Women and Love in the Novels of Laxness

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The first novel of Halldór Laxness appeared in 1919, when the author was only seventeen. It was called *Barn náttúrunnar* (Child of Nature) and had the sub-title "a love story". Love has been a central theme in the novels of Laxness ever since. For example, the second book of *Salka Valka* had the sub-title "a political love story".

In this paper I intend to take a brief look at the way in which Laxness's ideas of love appear in his works, at the same time relating this to the view of women that emerges there. I shall confine my enquiry to love between the sexes, to the exclusion of other kinds of love. For it is this – the love between man and woman – that provides what is probably a more important motive power behind his plots than any other factor of human nature. At the risk of generalizing, it can be said that all the novels of Laxness may be read as love stories.

Before proceeding, let us take a glance at the author's career as a whole. It can be divided into three main periods:

1) a period of bourgeois realism up to about 1930,
2) a period of social realism from 1930 to about 1955, and
3) a period of philosophical fiction from 1955 to the present day.

Although a number of fundamental changes take place over this stretch of time, both in form and narrative method, as well as in ideological viewpoint, there are other respects in which the novels are remarkably consistent. This applies, for instance, to the characters. Here we often have recurrent variations of certain basic types that can be traced from the author's earliest works to his latest. This repetition also occurs in motifs and situations, in novel after novel.

Recurrent types, motifs and situations appear with great prominence in the novels when they are concerned with love between men and women, as will be seen.

Laxness himself has noticed this characteristic of his own work and points it out in his autobiographical *Skáldatími* (Poets' Time), where he says:

> I cannot see people until their wrappings have been removed. What sort of parcel is this? What can there be inside this wrapping? Somehow, involuntarily and without conscious initiative on my part, I find myself with the same human types always in my hands; a kind of human highest common factor, which some would perhaps call pure mediæval allegory and regard as inborn.[1]

With regard to this estimate of his own characterization by Laxness, it seems to apply as a general rule much more to the female that to the male characters of his novles. The male types are both more numerous and more varied, and what is more, their roles in the stories are more varied, too.

At this point let me turn for a moment to what seems to me a fundamental factor in the presentation of female character and love in the novels of Laxness.

In all the more important instances, this is determined by the sex of the character. Women, young, middle-aged, and old, are described as sexual beings. The attitude of other characters towards them is resolved by this fact, and the author's stand point is coloured by it. It is not a question of this being especially characteristic of Laxness as an author. It is much more a characteristic of all Icelandic literature, and indeed all western European literature as well.

This can be seen most clearly in the love poems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Admittedly many such poems revolve round the poet's own feelings, but in male authors a good deal of space is also given to descriptions of the beloved: her hair and skin, eyes and neck, arms and breast, waist and hips, hands and feet. Such descriptions of the sexual assets of the male are rather rare in the poems of women. Right up to own times these have not usually gone much beyond mentioning the eyes, which in poetry, as everyone knows, are

the mirrors of the soul. For women it is above all a matter of the expression of personal emotions.

The strictly sexual attitude towards women in the novels of Laxness is the product of an inherited viewpoint which we may call dualism – a Christian dualism. This has moulded the female characterization of western European literature – as of other arts – at all events since the Middle Ages; and not only female characterization, but also the whole attitude towards life of western European man. Out of the tension between the irreconcilable poles of matter and spirit, good and evil, light and darkness, are fashioned all our frailities and achievements.

In the presentation of woman this dualism is crystallized in the epithets of Madonna and whore.

On the one hand woman is at the same time both a spiritual beloved and the mother of almighty God himself – Our Lady, maiden and mother, Sancta Maria. On the other, she is sin incarnate, the counterpart of the devil himself, gaping over the eternally tempting serpent and holding out her apples.

These are the opposed and irreconcilable poles. Somewhere between them most of the women in the novels of Laxness are to be found.

These women can all be classified according to age:
1) Young girls,
2) mature women in the bloom of life, and
3) old women.

Not unnaturally, groups 1) and 2) are more in evidence in the descriptions of love. The old women often have the function of providing shelter and security, or conveying the wisdom of life, drawn from long years of experience, whereas women of the first two groups generally have a role connected with their sex and the part played by their love in the development of the plot. Admittedly there are exceptions to this, in that women may be effective in areas of human life where love is not involved, and I shall refer to these exceptions later.

The three age-groups appear in the novels in distinct and differing ways.

Young girls are presented as almost unearthly, etherial beings and they are often symbols of a virgin purity. To their lovers they appear virtually as dream-visions, and they are often referred to as if they were of elf-kin and barely human.

The mature women, on the other hand, are completely of this earth. Almost without exception, they are richly endowed with female sexual symbolism and possess weight, vitality and the fruitfulness of the soil.

The old women often have something of the earthly character of the wise woman, and they are above worldly delights.

The life we meet with in the novels of Laxness is so varied and rich that readers rarely notice the fact that he is one of the greatest writers on love in Icelandic of all times, or that his women are more erotic than those of most other authors. The development of his material is frequently by erotic tension.

The first of the novels, *Barn náttúrunnar,* deals with the love of two wealthy businessmen for the young daughter of a farmer – the child of nature.

In her, various elements that are later to characterize the women of Laxness occur in combination.

On her first appearance in the book she is one of the maidens of elf-kin.

> She must have been bathing in the river and had put on only a blue dress, hastily, when she came out of the water. And there she stood, below in the hollow, gazing up at them, her blue dress half unbuttoned, revealing a white breast, bare-armed and bare-legged.
> She was lovely, like something out of a fairytale, and could not have been more than seventeen.
> Her hair was chestnut-brown, thick and not over-long, and

lay down her back, wet and free.[2]

In order to underline the girl's elfin nature, Laxness also gives her the name Hulda, which means elf-woman. However, on further acquaintance this elfin child proves to be fully human, and moreover very much of a *femme fatale.* When her former lover asks about her, her father replies:

> "Yes, her soul – Although I am her father, I am not ashamed to say that the wild animal dominates there."[3]

This motif: the beloved who is a wild animal and a man-eater, is a recurrent one in the novels of Laxness.

In *Barn náttúrunnar* Hulda develops from a kind of elf-maiden into a seductive and destructive siren, finally becoming the meek and serviceable slave of her lover. And when her former lover sinks into drunkenness and degradation on account of her infidelity, she drags him out of the mud:

> She wiped the crust of dirt from his cheeks and tidied his beard with her fingers.
>
> "What...what...what's this? he mumbled, trying to get to his feet.
>
> "It's only your Hulda," she said gently.

And later she says:

> "Randver, let me wipe your feet. There's nothing I want more."[4]

This motif: the beloved who is both a blue-clad elf-maiden and also man's servant and foot-wiper is found again in *Íslands klukkan* (Iceland's Bell) with Snæfríður and Magnús i Bræðratungu.

The next novel, *Undir Helgahnúk* (Under Helgahnúkur), is remarkable in that here many of the problems that came to characterize the work of Laxness appear fully for the first time.

Essentially this is the story of the growth of a boy from childhood to about the age of fifteen. He is associated with four women:

First, there is his mother, married to a parson. As a char-

acter she fulfils a double role. She is her husband's mistress and her children's mother. She is unhappy in this role, hating her husband under the surface, and ends in madness and suicide.

This character corresponds closely to the mother of Steinn Elliði in *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* (The Great Weaver from Kashmir) and is also the forerunner of many meek, colourless wives in the novels of Laxness.

Beside her, we find in *Undir Helgahnúk* the three female types already mentioned.

There is the hero's nurse; a loving, experienced, wise old woman:

> Old Þuríður, she was the best of women. She had been through so much. Her old eyes were so frank and kind, and she was bent and wrinkled from pure good will. (...)
> In her smile there was the same warmth, the same repose as there used to be many years before, when Atli was a little boy. (...) Maybe she had smiled in the same way long before he was born.[5]

Here, too, is the unearthly, elfin young girl who by the end of the story has become the boy's love:

> She gazed into space, and he saw the soft, half-ripened form of the youthful, moonlight body, silhouetted against the sky.[6]

Finally, there is the first unadulterated incarnation of woman as a sexual being, in the needlewoman Anna, who sews Atli's confirmation clothes:

> She (...) was tall, with blue, laughing eyes and large white hands. And her flesh had a bloom like freshly moulded butter. Her bosom was so large that it seemed on the point of bursting out of her jumper.[7]

Atli, the hero, is the precursor of many other males in the novels of Laxness, in that he is filled with repugnance when confronted with all this female flesh, while at the same time Anna exercises a strong sexual attraction over him:

> (...) he was disgusted by the touch of this woman's big, white hands on his body. He could distinguish the pores in her neck. Her wet mouth was not a span's breadth from his face. And every time she moved, a disagreeable odour rose from her body, through the opening of her jumper... He was horrified to feel this large female body so near him.[8]

The motif recurs repeatedly in the novels of Laxness. Many of his heroes are filled with revulsion by woman as a sexual being. This is a dominant theme of *Vefarinn mikli,* where it constitutes the second most important element in the makeup of Steinn Elliði. And though love only plays a minor role in the life of Bjartur í Sumarhúsum in *Sjálfstætt fólk* (Independent People), it also appears in his dream of the queen of the ballad epic who would show him her friendship, as it does, too, in Jón Hreggviðsson's dream of the parson's daughters in *Íslands Klukkan* (Iceland's Bell).

In *Ljós heimsins* (World Light), the first sexual experience of Ólafur Kárason, the principal character, is when a fat, clumsy maiden lies on top of him while he is ill in bed, and he almost suffocates under the burden of female flesh, and is filled with revulsion.

In *Gerpla* (The Happy Warriors) it appears to the viking Þorgeir as if "a most fearsome leon" is about to swallow him alive, when the young widow of Normandy gets into his bed and would bestow her favours on him. A similar acquaintance with an excess of female flesh is also Álfgrímur's first experience of love with the woman Cloë in *Brekkukotsannáll* (The Fish Can Sing), while in the latest novel, *Guðsgjafa-þula* (Rhyme of God's Gifts) this female type appears in the housekeeper of Íslands-Bersi, whose habit it was to bite and scratch her lovers and the marks of whose activities are referred to by Íslands-Bersi as angel-scores.

In the two juvenile works mentioned, the main outline of the female types to appear in later novels may be clearly seen.

But it is the next two, *Vefarinn mikli* and *Salka Valka,* that they appear in a fully realised and what might be called final version.

These two novels also contain an extensive discussion of the position of women in society and the role of love in human life.

The Great Weaver is a book founded on an ultimate dualism. The struggles of the hero, Steinn Elliði, are between the earthly and the heavenly – between spirit and matter, virtue and sin, God and the devil.

In the novel women are, generally speaking, symbols and representatives of the earthly, material, sinful, and diabolical.

There are three women chiefly involved:

The hero's grandmother, Valgerður Ylfingamóðir, is in some respects akin to other old women in the novels of Laxness. She is realistic, almost heathen, involved, yet cold and strong. She thus reminds us of other grandmothers and also of effective heroines such as Salka Valka and Snæfríður Íslandssól.

The other two are Jófríður, Steinn's mother, and Diljá, his lover, and they are both virtually of the same type.

Jófríður is ever-vigilant womanhood and is described in the following terms:

> Although she was the mother of a twenty-year-old son, Jófríður bore no marks of middle age. Far from it: her flesh was white and youthful, her body firm and blooming with femininity. No one would have ventured to guess her age, any more than that of a witch who had kept her youth from ancient times. Her face was pale as white marble, her lips the red of seaweed, her hair chestnut, while her dark eyes glowed with a fierce fire that bore witness at one and the same time to a consumptive passion and a sick desire.[9]

Jófríður is a weak female, typical bourgeois wife of the

upper class, at the same time a humble mother to her son and the sexual slave of her husband, as he says himself in their quarrel:

> "I can find five hundred whores much better than you, all for far less than you have cost me alone."[10]

Diljá, as a young girl, is of the moonlight and elf-kin type. She has loved and admire Steinn Elliði from childhood. She describes herself as clay in his hands.

To Steinn, the man of faith and the poet, however, woman is simply an agent of the devil. He says:

> "At an early age I discovered that woman appealed only to the evil in me. All my ideas were evil, so long as my mind was turned towards her. Every thought about woman is a stain on my soul. To the angel in me, nothing named woman exists. The man in me fears her as a repulsive beggar. The animal in me sees her as its most desirable counterpart. The satanic in me enjoys her in greedy anticipation." (...)
>
> "In other words, woman is no more or less than God's most dangerous rival for the human soul. In our earthly existence there are two fundamental forces that engage in a tug-of-war for our souls: what we call God, the goal of man's spiritual yearnings, and the flesh of woman."[11]

Steinn Elliði turns Catholic and enters a monastery, but when he returns on a short visit to Iceland Diljá tempts him, though now married to his uncle in Reykjavík. As a sexual being, woman even becomes a symbol of divine revelation to Steinn, thinking of Diljá:

> No woman ever embodied a more hungry femininity in the wax of her loins. Her movements were as the movement of the ineffable. In her breast breathed the life-force itself. Deep in her most secret parts slept past ages and ages yet unborn; ages that awaited their awakener and the kiss of eternity. Mother's milk, he thought. What stronger force than that which nourished the white suckling? He looked at his arm which she had briefly imprisoned, and

> saw that without her creation was a blunder. Woman is not only the mother of men, but also of saints. Yes, even of Christ Himself. Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum...[12]

One summer night at Þingvellir, Steinn Elliði is seduced by Diljá, and after their embrace he walks out into Icelandic nature in a haze of glory. The story might have ended here, but the author chose to end otherwise. Steinn Elliði returns to Rome to enter the service of the Catholic Church, and he writes to Diljá:

> "You have allowed yourself to be affected by the devil's delusions in my nature; swallowed me up in your femininity, because you thought I was an animal. Woman loves, not man, but the animal in man. You love the part of me that I hate and despise; my imperfection. You hate my perfection. For the side of my nature that turns towards God you will remain blind to all eternity, for the only thing that appeals to the female nature is deception."[13]

In Steinn Elliði love of achievement, love of God, which alone is great in his eyes, triumphs over love of woman, which is a symbol of the earth-bound, mean and diabolical.

After the publication of *Vefarinn mikli* in 1927, Halldór Laxness went to America, where he stayed for nearly three years.

These were very formative years. During them he abandoned the Catholic faith and became a socialist. Not by reading academic works on sociology, however, but by seeing the poor in the parks of San Francisco, as he has said himself.

The first fruit of the new socialist outlook was the collection of essays called *Alþýðubókin* (The People's Book), which appeared in 1929. In this volume the essay called "Maður, kona, barn" (Man, Woman, Child) displays his new opinions on the place of woman in society, love, family life, and education.

He concludes that the position of married women in bourgeois society is one of prostitution of the most absolute kind

ever produced in human history. He says:

> The women of the higher bourgeoisie can do nothing, want nothing, know nothing, think nothing - in other words, are nothing, except sexual utensils. (...) A perfect wife of the higher bourgeoisie is the purest brand of prostitute man has managed to produce here on earth.[14]

However, he cherishes the hope that in the socialist state of the future women will achieve a position of equality with men, thereby becoming fully effective citizens. This equality is also a condition of a normal love-life. His final words are:

> Their love-life cannot be a healthy one until a man and woman see in one another an equal social individual; find in each other an equal partner, comrade, and friend; neither dependent upon the other, except in the spirit of interdependence of friends.[15]

Salka Valka was the first novel to bear the marks of this new outlook on women in society, and thus on love.

There are three women specially involved: Salka Valka's mother, Sigurlína, is the same type of sexual being and meek mistress as Jófríður and Diljá in The Weaver, while old Steinunn in Mararbúð, Salka Valka's nurse, is another of Laxness's wise old women.

However, Salka Valka herself is one of the few women in the novels who plays a part in the plot other than that of the sex-bound beloved.

Salka Valka's first experience of love is while she is still a child, when she is raped by her mother's lover.

The motif of an older man raping or seducing a very young girl is a common one in the novels of Laxness. It occurs as early as in the Weaver, where Peppino the Piper is sentenced to fourteen years hard labour for raping a twelve-year-old girl, and Steinn Elliði also dreams of a similar deed.

In *Sjálfstætt fólk* Bjartur makes sexual advances to his

step-daughter, when he sleeps alone with her on his visit to the village, and at the age of fourteen she is made pregnant by her teacher.

The poet Ólafur Kárason in *Heimsljós* has intercourse with his unconfirmed pupil, and in *Paradísarheimt* (Paradise Reclaimed) the little daughter of the farmer Steinar has a baby by the aged horse-dealer.

Here we have a motif parallel to that of the male experiences of seduction by much older women in the novels, though actual rape is not involved.

As a woman, Salka Valka rejects the traditional sexual role. The example of her mother as a sexual slave acts as a warning to her. She is endowed by the author with various unfeminine physical characteristics. She has a deep, masculine voice, and is big, strong and coarse. At the same time, though, she is a perfect mate of the man she loves. But Salka Valka rejects the ineffective role of a loving woman. She plays a major part in the class struggle with the working people of her village, acts as a member of the crew of a fishing boat, and becomes part-owner of it.

Her function in the development of the plot is thus by no means limited to that of the lover, and love is at one and the same time her strength and her weakness. As a grown woman she is attracted by two men: her former rapist, a coarse seaman, and her childhood friend, the idealist and revolutionary Arnaldur, who becomes the great love of her life. However, when she finds out that Arnaldur has fallen for a rich American woman, she gives him her life savings to buy a ticket to America, and is left alone on the beach at the village. In paying her lover to go away she wins her greatest victory over herself as an independent person, and with the gull that lays its eggs on the naked rocks, she becomes a symbol of all in Icelandic life that is unconquerable.

Salka Valka is an exception among the female characters

of Laxness in rejecting the ineffective role of mistress. Apart from her, the only one to adopt this attitude is Ugla, the country girl of *Atómstöðin* (The Atom Station).

Like Salka Valka, she is torn between two men: on the one hand there is the shy policeman, who ends up as a thief; on the other, a highly educated business man, her employer, Búi Árland. She choses to join her lover, who is also the father of her child, in prison, hoping that together they may find happiness in their love as two free and equal individuals.

Except in these two novels, *Salka Valka* and *Atómstöðin,* the attitude towards love and the lot of woman follows in general the pattern indicated. Women are above all passive sexual beings and as such exercise influence on the progress of events, becoming an element in the experience of the heroes.

Women and love play remarkably little part in *Sjálfstætt fólk* (Independent People).

Both wives of Bjartur stand completely in his shadow as absolute slaves – mothers and mistresses. His old mother-in-law belongs to the class of wise, benevolent and reliable women. Ásta Sóllilja, his step-daughter, has already been mentioned. She is of the type of the young elf-maidens.

The women around Ólafur Kárason in *Heimsljós* (World Light) form a specially interesting group.

The first love of Ólafur is Guðrún from Grænhóli, his fellow confirmand, who belongs unambiguously to the race of mysterious supernatural maidens. His first experience of sexual love, however, is the occasion mentioned earlier, when the hunk of meat Magnína lies on top of him when he is ill in bed and after they have read the Felsenborg stories together.

The poet's fellow lodger, Jarþrúður, scarcely plays the role of lover, but in so far as she does, it is as his slave. Jarþrúður is above all an incarnation of the suffering of which the poet is unable to rid himself.

Vegmey Hansdóttir, in the second book of *Heimsljós,* is in some respects reminiscent of the etherial maidens of elfin breed. However, she has a special position among them in being completely earthly. She is a great deal more practical and worldly than the majority. In the eyes of Ólafur Kárason she is the loveliness of the earth itself in its curved convexity, in the shape of a young woman. In her presence he is filled with a religious awe not unlike that possessing Steinn Elliði before Diljá:

> It was she who had really given him life in the spring. She was the healthy nature who had nurtured him and revived him at her breast when he had no way out – the loving nature that gives living creatures not only health and fertility but also hope and faith and lifts our faces towards beauty itself at the same time as it clears the blindness from our eyes – she was not only his physical health, but also his spiritual life. Without her, no life.[16]

A young, loving woman, who symbolizes life itself, is perhaps even clearer, though, in the description of Jórunn, the next love of Ólafur. Her picture is in many respects reminiscent of Salka Valka:

> She had a very broad bosom; there was a cleft between her high, curved breasts. Her face was as strong as the bows of a ship – the forehead high and arched, the mouth broad with a very full lower lip, the eyes bright and wide under the thick brows.[17]

Like Salka Valka, Jórunn affects the action of the story in a number of ways, besides being the love of Ólafur. He sees her standing in a crowd of strikers at Sviðinsvík:

> Under the red banner that symbolized the life blood of mankind stood a young girl, fair and enraptured, with a high strong bosom and the light breeze of spring ruffling her hair; and the poet said to himself, "She is the Living Image of Liberty", and suddenly he understood her image to the full. On his lips still burned the hot kiss she had given him in the frost, as the sun kisses the earth in spring, and he felt he might blossom forth at any moment.[18]

"The Living Image of Liberty" is printed with initial capitals, to form in Icelandic the work "life". Jǫ́runn is herself the symbol of life. The attitude of Ólafur towards her no longer contains the ambivalence characteristic of Steinn Elliði's towards Diljá, whereby woman was seen at one and the same time as the primeval force of life and counterpart of the devil. This development continued in the later novels of Laxness the loving woman becoming ever more consistently a symbol of all that is constructive and positive.

We see this particularly in The Happy Warriors, in the description of the women associated with the foster-brothers. Yet even here the old dualism is still in evidence.

On the one hand we have the dark woman, superabundant, earth-bound flesh, sucking both courage out of heroes and creative power out of poets.

On the other we have Þórdís, bright, swan-winged beloved of Þormóður the scald. She is life and luck to him, together with their daughters, but at the same time she too is endowed with the characteristic that prevents the poet, lapped in her luck, from composing.

Woman as a symbol of life, fertility and good luck, also appears in the path of Þorgeir in Normandy, where he meets the young widow, who gives her sleeping child the breast as she cooks food over a slow fire, while a litter of pigs suckles the great sow on the floor. When the young woman would bestow her favours upon Þorgeir, he is filled with revulsion, like Atli in *Undir Helgahnúk* and flees from this peaceful glade in the forests of Normandy to meet death in the steel of weapons.

Finally, let me mention the treatment of women and attitude to love in two novels not yet mentioned, where there is a sort of synthesis of the two types of woman associated with love in the works of Laxness.

In *Íslandsklukkan* (Iceland's Bell), the character of Snæfríður Íslandssól stands so far above all other women of the novel

that one could almost say the reader hardly notices the rest. In fact I am tempted to describe Snæfríður as the greatest female character in Laxness. Her personality is so complex that she may be said to comprehend all the basic types that have been mentioned. As a young girl she is called the slender elfin body, is mysterious and unmanageable. She is love by the best of all Icelanders, and when he leaves her, choses the worst rather than take the second best. She is both the slave of her husband and his complete superior who drives him to destruction. She is the motive force behind great events, both as a sexual partner and as a realistic, cold-blooded politician and heir of the position of power in society which great possessions give her.

In a similar way the character of Úa in *Kristnihald undir Jökli* (Christianity at Glacier) contains in herself the basic types of woman that have been mentioned. Young and dreamy, she marries the parson, Jón Prímus. She runs away with her husband's boyhood friend, Godman Syngmann, has been both the Madam of a brothel and a nun, and returns home, a woman filled with experience of life and a spirit of tolerance, in her later years.

This woman, who comprehends in one person the basic female types of dualism – holy woman and whore – is in the eyes of the three men with whom she comes into contact in the story, the feminine image of eternity. In her, opposite poles are reconciled. The struggle between flesh and spirit is consummated with the synthesis of extremes in a single person.

And Úa is even more than this. In the eyes of the man of faith, Jón Prímus, she is a direct revelation of God. He says to the man who had cuckolded him, Godman Syngmann:

> "Do you remember when Úa shook her curls? Do you remember when she looked at us and laughed? Did she not accept the Creation? Did she reject anything? It was a victory for the Creator, once and for all."[19]

Here, in effect, we have come to the latest phase in the career of Laxness, so far as the evolution of his view of women and love is concerned.

In *Vefarinn mikli* woman as a sexual being was the symbol of all that was negative. She was the most dangerous obstacle on man's path to God. What mattered above all was that man should overcome his love for woman and seek his God. In later works to an ever increasing degree woman as a sexual being becomes a symbol, not of the negative and diabolical, but of life and happiness.

From Steinn Elliði, who sees her as the complete counterpart of the devil, through Ólafur Kárason, who sees her as an image of life, to Jón Prímus, who sees in her a victory for the Creator once and for all, there lies a long evolutionary process in Laxness's attitude towards women and love in the novels.

Direct description of love-making is of two kinds. Generally it is presented in a veil of mysticism or dream visions, but sometimes almost crudely realistic descriptions occur, as when Jón Hreggviðsson meets the woman of the streets in Holland.

The recurrent motif of rape or seduction as the first experience of love of young people is one that I shall not attempt to explain. We can ask whether this has psychological roots in the author himself, or if it is to be interpreted as a purely literary symbol of his attitude towards love.

All descriptions of love by Laxness is what I can only call a sexual mysticism, and I shall end this talk with a question: Doesn't Laxness regard love as the mysterious primeval force of life itself?

(English translation by Alan Boucher).

Notes.

1) Halldór Laxness Skáldatími. Reykjavík 1963. p.233.
2) Halldór Laxness Barn náttúrunnar. Reykjavík 1919. pp. 12 – 13.
3) Halldór Laxness Barn náttúrunnar. Reykjavík 1919. p. 41.

4) Halldór Laxness Barn náttúrunnar. Reykjavík 1919. pp. 213 – 215.

5) Halldór Laxness Undir Helgahnúk. Reykjavík 1924. pp. 203 – 209.

6) Halldór Laxness Undir Helgahnúk. Reykjavík 1924. p. 243.

7) Halldór Laxness Undir Helgahnúk. Reykjavík 1924. p. 193

8) Halldór Laxness Undir Helgahnúk. Reykjavík 1924. p. 194.

9) Halldór Laxness Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír. Reykjavík 1927. p. 17.

10) Halldór Laxness Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír. Reykjavík 1927. p.108.

11) Halldór Laxness Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír. Reykjavík 1927. pp. 171 - 175.

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In this brief research note the different scale and rate of