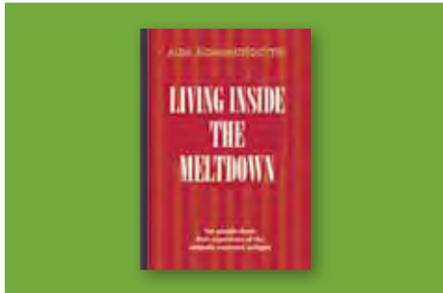


Books | Review

Living Inside the Meltdown

by Alda Sigmundsdóttir

Self-published. Available from
www.icelandweatherreport.com



Here is a short book, available only in electronic format, which presents eight interviews with ten people who tell their story of Iceland's economic collapse. We meet a couple who made some unfortunate real estate transactions, a student who was abroad during the collapse, a policeman who served during the demonstrations at parliament in January 2009, a half-Icelandic couple who moved back in 2007, two Portuguese immigrants, the owner of a small import business, a retired building supplies wholesaler, and an investment advisor at Íslandsbanki (a.k.a. Glitnir).

You can read this book in an hour or so. The interviews are interesting, though short. Icelanders are often more open in print than they would be in person. You won't get a detailed sense of Iceland's economic breakdown from this book but you will get an impression.

Alda Sigmundsdóttir took and edited the interviews and writes a brief introduction. For the last few years she has run a fine blog called the Iceland Weather Report, which makes good reading for those looking for updates about Iceland in English.

The book isn't available in print and doesn't have an ISBN number, but you can buy it (which means, get a URL which lets you download it as a PDF) from her blog website for \$24.99. Alda makes a plea on the website and in the book to respect her copyright and not read bootleg copies of the PDF. This is all good, but it raises a few issues.

One is whether it's OK to read the book, then pass it on to someone else and delete it from your computer. Alda doesn't give any clear guidance on this, but I'd say yes (as long as you really do delete it from your computer), along the same lines as that it's OK to resell a regular old paper book after you read it.

Another is that this book contains 91 pages of text, which means it's priced at \$0.27 per page. That's a lot, especially when you consider that longer e-books sell for \$10 on Amazon and you can buy a good song online (and play it over and over) for less than a dollar. One wants Alda to be compensated for her efforts, which are valiant and sincere. But people who are already overwhelmed with content, much of it free (including the nine volumes on the economic collapse from the government's truth commission) need a very compelling reason to justify spending twenty-five bucks on even a very sincerely produced ninety-one page PDF.

I wonder if Alda could do as well or better by reducing the price to well under \$10 and using a sales portal like lulu.com that would allow her to offer the book in paper form as well. As is, I think Living Inside the Meltdown just costs too much. That isn't a judgement about Alda's skills as a writer and editor, but rather a reminder of how complicated it is to find workable publishing models in the age of the Internet. **✂ - IAN WATSON**

Opinion | Rebecca Louder

The Art Of Sleep
The most underrated activity in Iceland

 As I walk to work every morning, I never cease to be amused by the people on Laugavegur. There are two kinds, really. First there are the people who clearly live here, who are going to work, walking at a steady pace with a cigarette or coffee. Typical.

Then you have the group of North Face-clad, up-and-at-'em camera-clutchers who really want to get a head start on their day. Invariably, they wind up looking completely befuddled and dismayed at the lack of anything being open at the crack of 9:30. That's what nobody tells you before coming here: everything starts really, really late! Stores don't open before 10, at the earliest, and most restaurants only start polishing the silverware around 11. Unless these tourists have an early morning day trip booked or are only coming back from last night's party, they should still be in bed.

A good friend recently came to visit me on her two-week long vacation from work. She had no particular plans for her stay here and just wanted to experience life in the city and take in some of the natural beauty of the countryside. While I would get up early and head down to work, she was still sleeping like a cat on opium on the couch. For the first few days of her visit, she shamefully admitted that she kept sleeping until noon. She also quickly realised that walking around the city in the morning was essentially pointless, since there is pretty much nothing to do. I thought this was a perfectly reasonable, considering it's rare that she could sleep in on a Monday, Tuesday AND Wednesday in a row. I was completely jealous.

And what better way to spend ones vacation really? Many cultures regard sleep as a flagrant indulgence that flouts convention and shows a lack of responsibility or work ethic. To this I say boo-urns! Sleep is a vital function that allows the body to regenerate and the mind to defragment, allowing a person to be happier and more productive in their waking life. Most of us, with our fast-paced, overworked lives, would not turn down an extra few hours of sleep each night. Why shouldn't we then qualify unrestricted sleep as a legitimate form of vacationing?

There is so much pressure whenever you go on a holiday to "make the most" of the time at your destination—meaning get your lazy bum out of bed—but this might be the only little time you get off work all year to rest and recuperate. The fact that everything opens so late in this country permits one to turn off their alarm and get some extra sleep, guilt free. While some visitors may find Reykjavik's lack of punctuality a frustrating cock-block to their travel plans, I suggest they try to appreciate the alternative. **✂**

Poetry | Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl

Cotery Poelumn: Pwoermds

 It's a poetic mouthful—a hard-to-perform sound poem in its own right—"pwoermd". When you Google it the machine asks if you meant "powermad" and you're half inclined to say "yes I am, what are you gonna do about it?"

beautyfault (Karri Kokko)
fjshjng (Geof Huth)
breathrough (Christopher Rizzo)
llyllylly (mIEKAL aND & Geof Huth)
eyeye (Aram Saroyan)

It's the new new in poetry. The new black. Yet since poetry, like infants, needs an entire childhood and adolescence before reaching young adulthood—the mere concept is already 23 years old (whereas, per usual, the practice is as old as language itself—in fact, it's probably how language was made). Coined in 1987 by entrepreneur Geof Huth, "pwoermd" is a combination (obviously!) of the two four-letter words "poem" and "word".

One of the first instances of public notoriety for pwoermds—the "obscenity trial" that made 'em famous (with no tabloid interest since the 1800s, poetry wouldn't have survived without its obscenity trials)—was when Aram Saroyan (son of William) typed the infamous "lighght." Saroyan was a 22 year old fan of dada and concrete poetry and had started working on one-word poems that, instead of requiring a "reading process," simply happened in an instant, a single moment. No subject-verb-object; no meenie, minie, moe; no ifs or buts or even abouts.

Lighght was first published in The Chicago

Review in 1965 and in 1969 it was included in the second volume of The American Literary Anthology—whereupon the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) awarded it the same sum as any other poem in the book: 750 dollars. Which makes about 5,200 dollars at current value (104,000 times what I make per word). For a single poem. Consisting of a single word.

Whoa!

Taxpayers were incensed. The government could not afford to cut taxes but they could afford to pay beatnik weirdos exorbitant amounts of money for writing one word "and not even spelling it right"? The American right—congressmen, voters and bureaucrats—had a full-on hissy-fit, with mailbags upon mailbags of rage arriving in Washington. The NEA was made to answer on Capitol Hill, the Republican Party used the opportunity to squeeze the NEA and as late as 1981 Ronald Reagan was still citing Saroyan's poem as a reason for the abolition of government funding for the arts.

The shortest poem I know is Steve McCaffery's "William Tell: A Novel". It is simply a lowercase "i" with an extra dot over the dot. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, however, the shortest poem is one by Charles Chigna entitled "I" (uppercase)—which goes "Why?" But neither constitutes a pwoermd as they are both dependent on their titles—and are thereby a process and not an instant.

Like writing any poetry, writing pwoermds is basically easy while writing good pwoermds is somehow miraculous. To a reader of pwoer-

mds they all seem very interesting at first, but the more you read the higher your standards become and the more it takes to surprise you, to create that prodigious instant which blows you away and leaves you "discombobulated". Which incidentally is a "normal word"—a nwoor-mad!—and not a pwoermd. **✂**



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