



ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ

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HAMSUN AND LAXNESS: OPPOSITION OR LITERARY DIALOGUE?

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The novel *Independent People* by Halldór Kiljan Laxness was published in 1934, and it is now considered to be one of the best Icelandic novels. Actually, this work was a response to Knut Hamsun's novel *Growth of the Soil*, in which peasant patriarchal relations were presented in an ideal light. In both of these novels, the image of a proud independent person, existing in isolation from society, is central. Both of them are national types: Bjartur is an Icelander and Isak is Norwegian, but they also embody a kind of universal personality with the ability to act at their own discretion for good or evil. Hamsun provides the ideal model of existence, his hero is the winner in the fight against civilization, but the depiction of Laxness' hero appears as the crucial facet of the Icelandic national character: Bjartur is stark, precise, educated, and quick-tempered, but he has great tenacity. His ideas and aspirations are very similar to Isak's aims, but they are just utopian. He brings only grief and death to those whom he loves, and to those who love him. Hamsun and Laxness both criticized the capitalist civilization, asking the same question: what are the greatest values in this life? However, they found very different answers. Hamsun tried to find his ideal in the patriarchal peasantry, and Laxness was enthusiastic about communist ideas. It was actually an ideological confrontation where Laxness, denying Hamsun's ideology, greatly contributed to the leftist ideology and its attack on democracy. There is no doubt that Laxness as an author borrowed a lot from Hamsun's manner of writing and his novel, under certain conditions, can be considered as a reinterpretation of Hamsun's novel.

Keywords: Norwegian literature, Icelandic literature, Knut Hamsun, Halldór Kiljan Laxness, novel.

In 1934 Knut Hamsun was already a world-famous writer and Nobel Prize Laureate, when the young Icelandic author Halldór Kiljan Laxness published his novel *Independent People* (Sjálfstætt fólk) — the story of the farmer Bjartur from Sumarhús (Summer Houses), which is now considered to be one of the best Icelandic novels. Actually, this book was a response to Hamsun's novel of 1917 *Growth of the Soil* (Markens grøde) and his ideal of peasant patriarchal relations far away from the destructive influence of civilization. This novel was also highly honored by the Nobel Prize Committee; in 1955 Laxness was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. This was the first and only time an Icelander received the award. Despite his ups and downs with the Icelandic public, due to his outspoken views as well as the nature of his writings, the Nobel Prize helped to cement his place as one of the world's greatest writers on par with Hamsun.

There is no doubt that Laxness as an author borrowed Hamsun's manner of writing, and his novel, under certain conditions, can be considered as a reflection of Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*. The structure of Laxness' novel is very similar to that of Hamsun's piece of art. It is possible to see parallels in the development of plots in both novels. However, *Independent people* has a completely different ideological vector compared to *Growth of the Soil*: Hamsun's positive personages are turned into negative characters.

Hamsun and Laxness both criticized the capitalist civilization, asking the same question: what are the greatest values in this life? However, they found very different answers. Hamsun tried to find his ideal in the patriarchal peasantry, and Laxness was enthusiastic about communist ideas. It was actually an ideological confrontation where Laxness, denying Hamsun's ideology, greatly contributed to the leftist ideology and its attack on democracy.

Hamsun's character Isaak is an embodiment of the ideal of a farmer and a man. Bjartur possess the same personal features, but he cannot build his own private world. Isaak looks much like a fairy tale hero: he overcomes obstacles, creates his individual paradise, and exists independently of other people. Isaak is a winner because he works hard, and he has a clean soul. He symbolizes the ideal style of life. Bjartur is also a toiler, who aspires to be independent, but he fails to find his way, and his hopes and dreams ultimately are broken at the end of novel. Isaak comes and takes land, where he builds his house; Bjartur was working for eighteen years to buy the old farm Summerhouses and to bring to

life his idea: he wants to be an independent farmer, free of duties. Since that time, all his life and the lives of his family members are strongly connected with this goal.

Bjartur's intention requires victims and he brings his two wives and his children to the altar of his belief in independents. Friða, an old woman who helps at Summerhouses, speaks of him as a tyrant and a murderer that killed his family.

Great is the tyranny of mankind.

"It doesn't matter so much if he kills me, the devil, for as God and anyone can tell you, I'm doomed in advance — slaved to death a hundred times and on the parish. But never was I so badly off that I didn't have something to keep out the wet in spite of fraud, tyranny, and murder. And you mark my words, my lad, and see if he hasn't racked the life out of your poor mother before God gives her another summer, the bloody slave-driver".

Nor was it to be denied that even in the height of summer their mother was often away from work because of illness, and as for the children, the green issue of their nostrils mingled with the rivulets that coursed down their faces [Laxness, 1946, p. 221].

Bjartur is not evil nor horrible, rather he is just a farmer and for him the life of sheep is more important than the lives of his family. His youngest son Nonni in response to the question of one tourist from the capital:

"Does your father want anything?" answers: "Sheep".

"Does your father want anything?" inquired the man.

"Sheep", replied the boy.

Then at last the visitor looked at the children, and it was as if he realized for the first time that this was a conversation, and that there was, moreover, some real substance in this conversation. He was rather surprised. "So he wants sheep", he said, with a heavy stress on the "sheep", as if unable to understand the word in this context [Laxness, 1946, p. 226].

Hamsun's hero could not choose between members of his family and his animals. Isak's life, in contrast, is full of work and his labor bears fruits: he does not lose anything; he becomes wealthier and wealthier each day. Isak erects many buildings on his farm; Bjartur starts to build one stone house and it is his failure. Hamsun's hero is absolutely independent from the rest of the world; Bjartur greatly desires to be independent, but he cannot be. His life is the eternal struggle with society,

weather, hunger, and illnesses. Undoubtedly, this picture of human being is more realistic, than in Hamsun's novel where Isak lives in the ideal and unbelievable land, but Bjartur exists in the real time and place.

Laxness describes the period of Icelandic history from the beginning of the 1900s to the beginning of the 1930s. It is important to note that Hamsun does not mention any historical events or names; there are just some features of the period in the novel, such as the 20th century bringing new technologies and new morals. That new epoch brings changes to the life of people and requires that they change their way of thinking. Isak remains outside of the time and space; he symbolizes the general essence of the human being. Galina Khrapovitskaya determined this text as a “novel-myth” [Khrapovitskaya, 2000, p. 38]. The beginning of the novel is the beginning of a story about everyman, and it is similar to a hagiography.

The man comes, walking toward the north. He bears a sack, the first sack, carrying food and some few implements. A strong, coarse fellow, with a red iron beard, and little scars on face and hands; sites of old wounds — were they gained in toil or fight? Maybe the man has been in prison, and is looking for a place to hide; or a philosopher, maybe, in search of peace. This or that, he comes; the figure of a man in this great solitude. He trudges on; bird and beast are silent all about him; now and again he utters a word or two; speaking to himself. “Eyah — well, well...” — so he speaks to himself [Hamsun, 1921, vol. 1, p. 7].

Isak is a righteous person, what is good for him is not good for man, who lives in changing times like Bjartur. Laxness raises the question, what could happen to Isak if he encounters real problems, when the main aim of a farmer is just to survive? Isak belongs to the ideal world; but Bjartur lives in reality. Isak created his microcosm and his son Sivert would continue to build it while Bjartur ruined his life, family, but in the end, he found the main value, human love. He understood this simple thing after all of his losses, and it provides some optimism to the dramatic story of his life.

Love as an esthetical category plays a very significant role in any literary text and usually it is one of the most important components of a plot in a novel. However, this is not in the case in Hamsun's novel. He implicitly reveals that Isaak loves his wife, family, and children, but the human love does not play a key role in the novel. Moreover, this motive has a negative connotation, because the main love should be a love to

plant. Relationships between man and the land are more ancient and more closed than relationships between people. Hamsun's position here is certainly considered as inhuman, and Laxness opposes his ideas, he tries to show, how this type of hero turns from a creator into a destroyer.

Isak's love for his relatives is very specific. It looks like he is very much attached to his family and his children. He helps Eliseus, the prodigal son, who left the farm and tried to build a life in the town. Isak can also be generous, because he is strong, wealthy, and God loves him. His love is the love of the lord, wizard, and patriarch who looks to the members of his family from above and forgives their mistakes. Isak does not have normal human emotions; he is above them like a real saint.

Bjartur tries to be strong and he possesses no emotions, not even love. He can think only about his farm and sheep. His children and both wives are just parts of his farm and he does not attribute much value to their lives. His first wife dies, when he is looking for the lost sheep and the second wife dies because he is going to kill their only single cow. One of the most impressive scenes in the novel is when Bjartur finds a dead body and possibly this is the body of his eldest son Helgi. He does not bury him, but rather he just leaves a glove on the dead body. In Hamsun's novel, his heroes Isak and Axel bury bodies of their babies killed by women. Bjartur contemplates a certain power to a greater extent, which he encountered and created obstacles on his way to becoming independent, than about the sorrowful fate of his his own son.

Nevertheless he found it difficult to absolve Kolumkilli of all intervention in human fate, for it often happens that though one is quite certain that the story of Kolumkilli is not true, or even that it is a downright lie, there are times when this same story seems to hold more truth than any truth. There is some devil or other on the moors who eats people. Ah well, he would have to do something for the body, seeing that he had found it, and that as quickly as possible, for the ewes had taken to their heels and were out of the gully by now. He was wearing a pair of thick, heavy gloves that were practically new, and he took the glove from his right hand and threw it to the corpse, for it is considered discourteous to leave a corpse that one has found without first doing it some small service [Laxness, 1946, p. 342].

Both of these personages, Isak and Bjartur, are very simple emotionally, their aims are similar, but the results of their activities are different. Hamsun's Isak is a canonical figure, almost saintly, but Bjartur is his direct opposite. Isak brings life while Bjartur brings death. Hamsun wrote

a hagiography while Laxness wrote a saga; the subtitle for the novel: “Hetjasaga” (Heroic saga) — the word “saga” means history in Icelandic. Hamsun creates a mythological figure and Laxness illustrates an existent type: Isak’s place is heaven and Bjartur’s place is earth.

In Hamsun’s novel, such emotions as love, passion, and desire are not inherent in his characters. The relations between a man and a woman look natural and archaic, there is no place for some fantasies and romantic dreams. Isak accepts Inger as a housewife, but not as a bright or beloved woman; a similar relationship can be found between other pairs of heroes: Axel and Barbru. The ideal woman is a domestic woman, who helps her man and lord to create their world. Passionate love is destructive and unacceptable because it is a sin in the biblical sense of the word. In the beginning, Inger was an ideal woman, but after her stay in prison she changed her mind and she started to sin in her soul. When she met the Swedish worker Gustav, she fell in love with him because she needed love, which is a part of women nature. This episode is a clear allusion to the biblical temptation.

Inger is sad and down-hearted enough; ay, so erringly faithful that she mourns for him. ‘Tis hard for her; she is honestly in love, without any thought of vanity or conquest. And not ashamed, no; she is a strong woman full of weakness; she is but following the law of nature all about her; it is the glow of autumn in her as in all things else. Her breast heaves with feeling as she packs up food for Gustaf to take with him. No thought of whether she has the right, of whether she dare risk this or that; she gives herself up to it entirely, hungry to taste, to enjoy. Isak might lift her up to the roof and thrust her to the floor again — ay, what of that! It would not make her feel the less [Hamsun, 1921, vol. 2, p. 115].

Love in this case is only adultery, sin, and this sin destroys a soul. Barbru’s soul becomes worse as she kills both of her children. She talks about his first baby without any emotions. In addition, this scene is one of the most impressive in the novel.

“D’you remember that in the paper about the body of a child found in the harbour? ‘Twas me that did it”.

“What?” said he.

“Body of a child. You never remember anything. We read about it in the paper you brought up”.

After a moment he burst out: “You must be out of your senses!”

But his confusion seemed to incite her more, to give her a sort of artificial strength; she could even give the details. “I had it in my box — it was dead

then, of course — I did that as soon as it was born. And when we got out into the harbour, I threw it overboard” [Hamsun, 1921, vol. 2, pp. 42–43].

Female images in Hamsun’s novel are portrayed much worse than male images. There is a very specific system of personages in the novel, where positive heroes are only men. In *Independent People*, we can see the opposite situation. Bjartur’s attitude to his two wives is similar to Isak’s attitude, for him they are only housewives and he cannot understand how to love anybody. “Love” is a word from literature, used just to compose verses. Bjartur lives without love and as a result, he is not able to create anything because only true love is positively portrayed. In Laxness’ system of values, love is a feature and women help to fulfil this.

In this context, the image of Bjartur’s daughter Ásta Sóllija plays a very important role for the narration. Her name is significant because in Icelandic “Ást” means “love”. She reads about love in books and she aspires to find it in real life. She knew physical love, when she was very young, and she thought that was the only true love. Love is the main emotion in her soul, and it makes her a much more attractive personage than Bjartur, who turns her out when he learns that she is pregnant. Ásta has the power to overcome all of life’s circumstances because her heart is open to love.

She was the woman in love who, having burned all bridges behind her, resorts now to her beloved. This was reality. This was love and the heath. Henceforth all that came to pass in her life would be true.

Love and the heath; there were still snowdrifts in the deep hollows, and the earth was muddy under the snow. A raw wind blew in her face [Laxness, 1946, p. 361].

She tries to find love everywhere: she loves man, her father, and her children. She brings up her daughter and does not accept help from anybody. Ásta is absolutely unlike Hamsun’s personages who killed their children: Inger and Barbru. In the end, Bjartur finds his daughter and starts anew. He moves to a new place with his ill daughter, her two children, and his former mother-in-law. For him it is the beginning of his human revival, he is ready to become a creator because he has love for his relatives in his heart, not only sheep. Ásta will likely die, but Bjartur has understood how to love people.

“Keep a good hold round my neck, my flower”.

“Yes”, she whispered. “Always — as long as I live. Your one flower. The flower of your life. And I shan’t die yet awhile; no, not for a long while yet”.

Then they went on their way [Laxness, 1946, p. 470].

This scene provides a more optimistic ending to the novel. Bjartur's family lineage will be continued: his son Gvendur, who was going to America, does not leave Iceland after learning what love and passion is. Gvendur's life started with love and it means this hero will find his path in life and he will be able to create his future.

Hamsun uses many biblical allusions in the text of the novel. His main character is not devoutly religious by visiting church regularly or praying every day, but he lives according to God's rules. His belief is very deep and ancient like that of heroes in the Bible. The name "Isak" confirms this connection.

Isak walked bareheaded, in Jesus' name, a sower. Like a tree-stump with hands to look at, but in his heart like a child. Every cast was made with care, in a spirit of kindly resignation. Look! the tiny grains that are to take life and grow, shoot up into ears, and give more corn again; so it is throughout all the earth where corn is sown. Palestine, America, the valleys of Norway itself — a great wide world, and here is Isak, a tiny speck in the midst of it all, a sower [Hamsun, 1921, vol. 2, p. 42].

Isak is not the only hero of this novel, nor is he the only national character; he is a universal hero — an example for all people and for all times. Hamsun describes the Norway of his time and creates the image of Isak's farm as an ideal of human beings forever and everywhere. The chronotope (using Bakhtin terminology) of Laxness' novel is absolutely other. It is a picture of a small part of Iceland (East Fjords). Laxness tries to depict local life, local people, and local attitudes — to describe the real Iceland, the country where the traditional style of life has been broken and it is inevitable that a new time is coming. Laxness' biographer Halldór Guðmundsson wrote: "his greatest strength as a novelist was always to make the microcosmic landscapes of his stories into a macrocosm...he'd write about a farmer in East Iceland and somehow make the story about the entire Fate of Man" [Brandsma, 2016, p. 13].

For an Icelandic author it is quite important to create a poetic image of his country with all its traditions, folklore, beliefs, and poetry. This novel is about Iceland. At the time, Laxness was attracted by communist ideals and he was a member of the left-oriented literary group "Red pens" (Rauður pennar). In the middle of 1930s, he visited the Soviet Union and wrote a book *Russian Fairy Tale* (Gerska ævintýri). However, he does not provide recipes of salvation for the human civi-

lization. Despite some socialist ideas present in this book, there is only one episode in the end of novel when Bjartur leaves his son Gvendur with workers who are on strike. This scene symbolizes the right way in life for a young man, he should take a part in a worker's movement. Nevertheless, this episode does not play an important role for the narration and the main message of the text.

The book is full of legends and poetry. The first chapter of the novel is a story of Gunnvör — the first owner of the farm, where Bjartur is going to stay. It is an old and horrifying tale about a woman, who gave her soul to the devil, but this is a local devil known as Kolumkilli. She has killed people, even her own children, and eats them. All the people from the region believe in this story. Bjartur, who tries to be independent from everybody including the weird power, does want to leave a stone on the grave of Gunver who avenges him by first his wife dies in the beginning and then he loses his farm in the end.

It was the man who was making for Albogastathir on the Moor a century and a half after the croft had last been destroyed. And as he passed Gunnvor's cairn on the ridge, he spat, and ground out vindictively: "Damn the stone you'll ever get from me, you old bitch", and refused to give her a stone [Laxness, 1946, p. 9].

Mythological comprehension of the actual events is part of a hero's nature, when the past can affect the present. Elena Somova wrote: "Understanding of time of Laxness' heroes is closed to the attitude of a man from Icelandic sagas, when the synthesis of Pagan and Christian concepts defines the existence of linear and cyclic time" [Somova, 2013, 94]. Bjartur believes in ghosts, but he does not believe in God. He is an Icelander and he fully belongs to the national culture; legends, sagas, and poetry form his worldview. His first wife told him about it.

"I'm sure you don't believe in God even, Bjartur".

"I'm saying nothing about that", he replied, "but there's one thing I'll never deny: that the Reverend Gudrnundur's is a grand breed of sheep, the best that's ever been known hereabouts".

"You don't mean to tell me you don't even say your prayers at night, Bjartur?"

"Oh, I don't know. If they rhyme I sometimes run through a prayer or two while I'm falling off to sleep, just to fill the time in", he said, "or used to when I had less to think about. But never the Lord's Prayer, because I don't call that poetry. And anyway, since I don't believe in the Devil, I see no point in pray-

ing, so we'll say nothing more about it. What do you say to a drop of coffee to freshen us up?" [Laxness, 1946, p.31].

In *Independent people*, only one character, the old woman Hallberra, sings psalms and prays; her God is a god of strange verses where Icelandic words combine with an understandable Latin:

In dulci jubilo
Lies our heart's desire,
Impre sepio
The heavenly choir,
Alfa hesido,
Alfa hesido.

O Jesu parvuli
My soul rest with thee,
O pura optimi
In thy kingdom free,
O prince of glorii
Drag on postea,
Drag on postea [Laxness, 1946, p. 151].

This God cannot help Bjartur and his family; this God is too far from them. All the heroes of the novel live in the atmosphere of magic mystical power, which connects them with the earth. This power makes ultimately comprises their reality as the eldest son of Bjartur goes to the world of elves and dies. Bjartur's second wife knows many fairytales about elves (álfar). His children believe in the magic world of elves and hope to escape there from the horrible reality, much like the heroes of fairytales.

From the white heaven of mist where the sun was hidden like a delightful promise there dropped into her hair a thousand precious glittering pearls as she told her stories. She pursed her lips at the end of each with solemnity, almost with adoration, as if they were sacred chronicles. Gently she smoothed the loops on her needles; the landscape was shrouded and holy, breathe quietly. Her best friend had been an elf-woman and she had known an elf-man, too, the elf-woman's brother; but all that had been long, long ago, when she was at home in Urtharsel. "Have I dropped a stitch?" she asked, and sighed. "Ah well, It doesn't matter. What is gone is gone. And will never return" [Laxness, 1946, pp. 185–186].

Two worlds occur in the Icelandic novel — the beautiful world of fairy tales, sagas, and poetry and the world of everyday life full of troubles. This is a remarkable feature of Laxness' poetics.

Isak also saw supernatural power in the wood. This episode resembles a scene from a hagiography: a hero overcomes the evil spirit with God's word and he becomes a real saint who possesses a certain power. He met the devil when he wanted and expected to meet God. Moreover, God for him exists in Nature, God is alive like Nature; that is the pantheistic understanding of the universe. Aleksandr Sergeev wrote: "Returning to Nature as an alternative of the modern society raises Hamsun above the tragical life" [Sergeev, 2011, p. 93]. Laxness wrote his first novel *Child of Nature* (Barn Natturans) in 1919 where it is possible to find similar ideas, but the Icelandic author has come a long way in terms of a personal and intellectual evolution by the time of publication of the novel *Independent people*. He was a Catholic monk in Luxemburg and having become disappointed in Christianity, he went to America where he was involved in the socialist movement, but it is very important for him to describe the vivid connection between Icelanders and their ancient rich culture. Hamsun's Isak is united with the soil, with nature, but the Norwegian writer ignores all matters connected to national traditions, folklore, and beliefs. Why is this not so important for the narration? The answer could be very simple: Hamsun tries to create a universal model of human being, but not the picture of Norway in all its originality. This aim is completely opposed to Laxness' aim to write a book about his country, to portray a picture not only of Icelandic reality in the beginning of 20th century, but also a picture of Icelandic culture for 1000 years.

Bjartur is rude and ignorant like Isak, but Bjartur is a poet (scald), he can read and write. He tries to teach his children himself, but later he invites a teacher for them and that is a part of Icelandic culture. Icelanders during their long history were poor and hungry, but they were reading old sagas and writing poetry; it is a feature of their national character, and Laxness notes it especially: the education of Asta starts from sagas.

With this maid-song from the Jomsviking Rhymes, Asta Sollilja began her education. When she had spelled her way through one stanza, Bjartur leaned back in his chair with half-closed eyes and chanted. Every verse that she read she learned by heart, the chant as well, humming them away to herself whenever she was alone. All the love-songs in this group of ballads were addressed to the same girl; she was called Rosa. Asta Sollilja never inquired who the girl commended so highly by these songs might be, but she saw her together with her father, and loved her with him in the primitive, rugged language of the

Rhymes, reminiscent of nothing so much as the pious but despairing cuts in the carving of her grandmother's spindle-holder [Laxness, 1946, p. 166].

Isak cannot read and write his wife learns to do it only in prison; his children do not go to the school. Isak teaches them how to love the earth. School knowledge belongs to the civilization and it could be destructive to human nature. Isak's eldest son Elyseus is a good example of this as he loses connection with soil and for Hamsun it means he loses himself:

Poor Elyseus, all set on end and frittered away. Better, maybe, if he'd worked on the land all the time, but now he's a man that has learned to write and use letters; no grip in him, no depth. For all that, no pitch-black devil of a man, not in love, not ambitious, hardly nothing at all is Elyseus, not even a bad thing of any great dimensions [Hamsun, 1921, vol. 2, p. 231].

He moves to America, the country, which symbolizes the industrial development of society. For Isak's world, his son's move is destructive. Bjartur's youngest son Nonni goes to America as well, but it does not result in a crash of personality; for him it is opportunity to improve his life, to become a self-made man. This aspect alludes to Laxness' way in life.

Even the most earth-bound man that ever existed was never so earth-bound that he would not go to America. It is said that for the past hundred years the most earth-bound men in the world have gone to America, in large steamships, over a vast ocean. The one thing that hinders the most earth-bound men from forsaking their land is not the land itself, and not man's ties with the land, but the lack of money with which to reach America. Just as Iceland's dalesmen, the core, the flower, the life-blood, and the backbone of the nation, the healthy rural culture in person, had emigrated to America over a period of forty years, inane of expression as the Israelites in the desert... [Laxness, 1946, p. 382].

Both Hamsun and Laxness lived in the USA, but they had different experiences of living in exile, which engendered their attitude to modern civilization and progress. They each rejected capitalism and tried to find a better means of social development, but their conceptions varied greatly. Laxness hoped to change the world for the best through socialist ideas; for Hamsun only one solution was acceptable and that consisted of returning to one's roots, to the archaic, and the natural form of being. Hamsun rejected industrial civilization, feminism, and liberal ideas. In the *Growth of the Soil*, the hero who presents the au-

thor's position is fellow countryman Geissler. He helps Isak to buy land and to liberate Inger. He supports Isak all the time because Isak is the soul of the land. His speech in the end of novel is central to understanding Hamsun's ideas.

There you are, living in touch with heaven and earth, one with them, one with all these wide, deep-rooted things. No need of a sword in your hands, you go through life bareheaded, barehanded, in the midst of a great kindness. Look, Nature's there, for you and yours to have and enjoy. Man and Nature don't bombard each other, but agree; they don't compete, race one against the other, but go together. There's you Sellanraa folk, in all this, living there. Fjeld and forest, moors and meadow, and sky and stars — oh, 'tis not poor and sparingly counted out, but without measure. Listen to me, Sivert: you be content! You've everything to live on, everything to live for, everything to believe in; being born and bringing forth, you are the needful on earth. 'Tis not all that are so, but you are so; needful on earth. 'Tis you that maintain life. Generation to generation, breeding ever anew; and when you die, the new stock goes on. That's the meaning of eternal life. What do you get out of it? An existence innocently and properly set towards all. What you get out of it? Nothing can put you under orders and lord it over you Sellanraa folk, you've peace and authority and this great kindness all round. That's what you get for it You lie at a mother's breast and suck, and play with a mother's warm hand [Hamsun, 1921, vol. 2, pp. 243–244].

Laxness in his novel describes personages who say very similar words to Geissler: the old poetess and her son Ingolfur Arnarson. The Icelandic author wants to show the complete hypocrisy of bourgeois society. They pronounce just words, words, words, and sometimes lie.

“Townfolk”, she said, “have no conception of the peace that Mother Nature bestows, and as long as that peace is unfound the spirit must seek to quench its thirst with ephemeral novelties. And what is more natural than that the townsman's feverish search for pleasure should mould people of an unstable, hare-brained character, who think only of their personal appearance and their clothes and find momentary comfort in foolish fashions and other such worthless innovations? The countryman, on the other hand, walks out to the verdant meadows, into an atmosphere clear and pure, and as he breathes it into his lungs some unknown power streams through his limbs, invigorating body and soul. The peace that reigns in nature fills his mind with calm and cheer, the bright green grass under his feet awakens a sense of beauty, almost of reverence. In the fragrance that is borne so sweetly to his nostrils, in the quietude that broods so blissfully around him, there is comfort and rest. The

hillsides, the dingles, the waterfalls, and the mountains are all friends of his childhood, and never to be forgotten. They are a grand and inspiring sight, some of our mountains. Few things can have had such a deep and lasting influence on your hearts as their pure, dignified contours. They give us shelter in their valleys and bid us give shelter, too, to those who have neither our size nor our strength [Laxness, 1946, p. 22].

Ingolfur talks all the time about how to improve a farmer's life and he is a founder of the co-operative society, but his real aim is to make a political carrier, and in the end of novel he became a prime minister. Laxness does not hide the ironical intonation when he writes about all his deeds. Ingolfur Arnarson plays an evil role in the life of the hero because Bjartur follows other people and takes money from this co-operative society to build a house. As a result, his farm was sold due to debt. Laxness does not believe in honest business people and politicians. Geissler looks like an angel from a hagiography who comes to declare God's will. His character is also legendary like the figure of Isak. Ingolfur Arnarson is not the devil, he is just a part of this bourgeois world, a part of reality, where Bjartur and other farmers should live.

Hamsun describes righteous people living their lives according to the commandments, but Laxness describes only humans. The mythological and real worlds meet face to face in these two novels. Hamsun creates the ideal model of human existence while Laxness shows the contemporary reality in all its ugliness and it is his answer to Hamsun's dream of perfect world. Laxness has been involved in a specific ideological competition with Hamsun where the Icelandic writer provides his vision of the development of civilization and tries to show that there is no way back to the past, to patriarchal existence. Undoubtedly, Laxness as a novelist took much from Hamsun's manner of writing, such as making characters and writing about nature, describing the world and the human being. However, Laxness and Hamsun saw the world from different perspectives and created different types of national characters.

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**ГАМСУН И ЛАКСНЕСС:
ПРОТИВОСТОЯНИЕ ИЛИ ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЙ ДИАЛОГ?**

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Роман «Независимые люди» Халлдора Кильяна Лакснесса был опубликован в 1934 году и в настоящее время считается одним из лучших исландских романов. Фактически это произведение стало откликом на роман Гамсуна «Плоды земли», в котором крестьянские патриархальные отношения представляли в идеализированном свете. В обоих романах центральным является образ гордого, независимого человека, существующего изолированно от общества и цивилизацией. Оба эти персонажа представляют национальные типы: Бьяртур — исландский, Исаак — норвежский, но они также воплощают некую универсальную личность, обладающую способностью действовать по собственному усмотрению во благо или во зло. Гамсун воспроизводит идеальную модель бытия, его герой является победителем в борьбе с цивилизацией, а герой Лакснесса предстает средоточием самых ярких черт исландского национального характера: Бьяртур суров, педантичен, образован, вспыльчив, но обладает большим упорством. Его идеи и стремления очень схожи с целями Исаака, но они оказываются утопическим. Он приносит только горе и смерть всем, кого любит, и тем, кто любит его. И Гамсун, и Лакснесс критиковали капиталистические отношения, задаваясь одним и тем же вопросом: что является наибольшей ценностью в этой жизни? Но пришли к совершенно разным ответам: Гамсун пытался найти свой идеал в патриархальном крестьянстве, а Лакснесс с энтузиазмом относился к коммунистическим идеям. Это было фактически идеологическое противостояние: Лакснесс, отрицая убеждения Гамсуна, весьма способствовал левой идеологии в ее наступлении на демократию. Несомненно, что Лакснесс как автор очень многое

заимствовал у Гамсуна, и его роман можно рассматривать как художественное переосмысление романа Гамсуна.

Ключевые слова: норвежская литература, исландская литература, Гамсун. Лакснесс, роман.

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