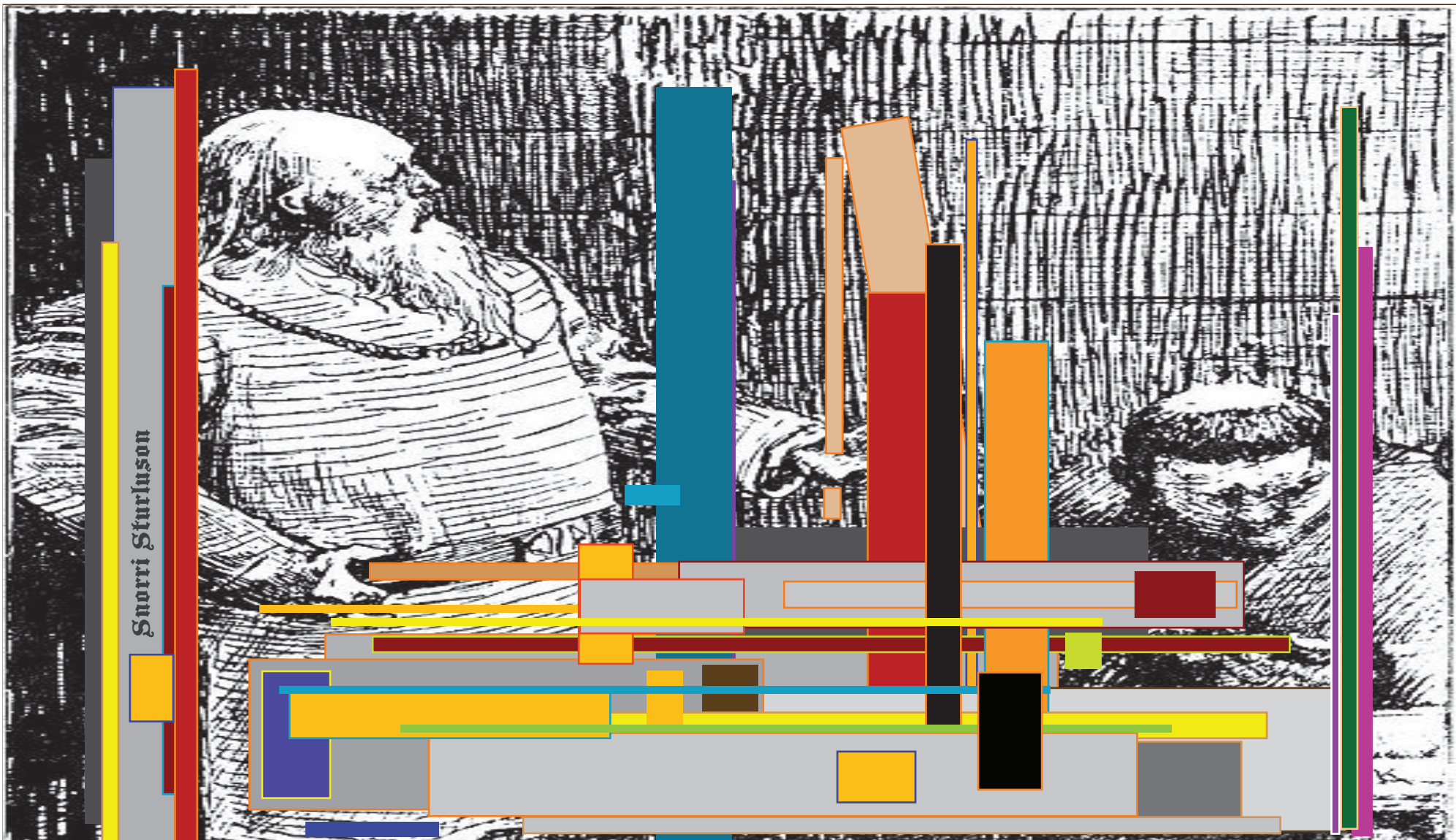
The hidden castle, veiled in mist and darkness, will soon give way to the protagonist’s experience in the village. Still, his experience remains a mystery. Gradually, the void above K. on the bridge begins to feel more like a blessing than a curse. Or is it a reflection?

A few centuries before Kafka wrote his *Castle*, the Spanish nun and mystic St. Teresa wrote *The Interior Castle*. Kafka, someone told her, was bewitched by the book. For Teresa, there is nothing “comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity.” But how to enter it? The reader is at the castle’s gate, starting the journey into what Teresa calls the first dwelling place out of seven, surrounded by darkness:

“The darkness is not caused by a flaw in the room -- for I don’t know how to explain myself -- but by so many bad things like snakes and vipers and poisonous creatures that enter with the soul and don’t allow it to be aware of the light. It’s as if a person were to enter a place where the sun is shining but be hardly able to open his eyes because of the mud in them.

The room is bright but he doesn’t enjoy it because of the impediment of things like these wild animals or beasts that make him close his eyes to everything but them. So, I think, must be the condition of the soul. Even though it may not be in a bad state, it is so involved in worldly things and so absorbed with its possessions, honor, or business affairs, [...], that even though as a matter of fact it would want to see and enjoy its beauty these things do not allow it to; nor does it seem that it can slip free from so many impediments.”

The Spanish 16th century writer Cervantes was a contemporary of Teresa, and like Kafka, compelled by her ideas and writings. In the introduction to his Icelandic translation of *Don Quixote*, Guðbergur Bergsson discusses how Teresa’s writings stood out at the time for her passion toward the inner life. The character of Don Quixote may carry a few of her seeds, as did the lives of both Cervantes sister, who entered the religious life and became a Carmelite nun, and Cervantes’ wife, who also sought Teresa’s company for longer or shorter periods.



#### on the unresolved (religious) human condition

Viewed from the perspective of the history of religion, Augustine's *City of God* and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* might cross paths as being two equally valuable texts. They are written by extraordinary interpreters at distinctive crossroads, in both cases, we as readers are in the midst of a prolonged, religious shift from paganism to Christianity.

When walking through the city gates, it is worth remembering that as a young man, before Augustine set his mind on the Christian god, Greek philosophy caught his attention. When entering into the kingdom of Christianity, Augustine enters not only as a former lover of countless pleasures, but as a great lover of thought. The result is measured by Augustine's alienation from the world, which is, as Hannah Arendt writes, much more radical than anything requested or even possible in orthodox Christianity.

Jacques Derrida, (in the spirit of Kierkegaard), may have been onto something in his *Gift of Death* when writing about the Christian self and the way in which it has not been thought through.

Snorri's *Edda* was written centuries after *The City of God* (around 1220), and by a writer many scholars view as a Christian. No trace of the aftermath of original sin, ladies and gentlemen, only the ebb and flow of joyful and horrific gatherings. Should we keep in mind the views of Páll Skúlason, a professor of philosophy? In his mind, Christianity does not have deep roots in Iceland.





Photograph: Guy Maddin

**on the human condition**

To exist in an open grave is natural and not to be escaped by anyone, or feared. As it is, the open grave hosts the most splendid gatherings. This someone she's thinking about is more like a crab, always moving to the side and enjoying whatever hunting might bring in the darkness cast by the shell.

Understanding Abraham and Isaac and the sacrifice which leaves one speechless is more than one can hope for in life. In a similar, yet different manner, the runes of a sacrifice, offered by chance, remain a mystery, running through life as the river no boat can cross, its currents free of any heavenly twists. The crooked creek.



# ODIN'S Shield Maiden

Photograph: Guy Maddin



Photograph: Guy Maddin

## Óðin's shield-maiden

When trying to make sense of the emotions, we could turn to one of the leading psychoanalysts of recent times, Jacques Lacan. He once asked his audience to “rely on the echoes of the experience that unites us [...]”

Love seems to be of an unknowable substance, a moment in time, floating between now and then, being and nothingness. And the uniting experience? We enter a familiar, yet strangely uncharted region.

The mythic-heroic thirteenth century *Saga of the Volsungs* is a striking source on the theme of love and knowledge. What we have are fragments from eddic poetry, a couple of Germanic legends crossing over into the northern tradition, and last but not least, a telling of events that may, or may not, have roots in ancient history. Another possible reason for the saga's uniqueness is the nature of the relationship between Sigurður the dragon-slayer and Óðin's shield-maiden, Brynhildur. The already mentioned sources play a crucial role in the relationship, not least the eddic poetry, opening up the eddic legacy, or the immediate, yet obscure dimension of the mythical and the heroic.

The relationship between Sigurður and Brynhildur invites us to explore a crossing of borders, only to be reached by a fearless hero in the company of Óðin's shield-maiden. There is no eternal bliss in sight. The knowledge gained is also knowledge lost. A slip on the borders of life and death has occurred, it seems, creating not only a pathway into otherwise hidden regions, but putting in motion



Photograph: Guy Maddin

a tragic, and in some ways, strangely familiar course of events.

The author of the saga expands the tightly composed form of the eddic poems, creating thereby a space wherein the emotions, as we perceive them, are allowed to unfold in mythic-heroic surroundings. Such a display of emotions cannot be said to characterize the majestically compressed style of medieval Icelandic literature. All the more reason to praise the anonymous author, who already in the thirteenth century embarked upon an odyssey better known later in history -- the practice to view ancient mythologies as primary sources on emotions. The Oedipus complex, for one, might never have become a topic at dinner time in the well equipped modern kitchen were it not for the emotional richness, complexity and timeless attraction of ancient myths.

Here is a fragment from the saga:

Ahead of him on the mountain he saw a green light, as if the fire was burning and the brightness reached up to the heavens. And when he came to it, there stood before him a rampart of shields with a banner above it. Sigurd went into the rampart and saw a man lying there asleep, dressed in full armor. First he removed the helmet from the man's head and saw that it was a woman. She was in a coat of mail so tight that it seemed to have grown into her flesh.

He sliced through the armor, down from the neck opening and out through the sleeves, and it cut like cloth. Sigurd said she had slept too long.



Photograph: Guy Maddin

After slicing through Brynhildur’s armor and waking her, Sigurður -- smeared with the blood of the dragon -- makes the following straightforward statement: “[I] have heard that you are the daughter of a powerful king, I have also been told of your beauty and your wisdom, and these I will put to the test.” This is Brynhildur’s response:

“I struck down Hjalmgunnar in battle, and [Óðin] stabbed me with a sleeping thorn in revenge. He said I should never afterward have the victory. He also said that I must marry. And I made a countervow that I would marry no one who knew fear.”

Hjálmgunnar was to live, according to Óðin. Hence, the severe punishment. One should not underestimate Brynhildur’s words, or what it could mean for Óðin’s shield-maiden never to experience victory again; to have been signed on to the fate of a marriage. Sigurður, the fearless hero, replies: “Teach me all the mighty things.”

Brynhildur is willing to teach the hero anything she knows that will “please” the man about ‘runes and other matters that concern all things’. She also wishes that he may gain “profit and renown” from her wisdom, and that he may later “remember” what they speak of. Brynhildur then moves on to general advice on women, men and gatherings of various kinds: “Even if you see beautiful women at a feast, do not let them entice you so that they interfere with your sleep or distress your mind.” “It is better to fight with your enemies than to be burned at home. And do not swear a false oath, because hard vengeance follows the breaking of truce.” Last but not least: “Beware of the wiles of





Photograph: Guy Maddin

friends. I see only a little of your future life, yet it would be better if the hate of your in-laws did not descend upon you.”

Sigurður acknowledges again the exceptional nature of Brynhildur’s wisdom: “No one is wiser than you. And I swear that I shall marry you, for you are to my liking.” Brynhildur does not oppose, and, exchanging vows, they pledge to marry.

How strange, then, to read a couple of pages later about Sigurður’s arrival at a large estate, where a great chieftain named Heimir rules. Brynhildur his foster daughter, is also there, the one who took up helmet and mail coat and went into battle. It is as if the reader is being introduced again to the beginning of their relationship:

She brought him a gold cup, and invited him to drink. He reached toward the cup but took her hand, drawing her down beside him. He put his arms around her neck and kissed her, saying: ‘No fairer woman than you has ever been born.’ Brynhild said: ‘It is wiser counsel not to put your trust in a woman, because women always break their promise.’

Sigurd said: ‘The best day for us would be when we can enjoy each other.’ Brynhild said: ‘I am a shield-maiden. I wear a helmet and ride with the warrior kings. I must support them, and I am not averse to fighting.’ Sigurd answered: ‘Our lives will be most fruitful if spent together. If we do not live together, the grief will be harder to endure than a sharp weapon.’

Brynhild replied: ‘I must review the troops of warriors, and you will marry Gudrun, the daughter of Gjuki.’ Sigurd answered: ‘No king’s daughter



Photograph: Guy Maddin

shall entice me. I am not of two minds in this, and I swear to the gods that I will marry you or no other woman.’ She spoke likewise. Sigurd thanked her for her words and gave her a gold ring. They swore their oaths anew. He went away to his men and was with them for a time, prospering greatly.”

The lovers’ dialogue, composed of two solitary individuals who travel in two different worlds, ends with them swearing oaths, anew.

How does Sigurður profit from Brynhildur’s love and wise counsel? He breaks the oath, marries another woman, and is killed in bed by hateful in-laws.

How to interpret this strange tale of love, doomed knowledge and all encompassing death?

Unlike Sigurður, who is a carrier of the human condition, being more or less of two minds, Brynhildur is of a different nature. She has to remind the dragon-slayer that he does not “altogether know [her] character,” a reminder stimulated by Sigurður’s suggesting to her that she should not despair, but live happily and love both her husband and him. For a character of one mind, the domestication of Óðin’s shield-maiden might thereby be complete, as if the no-win situation of mortal love is fully realized.

The magnitude of the defeat of Brynhildur’s and Sigurður’s love shines through as existing outside of their own society, but also out of

any possible system of belief and or ethics. As Aaron Gurevich noted, the concepts often applied in the matter of emotions,-- concepts like sin, repentance and atonement -- are bereft of meaning in this context. What is more, the force of habit in viewing emotions from the perspective of applied ethics may cloud the perception, thus casting another veil over the spectacular, eddic legacy.

Brynhildur is not to be pitied as a character, for it is she who creates the pathway into otherwise hidden regions, shape shifting into a mirror on the unthinkable borders of life and death. The result can be measured by the force of her perspective, casting reflections from both camps. One can perceive her genuine sorrow, originating from her former emotional disposition, or the clear-cut certainties of the battlefield's fatal rewards, opposed to the slim chances of both love and knowledge on the side of life. Likewise, one should resist the temptation of blaming Sigurður for the tragedy. Without him, Brynhildur would not have been tricked into a household of earthly heroes. One could even argue that Sigurður might be the visible slip on the otherwise obscure borders of life and death, in the sense that his nature is human nature, the material being of a creamy clay, someone who is constantly being shaped, desiring to be shaped, and where if not in the arms of Brynhildur, the "wise-heart" as William Morris wrote in his epic.

Dear reader,  
Arrive full of desire on the scene of love. "All weather is vicious"; death might thus always be too close.







### the consolation of philosophy, one more time

The Icelandic art of mixing the two colors of blood and ink, life and literature, entails an underlying philosophy. Without the final stroke, death, life remains both incomplete and inaccessible. Even Óðin, the father of the gods, cannot see through life, resulting not only in his love for poetry, warriors and wise women, but also in his striking intimacy with the world of the dead. A border-crossing character by nature, he travels relentlessly to the other side, not in order to repress his shortcomings at home or in a state of perpetual death wish, but to bring back fragments of wisdom and insights concerning life and the living.

Aesthetics is the most faithless of all sciences. Anyone who has truly loved it will in a way become unhappy; while anyone who has never done so is and remains a pecus [ox, or blockhead].  
-- Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

Life is an icy palace of language, the breeze of heartbreaking experience passing through it.



Photograph: Guy Maddin

**the consolation of nature**

Fortune is a broken shell. Everything depends on the tide, and the other animals on the beach.

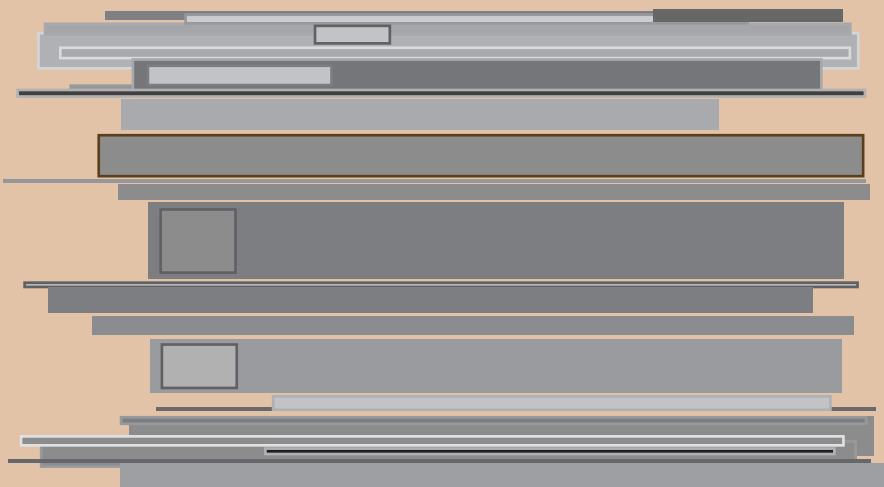




**a story of another eye**

Winter is approaching in the town of the Romantics. The hill sounds different and the leaves are blowing in circles. The valley; the green heart, is full of leaves. People are laughing, caught in the eye of a sweet truth.





**kinship**

In the second hand bookstore, the young man showed her a book called *Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz*. A contemporary of Goethe the empire, and briefly belonging to the circle of Goethe's friends, he was born in 1751 in Livland and died on a street in Moscow; he was buried in 1792 by an anonymous friend in an unknown place. What did strike her was the crushing father in Lenz's life, reminding her of the fate of Kierkegaard and Bergman. Kafka enters the picture, we can see that, and a few more.

For someone living in solitude, I am feeling as good as can be expected.  
-- Lenz.



**Caroline Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling**

Her theory on the downfall of the Jena-circle was collapsing. She holds Friedrich Schlegel responsible, the almost second empire in German culture, right next to the Weimar-man. But there are other people involved. There always are. Prior to the publication of the last issue of the Athenaeum in 1800, and to Novalis’ death in 1801, Schelling and Caroline fell in love, Caroline being the wife of August Wilhelm Schlegel. Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm’s brother and the one living with Dorothea Mendelssohn-Veit (later to become her second husband), loved Caroline from the start. He acted upon his feelings by disguising them in the *belles-lettres*. Literature has much to account for; we know that.

In the spring of 1800, Caroline suffers from emotional upheaval and becomes critically ill. Two men love her, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Schelling, and the third one, the husband August Wilhelm, may or may not obtain some pleasure from observing the ups and down of the perceivable triangle. Then there is Dorothea, the one who may never have liked Caroline, the latter being the beautiful and the desired. Dorothea’s unsympathetic reaction to the triple-affair is secondary, in the sense that it never matters to us what they do, those people we do not like. In order for the other female member of the Jena-circle to call it a friendship, Caroline had only to exist.

Who was Caroline Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling? Enlightenment is in the air and she is an agent of freedom, years before the clouds

begin to gather over the Jena-circle. Friedrich Schlegel’s *Lucinda* is inspired by her. She’s the woman who spreads her wings with no resemblance to the birds Plotinus spoke of, the ones who are not suited for flying, too heavy to depart from the earth. “Love is what this is all about, yes, Friedrich’s novel and the revolutionary fragments on women. It’s all about love,” people must have stated. But when did love become an obstacle in the history of mankind? Should we blame it on the Enlightenment, the deceiving yet disturbingly powerful light of reason? Love is everything, as is the lack of it.

In the spring of 1800, Caroline goes for a cure to Bamberg. Augusta Böhmer, her daughter from a previous marriage and the love-child of the Jena-circle, travels with her. Her husband August Wilhelm is also accompanying his wife and the child, but only for a stretch. He is on his way to Leipzig. Friedrich Schlegel is far away, but Schelling is approaching, rapidly.

Dear reader, you will have to finish this story. For now, this we know: At the time, Friedrich Schlegel may have started composing the fragment appearing in the last issue of the Athenaeum that same year, called “Über die Unverständlichkeit”. He was responding to the criticism, (originating from the the cultural elite in Berlin and Leipzig, still high on the Enlightenment), that the Jena-circle’s journal was ungraspable, in particular the fragments. “It would frighten you if the entire world would once and for all become transparent,” Friedrich wrote: “Wahrlich, es würde euch bange werden, wenn die ganze Welt, wie ihr es fordert, einmal im Ernst durchaus verständlich würde.”



Photograph: Haraldur Jónsson

**a town nearby**

She was in Weimar looking for Friedrich’s *Lucinda* and went from one bookstore to the next. Jena had run out. “This is not a bookstore, this is an antiquarian,” a Weimar-lady corrected her. She had entered the empire. To celebrate the fact, she ordered a cup of Russian chocolate at the Goethe-Café. On her way back to the hotel, she passed the theatre and saw a crowd of people rushing through the doors. It’s Wagner-time. *The Ring* is here and the people all dressed in black are hunting for love’s fatal reward, or maybe not. As it is, the opera serves many functions. Even a dragon-slayer cannot cut his way through the shiny armor of high society.





Photograph: Guy Maddin

### how to philosophize?

The dream is the closest we get to philosophy.  
-- Ludwig Tieck.



### **dreaming**

On the island, she dreamt the ocean had gone wild and the waves were climbing, higher and higher, aiming for the sky. There is nothing more to report, apart from the oceanic spectacle.

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
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