

# Gender, style and adjectives in the crime novel *Betty*

Anna S. Guðfinnsdóttir Aðils  
Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson

## 1. Introduction

The crime novel *Betty* (2004) has a special place within the works of the Icelandic author Arnaldur Indriðason (b. 1961) as his only book inspired by noir crime fiction. This is openly acknowledged by a reference in *Betty* to *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James M. Cain. As in the famous noir novel, *Betty* is a first person narrative that revolves around a deadly love triangle, including the femme fatale Betty and her older partner, Tómas. However, Indriðason departs from the noir tradition in that the narrator is a woman named Sara and it is her homosexual relationship with Betty that leads to the murder of Tómas. Sara is placed in custody and convicted for the crime even though Betty is the real culprit along with her secret boyfriend, Leó. Still, some justice is served in that Betty does not inherit any of Tómas' wealth and ends up in a poor neighborhood of Reykjavík.

The novel *Betty* features another interesting twist as the author tries to trick the reader into believing that the first person narrator is a man, only to reveal the truth in the middle of the book. The deception starts already on the cover of the book, which provides the following information about the narrator: „A young lawyer is in custody suspected of a serious crime. He himself claims to be innocent.” By the rules of Icelandic grammar, both *he* and *himself* refer to the grammatically masculine noun *lögfræðingur* ('lawyer'), a word freely used for both men and women. These pronouns are therefore independent of the biological gender of the lawyer.<sup>1</sup> However, readers might easily conclude from this that the lawyer is a man since the grammatical gender of pronouns is strongly correlated with biological gender in Icelandic when pronouns refer to humans. To judge by various reviews of the book, most readers of *Betty* fall for the trick and are taken by surprise when the truth is unearthed in chapter 18. The author's main intention behind this gender play is probably to get the reader to think about all the issues relating to gender and sexual orientation that the novel gives rise to.<sup>2</sup> Some of these issues relate directly to the plot, e.g. the extent to which Sara's gender contributes to her downfall in the story. A further goal may be to show the reader how one can be misled into believing something false, thereby making it easier to understand how the narrator is manipulated by Betty in the story.

In this paper, we will focus on this play with gender in *Betty* and how it manifests itself in the style of the novel. To play this game of deception, the author must write a text that is consistent with a male or female narrator and thus avoid gender-marked words describing the narrator, especially adjectives, in the first 17 chapters of the story. Since most adjectives in Icelandic make a morphological distinction between masculine and feminine, this is not an easy task, especially since *Betty* is a story where the thoughts and feelings of the narrator take center stage.<sup>3</sup> Nouns that indicate the gender of the person referred to (e.g. *dóttir* 'daughter', *faðir* 'father' and *vinkona* 'female friend') must also be avoided. We will also show how the absence of gender-marked adjectives affects the reader's perception of the narrator Sara and marks a strong contrast between her and Betty. There is also a clear distinction between Sara in the first half of the book and the second half since there is no lack of gender-marked

adjectives to express her thoughts and emotions from chapter 18 and until the story ends in chapter 31.<sup>4</sup>

The paper is organized as follows. Section two provides some background information on gender-marking in Icelandic and illustrates how the morphological richness of the language limits the stylistic choices available to the author of *Betty*. Section three focuses on the descriptions of Sara and Betty in the first half of the book where neither Sara's name nor gender have been revealed. As we will show, the paucity of adjectives describing Sara underscores her lack of power, money and significance. By contrast, all the adjectives bestowed on Betty reflect Sara's unbridled passion for her as well as her importance in the the story. Section four discusses the second half of the book where the reader has learned that the narrator is a lesbian named Sara and gotten more information about her history. In this part, gender-marked adjectives are freely used to portray Sara's emotions or situation, and sometimes they are stacked up or conjoined for emphasis. The result of these revelations and the change in style is that Sara springs to life on the pages of *Betty*. Still, this does not lead to any kind of liberation since Sara is still unable to defend herself against the murder charges and undo all her mistakes.

## 2. Gender marking and adjectives

Icelandic is a language where adjectives, pronouns, determiners, quantifiers, and numerals inflect for gender (masculine, feminine and neuter), number (singular and plural) and case (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive). Adjectives are by far the most important class for our purposes, since they are the most likely to uncover the biological gender of a first person narrator. (For convenience, participles are treated here as a subclass of adjectives).

Gender inflection in Icelandic involves many different forms (see Einarsson 1945) but we will abstract away from various morphological complications by focusing on the nominative singular. Thus, the term gender-marked will be used here to denote words that display a formal distinction between masculine and feminine in the nominative singular. Words that do not make this distinction will be referred to as gender-neutral. Our terminology is based on the nominative singular because it is the most common form for predicative adjectives in Icelandic.

In the following subsections, some grammatical and stylistic issues concerning gender-neutrality in the first half of the book will be examined. These issues involve pronouns, the two perfects in Icelandic, and the use of adjectives.

### 2.1 Pronouns

The narrator Sara talks about herself in first person (*ég* 'I' or *við* 'we') and others refer to her by using a second person pronoun (*þú* 'you (sg.)' or *þið* 'you (pl.)').<sup>6</sup> This creates no problems for the author of *Betty* since these pronouns are gender-neutral. Hiding the gender of a character in a third-person narrative is far more difficult because that rules out the use of gender-marked pronouns like *hann* 'he' or *hún* 'she'. This is particularly challenging if the gender of the main character remains hidden throughout the whole book, as in another crime novel by Indriðason, *Einvígið* (2013) (see Gunnarsdóttir et al. 2015). The only pronominal gender marking that is an issue in *Betty* concerns the complex reflexive *sjálfan sig* (literally 'self' + reflexive) because the first part inflects for gender. This pronoun is employed when

co-reference with the subject or the object is somehow unexpected (e.g. *Jón er alltaf að tala við sjálfan sig* ‘John is always talking to himself’). In other cases, the simple reflexive *sig* is used. There are at least three examples in the first half of *Betty* where the simple reflexive is used when a complex reflexive would be more natural in our view.<sup>7</sup> These examples are shown in (1) below where the relevant parts of the Icelandic text are shown in brackets.<sup>8</sup>

- (1) a. I would have liked to defend myself (*verja mig*) without him (p. 12)  
 b. ...when I looked at myself (*horfði á mig*) in a mirror (p.23)  
 c. I looked at myself (*leit á mig*) in the big mirror (p. 51)

Since people usually look at other people and lawyers defend their clients rather than themselves, a complex first person reflexive (*sjálfa/sjálfan mig*) is preferable to the simple reflexive (*mig*) in all these examples.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the author has to make a small stylistic sacrifice to play his game of gender deception.

As a final point here, it is worth noting that the noun *maður* ‘man’ in Icelandic can be used as a first person pronoun as well as a generic pronoun (cf. English *one*). Since *maður* is a masculine noun, it triggers masculine agreement on a predicative adjective if such an adjective is present, irrespective of the gender of the speaker. This makes it possible to use *maður* instead of *ég* ‘I’ with gender-marked adjectives without revealing the gender of the narrator. However, this strategy is never used in *Betty*. The reason is probably that the use of *maður* as a first person pronoun is pragmatically restricted and rather informal.

## 2.2 The two perfects

Icelandic has basically the same tense system as English and no gender marking in the formation of the simple present or past tense.<sup>10</sup> However, the aspect system is more complicated in that Icelandic has two perfects, the traditional one with the auxiliary *hafa* ‘have’ as well as a perfect based on the gender-marked participle *búin/búinn* ‘done/finished’, *vera búin/búinn að* (literally ‘be done/finished to’). The *búinn*-perfect is mainly used to express the immediate result of a past action, in which case it is preferable to the *hafa*-perfect (Jónsson 1992). This type of perfect has no equivalent in standard English but it seems to be quite similar to the *after* perfect in Irish English (see Kallen 2012 and references cited there). Since the *búinn*-perfect must be avoided in the first half of the book when the subject of the clause refers to Sara, only *hafa*-perfects are used instead:

- (2) a. I had forgotten (*hafði gleymt*) how small Iceland was (p. 11)  
 b. I have declared (*hef lýst yfir*) my innocence over and over again (p. 17)  
 c. I have given him (*hef látið hann hafa*) all the information... (p. 90)

In all of these examples, it would have been grammatically possible to use the *búinn*-perfect and also more idiomatic, at least in (2a) and (2b). Still, this is a fairly minor stylistic deviance that may only be noted by very attentive readers.

### 2.3 Adjectives

The main challenge in hiding the true gender of a first person narrator is to eschew gender-marked adjectives. This can be achieved in basically two ways. One is to use phrases that do not include any adjectives but express roughly the same meaning (see further in 2.4 below); the other strategy is to make use of gender-neutral adjectives. Approximately 20% of the most common adjectives in Icelandic are gender-neutral in the sense used here so this leaves some room for the author of *Betty*.<sup>11</sup>

Gender-neutral adjectives fall into roughly three subclasses in Icelandic. The first class consists of adjectives that are fully inflected but do not show any morphological distinction between masculine and feminine in nominative singular even though this distinction appears in other parts of the paradigm (e.g. accusative singular or nominative plural). This is exemplified below with the adjective *áhugalaus* ‘disinterested’:

- (3) a. Jón/María er **áhugalaus** ‘John/Mary is disinterested (masc./fem.).’  
b. Ég tel Jón vera **áhugalausan** ‘I believe John to be disinterested (masc.).’  
c. Ég tel Maríu vera **áhugalaus**a ‘I believe Mary to be disinterested (fem.).’  
d. Mennirnir eru **áhugalausir** ‘The men are disinterested (masc.).’  
e. Konurnar eru **áhugalausar** ‘The women are disinterested (fem.).’

As shown in (3a), there is no contrast between masculine and feminine in the nominative singular. A gender contrast appears, however, in the accusative singular where the masculine is marked by the ending *-an*, as in (3b), and the feminine by *-a*, as in (3c). There is also a contrast in the nominative plural, as shown in (3d) and (3e).

Uninflected adjectives constitute the second class, including some adjectives borrowed from other languages (e.g. *edru* ‘sober’, *kul* ‘cool’, *sexi* ‘sexy’) as well as adjectives with suffixes like *-a* (*andvaka* ‘unable to sleep’, *einmana* ‘lonely’, *sammála* ‘in agreement with’ etc.) or *-andi* (*óþolandi* ‘intolerable’, *óþreytandi* ‘relentless’, *spennandi* ‘exciting’ etc.). The third class is comparative adjectives, which are formed by the suffix *-(a)ri* but do not inflect for gender, number or case (e.g. *gætn-ari* ‘more careful’). Examples from both classes are shown in (4) below:

- (4) a. Jón/María var **edru** ‘John/Mary was sober.’  
b. Jón/María er stundum **einmana** ‘John/Mary is sometimes lonely.’  
c. Jón/María er **gætnari** en ég ‘John/Mary is more careful than me.’

As discussed in section 3 below, some gender-neutral adjectives are used to describe the narrator Sara in the first half of the book. Nevertheless, it is a major restriction to do away with all gender-marked adjectives in the description of a person whose thoughts and emotions form the core of the novel.

### 2.4 Replacing gender-marked adjectives

In the first 17 chapters of *Betty*, Sara expresses emotions like envy, anger or jealousy and describes her situation of loneliness and lack of money. In an ordinary text, this would call for the use of various adjectives, but this is not possible in the first half of *Betty* since the relevant

adjectives are gender-marked. The most common way of side-stepping this problem is to use nouns instead of adjectives. This is exemplified in (5) – (9) below where the relevant nouns are boldfaced. The b-examples show an alternative way of expressing the same meaning with gender-marked adjectives. The Icelandic equivalents of these adjectives are shown in brackets where the feminine form precedes the masculine form.

- (5) a. I was perhaps not at the **poverty line**. (p. 22)  
b. I was perhaps not poor (*fátæk/fátækur*)
- (6) a. and perhaps this was just **envy** (p. 24)  
b. and perhaps I was just envious (*öfundsjúk/öfundsjúkur*)
- (7) a. I do not mind **solitude**. (p. 52)  
b. I do not mind being alone (*ein/einn*)
- (8) a. I had not felt such **anger** before. (p. 75)  
b. I had not been so angry (*reið/reiður*) before
- (9) a. ...how intense the **jealousy** towards her husband was. (p. 75)  
b. how jealous (*afbrýðissöm/afbrýðissamur*) I was of her husband

Examples (5a), (7a) and (9b) strike us as stylistically odd. In all these examples, it would be better to use an adjective as in (5b), (7b) and (9b). The problem is that replacing adjectives by nouns tends to make the text too formal. In fact, overusing nouns is characteristic of so called *stofnanamál* ‘office language’ (literally ‘institution language’) in Icelandic, a common source of complaints by language prescriptivists. Thus, the emotional impact of the a-examples above is clearly reduced by the use of nouns in place of adjectives.

In addition to using nouns for gender-marked adjectives, some other ways of avoiding gender-marked adjectives are utilized in chapters 1-17 of *Betty*. This is exemplified in (10) – (12) below:

- (10) a. I sat in silence and thought about her words and got angry. (p. 104-105)  
b. I sat in silence and thought about her words and was angry (*reið/reiður*)
- (11) a. The words were not supposed to be so insensitive. (p. 24)  
b. I did not intend to be so insensitive (*meinleg/meinlegur*)
- (12) a. Then there is hardly an honest nerve in me either, I said. (p. 59)  
b. Then I am hardly honest (*ærleg/ærlegur*) either, I said.

In (10a), the verb *reiðast* ‘get angry’ is used where it would be more natural to use the adjective *reið/reiður* ‘angry’ because *reiðast* denotes a change of emotion rather than psychological state. In (11a), the property of being insensitive is ascribed to the narrator’s words rather than herself. Finally, in (12a), the adjective *ærleg/ærlegur* ‘honest’ is used attributively with the feminine noun *nerve* in an idiomatic expression but the meaning is that

the narrator lacks honesty. Hence, the gender-marking on the adjective reveals nothing about the gender of the narrator. The use of *ærleg/ærlegur* is interesting here because Sara uses the gender-marked adjective *heiðarleg/heiðarlegur* 'honest' in a question to Bettý just before she utters (12a).

### 3. The first half (chapters 1-17)

#### 3.1 Tricking the reader

As already mentioned, the author tries to get the reader to assume that the narrator of *Bettý* is a man until the truth is disclosed in chapter 18. This game starts on the cover of *Bettý* where readers learn about a lawyer in custody, who in the next sentence is referred to by two masculine pronouns (*hann* 'he' and *sjálfur* 'himself') in concord with the masculine noun *lögfræðingur* 'lawyer'. The word *lögfræðingur* occurs a few times in *Bettý* in relation to the narrator Sara and this helps keep the reader on the wrong track, not only because of the masculine pronouns but also because male lawyers outnumber female lawyers. Moreover, Sara is a specialist in the fishing industry, a heavily male-dominated field in Iceland. She is also kept in custody in a jail (*Litla-Hraun*) that is only for men. Last but not least, her steamy affair with Bettý is likely to make many readers think about a male lover, given the fact that heterosexuality is very much the norm in our society.

To hide Sara's gender, detailed accounts of the way she looks or dresses must be avoided. Thus, the following passage where Sara is looking in the mirror and wondering what to wear, contains no information that relates to her gender.

- (13) I had some nice clothes from the time I graduated as a lawyer here in Iceland. They were three years old and hung in a closet. I had nothing else to wear. I thought they would be ok when I looked at myself in the mirror. I had not gained any weight in these three years. Rather the opposite. (p. 22-23)

One may wonder if there are any clues about Sara's gender in the style of the novel, with all its repetitions, rhetorical questions, sentence fragments, and emotionally charged language, as exemplified by the third paragraph of the novel:

- (14) Could I have anticipated this? Could I have figured out what was happening and escaped? Left everything behind and disappeared? I can see it now, when the truth has been revealed, that I might have been able to see where things were heading. I should have seen the warning signs. I should have understood what was happening a lot earlier. I should have...I should have...I should have... (p. 7)

This passage describes quite vividly the narrator's uncertainty and desperation about the way she has been betrayed by her lover, Bettý.<sup>12</sup> Expressing equivocation, or hedging, is often claimed to be characteristic of women's language (Lakoff 1975, Coates 2004:88-90). This may be true but the problem is that hedging only involves a quantitative difference between the languages of men and women. Thus, someone reading this passage or similar passages is unlikely to conclude from the style that the narrator is a woman. In fact, there are no known features of women's language that apply exclusively to women with respect to Icelandic, apart from grammatical gender-marking we have already discussed.

### 3.2 Adjectives

Some gender-neutral adjectives are used to articulate Sara's thoughts and emotions in the first 17 chapters of the book. The first five occurrences of these adjectives are shown in (15) below. Since the novel starts on page 7 and the fifth example is on page 26, this amounts to five adjectives on 20 pages, or only one adjective for every four pages.

- (15) a. I tried to appear uninterested (*áhugalaus*) (p. 9)  
b. I am probably not cooperative (*samvinnufús*) enough (p. 18)  
c. I would have to be more cooperative (*samvinnuþýðari*) (p. 18)  
d. Are you sure (*viss*)? (p. 25)  
e. So busy (*bissí*)? (p. 26)

The example in (15c) involves the comparative form of an adjective. Such forms feature the suffix *-(a)ri* but otherwise they are uninflected in Icelandic. The adjective in (15e) is also uninflected, just like many other adjectives borrowed from other languages. However, since such adjectives tend to have a very colloquial flavor, they can only be used in conversations in *Betty*.

The scarcity of adjectives conveying Sara's thoughts and emotions in the first half of the book is in stark contrast to the second half (see section 4 below). There is also a clear contrast between Sara and Betty in the first half of the book as can be seen in the following paragraphs recounting the first meeting between Sara and Betty. For clarity of exposition, adjectives describing Sara and Betty are accompanied by their Icelandic equivalents but other adjectives corresponding to adjectives in the Icelandic text are underlined.

- (16) She was there. She arrived late and I noticed her immediately because she... she was gorgeous (*dýrleg*). Gorgeous (*Dýrleg*) from the moment I saw her first enter the dark hall. The lights in the hallway behind her lit her up like a movie star. She was not afraid (*óhrædd*) of being feminine (*kvenleg*) unlike many other women; one woman in the hall had extended her legs into the next row, wearing a sweatshirt. The woman in the doorway was wearing a tight-fitting dress with delicate straps over the slim shoulders, her thick, dark hair fell in curls over the shoulders, the eyes were deep set, brown with a tiny white gleam in the pupils. And when she smiled...

I noticed these details when she came to up me on the stage after the lecture. I tried to look uninterested (*áhugalaus*) or more accurately, I tried not to stare at her. The breasts were delicate and the nipples were poking through the dress. She was thin (*grönn*), with strong legs and delicate, almost fragile ankles. Like stems on champagne glasses. A small gold chain was around one of the ankles. My mother would have known how to describe her walk. Graceful, she would have said. (p. 9)

In these two paragraphs, four gender-marked adjectives are used to describe Betty (*dýrleg*, *óhrædd*, *kvenleg*, *grönn*) and one gender-neutral adjective to describe Sara (*áhugalaus*). Moreover, these paragraphs are filled with descriptions of Betty's looks and attire where adjectives play a major role. The descriptions of her petite body are noteworthy as they belie her steely determination which becomes gradually apparent as the story unfolds. Note also

how the author builds up anticipation for Bettý by referring to her by the pronoun *hún* ‘she’ before Bettý introduces herself to Sara.

One page later, all the glamour and sex appeal associated with Bettý is further underscored in the following passage:

- (17) She was well prepared (*reiðubúin*) when she appeared there in the hallway like a star. The dress that showed the tops of her small breasts. The nice cleavage. The gold around the champagne ankle. Maybe this was all staged for me. A private show. (p. 10)

There are no passages about Sara in the first half of the novel that resemble the passages in (16) and (17) in terms of content or style. Hence, a strong contrast is created between her and Bettý. As reflected in her own words, Sara comes across as fairly bland and unimportant compared to Bettý:

- (18) a. Most likely, I was bored. Nothing exciting was happening in my life and even though I did not necessarily want excitement, I wanted a change (p. 22)  
b. Bettý ended my isolation. Maybe this was also the reason that I found her exciting. She appeared at the right time, she was quick to find the weak spots and she was strangely direct and uninhibited. (p. 29)  
c. I was captivated by everything in Bettý’s behavior that was so different from mine. She was open and candid and entertaining and enjoyed life as if every day would be her last. I was so much more private or just more careful and still really uncertain of who I was and what I was. (p. 65)

Note that (18c) has two comparative adjectives, but this is unproblematic because such adjectives are gender-neutral in Icelandic (see 2.3 above).

#### 4. The second half (chapters 18-31)

The second half of *Bettý* starts with chapter 18 where Sara discusses her homosexuality for the first time in the book and how this has caused frictions within her family. This chapter feels very much like the beginning of a new story where Sara comes out of the closet and tells the reader who she really is. The chapter is filled with gender-marked words, mostly adjectives, and the first four pages have a total of 10 such examples of 7 different words:

- (19) a. I cannot be any (*nein*) other (*önnur*) than I am (p. 116)  
b. therefore I am different (*ólík*) from everybody else (p. 116)  
c. I am not shy (*feimin*) of being homosexual (*samkynhneigð*) (p. 116-117)  
d. that I was ready (*reiðubúin*) to do whatever...(p. 118)  
e. when I told her that I was homosexual (*samkynhneigð*). (p. 118)  
f. as if the only reason for me being homosexual (*samkynhneigð*) was... (p. 118)  
g. Later she said that I was disgusting (*ógeðsleg*) (p. 118)  
h. I have not done anything to become homoexual (*samkynhneigð*) (p. 119)

Sara’s gender is revealed not only by gender-marked words in chapter 18 but also through nouns that pertain only to women (e.g. *baráttukona* ‘fighting woman’ and *lesbía* ‘lesbian’).



There are altogether 31 examples of words revealing Sara's gender in chapter 18, a much higher number than in any other subsequent chapter. Note that two of the most important words in the chapter, *lesbía* 'lesbian' and *samkynhneigð* 'homosexual (fem.)' occur five times each. Hence, these two words are responsible for almost a third of the 31 examples showing that the narrator is a woman.

The number of adjectives describing Sara triples in the second half of *Betty* (see Guðfinnsdóttir 2015 for details) and this is a drastic change from the first half of the book. The significance of this is further enhanced by the occasional use of these adjectives to create a special stylistic effect. For instance, the same adjective may be repeated for emphasis as in (20):

- (20) a. I was relieved (*fegin*) that she came. I was relieved (*fegin*) that I had her to lean on. (p. 125)  
b. I was so alone (*ein*). I was so completely, terribly alone (*ein*). (p. 151)  
c. I was tired (*þreytt*). Tired (*þreytt*) of all the lies. All that hide and seek. So tired (*þreytt*). (p. 185)

There is nothing comparable to these examples in the first half of *Betty* and that is consistent with the author's intention to portray Sara as a dull and uninteresting person who needs someone like Betty to spice up her life. Moreover, it is harder to create a similar effect if gender-marked adjectives cannot be used.

There are also examples in the second half of *Betty* where different adjectives are piled up, either in adjacent clauses or conjoined within the same clause:

- (21) a. Did I really think that Betty and I could be happy (*hamingjusamar*) for the rest of our lives? Was I so childish (*barnaleg*)? Was I so blinded (*blinduð*)? (p. 120)  
b. I was tired (*þreytt*) and scared (*hrædd*) and terribly sad (*sorgbitin*). (p. 126)  
c. I know that I was ready (*reiðubúin*) to commit this crime with Betty...I was involved (*samsek*), I cannot deny it. But first and foremost I am guilty (*sek*) of having let myself be seduced. (p. 212)

All the adjectives in (20) and (21) are feminine singular, except for *hamingjusamar* 'happy', which is feminine plural. The changes in the style of *Betty* shown in these examples go hand in hand with changes in the narrative in the second half of the novel where Sara takes center stage and Betty moves to the background, especially after the murder of Tómas in chapter 20. Shortly after that, Sara takes matters into her own hands and assumes the role of a detective and unearths all kinds of facts about Betty's past as well as her devious plot to kill Tómas and frame Sara for the murder. She also becomes more of a full person in the second half since this is where the reader learns about her name, gender and sexual orientation, and gets more detailed information about her history, including past romantic relationships with other women. There is also a sense of personal closure since Sara makes peace with her mother after nine years of no contact.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed the strategies used by the author of *Betty* (2004) to write a gender-neutral text with respect to the narrator Sara in the first half of the novel. Since Icelandic is a morphologically rich language, the main challenge is to avoid gender-marked adjectives and this can be done e.g. by using gender-neutral adjectives or replacing adjectives by semantically equivalent nouns. Since this play with gender makes it difficult to write vivid descriptions of Sara, the result is that she comes across as a fairly insignificant character compared to Betty, the femme fatale of the story. However, once the true gender of Sara has been disclosed in the second half of *Betty*, the text becomes full of gender-marked adjectives expressing her innermost thoughts and feelings. The stylistic effect of these adjectives is intensified by the fact that they are sometimes repeated or concentrated in a small piece of text. This change in the style of the novel coincides quite nicely with changes in the story where the subdued narrator of the first half assumes a more active role in the second half and the readers learn important facts about her personal life and history.

## References

- Coates, J. (2004) *Women, Men and Language. A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language*. Third edition. New York: Routledge.
- Einarsson, S. (1945) *Icelandic. Grammar. Texts. Glossary*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press,.
- Fludernik, M. (2009) *An Introduction to Narratology*. New York: Routledge.
- Guðfinnsdóttir, A. S. A. (2015) 'Kynlegur sögumaður. Um kyn í tungumáli og bókmenntum' [A Queer Narrator. On Gender in Language and Literature], unpublished BA-thesis, University of Iceland, Reykjavík.
- Gunnarsdóttir, Á. B., Jónsson J. G. and Eythórsson T. (2015) 'Mál og kynóvissa í íslensku. Ráðgátan um Marion Briem' [Language and Gender Ambiguity. The Puzzle about Marion Briem.], *Ritið*, 15 (3): 159-182.
- Indriðason, A. (2004) *Betty*. Second edition. Reykjavík: Vaka Helgafell.
- Indriðason, A. (2012) *Einvígið*. [The Great Match.] Second edition. Reykjavík: Vaka Helgafell.
- Íslensk orðtíðnibók*. [The Icelandic Frequency Dictionary.] (1991) Edited by Magnússon F., Pind J., and Briem, S. Reykjavík: Orðabók Háskólans.
- Jónsson, J. G. (1992) 'The Two Perfects of Icelandic', *Íslenskt mál og almenn málfræði*, 14: 129-145.
- Kallen, J. L. (2012) 'The English Language in Ireland: An Introduction', *International Journal of Language, Translation and Intercultural Communication*, 1: 25-41.
- Lakoff, R. (1975) *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Livia, A. (2001) *Pronoun Envy. Literary Uses of Linguistic Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Livia, A. (2003) 'One Man in Two is a Woman: Linguistic Approaches to Gender in Literary Texts', in J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds) *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, pp. 142-158. Maiden: Blackwell Publishing.

Schabert, I. (2010) 'Translation Trouble: Gender Indeterminacy in English Novels and their French Versions', *Translation and Literature*, 19(1): 72–92.

---

<sup>1</sup> For some speakers there may be a preference for the gender of the pronoun to match the biological gender of the person referred to by words like *lögfræðingur* 'lawyer'. However, standard Icelandic requires concord with the grammatical gender.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed by Livia (2001) and Fludernik (2009:49-51), the point of hiding the gender of a fictional character is often to force the reader to confront his or her own stereotypical ideas about gender and sexuality.

<sup>3</sup> A similar problem arises when a gender-neutral text is translated from English to a morphologically complex language like French (see Schabert 2010 for discussion).

<sup>4</sup> The two halves of *Betty* are almost identical in length as chapters 1-17 are 109 pages (7-115), but chapters 18-31 are 100 pages (116-215).

<sup>6</sup> There are at least four examples in the second half of the book where other people refer to her by a third person pronoun.

<sup>7</sup> The simple reflexive is homophonous with the personal pronouns in Icelandic in first and second person but we will nevertheless use the term reflexive here.

<sup>8</sup> All the translations in this paper are our own since *Betty* has not (yet) been translated into English. These translations are quite faithful to the Icelandic text since various grammatical details in *Betty* must be preserved. Thus, every adjective in the Icelandic text is translated by an adjective and no gender-marked pronouns (like *her*) are used in the English version if they are not in the original text.

<sup>9</sup> When feminine and masculine forms are shown side by side in this paper, the former precede the latter.

<sup>10</sup> This is in contrast to the more complicated tense system of French. Thus, as Livia (2003:150) points out, to hide the gender of a person in a French novel one must use the *passé simple* rather than the *passé composé* even if this "introduces a literary, almost anachronistic element to the text."

<sup>11</sup> This claim is based on information from *Íslensk orðtíðnibók* (see references).

<sup>12</sup> One word expressing doubt that is quite often used by Sara in the first half of the novel is *kannski* 'maybe'. Interestingly, the use of this word drops sharply in the second half where Sara has begun to understand how *Betty* has deceived and betrayed her in highly elaborate ways.