

MANUSCRIPT RECORD

DATE REC'D March 27, 1945

SERIAL NO. G 305

AUTHOR Laxness, Halidor		TITLE INDEPENDENT PEOPLE (published in London by George Allen & Unwin) <input type="checkbox"/> TYPESCRIPT <input type="checkbox"/> PROOFS <input type="checkbox"/> SHEETS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOOK		NO. PAGES 544
SUBMITTED BY Curtis Brown, Ltd. 347 Madison Avenue New York 17, N.Y.		NO. OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND ILLUSTRATOR none		
INSTRUCTIONS FOR RETURN none		DISPOSED OF 1) HOW: 2) WHEN:		
BY WHOM READ:	NAME	DATE SENT	DATE RETURNED	FEE
	May Frances Martenet	3/28/45	4/2/45	
	AAK B. Smith	4/5/45	4/10/45	
REMARKS OR RECOMMENDATIONS				

REJECTED	BY WHOM	DATE	APPROVED
ACCEPTED	BY WHOM	DATE	APPROVED

REPORT

There is little I can add to Miss Martenet's report of this novel, for she has done it more than justice. The book possess all the qualities she describes-- it is intense, beautifully written, well developed, at time^s very moving indeed. It seems to me to be one of the best Scandinavian novels to come our way in a very long time.

The one thing Miss Martenet ^{failed to} point out is that its style, its characters, its atmosphere / generally, are distinctly unfamiliar to American readers. I would hesitate to use the word esoteric, yet I am tempted / to. It is that aspect of the work that, no doubt, accounts for Miss Martenet's anticipating only a modest sale. And modest is certainly the word. Indeed this may sell no better than Olav Duun's saga. Yet I recommend it as a work of literature from a language and a source that are virtually unknown in this country.

B. Smith

IMPORTANT: Please answer these questions fully and if you have further remarks to make put them on the other side of this page.

READERS' REPORT

Author..... Halldor Laxness Date submitted..... 3/28/45 Date of Report..... 4/2/45
 Title..... INDEPENDENT PEOPLE Reader..... May Davies Martenet
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~..... ~~Instructions for Reader~~.....

NOTE TO MSS. READERS

We aim to publish primarily:

1. Those books that are so good as to leave absolutely no doubt in the reader's mind of their being worth publishing. Such a manuscript happens along but rarely.
2. Foreign books that are of a great interest as such even when their intrinsic merits are not so obvious.
3. Those serious books that are pioneers in their fields. Such books must not be judged so severely as:
4. Other serious books that are well written and authoritative and of a timely nature or permanent interest.
5. Occasionally a book for its popular appeal pure and simple. This, recognizing that our own tastes if followed exclusively would rule out a great many harmless enough books of the sort that offer real pleasure to masses of readers and are legitimate gambles for the publisher.

A. Does this mss. fall into any of the above classes? If so, which? ~~Do not stop where you are unless you desire cordially to recommend its publication~~
This book belongs in class 1.

B. If you recommend us to publish the book give your chief reason in a single sentence.

Those who read this book will never forget it.

C. Make any suggestion that you think would improve the mss. The theme ("Little people" are exploited by "big people". There can be no such thing as an independant man) is over-stated with frantic insistance in the latter pages. I think perhaps this should be modified for it brings the book suddenly into the class of unqualified propaganda and mars the epic and timeless quality which is the finest thing about it.

D. Would you expect this mss., if published, to have (1) a modest, (2) a considerable, (3) a great sale?
 (1) 2000 (2) 5000 (3) 10,000 and upwards.

A modest or possibly a considerable sale.

E. Is there anything in the book that would make it liable to prosecution by the Society for the Suppression of Vice? If so, please designate such pages.

No.

F. If you recommend rejection, do you nevertheless feel the author worth encouraging for the future?

G. Is this a book you would yourself want to buy, own and read, if you saw it announced by another publisher? Say very briefly why.
Yes. In this book certain passages are of such beauty, so filled with an understanding of human dignity and pathos, so richly imaginative, that I want them permanently available for myself, my family, and friends.

H. Synopsis/Comments In Iceland in 1900 Bjartur, a poet-shepherd, uses his savings from 18 years of labor to make the first payment on a small farm which he buys from his former employer, the Baliff of Rauthsmyri. His acres are reputed to have the curse of a blood-thirsty troll upon them, but Bjartur

defies this superstition. He marries Rosa, a housemaid at Rauthsmyri. To maintain the farm and Bjartur's "independance" they must labor to exhaustion and live upon insufficient wretched food. Rosa dies at the birth of her first child which is not Bjartur's but that of the eldest son at Rauthsmyri. This child, Asta Sollija, Bjartur raises as his own. His second wife is Finna. Her old mother, Hallbera lives with them. They have three sons; Helgi, Gvendur and Joni. Finna bears a still-born or soon-to-die child each year and finally poverty and overwork kill her as they did the first wife. Bjartur and the child Asta love one another deeply. When Asta is fifteen need for money forces Bjartur to work in town for some months and he sends a pauper poet-teacher to instruct the children in his absence. This man seduces Asta and she becomes pregnant. Bjartur turns her out. Jon goes to America. Helgi is lost in a blizzard. Gvendur at seventeen falls in love with the granddaughter from Rauthsmyri. She leads him on then insultingly spurns him. The first world war brings a boom to Iceland and prosperity to Bjartur. He builds a house. In the depression following the boom he loses his farm. The Ballif of Rauthsmyri buys it. Bjartur decides to go to Urtharsal, the few acres belonging to his now ancient mother-in-law. On the way to Urtharsal, in town, he meets some Communists, spends the night with them and "gives" them Gvendur, his only remaining child. He then seeks out Asta Sollija, now dying of consumption and takes her and her two illegitimate children with him to Urtharsal.

Throughout the story the 'vested interests' (also Government, Aristocracy, Banking) are personified by the Rauthmyri folk. To quote: "The history of the centuries in this valley is the history of an independant man who grapples bare-handed with a spectre which bears a new and ever newer name." For Bjartur (and the reader) the name is Rauthsmyri. To quote again; "The lone-worker will never escape from his life of poverty for ever and ever; he will go on existing in affliction as long as man is not man's protector, but his worst enemy. The life of the lone-worker, the life of the independant man, is in its nature a flight from other men who seek to kill him. Bjartur's story is the story of a man who sowed his enemy's field all his life, day and night."

The author shows us hypocritical money-grabbing merchants. The clergy does not come off very well either, though there is a fine, not-unsympathetic portrait of the eccentric Reverend Gudmunder.

This book will be interpreted by many as a piece of out-and-out Communist propaganda. But whatever its purpose or classification may be it is both powerful and distinguished. On pages 217-218 there is a story told by gentle Finna to her sensitive boy Jon which alone would make the book worth owning. It is certainly worthy of publication but I fear it will not attract large numbers of readers unless it is extensively advertised - and perhaps not even then. The first portions of it are related, both in mood and style, to the Laxdale and other great Icelandic sagas. If publication should be undertaken I recommend that a little further work be done here and there on the translation; also that certain references to old Norse customs and to Icelandic literature be explained or clarified so that a general public who is not familiar with this background may not be "put off".

M. D. Martinet

Note to be appended to report on "Independent People" by Halldor Laxness

This book is superbly organized. Character development, plot, atmosphere and background are perfectly synchronized. It is long and detailed but in no wise padded. Each part, every emphasis, is in place.