

Haukur Ingvarsson. 2021. *Fulltrúi þess besta í bandarískri menningu. Orðspor Williams Faulkners í íslensku menningarlífi 1930–1960*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag. 491 pages. ISBN: 978-9935-466-28-0.

The past few years mark an interest in reinvestigating and reshaping the braces that define Icelandic literary history with the publication of several works on the subject, ranging from medieval to modern accounts. Haukur Ingvarsson's monograph, *Fulltrúi þess besta í bandarískri menningu. Orðspor Williams Faulkners í íslensku menningarlífi 1930–1960* [Representing the Best in American Culture. William Faulkner's Reputation in Iceland 1930–1960], is, in that context, arguably the most audacious with its assertions. He attempts to showcase the threads of Faulkner's influence in Icelandic literature and culture by examining a broad range of vectors that affect the latter's authorial function and influence, such as, but not restricted to, reception studies, translation studies, book history, and Icelandic history—literary, social, as well as political.

Ingvarsson himself is aware of the implications of positioning Faulkner as a representative of the best in American culture. On the one hand, he compares Faulkner's status in the United States with that of the equally disputed Halldór Laxness in Iceland (10–11). On the other hand, he admits that “sú skoðun er útbreidd, en ekki óumdeild, að Faulkner hafi verið hornreka í bandarísku bókmenntalífi í kringum 1940” [the opinion remains widespread, though controversial, that Faulkner was an outcast in the American literary scene around 1940] (17). Such assertions are indicative of the monograph's objective of centering Faulkner as a key but seemingly low-lying figure in the Iceland's literary history during the Cold War period. Ingvarsson further strengthens his argument by exploring Faulkner's influence on contemporary Icelandic authors such as Guðbergur Bergsson, Thor Vilhjálmsson, Svava Jakobsdóttir, and Steinunn Sigurðardóttir (9).

Tracing the literary and political footsteps of an author of Faulkner's calibre is not an easy undertaking. Ingvarsson manages, however, to situate deftly Faulkner's movements in the stage of world literature and Icelandic literary history by bringing together multifarious spheres of influence that converge in Iceland from both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, Ingvarsson divides his book into two parts. The first part traces the arrival of Faulkner's works on the Icelandic literary scene through cultural exportations from Scandinavian countries, particularly Denmark and Norway. Here, Ingvarsson focuses his attention on translations of Faulkner's works in the Nordic languages that gained ground in Icelandic libraries, demonstrating at the same time how

Iceland followed the literary trends from those countries closely. Ingvarsson gives prominence to Guðmundur Daníelsson (1910-1990) as an author and outlines the impact of Faulkner's corpus on Daníelsson's works. Additionally, Ingvarsson navigates through Daníelsson's contacts with the public library in Ísafjörður and its librarian, Guðmundur G. Hagalín (1898-1985) to outline Faulkner's sphere of influence in special relation to Daníelsson and Hagalín's activities within the world of Icelandic literature.

The second part discusses Faulkner's role and reception in Iceland in connection with the American occupation of the country. In this section, Ingvarsson highlights operations under the auspices of institutions such as the Office of War Information (OWI) that played an active role in the dissemination of American culture abroad, operations that are to be understood as efforts to refashion the image of the United States globally in light of the Cold War. Such endeavours, Ingvarsson shows, paved the way for the reception of American culture in Iceland while also impacting to some extent Icelandic politics. Ingvarsson demonstrates that the reception of Faulkner's works in Iceland is tinged with political discussions around the nature and conditions of literature in the country as well ideological stances on various topics such as communism, nationalism, and modernism.

One of the many strengths of Ingvarsson's monograph lies in its engagement with a broad range of approaches, and this is manifest in his use of special blocks of discussion that aid readers' understanding of his main arguments. They vary from background on political discourse to consultations of theory and commentaries on events surrounding Faulkner's movements. Throughout his discussion, Ingvarsson intersperses his arguments with references to Faulkner's novels as well as films based on these novels, and he skillfully engages with them as a point of comparison in specific relation to Guðmundur Daníelsson's works, which pay homage to the writings of Faulkner. Though this study would have benefitted from a more thorough examination of Icelandic colonial history around the period of its focus—inasmuch as Ingvarsson himself stresses its significance (27–29)—Ingvarsson nonetheless gives his readers enough context to understand the thematic importance of Faulkner's works as they influence the literary system of a formerly colonised country such as Iceland. Ingvarsson is detailed in his documentation as well as in his exposition not only of the marks left by Faulkner in Iceland, but also of the complex elements that come into play surrounding the arrival of his works and the author himself.

Ingvarsson's work offers a bold statement with its arguments regarding Faulkner and delivers on the expectations it sets. It is no less intricate than the author whose tracks it explores as it is arrayed with outstanding and diverse references to interesting facets of modern life such as pop culture, the CIA, political parties, and crime novels. This book unveils broad avenues for research

on Faulkner studies as well as Icelandic literary history, and Ingvarsson manages to trace with significant adroitness the red thread that connects these two seemingly separate worlds. It is ambitious, entertaining, enlightening, and engaging, broaching multifold subjects and covering vast ground, from cities such as Paris and New York all the way to Ísafjörður.

Brynjarr Perry Mendoza
University of Iceland, 2023