

“An Icelandic Driver”: J. Magnús Bjarnason’s Story as a History of Immigrant Hierarchy and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century Halifax: An Introduction

Jay L. Lalonde

Volume 30, 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1099323ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.29173/scancan214>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies in Canada

ISSN

0823-1796 (imprimé)
2816-5187 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lalonde, J. (2023). “An Icelandic Driver”: J. Magnús Bjarnason’s Story as a History of Immigrant Hierarchy and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century Halifax: An Introduction. *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies / Études scandinaves au Canada*, 30, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.29173/scancan214>

Résumé de l'article

Cette introduction à « An Icelandic Driver » d'après Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason a pour objectif de fournir un contexte critique à la lecture du texte. L'histoire offre un portrait d'Halifax en tant que ville d'immigrants et qui dépeint les autres histoires peu examinées de l'immigration islandaise urbaine. Cependant, elle s'appuie également sur les structures de la hiérarchie raciale des immigrants, de l'antisémitisme et l'effacement des Noirs. Cette introduction apporte des informations sur la vie et l'œuvre de Bjarnason et analyse de manière critique la façon dont son texte thématise l'identité nationale et la communauté. Elle tend aussi à rectifier les représentations stéréotypées des personnages Juifs dans l'histoire, ainsi que l'effacement total des Haligoniens Noirs, en fournissant des récits de certaines des nombreuses histoires des Juifs et des Noirs d'Halifax et de la Nouvelle-Écosse que Bjarnason choisit d'omettre.

© Jay L. Lalonde, 2023



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

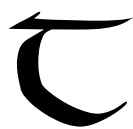
“An Icelandic Driver”: J. Magnús Bjarnason’s Story as a History of Immigrant Hierarchy, Erasure, and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century Halifax: An Introduction

JAY L. LALONDE

ABSTRACT: This introduction to “An Icelandic Driver” by Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason aims to provide a critical context for reading the text. The story portrays Halifax as a city of immigrants and depicts the otherwise underdiscussed histories of urban Icelandic immigration. It also relies, however, on the structures of racialized immigrant hierarchy, antisemitism, and Black erasure. This introduction provides background information about Bjarnason’s life and work, and critically analyzes the ways in which his text thematizes national identity and community. It also aims to rectify the stereotypical depictions of Jewish characters in the story, as well as the complete erasure of Black Haligonians, by providing accounts of some of the many Jewish and Black histories of Halifax and Nova Scotia that Bjarnason chooses to omit.

RÉSUMÉ: Cette introduction à « An Icelandic Driver » d’après Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason a pour objectif de fournir un contexte critique à la lecture du texte. L’histoire offre un portrait d’Halifax en tant que ville d’immigrants et qui dépeint les autres histoires peu examinées de l’immigration islandaise urbaine. Cependant, elle s’appuie également sur les structures de la hiérarchie raciale des immigrants, de l’antisémitisme et l’effacement des Noirs. Cette introduction apporte des informations sur la vie et l’œuvre de Bjarnason et analyse de manière critique la façon dont son texte thématise l’identité nationale et la communauté. Elle tend aussi à rectifier les représentations stéréotypées des personnages Juifs dans l’histoire, ainsi que l’effacement total des Haligoniens Noirs, en fournissant des récits de certaines des nombreuses histoires des Juifs et des Noirs d’Halifax et de la Nouvelle-Écosse que Bjarnason choisit d’omettre.

Jay L. Lalonde is a PhD student in the University of New Brunswick’s Department of History. Jay’s doctoral research focuses on nineteenth-century Icelandic migration to Atlantic Canada, especially regarding the connections between settler colonialism, capitalism, and immigration policy.



he English translation of “An Icelandic Driver” is presented here with the general aim of contributing to the body of Icelandic and Icelandic-Canadian literature accessible to readers in English, which has so far been rather limited.¹ It furthermore aspires to diversify the rather homogenous image of Icelandic-Canadian literature and its protagonists, as this story includes many motifs not commonly found elsewhere in Icelandic writing: an urban immigration experience, encountering immigrants apart from other Icelanders, and the antisemitism deeply ingrained in both mainstream Canadian society and in the incoming immigrants themselves. This short story or novella—first published in 1910 in his collection *Vornætur á elgsheiðum* [Spring Nights on Moose Heights]²—also shows J. Magnús Bjarnason’s interest in the supernatural and mysterious that comes to define his later works and thus reminds the reader that “immigrant literature” cannot be seen as a homogenous style or genre, as it is as varied as any other literature. This introduction provides a brief summary of Magnús’s³ life and oeuvre, followed by analyses of identity and foreignness, Halifax’s immigrant community, antisemitic stereotypes, and the erasure of Jewish and Black histories in the city as these themes are constructed in the short story that follows (both in translation and in its original Icelandic). While other themes (such as the aforementioned complex genre definition) could be analysed and focused on in the story, in this introduction I choose to discuss especially national identity and foreignness, as they defined not only my reading of the story, but also the approaches I took when translating it.

“An Icelandic Driver” tells the story of the Iclander Hrólfur who, like many of his compatriots, emigrated from Iceland to Nova Scotia in 1878. After first working for farmers in Halifax County, he arrives in Halifax in 1881 to look for work, but no one wants to hire him. One day, he saves the daughter of Jewish storekeeper Sebulon Goldenstein, from being trampled by a horse; as thanks, Goldenstein comes up with a solution to help Hrólfur out of poverty, suggesting that Hrólfur become a carriage driver. To make money for his horse and carriage, Goldenstein enrolls Hrólfur in a running race, trains him, and even lends him money for his entry fee. The runners represent the various European nationalities present in the city, and Hrólfur ties for first place. The last part of the story follows the now-carriage driver Hrólfur, as he drives a mysterious woman to a dance in the South End, and describes the fantastical events that happen to him that night.

This story provides a rare look at nineteenth-century urban society in Halifax from the point of view of an ethnic immigrant, but its perspective must be read with all its limitations. While the story is helpful in seeing the colonial immigrant hierarchy—thoroughly internalized by the Icelandic protagonist—its gaps, omissions, and silences are equally meaningful. The limited immigrant presence (mainly concerning immigrants from Northern, Western, and

Southern Europe, with a fringe presence assigned to Eastern European and Jewish characters) points to the internalization of the settler-colonial hierarchies that have privileged immigrants from Northern and Western Europe while marginalizing others, in the case of Nova Scotia especially the Mi'kmaq, Black Nova Scotians, and Jews. In this way, the story provides a glimpse of how omnipresent antisemitism was in both Iceland and North America in the late nineteenth century, how internalized it was among Icelandic immigrants moving in the North Atlantic space, and how it—along with erasure of the Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotians—reinscribed the urban space of Halifax. The story shows the city as well as the rural areas of the province as spaces to be inhabited by the winners of the metaphorical running race, i.e., the immigrants considered permissible and desirable within the settler colonial hierarchy. Perhaps most crucially, the story shows the colonial practices of reinscription and repopulation of space from the point of view of one of the ethnic immigrants tasked with repopulating it: a sometimes-outsider, who, albeit in a very limited way, feels solidarity with the character of the Jew, but is nonetheless a crucial part of reproducing the antisemitic settler colonial complex.

J. Magnús Bjarnason: Life and Work

Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason (1866-1945), mostly known as J. Magnús Bjarnason, was one of the most popular Icelandic-Canadian writers of his time, as well as a life-long teacher in various schools in Icelandic immigrant communities. Magnús was born on May 24, 1866, on the farm Meðalnes í Fellum in the Fljótshálsa region of the Norður-Múlasýsla district in East Iceland. His parents were Bjarni Andrússon and Kristbjörg Magnúsdóttir (Kristinsson 64). Magnús moved to Canada with his parents and younger sister Anna Málfríður when he was nine, in 1875, just when mass emigrations from Iceland to Canada were starting, with the first large group of Icelanders leaving for Canada in 1873 (Kjartansson and Heiðarsson 32). It is unclear which ship the family sailed on, but it seems likely that they did not leave with other Icelanders, as would have been typical for most emigrants. Their journey from Iceland served as the source for the voyage Magnús describes in his first novel *Eiríkur Hansson* (Þorsteinsson 296), which was originally published in three volumes between 1899 and 1903. *Eiríkur Hansson* was published in English as *The Young Icelandic* (2009).

The farm Magnús's family left, Fljótsbakki in Eiðahreppur in the Suður-Múlasýsla district of East Iceland, gives us a fascinating image of the waves in which Icelanders emigrated to North America, many of them from East Iceland. Another family left the farm in 1875, likely together with Magnús's parents:

Guðmundur Sveinsson, Guðbjörg Þorsteinsdóttir, and their two children. The family that seems to have taken over the farm left only a year later, in 1876, on the *Verona*. Yet a third family left the farm in 1901 (Kristinsson 64). Fljótsbakki is farmed to this day; for each family that decided to move to America, there was at least one other that chose to stay.

Magnús's family first lived in Markland, an Icelandic settlement in the Musquodoboit Valley in Nova Scotia (where most of his early short stories are set), but a few years later, after the settlement's dissolution, moved to Winnipeg. Magnús was selected to be the first official teacher in New Iceland, Manitoba, as soon as the school district was created in 1889, and he spent most of his life teaching in various Icelandic communities within New Iceland, among other things staging many plays with his pupils, all of which appear to be lost. Magnús and his wife, Guðrún Hjörleifsdóttir,⁴ also spent time in North Dakota and Vancouver before retiring in Elfros, Saskatchewan. While Magnús Bjarnason was highly respected both in Icelandic-Canadian communities and in Iceland (having received the Icelandic national order, the Order of the Falcon, in 1939), and even though he maintained lively correspondence with friends and acquaintances on both sides of the Atlantic until his final days, due to his failing health he never visited Iceland again after leaving the country as a nine-year-old, even though he always wished he could go (Bjarnason 2011, 141;250).

Magnús is now probably best known for his many short stories, which are often influenced by his own varied experience as an immigrant in Canada, as well as by his rich imagination and curiosity, though they also tend to be somewhat repetitive, occasionally to the point of stereotyping, and fluctuate in quality. Most of them are set in Icelandic-Canadian communities, but, as this story shows, many others thematize the general experience of being an immigrant in the world, along with Icelandic nationalism and the connections between the present, the past, and the realm of fantasy.

In addition to his short stories, however, Magnús also wrote poems, fables and fantastical stories for children, newspaper texts, three novels, countless plays, and a diary he kept for most of his life. Only a small fraction of Bjarnason's writing has been published in English: mainly his short stories and a handful of poems in magazines, in addition to Borga Jakobson's book-length translations, *Errand Boy in the Mooseland Hills* and *The Young Iclander*, published by Formac in 2001 and 2009, respectively.⁵

Identity, Community, and Foreignness in "An Icelandic Driver"

"An Icelandic Driver" provides a fascinating and to a large extent unique perspective on immigrant identity in Canada at the end of the nineteenth

century. The main tendency of first-generation immigrant literature in North America in this period can be defined in simple terms as describing the experiences—often to an extent autobiographical, if idealized—of the ethnic immigrant in the new environment among “Americans” or “Canadians.” A well-known example of this kind of portrayal by an Icelander is the short story “Vonir” [Hopes] by Einar Kvaran, which describes the hopes and disappointments of an Icelandic immigrant to Canada. The story is based on a rigid binary of Iceland-versus-Canada, and its perspective is focused narrowly on the Icelanders arriving in Canada and the impact emigration has on them.

Einar was certainly not the only one thematizing the Icelandic immigrant experience in these exclusionist terms, as, for example, virtually all of the poetry by Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur J. Guttormsson⁶ either looks back to Iceland or describes the Icelanders’ new homes in Canada. While both often set their writing in Canada, their poetry is nonetheless inhabited mostly by Icelanders and Icelandic-Canadians (and very occasionally Indigenous people), as if they did not share their new homes with many other immigrants. Daisy Neijmann (2006) generally sees this literature and the experience it describes through the lens of duality: the Icelanders were striving to preserve and prove their Icelandic identity, and to counter the anti-immigrant sentiments of the Anglo-Canadian establishment (613-14). Kirsten Wolf points out a recurring theme in these frequently-dualistic portrayals of the nostalgic love for Iceland and the beauty of their new homes: “the Icelandic hero,” who is often assigned romantic saga-like characteristics and values (437).

While this may be the most common depiction, it is not the only way Icelandic immigrants have perceived their immigration experience. While Magnús wrote in his diary that he felt homesick for the places in East Iceland he had last seen as a child (Bjarnason 2011, 141), and he eagerly followed news from Iceland—not least the reception of his works (69)—his writing offers a much more nuanced and interesting portrayal of Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century. The story “An Icelandic Driver” provides unique insight into the complexity of Magnús’s thoughts on national identity, foreignness, and the immigrant experience, as well as the parts of this experience that he consciously or subconsciously omits. The story flips the usual perspective and portrays Halifax and, more generally, Canada, as populated by immigrants: *all* the major characters in the story are immigrants.

The portrayal of the immigrants in the story immediately—if anachronistically—recalls John Murray Gibbon’s once-influential concept of the “Canadian mosaic.” Gibbon, in his 1938 book of the same name, *Canadian Mosaic*, proposed that the ideal Canadian identity was built out of various distinct immigrant identities. He imagined Canada as a mosaic of national or ethnic identities that each retain their distinct characteristics and the best qualities of each nation, but together create a larger multicultural identity. Gibbon’s theory

must be read in the context of the contemporary North American debate about immigration and nationalism, in which his mosaic stands in contrast to the assimilationist model of the "melting pot," characteristic of immigration policy and rhetoric in the United States (vii).

This Canadian mosaic still ultimately serves to create a sole national identity, albeit an identity of a new kind: one built on multiculturalism as its essential value. Gibbon's—like Magnús's—perspective is strikingly limited to European nations (or races, according to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century parlance), and he sees his multicultural mosaic as a direct tool of the success of settler colonialism—as a way of creating "[t]he Canadian race of the future" that is "being superimposed on the original native Indian races" (vii). The European nations Gibbon deems suitable for this colonial project are the English, French, Scots, Irish, Welsh, Germans, Dutch, Belgians, Scandinavians (Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and Icelanders), "Eastern Baltics" (Finns, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians), Poles, Ukrainians, Czechs, Slovaks, "Balkans" (Greeks, Romanians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bulgarians, and Macedonians), Hungarians, Russians, Italians, Spanish, and, in his very last chapter, Jews (or, in Gibbon's words, Hebrews).

Many of these nations—especially the Northern, Western, and Southern Europeans—are also mentioned in "An Icelandic Driver." According to Neijmann (2006), Magnús was the first author to introduce the idea of the "developing Canadian mosaic" into Icelandic literature (630), and this story also centres *the immigrant*: it focuses on the immigrant experience in general, rather than the particular situation of the Icelandic protagonist, Hrólfur, but it still portrays all immigrants as exclusively European. Their selection evokes the discussion among federal immigration officials, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, about the "desirability" of immigrants, i.e., the perceived worth of different nations to the Canadian settler colonial project. These "desirable" immigrants were those seen as contributing the maximum amount of capital and labour to the project, while conforming to assumptions about race, gender, class, and religion, that were thinly-disguised as concerns about moral character or intelligence (Eyford 26-27). Gibbon readily acknowledges that the immigrant populations he is interested in are "the foreign white stock" (xii), and his view of Icelandic immigrants is overwhelmingly positive while highly stereotypical. He describes them as hard-working, successful, active in civil society, and bringing with them a culture of poetry, exploration, and parliamentary democracy (243-47).⁷

Gibbon constructs his concept on an assumed understanding of what a national identity is: he is evaluating different European nations according to their own histories, cultures, etc., but he assumes that the members of these nations simply *feel* their belonging to or affinity with their respective nations, and he treats their national identities as a given. To be able to analyze

manifestations and portrayals of national identity, however, it is necessary to understand that this identity is in itself a construct. Just like the idea of “race” is a fiction and a construct, so is the idea of a “nation” (*þjóðflokkur*), following Benedict Anderson’s work on nation as an imagined community. In the words of philosopher Ernest Gellner, rather than nations being purely imagined, “nationalism *invents* nations where they do not exist” (Anderson 6; emphasis in original). The fact that nation is a modern invention does not prevent it, however, from being continuously naturalized, qualified, and racialized. What neither Gibbon nor Magnús discuss is how this understanding of national identity works within settler colonial states such as Canada. It functions as a shortcut for “desirability,” the nebulous quality that immigration officials and colonial politicians alike were looking for in incoming migrants and that would allegedly guarantee their maximum reliability as agricultural settlers, while simultaneously ensuring that only minimum investment would be necessary to support them. The unsaid element in this “desirability hierarchy” is that it has been crucial in settler colonialism’s mission to “remove and replace”⁸ Indigenous peoples with settlers: ideally with British Protestants, but, as exemplified by the Icelanders, ethnic settlers would also suffice, especially if they were perceived to be as close to the ideal of Britishness—or at least white Nordic, if not Anglo-Saxon, Protestantism—as possible in their alleged character, religion, and culture. This hierarchy, according to “proximity to Britishness” or “Anglo-Saxon Whiteness by proxy” has been crucial in structuring Canada’s colonial immigration policy, which saw some non-British settlers as desirable while others as unacceptable or even dangerous.⁹

Halifax Immigrant Community & National Identity Created and Negotiated in “An Icelandic Driver”

National identity is a major theme of the story, as Halifax is portrayed as a city of immigrants. Rather than describing Hrólfr’s struggles as those of an Icelandic immigrant among locals, the story’s focus is almost entirely on the immigrants and outsiders, with the locals assuming the role of—in the case of the race, literal—bystanders.¹⁰

The central act of the story—the running race—can be read as a metaphor. It is a metaphor of the struggle to climb the ladder, i.e., the immigrants’ chance to achieve social mobility in a society that systematically disadvantages them. However, it is immediately obvious that access to this opportunity is strictly limited: it is only available to those “born and raised in Europe, but no more than two men from each nation are allowed to participate.”¹¹ This means that non-European immigrants are excluded from this opportunity to “earn money and fame,” as “the Jew” tells Hrólfr, and also that the policy has a certain

multiculturalist aim, as members of the least-populous nations (i.e., those least represented in the province) have the highest proportional opportunity to participate. As "the Jew" says, Hrólfur will certainly qualify because he is "the only Icelfander who will compete this time, and [he] fulfil[s] all the requirements." There are no Jews participating in the race, but Goldenstein's help and advice play a major role in Hrólfur's eventual victory.

The various national communities in the city—and possibly the entire province—are also metaphorically represented by the fans encouraging the runners. Hrólfur mentions that no one was cheering him on, implying there were no Icelfanders in the city, since the Icelfanders in the province had already left.¹² Other runners, however, were supported by their fellow countrymen, because they, in Benedict Anderson's terms, felt a connection based on their shared belonging to the imagined communities of their nations. All the other runners were cheered on, encouraged "to uphold the glory of their famed ancestors and motherlands," but especially so were the Frenchman Leblanc, the Irishman Flanigan, and the Scot Campbell, referring to the most populous groups of immigrants in Nova Scotia at the time.

National Stereotypes

The running race is probably the clearest example of the story's portrayal of national stereotypes, but they in fact pervade the entire text. The race does end up working out for Hrólfur: he and Campbell both arrive first, and decide to split the first and second prizes rather than competing again. The money enables Hrólfur to pay for the horses and carriage he needs to access reliable employment in the city.

Except for the briefly-mentioned Russian runner, all contestants are from Northern, Western, or Southern Europe.¹³ Eastern Europeans in the story are described as odd, mysterious, and even as being involved in some shady dealings. The story describes many of the people Hrólfur drove as "in various ways very peculiar and mysterious, and many of them foreign—Germans and Russians in particular." When Hrólfur arrives at the house to which he drives the woman at the end of the story, all the people he sees there are "*clearly* foreign,—perhaps Polish or Russian. They [are] all dressed in dark clothing and [look] particularly shady" (emphasis mine). The narrator draws a clear distinction between different groups of immigrants, with Germans, Poles, and Russians being seen as inherently different and described negatively: as strange, suspicious, and mysterious.

While histories of Halifax are generally quiet on the matter, the South End (today seen as a wealthy and upper-class part of the city) does have an immigrant history: the German neighbourhood of Schmidtville existed in the

nineteenth-century South End, though it was not as far South as the house described by Magnús (McGuigan 25).¹⁴ Nothing indicates, however, that the large estates of the “new South End” (i.e. south of Tower Road, as mentioned in the story) were populated by people perceived as ethnic immigrants. In this case, the author appears to create a fictional geography based on the real South End, one defined by Polish and Russian residents. Not only are these people of certain nationalities (Germans, Russians, and Poles) described as suspicious, shady, and mysterious, but these qualities are said to be evident from their clothing and appearance, as well as from their lively music and dance, which Hrólfr finds unfamiliar. The story, however, seems to refer to some greater and more affluent past of these peoples and nations: the dance takes place in a large and ornate but run-down house, and the old Polish man “wore a somewhat glum expression but did not look evil, and he showed clear signs of having been rather aristocratic-looking in his younger years.” These descriptions of and allusions to suspicion or shadiness are shared among the Eastern European and Jewish characters, as are the references to a brighter past, such as in the description of Rachel, Goldenstein’s wife: “it was clear that she had once lived a good life and had been pretty and blooming when she was younger.” These descriptions are examples of the largely-antisemitic colonial trope depicting some nations as predestined to remain in the past (however glorious it may have been), while others—typically Anglo Americans and Canadians—are naturalized as having leading roles in the present and future.

Hrólfr is immediately suspicious of the Polish people at the dance, and when he wakes up, he assumes they have cheated him with the aim of stealing his horses, though it later turns out that his horses have been returned and Hrólfr is paid well for their use. After the mysterious disappearance of the “Polish man, who many thought was an exile or a refugee” on a Russian yacht, which later sank off Sable Island, Hrólfr never learns who the people at the dance were, but he thinks they were likely members of a criminal gang.

Despite Hrólfr’s deep suspicion, the Pole connects with him on some level: the Polish man is interested in talking with him, and immediately asks whether Hrólfr is a European. When he finds out he is an Icelander, he becomes even more interested, and points out that “Icelanders are certainly few and far between in this country. You’re the first Icelandic *man* that I’ve seen” (emphasis mine). On the other hand, Hrólfr does not ask about the other man’s nationality, in fact, nor even about his name: he is referred to solely as “the man” or “the old man” throughout the story until the end, when his nationality is mentioned in the newspaper (even though he introduces himself to Hrólfr as a Pole). This is reminiscent of “the Jew,” whose name Hrólfr also does not ask, and whose nationality or ethnicity is his entire representation in the story.

The so-called “Woman with the wooden leg” is undoubtedly the most mysterious character of all: she is first described as a secretive and possibly

questionable person, as neither she nor the man who orders the carriage for her will tell Hrólfr her name, and she is dressed all in black, with a wide-brimmed hat shading her face. Hrólfr is indeed suspicious of her till the very end of the story, when he says that "the woman, who could just as well have been a man in women's clothes, was in one way or another involved with the wrong sort of people—she was perhaps a high-ranking member of some criminal gang." He begins to feel an affinity with her, however, after he reads her note and realizes she, too, is Icelandic. He no longer considers reporting the events to the police even though the only thing that has changed is his knowledge of the woman's nationality, pointing to a clear experience of an imagined national community.

Portrayals of Iceland

Hrólfr's Icelandic-ness is described both explicitly and implicitly. At the very beginning of the story, his light complexion, blond hair, and blue-grey eyes are mentioned as stereotypical evidence of his Nordic heritage, and "the Jew" assumes Hrólfr will succeed in the race because he grew up in Iceland and must have gotten used to walking there. He thinks that Hrólfr's fitness, running ability, and especially his endurance are based on his Icelandic upbringing, as he tells him: "Old barren Iceland equipped you with good provisions that you've never used since you came to this country." Goldenstein's point about the effect of the environment on the qualities of a particular nation recalls Romantic ideas of nationhood as based on environmental determinism, such as those of Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder mentions the influence of nature and climate on the characteristics of a particular constructed nation—as "providence has wonderfully separated nationalities not only by woods and mountains, seas and deserts, rivers and climates, but more particularly by languages, inclinations, and characters" (Ergang 244)—a belief also echoed in *Canadian Mosaic*, where Gibbon says that the geography and climate of a country are necessary for judging the "social qualities of [a] people" (vi). Goldenstein sees Hrólfr as having a talent for running—even though he has never trained—because he was used to walking long distances in Iceland, often in hilly and rough terrain. Hrólfr ultimately succeeds in the race because he is better at running up hills than his competitors are, a quality that "the Jew" attributes to his Icelandic upbringing.

Hrólfr himself identifies strongly with being an Icelander. In addition to his feeling of community when he hears Icelandic during the race and reads the note written in Icelandic, he also insists on competing as an Icelander rather than as a Dane. His imagined national community takes clear precedence over the political system at the time, in which Iceland was part of the Danish kingdom: Hrólfr "did not want to wear the Danish flag as he wanted to win or lose as an Icelander." Similar to the way Hrólfr constantly calls Sebulon

Goldenstein “the Jew,” Hrólfur’s competitors refer to him as “Icelander,” highlighting the privileged position of national belonging in the story.

“The Wandering Jew”: Antisemitic Stereotypes

While Hrólfur is explicitly presented as the protagonist of the story, “The Wandering Jew”—Sebulon Goldenstein—is the person who makes Hrólfur’s adventures possible by helping him win the race. Hrólfur only ever calls him “The Jew”—even after he learns his name—and Hrólfur’s thoughts about him show a heavily-stereotyped point of view, with Goldenstein’s character reading more like a collection of common antisemitic tropes than a realistic description.

At the beginning of the story, we learn about Hrólfur’s past, motivation, and plans, but nothing is said about “The Jew” or his family. The first encounter with him is immediately and explicitly negative: when the bystanders see Hrólfur save Esther, they address “The Jew” to tell him to “[b]e an honest man and pay up for the generous help!” before he even says or does anything in the scene. When Hrólfur follows him into his store, he describes the store as being “packed full of old clothes as well as all kinds of knick-knacks, and [describes everything as] arranged in poor taste.” From the very first moment, Goldenstein is negatively associated with poverty, uncleanness, and lack of taste.

“The Jew” is immediately described as a miser; the first thing a reader learns about him is that he calculates the seriousness of the accident in terms of having suffered “the loss of thirty cents, as the jug cost twenty-five cents and the milk five cents.” He also insists that he is poor—“a destitute man”—and is described as unattractive-looking. On the other hand, his daughter Esther is described in contrasting terms; as Hrólfur says, “the girl was particularly good-looking.... She and the old man did not look much alike.” “The Jew’s” appearance is described in much more detail than any other character’s—including Hrólfur’s—both in terms of looks and clothing. The narrator pays special attention to him wearing a “little brimless velvet cap” and a “long, black linen coat that flapped behind him” because his clothing “made him look very peculiar and different from others.” I have not found period accounts of what Jews in Halifax might have worn at the time, but while there certainly were observant Jews wearing traditional dress, including a *kippah*, Magnús’s choice to portray Goldenstein in it says more about his desire to show him as an immediately apparent outsider than about trying to portray the city in all its diversity. His name (alluding to money and obviously coded as Jewish, in contrast with many historically-attested Jewish Haligonians, with some famous examples mentioned below), his clothing, and the description of his appearance all reflect a preconceived stereotypical notion of a Jewish person as not subject to change over time and visibly different from others. All descriptions of

Goldenstein and his family are almost entirely stereotypical: even though each separate instance could be a simple description of a real-life Jewish resident of Halifax, their sum is clearly not only informed by, but directly based on antisemitic tropes circulating on both sides of the Atlantic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The way Goldenstein himself identifies with the figure of the Wandering Jew, whom he mentions several times, adds another level of complexity to the text. The legend of the Wandering Jew tells the story of an old Jew who is condemned to live until the end of the world because he taunted Jesus on his way to the Crucifixion. This antisemitic legend has been spreading since at least the early thirteenth century in England, although George K. Anderson in his monograph traces its even earlier, partial, and complex origins—but was truly popularized by a German pamphlet in 1602 (42). The popularity of this antisemitic pamphlet (soon translated into many European languages) was likely fuelled by the anti-Jewish sentiments of the time, and its translations soon spread, as did as other literary portrayals—and even alleged sightings—of the Wandering Jew, including in North America. While the first tales of the Wandering Jew (Cartaphilus, Ahasver, etc.) in Scandinavia that are clearly identifiable as such are all post-Reformation, there is a wealth of folklore material, some of which seems conversant with medieval sources, that involves such a character (Cole 215). As analyzed by Cordelia Heß in the case of Sweden, texts based on medieval and early modern sources remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, and overwhelmingly relied on the themes of alleged Jewish rootlessness, character, and distinct physiognomy (42). The famous collector of Icelandic folktales, Jón Árnason, included a story of Ahasver, the wandering or literally walking Jew—*Gyðingurinn gangandi*, the very same words Magnús uses in his short story—who “has also been seen in Iceland, albeit very rarely” in his 1864 collection (47). Known for constantly reading Icelandic books and newspapers, Magnús would without a doubt be familiar with Jón Árnason’s tale and likely other iterations of the Wandering Jew material. Searching for late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century instances of the *Gyðingurinn gangandi* trope in Icelandic newspapers and magazines reveals that the legend was regularly (though not particularly often) mentioned around the time Magnús wrote the story, including in the main Icelandic-Canadian papers *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla*.¹⁵ Even two once-intimately-known Icelandic poets—Grímur Thomsen and Matthías Jochumsson—published poems with the title *Gyðingurinn gangandi*, in 1875 and 1911 respectively, emphasizing the familiarity of at least middle-class Icelandic readership with the trope, as it is presented without further contextualization.

Even though “The Jew” is described as being different from everyone else, he actually feels a connection and an affinity with Hrólfur, since they are both foreigners in Nova Scotian society at the time. While the short story is about

migration and relationship to one's homeland as well as to their country of arrival, it cannot be read without the layers of antisemitic portrayals that are omnipresent in it. Goldenstein tells Hrólfr that "[i]t was clear that [he wasn't] an American since [he] refused gold and silver," and that they are both poor but that at the same time there is a great difference between them: Hrólfr has a motherland while he does not; he is "a Jew—The Wandering Jew, who has nowhere to rest his head, and is in no one's good graces." He then describes being discriminated against and never welcomed by anyone—a sentiment not explicitly expressed by the story's (other) immigrant characters. He says that a Jew does not have any influence in Canada unless he is "rich like Rothschild or [has] power like Lord Beaconsfield [i.e., Benjamin Disraeli]," and that the Jews have never received any recognition by Christians for the Old Testament and its importance to Christianity.

As mentioned above, one particularly striking fact about the story is that Hrólfr never asks about "The Jew's" name—even though he promises to help him find work—and even after Goldenstein tells him, Hrólfr always keeps referring to him as "the Jew." This stereotyping and generalization of Goldenstein as the archetypal Wandering Jew—rather than seeing him as his own individual person—is also visible in Hrólfr's preconceived antisemitic ideas that characterize the beginning of the story, especially that "[i]t never occurred to [him] to rely on the Jew to get him a job—least of all a comfortable and well-paid job," and that "[h]e had never heard present-day Jews mentioned save as shady dealers, misers, and generally treacherous people: people whom Christians disliked and wanted to have as little to do with as possible." Hrólfr feels inherently superior to both "the Jew" and Esther: "like they had to be lesser beings than himself." He is suspicious of any help "the Jew" can offer him, and he makes sure to emphasize that it needs to be of "the most honourable" kind. This heavy-handed description is telling, as it clearly shows the power of antisemitism: Hrólfr struggles to navigate the colonial society in Nova Scotia as a new ethnic immigrant, but simultaneously feels superior to the Jewish storekeeper who has already established himself and his family in the city.

Goldenstein's charity and the fact that he clearly speaks English fluently (while Goldenstein is described as an outsider, the story does not mention any specific place he might have arrived from, nor does it mention him speaking Yiddish or any other language) are two of the typical characteristics of the legendary Wandering Jew (Anderson 48). Goldenstein is portrayed as a collection of antisemitic tropes and stereotypes: he sells used clothing and trinkets, constantly thinks and talks about money—even rubbing his hands together in glee when he does—and his offer to sell clothes to Hrólfr for the price he originally paid for them recalls a sharp-dealing tactic and a crass, always-haggling merchant who sees every relationship as transactional: an especially dehumanizing portrayal of a Jewish person. Rachel and Esther,

Goldenstein's wife and daughter, respectively, are only mentioned to provide a contrasting—but no less stereotypical—portrayal of Jewishness, as they are always described through Hrólfur's perspective, rather than as independent agents. Esther is an example of "the Beautiful Jewess" [*la belle juive*]¹⁵—and often specifically "the Jew's Daughter"—trope, which has typically been used in contrast with the male Jew (who is generally described as physically grotesque), and, especially in its clearest iteration—of the young and beautiful Jewish daughter of a tyrannical father who falls in love with a Christian man (like Rebecca in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, a novel Magnús would have almost certainly been familiar with) and whose life often ends tragically—a more conceited variation of the violently antisemitic masculine trope.¹⁶

Goldenstein is an extremely important character in the story, but his description is limited to the stereotypes detailed above and flattened to the archetypal "Wandering Jew." Even though Hrólfur seems to grow to appreciate the way "the Jew" helps him to train for the race and how he encourages him, he never openly expresses any other positive views about Goldenstein, except that "he was wise and knowledgeable about a lot, but always downplayed how much he knew." At least for a moment during the race, however, Hrólfur seems intimately aware of his connection to Goldenstein, which he alludes to when he describes himself as "a stranger in a strange land" (*framandi maður í framandi landi*). This reference to Exodus 2:22—where Moses names his son Gershom (literally "stranger there"), which appears to point to Moses's flight from Egypt—emphasizes this connection, as if Hrólfur has internalized Goldenstein's words. On one hand, Hrólfur (and so, by extension, all recent Icelandic immigrants) feels a connection to and affinity with Goldenstein (i.e. Jews in Canada) because of their shared experience as "strangers in a strange land." On the other hand, however, Hrólfur is susceptible to and complicit in the antisemitic attitudes that place Jews at the bottom of the hierarchy enforced by settler colonialism. After the race is over, Goldenstein is never mentioned again: he has fulfilled his literary role of helping Hrólfur enter colonial society and become "self-reliant" (though this self-reliance is enabled by Goldenstein's largely-uncredited help), and is no longer needed. There is a link, however, between the descriptions of "the Jew" and of Eastern Europeans in the story: both groups are alluded to as being dubious and mysterious characters. "The Jew" is also the only character who is described as transcending the boundaries of national communities, as he, unlike everyone else, has no fellow countrymen in the race to cheer on, and, as he says himself, has no motherland.

Jews in Atlantic Canada

While Sebulon Goldenstein can be seen to be the protagonist of the story at least as much as Hrólfur, he is nonetheless portrayed as an exceptional outsider

in a city that is not necessarily an exclusively British settlement anymore, but, in Magnús's view, is one populated predominantly with white immigrants from Europe. It is clear that the fictional Goldenstein would have been part of a diverse and bustling Jewish community—entirely left out by Magnús—but the Jewish history of Halifax has been notably under-studied. Existing survey works chronicle Jewish presence in both rural and urban settlements in so-called Canada, but they generally focus on urban Jewry in Montreal, and, to a lesser extent, Toronto and Winnipeg.¹⁷

These general histories do, however, reveal traces of Jewish presence in Atlantic Canada since its earliest colonial history. A number of Jewish traders arrived in Halifax from Boston and New York soon after its founding in 1749 and supplied its sizeable civilian population.¹⁸ The British colonies were an attractive proposition for Jewish merchants compared to explicit antisemitism in Britain because of the exception for Jews in the 1740 *Plantation Act* that allowed them to become naturalized after seven years of residence (Levine 18). Some Loyalists who migrated to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were Jewish: Jacob Louzada, Abram Florentine, Isaac DaCosta, and certainly others whose complete names are not preserved in the available historical record. Samuel Hart, a Jewish trader from Philadelphia, became a successful merchant in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, and the West Indies, and even took a Christian oath to become a member of the Nova Scotia legislature before being baptized as an Anglican in 1793 (Tulchinsky 14-16). Gerald Tulchinsky mentions that after Hart's death, "a few Jewish merchants continued doing business, but by about 1820 they too had disappeared," (16) but here again we should suspect gaps and holes in the record, and ask whether this "disappearance" was partly due to people who stopped publicly identifying as Jewish. Irving Abella and other historians, on the other hand, consider the period before the 1880s (when the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe began) and particularly the 1830s and 1840s the "golden age of Canadian Jewry" (Lapidus 29). Either way, by the time of Magnús's writing of the story (set in 1881)—so between likely the 1890s and when it was completed for publication, in 1910—a new Jewish community had emerged in Halifax, fuelled by immigrants arriving from Europe and the founding of Jewish institutions, such as a synagogue on Starr Street (destroyed in the Halifax Explosion, with the street and the entire neighbourhood razed in the construction of Scotia Square) and the Baron de Hirsch Benevolent Society. By 1890, a national and transnational Jewish community was clearly formed, and the Maritimes—albeit being home to only about five per cent of the Canadian Jewish population in 1901 and three per cent in 1911 (Tulchinsky 110)—were connected to its centre in Montreal through family relationships, business contacts, and, crucially, the *Jewish Times*. Furthermore, the period between 1880 and 1930 was one of significant growth

for the Jewish community in Canada, with many Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews arriving from Eastern Europe (Vigod 7-8).

When looking for Jewish histories in histories of Halifax considered authoritative, we must also try to look beyond the brief mentions and occasionally read against the grain to see traces of Jewish presence. *The* colonial historian of Halifax, Thomas H. Raddall, notorious for his racism, mentions Jews only three times in his *Halifax: Warden of the North* as the successful businessmen behind Nathan & Levy (later Nathan & Hart), as the equally successful businessman Nathan Nathans (who had a fishing station on Horseshoe Island), and in the case of early-twentieth-century Halifax having a "small Jewish colony, dating all the way back to colonial times, [which] received a sharp increase from elsewhere." (Raddall 39, 71, 243). In fact, Jews were not simply among the earliest colonial settlers in Nova Scotia: they were perceived and occasionally sought after as very valuable ones. Many early Jewish residents of Halifax were observant Jews, but were nonetheless permitted to serve as jurors, allotted a space for a Jewish cemetery in 1749, and—in contrast to other early communities—many brought their Jewish wives with them, perhaps a sign of their decision to settle permanently (Godfrey and Godfrey 76-77). Despite a decline in Jewish settlement after this early period and a lack of data on Jewish residents, Halifax remained a centre of the Jewish community on the East Coast: this community was clearly present in 1881 when Hrólfur mentions a single Jewish family. Sociologist Sheva Medjuck singles out the development of the Jewish community in Nova Scotia as unique, with its early Jewish settlers in the mid-eighteenth-century and a community that she also says disappeared in the 1820s and reestablished itself in the last third of the century (30). This theory is supported—or at least not refuted—by the fact that there are no figures on the Jewish population of Nova Scotia between 1824 and 1861 (31), but in the 1881 census, 15 Jews are recorded in Halifax.¹⁹ In 1891, there are 18, and in 1901, the last census before "An Icelandic Driver" was published, 114 (Eker and Pekilis 9, 16, 31).

The shortage of available data—as well as the census recording residents in two different categories, as Jewish by origin or by religion—means it is impossible to have a clear idea of the size or nature of the Jewish community in Halifax. The data does, however, provide evidence of Jewish settlers having been part of the city since its founding (as is attested by prominent early colonial settlers mentioned above) and beyond a doubt present at the time this story is set. Even though the antisemitic tropes detailed above are the most apparent structuring element of the story, and contribute to the enforcement of antisemitism by the newcomers into a settler colonial society, Black Nova Scotians are entirely omitted from the story, and this, along with the aforementioned minimization of the Jewish community, enforces the fabricated

image of the city and the province as one inhabited exclusively by European settlers.

Black Erasure and Immigrant Hierarchy within Settler Colonialism

Black people have been present in Nova Scotia and in what became Canada since their very colonial beginnings. Black Nova Scotians or African Nova Scotians²⁰ were essential for the building of Halifax, including its famous Citadel (in the case of Jamaican Maroons), as well as founding various Black communities across the province. In the 1880s—the time the story is set—there were established Black communities close to Halifax (such as Preston, Hammonds Plains, Beechville, and Beaverbank). While Magnús mentions various places in the province in his short stories, I have not found a single mention of Black Nova Scotians. This omission must be considered a conscious choice, especially as (at least some) real Icelandic settlers did have knowledge of Black Nova Scotians, as “a few thousand” of them—along with the Mi’kmaq—were mentioned in a promotional handbook about the province translated into Icelandic by the Icelandic settler-turned-immigration-agent Jóhannes Arngrímsson, which at least some of the Icelanders did read and would most likely have discussed with others (Crosskill 29). In addition to the Black settlements around Halifax, Black Nova Scotians would have also been seen in the city itself, in the very streets Hrólfur traversed with his carriage. Many of these Black Haligonians would have been the descendants of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812: the time immediately after the War marked a turning point in the development of the Nova Scotia-specific iteration of settler colonialism: an increase in European immigration coincided with an economic recession and resulted in fierce competition for jobs (Whitfield 49). While colonial sources provide rich evidence of the racism Black Refugees faced from established settler residents (46–47), what seems to be a complete omission of Black presence in the accounts by Icelanders must be, at least to an extent, taken to be an attestation of similar sentiment among the ethnic settlers.

In Halifax, Black Nova Scotians worked in a variety of wage industries, including roadwork and maritime trades (Whitfield 66). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, railway work had emerged as an especially important employment category for Black men, many of whom worked as railway porters, waiters, or cooks. Seafaring and railway work were central to Halifax’s turn-of-the-century Black community (Fingard 1995, 49). Following Judith Fingard’s analysis of Union No. 18, the Black freemasons’ lodge, it is clear that many Black seafarers and railway workers lived and worked in the downtown streets that both Magnús and his protagonist Hrólfur must have seen.²¹ As Magnús himself—

like most other Markland settlers—left Nova Scotia for Winnipeg in 1882, it is not unreasonable to imagine that the luggage of his family would likely have been carried by a Black porter, even if Magnús had not noticed the Black coopers, barbers, or tavern and hotel keepers. Some Black workers also used their skills from these professions to establish themselves in decidedly middle-class positions, like seafaring cook-steward George Roache, who became a restaurateur and grocer, or Clifford Edmund Ward, who opened the only marine school in Halifax at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fingard 1995, 53). The “old North End”—including Creighton, Maynard, and Maitland Streets, as well as the northeastern corner of the Halifax Commons where the carriage ride in the story begins—was a Black neighbourhood at the turn of the century: this points to a clear omission in a short story that is set at the same time and otherwise defined by an extremely faithful rendering of the city’s geography.²²

We can only speculate as to why Magnús—who was known for being well-read, maintaining a constant correspondence, and generally following current events—chose to entirely omit Black presence in Halifax. This conscious omission—considering he must have been at the very least aware of Black residents in the city, including from his own experience—enforces the settler colonial narrative that only some populations count as *settlers*, with Black, Jewish, and Indigenous peoples and histories being systematically erased or minimized. This state-sanctioned ideology, policy, and practice of settler colonialism is thus reflected in this text written by an ethnic immigrant: by one of the people operationalized by settler colonial policy, who soon became essential to its ongoing validation. Jewish and Black colonial settlers *did* exist, despite statements claiming “there is little to show that practising Jews made good pioneers” (Rosenberg 27). On the contrary: while most Jewish immigrants did settle in urban centres, there were rural Jewish settlements, especially in today’s Manitoba and Saskatchewan, such as New Jerusalem, Sonnenfeld, Edenbridge, Lipton, and Hirsch.²³ In fact, Jewish settlers had received land grants since the earliest years of British colonial presence in so-called Canada (Godfrey and Godfrey 161). This means that while individual Jewish settlers clearly existed, and were able to engage in settler colonial practices—to occupy and profit off of lands appropriated from Indigenous peoples—they, unlike other immigrants, do not generally appear in the official settler colonial narrative.

The limited immigrant presence described in the story (mainly concerning immigrants from Northern, Western, and Southern Europe, with a fringe presence assigned to highly-stereotyped Eastern European characters) points to the internalization of the settler colonial hierarchies that have privileged immigrants from Northern and Western Europe while marginalizing others, as is especially the case of Nova Scotia when considering the Mi’kmaq, Black Nova Scotians, and Jews. In this way, the story provides a glimpse of how omnipresent

antisemitism was both in Iceland and North America in the late nineteenth century, how internalized it was among Icelandic immigrants moving through the North Atlantic space, and how it—along with the erasure of the Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotians²⁴—reinscribed the urban space of Halifax. The story shows the city, as well as the rural areas of the province, as spaces to be inhabited by the winners of the metaphorical running race, i.e., the immigrants permissible and desirable within the settler colonial hierarchy. Perhaps most crucially, the story clearly shows these colonial practices of reinscription and repopulation of space from the point of view of one of the very ethnic immigrants tasked with repopulating it—a sometimes outsider, who—in a very limited way—feels solidarity with the character of the Jew because of their shared foreignness, but nonetheless plays a crucial part in the antisemitic settler colonial complex.

Conclusion

Settler colonialism and the ambiguous position of the ethnic immigrant within it constitute a crucial context for reading “An Icelandic Driver,” as well as the corpus of literature written by ethnic immigrants more broadly. The story is valuable because, contrary to the bulk of literature about turn-of-the-century Halifax or Canada, virtually all of its characters are either recent immigrants or characterized as foreign (in the case of the Goldenstein family). Despite not being described as immigrants, Sebulon, Esther, and Rachel Goldenstein are repeatedly portrayed as strange, mysterious, and inherently different. The Jews in the story are depicted as a group entirely distinct from the immigrants, even though they are also seen as essentially foreign. The ways that national identity on one hand and foreignness on the other are portrayed in “An Icelandic Driver” may be seen as drawing on a certain dualism in the identity of Magnús himself. While he spent most of his life in Icelandic communities, wrote exclusively in Icelandic, and was by many perceived as a “big nationalist, in the better meaning of the word” (Elíasson 83),²⁵ and as someone who “always upheld the honour of Iceland and Icelanders in his stories” (Sigurðsson 277),²⁶ he also identified with the more general immigrant experience and spoke of social injustices against the many groups of people perceived as foreigners or aliens (Neijmann 1997, 150).

This dualism is clearly visible in “An Icelandic Driver,” as its portrayal of immigrant and Jewish characters is full of contradictions. It presents nationalist imagined communities that are based on national pride and determinism, while also using xenophobic and antisemitic stereotypes of both Jews and Eastern Europeans as being associated with mystery, shadiness, and a lack of trust—this language mirrors colonial immigration policy and discourse of the time. It also uses the struggle of the running race as a metaphor for upward mobility and

perceived success among the immigrants: a feat that is possible, but is only accessible to European-born immigrants, and necessarily means leaving other immigrants behind. On the other hand, the story shows the potential for a larger community to be imagined—one that is not national or ethnic, but multicultural and immigrant. The story also points out that this social mobility is usually not what it seems on the surface—it is, after all, “The Wandering Jew,” Sebulon Goldenstein, who helps Hrólfur transcend the limitations of the social hierarchy and establish himself as an immigrant in a new country, even though Goldenstein himself is not allowed to access the same opportunity. Hrólfur’s success is portrayed as proof of his individual capability and dedication—qualities that are rewarded by the opportunity for social mobility—but this portrayal omits the fact that none of this success would be possible without Goldenstein’s advice, training, and constant help. While the story provides a rare look into the human geography of Halifax from the perspective of an ethnic immigrant and contributes to the emerging discussion of immigrant hierarchy and Icelandic urban presence in North America, it is simultaneously limited by its reliance on colonial stereotypes rooted in antisemitism, and by its erasure of Black and Indigenous spatial histories.

NOTES

1. I originally translated this short story in 2020 as part of my unpublished MA thesis at the University of Iceland: “‘A Stranger in a Strange Land:’ A Translation of ‘An Icelandic Driver,’ a Short Story by J. M. Bjarnason, with Analysis and Introduction to the Author.” This introduction is also adapted from that thesis, edited, reworked, shortened, and supplemented by further analysis. I am grateful to Dr. Guðrún Björk Guðsteinsdóttir for supervising the thesis and for all her helpful suggestions, assistance, and patience. I would also like to thank Dr. Harvey Amani Whitfield for reminding me of the story’s telling silences about Black Nova Scotians when I presented my earlier work on the geography of the story at the 2022 Atlantic Canada Studies Conference in Fredericton, New Brunswick. I am grateful to Virginie Tissier for translating the abstracts into French, and to Charles Merritt for rhyming the opening lines of “Íslands minni” [Memory of Iceland] by Bjarni Thorarensen in my translation. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewer for their thoughtful feedback and many helpful suggestions about the global histories of antisemitic tropes that significantly improved this paper. Last but not least, I would like to thank Irene Marks of Gimli, Manitoba, who made it possible for me to ask curious questions of her late mother, Borga Jakobson. Sigrun Borga Jakobson passed away at the age of ninety-four on November 19, 2022, but her translations of *The Young Iclander* and *Errand Boy in the Mooseland Hills* continue to make J. Magnús Bjarnason’s writing accessible to Anglophone audiences.

2. This short story collection has been published in English as *Errand Boy in the Mooseland Hills* (2001), but this story was omitted in the English edition because of its length.
3. Most Icelanders' last names are not family names but patronymics or, less frequently, matronymics. This means that they are then referred to by their first, rather than last, names. Jóhann Magnús styled his name J. Magnús and so I am referring to him as Magnús in this text.
4. Guðrún was born at the farm Litlu-Hólar in Mýrdalur in the Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla district in South Iceland. Her family moved to New Iceland in today's Manitoba in 1876, and she married Magnús in 1887 (Þorsteinsson 295).
5. See the Appendix for a complete list of the English translations I have been able to locate.
6. Guttormur was actually a second-generation immigrant, as he was born in Canada in 1878, but he spent his entire life in the Icelandic settlement in Manitoba (Neijmann 1997, 134), and, probably most importantly, wrote in Icelandic, and so he fits well with first-generation writers, like the only-slightly-older Jóhann Magnús.
7. Together with other chosen representatives of this "Icelandic stock," Gibbon mentions several poets, including Jakóbína Johnson, Guttormur J. Guttormsson, Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson, and a certain "Johann Magnus Bjarnason, a retired school teacher" (246).
8. This "logic of elimination," notably studied by Patrick Wolfe, is a crucial defining feature of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a system of management of land, resources, and populations which "destroys to replace." This means that elimination of Indigenous peoples and societies (often but not always physical, i.e. genocide) is its structural organizing principle: settler colonial states aim to establish a "new colonial society on the expropriated land base" (Wolfe 388). For this vision of a new colonial society, ethnic migrants-settlers play an important role in ensuring a sufficient number of settlers and solidifying the colonial status of land as property, especially in areas seen as less desirable by (in the case of Canada) the Anglo colonial establishment.
9. For discussion of the changing idea of whiteness of various groups of immigrants and of its importance to their perceived desirability, see, for example, David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martin's *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas* (2014), Thomas A. Guglielmo's *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (2004), Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (2009), Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1999), Mae M. Ngai's *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2014), and David R. Roediger's *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (2005). Very little research exists on whiteness and desirability specifically regarding Icelandic migrants, but Ryan Eyford's *White Settler Reserve* (2016) is an excellent history of the New Iceland settlement, including the immigration officials' attitudes towards the

Icelanders: many first regarded them with suspicion, but they quickly became a favoured immigrant group, especially compared with the Indigenous peoples whose lands they helped appropriate.

10. "The locals" include the farmers employing Hrólfur as a farmhand, the people among whom certain Icelanders used different names, the bystanders by the "the Jew's" store, and the horse trader from Truro.
11. All citations are my own translations of the story, which is published in the same volume of *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies*.
12. Hrólfur describes this feeling of abandonment at the beginning of the story: he did not choose to stay in Halifax but was forced to, to try and earn money for his fare west to join the Icelandic settlement there. This is a reference to the real Icelandic settlers of Markland, who left in 1882—with Magnús's family said to be the last one to leave (Þorsteinsson 295)—mainly for North Dakota (often via the established Icelandic settlement in Manitoba) and some for Minnesota.
13. There are said to be 21 runners from 13 European nations, but we actually only learn about 12. The runners mentioned are a Frenchman (Leblanc), an Irishman (Flanigan), a Scot (Campbell), an Englishman (Smith), an Italian, a Swede, a German, a Swiss, a Norwegian, a Russian, a Spaniard, and, of course, Hrólfur, an Icelandic.
14. My initial work on this story focused on its geography, and while this knowledge is not necessary for reading the story, the description of Hrólfur's journey in this section follows real geography of Halifax remarkably closely. The route begins at the northeast corner of the park [*norðausturhornið á skemmtigarðinum*], where Hrólfur waits for his passenger: I assumed this park to be the Halifax Commons. Judging from the name, it could also be the Halifax Public Gardens, but then the description of them driving south of the hill would not fit, because if they started at the Gardens, they would already be below the hill (Citadel Hill). The northeast corner of the park would in all likelihood be at the intersection of then-Agricola St. (now North Park St.) and Cunard St. From there, they go "south of the hill," which means they must travel south along then-Agricola (now North Park St. and Ahern Ave.) until it becomes Bell Rd.; they continue south on Bell Rd. for a block until it crosses Sackville St. and becomes South Park St., following the north-eastern wall of the Public Gardens until they reach the intersection of South Park St. and Spring Garden Rd., where it seems that they take Tower Rd. The first block of what was then Tower Rd. now seems to be Cathedral Lane, and its second block has been overtaken by the Queen Elizabeth II hospital, but on the 1879 Ruger's map, Tower Rd. begins at the southern edge of the Public Gardens. Hrólfur follows Tower Rd. until he reaches a point that the narrator deems "south of the long stone wall." This wall is most likely the still-standing stone wall running along Tower Rd., which once belonged to Enos Collins's now-demolished Gorsebrook estate. From there, he "keep[s] east of the stone wall," possibly by following today's Gorsebrook Ave. by turning west. However, here the story ceases to correspond with real geography as Hrólfur is supposed to "keep east of the stone wall until he reaches Shore Street" (*Strandgata*) and turns south on this street, where the

ninth house on the right is his destination. Not only is there no Shore Street, Coast Street etc. (corresponding with the Icelandic *Strandgata*) in Halifax, but there is also no street *at all* south off today's Gorsebrook Ave., neither now nor in 1879. This means that while most of Hrólfr's route mirrors the real city plan of Halifax, the final part of his journey is a product of the author's imagination, like the fantastic events that happen after Hrólfr arrives at the house.

15. The story is set in 1881, but, as Magnús wrote in his diary, he was still working on it shortly before submitting the manuscript of his short story collection in 1910 (2011, 103-4). The online database timarit.is provides access to all Icelandic newspapers and magazines, including the option to narrow down results by title and by decade.
16. See Ulrike Brunotte's "The Beautiful Jewess as Borderline Figure in Europe's Internal Colonialism: Some Remarks on the Intertwining of Orientalism and Antisemitism" (2019) in *ReOrient* 4, no. 2, for a discussion of this trope.
17. See e.g. Allan Levine's *Seeking the Fabled City* (2018) for Jewish history in Toronto and Arthur L. Ross's *Communal Solidarity: Immigration, Settlement, and Social Welfare in Winnipeg's Jewish Community, 1882-1930* (2019) for Winnipeg.
18. Some of these traders were Samuel Jacobs, Aaron Hart, Isaac Levy, Nathan Nathans, and John Franks (Levine 17, 20, 23). Stuart Rosenberg also mentions Israel Abrahams as one of the first Jews attested living in Halifax (107).
19. To put this number into context, about 3,000 Jews were recorded in all of Canada, with the majority of these as "Jewish by faith"—and of British origin (Vigod 3).
20. Black Nova Scotians or African Nova Scotians are the descendants of free or enslaved people of African descent, who arrived in the province at various times and under various circumstances, including the Black Planters (who arrived enslaved with the British settlers from New England in the 1760s), Black Loyalists (who emancipated themselves in the United States and sided with the British in the Revolutionary War), Jamaican Maroons (who emancipated themselves in Jamaica and were deported to Nova Scotia; most of them left for Sierra Leone in 1800), Black Refugees of the War of 1812, as well as later arrivants, including those from the Caribbean, many of whom worked in the steel mills of Cape Breton.
21. The official census identified 1,039 Black residents of Halifax in 1881—more than in Boston—with many more living in Halifax County (like Hrólfr and his compatriots in the Icelandic settlement) who may have commuted to the city for work (Fingard 1992, 170).
22. See note 14 for the summary of the area where the story takes place.
23. Like the aforementioned Baron de Hirsch Benevolent Society, the settlement was named in honour of the Jewish financier and philanthropist Maurice de Hirsch who sponsored Jewish colonization schemes in Argentina, Canada, and Palestine.

24. Magnús wrote a novel and a collection of short stories about his growing up in Nova Scotia, and also reminisced about the province and the Markland settlement in his diaries and memorial articles. Nonetheless, he seems to have never mentioned Black Nova Scotians and the only mention of the Mi'kmaq I have been able to find is an extremely stereotyped description of two Mi'kmaq women that Eiríkur, the protagonist of *The Young Icelandier*, meets outside of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and from whom he receives a basket as a gift (161-63).
25. "mikill þjóðernissinni, í betri merkingu þess orðs..." (translation mine).
26. "Hann heldur jafnan uppi heiðri Íslands og Íslendinga í sögum sinnum" (translation mine).

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Anderson, George K. 1965. *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*. Providence: Brown University Press.
- Árnason, Jón. 1864. *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*. Vol. 2. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich.
- Bjarnason, Jóhann Magnús. 2011. *Dagbók vesturfara 1902-1918*. Edited by Baldur Hafstað. Reykjavík: Lestu.is.
- . 2009. *The Young Icelandier*. Translated by Borga Jakobson. Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited.
- . 1910. *Vornætur á elgsheiðum*. Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Sigfúsar Eymundssonar.
- . 1982. *Vornætur á elgsheiðum*. Akureyri: Bókaútgáfan Edda.
- Cole, Richard. 2015. "When Did the Wandering Jew Head North?" *Scandinavian Studies* 87, no. 2: 214-33.
- Crosskill, Herbert. 1875. *Nova Scotia eður [sic] Nýja Skotland. Lýsing á loptslagi, landkostum og ágæti fylkisins*. Translated by Jóhannes Arngrímsson. Akureyri: Baldvin M. Stephánsson.

- Eker, Glen and Deborah Pekilis. 2004. *Index of Jews Resident in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island According to the 1861 to 1901 Censuses of Canada*. Toronto: The Ontario Genealogical Society.
- Elíasson, Gyrðir. 1997. "Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason." *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 58, no. 3: 79-92.
- Ergang, Robert Reinhold. 1931. *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Eyford, Ryan C. 2016. *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Fingard, Judith. 1995. "From Sea to Rail: Black Transportation Workers and Their Families in Halifax, c. 1870-1916." *Acadiensis* 24, no. 2: 49-64.
- . 1992. "Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20, no. 2: 169-95.
- Gibbon, John Murray. 1938. *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Godfrey, Sheldon J. and Judith C. Godfrey. 1995. *Search Out the Land: The Jews and the Growth of Equality in British North America, 1740-1867*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Heß, Cordelia. 2022. *The Medieval Archive of Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century Sweden*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Kjartansson, Helgi Skúli and Steinþór Heiðarsson. 2003. *Framtíð handan haf: vesturfarir frá Íslandi 1870-1914*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Kristinsson, Jóníus H. 1983. *Vesturfaraskrá 1870-1914. A Record of Emigrants from Iceland to America 1870-1914*. Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands.
- Lapidus, Steven. 2013. "The Golden Century?: Jews in Nineteenth-Century British North America." In *Canada's Jews: In Time, Space and Spirit*, edited by Ira Robinson, 29-37. Boston: Academic Studies Press.
- Levine, Allan. 2018. *Seeking the Fabled City*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

- McGuigan, Peter. 2007. *Historic South End Halifax*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing.
- Medjuck, Sheva. 1986. *Jews of Atlantic Canada*. St. John's: Breakwater Books.
- Neijmann, Daisy L. 2006. "Icelandic Canadian Literature." In *A History of Icelandic Literature*, edited by Daisy Neijmann, 608-42. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- . 1997. *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters: The Contribution of Icelandic-Canadian Writers to Canadian Literature*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- Raddall, Thomas H. 2010. *Halifax: Warden of the North*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing.
- Rosenberg, Stuart E. 1970. *The Jewish Community in Canada: A History*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Sigurðsson, Sveinn. 1945. "Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason, skáld." *Eimreiðin* 51, no. 4: 276-79.
- Tulchinsky, Gerald. 2008. *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Vigod, Bernard L. 1984. *The Jews in Canada*. Canada's Ethnic Groups, No. 7. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association.
- Whitfield, Harvey Amani. 2006. *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860*. Burlington: University of Vermont Press.
- Wolf, Kirsten. 1991. "Heroic Past—Heroic Present: Western Icelandic Literature." *Scandinavian Studies* 63, no. 4: 432-52.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4: 387-409.
- Þorsteinsson, Þorsteinn Þ. 1943. *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi*. Vol. 2. Winnipeg: Þjóðræknisfélag Íslendinga í Vesturheimi.

APPENDIX: AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLISHED ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF J. MAGNÚS BJARNASON'S WORKS

Austmann, Kristjan J., trans. 1944. "Three Fables [The Yule-Hall, The Peace Conference, The Mirage of Time]." *The Icelandic Canadian* 3, no. 2: 11-15.

———. "The Ice Drift." 1972. *The Icelandic Canadian* 30, no. 3: 46.

Bjarnason, Paul, trans. 1954. "Like a Child." *Odes and Echoes*, edited by Paul Bjarnason, 54. Vancouver: n.p.

———. "The Buckster." 1954. *Odes and Echoes*, edited by Paul Bjarnason, 55-58. Vancouver: n. p.

———. "Cradle Song." 1963. *More Echoes*, edited by Paul Bjarnason, 17. Vancouver: n.p. [Originally published in *The Icelandic Canadian* 40, no. 4 (1957): 31].

Björnsson, Sigríður, translator. 1969. "Sleep My Baby Sweetly Dreaming [Sof þú barn mitt, sætt þig dreymi]." *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, April 17: A2.

Campbell, Ninna Bjarnason, trans. 1998/1999. "Mr. Carson." *The Icelandic Canadian* 55, no. 2: 223-28.

———. 2003. "In the Red River Valley—The Treasure. Book II: Last Chapter & Conclusion." *The Icelandic Canadian* 58, no. 2: 73-86.

———. 2010. "Sighvatur and His Tale of the Landsend Man." *The Icelandic Canadian* 63, no. 2: 67-73.

"Grímur From Grund." 1940. *Heimskringla*, 31. January: A3.

Hartmann, Jacob Wittmer, trans. 1916. "An Icelandic Sherlock Holmes." *The American Scandinavian Review* 4, no. 6: 359-65.

Hjaltadóttir, Árný, trans. 2001. "The Christmas Candles." *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, December 21: A15.

———. "Alhamar and the Angel." 2004. *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, January 30: A8.

- "Icelandic Titan." [translated synopsis] 1989. *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, November 17: A6.
- Isfeld, G[unnur], trans. 1999. "Jón Austmann." *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, in 3 issues: October 8: A7; October 15: A6-A7; October 29: A18-19.
- Jakobson, Borga, trans. 2001. *Errand Boy in the Mooseland Hills*. Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited.
- . *The Young Icelander*. 2009. Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited.
- . "Swanfrid." 2013. *Icelandic Connection* 65, no. 3: 110-14.
- Kirkconnell, Watson, trans. 1930. "Homesick." *The North American Book of Icelandic Verse*, edited by Watson Kirkconnell, 186. New York and Montreal: Louis Carrier & Alan Isles.
- . 1935. "Summer Evening." *Canadian Overtones*, edited by Watson Kirkconnell, 29-30. New York: The Columbia Press Limited.
- . 1935. "The Herdboy." *Canadian Overtones*, edited by Watson Kirkconnell, 28-29. New York: The Columbia Press Limited.
- Lalonde, Jay, trans. 2021. "The Man from New Zealand." *Icelandic Connection* 72, no. 2: 76-81.
- Steffensen, Jan B., trans. 1994. "An Icelandic Sherlock Holmes." Aalborg: Pinkerton [From Danish].
- Stewart, Guy, translator. 1990. "The Icelandic Paperboy." *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, March 2: A4-A5.
- Whale, Thelma Guðrún, trans. 1988. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter I: The Crooked House." *The Icelandic Canadian* 46, no. 3: 20-27.
- . 1988. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter II: O'Brian." *The Icelandic Canadian* 46, no. 4: 19-22.
- . 1988. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter III: Adventure in St. Boniface." *The Icelandic Canadian* 47, no. 2: 28-34.

- . 1989. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter IV: Adventure in Elmwood." *The Icelandic Canadian* 47, no. 3: 45-55.
- . 1989. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter V: Mrs. Colhart." *The Icelandic Canadian* 48, no. 2: 48-56.
- . 1990. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter VI: Selections from Arnór's Diary." *The Icelandic Canadian* 48, no. 3: 21-29.
- . 1990. "In the Red River Valley. Book I, Chapter VII: The Letter & Chapter VIII: The Writing on the Wall." *The Icelandic Canadian* 48, no. 4: 36-46.
- . 1990/1991. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter I: A New Adventure & Chapter II: Adventure in Apemama." *The Icelandic Canadian* 49, no. 2: 36-42.
- . 1991. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter III: The Tug-of-War." *The Icelandic Canadian* 49, no. 3: 27-40.
- . 1991. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter IV: The Girl in Grey." *The Icelandic Canadian* 50, no. 1: 34-42.
- . 1992. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter V: The Story of the Man from New Iceland." *The Icelandic Canadian* 50, no. 3: 161-66.
- . 1992. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter VI: The Trip to Batoche and the Phantoms in the Ravine." *The Icelandic Canadian* 51, no. 1: 44-54.
- . 1992. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter VII: The Story Told by the Policeman." *The Icelandic Canadian* 51, no. 2: 121-31.
- . 1993. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter VIII: The Story Told by O'Brian." *The Icelandic Canadian* 51, no. 4: 213-26.
- . 1993. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter IX: The Story Told by the Indian." *The Icelandic Canadian* 52, no. 1: 35-42.
- . 1993. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter X: The Story Told by the Metis." *The Icelandic Canadian* 52, no. 2: 86-92.

- . 1994. "In the Red River Valley. Book II, Chapter XI: Madeleine Vanda." *The Icelandic Canadian* 52, no. 4: 215-21.
- . 1994. "In the Red River Valley. Part III, Chapter I: Mabel." *The Icelandic Canadian* 53, no. 1: 40-49.
- . 1995. "In the Red River Valley. Part III, Chapter II: The Wandering Iclander & Chapter III: The Narrative of Bernard the Monk." *The Icelandic Canadian* 53, no. 3&4: 143-53.
- . 1996. "In the Red River Valley. Part III, Chapter IV: O'Brian and Godson." *The Icelandic Canadian* 54, no. 1: 37-44.
- . 1996/1997. "In the Red River Valley. Part III, Chapter V." *The Icelandic Canadian* 54, no. 2: 91-96.
- Wolf, Kirsten, trans. 1991. "Little Karl." *The Icelandic Canadian* 50, no. 1: 27-33.
- . "An Icelandic Giant." 1992. *Western Icelandic Short Stories*, edited by Kirsten Wolf and Árný Hjaltadóttir, 49-59. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.