(1958), pp.77-79); Kristján Albertsson (*Morgunblaðið* 30 April 1957, repr. in *Menn og málavextir. Ritgerðasafn* (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1988), pp.101-103); Kristján Karlsson (*Nýtt Helgafell* 1 (1957), pp.83-84); and Ragnar Jóhannesson (*Dagskrá* 2 (1958), pp.65-72).

3. 'Hugþekkt interludium in modo antico'. Elías Mar. 'Brekkukotsannáll.' *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 2 (1957), p.181.

4. Sigfús Daðason, 'Athugasemdir um Brekkukotsannál', *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 2 (1958), pp.150-172.

5. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, 'Innan og utan við krosshliðið: Um íroníu í Brekkukotsannál Halldórs Laxness.' *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 2 (1982), pp.180-200.

6. There might be a slight problem with the otherwise excellent English translation at this point. The original reads: 'En í púngum þessum tveim, er stóðu hlið við hlið uppá syllunni fyrir ofan rúm hans, *gerðist* með sínum hætti annáll þessi er hér ritast' (*Brekkukotsannáll*, p.54, italics mine). The translation does not seem to do full justice to the verb 'gerðist', which in this context refers to a continuous process, i.e. the unfolding of the entire chronicle. Rendering it as 'unfolded' or simply 'took place' rather than 'came into being' might better capture the meaning of the sentence.

7. I use the word art (and artist) in a general sense here, referring to all categories of arts, creative as well as performing.

8. On the different values that apply inside and outside of the gates of Brekkukot cf. also Dagný Kristjánsdóttir, 'Innan og utan við krosshliðið', pp.196-197.

9. 'Athugasemdir um Brekkukotsannál', pp.168-170.

10. 'Innan og utan við krosshliðið', pp.188-189.

From Finland Station to Atom Station: A Possible Case of Influence

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In this paper I should like to consider whether Halldór Laxness, in writing his novel *Atómstöðin* (1948; *The Atom Station*, 1961), was influenced by Edmund Wilson's book on the prehistory of the Russian revolution of October 1917, *To the Finland Station* (1940). What has led me to consider this question is the similarity in content of a particular passage in Laxness' book to one in Wilson's, each of them describing two boys playing chess. The one in Wilson's book may be quoted first. Here the boys in question are the young Lenin (Vladímir Ilyich Ulyánov), referred to both as Vladímir and as Volódya, and his elder brother Alexander Ilyich Ulyánov, referred to as Sasha. Also referred to in the passage are their younger brother Dmítri and their father, Ilyá Nikoláevich Ulyánov:

> The first effect on Vladímir of Ilyá Nikoláevich's death was to release the natural arrogance which his father had held in check. He even became rather offhand with his mother. On one occasion, when she asked him to do something at a moment when he was playing chess with Sasha, he answered curtly and went on playing. Sasha told him he must do what she wanted or he would not finish the game. One

> evening, writes their brother Dmítri, the younger children were playing in the yard. Through the screened and open window, they could see Sasha and Volódya inside, sitting absolutely motionless and silent, bent over the lighted chessboard. A little girl came up to the window and shouted: 'They're sitting in there like convicts that have just been sentenced to hard labor!' The two brothers suddenly turned and looked out, while the little girl ran away (p.359).[1]

The passage in *Atómstöðin* may be quoted in Magnus Magnusson's translation. Here the boys in question are cousins. One of them is a son of Búi Árland, the Icelandic Member of Parliament in whose house Ugla Falsdóttir, the narrator of *Atómstöðin* and the speaker of the passage quoted, works as a maid. The passage forms part of the sub-chapter (of ch.13) entitled 'Jörfagleði' (Orgy) in which Ugla describes an orgiastic party held by Búi's older children in his house in the absence of their parents. Earlier in the story, to judge from what the narrator (in ch.6) reports another character in the novel, a policeman, as saying, the boys had been in trouble with the police for stealing fifty mink from a mink-farm, killing some of them and letting the rest escape. The narrator, Ugla, had subsequently (in ch.11) bestowed the nickname *Gullhrútur* (Gold-ram) on this son of Búi's, and had confiscated from him some revolvers which, according to his elder brother, he had been complicit in stealing:

> I opened the door of the brothers' room and peeped in. There on the elder brother's bed a sozzled couple lay slobbering, and on the younger boy's bed a girl in a vomit-smeared brocade dress had been laid out in a Christian attitude, with arms folded across her breast. The radio was tuned to some American stallion-station, with hideous squealings and rending farts. Then I saw that the door of the clothes-cupboard was ajar, with the light on inside; and what was going on in there in the midst of the orgy of the century? Two boys playing chess. They sat facing each other, crouched over a chess-board in the cupboard, infinitely remote from everything that was going on just beside them; the mink-and-revolver thieves, Gold-ram and his cousin. They made no reply even though I spoke to them, and never looked up even though I stood at the cupboard door for a long time watching them. And at this sight I was once again captivated by the essential security of life, by

> the radiance of the mind and the healing powers of the heart, which no accident can destroy. I contemplated once more the civilized peace of the chess-game amongst the din from the American radio-station and the four gramophones scattered throughout the house, some saxophones, and a drum; then I went up to my room, locked the door, went to bed, and fell asleep (*Atom Station*, pp.102-03).[2]

I have quoted both passages at some length in order to give an idea of the context of each and in order to avoid making them look more similar than in fact they are, which it might have been possible to do by quoting them more selectively than I have done. While the differences between them are, I trust, evident, the similarity between them in portraying two boys concentrating hard on a game of chess under a light is, I hope, no less clear; it may also be noted that the boys are compared to convicts in the first passage, and described as thieves in the second. What is not so obvious from the way the passages have been quoted here is that each of them has an important thematic function in the book of which it forms part, the former in indicating not only what it calls Lenin's 'natural arrogance' but also his tendency to concentrate in general on 'contingencies immediately to be reckoned with' (Wilson, p.453); and the latter in using the chess-game to symbolise the enduring capacity of Icelandic culture to resist foreign, and in this case American, influence.

I must confess at the outset that the argument I am offering here, that Laxness was influenced in *Atómstöðin* by Wilson's *To the Finland Station*, rests on no *hard* evidence that I have so far been able to discover – in the form of, for example, an explicit reference to Wilson's work in one of Laxness' writings. I have not made an exhaustive search of all Laxness' work dating onwards from 1940, the year in which Wilson's book was published, but have found at the time of writing no reference to this book or to Wilson in any of Laxness' writings published between that date and 1948, the date of the publication of *Atómstöðin*.[3] Nor have I had direct access to Laxness' draft versions of *Atómstöðin*, which might be expected to throw light on the matter. These have, however, been subjected to a close analysis by Peter Hallberg, who would, I strongly suspect, have found and noted a reference to Wilson's work in them if there was one to find.[4]

While it may seem discouraging in the present context that Hallberg apparently found no such reference, it may be noted that he draws attention to a reference by Laxness in the earliest known draft of *Atómstöðin*, dating from 1946, to Ruth Benedict's book *Patterns of Culture*, and shows clearly that Laxness made use of this book in writing *Atómstöðin*. Benedikt's book was first published in 1934, but if we may trust Hallberg's indication that the edition of it used by Laxness was issued in 1946,[5] the reference at least serves to emphasize that Laxness, if he did know of Wilson's book, and even if he read it in its second edition, which appeared in 1942, would have had plenty of time to read and digest it before giving final form to *Atómstöðin*. My own suggestion that he made use of it in writing that novel must remain, however, for the moment at least, a suggestion and nothing more.

I shall first consider certain aspects of Wilson's book that Laxness might well have found congenial to him, to judge from what he had already published by the time that he was working on *Atómstöðin*, and will then go on to identify features of Laxness' work published since 1940, including *Atómstöðin*, which seem to reflect certain aspects of Wilson's book, and which suggest, to me at least, that he was influenced by it. Considerations of space will mean that each of my points will have to be made rather briefly; nevertheless, I hope they may have a cumulative effect.

It may first be noted that Wilson (p.213, cf. p.193) emphasizes the influence of Dante Alighieri on Karl Marx, and that Laxness himself, as is well known, was profoundly influenced by Dante, most especially in his first major novel *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* (1927; The Great Weaver from Kashmir) and in the sequence of four novels that came to be known as *Heimsljós* (1937-40; *World Light*, 1969/2002).[6] Secondly, Wilson's discussion (pp.101-02; cf. however p.169) of the interest in the railways shown by the French engineer and socialist Prosper Enfantin as a means of bringing people together and unifying them may be compared with Laxness' own wish to see railways in Iceland, expressed in *Raflýsing sveitanna* (The Electrification of Rural Areas), a series of articles by him published in the newspaper *Alþýðublaðið* (The People's Paper) in March 1927 ('cultivating the soil, laying

railways, building schools and churches').[7] Thirdly, Jules Michelet's view of history as organic, discussed by Wilson in his first chapter (pp.4-5; cf. also his discussion of the Hegelian Dialectic in ch.11, pp.195-96), may be compared and contrasted with Oswald Spengler's view of history, in which Laxness in the essay 'Þjóðerni' (Nationality), published in his essay collection *Alþýðubókin* (1929; The Book of the People), expresses a critical interest, maintaining that Spengler's notion of the Decline of the West does not apply to Iceland.[8] Fourthly, François-Noël Babeuf's view that, as Wilson paraphrases it, 'Christ's code of equality caused him to be prosecuted for conspiracy' (p.78) is analogous to Laxness' comparison, in his essay 'Trú' (Faith; also published in *Alþýðubókin*), of the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti with the crucifixion of Christ.[9] Fifthly, Wilson's summary of the view expressed in Marx's *The Holy Family*, that, in Wilson's words, '[i]t [...] is *man* – real, living man – who acts, possesses and fights in everything' (p.195) may be compared with Laxness' own view, also expressed in the essay 'Trú', that '*Man* is the gospel of the new culture, man as the most perfect biological species, man as social unity, man as a life symbol and an idea, the only true man – *You*'.[10]

Sixthly, the predicament of Michelet as a boy, as described by Wilson: 'hungry and cold', and 'forced in for food and heat on his own mind and imagination' (p.14), may be compared with that of Ólafur Kárason, the hero of Laxness' four-novel sequence *Heimsljós*, as described in the early chapters of the first novel in the sequence. More specifically, there are in Wilson's book accounts of visionary experiences which recall the vision in which the nineteenth-century Icelandic folk-poet Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798-1846) appears in that same novel to Ólafur, and consoles him in his distress by conferring upon him the title *ljós heimsins* (the light of the world), which was also the title of the novel itself in its first published form.[11] There are four such accounts in Wilson's book, dealing respectively with the Comte de Saint-Simon's vision of Charlemagne saying to him: 'Get up, *monsieur le comte*! remember you have great things to do!' (p.80); with the vision in which it is revealed to Saint-Simon that Isaac Newton, and not the Pope, was elected by God to sit beside him and transmit God's purposes

to humanity (p.83); with Robert Owen's belief that all those who had shared his vision of social reform, including Percy Bysshe Shelley and Thomas Jefferson, were returning from the other world to support him (p.97); and with Gustave d'Eichthal's claim that it had been revealed to him that 'Jesus lives in Enfantin', and that Enfantin was one of a holy couple, the Son and Daughter of God, who were to convey a new gospel to humanity (p.100). If Laxness did indeed read Wilson's book shortly after its publication in 1940, the year in which the fourth and final volume in the *Heimsljós* sequence was published, he could hardly fail to have been struck by the similarity of these accounts to his own presentation of Ólafur Kárason in the first volume in the sequence, published in 1937.

Seventhly and finally under this heading, the relatively general point may be made that Wilson (pp.190-91) strongly emphasises Marx's love of paradox, and the fact that there is in Marx's work more of paradox than of the progression that is found in that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Wilson, p.289), whose principle of the Dialectic Marx and Friedrich Engels took over and adapted to their own purposes. In other words, Marx, according to Wilson, tends to stay with the first and second elements, thesis and antithesis, of the Hegelian Dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, rather than to move towards the third element, synthesis, which is supposed to reconcile and unify the first two. Much the same could be said, and indeed has been said, of Laxness. Hallberg in his writings on Laxness has emphasised 'the markedly dialectical slant' that pervades the world of Laxness' literary creation, which Hallberg sees as embodying tensions not only between man as social being and as individual, but also between, among other things, rationalism and mysticism, head and heart, cold and hot, irony and pathos, in such a way that 'a thesis may suddenly turn into its own antithesis', and 'the reader is never allowed to settle down in safe possession of an insight or a final judgement'. Although these observations of Hallberg's were meant to apply to Laxness' work in general, they were clearly stimulated chiefly by close reading of *Alþýðubókin* and *Heimsljós*.[12]

These seven considerations, which relate for the most part to works by Laxness published before 1940, obviously cannot be used

in support of the view that Wilson's *To the Finland Station*, first published in that year, influenced his writing. They may serve to suggest, however, ways in which Wilson's book is likely to have appealed to Laxness if, as I believe is possible, he read it before or during the writing of *Atómstöðin*. In the remainder of this paper I should like to draw attention to aspects of Wilson's book that seem to me to find echoes in works by Laxness published after 1940, including *Atómstöðin*, and which, when taken together and viewed in relation to the passages quoted at the beginning of this paper, may help to establish the influence of this book on *Atómstöðin* as a probability rather than merely a possibility. Once again considerations of space will mean that each of my points will need to be made fairly briefly.

Firstly, Leon Trotsky's view, quoted by Wilson (p.385), that Lenin's correspondence with his close colleagues was carried on 'in a telegraphic language' may be compared with Laxness' notion of 'the unique stylistic quality of the telegram' ('stíleinkenni símskeytisins') as expressed in the article 'Málið' (1941; The Language) in connection with *Vopnin kvödd* (1941), his translation of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.[13] Secondly, Wilson's frequent use (pp.74-79) of the first person in his otherwise third-person summary of Babeuf's defence of his position in the trial that culminated in his attempted suicide and execution (in May 1797) may be compared with Laxness' own use of *style indirect libre*, which is especially evident, as Hallberg has shown, in the novel trilogy *Íslandsklukkan* (1943-46; *Iceland's Bell*, 2003),[14] but which also occurs in *Atómstöðin*, where the narrator, Ugla, sometimes refers to herself in the third person, most notably in the antepenultimate paragraph of ch.9. Thirdly, Wilson writes in the context of Lenin's funeral: 'He is the most male of all these reformers because he never weeps' (p.450). Given the context in which it is made, this statement may be contrasted with the one made by Ugla near the end of ch.16 of *Atómstöðin*: 'he who weeps does not die; weeping is a sign of life; weep, and your life is worth something again' (*Atom Station*, p.127).

Fourthly, as Hallberg has noted, the end of ch.25 of *Atómstöðin* appears to show the influence of Anatole France's novel *L'île de*

pingouins (1908; Penguin Island),[15] to which Laxness refers more than once in his draft versions of *Atómstöðin*, as Hallberg has also shown.[16] In this book, according to Wilson's account of it in *To the Finland Station*, 'the rebels are wiped out with their masters, and such men as are left on earth return to their original condition as tillers of the soil' (p.62). The relevant passage in *Atómstöðin* is spoken by the organist, Ugla's organ teacher and apart from her the most prominent character in the novel:

> The loveliest garden is nevertheless the countryside; that is the garden of gardens. When the nuclear bomb has razed the cities to the ground in this present world revolution because they have failed to keep pace with evolution, then the culture of the countryside will arise, and the earth will become the garden that it never was before except in dreams and poetry... (*Atom Station*, p.194).

This idea of the return of a lost age, reminiscent of what is prophesied by the sybil towards the end of the eddic poem *Völuspá* (c.1000; The Sybil's Prophecy), may be seen in relation to Wilson's account of how Marx and Engels, both of whom initially saw history in terms more of class struggle than of brotherly relations between human beings, came to believe, under the influence of the American ethnologist and socialist Lewis H. Morgan, in 'something in the nature of a Golden Age of communist ownership and brotherly relations' (Wilson, pp.300-02; cf. also pp.159-60; 196-97; 246-47).

Fifthly, Wilson compares Marx's ironic argument in defence of crime in *Das Kapital* (i.e., that crime reduces the population and thus increases the possibility of employment) with Jonathan Swift's '"modest proposal" for curing the misery of Ireland by inducing the starving people to eat their surplus babies' (Wilson, p.290). Wilson's comparison may itself be compared with Laxness' ironic use of this same work of Swift's (*A Modest Proposal*, 1729) in connection with the Korean war, in an article written on the occasion of a meeting of the World Peace Council in Vienna in December 1952, and published in his collection of articles and speeches *Dagur í senn* (1955; A Day at a Time).[17] Mention may also be made here of Wilson's further comparison of Marx with Swift as someone who, like Swift in the

Drapier's Letters (1724), can 'get a certain poetry out of money' (Wilson, p.290); and of his view that Marx, in his book *Herr Vogt* (which takes its title from Karl Vogt, the object of its attack), is 'almost as excremental as Swift' (Wilson, p.223). Wilson clearly finds a close affinity between Marx and Swift, a writer whose influence on Laxness is no less clear, albeit less frequently attested, than that of Marx; and if Laxness, like Marx as Wilson views him, has a capacity for making poetry out of money, this is perhaps most evident in his novel *Brekkukotsannáll* (1957; *The Fish Can Sing*, 1966/2000), in which the account of how a gold coin passes into, out of, and back into the possession of the young protagonist, Álfgrímur, has something of a unifying function.[18] Sixthly, Hippolyte Taine's view, quoted by Wilson (p.49) in the context of Taine's isolation of himself from French politics after the *coup d'état* of Louis Bonaparte in 1851, that '[p]olitical life is forbidden to us for perhaps ten years. The only path is pure literature or pure science', may be compared with what Laxness, in a foreword written in 1955 for a German edition of *Heimsljós* (and published in his *Gjörníngabók* (1959; Miscellany))[19] calls 'inner emigration' ('innri landflótti'), and describes there as the third of three alternatives open to creative writers under Nazism – the first being the impossibly dangerous one of open opposition to the regime, and the second being flight abroad.

Seventhly, it may be noted that there is much in Wilson's book that would lend support to the view expressed by Laxness in his article 'Eastern Lessons', written in English in 1958 (and also published in *Gjörníngabók*), that 'Communism is an English religion [...] evolved by a German-writing London Jew'.[20] Wilson's emphases on the religious element in Marxism, and on Marx's English experience and his Jewishness, may be considered here in turn. Wilson describes the Dialectic as 'a religious myth' (p.194) and as 'a semi-divine principle of History' (p.197). He writes of Joseph Proudhon's warning to Marx and Engels against posing 'as the apostles of a new religion' (p.154) – a warning hardly heeded by them, as Wilson implies in his account of Engels' Calvinist upbringing, and of how Marx, while on the one hand claiming to 'hate all the gods', on the other hand maintained that a writer with a message to convey must 'in his way adopt the

principles of the preacher of religion' (p.194). Wilson also notes that Marx's physical appearance at sixty showed a 'bend from the defiance of the rebel into the authority of the Biblical patriarch' (p.263) – a feature which is, of course, also consistent with his Jewishness. Wilson (pp.437-38; cf. pp.421-22) further shows how Trotsky, in his book on the Russian revolution of 1905, sees that event as part of history's providential plan, and how in this book, no less than in his other writings, Trotsky implicitly equates the dialectic of history with God. Even Lenin, as Wilson describes him (p.453), although much more of a realist than a theorist like Trotsky, and disinclined to see history as a Guardian Angel, is not above shifting responsibility onto it, or entirely free of a sense of 'God still disguised in the Dialectic' (Wilson, p.469).

As for Marx's English, and specifically London background, Wilson gives considerable emphasis to this. He writes of Marx's move to England after his expulsion from Paris in 1849 (pp.177-78); of his enforced removal in 1850 from Camberwell to Soho, where he was to remain for six years (pp.206-08); of his admission to the British Museum reading room in June, 1851 (p.205; cf. p.212); and of his move from Soho to Maitland Park, on Haverstock Hill, in 1856 (p.241). He describes Marx's impoverished circumstances in London (pp.217-21; 241-45; 255-59), shows that his fortunes changed for a time with Wilhelm Wolff's bequest to him of £800 (p.260), and relates how, after travelling abroad in 1882, he went to the Isle of Wight to escape the London fogs shortly before his death in London on March 14, 1883 (pp.333-34).

A strong impression of Marx's Jewishness also emerges from Wilson's book. We read how Marx, descended as he was from Rabbis on both sides, was from an early age profoundly conscious of the socially disadvantaged status of the Jews (pp.112-14). Wilson describes Marx as 'the great secular rabbi of his century' (p.118), quotes Marx's view that '[t]he social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism' (p.146), and comments that '[a]s a Jew, Marx stood somewhat outside society; as a man of genius, above it' (p.151). Marx's failure to seek employment, according to Wilson, was at least partly due to a wish to forestall the imputation of

commercialism so often brought against the Jews (p.208); and his substitution of the plight of the proletariat for that of the Jews, also discussed by Wilson (pp.305-11), was, in the latter's view, mistaken, since the proletariat had been stunted intellectually in a way that the Jews had not (pp.318-19).

Eighthly and finally under this heading, it may be noted that in Wilson's book (pp.105-10), Etienne Cabet, the French socialist and founder of the ill-fated American-based group know as the Icarians, is contrasted with Brigham Young, the leader of a relatively successful co-operative community, the Mormons (pp.105-08); while the American socialist John Humphrey Noyes is compared, not least because of his preoccupation with sex, to Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church (pp.108-11). This is obviously relevant in the present context to Laxness' novel *Paradísarheimt* (1960; *Paradise Reclaimed*, 1962/2002), which is to a large extent about Mormonism.[21]

Readers may judge for themselves whether these eight considerations, taken together with the two quotations given at the beginning of this paper, are enough to make it probable, rather than simply possible, that Laxness in writing *Atómstöðin* was influenced by Wilson's *To the Finland Station*. In the remainder of this paper I should like to consider briefly the question of whether Laxness was influenced by the title of Wilson's book in his choice of the title *Atómstöðin*. The Finland station, to which Wilson's title refers, is the railway station in Petrograd (St Petersburg) at which Lenin arrived in Russia in early April, 1917, on his return there from exile by way of Finland. Wilson ends his book with an account of Lenin's arrival, assuming in the reader knowledge of its momentous consequences: the leadership by Lenin of the October Revolution and the formation of the Soviet Government. The atom station of Laxness' novel, on the other hand, is not quite so easy to identify. *Atómstöðin*, as is well known, was written to a large extent in response to the decision by the Alþingi in 1946 to grant to the United States control of the airfield at Keflavík, some thirty miles southwest of Reykjavík, for military purposes – a decision which was seen by many Icelanders, including Laxness, as treasonable. The theme of 'selling the country', i.e.,

selling Iceland to a foreign power, is certainly a recurrent one in the novel,[22] and one might think that the atom station of the title is meant to represent Keflavík. Not all are agreed that this is so, however. Kristinn E. Andrésson, one of the earliest critics to discuss *Atómstöðin* at length, wrote in 1949: 'The atom station is not Keflavík', and maintained that the novel was itself an atom station, the tendency of which was to expose, with atom-splitting accuracy, the hypocritical contradictions in the capitalist mentality that in his view was the root cause of the Alþingi's decision.[23] Peter Hallberg has since written that 'the atom station is, broadly speaking, the symbol of a certain disintegration or explosion of accustomed ideas and associations', such as was bound to result from Iceland's contact with the outside world during the years of the Second World War,[24] and which is, indeed, well conveyed by the passage about chess-playing from ch.13 of the novel, quoted at the beginning of this paper. Rather more recently, Hermann Pálsson has written: 'The title is not only an allusion to the American military base in Iceland, but it also has a deeper significance',[25] and refers in this context (as Kristinn E. Andrésson also did) to Búi Árland's view, expressed in ch.23 of the novel, that '[t]he whole world is one atom station' (*Atom Station*, p.183).

Wilson's Finland station, albeit more easily localisable than Laxness' atom station, clearly has a symbolic function. In giving his account of it a climactic place in his book and in choosing to refer to it in his title, Wilson seems to have intended it as what in fact it is: a striking symbol of the historic meeting of Russia with the outside world that led to events of enormous consequence not only for the history of Russia, but also for world history. In much the same way, if rather less obviously, Laxness seems to have intended his atom station to be symbolic of the meeting of Iceland with the outside world that took place during and just after the Second World War, with consequences of obvious significance for Icelandic history, and potentially also, in view of Iceland's strategic importance in an east-west context, for world history as well. It is conceivable, then, that Laxness was influenced by the title of Wilson's book in choosing the title of his novel.

It is also interesting that both writers make use of the image of a game of chess in rather similar ways. Wilson, who refers more than once to Lenin's chess-playing (pp.359, 366, 382), seems to be using chess as symbolic of something stable and unchanging in Lenin's character, and perhaps also in the Russian character generally; and Laxness, as already indicated, seems to be using the image of a chess-game in the passage quoted above as a symbol of what is permanent and enduring in Icelandic culture, even in the face of foreign influence.[26] Laxness could not have known when he wrote *Atómstöðin* that the world championship chess match between Boris Spassky and Robert Fischer would take place in Reykjavík in 1972, or that Reykjavík would also be the venue for the summit meeting of Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in 1986. *Atómstöðin* does seem to hint, however, at the possibility of events such as these taking place, and the fact that it does so may in part be due, no less than other aspects of the novel discussed here, to the influence of Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station*.

Notes

1. References to Wilson's book are to the first edition: Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1940). Page references to this book are preceded by Wilson's surname in cases of possible doubt as to the source of the reference. For consistency's sake, Wilson's spellings of Russian and other names are used in the text of the present article, as well as in the quotations from his book.
2. Quotations from *Atómstöðin* are from Halldór Laxness, *The Atom Station*, trans. by Magnus Magnusson (London: Methuen, 1961). Other quotations from works not in English are translated by the present writer, unless otherwise indicated.
3. The relevant works are *Fegurð himinsins* (1940; The Beauty of the Skies), which forms the fourth and final part of the novel sequence *Heimsljós* (1937-40; *World Light* 1969/2002); *Vopnin kvödd* (1941), a translation of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929); *Sjö töframenn* (1942; Seven Sorcerers), a short story collection; *Vettvangur dagsins* (1942; The Contemporary Scene), a collection of essays and articles; the novel trilogy

Íslandsklukkan (1943-46; *Iceland's Bell*, 2003); *Birtíngur* (1945), a translation of Voltaire's *Candide* (1759); and *Sjálfsagðir hlutir* (1946; Commonplaces), another collection of essays and articles.

4. Peter Hallberg, 'Úr vinnustofu sagnaskálds: nokkur orð um handritin að Atómstöðinni' (From a Writer's Workshop: Some Observations on the Manuscripts of *Atómstöðin*), *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, 14 (1953), 145-65.

5. See Peter Hallberg, *Skaldens hus: Laxness' diktning från Salka Valka till Gerpla* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1956), pp.486-87; and cf. Hallberg, 'Úr vinnustofu', p.164.

6. See Svetlana Nedelyaeva-Steponavichiene, 'On the Style of Laxness' Tetralogy "World Light"', in *Scandinavica: An International Journal of Scandinavian Studies. Supplement: Special Issue Devoted to the Work of Halldór Laxness*, ed. by Sveinn Skorri Höskuldsson (May 1972), pp.71-87, esp. 79-81.

7. The relevant passage is quoted in Swedish by Peter Hallberg in his *Skaldens hus*, pp.33-34. For a version of it in English, see Peter Hallberg, *Halldór Laxness*, trans. by Rory McTurk, Twayne's World Authors Series 89 (New York: Twayne, 1971), p.53.

8. For the essay 'Þjóðerni', see Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Alþýðubókin* (Reykjavík: Jafnaðarmannafélag Íslands, 1929), pp.45-75. On the Decline of the West in relation to Iceland, see pp.68-70.

9. For the essay 'Trú', see Laxness, *Alþýðubókin*, pp.351-68. On Sacco and Vanzetti in relation to Christ, see p.358.

10. See Laxness, *Alþýðubókin*, p.368. For an English translation of the whole paragraph from which the quotation is taken, see Hallberg, *Halldór Laxness*, trans. McTurk, p.58.

11. See Halldór Laxness, *Ljós heimsins* (The Light of the World) (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1937), p.99. In subsequent editions, this title has been both abandoned (in favour of the more cumbersome *Kraftbirtíngarhljómur guðdómsins* (The Sonic Revelation of the Deity), and readopted. For details, see *Kraftbirtingarhljómur guðdómsins. Dagbók, sjálfsævisaga, bréf og kvæði Magnúsar Hj. Magnússonar, skáldsins á Þröm* (The Sonic Revelation of the Deity. The Journal, Autobiography, Letters and Poems of Magnús Hj. Magnússon, the Poet of Þröm), ed. by Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðumenningar 2 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1998), pp. 11-12, footnote 2.

12. The quotations are from Hallberg, *Halldór Laxness*, trans. McTurk, p.140. See further p.60 of that same book, as well as Hallberg, *Skaldens hus*, pp.123 and 392-93.

13. The essay is published in Halldór Laxness, *Vettvangur dagsins: ritgerðir*

(The Contemporary Scene: Essays) (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1942), pp.292-323; see p.313.

14. See Peter Hallberg, 'The Dialogue in "Íslandsklukkan"', pp.33-44 of the supplementary volume of *Scandinavica* (1972) referred to in note 6, above; esp. pp.41-44.

15. See Hallberg, *Skaldens hus*, p.482.

16. See Hallberg, 'Úr vinnustofu', p.164.

17. See the article 'Íslensk hugleiðing í tilefni friðarþings þjóðanna, höldnu í Vín þessa daga (des. 1952)' (An Icelandic View: On the Occasion of the Meeting of the World Peace Council Currently Being Held in Vienna (December 1952)), in Halldór Laxness, *Dagur í senn. Ræða og rit* (A Day at a Time – In Speech and Writing) (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1955), pp.158-60. For a discussion of Laxness' alliance of himself with Swift in this article, see R. W. McTurk, 'Swift, Laxness, and the Eskimos', pp.45-62 of the supplementary volume of *Scandinavica* (1972) referred to in note 6, above; esp. pp.47-49.

18. See Halldór Laxness, *Brekkukotsannáll* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1957) and *The Fish Can Sing*, trans. by Magnus Magnusson (London: Methuen, 1966/Harvill Press, 2000), esp. chapters 17-19, 33 and 41.

19. i.e., 'Bókin um skáldsnillinginn' (The Book about the Master Poet), in Halldór Laxness, *Gjörníngabók* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1959), pp.42-44, see p.43.

20. See p.201 of 'Eastern Lessons' in Laxness, *Gjörníngabók*, pp.201-11. It may also be noted that in *Atómstöðin*, ch.18, Búi Árland refers to 'our uncrucified Jew-dog Marx' ('okkar ókrossfesta þrekkjúða Marx'), expressing agreement with Marx's view that 'the Cross is opium for the people' ('krossinn sé ópíum handa fólkinu'), and giving this as his reason for supporting 'old Jesus' ('Jesú kallinn') in Parliament (*Atom Station*, p.137).

21. Especially from chapter 5 onwards. See Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Paradísarheimt* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1960) and *Paradise Reclaimed*, trans. by Magnus Magnusson (London: Methuen, 1962/New York: Knopf, 2002).

22. Most explicitly, perhaps, in chapters 4, 6-9, 14-15, 20, 23-25 and 27.

23. See Kristinn E. Andrésson, *Íslenzkar nútímabókmenntir, 1918-48* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1949), pp.332-41. The quotation is from p.338.

24. See Hallberg, *Halldór Laxness*, trans. McTurk, p.163; cf. also pp.160-61.

25. See Hermann Pálsson, 'Beyond The Atom Station', in *Ideas and Ideologies in Scandinavian Literature since the First World War*, ed. by Sveinn Skorri Höskuldsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Institute of Literary Research, 1975), pp.317-29. The quotation is from p.318, footnote 1.

26. On chess in Iceland and Russia, see respectively Willard Fiske, *Chess in*