

Task for *Burial Rites*

Voice

Burial Rites is a particularly useful text for exploring the concept of voice, specifically narrative voice. While there are many different voices in texts, such as those of the author or the characters, narrative voice is a product of the relationship between the language of narration and point of view.

Brian Moon explains that voice ‘refers to the real or imagined identity of the speaker or speakers in a literary text.’ It is what we hear in the pages. Moon elaborates to say that, ‘a common assumption is that the most prominent voice we “hear” in a text is that of the author. But authors do not generally speak as themselves: they invent narrators and characters who become the storytellers and participants in the text.’ Moon, B. (2017). *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*. Chalkface Press

Class activity

Examine the significance of narrative voice in the following passages, making notes as discussions unfold:

1. I remain quiet. I am determined to close myself to the world, to tighten my heart and hold on to what has not yet been stolen from me. I cannot let myself slip away. I will hold what I am inside, and keep my hands tight around all the things I have seen and heard, and felt. (p. 29)
2. Perhaps it is a shame that I have vowed to keep my past locked up within me. At Hvammur, during the trial, they plucked at my words like birds. Dreadful birds, dressed in red with breasts of silver buttons, and cocked heads and sharp mouths, looking for guilt like berries on a bush. They did not let me say what happened in my own way, but took my memories of Illugastadir, of Natan, and wrought them into something sinister; they wrested my statement of that night and made me seem malevolent. Everything I said was taken from me and altered until the story wasn't my own. (p. 100)
3. It's not fair. People claim to know you through the things you've done, and not by sitting down and listening to you speak for yourself. No matter how much you try to live a godly life, if you make a mistake in this valley, it's never forgotten. No matter if you tried to do what was best. No matter if your innermost self whispers, 'I am not as you say!' - how other people think of you determines who you are. (p. 108)
4. For the first time in my life, someone saw me, and I loved him because he made me feel I was enough. (p. 221)
5. Agnes Jónsdóttir. I never thought it could be that easy to name yourself. The daughter of Jón Bjarnasson of Brekkukot, not the servant Magnús Magnússon. Let everyone know whose bastard I truly am. (p. 232)