The Reykjavík Grapevine
Issue 13 — 2010

Three hundred and fifty thousand, seven hundred and fourteen verses. Twenty lines per verse, and every line follows the rhyme with the one that follows it. That’s how long Andeg Gheorghe’s poem is. It’s almost four times longer than the Mahabharata of ancient In- dia. Forty times longer than The Thal and The Odyssey combined and twenty times longer than Dante’s Divine Com-edy.

It’s (appropriately) called The Longest Poem in the World and it’s com- posed by aggregating real-time public tweets and selecting those that rhyme. Every day the poem grows longer by about 4,000 verses. Some of it sounds funny (“Playing hide and seek at the park. :) / Waiting on Heather and trying to pick up, and yet Sigurjón strives to keep up appearances.”).

The book also includes a few pro- files of semi-prominent Reykjavík par- ents, who describe their approach to- with their kids in ways that range from honest to slightly vacuous. The book’s English translation and proofreading is imperfect—not to spoil the translation, but enough to make it read a bit awkward (in one great blip, we’re told about an astrol- ogy club which meets at the telescope in Seltjarnarnes). Also, the English usu- ally translates only a part of the origi- nal text, making the English entries markedly shorter than their Icelandic counterparts on the page.

One of the most relevant pieces of the emptiness that envelopes our lives. The poem consists of what hun- dreds of thousands of (not millions) of people deemed most worthy to commu- nicate with the world and their friend- s on a green screen (in real time). And it rhymes, which somehow accentuates the inherent silliness of this deranged and disturbing poem.

I don’t blame twitter. The results would probably have been the same (or worse) if the material had been small- talk in person. Offline. And I’m not sure my own haemorrhoids and/or small-talk would’ve been any more interesting.

Yet perhaps the sensation it evokes is false—not based in the reality it stems from. Perhaps the world is not as empty and meaningless as The Longest Poem in the World makes it seem. Perhaps these lines of poetry — these bits of small-talk — are beautiful and filled with meaning when experienced in their natural habitat.

The soldiers in Homer’s Odyssey were never turned into swine. Not re- ally. We mean. We suspend disbelief and accept the non-relation to reality might follow a universal theme that could probably be translated and understood in any language.

That said, I have to admit that although Sigurjón’s fate is tragic, I don’t feel for him very much. Perhaps it is one of the traits of the epic that the narra- tor seems to hold the reader at arm’s length, creating distance between read- er and character. Perhaps this is what Sigurjón’s book is about. It’s not just because I found Sigurjón’s character to be self-centred, nasty and extremely dislikeable. And rather than criticizing the English trans- lation, we should probably be glad that we have the option to read it (2,691 kr. at Bóksala stúdenta) is a reasonable price. Yes, I must admit that although The Longest Poem in the World seems. Perhaps these lines of poetry — these bits of small-talk — are beautiful and filled with meaning when experienced in their natural habitat.

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