

Language and Culture Show and Tell: Faroese Bjarni Steintún

Transcript

1.

These are the Faroe Islands. A small archipelago consisting of 18 islands located in the North Atlantic, halfway between Iceland, Scotland, and Norway. While the islands today are an autonomous region of Denmark, they were originally settled by Vikings from the west coast of Norway around the ninth and tenth centuries. These Norsemen took great risks when they took to the sea in search of new lands and a better fortune. Even though they were excellent sailors and their ships were built for long journeys, the sea could be treacherous, and probably some of these first settlers were blown off course towards unintended destinations, and perhaps a few of them even perished at sea. But many of them eventually arrived at these practically empty weathered islands, and here they started building their new lives, surrounded by ocean, basically in the middle of nowhere.

2.

This is a painting from UCL's Art Collections by Thomas Arge, a Faroese painter. The painting is rather obscure and not considered one of his main works, but the motif is quite common in Faroese art: man and the sea. And no wonder, as the Faroese people have always been surrounded by the ocean, and, like the first settlers, have risked much when they have sought their fortune on the sea. The sea always looms in the imagination of the Faroese, and indeed it is almost unavoidable to see it, as the farthest you can get from the sea anywhere on the islands is only about five kilometres.

The natural surroundings of a people are bound to have an influence on its psyche, and the volatile nature of the sea and the weather has in many ways moulded the Faroese mind. The Faroe Islands are often jokingly referred to as the Land of Maybe, as the weather plays such a significant role in planning for the future. Even though the infrastructure has been radically improved these last 50 years, and transport has become increasingly fast and reliable, there are still days when the police advises everyone to stay at home, as the wind is reaching hurricane levels. And there are days when roads are filled with either ice or snow, making travelling by car highly risky. The few ferries that have not yet been replaced by sub-sea tunnels are not so seldom cancelled during the winter due to bad weather. The Faroese phrase 'um viðram' by

necessary, to live is not'

8.

So although we are still as dependant as ever on the sea for our survival here on the islands, the sorrow and the worry are not as prominent as before. The ships are now larger and safer, the shifts are shorter, and the facilities on board are top notch. We are in a prosperous time with economic stability.

We have indeed found our fortune in the sea. Without it, there would be no foundation for the society that lives and thrives here today. Indeed, tourists now come in great numbers to experience the wildness of the sea and nature in the Faroes. They willingly pay to go on long hikes to see great waves crash against the sea stacks, while the wind blows in their faces. The sea really is what makes life on these wind-swept, M their