

by Joachim B. Schmidt
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Fiction

We are delighted that this book has now been published in English translation.

Ósmann

Ósmann

review

Joachim B. Schmidt's latest novel is a literary biography of Jón Ósmann (1862–1914), a ferryman who lived in the remote north of Iceland at a time when modernity was beginning to encroach on traditional Icelandic life. Following the success of novels such as Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites* and Sally Magnusson's *The Sealwoman's Gift*, *Ósmann* will satisfy English-speaking readers' continuing enthusiasm for historical fiction set in Iceland.

Ósmann is written in fluid, lyrical prose, and is full of evocative descriptions of the landscape and atmosphere of northern Iceland, as well as the hardships faced by its inhabitants. The protagonist is born in the northern valley of Skagafjörður, and spends his whole life working as a ferryman, taking passengers back and forth across the estuary of the Héraðsvötn, a glacial outflow river. Jón Ósmann is a larger-than-life, almost mythical figure – a head taller than any other man in the valley, a noted glima wrestler, famed for his hospitality and his feats of strength.

The years pass following a predictable routine – summers ferrying passengers across the river, winters hunting seals on the pack ice of the frozen fjord. But there are changes along the way: Ósmann's rowboat is replaced by a cable ferry; the nearby settlement of Krók (Sauðárkrókur) grows into a flourishing trading town; and Iceland gains its independence from Denmark. Ósmann, has various friendships and love affairs over the years but these end in tragedy

and loss. He falls in love with three different women and fathers four children, two of whom die in infancy. One close friend drowns in the river before his eyes, while others choose emigration to North America over a life of adversity in Iceland. Ósmann struggles with alcoholism, and, worn down physically by decades of hard labour and mentally by the many losses he has faced, he ultimately chooses to drown himself in the river he has worked on all his life.

Ósmann's life story is told in a series of vignettes, each set in a different year, by an unnamed narrator. Only in the final chapter is it revealed that the narrator is a ghost, who drowned while fording the river and is visible to only to Ósmann. The narrative structure weaves a thread of myth and mystery through the story and conveys a sense of the passage of time in the valley: long periods of monotony, punctuated by momentous events, against a backdrop of gradual change, and a sense of increasing uncertainty about what is and is not real.

Ósmann is a beautiful and moving literary treat by a hugely talented author.

Find out more:
https://www.diogenes.ch/foreign-rights/titles.html?detail=98eabb13-a4d9-4ce0-bceb-efc78f76f988

press quotes

> *“An incredibly vivid sense of place, and a gifted storyteller.”*

Welt am Sonntag, Berlin

> *“Schmidt reveals himself to be a highly empathetic and skilled narrator with an impressive gift for light humour.”*

Hanspeter Eggenberger / Tages-Anzeiger, Zurich

> *“Joachim B. Schmidt is an ingenious narrator and author who pulls his readers into the action, and gets them involved with his characters and their complex inner lives.”*

Lisa Wieser / Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung, Heidelberg

about the author



Maria Schreva / © Diogenes Verlag

Joachim B. Schmidt was born in 1981, and grew up in the Swiss canton of Grisons before emigrating to Iceland in 2007. His novels are bestsellers and have won numerous awards, including the Crime Cologne Award and, most recently, the Glauser Prize. Schmidt has dual citizenship, and lives in Reykjavík with his wife and their two children.

Previous works: Kalmann, Diogenes (2020), Tell, Diogenes (2022), Kalmann und der schlafende Berg, Diogenes (2023).

Previous translations: Kalmann, Bitter Lemon Press (2022), Kalmann and the Sleeping Mountain, Bitter Lemon Press (2024).

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