

Literary names and naming techniques:
A case study from *Brekkukotsannáll* (1957) (*The Fish can Sing*)

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the importance of names in fiction by examining the novel *Brekkukotsannáll* (1957) (*The Fish can Sing*) by the Icelandic Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness (1902-1998). It will be argued that Laxness used names and designations for fictional characters in multiple ways, e.g. to classify characters according to their social status, express attitudes, control perspectives and to convey important themes and atmosphere.

The book under discussion tells a captivating and multifaceted story about the deception of fame and the conflict between tradition and modernity. It is special in its innovative techniques of using names that are crucial for the story. One of them involves namelessness in order to express different attitudes towards men and women, and another involves the use of preproprial articles to give the reader a sense of a small rural society. The third technique relates to deception because one character can be seen as three different persons depending on how he is referred to by other characters. These methods, and more, will be examined in the paper in addition to a general discussion of names in literature.

Keywords: Laxness, onomastics, names, literature

1. Introduction

Every detail within artistic works contributes to the overall impression, and the use of names is no exception. Names are, in fact, much more than mere labels as they play a very important role in fiction, and they should be analysed in the broader framework of the narrative (see Butler 2013; Iliescu 2015). As readers, we seldom scrutinise each and every fictional character's name, but authors usually put a great deal of thought into them and consider how they may affect our understanding of the story. Authors of fiction tend to choose, or even create, names that match the personality of each character. Sometimes the names have been chosen because of their phonology, their uniqueness or even personal significance for the author (see Baker 2014).

Furthermore, authors are able to convey different attitudes and perspectives by using different designations for a character. This will be explained in chapter two where literary onomastics in general are discussed and some examples will be provided.

In certain cases, authors use names to embrace crucial thematic motifs, or to show their own point of view (see Wamitila 1999). As a case in point, the novel *Brekkukotsannáll* (1957) (*The Fish can Sing*) by the Icelandic Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness (1902-1998) is saturated with onomastic effects. Characters are referred to in different ways in order to highlight their various roles and reflect attitudes and opinions of others. The workings of points of view in the narrative are multifaceted, forming a web of perspectives designed to impact the reader's experience. Finally, and most importantly, the use of different appellations and epithets plays a key role in creating the story's theme and message.

The story is about the deception of fame and its central theme is the conflict between tradition and modernity. Authenticity arises from rootedness and integrity whereas celebrity is connected with modernity, based on vanity and illusion. 'The novel warns against self-deceptive vanity and community-endorsed illusions, and celebrates the persistent benefits of nurturing relationships, all within a lyric contemplation of individual adaptive resilience and quotidian domestic pleasures' (Baldwin 2017). The book is supposed to be a monument to forgotten generations and to a way of life irretrievably lost (Magnússon 1992).

The novel is remarkable in that it displays so many ways of referring to people, for example: A) forenames, surnames and parts of names, B) epithets, titles and Danicised names, C) nicknames D) stage names, E) namelessness, F) possessive determiners and prepositional articles that appear with names. These various ways all serve the purpose of creating the story's theme which involves the distinction between illusion and reality or, more precisely, between the genuine way of life and the misguided pursuit of fame.

2. Literary onomastics

When it first became scholarly practice to study the function of names in literature, the chief aim was to investigate names' original word meaning, their etymology. Gradually, the horizons of the onomastic investigation widened and scholars began asking themselves: 'What is this particular name doing in this particular text, and why did the author choose this particular name for this particular character or location?'

(Nicolaisen 2008). Today, various kinds of studies in the field of literary onomastics are carried out and one of them is the analysis of how a particular author uses personal names and appellations to express attitudes, his/her own or those of others. For Laxness, who was deeply rooted in the oral folk tradition, shaped by the history and environment of his people, it is no wonder that his naming techniques reflect different perspectives related to different times in his nation's history.

Uspensky (1973) explains how naming can affect the point of view in literary works. Different characters have distinctive ways of referring to a given person and as an example of how one character is called by several different names and designated by a variety of titles, Uspensky cites *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. The narrator usually refers to Napoleon by his neutral name, *Napoleon*, but in order to change perspectives and interpret other characters' views, he uses a range of appellations, such as *the Emperor*, *Bonaparte* and *Your Majesty*. Furthermore, Uspensky points out that, in the course of the narrative, we become witnesses to the changes in the names used by the Russian society to designate Napoleon. At the beginning of the novel he is consistently called Bonaparte, later on this name is seldom used by anyone (with the exception of minor characters), and at the end this name is never used (Uspensky 1973: 32). This way, the author adopts growing aversion to Napoleon, corresponding to the attitudes of the society.

Similarly, narrative analyses of the Bible have revealed textual elements, including naming, manipulated in various ways to produce different points of view. As a test case in his biblical narrative criticism, Yamasaki (2006) has examined the use of point of view in the gospel story Luke 19:1-10: '[...] the designation "Lord" is most often found as a phraseological trait of characters who exhibit at least some degree of faith in Jesus, as they either address him or refer to him' (Yamasaki 2006: 103). In the story, the narrator usually refers to Jesus Christ as *Jesus*, that is seventy-five times, but only fourteen times as *the Lord*. The narrator adopts a linguistic trait of characters who believe in Jesus when he refers to him as *the Lord*, resulting in point of view shifts.

While the name *Jesus* is neutral and impartial, other designations are not. David Howell, who studied this in the Gospel of Matthew, argues that the implied author/narrator is able to shape the role of the implied reader by the manner in which he tells his story. In the infancy story, Jesus is called *King of Jews* by the wise men who worship Jesus and who are positively described by the narrator. By contrast, both

Satan and demons identify Jesus by calling him *Son of God* and in a similar manner, the high priest calls Jesus *Son of God* as he accuses him of blasphemy. ‘Names or points of view which by themselves are correct but which are voiced by characters who do not accept Jesus are placed in a context which evaluates them according to the overall perspective of acceptance or rejection of Jesus’ (Howell 2015: 202).

Names can also be used to classify fictional characters according to shared qualities, backgrounds or characteristics. William Shakespeare’s characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are a good example of this. They are divided into three distinct groups within the play and their names reflect each group (Smith 2016).¹ The origin and meaning of a name must often be the main reason why an author chooses it for his/her character but phonology may also play a role. A well-known example of this is the name of the initially cold-hearted character Scrooge, created by Charles Dickens, which has become synonymous with the idea of a cranky, selfish miser. It is presumably a variation of the obscure English verb ‘scrouge’, which means ‘squeeze’ (Roberts 2011), and the character is described with these words: ‘Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grind-stone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!’ (Dickens 1843: 8).

3. Brekkukotsannáll (The Fish can Sing)

Published in 1957, *Brekkukotsannál (The Fish can Sing)* was Laxness’s first book after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1955. The story takes place in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, in the early 20th century. At that time, the town was still very small and agricultural, with only a few thousand inhabitants, but it was expanding and the society was undergoing modernisation faster than ever. The fishing industry grew rapidly, which led to an increasing social class distinction and a new national identity. Along with population growth and an increasing inequality, Danish influence became significant. The patronymic system had been dominant in Iceland for ages but gradually Danish names became a status symbol (Pálmason 1987). People began to travel more and concern themselves with the rest of the world – not least about their own country’s image – but the older generation had a different attitude towards social and cultural traditions. Thus, the central topic of the story is the conflict between different times in the history of Iceland and between different views and values associated with these times.

As in many other works of Laxness, the story's theme involves national identity. The title of the book, *Brekkukotsannáll*, can be seen as a tribute to the disappearing generation. *Brekkukot* is a typical name for an Icelandic turf cottage (a compound formed by *brekka* 'hill' and *kot* 'cottage'). The word *annáll* means 'chronicle' – a written account of historical events. Thus, the title is supposed to sound ordinary and old-fashioned while it implies that the events being told are true. The book is written in honour of the common people who do their jobs in silence, as seen by the following description in Laxness's notebook:

"Hidden People" the ordinary "uncorrupted" people – and yet endlessly fallible seen from the perspective of moral theology or other moral systems – the book will be written in honour of them, and be a proof of the fact that exactly these people, the ordinary folk, are the ones who foster all peaceful human virtues.
(Ólafsson 2002: 41-42 [my translation])

As a young boy, the narrator, *Álfgrímur Hansson*, lives with his adoptive grandparents who represent the modest and serene, but disappearing, generation of commoners. They are satisfied with their life, they see all people as peers and do not have any desire to become rich, famous or powerful. Their turf-and-stone cottage, *Brekkukot*, is open to everyone in need of shelter, just like people's homes used to be in the old days. By contrast, there are characters who represent modernity and see themselves as superior to others. One of them is the local business magnate, merchant *Guðmundur Guðmúsen*, who desires a modern, sophisticated lifestyle and brags about his involvement in high-class culture.

One of the central characters in the book is *Garðar Hólm*. He is said to be a world-famous opera singer, but gradually *Álfgrímur* finds out about the truth. *Garðar Hólm* turns out to be a poor and miserable fisherman named *Georg Hansson* who lives in Denmark. We also learn that *Guðmúsen* has funded the singer's education and created his false reputation from scratch, only to raise himself in people's opinion. Towards the end of the book, *Guðmúsen* offers to finance the young and talented *Álfgrímur*'s music education but *Álfgrímur* does not want to accept the grant and become just like *Garðar Hólm*, so he chooses to find his own path with the support of his grandparents.

On the one hand, the novel throws light on the disappearing, cohesive community of farmers, and, on the other, on the establishment of urban culture. Laxness had a special skill with words to convey atmosphere and one of his

techniques involves the use of pronouns before names (preproprial articles). In order to make conversations sound similar to the way people used to talk in the old agricultural society where everybody knew each other, preproprial articles are frequently used. This is common in the Nordic languages but impossible in English, so in order to explain this, names and pronouns are underlined in the following quotation from the original text of the book. For comparison, the same excerpt from the English translation is shown below:

Ég varaði mig bara ekki á því að þó hann Björn talaði, þá var það ekki altént hann Björn sem var að tala: annar var ennþá nær honum Birni í Brekkukoti en hann Björn í Brekkukoti sjálfur; það var hún amma mín.
(Laxness 1957: 232)

But I simply had not taken it into account that when Björn spoke, it was not always Björn who was speaking; there was someone else even closer to Björn of Brekkukot than Björn himself – my grandmother.
(Laxness 1966: 179)

This stylistic feature implies that the speaker knows the person he is referring to personally, but unfortunately it is impossible to translate into English. As stated earlier, names and appellations are a fundamental part of *The Fish can Sing*, and the purpose of this frequent use of preproprial articles is also to emphasise them even more.

3.1 Álfgrímur

In harmony with the story's theme, the narrator's name, Álfgrímur, combines the past and the future. The author seems to have made the name up, but today, seven men are called Álfgrímur in Iceland (Kvaran 2011; Registers Iceland 2019). It is composed of the names *Álfur* (meaning 'an elf') and *Grímur* (meaning 'sb. wearing a mask'), and the reason for this combination is explained in the book: His biological mother wants to give him the unusual name Álfur but his grandmother wants him to be named Grímur, like her late sons, and therefore the name indicates past events. Álfgrímur's mother leaves Iceland in search of a better future in America, just as many others did around the turn of the century, especially young people, and therefore his name represents the conflict between generations and different times in the history of Iceland. Grímur is a logical abbreviation of the name Álfgrímur and it is also a traditional Icelandic name, so it is no wonder that he is only and always called Grímur

by his grandmother, who represents the past. All the other characters refer to him as Álfgrímur and in the book we see the following, invented, meaning of the name, as Garðar Hólm admires it:

“Who are you, young man?” said the world singer.

“Álfgrímur,” I said.

“He gazed at me abstractedly and repeated my name to himself: Álfgrímur – he who stays one night with the elves. Álfgrímur – that’s what we should all have been called.”

(Laxness 1966: 72)

This is not the only time that the reader’s attention is drawn to the name, which indicates that it really matters for the story. Garðar Hólm comments on it four times in the book as he finds it hard to believe that the boy’s name is really Álfgrímur. This is because he sees no one but himself in the boy. They are very much alike because they grew up in similar circumstances; fatherless, with the same people around, and they both have musical skills.

The name is clearly coined with the hidden people in mind.² Both its previously mentioned etymological meaning (‘elf’ and ‘mask’) and its invented meaning found in Garðar’s comment above, indicate that Álfgrímur is named after these people. His grandparents, the ones he stays with, represent the hidden people – the ones we should all learn from and appreciate, according to Laxness.

Similar to the way Shakespeare’s characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* reflect different social classes, Danish names in the novel symbolise the upper class. The last name Gúðmúnsen is a Danicised version of the Icelandic surname Guðmundsson. It looks absurd spelled with the Icelandic letters ‘ú’ and ‘ð’, which are not found in Danish, and underlines the vanity of trying to elevate oneself with fancy names or titles by using Danish names. In sharp contrast to the Danish family names, Álfgrímur’s last name is Hansson, a name that was usually given to fatherless children in Iceland, meaning literally ‘his son’. As already mentioned, Georg is also named Hansson, so the author uses the name Hansson to connect these two characters and imply their similarities. They recognise themselves in each other. Garðar sees his past in the present, and regrets it, while Álfgrímur sees Garðar’s present as a prediction of his own future and finds it appealing but risky.

3.2 Garðar Hólm

Garðar Hólm is an enigmatic and complex character who can be seen as three different persons, as reflected in the way he is referred to in the novel. He is usually called Garðar Hólm by the narrator and by most of the characters; that is to say, the ones who do not know him personally, and the narrator sees Garðar through the eyes of Álfgrímur as one of the characters. Garðar Hólm is the name of the great singer who is believed to be performing all around the world for the glory of Iceland. On a regular basis merchant Gúðmúnsen uses his own media to tell his compatriots about Garðar's success. The truth is, however, that Georg Hansson is trapped in the deception, world-weary and unhappy.

Garðar Hólm used to be a carefree and innocent young boy with the nickname Gorgur (little Georg). He had a talent for music, just like Álfgrímur, and he grew up in a cottage similar to Brekkukot, with his mother, Kristín, who is the sister of Álfgrímur's grandmother. The older generation, that is Álfgrímur's grandparents and Kristín, refer to him as Gorgur. Their affection for him is evident as the name Gorgur is always followed by the words *minn* ('my') or *litli* ('little'). They remember him as a boy and they know the truth so they get slightly upset every time the name Garðar Hólm is mentioned.

Garðar Hólm is first introduced in the fifth chapter of the book where Álfgrímur is observing a portrait of this peculiar man and asking his grandmother about him:

Even more remarkable, however, was the discovery I soon made that this was the son of Kristín of Hringjarabær, and consequently related to us at Brekkukot – Georg Hansson, who “nowadays”, as the old woman said, was called Garðar Hólm.

One fine day or the other when I was contemplating this picture of Garðar Hólm, I could not resist asking my grandmother, “Does Garðar Hólm have a home anywhere? Or is he perhaps just an angel?”

“Little Georg?” she said. “No, I suppose he no longer has a home anywhere, poor creature.”

“Why didn't he stay put at home with his mother, our Aunt Kristín at Hringjarabær?” I asked.

“He took to travelling,” she said.

“How did he do that?” I asked.

“It is ill-fortune that causes people to travel,” said my grandmother.

“What ill-fortune?” I asked.

“We won't talk any more about that, little one,” she said. “He was a nice boy, Kristín's little Georg, when he was playing here in the churchyard. Very like you. But he took to travelling.”³

(Laxness 1966: 25-26)

All of the three names, Garðar, Georg and Gorgur (little Georg), appear when Garðar Hólm is first mentioned, which indicates that these different names are important for the story. The portrait can be seen as a symbol for Garðar Hólm. The man in the picture does not exist in real life, he is just an illusion. The remarks about Gorgur's "ill fortune" and him not having a home anymore imply that he has distanced himself from his origin in Iceland.

This use of names to create a three-sided character in order to express a theme in a novel is quite remarkable. As we have already discussed, many writers use different names to indicate different perspectives, but, in this case, it is a fundamental part of the story. The following table illustrates the number of times each character in the novel, and the narrator, refer to this mysterious man, and what version of his name they use, which depends on their knowledge and attitude towards him:

Frequency distribution of appellations under discussion

	Garðar (Hólm)	Georg (Hansson)	Gorgur
The narrator (Álfgrímur)	111	2	3
Álfgrímur (direct speech)	11		
Garðar/Georg/Gorgur	4		
Álfgrímur's grandparents			5
Kristín (Garðar's mother)	1	1	2
Little Miss Gúðmúnsen	9		
Merchant Gúðmúnsen	3	4	3
General public	5		
In total	144	7	13

The narrator, Álfgrímur, tells the story as an adult, looking back at his childhood. Thus, the young Álfgrímur is one of the characters and he has no knowledge of future events. Therefore, he always uses the name Garðar Hólm or Garðar while other characters who know the truth can refer to him as Georg or Gorgur. Young Álfgrímur's perspective is dominant in the narrative, so on these few occasions where the narrator uses the names Georg or Gorgur, he is repeating someone else's words or referring to the man Garðar previously used to be.

Merchant Gúðmúnsen is the only character in the book to use all of the three names, with the exception of Garðar's mother, who once repeats the name Garðar Hólm after Álfgrímur with distaste. Gúðmúnsen knows Georg very well and remembers him as the young Gorgur. Nevertheless, he is the creator of Garðar Hólm and must withhold the truth. The general public, who are regularly informed of the singer's success in the newspapers (owned by Gúðmúnsen), uses the name Garðar

Hólm and so does the merchant's daughter, little Miss Gúðmúnsen, who believes she's in love with him.

The name Garðar appears 144 times and it is followed by the last name Hólm 134 times. Hólm is a Danicised surname and not in accordance with the traditional Icelandic name system (Pálmason 1987: 5). The frequent use of the character's full name underlines how notable and important he is. In addition, the name is often combined with (or replaced by) appellations like 'opera singer', 'world singer' or even 'the great world celebrity', in order to reinforce the illusion's effect:

But there were other texts, in prose to be sure, which quickly attracted my attention after I had learned to read, and these were the articles about the fame of our world singer, Garðar Hólm.
(Laxness 1966: 68)

The great world celebrity is on his way here from the realm of France; during the winter he has been gladdening men's hearts with beautiful singing south of the Alps in all the greatest cities in that part of the world.
(Laxness 1966: 181)

During the settlement of Iceland in the Viking Age the island was called Garðarshólmi, so the name Garðar Hólm indicates the size and importance of its bearer – he is supposed to embody and represent his country. However, there might be some irony in the name because *hólmi* means a small island in a river.

Again, the different names support the story's theme as they reflect different times. Georg Hansson and Gorgur stand for the past, and reality, while Garðar Hólm symbolises the new times – and turns out to be an illusion. The names Georg and Gorgur appear much less often, which draws the reader's attention to them each time they are used, and widens the gap between illusion and reality. Some of these examples are found in chapter 15 where Garðar is accompanied by Gúðmúnsen to Brekkukot as the merchant wishes to purchase the property. Álfgrímur keeps an eye on the visitors as his grandfather welcomes them:

“Hullo, my dear Georg, and welcome home. And hullo to you, little Gúðmúnsen. [...]” The man my grandfather called “little Gúðmúnsen” was in fact none other than Gúðmúnsen the merchant himself, the owner of Gúðmúnsen's Store [...]; and “my dear Georg”, this foreigner with the broad-brimmed hat and the eyes, nose and mouth of an eagle – this was the great man himself.
[...]
“Well, as you know, Georg, my wife comes of that Danish merchant nobility that became Icelandic fish-businessmen here in the south,” said Gúðmúnsen. [...]

“We know that your wife’s toasted white bread is the best you can find anywhere,”
said that world-famous man, Garðar Hólm.
(Laxness 1966: 72-74)

The author refers to the same character from several different perspectives. A distinction between points of view is clearly shown when different forms of address collide in a single sentence (Uspensky 1973: 22-23). The narrator is describing the meeting from the young Álfgrímur’s point of view, and, seen from an innocent child’s perspective, who admires these notable guests, it is no wonder that he refers to them as ‘Gúðmúnsen the merchant himself, the owner of Gúðmúnsen’s Store’ and ‘that world-famous man, Garðar Hólm’. Álfgrímur’s grandfather does not admire the guests, he knows them and he is older than both of them, so to him it is natural to refer to them as ‘my dear Georg’ and ‘little Gúðmúnsen’. In a similar manner, Gúðmúnsen calls Georg by his real name, and not Garðar, because he knows him personally and this is a private conversation where there is no need to pretend.

Despite being tired of the deception created by Gúðmúnsen, Garðar cannot escape it so he plays along and accepts the name Garðar Hólm. However, as the following quotation shows, he does not see himself as Garðar Hólm:

The madonna came running after us with the gold coin.
“I beseech you, Garðar Hólm, take your gold coin from me,” she said.
“Give it to this young lad, Madonna,” said the singer. “He is nearer to being myself than Garðar Hólm is.”
(Laxness 1966: 91)

Garðar Hólm is an illusion that many people believe to be true, so the man behind the name knows that he has more in common with the young Álfgrímur than with this so-called opera singer. As demonstrated above and throughout this paper, the use of names in the book is special in the sense that it not only involves different perspectives or attitudes, but it also indicates whether a character exists or not, based on the knowledge of other characters.

3.3 Álfgrímur’s grandparents

When it comes to Álfgrímur’s grandparents, the different ways of referring to them do not only reflect different perspectives of the characters in the story, but also describe the general attitudes of people towards men and women at the time the story takes place. Álfgrímur’s grandmother is one of the most important and most frequently

mentioned characters in the novel. However, her name is never revealed. She is generally referred to as *amma mín* ('my grandmother') by Álfgrímur, and the possessive determiner is included even when he addresses her. In addition, the prepossorial article, *hún* ('she'), is often placed in front of *grandmother* or *my grandmother*.⁴

The absence of the grandmother's real name is important for the story as it emphasises the main messages of the story – what really makes a person is not a name or a title, but a kind heart. She represents the stereotypical woman of her generation – or even women of the past, all around the world, who lived in the shadow of men. The grandmother is the glue that holds together the household of Brekkukot but she is extremely humble and nobody pays any attention to her. She does not even have her own bed to sleep in but takes good care of every guest that comes to stay in the cottage. When she has passed away, Álfgrímur realises that although she was the one who raised him, he did not know her at all.

The name of the grandfather, Björn, frequently appears throughout the book. He is well respected and his name is often associated with the name of the cottage, Björn of Brekkukot. He is considered to be the head of the household and extremely generous, while the grandmother is really the one who wakes up in the morning to make breakfast for everybody. The following is an example of how they appear in the book as Álfgrímur describes his childhood:

This was where my grandfather lived, the late Björn of Brekkukot who sometimes went for lumpfish in springtime; and with him lived the woman who has been closer to me than most other women, even though I knew least about her: my grandmother. (Laxness 1966: 3-4)

This passage is in the first chapter of the book, where Álfgrímur's adoptive grandparents are first introduced. It clearly shows how significant the grandfather is considered to be, while the grandmother is simply included in the description of him. He is referred to as 'the late Björn of Brekkukot' but she is described as 'the woman who [...]'. The grandparents are based on real people who formed and influenced Laxness. For example, this description of his mother sounds quite familiar: 'In fact, I never knew this woman. She was a hidden woman.⁵ However I have cared more for her than I have cared for other women' (Laxness 1975: 21 [my translation]). In a similar manner, in his childhood memoir, Laxness describes Halldóra Álfsdóttir, an elderly woman who was not a family member but stayed with his family from time to

time and assisted with household chores: ‘When it comes to Halldóra Álfsdóttir I sit down and cross myself while I silently say to myself: Thank God for the existence of men and women who do not get famous’ (Laxness 1975: 103-104 [my translation]). And above all, Laxness remembered his grandmother as he gave a speech at the Nobel Banquet in 1955:

What can fame and success give to an author? A measure of material well-being brought about by money? Certainly. But if an Icelandic poet should forget his origin as a man of the people, if he should ever lose his sense of belonging with the humble of the earth, whom my old grandmother taught me to revere, and his duty toward them, then what is the good of fame and prosperity to him?
(Laxness 1955)

Around the time Laxness was awarded the Nobel Prize he was preoccupied with the question of an author’s responsibility. For this reason, *The Fish can Sing* exposes the fragility of fame and praises the wisdom found in the lives of ordinary people. Álfgrímur comes to appreciate his true self and instead of becoming an upscale celebrated singer like Garðar Hólm, he becomes an author who writes about his people. He chooses to venture forth and seek his fortune but he does that on his own terms and keeps his integrity and rootedness in heart. Laxness himself was a man of both worlds, modernity and tradition. He became famous and travelled extensively in addition to writing books in honour of those he called the hidden people of Iceland.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to discuss the use of personal names in literary works in order to understand their effect in the novel *The Fish can Sing* by Halldór Laxness, which is particularly interesting because of its diverse naming techniques. Not only does the author use names to control perspectives in this puzzling story, he also builds up an atmosphere and creates a theme with the use of names and various designations for the same character. Namelessness is used to emphasise the story’s message and also in order to describe general attitudes towards men and women in the old days. The grandmother’s real name never appears even though she is one of the central characters of the book. Additionally, the author expresses his own attitudes towards national identity, modernisation and success. For example, the Danicised, aristocratic names are spelled in an absurd way because the novel is supposed to celebrate the ordinary and uncorrupted people of Iceland.

The child's perspective is dominant in the story although the narrator is an adult looking back at his childhood. The young Álfgrímur always uses the name Garðar because he has no knowledge of future events nor of his background. Thus, the narrator is not omniscient but observing, which supports the theme of the story, the deception associated with Garðar Hólm. He can be seen as three different persons depending on how he is referred to by other characters. The characters who refer to him as Georg or Gorgur know the truth and gradually the reader discovers the truth as well.

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¹ The names of characters belonging to the ruling class are derived from Greek mythology (such as Theseus and Hyppolita). The second group consists of mechanicals, whose names are figurative coinages associated with common trades and English life (such as Nick Bottom and Tom Snout). Characters belonging to the third group are supernatural and their names suggest an overriding hierarchy and order in nature (such as Oberon and Peaseblossom).

² Hidden people are elves in Icelandic folklore who live in harmony with nature in a parallel world. As previously mentioned, Laxness used this term to describe the common people.

³ With a feeling of pity, Álfgrímur’s grandmother implies that Garðar abandoned and rejected the pastoral community and its values by leaving his home to travel.

⁴ Prepropriat articles are discussed in chapter 3, pp. 5-6.

⁵ ‘Hidden woman’ is a direct translation of the word ‘huldukona’. See note 2 above.