

# JÓNAS BLONDAL

Comic's Message



*The purpose of "Jónas Blondal" is not just to entertain. True, to be entertaining is an important element of a comic but this story goes further than that. It has a message. A serious message.*

This is made very clear by the summary on the cover: "Confronted for the first time with the harsh reality of the whaling business," it says about the boy Jónas, "his excitement gives way to thoughtfulness, and his thirst for adventure turns into compassion for the helpless creatures ..."

This is what it's all about. It's not just about whaling but about care and responsibility in dealing with creation. Historical whaling may be the frame for this story but conditions at the time, now over a hundred years ago, are not the main focus in this story. Rather to question the consequences of whaling. This subject is certainly of topical interest – probably more now than ever before.

The story about [Jónas Blondal](#) is not trying to politicise but to sensitise. The aim is to sharpen the mind against senseless behaviour – in a subtle way.

The Blondal family plays the central role in this regard. After the death of his two brothers Sigurð and Grímur, Jónas is the only remaining child of Amalie and Ivar Blondal. Therefore his mother reacts strongly, when she hears about her husband's plan to take her youngest on one of the forthcoming trips on a Norwegian whaler. She is aware of the danger of losing her last child due to such irresponsible actions. Ivar Blondal meets these concerns with a rationality that borders on indifference. He lectures Amalie about 380 whales that once stranded and died near Scheveningen. "That's the way things go.", he remarks laconically, "Disasters happen ... why should it be different for humans?" Amalie's objection that it would be wrong to accelerate the process, falls on deaf ears.

This is a key passage: It becomes clear that the Blondal family with its past and future stands for something much larger. Their personal story is a kind of analogy: Due to a lack of responsibility (and the whaling itself), the life of their child and therefore the preservation of their family is threatened. Similarly an irrational and careless attitude threatens the survival of the whale population until today.

This "parallel of fate" appears again in a different part of the story: After the catch of a humpback whale cow, the orphaned calf follows the whaling ship\*. Jónas names the calf – and worries about it: "Is Finn all by himself now, just like me?", he asks his father the morning after the "successful" catch. And again Ivar Blondal reassures him with a mixture of carelessness and inappropriate joviality: "Listen, Jónas. Don't make the mistake of thinking about the whales too much. There have always been whales and there will be in the future. Finn will have a large family ... just like you."

Here the questionable naivety of the child triumphs over the questionable learning of the adult.

"History should not burden the memory, but inspire the mind."

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing



The graveyard in Reykjavík:  
After the funeral of their second child, Amalie Blondal worries about the safety of her son Jónas. Unreasonableness and carelessness finally endanger the continuance of the Blondals

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Would it be different today? How do you make a child understand, why people continuously kill so many animals of one species until it is extinct? Which animal breeder would not at least save one pair from the slaughter for further breeding? Are the children in need of more understanding, or are they the ones that sometimes ask the better questions?

Two questions are raised in the appendix of the comic: "What is the future for the whales? Will they share the fate of Jónas, the last remaining child in his family?"

According to the story Ivar Blondal stubbornly works as a whaler for the rest of this life – unreasonable and unwilling to learn. He dies in August 1913. His wife follows him the year after. On the last page of the comic it reads: "The Blondals did not leave any descendants."

Jónas Blondal and his family did not exist. The story is not authentic. But it could be – and possibly will be. Should some states persist in their decision to ignore international whaling regulations there could soon be a time when only pictures will remind us of these fascinating animals, the giants of the sea ...

\* Such tragic scenes have occurred several times, when whale calves mistook the hull of the whaler for the body of their mother.



The whale calf "Finn" in front of his mother's cadaver. Often the cruel hunt was turned around: First the whale calves were harpooned, to get hold of the mother animal – they always stayed close to their injured babies

What will become of the whales?

