Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have in common their history as Danish dependencies within a historically and geographically coherent region. The complex aftermaths of Denmark’s sovereignty over its North Atlantic territories and their ongoing nation building processes lie at the core of this book. Today, we are witnessing region building processes beyond bilateral links to Denmark. How do the countries position themselves, individually and collectively, vis-à-vis the European metropolitan centres, a larger transcontinental North Atlantic region, the „hot“ Arctic, and global histories of colonialism and decolonisation? By examining the region from cultural, literary, historical, political, anthropological and linguistic perspectives, the articles in this book shed light on Nordic colonialism and its understanding as „exceptional“, and challenge and modify established notions of postcolonialism. Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands are shown to be both the (former) subjects as well as the producers of cultural hierarchisations in an entangled world.
MALAN MARNERSDÓTTIR
Translations of William Heinesen –
a Post-colonial Experience

The argument of this article is that the Faroese translations of works by the Faroese Danish-language author William Heinesen (1900–1991) show post-colonial characteristics due to the role of the translations in the construction of a Faroese national literature. Furthermore, the article points out some conceptual overlaps between post-colonial study and literary research. Heinesen is the internationally best-known Faroese author of the 20th century. He published several volumes of poems, novels and short stories in Denmark, as well as translations of novels and short stories in many countries. The Faroese translations of his work form the core of this article, which discusses how translations of literature contribute to the creation of national culture. What interests me is how certain literary devices in Heinesen’s works tend to alter through translation. In order to do this, I study how translations deal with literary devices such as effet de réel and metonymic gaps, and how concepts like double articulation and multilingualism contribute to broadening our understanding of the consequences of translation strategies. In addition to interlingual translation, intralingual translation is also at play, and the latter affects the literariness of Heinesen’s work, its narratology, characters and cultural setting.

Apart from short stays in Denmark and various other trips abroad, Heinesen spent the whole of his life in Tórshavn on the Faroe Islands. His father’s first language was Faroese and his mother’s was Danish. The family spoke Danish at home, as was often the case in Tórshavn in those days. Faroese is a West Scandinavian language that is spoken and written today by the almost 50,000 inhabitants of the Faroes, a self-governing part of Denmark, according to the Danish Parliament’s Home Rule Act of 1948. At the beginning of the 20th century, the overriding ideological and cultural issue in the islands was that of language. The notion that Danish was the language that had to be used in all official matters and as the language of instruction was challenged by the fact that Faroese was the spoken language and the language of the common people, and that it had been for centuries.

1 A version of the article without the discussion about literary terms was published in Knudsen: 2012.
The Faroese national movement began in the middle of the 19th century. It became more outspoken among Faroese students in Copenhagen in 1876 when they began to write songs in Faroese (praising the Faroese landscape) and founded the first Faroese association. The movement was introduced at a meeting in Tórshavn on Boxing Day, 1888, and this led to the founding of Føringafélag, the Faroese Association, in January 1889. The common aim was to put the Faroese language, and particularly the written language, on the agenda. A student of theology, V. U. Hammershaimb, created the written language in 1846. Writing in Faroese was for many years chiefly used for recording the oral poetry and storytelling tradition, but towards the end of the century, written Faroese also came to be used to discuss the topics and problems of the time in literary journals and newspapers. Faroese was strongly influenced by Danish, and as a result of the language purism that developed from the nationalist movement of the 19th century, it was considered important to separate Faroese from Danish as much as possible. This was achieved, for example, via the removal or translation of Danish and English loanwords. Since the end of the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st, there has been something of a shift in attitudes and nowadays more loanwords are accepted. This is evident in the foreign language dictionaries published in the 1990s.

As for the development of the Faroese nationalist movement, at the very beginning of the 20th century the discussions about Faroese language and culture led to the establishment of the first political parties. The very names of the first political parties show that the main issue was the country’s relationship to Denmark: Sambandsfólkur, the Unionist Party, was founded in 1906, and Sjálvstýrisfólkur, the Self-Government Party, started its activities the same year. In the following decades, until the outbreak of the Second World War, the establishment of a literature in Faroese was a central issue, despite the fact that Faroese was not a full subject on the school curriculum and therefore most people did not write Faroese. However, the first authors to write in Faroese emerged in the 1870s, and from the end of the 19th century, people started to publish texts in Faroese. Some of the first Faroese-language authors had attended

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2 WEST: 1972.

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Translations of William Heinesen

Faroaya Fólkaháskúla, which was established in 1899 and was the first institution to teach Faroese reading and writing. In 1938, Faroese was allowed in the schools and it was included in the school curriculum. The Home Rule Act of 1948 states that Faroese is the main language in the country alongside Danish, which has to be taught thoroughly.

The author

William Heinesen was one of the two great Danish-language Faroese authors in the first part of the 20th century. The other was Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen (1900–1938), who posthumously published the beloved historical novel, Barbara (1939), which experienced something of a renaissance following Danish film director Niels Malmros’ 1997 film. In contrast to Jacobsen, who died prematurely, William Heinesen was fortunately able to create a broad body of work. Public recognition of this work in the Faroes, however, came late. On the one hand, some people would not read his writings because they were written in Danish. Further, Heinesen’s books were not included in the teaching of literature in schools: the Faroese teachers felt that as the works were in Danish, they should form part of the Danish syllabus, whereas the Danish teachers felt that as Heinesen was a Faroese author, his works belonged to that subject. In her investigation into the author’s position in education, sixth-form teacher Ann Ellefsen concludes that Heinesen did not appear on the curriculum for Faroese lessons until after 1950. Just prior to this, six of his novels and one collection of short stories were published in Faroese to mark Heinesen’s 75th birthday and he was made a freeman of the city of Tórshavn.

Translation concepts

In the translations of Heinesen’s novels and short stories, which are the subject of this article, not only interlingual, but also intralingual and cultural translation are at work. Intralingual translation is a concept put forward by Roman Jakobson that describes the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language. An example of similar phenomenon to what takes place in translations of Heinesen’s novels can be found in literary works written in Québec French; here, English

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5 ELLEFSEN: 1994, 133–163.
6 JAKOBSON: 2006, 331.
words and sentences appearing within the French text are translated into English in a way that makes the bilingual character of the source text disappear. Intralingual translation corresponds to a certain extent to what anthropologists call “cultural translation”: it is what happens alongside linguistic translation when one describes the behaviour and thoughts of foreigners to people in one’s own culture and does this by means of comparisons and allusions to that culture. In the Faroese translations of Heinesen’s works that appeared in the 1970s, intralingual as well as cultural translation are both at play. Some of the translators’ choices seem to have been based upon implicit evaluations of the potential readers’ cultural backgrounds; other translation choices seem to be connected with language politics and thus led to the production of translations that corresponded to the dominant ideas of linguistic purity that were part of the nationalist ideology of the time.

The function of multilingualism in Heinesen’s texts is often an effet de reel (“effect of reality”), a concept originated by Roland Barthes. The concept concerns, as he argues:

notations which are left out of structural analysis, either because its inventory omits all details that are “superfluous” (in relation to structure) or because these same details are treated as “filling” (cataphases), assigned an indirect functional value insofar as, cumulatively, they constitute some index of character or atmosphere and so can ultimately be recuperated by structure.

This article will show how the translators’ choices sometimes take away the effect of reality and sometimes affect the characterology and the narratology of Heinesen’s novels.

Post-colonial study concepts

The Faroese language in William Heinesen’s texts is evident even in his earliest writings. In the poem “Det glade Træ” (“The Happy Tree”), from the 1924 volume Høibjergning ved Havet (“Harvesting by the Sea”), the word Groejeir-Nat is a compound of the Faroese word groðrarveður (“growing weather”) and the Danish word nat (“night”):

Vi gaar omkring I den lysende Vaar, 
vi ser dig straaale, du glade Træ, 
vi ved jo, du skære Groejeirs-Nat, 
at du har lindring for hver en Kval.

We are walking about in the brightening spring/we see how you beam, you happy tree/we know, you gleaming growing weather night/that you relieve every agony.

In the context of the poem, the “growing weather night“, Groejeir-Nat, designates the quality of a specific type of weather. However, the first part of the Danish word works as a metonymy – it is a Faroese-looking word instead of a Danish word. This opens up into a broader Faroese cultural and linguistic context. In Danish, groejeir is hardly a common concept, whereas grødevejr is listed in dictionaries and covers the same phenomenon. W. D. Ashcroft has coined the term “metonemic gap” for this kind of double articulation. In the gap between the Faroese concept of “growing weather” and the Danish word in the poem with no immediate parallel, a set of oppositions emerges between Faroese and Danish that refers to the relationship between the Faroes and Denmark in terms of language, culture and politics. The uncommon but completely understandable Danish term Groejeir in a poem in Danish by an author who speaks and writes in Faroese and Danish might tease Danish readers. At the same time, Faroese readers might be delighted about finding a Faroese-looking word in a Danish context – it is very similar to what Homi Bhabha says about double articulation and mimicry.

Heinesen’s novel Det gode háb (“The Good Hope”) especially contains plenty of metonymic gaps and thus demonstrates the hybrid language of the author; it is also the only novel by Heinesen that is not translated into Faroese. Det gode háb is set in the 17th century and is written in a fictitious “departmental” style of Danish that includes Faroese place names rendered in Danish. Moreover, there are several examples of Faroese words and wordings rendered as they are without explanation.

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8 Liehnhardt: 1993. Here from ASAD: 1986, 142: “the problem of describing to others how members of a remote tribe think […] begins to appear largely as one of translation, of making the coherence primitive thought has in the languages it really lives in, as clear as possible in our own.”
11 Word-by-word translation by Malan Marnersdóttir.
14 Bhabha 2004: 122.
metonymic gaps and double articulations in Heinesen’s poems and prose are effects of his poetic use of language, which also function as a reference to the linguistic hegemony of Danish on the Faroe Islands and in Faroese culture. The metonymic gaps demonstrate the creative power of the Faroese language in a Danish context.

The linguistic impurity of novels

The presence in a text of more than one language challenges the traditional preconception that a good text is written in one single language. The first question is, of course, if there is such a thing as one single language in a work of literature, especially in novels. Historically, the preconception that texts should be written in only one language is repudiated by the fact that in medieval literature texts written in the vernacular were interspersed with Latin words and sentences. Mikhail Bakhtin writes about heteroglossea in novels, which he links with the novel’s lack of a generic. In translation studies, the phenomenon of multiple languages being present in a text is labelled multilingualism, whereas Ashcroft’s metonymic gap and Bhabha’s double articulation are terms used in post-colonial studies. The double articulations and metonymic gaps in Heinesen’s works emerge from compound or hybrid language. Instead of the rather downbeat expression »hybrid«, John Mitchinson has proposed a more productive term: compound language shows the synergy of two languages at play – in this case, Faroese and Danish. In contrast to »hybrid«, which indicates some kind of defect, »synergy« indicates that the languages in question work together to produce results greater than the sum of the effects of each language on its own. This is exactly what is at play in Heinesen’s texts – they show how Faroese and Danish work together to create a surplus of meaning. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the Canadian poet and translator E. D. Blodgett suggests that the otherness and alienation created by multilingualism should be preserved through translation.

Therefore, it is interesting to look at how such multilingual texts are translated. The translation scholar Rainier Grutman states that »minority

writers also resort to multilingualism in order to convey the linguistic heterogeneity of their speech communities (...) [underlining] their dependence on the culture(s) that surround them. For most of Heinesen’s lifetime, the surrounding culture was the Danish culture – the great opponent in the struggle to create and promote a Faroese culture. During this period, Faroese was transformed from an unofficial language that was hardly ever written to the official spoken and written language of the islands. In fact, by the end of the 20th century Faroese literature had become monolingual.

The translation of the novel Noatun

Heinesen’s novel, Noatun, which was published by Gyldendal in Copenhagen in 1938, appeared in a Faroese translation by Áshild Olsen in 1975. In the early 20th century, Faroese place names on maps were rendered in Danish. Place names which appear in the novel – such as Urefeld, Kvanfjeldskleven and Kyrrevig are »taken back« to their Faroese forms: Uðarféll (»Scree Mountain«), Hvannaldalskvíð (»Angelica Valley Clef«), Kyrrevík (»Calm Bay«). These are not real place names, but hvannadalur, kleiv and kyrk occur in several Faroese place names. The names of the characters, however, follow the age-old Danish naming customs that were still observed in the Faroes at the time the novel was written. The novel’s characters have names like Niels Peter, Ole Órnberg and Frederik; these are not translated into the dominant forms of these male names used on the Faroe Islands today: Pétur, Óli and Fríðrikur.

The leitmotif of the novel, the folk song »Jernvængha« (about a ship called »The Iron Bay«), which is sung and danced to on several occasions throughout the course of the novel, is retained in Danish in the Faroese edition. Some of the more modern songs that the characters sing and to which they refer stay in Danish in the translation, such as Frederik’s song »Farvel, Farvel« (»Goodbye, Goodbye«). Other songs are translated into Faroese, like Ole Órnberg’s song, »Når væren kommer« (»When Spring Comes«), which is translated into »Tá várið kemur við treysti«.

17 BAKHTIN: 1981.
18 MITCHELIN: 2012, 222.
19 MEZEI: 1988, 12.
21 MARNERSDÓTTIR: forthcoming.
22 WEYHE: 2012.
24 HEINESEN: 1951, 56, and HEINESEN: 1975a, 68.
The translation of popular songs takes away a potential reality effect. Reproduced in Danish in the Faroese translation of the book, the mere language of the song would have rendered the realism of the novel. In the novel there is a newspaper called Budstikken (»fiery cross«; »message«), which is rendered with the name of a real contemporary Faroese newspaper, Tingakrossur. The Faroese translation happens to be the literal translation of the Danish word. The Noatun translation also has a very rare Danicism among the Heinesen translations: the word forbanned (»damned«) is translated as forbidd. Faroese language purism actively sought to erase Danish words with a German prefix like this from the language.

To sum up, the translation of Noatun has retained some of Heinesen's compound language and in doing so it sets itself apart from the other translations of his works. In the Faroese translation, the text »Jernvågen« points to fact that an important part of the old ballad and dance tradition is in Danish. The ballad text quoted in the novel is a piece of genuine Faroese folklore. However, it is not quite the same after all. The difference is the meaning the quotations create. What is not a metonymy gap in the source text, where it is just another song, is a genuine metonymic gap in the target text – a gap between the linear text and the meaning that emerges out of the code switch from Faroese to Danish. Other metonymic gaps and the double articulations, such as place names and ballad text in Faroese, however, have changed into single articulations in pure Faroese and thus lost their additional significance.

The translation of the novel Blæsende gry

The Faroese translation of Noatun is an example how to maintain a hint of double articulation in the translation into the language that creates the multilingualism in the source text. The second and revised edition of Heinesen's novel Blæsende gry was translated into Faroese as Degningsvindar (»Winds of Dawn«) by professor of the Faroese language and poet, Dr Christian Matras. Matras did not keep hymns and poems quoted in the novel in Danish but translated them all. The novel is written in keeping with realist aesthetics while containing a touch of folklore. It is set in the 1920s, when Danish was still both the official language on the islands and the language of faith in the Lutheran Church. Therefore, the texts of the church – as hymns, Bible and rituals – were in Danish. At one point in the novel, the churchgoers sing Thomas Kingo's »Vågn op og slå på dine strenge« (»Awake and Strike the Strings«). In the Faroese translation of the novel, the hymn is translated into »Vakna, triv i strengjatolj«. Here the translation misses an opportunity to create a reality effect in the source text. By maintaining the hymn in Danish, a moment of double articulation would have been represented. Matras' translation of Blæsende gry is similar to what Kathy Mezei in a Québec context calls: a subtle subversion of Quebec culture in that the use of English in speech acts, phrases, words, dialogue in French-language poems, plays, or novels is rarely acknowledged in the target or receptor text. Yet for the author of the original text, this English usage was intended as a highly symbolic signifier. In Heinesen's text, the quotes in Danish are highly symbolic signifiers which the translation does not acknowledge, thus depriving the Faroese text of significance. The Faroese translations transform Heinesen's works into acts of interlingual translation. Christian Matras translated several of Thomas Kingo's hymns. He translated »Sørreg og glæde« (»Sorrow and Joy«) in 1921 and »Far, Verden, far vel« (»Fare, World, Farewell«) in 1929, both of which were included in the Faroese hymn book in 1960. Christian Matras' translation of »Vågn op og slå på dine Strenge« is not listed in his bibliography. Probably Matras translated the hymn during the work on Blæsende gry.

In Blæsende gry the refrain of a folk song about Charlemagne's battle in Roncesvalles in the year 778 is sung. This features in a whole cycle of ballads about him. In the source text the refrain is in Danish with unmistakable Faroese elements, for instance the place name Runseval, for Roncesvalles: »They ride out of France with the dear maid in the saddle/ blow the horn of Olivant in Roncesvalles.« In the target text the refrain

26 HEINESEN: 1951, 56, and HEINESEN: 1973a, 68.
is, naturally, if I may say so, translated back into Faroese. We could say that the refrain’s «otherness» — potentially evident in the source text — has been domesticated in the translation.

Christian Matras was one of the authorities in the language debate from the middle of the 20th century. The author Hans Andreassen (Hanus Kamban) characterised him as a translator thus:

As a translator, Christian Matras often chose not to use common European loanwords, but instead created new words. (...) Through his translations he passed on part of his immeasurable knowledge about Faroese; knowledge that we otherwise would have missed.

This is in keeping with the characteristic purist language policy of the period.

Attacks on characterology

The tendency to eliminate double articulation, metonymic gaps and multilingualism is intensified in the translation of the mythical novel, Moder Syestjerne (Mother Pleiade). It was the realist author, Heðinn Brú (1901–1987), known for his particularly fine use of written Faroese, who translated the novel in 1975. The translation of Moder Syestjerne transfers the text into an «uncontaminated» Faroese that is characterised by large omissions that particularly involve allusions to Central European culture, mythology and history. The Greek prophetesses, the Sibyls, are replaced by Norse röður (Danish vælker), seeresses. The foreign word, dityrambisk («dithyrambic»), used to describe the rapturous chattering of the main character, Antonia, to her little son, is translated with ovurkaeti — delight. In itself, the translation is correct, but Heinesen wrote dityrambiske tilstande («dithyrambic conditions») and not, for example, henrykte tilstande («delighted conditions»). Following this, a long passage containing what Antonia says to her son is omitted in the translation.

TRANSLATIONS OF WILLIAM HEINESEN

omitted piece of text is characterised by geometric and mathematic concepts, foreign place names, fantastic metaphors, names from art history and the Bible. However, this piece of text has been translated into a number of other languages — for instance into English:

You are my loveliest tangent, you are my square, you are the hypotenuse that's the sum of the squares on all the right-angled sides! You are my Lucidarius, my old book of knowledge, my Copernicus and Newton! Yes, you are my Isaac Newton, my beloved Isaac Newton, for I've always loved Newton and will always love both Kepler and Newton as well as Galileo. Oh, you, my Leaning Tower of Pisa, if only you need never collapse and go through the realm of death and rise again and sing your song to the lamb and the throne. (...) Ah, you my press, my wine press, my tear press. Then press, my Persian press, drink of the white juice of the press, drink of the Persian sea. Yes, turn and twist your way through life with those tiny hands that are like sweet-smelling rosebuds, like love-struck lettuce and sprouts, or like Michelangelo Buonarroti! You, you, my Buonarroti, my angel of life, you crazy thing, you gift from Moses and Pharaoh and Potiphar's wife and the heavenly king Jesus Christ! You chirrup, up, up.

In the novel, the narrator makes a point of explaining how it came to be that Antonia is capable of delivering such a learned passage: «From her exquisite linguistic ability, it is clear from her exquisite use of language that she has gone through school and knows geometric formulae.»

Both the English and the Faroese translation omit the concrete level of her qualifications. Actually, in the original she has passed the final school exam, which the term realeksamen makes clear. This exam was the highest educational qualification available at the Faroese school at

33 Heinesen: 1976; 46.
34 Sum umsetari hevur CM sum oftast valt ikki at bruka følgeseuropeisk fremmand-orð, men í stálin firi at bróta upp úr nýggjum málslíga. (...) Níður í sínum týðingar hevur ham felt ein part av sinum ómetalga stóra kunnlíka til fóruvísst, sum vit annars helst høvda noyðst at veri fyrirtan.» (Anderssen: 1980).
36 Heinesen: 1992, II.
39 »tad skilt av ordalagun at hon hevur nitt sina skulalitö völ og er bókliga vitandi» (Heinesen: 1952, 11).
the beginning of the 20th century, when the novel is set. The English translation does, however, let Antonia have her geometric knowledge—something that is omitted in the Faroese translation. Firstly, the Faroese translation removes the speech itself, with its many scholarly expressions. Secondly, the translation hides the fact that Antonia has passed her final school exams. At the beginning of the 20th century it was unusual for girls to reach that level of education. Therefore, the translation does not just lower the level of Antonia’s education, it also denies her a feminist position and, with the omission of the long and educated speech, renders her a clever, but rather uneducated girl. This act of degrading translation corresponds to the reduction of the setting and the gallery of characters to a lower register in the translation of French-language plays in Québec in Canada.40

Attacks on the narrative discourse

The final example also deals with an omission. It is from the translation of the novel Tårnet ved verdens ende (»The Tower at the Edge of the World«), which was published simultaneously with the original version in 1976. The translator was Hans Thomesen, who received a literary prize for translating this work by Heinesen, along with books by other authors. The example is from the chapter, »The Words:«

Words come drifting along. Or they come falling gently. Or they settle on the window-panes like raindrops or ice-flowers.

Words are like flower bulbs in glasses, covered by brown paper cones. One day the paper cones are removed and the sweet-smelling hyacinths and tulips are on their way.

Hyacinth and Tulip are the most beautiful of words. You cannot get tired of saying them and playing with them. Tulip-Hyacinth-Tulicinth-Cinthilip-Tuliby.41

The source text is highly poetic. It describes the fascinating character of words. The boy sees them as things in space, creates similes, and ends by playing with the sound of the words by interchanging the syllables, which creates new nonsense words. The text is beautifully translated up until the last section, which leaves the text deprived of showing what the boy and the novel actually do with language.42 Hyacinths and tulips are imported flowers and imported words that have maintained their original names in Faroese. This, however, is not such a straightforward business. In the 1998 edition of the Faroese dictionary, Føroysk orðabók, tulip (Far. tulípán) is listed as both a feminine and masculine noun. The translator selected the masculine form (tulípán, sg.; tulípanarnir, pl.) over the more widespread feminine form (tulípán, sg.; tulípaní, pl.). Perhaps this is why the speech at the end of the quotation is omitted. The masculine »ur« ending would have worked poorly, while the feminine form would have fitted excellently into the pattern: Tulípán-Hyacinth-Tulicinth-Sintipán-Tuliby!

As in Moder Syvstjerne, a whole speech is omitted—here one containing sound-play with flower names. The translation has removed the novel’s »showing«, so that only the »telling« remains—i.e. the translation attacks the novel’s narrative discourse just as it did with Antonia’s characterology.

The reception of Heinesen’s translated works

One should suspect that the literary event of publishing seven of Heinesen’s works would have resulted in lots of reviews. This was not the case. One Faroese newspaper mentioned the event and two critical comments appeared in Faroese magazines published in Denmark. Both magazines, Oyggjaskeggí and Framin, were a kind of diaspora journal published by more-or-less left-wing students in Copenhagen. In Oyggjaskeggí (»Islanders«), the psychology student, singer and songwriter Kári Petersen was not pleased with the translations:

For one, they have lost much of his [Heinesen’s] personal character and humorous style with their solemn language. It ought to have been a requirement that the translator understands the basic elements of the author’s symbolism: the theme from »Now the bridge is falling down« is of fundamental importance for the understanding of Heinesen’s novel, Den sorte gyde (with its title’s reference to »he who comes last, i.e. the social losers«).43 The Faroese title is I sortianum [»In the Black«], a name which means nothing. I must therefore ask

40 BRISSET 2004.
43 The title, Den sorte gyde (»The Black Cauldron«), comes from the last line of the children’s song »Now the Bridge is Falling Down«: »He who comes the last of all/Ends in the deep black cauldron« (HEINESEN: 1992, 248); Marnersdóttir’s comment.
whether Heinesen had as little to say as Camus about the fact that L'étranger (which symbolically refers to someone who is alienated in the existential sense) was incorrectly translated as Fremmandamúðurin (»The Foreigner«).  

In the radical left-wing magazine, Framin (»For the Benefit«), sociology student and later Social Democrat member of the Faroese parliament and social minister, Hans Pauli Strøm, wrote ironically about the translations. Strøm’s argument was that the translations would allow a Faroese audience to know Heinesen’s foreign points of views in his novels. Petersen and Strøm’s comments appeared in reviews of a book by Henrik Ljunghberg about Heinesen’s novels. These argumentative evaluations of the translations were met with a very positive one in the nationalist republican newspaper, 14. september. The teacher and author, Ólavur Michelsen, writing about the translation of Tårnet ved verdens ende (»The Tower at the End of the World«), commented that the translator »not only demonstrates an understanding of the language, but also of Heinesen’s style. William Heinesen loses nothing in Hans Thomsen’s translation.«  

It is obvious that the evaluation is not based on a comparison of the original and the translated texts. Two years later Hans Thomsen won Tórshavn City Council’s literature prize for his many translations, and The Tower at the End of the World was specifically named in the reasoning for the award.

New translations

The grand translation project to mark Heinesen’s 75th birthday in 1975 produced seven works by six translators. The work on the project began two years before Heinesen’s birthday, initiated by the late enterprising

businessman, Emil Thomsen (1915-2012). The marketing of the books was extensive. In the sales literature, two of the translators, Christian Matras and Heðin Brú, together with other established authors and artists, put forward their reasons why it was important to provide Faroese readers with Heinesen’s works in their own language. There was, however, no thorough editing of the translations beyond the usual corrections. Without a doubt, the translations display a fine and beautiful use of purist Faroese. Nevertheless, it is clear that they leave much to be desired in terms of their level of artistry and the integrity of the texts. As shown in this article, several translations of the novels attack Heinesen’s narratology and characterology. The texts’ intellectual and cultural dimensions often disappear. However, Noatun is the exception; the creation of the Faroese »other« in the source texts corresponds in Noatun with the inclusion of Danish passages and individual Danish words.

As a whole, the Heinesen translations are characterised by the fact that they were part of a post-colonial translation project, which transformed the Faroese-Danish lingual synergy into pure Faroese. By consequence, allusions to ancient Greek mythology and European scientific history had no part to play. The deletion of the multilingualism and suppressing of original metonymic gaps make the texts simpler, less ambiguous and thus significantly poorer. The target text loses important signifying dimensions. There is, therefore, a need for new translations of Heinesen’s novels and for these to be undertaken with a less purist and domesticating post-colonial approach that respects the text as »Other«.

45 According to information from Áshild Olsen, the translator of Noatun and the wife of the publisher, 20.9.2010.