



## Trilogie : Hemel en hel ~ Het verdriet van de engelen ~ Het hart van de mens

*Jón Kalman Stefánsson , Marcel Otten (Translator)*

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Nu in één band: de drie prachtige romans van de IJslandse Jón Kalman Stéfansson over de naamloze jongen: *Hemel en hel*, *Het verdriet van de engelen* en *Het hart van de mens*.

Twee vrienden, Bardur en de jongen, gaan vissen op zee. Wanneer ze worden overvallen door een storm raakt Bardur onderkoeld en sterft. Op zoek naar een manier om dit verlies te verwerken besluit de jongen op reis te gaan. Wanneer hij na vele omzwervingen weer terugkeert in het dorp, merkt hij dat hij is veranderd. Hij laat zich niet meer zo door anderen leiden, neemt zijn eigen beslissingen en is vastbesloten te kiezen voor de liefde. Jón Kalman Stefánsson is een van de grootste schrijvers van deze tijd. Hij won de IJslandse literatuurprijs en de Per Olov Enquistprijs. Hij werd genomineerd voor de Nordic Council Literature Prize.

## **Trilogie : Hemel en hel ~ Het verdriet van de engelen ~ Het hart van de mens Details**

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## **From Reader Review Trilogie : Hemel en hel ~ Het verdriet van de engelen ~ Het hart van de mens for online ebook**

### **Martijntje says**

Het is net poëzie, dit boek. Maar zwart. Somber. Ik vrees dat ik deel 2 en 3 maar laat liggen.

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### **Margreeth Wallast says**

Een somber, zwaarmoedig en traag boek. Wel mooie sfeertekening van IJslandse cultuur

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### **Ronny says**

Dik 900 blz puur slow-reading leesgenot. Zo ongeveer het mooiste dat ik al gelezen heb.

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### **Marianne Stranden says**

Marvelous, sensitive, poetic, everything you could wish from a book!

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### **Jon Vegard says**

Fin bok, men litt luftig og store ord innimellom som gjer det litt vanskeleg å henge med for ein enkel sjel som meg.

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### **Jessica says**

This is definately a book (trilogy) that I will read again. If only for the dreamy, fairytale-like prose. Reading this book is like an oasis of quiet in (my) busy life, and with beautiful sentences. But the story is compelling too, you want to know, to understand..

No further words needed, just read it.

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### **Vibeke says**

So many emotions. Perspectives on life and humanity weaved into the harsh life of this boy on Iceland. The author manages to show life's beauty and terror in one story. Poetic. Best book I've read. Ever.

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## Cecily says

This is one novel in three parts. One of the most powerful, beautiful, and unusual novels I have read. It is a poetic paean to the power of words and to the desire to live. It tells of the perilous journeys, on sea and land, of a book-loving "boy" of nineteen, with no family or home. The environment is beautiful, but unforgiving. In this white landscape, a century ago, the dark shadow of death is all around.

My reviews of the individual parts are somewhat elliptical and impressionistic, especially the middle one (see links, below). This is a more conventional, unemotional, and less interesting(!) record of the setting, plot, characters, themes, and unusual narrative style. For numerous quotes, to give a flavour of the beautiful writing, see my individual reviews.

### What Sort of Book?

Labels could include: philosophical, survival, existential, Bildungsroman, and Odyssey.

Themes include: the power of words, life and death, family, friendship, love, change, and feminism. Despite the title of the first part (Heaven and Hell), religious belief is a very minor aspect.

### Narrators

The story is narrated by one(?) of the "bloodless shadows" - dead who are not properly dead, and are unseen and unheard by the living (except for kittens!).

Their explicit mission is to save the world by telling stories such as this. These lives in limbo mostly narrate in conventional ways, so you can almost forget what they are. But the first page or two of each part, and at two or three places inside each one, they explicitly address the reader, as they try to explain themselves.

Nevertheless, this is definitely not a ghost story, or even really a supernatural one.

### Chronology

The story takes place over a few months in the very early days of the twentieth century, in rural Iceland. In the first two parts, you could easily believe it is set much earlier, but the final part has the transformative arrival of things like steam ships and the telephone.

It is broadly chronological, but with little jumps, especially in the third part: something happens, you move to next scene, and then you learn the details of what happened in the previous scene.

### Characters

In addition to the boy, key figures in all three parts include: Bárður the boy's book-loving friend; Kolbeinn, an old captain who has lost his sight and can no longer read his beloved books; Jens, the dedicated but nearly wordless postman; Geirþrúður, a 30-something widow who runs a café and scandalises some by her

independence and refusal to remarry. There are many others, though.

The boy and the village where he settles are anonymous - unique or universal?

### **Three-Volume Novel**

This is not a trilogy; it is a single novel, published in three parts. The first works as a standalone, but the second and third are best read back to back.

#### **1. Heaven and Hell**, reviewed [HERE](#).

A sea journey and a land journey in winter. Both epic and treacherous. In between, the boy spends time in the village, where we meet characters who recur in later parts. The power of words dominates.

#### **2. The Sorrow of Angels**, reviewed [HERE](#).

This starts three weeks later, in the village, followed by another dangerous land journey to deliver post (words). The power of death dominates, and it feels unfinished in a way that Heaven and Hell does not.

#### **3. The Heart of Man**, reviewed [HERE](#).

This starts a few hours later and is set mostly in the village, in summer, with several smaller, but no less significant journeys. The power of life dominates, reflecting the change of season. This does not have a definitive end, but feels more complete.

### **The Ending - no spoilers, though**

Two thirds through the third part, I was worried. It had started as perfectly as the previous part ended, but there had been too much wheeler-dealing and too many feuds, fights, and worse for many pages. It includes three characters who experience non-consensual sex. The incidents are sensitively done (not graphic), and one was almost sweet. But there was mental manipulation in the second case, and gang brutality in the third. They just felt out of place in this world, in this book, which was, of course, precisely the point: it's not just the seasons that changed, but the twentieth century had firmly arrived, and it unsettled the social order. (Of course, such things would have gone on before, as well, but I think they're used here as allegory.)

I wanted a return to bleak beauty. I kept reading. I was not disappointed. The final few pages were mysterious, maybe even miraculous. Certainly open to more than one interpretation. Sublime.

### **Recurring Phrases**

There are recurring ideas and phrases. Sometimes they are repeated verbatim, and other times with slight variations. This is true within and across all three parts. Examples include: "words to change the world", "shoulders of moonlight", "the heart is a muscle", "words can be bullets, but they can also be rescue teams", "dare to live", and "Nothing is sweet to me, without you".

It gives a hypnotic, liturgical, mystical reverence to the words.

But it also demonstrates the opposite of some of the words on the page: "Nothing happens if we always use the same words", such as at a funeral. "Old, dog-eared words of God, those overused, threadbare garments that we still wear because we haven't found others."

### **Dialogue**

The dialogue lacks punctuation, but not clarity. Some people might find it distracting and annoying, but for me, it felt right. In this respect, it reminds me of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (reviewed [HERE](#)).

Just occasionally it is written more like dialogue in a play.

### **Translation**

The power of words, especially written ones is perhaps the strongest theme, “words to change the world”.

Translation is also there: the boy learns to translate Dickens and Shakespeare, amongst others, and later, a contributory factor to some deaths is probably that a foreign captain doesn't understand the storm warning a local gives him.

That is especially pertinent, given that I was reading a translation. The writing is very poetic, and Jon Kalman Stefansson is a poet as well as a novelist, but it's impossible for me to know how much credit goes to him and how much to Philip Roughton, the American translator. It felt natural and effortless and - on the basis of no experience on my part - authentically Icelandic. The only exception was two uses of “plonker” in the very British sense of a fool.

And then there's metaphorical translation (see my individual reviews).

Image source of Landmannalaugar:

<https://www.thecrazytourist.com/wp-co...>

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### **Marjolein says**

Wat een boek... De beschrijvingen zijn als schilderijen, met precies die accenten die ertoe doen. Dromerig en meeslepend. Heerlijk leesvoer.

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### **Joke says**

Drie boeken, ik las ze na elkaar, deze trilogie van samen bijna 1000 bladzijden, van een IJslandse klasse auteur, zo blijkt.

Voor wie houdt van traagheid, mijmeringen, filosofisch denken, mooie woorden, rauwheid en puurheid van de mens, en geen schrik heeft van natuur in al haar kracht.

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