ALIENATION, NATIONALISM AND EXCEPTIONALISM: ICELANDIC 'ISLANDNESS' AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ANTI-HEROIC INDIVIDUAL IN *ANGELS OF THE UNIVERSE* AND *NÓI THE ALBINO*

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I.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXTS

Angels of the Universe by Einar Már Guðmundsson is a 1995 novel that details the life of Páll Olafsson and his decline into schizophrenia. The novel contains pseudo-biographical elements, as Einar Már's brother Pálmi Örn Guðmundsson battled with mental illness for most of his life.[1] The first and second parts of the novel fundamentally describe Páll's childhood and Páll's adulthood, although due to the fragmented narrative structure, there is never a clear distinction of how much time has passed; Páll narrates non-linearly between before and after he was institutionalised. Páll was born in Reykjavík 'on 30 March 1949, the same day that Iceland joined NATO.'[2] Páll often recounted memories from his childhood that involved the mental hospital, Kleppur, as he and his friends were haunted by its presence, afraid they would be admitted. As a young adult, Páll was an artist, which mirrors Pálmi Örn's life as a poet. Páll falls in love with a bourgeois woman named Dagný as his mental health begins to show signs of decline. When Dagný leaves him for a wealthier crowd, Páll's experiences more violent schizophrenic episodes, and he is eventually sent to Kleppur. In the mental hospital, Páll becomes friends with Óli, Viktor and Pétur. Óli thinks he can telepathically transport song lyrics to the Beatles, Viktor thinks he is Hitler and Pétur fantasises about a doctorate he never wrote. They are all treated like 'guinea [pigs]' in an experiment, as they are constantly fed psychiatric drugs.[3] Throughout his journey within the psychiatric system, Páll recovers and relapses, but he is never able to fully recuperate. In the end, feeling alone and abandoned by the world, Páll takes his own life.

Nói the Albino is a 2003 coming-of-age film written and directed by Dagur Kári Pétursson. Nói Kristmundsson is a seventeen year-old outsider with snow-white skin,

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[1] Einar Már Guðmundsson, 'Pálmi Örn Guðmundsson – Memorial,' *Morgunblaðið*, 5 June 1992, p. 34.
[2] Einar Már Guðmundsson, *Angels of the Universe*, trans. by Bernard Scudder (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 7.
[3] Ibid., p. 149.

residing in a small village in Iceland's Westfjords. He lives with his grandmother in a house of corrugated iron. His father, Kiddi, re-joins Nói's life at the beginning of the film, as he was presumably absent for most of Nói's life. Struggling at home and in school, Nói has one outlet for escapism: the hidden cellar beneath his basement floor. Nói maintains a mundane routine, spending his days visiting the petrol station for malt soda, or passing the time with the village bookstore owner, Óskar. His routine is altered with Óskar's daughter, Íris, moves from Reykjavík and starts work at the local petrol station. Nói and Íris form a romantic relationship and agree to run away to Hawaii together, which sparks Nói's interest in the tropical island. His runaway fantasy falls apart when Íris refuses to go with him. After a careless and failed bank robbery, Nói steals a car and is chased by the police, only to get arrested when his car gets stuck in the snow. After he is bailed out of jail by his father, Nói seeks refuge in his basement hideaway, just as an avalanche shakes the village. Nói survives in the protection of his cellar, but aboveground everyone he knew and loved was killed by the avalanche. His future remains as uncertain as before, yet the tragic event seems to signal a possibility for a new beginning.

I.2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In my dissertation, I examine the critiques of 'islandness' to illuminate the psychological exploration of estrangement and loneliness that is detailed in both *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino*. 'Islandness' is often viewed as a feeling that is intrinsically bound to the island-space; however, the discourse surrounding the imaginative nature of the island-space has contributed to a redefinition of 'islandness' as a subjective experience that can be felt by anyone from anywhere. Therefore, I agree with Björn Norðfjörð's definition of 'islandness'; he defines 'islandness' as 'something to do with a certain separation, not only from continents, but from all things big, central and populous.'[4] This changing definition affects literature and film by creating narratives of psychological experiences of 'islandness'. Iceland's national identity was predicated on a nationalistic cultural 'islandness' that sought to preserve Iceland's unique identity in the postcolonial period. Thus, this nationalistic pride developed into idealised Icelandic exceptionalism. Exceptionalism can be damaging because it promotes idealised expectations that are impossible for the contemporary individual to meet; exceptionalism does not allow for the existence of people like Páll and Nói because they are characterized by their opposition to the conventions of the idealised Icelandic individual.

Nói does not experience 'islandness' in the same way that Páll does. Nói's 'islandness' is prompted by his existential dread, but he is still allowed to escape death at the end of the film. Páll experience of 'islandness' is a product of society's rejection of him, but Páll is not able to escape his death as his fate is sealed from the moment Páll reveals that he is already dead. Páll's post-mortem narration communicates the limiting effects of a cultural 'islandness' that rejects the mentally ill. Additionally, the fragmented narrative structure

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[4] Björn Norðfjörð, *Dagur Kári's Nói the Albino* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), p. 32.

allows for a critique of the limiting postmodern discourse, such as Frederic Jameson's definition of the postmodern schizophrenic subject. Páll's position as the author and the protagonist of his story returns the autonomy to the schizophrenic subject rather than using the schizophrenic experience as a way to illuminate postmodernity. The structure of *Angels of the Universe* allows Páll to become an anti-heroic model for the demand to release the schizophrenic subject from damaging social limitations. In *Nói the Albino,* Nói's 'islandness' is represented through the claustrophobia of his village. Natural borders like mountains and snow create physical barriers between Nói and the rest of the world; however, the coming-of-age style of the narrative allows for an interaction between the local and global audiences, as this filmic style is not something that is inherently Icelandic. Both *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino* utilise stylistic techniques to illustrate a separation between the individual and society.

Additionally, a close examination of both Páll and Nói's subjective experiences of 'islandness' challenges specific constructions of conventional thought. Páll's mistreatment in Kleppur directly communicates a need for change; his inescapable death presents the urgent demand for a redefinition of society's relationship with the mentally ill. Páll is a metaphor for the need to mix Iceland's cultural 'islandness' with its growing globalisation. On a global scale, the historical treatment of the mentally ill, as detailed by Michel Foucault's analysis, presents a need to transform global attitudes into something more accepting and understanding. Nói and the other villagers experience 'islandness' from their environment in the form of a confused relationship with the surrounding nature, which enhances Nói's experience of an existential 'islandness' from himself. His internal 'islandness' anti-heroically communicates the need to dismantle the continued pressures of idealised exceptionalism.

In making such claims about Iceland's 'islandness', I am not attempting to remove the importance of a cultural 'islandness' that was built on national pride for post-colonial rehabilitation, nor am I attempting to claim that all 'islandness' is limiting. Additionally, I am not claiming that 'islandness' is only found in Iceland or island nations. In this dissertation, I am arguing that 'islandness', influenced by imagined borders and communities, has affected how certain groups of people identify themselves. In Iceland, this identity is projected through an installation of nationalism and exceptionalism. I argue that although nationalism was important for traumatic recovery, it is unrealistic to maintain this nationalistic identity in a contemporary cosmopolitan society. Through an analysis of the texts, and a close-up examination of the protagonists' psychology, *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino* express the social injustices that Páll and Nói experienced, and advocate for a change in the attitudes surrounding Iceland's national identity.

This dissertation explores the many definitions of 'islandness' and its impact on contemporary Icelandic literature and film. The study of 'islandness' illuminates the anti-heroes of *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino*. Because the search for the anti-hero is prompted by the psychological need to seek out heroes, this desire to find heroes is in response to uncertainties in the world; Páll and Nói are anti-heroes that represent a need for change, thus they become a way to create new modes of thinking to challenge these uncertainties.[5] In developing a comparison between anti-heroes and 'islandness', I explore how Einar Már and Dagur Kári's works call for a new Icelandic identity that is symptomatic of a debilitating cultural 'islandness' that was built from post-colonial nationalism. Through the anti-heroic image of Páll and Nói, 'islandness' is represented as a new foundation for conceptualising Iceland's multifaceted relationship with modernity. The protagonists

[5] Zeno E. Franco, Scott T. Allison, Elaine L. Kinsella, Ari Kohen, Matt Langdon and Philip G. Zimbardo, 'Heroism Research: A Review of Theories, Methods, Challenges, and Trends,' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (2016), 1-15 (p. 8).

experience ‘islandness’ as a separation from their community and themselves, and this is brought on by Iceland’s perpetuated relationship with nationalism. I argue against a purely nationalistic identity through my claims – although nationalism helped Iceland recover from occupation, it is more effective in contemporary society to adopt an identity that mixes cultural ‘islandness’ with modern outlooks. Recently, this harmonious ideal has prompted a new genre of literature and film, which focuses heavily on a blending of old and new, and ultimately proves that this combination is productive for Iceland in a globalised world.

I will refer to Icelandic names in their original form to preserve the integrity of the language and to avoid inaccurate Anglicised forms. For those who are not familiar with the Icelandic language, there are a few characters that require clarification: þorn (Þþ) and eð (Ðð). They are similar to the ‘th’ sound in English. When referring to names after the first mention, I will state the first names instead of the second names, for example: Einar Már Guðmundsson will be referred to as ‘Einar Már’ instead of ‘Guðmundsson’. This is because the Icelandic second name is patronymic or matronymic, so referring to it as a surname would be inaccurate.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 'ISLANDNESS' AND THE ICELANDIC LITERARY AND FILMIC ANTI-HERO IN *ANGELS OF THE UNIVERSE* AND *NÓI THE ALBINO*

This section will be divided into three subsections. In the first subsection, I will analyse the discourse surrounding 'islandness' and develop a critique of its limiting factors and new definitions. The next subsection will introduce the subjective experience of 'islandness' with a particular focus on the structure of the novel and the aesthetics of the film, and how these techniques communicate the alienation of the anti-hero from their environment because of cultural 'islandness'. Additionally, I will assess certain moments when society alienates Páll and Nói, which contributes to their heightened experience of 'islandness' and a separation from themselves. And finally, I will present an idea for the future of 'islandness' through an examination of the tragic yet hopeful endings of both the novel and the film. I will explore how this new Icelandic identity has contributed to a new genre that mixes cultural 'islandness' with the advances of the contemporary world.

II.1. A CRITIQUE OF 'ISLANDNESS'

Iceland is often portrayed as the quintessential island; its remote geographical location has enabled a preservation of its Viking-born national identity and traditions. Björn Norðfjörð defines Iceland as belonging to both 'North America and Europe [geologically], [existing] as a result of the collision between the two continental plates; [however], Iceland has for most of its history been too remote to belong culturally to either.' [6] In a globalised world, it becomes increasingly less convincing to claim that Iceland remains detached and isolated in a sphere of cultural self-preservation – nonetheless, this mentality persists to this day. John R. Gillis examines the invention of this island mentality in his book *Islands of the Mind*:

> [Iceland is] another example of a place that, while fully engaged with the world on every level and by no sense remote except in terms of physical distance, has developed an image of itself as a cultural island, pure and uncontaminated by the outside world, true to its origins [...] none of this has anything to do with the nature of the island itself.[7]

The Icelandic word for Iceland is 'Ísland', which forms a strong Anglophone association between Iceland and 'islandness'.[8] Bill Holm, an American poet, claims in his novel *Eccentric Islands* that 'whatever "islandness" is, Iceland is the incarnation of that.'[9] Much discourse is devoted to the conceptualisation of 'islandness', although theorists have not been able to agree on a universal definition; however, Benedict Anderson claims that it is problematic to define a nation by its geography in a globalised world because the nation 'is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'[10] Anderson explains how the emergence of mass printing and media contributed to a feeling of

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[6] Norðfjörð, p. 34.
[7] John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 119
[8] Norðfjörð, p. 33.
[9] Bill Holm, *Eccentric Islands: Travels Real and Imaginary* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2000), p. 95.
[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

a shared community even though 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them'.[11] The development of Iceland's literary and filmic culture cultivated a mass circulation of nationalism, which helped Iceland grow out of post-colonialism. Additionally, this nationalism created an imagined feeling of separateness and exceptionalism, that contributed to Iceland's cultural 'islandness'.

'Islandness' was an outlet for rehabilitation and for a construction of an independent identity in the post-colonial period; therefore, it is integral to its national identity. Iceland is a nation that has been occupied more than it has been independent: Iceland's independence initially lasted for 388 years after Viking explorers discovered Iceland, until Norwegian rule began in 1262.[12] This power transferred to Denmark in the late 14th century and lasted until Iceland's independence in 1944.[13] During and after the Second World War, Iceland was occupied by British and American forces, forcing Iceland to relinquish its neutrality due to the foreign occupiers who were already involved in the war.[14] These occupations stimulated a feeling of 'islandness' for Icelanders, or an 'islandness' that is associated with an estrangement from an independent national identity. In the wake of Iceland's independence, there was a call for a more nationalistic identity, transforming Iceland's 'islandness' into a device for national recovery through the notion of Icelandic exceptionalism. According to Marilena Zackheos, 'islanders themselves challenge their specific historical oppressions [through] their [...] construction as an idealised island-space.'[15] In Iceland's case, its 'traumatic history of [...] invasions' contributed to the development of a 'conflicted

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[11] Ibid., p. 6.
[12] Óttar Guðmundsson, 'The Origins of Icelandic Psychiatry at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,' *History of Psychiatry*, 11:44 (2000), 425-433 (p. 425).
[13] Ibid., p. 425.
[14] Katharina Hauptmann, 'Iceland during World War II: The War and Its Impact on the Country,' *Wall Street International Magazine* (2013), 1 (p. 1).
[15] Marilena Zackheos, *The Ex-isle Reinvention: Postcolonial Trauma and Recovery in Contemporary Island Literature* (Michigan: ProQuest, 2011), pp. vi-vii.

nationalist belonging'.[16] Even though Iceland experienced economic growth during the British and American occupations, and this growth led to eventual touristic success, Iceland gained this contemporary development 'at the expense of [the Icelanders'] own narratives about their true lived island and colonisation experiences.'[17] If Icelandic society was built on the nationalist conception and normalisation of Icelandic exceptionalism, and an individual differs from that norm, it can create a social dynamic where these individuals are treated as outsiders.

In *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino*, this separation is explored through the treatment of Páll and Nói within their communities. Páll is rejected from his community because of his mental illness since schizophrenia is perceived as 'abnormal'. Nói is never accepted, as he is an outsider in his village, which is immediately visible through his appearance, drawing 'attention to how singular Nói is in the small community of the village.'[18] In this sense, 'islandness' has transitioned from an outlet for preservation to a perpetuation of romanticised notions of an ideal past, and Einar Már and Dagur Kári seek to argue against this preserved ideal. Although the concept of 'islandness' has been exploited and stretched, in addition to its many definitions, a feeling of separation and isolation remains fundamental to islanders and island identities. Norðfjörð defines 'islandness' as an individual separation from all things, creating a highly subjective experience.[19] Since it is futile to define 'islandness' strictly by geographical location due to the imaginative nature of communities and in the age of globalisation, it becomes more effective to define it as something which affects any individual who may experience symptoms of cultural 'islandness', for example, feelings of separation or estrangement. Because of this, I return to Anderson's imagined community and propose that 'islandness' can be many things, but in *Angels of the Universe*

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[16] Ibid., p. vii.
[17] Ibid., p. 9.
[18] Norðfjörð, p. 45.
[19] Ibid., p. 32.

and *Nói the Albino*, Páll and Nói's experience of 'islandness' is subjective rather than an experienced tied to the imagined island-space. 'Islandness' is a universal phenomenon and can be experienced on continents as well as islands, but an analysis of how 'islandness' continues to affect the islander offers an interesting examination of geopolitics. In literature and film, 'islandness' reveals individual internal distress, providing an opportunity to examine the social issues of an island nation.

II.2. 'ISLANDNESS' AND THE INDIVIDUAL: THE ALIENATED ANTI-HERO

The contemporary Icelandic protagonist becomes an anti-hero because of their relationship and confrontation with 'islandness'. Páll and Nói's alienation from society is encouraged by previous notions of cultural 'islandness', which contribute to a feeling of infinite separation and estrangement. This feeling is attached to the notion of the anti-hero, as a character's experience of 'islandness' is predicated on their isolation and alienation: the figure of '"loner," "outlaw" or "anti-hero" [becomes] a metaphor for the small, remote island, far up in the high north.'[20] The unconventional, fragmented narrative structure of *Angels of the Universe* highlights Páll's 'islandness', illustrating Páll as an anti-heroic model for acceptance and change. Páll acts as both the narrator and author of his own story; Páll's sporadic storytelling symbolises his mental instability. Páll shifts spontaneously between timelines and seems to become more self-reflexive as the narrative progresses. In some discourse, Páll's shift in self-awareness is interpreted as his response to psychiatric drugs, which allows him to assess and respond to the injustices surrounding his treatment.[21] Alternatively, I think his increase in self-awareness is symptomatic of his position as a narrator, as Páll is recounting his life from a post-mortem point of view. Páll notes at the beginning of the novel, 'I would prefer to say that no one should write his biography until his life is over.'[22] Páll confirms his posthumous narration; he notes, 'when I died, [my friend Arnor] conducted my funeral ceremony, and as far as I know he made a very fine job of it.' [23] Once he dies, he is rapidly introduced to a position of agency, as now that he is removed from the constraints of society he is allowed to recount his story freely. After death, Páll exists in a sphere where schizophrenia has not been stigmatised, allowing him to recount his story

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[20] Kristín Loftsdótiir, Katla Kjartansdóttir, and Katrín Anna Lund, 'Trapped in Clichés: Masculinity, Films and Tourism in Iceland,' *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24:9 (2017), 1225-1242 (p. 1232).
[21] Ingólfur Arason, 'Geðsjúkar söguhetjur Andlega veikar aðalpersónur í þremur kvikmyndum' (unpublished BA Thesis, University of Iceland, 2016), p. 10.
[22] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe*, p. 7.
[23] Ibid., p. 106.

without limitations. Páll's posthumous narration immediately communicates the damaging effects of an 'islandness' that contributes to a feeling of loneliness. Not only does the fragmented narrative structure communicate this 'islandness' through a stylistic form that strays from convention, but it also illustrates the effects of a society that is built on a cultural 'islandness'. Páll's post-mortem narration allows him to tell his story without the limiting factors placed on him by society.

In addition to Páll's reclamation of the self through post-mortem narration, Páll's position as the narrator and protagonist critiques the literary treatment of the schizophrenic subject – one that frequently exploits their imposed 'islandness'. *Angels of the Universe* is 'characterised by postmodern fragmentation,' offering an opportunity to critique the postmodern assessment of the thematic concerns of the novel, particularly the postmodern discourse surrounding schizophrenia.[24] Frederic Jameson defines the postmodern schizophrenic subject, claiming that 'the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.'[25] Postmodern theorists value schizophrenic thought 'precisely because it imagines them insulated from civic life,' as people who cannot regularly integrate into society; however, the only reason the schizophrenic subject is separated from society is that historically, society deliberately and perilously rejected them.[26] It is problematic to strip the schizophrenic subject of their agency as a way to demonstrate postmodern thought, although postmodern theorists, such as Jameson, praise schizophrenics. It is unethical to attempt to explain the seemingly shared experience of postmodernity through a schizophrenic point of view, which, in

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[24] Ástráður Eysteinsson and Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir, 'Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–2000,' in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Daisy Neijmann (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 460.
[25] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 26.
[26] Catherine Prendergast, 'The Unexceptional Schizophrenic: A Post-Postmodern Introduction,' in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th ed. (Routledge: New York & London, 2013), p. 239.

Jameson's case, is not a shared experience.[27] Thus, Jameson's analysis of the schizophrenic subject borders on exploitative rather than renewing. In a sense, *Angels of the Universe* attempts to go beyond postmodernism, as Einar Már rejects the limiting discourse that depicts the schizophrenic subject as 'an agent-less non-self'; he wants to give them a voice by diminishing damaging constructions of exceptional 'islandness' in global mentality, and he does this through Páll's status as an anti-hero. The literary and filmic popularity of the anti-hero arose from the psychological motivation 'to seek out heroes, most likely because heroes serve fundamental human needs.'[28] The figure of the anti-hero became a common feature of literature and film in response to drastic change and social uncertainties. The Icelandic anti-hero is an outlet to address national anxieties that are influenced by a need for social transformation. Thus, Páll becomes an anti-heroic model for the need to grant the schizophrenic subject a voice.

In *Nói the Albino*, the visual aesthetics and structure seem to create a separation between the land and the people, and between the people and themselves. These surreal visuals fuse the film's 'islandness' with a feeling of claustrophobia. Nói's experience of 'islandness' is caused by his estrangement from his community, which prompts his need to escape his village. The film's geopolitical analysis of the island-space and contrasting island-spaces, like Hawaii, provide a crucial evaluation of the marginality of Iceland and Iceland's national identity. When Nói and Íris break into the Natural History Museum, they experiment with a map that illuminates a red bulb over a certain country or region when a button is pressed. On the map, Iceland does not have a light bulb and therefore cannot light up; Norðfjörð claims that Iceland 'has not been deemed important enough by the map's makers to warrant a red bulb.'[29] Nói is struck by Iceland's insignificant appearance on the map,

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[27] Ibid., p. 239.
[28] Franco, p. 8.
[29] Norðfjörð, p. 54.

claiming 'it looks like spit.' [30] From this lack of representation, it seems as though Iceland should not be on the map at all. Ástráður Eysteinsson comments on this frequent cartographical exemption; he notes:

> On many maps of Europe, Iceland simply does not appear. It is not difficult to understand why. Its presence makes the map awkward, a lot of space is "wasted" on the blank ocean, an ocean which is meaningful to Icelanders…[31]

Íris asks Nói to close his eyes and randomly select their runaway destination. On the opposite end of the world – seemingly the antithesis of Iceland – the red bulb flashes over the Pacific island nation of Hawaii (fig 1.0). As Nói and Íris stare wistfully at the map, their heads conveniently cover mainland Europe in a close-up shot, leaving Iceland to sprawl amongst the vast, endless sea (fig. 1.1). This scene points to Iceland's 'islandness' and marginal status. By covering Europe, the viewer can conceptualise the 'islandness' that Icelanders' experience, which is established by a national identity that is built on cultural 'islandness'. Iceland is visually separate, and its inability to light up separates it even more. Immediately after Íris and Nói visit the museum, one of the film's few establishing shots pans across the screen (fig. 1.2). The viewer encounters the image of the vast sea and an icy blue mountain that looms over the tiny village. The snowy peak is in direct contrast to the sunny images of Hawaii that quickly leave the viewer's mind the minute they are reminded of the isolated 'islandness' of Nói's home. The mountain blocks the open sea, creating a physical barrier between the village and the rest of the world, which increases Nói's feeling of 'islandness'. The visual aesthetics illustrate a microcosmic village that amplifies all senses of 'islandness', particularly highlighting Nói's status as an anti-hero and his isolation from a village that does not understand him or offer him many opportunities for growth.

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[30] Dagur Kári Pétursson, *Nói the Albino* (Iceland: Zik Zak Filmworks, 2003).
[31] Ástráður Eysteinsson, 'Icelandic Resettlements,' *symplokē*, 5:1/2 (1997), 153-166 (p. 155).

There are many moments in *Nói the Albino* when the film's 'islandness' combines with a sense of claustrophobia. For instance, Nói is often confined within a small space; the film itself begins with Nói physically digging himself a way out of his home through an eye-level layer of snow (fig. 1.3). The viewer rarely gets a glimpse of anything outside of the village's condensed boundaries besides the icy mountain. Nói spends time hidden in his secret cellar, which is a condensed space that does not offer sufficient amenities for a prolonged stay. When Nói is stuck in his cellar after the avalanche, the viewer becomes aware of the claustrophobic nature of Nói's only sanctuary. Dagur Kári creates a film composed of many close-ups, whether it is a close-up shot of Nói or the close-up, microcosmic nature of Nói's village. Jameson reveals that filmic close-ups create a claustrophobic feeling because of a destabilisation of the geography and setting, which prioritises emotions instead of physical characteristics.[32] Since 'islandness' is generated by a metaphysical sensation, which means it cannot be defined by an objective observation of physical reality, close-ups in *Nói the Albino* prioritise an individual emotive response to 'islandness'. The film's visual aesthetics contribute to a formation of Nói's village as its own island, exaggerating the romanticised perceptions of Iceland as remote and otherworldly.

In *Nói the Albino,* Hawaii's presence in the film illustrates an interesting contrast between the 'islandness' of two island-spaces; both Iceland and Hawaii are islands, but Nói romanticises the 'islandness' of Hawaii, illustrating an island-space that is more favourable to him than Iceland. Nói's conception of Hawaii is 'more an imaginative construct than an actual place.'[33] After Íris and Nói decide to run away to Hawaii together, Nói becomes enthralled with the idea of its white, sandy shores and crystal blue waters. Nói is often placed against the background of tropical motifs. The walls of Nói's living room are decorated with

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[32] Frederic Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indiana: Bloomington, 1992), p. 64.
[33] Norðfjörð, p. 45.

wallpaper that is studded with a repeated palm tree motif (fig. 1.4). Nói's grandmother gives him a View-Master with tropical scenes for his birthday, which becomes Nói's second outlet for escapism. The anti-hero is categorised by the mistakes they make because these mistakes reveal specific areas of society that need to be redefined: Nói's romanticisation of Hawaii communicates an important aspect about society's perception of the island-space. In exoticising Hawaii through Nói's infatuation, Dagur Kári is illustrating society's propensity to romanticise island nations. Nói's exoticisation reveals that even subjects from an island-nation who experience 'islandness' are victims of what Gillis calls 'islomania', or the idealisation of the remote island-space.[34] Nói can escape his village through the 'islandness' of Hawaii. This outlet for escapism is based on Hawaii's same touristic manipulation of its past; the neo-colonial power of its colonial past still has a lingering effect on how the world views Hawaii. Nói is complicit in the neo-colonial exploitation of the island-space and in Nói's failure to obtain his escape, Dagur Kári highlights that this ideology is destructive to the island-space; Nói's anti-heroic errors bring this superfluous romanticisation to the surface. Contemporary literary and filmic protagonists have become anti-heroic vehicles for the communication of individual social victimisation through a destabilisation of any principal structures or ideologies. Thus, Dagur Kári subverts existing stereotypes and realities of cultural 'islandness' and magnifies them in order to highlight the instability of a cultural narrative that relies so heavily on separation and limitation.

Nói the Albino is a coming-of-age film, as it focuses on the uncertainties of Nói's adolescence. 'Films in this genre revolve around a character who is on a journey of self-discovery' and wants to achieve this through a search for a better life.[35] Nói is an outsider who is unable to fully integrate into small-town life. The film employs 'universal themes

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[34] Gillis, p. 1.
[35] Alistair Fox, *Coming-of-Age Cinema in New Zealand: Genre, Gender and Adaptation in a National Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 5.

[such] as the pains of growing up, romance, love, loneliness and death.'[36] Nói never fits in to his society and is never able to form a strong relationship with anyone. His relationship with Íris was almost an exception to this reality, although in the end he is not able to form a strong relationship with anyone he knows, as they all perish in the avalanche. The coming-of-age narrative structures is not a mode of storytelling that is unique to Icelanders. On the contrary, 'the themes of "islandness", isolation and existentialism addressed through a close analysis of the text are also crucial to any understanding of the film's global context.'[37] By employing the use of a coming-of-age narrative, Dagur Kári places *Nói the Albino* in the global sphere, illuminating 'islandness' in a way that global audiences can understand and appreciate. At the same time, Dagur Kári does not sacrifice local references or concerns, and in doing so he creates a narrative that interweaves the local and the global. For example, he makes a reference to the 1995 avalanches in Súðavík and Flateyri, which holds a poignant local significance but may not be as moving to the global audience.[38] *Nói the Albino* is a model for the harmony between the traditional and contemporary, and the local and global. Additionally, *Nói the Albino* represents the interchangeable nature of Nói's anti-heroic story, communicating that 'islandness' could be experienced anywhere by anyone, just as Nói's unnamed village could be anywhere in the world.

Angels of the Universe and *Nói the Albino* create narratives that exemplify the separation between the individual and their community; additionally, the narratives reveal specific moments when this separation contributes to a detachment between the subject and the self. In *Angels of the Universe*, Einar Már utilises the character of Páll to critique the psychiatric system in Iceland and to challenge society's view of the mentally ill subject. A memory from Páll's childhood introduces how Icelandic society perceives the mentally ill at

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[36] Norðfjörð, p. 115.
[37] Ibid., p. 115.
[38] Ibid., p. 73.

the time. Páll had a childhood friend whose father, Bergsteinn, was an artist. Bergsteinn was 'such a realist that it is said, if a tiny little fly hovers around when he is painting, you can be sure to find it in the picture.'[39] Because of this, Bergsteinn's pictures often feature Kleppur. Bergsteinn 'never sells a single picture' because, according to Bergsteinn's friend no one 'in his right mind would want to have a mental hospital hanging up on a wall in his home'.[40] Bergsteinn's struggle to sell his paintings communicates the poignant reality of the stigmatic mindset about mental illness in Iceland; a painting of Kleppur deters buyers, even though Kleppur is 'by no means an unattractive building'.[41] Nevertheless, Kleppur and its patients remain removed from the local conscience, in an isolated sphere of enforced 'islandness'. Óttar Guðmundsson notes, 'when choosing the location of the hospital, which was just outside of Reykjavík, the focus was on the principal rule that a mental hospital should be at an isolated site in the community.'[42] Kleppur and its residents have always experienced 'islandness', as its foundations were built on a concept of deliberate isolation. This purposeful isolation has affected the way society views the mentally ill because it marks them as individuals that should be kept away from 'normal' society. Páll experiences 'islandness' because of the loneliness he feels, which is symptomatic of society's rejection of the mentally ill. 'Islandness', or loneliness in this sense, is predicated on an absence of 'linkages to a coherent community'.[43] Loneliness 'is a highly prevalent experience in schizophrenia' due to this estrangement from society.[44] Kleppur becomes a symbol for an island within an island, and Páll directly experiences this 'islandness' as an island of his own.

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[39] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe,* p. 55.
[40] Ibid., pp. 55-56.
[41] Ibid., p. 56.
[42] Óttar Guðmundsson, 'History of Icelandic Psychiatry,' *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 66 (2012), 25-30 (p. 27).
[43] Robert Weiss, *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1975), p. 17.
[44] Graham M. L. Eglit, Barton W. Palmer, A'verria S. Martin, Xin Tu, and Dilip V. Jeste, 'Loneliness in Schizophrenia: Construct Clarification, Measurement, and Clinical Relevance,' *PLoS ONE*, 13:3 (2018), 1-20 (p. 1).

The stigma surrounding the mentally ill is explored through Páll's treatment at Kleppur; however, even before he was institutionalised, he witnessed a traumatic experience of 'islandness' involving Kleppur. A student at a grammar school matriculation pulled out a knife and incited panic among the students. The police and hospital staff treated him without any care, claiming that he was mad and admitting him to Kleppur without establishing the cause of his behaviour. As the student behaved more erratically, 'banging his head against the wall' until 'his student's cap was no longer white, but red with blood', the police decided he belonged in Kleppur. A few weeks later, the student died in Kleppur. It was only after the student died that an autopsy was performed, revealing 'a cerebral tumour, which had exerted such pressure on his brain and caused such agony that he suffered without respite.' This lack of care, and complete disregard for human agency, is prevalent throughout the novel, and is a common concern that Einar Már is trying to address. In doing so, Einar Már attempts to return the agency to the schizophrenic subject since Páll himself details his lack of autonomy due to his mental illness. He notes, 'but we who are committed to asylums and kept in institutions, we have no answers when our ideas are at odds with reality, because in our world other people are right and know the difference between right and wrong.' [45] Aware of his constructed place in society, Páll knows that there is no way out; Páll's status as an anti-hero communicates this unjust reality to develop a critique of the limiting constraints that keep Páll confined within damaging stereotypes, forced to feel a separation from himself.

Páll is a symbol for the tragic experience of the mentally ill in a society that does not accept them. When Páll's mother was pregnant with him, she had a dream just before she went into labour. Páll narrates:

> A long way out in the meadow she saw four horses [...] My mother felt these horses belonged to her [...] When the horses galloped away, the skewbald one began to lag. It

[45] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe*, p. 4.

> ran around in circles and behaved very strangely. Then it tried to gallop like the other horses, but stumbled and fell. When she reached it, it was lying on the ground, dead.[46]

A symbol of Páll himself, the skewbald horse anticipates Páll's struggle with mental illness. When the skewbald horse tries to run with the others, it cannot keep up. This is symbolic of Páll's struggle to live in a society that will not accept him. The reader gains insight into Páll's inevitable and tragic fate through his mother's premonitory dream. Years later, after Páll's death, Páll's mother finally remembers her dream when she reads this phrase in a poetry book: 'Dreams, at the bottom of them we perceive the merciless onslaught of reality.'[47] Dreams are not random; they are derived from reality. Páll's mother seems to internalise the fear of not being able to protect her son from society. The skewbald horse is a symbol of Páll's 'islandness' and vulnerability; Páll is a victim to society, an anti-heroic outsider.

The separation of Páll's self and self-image is symbolic of the fraught relationship between the traditional and the modern, which is explored through Iceland's relationship with their national identity. Páll is preoccupied with the date of his birth, which coincides with the date Iceland joined NATO. He seems to think there is a connection between the two events: 'there is no denying, all the same, that just over forty years after my birth, when I packed my bags and left this earthly existence, NATO was at a crossroads too,' he notes.[48] Páll is convinced that his life is intertwined with the ratification of Iceland's NATO membership:

> The chaos that would later take root inside my head was none the less ratified by the government and parliament that selfsame day. Suddenly the world was like a madman in microcosm: schizophrenic, split into two, the world picture a chronic misconception. To keep their misconceptions under control, psychiatric patients are given drugs, huge doses to counter the symptoms of madness, which have intense protein-binding properties and exert a powerful influence on the signals relayed to the brain. But societies defend themselves with weapons to prevent madness from becoming total.[49]

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[46] Ibid., p. 6.
[47] Ibid., p. 163.
[48] Ibid., p. 7.
[49] Ibid., p. 12.

Páll's inner turmoil represents the violence of an unstable world and references the presence of U.S. soldiers at the Keflavík military base, which was a condition of Iceland's NATO membership. In signing the agreement, Iceland went from surviving foreign occupation during the Second World War, to a forceful abandonment of its neutrality and its identity during the Cold War in alliance with America.[50] Páll feels a similar 'islandness', or isolation, from himself and society. After an abrupt change in his mental state that reconstructed his entire identity, Páll suddenly found himself in a mental hospital. Páll consistently struggles to regain his autonomy throughout his treatment, just as Iceland continued to wrestle with its national identity during the American military occupation that lasted nearly 60 years.[51] The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified an end to the Cold War; however, the Keflavík base remained open until nearly 17 years later.[52] In the novel, Páll reflects on this momentous event, saying, 'this wall can collapse but the walls between me and the world will never collapse; they stand unbreachable and firm, even though no one can see them with the naked eye.'[53] The feeling of 'islandness' that came from the American occupation will not disappear in the post-war period. Páll's struggle with his mental illness is both a symptom and symbol of Iceland's national trauma. Páll is a metaphor for the conflict between the traditional and the modern, which is exemplified through Iceland's struggle to adopt modern advances in globalisation, or maintain a cultural 'islandness' that promotes exceptionalism. Additionally, Páll sees the world as a physical barrier between himself and reality; he feels as though his mental illness will never allow him to break free from society's misconceptions. Instead, Páll remains in a small space; his 'islandness' is internalised because society refuses to accept him.

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[50] Paul Binding, 'Inside the Imagination of Iceland,' *The Times Literary Supplement*, (1995), 19 (p. 19).
[51] Hauptmann, p. 1.
[52] Ibid., p. 1.
[53] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe,* p. 7.

Páll social mistreatment in his community and in Kleppur emphasises his status as an anti-hero, because he presents a need for change. In her thesis, Katrín Þóra Víðisdóttir Berndsen analyses the treatment of mental illness in the film adaptation of *Angels of the Universe*, defining the main thematic concern as '[et] sammenstøt mellom den *gale* og den *normale verden*' [a clash between the *wrong* and the *normal world*].[54] This clash between two worlds highlights Páll's experience of 'islandness' since it is enforced by a damaging ideology that classifies people with mental illness as 'abnormal'. Michel Foucault analyses the isolation that contributes to a sense of 'islandness' for those afflicted with mental illness:

> It is curious to note that for centuries in Europe the speech of the madman was either not heard at all or else taken for the word of truth. It either fell into the void, being rejected as soon as it was proffered, or else people deciphered in it a rationality, naive or crafty, which they regarded as more rational than that of the sane.[55]

Society's relationship with the mentally ill, according to Foucault, is paradoxical: on the one hand, society fears the schizophrenic, labelling them abnormal and even dangerous; on the other, they are praised for their mind's separation between external and internal reality. They are labelled 'madmen' and, in more ways than one, are consistently stripped of their agency. Páll illustrates this loss of agency when he reveals: 'the madman says [he is] dead and been buried. Every Sunday he goes up to the cemetery and puts flowers on his grave.'[56] To Páll, being institutionalised for mental illness is the same as being dead; in Páll's community, those who suffer from mental illness are doomed from the start. Páll is mistreated at Kleppur; the mental hospital is more akin to a prison than a rehabilitation centre. Páll details receiving 'an injection and then' being 'thrown into isolation.'[57] He notes that 'there was nothing there

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[54] Katrín Þóra Víðisdóttir Berndsen, 'Kleppur er víða, noen er mer *Elling* enn andre: Analyse av filmene *Elling* og *Universets engler*' (unpublished BA thesis, University of Akureyri, 2008), p. 3.
[55] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse,' in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young, trans. by Ian McLeod (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 53.
[56] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe*, p. 114.
[57] Ibid., p. 113.

but a bed with a chamber pot under it.'[58] Páll is an anti-hero because he is a victim to society, never able to reintegrate due to his schizophrenia. He reflects on this inability to integrate, saying, 'no one in my position ought to dream about climbing higher in society than up to the top floor of the rehabilitation blocks for the handicapped.'[59] Even when Páll seems better, he is not given enough care to remain that way. At the end of his treatment, he writes a letter to his younger brother, saying, 'I haven't gone bald yet although it must have tickled the psychiatrists to think that now they couldn't fill me up with psychiatric drugs any more it wouldn't be long before the cancer drugs started.'[60] The patients are meant to recover, but the psychiatric system seems to replace one problem with another. Páll's death highlights the tragic mistreatment of the mentally ill in a society that perceives them as mad, rather than ill and in need of care. His victimisation highlights his status as an anti-hero and communicates a need to change society's perception of the mentally ill. Páll experiences 'islandness' in all areas of his life and is not able to escape this feeling of isolation due to the mistreatment of the mentally ill.

The villagers in *Nói the Albino* seem to have a dissonant relationship with their environment. They wear clothing that is not appropriate for the severe winter weather in Nói's village. Nói is hired to dig graves at a local cemetery and struggles to shovel through the frozen ground. After Nói is interrogated by his father and the school psychiatrist, he takes his grandmother's rifle and shoots at icicles that hang from a cliff's edge. Norðfjörð claims that this is Nói's attempt to '[assert] his existence' and claim '"I" exist!'[61] Alternatively, Canadian filmmaker Christine Welsh reads this scene as 'the uneasy relationship with the land that pervades this film.'[62] If Nói's village is a microcosmic caricature of the existing

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[58] Ibid., p. 113.
[59] Ibid., p. 147.
[60] Ibid., p. 149.
[61] Norðfjörð, p. 106.
[62] Christine Welsh, 'Björn Norðfjörð: *Dagur Kári's Nói the Albino,*' *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies/Études Scadinaves au Canada*, 20 (2011) 126-129 (p. 128).

stereotypes that define Iceland's cultural 'islandness', such as its incomprehensible purity of nature, then the villager's disconnect from the nature around them symbolises Iceland's fraught relationship between the traditional and the contemporary. Icelanders are often depicted 'as eccentric or sublime "children of nature"' in cinema.[63] In illustrating the villagers' confused relationship with the nature around them, Dagur Kári is rejecting a representation of a cultural 'islandness' that has become outmoded in contemporary society. Because this nationality promotes aged ideals, the villagers act in a confused way; they are not able to interact with nature in a normal way, because they are unable to make sense of the continued pressures of an idealised past.

In *Nói the Albino,* when Nói visits Óskar in his bookshop, he walks in on Óskar reading a passage from Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*:

> If you hang yourself, you will regret it, if you do not hang yourself, you will regret it; if you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or you do not hang yourself, you will regret both. This, gentlemen, is the sum of all practical wisdom.[64]

Óskar quickly dismisses Kierkegaard's statement, saying that Kierkegaard's last name sounds much like the Icelandic word for 'graveyard' – or *kirkjugarður* – and that it is 'a suiting name for such an idiot.'[65] Despite Óskar's disapproval, Nói seems interested in Kierkegaard's insights. Nói seems to experience this Kierkegaardian existentialism in the form of an 'islandness' from his community. Because Nói recognises that he is unhappy in his village, he wants to work to resolve this unhappiness, and to Nói, this will come to fruition through his runaway escape to Hawaii with Íris. Norðfjörð claims 'Nói takes refuge in the den when things do not work out for him aboveground.'[66] Nói experiences dissatisfaction with his life

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[63] Ibid., p. 63.
[64] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, translated by Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 54.
[65] Dagur Kári.
[66] Norðfjörð, p. 108.

many times throughout the film, as Nói experiences 'islandness' within every relationship he has.[67] His father has a drinking problem and admits to Nói's accidental conception when Nói visits him one evening. Nói attempts to bond with his classmate, Davíð, but he is never able to form a relationship with him. His runaway fantasy with Íris falls through, and after Nói is bailed out of jail by his father, his father propositions Íris at the petrol station. Nói visits his cellar on three occasions: at the beginning of the film before his relationship with Íris, after one of his failed attempts to bond with Davið, and after he and Íris break up.[68] Nói uses his cellar as an escape from an existential dread that is brought on by the 'islandness' of his anti-heroic existence. Although Nói had people in the village that cared about him, he still felt the need to escape; these relationships were never able to strengthen due to the conflict between Nói's desire to escape and the inability for him to bring everyone he cares for with him. If Nói's life pre-avalanche is one that is shrouded in uncertainties, then the avalanche washes away all of the qualms of existentialism and tragically allows Nói to start anew.

Nói, stuck in his cellar, finds himself utterly alone, even more than before. In an extreme close-up the viewer sees the flame of Nói's lighter flicker into the darkness of oblivion, as his old life ceases to exist (fig. 1.5). This moment of complete darkness and 'lack of visibility' communicates Nói's escalating experience of singularity and 'islandness' as the film unfolds.[69] Nói is rapidly plunged into the darkness of his being, and the visual exemplification of the whiteness aboveground is drastically contrasted by the blackness of the dark screen that lasts nearly twenty seconds. Nói experiences a lack of visibility in all areas of his life, and at this moment, he has reached the pinnacle of this alienated 'islandness' as he is cut off from the rest of the world, covered by a mass of snow. Snow is the main factor of natural separation throughout the film, as the icy mountain and mass amounts of snowfall

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[67] Ibid., pp. 17-19.
[68] Ibid., p. 107.
[69] Ibid., p. 99.

create a physical barrier between Nói and the rest of the world. Nói, stuck in the core existence of his 'islandness' is given a second chance as he is exhumed from his snowy grave. He is the sole survivor, and by experiencing his peak of isolation, he is given a chance to start over, as if Nói is reborn. Thus, in this flood of snow, Nói is allowed for a moment to decide how to release himself from the 'islandness' of his isolated village, which is represented in the end as he gazes into his View-Master, surrounded by bright and warm imagery that comes to life. Whether or not Nói will ever leave his village is not revealed; however, in this moment of reflection Nói finally seems to be represented as an individual who is in control of himself and his future.

II.3. RE-IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF 'ISLANDNESS' THROUGH A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

There is a sense that these texts prompted the emergence of a new Icelandic identity that retains some elements of 'islandness', in combination with a more cosmopolitan, global identity. This new identity is presented as something that could be hopeful for Icelanders, which is depicted by the somewhat optimistic endings of the novel and film. Although Páll was forced to leave his earthly existence, he reflects on this reality in a way that reassures the viewer that he is in a better place, removed from the constraints of a society that ultimately killed him. On the novel's last page, Páll reveals, 'no, I am not dead. I've gone to sea. I am sailing the blue sea in the mansions of the father.'[70] Páll is not dead, he lives on as an anti-heroic model for the future of Iceland's national identity, one that abandons a limiting cultural 'islandness'. *Nói the Albino* ends with the sombre realisation that everyone he knew perished in the avalanche. In the last scene of the film, Nói sits on the rubble of his old house with the View-Master his grandmother gave him for his birthday (fig. 1.6). The scene within the device depicts a sandy beach with blue waters, and as Nói gazes in wonderment, the scene changes from a still frame to a tropical paradise that comes alive, as the palms sway in the breeze (fig. 1.7). This transition from freeze frame to a moving image releases Nói from the microcosmic, imaginative island-within-an-island that is his village, and although the final scene is tragic, the hopeful imagery seems to suggest that his future may be a little brighter.

The Icelandic anti-hero, influenced by their 'islandness', has contributed to the creation of a certain genre of literature and film, one that Ástráður calls 'urban epics'.[71] Urban epics employ a sense of 'realism [...] often assuming an epic dimension' and they are often 'set in Reykjavík in the years during and after the Second World War'.[72] The urban epic

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[70] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe*, p. 164.
[71] Ástráður, 'Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–2000,' 459.
[72] Ibid., p. 459.

explores the surreal nature of the Icelandic epics but interweaves this with moments of modernity. Additionally, 'the island trope is central to the structure of the novels, where Iceland serves as a frame surrounding an even smaller island that is' the mental hospital, while the mental hospital 'frames the smallest island unit, the family, including the main characters'.[73] The urban epic in literature is 'characterised by a mixture of traditional storytelling and postmodern fragmentation, creating an effective form for emotional descriptions of poverty and struggle.'[74] Thus, the urban epic can be interpreted as the Icelandic version of magical realism, incorporating the 'split personality' of the Icelandic people that Brynjólfur, in *Angels of the Universe*, describes: 'schizophrenia is deeply rooted in the Icelandic identity, that all that belief in elves and spirits, ghosts and trolls is just a split personality.'[75] This split between the rational and irrational is an integral part of the Icelandic national identity, as the sagas are 'one of the most important factors in the creation of the Icelandic identity,' and the sagas often tell mystical stories of elves and trolls.[76] In creating a genre that ties the modern to traditional Icelandic mysticism, the urban epic advocates for a harmonious existence between the traditional and the modern. Páll is an Icelandic anti-hero who represents the possibility of this harmony. The schizophrenic subject should not be labelled and limited based on a societal invention of their 'irrational' identity. Páll is an anti-hero because he expresses a possibility for change. In the end, his death is prompted by society's failure to provide him with sufficient care and understanding, revealing the damaging effects of an invented identity that removes agency from the schizophrenic subject.

Recently, the urban epic has turned its attention back to the rural sphere. Ástráður notes:

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[73] Ibid., p. 459.
[74] Ibid., p. 460.
[75] Einar Már, *Angels of the Universe*, p. 107.
[76] Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Icelandic National Identity: From Romanticism to Tourism,' in *Making Europe in Nordic Contexts*, ed. by Pertti J. Anttonen (Finland: NIF, 1996), p. 43.

> This is not only because so much of Iceland's history is resolutely rural but also because this is a country that has a great deal of space to be observed as a background to the urban culture that has become paradigmatic.[77]

The small village becomes an island within an island, as its claustrophobic boundaries exemplify its 'islandness' from the rest of Iceland. Nói's home is a rural fishing village but is coupled with images of urbanisation and transnationalism, such as Óskar's collection of Coke bottles or Kiddi's love for Elvis Presley. *Nói the Albino* attempts to confront a national cinema that romanticises the Icelandic landscape. The film rejects the archetypal 'landscape and tourist scenery typical of Icelandic cinema' and confronts the viewer with images far removed from this ideal island-space: a cold, dark, unnamed village, far away from any touristic constructions and at the mercy of a looming mountain, which, as seen in the film, could destroy life in an instant. These contemporary rural epics seek to blend the new and the old, the familiar and the unfamiliar, 'balancing irony and nostalgia, [and evoking] to some degree the rural community of old, but they depict its way of life as modern, a setting, in fact, that crystallizes certain cultural aspects of modernity'.[78]

Contemporary Icelandic storytelling through literature and film has shifted its focus to a critique of 'islandness', which contributed to a formation of a new genre. This genre takes influence from the Icelandic urban epic, yet it introduces narratives from the rural island-space as a means to subvert the traditional mode of rural storytelling. *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino* encourage a blending of tradition and modernity through a critique of nationalistic 'islandness'. These texts suggest a new understanding of 'islandness' both at a national level and an individual level, which retains some sense of cultural identity but does not necessitate the estrangement of the individual or the nation from a world that is increasingly globalised.

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[77] Ástráður, 'Icelandic Prose Literature, 1940–2000,' p. 461.
[78] Ibid., p. 461.

III. CONCLUSION

Through my research, I have discovered the vast amount of discourse surrounding 'islandness' and its many definitions. In this dissertation, I have sought to expand on the developing critiques of 'islandness', from its use as a coping mechanism for national trauma, to a means for presenting a new, more openly globalised national identity.

I was not able to examine how the effects of 'islandness' that were explored in *Angels of the Universe* and *Nói the Albino* have changed since the texts were released in 1995 and 2003 respectively. Instead, I focus on the development of 'islandness' at the turn of the twenty-first century and how it interacted with the changing attitudes at the time. This allowed me to focus on a specific moment in literary and filmic history that proved to be important in regards to an assessment of 'islandness'. Although there has been much discourse surrounding 'islandness', throughout my research I did not find any discourse that details the interaction between 'islandness' and the Icelandic anti-hero. I think an examination of the use of 'islandness' in contemporary society would provide an interesting assessment of the social issues that Icelanders face today.

Angels of the Universe and *Nói the Albino* have proved that 'islandness' is more than a characteristic inherited in the island-space, and in literature and film, it is an outlet to expand on the psychology of an individual who is an anti-hero that expresses a need for change. I have examined the formation of a new Icelandic national identity through a rejection of the limiting cultural 'islandness' that preserved nationalistic ideologies and exceptionalism. I have displayed how Páll and Nói are symbols for a new contemplation surrounding Iceland's relationship with modernity. Páll and Nói are separated from their communities, and in this separation is brought on by the experience of 'islandness'. I have argued against a perpetuation of a cultural 'islandness' that favours nationalism and exceptionalism over cosmopolitanism. This relationship between the national and global has

developed a new genre of literature, which seeks to develop an identity that can be both traditional and contemporary. Throughout an exploration of literature and film at the turn of the twenty-first century, I realised that Iceland is constantly reminded that – as Ástráður claims – 'their nationhood is also an islandhood' due to conventions of cultural 'islandness'.[79] Literature and film must continue to advocate for a global identity that also incorporate traditional expression in order to encourage a release from imagined constraints; I proposed that a destabilisation of conventional modes of thought is prevalent in global literature and film and in Iceland, this was explored through the examination of an 'islandness' that created alienated anti-heroes and encouraged a need for changing ideals in the age of globalisation.

[79] Ástráður, 'Icelandic Resettlements,' p. 154.

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IMAGE PLATES

Fig. 1.0

Fig. 1.1

Fig. 1.2

Fig. 1.3

Fig. 1.4

Fig. 1.5

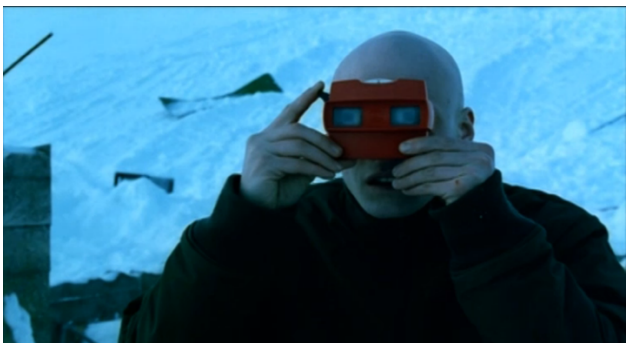

Fig. 1.6

Fig. 1.7