

VIKINGS OF THE MIDWEST:  
PLACE, CULTURE, AND ETHNICITY IN  
NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1870-1940

DISSERTATION

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By

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## ABSTRACT

Although immigration is one of the defining elements of American history and ideology, texts written in the United States in languages other than English have been overlooked within American literary studies, as have the related categories of immigrant, ethnic, and regional writing and publishing. My project addresses the need for studies in multilingual American literature by examining the concept of home or *Vesterheimen* (literally, “the western home”) in Norwegian-American literature. I argue that ethnic writers use the notion of home to claim and/or criticize American values and to narrate individual and collective identities—in essence, to write themselves into American literature and culture. Hence these “hyphenated” American authors are united in the common imaginative project of creating a home and history in the United States.

My project locates and examines *Vesterheimen* in three main contexts: place, community, and culture. The first part of the dissertation focuses on Norwegian-American print culture as a dynamic force in shaping and promoting ethnic consciousness. The first and second chapters provide case studies on Augsburg Publishing House and one of its feature publications, the Christmas annual *Jul i Vesterheimen*. I reveal the ways in which Augsburg connects reading practices to class, culture, and citizenship and contend that such messages are important in illuminating the particular literary activities of *Vesterheimen* as well as larger aspirations and conflicts

surrounding the production of ethnic literature. I also contend that Augsburg and *Jul i Vesterheimen* attempt to construct ethnic identity, create an historical legacy, and write Norwegian-Americans into the nation as Americans of distinction.

The second part of the dissertation examines some of the major themes and issues introduced in the early chapters, especially literary portrayals of place and community in *Vesterheimen*, via close readings of selected works of Norwegian-American literature. The third chapter considers notions of rootedness and displacement. I argue that place forms a center of meaning in the texts as writers use literature to convey place identity and articulate their attachment to homelands in Norway and America. The fourth chapter considers the struggle between cultural preservation and assimilation in the Norwegian-American community. Ultimately, I explore the dynamic and sometimes conflicted work of Norwegian-American literature as writers negotiate, strategically and skillfully, a home in America.

For my grandparents, who instilled in me  
a love of stories, a respect for the past, and a sense of place.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Vikings of the Middle West: They threw themselves blindly into the Impossible and accomplished the Unbelievable. [. . .] Not for conquest. Not intent upon spoils. But to do mighty deeds and build for a greater human happiness! —O. E. Rølvaag, 1929<sup>1</sup>

### **Inspirations and Reflections**

The title of this dissertation, “Vikings of the Midwest,” was inspired by Norwegian-American author O.E. Rølvaag (1876-1931). Rølvaag used a similar title—“The Vikings of the Middle West”—for a 1929 article in American Magazine, a portion of which appears as the epigraph to this introduction. The general purpose of Rølvaag’s article is to assert the importance of the westward movement and immigration in American history, with specific reference to the part played by Norwegian-Americans. As the title suggests, Rølvaag emphasizes the epic scale and “romantic spirit” of such an undertaking. I find Rølvaag’s article to be a fitting entrance into my project: his main points highlight key issues at stake in Norwegian- American literature, in the critical discussions of this dissertation, and in the challenges associated with my completion of this work.

Rølvaag begins his article with the story of Cleng Pierson (or Peerson), “the pathfinder of Norwegian immigration to America” (44).<sup>2</sup> Rølvaag recounts Peerson’s legendary journey (partly on foot, no less) from the shores of Lake Ontario in New York to the Middle West in search of a site for a Norwegian colony. The story follows

Peerson's trials and tribulations "on the trail to Sunset Land" and climaxes with his vision of "a new Kingdom" or "the new Goshen" in La Salle County, Illinois (44-45).

Rølvaag's reasons for relating the tale are twofold: it marks the arrival of the Norwegians in the Midwest and provides an historical narrative typical of the Mississippi Valley. A similar impulse may be traced in Norwegian-American literature: a story that is at once distinctly Norwegian and typically American. Rølvaag also predicts the subject, tone, and theme of much Norwegian-American (and American) literature: the immigrant voyage; the pioneer struggle to tame the wilderness; the heroic building of local settlements, institutions, and communities; and the attainment of a new home in America.

Within these broader themes, Rølvaag identifies some of the recurring touchstones of Norwegian-American literature discussed in this dissertation. First, the author's invocation of Vikings represents ties to Norwegian history and culture, a noble past, an "authentic" ethnic identity, and the father/mother land of Norway. Second, Rølvaag claims both Norwegian and American influences. For example, he points out that social, political, and artistic movements in Norway—particularly the National Romanticism that flourished in the nineteenth-century—coincided with the westward movement in the United States and provided the "romantic spirit" necessary to immigration. Indeed, Rølvaag establishes a "trinity of mighty forces" that led to the settlement of the West: European romanticism, immigration, and westward migration (46). Third, he stresses the inherent Old World values of Norwegians that predict their success as American citizens: democracy ("From time immemorial they had been used to governing themselves"), religious faith and tolerance ("By nature they were mystics, therefore deeply religious, but certainly—not saints!"), a sense of community, and a rich

culture, particularly literary culture: “Who today would make yearly walking trips between northern Illinois and New York City just to have a couple of small religious books printed?” (83). Rølvaag argues for the cultural work of Norwegian-American literature: the transmission of the Norwegian heritage, the preservation of ethnicity, the formation of an American identity, and the creation of collective memory. Additionally, he points out the difficulty in producing, preserving, and interpreting such literature:

But so far we know only part of the history; that of the non-English speaking immigrant remains yet, very largely, to be heard. Unbelievable things happened. Divine comedies; unspeakable tragedies; deeds of valor and daring that surpass anything we know of from the days of knighthood.—I am testifying for the Norwegians; the Viking spirit was certainly not extinct. (47)

Rølvaag’s desire to “testify” for his ethnic group’s history and culture reveals another important aspect of Norwegian-American literature at its high-water mark in the early twentieth-century: a sense of urgency to record and create a legacy in the face of the ethnic group’s assimilation and language loss and America’s increasing nativism and decreasing immigration. Moreover, his call for attention to the cultural history of “non-English” speaking groups in the United States anticipates current scholarly endeavors in the areas of multiculturalism and multilingual American literature, as well as the “not English only” movement within American Studies, in which this dissertation participates.<sup>3</sup>

Rølvaag’s colleague in ethnic activism and authorship, Waldemar Ager (1869-1941), expresses similar sentiments as he contemplates the future of Norwegian-American literature in a letter written to author O. A. Buslett at the turn of the century:

Should it happen that the people (the Norwegians) are swallowed up here, then it will be these literary attempts we make that will live longest and bear witness best. [. . .] I do not wish to say that it is because *we* produce it that it will live, but rather because *somebody* produces *something*. If we as an immigrant people cannot bring forth great prophets, this is still no reason that the *little* that is created should be cast away. The future will grant literature first place. That which is printed here and now will be searched for—periodicals rummaged through and forgotten things brought forward.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to Rølvaag's testimonial on behalf of Norwegian-American cultural history, Ager's prediction casts literature as the legacy of and witness to a vital Norwegian-American community in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Ager's statements also attest to the frustration and isolation experienced by ethnic writers (given the tone of the letter, he must have been responding to expressions of that kind from Buslett). Although Ager's comments pre-date the zenith of Norwegian-American literature in the teens and twenties—when the ethnic group would indeed find a “prophet” in Rølvaag and enjoy the international success of his prairie classic, Giants in the Earth (1927)—they are nevertheless typical expressions of hope and uncertainty, even futility, regarding the outlook for ethnic literature in the United States.

The statements of both writers relate to my own work in pursuing and completing this dissertation. For example, Ager describes the nature of the scholarly endeavor to recover the voices and histories of immigrant and ethnic writers, particularly those who used languages other than English—digging through old papers, unearthing books, magazine, letters, and other historical materials. Indeed, the two documents quoted here are examples of just such work: I found both items in the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA), located at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. The quotation from Ager is especially meaningful to me, as it was discovered



at the end of one of many long, tiring, yet rewarding and exhilarating days at NAHA. As I sat alone in the archives in the basement of Rølvaag Library, surrounded by the ghosts of the past, I came across this prophetic passage and found myself doing just what Ager had envisioned a century ago.

In a sense, I too have possessed some of the intrepid “romantic” spirit that Rølvaag attributes to his Vikings of the Middle West in undertaking this project. I have journeyed to libraries and archives in the Upper Midwest, particularly Wisconsin and Minnesota, as well as across the sea to Norway, in order to collect primary and secondary source materials. I have also traveled far and wide to meet with other scholars active in the field of Norwegian-American studies. I have read and translated an antiquated form of Dano-Norwegian (sometimes having to decipher Gothic script) that the immigrants brought with them in the nineteenth-century. My translations are neither elegant nor literary. I wish they were, but I am not a translator by training, nor is translation for its own sake my primary aim; rather, I have attempted to provide satisfactory renderings of the original Norwegian that convey, to the best of my ability, the meaning and spirit of the original, if not the eloquence. Regardless of the success or failure of my efforts, something is always lost in translation, an idea that is often expressed by these ethnic authors in and about their own work. It has been an inexpressible joy for me to read these writers’ words in the original Norwegian and an equally inexpressible frustration when I have been unable to convey that very quality. Nevertheless, a great deal of the source material utilized in this dissertation was originally written in Norwegian and appears here in my translation. When reputable English translations of texts, particularly novels, have been available, I have generally used them (with some caution and always in

conjunction with the original Norwegian versions). The use of translations has to do with pragmatism as well as the fact that this dissertation is written in an American literature program, in the field of American studies, in an English department. My approaches shed light on the challenges and uncertainties surrounding the study of American literature in languages other than English: knowledge of and access to materials, ability in the native language and familiarity with the “native” culture; and potentialities and pitfalls of addressing multiple (scholarly) audiences. These very issues reveal what is most exciting and vital about work in multilingual American literature as well: the opportunity, indeed the necessity, to cross cultural, linguistic, historical, and disciplinary boundaries.

Rølvaag’s concern that the cultural history of non-English speaking peoples in the United States would go largely unheard is shared by a number of contemporary scholars in American studies. In terms of American literature, Rølvaag’s observations still hold true: despite the fact that immigration is one of the defining elements of American history and ideology, texts written in the United States in languages other than English have often been overlooked or marginalized within literary studies, as have the related categories of immigrant, ethnic, and regional writing and publishing. The neglect of such a rich and varied body of works is especially problematic given the current value of multiculturalism as “a model that describes and interprets the cultural and ethnic complexities of the United States” (Øverland 5). While multicultural perspectives promote diversity, they have tended to overlook the significance of language in the formation of ethnic identities, cultural values and behaviors: “Indeed, the strange

anomaly of combining multicultural theory with monolingual practice has been largely unquestioned in American studies” (Øverland 2). Literary historian Werner Sollors has referred to language to be the “blind spot” of multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately, this is changing as scholars work toward a more comprehensive understanding of American culture through studies of individual languages and literatures that collectively form the multilingual America of past and present. Part of this project is an act of recovery, finding texts and other cultural artifacts and bringing them to light. It is also an act of translation, both in linguistic terms—conveying the meanings of the original language(s) in English—and in its cultural dimension, locating and interpreting multilingual American literature within specific and multi-layered historical contexts. Ground-breaking work with regard to the translation and accessibility of texts has been done by the Longfellow Institute, Harvard University, in the Longfellow Series of American Languages and Literatures. One of the books in this series—Drude Krog Janson’s A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter (1887; 2001)—is a featured text in this dissertation. Similarly, The Multicultural Anthology of American Literature (2000) makes it possible for scholars to share these texts with their students.<sup>6</sup> Another collection, Multilingual America (1998) presents an assortment of scholarly essays that individually examine various American ethnic communities and languages (Spanish, Welsh, Yiddish, Chinese, Norwegian, and Turkish, among others) and collectively provide new theoretical approaches to multilingual American literature, ethnicity, and American literary history. These publications and others like them work to shift American literature and American studies “from an ‘English-only’ to an ‘English-plus’ approach.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, work in

multilingual American literature compels one to revisit the many and varied forms and discourses of American literature and to reconsider the authors and texts that constitute American letters.

I contribute to this much-needed and timely advance in American studies through my examination of Norwegian-American literature. By reading and interpreting ethnic literature within a dual perspective—one that combines a sophisticated knowledge of American traditions with expertise in the native language and culture—I reveal the dynamic dimensions of ethnic life and literary expression among Norwegian-Americans. Ultimately, my project works to increase awareness, appreciation, and understanding of immigrant, ethnic, and regional cultures of letters and their roles in the production of American literature.

My dissertation, “Vikings of the Midwest: Place, Culture, and Ethnicity in Norwegian-American Literature, 1870-1940,” considers place and ethnicity as imaginative factors that shape notions of identity, community, and nationality. The project focuses on *Vesterheimen* (literally, “the western home”), a term used by Norwegian-American immigrants in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century to refer to their distinct ethnic, linguistic, and geographic “home” in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The term *Vesterheimen*—derived from the Old Norse word for “the Western world”—was formally proposed as a name for Norwegian America in 1875, when Norwegian-American scholar Rasmus B. Anderson (1846-1936) proposed its use in an article in the Chicago-based Norwegian language newspaper, *Skandinaven*. By invoking this term, Anderson

hearkened back to an earlier Norwegian migration and settlement in Iceland (a precursor to Rølvaag's Vikings of the Midwest) as well as an authentic and "expressive" Norse word for the New World.<sup>9</sup>

Although the term *Vesterheimen* had been in circulation prior to Anderson's reference to it, he appears to have been the first ethnic leader to suggest its formal use as the designator of a distinct Norwegian subculture in the United States. However, a sense of community and ethnic solidarity certainly existed among Norwegian-Americans well before Anderson coined the phrase; indeed, this idea of a New Norway in America was expressed in some of the earliest Norwegian-American writing. For example, in one of the early "America books"—True Account of America for the Information and Help of Peasant and Commoner (1838)—author Ole Rynning "was not only describing a new country but actually writing the history of a Norwegian America to which he belonged."<sup>10</sup> As Norwegian immigration accelerated and new communities formed, *Vesterheimen* took on additional meanings and implications. On one level, the term signified a geographic orientation in the Midwest, particularly Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.<sup>11</sup> On another level, the term represented the ethnic and cultural community of Norwegian-American immigrants and their descendants. Gradually, *Vesterheimen* also referred to a Norwegian-American literary tradition or, to borrow Richard Brodhead's term, a "culture of letters," as well as the primary topic, theme, and symbol to be invoked and negotiated by writers of that culture. As Øverland points out, "*Vesterheimen* was as much a theoretical concept as it was a transitional reality" (The Western Home, 10).

This notion of *Vesterheimen* as a cultural and literary concept is the focus of my dissertation. In the broadest sense, I am interested in exploring the ways in which

*Vesterheimen* is used to construct, interpret, and represent immigrant identity and culture. I view these processes as complex and dynamic: Norwegian-Americans create and develop *Vesterheimen* while they, in turn, are shaped and influenced by their “western home.” These ethnic Americans dwell and write within the real and imagined boundaries of *Vesterheimen*, yet they also question, challenge, revise, and cross borders. My study locates and examines *Vesterheimen* in three main contexts: place, community, and culture. I argue that ethnic writers use the notion of home and homeland to claim and/or criticize American values and to narrate individual and collective identities—in essence, to write themselves into American literature and culture. Hence these “hyphenated” American authors are united in the common imaginative project of creating a home and history in the United States.

In addition to revealing the ways in which “white ethnic” European-American immigrants enter into the national imaginary, my project illuminates connections between studies in immigrant literature and culture with those of multiculturalism, regionalism, and the history of the book. I employ an interdisciplinary approach for reading ethnic and regional literatures that takes into account the complex historical and cultural contexts of their production. My method is to engage in close readings of primary texts—fiction, poetry, and non-fiction published in books and periodicals—using critical theory from fields like literature, history, cultural geography, and folklore. My textual analyses are informed by a wide variety of historical sources, such as publishing documents, letters, articles, literary reviews, and biographical materials. Archival

sources, including published and unpublished materials in English and Norwegian, figure prominently in both the primary texts I examine and the cultural framework that guides my interpretations and conclusions.

Chapter One, “‘A Literature of Our Own’: Pride, Patriotism, and Literary Culture at Augsburg Publishing House,” discusses the role of the ethnic press as a dynamic force in shaping and promoting ethnic consciousness, American acculturation, and literary taste. Augsburg provides an interesting case study as the publisher of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America and as a primary source of Norwegian-American literature in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. I focus on Augsburg’s self-proclaimed role as “a center for Norse-American culture,” expressed in advertisements and editorials in publishing catalogues and the Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin. By examining Augsburg’s discussions of books, reading, and publishing in relation to ethnicity, domesticity, and upward mobility, the chapter reveals the ways in which Augsburg connects reading practices to class, culture, and citizenship. I argue that such messages are important not only in illuminating the particular literary activities of Augsburg but also in revealing the larger beliefs, values, aspirations, and conflicts that surround ethnic publishing and the project of creating and sustaining ethnic literature and culture in the United States.

Chapter Two, “Christmas in Our Western Home: The Cultural Work of a Norwegian-American Christmas Annual,” develops further the issues raised in the previous chapter by examining one of Augsburg’s premier publications, *Jul i Vesterheimen* (“Christmas in our Western Home”), a Christmas annual published from 1911-1957. My analysis of the magazine takes into account its visual and discursive

contents, its placement within the Augsburg catalogue, and its relationship to the larger tradition of periodicals and gift books of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century. By studying both the contextual influences and textual components of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, this chapter reveals the complex and often conflicted cultural work that the Christmas annual performed for its immigrant and ethnic readers: the transmission of an Old World Heritage, the creation of a New World home of *Vesterheimen*, and the negotiation of American life and citizenship. Ultimately, *Jul i Vesterheimen* works to construct and preserve ethnic identity, to create an historical legacy and consolidate collective memory, and to write Norwegian-Americans into the nation as Americans of cultural distinction.

Chapter Three, “Rooted: Place, Homeland, and Identity in Norwegian-American Literature,” considers the relationship(s) between place, ethnicity, and identity. In my examination of texts by N. N. Rønning, O. E. Rølvaag, O. A. Buslett, and Dorthea Dahl, I argue that place forms a center of meaning, both for the largely displaced immigrants or ethnics portrayed as well as in the texts as a whole. Moreover, a sense of place does not merely function as thematic material in Norwegian-American writing; the literature itself becomes a vehicle for conveying place identity as writers work to articulate expressions of belonging and rootedness to homelands in Norway and America. In writing about place, these authors also participate in American literary traditions like urban fiction, agrarian writing, and pastoralism. Place attachment is therefore an important imaginative factor in Norwegian-American culture and an exceedingly relevant concept for understanding and interpreting immigrant identity and the real and imaginary place(s) of *Vesterheimen*.



Chapter Four, “‘A Harmonious Part of a Greater Whole’: Visions of Community in *Vesterheimen*,” focuses on literary portrayals of Norwegian-American communities in novels by Drude Krog Janson (1846-1934) and Waldemar Ager (1869-1941). Both authors examine Norwegian-American ethnic enclaves and the inhabitants’ struggles to preserve an ethnic heritage and identity as they assimilate American values and behaviors. Janson’s feminist novel, A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter (1887), portrays the American city (Minneapolis) as a source of opportunity but also the root of social and moral ills. Waldemar Ager’s On the Way to the Melting Pot (1917)—sometimes referred to as the Norwegian-American Main Street in its anticipation of Sinclair Lewis’ 1920 novel—provides a scathing satire of immigrant materialism in a Midwestern town and reveals the significant price and superficial reward of melting pot assimilation and ideology. Ager and Janson stress that Norwegian-Americans do not merely struggle to maintain ethnic integrity amidst the dominant Anglo-American culture, but that they also contend with obstacles and dissension within the ethnic group itself. Both authors reflect the strong polemical tradition in Norwegian-American literature as well. I analyze recurring themes—the costs of Americanization, the limitations of Midwestern provincialism, the emptiness of materialism, conformity, and middle class mediocrity—in light of European and American social debates and literary movements of the period.

Ultimately, my dissertation participates in several current projects within the profession: the theorization of place, race, and ethnicity as factors in identity formation and literary production; the reevaluation of ethnic, immigrant, and regional cultures of letters; and the redefinition and expansion of the body of works and authors that form the field of American literature. Finally, while it enriches our understanding of the cultural

and literary endeavors of a particular ethnic group, my project illuminates the ways in which literary mappings of American cultures and regions contribute to a sense of collective identity and a shared American experience. I explore the dynamic and often conflicted work of ethnic literature as writers attempt to negotiate, often strategically and successfully in the vocabulary and ideology of their adopted country, a home in America. Thus, immigrant and ethnic authors, much like their earliest American predecessors, illuminate the compelling ties between literature and citizenship.

### **Setting the Stage: Authorship and the Literary Scene during The Zenith of Norwegian-American Culture**

In order to explore the issues outlined above, my project focuses on selected authors and texts from Norwegian-American literature, 1870-1940. A literary history of *Vesterheimen* is a monumental task that far exceeds the boundaries of a single dissertation.<sup>12</sup> While literary history forms a constant backdrop to my discussions, I am primarily interested in exploring and documenting the ways in which *Vesterheimen* is invoked as a literary and cultural construction. The rationale for locating my study within this period is based on several factors. My project commences with the 1870s, when Rasmus B. Anderson consciously proclaims *Vesterheimen* to be a fitting designator for Norwegian America. As pointed out, the idea of *Vesterheimen* was already in circulation and literary activity was well underway prior to 1875. Indeed, a number of literary endeavors—immigrant letters, periodicals, secular and religious books—flourished in the early and mid-nineteenth-century. However, Anderson's public naming of *Vesterheimen* recognizes an increasingly codified Norwegian-American culture in the

latter part of the nineteenth-century. Similarly, I end my project in the early twentieth-century when *Vesterheimen* began to wane as an active ethnic and literary subculture.

Another reason for focusing on this historical period is that it represents a particular flowering within Norwegian-American literary culture, a time in which literary production, especially fiction, flourished. Moreover, the aesthetic value of writing became of increasing importance for Norwegian-American authors at this time, resulting in a number of the most important and enduring texts in Norwegian-American literature as well as debates concerning the nature and future of Norwegian-American letters. Indeed, Norwegian-American writers have their greatest (albeit limited) success in crossing over to the “mainstream” in terms of audience and literary market during this period. In many ways, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century is the zenith of Norwegian-American literature.

A curious and compelling aspect of this zenith is that—just as the ethnic group and its cultural endeavors reach a high water mark—it predicts its own demise. While they enjoyed some of their greatest success, immigrant authors and publishers could already sense their community and way of life beginning to fade. This was due to a variety of social and historical factors, including issues of assimilation and language loss with the ethnic group as well as growing nativist policies in the United States, particularly during World War I and World War II. For the purposes of my study, what is especially interesting about the close proximity of this climax and decline is the resulting tension in the culture of *Vesterheimen*; in addition to cultivating an ethnic American literature and identity, Norwegian-American authors and texts become increasingly

engaged in memorializing that identity as something already passing away or under siege. Increasingly, writers feel pressed to mediate between claims of ethnic pride and (American) national loyalty.

In addition to understanding the larger historical context surrounding the authors and works discussed in this dissertation, it is helpful to consider some of the factors that shaped Norwegian-American authorship. While there are many exceptions and each author faced his/her own unique set of challenges, some general factors should be highlighted. Because of the historical, linguistic, and cultural specificity of Norwegian-American literature, I have chosen to use Richard Brodhead's term "culture of letters" to refer to the literary milieu discussed in this dissertation. Brodhead introduces and illustrates his terminology by examining the specific contexts of three case studies—the literary debuts of Theodore Dreiser, Herbert S. Stone, and Szczesny Zahajkiewicz—all of which took place in 1890s Chicago but each of which reflects distinct cultural impulses:

What even so brief an account will have suggested is that these three bodies of Chicago writing arose in differently organized (if adjacent) literary-social worlds, in differently structured cultural settings, composed around writing and regulating its social life—in different cultures of letters, to give this phenomenon a shorthand name.<sup>13</sup>

Brodhead's culture of letters—emphasizing the communities that shape writing and authorship—is an apt model for my work in Norwegian-American literature and studies in ethnic print culture in general. Indeed, the multi-layered "literary-social worlds" of ethnic cultures of letters influences greatly the forms and functions such literatures take.

In order to understand and interpret the ideas and values expressed in Norwegian-American writing, one must consider the social forces at work within and without *Vesterheimen*, particularly the realities that influenced literary production. For example,

one aspect of Norwegian-American writing is that it features “the untutored voices of ordinary people rarely heard from in a national literature.”<sup>14</sup> Hence the quality of the literature varies greatly, “from very good and quite good through different degrees of so-so down to perfectly awful” (Skårdal 1). While this range of voices affects the aesthetic quality of ethnic literature, it also reveals one of its strengths: a polyphony of voices and viewpoints that make for a dynamic cultural scene. Ingrid Urberg points out that aesthetic considerations have at times hindered or prevented the study of specific authors and works as well as ethnic literatures in general. In the case of Norwegian-American literature, she points out that “indeed, if one dismissed works with marked aesthetic weakness or flaws [ . . . ] much of value would be lost.”<sup>15</sup> One must also take into account that Norwegian-American authors typically held regular full-time jobs, and many held civic or voluntary positions in their communities as well. In terms of literary activities, writers might function as author, editor, printer, and distributor of their own works. Few had the luxury of full-time writing with financial and artistic support.

Another factor in both aesthetic quality and literary production is the fact that “Norwegian-American writers lacked good editors and critics.”<sup>16</sup> Although there were critics of skill and perception, the group was relatively small; to complicate matters, most of the authors knew each other, and this influenced their responses to one another’s work. Writers in *Vesterheimen* also lacked critical feedback from writers in Norway, as most Norwegian-Americans used a form of Dano-Norwegian that grew increasingly outmoded as a form of literary expression. Some authors even wrote in their own Norwegian dialect, which further shrank their potential audience. While some writers did keep up with linguistic and literary developments in modern Norway—O. E. Rølvaag chief

among them, since he was both an avid reader of modern literature and a professor of Norwegian at St. Olaf College—many authors wrote within a kind of linguistic isolation.

Norwegian-American literature also appeared outdated to contemporary readers in Norway and America in that it frequently suffered from what Orm Øverland refers to as literary prudishness. Sometimes this purity was inherent in the work itself, as in the sentimental, happy endings characteristic of Dorteia Dahl's domestic fiction (Chapters Two and Three) or the female bildungsroman of Drude Krog Janson (Chapter Four). At other times, this conservatism was more institutional, whether in terms of genre, as in the case of many texts written for the nostalgic Christmas annual *Jul i Vesterheimen* (Chapter Two), or the editors and publishers responsible for printing and distributing the literature, as in the case of Augsburg Publishing House and its ties to the Norwegian Lutheran Church (Chapter One).

Indeed, the church exerted considerable influence in Norwegian-American communities, with regard to sacred and secular culture as well as linguistic policy. As the first and second chapters reveal, Augsburg Publishing House manager and *Jul i Vesterheimen* editor Anders Sundheim suffered from conflicts with the church publishing board, which occasionally hampered his efforts to publish high-quality secular literature or pressured him to publish more texts in English. As an advocate for Norwegian-American authors and as editor of Augsburg's Christmas annual, Sundheim reflects the personal commitment and sacrifice that was required for any Norwegian-American literature to be produced. In a letter to Buslett, Sundheim expresses some of the weariness, frustration, even futility that such personal investment sometimes created:

I know, however, all too well that it is only with personal sacrifice that any Norwegian-American literature can be produced and published. But I have stopped fretting about it. It doesn't help anyway.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Norwegian-American authors both benefited and suffered from the multiple subject positions they themselves held—Norwegian or American, amateur or professional author, and so on—and their unstable status as cultural insiders and outsiders. In terms of language and audience, ethnic authors may be viewed as marginal figures in relation to mainstream literature and/or a dominant Anglo-American culture. Yet many of these writers were simultaneously at the very center of their ethnic and local communities and literary cultures, not to mention engaged in larger debates and movements in American literature and culture. Moreover, even within the narrow limits of *Vesterheimen*, literary access differed and hierarchies existed. In her study of Norwegian-American women novelists, for example, Ingrid Urberg acknowledges the “double marginalization—namely, the marginalization of female writers within this immigrant or ‘hyphenated’ tradition” (Urberg 3). In the case of Dorteia Dahl, such isolation was also geographic in that she spent most of her career in Idaho rather than the Midwestern states that comprised the heart of *Vesterheimen*.

These are only a few of the factors that shape the “literary-social world” of *Vesterheimen* and reveal the challenges faced by ethnic authors, publishers, and readers. Given such considerations, the amount, variety, and depth of Norwegian-American literature produced in the United States is that much more fascinating. It is the conviction of this dissertation that Norwegian-American literature and the literary culture of *Vesterheimen*—with all of its limitations and opportunities—is a subject worthy of

further examination and critical study. As anyone who has visited the archives and seen the many boxes of papers awaiting discovery can attest, there are many more voices to be heard and stories to tell.



<sup>1</sup> O. E. Rølvaag, "The Vikings of the Middle West," American Magazine Oct. 1929: 44-46. Hereafter quotations have their page numbers provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Cleng Peerson (1782 or 1783-1865) played an important role in the first Norwegian mass emigration to the United States. Peerson was one of two agents—along with Knud Olson Eide—who were sent to America in 1821 to investigate conditions in the New World on behalf of a group of Norwegian Quakers and Haugeans from Western Norway. Peerson returned to Norway in 1824 for a short stay, during which he reported on the situation in America to the religious dissenters. He returned to the United States shortly thereafter and made plans for the emigrants' arrival. The group arrived on a sloop, the *Restauration*, in New York in 1825. They initially settled on land purchased by Peerson in Kendall Township, upstate New York (with assistance from American Quakers). The settlement served as a gateway and stopover for Norwegian immigrants moving westward to new territories, including the early Fox River valley settlement in Illinois (also discovered by Peerson). Peerson has been referred to as "the father of immigration" and "Peer Gynt on the prairie" as well as the Norwegian Moses, leading his people to the Promised Land. The first group of immigrants is frequently referred to as "the sloopers" in honor of their ship. See Odd S. Lovoll, The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> I borrow this term from a collection of scholarly articles on multiethnic and multilingual American literature and cultural studies. The editor of the collection invokes the term in response to the English Only campaigns of the twentieth-century United States, as well as the current monolingualism in multiculturalism and American studies. See Orm Øverland, ed., introduction, Not English Only: Redefining "American" in American Studies (Amsterdam: Amerika Instituut, 2001) 2-11. Hereafter quotations from this source have their page number provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Waldemar Ager, letter to O. A. Buslett, 19 Aug. 1900, O. A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. My translation.

<sup>5</sup> Werner Sollors, "For a Multilingual Turn in American Studies," American Studies Association Newsletter 20 (June 1997): 13.

<sup>6</sup> See Marc Shell and Werner Sollors, eds., The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations, A Longfellow Institute Book (New York UP, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Werner Sollors, introduction, Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature, A Longfellow Institute Book (New York: New York UP, 1998) 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Vesterheimen* may also be translated as "the home in the west" or "our western home." I have often utilized the latter translation in this dissertation as it suggests the community and collective identity and history *Vesterheimen* came to represent.

<sup>9</sup> Rasmus B. Anderson, "En tur ikring i Vesterheimen," Skandinaven [Chicago] 23 Feb. 1875: npg. In the article, Anderson claims that *Vesterheim* is the word Icelanders use for America. Anderson was a professor of Scandinavian languages at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1869-1883.

<sup>10</sup> Orm Øverland, The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America, Author Ser. 8 (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Assn., 1996) 29. Hereafter quotations from this source have their page numbers provided parenthetically in the text. America books or pamphlets were generally written for a Norwegian audience in order to provide information about the New World and, frequently, to

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encourage emigration. Such documents circulated widely; for example, America letters were reproduced by hand and sent beyond the locality to which the original letter had been mailed while others were printed in Norwegian newspapers. See Øverland, introduction, 3-31.

<sup>11</sup> After the Sloopers landed in New York and took up residence in Kendall Township, most of them soon migrated to the Fox River Valley in Illinois. From here, additional settlements sprang up in and around Chicago and other parts of Northern Illinois. However, for most of the nineteenth-century, Wisconsin was the center of Norwegian immigration. Already in the 1840s, Wisconsin became the primary region of settlement, remaining so until the Civil War. Additional migrations into Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas followed after (with Wisconsin still serving as a way station for newly arrived immigrants from Norway). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, a secondary migration to the Pacific Northwest took place. While the Midwest was not the only site of settlement—a vital Norwegian-American community existed in Brooklyn throughout the nineteenth-century, for example—the Midwest was and the main site of Norwegian immigration and Norwegian-American institutions.

<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, Orm Øverland makes an excellent contribution in this area with his ground-breaking study, The Western Home (see reference above).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Brodhead, Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 5. Hereafter quotations have their page number provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Skårdal, “Old-Country Influences on American Ethnic Literature,” ts., 1. I received a copy of this document, dated June 2001, from the author. I am grateful for the reference. Hereafter quotations have their page number provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>15</sup> Ingrid Urberg, “A Sense of Place: America Through the Eyes of Norwegian-American Women Novelists,” diss., U of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Solveig Zempel, trans., introduction, When the Wind is in the South and Other Stories, by O. E. Rølvaag (Sioux Falls: Center for Western Studies, 1984) 13.

<sup>17</sup> Anders M. Sundheim, letter to O. A. Buslett, 31 Oct. 1922, O. A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. This is my translation of the original Norwegian.

## CHAPTER 1

### A LITERATURE OF OUR OWN: PRIDE, PATRIOTISM, AND LITERARY CULTURE AT AUGSBURG PUBLISHING HOUSE

As Americans, we feel that the literature of this country is our literature, expressing and interpreting our common American life; but as Americans of Norwegian descent, having our own peculiar characteristics, history, traditions, institutions, and problems, we need also a literature of our own.<sup>1</sup> —N. N. Rønning, *Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin*, 1920

#### **Introduction: The Rise of Augsburg**

Orm Øverland points out that “[t]he history of Norwegian-American literature is inseparable from the history of printing, publishing and distribution of newspapers, magazines and books in the Norwegian language in the United States.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter, which views *Vesterheimen* as a distinct culture of letters, turns its gaze to American ethnic print culture. Specifically, my discussion focuses on Augsburg Publishing House of Minneapolis,<sup>3</sup> one of the most prestigious publishing houses to have its roots in the Norwegian-American community. Changes and expansions at Augsburg in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century set the stage for publication of the Christmas annual *Jul i Vesterheimen* (discussed in the following chapter) as well as many other seminal works of Norwegian-American fiction. Indeed, this literary flowering was directly connected to the fortunes of Augsburg Publishing House. By the turn of the

century, Augsburg had solidified its position as the main publisher of Norwegian-American fiction and poetry and had become “the largest Lutheran concern in the publishing field.”<sup>4</sup> What is more, as the official organ of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, Augsburg wielded considerable power within the ethnic community and had the capability to reach a large audience. Indeed, in one Bulletin article, Augsburg places itself as the center of Norwegian-American culture: “[b]esides being the headquarters of The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, Augsburg Publishing House may also be said to be sort of a center for Norse-American culture.”<sup>5</sup> Augsburg’s growing stature and its increasing attention to secular literature contributed to what Øverland deems the “pentultimate chapter” of Norwegian-American literature.<sup>6</sup>

Founded in 1890, Augsburg Publishing House became the official publishing concern of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.<sup>7</sup> However, given that church publishing concerns had been active since the mid-nineteenth century, the 1890 founding date belies the rich tradition that filtered into the newly centralized Augsburg.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Augsburg itself was not an entirely new entity since the Danish Norwegian Conference had a “very strong publishing branch with numerous publications in books and periodicals” that served as a “direct predecessor of the Augsburg Publishing House.”<sup>9</sup> This publishing ancestor had been “virtually nameless or [was] being called by a variety of names such as the publishing society, the publishing company, the publishing board, the publishing concern” and so on.<sup>10</sup> Such church-related publishing was common to the various synods; in fact, many sponsored their own publications, even if they did not have an official center for publications. Thus, the consolidation and formation of a *named* Augsburg Publishing House—itsself the result of three publishing concerns merged into

one—takes on tremendous significance within the broader context of both Lutheran publishing and the Norwegian language press in the United States. On the one hand, Augsburg is the descendant of the myriad publishing concerns of the various Lutheran synods in America during latter half of the nineteenth-century. Its place at the center of church printing would, in and of itself, recommend Augsburg as an important player in Norwegian-American history. On the other hand, Augsburg is also tied to the secular publishing tradition of Norwegian immigrants in America.<sup>11</sup> From the standpoint of a literary scholar, this connection to secular culture, especially belles lettres, adds an interesting twist to the Augsburg story. Indeed, these two legacies of Norwegian-American print culture—the sacred and the secular—would complement and collide with each other in rather interesting and complex ways as the publishing house entered the twentieth century under the leadership of Anders M. Sundheim.

Born in Valdres, Norway in 1861, Sundheim immigrated to the United States at the age of 17. Having undertaken various printing and publishing activities in Minnesota and California, Sundheim was made Superintendent of the printing office at Augsburg in 1890, the year of the United Lutheran Church merger. After becoming Assistant Manager in 1904, Sundheim assumed the reigns as General Manager in 1917. Sundheim's ascent to the top position at Augsburg came in the wake of yet another merger, this time between the "book business concerns and the printing establishments of the Hauge Synod, the Norwegian Synod and the United Church" which "merged into one business concern, the main seat of...Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota."<sup>12</sup> This new arrangement necessitated expansion and remodeling of the office space and meant that the church administration and publishing branches would be

housed together. Thus, as Sundheim takes over the reigns, Augsburg Publishing House becomes a consolidated publishing power, unprecedented in the history of Norwegian-American print culture.

The various church and publishing mergers and the arrival of Sundheim at the helm at the turn of the century set the stage for changes in the publishing policy of Augsburg and the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA). In tracing this policy, Orm Øverland marks a significant shift in 1911-1912, with the arrival of two new publications: the Christmas annual *Jul i Vesterheimen* and the secular novel *Amerika-breve* (America Letters), the latter by the relatively unknown Paal Mørck (pseudonym of Ole Edvart Rølvaag) who would go on to become one of Norwegian-America's most important writers and cultural activists and an author of international stature. Although Augsburg had already begun to publish some secular and general reading material alongside its religious works and pious fiction in the final decade of the nineteenth-century, the arrival of *Jul i Vesterheimen* signaled a conscious move toward literary texts and the cultivation of a secular Norwegian-American literature. Citing Sundheim's own writings and official statements in reports of the NLCA, Øverland refers to this emerging policy as one of "dual responsibility, one 'religious,' the other 'national' and cultural." With this "strong statement of cultural commitment," the publishing house "has obviously gone beyond its traditional role of printer and distributor of church publications."<sup>13</sup>

But in moving beyond its traditional activities, what new roles did Augsburg Publishing House seek to fulfill? How did it imagine itself and its readers during this

period of unprecedented growth and vitality? And what are the implications of changes in the publishing house's management, the products it offered, and the ways in which it presented itself, its merchandise, and its mission to patrons? This chapter addresses these questions by focusing on Augsburg's self-proclaimed role as "a center for Norse-American culture." I examine the implicit and explicit messages surrounding books, reading, and publishing expressed in Augsburg publications. Since these publications were written in both English and Norwegian—sometimes one or the other, sometimes a mixture of both—they reveal shifting Norwegian and American allegiances in terms of identities and values, as well as the linguistic conflict and fluidity that characterize the Norwegian-American culture of letters at this time. Moreover, I argue that Augsburg's statements about class, culture, and citizenship are important in illuminating the particular goals and literary activities of the publishing house as well as the larger beliefs, values, aspirations, and conflicts surrounding the project of creating and sustaining Norwegian-American literature and culture. Using Augsburg as a case study, I contend that the ethnic press works to shape and promote ethnic consciousness, American acculturation, and literary taste.

### **Progress and Prestige**

One recurring message is Augsburg's insistence on progress in terms of the firm's growing prestige, productivity, and presence in the literary marketplace. For example, in his important article "A Literature of Our Own"<sup>14</sup> (quoted at the beginning of this chapter

and published in the Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin), N. N. Rønning calls for the cultivation of a distinctly Norwegian-American literature and outlines its means of production:

And all of us look to Augsburg Publishing House with its splendid manufacturing equipment, its efficient distributing organization, and its ever increasing constituency, as the leader in stimulating, encouraging, and guiding the movement for a literature of our own.<sup>15</sup>

This comment not only affirms the commitment to literary culture but also highlights the central role Augsburg will play in this cultural program as producer, distributor, and guide. J.J. Hopperstad<sup>16</sup> quotes Rønning's statement in his own Bulletin article, "Ho, for a Greater Augsburg." As the title suggests, Hopperstad stresses the need for "practical realization of the program" and asserts that "[w]e are firmly convinced, and we rejoice in this conviction, that Augsburg Publishing House is on the threshold of an era of expansion and growth which in a few years will exceed the most extravagant dreams of the founders."<sup>17</sup> Such statements may be interpreted in light of the particular developments at Augsburg in the early decades of the twentieth-century already outlined in this chapter. Additionally, it is important to note the insistence on the modernity and technology of the publishing house as a key to success. In this respect, Augsburg reflects larger trends in American advertising in the early twentieth century, as described by Susan Strasser:

Historians have pointed to the celebration and promotion of modernity in the advertising of the 1920s. Their evidence suggests that the transformation of culture, from ideas and lifestyles based on local relationships and regional manufacturing to those contingent on mass production and a national market, took decades. Yet that transformation was well on its way before World War I, activated in part by the products themselves. In promoting those products, manufacturing companies in this earlier period were often direct in stressing modernity as an



advertising theme. Other companies put a strong emphasis on converting the population to the modern ways of mass production and factory-made goods, using images that ranged from fanciful to factual and inviting the public to observe mechanized processes.<sup>18</sup>

Though Augsburg's reputation and consumer base were still largely centered in its ecumenical, ethnic, and regional identities, the publishing house was increasingly becoming aware of and participating in these national modes of advertising, as seen in the following example:

Take time to visit Augsburg Publishing House before you leave the city. It will interest you and your friends to see in full operation the largest printing plant and book business ever built up by *Norse-Americans*. [. . .] During the 35 years of its existence [. . .] hundred thousands of books printed on our presses have been broadcasted in all directions. Other hundred thousands of imported Norwegian books and Bibles have been sent out in East and West to supply the homes, libraries, congregations, Sunday schools and young people's societies.<sup>19</sup>

Exhibiting the traits outlined by Strasser, Augsburg stresses its modernity and national reach and invites its customers to observe the "mechanized processes" related to the production of its publications. Augsburg also values national recognition of its products and services by outside American "experts" and enjoys sharing these with its patrons:

A recent number of *Successful Selling*, published in Philadelphia in the interest of booksellers, [. . .] had these words of praise for the last issue of our BULLETIN: "That progressive, up-to-the-minute concern, The Augsburg Publishing House of Minneapolis, are issuing a mighty interesting house organ—THE BULLETIN. It is ideal in make-up and presswork and general artistic appearance. Warmest congratulations to this enterprising Western house."<sup>20</sup>

Similar comments surround the production and promotion of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. For example, an article on the printing standards and techniques at Augsburg features *Jul i Vesterheimen* as its primary example: "Our 1919 edition of 'Jul i Vesterheimen' is fully up to its usual high standard, and is a piece of work of which we are especially proud."<sup>21</sup>

The magazine is also cited among the best accomplishments of the publishing house in a special Norse-American Centennial<sup>22</sup> Number of the Augsburg Publishing House

Bulletin:

The Augsburg presses have a good name for turning out high class work. University annuals like “The Minnesota Gopher” and “The Dacotah,” as well as a large number of high school annuals, are fine specimen of our work, and the thousands of people who every year buy “Jul i Vesterheimen” know what beautiful color work can be reproduced in our plant.<sup>23</sup>

Here Augsburg stresses its high quality printing and wide range of services, an idea frequently echoed in slogans like, “‘Augsburg Quality’ Stands for Superiority” and “Book Builders From Cover to Cover.”<sup>24</sup> The passage also advertises some of the firm’s more prominent and recognizable products, including secular, non-Norwegian publications, and suggests Augsburg’s position as specialist in the production of literary annuals in particular. Augsburg’s desire to be identified in new ways that go beyond its traditional image is clearly stated: “[s]ometimes we cannot avoid the impression that some of our friends fail to appreciate the fact that Augsburg [. . .] is one of the largest and best equipped printing institutions in the Northwest.”<sup>25</sup> The article goes on to feature the “fancy souvenir volumes” for which Augsburg is becoming known: “[w]e do not boast, but simply tell the plain truth when we say that these orders were placed with us because our customers know that we are fully able to turn out the finest work in the printing art.”<sup>26</sup>

Excellence in technology and print quality is not the only credibility Augsburg is seeking, however, as shown in the following entertaining editorial, “Musings of Our Elevator Boy,” in which a loyal employee discusses the 1919 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen*:

“As near as I can figure out,” said the elevator boy [ . . . ] “there are only two kinds of people in this whole world, and that’s the kind that knows and the kind that don’t know. And from my observations of the business of this elevator, the kind that knows is getting larger and larger every day, too. Know what, did you say? Why, that right here...at Augsburg...they can get the best kind of printing and the best kind of binding it is possible to get anywhere. Take a look at that “*Jul i Vesterheimen*” now. Look at the pictures. They are just as natural as life and can do everything but talk and walk. And look at the printed page. Not only does every line and every word stand out clear and distinct, but every letter, even, stands out with a prominence as conspicuous as it if were a member of a reception committee at a public gathering...And have you seen some of the books we have bound here...? Say, every volume has a positive personality entirely its own. It just seems to radiate class and distinction and seems as important as an eight year old farmer boy in his first suit of store clothes.”<sup>27</sup>

Once again, Augsburg emphasizes progress and productivity, representing the firm’s technological superiority through the words of the elevator boy and his placement in a modern machine. The passage further attests to the prominence of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a showcase publication for Augsburg, one that symbolizes the firm’s quality, “class and distinction.” Moreover, the elevator boy’s speech indicates the ways in which the publishing house imagined itself and its readers. For example, Augsburg chooses to speak through the voice of the lowly elevator boy, lending the editorial a colloquial style that suggests an honest-to-goodness assessment and serves as a first-person testimonial to the product and “the ability of Augsburg to do good work.”<sup>28</sup> This personification also allows Augsburg to advertise and enact its policy toward visiting customers: “[w]e would like to shake hands with you, have a chat, and show you around the plant.”<sup>29</sup> As if afraid to scare away the blue-collar clientele with the many examples of high-class quality, the editor ends the passage by invoking a final comparison between the new and improved Augsburg and a farm boy in his first finery. This is a telling image in that many of

Augsburg's readers would have come from first or second-generation farm and/or working-class families. By using this example, the publishing house not only shows sensitivity to its readers but also casts itself as a hard-working farm or elevator boy, working its way up the ranks with industry and integrity (signified by the boy's steady rise in the elevator through the floors of Augsburg).

At the same time, however, this rhetoric of upward mobility suggests that the publishing house is giving its readers a gentle nudge, encouraging its audience to be in the right group—"the kind that knows." The underlying implication is surely one of class and taste, and with this seemingly simple and down-to-earth editorial, the editor makes a clever pitch for Augsburg as an arbiter of good taste. Ultimately, the customer should be pleased with the quality of both the appearance and content of publications, especially *Jul i Vesterheimen*. Just in case the average reader does not pick up on this point, the editor leaves the elevator boy and concludes the article with the following reflections:

But we hope to hear more from him [the elevator boy] on his favorite subject of the ability of Augsburg Publishing House to demonstrate to that constantly increasing kind of people "that know" that in "the art preservative of all arts" we stand ready to give only the best. The "Augsburg Quality" of printing and binding—in short, of the bookmaker's art, embodies that class, distinction, individuality which alone can satisfy a discriminating and particular class of patrons.<sup>30</sup>

With this commentary, the editor establishes a cultural hierarchy in terms of art (high art) and audience (a culturally savvy "class of patrons") as well as the key ingredients in the Augsburg recipe for success: "constantly increasing" "class, distinction, individuality." What is more, the brawny, muscular statements that characterize Augsburg's previous descriptions of its finely-tuned printing presses and outstanding manufacturing capabilities are transformed in this passage to the "bookmaker's art," suggesting that it is

time to trade in the dirty overalls for the clean apron of a classic artisan. In addition to its technological prowess and productivity, then, Augsburg asserts its quality and integrity, presenting itself as a firm able to supply readers with suitable reading material. With this comment, the editor assures readers that Augsburg offers the best of past and present—suggesting “a connection between new products and the presumed integrity of previous times”<sup>31</sup>—an appealing formula that combines tradition and progress in order to produce a literary product that is artistic, tasteful, and unique.

### **Becoming Middle Class: Reading, Domesticity, and Culture**

By introducing issues of artistry, taste, and class, Augsburg positions itself as a cultural authority and encourages its customers to put themselves in the firm’s hands, allowing the publishing house to guide and instruct them. This message is made explicit in an introduction to the Bulletin entitled “To Our Readers,” in which Augsburg promises that it “shall try to arouse interest in and promote the sale of good literature, giving reviews and comments on books that are worthy of discussion or special mention.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, readers are instructed to “keep the bulletin as you would a valuable reference book” to aid in furnishing a home library.<sup>33</sup> Augsburg’s role as reference and guide is reflected in a number of Bulletin articles and catalogue listings that emphasize education and reading—in both English and Norwegian—such as “Books for the Home Circle,” “The Importance of a Home Library,” “Reading Circles,” and “Books for our Young People.” As these titles suggest, domesticity and family are central components of this

sales pitch, and the publishing house reminds its customers frequently that “[a] well-chosen library is an ornament to any home” and that “Augsburg Publishing House would like to help you build your home library.”<sup>34</sup>

In *A History of Augsburg Publishing House*, Ozolins ties this increasing interest in reading to developments leading up to the centralization of church publishing concerns and the foundation of Augsburg in the late nineteenth-century. For example, he cites “the formation of public libraries in congregations in the Norwegian Synod around [...] 1874 as an indication of the reading zeal and eagerness among the constituents.”<sup>35</sup> Ozolins also points to resolutions in support of reading and book promotion—established at the annual meetings of the Conference in 1886 and 1887—as signs that church publishers were becoming increasingly interested in the development of a Norwegian-American readership and their role in shaping such an audience: “[t]he Conference recommends the starting of reading circles, Sunday school libraries, etc., in the congregations; and as the publishing society always keeps a rich selection of good books particularly suitable for such circles, these are advised to get books from our own book concern.”<sup>36</sup> This resolution suggests church publishers’ interest in a position of moral and cultural authority, as well as their desire to cultivate a distinct Norwegian-American audience and a direct market for their publications. According to Ozolins, by the early decades of the twentieth century—right at the time *Jul i Vesterheimen* appears on the scene—the promotion of reading is evident in both a blossoming of new publications at Augsburg and a “counterattack” on the (in the words of Augsburg management) “flood of poor literature [. . .] and a plethora of wretched reading matter [that] corrupts the young people, fills their minds with smutty thoughts.”<sup>37</sup>

The concern over immoral literature, especially as it influences young people, is echoed in a number of articles and advertisements in the Bulletin. For example, in an article entitled “Young People and Books,” J. N. Brown, President of the Young People’s Luther League, asserts that “[o]f all the forces in life, which influence our character and determine our ideals in life, environments, companions, and our reading, undoubtedly, play the leading role.”<sup>38</sup> Brown then urges readers to “[f]orm the habit of ordering your reading material thru our own Publishing Houses,” to build league libraries based on suggestions from these same publishers and, finally, to visit the Augsburg Publishing House booth at the convention. Clearly, Augsburg is making a direct appeal to its young readers—indeed, this particular volume of the Bulletin is a “Special Convention Number” devoted to the Young People’s Luther League (YPLL) of the NLCA—presenting itself as both a supplier of suitable texts and an advisor on reading materials and practices.

Similar appeals are made to the parents of these young readers, although the tone becomes more severe: “[o]ne good book placed in the hands of your boy or girl may determine their whole future career; a bad book read at the impressionable age may poison the mind and turn them to evil ways.”<sup>39</sup> Augsburg’s concern for moral reading material is certainly understandable given its position as a church publisher; these statements work to support the religious mission of the publishing house, to strengthen the moral authority of its editors and managers who claim that “as Christians and Lutherans [we] are interested in spreading good literature among our people [. . .],”<sup>40</sup> and to encourage the sale of religious works and pious fiction, staples of the Augsburg catalogue.

Yet this reading appeal serves to promote Augsburg and its mission in other ways as well. For example, the consumption of good books is connected to the morality and happiness of the domestic sphere. Here Augsburg makes use of what Katherine Grier refers to as “the concept of the Christian household,” an idea popular in nineteenth century advice books and one that “was a powerful shaper of discussions of home life, enhancing the symbolic meaning of ‘home’ by blending religiosity and domesticity.”<sup>41</sup> In a Bulletin article entitled “A Unique Hope Chest,” an “ultra-modern” young woman replaces the “old-fashioned hope chest” with a new twist: a bookcase or, in the updated lingo of the editor, a “hope chest of books!” The editorial points out that this new-and-improved hope chest forms the foundation of a good marriage as it belongs to *both* the bride and groom (unlike the former kind which “was an affair appertaining peculiarly to the bride”). Moreover, much like the characterization of Augsburg’s publishing practices, this hope chest of books includes the best of old and new, both “standards” and “moderns.”

The value placed on both old and new also suggests the ethnic and linguistic dilemma facing Augsburg’s Norwegian-American patrons. This scenario offers a harmonious resolution: a home library that contains both Norwegian and English books, and a home life that incorporates both the modern (American) and the old (Norwegian), brought together here in the hope chest, a symbol that encompasses continuing cultural traditions, family legacies, and plans for new beginnings and future generations. Ultimately, the bookcase becomes the very symbol of the harmonious home, and the library as the room that frames the scene of domestic bliss:



And by and by, when they read together in their own library, under the light of a cozy lamp, it would not surprise us if he put down his book a moment to look with a delightful eye on the bookshelves in the firelight and to remark heartily in modern vernacular, “Some hope chest, I’ll say!”<sup>42</sup>

The passage portrays the library as the home’s moral center and reflects Grier’s notion of a “domestic environmentalism” that conflates “moral guidance with the actual appearance and physical layout of the house and its contents.”<sup>43</sup> The ornamental quality of the bookshelf may be understood as a reflection of the power of “the house’s physical setting and details [...] to shape human character.”<sup>44</sup> As such, the bookshelf is one of the key elements in a well-appointed home, a sign that this is a household of upstanding, educated, upwardly mobile and “ultra modern” people (folks whom the elevator boy would deem “the kind that knows”). Thus, books are not only edifying but fashionable, important for their decorative qualities which, in turn, inspire higher thoughts: “[a]mong the influences which serve to counteract the tendency to destroy the real home atmosphere, none is more potent than a cultivation of a desire for good reading, a desire which often springs up spontaneously through the chance perusal of some particular article, book or magazine.”<sup>45</sup> In addition to moral instruction and spiritual uplift, cultural savvy may be gained through reading and the outfitting of a home library.

Similarly, education and self-improvement are frequently tied to the act of reading, whether as individual or family pursuits: “[t]here is no better means of education, and this education can be taken at home, either apart from the rest of the family or also together with them.”<sup>46</sup> Like the elevator boy’s speech, this comment is

mindful of those readers who may lack formal education or an interest in reading as a leisurely pursuit. Indeed, for these customers, the Bulletin provides a direct link between the home library and the family's bottom line:

A careful chosen book is an addition to the home of permanent value. It is something that may prove its worth to all members of the family. A good home library has a cultural value that is rarely understood. When the young people enter the business world it is easy to perceive a lack of home influences that may add to, or detract from, their earning power. Everyone needs books, so, if you love your friends, tell them so with books.<sup>47</sup>

The language of the marketplace—"worth," "value" (twice), "earning power"—pervades this passage and makes explicit that which previous examples only hinted: reading the right kinds of books, namely those provided by Augsburg, will help patrons and their children earn more money. What is more, "the business world" and monetary wealth (public sphere) are conflated with the "cultural value" of literature and the sentimental attachments of family and friends (private sphere). Taken together, these various statements about reading form a logical sequence: reading Augsburg's books and having the firm as literary advisor will make one a better Christian, a beloved family member in a happy and fashionable home, a cultured individual of increasing prosperity and social distinction, and, ultimately, a better American.<sup>48</sup> O.A. Tingelstad, Secretary of the YPLL and contributor to the Bulletin, verifies the first and final links in the chain by stating that "[b]ooks make us better citizens, especially those that make us such because they make us better Christians."<sup>49</sup> Here Augsburg trumpets a nineteenth-century popular notion that "attributed great power to the family environment in the shaping of personal—and, by implication, national—character."<sup>50</sup> Should anyone doubt the effectiveness of books as a catalyst for climbing the social and financial ladder, one need only remember that "[y]ou

can read and study yourself to the presidency of the United States, like Abraham Lincoln did [. . .].”<sup>51</sup> Augsburg’s utilization of Lincoln as the epitome of American initiative appears to be in harmony with its promotion of the Christian household:

The engraving of Abraham Lincoln’s parlor published by *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* in 1860 is an emblem of the middle-class model of parlor furnishing, modest in ambition and appropriate for thrifty consumers with middling incomes. Its publication suggested that knowing the room was crucial to knowing the man.<sup>52</sup>

The appeal to modest ambitions and middling incomes makes sense in light of Augsburg’s ethnic audience, since many Norwegian-Americans would have come from humble backgrounds and/or would still have limited economic means. Another aspect of Lincoln’s “everyman” appeal is the sense that he remained humble and never forgot his roots, ideas that would appeal to an ethnic group that was not entirely comfortable with boasting of its material progress in the New World. Yet this example cannot completely reconcile the tension between Norwegian and English since Lincoln presumably read books in English as a way to become a member of the American social and political establishment and gain access to its seats of power. Like nineteenth-century American manners and advice books, Augsburg reveals that “[b]ecoming genteel by dint of personal effort was a corollary to the American belief that individual economic progress was possible.”<sup>53</sup> This recipe for success, if unoriginal—one thinks of Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* and its formula for self-improvement, including education, hard work, and moral integrity—is nevertheless effective, guaranteed to appeal to a wide range of customers, especially among immigrant or ethnic readers for whom Franklin’s formula would hold immediate relevance.<sup>54</sup> The overall message is clear: Augsburg has a book for everyone, whether pragmatist, elitist, or something in between. So, “[l]ook

through the Bulletin and you will find it much like a menu of a first-class hotel as it caters to many tastes at the same time as it offers the essential bread and butter, the really worth while books to all.”<sup>55</sup>

The connection between reading, education, and family points to Augsburg’s related roles as purveyor of good literature, as source of edification, improvement, or instruction, and as promoter of American middle class values and a bourgeois lifestyle. Furthermore, the emphasis on reading suggests the increasing importance of belles lettres to Augsburg Publishing House and its promotion of literary publications, particularly Norwegian-American literature, at the turn of the century. Indeed, while Augsburg would continue to offer the “essential bread and butter” in the form of religious literature and materials, it would also expand its “menu” to include an unprecedented number of secular texts and products.

The increase in secular literature is evident in Augsburg catalogues from the early decades of the twentieth-century. The *Jubilæums-Katalog, 1890-1915* (Jubilee Catalogue), issued in connection with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publishing house in 1915, provides an overview of the standard catalogue offerings during the firm’s first quarter century. A section entitled “Hvad sælger vi mest af?” (“What do we sell most?”) lists the leading products or product types in the following order (the original in Norwegian): school books,<sup>56</sup> psalm books and song/music books, bibles and testaments, religious literature, belles lettres, devotional books and books of sermons, pictures books, historical works. The statement goes on to add that the order of importance varies between these categories and that “of late an increase in common fiction has been

noted.”<sup>57</sup> This trend continues and accelerates as the twentieth-century advances: “the years 1917-1929 produced a variety of publications outside the religious sphere of interest,” including “an array of novels” (several of which became important works by major figures in Norwegian-American literature), historical fiction, and “books of travel and adventure.”<sup>58</sup> Ozolins notes, with surprise, an increase in poetry as well as “an unclassifiable list of varia in secular publication [. . .] consisting of essays, speeches of Wm. [sic] Jennings Bryan, textbooks, manuals, record books, etc.” and finds “[t]he percentage of these secular publications [. . .] rather high” in that “about one-third of the new publications were secular in character.”<sup>59</sup> Within this time period, the year 1920 stands out: “[t]his year is quite peculiar in book production by Augsburg [. . .]” since with the exception of a few pamphlets and readers, “all other publications are in the field of belletristics.”<sup>60</sup>

This growing emphasis on belletristics and secular culture is not limited to texts; indeed, one of its most visible and interesting manifestations appears in the form of what I will deem parlor equipment. For example, the 1913 *Illustreret Katalog* (Illustrated Catalog)—in which the first prominent advertisement for 1911 and 1912 back issues of *Jul i Vesterheimen* appears on the inside cover—includes a full-page advertisement for “woodenette” decorative wall plaques. One of the featured products, reproduced in a black and white picture, is an “American Poets” plaque: “[t]he article is beautifully lithographed, with portraits of six great poets [Holmes, Bryant, Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, and Longfellow], and is made up in an artistic, ornamental, and refined way.”<sup>61</sup> For those who prefer music to literature, “[t]he same article is also supplied with six great composers.” Each plaque retails for twenty cents and is “finished with a hanger from

which this article may be suspended.” These descriptions echo the refined and ornamental aspect of the home library or hope chest of books in the Bulletin as consumers are encouraged to become “[o]wners of stylish furnishings” who understand “the symbolic, communicative possibilities of the furnishings” and use them as “rhetorical statements expressing aspirations.”<sup>62</sup> In this case, the plaques are designed for home display, to give the appearance of quality and reflect the homeowner’s good taste and cultural savvy--American literary culture in the case of the poets and high culture in the case of both poetry and music. Yet the appearance of an American poets plaque in an Augsburg catalogue (written primarily in Norwegian) appears as a direct contradiction of the notion of “A Literature of Our Own” and underlines the duality of Augsburg’s cultural project: to promote “things Norwegian” alongside “things American” while encouraging an increasingly American model of consumption and domestic ideology.

Should one prefer something less erudite or have another room to furnish, one may choose the companion piece to the authors plaque; this one features a portrait of one of several stylized heads of “Fair Women” placed next to quasi-philosophical or sentimental mottoes. Customers may choose from among four different subjects, each accompanied by one of four female portraits, as follows: “Home, Sweet Home,/Be it ever so humble,/There’s no place like home;” “Life is a mirror/Try smiling at it;” “Tears are turned to laughter/By just a pleasant smile;” and “I would rather love what I cannot have,/than have what I cannot love.” Apparently, these words of wisdom are designed to inspire higher thoughts, along with the visual impact of the plaque: “[t]he beautiful colors on the picture together with the shadings on the woodenette are very harmonious, and

[. . .] make a wonderfully artistic article.” Like a hope chest of books, this lovely lady plaque encourages domestic felicity and contributes to the cultural refinement of the occupants. Moreover, these plaques of woodenette (imitating solid walnut or “polished hard wood” in a more affordable, mass-produced form) attest to Augsburg’s interest in appealing to a growing assimilated, middle class audience with an aspiration for culture and the purchasing power for mass-market goods.

Selling products other than books was certainly not new for Augsburg. The firm had always carried some secular items and practical supplies, including Rand-McNally maps, miscellaneous certificates and record books, and an assortment of church-related materials and office supplies. Early catalogues contain some pictures and decorative items as well, but with the exception of a few landscape paintings, the subject matter of these is primarily religious—portraits of Martin Luther and recreations of biblical scenes—or pious/sentimental, as in a series of pictures featuring that favorite nineteenth-century icon, *Skytsengelen* (the guardian angel), who is usually pictured in a domestic setting, watching over infirm or sleeping children. These staple items continue to appear in later catalogues throughout the teens and into the twenties and thirties; what changes is the expansion in existing product lines, coupled with the proliferation of literary texts and secular art which had been largely absent in previous years. The changes in the catalogues reveal both the general growth of the publishing house during this period and the particular role(s) being cultivated by Augsburg as a kind of cultural clearinghouse for its patrons.

One indicator of Augsburg’s increasing cultural clout is the development of new catalogues during this period. The company begins to offer multiple catalogues in a

single year as well as increasingly specialized catalogues such as the *Illustreret Katalog* (Illustrated Catalog) that includes a broad selection of books and materials; a catalog devoted exclusively to *Skjønliterære Verker* (Belles Lettres)<sup>63</sup>; a catalogue of *Norske Bøker* (literally “Norwegian Books” although “Books in Norwegian” is more accurate here), including Norwegian-American and imported works of various genres; and a variety of Christmas and gift book catalogues. The 1915 *Illustreret Katalog* (Illustrated Catalog)—which features a full-page advertisement for current and back issues of *Jul i Vesterheimen* inside the front cover—gives a good indication of Augsburg’s expanding role as clearinghouse. The catalogue is over 400 pages long and offers a wide range of items, among which the major categories include Norwegian books, English books, psalm books, hymn and music books, school readers and grammars (Norwegian and English), tracts, bibles and testaments, dictionaries, and picture books (or what one might today refer to as coffee table books), among others. In the area of English books alone there are several sub-divisions, such as “Juvenile Books,” “Sermons,” “Prayer and Devotional Books,” “Bibles,” and so on. In addition to texts, the catalogue includes a wide variety of materials and equipment, both religious and secular: altar sets and communion ware, albums, bookmarks, banks, certificates and record books for church and school, souvenir postcards and greeting cards, maps, fountain pens, flags, artwork and art reproductions, assorted wall-hangings and decorative objects. The last category includes “Handpainted Plastic Wall Mottoes,” plaques, lithographs, and highly embossed cardboard or paper mottoes with silver and gold fancy lettering, silk cords, floral sprays,



and any number of “sentiments” or scriptures reproduced in English or Norwegian. Last but not least, customers could purchase a bookcase and begin to build their very own “hope chest of books.”

The selection of texts for furnishing such a bookcase also expands greatly and speaks to Augsburg’s desire to be seen as a mainstream publishing house, offering an array of secular, popular, and high end publications. One area of growth is books in English, especially belles lettres by British and American authors. For example, patrons could choose individual texts from a variety of established writers such as Alcott, Barrie, Bronte, Cooper, Cummins, Defoe, Eliot, Holmes, London, and Longfellow, among others. In addition, Augsburg offers an increasing number of literary series, such as “Burt’s Home Library” which provides readers with a collection of texts (fiction and non-fiction) that feature literary “classics” and attractive, uniform bindings. This trend continues in the 1923 catalogue which advertises the “Everyman’s Library” series as a “low priced edition of standard books” that are nevertheless beautiful to behold with their leather bindings and “gilt top.”<sup>64</sup> Some of the authors included in this collection are Dickens, Browning, Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, and Thackeray. Similarly, Crowell’s “Poets” series—featuring Whittier, Longfellow, Wordsworth, Burns, Tennyson, Lowell, Milton, Scott, Browning, Dante, and a collection of “Poetical Quotations”—offers readers “photogravure portraits, title-pages printed in two colors [ . . . ]” inside, and an outside that is “durably and attractively bound.”<sup>65</sup> Like the woodenette wall plaques, these home library collections provide “culture” (in both intellectual and decorative form) at an affordable price for the average person. They also

take the work out of choosing reading material by providing patrons with pre-selected texts that are considered to be “good reading.” In this way, the book series complement Augsburg’s role as reading advisor.

Alongside literary classics, Augsburg increases its traditional staples like religious books, pious works, and sentimental fiction, including individual texts, collections, and series (the last of these includes an extensive list of publications by the American Tract Society). Here again, one sees an increase in “classic” titles, such as Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (which may be purchased in either English or Norwegian, standard or embellished gift editions) and the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe, especially that perennial favorite, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which also appears in standard and gift editions in both English and Norwegian. In addition to gift editions of standard titles, the catalogues feature a wide range of occasional gift books. While earlier catalogues tend to include a few gift books or special Christmas offerings, especially for children—such as Hans Christian Andersen’s Fairy Tales and the American Tract Society’s “Bright Eyes Series for Little Folks,” as well as a number of Norwegian publications—the catalogues in the early decades of the twentieth-century advertise a great many new Christmas books and periodicals (including *Jul i Vesterheimen*) as well as gift books in the form of individual texts and series. Augsburg also offers a line called “Popular Copyright Fiction”; while this includes some books that would qualify as literary “classics,” it appears to be a more general hodge-podge of “popular” books to be enjoyed as fun, leisurely family reading. In addition to the “literary” and “cultural” then, these product lines—all of which included gift book editions—suggest Augsburg’s desire to include affordable, popular works that appeal to the mainstream reader:

This section includes some of the best books of the best authors; books you have always wanted; books you cannot afford to be without, because the cost is so small. Start a library in your home with these popular books and watch it grow.<sup>66</sup>

The attention given to the physical descriptions of the books in the catalogues—including exact measurements, number of pages, type and quality of illustrations, and details regarding bindings, gilding, engraving, and so on—suggests the importance of and appreciation for the decorative value of books as well as the financial investment entailed. This ornamental quality, coupled with the great number of gift books and other forms of parlor equipment featured in the catalogues, reveals the extent to which Augsburg now envisions its reader as a person of some means and leisure, even a parlor collector of sorts. While Augsburg still features its own publications and courts its traditional audience of Norwegian-American Lutherans, the publishing house has intensified and expanded its role as purveyor of quality literature, becoming a supplier of other publishers' products.

The Augsburg management likes to remind readers of the firm's expanding repertoire, as in the case of the 1913 *Skjønliterære Verker* (Belles Lettres) catalogue which opens with a salutation and the assurance of good service, even for those books which Augsburg does not carry: "And should you want a book that is not included here, we will obtain it in the quickest manner possible and, on the whole, do our best to accommodate our customers as well as possible."<sup>67</sup> The passage goes on to position Augsburg as an importer of books and as part of the international literary trade, especially in Denmark and Norway:

The respective publishers in Norway and Denmark will hereafter keep us updated regarding all new and good literature, which we in turn will advertise in our publications, together with a yearly overview in the form of our belles lettres catalogue.<sup>68</sup>

Augsburg's self-promotion in the area of literary imports figures in several key ways.

One of the main areas for imports is American and British literature. This chapter has already mentioned the significant increase in English language publications, including those of other publishing houses, in the Augsburg catalogues. However, another source of British, American, and European literature was Norwegian translations of the same. For example, the *Kronebiblioteket* (Crown Library) series included Norwegian translations of works by the likes of Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Alexander Dumas, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Selma Lagerlöf. A Norwegian-American might read Jane Eyre in a Norwegian edition from Gyldendal (Copenhagen), Cappelen or Aschehoug (Oslo) rather than an English edition published by an American or British publishing house. The same would hold true for American texts if the linguistic preference of the reader was Norwegian.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the *Norske Bøger* (Norwegian Books) catalogue includes Norwegian translations of works from other languages, especially English. Part of the status of Augsburg's new and improved role as importer, then, is derived from the marketing of "literature" as a cosmopolitan, high art form and the firm's growing expertise and presence in the literary marketplace. At the same time, Augsburg's connections to the prestigious Scandinavian publishing houses denote a specialization in Scandinavian books, especially books in Norwegian: "Those who read Norwegian should bear in mind that Augsburg Publishing House is the largest importers [sic] of Norwegian books and Bibles in U.S."<sup>70</sup>

The expansion of books in Norwegian—both imports and Augsburg publications—is tied to the general increase in secular literature and products among the firm’s offerings in the early twentieth-century. Much like its British and American counterparts (with which it is regularly advertised in the catalogues), Norwegian literature is billed as “classic,” a symbol of culture. Not surprisingly, major Norwegian authors—Jonas Lie, Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Wergeland—are well represented, as are traditional works like Norwegian folktales and Snorre Sturlason’s *Heimskringla*, the Sagas of the Kings of Norway.<sup>71</sup> In addition to books, a greatly expanded section for Norwegian art is included. The 1915 *Illustreret Katalog* (Illustrated Catalogue), for example, includes a lengthy section entitled “Norwegian Art: A Selection of Unusually Beautiful Pictures by Norway’s Most Famous Artists.”<sup>72</sup> This is yet another manifestation of Augsburg’s promotion of culture—along with literary “classics” the catalogues now feature “*Mesterværker*” (Masterworks) by renowned artists—as secular art is made available and affordable for the middle class home. At the same time, the expansion in Norwegian art and literature signals another important piece of Augsburg’s mission: that of preserver and promoter of a distinct Norwegian ethnic heritage.

### **Ethnic Pride**

Important clues to the ethnic facet of Augsburg’s cultural program may be seen in the catalogue selections pertaining to Norwegian culture. By the turn of the century, writers like Ibsen and Bjørnson were cemented in the Norwegian imagination as “national” poets—indeed, Bjørnson’s patriotic poem “Ja, vi elsker dette landet” (“Yes, We Love This Land”) became the lyrics of the national anthem—having grown out of the

national romanticism or “National Breakthrough” that took place in nineteenth-century Norway. A central component of this movement was the recovery and rediscovery of the oldest and presumably most authentic Norwegian cultural traditions. In the literary arena, key influences included the 1841 *Norske Folkeeventyr* (Norwegian Folktales)—collected by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, Norway’s version of the brothers Grimm—and medieval works like *Heimskringla*. Even today these texts hold a central place in Norwegian cultural history. Harald [UU1]Næss concludes that “Asbjørnsen and Moe’s folktales were the single most important product of Norwegian national romanticism, and the illustrated edition [. . .] has remained a classic since its first appearance in 1879.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly, “*Heimskringla* has gradually become a people’s classic, [. . .] [a]nd, again like the folktales, it was a powerful influence on the new generation of Norwegian writers, for example, on Bjørnson in his rustic tales and on Ibsen in his historical dramas.”<sup>74</sup> In his *History of Norwegian Literature*, Theodore Jorgenson states that “[Sturlason’s] work has held a place next to the Bible in the homes of Norway.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, by including these works in its catalogue, Augsburg not only parallels the trend toward secular literature and literary classics that characterizes its English language offerings but also makes a statement of ethnic pride as it features Norwegian authors and texts of cultural icon status.

In characterizing the National Breakthrough in Norway, Næss grounds his discussion in the presentation of a single painting:

[. . .] on March 28-30, 1849, they [a group of Norwegian painters] put on an entertainment program that has since come to be viewed as the epitome of [. . .] national romanticism. The central event was a piece of *gesamtkunst* called “Brudéfærden i Hardanger” (The Bridal Procession in Hardanger). It consisted of a large painting by Hans Gude (the fjord land-

scape) and Adolf Tidemand (the rowing boats with colorful passengers) and a corresponding poem by Andreas Munch, set to music by Halfdan Kjerulf and sung by the Oslo Student Chorus. The audience was made up of intellectual city dwellers whose eyes had been opened to the natural and cultural beauties of the countryside—its scenery, folk literature, folk music, folk art, folk language.<sup>76</sup>

Sure enough, a \$4.50 reproduction of this symbolic painting is featured in the newly expanded “*Norsk Kunst*” (Norwegian Art) section of the 1913 and 1915 editions of the *Illustreret Katalog* (Illustrated Catalogue). Alongside are reproductions of additional paintings by Tidemand, Gude, Werenskiold, and other prominent artists; the subjects include a few biblical or religious scenes, dramatic Norwegian scenery featured in a number of landscape paintings, and stories from Norse mythology, such as Arbo’s famous “*Valkyrier*” (Valkyries). Many of the featured pictures are important examples of national romantic painting, and the catalogue descriptions take special note of those belonging to the National Gallery in Oslo (where they may still be seen today). For those who prefer popular designs but would still like to make a nationalistic statement, Augsburg offers a picture of the nineteenth-century Norwegian emigrant ships “Hebe” and “Galathea” or portraits of the reigning monarchs, King Håkon and Queen Maud of Norway.

Similar developments are visible in the music sections of the catalogues. For example, to complement a framed reproduction of “Brudfærden i Hardanger,” one may purchase the sheet music of the same title by Kjerulf for 15 cents. In addition to an impressive collection of sacred music, the catalogues carry an extensive array of folk tunes, such as Ole Bull’s violin pieces—most notably “*Sæterjentens Søndag*” (1849; The Dairy Maiden’s Sunday), a celebration of the Norwegian pastoral with traditional dairy

maids on the *sæter*, a mountain farm used as summer pasture—and “*Fanitullen*” (The Devil’s Tune), perhaps the single most famous piece for that distinctly Norwegian instrument, the *Hardingfele* or *Hardangerfele* (Hardanger Fiddle).<sup>77</sup> The selection of secular music also includes a great many popular and national songs. Not surprisingly, Edvard Grieg—who employed the sounds and structures of Norwegian folk music in his own compositions—figures prominently in the music listing, especially selections from the “Peer Gynt Suite” (1876; based on Ibsen’s allegorical drama of 1874-75) and “*Norske folkeviser og danser*” (1869; Norwegian Folk Songs and Dances).

These examples of secular art and music reveal, once again, the growing emphasis on parlor culture—“good” literature to read in attractive editions for display, fine music to perform for guests or the family circle, and decorations for a genteel yet homey atmosphere—yet with a twist. For while the catalogues still function as reading advisor and cultural educator—indeed, just reading through the pages of Norwegian goods provides a working knowledge of the hallmarks of Norwegian culture—they also provide an ethnic education of sorts, suggesting to patrons what it means to be of Norwegian stock. Since many of the advertised items are in the nationalistic and/or national romantic mode, the “Norwegianness” presented in the catalogues is of a hyper-ethnic and idealized variety, one that glorifies the distant Norwegian past, the peasant background from which many Norwegian-Americans came, and/or the contemporary international acclaim of world-renown artists and folk heroes like Ibsen and Grieg. Thus, the catalogue presentation of Norwegian items works to convey and preserve the Norwegian heritage, to celebrate Norwegian cultural achievements, and to stimulate ethnic awareness and pride.



The Norwegian language is a central component of this ethnic pride. Given Augsburg's historical ties to the Norwegian-American churches, the centrality of the Norwegian language to the firm's publications and business dealings is not surprising. The earliest Augsburg catalogues feature educational and linguistic materials in Norwegian for the church, school, and home—such as readers and primers, songbooks, and dictionaries—and these items remain as staples of the twentieth-century catalogues. That is not to say that the church promoted the Norwegian language exclusively. As early as 1841, for example, an English translation of the catechism was made available in the anticipation that Norwegian immigrants would eventually switch to the language of their new country.<sup>78</sup> This translation proved premature, as did the English version of the hymnal published by Augsburg in 1898, for Norwegian remained the dominant language among many congregations into the twentieth century. These translations point to the largely practical approach to language utilized by the church and its publishing branches, and this residual pragmatism is partly responsible for the continued prevalence of Norwegian offerings in the Augsburg catalogues. Nevertheless, though their language politics could be problematic and they may not have always been conscious of or uniform in their promotion of Norwegian, the churches may still be considered as “the single most influential body of institutions of linguistic and cultural preservation in *Vesterheimen*.”<sup>79</sup>

Yet while Norwegian language materials and books had always been sold by Augsburg, there is a marked shift in the way such material, as well as the Norwegian language itself, is discussed in Augsburg publications during the early decades of the twentieth century. A 1922 Augsburg Bulletin editorial entitled “The Norwegian Language” emphasizes the sentimental attachments of language: “To most of us,

Norwegian is our mother tongue, the language of our fathers, and we have learned it in our homes; it is part of our heritage [. . .].”<sup>80</sup> These references to family, home, and heritage clearly promote a common Norwegian-American identity shared between Augsburg and its customers. Far from being merely a pragmatic tool or an inheritance to be taken for granted, Norwegian is described as the link to a vital cultural tradition:

Aside from being of great practical value, the knowledge of Norwegian is the key to a rich literature. Norwegian books are being translated into all civilized languages. Among the most read books in America in recent years are English translations of Norwegian authors.<sup>81</sup>

The terms employed in this passage to construct Norwegian culture, particularly literary culture, are important: it is “rich” and “civilized” (suggesting a depth and breadth of texts from an old culture), yet it is also international and modern. This is a culture of artistic stature, producing authors and texts of the highest quality that rank among the best of world literature, and should therefore interest Augsburg’s patrons.

The article goes on to promote the use of Norwegian, urging readers, especially “our young people,” to learn the language since “[t]o get real enjoyment from a book, [. . .] it should be read in the original.”<sup>82</sup> Here Augsburg recommends its own language training publications, including “two excellent textbooks for English-speaking students by J. A. Holvik, besides our school editions of Norwegian Classics with notes, which offer splendid material for students.”<sup>83</sup> This reference to “classics,” reminiscent of the Augsburg catalogue descriptions of American and British literature, affirms and elevates the importance of an established Norwegian literary tradition and recommends

Norwegian books as a desirable addition to the home library. After reminding readers of Augsburg's status as the major importer of Norwegian books, the article closes (much like it begins), with an appeal to sentiment:

Lat os ikkje forfedrene gløyma  
under alt som me venda og snu!  
For dei gav os ein arv til aa gjøyma.  
Han er større enn mange vil tru.  
Let us not forget our forefathers  
In the course of our twists and turns  
For they gave us an inheritance to treasure  
that is greater than many would think.<sup>84</sup>

This little verse (which rhymes in the original Norwegian) is written not only in the language of the forefathers but in a dialect form that stresses the beauty, poetry, pathos, authenticity, and history of the language. The article echoes the familiar formula of Augsburg's sales pitch (the association of books and reading with family, middle class values, education and cultural refinement) and promotes Augsburg in general and its line of language materials in particular. Yet the rhetoric of the article serves additional purposes that set it apart from previous examples. The strategic deployment of this verse at the end of the piece makes a final tug at the ethnic reader's heartstrings, identifying Augsburg strongly with its Norwegian-American roots and creating a sense of ethnic brotherhood. Moreover, by concluding the editorial with a quotation about ethnic heritage written in Norwegian dialect, Augsburg is enacting, as it were, the very idea discussed in the text, positioning the publishing house quite firmly and explicitly as a promoter of Norwegian culture and a proponent of linguistic preservation among Norwegians in the United States.

The appeal to ethnic brotherhood makes sense in terms of selling books and periodicals, especially given Augsburg's core audience of Norwegian-Americans. This tactic is evident in the following advertisement for *Lutheraneren* ("The Lutheran"), the official Norwegian language synod newspaper published by Augsburg:

No member of our synod can be well informed with regard to his own Church without being a reader every week of "LUTHERANEREN," if Norwegian is his heart language. "A Lutheran Church Paper in Every Lutheran Home" should be more than a mere phrase, and ought to be translated into an actual fact.<sup>85</sup>

Again, the sentimental potential of language is key to this passage, as Norwegian becomes the "heart language." At the same time, ethnic solidarity produces a loyal readership: in order to be a good Norwegian and a good Lutheran, one reads *Lutheraneren*.

While Augsburg may celebrate the Norwegian ethnic and linguistic heritage in service of its commercial activities, the invocation of Norwegian culture has implications beyond the book trade. This becomes clear in a number of examples whose tone is decidedly more defensive. For example, the April 1919 *Bulletin* includes a rather uncharacteristic full-page presentation of census statistics. The page is divided into two tables, the "Composition of Population in Minnesota, Census 1910" and "Publications in Foreign Languages in Minnesota, 1916" respectively. The population table lists various ethnic groups and ranks them according to total numbers (which include "Foreign-born" and "Foreign-born Parents" as sub-categories contributing to the total). On this chart, Norwegians rank an impressive third (231,851), after the Germans (305,164) and Swedes (240,510).<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the table listing the state's foreign language publications shows

16 Norwegian publications, an impressive number given that the Germans and Swedes each post 17, the Danes and Finns each post 4, and most other ethnic groups show only 1 each.

The tables are not accompanied by a full-fledged analysis; only a few sentences summarizing the statistics are provided at the bottom of the page. Of these, several merit mention: “58% of the total population of Minnesota is foreign born or children of foreign,” “50% of the foreign population is Scandinavian,” only “7% of the periodicals are in a foreign language, 93% are in English” while “37 of the foreign language papers, or 58%, are Scandinavian.”<sup>87</sup> The page concludes with a final statement: “[t]he argument against the foreign papers can not be supported by statistics.” The sentence is curious in that “the argument” (presumably anti-foreign in some respect) is not discussed. It is unclear whether the argument was discussed in some previous article or is assumed to be common knowledge among the readership and therefore does not require discussion. In any case, the function of this page of statistics—despite its unscientific and incomplete presentation—appears to be twofold: first, to defend the “foreign” papers (and, by extension, “foreign” peoples) as a non-threatening minority phenomenon amidst the dominant English papers (and mainstream Anglo-American culture) and second, to simultaneously distinguish the Scandinavians and their papers’ predominance among a substantial “foreign” population in the state.

Clearly, Augsburg has a major stake in such arguments as an ethnic publishing house that produces a broad range of products that feature a “foreign” culture and language. Moreover, the tone of this particular example suggests sensitivity, even anxiety, regarding the firm’s position in an American society of increasing nativism in

the wake of World War I. This tension is reflected in the Bulletin itself: on the facing page, one finds a list of servicemen (all of them with ethnic names that are overwhelmingly Scandinavian) and a “Welcome Home” salute to returning American soldiers that proclaims, “[i]n almost every home, every paper, on every street, and at all the railroad stations we read the same glad tidings: ‘*Our boys are coming home.*’”<sup>88</sup> The expressions of American loyalty and unity expressed on the left-hand page appear in direct contrast to the distinct separation and quantification of “foreign” Americans on the right. In this case then, *Augsburg* becomes less a promoter and more a defender of Norwegian culture, the foreign language press, and ethnic publishing in the United States.

### **American Citizenship**

While *Augsburg*’s promotion of Norwegian culture may take on a defensive posture of “them and us,” “Americans versus foreigners,” one also frequently finds a conflation of ethnic and American values and symbols. Understandably, this rhetoric tends to heighten and become more explicit in wartime publications, as in the following example from the July 1919 Bulletin:

There are at least two sides to every question. During the Nineteenth Century about 30,000,000 persons crossed the Atlantic to settle in America. They have made America their home. They have tilled the soil and built prosperous cities; they have built schools and churches; they have obeyed the laws and given their sons to war. They are often in derision called “foreigners,” [ . . . ] if they happen to speak more than one language. They are often told they came here with two empty hands and now are rich, thanks to America. All this is true, but there is also another side to the case. Take an example.<sup>89</sup>

Similar to the “argument” concerning foreign papers, this passage implies an attack that must be countered and disproved. The solution appears to be a statement of absolute

loyalty that aligns the “foreigners” with American values and accomplishments—nation-building, manifest destiny, upward mobility, democracy, and freedom—and places immigrants beyond reproach.

The other “side to the case” presents the foreign perspective, and the “example” is, of course, Norway. Much like the statistical tables mentioned previously, impressive numbers form the basis for the counter-argument, perhaps because factual evidence is harder to dismiss than philosophical appeals and patriotic effusions. The list of numbers begins with the immigrants (“Norway has permitted about 500,000 of her best youth to come to America to live”) and expands to include their descendents (“Norwegians in America now number at least 2,000,000”), of which “1,000,000 understand the Norwegian language, and are not ashamed of it either.” However, the statistical barrage does not stop there. Mimicking the American language of buying and selling, the passage transforms humans into dollars and translates the value of immigration into economic terms:

The life of every person is estimated to be worth, in a business way, at least \$10,000. At that rate the 500,000 Norwegian immigrants contributed to America not less than \$5,000,000,000. Add to this about \$1,000,000,000 in property which they took along from the Mother Country. Their children are worth at least \$15,000,000,000. They came here [ . . . ] to work, and not to put up peanut stands. They have worked. The Norwegian farmers of South Dakota alone are said to be worth \$1,000,000,000.<sup>90</sup>

These numbers are treated as estimates, and their source is not provided. Rather, the point of this monetary escalation lies in its impact—the sheer largess of the numbers concerned—and the overwhelming sense of progress and prosperity that characterizes their presentation. The immigrants’ contributions are quantifiable and therefore

undeniable. Furthermore, given America's history with immigration and slavery, the project of accounting for people relative to their economic value as just another commodity seems a troubling notion indeed. Thus, the "foreign" perspective hints at the underside of the American dream.

While the numbers are certainly important, the counter-argument does not stop there, for this is an excellent opportunity for Augsburg to editorialize regarding the particular ethnic traits and cultural heritage that make Norwegians such good Americans:

They came as one of the most literate and law-abiding of the European peoples. They came from a country that had never had a nobility, but had always lived out democracy. They came with their Bible and catechism in hand and began to build churches and Christian schools. Their record in this matter can not be surpassed by any people on the face of the earth.<sup>91</sup>

This passage is a superlative statement of ethnic pride. While it echoes the first passage in its support for American values and institutions, it locates the origins of these ideals with Norway and Norwegians; in other words, if Norwegians prospered thanks to the opportunity of America, it was (at least in part) because Norwegians were already suited to make the most of the American way. Thus, rather than "derision," America owes Norwegian-Americans respect and gratitude just as Norwegian-Americans "acknowledge with deepfelt [sic] thanks that they owe much to America."<sup>92</sup>

To further emphasize the reciprocal relationship between immigrant and America, between Old World and New World, a pictorial rendering of the Norwegian-American contribution, accompanied by a quotation in Norwegian, renders this exchange in symbolic terms:

Mother Norway has given Uncle Sam  
Many hardy, clever, hardworking, law-abiding,



patriotic, religious citizens who have made  
the Northwest into a Garden of Eden and have shaped  
a church history that captivates hearts.<sup>93</sup>

The allegorical figures of *Mor Norge* and *Onkel Sam* are then joined by one *Per Husmand*<sup>94</sup> (literally, “Per Farmer,” a generic everyman for which the English translation might be something like “Farmer John Smith”), who appears as the representative Norwegian emigrant in the drawings below the quotation. The series of pictures operates as a “before and after” story. On the top row are three tiny drawings of, from left to right, a humble schoolhouse, a rustic farmstead, and an ancient *stavkirke* or stave church; below these is the caption “Hvor Per bodde” (“Where Per lived”), meaning where he lived in Norway. The middle row shows a line of immigrants, including children, women, and men, dressed in Old World costumes; below them is a caption that reads, “Da Per Husmand kom over” (“When Per Husmand came over”), referring to immigration to the United States. Finally, the bottom of the picture mirrors the top, again presenting three drawings in a row from left to right, this time of a large and stately looking school, an expansive and well-established farm, and an impressive and modern-looking church; the caption below these reads, “Hvor Per bor nu” (“Where Per lives now”).

While the picture is a study in contrasts—the humble origins of the Old World juxtaposed with the progress and prosperity of the New World—it also provides a kind of continuum from Mother Norway to Uncle Sam, from poor and humble Per to wealthy and proud Per. This continuum ties Norwegian-Americans to their culture of origin yet also allows them to be good Americans, indeed the best Americans, according to the strong language of the quotations. While the schools, farms, and churches grow bigger and fancier, the core institutions and values remain the same: home and family,

community and church, filial loyalty and piety, education, industry, and so on. This dual loyalty to Mother Norway and Uncle Sam may be understood as an attempt to achieve what Jon Gjerde refers to as “complementary identity”:

In a very real sense, [. . .] allegiances to the American nation and to cultural traditions carried across the sea could coexist. Indeed, they could be mutually supportive and self-reinforcing. Immigrants celebrated life in the United States because it enabled them to retain beliefs that originated outside of it. They thus could develop a “complementary identity” that pledged allegiance to both American citizenship and ethnic adherence.<sup>95</sup>

This notion of “complementary identity” is certainly a strategy at work in the advertisement and helps to explain the related manifestations of continuity and progress in the pictures. It makes good sense for “foreigners” during times of war, when national loyalty becomes paramount, and it serves as an effective promotional tool for Augsburg Publishing House. For example, the last part of the piece advertises one of Augsburg’s publications, *Menighetskalenderen* (“The Parish Calendar”), an annual yearbook or almanac that, in addition to the standard church calendar and events, “tells a part of the story of their [the immigrants] building of Congregations.”<sup>96</sup> The final caption under the pictures reads, “Subskriber paa Menighetskalenderen” (“Subscribe to the Parish Calendar”). Thus, the project of cultural elevation and justification so central to this passage seems to come full circle, ultimately promoting a particular Augsburg product as well as the publishing house’s mission at large. The emphasis on the church and Norwegian-American history anchors Augsburg to its roots and affirms the publishing house’s continued commitment to the founding ideals, even as the firm becomes increasingly modern, expansive, and “American” (much like the “before and after” drawings in the advertisement’s picture). Thus, while celebrating its Norwegian roots,

Augsburg acknowledges its American contributions and hard-won place in the New World economy and society. Augsburg itself becomes a symbol and benefactor of this notion of “complementary identity.”

However, this is not the whole story, for the balance between Mother Norway and Uncle Sam seems rather a precarious one; though the piece tries to toe the line between American and Norwegian identities, the text is not quite able to carry off a seamless blending of the two. Rather, a great deal of tension and conflict is apparent. In the end, it is the defensive tone and the insistence upon quantifiable evidence, so characteristic of the discussions of population statistics, non-English publications, and “foreigners” mentioned earlier, that wins out in this particular instance. After (finally) mentioning *Menighetskalenderen*, the supposed reason for producing this advertisement in the first place, the text closes with the following statements:

The Norwegian Lutheran Church, from incomplete returns gave 26,346, or 6%, of her sons to the country [America]. 842 of these died on the battle field. Only 4% of the general population went to war. 6% of the Norwegians went to war. Some day we shall get a War Calendar of the Norwegians, as we now have a Church Calendar. But meanwhile buy and read our Church Calendar—“Menighetskalenderen.” It’s Great!

On the one hand, this passage may be understood in terms of “complementary identity” in that “faithfulness to an ethnic subgroup within a ‘complementary identity’ theoretically fostered a magnified loyalty to the United States.”<sup>97</sup> Certainly Norwegian-American loyalty to the United States is expressed in the profoundest of terms—that of war casualties. This loyalty is further amplified by the comparison between Norwegian-American participation in the war (6%) and that of the “general population” (4%) as Norwegian-Americans not only meet but actually exceed the norm when it comes to

national sacrifice. Rather than a gracious blending of Norwegian and American ideals, however, the passage ends with a separatist assertion that calls for a future Augsburg product, “a War Calendar of the Norwegians.” While this example reveals, once again, the use of ethnic solidarity in order to promote and sell Augsburg’s products, the exclusionary rhetoric and emphasis on a war calendar overshadows the product at hand—*Menighetskalenderen*. Indeed, it is easy to overlook the calendar altogether. The name only appears three times in a page-long document, of which the two in-text references appear at the very end of the piece and the third (and only clearly visible instance) appears in the final caption under the picture. Thus, although the text is presumably there to support *Menighetskalenderen*, in the final analysis, it appears that the calendar provides an opportunity for Augsburg to pontificate in defense of its ethnic prerogative.

The *Menighetskalenderen* example indicates the continued yet changing importance of Augsburg’s ethnic ties in the early twentieth-century. While the ethnic references support Augsburg’s business practices—encouraging sales of the firm’s goods and enhancing the publishing house’s reputation among ethnic patrons—they also reveal Augsburg’s commitment to defend, promote, and preserve Norwegian-American culture in an American society of increasing nativism. In contrast to the confidence and optimism that characterize descriptions of Augsburg’s mainstream modernity, fashion, and refinement, these remarks reflect a decidedly reactive and defiant tone and reveal the firm’s potentially precarious position within and/or between its American and Norwegian-American contexts. Moreover, the celebration of the Norwegian cultural heritage, the proclamation of Norwegian-American distinction, and the consolidation of

an ethnic brotherhood points to another important part of Augsburg's cultural mission and the creation of *Jul i Vesterheimen*: the cultivation of a distinct Norwegian-American literature.

### **A Literature of Our Own**

Augsburg's interest in and commitment to a Norwegian-American culture of letters is revealed in a special 1925 "Norse-American Centennial Number" of the Bulletin that describes the goals of the publication:

One of the purposes of this Bulletin is to give visitors to the Centennial celebration an idea of what Norse-Americans have produced in the way of books. Representative lists of our writers and their works in both English and Norwegian thus occupy a prominent place. Another is to make the public better acquainted with our business.<sup>98</sup>

The promotion of Norwegian-American literature is evident in a number of Bulletin features like "Among Our Authors and Editors" and "Our Norwegian-American Authors." The former provides short updates—including biographical miscellany along with recent publications and professional activities—for leading Norwegian-American authors, editors, and journalists such as Simon Johnson, Peer Strømme, Johannes Wist, O.E. Rølvaag, Dorthea Dahl, Jon Norstog, and others. The latter, which also provides brief information about the authors, presents a selection of books by Norwegian-American writers with the following introduction:

That our people during the busy century of their stay in America have found time to write books, to make real contributions to literature, yes, even to write poetry, is remarkable, to say the least. While most of our authors have written in the Norwegian language, a few have written in English and have done it so well that they have won recognition by the best American critics.<sup>99</sup>

This passage points to several key tensions within the Norwegian-American culture of letters during this period: the linguistic and cultural questions surrounding the use of English versus Norwegian as literary languages (a dilemma revealed rather ironically in Rønning's own use of English to discuss a Norwegian "literature of our own"); the anxiety over audience ("our people" is exclusionary yet books in English may be read by all Americans and are, apparently, read approvingly by "American critics"); and the pull between proud statements regarding a literature of our own versus the desire for acceptance and recognition by the dominant American establishment.

This tension also helps to explain the function of the Bulletin author features previously mentioned. First, the descriptions of authors work to acquaint readers with the individuals and their texts, encouraging patrons to buy Augsburg titles and participate in the cultivation of Norwegian-American literature. This message is explicit in the centennial edition of the Bulletin: "The best souvenir you can possibly bring home from the Norse-American Centennial is a book or two by our own people. Encourage our writers by reading their books."<sup>100</sup> The possessive quality of this statement clearly appeals to ethnic loyalty and reminds Norwegian-Americans that they have a stake in supporting the literary endeavors of the ethnic group. Second, the author profiles convey an increasing sense of professionalism among Norwegian-American writers.

This professionalism is important in terms of both authorship and the social prominence of writers and editors. For example, a number of leading writers held other positions of civic importance. Johannes Wist (who sometimes published under the pseudonym "Arnljot") was editor of *Decorah-Posten*, one of the major Norwegian-American newspapers (which ran from 1874-1976), and served as Norwegian vice consul

for Iowa. The Bulletin makes a point of both distinctions. Author Simon Johnson is described as both a “talented author of [. . .] excellent novels” and as editor of *Normanden* in Grand Forks, North Dakota while Peer Strømme occupies the roles of “author, editor, globe trotter, and Democrat.”<sup>101</sup> Editors of various Norwegian-American and/or Lutheran publications are also discussed, along with their latest activities or career moves. The list also includes a number of prominent academics and clergy, whom the Bulletin lists by title: Professors J. A. Holvik and O. M. Norlie, Reverends Thore Eggen and Sigurd Folkestad, among others. The same holds true for “Our Norwegian-American Authors.” Although the focus of this piece is the texts, author prestige still plays an important role. In a selection of eleven books, seven of the authors are listed with professional titles, including six scholars: one identified as “professor,” four listed by their proper names followed by “Ph.D.”, and one, Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, noted as “late professor of the Germanic Literature and Languages at Columbia University.”<sup>102</sup> While the Bulletin editors certainly work to foster Norwegian-American authors, intending that customers glean some knowledge of the writers and texts and (hopefully) purchase some of the books, the wording of such promotions suggests a third function: to remind readers of the creative and professional achievements of Norwegians in the United States.

Thus, the author profiles and book lists serve as a sort of feather in the cap of Norwegian-Americans; the existence of an ethnic literati and learned, professional class attests to the credibility and vitality of a distinct Norwegian-American cultural scene just as it reassures customers that they are members of an educated community. In some instances, authors even seem to function as models of the ideal immigrant. For example, the author profiles in “Who’s Who Among Our Authors”<sup>103</sup>—while they do mention the

authors' texts—provide lengthy and detailed biographies that chart the writers' paths to success and renown. To accentuate this success, however, is also to acknowledge the relative assimilation and socio-economic upward mobility among Norwegian-Americans. Thus, the separatism of statements heralding “a literature of our own” and “our authors” coexists with the recognition and affirmation of the ethnic group's success in America. While this may be somewhat problematic, such descriptions do support Augsburg's role as cultural clearinghouse and work to convince readers that they are or should become informed, educated, middle class connoisseurs of good literature, thereby becoming both good Norwegian-Americans and good citizens.

By celebrating the achievements of the immigrant group in America—particularly growing prosperity, social position, and cultural prowess—pro-ethnic proclamations contribute to the image of a well-equipped, middle class Norwegian-American readership that the publishing house is cultivating. Augsburg utilizes ethnic appeals to promote the artistic and cultural endeavors of Norwegian-Americans in general and a literary renaissance in particular, and this cultural activity, in turn, fuels ethnic pride and preservation. At the same time, however, the focus on progress and prestige demands that Augsburg come to terms with its American success and engage with contemporary American society, a move that is not always in harmony with the firm's ethnic mission(s). Thus, the author profiles reveal the curious connections between ethnic distinction and American assimilation in the development of a Norwegian-American culture of letters.

The accomplishments of Norwegian-Americans and their contributions to the United States do not merely serve to promote a Norwegian-American literary scene,



however; they also form the primary subject matter of Norwegian-American literature, as outlined by N. N. Rønning in his Bulletin article “A Literature of Our Own”:

We have already a vast amount of material for the historian and the novelist. It is now nearly one hundred years since our people began to come to this country in an ever widening stream of immigration. This movement, shot through with heroism and steeped in romanticism, forms one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the Norwegian people.<sup>104</sup>

Rønning’s link between the historian and novelist is important in that a primary inspiration and function of Norwegian-American literature was to record and immortalize the achievements of the immigrant group in America. Similarly, common topics (immigration and settlement) and styles (heroic and romantic) of this literature reflect this “backward glance” aspect of Norwegian-American writing.

Rønning appears to illustrate his own point regarding content and style as he develops his list of potential literary topics:

The coming of news to the Norwegian country districts from the Promised Land in the Far West, the contagion of “America fever”, striking now here, now there, the preparation for the long journey, the sad home-leaving, the weary trip across the ocean, the cumbersome journey into the interior, sleeping under the star-lit sky, the planting of the new home, the hewing of the forest and the plowing of the prairie, the first visit by a Norwegian preacher, the organizing of congregations, the doctrinal discussion, the entering into American life—all this forms the most alluring materials for the historian and fiction writer.<sup>105</sup>

At first glance, Rønning’s list appears neither remarkable nor original since most of the topics—America fever and Old World disillusionment, migration, colonization, manifest destiny, frontier life and nation-building—may be counted among the great American narratives. Indeed, were the term “Norwegian” removed from the passage, these lines could refer to any number of American peoples and a variety of migrant/immigrant

literatures. Yet the passage does grow more specific toward the end, suggesting subjects and experiences to which Norwegian-Americans can lay specific claim: hewing the northern forests of Wisconsin and Minnesota, plowing the prairies of the Dakotas, building Lutheran churches and schools, and establishing a vibrant community and culture in America. Rønning's formula for Norwegian-American literature in the above passage echoes his proclamation for "A Literature of Our Own" quoted at the beginning of this chapter—a literature "interpreting and expressing our common American life" yet incorporating the "peculiar characteristics, history, traditions, institutions, and problems" of Norwegian-Americans.

While Rønning claims both a common American literature and a distinct ethnic literature for Norwegian-Americans, he also uses American literature and history to recommend a separate Norwegian-American tradition:

A good deal of pioneer work has already been done by several historians, and of late some [. . .] have become intensely interested in the record of our people in this country and are finding it just as captivating as the record of the Pilgrim Fathers. As our young people begin to realize the heroism and the romance wrapped up in the story of the pioneers, one after another of them will bring forth, in the form of stories and novels, their contributions to our own literature, portraying with sympathy and love the past, and in so doing interpreting the present.<sup>106</sup>

In this example, Rønning justifies the writing of Norwegian-American literature by comparing Norwegian settlement of the United States with the earlier colonization by the pilgrims. In doing so, Rønning not only asserts that the Norwegian-American experience in the New World is as interesting and valuable as that of earlier immigrant groups, but

he also presents Norwegian-American history as a subsequent chapter in the ongoing narrative of American experience. Moreover, the reference to the “Pilgrim Fathers” denotes a sense of membership in a larger American family.

Yet the passage also suggests that Norwegian-Americans have just as much right to tell their story as other groups; although such narratives may reflect central American themes and values, they will also record distinct Norwegian-American experiences. Rønning’s comments may be understood as both a defense of Norwegian-American literature and a call for action as he attempts to foster authorship and literary culture within his ethnic community and to create future writers among the younger generation. And although Rønning is committed to the development of Norwegian-American literature for its own sake, he suggests also that by creating new writers and readers, ethnic leaders of his generation forge a link with future generations. While much of Norwegian-American writing involves looking back and recording the past, this literature also offers contemporary relevance and future inspiration. This connection between past and present—expressed in the last line of the quotation—gives a new meaning and urgency to the mention of “our young people” in Augsburg publications since here the younger generation is viewed as potential storytellers, authors as well as readers, who will carry on the Norwegian legacy in America. In light of this point, the previously-mentioned discussions about the relevance of the Norwegian language, the moral and cultural benefits of reading, the value of a home library, and the importance of family take on added significance; not only do such comments denote education, domesticity, taste, and upward mobility among Augsburg’s patrons but also a knowledge of and appreciation for the past.

Indeed, as much as Rønning is interested in the creation of Norwegian-American literature, he appears even more concerned about the reception of such literature:

The material we have; the artisans are coming. What about the public? Have we a sufficiently large appreciative public? So far it has been sadly lacking, but the time is near at hand when thousands and thousands of intelligent descendants of the poineers [sic] will read the saga of the immigrants with the thrill of discovery, with gratitude and admiration.<sup>107</sup>

The anxiety over audience is another reason for Rønning's particular reference to the younger generation of Norwegian-Americans who reveal a growing detachment from the Norwegian language and the "pioneer" culture of their forbearers. On the one hand, Rønning is worried about having a readership large enough to support a Norwegian-American culture of letters. On the other hand, he is equally troubled about the way in which the audience will read (in English or Norwegian), interpret, and receive such works, hoping it will be with "the thrill [. . .], gratitude, and admiration" that he envisions. Rønning's comments reveal concern for and about the increasingly American sons and daughters of his ethnic community, their connection to earlier generations (of immigrants, writers, parents and grandparents), and their potential for the future. Moreover, Rønning's preoccupation with the past points to one of the central components of Norwegian-American literature: the fear of forgetting. The remembrance and preservation of ties to Norway, to the Norwegian language and cultural heritage, as well as to the immigrants' challenges and accomplishments in creating a hard-won place in America all contribute to a larger message: we were here! Thus, the development of a Norwegian-American culture of letters is not only tied to the growth of ethnic publishers,

the increase in artistic activity and professionalism, and the enlightenment of a prosperous middle class audience but also to the broader endeavors of collective memory and ethnic preservation.

The conclusion of Rønning's landmark essay connects the future of Norwegian-American literature to the fortunes of Augsburg as "the leader in stimulating, encouraging, and guiding the movement for a literature of our own."<sup>108</sup> This point is important since the expansion and development of Augsburg played a crucial role in making possible both the imagining and the realization of a Norwegian-American literary renaissance in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the growth and changes at Augsburg helped to make Rønning's plan for a literature of their own seem viable. While a Norwegian-American culture of letters already existed and a number of other publishers played their part in its development, the influence of Augsburg—under the stewardship of Sundheim—had much to do with the direction and momentum of Norwegian-American literature during its relatively short-lived zenith. Despite the doubts that creep into Rønning's essay or the defensive tone of Bulletin articles reacting to "anti-foreign" sentiment in America, optimism and progressivism tend to characterize Augsburg's outlook at the turn of the century. In 1915, Augsburg marked its twenty-fifth anniversary, "although it was acknowledged that its business was started at an earlier date."<sup>109</sup> At the annual meeting in June of that year, Augsburg celebrated the anniversary with a sense of pride in past accomplishments and high expectations for future developments: "[w]ithout exaggeration it may safely be said that our book concern has become a factor of great importance to the religious, literary, and cultural development of

our people in this country.”<sup>110</sup> This quotation forms a fitting mission statement for Augsburg, one that encompasses much of the cultural work of the publishing house outlined in this chapter. These same impulses—“the religious, literary, and cultural development” of the Norwegian people in America—would also shape the rich and complicated agenda of one of Augsburg’s premier publications, *Jul i Vesterheimen*.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> N. N. Rønning, “A Literature of Our Own,” APH Bulletin (January 1920): 10.

<sup>2</sup> Orm Øverland, “Augsburg Publishing House: The Penultimate Chapter of Norwegian-American Literature,” Norwegian-American Essays, ed. Knut Djupedal et al., (Oslo: NAHA-Norway, 1993) 12. Hereafter referred to in citations as Augsburg.

<sup>3</sup> Today the former Augsburg Publishing House has become Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>4</sup> Karlis L. Ozolins, “A History of Augsburg Publishing House,” M.A. thesis, U of Minnesota, 1960, 62.

<sup>5</sup> “The Norse-American Centennial and Augsburg Publishing House,” Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin (June 1925): 5. Hereafter the Bulletin is referred to as APH Bulletin in the notes.

<sup>6</sup> Orm Øverland, Augsburg 11.

<sup>7</sup> This united church was formed in 1890 through the merger of three distinct church bodies, namely the Danish Norwegian Conference, the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood, and the Norwegian Augustana Synod congregations. For more information, see Ozolins.

<sup>8</sup> Ozolins considers Norwegian immigrant Elling Eielsen as the “pioneer of Norwegian publishing in America with his two privately published books: the *Small Catechism* (1841) and *Forklaring 1842* (1843).” See Ozolins 16. Eielsen organized the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, also known as the Eielsen Synod, in 1846.

<sup>9</sup> Ozolins 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ozolins 56.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that not long after the organization of the first Norwegian congregation in the United States and the ordination of the first Norwegian-American pastors—both of which took place in 1843—came the foundation of the first Norwegian newspaper, *Nordlyset* (“The Northern Light”) in 1847. Most of these events took place in the Muskego settlement of Southeastern Wisconsin.

<sup>12</sup> Ozolins 125 (noted as “G. T. Lee’s translation of the Articles of the Union and Constitution typewritten manuscript Augsburg Publishing House”).

<sup>13</sup> Øverland, Augsburg 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> This call for the establishment of a Norwegian-American literature is one of the most important statements in Norwegian-American history; however, it has formerly been erroneously attributed to Sundheim (who did indeed author several of the unsigned editorials in the Bulletin). I discovered the correct attribution while reading copies of the Bulletin in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. A passage from Rønning’s article opens Orm Øverland’s comprehensive study The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America (1996). Professor Øverland requested that I note the correction in my essay (see citation below).

<sup>15</sup> N. N. Rønning, “A Literature of Our Own,” APH Bulletin 1.3 (1920): 10.

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<sup>16</sup> Julius J. Hopperstad (1861-1920) was circulation manager of Augsburg publications and worked at the publishing house from 1911 until his death. His duties included oversight of the Bulletin, to which he contributed both prose and verse. His poems appeared under the pen name "Bluntquill." For more information, see his obituary in the APH Bulletin (November 1920), 12.

<sup>17</sup> APH Bulletin (November 1920), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market (New York: Pantheon, 1989) 109-110.

<sup>19</sup> "The Norse-American Centennial and Augsburg Publishing House," APH Bulletin (June 1925): 5.

<sup>20</sup> "Our Bulletin Pleases," APH Bulletin (November 1920): 9. The remarks quoted in the piece are attributed to L. M. Cross, editor of *Successful Selling*.

<sup>21</sup> "Augsburg Publishing House as Printers," APH Bulletin (January 1920): 9.

<sup>22</sup> The Centennial was celebrated in 1925, marking the anniversary of the voyage of the *Restauration*, which sailed from Stavanger, Norway to New York. Although Norwegians had immigrated to the U.S. prior to this date, the *Restaurationen* is viewed as the first organized migration.

<sup>23</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1925), 4.

<sup>24</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg. These slogans appear on a full-page ad on the back cover.

<sup>25</sup> "Augsburg Publishing House as Printers," APH Bulletin (January 1920): 8.

<sup>26</sup> "Augsburg Publishing House as Printers," APH Bulletin (January 1920): 9.

<sup>27</sup> APH Bulletin (January 1920), 16.

<sup>28</sup> APH Bulletin (January 1920), 15.

<sup>29</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), npg.

<sup>30</sup> APH Bulletin (January 1920), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Strasser 118.

<sup>32</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), 1.

<sup>33</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1925), 30.

<sup>34</sup> APH Bulletin (January 1920), 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Ozolins 53.

<sup>36</sup> The quotation is apparently from the records of the Conference's 1886 annual meeting and appears in Ozolins 53.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Ozolins 102. This statement is particularly telling and somewhat ironic in that the primary impetus that propelled Augsburg into secular publishing and the cultivation of a Norwegian-



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American literary establishment—the desire to provide “suitable” reading material to improve the people—would ultimately be an impediment (in the form of prudishness) to the artistic and literary quality of its publications, including *Jul i Vesterheimen*.

<sup>38</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 3.

<sup>39</sup> APH Bulletin (November 1920), 3. Attributed to the Lutheran Church Herald, August 10, 1920. As in this case, bits and pieces from other Augsburg publications were commonly excerpted or reprinted in the *Bulletin*.

<sup>40</sup> APH Bulletin (November 1920), npg.

<sup>41</sup> Katherine C. Grier, Culture and Comfort, Parlor-Making and Middle Class Identity, 1850-1930 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution P, 1988) 4.

<sup>42</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 15. Attributed to “Part of an Editorial from The Woman’s Home Companion, April, 1922” (sic).

<sup>43</sup> Grier 6.

<sup>44</sup> Grier 6.

<sup>45</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1925), 30.

<sup>46</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), 3.

<sup>47</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 17.

<sup>48</sup> Augsburg is not alone in the conflation of reading, publishing, and patriotism. In a short write-up of the 1920 American Bookseller’s Association meeting, the Bulletin mentions “Building Americanism Thru Books” (by author John Spargo) as one of the feature addresses. Moreover, the convention took place in Philadelphia and included, among the “entertainment features,” patriotic “visits to Independence Hall, Betsy Ross House, Old Christ Church, Benjamin Franklin’s Grave, Leary’s Old Book Store, and an auto trip to Valley Forge.” APH Bulletin (November 1920): 3.

<sup>49</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 11.

<sup>50</sup> Grier 6.

<sup>51</sup> T. L. Hanger, “Drawing the Reading Line,” APH Bulletin (June 1922): 25.

<sup>52</sup> Grier 105.

<sup>53</sup> Grier 99.

<sup>54</sup> Franklin serves as the example in another Bulletin article that compares Augsburg’s plans for future growth with Franklin’s plans for expanding America’s newspapers with the founding of the Saturday Evening Post. See “Augsburg Publishing House Expands,” APH Bulletin (November 1920): 9.

<sup>55</sup> “Say it with Books,” APH Bulletin (June 1922): 17.

<sup>56</sup> This would include religious and secular texts since church publishers provided teaching materials for the Norwegian-American parochial schools.

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- <sup>57</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Jubilæums-Katalog, 1890-1915 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1915) 64.
- <sup>58</sup> Ozolins 129-30.
- <sup>59</sup> Ozolins 130-31.
- <sup>60</sup> Ozolins 181.
- <sup>61</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Illustreret Katalog (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1913), 214\*.
- <sup>62</sup> Grier 15.
- <sup>63</sup> The term *skjønliterære verker* could also be translated as “Works of Fiction.” However, I have chosen the more general term of *belles lettres* since the catalogue included non-fiction. *Skjønliteratur* may denote “literary” or artistic/creative writing in various genres.
- <sup>64</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Catalog, 1923 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1923), 228.
- <sup>65</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Catalog, 1923 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1923), 230.
- <sup>66</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Catalog, 1923 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1923), 233.
- <sup>67</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Kommissionslager af Skjønliterære Verker (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1913), 2.
- <sup>68</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Kommissionslager af Skjønliterære Verker (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1913), 2.
- <sup>70</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 27.
- <sup>71</sup> Composed during the thirteenth-century, Heimskringla (literally, “orb of the world”) relates the history of the Viking Age and the genealogy and individual exploits of the Norse kings from their supposed origins up to 1177. The work, based on oral tradition and skaldic poems, is of great literary and historical significance. Sturlason (1178-1241) was an Icelander of the prominent Sturlung family. He spent time in Norway, was a member of the Norwegian nobility, and gained artistic renown as a skald, composing poems for Norwegian royalty. He was also involved in the political turmoil of Iceland and was elected speaker of the Icelandic *Althing* (popular assembly that functioned as a legislative body and court, founded in AD 930, considered today as a kind of proto-parliament). His other works include Skaldic Poems, A Saga of St. Olav, and the famous Prose Edda.
- <sup>72</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Illustreret Katalog, 1915 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1915), 247-253.
- <sup>73</sup> Harald S. Næss, “Norwegian Literature 1800-1860,” A History of Norwegian Literature, ed. Harald S. Næss, *A History of Scandinavian Literatures 2* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993). 97.
- <sup>74</sup> Næss 98.
- <sup>75</sup> Theodore Jorgenson, History of Norwegian Literature (1939; New York: Haskell House, 1970) 59.
- <sup>76</sup> Næss 95.

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<sup>77</sup> The Hardanger fiddle is a folk instrument that was traditionally played at weddings and other festive occasions. The fiddle has eight strings, four of which are actually played while the others sound sympathetically, creating the characteristic tone that makes the instrument so distinctive. The fiddles are often decorated. The instrument is an important symbol of Norwegian culture and remains in use as a folk instrument and a key part of the traditional music scene in Norway today.

<sup>78</sup> Preacher Elling Eielsen (see note seven above) had an English version printed in 1841.

<sup>79</sup> Øverland, Augsburg 12. For further information concerning Augsburg, the churches, and language politics, please see this article.

<sup>80</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 27.

<sup>81</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 27.

<sup>82</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 27.

<sup>83</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 27.

<sup>84</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1922), 27.

<sup>85</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), 17.

<sup>86</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), 11.

<sup>87</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), 11.

<sup>88</sup> APH Bulletin (April 1919), 10.

<sup>89</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg. The document appears on the inside cover.

<sup>90</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg.

<sup>91</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg.

<sup>92</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg.

<sup>93</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg.

<sup>94</sup> *Husmand* or *Husmann* refers to a cotter or crofter, a tenant farmer who works land belonging to someone else. Cotters might work on several farms in succession or have life tenure on one farm, depending on economic and social circumstances. In either case, the designation, while not necessarily a mark of shame, does denote humble origins. Many cotters left Norway for better opportunity in America. A favorite plot formula of Norwegian immigrant literature is the poor cotter's son who makes good in the New World; in some cases, he even returns to Norway, defying the Old World class system and social customs, to marry the landowner's daughter and/or buy the farm at which he formerly worked, as in the case of the 1884 novel, Husmannsgutten (The Cotter's Son), by H. A. Foss.

<sup>95</sup> Jon Gjerde, The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Midwest, 1830-1917 (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997), 8. For more on "complementary identity" see pages 54-66.

<sup>96</sup> APH Bulletin (July 1919), npg.

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<sup>97</sup> Gjerde 60.

<sup>98</sup> “The Norse-American Centennial and Augsburg Publishing House,” APH Bulletin (June 1925): 3.

<sup>99</sup> “Our Norwegian-American Authors,” APH Bulletin (June 1922): 26.

<sup>100</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1925): 30.

<sup>101</sup> “Among Our Authors and Editors,” APH Bulletin (November 1920): 10.

<sup>102</sup> “Our Norwegian-American Authors,” APH Bulletin (June 1922): 26.

<sup>103</sup> “Who’s Who Among Our Authors,” APH Bulletin (July 1919): 4-6.

<sup>104</sup> Rønning 10.

<sup>105</sup> Rønning 10.

<sup>106</sup> Rønning 10.

<sup>107</sup> Rønning 10.

<sup>108</sup> Rønning 10. See also page 9 of this chapter.

<sup>109</sup> Ozolins 106.

<sup>110</sup> Ozolins 107. Henrik Voldal, chairman of the Publishing Committee, is credited with this remark.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHRISTMAS IN OUR WESTERN HOME: THE CULTURAL WORK OF A NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN CHRISTMAS ANNUAL

Among that which our forefathers, the emigrants, took with them to America [. . .] was Christmas in Norway. [Christmas] had, through a long tradition, taken the shape of a fine festival in home and church. And as such, it left its deep mark in town and country, in our people's hearts and lives. It was therefore rather natural that the emigrants took this with them to their new home and that [Christmas], in much the same form as in the fatherland, entered into life in the western home. Shall we protect the beautiful tree with its many lights, or shall we let it wither and its light go out, as happens with so many things these days?

—Marcus O. Bøckman, “*Jul i Vesterheimen*,” 1936<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

During the early part of the twentieth-century, when Norwegian-American literature was entering its golden age, Augsburg Publishing House introduced one of its premier publications: the Christmas annual *Jul i Vesterheimen* (“Christmas in the Western Home”).<sup>2</sup> The lavishly illustrated oversize magazine, published from 1911-1957, offered a wide range of literary genres and styles, including biography, memoir, travel narrative, history, geography, fiction and poetry by Norwegian-American writers.<sup>3</sup> The magazine was originally included texts in both English and Norwegian—although Norwegian eventually became the exclusive language of the publication—and was primarily designed for an immigrant or ethnic audience. Given its highly professional and luxurious presentation, its institutional status as a publication of Augsburg, and its

promotion of the ethnic group's literary and other cultural endeavors, *Jul i Vesterheimen* represents a culmination in the periodical tradition of Norwegian-American publishing. Moreover, the magazine attests to the vital connection between immigrant periodicals and the development and production of immigrant literature in America, as the ethnic press played a key role in the dissemination of literature, the fostering of authorship, and the formation of a "Norwegian-American consciousness."<sup>4</sup>

*Jul i Vesterheimen* serves as a compelling artifact that reflects the concerns of its cultural and historical moment. By the time the magazine began publication in the early decades of the twentieth century, Norwegian-Americans were approaching the centennial of their emigration to the United States—usually dated from the first organized migration of 1825—and had cultivated a place for themselves in the American scene, especially in the Upper Midwest. As a group, Norwegian-Americans had attained a level of economic prosperity and social and linguistic integration that contributed to three important factors in the development of literary activity: first, the rise of a professional class of Norwegian-Americans who held positions of authority and influence, including editors and publishers; second, the growth of a commitment among leaders of the ethnic community to preserve and promote Norwegian culture (as they saw it) in America; and third, the presence of an established ethnic audience to read and support such endeavors, particularly a middle class readership with the leisure and means to support gift books and annuals.

*Jul i Vesterheimen* arrives on the scene as Augsburg Publishing House enters a period of unprecedented literary activity. Having already consolidated its position as the official publisher of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America by the late nineteenth-

century, Augsburg would go on to become “the largest Lutheran concern in the publishing field.”<sup>5</sup> In the decades to follow, Augsburg would become a leading publisher of Norwegian-American literature as well. This publishing vision, in which *Jul i Vesterheimen* played a considerable role, owed much to editor and manager Anders M. Sundheim (1861-1945). His commitment to Norwegian-American culture, particularly literary culture, was exemplified by his dedication to *Jul i Vesterheimen*, and its very pages became the manifestation of his ideals. In a retrospective article about their father, Sundheim’s daughters describe the special connection between the editor and the magazine, his “dearest work”:

For he was not just the Christmas magazine’s creator and first editor; when the first volume of this magazine came out in 1911, it was the realization of something he had dreamed of for many years: to create a Christmas magazine that not only compared favorably with the many attractive holiday magazines published each year in his dear homeland [Norway], but something that, in a meaningful way, could represent the spiritual life of immigrant Norwegians in America and their descendants.<sup>6</sup>

This passage suggests several important traits associated with the magazine and its mission. One is the connection between *Jul i Vesterheimen* and a much older tradition of gift books and annuals that flourished in the nineteenth-century. In tracing the development of the genre, Frederick W. Faxon lists “‘The Forget-me-not,’ published in England in 1823,” as the “first ‘literary annual.’” Based on “Almanacs” and “Pocketbooks” appearing in Germany at the time, the English gift book phenomenon quickly became a craze that spread to the United States, where “the fad developed into even greater proportions and lasted longer.”<sup>7</sup> The 1826 “Atlantic Souvenir,” published in Philadelphia by Carey and Lea and sold as “a gift for Christmas and the New Year” in

December 1825, is generally considered the first American annual.<sup>8</sup> Ralph Thompson explains the function and positive reception of American gift books:

Here were books ideally suited to an aspiring middle class. They appealed to the eye and the heart rather than to the mind; they were handsome and costly; they were “artistic” and “refined.” They met a demand for “culture” and showed the purchaser that his country could produce—and would support—its own painters, engravers, and authors.<sup>9</sup>

Thompson’s description of the early American gift books is useful in understanding *Jul i Vesterheimen*, since the genre in America is linked to nationalism, the rise of the middle class, and the importance of literature (and other art) in the formation of a national consciousness. Indeed, the gift book itself stands as a symbol of the nation’s eminence and the cultural aspirations of its people. Similarly, nearly a century later, *Jul i Vesterheimen* would stand as a symbol of Norwegian-American culture in the United States: affirming and cultivating the middle class status of its publishers, contributors, and readers, projecting taste and refinement, and supporting the cultural endeavors of the ethnic group. In so doing, the magazine would function as both a source of ethnic pride and an expression of American citizenship.

Given its close association with Christmas, *Jul i Vesterheimen* exemplifies the role played by literary culture in shaping and even institutionalizing an important American holiday. In the early nineteenth century, for example, the Knickerbockers (a New York literary club) promoted the Dutch tradition of Saint Nicholas: Washington Irving rendered the scene of St. Nick’s horse-drawn sleigh in Diedrich Knickerbocker’s A History of New York (1809); John Pintard circulated a broadside that depicted the saint with nice and naughty children (1810); and Clement C. Moore portrayed St. Nicholas in



“’Twas the Night Before Christmas” (1822). Beginning in 1863, cartoonist Thomas Nast popularized Santa Claus and the North Pole workshop via caricatures published in Harper’s Magazine.

While *Jul i Vesterheimen* partakes in a rich American tradition, the magazine also benefits from an Old World custom, as another source of Sundheim’s inspiration was the *julehefter* and *julebøker* (Christmas annuals and Christmas books) from Norway. The tradition came to Norway in the nineteenth century via Northern Europe, particularly Germany. Christmas annuals flourished throughout the nineteenth century, with contributions from many of Norway’s leading writers, and continued into the twentieth century with publications like *God Jul* (“Merry Christmas”), *Jul i Norge* (“Christmas in Norway”), and *Julen* (“Christmas”), later called *Norges Jul* (“Norway’s Christmas”)<sup>10</sup>, all of which overlap at various points with the publication of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. In her study of Yuletide traditions in Norway and America, Kathleen Stokker identifies Christmas annuals, particularly *Jul i Vesterheimen*, as one of the three most important customs to survive among Norwegian-American immigrants in the United States. Stokker argues that “[b]ecause of the way these two different celebrations [American and Norwegian Christmas] met, Christmas reveals better than any other aspect of Norwegian American culture the forces of evolution, preservation, and assimilation that faced the Norwegians as they made their new home on American soil.”<sup>11</sup> The vital connection between *Jul i Vesterheimen* and the “dear homeland” of Norway suggests the publication’s strong symbolic ties to heritage and ethnicity.

Finally, the “spiritual life” of Norwegian-American immigrants may be understood to include religious faith as well as creative and artistic attributes, just as the

magazine follows Sundheim's larger vision of "dual responsibility, one 'religious,' the other 'national' and 'cultural,'" for Augsburg Publishing House.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the care with which Sundheim designed each and every issue attests to the growing sense of professionalism at Augsburg. This move from the mere printing of religious books and church documents to the production of high quality artistic publications reflects not only the magazine's position as the jewel in the crown—or, as one admiring critic praised it, "the aristocrat of Norwegian America's Christmas literature"<sup>13</sup>—among Augsburg's publications, but also the publishing house's role as a kind of cultural clearinghouse for Norwegian-America.

There are several key factors that recommend *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a site of scholarly inquiry. First, the magazine's various positions as a gift book, a feature Augsburg publication, and an ethnic literary annual make *Jul i Vesterheimen* an artifact that is very conscious of its cultural responsibility. Moreover, the duration of the magazine's publication (over forty years), allows for longitudinal study of both the publication and its context, as *Jul i Vesterheimen* provides important information about the changing cultural, linguistic, and ethnic landscapes of its publishers and patrons. Ultimately, the Christmas annual reveals many versions of a single story: how Norwegian-American writers and artists imagined themselves and their place within their "western home" and American culture. *Jul i Vesterheimen* serves as a compelling case study in which the attitudes of its publisher, contributors, and (to some extent) readers are enacted. An examination of both contextual influences and textual components of *Jul i Vesterheimen* reveals the complex and often conflicted cultural work that the Christmas annual performed: the transmission of an Old World Heritage, the cultivation of a New

World home of *Vesterheimen*, and the negotiation of American life and citizenship.

Ultimately, *Jul i Vesterheimen* works to construct and preserve ethnic identity, to record an historical legacy, and to write Norwegian-Americans into the nation as Americans of cultural distinction.

### ***Jul i Vesterheimen* Through the Decades**

A survey and analysis of the advertising for *Jul i Vesterheimen* and its placement in the Augsburg catalogues indicates the multi-faceted mission(s) that the Christmas annual worked to fulfill. These sources also paint a broad picture of the magazine's forty-plus year career, including its inception, growth, and eventual demise. When *Jul i Vesterheimen* appeared in 1911, it joined an already-active field of Christmas products and publications, gift books and occasional merchandise, as well as an extensive list of regular books, church newspapers, and products offered by Augsburg. The magazine benefited from the popularity of the gift book genre and built upon an existing tradition of Augsburg Christmas publications "designed to satisfy the Christmas season's gift demands."<sup>14</sup> These festive books were new and frivolous territory for Augsburg in that they were designed with the popular market in mind, a shift for an ecumenical publisher that had traditionally been focused on pragmatic publications for use primarily in churches and schools. The appetite for annuals and gift publications was growing among Augsburg's patrons, and the stage was set for the arrival of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. Indeed, only a few years after the annual's inception, Augsburg could announce that the 1914

edition was sold out<sup>15</sup> and celebrate the publication's success. From the beginning, the superiority and singularity of *Jul i Vesterheimen* stand out, along with its elegance and quality:

On the whole, these Christmas booklets are the finest and best things that are published among the Norwegians in America, and no one who has a trace of literary interest can afford to neglect to secure him/herself a copy.<sup>16</sup>

Augsburg's new Christmas annual is linked with class and culture, particularly literary culture. This characterization of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as an elite publication is evident in an advertisement from the 1920 catalogue, which includes a picture of the magazine and a lengthy description:

*Jul i Vesterheimen* [sic] comes out each year. This attractive Christmas booklet, with its choice content and fine artistic format, has become a regular Christmas guest among our people. It is certainly a magazine that brings one both pleasure and entertainment. A whole year's worth of searching for the best that can be had in the form of reading material and illustrations is collected here. Each issue has several color-print enclosures in addition to a gorgeous cover of many colors. Moreover, most of the booklet itself is printed in multiple colors. The magazine sells for \$1.00.<sup>17</sup>

This passage includes a number of important attributes of *Jul i Vesterheimen* and begins to give a sense of the various functions and appeals of the magazine. First, readers are reminded of the special keepsake quality of the annual and encouraged to become collectors of the publication. Along similar lines, the physical beauty and ornamental nature of the gift book—particularly the attractive covers and lavish illustrations—makes *Jul i Vesterheimen* the ultimate parlor *accoutrement* and exhibits Augsburg's printing prowess. The magazine also appeals to a range of readers. For example, the description of the content as “choice,” “fine,” and “artistic” suggests a refined, upper-crust image

designed to appeal to discerning readers (a goal to which Augsburg encourages its customers to aspire). At the same time, the Christmas theme and claims of “appropriate [. . .] Christmas reading”<sup>18</sup> recall the magazine’s sentimental or pietistic aspect. For the casual reader, *Jul i Vesterheimen* functions as a diversion or suitable family entertainment. Meanwhile, the personification of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a “regular Christmas guest among our people” calls up images of genteel relations in well-appointed Norwegian-American homes and makes a subtle yet distinct ethnic appeal. Finally, the increased price of the magazine—which places it on par with regular books in the Augsburg catalogue—makes it a special investment for the middle class home library that Augsburg encourages its customers to compile.

The description is typical of advertisements for *Jul i Vesterheimen* and appears repeatedly throughout the catalogues of the teens and twenties. This passage shows that the various attributes and activities with which Augsburg associates its posh Christmas annual—culture, refinement, edification, entertainment, domesticity, tradition, and quality—are very reminiscent of the qualities that Augsburg assigns to itself and its readers. Much like Augsburg’s characterization of its own publishing practices and recipe for success, *Jul i Vesterheimen* combines the best of old and new, packaging an Old World style Christmas publication in a modern and updated format, using both Norwegian and English. In this way, *Jul i Vesterheimen* may be seen to exemplify the motto in Augsburg’s holiday catalogue: “A Greeting and Gift for Every Purse and Person.”<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the teens and twenties, *Jul i Vesterheimen* is featured in a wide variety of catalogues, becoming an important symbol of Augsburg’s high publishing

standards and increasing belles lettres activities. Augsburg supports the annual's reputation as a literary magazine, particularly as a showplace for Norwegian-American literature, by grouping *Jul i Vesterheimen* with other literary works and by reminding readers of the firm's special commitment to a Norwegian-American culture of letters. The importance of *Jul i Vesterheimen* to the ethnic group's cultural aspirations, particularly literary and artistic expression, is the emphasis of a 1924 advertisement, an extensive two-page ad that opens the Gift Books for Christmas catalogue:

For fourteen years, *Jul i Vesterheimen* has been like a high-flying banner, leading the way for our literature. Built upon good Norwegian traditions, it [*Jul i Vesterheimen*] has brought celebration and color to our Christmas table, brought cheer into thousands of homes, and Christmas greetings to relatives and friends both here at home and in Norway.<sup>20</sup>

This passage emphasizes the magazine's role as a symbol of and leader in the development of "a literature of our own" while it affirms the Christmas annual's ties to Old World traditions and Norway. One major function of *Jul i Vesterheimen* then, is the cultivation and perpetuation of Norwegian culture in America, both in its contemporary guise as Norwegian-American literature and in its more traditional forms like language, holiday customs, and family ties. This aspect of the magazine's mission is evident in a 1928 advertisement for *Jul i Vesterheimen*: "It bears Christmas tidings from both the western home and from Norway."<sup>21</sup> While the magazine encourages Norwegian-Americans to honor and preserve their ties to Mother Norway, *Jul i Vesterheimen* also showcases the new culture built by Norwegians in America, particularly in the Upper Midwest. These two sources of ethnic pride and identity—the old world heritage of

Norway and the new world home of *Vesterheim*—are important aspects of the magazine, as shown in a special advertisement for *Jul i Vesterheimen* in the commemorative

*Jubilæums-Katalog* (Jubilee Catalog), 1890-1915:

The reading material is mostly original, written by our best known men and women in Norway and over here [the United States], and “Jul i Vesterheimen” brings with it the mood of our great expanses of the West but also memories from our old Norway with the weathered contours and quiet hillsides.<sup>22</sup>

This example underscores the ethnic and regional prerogative of the magazine and Augsburg Publishing House. Moreover, the use of symbolic landscapes in the passage—one idealistically American, the other typically Norwegian—expresses dual loyalty to Mother Norway and Uncle Sam and illustrates the importance of ethnic identification as readers are made to feel “at home” in either the mountainous fjord landscape of Norway or the open prairies of the American West. And despite the marked differences between these geographies, they are linked by a similar characterization: one of romanticism, heroism, and/or nostalgia.

This tie between the two homelands is echoed in the description of the magazine’s content and contributors: “[. . .] fortællinger, skisser, og digte fra kjendte penner paa begge sider havet” (“[. . .] stories, sketches, and poems from well-known pens on both sides of the ocean”).<sup>23</sup> The advertisement goes on to encourage readers to purchase copies of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as Christmas gifts for friends and relatives in Norway—to maintain old ties but perhaps also to show folks in the old country that Norwegian-Americans have “arrived” economically, socially, and culturally in the United States. This is certainly the idea expressed in a favorable review of *Jul i Vesterheimen* in the Norwegian-American literary journal *Norden*:

In short, we Norwegian-Americans have finally got our own gift book that can compete with the great Scandinavian ones in all areas. What a pleasure for us to be able to send this home to Norway. We also finally have an opportunity to show that we can afford to be discriminating.<sup>24</sup>

In its early years, *Jul i Vesterheimen* expresses a sense of gratification for immigrant achievements and optimism over the outlook for Norwegian-American culture. The magazine also stands as a symbol of the vitality of Norwegian language and culture in America in its golden age. Given the historical moment, the energy and optimism that characterize the early years of the magazine are not surprising. This period marks the high point of Norwegian-American literature, both in terms of quality and quantity (the latter referring to both the amount of important works produced and the number of active authors). Moreover, the Norwegian language was frequently used by this generation of writers and was, for most of them, the literary language of their choice. Finally, the cultural climate of the early twentieth-century still allowed for a vision of a vital Norwegian-American culture of letters, an aspiration that was already dimming with the onset of the 1930's, the decade in which the importance and visibility of *Jul i Vesterheimen* would begin to decrease markedly.

The aforementioned advertisements, written in Norwegian and stressing the “*norskhet*” (“Norwegianness”) of the magazine, would lead one to believe that *Jul i Vesterheimen* was purely an endeavor in Norwegian language and culture. Yet this was not the case. From the beginning, *Jul i Vesterheimen* included texts written in both English and Norwegian. In fact, the Christmas annual exhibits the sometimes-fluid, sometimes-schizophrenic movements between English and Norwegian, between American and ethnic loyalties reflected at large in Augsburg's catalogues and publishing



policies (discussed in the previous chapter). This curious blending is apparent in a full-page advertisement, appearing on the back of the 1927 Christmas Gift Suggestions catalog, with the headline “The Only Christmas Annual in the United States.” The top half of the advertisement appears in English and quotes an American description of *Jul i Vesterheimen* from the Inland Printer:

This is, as far as we know, the only Christmas Annual published in the United States. It is a magazine of fifty-six pages and cover, 10½ x 14 inches, with four process plates in four colors, reproduced from original paintings. The cover is printed in four colors. The text matter is in English and Norwegian, about half of each. The book is profusely illustrated with original drawings and designs. It is a beautiful book and a great credit to its publishers, the Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis.<sup>25</sup>

Such praise is no small compliment coming from the Inland Printer, which “because of [its] own extraordinary graphics, [. . .] also became a focal point for reporting and debating the new ideas and technologies that were transforming magazine illustration—and all the other popular arts.”<sup>26</sup> However, the bottom half of the very same page that describes *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a unique “American” publication (in English) goes on to say (in Norwegian) that “‘Jul i Vesterheimen’ is well-known both in America and in Norway [. . .]”). This example shows an anxiety of influence and the conflicting demands placed on the magazine as Augsburg tries to have it both ways, celebrating *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a symbol of Norwegian tradition and American ingenuity. Ultimately, claims to the magazine’s mainstream appeal are unconvincing.

Maintaining a balance between Norwegian and American selling points in a single advertisement proves tricky, and subsequent catalogues opt for separate ads in English and Norwegian. This change marks an important shift since, by the 1930s,

English was increasingly becoming the language of both the practical and the poetic, especially among second and third-generation Norwegian-Americans. Given Augsburg's mission as a church publisher, the language issue was especially important and had always been of major concern to Augsburg's management and church leaders. Already in the late nineteenth-century, Augsburg had anticipated—albeit prematurely—the importance of English language materials among its patrons, especially the Lutheran congregations. Orm Øverland points to the example of the 1898 English version of the hymnal:

In urging a switch to English the management of Augsburg were jumping their guns. As a matter of fact, Norwegian was still the preferred language of the overwhelming majority of the congregations and the press had little success with their first publishing ventures in English. Thus the first English version of the hymnal in 1898 was printed in only 2000 copies compared to the 33,000 copies of the Norwegian one at the same time. Indeed, the English publications were subsidized by the Norwegian ones. Concern for the young generation was a main argument in favor of English [. . .].<sup>27</sup>

Ozolins supports this scenario in his discussion of the language issue, noting church leaders' preoccupation with English publications as a means of retaining the younger generation as church members, as well as the accompanying poor sales of such English editions from a "Norwegian publishing house [that] was expected to do Norwegian publishing."<sup>28</sup>

By the 1930's, however, the demand for English publications was real and on the rise. Despite its importance and versatility as a major Augsburg publication, *Jul i Vesterheimen* did not fit into an increasingly English-language format, especially given its identification with and commitment to the cultural preservation and promotion of

Norwegian America. Augsburg's solution to the linguistic dilemma appears to have been to create duplicate publications. Ozolins attempts to explain this phenomenon, which he refers to as one of "parallel publications":

In the sea of Anglo-American speaking peoples these smaller foreign language speaking islands felt necessitated to bolster their entrenchments with publications of their own. It is interesting that even in the transition periods to English we have frequently parallel publications, books in the original and in English translation, two church official organs, one in the native tongue the other in English, etc.<sup>29</sup>

While Ozolins' portrayal of an embattled ethnic press fighting for survival among mainstream Anglo-American culture provides one explanation for duplicate publications, it is important to remember that such "parallel publications" were also created in response to the needs of ethnic publishers' own constituencies, especially as the twentieth-century progressed. In the case of Augsburg, the creation of twin publications in English and Norwegian reflected also the growing number of ethnic readers for whom English was the primary language. For example, the church newspaper *Lutheraneren* ("The Lutheran") had an English-language sibling, The Lutheran Church Herald. Similarly, the traditional almanac, *Folkekalenderen*—"the Norwegian edition of the yearbook of the N.L.C.A."<sup>30</sup>—had the Lutheran Almanac as its English alter-ego. While the English versions of these publications may have initially lagged behind their Norwegian counterparts in terms of sales and circulation, they eventually overtook and exceeded them. Indeed, by the late twenties, English language publications were becoming more dominant at Augsburg. In the case of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, the vitality and centrality of the magazine would suffer a serious blow with the arrival of an in-house competitor: Randolph G. Haugan's Christmas.

It is important to connect Christmas to Haugan since, like the relationship between Sundheim and *Jul i Vesterheimen*, Christmas was Haugan's pet project. Moreover, the decline of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as Augsburg's showcase Christmas publication is not only due to the arrival of Christmas but also to political shifts in the management of Augsburg. One key change was Sundheim's departure as general manager of Augsburg Publishing House in 1929, a position he had held for more than a decade; Sundheim gave up the reigns after a 24-year career in Augsburg's management and a 38-year history at the publishing house.<sup>31</sup> Sundheim was succeeded by Haugan, and Martha Sawyer Allen describes the transfer of power as less than cordial:

Sundheim was manager of Augsburg from 1917 to December 1928. He retired and was succeeded by Randolph Haugan, who pushed the publishing house into English. Although church records credit Sundheim with "good judgment and progressive conservatism," his retirement was not completely smooth. Haugan was hired as his assistant, but Sundheim said he didn't need an assistant and refused to give Haugan keys to his office.<sup>32</sup>

It is easy to imagine a rivalry developing between the two men since they had some philosophical differences regarding how Augsburg should be run. Although the positions are somewhat simplified, Allen is right to point out Haugan's role as pro-English while Sundheim continued to advocate Norwegian: "[he] believed that most of the publications should be in Norwegian."<sup>33</sup>

Ozolins describes some of the tensions and changes that characterized the switch in leadership. While Sundheim was credited with developing Augsburg into "the largest Scandinavian publishing house in the world,"<sup>34</sup> there was some concern as to the efficacy and propriety of Sundheim's broad publishing aims which "had caused [. . .] doubts on the part of the church—was it proper that a church-sponsored concern promote general

culture instead of Christian religion.”<sup>35</sup> This comment surely refers to the expansion of secular publications and products under Sundheim’s leadership, not to mention his well-known commitment to the preservation of the Norwegian language and culture in America, particularly literary culture. Sundheim’s problems at Augsburg do not, therefore, begin with Haugan’s arrival at the helm, as Sundheim had previously been at odds with the church Board of Publication.

One notable example of such tensions is the publication of O. A. Buslett’s story, “Veien til Golden Gate” (“The Road to the Golden Gate”), an allegory favoring ethnic preservation and cultural pluralism that was originally submitted as a contribution for the 1915 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. In his introduction to a recent English translation of the story, Øverland points out that “Sundheim was a strong supporter of the views of Buslett [. . .], but he clearly felt that he would be going too far in challenging church policy by publishing ‘The Road to the Golden Gate.’”<sup>36</sup> Sundheim explains his position in a letter to Buslett:

According to the publishing board’s resolution, I am required to have an English section [in *Jul i Vesterheimen*], and even though this section was a setback for me that I protested against, I am not big and strong enough to declare a war when I know I will be defeated. I have no doubt that it is Norwegian that carries “Jul i V.” [sic] and has brought it this far, but from the beginning there has been a compromise with English, and to use “Veien til Golden Gate” would therefore be taken as a clear misuse of my position.<sup>37</sup>

Sundheim’s letter reveals not only the difficulty of his overall position at Augsburg but also the particular challenges surrounding his role as editor of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. In addition to the language issue, the topic of Buslett’s story appears to have been another factor in the decision not to publish it in the magazine. In the same letter, Sundheim tells

Buslett that he has published a few other pieces “with a tendency in that direction” (i.e. promoting ethnic preservation) and fears that Buslett’s story, despite its “beautiful and captivating style,” is so “devastatingly powerful” as to bring on a “real storm.” Instead, Sundheim ended up printing a more harmless alternative despite his own literary instincts: “Personally, I liked it [“Veien til Golden Gate”] much better than the other one that I am using, but then I would have incurred more unpleasantness than I care to be bothered with.”<sup>38</sup> These comments show that Sundheim sometimes had to sacrifice literary quality to other considerations, whether linguistic, thematic, social or political. Moreover, this example reveals that ethnic authors and writers did not only encounter resistance from the “mainstream” Anglo-American culture but also within their own ranks.

Sundheim’s solution was to print Buslett’s story independently, as a sort of pamphlet, which was printed (ironically) on the Augsburg presses. To this end, he enclosed—somewhat defiantly—a handwritten estimate of the costs involved in such a venture with his first “rejection” letter to Buslett. The publication of Buslett’s story attests to Sundheim’s considerable determination in the fostering of Norwegian-American literature and authorship. Though *Jul i Vesterheimen* certainly bore his personal stamp, he did not view the magazine merely as a mouthpiece for his own philosophical leanings. Sundheim had a real commitment to the integrity of the literature and the increasing professionalism of Norwegian-American authors. While he appears to have accepted some open submissions for *Jul i Vesterheimen*, Sundheim frequently sent personal letters of invitation to authors, requesting that they submit something (of their own choosing) for the magazine: “As editor of next year’s annual, I am kindly requesting

a contribution from you, and in the case that you consent, the subject [of the piece] will be left up to you.”<sup>39</sup> Sundheim usually sent such inquiries in late winter, requesting that writers submit their selections by June. The editor also made sure that authors received a fee for their submissions, as well as complimentary copies of the magazine: “When autumn comes, a little check will be sent to all who have contributed, and I will see to it that a couple copies of the magazine are sent to you.”<sup>40</sup> In the twenties, the amount of payment appears to have hovered between \$5.00-\$15.00 per submission.<sup>41</sup> For example, in 1921, Rølvaag received a fee of \$15.00 for his sketch, “Klare morgen og vaate kveld” (“Clear Morning and Wet Evening”) while, in the same year, Magdalene Xavier received \$5.00 for a poem, “Stormens Væter,” although it was not used until the following year (and Sundheim seems to have had some reservations about its quality).<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps Sundheim included Xavier’s poem because she was an associate of Rølvaag or because the quantity of submissions was lacking, for Sundheim was sensitive to the overall quality of his Christmas annual. On other occasions, he even turned down submissions by leading writers despite a shortage of material: “Two contributions, which I sorely needed, I must return. One of them, unfortunately, is Waldemar Ager’s. I cannot bring myself to use it.”<sup>43</sup> In developing *Jul i Vesterheimen* and Augsburg Publishing House as resources for Norwegian-American literature, Sundheim clearly took both his position and his commitment to author and literature very seriously.

Ironically, the very publishing priorities that were so key to the inception and evolution of *Jul i Vesterheimen* would also prove to be the cause of Sundheim’s (and the magazine’s) eventual demise. Ozolins confirms this observation in his discussion of the change in management: “If Sundheim’s management could be termed emphasizing

general and Norse culture, the new management emphasized Christian literature in several aspects.”<sup>44</sup> Not only was Haugan instrumental in “redirecting [Augsburg’s] attention to the religious aims of the church and considering itself as a service institution of the church,” but the new manager was also concerned about “the increasing use of the English language and along with it certain thought currents flooding upon the Norse Lutherans [. . .]” (these troubling “currents” are labeled “Modernism, Agnosticism, Atheism, and various other destructive tendencies”).<sup>45</sup> In a nutshell, Haugan’s plan for Augsburg appears to be somewhat conservative in its hard-line focus on predominantly religious publications and its increased utilization of English “for fostering and nurturing the spiritual life of the church constituents” in order to defend against “destructive tendencies.”<sup>46</sup> However, Haugan’s use of English may also be seen as a realistic and even progressive move in that Norwegian was no longer the primary language of the church and the time for English had come: “the faith handed down by the fathers had to be reaffirmed and redefined in terms of the present.”<sup>47</sup>

For the scholar interested in a Norwegian-American culture of letters and the role of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a vital player in the creation of Norwegian-American art and literature, the arrival of Haugan at the helm and the subsequent “reorientation” (to borrow Ozolins’ term) of Augsburg marks the end of an era. With the ascent of Haugan and his new Christmas annual, the prestigious placement of *Jul i Vesterheimen* in the Augsburg catalogues begins to decline.<sup>48</sup> In the 1932-1933 Catalog of Books, for example, advertisements for Christmas and *Jul i Vesterheimen* appear side-by-side, in English, under the heading “Christmas Annuals and Year Books,” and both magazines retail for



one dollar. However, Christmas is now the headliner and merits a lengthier and more detailed description than *Jul i Vesterheimen*:

Reproductions in colors of world-famous paintings and original paintings, and literary contributions by outstanding Lutheran writers. The first volume of “Christmas” published in 1931 compares favorably with the great Christmas annuals published by leading publishing houses in Europe. It is unique in this country. The 1932 annual has five paintings suitable for framing, three paintings by Dean Cornwell, one of America’s great artists. Its twelve contributions carry with them the Christmas message and the Christmas spirit in a way that will delight people with literary taste and spiritual discernment.<sup>49</sup>

This description sounds very similar to previous write-ups of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. Much like its Norwegian-American counterpart, Christmas is advertised as a high-quality production with a literary bent, and the opulent quality of the magazine and its decorative function as a gift item remain important. Christmas is also proclaimed to be a novelty in America and linked to the Christmas gift book tradition of Europe, an idea echoed in later discussions of Haugan and his annual: “Haugan perfected the Norwegian tradition of an annual Christmas book.”<sup>50</sup> The only marked differences in the marketing of Christmas are its mainstream “American” appeal, English language bent, and emphasis on “Lutheran writers,” (reflecting Haugan’s mandate for religious texts). However, several of these ingredients also figured in the mission of *Jul i Vesterheimen* and Augsburg under Sundheim; Christmas therefore reveals the extent to which Haugan is indebted to Sundheim’s model for the form and content of his “new” Christmas annual as well as Augsburg’s strong tradition and reputation in the production of first-rate annuals and gift books.<sup>51</sup>

The accompanying description of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, shorter and less exuberant than that of Christmas, actually points to the main difference between the two

publications. As the ad copy points out, “This Christmas annual [*Jul i Vesterheimen*], now entirely in the Norwegian language, has been published annually every year since 1912. The stories, sketches, and poems reach the highwater mark in Norwegian-American literature.”<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, this is the first time that *Jul i Vesterheimen* is advertised as being completely written in Norwegian and that the text’s “Norwegianness” becomes the main selling point. Even previous examples that stressed *Jul i Vesterheimen*’s commitment to “our writers” and Norwegian-American literature incorporated the magazine’s other qualities, many of which now appear to be solely attributed to its English-language cousin, Christmas. By the following year, Christmas supplants *Jul i Vesterheimen* as the featured gift publication while *Jul i Vesterheimen* appears in the Norwegian section at the back of the catalogue. Clearly, the lines have been drawn, with Christmas as the “American” annual and *Jul i Vesterheimen* as the “Norwegian” one.<sup>53</sup>

This trend continues in advertisements throughout the thirties. Meanwhile, ads for Christmas grow increasingly detailed and effusive as that publication takes off. For example, by the seventh volume in 1937, Christmas has increased to 72 pages in length (as compared to 48 pages in the early volumes) and comes in two styles of binding: one with paper cover (\$1.00) and one with cloth cover (\$2.00), “[e]ach copy suitably enclosed in an attractive gift box.” Moreover, Augsburg may boast that “30,000 copies were distributed last year” and that “‘Christmas’ is on sale at leading book stores throughout America.”<sup>54</sup> By 1939, after a nine-year run, Augsburg may speak confidently of Christmas as a mature volume of high repute:

In its infancy inspired by the colorful Yuletide Annuals of European development, “Christmas” has become a distinctively American tradition. It combines well-written Christmas stories and literature, poetry, richly-colored art reproductions, and exquisite photographic portrayals, reflecting the joyousness and vitality of the Christmas season.<sup>55</sup>

Ironically, this same description could apply to *Jul i Vesterheimen* (minus the American emphasis). Instead, the focus on Christmas reflects another historical marker in the story of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as Sundheim steps down, retiring fully from Augsburg, and the editorship of the Norwegian-American annual falls to Herman E. Jørgensen.

Though *Jul i Vesterheimen* continues—in much the same vein as during Sundheim’s oversight—into the forties and fifties, the late catalogues reveal the magazine’s growing irrelevance within the larger ethnic, linguistic, and cultural scene at Augsburg. For example, by 1945, *Jul i Vesterheimen* is not merely relegated to the lesser section of the catalogue that lists Norwegian-language texts, but the actual catalog copy for such texts is written in English. Moreover, the opening sentence of the description reads “A Norwegian Christmas annual that is a splendid gift for all who know Norwegian.” Similar caveats are included in the descriptions for the *Folkekalender* (“[s]imilar to Lutheran Almanac but published in the Norwegian language”) and *Alt for Norge* (“All for Norway”), “[a] gift book for those who love Norway and understand Norwegian.”<sup>56</sup> Such caveats speak volumes about the changes in Augsburg’s perceived audience during this period. Formerly, those sections of the catalog dealing with Norwegian-language offerings were written in Norwegian. The change over to English suggests that Augsburg envisions a core audience of English speakers. In addition, the nativist sentiment and anti-foreigner campaigns that occurred in the United States during this period may also have played a part in the switch to an all-English catalogue.

The last editions of *Jul i Vesterheimen* seem to be riding primarily on nostalgia—for the “good old days” of the pioneer settlers and the earlier years when *Jul i Vesterheimen* and Norwegian-American literature possessed vitality, originality, and relevance—as the magazine passes into a sort of cultural and linguistic no-man’s land. Among the features advertised for the 1946 edition are “articles on pioneer days in South Dakota” and “parsonage life in rural Wisconsin half a century ago.”<sup>57</sup> The catalogues of the late forties and early fifties continue to market *Jul i Vesterheimen* as a fitting “gift for those who know and enjoy reading the Norwegian” as well as friends and relatives in the old country: “It is a splendid way to send greetings to friends in Norway who through the pages of *Jul i Vesterheimen* [sic] can share your Christmas season with you.”<sup>58</sup> The 1954 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen* merits but a few lines in the catalog and is described as being “always popular at Christmas among the Norwegian-reading groups.”<sup>59</sup> The mention of reading groups also calls to mind, somewhat ironically, the early expansions and changes at Augsburg at the turn of the century—the growing interest in secular texts and products, the firm’s role as reading advisor and cultural clearinghouse for Norwegian America, and the growing interest in and cultivation of a Norwegian culture of letters—that led to the creation of *Jul i Vesterheimen* and its development into a prominent Augsburg publication. In contrast to the optimism that characterized the magazine’s beginnings, the last portion of the annual’s tenure denotes increasing marginalization. With the retirement of Jørgensen as editor, the final edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen* appears in 1957. The last copy of the magazine includes, quite fittingly, a tribute to long-time steward of both *Jul i Vesterheimen* and Norwegian-American letters, Anders Sundheim.

## **The Cultural Work of a Norwegian-American Christmas Annual Mother Norway and Viking Fathers**

The cultivation of ethnic pride was an important aspect of Augsburg's publishing agenda in the early decades of the twentieth-century. The marketing of Norwegian books, materials, and home furnishings encouraged Augsburg's patrons to maintain ties with Norway and preserve aspects of their ethnic heritage. *Jul i Vesterheimen* exhibits a similar commitment to Norwegian culture, and Norway plays an important and relatively consistent role in the magazine for over forty years, appearing in picture, poem, song, and story. One of the most prevalent manifestations of Norway in *Jul i Vesterheimen* is in pictures of the sublime Norwegian landscape, whether as feature illustrations or in photos and paintings that accompany texts. Such pictures celebrate the epic Norwegian landscape of fjords, mountains, green valleys, and the sea. Norway is also made visible through landscape paintings by major Norwegian artists, many of the National Romantic tradition, that are featured in illustrations or the "Bilag" ("Art Supplements") section of *Jul i Vesterheimen*.

The Norwegian landscape figures prominently in several popular writing genres in the magazine as well. One such genre is travel writing, especially essays that highlight distinctive areas of Norway and provide a tourist's vision of the country for readers. These places are invested with cultural significance as the articles establish strong identities for the various regions of Norway and their inhabitants. For example, essays on the Northern regions of Lofoten and Tromsø discuss the adventures and customs of local fishermen, celebrating the nation's great sea-faring tradition. Also up north, Finnmark and "Lapland" (a traditional home of Norway's indigenous people, the Sami) are

featured in articles about the ancient practices of reindeer herders and the mystique of the land of the midnight sun. Meanwhile, many stories discuss the famous mountains of Norway and their mythical stature. Texts commonly refer to nature and outdoor life, sacred aspects of Norwegian culture, including articles and illustrations that portray Norway as a winter wonderland with skiing in the mountains, winter reveries in the great forests, and cozy Christmas scenes in idyllic snow-covered villages. The winter landscapes of Norway also lend themselves to the holiday theme of the magazine and its attendant nostalgia as writers look back on Christmases past in the old country, describing ceremonial food and drink, Christmas customs, and gatherings of family and community.

Regions and particular places in Norway are frequently associated with folklore and myth. Folktales and legends are staples of the magazine as both Norwegian and Norwegian-American authors retell old tales or use them as inspiration for new tales modeled on the folktales. Similar to their nineteenth-century American predecessors who wrote regional literature and local color stories, Norwegian-American authors often employ distinct Norwegian dialects in their tales, sketches, and poems. Oral tradition also figures in the 1917 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, which features the folk song “Valdrisvisa” (a traditional tune from the region of Valdres); the sheet music is accompanied by charming illustrations, surrounded by intricate floral-patterned borders, of pastoral scenes in which farm girls in traditional costumes tend to the mountain herds. Similarly, the 1936 edition features a full-page illustration of a young woman on a mountain farm in Telemark, singing a “gamalt stev fra Telemarken” (“an old verse from Telemark”).<sup>60</sup> Folk culture is often included in selections that feature the geography,

landscape, and/or history of Norway, providing readers with a working knowledge of key customs and symbols. Like the “Valdrisvisa” example, a number of texts are accompanied by illustrations of individuals in *bunader* (traditional folk costumes particular to the various regions of Norway), including idealized portrayals of a *Hardanger brud* (Hardanger Bride) like the one made famous in Tidemand’s and Gude’s idealized National Romantic painting “Brudfærden i Hardanger” (“The Bridal Procession in Hardanger”), a reproduction of which is conveniently sold in the Augsburg catalog. Other popular symbols include ancient stave churches, traditional wooden farm buildings, and scenes from rural life.

Indeed, pictures of traditional Norwegian farms—the likes of which many first-generation immigrant readers of *Jul i Vesterheimen* would have left behind—are one of the most common illustrations. To go along with these pictures, texts utilizing memoir, personal essay, and autobiography take readers down memory lane, as authors return to the places of their birth and memories of the old country. Many of these texts may be grouped thematically under the heading “the old homestead.” In these pieces, authors return to the localities—usually villages or individual farms—from which their forefathers came or from which they themselves emigrated. While some of the non-fiction accounts do provide realistic and detailed information about Norway and its people—geographic descriptions, social customs, linguistic variations, biographical or historical detail regarding emigration—the majority of the selections are more inclined toward idealism, nostalgia, and the picturesque.

As one might expect, a number of the fictional accounts taking place in Norway deal with emigration. The stories tend to be highly formulaic, borrowing from the

folktales and National Romantic tales of Bjørnson, Ibsen, and others. N. N. Rønning's 1918 story "Naar døren aapnes" ("When the Door Opens") includes many of the stock characters and themes and is therefore a good example of the emigration tales in *Jul i Vesterheimen*. The story opens with an introduction to the protagonist, Lars, which links him intimately with the Norwegian landscape: "Lars was raised in the mountain's broad bosom, and he loved the mountain as a child loves its mother."<sup>61</sup> Lars' tie to "Mother Norway" is echoed in his close relationship with his human mother; she is a widow and he her only child, and the two live and work together as poor cotters on the mountain farm. Though the work is hard and the tiny family is poor, Lars' early life is a happy one as he and his mother live the pastoral ideal: "The mountain was his best friend. It gave him a place to play, and toys, and offered wonderful adventures from morning to night." The mountain is not only the geographic and economic "home" for Lars and his mother; it also serves as an early spiritual and intellectual inspiration and teacher for Lars as he comes to know both the light and dark sides of the mountain, its joys and its evils (the latter represented by threatening stories of trolls, *nisser*, and *huldrer*).<sup>62</sup> For the most part, however, the Norwegian landscape is a benevolent force in Lars' early life and is characterized by lyrical descriptions:

So one summer followed another, and the waterfall's roar, the wind's whisper among the tops of the spruces, the birds' warbling and all the many marvelous sounds off in the woods, and not least the wistful melodies that mother hummed, sharpened the ear and attuned the soul to a quiet, melancholy longing.

Lars' own longing begins to develop as he grows older and starts to realize the differences between himself and other members of the community, particularly the rich folk: "As he grew older, it began to dawn on him that there were differences between



cotters' children and rich men's children." This realization intensifies during his interactions with two other characters in the story: the pastor's son, Adolf, an educated city boy who befriends him, and Gutorm, the son of the richest man in the village who insults Lars' humble background during a ballgame, resulting in a physical skirmish between the rich boy and the poor boy (Lars wins the physical battle but leaves the encounter morally devastated).

As Lars encounters Gutorm's insults and Adolf's stories of the city's grandeur and sophistication, his attitude toward the mountain begins to change; what had formerly been like a "fairytale land" now appears to him for the first time as an isolated, provincial, and impoverished corner of the universe. Moreover, as the injustice of his situation becomes increasingly clear and painful to him—even though he is smarter, stronger, and spryer than any rich man's son, he is still of a lower class—he starts to understand Ole the woodcutter's view of the mountain as mere gray stone ("graastein"). Lars now sees the mountain as a "high wall" encircling the little village.

Yet even in the dark shadow of a great mountain there is hope and inspiration, as Lars discovers when he goes to visit Adolf at the parsonage. Lars ends up speaking with Adolf's father instead, and the pastor questions the boy about his future plans, eventually leading him over to the bookcase:

Here is a book on Peter Fjellstedt, the shepherd boy who became one of Scandinavia's greatest missionaries. This book tells about Thorvaldsen. Born of poor parents, he still became one of the world's greatest sculptors. [. . .] And here is a book that you must absolutely read. It is a biography of Abraham Lincoln. He was born in a cabin more wretched than any of the cottages here in the village. He became his country's president and freed millions of slaves. No name has a lovelier ring than his where people yearn for freedom and equality.

The pastor's overall lesson is that many a poor boy has moved ahead and improved his lot out in the world; as Lars leaves the parsonage, "a door began to open" for him.

The scene with the pastor and his bookshelf is an important one that helps to explain other aspects of the narrative. For example, the purity and nobility of spirit that Lars and his mother personify as happy peasants in the early part of the story, as well as Lars' keen sense of justice and fair-play exhibited in the fight scene with Gutorm—now take on added significance as Lars' revelation about the outside world, particularly America, begins to develop. Although the raw talents and values are given and nurtured by "Mother Norway" early on, he needs America for the final inspiration and realization of his potential. Yet the friendship and mentoring of Adolph and his father are also a credit to Norway, showing that even the smallest, most isolated village has culture and dignity. Indeed, it takes the quiet wisdom of a Norwegian country preacher to appreciate and cultivate the values of Abraham Lincoln. The fact that this important scene centers on a bookcase and that Lars' revelation is finally realized through books is also an important aspect of the story, echoing Augsburg's reading incentives and its promotion of the home library (including direct references to Lincoln) as a means of self-improvement and economic success. While books and education form a metaphorical passport to the outside world in this scene, by the end of the story, they lead to real opportunity and a ticket to America.

The turning point comes when Lars spends his first night alone on the mountain, his mother being compelled to spend a long day in the village in order to run errands and meet with the minister. Lars spends a harrowing night on the mountain, confronting real and imagined fears. When he wakes in the morning, he knows two things: he never

wants to be alone on the mountain again, and it is his last summer on the farm. Lars resigns himself to his class like his father and grandfather before him, planning to look for work in the village, but thinks bitterly of the sons of rich men and ministers who go on to school and further education as they please. Just when all hope seems lost, his mother returns and announces that the minister has arranged for him to continue his education (at the same school as the sons of rich men and ministers no less); moreover, should he and his mother wish it, upon completion of Lars' education, they may travel to America on a ticket promised by an American friend of the minister. The nightmares of the past year—in which Lars saw his own bloody hands pounding against a high, thick wall raised against him—are now replaced by a dream vision: "Suddenly a door was wide open, a door that opened to the opportunity of education and of travel to Lincoln's land, to the land of equality." The story ends with a return to the lyrical and melancholy mountain landscape that again speaks to Lars, this time with a new tone that almost sounds as if it would call him back, signaling his imminent departure. His final dream is a return to the comfort of childhood:

And he dreamed that he was again little and lay in his mother's lap, and she sang for him, so amazingly gently and beautifully, one of those lullabies that have rendered the melancholy and longing of farm folk down through the ages.

While the ending of the story may be conventional, it (like the rest of the narrative) performs important work. By ending with maternal images and the folk songs that have been passed down through the generations, the story affirms Lars' ties to his homeland and ancestral traditions, just as it opens the door for his departure to America. The final message is one of continuance: Lars' mother may accompany him to the new

world, and the voice of “Mother Norway” still speaks to him at story’s end. These messages of comfort and wholeness would have meant a great deal to first-generation immigrant readers of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. Moreover, Lars’ reckoning with injustice, disappointment, and doubt provides moral encouragement to immigrant readers and justifies their decision to leave Norway since it is clear that he cannot achieve the life he desires (and apparently deserves) if he stays in the old world. The story even improves upon the standard emigrant narrative in some ways. For example, Lars is able to finish his education (and therefore attain at least some form of equality with his social superiors) in Norway before he begins his American adventure. This is certainly an idealistic twist since few emigrants had such an opportunity. Additionally, Lars’ education provides a kind of correction for Norway’s one main flaw in the story—her class limitations—while it connects him to Lincoln and the virtues of America. In these and other ways, the story functions as a kind of catharsis for immigrant readers: allowing them the proper leave-taking they were never granted, the chance to “get even” with their old world superiors, a way to ease the guilt or longing for loved ones left behind, or a chance to return for a moment to the old mountain farm in Norway and listen to the magical sounds of a midsummer night.

The tendency to portray an idealized Norway—one that possesses and even predicts important “American” traits like bravery and equality—is amplified in the fiction and poetry of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. One favorite mode of expression is the poem of tribute to the old homeland that, although not the best example of the literary caliber of the magazine, plays an important role in the ethnic project of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. While these poems are written more frequently in Norwegian, there is an English example

entitled “To Norway”: “By the sheen of the fjord thou has mothered us well, / Where the croon of the pine on our infancy fell / By the glint of the sun on the tall mountain crag / Thou has lighted our youth to the high deeds of eld” (5-8). Like “Mor Norge” (“Mother Norway”) who delivers her best children to Uncle Sam in the pages of the Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin, Norway is portrayed with maternal benevolence, her sublime natural beauty inspiring noble qualities in her human offspring. The “high deeds of eld” refers to a heroic past that is amplified in the paternal imagery of the next stanza: “Round the graves of our fathers the gray cliffs arise, / And they shelter the tomb where the warrior lies, / While the requiem sung by the storms on the sea / In our souls unforgotten, eternal, shall be” (9-12). Again, the landscape is conflated with human values—filial honor and loyalty, sacrifice, remembrance. The warrior imagery continues in the next stanza, this time with contemporary relevance: “All we ask in the stress of the battles that are, / When a beckoning fate leads to regions afar, / Is the dent on the shield, is the sward flame that won, / Ere the mold over us as on them shall be dun” (13-16).<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, the sublime natural wonder of “Mother Norway,” combined with the fierce warrior’s courage of “Father Norway,” will preserve those descendants whose “fate leads to regions afar” (i.e. emigrants traveling to America). Thus, the poem celebrates a glorious ethnic past and casts emigration in a heroic light. The text is accompanied by a dramatic and rather stark photo of bold cliff faces plunging into the sea. Text and illustration present archetypal Norway and reinforce the image of an ancient and noble culture; this is clearly Norway of the past, and the images appear static and rock solid, like the mountains of the Norwegian landscape.

The cultural work of the poem may be understood within the context of homemaking myths of American immigrant groups:

Ethnic leaders, intellectuals, and writers were dedicated to the creation of a similar kind of collective pride in the former homelands of their respective groups. To them it was evident that such pride was necessary both for the development of an ethnic group identity and for the collective entry of their ethnic group into the new homeland.<sup>64</sup>

The double function of this collective pride—to pay tribute to the old world homeland and to justify the quest for the new world home—is clearly expressed in the poem’s parallel between the heroic traditions of Norway and the heroic acts of her emigrant descendants. Moreover, such ethnic pride is crucial to the promotion of immigrant literary culture, one of Sundheim’s goals for the magazine, in telling ethnic Americans that they descend from old and great civilizations. This is certainly the case in the poem “To Norway” and helps to explain the overly-romantic and superlative style of the poem which echoes the sagas and epic poems of Old Norse literature in language and motif.

The Christmas theme of the magazine also lends itself to nostalgic contemplations of the homeland as revealed in the titles of poems like “Heimlengt” (“Homesickness”), “Mindernes skute” (“Memory’s Ship”), and “Hilsen til Norge” (“Greetings to Norway”). Some of the poems of tribute—particularly those written in Norwegian by the likes of Julius Baumann and Simon Johnson—possess a bit more lyricism and subtlety. However, the primary signifiers remain the same. In Simon Johnson’s “Mor Norge” (“Mother Norway”), for example, the context may change from voyages of Norwegian exploration to the quest of building American civilization, but the buzzwords are familiar: strength, honor, wisdom, remembrance, inheritance, home, church, family. More often than not, poems of tribute resemble “To Norway” in that they employ a heavy

hand, favoring ethnic propaganda over poetic technique. What is more, the poem's celebration of brave warriors and sea-faring explorers suggests a favorite Scandinavian symbol of ethnic (racial) pride and myths of origin: the Vikings. Like the term *Vesterheimen*, with its Old Norse linguistic origin, Vikings connect Norwegian-Americans to an ancient culture. They also provide a link to Norwegian history and mythology through sagas, folktales, and legends, as well as modern art and literature.

### **“American” Antecedents**

Vikings crop up in various guises throughout the pages of *Jul i Vesterheimen* and even make a stunning appearance on the cover of the 1916 edition, which pictures armed Vikings in their longship plowing through the sea (presumably landing on some North American shore). In addition to ethnic pride and connections to ancient Norwegian roots, Vikings connect Norwegian-Americans to American history and identity. In this respect, Norwegian-Americans are neither unique nor original in their choice of Vikings; nineteenth-century American writers like Longfellow and Lowell had already helped to popularize the Norsemen as sources of an original American character, embodying vigor, heroism, racial teutonism and “ancient traditions of liberty.”<sup>65</sup> Norwegian-Americans benefit from such claims and give them new life in the early twentieth century.

Norwegian-Americans celebrate their ethnic and racial identity as Americans of “authentic” Viking descent and claim a special right to American citizenship through Leif Eriksson's discovery of America (several hundred years before Columbus), which makes them the first European group to arrive in the New World.<sup>66</sup> Sure enough, the 1935 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen* includes a poem of tribute entitled “Leif Erikson,”

accompanied by a reproduction of the famous 1893 painting “Leif Eiriksson oppdager Amerika” (“Leif Eiriksson discovers America”) by Norwegian artist Christian Krohg (1852-1925). The poem ties nineteenth-century Norwegian immigrants and their descendants to Eriksson’s quest for a “new world,” tracing the emigrants’ voyage to America to the same vision and courage that inspired Eriksson’s earlier exploration of *Vinland*. Ultimately, the poem portrays the building of American civilization—including the cultivation of American soil (“Vinland’s jord”) and American genius (“Vinland’s ånd”)—by Norwegian-Americans as a realization of the original dreams and plans of Eriksson. Eriksson, who is referred to as the “chieftan” (“høvdingen”) and “our Vinland’s father” (“vår Vinlands far”), provides both a patrilineal inheritance from Norway and an amplified loyalty to “our new fatherland” (“vårt nye fedreland”).<sup>67</sup> Like Columbus, who “embodied the primordial link between Italy and America”<sup>68</sup> for Italian-Americans, Eriksson provides Norwegian-Americans with an important legacy: an ancient tribal identity, a heroic tradition, and an “original” or preemptive claim to the territory and spirit of America. Thus, *Jul i Vesterheimen* uses Vikings to express what Rudolph J. Vecoli refers to as an “ideology of accommodation that would bridge the duality of being both immigrants and Americans.”<sup>69</sup>

This celebration of the “American” spirit of the Vikings is evident in Augsburg’s own publications, such as the following passage that appears in the Augsburg Bulletin, alongside a picture of an American pioneer, driving his team of oxen west:

Here is the famous ox-team of pioneer times, the early forerunner of that empire of the Northwest, in the upbuilding of which our ancestors have had no small share. The hardy people who traveled towards the sunset in this primitive way to find the promised land of the West had the same fearless heart as the Vikings of old who set out to find the shores of



Vinland. The brave men and women, who laughed at the hardships of pioneer life, deserve as rightly as the first white men who set foot on American soil the name of discoverers of America.<sup>70</sup>

The cover of the 1913 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen* fits this description perfectly, displaying a settler driving his mighty team of oxen, their forms silhouetted against a brilliant sunset sky. This quotation makes a direct link between the Viking discovery and (temporary) settlement of Vinland and the nineteenth century Norwegian immigration to and settlement of America, specifically the Midwest. The Viking comparison, once again, invests Norwegian-Americans with pure racial origins, a heroic past, and a special claim to America as their homeland, even giving them precedence over Anglo-Americans since Norwegians are the original “white men” of America. This passage celebrates the glory of ancestors and the legacy of Viking conquest and settlement yet also introduces the primary symbol of Norwegian-American history in the United States: the Midwestern pioneer. Thus, ethnic pride is not only derived from old world heritage but also from the culture of *Vesterheim* celebrated in the magazine’s title.

Like their late nineteenth and early twentieth century cousins in Norway—who associated Vikings with political independence and strongly identified with the “tough and understated heroism” of Viking farmers<sup>71</sup>—Norwegian-American writers frequently connect the Vikings to their modern Midwestern descendants. Referring to a South Dakota farmer, for example, one writer observes that “the farmer feels ready for a storm siege, and as a descendant of the Vikings, he bids the elements defiance.”<sup>72</sup> A similar parallel is used by J. A. Holvik, who compares the Norwegian-American migration to and settlement of “the new *Vesterheim*” in the American Midwest) with the earlier exploration and settlement of Iceland. (“the Icelandic *Vesterheim*”), by Norwegians close

to a thousand years earlier.<sup>73</sup> In “Christmas on the Prairies,” G. M. Bruce celebrates the contributions of Norwegian-Americans who helped to make a “Great American Desert of a few decades ago” into “the splendid garden spot of today.” He traces the success of these “sturdy and hardy Norsemen and their families” to “the many traits inherited from [their] ancestry” and to “the rich heritage which they or their fathers and mothers brought with them across the waters.”<sup>74</sup> In a personal memoir entitled “A Pioneer Boy’s Experiences in a Corner of Goodhue County,” I. F. Grose makes a similar point:

Americans of Norse stock do well to keep in mind both the rock from which they have been hewn and the land by which they have been adopted. They owe much comfort, competence, position, prestige, and education to enterprising ancestors who by intuitive foresight, patient sacrifice, and unremitting toil acquired lasting benefits both for themselves and for posterity. The pioneers possessed qualities enabling them to put to good use the advantages and privileges tendered them by this wonderful land of opportunity and freedom. It behooves members of this generation, therefore, to cast a backward glance and look at the prevailing conditions of early days in order that they may sense a thrill of appreciation for the work which the pioneers did for their benefit.<sup>75</sup>

Grose suggests a reason for reading *Jul i Vesterheimen* (for members of the younger generation to look back and remember the history of their people) as well as the proper response to such reading (“a thrill of appreciation”), both of which echo comments made by Rønning in his manifesto, “A Literature of our Own.” While Grose acknowledges the opportunities of America, he stresses the Norwegian immigrants’ abilities to make the most of them.

N. N. Rønning makes a similar point in his own memoir, “Some Experiences of a Newcomer,” albeit in a more sarcastic manner. Rønning begins with the cliché of the

newcomer whose “heart leaps with joy” upon arriving in New York harbor and seeing “the uplifted hand of the statue of liberty.” However, the happiness is short-lived when the new arrival enters the immigration line:

No sooner has he entered Castle Garden (was ever a name more of a misnomer?) before enough indignities are heaped on him to make his blood boil. The cattle in his native land were never subjected to worse treatment. Yes, this is indeed the land of liberty. The Declaration of Independence mentions as chief among inalienable rights life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. The natives seem to interpret that to mean that they were given life to make his life miserable, they were given liberty to take away his liberty, and they were to find their greatest happiness in depriving him of his.<sup>76</sup>

Rønning’s wry inversion of America’s “inalienable” rights and his comic recreation of the frustrations of the newcomer reveal the extent to which the immigrant’s success in America is still greatly dependent upon his/her own initiative, fortitude, talent, and background.

Both Bruce and Grose suggest that Norwegians were already eminently suited for American life through their own traditions and values, an idea that is also expressed in the following comment by C. A. Melby:

There is [ . . . ] a constant and powerful undercurrent of democratic idealism, which finds its promise in the United States. The prospects of political equality, the absence of class distinctions and barriers, the liberty of opinion and conscience are everywhere emphasized in the writings of the emigrants. The Norwegians, like their Puritan predecessors in New England, were seekers after and protagonists of liberty and equality in every field. Such a spirit accounts for the rapid assimilation and the admirable public spirit of these new frontiersmen.<sup>77</sup>

Like Rønning’s fictional account of Lars’ quest for liberty and equality in “When the Door Opens,” Melby’s comment locates a tendency toward democracy and egalitarianism within Norse culture. Additionally, the favorable comparison between the Midwestern

pioneers and their colonial predecessors, the Puritans, links Norwegian-Americans to American traditions and values. This coupling of Norwegian-Americans' predilection for American ideals with their potential for assimilation thus produces model citizens. In his analysis of a German-American magazine, *Die Abendschule* (1854-1907), Brent O. Peterson notes a similar move among German-Americans at the turn of the century. He notes that "[. . .] *Die Abendschule*'s narratives attempted to appropriate the norms and values of the 'Anglo-Saxon' establishment, people whose history was nothing if not 'German.'" Peterson identifies this strategy as "triumphant appropriation" in that the magazine's texts were "concerned with proving that Germans were the real source of Anglo-Saxon—that is, 'American'—virtues and institutions."<sup>78</sup>

The link between Old Norse/Viking culture and contemporary Norwegian-American culture is also expressed in the iconography of the magazine. For example, one rather exuberant poem entitled "The Cross at the Prow" replaces the image of the dragon's head on the prow of a Viking ship with a cross. The text is accompanied by an illustration based on the "Viking Window" in the chapel at St. Olaf College.<sup>79</sup> The window depicts a Viking ship sailing on the sea, with the ship located in the middle of the window, between two shores; the land on the right represents Norway (which the ship has left behind), signified by a stave church, and the one on the left represents America (toward which the ship is sailing), signified by an American church. While the transformation from pagan Viking into Lutheran Norwegian-American is quite a leap, the images affirm the cultural, ethnic, and institutional connections between *Vesterheim* and Norway.

In another example, the Viking metamorphoses into a modern American worker in the illustration that accompanies an article entitled “Scandinavian Qualities and American Ideals.” The left side of this picture shows a Viking chieftan, hand on his sword, in the foreground with a fleet of Viking long ships (full of armed warriors) in the background. On the right side is an American pioneer who stands in the foreground next to bales of hay and, with a scythe in one hand, turns to contemplate a background that includes a steaming locomotive speeding past an impressive cityscape.<sup>80</sup> The only thing that separates the two panels of the picture is a thin column, upholding an hourglass; apparently, time, opportunity, and progress are the only ingredients necessary to turn the sword into a scythe, the Viking into the modern American worker/citizen. The article goes on “to appraise these children of the Northland and thus secure a clearer conception of their actual as well as their potential value in the building of the greater and better Nation of which many dream and for which all should pray.”<sup>81</sup> This example, like the earlier comparisons between Vikings and pioneers, is significant in that Vikings connect Norwegian-Americans to the American work ethic, “one of the cornerstones of assimilation.”<sup>82</sup> Peter D. Salins argues that the American (Protestant) work ethic was beneficial to immigrants in that it provided an “economic rationale” for admitting immigrants to the United States; additionally, it was one criterion for citizenship over which immigrants had some control.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the Viking and the pioneer also link Norwegian-Americans to American labor and capitalism.

## **The Pioneer Legacy and the Midwestern Home**

Not surprisingly, stories of immigration and nation-building are prevalent in *Jul i Vesterheimen*, and the pioneer is a popular symbol that is frequently pictured on its pages and discussed in its texts, albeit with varying treatments. Non-fiction selections, like D. G. Ristad's "Norske bygder i Manitowoc county og deromkring" ("Norwegian Settlements in and around Manitowoc County"), tend to focus on local and regional history (in this case, areas in east central Wisconsin bordering Lake Michigan) and the real-life experiences of settlers. While the accounts may emphasize the adventures or hardships involved, these pieces focus primarily on recording individual and communal histories and celebrating Norwegian-American accomplishments and contributions to the civilization of the west. For example, Ristad's article begins with general historical and geographical background on the area and its peoples—such as Native Americans, Jean Nicollet and early French traders, and subsequent groups of immigrants, including British, German, Irish, and "Yankee" settlers. The article then focuses on the first Norwegian residents and the gradual building of Norwegian-American communities and institutions in the region. While historical documentation is an important part of Ristad's project, he is equally interested in recording the stories of everyday people. This becomes clear in the last paragraph of the article; while Ristad mentions prominent Norwegian-American families and individuals, he dedicates the bulk of the conclusion to the many nameless but excellent people who, he asserts, deserve recognition for their "dependable, modest, patient, loyal service in the home community's daily realities of school, church, and citizenship [. . .]."<sup>84</sup> Indeed, it is the "so-called 'average man and woman'" whom Ristad most wants to "have a word" in the history of their people and the

glossy pages of Augsburg's Christmas annual. Thus, Ristad's text reveals the important function of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as historical witness and archive for collective memory. Though the article occasionally incorporates the celebratory and self-congratulatory spirit common to discussions of pioneer life in *Jul i Vesterheimen*—upholding the supposed virtues of manifest destiny and detailing the epic struggle to tame the prairie wilderness—Ristad is ultimately more interested in realism and the details of everyday life. Stories of pioneering and frontier life—whether they be presented in the form of local color fiction, history, or memoir—are important in that they allow Norwegian-Americans to participate in both the common American story of westward migration and settlement and the more particular regional and ethnic narratives of their agrarian heritage in the Midwest. Such stories attest to a strong work ethic and material prosperity among Norwegian-Americans, as well as a love of the land and a kinship with their western home.

In addition to homesteading stories, nature writing is an important genre in *Jul i Vesterheimen*, one that enables Norwegian-American writers to express their ties to the landscapes of America, particularly the Midwest. In contrast to pioneer narratives that recall the clearing of great forests in Wisconsin and Minnesota or the cultivation of the prairies in the Dakotas, these texts focus on the natural beauty and wilderness of such regions. For example, Rølvaag's "Stemninger fra Prærien" ("Prairie Moods"), an early literary effort published in *Jul i Vesterheimen* under the pseudonym Paal Mørck, is primarily interested in conveying the spirit of place. The text is basically a contemplation of the landscape, structured in four parts, describing the prairie in each of the four seasons. The prairie is rendered through two primary aspects of the narrative: a third-

person omniscient observer who relays feelings and impressions with clarity and immediacy, and the first-person voice(s) of the prairie itself, expressed through natural elements. In either case, personification is the main literary technique utilized by Rølvaag in order to bring the landscape to life. For example, “spring is a fickle fellow” while winter is a fair maiden:

One morning, near Christmas time, the prairie has put on her winter attire. She wears a dress that is whiter, more pure and more dazzling than even the loveliest fairytale bride has ever dreamed [. . .].<sup>85</sup>

In another instance, the prairie speaks through a dandelion, characterized as a wise and white-haired oldtimer (“den gamle”), who reassures the other flowers of the inevitable arrival of summer just as he warns of the impending doom of autumn and winter. While such images have their charm, they are balanced by pictures of a cold and indifferent landscape: “There was stillness in this endless darkness. Not a sound. Not a breath of wind. Nothing. The stillness was endless as the darkness.” Thus, the personification does not overly-romanticize the prairie since the reader is frequently reminded of the life and death cycles that govern the landscape and its creatures.

Included in this vision are humans who, despite their farms and fields, are also subject to the immutable cycles of nature and the changing moods of the prairie. Rølvaag emphasizes the interdependence between land and people in the structure of his text, following up particular descriptions of natural, terrestrial, or atmospheric events with the corresponding human reactions and behaviors. For the most part, human thoughts and actions are kept to a minimum, and those that are described center on knowledge, understanding, and intuition concerning the natural world. The end result is a reflective and poetic piece that presents a wide spectrum of prairie moods, from bucolic and tender



to hostile and deadly, in a variety of manifestations. The text also portrays an organic, intimate relationship between land and people. Rølvaag's preoccupation with and treatment of the landscape in this piece anticipates his later work in novels like The Boat of Longing and Giants in the Earth. Orm Øverland notes the "impressionistic" quality of "Stemninger fra Prærien" and remarks that "[t]he style of these sketches of the prairie and its seasons has a refreshingly oral quality and they are an implicit statement about an important aspect of Rølvaag's literary program: writing should be yet another way of making a home for the immigrant in the New World."<sup>86</sup>

Another important aspect of writings about the Midwest, especially those that focus on particular landscapes, parks, or wilderness areas, is that they express a love of outdoor life and the natural world particular to Norwegian culture. In this way, Norwegian-American writers are able to take traditional beliefs and behaviors and adapt them to new locations and lifestyles in the United States. For example, D. G. Ristad's article "Det ny Normandi i Minnesotas Park Region" ("The New Normandy in Minnesota's Park Region"), details the climate, topography, and ecology of areas in Northern Minnesota. As Ristad surveys the cultural geography of the region, he notes specific areas that have Norwegian connections, such as places near which immigrants settled or particular landscape features that complement Norwegian cultural and economic traditions: "Here was forest and water and plains and fish and birds and animals. That was something Norwegians liked."<sup>87</sup> Ristad continues in this vein as he explains the importance of nature and the environment in the formation of human ties to the land:

That the generations begin to take root in the soil on which they live is one of the signs. In the beginning, the feeling of home was not awakened to any great extent. And it was not to be expected. The pioneers were transplanted, and it takes time to take root. But it is beginning to go better. People have begun to form a love for their land [. . .]. The nature up here helps this along. It is beautiful here.

Ristad's observations reveal important factors that recommend the Midwest as an American home for Norwegian immigrants: an environment that bears some resemblance to Norway and that supports Norwegian traditions and ways of life (such as farming, fishing, forestry), yet also a distinct place possessed of its own appeal and character that is gradually imparted to the settlers.

The landscape is also credited with determining, to some extent, the disposition of farms or homesteads and the development of villages and towns. For example, Ristad traces the building and maintaining of community to the northern landscape, pointing out the natural boundaries of lakes and forests (in contrast to the prairies) that compel people to live closer together; thus, "the farms in the valley sections group themselves more naturally around a church or village" which leads to "more love for the family farm and childhood memories and the home neighborhood." Ristad affirms the links between land and people, suggesting that as people forge bonds with land and place, they also strengthen ties to each other.

Another way in which Norwegian-American writers express their affection and loyalty for *Vesterheimen* is through poems of homage much like those written in honor of Norway. This time, authors pay tribute to the Midwest, but visions of an idealized landscape, expressions of filial loyalty, and tributes to noble ancestors are much the same, denoting the transfer of key values from the eastern home to the western home. The titles

of such poems—“Pioneereren” (“The Pioneer,” 1915), “Prærien Min” (“My Prairie,” 1922), and “Vår i Wisconsin” (“Spring in Wisconsin,” 1939)—suggest their heroic and bucolic tone. One exuberant example in English is the poem entitled “To Minnesota”:

“We turn our voices, unite in toast / To Minnesota, distinguished host, / Whose name and story / And native glory / Inspire us most.”<sup>88</sup> The poem details the general features and contours of the Minnesota landscape—“the mystic, alluring gleam” of rivers, ten thousand lakes like “[a] chain of jewels,” rich farms “on the slope and plain,” “snow-decked prairies,” and “forests in golden glow”—as well as specific landmarks like Lake Itasca and the great Mississippi. The overall impression is a landscape of transcendent beauty and hospitality—a good place to make a home. The poem concludes with the assertion that Minnesota is the “favored region of favored land,” providing a dose of regional boosterism and national pride.

Urban locations also figure in texts written about the Midwest, although they are in the minority. For example, Olav Bøhmer’s memoir “Minner fra Minneapolis” (“Memories from Minneapolis,” 1936) records special places and experiences in the urban environment, including his first Christmas in the New World. Minneapolis also appears in a feature illustration, “Parti fra Minneapolis” (“View from Minneapolis”), in the 1926 edition of the magazine.<sup>89</sup> *Jul i Vesterheimen* is full of pictures of Midwestern places, both as illustrations accompanying texts and as feature items. As one might expect, these images include Midwestern landscapes, both real and legendary, including forests, lakes, parks, and prairies. Other popular motifs include homesteads, farm scenes, quaint countryside villages, churches and parsonages, and people engaged in farming or outdoor pursuits. In addition, the Christmas theme of the magazine lends itself to special

holiday or seasonal illustrations, such as “Ved juletid i storskogene i nordre Minnesota” (“At Christmastime in the Great Woods of Northern Minneosta,” 1932). Images and texts combine to create a Midwestern ethos that serves important functions: reinforcing ties to American places and communities, creating collective memory of a proud immigrant past, preserving a history of contributions to the new American homeland, and affirming a vital ethnic community that continues to play an important role in the region.

### **American Citizens and Patriots**

While it promotes ethnic pride and Midwestern roots, the focus on Norwegian-American contributions to the American society also suggests integration into the larger American culture. Though the treatments of Norway and the Pioneer/Midwestern legacy certainly vary, *Jul i Vesterheimen* achieves a generally unified overall picture of these aspects of Norwegian-American identity through consistent themes and iconography. Moreover, discussions of Norway or the pioneers—both geared to the past—allow readers to have it both ways, so to speak, celebrating their particular ethnic and regional heritage and history while also proclaiming their American loyalties. Discussions of American identities tend to be more complicated and conflicted.

This is not to say that expressions of American loyalty do not bear a resemblance in theme and form to those examples that pay homage to Norway or the Midwest. For example, the poem “Amerika—Vårt Land” (“America—Our Country”)<sup>90</sup> begins with tributes to the beauty and grandeur of the American landscape, which symbolizes American traits (towering strength, prosperity) and values (freedom, hard work). The poem then characterizes America as the long-sought and hard-won “home” of the fore-

fathers. The final message is one of future hope as the poem—dedicated to “Norwegian youth in America”—concludes with images of young Norwegian-Americans, “united and strong,” rallying around the Star-Spangled Banner.

Meanwhile, the poem “This Land of Ours” utilizes similar symbols—“We came as Vikings, and we came / As Pilgrims”—to discuss the process of emigration and eventual citizenship. Like earlier examples, the tone is heroic and the themes are focused on immigrant talents and contributions to the building of America: “Our passport was a fearless heart, / And willingness to do our part. / We brought our store of health, and will, / Of strength, of courage, and of skill. / And so, from what each one has brought, / A mighty structure we have wrought”(13-18).<sup>91</sup> As in the tributes to Mother Norway, Old World brains and brawn build New World civilization. However, a new emphasis on assimilation concludes the poem: “We in the process of the sun / Were slowly welded into one: / One aim to gain the noblest end; / One will our freedom to defend; / One impulse: that of doing good; / One nation—one vast brotherhood!” (19-24). This proclamation of American cultural unity and melting pot idealism portrays assimilation as both a natural and philosophical process. The decorative images surrounding the poem reinforce its propagandistic nature, as the text is enclosed in a border composed of American flags, flowers, stars, the Statue of Liberty, and the American Eagle.

Indeed, like the images of Norway and the Midwest, patriotic illustrations in *Jul i Vesterheimen* provide the most clear-cut (and often stereotypical) view of American traits and values. For example, in a full-page photo spread entitled “America,” readers are presented with a collection of photographs of notable American landscapes, such as the California Redwoods, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone National Park, among others.

The presentation begins with a portrait of George Washington and an American flag pictured above the following lines: “My native country Thee, Land of the noble free, Thy name I love.” The verse then continues, pairing each photo with expressions of the “love” and “rapture” that such landscapes inspire.<sup>92</sup> In addition to scenery, American history is popular. Images of Colonial America appear in various editions of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, whether in celebration of American holidays—the pilgrims are shown partaking of Thanksgiving (1935) or Christmas morning in Plymouth (1920)—or in remembrance of defining moments in American history like the pilgrims’ landing (1934), Washington at Valley Forge and the reading of the Declaration of Independence (both 1935). Abraham Lincoln also makes an appearance in the 1934 edition, pictured at the Gettysburg Address.

Patriotic images are featured on the covers of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as well. For example, the 1925 edition has a beautiful cover that shows Betsy Ross sewing the Stars and Stripes. This choice is surprising given that 1925 was the year of the centennial of Norwegian-American emigration to the United States. Given the number of ethnic celebrations and pageants sponsored by Norwegian-American groups around the country at this time, one fully expects to see the cover decked out in all of its Norwegian glory. Instead, the issue features a patriotic image from colonial America. This may seem strange at first, but when one considers the anti-immigration laws of 1924 and the anti-hyphen Americanization campaigns of the early twentieth century, the cover begins to make good sense. The table of contents for this issue provides further clues. A lengthy article detailing the centennial celebrations is present, along with a glossy illustration of the ship *Restaurationen*, which brought the first Norwegian immigrants to American

shores. These expressions of Norwegian-American history and pride, however, are tempered by matching American images: a lavish illustration of the Mayflower and full-page portraits of President and Mrs. Coolidge (who attended the centennial festivities in Minneapolis). Thus, *Jul i Vesterheimen* performs a balancing act, allowing Norwegian-Americans to celebrate their ethnic distinction yet remain loyal American citizens.

The line “One will our freedom to defend” (from the poem “This Land of Ours”) suggests another important mode of patriotic expression in *Jul i Vesterheimen*: war propaganda, both in illustrations and in texts that discuss ethnic Americans’ sacrifices in American wars. For example, the cover of the magazine for 1917—the year in which the United States enters World War I—features a quintessentially American image entitled “Our All for Democracy.”<sup>93</sup> The largest object in the picture is a billowing American flag, set against a dramatic and colorful sky, flying over a tower of humanity. Various people, of all ages and walks of life, raise their hands toward the flag. At the top of this human pyramid (directly beneath the flag) stand three individuals who are larger and more defined than the masses surrounding them: a Red Cross nurse flanked by two soldiers (one representing soldiers by land, the other soldiers by sea). A vague cityscape appears in the distant background, of which the distinguishing features are smokestacks and ships in the harbor; these, coupled with an airplane flying above, signify the American war machine at full tilt. The cover illustration is then repeated inside the magazine, quite atypically, in a smaller format that is more amenable to removing and framing. This smaller version is mounted on heavy paper above a quotation from President Wilson’s address to Congress upon America’s entry into the war. The proliferation of patriotic images and effusions may be traced, in part, to the position of

*Jul i Vesterheimen* as a church publication and a Christmas annual that is bound to show moral support for the nation's war effort as well as for soldiers and their families, especially at holiday time. Yet such statements also suggest the potentially precarious position of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as an ethnic publication; despite (or perhaps because of) its ethnic audience, the editors seem compelled to express their loyalty and patriotism as Americans.

Such patriotism is also expressed in stories like "Loyalty Under Fire" (1924) and "Den sidste akt" ("The Final Act," 1922), which attest to immigrants making the ultimate sacrifice for their American homeland. However, the positive and homogenous representations of assimilation and Americanism displayed in the magazine's illustrations are not so easily maintained in the texts that contemplate ethnic soldiers fighting in American wars. Simon Johnson's aptly-titled story "Borgere" ("Citizens"), for example, questions the ultimate meaning of such sacrifice. The story centers on an idealized Norwegian-American family led by patriarch Ole Norden. The narrative opens with a characterization of Ole, who is revealed through his gray, "honest eyes":

But it was not the color of the eyes that one noticed in Ole Norden, it was the entire figure—"the whole person," as someone had said. And the whole person was abundant strength, fair conduct, honesty and sound judgment in all things, great or small.<sup>94</sup>

Ole's defining feature is his absolute moral integrity, which is further evidenced through his approach to material prosperity and family values. For example, unlike the Norwegians of Buslett's story, who "sell out" their land and neighbors, Ole and his wife, Maren, have held fast to their "goal" of "Norden-farmen" ("The Norden Farm") as they cultivate their land. The narrator points out that, for them, "the three sections of land



were not just pieces of earth. They were a *home*” (sic). After years of strife and strain, it is the “ardor,” “perseverance,” and “faith” of the Nordens that “placed these buildings in this desolate place and that cut field after field out of the wide grasslands.” Ole and his wife are model immigrants who have achieved the American dream in the right way.

As if this were not enough to recommend them, the Nordens are described as “good-hearted and intelligent people” who cultivate their minds and souls as well as their land:

Their houses possessed bookcases, and they did not buy magnificent volumes meant only for show and not for people. And the musical instruments were more than just furnishings in a house.

This education and refinement, coupled with a strong work ethic and moral backbone, makes the Nordens not only ideal immigrants but also model Americans. And unlike Yankees, the Nordens do not take their opportunities or good fortune for granted; instead, they remain humble and conscious of their debt to America in achieving their “fairytale” life, as Ole calls it, when he comments that ““America is a fine country. We have much to thank America for.””

The ultimate symbol of the Nordens’ past success and future hope is “Guldgutten” (“Golden Boy”), their youngest son, Eyvind, who will take over the main farm in their retirement. Like the rest of his family, Eyvind is idealized; his diploma, medal, and American sweetheart attest to his success and stature. Moreover, Eyvind represents the model second-generation Norwegian-American who, despite his success in mainstream American life, does not forget or grow ashamed of his background: “He came back to the family farm. Smart yet good. Learned enough to know that he was grown of good stock.” Eyvind’s position as the “Golden Boy” holds added significance in that he is a

foil to the many second or third-generation ethnic characters in Norwegian-American literature (and immigrant literature in general) whose education and upward mobility only serve to distance or completely alienate them from their parents, grandparents, and ethnic roots. Contrary to the pattern, Eyvind returns to the homestead to put his education and experience to use for family and community.

Of course, this “fairytale” existence is too good to last, and the idealization of the characters sets them up for a test and potential fall from grace. The crisis comes when Ole reads about conscription and the war effort in the newspaper. He and Maren are gripped with fear and horror when they realize that Eyvind falls within the age limits:

It becomes dark and sorrowful around Maren Norden. Her Golden Boy—before the German bayonets...Golden Boy, stiff and pale—far away from his mother....

Succumbing momentarily to maternal anguish, Maren asks Ole if there is some way around this, especially since “Eyvind is not capable of killing someone anyway.” Ole is well acquainted with “the rules,” however, and his response is true to form:

“We cannot engage in such things, Maren. We are too good for that. The likes of him are being called up across the whole country. When the government deems it necessary to defend the country with armed force, then we must do our part like the others.”

The poignancy of Ole’s speech in honor of duty and sacrifice is intensified by the fact that, in addition to sending their most beloved son into service for Uncle Sam, the aged couple will now have to delay their hard-earned retirement and “begin yet again” with the work of the homestead. Ole goes on to remind his wife that he is absolutely sure that Eyvind would not have it any other way, a conviction that is echoed in the son’s own reaction upon receiving the call to duty: “We must do our part.”

On the day Eyvind is shipped out, the family meets for a painful farewell at the train station. A festive send-off is planned for the boys, but after the color of the flags and the noise of the speeches and brass band subside, a terrible quiet descends on the station as family groups gather to say their final good-byes. Interestingly, it is the words, in Norwegian, between parents and son that bring them the strength they need to part: “He [Eyvind] speaks to her—good, Norwegian words—words for mother; after all that broken English, it sounds almost strange and distant, but good, so good.” In addition to comfort, the Norwegian words bring wisdom and faith, as Ole gives his son some final advice:

“Do that which is right, Eyvind. You are just as good a man as anyone else. Your kin has carried arms before. You are surely not going to forget us, you are coming back as good a man as when you left. No one can take your integrity from you.”

Ole’s comment is important in several ways. Its message about equality not only speaks to Eyvind doing his duty but also to the young man’s position as an ethnic American soldier who is “just a good” as any Yankee. The allusion to Eyvind’s lineage, meanwhile, implies a long history of honor that may be traced to his distinct ethnic heritage; this reference would have conjured up images of Vikings and the ancient warrior tradition of Norse history and mythology in the minds of many Norwegian-American readers. Finally, the closing comments about remembrance and integrity affirm Eyvind’s keen moral compass, one that is inextricably centered in his family roots.

Ole’s prophecy comes true, in a way. Like his parents before him, Eyvind sticks to his one “goal,” that “[t]he country’s security and honor shall be upheld.” Eyvind soon becomes a leader among the soldiers and is promoted to increasingly important (and

dangerous) positions. The parents are proud that Eyvind is so valued and respected and that they have taught him well the meaning of “duty” and “integrity.” And the Golden Boy does return “as good a man as when he left,” although he comes back as a dead soldier, wrapped in his nation’s flag. The fact that Eyvind is killed in action (doing his duty) by a band of German deserters (fleeing their duty) makes his death that much more pathetic and symbolic.

Though it occurs at the end of the story, Eyvind’s funeral becomes the site of the narrative’s main conflict and climax. The parents envision a quiet family service, with “the old, venerable funeral hymns and a sermon in Norwegian by Pastor Larson.” However, this cannot happen since “the authorities had outlawed official ceremonies performed in languages other than English.” Instead, Eyvind receives a hero’s burial with full honors, including flags, uniforms, and an impressive assembly comprised of members of both the military and civil establishments, not to mention the multitude of visitors who come to see the rare pageantry. Indeed, “Eyvind Norden was honored like none before him and there were many who shook the old folks’ hands.”

After the fanfare, however, both Ole and Maren feel uneasy, as though something is amiss in this burial and things still remain to be said over Eyvind’s grave. The story ends with the two parents making their way out to the local church near the family farm where, after a slight hesitation, they decide to do something themselves:

As a reddish gleam from the setting sun lingered upon the church windows and flickered about among the graves and headstones, the solitary citizens mumbled a Norwegian “Our Father” over the Golden Boy’s grave.

Like the earlier scene at the train station when Eyvind leaves, it is the words (in this case, the Lord's Prayer) in Norwegian that bring comfort and closure to the leave-taking between parents and son. With this conclusion, Johnson chooses irony as the primary vehicle for his message: irony in that the very culture and values that made Eyvind the "Golden Boy"—model citizen, soldier, son—are somehow denied upon his death. The reference to Ole and Maren as "solitary citizens" underlines their alienation, suggesting that they too have been deserted and disenfranchised in some way. Moreover, the authorities that sponsor official honors at Eyvind's funeral are the very same ones that ban similar rites in his native tongue. Ultimately, the flashy ceremony overlooks the heart of things and is indifferent to (if not outright disrespectful of) the heritage that made Eyvind a great American worth celebrating. Though the Nordens have delivered on their debt to America, this debt is not repaid in full at the end of the narrative. Consequently, Ole's speeches of loyalty, duty, and faith in the government—first to Maren when she questions the rules of enlistment and then to Eyvind as he departs for war—now ring somewhat hollow, as do the patriotic effusions that proliferate the text. Like the "Amerika" poem, Johnson leaves readers with a vision of Norwegian youth draped in the American flag, but this time the image is much more troubling and problematic.

Though his criticism is implicit, Johnson nevertheless reveals the hypocrisy in America's treatment of her racial and ethnic minorities. Indeed, the narrative may be understood as a response to increasing xenophobia in the United States, as Johnson defends ethnic Americans' loyalties and rights as citizens. The story comes from a longer work, the novel *Frihetens hjem* ("The Home of Freedom"), that Johnson was writing at the time Sundheim requested a submission for the 1924 *Jul i Vesterheimen*.

According to Øverland, *Frihetens hjem* (1925) is “an interesting document, demonstrating, along with Foss’s *Valborg* [1927] and Rønnevik’s *100 procent* [1926], the traumatic experience of World War I nativism among many loyal Americans in the Upper Midwest.”<sup>95</sup> The period’s prevailing nativism and anti-foreigner sentiment surely account for some of the patriotic imagery and wartime selections in *Jul i Vesterheimen* (especially those with a defensive or critical tone), and the magazine must be viewed in light of other mainstream American periodicals concerned with the same. Tebbel and Zuckerman point out that, “[i]n McClure’s, as in the majority of American magazines during 1917 and 1918, the tone was one of absolute conformity to the prevailing ‘Americanism’ and total intolerance for any kind of dissent.”<sup>96</sup> During the same period, the Saturday Evening Post—“the bible of middle-class America”—ran editorials and articles with headlines like “The Scum of the Melting Pot” and “Our Imported Troubles and Trouble-Makers.”<sup>97</sup> Even Christmas publications expressed anti-foreigner sentiment:

Hard as it is to believe that the joy and warmth of American Christmas could be combined with jingoism, in fact, Brad Stephen’s 1917 “gift book” specifically denied all Germans any role in the folk history of Christmas, any genuine religious feeling, or any honesty, courage, and intellectual power—using this flamboyant assault to fire up American “ideals.”<sup>98</sup>

Though *Jul i Vesterheimen* works to foster American loyalty, it also defends its readers’ (and its own) ethnic background and interests. Thus, the magazine reveals its responsiveness to contemporary culture and reflects a larger body of Norwegian-American and other ethnic literature that considers the problematic status of immigrants and ethnic Americans in twentieth-century America.

## Experiences of American Life

The contemplation of American citizenship is a major focus of the literature in *Jul i Vesterheimen*, and many texts question what it means to be Norwegian-American, especially in a post-immigration, post-pioneer, and post-war era. Dorthea Dahl examines this issue in her short story “Det gamle bokskap” (“The Old Book Case”), which first appeared in Norwegian in the 1919 *Jul i Vesterheimen*.<sup>99</sup> The text was subsequently translated into English and published in the short story collection Returning Home (1920), the title of which suggests one of Dahl’s main themes: second and third-generation ethnic Americans returning to their American home and re-discovering their American roots.

“The Old Book Case” takes place in Washington state (an extension of *Vesterheimen* with the second wave of Norwegian immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) and opens with the main character, Diesen, reading a newspaper: “Nothing but the same chaos, the same difficulties, the same constantly increasing entanglements. To keep one’s mind on the present conditions of the world would drive one to insanity.”<sup>100</sup> Diesen throws the newspaper down in disgust and begins pacing the room, revealing the agitation and discomfort that are symptoms of modern life. His thoughts immediately shift to his appointment that evening with his love interest, Edith, whose primary attributes are her beauty and elegance:

How perfectly adorable she had been when he had met her on the street that day, in her new and expensive looking coat, and that chic little hat that somehow vaguely reminded one of an airplane. That it was a late model was established beyond question by her wearing it. Everything about Edith was the very last word in styles, from the heels of her shoes to the tips of her fingers, with their pink, pointed nails. (7)

Every aspect of Edith's appearance suggests charm, taste, and fashion—she is completely up to date. However, this is not a soft, classic beauty but a flashy, smooth production; like the shine on a speedy “late model” boat or “airplane,” Edith's lacquer is polished to a high gloss. Moreover, her costume suggests her upper class status, which is further emphasized by her position as the daughter of a prominent judge, as well as her place in Diesen's own reveries, as he contemplates the seriousness of her interest in him and whether or not he should visit her that evening.

Not much is initially revealed about Diesen's background, and the earliest characterization comes from the teasing banter of his sarcastic doctor roommate: “Your manifest destiny is to satisfy some fair maiden's longing, with your bright prospects for the future, your rather more than presentable personal appearance, your honorable discharge after having done your patriotic duty and acquired your officer's uniform, etc., etc. (10).” The information confirms Diesen's general reputation, including his status as a successful soldier and recent war veteran, and his potential for upward mobility. This last aspect helps to explain his worries of inadequacy regarding a visit to Edith and Judge Trimble's home; though Diesen is clearly respectable, the implication is that he comes from a more humble background than Edith.

Dahl soon dispels Diesen's concerns of inadequacy, however, by revealing the superficial nature of the Trimbles' superiority via a two-page rambling discourse by Edith. In addition to inadvertently revealing delicate and damning information about her father's business and her own personal attitudes, Edith overwhelms Diesen with her flighty, vacuous conversation. Through the form and content of Edith's dialogue, Dahl cleverly displays the hollow reality beneath Edith's pleasing exterior. The bulk of



Edith's talk deals with her own desires, revealing not only her selfishness but also her insensitivity to others. For example, Edith complains at length to Diesen about the sacrifices she was compelled to make during the war years: "Papa had been so terribly strict about saving and saving in order that the war might be pursued all the more effectively that he had cut down her allowance to an absolutely ridiculous figure" (12). Edith's comment reveals that her sacrifice was relatively small, a reality that makes her follow-up statement all the more distasteful: "In fact she intended to make up for everything she had had to go without during the war. It seemed to her [. . .] that there was a certain average for a person's enjoyment, and if that average was not reached for some time one simply had to catch up later" (13). Edith is clearly above average when it comes to self-indulgence; however, even more troubling is her flippant discussion of sacrifice in the presence of Diesen, who (as a veteran) presumably knows something about the hardships of war. The one topic of Edith's conversation that could redeem her is her wartime charity work. Unfortunately, this only adds to her negative portrayal. Diesen himself unwittingly exposes her lopsided priorities when his glance falls upon an "array of laces and ribbons and bits of embroidery and spools and skeins and pasteboard boxes [. . .] all thrown together in the most picturesque disorder" (14). Diesen asks if these are "intended for the French and Belgian sufferers" and is told "[i]ndeed not. It was intended for her suffering friends—suffering from her long neglect" (14). Even when Edith does work for the war effort, such contributions have no significant meaning for her: she describes the Red Cross bazaars as exhausting distractions that infringe on her Christmas holiday. If not an outright inconvenience, the charity event, like other activities on her social calendar, is no more than a mere distraction until better days and

entertainment can be had once again. The irony and wry humor of the entire episode are best summed up in Edith's own indignant complaint: "Some people were so stupid and showed so little consideration" (12).

Edith's speech reveals not only her own shortcomings but also those of her father, Judge Trimble. In complaining about cuts in her allowance, for example, Edith attributes her father's action to his support of the war effort. However, she immediately undermines this noble picture by revealing her father's primary concern: "He insisted that it was necessary for people in their position to give a good example to others" (12). The judge is clearly preoccupied with his social and professional standing in the community. Yet this very influence seems to draw him into shady dealings, as Edith reveals in her rambling to Diesen: "It was that large lumber firm that engaged papa to watch so that law did not get passed, the firm that papa was quite heavily interested in himself" (12). Edith's comment places her father's moral integrity, not to mention his professional reputation, in jeopardy, as the judge seems overly susceptible to the influence of big business. Moreover, Judge Trimble's interpretation and execution of the law and public service is suspect. Compared to Simon Johnson's model citizen, Ole Norden—with his ultimate sacrifice (his dearest son), absolute moral integrity, pure wisdom, and keen sense of duty and fair play—Mr. Trimble comes off as a questionable moral authority at best.

The doubts about Judge Trimble only intensify as Diesen recalls, somewhat uncomfortably, similar situations to the one mentioned by Edith:

Edith's reference to her father's errand at the state capital had affected him [Diesen] unpleasantly. Certain rumors were afloat in town, rumors he had chosen not to believe. The dailies in the city contained nothing bearing on it. They were paid to keep silent, the same rumors said. For the daily papers gave an unstinted and systematic support to all the activities of the

lumber firm in question. And what they could not openly support, they refrained from mentioning. That much he knew to be beyond dispute. What hurt him was the frequency with which Judge Trimble's name was mentioned in the same connection. (13)

Diesen's contemplations support the suspicions about Judge Trimble and reveal that the problem goes beyond the judge or the lumber company. Major American institutions—the law, the free press—appear to be seriously flawed. With the mention of the state capital, there is also a sense that democracy is no longer being upheld and served in the way it was intended. Like the chaotic and “constantly increasing entanglements” of modern life mentioned in the opening scene, the contemporary social and political scene is one of confusion, concealment, and corruption. Although his involvement is indirect, Diesen is also implicated in the scandal in that he has “chosen not to believe” or to seek out the truth of the situation.

His reasons for avoiding reality are made clear: “To Diesen the judge was not only Edith's father, but an ideal, a standard to measure up to, an object of admiration” (13-14). Interestingly, Diesen's attitude toward the judge resembles his attitude toward Edith in that he sees both Trimbles in an unrealistic and superficial light. They are people of fashion, means, and influence, and because of this he appears willing to overlook their (rather serious) flaws. Moreover, Judge Trimble knows “men of influence in the city, men who were in a position to be of assistance to him” (15). While Diesen may be excused for his conventional choice of mentors—especially when they are so charming and hospitable—they are nevertheless bad models in terms of their fundamental integrity. Again, Edith unwittingly speaks the ironic truth when she reminds Diesen that “[s]o much depended on his forming the proper connections at the start” (15).

Diesen is prevented from pursuing such connections with Edith and her father, at least for the time being, as he returns home to discover a telegram announcing his father's death. Interestingly, it is at this point in the story that the reader learns Diesen's first name, when his roommate—upon finding a distressed Diesen with a bag packed with “the things he needed for a journey”—addresses him: “‘But my dearest Herman,’ he exclaimed when he saw his face, ‘what has happened?’ It was not often that the doctor addressed him by his given name” (16). Diesen's emotional reaction suggests that he has been jolted out of his complacency by the impending “journey” and its implications. The narrative continues in this vein as Diesen makes the trip “back East” to deal with his father's funeral and estate: “To come back to the town in which he had spent his boyhood was to Herman Diesen like coming to a strange place” (16). Using his full name for the first time, Dahl emphasizes Diesen's heightened awareness and anxiety regarding his personal identity as he is compelled to leave the superficial world of the Trimble and his west coast lifestyle and return to the place of his roots.

When Diesen arrives at the station, he is met by Berlie, an old friend of his father, “well known in town as one of its ablest attorneys” (17). Berlie welcomes Diesen warmly but expresses his regret that Diesen is “too late to give [his] father any joy,” especially since his father “was longing for [him]” (17). Diesen promptly defends himself with reasons for his long absence: the considerable distance and long journey, the lost personal and professional time during the war, and the demands of building his law career in the big city. Though Diesen initially feels “[c]old and tired and [. . .] outside of everything” upon the return to his hometown, he soon begins to feel comfortable during his visits to the parsonage, before and after the funeral: “Within there was light and

warmth, and he felt that he was really a welcome guest. He had been made to feel that way the short while he had been there [. . .] and it made it easier for him to accept their hospitality” (19). Gone are the worries of inadequacy that characterized Diesen’s visits to the Trimble home. The difference between the two households in terms of class and material wealth is also apparent when Diesen observes a member of the family serving dessert: “There was evidently no maid” (21). Indeed, the parsonage forms a stark contrast to the contrived atmosphere of Judge Trimble’s “big living room” and Edith’s coy attempts to make the place “homey” via her domestic tools and trimmings: adjusting lights, rearranging furniture, painting china and water colors, and entertaining guests with her incessant chatter and singing-lesson recitals. Instead, the parsonage offers the down-to-earth goodness of “steaming coffee,” “the laughter of children,” “and the low tones of a woman’s voice” (19). Despite its straightforward simplicity, the parsonage possesses a powerful sensory and emotional aura that reveals familial bonds and fellowship: “It gave Diesen a strange feeling of security to be thus with the ones who had known and loved his father [. . .]. It was like finding old friends whom he had not seen for a long time” (20). The Trimble house, on the other hand, appears as a mere decorative façade, a setting that functions less as a home and more as a theatrical backdrop for the performance of class and the formation of human ties predicated on social, economic, and political grounds.

The most important contrast between Diesen’s old life and his new experiences at the parsonage, however, center around the sister of the minister’s wife, Margaret, who nursed his father in the past and has returned for a Christmas visit. A foil to the frivolous Edith, Margaret is a nurse who performs meaningful service and understands the real

sacrifices involved in war, sickness, and death. As Diesen recalls his first conversation with Margaret, he remembers that “[s]he had talked easily and without any effort” about her war experiences and that “the conversation had naturally shifted to the recent war, and the unsolved problems which still confronted the nations of the world” (20-21). Not only does Margaret speak thoughtfully about meaningful issues, she even has “theories” that suggest her position as “an idealist.” Diesen is surprised to realize that “he had talked with her just as tho [sic] she had been a man, never once being conscious of that distinctly feminine appeal which was the chief conversational asset of so many young women he knew” (21). Of course, “feminine appeal” is the only “conversational asset” Edith possesses, and Margaret’s profundity further emphasizes Edith’s triviality:

[Edith’s] talk was exactly the same stream of talk to which he had listened so many an evening before. [. . .] Not particularly deep, of course—how many modern young women did one meet who ever thought seriously about the problems of the day? [. . .] It had occurred to him once or twice that it was barely possible that a man might, in the long run, tire a little of listening to that unceasing flow of small talk which Edith seemed always to have in readiness. (15)

Diesen’s musings reveal that Edith is as shallow and affected as Margaret is grounded and sincere; the passage also attests to Margaret’s rarity among the “modern” women of Diesen’s set. Margaret is therefore not just an idealist but an idealized character; in addition to being industrious, kind, intelligent, and well-spoken, Margaret is “strikingly beautiful” (21). Unlike Edith’s studied beauty, Margaret’s loveliness is pure, completing her saintly status as Diesen imagines her “like a Madonna, with her sister’s baby held close to her breast. In a less modern attire the picture would have rivaled any painted Madonna” (21).

The turning point of the narrative comes when Diesen enters his father's house to hear the reading of the will and to begin to dispose of his father's possessions. Although "[h]is father had not been a rich man, [. . .] he left more property than the son had any knowledge about" (22). Moreover, the father's generosity is exemplary when it comes to remembering friends and charities. Although it is the place where he "spent the happiest time of his life," Diesen intends to dispose of the house and its contents since "in reality the furniture [. . .] and things that go to make a home are only so many pieces of lumber and so much paint and varnish" (22). Diesen even worries that he will not be able to get rid of the house since "it is not really modern" (22). In response to Berlie's suggestion that Diesen might stay and even take over Berlie's law practice, Diesen laughs "with a touch of bitterness in his voice" (22).

As Diesen walks about the house alone, surveying the furniture in order to decide which pieces are good enough to be sold and which "would have to be thrown on the scrap-heap," he comes across "an old book case" (23-24). Diesen can't understand why his father would not have replaced the old one with a new bookcase, nor what he himself will do with "a big, cumbersome thing like that" which is "due for the discard, nothing else" (24). The contents of the bookcase also pose a problem:

What could be done with a pile of old books? Books no one would ever think of reading any more. [. . .] There was the old family Bible, which had belonged to his grandfather. Such things were customarily passed from father to son, but what could he do with it all? [. . .] There were devotional books and collections of sermons, and whole sets of a distinctly theological appearance, with the gold lettering on the massive black letter bindings. (24-25)

Diesen's puzzlement over the value of such books speaks to his current alienation from his (familial, cultural, spiritual) heritage in that "[t]hese were the books his father had

read in as far back as Herman could remember” and they “formed his father’s dearest diversion” (25). Again, Dahl uses Diesen’s first name, stressing the importance of this moment of personal reckoning as he erroneously dismisses both the utilitarian and sentimental value of the books that represent his own family history.

However, the bookcase starts to work its magic as Diesen begins “to feel dimly that there were values hidden in these books, not so much perhaps on account of the things they contained as for the reason that they had comprised his father’s whole world” (25). Diesen realizes that he might enjoy reading some of these himself:

Glancing at some of the newer ones, he found not a few historical and biographical treatises of life in the new land, life-stories of the men who had struggled and sacrificed to found the church of his father’s faith on the strange soil, and to save it from destruction. There were also books of a more purely literary trend [. . .]. (26).

The texts in the father’s bookcase sound very much like the selections in the Augsburg catalogues and the contents of *Jul i Vesterheimen*: a mixture of religion, history, biography, geography, and fiction (pious and secular), with a special emphasis on stories of immigration, pioneering, and the founding of ethnic institutions in the New World. Thus, it is not only through literature and the old bookcase that Diesen begins to reconnect with his heritage and find his true identity, but it is via the right kinds of books, a point that is emphasized when Diesen recognizes several texts that he has seen on his roommate’s shelves:

The doctor rather prided himself on keeping in touch with the movement for saving the cultural inheritance of those whose fathers had come from another land and making it a part of the life in the new home-land, and he recognized names which he remembered having heard the doctor mention in his many effusions on the subject. (26)



This passage suggests that Diesen himself comes from a not-so-distant ethnic or immigrant background, given the nature of the books and his father's commitment to them. Moreover, the passage makes explicit the connection between reading, culture, and identity as well as their importance to both cultural preservation and assimilation among ethnic Americans, allowing people to preserve the best of their inheritance and carry it forward into their "life in the new home-land" (26).

As he discovers that "all this had existed outside of his own interests," Diesen ponders one of the key questions of the story (and, indeed, one of the primary issues raised in Norwegian-American and other ethnic literature):

Why should there be such a wide gulf between one generation and the next, when only life's brief day separated them? And what was there in his own life which could take the place which this had taken in his father's life?—His work, his plans for the future, his friends, the daily paper, the latest magazines, with occasionally the theatre or a concert or a lecture.—That was all—that and his evenings with Edith. (26)

Dahl makes two important points here. First, the story emphasizes the need for people to have something spiritual, sacred, and lasting (something "stable and anchored," like Diesen's father (25)) in their lives. Regardless of how one interprets such activity—as artistic or intellectual, religious or philanthropic (and the story includes all of these options)—Dahl sees this as a way to maintain traditions and family ties, to ground oneself, and to forge new connections amidst the "chaos," "difficulties," and "entanglements" that characterize modern life. Second, the summary of Diesen's life in the above passage does not seem so bad; in fact, it is quite close to being a description of the ideal middle class American lifestyle: a good career, an active social life, and cultural

pursuits. Dahl's point is not that these things are bad in and of themselves, but rather that—in the case of Diesen and the Trimble— they are void of any special meaning and serve instead as vehicles for or distraction from an unexamined life.

Diesen realizes he has thought of neither his west coast life nor Edith since he came home. However, he has thought of Margaret with increasing intensity, a situation that perplexes him since “[i]t was nothing short of insanity for him to try to interest a girl like Margaret in his empty life, a girl who lived so fully, so vividly” (26-27). Suddenly, Diesen chances upon a book inscribed to him from his father. He finds several others with his name written inside and then discovers one inscribed to Margaret. All of these books are old and bear “marks of having been read in a great deal” (27). The inscriptions cause Diesen to wonder about his father's dreams and hopes in writing those names. As Diesen returns late to the dark parsonage, he makes a detour to the church, which was “lit up both above and below” (27). Here Diesen finds “a merry crowd of young people busy decorating a huge Christmas tree” with Margaret among them (28). She questions him about the status of his affairs, concerned that he might sell everything and leave. Diesen's reply reveals his solution and salvation: ““I did plan to do something like that [. . .], but that was before I had found the old book case”” (29). Dahl's happy ending is conventional, the implication being that Diesen will remain and build a life of substance and integrity with Margaret, the life his father imagined for him. “The Old Book Case” is typical of many of Dahl's stories and novels that deal with community and family strife, particularly generational differences. The story is also representative of the many texts in *Jul i Vesterheimen* that deal with homecomings and their associated conflict, healing, and restoration. Clearly, Dahl envisions a meaningful place for both old and new in

contemporary life, as Diesen finds answers to both his past and future in the volumes of an old bookcase. Thus, the story provides a positive statement about the importance and continued relevance of ethnic literature and culture in the twentieth century, especially for a growing number of readers who identify themselves less as Norwegian-Americans and more as Americans of Norwegian descent.

### **We Have Arrived: Middle Class Americans**

Like the books in Dahl's "The Old Book Case," *Jul i Vesterheimen* encourages Americans of Norwegian descent to maintain and integrate the best of their ethnic traditions and values into a successful and meaningful American life. One way that the magazine exhibits this integration is through visual images that combine Norwegian and American traits and lifestyles. For example, the cover of the 1917 edition shows a classic Nordic image: a figure on skis, an ancient symbol of Norwegian culture. This particular skier is a fair-haired young woman in a colorful and formal skiing dress. Her traditional attire (reminiscent of a folk costume) and wooden skis also have a distinctly Norwegian flair. The woman is shown skiing down a hillside in an idyllic winter landscape—typical of Norway—that includes a cozy cabin, evergreens, and a thick blanket of white snow. Yet despite the Old World quality of her appearance and the picture's references to Norway's national sport and its hallowed cabin culture, the illustration also speaks to the American affluence and gentility of the magazine's readers who—perusing *Jul i Vesterheimen* in their well-appointed parlors—may contemplate the luxury of a ski vacation "out West" or a visit to their own vacation cottage "up North."

This modern sense of leisure is also portrayed in texts (both fiction and non-fiction) that deal with adventure, sport and other outdoor pastimes. For example, a number of notable Norwegian-American authors, among them Rølvaag and Ager, emphasize natural settings and outdoor pursuits in their writings. In the case of Rølvaag's "Klaare morgen og vaate kveld" ("Clear Morning and Wet Evening"), first published in the 1921 *Jul i Vesterheimen*, the humorous story is built around a fishing trip. Sundheim was also a great lover of the outdoors and wrote several pieces for *Jul i Vesterheimen* that featured wildlife and natural settings. While writers honor their Norwegian roots in celebrating the *friluftsliv* ("outdoor life") tradition, these texts reinforce ties to the American home (frequently rendered in Midwestern landscapes) and a sense of belonging to American culture. In the case of Sundheim's article "Gamle Antigua, Guatemala," for example, a musical performance experienced during a visit abroad makes him yearn for *Vesterheimen*: "[The music] filled my own mind with longing. At that moment I would have gladly traded the magnificent mountains and the colorful palm garden for a cabin on a clear lake in the woods of northern Minnesota."<sup>101</sup>

Travel articles about Norway and the Midwest exhibit an increasing move away from the emigrant and pioneer "reality" of such places toward a tourist's perspective of the locations as sites of historical, sentimental, or scenic interest. The very title "For hundre år siden og framover" ("One Hundred Years Ago and Onward")<sup>102</sup> suggests this distance, as the article recalls important "firsts" of Norwegian-American culture and educates readers about life among early immigrants via anecdotal stories and family history. Meanwhile, "Norske Monumenter i Vesterheimen" ("Norwegian Monuments in the Western Home")<sup>103</sup> encourages a form of cultural tourism based on ethnic identity.

The article discusses a variety of Norwegian-American monuments in the United States, providing attractive illustrations (primarily photographs) and information for each example. While the article does convey a good amount of history, its discussion of a Norwegian-American artistic tradition (particularly sculpture) in the United States as well as the civic prominence and action of a number of Norwegian-American dignitaries, organizations, social clubs, colleges, and other groups that sponsored the monuments is equally important in emphasizing the contemporary cultural status of the ethnic group.

The preoccupation with the group's increasing affluence, social prestige, and high culture in the early twentieth century is not unique to Norwegian-Americans. In his study of educational issues and intellectual history in African-American periodicals between 1900-1930, for example, Michael Fultz observes a similar trend in that the magazines frequently stress "noteworthy accomplishments and [. . .] the activities of African-American 'society' in an effort to "create prestige." Fultz also notes an "essentially middle-class orientation of the periodical literature [. . .]" that celebrates such prestige and shapes the magazines' prevailing discourse and discussions of education.<sup>104</sup> Despite the considerable differences between Norwegian-Americans and African Americans in terms of their respective histories in the United States, the two utilize a common strategy in their efforts to uplift their particular group and to gain access to the more elusive and exclusive markers of American citizenship.

A growing sense of class-consciousness among the magazine's writers and readers is also evident in articles on travel and tourism, which complement the parlor refinement of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. American destinations are popular travel subjects, especially trips to the Western United States, as in the article "To the Land of the Lily

and the Laurel” (1911), which details a trip from the North Dakota prairies to the California coast. The magazine features international destinations as well. As one might expect, essays describing homecoming trips to Norway or travel in other regions of Scandinavia are common, but the magazine also includes tours of fashionable sites around the world: the boulevards of Paris, the English Lake District, Oxford, church architecture in Spain, monuments of ancient Egypt, and even an antelope hunt in Africa. The literature of travel and tourism attests to the worldliness and cultural clout of the ethnic group.

The heightened awareness of an elite professional class among Norwegian-Americans extends to the literary arena as well. Selected editions of *Jul i Vesterheimen* include a section entitled “Our Contributors,” which lists the name of each writer, followed by a short (usually a paragraph-long) biographical sketch, including information about the person’s place of birth and/or residence, education, professional training and activities, and other literary or cultural endeavors. Many of the profiles include some light-hearted remark regarding a particular personal quality or favorite pastime of the writer, especially for regular contributors. For example, regarding prairie poet and novelist Simon Johnson, the editor informs readers that “[t]he wonder is that one born in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway, has been able to make fine poetry grow in North Dakota” while O. E. Rølvaag receives a humorous jibe regarding a fishing story: “it is difficult to believe [. . .] that a fine looking, scholarly professor of literature, and a maker of literature, could tell such a fish story as Prof. Rølvaag does [. . .].”<sup>105</sup> Several versions of the “Our Contributors” also include attractive black and white portraits of the writers. The tone is friendly and inclusive (“[we] Norse folks”), promoting the sense of a

common background and inviting readers to learn more about the writers and texts. Moreover, like its counterparts in the Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin—"Among Our Authors and Editors," and "Our Norwegian-American Authors"—the section on "Our Contributors" both encourages readers to support literary culture and reminds them of the achievements and status of Norwegian-Americans in the United States.

Along same lines, *Jul i Vesterheimen* occasionally includes a section called "Our Art Supplements." This section is especially interesting in that it provides the only explicit instructions in the magazine itself regarding how readers should interpret the illustrations. For example, the 1923 edition includes a series of four western scenes (based on original paintings): "The Signal Fire," "Trouble Hunters," "In the Wake of the Buffalo Runners," and "Eve on the Cattle Range." Readers are first instructed to consider all four of the pieces together: "They are all closely connected with each other, depicting different sides of a distant type of real life. Therefore our readers will get most pleasure out of these views by studying them connectedly, as a whole."<sup>106</sup> After informing readers how to view the pictures, the directions then provide an interpretation of the paintings' overall motif: "They give an inkling of the tragedy of the ceaseless warfare which characterized the life of the Red Man until the White Man got the upper hand from sea to sea." The historical significance of the subject matter, which is also emphasized in the instructions, is clearly in harmony with the tone and theme of many texts in *Jul i Vesterheimen*: "That wonderful chapter of the history of our country [. . .] known as 'Western Life,' is now practically a thing of the past [. . .]." Despite the

emphasis on the paintings' realism, the overall impression is a fanciful and heroic vision of the Old West: "All the redblooded action and romance of the Western plains flash thru one's mind as he beholds this composition."

The editor goes on to give readers a brief (and, by current standards, humorous) course in art appreciation: "They are real art. Don't take a glance at them, and then throw them away. [ . . . ] No piece of art can be properly appreciated unless you let both your outer eye and your 'mind's eye' dwell on it for some length of time." Readers are not only instructed in art appreciation but are encouraged to save and display the pictures in *Jul i Vesterheimen*. Similarly, the earliest advertisements for the magazine emphasize the prominence of the illustrations and their potential as material artifacts of culture and gentility, as in the case of an ad for the 1911 edition, which includes artwork by Herbjørn Gausta (1854-1924), one of the most renown and popular Norwegian-American artists:

Based on an original painting by Herbjørn Gausta. (Motif from Telemark.)  
[sic] This is one of Gausta's greatest masterworks; it is reproduced in the original colors and lends itself to framing.<sup>107</sup>

Just as Augsburg Publishing Houses recommends itself as reading advisor and cultural guide in its catalogues, so too does *Jul i Vesterheimen* attempt to educate its readers and guide their taste. In advertising Gausta's work in particular, Augsburg reminds Norwegian-American readers that they have an artist of their own,<sup>108</sup> and idea echoed in a *Jul i Vesterheimen* article in which J. J. Skørdalsvold proclaims Gausta as "first among Norwegian artists in America."<sup>109</sup>

Gausta is an excellent example of both the combination of Norwegian and American (particularly Midwestern) sensibilities and the function of "culture" in *Jul i Vesterheimen*. His works typically portray landscapes or interiors steeped in local



custom, incorporating traditional settings and ways of life and featuring locations of natural and cultural significance. Gausta's figures are often common laborers invested with quiet dignity; the settings, despite their realism and detail, are somewhat idealized, showing the influence of National Romanticism in the artist's work. A number of his works that are reproduced in the magazine portray distinctly Norwegian settings and people, several based on Gausta's native Telemark (a region especially associated with Norwegian folk culture, even today). In "Far Kommer" ("Father is Coming," 1916),<sup>110</sup> a mother in traditional attire holds a young child as the two watch a figure (father) approaching in the distance. Mother and child stand in front of an old house that—with its distinctive timbers, sod roof, acanthus woodcarvings, and foundation of large stones—is typically Norwegian, as is the surrounding landscape of steep, snow-capped mountains and rocky fields. Like the exterior architecture of the first example, the interior scenes of "Bondestue i Telemarken" ("Farmer's Cottage in Telemark," 1922) and "Fiskerhytten" ("The Fisherman's Hut," 1915) portray traditional furnishings, folk art, tools and implements as well as common ways of life. In all three examples, humble people, even peasants, are shown at work or at rest in their daily surroundings. *Jul i Vesterheimen* also includes works by the artist that are distinctly American and Midwestern. These paintings frequently feature special landscapes or places. Examples include "Minnetonka," (1919) which shows a boy and girl in a boat on the famous lake, as well as "Utsigt fra Luther College, Decorah, Iowa" ("View from Luther College, Decorah, Iowa," 1919, reprinted 1949), both of which emphasize locations of natural and cultural significance in the "western home."

Perhaps the most telling images are those that speak to both Norwegian and American experiences. For example, Gausta's painting, "En Ung Mor" ("A Young Mother," 1912) shows a mother watching over her sleeping child. Again, the scene is typically Norwegian in its use of traditional elements. The architecture of the cozy farmhouse interior is old-fashioned; an antique bed, embellished with traditional painting and woodcarving, holds the sleeping child and centers the composition. Meanwhile, the mother, who is wearing a traditional costume and knitting, sits next to the bed in a *kubbestol*,<sup>111</sup> as the child sleeps under a woven coverlet. Both mother and child are firmly rooted in the Old World, as signified by their attire, pose, and surroundings. The interior, the chair, and the handicrafts are all highly symbolic of Norwegian folk culture, and the style of the painting is such that several nineteenth century Norwegian artists might have painted it.

Yet the meaning of the work is transformed by its American context and its appearance as a framable reproduction in a Norwegian-American Christmas annual. From the viewpoint of an immigrant audience, the picture becomes an allegory for emigration: the scene epitomizes the Old World home and heritage, as Mother Norway watches over her children and imparts values and traditions to her emigrant sons and daughters. Moreover, when one considers the family ties broken by emigration and the cultural, social, and linguistic strains between successive generations of immigrant/ethnic Americans, the comfort and calm rendered in the scene take on added emotional power. The picture also affirms the familial, religious, and cultural bonds so central to *Jul i Vesterheimen* and fits in well with domestic and sentimental motifs so prevalent in gift book art. Yet the most compelling aspect of the painting, in terms of the cultural work of

*Jul i Vesterheimen*, is that what would formerly have been a symbol of humble origins becomes an image of nostalgia and pride. In fact, middle class Americans of Norwegian descent are even encouraged to clip the pictures from the magazine and proudly frame them on their parlor walls, a reminder of the culture from which they came, the sacrifices they endured when they left, and the economic, social, and artistic stature they now enjoy in their “western home.”

### Conclusion

Having examined the historical trajectory of *Jul i Vesterheimen* and the cultural work performed by selected texts and images, one may begin to assess the overall function(s), effectiveness, and significance of the magazine. As a literary document, *Jul i Vesterheimen* has mixed success, and much of this has to do with genre. Like many gift books, *Jul i Vesterheimen* has an inherent idiosyncrasy in that it tries to be both a decorative diversion and a serious literary contender. Felmingham points out that most gift books were not “produced for the student or scholar but were intended for the drawing-room coffee table or nursery shelf,” to be perused at leisure.<sup>112</sup> Not only were gift books to be decorative, but they should also be decorous: “The literature [. . .] was remarkable for its freedom from the slightest taint of impropriety. There was never a contribution that savored of the lack of refinement.”<sup>113</sup>

This tension is evident in *Jul i Vesterheimen*, and the literary quality of the magazine sometimes suffers due to the overly sentimental or didactic nature of the writing as well as the pull between the “popular” and the “artistic.” Moreover, in working to convey a moral message or perform other cultural negotiations, texts in *Jul i*

*Vesterheimen* sometimes blur genre boundaries. A tendency toward didacticism—a quality that is amplified by the magazine’s Christmas theme and its nostalgic or religious overtones—is also noticeable in many texts. As a Christmas gift book and quasi-religious publication, *Jul i Vesterheimen* also possesses some of the purity of nineteenth-century gift books and annuals, which Ralph Thompson describes as “highly moral and polite.”<sup>114</sup> The tension between sacred and secular publishing that is visible in Augsburg’s catalogues during the early part of the twentieth century also plays out in *Jul i Vesterheimen*, especially in the case of Sundheim’s commitment to cultural preservation and literary culture, a goal that was sometimes at odds with other priorities of the publishing house. Additionally, in his role as editor of the magazine, Sundheim sometimes struggled in his attempts to elicit enough high quality submissions, to include a rich variety of literary genres and styles, and to utilize a quantity of qualified writers.

At the same time, however, it is important to point out that genre also worked for the magazine in some respects. For example, the sentimental and nostalgic tone of the Christmas annual corresponds to the retrospective quality of the many texts dealing with the Old Country, emigration and pioneering. The religious references found in some pieces may also be complementary in terms of genre (a yearly “taking stock” in an annual publication, especially during a religious holiday) and themes (the spiritual well-being of Norwegian-American culture). And the magazine’s ethnic mandate overlaps frequently with its moral instruction. Moreover, though *Jul i Vesterheimen* reflects the sentimental, romantic, picturesque and exotic elements of its nineteenth century predecessors, it differs from the majority of earlier gift books in its consideration of and responsiveness to social reality.<sup>115</sup> Stokker views the authors of *Jul i Vesterheimen* as “sensitive observers

of contemporary society [who] produce fiction that meaningfully reflects the prevailing mood and pressing issues of their time.”<sup>116</sup> Even when texts appear at their most conventional or formulaic, they may provide a meaningful social commentary or critique. The tone of such texts is often indicative of the honesty of writer or narrator, as ethnic Americans reveal their impressions of and reactions to American life. This honesty and social relevance is due in large part to the ethnic nature of the magazine and its historical moment. Furthermore, the mixture and variety of genres and styles works well in the scrapbook format of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, as the magazine provides a dynamic collection of many voices in a single space. A number of texts are of a high literary caliber and merit consideration for their technical skill, especially in terms of regionalism and local color, nature writing, allegorical tales, and the short story or sketch.

The visual quality of the magazine is first rate, including the many colorful and attractive illustrations, paintings, and photographs featured on the magazine’s covers and on its pages. *Jul i Vesterheimen* benefits from and participates in the “golden age” of magazine illustration and the subsequent “boom in illustrated gift books” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>117</sup> While illustrations often complement texts, the iconography of the magazine stands on its own as a powerful medium, conveying the cultural messages via visual cues. Much like Norman Rockwell’s famous covers for the Saturday Evening Post, many of the illustrations in *Jul i Vesterheimen* work to idealize, even mythologize, important components of Norwegian-American life and to create a positive and uniform group image among readers. Put another way, pictures are identity, ethnicity, and community made visible and reveal how editors and contributors wished to see themselves and their world. Even for successive generations of Norwegian-

Americans who could no longer read Norwegian, the visual appeal and physical beauty of the magazine retained its charm and some of its meaning. Taken together, texts and illustrations form a powerful rhetorical package. Ultimately, the magazine is unprecedented as a showcase for Norwegian-American culture at its high water mark and provides a key forum for Norwegian-American literary and artistic activity.

Indeed, *Jul i Vesterheimen* may be viewed as a repository of culture. Like the Augsburg catalogues of the same period, the magazine functions as a kind of cultural lexicon, educating readers about Norway and their Norwegian heritage as well as their own American history. When it comes to American life in particular, *Jul i Vesterheimen* functions as a “medium of acculturation,” to borrow a phrase from Sigrid Brevik Wangsness. In her study of *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (“The Woman and the Home,” 1888-1947), one of the foremost Scandinavian-American women’s magazines in the United States, Wangsness argues that the magazine participated in efforts to Americanize its readers, “aiming at helping its readership to *participate* [sic] in American life.”<sup>118</sup> *Jul i Vesterheimen* certainly does this as well, and in many ways, the magazine is in itself a proof of acculturation, affirming Norwegian-Americans’ status and success in their American home. *Jul i Vesterheimen* seeks to acculturate its readers but also to remind them that—as they become prosperous and assimilated middle class Americans—there is a right way (and a wrong way) to do things. Like Augsburg’s “Hope Chest of Books,” *Jul i Vesterheimen* contains important values and traditions that should not be lost or forgotten, even as Americanization takes place.

The fear of forgetting is another prominent theme of the magazine, one that points to a key aspect of its cultural work: the formation of collective memory. *Jul i*

*Vesterheimen* is as much about creating a legacy as it is about creating a literature, and as the window of opportunity begins to close on the vision of a distinct, long-lived Norwegian-American subculture in the United States in the twentieth century, the creation of a historical legacy becomes all the more urgent. In fact, during the later years of the magazine's publication, this appears to be the primary preoccupation. *Jul i Vesterheimen* is therefore not only a site for acculturation but also for negotiation as to which aspects of the Norwegian-American experience should be retained and passed on. Moreover, the problem of the decreasing use of Norwegian and the reality of assimilation among Norwegian-Americans during this period is a real concern that underlies much of the content in *Jul i Vesterheimen* and accounts, in part, for the highly nostalgic tone of many texts. Thus, *Jul i Vesterheimen* may be understood as a symbol of a culture at a crossroads, attempting to consolidate its ethnic identity and collective memory while still envisioning future hopes and aspirations for its people in America.

The continued formation of Norwegian-American identity well into the twentieth century also attests to the evolving nature of ethnicity as well as the complex and dynamic processes of assimilation, even among one of the "old" and "white" ethnic groups of protestant Scandinavians in the United States. For though the relevance of Norwegian as a language in America had begun to wane, and the ethnic group had adapted successfully to American life in a number of arenas, a strong ethnic impulse is still very much apparent in *Jul i Vesterheimen*. Indeed, the ethnic identification expressed by the magazine's writers (and presumably shared, to an extent, by its readers) supports theories of ethnicity as an adaptive and creative phenomenon, one that is shaped by both the internal workings of the ethnic group and its dialogue with outside forces.

The fact that ethnicity continues to play a role even after the group is significantly assimilated to American life is supported by the magazine's ethnic focus, its long publishing run of over forty years, and its use of the Norwegian language well into the 1950's (more than a century after the boom period of Norwegian emigration to the United States commenced). While *Jul i Vesterheimen* reveals competing subject positions and conflicting linguistic and cultural loyalties among Norwegian-Americans, the magazine also exhibits a remarkable fluidity, showing that ethnic writers and readers negotiated multiple identity categories and a variety of cultural forms and traditions with acumen, thoughtfulness, and skill. *Jul i Vesterheimen* is therefore relevant and responsive to both its ethnic and American contexts.

Perhaps a single image from the magazine sums it up best: with the American flag waiving on the left and the Norwegian flag on the right, a glowing Christmas tree anchors and illuminates the center of the picture.<sup>119</sup> Through the shared custom and unifying theme of Christmas, *Jul i Vesterheimen* presents a collective vision of Norwegian-America in which Norwegian and American impulses are synthesized and ethnic writers and readers are encouraged to contemplate and celebrate their past, present, and future. Like "den gamle kisten" (the old immigrant chest) or Augsburg's more modern "hope chest of books," *Jul i Vesterheimen* is the crowning keepsake, a testament that Norwegian-Americans are, as one contributor put it, "a cultural people of distinction."<sup>120</sup> Finally, *Jul i Vesterheimen* not only attests to the key role played by ethnic publishers and periodicals in the formation and preservation of ethnic literature, but also to the importance of books and reading in establishing "culture," in constructing identity, and in claiming citizenship.



<sup>1</sup> Marcus O. Bøckman, "Jul i Vesterheimen," Jul i Vesterheimen 1936: n. pag.

<sup>2</sup> The term *Vesterheimen*—derived from the Old Norse word for "the Western world"—was formally proposed as a name for Norwegian America in 1875 when Rasmus B. Anderson, a Norwegian-American scholar, suggested its use in an article in the Chicago-based Norwegian language newspaper, *Skandinaven*. Anderson's suggestion was adopted, and *Vesterheimen* ("the Western home") came to refer to the distinct ethnic community of Norwegians in the United States, located primarily in the Upper Midwest (with a secondary migration to the Pacific Northwest).

<sup>3</sup> Norwegian writers also contributed to Jul i Vesterheimen, although the magazine was primarily focused on Norwegian-American writers and topics.

<sup>4</sup> Orm Øverland, The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1996) 32.

<sup>5</sup> Karlis L. Ozolins, "A History of Augsburg Publishing House," M.A. thesis, U of Minnesota, 1960, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Borghild K. Sundheim and Marie Sundheim Anderson, "Vår far—Anders Sundheim," Jul i Vesterheimen 1957: 7.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick W. Faxon, Literary Annuals and Gift Books, A Bibliography, 1823-1903 (Boston: Boston Book, 1912; Pinner, Middlesex: Private Libraries Assn., 1973) xi-xii.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Thompson, American Literary Annuals and Gift Books, 1825-1865 (New York: Wilson, 1936) 1-2. There were other early American attempts at the genre contemporary with The Atlantic Souvenir, but it is nevertheless viewed as the best first example of the genre in the United States.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson 4.

<sup>10</sup> Julen, or Norges Jul, was published by the Nordmanns-Forbundet (The Norseman's Federation), an organization in Oslo promoting cultural bonds between Norway and Norwegians around the world. The annual was also sometimes called Nordmanns-Forbundets Julehefte ("The Norseman's Federation's Christmas Annual"). Some of the contributors and readers of Jul i Vesterheimen would have been familiar with the Norseman's Federation and its publications. For example, the 1924 Nordmanns-Forbundets Julehefte was advertised in the Augsburg Christmas catalog, and Waldemar Ager was listed among the contributors. See Gift Books for Christmas (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1924) 24. The Norseman's Federation is headquartered in Oslo and remains active today.

<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Stokker, Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society P, 2000) xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Orm Øverland, "Augsburg Publishing House: The Pentultimate Chapter of Norwegian-American Literature," Norwegian-American Essays, ed. Knut Djupedal et al., (Oslo: NAHA-Norway, 1993) 12. Sundheim's program of "dual responsibility" and its influence on Augsburg Publishing House is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1940) n. pag. This line is quoted in an advertisement for *Jul i Vesterheimen* in the catalog, but no formal attribution is provided for the quotation. The phrase is also used in the above article, authored by Sundheim's daughters (see note number 2).

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<sup>14</sup> Ozolins, 62.

<sup>15</sup> I have not yet been able to locate circulation information for the magazine during its early (and most vital) years. Ozolins provides circulation figures beginning in 1931, when Augsburg's new annual, Christmas, appears. During the 1930's and 1940's, Jul i Vesterheimen generally ranges from 2,500-6,500 copies. See Ozolins 261-66. Most of the documents I have read concerning the magazine deem it to be very successful and a good seller. The July 1919 and January 1920 editions of the Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin, for example, list the Christmas annual among the year's bestsellers. The interpretation of circulation data and the assessment of the magazine's reach and influence are also complicated by the nature of the publication since, as a gift book, the magazine was produced in limited numbers and was often kept and re-read by patrons long after its original date of publication.

<sup>16</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Illustreret Katalog, 1915 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1915) n. pag.

<sup>17</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Catalog, 1920 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1920) 47.

<sup>18</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions, 1929 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1929) n. pag. The ad appears on the back cover of the catalog.

<sup>19</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions from Augsburg Publishing House (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1927) n. pag.

<sup>20</sup> Gift Books for Christmas, English and Norwegian (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1924) 2.

<sup>21</sup> Augsburg Publishing House 1928 Catalog (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1928) 280.

<sup>22</sup> Jubilæums-Katalog, 1890-1915 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1915) 21.

<sup>23</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions, 1929 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1929) 63.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Nilsen, rev. of Jul i Vesterheimen, ed. A. M. Sundheim, Norden 3.7 (1931): 37. The review is signed with the initials "P. N." which likely indicate Associate Editor Paul Nilsen, to whom I attribute this piece. Norden was a literary journal published in Chicago by Det Litterære Samfund (The Norwegian Literary Society).

<sup>25</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions from Augsburg Publishing House (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1927) n. pag. The advertisement attributes this quotation to the February 1927 edition of The Inland Printer.

<sup>26</sup> John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, The Magazine in America, 1741-1990 (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 71. The Inland Printer (now the American Printer) is also generally credited with the innovation of changing the magazine cover with each issue, beginning in 1894.

<sup>27</sup> Orm Øverland, "Augsburg Publishing House: The Pentultimate Chapter of Norwegian-American Literature," Norwegian-American Essays, ed. Knut Djupedal et al., (Oslo: NAHA-Norway, 1993) 13. Hereafter referred to in citations as Augsburg.

<sup>28</sup> Ozolins 93. See 92-94 for a discussion of early English editions, assimilation, and the lackluster response from Augsburg's patrons.

<sup>29</sup> Ozolins 5.

<sup>30</sup> 1932-1933 Catalog of Books (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932) 9.

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<sup>31</sup> According to Ozolins, Sundheim “retained the position of Literary Counselor and Treasurer of the Publishing House until his death Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1945.” See Ozolins 134.

<sup>32</sup> Martha Sawyer Allen, “Remembering With Thanks,” Star Tribune [Minneapolis] 8 Nov. 1997: B2.

<sup>33</sup> Allen B2.

<sup>34</sup> Ozolins 134.

<sup>35</sup> Ozolins 135.

<sup>36</sup> Orm Øverland, introduction, “The Road to the Golden Gate,” by Ole Amundsen Buslett, The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations, ed. Marc Shell and Werner Sollors, (New York: New York U, 2000) 416-19. For more information on Sundheim’s relationship with the church publishing board, see also Øverland, Augsburg 15-20.

<sup>37</sup> A. M. Sundheim, letter to O. A. Buslett, 10 June 1915, O. A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. This and other quotations from the letter are my translation of the original Norwegian.

<sup>38</sup> A. M. Sundheim, letter to O. A. Buslett, 16 Sept. 1915, O. A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. This is my translation.

<sup>39</sup> A. M. Sundheim, letter to O. A. Buslett, 28 Mar. 1913, O. A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. My translation.

<sup>40</sup> A. M. Sundheim, letter to O. A. Buslett, 6 June, 1913, O. A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. My translation.

<sup>41</sup> I have not yet been able to consult Augsburg’s publishing records concerning royalties, but Sundheim does mention the amount of some payments in letters to authors.

<sup>42</sup> A. M. Sundheim, letter to O. E. Rølvaag, 14 Dec. 1921, O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>43</sup> A. M. Sundheim, letter to O. E. Rølvaag, 21 Oct. 1920, O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. My translation.

<sup>44</sup> Ozolins 135.

<sup>45</sup> Ozolins 136. Ozolins attributes this comment to N. N. Rønning. See note number 43 below.

<sup>46</sup> Ozolins 136.

<sup>47</sup> Ozolins 136. This comment is attributed to a speech made by N. N. Rønning, appearing in the 1931 annual report as listed on page 952 of Johannes Jensen Skordalsvold, History of Augsburg Publishing House, 1841-1931, ts., Augsburg Publishing House Archives. I have not seen the Skordalsvold typescript and cannot verify the citation. However, if it is correct, this is a curious development since Rønning was a leading advocate of Norwegian-American culture and wrote the literary manifesto, “A Literature of Our Own” in the 1920 Augsburg Publishing House Bulletin.

<sup>49</sup> 1932-1933 Catalog of Books (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932) 9.

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<sup>50</sup> Allen B2.

<sup>51</sup> Ozolins notes the importance of Augsburg's early Christmas publications, particularly Jul i Vesterheimen, in setting the stage for Christmas and contributing to the latter's overwhelming success: "[. . .] 'Jul i Vesterheimen' and other Christmas materials established a circle of appreciative readers which grew with each year and with its printing and binding created a good reputation for the House [. . .]." Ozolins 257.

<sup>52</sup> 1932-1933 Catalog of Books (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932) 9.

<sup>53</sup> All information and quotations from Christmas Gift Suggestions (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1933) n. pag.

<sup>54</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937) n. pag.

<sup>55</sup> Christmas Gift Suggestions (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1939) n. pag.

<sup>56</sup> The Augsburg Gift Catalog (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1944) 74.

<sup>57</sup> The Augsburg Gift Catalog (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1945) 65.

<sup>58</sup> Augsburg Gift Catalog (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946) 116.

<sup>59</sup> Augsburg Gift Catalog (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1953) 31.

<sup>60</sup> Jul i Vesterheimen 1936: n. pag. A "stev" is a form of folk music that involves a short, improvised song or chorus, usually based on four-line rhymed stanzas. This particular *stev* comes from Telemark, Norway, a region known for its folk traditions.

<sup>61</sup> N. N. Rønning, "Naar døren aapnes," Jul i Vesterheimen 1918: n. pag. All quotations come from this story.

<sup>62</sup> "Troll" may refer to a specific kind of monster or ogre, or to a more general sense of witchcraft or sorcery. In either case, they bode evil for mankind. Trolls are frequently associated with Norwegian nature, dwelling in the mountains or forests. *Nisser* are usually pictured as little elves or pucks with long white beards, usually wearing red stocking caps. While *nisser* may also become malevolent, they are not entirely so, as in the modern-day version of the "*julenisse*," (a sort of Christmas elf). *Nisser* were frequently believed to inhabit barns; one Norwegian Christmas tradition involves placing a bowl of porridge out for the *nisse*, in tribute to his work about the farm and/or in the hope that he will not do harm to the farm or its inhabitants. The *hulder* is a beautiful but wicked siren (usually rendered as fairly human in her appearance, with the exception of her cow-like tail), who dwells in the wilderness and lures people away. See Stokker 53-55.

<sup>63</sup> C. O. Solberg, "To Norway," Jul i Vesterheimen 1911: n. pag. All quotations come from this poem.

<sup>64</sup> Orm Øverland, Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930, Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Ser. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000) 30. Hereafter referred to as Immigrant Minds.

<sup>65</sup> Geraldine Barnes, Viking America: The First Millennium (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001) 60-62.

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<sup>66</sup> Indeed, this is still a popular practice among Norwegian-Americans and Scandinavian-Americans when it comes to ethnic expression; a contemporary example may be seen in the mugs, bumper stickers, t-shirts, etc. that sport the slogan, “Leif landed first!” (usually accompanied by a picture of one or more Vikings). Leif Eriksson (Leifr Eiríksson in Old Norse/Icelandic), also known as “Leif the Lucky,” is credited with having reached North America, referred to most commonly as “Vinland” of the Vinland Sagas, in the eleventh century. Remains of a short-term settlement have been excavated at what is now L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland.

<sup>67</sup> Johan Egilsrud, “Leif Erikson,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1935: n. pag. I quote lines 30, 36, and 40 respectively.

<sup>68</sup> Rudolph J. Vecoli, “The Italian Immigrant Press and the Construction of Social Reality, 1850-1920,” Print Culture in a Diverse America, ed. James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, *The History of Communication* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1998), 23.

<sup>69</sup> Vecoli 23.

<sup>70</sup> APH Bulletin (June 1925): 2.

<sup>71</sup> Lars Lönnroth, “The Vikings in History and Legend,” The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings, ed. Peter Sawyer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 244.

<sup>72</sup> Oluf Glasøe, “To the Land of the Lily and the Laurel,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1911: n. pag.

<sup>73</sup> J. A. Holvik, “Et glimt av vårt virke,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1938: n. pag.

<sup>74</sup> G. M. Bruce, “Christmas on the Prairies,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1912: n. pag. Both quotations are from this article.

<sup>75</sup> I. F. Grose, “A Pioneer Boy’s Experiences in a Corner of Goodhue County,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1919: n. pag.

<sup>76</sup> N. N. Rønning, “Some Experiences of a Newcomer,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1912: n. pag. All quotations are from this text.

<sup>77</sup> C. A. Melby, rev. of Norwegian Migration to America, 1825-1860, by Theodore C. Blegen, Norden 3.7 (1931): 37.

<sup>78</sup> Brent O. Peterson, Popular Narratives and Ethnic Identity: Literature and Community in Die Abendschule (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 8, 244.

<sup>79</sup> “The Cross at the Prow,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1918: n. pag. The stained glass window, designed by Edward Mohn, appears in Hoyme Memorial Chapel at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>80</sup> The picture bears an uncanny resemblance to a description by George Webbe Dasent, a British translator of Old Norse sagas, who compares the modern progress of British Victorians to the ingenuity of the Vikings: “They [the Vikings] were like England in the nineteenth century: fifty years before all the rest of the world with her manufactories and firms—and twenty years before them in railways. They were foremost in the race of civilization and progress; well started before all the rest had thought of running. No wonder therefore that both won.” Quoted in Lönnroth 243.

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<sup>81</sup> Mary Wilhelmine Williams, "Scandinavian Qualities and American Ideals," Jul i Vesterheimen 1921: n. pag.

<sup>82</sup> Peter D. Salins, Assimilation, American Style (New York: BasicBooks-HarperCollins, 1997) 124.

<sup>83</sup> Salins 127-28.

<sup>84</sup> D. G. Ristad, "Norske bygder i Manitowoc county or deromkring," Jul i Vesterheimen 1932: n. pag. This is my translation of the original Norwegian.

<sup>85</sup> Paal Mørck, "Stemninger fra Prærien," Jul i Vesterheimen 1912: n. pag. All quotations are from this source; the translations are mine.

<sup>86</sup> Øverland, Western Home 348-49.

<sup>87</sup> D. G. Ristad, "Det ny Normandi I Minnesotas Park Region," Jul i Vesterheimen 1915: n. pag. The quotation appears in this source; the translation from the original Norwegian is mine.

<sup>88</sup> D. C. Jordahl, "To Minnesota," Jul i Vesterheimen 1924: n. pag.

<sup>89</sup> The reproduction is based on an original painting by Knut Heldner.

<sup>90</sup> M. O. Wee, "Amerika—Vårt Land," Jul i Vesterheimen 1940: 31.

<sup>91</sup> John Heitmann, "This Land of Ours," Jul i Vesterheimen 1922: n. pag. All quotations are from this source and are quoted in the original English.

<sup>92</sup> "America," Jul i Vesterheimen 1922: n. pag. The photos are attributed to Frank Palmer.

<sup>93</sup> The table of contents describes the illustration as based on an original painting by F. C. Yohn while the ornamental framing in gold is based on a drawing by M. Bakke.

<sup>94</sup> Simon Johnson, "Borgere," Jul i Vesterheimen 1924: n. pag. All quotations are from this story, and the translations from the original Norwegian are mine.

<sup>95</sup> Øverland, Western Home 276.

<sup>96</sup> Tebbel and Zuckerman 80.

<sup>97</sup> Tebbel and Zuckerman 81.

<sup>98</sup> Philip Reed Rulon, Keeping Christmas: The Celebration of an American Holiday (Hamden: Archon-Shot Spring P, 1990) 160-61. Rulon refers to a text entitled "Our Family Fireside Commencement: An American Message of Christmas Good Cheer, with Some Helpful Thoughts Also for the Germans," (Boston: Heintzemann P, 1917) 3-12. Rulon suggests that the document was likely written for George Creel's Committee on Public Information.

<sup>99</sup> Dorthea Dahl, "Det gamle bokskap," Jul i Vesterheimen 1919: n. pag. I quote the English translation of the story that appeared the following year (see below).

<sup>100</sup> Dorthea Dahl, "The Old Book Case," Returning Home (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1920) 7-29. This and all other quotations are from this source.

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- <sup>101</sup> A. M. Sundheim, "Gamle Antigua, Guatemala," Jul i Vesterheimen 1931: n. pag.
- <sup>102</sup> Nellie Johnson Houkom, "For hundre år siden og framover," Jul i Vesterheimen 1943: 53-56.
- <sup>103</sup> Carl G. O. Hansen and H. O. Fjelde, "Norske Monumenter i Vesterheimen." Jul i Vesterheimen 1917: n. pag. The monuments discussed are the Ole Bull statue in Minneapolis, the Henrik Wergeland and Gange-Rolv monuments in Fargo, the Ivar Aasen and Hans Nielsen Hauge monuments at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, the Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson monuments in Fargo and Mayville, North Dakota, and the three Ibsen monuments in Wahpeton, North Dakota, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Tacoma, Washington, respectively.
- <sup>104</sup> Michael Fultz, "'The Morning Cometh': African-American Periodicals, Education, and the Black Middle Class, 1900-1930," Print Culture in a Diverse America, ed. James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, *The History of Communication* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1998), 135.
- <sup>105</sup> "Our Contributors," Jul i Vesterheimen 1921: n. pag.
- <sup>106</sup> "Our Art Supplements," Jul i Vesterheimen 1923: n. pag. All subsequent quotations are from this source. Of the illustrations concerned, three ("Signal Fire," "Trouble Hunters," and "In the Wake of the Buffalo Runners") are from paintings by C. M. Russell. The fourth illustration ("Eve on the Cattle Range") is from a painting by Phillip R. Goodwin.
- <sup>107</sup> Augsburg Publishing House Kommissionslager af Skjønlitterære Verker, 1913 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1913) 37. The same advertisement also appears in the 1913 Illustreret Katalog.
- <sup>108</sup> Gausta was a first-generation immigrant from Telemark, Norway, who (at the age of 13) came with his parents to a farm in southeastern Minnesota. He attended Luther College in Decorah, Iowa and then continued his training—with financial support from the local Norwegian-American community—as an artist in Europe, first in Kristiania (now Oslo) and then in Munich. He eventually settled in Minneapolis in 1888 and remained there until his death in 1924. In addition to his paintings of scenes in both Norway and America, Gausta is known for the altars (circa 400) he painted in Norwegian-American churches. For more information, see Marion Nelson, Painting by Minnesotans of Norwegian Background, 1870-1970 (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Assn., 2000); "Norwegian-American Painting in the Context of the Immigrant Community and American Art," Nordics in America: The Future of Their Past ed. Odd S. Lovoll (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1993) 157-86; and "Herbjørn Gausta, Immigrant Artist 1854-1924," Norvegica-Americana III (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971).
- <sup>109</sup> J. J. Skørdalsvold, "Herbjørn Gausta," Jul i Vesterheimen 1922: n. pag.
- <sup>110</sup> The dates provided in parenthesis refer to the appearance of the work in Jul i Vesterheimen, not to the date of the original painting.
- <sup>111</sup> This is a chair with a somewhat rounded shape, carved from a large, single piece of log.
- <sup>112</sup> Michael Felmingham, The Illustrated Gift Book, 1880-1930 (Aldershot: Scolar P, 1988) 2.
- <sup>113</sup> Faxon xxi.
- <sup>114</sup> Thompson 24.
- <sup>115</sup> There were, of course, exceptions to the rule in that some gift books of the 1840's and 1850's dealt with contemporary issues like slavery or temperance. See Thompson 5.

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<sup>116</sup> Stokker 198. Stokker emphasizes the responsiveness of Jul i Vesterheimen to contemporary culture by organizing her discussion of the magazine around seven chronological topics: “Pioneer Sacrifice and Aspiration,” “The Generation Gap,” “The Generation Gap Widens,” “American Nativism,” “Into the Melting Pot of Financial Ruin,” “The Immigrant Experience Reappraised,” and “Standardization of the American Lifestyle.” While Stokker’s identification and discussion of these “representative narratives” is helpful and illuminating, her assertion that “each decade of the annual seems to be characterized by a particular theme” (200) is less persuasive. Such themes appear and reappear, in various versions, throughout most of the magazine’s tenure, and while the magazine does respond to specific historical developments, its relative consistency in topic and theme is equally compelling. See Stokker, Chapter 8, “Mirroring the Norwegian American Experience,” 197-219.

<sup>117</sup> Felmingham 1. During this period, wood engraving gave way to photomechanical processes of reproduction that made illustrations more colorful and easier to produce. Some of the American artists associated with this period include Howard Pyle, N. C. Wyeth, Maxfield Parrish, Jessie Wilcox Smith, and Charles Dana Gibson.

<sup>118</sup> Sigrid Brevik Wangsness, “*Kvinden og Hjemmet*: A Magazine for Scandinavian Immigrant Women, 1901-1910,” Norse Heritage—1989 Yearbook, ed. Hans Storhaug et al. (Stavanger: Norwegian Emigration Center) 105-16.

<sup>119</sup> The image, which is accompanied by a poem, appears in the 1917 edition of Jul i Vesterheimen under the title “De to flag” (“The Two Flags”).

<sup>120</sup> J. A. Holvik, “Et folk i fest,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1925: n. pag.



## CHAPTER 3

### ROOTED: PLACE, HOMELAND, AND IDENTITY IN NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

[W]e need to foster this feeling for place.<sup>1</sup> –O. E. Rølvaag, 1917

It is no exaggeration to say that the great majority of Norwegian America's first generation is *rootless*, nor that many of the second and third generation [. . .] are, at least in part, rootless.<sup>2</sup> –N. N. Rønning, 1943

#### **Introduction**

Depictions of Norway and America in the pages of *Jul i Vesterheimen*, discussed in the previous chapter, communicate shared visions of heritage, ethnicity, and community and reveal that a sense of place is key to constructions of Norwegian-American identity. Whether manifested in the emigrant land left behind or the immigrant world created anew, the notion of homeland is integral to the production of ethnic culture, including ethnic literature. As an important New World destination of the past two centuries, America has figured prominently in literary explorations of environment and place; indeed, American literature abounds in discussions of the American landscape, which frequently include contemplations of boundaries, regions, communities, and identity categories, as well as their associated “American values.” From the earliest narratives of exploration and colonization to the literature of the frontier and American

West, from regionalism and local color to environmental literature and ecocriticism, the American land is a central component of American life; moreover, place attachment contributes to a sense of belonging and therefore figures strongly in expressions of affiliation, including nationalism.

Immigrant and ethnic literatures have much to tell about the nature and meaning of American places. Reflecting the United States' history as a nation of migrants and displaced peoples, the immigrant is an important figure in American literature, whether as author and observer (St. John de Crevecoeur) or as fictional protagonist (Willa Cather's Antonia Shimerda or Alexandra Bergson). Indeed, the story of landscape is wedded to the story of the immigrant American when it comes to meta-narratives of American literature—particularly the story of westward migration and Manifest Destiny. As Henry Nash Smith points out, “one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing populations westward.”<sup>3</sup> Yet despite the pervasiveness of the immigrant in American culture, the manifestation and function of place identity among immigrant and ethnic writers has not received systematic attention among literary scholars. This is not to say that immigrant authors' relationship to place has gone unnoticed: Jacob Riis is known and remembered for the urban tenement life portrayed in his photographs and writings; Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin are indelibly intertwined with the melting pot milieu of New York's Lower East Side; and Norwegian-America's own O. E. Rølvaag gained international renown for his pioneer epic, Giants in the Earth, which remains a seminal text in the areas of frontier writing, Midwestern literature (particularly Great Plains literature), agrarian fiction, and ethnic literatures.

However, as these examples point out, immigrant, ethnic, and minority writers' relationship to place is often (and understandably) limited to specific regions, genres, or movements. While this particularity is important and even necessary, place identity as portrayed in ethnic literature and expressed by ethnic writers merits further attention and benefits from a broader theoretical lens. In the introduction to her book on nature and agriculture in American fiction, for example, Stephanie L. Sarver notes her curious meandering through the library stacks in order to conduct her research, a path that includes sources in ecology, environmental philosophy, agricultural economics and history, horticulture, and American literature—especially agrarian literature.<sup>4</sup> Recent literary studies of place utilize scholarship from fields like environmental studies, cultural geography, folklore, and regionalism, which complement studies in ethnic culture. Indeed, place studies seem a natural fit for immigrant literature: as newcomers to various American “scapes,” immigrant writers offer unique perspectives, occupy multiple subject positions as both insiders and outsiders, and record reactions and adaptations to new environments.

The lack of systematic study of region or place is not limited to immigrant and ethnic literatures. In an essay entitled, “Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism,” Michael Kowalewski poses a key question: “Why has region been neglected as a critical category?”<sup>5</sup> His tentative answer is that “[t]he critical assumption seems to be that region or a sense of place is not an imaginative factor that can be internalized and struggled with in the same literarily rewarding ways that writers struggle with issues of race, class, and gender [ . . . ] (174). Putting it in a more amusing way, Kowalewski provides a metaphor for the critical devaluation of Regionalism: “a kind of

literary chamber of commerce juxtaposed to the three national congressional houses of race, class, and gender” (175). Kowalewski acknowledges that critics may “lack a vocabulary with which to ask engaging philosophical, psychological, or aesthetic questions about what it means to dwell in a place, whether actually or imaginatively” (174); though this be a hindrance, however, “[h]aving doubts about the possibility of adequately defining regional identity is not the same as asserting that it does not exist” (175).

This chapter takes beginning steps toward an understanding of place identity in writings by immigrant and ethnic authors. Hopefully, the discussion of place as a factor within specific ethnic literary traditions will lead scholars to conclusions that may be applied more generally to immigrant and ethnic literary studies. Yet even within a single ethnic group, portrayals of human relation to environments and landscapes are numerous and various. Far from comprehensive, this chapter represents an introductory and somewhat cursory investigation into the importance of place in Norwegian-American literature. Yet even in the relatively few examples discussed in this chapter—an essay by N. N. Rønning, a novel by O. E. Rølvaag, short stories by O. A. Buslett and Dorthea Dahl—it is clear that place matters. The introduction to a study on “Region, Place, and Locality” provides a foundation for the concept of place in this discussion:

Regions or places [. . .] can also be viewed as expressing a sense of belonging or lived experience for the people who inhabit them. From this point of view, the region or place is a locus of identity; while living their lives people invest their surroundings with meaning and can develop a ‘sense of place’.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter, then, examines expressions of belonging and notions of identity that are tied to a sense of place. One of the theoretical underpinnings of this chapter is Humanistic

Geography, which “uses the term place to refer to the specific geographical settings or locales in which a sense of place is established by knowing and sentient human beings.”<sup>7</sup>

A sense of place therefore incorporates both the physical environment(s) and the human inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, place may be understood as both natural and cultural environment, or even the sites at which the two intertwine. Kent C. Ryden, a scholar of American studies, provides a helpful summary of the ingredients that go into a sense of place: “The depth that characterizes a place is human as well as physical and sensory, a thick layer of history, memory, association, and attachment that builds up in a location as a result of our experiences in it.”<sup>9</sup> As Ryden’s formulation suggests, a sense of place is tied to social networks, economic systems, languages, customs, attitudes and values; it is shaped by both individual and communal perception. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan makes a similar statement about place attachment:

Attachment of a deep though subconscious sort may come simply with familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time. It is difficult to articulate quiet attachments of this type.<sup>10</sup>

Place attachment is as much about communal and cultural identity as it is about geographic or topographic reality. Thus, place may be understood as “a center of meaning constructed by experience.”<sup>11</sup> I argue that in the Norwegian-American texts examined here, place does indeed form “a center of meaning,” both in the works at large and for the de-centered immigrants or ethnics they portray. Moreover, a sense of place does not merely function as thematic material in Norwegian-American writing; the literature itself becomes a vehicle for conveying place identity as writers work to articulate the “quiet attachments” that figure so prominently in immigrant life. Place

attachment<sup>12</sup> is therefore an important imaginative factor in Norwegian-American culture and an exceedingly relevant concept for understanding and interpreting immigrant identity and the real and imaginary place(s) of *Vesterheimen*.

### **From Norway to America: Place and the Immigrant Soul in Rønning and Rølvaag**

As the introduction to this dissertation explains in detail, the very term *Vesterheimen* invokes the concept of home (Norwegian *heim* or *hjem*) in several ways: a geographic center in the Upper Midwest, the temporal and cultural space of Norwegian-America, and the geographic and theoretical concept of a “western home” in America which, in its very articulation, implies the “eastern home” or native ground of Norway. In addition to appearing in various manifestations in the texts themselves, issues of environment and place shape the literature that is produced. For example, the earliest forms of Norwegian-American writing—immigrant letters, pamphlets and books like Ole Rynning’s True Account of America for the Information and Help of the Peasant and Commoner (1838), and diaries like the pioneer record of Elisabeth Koren (1853-55)—frequently feature topography, climate, vegetation, landscape, and other environmental factors as primary subject matter. Even when Norwegian-American literature comes to maturity in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, writers commonly utilize symbolic and thematic treatments of place, landscape, and environment as they explore favored topics like migration, settlement, and homesteading, exemplified in works like Drude Krog Janson’s Tore: Fortælling fra prærien (Tore: A Story from the Prairie; 1894), Simon Johnson’s From Fjord to Prairie; or In the New Kingdom (1914; 1916), Johannes

Wist's Hjemmet paa prærien (Home on the Prairie; 1921), and Ole Rølvaag's Giants in the Earth (1925; 1927). Indeed, it is in the areas of pioneer and frontier literature that the role of place and landscape in Norwegian-American and other immigrant texts has received the majority of critical attention. However, this is not the whole story; in addition to frontier epics, other texts by Norwegian-American writers explore the meaning of place to the immigrant. Some feature urban environments like Chicago and Minneapolis,<sup>13</sup> the latter figuring prominently in one of the texts discussed in this chapter, Rølvaag's The Boat of Longing. And it is not only through fiction that place identity is negotiated. As the previous chapter reveals, a number of non-fiction texts in *Jul i Vesterheimen* feature special places in Norway and America (particularly the Midwest) and discuss place attachment as one of the conditions for community, citizenship, and culture.

One such selection is an essay by N.N. Rønning entitled “Når et folk mister sitt morsmål” (When a People Loses its Mother Tongue). Rønning's essay—from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken—points out the intimate and undeniable link between language, which he considers at the very core of identity and culture, and the native environment: “Temperament and character are formed, to a great extent, by the country's nature and climate. These distinctive features give the people's speech its life and ring and color” (35). In fact, Rønning's characterization of Norwegian language becomes a cartographic exercise in which the geographic map of Norway reflects the collective psyche of the people. “Casting a glance” over the map of Norway, Rønning notes the great presence of the sea, the “deep valleys, high mountains, and dark woods,” the short days and long, dark nights of winter, and the summertime in which “the days are long and

light, and the nights are not night but just a faint shadow” (35). Rønning goes on to compare features of the landscape with parallel attributes of the Norwegian consciousness and to connect language and culture, particularly literature, with the native environment: “And when one reads the best of Norwegian literature—that which mirrors the people’s soul—the language sounds like the axe’s blow in the woods, like the wind’s whispering in sheltered hillsides of birch, like the brook’s babbling in the sunset” (35). Rønning presents language (and by extension culture) as inextricably linked to place; once these native markers and practices begin to fade, the continuity and vitality of the cultural legacy is interrupted. Rønning’s link between place and language also suggests the intricate, embedded meanings in both—here is something that ultimately defies translation (and transmission) once it becomes corrupted or lost. Rønning warns that “it is sad and tragic when a people loses its mother tongue” and that such loss represents “damage to one’s soul” (35).

The relationship between place, culture, and the immigrant soul is of primary concern to O. E. Rølvaag as well. The author explores the problem quite eloquently in his novel Længselens Båt (1921) or The Boat of Longing (1933) through the story of Nils Vaag, a young Norwegian immigrant who leaves his native Norway for Minneapolis in the early decades of the twentieth-century. This novel has at times been overlooked due in large part to its more famous cousin Giants in the Earth (1927), which served as the breakthrough book for Rølvaag, bringing him increased attention and kudos from critics and readers. Of all Rølvaag’s works, Giants in the Earth has received the lion’s share of literary criticism, including studies of the novel’s varied and powerful uses of the Dakota landscape. Partly for these reasons, and partly because The Boat of Longing is a



compelling novel in its own right, especially in terms of immigrant place identity, it is a feature text of this chapter. As the dates suggest, the publishing history of The Boat of Longing also has something to do with audience expectations and critical reception. Although it actually preceded Giants in the Earth in its original release as Længselens Båt—published in Norwegian by Augsburg Publishing House in 1921—the English edition did not appear (posthumously) until 1933, after Giants in the Earth (published in an English edition by Harper in 1927) had already helped the author to earn an international reputation.

The reviews of The Boat of Longing reflect this curious publishing circumstance. Early reviews of the original Norwegian edition are overwhelmingly positive, comparing the novel to previous works by the author and concluding that Rølvaag has turned a creative corner and truly found his voice. Although the later reviews for the English edition are also very positive, they reflect some hesitation: this work does not include “such a mighty canvas as was spread before the reader in the author’s vast saga of America’s prairies,”<sup>14</sup> and “compared with that great work [Giants in the Earth] this novel seems sketchy, limited in scope and premature.”<sup>15</sup> Whether seen as an earlier work leading up to Giants in the Earth or as an artistic anti-climax following its more famous cohort, The Boat of Longing is often viewed as less technically savvy than its peer. This has to do with the form of The Boat of Longing as well, as the novel is somewhat experimental. Rølvaag commented that he “broke with the plot formula” in this novel.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the alternating romantic and realistic strains of the book, and its intermingled

poetry and prose, confound scholars who wish to place it in a neat category. Whatever the reasons, the text is frequently referred to as Rølvaag's "second best novel" or a text that "belongs with his best work, second only to 'Giants in the Earth.'"<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, although Giants in the Earth certainly has its share of tragedy, despair and defeat, the epic scale of the work and the overwhelming energy and optimism of character Per Hansa lend the novel a heroic and celebratory tone. In contrast, The Boat of Longing is largely a story of disappointment, alienation, and failure, and protagonist Nils Vaag is frequently viewed as a tragic figure. As one reviewer puts it, "This is not a story of triumph and happiness. It is a story of the spiritual isolation of the immigrant in a strange land [. . .]. It is a tale of unfulfillment, but even in its tragedy it has a strength and beauty which surpasses the material life."<sup>18</sup> This may also have influenced the reception of the work, as many reviewers acknowledged the "pathos and the tragedy of the sundering of home ties."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, some readers and critics appear to have been uneasy about a story that renders the darker side of immigration: "one perplexity is that he [Nils] stops writing home to his parents. But presumably this dilemma will be cleared up in the next volume."<sup>20</sup> This reviewer refers to the fact that Rølvaag had planned to write a sequel to The Boat of Longing. However, the author did not accomplish this goal, and the book that might have redeemed Nils and given his immigrant story a happier outcome never appeared.<sup>21</sup>

Still other critics take a more balanced view of The Boat of Longing, seeing it not merely as a precursor to Giants in the Earth but as an important statement in its own right: "The earlier Rølvaag books were mostly accounts of the immigrant as pioneer. This is a study of the immigrant's relation to the country he has left, the motives that sent

him from it, and the effect of his departures on those who remain behind.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, comparisons between the two works are most helpful in terms of the immigrant stories they purport to tell. Regarding the sites of immigrant displacement and New World negotiation, The Boat of Longing provides an urban (Minneapolis) and north woods counterpart to the prairie of Rølvaag’s trilogy. The Boat of Longing may even function as a kind of companion piece to Giants in the Earth in that the former provides the economic and psychological background to emigration and explores in detail the native attachments that help, hinder, and haunt Norwegian immigrants like Nils Vaag and his counterparts, Per Hansa and Beret (whose story commences with the crossing of the prairie in the United States in the opening scene of Giants in the Earth).

However one chooses to situate The Boat of Longing historically and artistically, the one aspect of the work about which the vast majority of readers agree is the effectiveness and power of the earliest sections of the novel, particularly the portrayals of Nils’ native region of Nordland in Northern Norway. If it be true that “[p]oets make the best topographers,” then Rølvaag must be a prime example.<sup>23</sup> Not only do readers respond to the “[f]ineness of perception and observation, and strength of description, together with vividness of narration”<sup>24</sup> but also to the undeniable link between people and place. Several reviewers note the effectiveness with which Rølvaag relates the “remarkable Nature” of Nordland to its people, “whose psychology has been marked by this Nature and by the struggle with the sea,” particularly “the Nordland boy Nils [who] feels himself intensely attached to this land.”<sup>25</sup> While readers of both the English and Norwegian editions express similar praise, the Norwegian language audience is

understandably enthusiastic in its response, proclaiming both the “genius of Rølvaag’s pictures from Nordland”<sup>26</sup> and a strong identification with the Norwegian landscape and immigrant themes of the novel:

[. . .] nature’s mystery and the national character are connected sympathetically; [the reader’s] feelings and thoughts are captivated; memories, which were father’s and mother’s most dear and precious possession, come to mind involuntarily. The author shows himself to be a real people’s poet. He induces us to get to know ourselves again. In this he does the Norwegian-American people a prophet’s service.<sup>27</sup>

This quotation attests to the emotional, even personal response of readers. As one reader puts it, “this book is deep as the ocean.”<sup>28</sup> The success of such portrayals was no doubt due in part to the autobiographical impulses surrounding Rølvaag’s writing of the book. The author himself came from Northern Norway, born into a fisherman’s family in the hamlet of Rølvaag, on the island of Dønna in Helgeland. Rølvaag retained his identity as a *Nordlænder* (Nordlander or person from Nordland) all of his life, being an active member of the *Nordlandslaget*<sup>29</sup> and writing many pieces for the group’s journal, *Nord-Norge*.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps because of the novel’s parallels with his own life, *The Boat of Longing* was Rølvaag’s favorite among his own works: “I have put more of myself into that book than into any other.”<sup>31</sup> That he felt a personal connection with the novel is evident in his Foreword to *The Boat of Longing*:

Through long association with the persons in these pictures I have learned to know and love them. It is, therefore, with a feeling of regret that I now part with them and send them out into the world. Take them in and be good to them. They need it.<sup>32</sup>

This reference to the integrity of the characters is further emphasized in Rølvaag’s epigraph to the novel: “It is a mistaken belief that the immigrant has no soul.” Thus, the

novel sets out to prove the substance of the immigrant soul and utilizes place attachment as one of the primary factors in the formation and expression of Nils Vaag's identity.

One only has to read the first chapter of The Boat of Longing—"The Cove Under the Hill"—to realize that place is central in this novel.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the author seems obsessed with place, intent on seeing the Nordland landscape from every angle and capturing it in words. This fixation on the environment and mystique of Nordland, coupled with the fact that a significant portion of the book takes place in Norway, reveals just how central the spirit of place is to this text. The novel begins with a contemplation of Nordland: "The place lay on the sea, as far out as the coast dared push itself, and extremely far north, so far, in fact, that it penetrated the termless solitudes where utmost Light and utmost Dark hold tryst" (1). Here Rølvaag characterizes the Northern Norwegian landscape as one of epic proportions (predicting his subsequent writing about the Midwestern prairies): a land of power, isolation, and extremes. The environment does not merely serve as a dramatic setting, however; the narrator goes on to establish the landscape, particularly the sea, as a presence in the story. The reader is told, for example, that "[i]n summer an idle sea stretched broad-bosomed and dreaming between skylines—for days too indolent to stir more than just enough to betray its eternal restlessness" and that "[s]ummer night, glorious and big, listened intent" (1). The personification of landscape so characteristic of Rølvaag's fiction functions in two important ways. First, as Einar Haugen points out, Nordland becomes "a character in the tale."<sup>34</sup> Second, Rølvaag establishes the link between place and people, as Nordland shapes its human inhabitants and their psychological states.

This connection between the landscape of the north with the mindscape<sup>35</sup> of the people is revealed in the effects of Nordland's environmental extremes:

And sun. Day and night—sun. Through the entire round of the hours it found nothing to do but pour splendour upon sea and sky, on steely crag and growthless rocks. Gold glittered, gold flamed crimson, and gold—dull and intert—glowed feebly, like dying embers. Everywhere sun...Sunny too the moods of men at this season of the year. (2)

The lyricism of the summer landscape is then contrasted with the utter darkness and despair of winter:

But when winter came—! There where aforetime bright joy had reigned so strongly, gloom and a numbing fear set in [. . .]. Darkness hung like a pall over house and home. It was as though every evil genie had come abroad. Hideous to hear in the dead of night the hollow sobbings of the great breakers. The tempest piling the frothy water mountains high and hurling them thunderous up on land would bring men to cower in terror, for that sounded like the crack of doom...Talk was little among people then...they only listened. (2)

These two descriptions illustrate the ways in which the natural or “outer” geographies are mirrored in the “inner geography”<sup>36</sup> of people. The two contrasting depictions of nature—one lyrical, the other malevolent—are both sublime in their power to awe and inspire human beings, to shape their identities and destinies, and to define their culture.

The link between place and culture is expressed in the folklore of Nordland.

Specifically, it is around the myth of the Boat of Longing that the novel evolves:

Such wild tales and queer legends went about in that far northern countryside. Of the many, one concerned a boat said from time to time to have shown itself out in the open sea. So phenomenal was the manner of its appearance that folk did not know what to make of it. It would come all of a sudden, float quietly in the sunlight awhile, then vanish as instantly as it had come. Not that anyone had ever been near it; but many had seen it at various times. At length it had crept into the stories and become part of the common lore. (2-3)

The book goes on to relate a number of tales concerning local people who have seen the phantom boat. All of these are tragic figures: those who have lost loved ones at sea, those who are dying, those who have suffered some great spiritual loss or affliction. Thus, the boat is connected to the physicality and geography of the region as well as the history and sentiment of human experience. By beginning the book in this way and introducing both land and people simultaneously—as parts of an organic web of natural environment, memory, and lore—the novel reveals that “our sense of place [. . .] is rooted in narration.”<sup>37</sup> Barbara Johnstone explains that people are “at home in a place when the place evokes stories and, conversely, stories can serve to create places” (5). As if to illustrate the point, Rølvaag brings the reader into the mystical realm of Nordland via landscape (that shapes the people’s stories) and legend (that, in turn, creates the place of Nordland). In doing so, the author communicates a strong association between land and people, a sense of identification that contributes to individual and cultural identity.

This tie between place and people is exemplified in the protagonist, Nils Vaag. Nils’ place identity as a *Nordlending* is made explicit in a number of ways. For instance, the family livelihood is fishing, so the sea forms both the economic and cultural basis for Nils’ family and community. Even among fishermen, Nils “bade fair to become the coast’s most able fisher,” exhibiting an uncanny instinct on the water:

Even his father, who was himself acknowledged to be the most intrepid fisherman along this coast, preferred him [Nils] in the boat in times of danger to anyone he knew; it gave him such a sense of security to have him there. He observed with what joyous abandon the boy would meet an overgrown sea, and it gladdened his heart...well-nigh made him think the lad a stranger to fear; already, despite his young years, he was like the most seasoned old salt. (18)

The family name provides another link between place and character. For example, Nils' father is called "Jo by the Sea," and the family surname, the place name of Vaag, links them to the physical landscape in several ways. Vaag refers to a named geographic location (similar to the author's own name of Rølvaag). The word "vaag" has relevant meanings as well. The word may be translated as "bay, fjord, harbor, inlet," and there is also an archaic form of the word that means "billow or wave."<sup>38</sup> Finally, the cozy character of the family cottage is echoed in its larger geographical surroundings: "a genial little cove had hid itself away well out of reach of the great ocean...even when the sea raged at its worst it was the securest of havens" (15). Thus, Nils' sense of place in Nordland encompasses home, family, community and their attendant traditions and values.

Nils' place identity—particularly his bond with the sea—also includes his psychological and spiritual life: "The dreams which the sea cradles are many and strange...it was these [that] filled the mind of Nils and gave him growth" (18). This dream-like quality of the sea suggests both its mystical properties and the visions it inspires in Nils, particularly his developing aspirations as a young man and an artist: "Besides the sea, there was really only one other power which had any hold upon him"—music (18). Nils is a fiddler, trained by an "old pauper," whom the family takes in during Nils' boyhood. When Nils plays, "[h]is eyes would then take on a new look, dwelling upon something far away, beyond the border of any land. Jo didn't like this fiddling, for whenever Nils sat thus he would enter another world whither Jo could not follow" (18). This shadowy realm into which the father cannot follow is the imaginary world of Nils' creativity and individualism. Here Rølvaag plays with the literal and metaphorical



implications of borders and distant lands, foreshadowing the separation of father and son. Nils' fiddle tunes—particularly the one he composes “out of what he had heard his sea dreams saying”—represent a vague notion of becoming “that which is highest of all” and seeing “the most beautiful” (70). Gradually, these ideals manifest themselves in more concrete forms: Nils' romantic attachment to an exotic and musical young woman named Zalma (later revealed to be a Russian Jew) brought to him by a mysterious shipwreck and later sent away by his father; his decision to hire out as a Lofoten fisherman and go to sea independently; and, most importantly, Nils' growing sense of self and restlessness, the “longing to escape” (53) that eventually leads him to America.

Again the environment plays a central role in Nils' development. The arrival of Nils “peculiar restlessness” coincides with the change in season:

[. . .] the beginning of winter, the season just before Christmas, when the gloom of awful, ingathering night begins to weigh heavily upon every object [. . .]. It is as though some dark foreboding passes through nature and people alike, announcing that the sun is about to undertake a long journey from which it can never return.” (42)

Nils, too, is about to undertake a journey from which he can never return. Nils' wanderlust solidifies in a scene in which the family sees the legendary Boat of Longing on the horizon; Nils rows out to meet it and hears an uncanny sound, “[a]n interweaving of song and violin....It came out of the sunglow. And from the sea” (40). Nils' attempt to reach the boat and its song are interrupted when the “deafening roar” of an enormous school of saithe surrounds his boat. The fisherman in Nils takes over, and in his frenzy to catch the fish, he loses sight of the Boat of Longing. The parents are relieved when their

son returns with his miraculous catch; however, from that time forward, “both parents could see that Nils wasn’t the same,” (43) and it becomes clear that Nils catches more than fish in his strange voyage to meet the mystical boat.

In another moment of epiphany in the natural environment, Nils’ personal and artistic aspirations fuse with his desire to go to America. On Easter Sunday, Nils goes into the mountains alone. Already inspired to “great heights” by the hymns and sermon, Nils continues his feelings of transcendence as he climbs the mountain and gains “the summit and infinitude” from which he can see “the endless reaches of the north” (59). Like a Wordsworthian hero, Nils finds his spiritual and creative self in the romantic landscape: “As he sat there on the rock, a terrible longing gripped him, a longing to get out to the great and the sublime, to the imperishably beautiful...And he prayed...that he might live it” (59). Nils then begins making movements as if he were playing his violin:

Never before had he felt such need for expression in tone. Sitting thus, swaying his head, beating time with his foot, fingering imaginary strings, it was as though mighty flood-gates hitherto locked had suddenly burst open. [. . .] And he heard tones in this mountain place, purer and stronger and more exquisite than any he had ever dreamed....He sat till the sun sank into the sea. When he went down, he walked as in a daze. (60)

Immediately after this experience, with the “spell of the sublime [. . .] over him still,” Nils resolves to tell his parents of his plans to emigrate to the United States (60). The imaginary world into which Jo cannot follow his son now becomes the New World of America. As Nils departs, Rølvaag again interweaves character and geography; this time, however, it is Mother Anna and Jo by the Sea who become part of Nils’ place attachment. In a landscape that seems to mourn Nils’ departure, the son looks back to see his mother:

And there through the shrieking storm and driving rain he saw the figure of his mother, plain as could be against the murky sky [. . .]. The mother was holding her right hand high [. . .]. The gloom and the rain were now so thick that the hand could no longer be distinguished...only the arm reaching up into the darkness. (78)

Similarly, as the steamer departs, Nils looks up to his father, who melds into the landscape: “And there up on a crag, square in the face of the west-wind storm, sat a hunched figure, leaning forward [. . .] Nils remained in the bow until the figure on the point became one with the rocks and the rain and the storm” (81). Mother, father, and Nordland (motherland, fatherland) become one, and the environment that cradles Nils’ life and dreams becomes again the symbol of home and heritage.

In this vital first section of the novel, then, Rølvaag assigns values and meanings to particular places. Norway, or more specifically, Nordland, is aligned with family, community, heritage, and native culture. The mysterious northern realms are also linked to Nils’ creativity and selfhood; the region gives him his “song of the sea” and his longing to realize talents and aspirations. However, this same longing leads him to America, which is also linked to Nils’ individualism. If it is the sublime mountains and sea of Norway that inspire him, it is the vast unknown geographies of America that promise opportunity and eventual fulfillment of his potential. In this way, America may be understood to function as a “mythical space” in the novel, to borrow the terminology of Yi-Fu Tuan:

When we wonder what lies on the other side of the mountain range or ocean, our imagination constructs mythical geographies that may bear little or no relationship to reality. Worlds of fantasy have been built on meager knowledge and much yearning.<sup>39</sup>

Several of the keywords in Tuan's depiction of mythical space—mountain range and ocean, imagination, reality, fantasy, and yearning—echo key aspects of Rølvaag's novel, and Tuan's concept sheds light on the potential and promise associated with American space and place in the immigrant imagination.

The second section of the novel, aptly entitled "In Foreign Waters," continues Nils' immigrant story approximately three months later. Nils lives in a boardinghouse, known informally as "Babel" for the confusion, noise, and many languages that fill its halls, in an immigrant neighborhood in south Minneapolis. Contrary to the fairytale "enchanted city" (53) that Nils and his traveling companion Per Syv have envisioned, Minneapolis appears as a "great, strange city" of "infernal racket" (83). With the change in scene comes a marked shift in the tone and pace of the novel as well. Gone are the romantic and languid descriptions of the midnight sun and the changing seas of Nordland, replaced by the rather seedy venues of the Scandinavian immigrant neighborhoods around Cedar Avenue and Seven Corners. Einar Haugen remarks, "To fall from the high romance of the first section to the realism of urban Norwegian-America in Minneapolis is something of a shock."<sup>40</sup> The Norwegian-American critics appear to have been most bothered by the switch. American critics also note the change and tend to prefer the first section of the novel, but their reactions are less visceral than that of the Norwegian-Americans. Still other reviewers relate the shift to issues of genre and form, seeing the combination of romance and realism as part of the "prose poetry" that makes the work one of the author's "richest but also most frustrating books"<sup>41</sup> (rich in its lyricism and pathos, frustrating in its lack of structure and plot). For example, one reviewer remarks that the novel "is noteworthy for its combination of two widely dissimilar strains, the

mystical folktale and the realistic novel.”<sup>42</sup> Another critic describes the novel as “one of the most phantastic and at the same time one of the most realistic books I have read.”<sup>43</sup> Rather than attributing the difference in the America sections of the book merely to technical weaknesses in plot and structure, dramatic changes in tone, or sloppiness on the part of the author, one must consider that the jolting reality and displacement of these sections serves to place the reader in Nils’ position—that of a discombobulated observer attempting to negotiate the cityscape, where all the rules of engagement have changed.

Yet despite the harsh realism of the city, the terms with which it is described create a curious connection with Nordland. For example, the sea imagery returns as Nils experiences urban scenes: he “glide[s] into the great human stream coursing Nicollet” Avenue (89); he sees a “sea of tables” in a “vast saloon” (121) and an “ocean of swaying heads” in a theatre (126). At one point, there is even a direct comparison between Nordland and Minneapolis: “Through the street whirled two endless processions of motor cars [. . .]. Like running the undertow in Nordland to get past them” (90). The use of oceanic imagery might seem incongruous with the city setting, but it functions in several important ways. First, it emphasizes Nils’s status as an alien, both as an anonymous figure in the urban throng and as a foreigner of lowly immigrant status. Moreover, on the linguistic level, the sea metaphors that characterize Nils’ impressions of urban space reinforce his cultural identity; he is thinking like a Norwegian, or more specifically, like a Nordlander, using his fisherman’s vocabulary of sea and weather to interpret American places and experiences. This is reminiscent of scenes in Giants in the Earth in which Per Hansa, using his seafaring background, sews fishing nets in order to catch geese and orients himself on the “ocean” of the prairie with sun, moon, and the North Star for

navigation guides. As Michael Kowalewski points out, “layers of locality are what we think with.”<sup>44</sup> Rølvaag reflects a similar idea in that both protagonists utilize their native knowledge in an effort to “map” and adapt to their new surroundings. While Minneapolis may not match the natural splendor of Nordland, it nevertheless compares in scale and power in a description by a naïve Per Syv:

[. . .] a tremendously large city [. . .] a city so unconscionably big [. . .] that one could, on his life, walk for half a year and never reach the end of it. For that reason the inhabitants had had to build railways in the streets! You see, they had to have some way of getting from one part of the city to another, and for them to walk such distances was unheard of. Adjoining this city was another equally large [St. Paul]. Simply unbelievable what might and power there was in America! (49)

Nils’ response—“But don’t people get lost in such a city?”—is a touching, ironic, and ultimately foreboding commentary on the boys’ inability to chart and negotiate these “foreign waters” as their cultural and moral compasses fail them.

Nils’ interpretation of the city places he encounters, even those replete with wealth and beauty, point to a problem in perception. For example, Nils’ favorite pastime of strolling the finer streets—the “fairyland” between Fourth and Tenth (90)—and admiring the fancy shop windows reveals his obsession with “all those comely and happy-looking human beings” (89). Indeed, he goes out of his way to avoid the faces of the city’s darker side since “it was like getting into a different world...the faces were so worn and hideous, as though they had never known happiness...there was that in their look which frightened him” (89). Using his fisherman’s sensibility, Nils compares these “shut and stolid-looking” faces to a menacing ocean: “They reminded him of the west sea when it lay sleek far out, with cloudbanks above it [. . .]” (89). In contrast to the bountiful ship-load of saithe gleaned from the sea on the day Nils encounters the Boat of

Longing in Nordland, the shop windows of Minneapolis promise “every curious and exquisite object that money could [. . .] buy,” and Nils fantasizes about “having a shipload” of such treasures to take back home to Norway (90). However, it is the people Nils looks at most:

Well-dressed nearly all of them; and so beautiful of countenance that they could never have known adversity. Goodness and joy shone in their faces, as though sorrow did not exist in the world! It seemed to Nils that he also could catch their intoxication just by gliding into the stream. Could he, too, he often wondered, become like these—as good and as happy—could he become one of them? (90)

This passage echoes earlier descriptions of Nils’ desire to join the urban throng, but here there is also a suggestion of “gliding into the stream” as an assimilation metaphor. Moreover, the passive language used to describe Nils’ intoxication with what he perceives to be well-to-do American citizens and his pleasurable gliding through the streets does not bode well for his identity as an artist; Nils mistakes the superficial beauty of well-groomed strollers for the essence of beauty found in the comparatively pure landscapes of Nordland and in his music. He indulges in the fairytale glamour of the city while he denies its decadence. Nils’ naivete is exposed when he discovers that one of the fine establishments that catches his fancy is only the “five-and-ten-cent-store on Nicollet,” and the “rich folks” who shop there are immigrants like himself: “Only ten cents! Here on Nicollet, mind you, right in the very center of wealth” (92). The repeated association of the city with material values suggests that Nils’ quest for the beautiful and most high is misplaced. This becomes clear when a woman “as lovely as the finest lady

on Nicollet” (117)—in actuality, a prostitute—on a date with Nils gives the “newcomer” some streetwise advice: “Nothing but business here—only thing that counted in this country.” Nils replies, “Was that so beautiful, then?” (119).

Nils’ displacement in the American scene is reinforced by the few moments of connection and wholeness that occur in the New World. One important scene takes place in the depressed Bohemian Flats area, a poor neighborhood of “houses in the pit” (108) at the river’s edge that Nils has previously avoided. Ironically, it is here that Nils experiences a brief interlude of home in America, when he happens to meet another immigrant from Nordland, Kristine Dahl. Once again, the connection between environment and selfhood appears as Nils, getting closer to the river, starts to “feel like a human being once more” and begins to whistle a Nordland melody. The closer he comes to the water, the better he feels, as his recognition of and identification with the place intensify: “Sakes alive! [. . .] here’s a sand beach just like ours at home!” (109). A woman who lives nearby, Kristine Dahl, approaches Nils on the beach:

She spoke first, in a voice so soft that it fell like a benediction upon his ears, filling him with a sense of peace, just as do the notes of a beautiful song; it was in the pure low dialect of Nordland. (110)

Rønning’s connection between language, culture, and “roots” is repeated in Rølvaag’s novel, as the sense of home and belonging is manifested in Nils’ visit with Kristine. He spends the better part of a day in her tiny hut, which is reminiscent of his parents’ cozy cottage by the sea. Nils eats traditional Norwegian foods, discusses the people and legends of Nordland, and plays the violin of Kristine’s lover who was lost at sea. As he plays the haunting melody he learned in the Norwegian landscape, Nils envisions “in the sublime, [. . .] a wide-stretching sea, drifting in golden calm” and a “boat under bellying



sales” from which “came music...with laughter in it...and crying” (115). With these images of Nordland and the mystical boat, Nils’ artistic transcendence returns, and he reveals to Kristine the title of his song: “The Boat of Longing.” For the first time since his arrival in America, Nils feels like himself and in harmony with his surroundings. Looking into Kristine’s face “was like being welcomed home after a long journey,” and sitting in her house “was as though he were sitting in a neighbour’s house at home; all strangeness [. . .] had vanished. All he needed to do was surrender to the peace and security of the place” (151). The use of folk culture in this scene helps to reintroduce and reinforce the sense of place:

In fact, the sense of place—the sense of dwelling in the invisible landscape—is in large part a creation of folklore and is expressed most eloquently through folklore. It is through traditional narratives, both personal and communal, that the human meanings with which the landscape is imbued are given form, perpetuated, and shared.<sup>45</sup>

Another moment of connection between Nils and an older Norwegian in America occurs at the end of Nils’ winter logging season in the great north woods. Nils meets “an old Stril”<sup>46</sup> who relates his tales of travel and adventure and questions Nils about Nordland: “about the colour of the sea, the contour and depth of the fjords; about sea vegetation, mollusks, and bird life; about currents and seasonal changes” (167). Although the Stril has westward hunger that keeps him on the move, he is a counterpoint to Nils in that the old Norwegian has successfully adapted his seafaring ways and adjusted his perceptions to America. When asked by Nils if the Stril has met “many who were happy” and where the happiest may be found, the Stril, after “a quiet, good-natured chuckle,” responds:

That's easily answered. I remember it very well. It was sixty-two years ago; and the persons were five boys minnow-fishing on a bay, rocking about in a four-oared boat in the glittering summer sun. (167)

When Nils does not take the answer seriously, the Stril responds to the question in another way:

“You were asking about the happy people: Well, they don't live on our planet, you see; we'll just have to wait, my boy! On this one human beings are not human beings. They are seamen and farmers and miners and lumberjacks; they are tramps and preachers and professors; they are this and that and the other. And happiness departed from them when they left off being human beings and became this other [. . .].” (168)

This comment echoes the prostitute's assertion that only business counts and people are only counted according to their business. Stressing the immigrant's position in society as mere common laborer and just another cog in the wheel, the Stril reveals the lack of humanity and wholeness that plagues people in the New World.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the Stril's vision of happiness (ironically, a simple fishing scene like the ones Nils left behind in Nordland) calls “to mind the life he had lived together with Mother Anna and Jo by the Sea” and leads Nils to reply, ““Yes, but I know there are happy people to be found”” (169).

These interludes with Kristine and the old Stril, coupled with the fact that Nils' “experiences in the wilderness, the hard labour and all, had matured him greatly and clarified much that had hitherto been vague to him” (165), suggest that Nils has regained his bearings and set a better course for realizing his dreams in America. He looks forward to returning to Minneapolis and possibly enrolling in a conservatory to pursue his music. However, as he and Per Syv make their way cheerfully southward on a train bound for Minneapolis, feeling “as though they were approaching *home* [my emphasis]”

(165), the two immigrants encounter an American confidence man. The man, who symbolizes American style, power, and ingenuity to the Norwegians, especially the gullible Per—insinuates himself into their company and eventually lures Per away to an unknown destination. Nils, remembering the promise he had made to Per’s father to look after the son, is left abandoned and disconsolate in the city.

In his desperate search for Per, Nils is drawn back to the train station, but the “fairyland” building that welcomed him upon his happy return has now become the sight of horror and alienation. The last chapter of the novel in which Nils appears is appropriately entitled “Adrift.” In one of the final scenes, American and Norwegian, real and mythical geographies merge in a painting on the wall of the Great Northern Station. As Nils stares at the painting, he imagines walking into it. In direct contrast to his mountain ascent early in the novel, the final scene describes Nils’ descent into a desolate mountain landscape that encompasses “all that was evil, all that engendered sorrow and despair, all that made the blood turn cold” (241). Here, the eyes of Ole Hansen, Per’s father, stare out at Nils like “luminous orbs” (241). Nils—unable to find his friend and therefore unable to write home for fear of revealing the fact—eventually takes the Great Northern Railway, “searching and searching, like a lone gull, perched watchfull” for his friend (243). It is both ironic and tragic that “From that day on, Nils never entered the Great Northern Station in Minneapolis without feeling that he had come home; it was as though he had lived many years in that place” (243). However, this morbid attachment is not the home of beauty in America that Nils imagined for himself.

The Nordland imagery and native place identity attributed to Nils in the beginning of the novel return in this scene, this time to articulate the incompatibility of nurturing the

immigrant soul amidst the displacement of immigration and assimilation. In the end, Nils becomes a wanderer, working on the Great Northern Railway, “from bridge to bridge and city to city” (243). The reader’s final glimpse of Nils, shared with the passersby in the story, is of a young man haunting street corners:

Those really becoming aware of the face were involuntarily made to wonder at its sad and weary look, especially since it seemed so young.

“That person must surely have committed some dreadful wrong!” they thought, and hurried past. [. . .]

—Other than that, people bestowed little thought upon the face or upon him who owned it, being too busy about their own affairs to remember much else. (243)

Like Per, Kristine Dahl, and other characters in the novel with whom Nils had begun to bond and feel at home, Nils disappears into the nameless, faceless anonymity of America.

The novel concludes with the ramifications of this disappearance on those left behind in the final section, “Hearts That Ache.” Having not heard from Nils or Per for many months, the parents resolve that Jo should go to America and “see how the boys are getting on” (273). Jo takes a ship to America, upon a sea in which “Loneliness dwells” (277). As the ship approaches New York, Jo is struck by the sudden and absolute darkness that “closed over the earth” (in contrast to the midsummer light of Nordland described in the opening pages of the book). Then Jo sees New York:

Countless towers reared themselves in the luminousness ahead; some of them were dreadfully high, and appeared to touch the heavens [. . .]. A sense of insignificance began to impress itself on him—he felt so infinitesimally small [. . .]. (279)

Jo comforts himself with the knowledge that “this was the country where Nils was” and that “in two days he might be seeing that dear blessed boy of his [. . .]” (279-80).

However, Jo’s hopes are soon dashed when, after a traumatizing experience at Ellis

Island, he is turned away for lack of the proper paperwork. The New York skyline, the ultimate “fairytale” immigrant city and symbol of American opportunity, ends as an impenetrable boundary, even for the intrepid seaman, Jo. He is sent back on the same liner on which he had come and returns to Norway a changed man:

This was an old man, stooped and broken, whose eyes seemed to have become set while in the act of hunting for something. It was this strange admixture of the stifled and the tense in the face which got people to turn and look at it. (285)

Similar to the haggard description that characterized the reader’s last glimpse of Nils, Jo appears lost and broken and eventually disappears, rowing out to “the beautiful castle west in the sea [. . .] where dwelt his boy” (304), never to be heard from again.

Jo’s disorientation and Nils’ placelessness in America are symbolic of the immigrant’s plight: the psychic dislocation, described by N. Scott Momaday, of one who becomes disoriented and loses fundamental connection to his land and culture, thus inviting “spiritual death.”<sup>48</sup> Nils is not a failed immigrant in terms of his material prosperity and growing knowledge of America. However, in linking Nils’ quest for selfhood to his idealistic and artistic yearning for beauty and happiness, the author concludes the novel with Nils remaining, essentially and existentially, “at sea” in America. As Einar Haugen points out, “Through the book runs an emphasis on the relation of creative art and cultural inheritance: art will not thrive in a society of the rootless and the insecure.”<sup>49</sup> Rølvaag, who once referred to The Boat of Longing as “the book about life’s anguish,” states that “no one can ever fully explain what it means to lose his Fatherland...We lost the inexpressible.”<sup>50</sup> And Rølvaag proves that “[t]o capture and express [the sense of place], that complex intersection and interaction of geography

and mind, we need art.”<sup>51</sup> Like his protagonist Nils, whose art and soul are contingent upon the place attachments of Nordland, Rølvaag uses the unifying symbol of the Boat of Longing—a sign of Old World culture, New World aspirations, creativity and individualism, loss and insatiable yearning—to express “the inexpressible” and to articulate the “quiet attachments” that shape culture and self.

### **A Cautionary Tale: Buslett and the Consequences of Rootlessness**

Another text that explores the problem of immigrant rootlessness in America is Ole Amundsen Buslett’s “pioneer sketch” (“nybyggerskisse”) entitled “—Og de solgte ut” (“—And They Sold Out”). Buslett’s focus is on immigrants like Rølvaag’s “old Stril” in The Boat of Longing, whose constant westward wandering seems endless as the American west. The setting is again the Midwest, this time the area surrounding the community of Stevens Point, in central Wisconsin. Although the sketch is fictional, it is based on historical developments in the region during the mid to late nineteenth-century, specifically a Norwegian settlement of the 1860’s and 1870’s. Buslett begins the sketch with a description of “a million dollar Polish Catholic church” and a view, as seen from the hill on which the church stands, of “a large and rich Polish settlement.” He then explains the significance of this vision: “The intention was that this should have been Norwegian.”<sup>52</sup> This opening salvo sets the tone for the rest of the piece, which examines the consequences of Norwegian settlers who literally sell their land and metaphorically “sell out” their morals, their ethnic brethren and the larger community. Buslett also points out “the expectation that will become characteristically American: exhaust the soil and move on.”<sup>53</sup>

Buslett's method of storytelling is effective in that he utilizes the by now familiar story of pioneer struggle and eventual success, only to undermine that very same narrative (and not once, but twice). For example, Buslett uses a stock character, Olav Nordmand,<sup>54</sup> to represent the average Norwegian-American pioneer. Olav's story unfolds as expected: he clears his land, works hard on his claim, and after two years, accumulates enough wealth that he is able to send an America ticket to Anne, his sweetheart in Norway. Anne arrives in typical fashion, in her old world peasant clothes and with a large immigrant chest inscribed, "ANNE OLSDATTER, Vaupæka via Oskos i Visekonsien" ("Anne Olsdatter, Waupaca via Oshkosh in Wisconsin"); here Buslett has a bit of fun in mimicking typical features of the Norwegian-American immigrant story as well as the formulaic tendencies of rags-to-riches immigrant narratives in general. With his hearty, rosy-cheeked bride at his side, Olav continues his pioneering progress, catalogued in detail by the narrator, until (years later) he boasts "a new house, new barn and outhouse, and 40 acres of land under cultivation." However, this is not the happy culmination of the narrative but rather the point at which pioneer progress is disrupted, when the narrator reveals that all of Olav's Norwegian neighbors have sold out and begun the westward migration for the second time. Despite the individual success and prosperity of Olav and Anne, they and their way of life cannot survive without the support of their fellow Norwegians. The erosion of the community is conveyed through the image of the "little red schoolhouse" (the public school being a symbol of the American way) that now stands empty since "the Poles belonged to the cloister school."<sup>55</sup> Eventually, Olav is all but surrounded by Poles ("now there were Poles in the north and

south, east and west”) and grows increasingly vulnerable to the take-over bids of his Polish neighbors: “It was hopeless! He received one offer after the other—and they became aggressive toward him [. . .].”

Olav feels he has no other option but to sell out like his neighbors before him. So he and his family pack up and migrate to a dilapidated homestead that serves as temporary housing while Olav searches for a new plot of land. Although the tone is quite matter-of-fact, the loss and sacrifice that the move represents for the family are revealed in key details: available land is no longer as cheap, plentiful, or well-situated as it was the first time around, and Anne and the children have to manage “without a home of their own” for a time as Olav leaves to secure a new homestead. Olav finally decides on a piece of land on the outskirts of a Norwegian settlement, “so far away from the Poles that he should be free of them for the rest of his life.” Progress and good fortune gradually return, along with poetic images of strong-shouldered Norwegian men doing battle with and eventually taming the vast northern forests: “[t]he woods rustled—and the woods fell, and the soil bore rich crops.” Olav becomes a leader among these new settlers, and together they build the community, through years of “strenuous work,” into “a large settlement with a schoolhouse and a house of God.” Olav’s own house appears equally secure as he “sits debt-free” on his productive farm.

With only a few lines remaining in the story, the reader may expect a happy ending, but this is not to be. The first sign of trouble is that Olav’s own children have the westward wanderlust; the older children have already departed, and the younger ones still living at home have the desire to go. What is more, “the worst was that the Poles had



followed; they had surrounded two Lutheran church buildings, buying their way in; for the Norwegians sold out.” Once again, Olav is gradually squeezed out:

The Poles came from the north and west and the Russians from the east and met at Ola Nordmand’s home—and his Norwegian neighbors sold out. He had only to set his price on the homestead and wander out—far out west—far away!

Olav’s decision is revealed in one sentence: “Og han solgte ut—“ (“And he sold out—“), the final breakdown of individual and communal integrity accentuated by the dash that punctuates the end of the proclamation. The story ends with Olav and his family suffering a seemingly-endless cycle of westward migration: “Restless and rootless, Olav Nordmand wanders westward with his aged wife; —for their sons and daughters should be out there somewhere—God knows how far west!” If place be understood, in its simplest form, as a “pause in movement,” and if “[p]ermanence is an important element in the idea of place,” then Buslett’s Norwegian-Americans are surely doomed to remain placeless in America.<sup>56</sup> The conclusion to Buslett’s sketch seems doubly demoralizing in that the same problem strikes Olav again (despite his best attempts to plan for and avoid it), and this time the outcome is even worse in that he is separated from his own children in addition to his Norwegian-American neighbors.

Indeed, the narrative has several troubling undertones. One involves the anti-Polish and anti-Catholic messages in the story. Although the narrator is careful to point out that the Poles who take over the Norwegian settlements “are not Poland’s best men,” this caveat does not counteract the highly unflattering characterization of the eastern Europeans as invading marauders who have an almost-parasitic relationship to the “original” Norwegian settlers. The Catholic Church is equally demonized in the story as

the “Catholic organization knows what it’s doing” in encouraging and supporting the settlement patterns of the Poles, especially when they “surround” the Norwegian church buildings. Additionally, the failure of the Poles and Catholics to support the “little red schoolhouse” and the local school district suggests something fundamentally un-American in their beliefs and behaviors. Beyond the explicit territorial, political, cultural, and economic differences emphasized in the story, racial mixing also appears to be an implicit fear as the “pure” Norwegians defend themselves from ethnic and religious “others.” In Orientalism, Edward Said notes the importance of “imaginative geography” in formulating boundaries that separate one’s self or group from the “other.” Although such borders or designations may be arbitrary, “[i]t is enough for ‘us’ to set up these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from ‘ours.’”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, by revealing the antipathy that exists between the Norwegians and the other ethnic groups as they compete for territory, Buslett joins writers like St. John de Crevecoeur, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Hamlin Garland in recognizing “that farming is simultaneously as political and social as it is personal and spiritual.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite the pro-Norwegian and pro-Lutheran stance suggested in the above examples, Buslett’s disfavor is primarily directed at the Norwegians who “sell out” their fellow man, not to mention their values and ideals, to the highest bidder. Indeed, Buslett makes it clear that the economic dynamic surrounding homesteading and pioneering ultimately deters and degrades the community-building that should be the eventual goal. This is expressed through frequent comments about money. For example, when the settlers sell out, the narrator mentions that “the Norwegians had gotten a good price for

their homes.” Similarly, when the family leaves the first homestead, the reader is told that “Olav Nordmand and Anne took their children and the money they got from the farm [. . .]” and departed, with children and money placed on the same par. It comes as no surprise, then, when Olav cannot maintain his family ties despite the fact that he lives “debt free” on his (second) prosperous farm at the story’s end. Financial gain is clearly no protection from or solution for the larger challenges of land lust, greed, and westward hunger. Early in the story the narrator informs readers that “here we begin a little chapter of the Norwegian-American tragedy.” While Buslett’s sketch points to problems within the Norwegian-American community—the lack of ethnic and cultural solidarity, the loss of crucial family and regional ties, and the abandonment of sacred institutions in the name of short-sighted economic gain—the story also functions as an American tragedy, dimming the luster of manifest destiny and the romanticized “West.” Buslett’s messages about place identity and migration are still relevant today, as shown in an essay by Scott Russell Sanders:

If our interior journeys are cut loose entirely from [. . .] place, then both we and the neighborhood will suffer [. . .]. When we cease to be migrants and become inhabitants, we might begin to pay enough heed and respect to where we are. By settling in, we have a chance of making a durable home for ourselves, our fellow creatures, and our descendants.”<sup>59</sup>

Sanders’ vision of a place attachment that is founded upon cooperation, community and continuity is certainly shared by Buslett, who wishes for a better legacy from Olav Nordmand. Unfortunately, although Buslett invests his Norwegian-American characters with some heroism and integrity, it is not enough to withstand the pressures of American life or to sustain long-term communities in America. Like The Boat of Longing, Buslett’s story reminds and cautions readers as to the cost of immigration (and continued

migration). In addition, his account offers a more realistic and subdued view of pioneering—one that includes both success and failure—than the many romanticized pioneer texts in Norwegian-American literature and American literature in general. Apparently, the story struck a chord with readers when it was published in the Christmas annual *Jul i Vesterheimen*: editor Anders Sundheim reported to Buslett that “your contribution [. . .] was extremely successful and has received much laudatory discussion.”<sup>60</sup> Perhaps readers appreciated that the story provided a moral lesson, acknowledged the hardship, alienation, and loss that frequently characterized the experience of immigrants, and affirmed the continuing value of and need for community and culture in *Vesterheimen*.

### ***Returning Home: Rooted in American Places***

At the core of Buslett’s sketch is the need for Norwegian-Americans to establish deep and enduring roots in American places, a need that is echoed and, to a large extent, realized in the work of Dorthea Dahl. While Dahl shares similar concerns with Rønning, Rølvaag, and Buslett—the importance of roots and a sense of place in creating and maintaining identity, family, community, and ethnicity—her work tends to focus more on existing ties to American places and the difficulty in maintaining these in contemporary culture. Unlike Nils Vaag and Olav Nordman, who negotiate the transition from Norway to America (and within America, from one point of migration to another) as first-generation immigrants, the characters in Dahl’s stories tend to already be “hyphenated” Americans or even second or third generation ethnic Americans who migrate to/from an American home place. The conflicts in Dahl’s texts therefore often revolve around

communal and generational divides and the challenges of keeping roots in an increasingly modern, fast-paced society. Thus, a major theme in Dahl's works is returning home, both literally and figuratively.<sup>61</sup>

In exploring change and upheaval, Dahl often utilizes a central symbol or system of symbols with which to anchor the story. One example is the old bookcase (in a story of the same name discussed in the previous chapter), which symbolizes family and ethnic history, cultural inheritance, and continuity. Similarly, the family farm becomes the site of core identity and values in Dahl's story *Rotfæstet* (Rooted, 1918; 1929)<sup>62</sup> and functions as the center of meaning around which other issues crystallize. Orm Øverland compares Dahl to Buslett, Rølvaag, and Simon Johnson in that the author "often relates her characters' concern for their heritage to their attachment to the soil, in particular the land cleared and farmed by their parents [. . .]."<sup>63</sup> Dahl's work may therefore be viewed along a continuum with that of the other writers surveyed in this chapter.

As the title of the story suggests, protagonists Birger and Mariane Engen have established deep and abiding roots in the American landscape, specifically their farmstead. Indeed, the central conflict of the story surrounds the impending sale of the family farm, as the old couple looks toward retirement. Contrary to the characters in Buslett's "pioneer sketch," the Engens have qualms about "selling out." The story opens with this very problem:

Birger and Mariane had long spoken of selling the farm, but when Odem came racing from Menota in his newest automobile and nailed up a sign on the tall spruce down by the road, so all who went by could know that the farm was for sale [. . .], Mariane went into the large, airy living room and seated herself in the softest armchair and burst into tears.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to setting up the main plot of the story, this passage anticipates the larger tensions and implications surrounding the sale of the farm. For example, Odum's fast and stylish car denotes an increasingly technological and mechanized society, as well as modern business methods (Odum's offices are above a store "in town"). His presence and pace (as he moves to make a quick sale) threaten irrevocable change throughout the story. Moreover, the act of nailing the sign to the tree—placing a physical mark or blemish on the land that has traditionally belonged to the Engens—makes concrete the objectification of the place as material property to be sold. These external forces are placed in direct contrast to the cozy and reassuring interior space of the farmhouse into which Mariane withdraws; for the time being, the parlor escapes the violation and devaluation that the tall spruce endures, and the room's markers of domesticity, family, and comfort prevail. When Birger returns to the house to find Mariane weeping and offers to back out of the sale, Mariane declines and explains what happened: seeing Odum with the sign, "[i]t was almost like they didn't have a home anymore" (1161). Mariane tells Birger that she just needs time to "get used to seeing that sign there" (1161).

Although each of them puts on a brave face (mostly for the other), Birger's and Mariane's reveries and flashbacks about the farm reveal what the place represents and why parting with it brings such sorrow:

When they were young, and they cleared and chopped and toiled to improve their circumstances, they thought naught else but that they would come to spend all of their days there at that place. The children grew and became more and more able to help, and one day in the future, when they grew old and tired and it was good to take it easy, they would be able to

retire and turn over the management to the boys. That this piece of land, whereon they had laid down all of their best strength, should ever go into strange hands was a possibility they had never considered. (1161)

Far beyond the basic units of territory and property, the farm stands for hopes, aspirations, and histories. The place represents their own stories: as immigrants, as pioneers and farmers, as parents. For example, the narrator reveals that the Engen family was among the first pioneers at Wauka Ridge, and that Birger “came over from Norway during the time when people east of the Mississippi viewed the Dakota Territory as lying at the outermost edge of civilization” (1161). Echoing the language of The Boat of Longing, the narrator relates Birger’s experience of pioneering as a “fairytale.” Yet Birger avoids evil temptations and tempers his adventurous streak by remembering and holding fast to “the two things that held him back, held him fast like a ship that has dropped anchor” (1161). One of these items is a Norwegian hymnal (which his mother laid in his suitcase when he left home) that “was like a connecting link between the home he had left and the home he hoped to build one day” (1161). Emphasizing the point, the narrator states that without the hymnal, the new place would not be a home. Birger’s second talisman is the memory of a girl’s (Mariane’s) eyes, back in La Crosse, Wisconsin. When Birger sends for Mariane, he informs her that he has “discovered a new Norway, [. . .] where he has got himself land” (1162). In addition to pioneering in the area, the Engens have been leaders in building a community, playing central roles in local institutions like the women’s club and the church.

In contrast to many of their countrymen (and their counterparts in Buslett’s story), the Engens stay put and endure when the going gets tough:

People did not come to build a home anymore, Birger used to say, where they and their children could live; they merely bought the cheapest land they could find, in order to hold onto it until it went up in price and then to sell it, only to find themselves a temporary home in a new place. (1162)

Suffering from land hunger and seeing the land only as a material asset, such roamers neglect to put down roots and defile the very notion of home:

[. . .] Mariane often said, “people do not have any idea as to what a home is. It is only floor and walls and roof and some furniture [. . .]. If they get the desire to sell what they have and travel to a new place, it costs them no more to part from their home than it does for me to discard my old everyday dress and begin to use a new one.” (1162)

The reader is to understand that the Engens are the best kind of immigrants; in establishing and maintaining their farm, they have attained not only a livelihood but a meaningful life as well. Selling the farm poses both sentimental and philosophical problems for Birger and Mariane, as their entire history and value system is built on the family farm ideal. Mariane’s intense reaction to the “for sale” sign on the tree (a figurative price tag) is therefore understandable. Similarly, the farm represents sacrifice, and there is a sense of disappointment in that this creation derived from “their best strength” should now cede to strangers. Related to this is the only unrealized aspect of their original vision: the dream that their children should one day take over the farm.

Although the reader is assured that the Birgers have “unusually nice children” and that “when they [the parents] thought about how nice they were, [. . .] they could almost become ashamed when they remembered that they had once wished that some of them would want to devote themselves to the farm” (1170). However, the Birgers’ successful children have other plans: Henry is a lawyer in Spokane; Hannah has a good position in a library on the coast; Carl (who at one time expressed interest in being a farmer) has



apparently lost this desire in the course of his education; and Lina, who had been home for a long time, has left for school as well. Upon the departure of the last child, the parents fear that they will “lose her too” (1170). Ironically, it is in part due to the Engens’ success as immigrants and parents that their children have grown away from the farm. Despite the fact that the Engens achieve an idealized model of material prosperity—balanced with a strong work ethic, religious faith, and community-mindedness—the upward mobility and assimilation of their children is somewhat problematic. That the parents should even feel ashamed to wish farm life upon their own children suggests a growing class consciousness and divide between the generations.

Changing concepts of class and lifestyle are also at work in the Engens’ own decision to leave the farm. Mariane is primarily concerned that Birger be spared the hard labor of the farm, especially as they grow older, and Birger is most interested in doing whatever will make Mariane happy. Other than that, the main motivation for leaving the farm appears to be a vague notion of the perks of town life, which take the form of modern kitchen appliances (an electric cookstove) and leisure: “father and mother should now have it so good” (1170). As the quotation suggests, it is the children who take such a view while the parents seem to half-heartedly repeat such sentiments in an effort to persuade themselves. As the sale of the farm becomes increasingly real and the Engens contemplate their move, some potential problems arise.

The gulf between parents and children is revealed in letters that the children send after hearing the “good news” that the farm is finally to be sold. Henry writes that it is too bad the sale could not have taken place sooner, for then the old folks could have joined him at his summer home. He offers to have them visit him in Spokane, although it

will not be as nice as the summerhouse on the lake. When they read the letter, the parents remember, “without saying anything to each other about it, that in all the years that Henry had been married, he had never invited [them] to pay a visit” (1170). Similar caveats appear in the letters of the other children. One remarks that the parents will be lonely as “there are no Norwegian people or any Norwegian churches [. . .]” (1170). Another expresses her (self-centered) excitement that should the parents come and live near her, “then she could have a home again,” as well as save money if they all lived together (1170). Although the invitations are sincere enough, the parents are worried and puzzled—how can the children be well so “far away from all that [the parents] had hoped their children would learn to cherish highest in life?” (1170). The children’s attitudes toward their parents and the farm suggest that rural life is somehow outmoded and unfulfilling according to modern standards. Yet ironically, it is the contemplation of moving to the (supposedly) easier town lifestyle that leaves Birger and Mariane feeling “lonely and homeless” and “that they suddenly had become so old” (1188).

Although Dahl traces the children’s growth away from parents and farm to education and upward mobility, her critique is not that bettering oneself and one’s family is a bad thing but rather that such changes should not erase or replace the past and its values. The conclusion to the story affirms this message. The members of the community, with growing concern and dismay as the sale of the Engen farm becomes a reality, realize just how much they stand to lose. Via the local channels—including secret meetings, letters, and a party-line phone system through which the neighborhood busy-bodies regularly keep tabs on community happenings—several old friends arrange

for a surprise gathering, including the appearance of all four of the Engens' children. The result is a going away party that pays homage to the couple's contributions.

One of the main events of the evening is a series of speeches in honor of the family. Birger and Mariane are so overcome with emotion that they have trouble concentrating on each of the speakers. However, as Birger listens to the doctor's speech, he hears one word—"rooted"—that takes "firm hold" of him:

Rooted, that described his feelings better than any other word could have done. To leave this place and these friends, it could not be done without something being torn open, torn apart. And was this not how he had felt about it for a long time? He had merely lacked words for it and had tried to drive the thoughts from his mind like something insignificant. But when something that has put down roots is torn up, it has difficulty in forming roots again. He understood that well enough, farmer that he was. The older the plant, the more dangerous it was to meddle with the roots. Small trees could sometimes be moved, but it was difficult to do so with the large ones. They sickened and died—they did not grow roots anymore—. An angst came over him. (1224)

With this passage, the symbolism of the story comes full circle. Now it is Birger who, like the spruce in the opening scene, feels the weight of the "for sale" sign. Like a tall tree, Birger cannot be wrenched from the soil and replanted without risking sickness or even death (physical and/or spiritual). Moreover, the images of roots and plants, combined with his perception and experience as a farmer, portray Birger as an organic part of the landscape. Thus, it is the word "rooted" that manages to articulate the compelling, "quiet attachments" of place and the farm that encompasses home, family, history, and community.

The rupture of uprooting is avoided when Birger's son Carl takes the floor and makes a surprise announcement: he has spoken with Odem and, if his parents agree, he will take over the farm and it need not be sold. Part of this turn of events involves a

romantic attachment between Carl and his former local sweetheart, Martha; the couple reunites at the party and plans a future together on the farm. The other Engen children agree with this plan and rediscover the value of the old farm in the course of the party as well, proclaiming that “they had all felt that father and mother could never be completely happy someplace else” (1225). With this conclusion, wholeness is restored: the community is anchored and renewed, and the Engens are no longer compelled to tear up their roots, “which would surely never come to grow again in some other soil” (1224). Mariane and Birger not only retain their home and homestead but realize their ultimate dream as well: one of their children will take over the farm. The legacy of the past combines with hope for the future, and continuity of place and heritage is assured. Thus, the implications of returning home are many, and roots grow stronger and deeper. As the story concludes, Mariane imagines the little home she and Birger might build across the road, while Carl and Martha move into the main house. The final image of the story returns to the interior sanctum of domestic space, the very heart of the home—the kitchen—as a celebratory cake is cut. A reviewer’s assessment of Dahl’s prose mirrors the sensibility of “Rooted”: “To read some of her pages is to be carried into a purer atmosphere—[. . .] a sort of unintentional sanctuary.”<sup>65</sup>

The conclusion of Dahl’s story would certainly have been more realistic, and perhaps more interesting, had she opted not for the happy ending but pursued instead a way for the family to negotiate the preservation of roots and heritage amidst the selling of the farm. But this is not Dahl’s project. Rather, Dahl works to recoup the agrarian model and link the family farm explicitly with what she views as the most vital assets of Norwegian-American culture: native traditions, material prosperity, moral integrity,

physical and spiritual sustenance. At the same time, Dahl partakes in a much larger American tradition in which “the farm has become a repository for a range of beliefs and the metaphoric vehicle through which many people explore their relationship with or place in nature.”<sup>66</sup> The fact that the Engens’ cultivation (as opposed to exploitation) of the soil parallels their own elevation as human beings and their edification of the community leaves little doubt that they are to be viewed as good stewards of the land and model citizens.

In upholding the family farm, Dahl joins Rønning, Rølvaag, and Buslett in affirming the sense of place as an important component in the process of (desirable) assimilation into American culture. While the characters in each text differ—the broken and adrift Nils Vaag, the betrayed and wandering Olav Nordmand, the grounded and rejuvenated Engens—the authors collectively envision a Norwegian America in which immigrants forge a place identity and roots endure. The alternative is an existential no-man’s land. Each of the authors uses literature as the medium for evoking and communicating the power of place, for “[i]dentity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life.”<sup>67</sup> Finally, Norwegian-American writers’ engagement with place reveals that attachment to real and mythical geographies—a plot of land, the fields and forests, or the homelands of America and Norway—is essential to the processes of self-definition, the formation of American roots, and the creation of a “western home” (*Vesterheimen*) that “mirrors the people’s soul.”<sup>68</sup>

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> O. E. Rølvaag, The Third Life of Per Smevik, trans. Ella Valborg Tweet and Solveig Zempel (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1987) 126.

<sup>2</sup> N. N. Rønning, "Når et folk mister sitt morsmål," Jul i Vesterheimen 1943: 35-37. My translation. Hereafter quotations from this source have their page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950; Cambridge: Harvard UP 1970) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie L. Sarver, Uneven Land: Nature and Agriculture in American Writing (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999) 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Kowalewski, "Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism," American Literary History 6.1 (1994): 171-83. The following quotations are from this source and have their page numbers cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>6</sup> John Agnew, David N. Livingstone, and Alisdair Rogers, "Region, Place and Locality." Introduction. Human Geography: An Essential Anthology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 366-67.

<sup>7</sup> Agnew, Livingstone, and Rogers 371. See also Chapter 28, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," by Yi-Fu Tuan, 444-57.

<sup>8</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan traces the development of a sense of place to both biology and culture. See Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: U of MN P, 1977) 6.

<sup>9</sup> Kent C. Ryden, Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place, American Land and Life Ser. (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993) 38.

<sup>10</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place 159.

<sup>11</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," Geographical Review 65 (1975): 152.

<sup>12</sup> Altman and Low relate place attachment to the following terms: "Place attachment subsumes or is subsumed by a variety of analogous ideas, including topophilia (Tuan, 1974), place identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), insidedness (Rowles, 1980), genres of place (Hufford, Chapter 11), sense of place or rootedness (Chawla, Chapter 4), environmental embeddedness, community sentiment and identity (Hummon, Chapter 12), to name a few." See Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low, eds., Place Attachment, Human Behavior and Environment Ser. 12 (New York: Plenum P, 1992) 3. I use several of these terms in my discussion as befits the context and substance of my analyses; the reader is asked to forgive my employment of such terms if they at times appear to lack precision. Altman and Low take part in what they refer to as "a second stage analysis of place attachment" in which scholars "attempt to define it more precisely" and call for a future "third phase of scientific and scholarly work" in which "there is development of systematic theoretical positions [. . .]," (3-4). Thus, much exciting work remains to be done in this area.

<sup>13</sup> See Rolf H. Erickson, "Chicago: Writing in and About the City by Norwegians," Norse Heritage Yearbook (Stavanger: Norwegian Emigration Center, 1989) 19-33. For further information on Norwegian-Americans in urban America, see Carl G. O. Hansen, My Minneapolis (Minneapolis: Standard P, 1956); Odd S. Lovoll, A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930 (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1988); David C. Mauk, The Colony that Rose from the Sea: Norwegian Maritime Migration and Community in Brooklyn, 1850-1910 (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical

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Association, 1997); and Norwegians in New York, 1825-2000: Builders of City, Community and Culture (Huntington, NY: Norwegian Immigration Association, 2000). The latter is a companion publication to an exhibit from April-October 2000 at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. A detailed social history of Norwegian-Americans in the Twin Cities, "The Twin Cities History Project: Ethnic Identity in the 'Capital' of Norwegian America," directed by David Mauk, is currently being co-sponsored by The Norwegian-American Historical Association and the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>14</sup> Percy Hutchison, "A Voyager to the Promised Land," rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, The New York Times Book Review 22 Jan. 1933: 6. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>15</sup> James T. Farrell, "The Lonely Immigrant," rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, New York Sun 21 Jan. 1933. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>16</sup> O. E. Rølvaag, letter to Eugene Saxton, 31 March 1930, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. Also quoted in Haugen 62. In the Foreword to The Boat of Longing, Rølvaag refers to the novel as "a series of moving pictures" or "film billeder" (film pictures) that contribute to the novel's impressionistic quality: a collection of scenes rather than a text of formal narrative/plot structure.

<sup>17</sup> The first quotation refers to a good-natured comment made by Dr. Dorothy Skårdal, a distinguished scholar of Scandinavian-American literature, during a meeting on July 15, 2001 in Oslo. The second quotation is from Fred T. Marsh, "Rølvaag's Fifth and Last Novel," rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, New York Herald Tribune 22 Jan. 1933: 5. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. Both comments voice a common sentiment regarding the relative quality of the text as expressed in reviews and/or studies of the novel.

<sup>18</sup> Rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, Washington, D.C. Star 14 Feb. 1933. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>19</sup> Rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, The United American 13 Jan. 1922. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>20</sup> Rev. of Længselens Båt, by O. E. Rølvaag, Sønner af Norge Jan. 1922. My translation. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>21</sup> After the publication of Længselens Båt, Rølvaag learned that Norwegian author Johan Bojer planned to write an epic narrative about Norwegian immigration in the United States. Feeling that a Norwegian-America should tell this story, Rølvaag directed his attentions to writing the first version of Giants in the Earth, written in Norwegian in two separate sections, I de dage (In those Days, 1924) and Riket grundlægges (The Founding of the Kingdom, 1925). The author passed away before he was able to continue Nils Vaag's story.

<sup>22</sup> Rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, The Catholic Bulletin 25 Feb. 1933. Quoted in "Rølvaag's 'Længselens Baat' faar fin Mottagelse av Kritikerne her," rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, Nordisk Tidende 14 Mar. 1933. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>23</sup> W. G. Hoskins, The Making of the English Landscape (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 17.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. of Længselens Baat, by O. E. Rølvaag, The United American 13 Jan. 1922. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

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<sup>25</sup> Rev. of Længselens Baat, by O. E. Rølvaag, Minneapolis Tidende 29 Dec. 1921. My translation. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn, Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>26</sup> “‘Længselens Baat’: Prof. O. E. Rølvaag’s Latest Book,” rev. of Længselens Båt, by O. E. Rølvaag, Familiens Magasin Jan. 1923. My translation. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>27</sup> Jersing Thompson, “Bokanmeldelse,” rev. of Længselens Baat, by O. E. Rølvaag, Visergutten n.d. My translation. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>28</sup> Bjarne Blehr (John Heitmann), “Længselens Baat: En fortælling av O. E. Rølvaag,” rev. of Længselens Båt, by O. E. Rølvaag, Nord-Norge 24 (Spring 1922), 17-18. My translation. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>29</sup> *Nordlandslaget* is a Norwegian-American *bygdelag*, one of many societies formed to help immigrants from specific regions (a *bygd* or district) in Norway maintain ties. The *bygdelag* movement began formally in 1901 and continues to this day. The groups typically meet for an annual *stevne* (meeting or reunion) and share information on immigration history, genealogy, farm names and family histories in Norway and the United States, folk culture, and information regarding other historical data and sites of interest relevant to their particular group. The *bygdelag* may also serve as a kind of archive, keeping records pertaining to people in the district in Norway as well as their relatives and descendants in North America. For more information and history regarding the *bygdelag* movement in America, see Odd S. Lovoll, A Folk Epic: The Bygdelag in America (Boston: Twayne, 1975).

<sup>30</sup> John Heitmann, “Rølvaag’s Barndom,” Nord-Norge 63 (March 1932): 4-6 and L. H. Straumen, “Professor Rølvaag’s Virke inden Nordlandslaget,” Nord-Norge 63 (March 1932): 8-9. Both articles come from a special commemorative edition of Nord-Norge devoted to Rølvaag. O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Collection, National Library, Oslo, Norway.

<sup>31</sup> Einar Haugen, Ole Edvart Rølvaag, Twayne’s United States Authors Ser. 455 (Boston: Twayne, 1983) 63. Haugen, who knew Rølvaag personally, quotes the author.

<sup>32</sup> O. E. Rølvaag, foreword, The Boat of Longing, trans. Nora Solum (1933; New York: Harper; St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society P, 1985). Hereafter quotations from this source have their page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>33</sup> I refer to the four major sections of the text as chapters since the Solum translation breaks the novel into four main parts: “The Cover Under the Hill,” “In Foreign Waters,” “Adrift,” and “Hearts that Ache,” all of which are numbered consecutively. However, it is important to note that, in the original Norwegian edition, there are additional chapters: while the novel includes the same four major divisions as Solum’s version, there are other sub-divisions or chapters underneath each of the four major sections. Since these sub-categories are so numerous (fourteen in the first section, eleven in the second, and ten each in the third and fourth sections), I do not name them all here. Again, these smaller sections in the Norwegian version may be more accurately conceived as “scenes” than chapters, reflecting the author’s loose form of “film pictures.”

<sup>34</sup> Haugen, Rølvaag 54.

<sup>35</sup> I borrow this term “mindscape” from Arnold L. Goldsmith, The Modern American Urban Novel: Nature as “Interior Structure” (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991): 60.



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<sup>36</sup> Wayne Franklin and Michael Steiner refer to the “inner geography of migrants” in their introduction to Mapping American Culture, The American Land and Life Ser. (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1992): 14.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Johnstone, Stories, Community, and Place: Narratives from Middle America (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 5.

<sup>38</sup> See Einar Haugen, Norwegian English Dictionary: A Pronouncing and Translating Dictionary of Modern Norwegian [Bokmål and Nynorsk] With a Historical and Grammatical Introduction, (1965; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget; Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1986) 491. Another form of the word has the meanings “risk, dare, hazard, chance” which the author may also have had in mind.

<sup>39</sup> Tuan, Space and Place 86.

<sup>40</sup> Haugen, Rølvaag 60.

<sup>41</sup> Haugen, Rølvaag 58. Haugen utilizes the term “prose poetry” to describe a section devoted to the sea in the last chapter, “Hearts That Ache.” The section is labeled part VII and begins on page 276 of the edition quoted in this chapter. This discussion of the sea is reminiscent of the chapters in Melville’s Moby Dick that “interrupt” the plot flow of the novel in favor of existential contemplations. Emilio De Grazia compares Rølvaag to Melville, exploring comparisons between the prairie and sea and calling Nils Vaag the “twentieth century Ishmael” (40). See Emilio De Grazia, “The Great Plain: Rølvaag’s New World Sea,” South Dakota Review 20:3 (1982): 35-49.

<sup>42</sup> Gerald Sykes, rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, The Bookman Mar. 1933: 302-03. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>43</sup> R. O. Sigmond, “Rølvaag’s Fine Work,” rev. of The Boat of Longing, by O. E. Rølvaag, Nordisk Tidende 11 Apr. 1933. Clipping from the O. E. Rølvaag Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>44</sup> Kowalewski 174.

<sup>45</sup> Ryden 45.

<sup>46</sup> Stril refers to a person from the west coast of Norway, particularly areas north and west of the city of Bergen.

<sup>47</sup> By labeling people according to their occupations, the Stril reduces them to “types,” which relates to novel’s mission. In the Foreword, Rølvaag states firmly that his characters are not “types” but “humankind”: “[. . .] I am interested in human beings. And there will scarcely be a life history which it would not be interesting to look at if it were singled out for scrutiny. Human portraiture has no end.”

<sup>48</sup> N. Scott Momaday, “An American Land Ethic,” Ecotactics: The Sierra Club Handbook for Environmental Activists. Ed. John G. Mitchel (New York: Trident P, 1970) 97-105. The quotation appears on page 103.

<sup>49</sup> Haugen 60.

<sup>50</sup> Kristoffer Paulson, “What Was Lost: Ole Rølvaag’s The Boat of Longing,” MELUS 7.1 (1980): 51-60.

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<sup>51</sup> Ryden 50.

<sup>52</sup> O. A. Buslett, “—Og de solgte ut,” Jul i Vesterheimen 1913: n. pag. All quotations are from this source; the translations from the original Norwegian are mine.

<sup>53</sup> Sarver 15. Sarver examines American farming and westward land hunger in Crevecoeur’s writings.

<sup>54</sup> Literally “Olav Norseman” or “Olav Norwegian,” something like an English “John Smith” or “Farmer Brown” who symbolizes all Norwegian-American settlers.

<sup>55</sup> The potentially democratic and unifying presence of the country school echoes the American farm’s position as the foundation of Jeffersonian democracy.

<sup>56</sup> Tuan, Space and Place 138-140.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Said, “From Orientalism,” Agnew, Livingstone, and Rogers 417-21. The quotation appears on page 417.

<sup>58</sup> Sarver 13.

<sup>59</sup> Scott Russell Sanders, “Staying Put,” Orion 11.1 (Winter 1992): 42-43.

<sup>60</sup> Anders M. Sundheim, letter to O. A. Buslett, 18 Feb. 1915, O.A. Buslett Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota. My translation.

<sup>61</sup> Returning Home is also the title of a collection of stories Dahl, which I invoke in the title to this section of the chapter. See Dorthea Dahl, Returning Home (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1920).

<sup>62</sup> The text first appeared as a serialized story in the church publication Lutheraneren (“The Lutheran”). It was published with three related stories (all in 1918): “Ungdomsforeningen paa Wauka Ridge,” “Kirkeindvielsen” (translated as “The Dedication” in 1920), and “Søster Hannah.” The story later appeared in an English translation, entitled “Rooted,” in the 1929 Jul i Vesterheimen. I am quoting the original Norwegian version from Lutheraneren.

<sup>63</sup> Orm Øverland, The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Assn., 1996) 285.

<sup>64</sup> Dorthea Dahl, “Rotfæstet,” Lutheraneren 11 Sept. 1918: 1161-62, 1170; 18 Sept. 1918: 1187-89; 25 Sept. 1918: 1224-25. The quotation is from the first installment and appears on page 1161. Hereafter quotations from this source have their page number cited parenthetically in the text. All translations from the original Norwegian are mine.

<sup>65</sup> J. J. Skordalsvold, “Dorthea Dahl,” Lutheran Church Herald n.d. Clipping from Dorthea Dahl Papers, Norwegian-American Historical Assn., Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>66</sup> Sarver 3.

<sup>67</sup> Tuan, Space and Place 178.

<sup>68</sup> Rønning 35.

## CHAPTER 4

### “A HARMONIOUS PART OF A GREATER WHOLE”: VISIONS OF COMMUNITY IN *VESTERHEIMEN*

Let me repeat: We have become outsiders to the people we left, and we are also outsiders among the people to whom we came. Thus we have ceased to be a harmonious part of a greater whole; we have become something apart, something torn loose, without any organic connections either here in America or over in Norway.<sup>1</sup> –O. E. Rølvaag, 1917

#### Introduction

While the community of *Vesterheimen* plays an important role in the previous chapters, concepts of community become the primary concern of the texts discussed in this final chapter. The featured texts—Drude Krog Janson’s *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* (1887 and 1889) and Waldemar Ager’s *On the Way to the Melting Pot* (1917)—examine the Norwegian-American community from the inside out, so to speak, questioning its values, behaviors, and social customs. Janson’s community includes the Norwegian immigrant enclaves of urban Minneapolis in the late nineteenth-century, while Ager focuses on Norwegian-Americans in a Midwestern town in the early twentieth-century. While the two texts and their respective authors may seem an unlikely pairing at first, they actually complement and inform each other in compelling ways.

Given the historical settings of each novel, *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* and *On the Way to the Melting Pot* form two parts of a larger story. Janson chronicles an earlier

period of immigration and assimilation, when Minneapolis was still a young city and the urban immigrant population was still in a formative stage. Ager, on the other hand, provides a glimpse of Norwegian-American life approximately thirty years later; although new immigrants continue to play an important role in his novel, Ager examines a Norwegian-American community that is relatively codified and assimilated. While most of Janson's characters are still working to attain a foothold in the New World, the majority of Ager's characters have settled into American life and are preoccupied with improving their lot and look back on the immigrant experience. If Janson's novel questions the nature of the community being forged, Ager's novel considers the apparent results of that very project. In both cases, the authors explore the nature of ethnic identity and community in America. Ager and Janson stress that Norwegian-Americans do not merely struggle to maintain ethnic integrity amidst the larger Anglo-American culture, but that they also contend with obstacles and dissension within the ethnic group itself.

The authors share other important links as well. In terms of genre, both writers choose the novel as the literary vehicle through which they will explore community. While the two novels differ in form and structure—in part due to the time periods in which they were written—they both spring from an impulse of social activism and reform. This is not surprising, given that Ager and Janson were involved in the social and political debates of their time. Janson, for example, wrote articles for the Norwegian feminist publication *Nylænde*; one of her pieces is a review of Helen Campbell's Prisoners of Poverty (1887), which served as source material for both Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1900) and Kristofer Janson's Sara (1891).<sup>2</sup> For his part, Ager worked as a printer and eventual co-editor of the Norwegian temperance weekly Reform (Eau Claire,

Wisconsin) and served as founder and editor of the journal *Kvartalskrift* (Quarterly), published for The Norwegian Society of America. Ager's temperance activism also served as inspiration for one of his earliest literary works, *Paa drikkeondets konto: Fortællinger og vers* (Charged to the Account of the Evils of Drinking: Short Stories and Verse; 1894). Similarly, the novels share thematic interests, incorporating issues like female emancipation and temperance and examining the implications of materialism, provincialism, and individualism, both within a specific Norwegian-American milieu and broader literary and social contexts. With their focus on the city and town in these novels, Janson and Ager represent another important venue of Norwegian-American literature (which is more commonly associated with frontier and agrarian literature). Finally, both authors engage in social commentary that highlights the implications of ethnicity, gender, and class in the formation of *Vesterheimen*. While the time period and manner of storytelling may differ, both Janson and Ager reveal an immigrant culture struggling to establish and maintain a value system in the American context. Their commitment to change and the betterment of both the Norwegian-American community and the American society attests to the importance of the polemical tradition.

**“Ability, Sincerity, and Moving Conviction”: Female Self-Realization in  
*A Saloonkeeper's Daughter***

In the preface to a new English edition of *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, translator Gerald Thorson emphasizes the novel's value as “an authentic story of life in Minneapolis in the late nineteenth-century” (Thorson, *ix*). Thorson traces this “ring of authenticity” to “the mind and craft of an artist at work,” attesting to the quality of

Janson's writing as well as the text's continued appeal and relevance for modern readers: "For the contemporary reader, the novel provides a glimpse of an immigrant society, a culture in exile, and the immigrants' responses to the social scene" (ix-x). Given the apparent authenticity with which the book documents the Scandinavian-American milieu of 1880's Minneapolis, A Saloonkeeper's Daughter is an excellent focus text through which to examine literary portrayals of the community of *Vesterheimen*. The novel also speaks to a number of other texts in Norwegian-American and American literature of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century through its major topics and themes: the decadence, injustice, and depravity of the American city; the oppression and hypocrisy of "society" (especially for women); the rise of movements like feminism, Unitarianism, and temperance; and the problems of individual subjectivity and responsibility in the modern era. Janson's novel takes these philosophical and thematic touchstones and interlaces them with features of the immigrant narrative and the bildungsroman; the result is a wonderfully textured novel, full of vivid description and keen social commentary. A Saloonkeeper's Daughter is therefore an interesting and multi-faceted text that reflects its specific Norwegian-American scene as well as broader developments in American and European literature of the later nineteenth-century.

Placing A Saloonkeeper's Daughter within these larger contexts, Ingrid Urberg connects Janson's work—particularly her portrayals of the female artist—to other Scandinavian writers of the Modern Breakthrough.<sup>3</sup> Urberg finds that Janson and other authors "combine a Romantic aesthetic with a breakthrough message," viewing "art as a sacred vocation and calling" yet wedding art to social responsibility and reform.<sup>4</sup> Janson's heroine, Astrid Holm, may be understood as just such a female artist, combining

romantic idealism and individualism with her social missions (feminism, temperance, and Unitarianism among them). Thorson emphasizes the feminist concerns of the book, finding in the novel “an unusually up-to-date study of the problems of gender and class” (x). Part of the importance of gender in the novel has to do with the type of protagonist; Urberg invokes the phrase “hungry heroine”—used by Blanche Gelfant<sup>5</sup> to identify a common figure in American urban fiction—to describe a character type in Norwegian-American literature:

Similarly, in Norwegian-American fiction, the young, female protagonists, who actively seek knowledge, education and a better life, have been overlooked. These “hungry heroines”—all rebels in various ways—are the rule rather than the exception in novels written by Norwegian immigrant women at the end of the nineteenth century, and they continue to appear in Norwegian-American female fiction after the turn of the century. Not only do these heroines actively search for a way to appease their hunger, they are “successful” and their quests end on a positive note. (12-13)<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Urberg points out that “a majority of the hungry heroines are city dwellers once they arrive in America” in contrast to their male counterparts (42).<sup>7</sup>

This connection to the urban environment is an important one. In identifying forms of the city novel, Blanche Gelfant refers to the “‘portrait’ study, which reveals the city through a single character, usually a country youth first discovering the city as a place and manner of life.”<sup>8</sup> Janson’s novel may be read as an urban portrait novel, particularly in light of the book’s qualities as a bildungsroman and an immigrant narrative, in that the book emphasizes the process of “initiation” Gelfant describes:

The portrait novel belongs in the literary tradition of the novel of initiation—that is, a novel tracing a young hero’s discovery of life and growth to maturity. In the portrait novel, the hero is typically a naïve and sensitive newcomer to the city, usually a country youth, as in the fiction of

Dreiser, Herrick, and Wolfe [. . .]. Structurally, the novel is built upon a series of educating incidents in which the city impresses upon the hero its meanings, values, and manners. (11)

The comparison with Dreiser is an apt one, as Gerald Thorson points out that A Saloonkeeper's Daughter draws “on the realistic and naturalistic trends in Europe and America” and “anticipates the works of such writers as Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and Sarah Orne Jewett” (x). Janson's discussions of feminism, temperance, and other social movements in her texts reveal her commitment to a socially relevant (and responsible) literature and her utilization of some features of realism and naturalism. At the same time, her concern with temperance and the role of the church place her firmly within her immigrant and ethnic tradition, as these are two major topics of Norwegian-American literature. Finally, in both theme and plot—an immigrant girl overcomes multiple challenges to become a Unitarian minister in America—Janson's work participates in the female bildungsroman tradition and shares similarities with American domestic fiction. One hopes that, with the new English edition of the novel, Janson will receive more critical attention and be studied alongside American writers.

Orm Øverland suggests compelling possibilities for such comparisons as he points out examples of intertextuality between Janson's novel and other works of American literature. For example, Øverland finds parallels in Sarah Orne Jewett's A Country Doctor (1884): “This, too, is an exceptional novel in American literature of the 1880s in presenting a heroine who successfully enters a profession still thought to be the exclusive domain of men” (xxviii). Urberg also notes the intertextuality at work in Janson's novels, connecting A Saloonkeeper's Daughter to Camilla Collett's Amtmandens Døtre (The



District Governor's Daughters; 1854-55) and a body of works by and about women artists who attempt to escape "from restrictions and conventions imposed by a patriarchal society."<sup>9</sup>

Similarities between Janson's novel and other examples of nineteenth-century women's fiction become apparent in the opening of the story; in many ways, Astrid is a typical nineteenth-century heroine. For example, she is an imaginative and emotional child, given to dress up and play-acting in the family attic. Although she has siblings, "[h]er two sisters had both died, leaving her with two little brothers who were so much younger that they provided little companionship for her."<sup>10</sup> Astrid's one true companion is her ailing mother, whom she loves "passionately":

Astrid never had much to do with her father. All the love her heart could hold went to her quiet, melancholy mother, who was always very affectionate and loving. She had very few friends because she could never take anyone home with her for fear of disturbing her sick mother. Therefore, all the time that she was not with her mother in her mother's bedroom she was thrown on her own resources. It was then she acted out her plays and lost herself in fantasy. (4)

Given the emotional distance between Astrid and her father and the age difference between the girl and her brothers, Astrid appears to be a relatively solitary creature. Much like the protagonists of sentimental novels—one thinks of little Ellen in Warner's Wide, Wide World—Astrid has only her own imagination or the maternal love and female companionship of her mother to cheer and protect her.

Astrid also has romantic, artistic antecedents to which she is oblivious but nevertheless instinctively attracted: her favorite playthings in the attic chest are the very costumes her mother wore when she was "an actress with a road company" (3). However, Astrid's father has kept the mother's "common origin" a secret: "He was a

respected merchant who thought that he had bestowed a great honor upon his wife by raising her up to his level” (4). Besides these creative tendencies, Astrid’s early intellectual growth is also attributed to her mother:

Now she read everything she could lay her hands on. To her mother she would read aloud the new literature as it appeared. She noticed that her mother was especially fond of listening to tragedies and comedies. At those times her mother’s eyes would sparkle, and a pale flush would appear on her cheeks as she lay and listened intensely. Astrid liked to read aloud. [. . .] Those hours of reading aloud bound mother and daughter even more closely. (4)

Early in the novel, then, fundamental aspects of Astrid’s character suggest the tensions and themes to be played out in the narrative: class conflict and societal strictures, maternal attachment and paternal detachment, intellectual and creative drive, loneliness and isolation, and idealism.

Additionally, the presentation of Astrid as a child, even when she is nearly seventeen, suggests her innocence:

Astrid was late in maturing. She still looked like a child, and on her mouth flickered a bright childish smile. Deer-like, she would lift her chin attentively; her large gray-blue eyes looking ahead of her expectantly as if she were dreaming of all the delight life promised her. (4)

Like Sylvia in Jewett’s “A White Heron” (1886), Astrid is linked to the purity of girlhood and the sanctity of nature (“pure divinity” (5)), a child in the garden of Eden who has yet to fall:

Later, after the others had gone to bed, she sneaked out into the large apple orchard among the powerful old trees that cast their mysterious shadows over the greensward in the moonlight. Ripples from the fjord sounded to her like soft sighs. Then she was the princess running around in the enchanted forest. The fragrance of the flower garden reached her, virtually intoxicating her. [. . .] She put together a wreath of fragrant

leaves while the sea rocked and rocked her into her fairy-tale dreams with its quiet whisper. It was the elf king, singing for her about his yearning and his love. What joy to be alive! (5)

This passage connects Astrid with the natural environment, particularly the floral symbolism that recurs throughout the novel. Astrid's ties to nature denote her innocence, her spiritual growth (intellectual, artistic, and religious), and her maternal bonds. The fairy tale imagery conveys Astrid's imagination and creativity and her role as an idealized heroine (in her own mind and in the view of the reader). Like Nils Vaag in The Boat of Longing, Astrid is characterized as an artistic and sensitive individual who finds the first vague outlines of her own aspirations and ambitions in the transcendent world of nature: "The moon cast its trembling golden path out over the sea [. . .]. Then she felt so strange that she wanted to throw herself down in adoration and jubilation" (5). Astrid's strangeness—"strange" is a term used repeatedly throughout the novel to describe the self-sufficient, intellectual and professional woman—is also linked to her spiritual and moral integrity and anticipates the feminist themes of the book. Like Nils and his beloved Nordland, Astrid becomes one with the sublime fjord landscapes of western Norway while on a visit to her uncle's farm. Her reaction to the countryside—"Astrid felt as if she shared a secret with that place"—further separates her from her father who cannot understand "how those people can continue to live there year in and year out" (6).

It is also through nature that Astrid first learns of the darker side of life. On a trip to the city of Bergen with her father, Astrid is troubled by the site of the dark lake, *Svartediket* (black tarn) which is "impressive, almost frightening." When Astrid learns that people frequently drown themselves in the lake by jumping off nearby cliffs, she begins to be aware of others' misfortunes: "Oh, God, how unfortunate they must have

been to do such a thing. And she had always thought that life was so beautiful!” (7).

Again sounding like Nils Vaag, Astrid reveals her naiveté and idealism, as well her commitment to “beauty.” During the trip to Bergen, Astrid sees Ibsen’s play The Vikings at Helgeland (1858) and determines to become an actress.<sup>11</sup> However, she does not tell her father but waits instead to tell her mother, who “would understand her” (7). When Astrid does tell her mother, however, she is disappointed to learn that her mother’s acting career produced such disillusionment as to lead her into an unhappy marriage. Astrid’s happy world begins to crumble:

Those were the first serious hours in Astrid’s life. A shadow had come over the sun. For the first time she had looked into another life full of disappointment, loneliness, longing, and that was the life of the one nearest and dearest to her in the whole world. “Poor, poor mother,” she thought. Tears ran down her cheeks as she sat looking at the white face. (12)

Like many protagonists in sentimental fiction, Astrid is prone to tears, swooning, and fainting. Yet she is also perceptive and empathetic, traits that will serve her well later in the novel. Astrid’s troubling conversation with her mother is to be their last, as Mrs. Holm develops a fever later that evening and, after being comforted by Astrid, dies three days later. Now partially orphaned (the maidservant refers to the Holm children as “motherless waifs [. . .] in the wide world”),<sup>12</sup> Astrid’s disenfranchisement becomes complete when her father, suffering terrible business losses and incurring overwhelming debts, decides to try his luck in America. The family thus loses its material prosperity, social standing and citizenship.

These early details of the novel not only provide clues to plot and character but introduce the primary terms according to which the Norwegian-American community and

the larger American culture are portrayed and critiqued in the novel. The immigrant narrative in the book highlights this further. For example, Old World class constraints become evident when, soon after the mother's death, Astrid's father announces his plans to go to America:

Business is going downhill here, and the times are so bad that there is no future for a man who wants to make a go of it. America is the right place for me. There a man with knowledge and experience can get ahead. It's a republic and a land of free institutions. I belong there where one is free of all this aristocratic nonsense. (19)

When Astrid registers surprise at her father's remarks—he who has “always talked with the deepest respect about the royal family”—Mr. Holm attempts to downplay his inconsistency by confirming a change of heart: “Of course, I once had different notions. But lately I have come to believe that a republic is the best form of government [. . .]” (19). This scene suggests the difficulty and hypocrisy of Mr. Holm's position as an upper class Norwegian who will become (at least for a time) a working class alien; at the same time, however, Holm apparently plans to retain his Old World customs, including patriarchal privilege, as he forbids Astrid to become an actress. However, Astrid's acting aspirations begin to form around the idea of America:

Would she ever amount to anything in the world? She had had such wonderful dreams! Oh to be free! And now she was going to America. To America! Perhaps, when it came down to it, that was the best. She lifted her head. There is so much freedom there. Maybe there could be freedom for her, too. At any rate, she might just as well venture out and see a little of the world. (20)

Like many female characters in many nineteenth-century novels, Astrid feels “like a bird trapped in a cage,” and the real story begins as the orphaned and impoverished protagonist embarks on her quest for selfhood and a better life (23). In the case of A

Saloonkeeper's Daughter, the community will be explored and measured according to the challenges facing Astrid at the outset of the novel: issues of morality and integrity, class and social custom, feminism and female self-determinism, and artistic and intellectual possibility:

She could no longer stand it in Norway. Gradually, all her dreams were focused on America, for she was so young and vibrant with hope and zest for life that she had to dream. In America she would begin to live again, and she dreamed of endless sun-lit plains where people were happy, where all could follow a call, and where no one treated others harshly because of prejudice. (23)

Astrid resembles Rølvaag's Nils Vaag in her desire to find "the happy people" and a (artistic) calling in life; her utopian visions of America are typical immigrant fantasy. After the voyage (which includes descriptions of stops in Hull and Liverpool, England as well as scenes from the steerage deck during the transatlantic crossing), Astrid's dreams seem to be realized as she gazes for the first time at New York:

How open it lay there with its fully outstretched arms so arrogantly confident in its rich splendor. It could easily welcome a large share of the world's rejects, the poor, and the homeless! It was confident of being the entrance to a better life, to human value, and to human rights. Hope and courage for the future would fill even the most forsaken when such an individual was welcomed by all this beauty after her lonely voyage and anxious brooding on what the future might bring. [. . .] Star-spangled banners waved from the ships' masts. They were full of people who, when they saw the Atlantic voyagers, shouted and swung their hats and waved their handkerchiefs. (26)

While this quotation serves as standard patriotic propaganda on the one hand, it contains and implicit critique on the other. The manner in which the passage is written reveals its dual purpose: while Astrid is taken with her jubilant vision of America's shores, the narrator offers another impression. The personification of America as "arrogantly

confident” in its riches and opportunities suggests that it is not all it appears or promises to be. Astrid’s perspective (invoked directly in the passage) and expectations of America are therefore shown to be naïve and overly idealistic.

It is not long before the narrator’s foreshadowing comes to pass; as the Holm family finally reaches Minneapolis after days on the train from New York, Astrid’s first glimpse of the city brings disappointment: “How ugly it was—flat and dusty, with a few poorly constructed little houses scattered on the naked prairies. God forbid! People could not live here. How they could stand to live like that, she could not understand” (28). Astrid’s reaction is important in that it anticipates her awareness of and eventual concern for the poor and downtrodden (which comes into play later in the novel) as well as her own disappointment in the reality of America. Even as the neighborhoods improve, she must admit that “it was not beautiful” and begin to adjust her aspirations. The passage is also one of the first to suggest the depressed and depraved aspects of urban America, as well as its primitive culture. Even in the nicer neighborhoods, the architectural (and by implication—ethnic, linguistic, social) hodge-podge of Minneapolis is disconcerting to Astrid: “There were several attractive, elegant buildings, but scattered among them were several old shacks that seemed to have been overtaken by surprise by their more splendid neighbors” (28).

Astrid’s hope that “they would be living in an attractive district” is crushed when her father drives up to a small building on one of the more humble streets:

“This is where we live,” he said to the boys without looking at Astrid. She stepped out of the carriage [. . .] as if in a dream. She saw a barely distinguishable sign over the door on which the word *Saloon* appeared in large letters. She smelled a strange, unpleasant odor. (28)

Astrid does not yet know what the word saloon means, but her reaction to the smell of alcohol instinctively tells her something is wrong; although she is willing to make the best of the humble quarters above the saloon, Astrid cannot get over the smell: "If only the odor had not been there. She did not know what it came from, but it seemed as if she had not been able to breathe since she had entered" (29). Astrid's actual physical repulsion to the smell also functions metaphorically as she senses the moral depravity of the location and cannot "breathe" under the confines of her father's roof and the lifestyle to which he has brought her. Later that day, the first evening in her new home, Astrid learns the meaning of the saloon; she witnesses a violent and vulgar display by a drunken customer whom her father has thrown out and who is dragged away by the police:

She was petrified. Her eyes had an eerie expression, her fresh young lips were painfully distorted. "Saloonkeeper, saloonkeeper." She repeated the man's words mechanically, and, without realizing it, she wrung her hands and walked up and down the floor. "We sell liquor, and people come here to get drunk. That is what I have come to America for. It seems ridiculous." She twisted her mouth in an attempted laugh, but it would not come. (31)

The situation of Astrid's family serves as a lesson in the "freedom" of America. While Astrid and her father have counted on American opportunity, their upper class sensibilities have not allowed for the realistic forms such opportunity might take, or that their chances might be limited, especially as people of a higher class. This inversion of Old World custom gives an ironic twist to Mr. Holm's previous comment that he wishes to escape "aristocratic nonsense." Clearly, Holm has more to reckon with in the New World than he bargained for:

It had not been as easy for Holm to make his way in America as he had thought it would be. His upbringing and talents were not at all appreciated. People only asked, "Can you work?" But that Mr. Holm



could not do. The modest business ability he possessed was not of any use, for he could not speak English. [. . .] He did not have the capital to begin any business of his own; fifty dollars was all he had when he arrived in Minneapolis. His only choice was manual labor or the saloon. The first he felt, and probably was, entirely unfit for, and so he ended up in the saloon, like thousands of others who came over with big dreams of carving out a brilliant future in America. It would be unfair to him, though, not to admit that the decision was not an easy one. It was very tough for him—not so much because of the ethics involved but because he felt it was a disgrace that he, a well-bred gentleman, the scion of an old patrician family, should sink so low as to become a dispenser of alcoholic beverages. (31-32)

This psychological profile of Holm and his motivations reveals a number of problems.

Holm is ill-bred for his life in America, and what little clout (cultural, not financial) he brings with him actually hinders his progress. Moreover, Holm's Old World values are equally ill-suited to his new scene and only prevent him from making a clean break and starting a new life. For example, he considers himself better than the other saloonkeepers as well as many of his own customers, saying that “we who are well bred must try to keep our distance” (32). Despite his disdain for the situation, Holm is already growing dangerously passive about it—“he gradually grew less anxious about the unpleasantness of his present state of affairs and the need to move out of it”—and takes to saying that “in America, [. . .] you had to take life as it came” (32). Although some sympathy is extended to Holm in the passage, the narrator is careful to point out the shallowness of Holm's reasons for disliking his situation: pride as opposed to moral outrage. Holm has lied to his daughter as well: “He had written to her that he was in the wine business. In a way he was [. . .]” (32). Worst of all, the father plans to use his daughter as a business enhancement, dangling her like a sexual carrot in front of the customers:

In the meantime he sought [. . .] to raise his saloon above the common run by making it a hangout for the dashing young men who had the urge to get

together to chat over a glass of beer. In this endeavor he hoped to get much help from Astrid as a drawing card for these fine gentlemen. (32)

Thus, Holm fears Astrid's reaction not because he cares for her feelings and does not like to admit that he is placing the family in harm's way, but because he needs her cooperation and fears a scene: "'I'd better speak with her in the morning and get her to see the matter from a sensible point of view. If only she hadn't had such fantastic notions from her mother. She has such damned annoying eyes'" (33).

Holm's plan for Astrid and the saloon does not work very well initially, given that his daughter is deeply depressed and withdrawn and therefore no decorative enticement to the gentlemen who frequent the saloon and even Holm's private parlor:

He [Holm] tried to take her mind off the situation by inviting some of the "handsome young men" upstairs for a glass of wine. But it did not help. Astrid found these "handsome men" dissipated and revolting, and they thought she looked damned stuck up. (36)

As the quotation marks suggest, Holm's Old World perceptions and prejudices about class and manners lead him astray in the New World, where he mistakes fine clothes, a polite manner, and an "aristocratic name" (60) for true quality. This becomes painfully clear in the first of Astrid's suitors, a poser named Meyer. Meyer insinuates himself into the Holm household by flattering and impressing Mr. Holm, who is "elated over his guest" (45) and believes Meyer to be an up-and-coming professional man (he claims to be a law student) and a gentleman. Nothing could be further from the truth, but "[h]ere in the saloon, however, [Meyer] was still the superior and intelligent gentleman who stooped to sit in such lowly and uncultured surroundings" (138).

The reader eventually finds out that Meyer lives in a boardinghouse, sponging off Pettersen, his working-class friend. Pettersen, who initially invites Meyer up to his room

based on the latter's "cultured and intelligent" mien, begins to realize that he may have been duped: "To be sure, it was a big thing to have such a cultured and learned associate, but he could not say that he personally had such great benefit from it since Meyer was always sleeping when Pettersen went to work [. . .]" (57). Indeed, it is Meyer who has the great benefits, including the use of Pettersen's clothing, food, and apartment, as well as a superiority complex to top it off. Meyer also attempts to enter better society. Early in the novel, the upper class ladies regard him as an exemplary specimen, as one woman remarks to another, "'It's so seldom you meet a young man with such firm moral principles. You can see that he comes from a good family back home in the Old Country'" (70). Apparently, Holm is not the only one to be duped. Eventually, however, Meyer wears out his welcome in better circles and is found out:

Meyer had played himself out in the fine society circles. The men of the house had begun to understand that he was a gossipy freeloader who wanted to live on their wives' good hearts and get ahead by their husbands' letters of recommendation. So they had warned their wives of him. (127)

Unfortunately, Meyer does not become an outcast of society before he manages to slander Astrid and ruin her reputation as well. Despite his malevolence, Meyer is an important character in the novel. He reveals the fickle standards by which Norwegian-American "society" judges itself and others; he presents a Norwegian-American version of the American confidence man, feeding off the gullibility and ignorance of his fellow immigrants; he represents the primitive and territorial sexual male that stalks Astrid throughout the novel; and he exposes the sham aesthetics that count for education, refinement, and "culture" within the immigrant milieu.

Indeed, Meyer plays a key role in one of the most important scenes in the novel, the amateur theater production of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's The Newlyweds (1865).<sup>13</sup>

Meyer convinces Astrid to take part (and her father to give permission) by appealing to her class, vanity, and sense of responsibility:

“Yes, it isn’t easy for refined people to make themselves at home in these western cities where all the dregs from the Old World are streaming in,” said Meyer superciliously. “In Chicago it is barely possible, for there are some people of culture gathered there. But Minneapolis is still disorganized and in its infancy. We educated persons have a mission here. We must all contribute our share to the improvement of society.” (40-41)

Meyer’s assessment of the Scandinavian immigrant scene in Minneapolis is accurate if elitist, not to mention wonderfully ironic given that he himself could be considered one of the very “dregs” he so despises. Meyer prevails upon Astrid to fulfill her “mission” and be an actress in the play:

Among the Scandinavians here there are so few refined young ladies. Most are hired girls—or came over as such. So ladies of culture are what are most needed. And, of course, you also have talents as an actress. (41)

Holm, believing “a private company” in America “is an entirely different matter” than the theater companies to which he objected in Norway, gives his consent. Astrid, who sees her chance to fulfill her fantasies of being an actress coupled with the opportunity to “minister” to her “poor countrymen” in America, requires no convincing (41).

The theater performance is indeed educational, but not in the way Astrid intends nor hopes. Although the others warn against it from the outset, Astrid insists on a play that is “both beautiful and serious.” After all, “was it not their intention to educate and refine the public?” (46). Astrid also objects to the “grand ball” held after the play, until Meyer and the others explain that it’s the only way to get people to attend the theater

(47). The others smile over Astrid's naiveté, but she does not realize her utter miscalculation in the choice of play and her overestimation of the audience until she stands on stage for the performance and looks into the crowd:

The audience was a motley group. There sat the common laborer with his thick woolen scarf around his neck and by his side his solidly built wife with bulging cheeks and curls over her forehead and a velvet hat with a deep red ribbon. Close by sat another woman with a little one in her arms. Her pale face and lackluster eyes told of days without rest and nights without sleep. The mother looked around furtively and anxiously whenever the baby cried and those around her looked back at her annoyed. She pulled her threadbare black woolen shawl around her to cover her shriveled-up breast with which she finally quieted the baby. Her husband sat beside her, fat and contented, with thick inflamed cheeks and moist eyes. It was easy to see who took the lion's share in that marriage. Nearer the stage sat some young girls around fourteen or fifteen years of age, overly dressed in silk and velvet, giggling and fooling around because a couple of young gentlemen with pompadours and starched shirt fronts were flirting with them [. . .]. On another seat sat a lady with rouged cheeks wearing a blue velveteen dress [. . .]. Her hair was curled like a poodle dog's. Her thick red hands and fat wrists, covered for the moment with imitation bracelets, showed that she was a hired girl. Her cavalier was a large robust fellow with a broad, happy smile. He seemed to believe that the chief purpose in going to the theater was to stamp one's feet and make all the noise possible. (48)

This passage, a scene of both the comic and the grotesque, deserves to be quoted at length; not only is it one of the most important moments in the novel, but the rich description provides a detailed picture of Scandinavian immigrant culture in urban America. In a relatively short space, Janson manages to show a cross-section of lower class immigrant society and to intimate the cultural aspirations and limitations of members of the audience. While the tone is often disdainful, there is some sympathy for these sad types, particularly the forlorn figure of the mother in the black shawl. Janson manages to provide human insights as she pans the faces in the crowd: the homeliness of the laborer and his wife; the inequality in the marriage of the weary mother and the fat,

self-satisfied husband; the exaggerated elegance of the hired girl in cheap finery and her companion's good-natured but misguided responses to the production on stage. The description continues for two more pages—portraying “modish young men,” “tired mothers” and “stodgy fathers,” and “a little scatterbrained editor with gold-rimmed glasses and a goatee”—rendering a scene of hilarity, vulgarity, and (barely) organized chaos. Policemen stand at the back of the hall, “[. . .] for the crowd was large and their faces became more and more vulgar and rudimentary the further you looked [. . .]” (49). Janson's description of the theater crowd reveals not only the lack of culture and refinement among the masses and the gulf between them and Astrid, but also the naturalistic qualities of the novel, as audience members are characterized as simpletons or even barbarians.

Astrid's theater debut is a fiasco; although her acting is creditable (according to the novices around her), much of the dialogue goes unheard in the din of the crowd: “Everything floated together for her into a bewildering mass—the many heads, the beer glasses, the stamping, the shouting, the roaring” (50). Astrid realizes her naiveté, but a more grim realization awaits her:

This was just too much of a farce! She had wanted to educate this audience and show them something fine and great. Meanwhile her father was serving beer—moving the saloon into the theater! (51)

Once again, her father and the saloon bring humiliation and defeat. Holm appears oblivious to the situation, celebrating the evening as “a proud occasion” (52). Astrid realizes that she has become the selling point for her father's business after all: “[. . .] Now you have me as you want me, Father.’ Holm was too happy to detect the scornful note in her voice. He was too busy calculating how much beer would be sold

and how much money he would make” (52). The final blow comes later that evening, when Meyer escorts Astrid home. Throughout the book, the narrator reveals Meyer’s lust (“Meyer devoured her with his eyes” (43)) and possessiveness (“she was his possession” (53)), both of which become explicit in a scene of sexual aggression:

He came closer and closer. Her eyes became fixed and large. Then she felt an arm around her body, pulling her forward forcefully, and a burning whisky-stenched breath touched her. She saw two lustful, bleary eyes and two thick lips that groped for hers. (54)

Astrid strikes Meyer on the ear and calls him a “disgusting beast” to which he responds that she is a “saloonkeeper’s wench” (54-55). The labels reinforce what the action and naturalistic description make clear: Astrid is surrounded and endangered by moral and cultural inferiors at every turn, yet she herself is an object of desire or scorn, seemingly without power or status. The depraved environment of the saloon forms a microcosm of the larger city and system that Astrid must negotiate in order to find her place in the community and fulfill her aspirations for a life of meaning and integrity.

Given her experiences with Holm and Meyer, Astrid realizes that a large part of her problem is her class and gender. As she considers her situation, she begins to see the hypocrisy and inconsistency of those around her, especially her selfish and weak father:

Now he used the same words to argue that the one right and sensible thing for him to do was to run a saloon. For her to be an actress was an impossibility and a disgrace, but this was not a disgrace. [. . .] Was it not just because she was a woman that he dared to behave in this manner toward her? Would he have dared do it if she had been a man? [. . .] Oh, if only she had been a boy! What right had they to tie her up and destroy her because she was not a man? (35)

Astrid finds a double standard in America, in terms of both moral conduct and gender bias. The injustice she feels is also manifested in the city at large. Astrid takes to sneaking out for walks at night and discovers how the other half lives:

She always ran through the dimly-lit streets in her part of town. She was afraid someone would grab her. When she came into the more fashionable, better-lit part of the city, she slackened her pace. She walked past the wonderful shops on Nicollet Avenue where people were streaming up and down dressed in light colors and fashionable clothes. How wonderful it was to see them so happy! [. . .] Apparently they were able to follow their call and live to work and be happy. (37)

Astrid's fear of being pursued and taken by Meyer is echoed in her fear of the city at large, especially the lower class area in which she lives. Astrid also becomes increasingly aware of the vast differences between the haves and have nots in America, and the novel offers stark and plentiful contrasts between rich and poor. Like Nils Vaag in The Boat of Longing, Astrid idealizes those who appear better off than herself. The rich seem happy, safe, and morally superior in their large homes and comfortable parlors:

Here were the homes of the successful and wealthy families. In the American custom they had lighted their gas lamps but had left their curtains withdrawn so that the bright light from their living room fell out on the street. There she could stand for a long time, leaning with her head in her hands on the graceful fences that surrounded the front yard. The odor of flowers drifted over to her while she listened to the refreshing trickle of a fountain. [. . .] The thick curtains, the paintings on the walls, and [. . .] a lighted fireplace were all so splendid and homelike. There they could talk together and laugh and be happy. She would stand there as if petrified until a door opened. Then she would run back into the darkness where she felt that she belonged. (37-38)

Astrid's vision underscores the vast difference between the salon and the saloon. The upper class home provides a portrait of perfect domesticity, a haven of serenity, luxury, and morality. The light imagery throughout the passage—the house is not only illuminated within but radiates light onto the street outside—contrasts with the darkness



that Astrid experiences as she contemplates throwing herself into the Mississippi River (a New World version of the black pool of *Svartediket* in Norway). Similarly, the darkness with which Astrid identifies suggests the blackness of the saloon, its environment as morally corrupting as the domestic parlor is morally purifying. This scene is important in emphasizing the difference between rich and poor, as well as Astrid's position as an outcast. Moreover, the description of the wealthy homes may be understood as an expression of what James L. Machor refers to as "urban domesticity":

Didactic novels such as Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* and Sedgwick's *Clarence*, self-help guides on family life, and magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* [. . .] defined the ideal urban home as a pastoral enclosure where virtue, love, companionship, and a saving constancy would prevail. Advocates of urban domesticity identified home and family as a self-contained social unit insulated from the corruptions and distortions of the city at large. As such, the home would serve as an idyllic asylum, nourishing the natural goodness for its members and administering an antidote to the dislocation of urban existence.<sup>14</sup>

In light of such theories of urban domestic space, Astrid's dismay over the saloon is even more significant. Far from a virtuous enclosure, the saloon is depicted as a vile cage that harbors depravity rather than shields against it. As if anticipating Machor's very language, Janson replaces the "idyllic asylum" of urban domesticity with the insane asylum of the saloon and Astrid's room:

At times she wondered if she was not going mad. She would look around the little room at the white, bare walls and the narrow window where the sun never entered. Perhaps she was already insane and had been put in her cell and everything was gone, and here she would sit until she died. (36)

The physical spaces of the saloon and the city become yet another marker of the oppression and isolation Astrid experiences in America, as well as her alienation from her own family and community..

Astrid's admiration for the upper classes, however, is also misplaced, as she soon realizes when her new suitor, Smith, introduces her to Scandinavian-American society in Minneapolis. Smith appears as a higher order male to displace Meyer and pursue Astrid. Smith's refinement and social standing belie his "coarseness" and cruelty, and the terms of the relationship are not much different than they were with Meyer. If anything, they are worse: Smith treats Astrid as his property in public and becomes sexually aggressive and violent toward her in private. The descriptions of Smith's "animal desire" (81) escalate; he frequently looks "as if he would devour her" and (in a comical moment for the modern reader) nearly drools with lust (124). Astrid, for her part, reacts like the heroine of a gothic novel, fleeing or fainting. Astrid's reticence and chastity only cause the men to desire her more: "At the same time he longed to get that pride in his clutches so he could break it to pieces bit by bit in his beast-of-prey claws" (125). Smith refers to their impending marriage as a lustful threat rather than a sacred promise: "'In ten days you will be my lovely possession, and then no shout will help you'" (106). The institution of marriage is likened to prostitution, as Astrid feels that she has "sold herself for the red gold" of her wedding ring (111).<sup>15</sup> She knows now that "the purity of the flowers [does] not suit her" (106).

The demonization of these male characters is explicit in the novel, and their lack of depth and substance is accentuated by their simple and generic last names (suggesting such scoundrels are a dime a dozen in America). While this characterization is due in part to the feminist themes of the novel, it also has to do with class and the naturalistic

aspects of Janson's text. In discussing the differences between rich and poor in the novels of Theodore Dreiser, for example, Gelfant traces Dreiser's representation of materialism in the modern man:

So long as the worlds of rich and poor remained so widely separated, men would engage in 'wolfish' competition for wealth, and the brutalities committed in the name of free enterprise would make the city a jungle of preying and preyed-upon animals.<sup>16</sup>

In Janson's novel, men compete for wealth and women, and Astrid is a piece of high quality merchandise. The earlier images of Astrid as fawn-like or childlike now take on an added significance, as she becomes prey in the urban wilderness of Minneapolis.

Apart from the sexual interludes, Astrid seems resigned to her fate. After the theater debacle and the scornful treatment by Meyer, Astrid accepts her position as "sacrificial lamb" and becomes engaged to Smith:

Now that she appeared in the company of a man whose mere presence she felt to be an insult to the purest and most feminine in her character, they all greeted her profusely. [. . .] What kind of society was she living in? A man could be whatever he wanted, and he was still accepted. No matter how immoral his talk or tactless his behavior, he was always tolerated, while a poor, defenseless girl who had done nothing wrong was despised and shunned until she came under the man's protection. Well, if that was the way it was, then she would simply adjust. (81)

As Smith's fiancée, she is surprised to find herself being received into the homes and social circles of the very same snobs who formerly ridiculed and rebuffed her; instead of the saloonkeeper's daughter, she is now a society pet.

The society ladies are portrayed as a superficial and petty lot whose primary topics of conversation (gossip) are parlor bric-a-bracs, new dresses, and the latest affairs and divorces. One topic of conversation is a Mrs. Hale, who takes her children and leaves her rich banker husband due to his drinking and abuse. One of the ladies remarks

that the woman should “have found some other way than to forsake her husband and children” (65). Janson reveals that women harm women in the system of patriarchy and that marital inequality affects the rich as well as the poor, as Mrs. Hale becomes the upper class counterpart to the ragged mother in the theater audience. Much like Meyer, the society ladies are pretentious and have an ill-founded sense of superiority, especially since most of them are immigrants themselves: one is “the daughter of a demented clergyman” (68), and another is a former shop girl who married a rich merchant. With her patrician background, Astrid actually holds a superior pedigree, but in the New World that does not help her. Though outwardly different, the overall portrait of the upper class is remarkably similar to that of the lower class: a band of misguided immigrants, driven by materialism and self-preservation as they attempt to claw their way up the economic and social order. Astrid sees this and realizes her own power within the system; since her engagement to Smith, Meyer and her father cower before her and acknowledge “that she [is] the stronger” (80). However, Astrid’s seemingly improved prospects only fill her with deeper scorn and self-loathing, as “she herself now seemed the dirtiest and ugliest of all” (98). Astrid compares herself again to Dame Margit, in that she feels bewitched and “taken underground by the Mountain King” (111).

The turning point in the story occurs when Astrid sees the famous Norwegian poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who is on a lecture tour in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Astrid experiences an epiphany when she attends Bjørnson’s lecture on Grundtvig<sup>18</sup> at Market Hall:

So there were still such men to be found in the world! She had almost forgotten it. A nameless joy broke through her pain [. . .]. It was the joy of a new sense of faith, faith in mankind, a faith that there was still

something in life worth fighting for. She absorbed each word he said as a dried up, scorched field soaks up the merciful rain which finally comes. (104)

In direct contrast to Astrid's experience on the theater stage, Bjørnson manages to elevate and inspire his listeners:

He talked [. . .] in words so vivid, so full of power, wit, humor, and gentleness that they touched hidden heartstrings and caused minds that never rose above material concerns to soar in rapture. It was the spirit's triumph over matter, enthusiasm's victory over apathy. (104)

Bjørnson's speech signifies the beginning of Astrid's awakening. For the first time in the novel, her aspirations seem possible—if not for her (because she considers herself lost), then for someone else. A similar transformation takes place when Astrid attends a society party given in Bjørnson's honor a few days later:

What power genius has, she thought. There sat all these people whose thoughts usually never stirred from dresses, society, town gossip, day to day politics, and material concerns. Now they sat completely transformed, breathing in every word he said. A gentleness came over them, a sense of community that otherwise was quite strange to them. (110)

Here the change that comes over Astrid as she first hears Bjørnson speak is reflected in the petty matrons and stuffed shirts of the upper class; the scene testifies to Bjørnson's compelling presence but also, more importantly, to the potential for community among Norwegian-Americans. Bjørnson epitomizes Quintillian's rhetorical principle of "the good man speaking well" and parallels Astrid's ideal of the good person in a noble calling.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is also interesting that it takes Bjørnson, a European, to convey the true potential of America to the masses and move people to practical realization of their ideals.

The transformative power of the assembly is manifested in two important contacts for Astrid: a meeting with Bjørnson and a conversation with Helene Nielsen. Dr. Nielsen, a cousin of one of the wealthy hosts of the party, exists on the fringe of society as an unmarried professional woman who serves the poor. The two women are united in that they both possess a noble spirit and suffer from the misapprehension and contempt of those around them. For example, when expressing their ideas, Astrid and Helene are continuously referred to a “strange” and “peculiar” by other characters in the novel. The meeting with kindred spirits awakens Astrid from her apathy: “She had not been so wide awake for a year” (113). She returns home to write Smith a letter, breaking their engagement; as she removes the ring from her finger and prepares to return it, along with all the other baubles he gave her, she feels renewed: “She thought about the princess in the fairy tale who had been enchanted and taken into the mountain by the troll people and she felt as if the spell was suddenly lifted” (114).

Astrid realizes that this is her chance to make “a clean break” (114) and seeks out another meeting with Bjørnson. During their talk, Bjørnson acts as confessor and advisor to Astrid, listening to her whole story and providing counsel. Astrid begs him for “a mission,” and Bjørnson encourages her take her place in humanity. Bjørnson’s comments stress the possibility for community in the New World; despite America’s problems, Bjørnson nevertheless sees it as the place for opportunity and change:

“A woman in our day has no excuse if she gives up,” said Bjørnson firmly. “God forbid! That time is past, especially here in America. Here a defeated woman does not have to take her own life or give herself in an immoral marriage that is no better than another form of prostitution. That is the history of barbaric ages and it has demanded millions of sacrifices. Now that must come to an end. (118-19)

Linking the patriarchy and distorted forms of marriage and family to corrupt Old World traditions, Bjørnson affirms Astrid's particular struggles as well as the potential for women's rights and reform in general. Through Bjørnson, Janson provides a plan for female self-realization:

By women ceasing to regard themselves as subordinates. By women demanding full individual freedom and, with the strength of this freedom, by setting themselves higher standards by acquiring a full sense of responsibility. An individual is not first a woman or a man but a human being. (119)

Bjørnson's pro-feminist speech is designed to appeal to both sexes, the rationale being (in its simplest form) that as the plight of women improves, so does the situation for everyone. His remarks reflect the domestic ideology of nineteenth-century urban reform in which the urban home (and by extension, community) could be recouped through women. Thus, Astrid's rejection of a loveless and immoral marriage to Smith supports both her personal quest and her larger social responsibility. Bjørnson sounds a note of unity when he ends with a call for women to join the ultimate community of humanity: "And as a human being one has to take one's place" (119).

Bjørnson also recommends that Astrid read in order "to gather knowledge" (119). Thus, art, literature, and history are not merely entertaining trifles but necessities that provide the solution to one's individual mission and place in the world, as well as an understanding of life beyond oneself.<sup>20</sup> Bjørnson continues to bemoan the "lack of a broad vision" among people that prevents them from becoming 'one large brotherhood' (120), a problem he traces in large part to dogmatic Christianity: "And this leads to prostitution, beastly marriages, war, falsehoods, and lies in all situations in life" (120).<sup>21</sup> He then comes upon the solution for Astrid—that she become a minister, one of "liberal

persuasion,” “like those found here in America” (120). Bjørnson relates that he has just been on the East Coast and seen “noble women who boldly stood up beside the men and proclaimed their views just as skillfully and with just as convincing arguments” (121).<sup>22</sup> Thus, Astrid can use her skills as an actress on the stage of life; by becoming a good woman speaking well, she fulfills her obligation to herself and her community: “[. . .] women who now begin to see clearly have a double responsibility: first, to save your own lives, and afterwards by your example to save those of the thousands of women who follow you” (121). The result, Bjørnson prophesizes, will be the democratic, utopian vision that greeted Astrid in New York harbor: “a community of brothers and sisters where injustice and oppression are gone and the stronger individual supports and helps the weaker and does not, as now, oppress them” (121).

Astrid’s awakening and renewal are symbolized in the recurrence of the floral imagery as she leaves her meeting with the poet: she goes home, feeling “as if a thousand spring flowers had blossomed in her” (122). In stark contrast, the depravity of the saloon is manifested in an actual contagion as Astrid’s brothers are struck with diphtheria. While she nurses her siblings and atones for her past, Astrid plans for her new life. The day the youngest brother dies is “a holy day for her soul,” and Astrid finds the courage to finally break altogether with her father. Before she goes, she confronts him about her mother, accusing him of killing the mother’s spirit with their joyless marriage instead of providing “nourishment for her soul” (129-30).

Enacting Bjørnson’s vision of a mutually supportive community of women, Astrid goes to Helene Nielsen’s home, seeking refuge and guidance, where she finds true companionship and a model of female agency: “[. . .] she had looked into the heart of a



woman so pure and noble and so dedicated to self-sacrifice that it reconciled her to all the ugliness that she had been confronted with” (135). Astrid’s transformation is neither immediate nor easy, however. After a period of study—borrowing books on history and intellectual movements from the Athenaeum—and work in Dr. Nielsen’s medical practice, Astrid attempts to lecture on temperance in a public hall. Although Astrid proves herself to be a powerful speaker, her presentation is sabotaged by a bitter and vengeful Meyer, who incites protest among the saloonkeepers in the audience. The old humiliation returns as the men jeer and call her a saloonkeeper’s daughter, damaging her credibility as a temperance activist and disrupting the speech. The men also object to “this American practice of letting women preach” and tell Astrid to mind her own business (142). The irony is that this is her business, as Astrid has witnessed firsthand the suffering of poor families afflicted with “drunkenness” in her work with Helene. The crowd’s objections appear especially close-minded and shortsighted, given that temperance was an issue of particular importance within the Norwegian-American community: “[. . .] it was dreadful to see how this vice was so ingrained in the Norwegian character” (140). The affair reminds her of the ill-fated theater performance in Turner Hall.

Astrid and Helene decide that the only way for Astrid to make a break is to go somewhere else. The women speak to a Unitarian minister in St. Paul and arrange for Astrid to attend the Unitarian university in Pennsylvania. Like the Norwegian immigrants in Minneapolis in The Boat of Longing, Astrid has been adrift; however, she now regains her course and steers toward a clear destination: “At last she was beginning to catch sight of land” (145). This newfound “clarity and enlightenment” of mind is

echoed in body, as the language of self-possession pervades the scene: “My body belongs to me, and no one else has a right to it. Just think! I’m saved” (145).

The final pages of the novel return to the transcendent garden imagery that characterized Astrid’s first moments of self-discovery at the beginning of the book. It is six years later, and Astrid writes a letter to Helene—“mother, sister, friend”—in anticipation of her ordination and the beginning of her vocation. Astrid’s childlike purity is again intact, this time accompanied with the wisdom of womanhood:

[. . .] I feel like a child who has climbed a high mountain. [. . .] I breathe purer air, have higher goals and greater visions. And I know that no happiness on earth is equal to that which comes from finding a mission that can fill me completely [. . .]. (147)

The purity of nature and the renewal of spring also contribute to the bridal imagery of her impending ordination—“everything [. . .] was enveloped in a fragrant white bridal veil” (147)—as the marriage plot typical of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels reaches an alternate conclusion in Janson’s narrative: instead of marrying a human suitor, Astrid will wed God and her mission.

This is not to say that family and domesticity are incompatible with a vocation, however. In fact, Astrid’s mission also restores her family. She keeps her promise, sending for Helene, Annie (the old and loyal maidservant) and her brother, whom she will now tend and support. Astrid forgives her father and remembers her mother without pain. She becomes the benevolent matriarch of a happy family in a moral home. In the last scene of the novel, as Astrid’s ordination is celebrated in her new church in Chicago (Unity Church), her personal, professional, and spiritual aspirations are realized in a scene that supplants her previous performances on stage: she possesses physical and

moral “courage,” the audience is “a sea of friendly faces,” and she speaks from the pulpit with words of “power.” (150). Astrid is finally “at home here” and finds her place.

Janson affirms the potential for a Norwegian-American community in the positive conclusion to Astrid’s story and the didactic episodes with Bjørnson. The outcome of Astrid’s quest and its implications for her fellow countrymen are certainly more positive than the stories of Buslett’s Olav Nordmand or Rølvaag’s Nils Vaag. Indeed, Janson invokes Astrid’s roles as immigrant and (social) pioneer in order to stress that when Astrid roams west, it will be with a steadfast mission, an anchoring faith, and an intact family, for she has already “reached her destination” (150) in the existential sense:

She saw her future life following cleared paths where her thirst for clarity and enlightenment would be satisfied and guided by a goal that was great enough to take her through all difficulties How she would work! (145)

Astrid serves as a foil to the typical immigrant and provides an alternate model in that her thirst is not for land but for knowledge, her work is not only for her own material gain but for her community and all humanity.

Despite the positive conclusion, however, the outlook for the Norwegian-American community remains uncertain and Janson’s optimism is restrained. In order for Astrid to succeed, for example, she must leave her immigrant community, at least for a time. And in completing her education and planning her career, Astrid cannot foresee returning to her ethnic group right away:

[. . .] most likely I will go west and take over an American congregation. It is possible that someday I may be able to have a mixed Norwegian and American congregation—once our fellow countrymen finally reach the stage where they can accept a woman preaching to them. (149)

Thus, Astrid's New World success is achieved and practiced largely outside of the immigrant community, which remains isolated, ignorant, and morally bankrupt. Indeed, Janson's vision of the Norwegian-American community is therefore a far cry from the images of home and church portrayed in *Jul i Vesterheimen* in Chapter Two. When one considers the close calls Astrid herself faced in Minneapolis, as well as her dubious prediction about serving the immigrants in the future, the communal bonds among Norwegian-Americans seem tenuous indeed.

As one interprets the overall messages in the novel, Janson's perspective and bias as an upper class, educated, European woman must be taken into account. Janson experienced much conflict and frustration during her time in America, and she eventually returned to Europe for the remainder of her life. As a returned immigrant, Janson's views of the United States would be understandably mixed. Yet with her passion for women's rights and social reform, Janson possessed a sincere admiration for American thought, as she makes clear in Bjørnson's speech at the party:

Then he went on to speak about Norway and gave a short description of the political work for freedom that was being done and expressed gratitude to the country that had dared to go in the lead and show people the way, the free American republic. (109)

Bjørnson's remarks and Astrid's success make clear that America, not Europe, is still the best place for opportunity, change, and reform. The ending may therefore be understood as a sort of compromise: although American freedom wins the day, the literal and figurative voice of change is that of a European intellectual in America. Thus, there is hope for both the New World and the Old World. If the current Norwegian-American community is too primitive and provincial to produce a prophet of its own, it can still be

the site of inspiration for a Norwegian poet's vision. And it is through the wisdom, patience, and generosity of another professional woman, Helene, that Astrid is able to achieve her transformation and enact her mission. Astrid's story suggests that *Vesterheimen* may one day have a prophet of its own, one that will speak in the eloquent voice of a noble woman. The unanswered question is whether or not this prophet's fellow Norwegian-Americans will be prepared to listen.

**“Into the Great Melting Cauldron”: Provincialism and Assimilation in  
Ager's *On the Way to the Melting Pot***

In contrast to the tempered optimism of the conclusion to Janson's novel, Waldemar Ager's On the Way to the Melting Pot (1917) has been referred to as the author's "bitterest book."<sup>23</sup> Rather than the words of "moving conviction" that are finally expressed by Astrid Holm in A Saloonkeeper's Daughter, most of the characters in Ager's novel go out of their way to vocalize conventional wisdom, conforming to what they perceive as the American standard. Their lack of imagination is reminiscent of the Midwestern town folk described in Sinclair Lewis' Main Street (1920):

It is an unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment . . . the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God.<sup>24</sup>

Although Ager's Midwestern townspeople have not quite reached the conformity and flatness of those in Lewis' Gopher Prairie, the Norwegian-Americans portrayed in On the Way to the Melting Pot are well on their way, "a population in full flight from their Norwegian past to their American future" (Haugen 90). Indeed, a recent edition of On

the Way to the Melting Pot, translated by Harry T. Cleven, characterizes Ager's book as "a 'Main Street' of immigrant life," and Einar Haugen identifies "the same savagery" in the tone that both authors take toward their characters, as Ager "lambasted and lampooned his Norwegian Americans for their worship of the dollar and their readiness to throw away their Norwegian heritage" (Haugen 88). Coupled with this haste to Americanize and jump into the melting pot is an apathy among Norwegian-Americans toward their own community and culture; according to Peter Thaler, Ager's frustration and sarcasm stems from this "noncommittal attitude" among members of the ethnic group.<sup>25</sup> The setting of Ager's novel also links him to Lewis and a Midwestern tradition: "His [Ager's] focus was on the small Midwestern town where the process of assimilation had to do with social groups of Norwegian Americans who mingled and interacted with other groups in town."<sup>26</sup> Ager's choice of the town as the site for explorations of assimilation and community among his own ethnic group reflects a larger trend in American literature, in which the "town myth [. . .] is primarily a myth of community."<sup>27</sup>

Ager's use of satire and social criticism, his disdain for conformity, materialism and provincialism, and his focus on the Midwestern town and local community place him within a larger Midwestern tradition, particularly the "Revolt of the Village" movement of the early twentieth-century. Yet despite Ager's similarities with Lewis and other Midwestern writers of the period, Ager has not been formally discussed within this tradition. This is no doubt largely due to the fact that On the Way to the Melting Pot, originally published in 1917 in Wisconsin as Paa veien til smeltepotten, has only recently

become available to readers in English.<sup>28</sup> Given Ager's identity as an immigrant writer and the novel's discussion of assimilation, scholars have primarily focused on the ethnic aspects of the book.

While questions of assimilation and the melting pot are central to the novel and remain an important consideration in my discussion of On the Way to the Melting Pot, I am also interested in placing Ager within the larger Midwestern literary tradition—particularly the village revolt of the teens and twenties—and utilizing the theories of this literary movement to further inform and enhance critical interpretations of Ager's novel. Carl Van Doren first identified “The Revolt from the Village” in a 1921 essay, part of a series of articles on contemporary American fiction in The Nation.<sup>29</sup> Van Doren identified an emerging pattern among American writers who criticized the American small town, an icon of American purity, security, and community. Rather than romanticizing or mythologizing the village, modern writers portrayed the town with brutal (even exaggerated) realism and revealed its underside of repression, conformity, hypocrisy, and complacency. Among the works associated with this anti-idyllic tradition of the early twentieth-century are Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology (1915), Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (1919), and Sinclair Lewis' Main Street (1920). Indeed, Lewis codifies the revolt in readers' minds: “With *Main Street*, the revolt from the village became official, public, almost institutional (Hilfer 158). British novelist E. M. Forster remarked that “Lewis has lodged a piece of a continent in the world's imagination.”<sup>30</sup>

This is not to say that Lewis and his peers were the first to portray the darker realities of American village life. An earlier village revolt may be traced from roughly

1870-1890, with the development of American literary realism, particularly regionalism and local color. For example, The New England regionalists of the nineteenth-century—such as Mary Wilkins Freeman in A New England Nun (1891) and Sarah Orne Jewett in the Country of the Pointed Firs (1896)—contemplate the small town and its model(s) of community in an increasingly industrialized American society. Similarly, realistic writers like Willa Cather (The Troll Garden; 1905), Edith Wharton (Ethan Frome; 1911), and Theodore Dreiser (A Hoosier Holiday; 1916) reveal the isolated, narrow-minded, and obsolete qualities of small town life. In terms of a Midwestern tradition, Lewis and his colleagues owe a great deal to a previous generation of writers who portray the harsh realities of rural life and tarnish the village myth: Edward Eggleston's The Hoosier Schoolmaster (1871), E. W. Howe's The Story of a Country Town (1884), Joseph Kirkland's Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County (1887) and Hamlin Garland's Main-Travelled Roads (1891), the latter credited in Lewis' Nobel Prize speech.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the humorous blending of local color, dialect, and social satire in Ager's novel is reminiscent of Mark Twain. Ager's balance between comedy and pathos and his brilliant satire render immigrant psychology vividly.

In his study of the Revolt from the Village movement (1915-1930), Anthony Hilfer describes the village as symbolic nucleus:

The village was synecdoche and metaphor. The village represented what Americans thought they were, what they sometimes pretended (to themselves as well as others) they wanted to be, and if the small town was typically American, the Midwestern small town was doubly typical. [. . .] The town was the focus of what was in actuality an over-all attack on middle-class American civilization. (Hilfer 6-7)



This formulation is helpful in understanding Ager's novel, especially since many of his Norwegian-Americans—whether they be first generation immigrants or not—are extremely invested in what they perceive to be American civilization. For that very reason, Ager's characters make fine test cases for American behaviors and values; as ethnic Americans who try desperately to emulate and imitate their American counterparts, the Norwegian-Americans in On the Way to the Melting Pot expose assumptions about and interpretations (largely misinterpretations) of American life. However, it is important to point out that Ager is not merely attacking American culture. Like his village revolt contemporaries, it is “not an actual village existing in time and space but a mental conception of the village existing in the mind of a great number of Americans” (Hilfer 4) to which Ager objects. Similarly, it is the superficial, narrow, or short-sighted view of American life assumed by so many of the Norwegian-Americans that the author exposes.

Additional qualities of the Revolt from the Village rubric inform Ager's novel. For example, the myth of the village “denied satire, tragedy, even comedy” (Hilfer 26), the very ingredients Ager employs in his narrative to expose the myth. Moreover, the two main themes of revolt literature, “the buried life and the attack on conformity” (Hilfer 29), play a vital role in On the Way to the Melting Pot. Indeed, it is Ager's treatment of these themes that attests to his links to the movement and contributions to it. While explorations of the inner life and conformity in Ager's novel function in much the same way as those of the other “revolt” authors—questioning and critiquing the values of middle class, middle-brow culture—the ethnic aspect of the novel provides an additional layer of social commentary. In On the Way to the Melting Pot, “the buried life” takes on

the added dimension of an original, authentic self or ethnic conscience (the “Norwegian Adam” as Ager refers to it in the novel), while “the attack on conformity” includes (and to a large extent becomes) a critique of Norwegian-American melting pot assimilation. In the broadest sense, Ager’s novel is a speculation on the many forms and expressions of Norwegian-American and American provincialism. For the Norwegian-American community profiled in On the Way to the Melting Pot, this provincialism may be understood as a watered-down Americanism of the worst kind: mediocre, trivial, fickle, unenlightened and complacent.

As the title suggests, assimilation is a key concern of the novel. Ager’s use of the melting pot metaphor refers to the 1908 play, The Melting Pot, by Israel Zangwill (published as a book in 1909). Zangwill’s melting pot is a crucible in which European immigrants are effectively melted down and reformed into the new American. Øyvind Gulliksen points out that Ager disagreed with this view of assimilation, arguing instead for the uniqueness and integrity that immigrants could contribute to America (Gulliksen 235). Solveig Zempel asserts that “[t]here is no doubt that Ager is referring directly to Zangwill [. . .] and that this novel provides a useful corrective to Zangwill’s romantic notion.”<sup>32</sup> Finally, Ager’s translation of melting pot in his title suggests his negative view of the metaphor and the hybridization for which it stands. A more accurate translation of the English melting pot would be the Norwegian *smeltedigel*; however, Ager chooses instead to use *potte*, which typically refers to a small pot or kettle. In addition to removing the superlative stature of the “great cauldron,”<sup>33</sup> Ager attaches a derogatory meaning to the metaphor: the Norwegian *potte* may refer to an ordinary flowerpot, a pot of money (as in a game of cards—interesting given the materialistic themes in the book),

and a chamber pot, the last of these scathingly satirizing the very “melting pot” ideology by turning the term into a pun. Finally, Ager illustrates through his title the actual linguistic (and cultural) corruption that occurs with such mixing.<sup>34</sup>

Most critical studies of On the Way to the Melting Pot focus on assimilation (and rightly so), placing the novel within its historical context and with regard to the nativist sentiments that increasingly permeated American culture during World War I. Peter Thaler sees Ager’s novel as a response to wartime propaganda and anti-immigrant and/or anti-alien legislation of the period: “In his novel, Ager fought back by illustrating the negative aspects of assimilation to his fellow Norwegian-Americans” (Thaler 32). Øyvind Gulliksen also places Ager’s theories of cultural preservation and assimilation in context and differentiates Ager’s preferred model of assimilation from others along the continuum:

If the melting pot was considered a complete surrender to the host society without leaving any cultural trace at all, Ager was dead set against it. Instead, his ideas come remarkably close to those offered by contemporary proponents of [ . . . ] “cultural pluralism.” (Gulliksen 236)<sup>35</sup>

While Anglo-American conformity represents a complete surrender to the dominant American culture, and the melting pot ideology calls for a cultural leveling (to use Ager’s own terminology)<sup>36</sup> and biological mixing among ethnic groups to form a new American, Ager’s approach to assimilation advocates for the immigrant to retain some of his or her “native” qualities and so benefit the individual, the ethnic group, and the larger American society. This model holds ethnic distinction to be an asset that enriches the American culture rather than one that detracts from or competes with it. Gulliksen asserts that On the Way to the Melting Pot “is definitely a novel defending cultural pluralism” (237) and

that “Ager felt that the melting pot was an improbable and impossible metaphor in American life” (235). Ager’s coupling of one impossible metaphor (the melting pot) with another (the myth of the village) provides for a keen, witty, and contemptuous portrayal of Norwegian-American community in a Midwestern town.

Ager’s approach is to paint a wide canvas in his novel, telling the larger story of the community through a collection of individual stories. He therefore incorporates many characters and simultaneous narratives in order to portray various instances of familial, ethnic and communal conflict. The over abundance of characters is often viewed as a technical weakness in the novel. For example, Solveig Zempel points out that “[t]here are too many subplots, and no one clearly defined protagonist, making for a diffuse story. The polemic is too close to the surface; the characters are caricatures.”<sup>37</sup> Yet Zempel adds, “[c]aricature can be revealing as well as amusing, and Ager’s novel is both. His delineation of class, ethnic group, and generational struggle is exaggerated for satirical purposes, but it rings true [ . . . ]” (112). Einar Haugen expresses a similar opinion: “The strength of this novel lies in its many amusing details. But as a whole the novel is diffuse, attempting to follow too many characters and losing its focus in the varied episodes” (Haugen 94). Despite the lack of in-depth and sustained characterization, however, Ager captures the reader’s interest and sympathy: “The specific details are so down to earth and truly delineated that the reader is curious concerning the outcome. These people are indeed real, but their characteristics are heavily loaded in the direction of Ager’s convictions and prejudices” (Haugen 90). Two characters who help to anchor the novel are immigrant newcomers Lars Olson and Karoline Huseby (who are engaged); although they are not developed much more than the other characters, they do provide a

kind of trajectory to the story, moving from naiveté to sophistication in their knowledge of Norwegian-American and American culture. Their point of view also functions as a kind of moral filter in the novel, since their position as immigrants and outsiders reveals the cloudy, confusing rules and hierarchies governing the town. Lars and Karoline offer two models of assimilation as well: Lars joins the melting pot while Karoline advocates cultural pluralism.

The beginning of the novel features a gathering of family and community, as neighbors join the Omley family in celebrating the christening of their fourth child. This opening scene reflects the text's scale, introducing a wide range of characters and issues, as well as the various arenas in which assimilation and provincialism play out in the novel; including language practices, social customs, family relations, economic systems, and education. Many of these venues overlap, and all of them are explored via familial interactions. Indeed, the family unit functions as a locus for issues of assimilation, identity, and cultural values. Thus, my analysis focuses primarily on the relationship between parents and children, which is symptomatic of the larger challenges and problems facing the ethnic community.

The novel opens with Mrs. Lewis Omley, who is slaving over a hot stove in preparation for the arrival of her guests from church, where her first native-born American son is being christened. Mrs. Omley is nervous as she prepares "an American-style dinner" and knows that "her good name and reputation, and that of her family, [. . .] bubbled away on the stove."<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Omley's reasons for making the American dinner (not her area of culinary expertise) are twofold: first, Mrs. Skare had made the mistake of serving traditional Norwegian fare at her child's confirmation and it was viewed as a

social gaffe, and second, an American woman married to a Norwegian will attend the dinner and therefore must be impressed. Mrs. Omley also has “official” sanction of the menu: “The ladies in the Presbyterian church had served a dinner like that last winter and it had been written up in the newspapers. Lewis had read about it in the *Daily Chronicle*” (2). Mrs. Omley originally envisions an elegant “American” meal, but as the smell of cooked cabbage invades the house on a “burning hot” day, she regrets her decision. Mrs. Omley’s experience underscores the unnaturalness of the process and the poorness of the product when Norwegian-Americans attempt to import American traditions without any knowledge of them. Moreover, Mrs. Omley’s reasons for doing so are superficial at best (she hopes to impress her neighbors).

The same scene introduces another of the major topics of Ager’s novel: the relationship between first and second-generation Norwegian-Americans. During her preparations for the meal, Mrs. Omley requests her daughter Sophy’s assistance. Even though her mother requires help and Sophy has nothing else of importance to do, the daughter is extremely put out at having to set the table. Mrs. Omley, however, has trouble disciplining her daughter:

Mrs. Omley could never remain angry long enough to complete a lengthy sentence. And whenever Sophy got angry and spoke English, it was as though something so fine and ladylike came over her that her mother often felt ashamed at the thought of her own plainness. She couldn’t understand everything Sophy said at such moments, but she felt a mother’s pride when she saw Sophy straighten up and answer like a fine lady. (3)

This passage introduces several important features of parent-child interaction that are explored in the novel. First, the language gap causes problems in both communication and the “balance of power” between parent and child. Because the mother values English

and believes it to be the language of “fine folk,” she overlooks Sophy’s behavior. The parental shame associated with the supposedly superior “American” child is also a recurring problem among Norwegian-American families in the novel. Finally, the irony of the situation—Mrs. Omley feeling a mother’s pride over something any other mother would view as misbehavior and disrespect—is typical of Ager’s narrative and his method of social commentary.

Ager goes on to reveal the psychological motivations and value systems at work in Mrs. Omley:

Sophy puckered her otherwise pretty mouth so that her upper lip rested on the bottom of her nose. This also made Mrs. Omley’s heart beat faster because it made her think of the children in the wholesaler’s family in Norway where she had worked as a maid and Lewis as a servant. There was something fine about Sophy because she wrinkled her upper lip just the way the upper-class people did [. . .]. (3)

Referring back to her lower-class status and experience in Norway, Mrs. Omley equates her daughter’s spoiled attitude with the higher-ups she used to serve. Mrs. Omley sees future promise in her daughter’s disobedience, but this does not fit the American context. The fact that the mother feels shame (when it is the daughter who should do so) makes the scene that much more troubling. Typical of Ager, a single moment or emblem—in this case a pouty lip—crystallizes the ridiculous, pathetic, or tragic essence of the scene.

Ager’s apt (and often hilarious) choice of symbols for his characters’ social aspirations contributes to the humor and satire of the novel. For Mrs. Overhus, for example, the symbol of social superiority is a high handshake that she has learned from the illustrious wife of an American mattress manufacturer. Mrs. Overhus cannot wait to show off the new skill “that she now aspired to practice on her more uninitiated fellow

Norwegians” (75). With facial powder to give her an “aristocratic, floury touch,” Mrs. Overhus deploys the handshake. Apparently, style and good manners are contagious in this community: “Mrs. Hill sat there positively aching to get home so that she could try out that fine high-arm greeting on her next-door-neighbor lady, who still lived in a state of innocence when it came to shaking hands” (75-76). Ager reveals not only the misplaced importance that such trivial gestures receive in Norwegian-American “society,” but also the competitive, envious, even back-biting nature of such “neighborly” interactions.

The negative impact of this desire for (superficial) social status is compounded by Norwegian-Americans who wield their superiority as a weapon against fellow Norwegians. This is especially true of the interactions between the more “established” Norwegian-Americans and immigrant newcomers, like Lars Olson. For example, Lars’ employer at the paint shop, Louis Omley, notes Lars’ new mustache (another symbol of social demarcation) with indignation: “Omley observed this mustache with increasing concern. It didn’t take long before these newcomers began to get above themselves and follow the latest fashions” (74). Omley fears that the mustache may even “hurt business” (as it is not the kind of mustache that church-going men usually cultivate) and begins to turn against Lars. Similarly, Mrs. Nelson boasts a son who speaks English and knows hardly any Norwegian at all: “Mrs. Nelson liked to drive this point home. It was good for these newcomer women to be humbled a little when they attempted to make themselves look big after being in the country for only a couple of years” (45).

In many cases, the desire to surpass one’s fellow Norwegian-American prevents any meaningful interaction, as in the case of Mrs. Newhouse at the Omley christening



party. When she does not have the opportunity to tell the assembly about her recent surgery, it is a great blow to Mrs. Newhouse:

Here these chatterboxes had spent the whole time talking about their kids and she had let them go on because she had carefully figured that she would have a good opportunity to talk about the operation following coffee. She was the only one here who had been through a real operation. When she stopped to think about it there weren't many among the Norwegians who had ever been through anything like that, although there were more among the Yankees. (20)

Although her point of distinction (the operation) is less superficial than that of Mrs. Overhus (the great handshake), Mrs. Newhouse actually serves as a more severe example of pettiness in that she reduces a serious subject to a social triviality. In the case of both women, anything connected to "real" Americans or Yankees smacks of superiority, and this is their primary motivation for sharing.

Competitiveness, superficiality, and class-consciousness also distort the relationship between parents and children. The desire for status is amplified in another scene from the party, when the mothers and their offspring gather. One guest, Mrs. Stenson, has served as a nursemaid in an American home, and she deploys the language she learned from her superiors in an effort to impress the other mothers:

When the other women were scolding their children in bad English saying "*shut up*" and "*I'll knock the stuffing out of you if you don't behave yourself,*" they became silent and showed almost religious reverence when Mrs. Stenson started in. Her [. . .] nose turned up sharply when she let loose a voice that was unfamiliar and somewhat strained: "*Be a little lady now—Mehala, dear—don't do that darling! You make me, oh—so nervous. Your poor mama is all in. Puds Næsa di, Darling! Mama's angel child musn't plokka Næsa. Saa ja! Now run and play nice and don't disturb your poor mama anymore—I am ALL IN.*"<sup>39</sup>

The angel child Mehala groped obediently for her little Norwegian snub nose. Mama breathed a triumphant sigh and leaned back and didn't even see the little red tongue the child stuck out at her, which also was Norwegian. But the women were impressed. Just imagine to be able to

remember all those words at once! How they wished to be able to direct something like that to their own children on special occasions, but there is so much here in this world that the children of simple folk must do without. (6-7)

In this ridiculous scene, Ager exposes the topsy-turvy values and misconceptions about what counts for refinement and good breeding among the Norwegian-Americans. The communal respect for Mrs. Stenson is misplaced, as she is neither a social superior nor an accomplished speaker of English. In fact, the mixing of English and Norwegian degrades both languages into corrupt mish-mash. Rather than be herself with her own child, Mrs. Stenson emulates an American woman who was “sickly and high-strung.” The model upon which Mrs. Stenson bases her performance is therefore not particularly appealing. Finally, the whole point of the tirade—to get the child to blow its nose instead of pick it—reduces the entire performance to its most base level. The final details about the child—that the dirty little nose and sassy tongue are “Norwegian”—implies that a good Norwegian reprimand would be the best medicine. Worst of all, this exhibition is considered worthy of admiration and emulation by the social group.

In addition to revealing his commentary via scenes and character interactions, Ager expresses his points more directly in didactic sermons, expressed via dialogue or contemplations by the characters. For example, in case the reader missed something in the aforementioned scenes from the Omley party, the plumber (often the voice of reason) sums it up: “‘There are beasts,’ the plumber said, ‘who have so little understanding that they eat their own offspring; but the Norwegians in America are even more ignorant, because they let themselves be devoured by their kids’” (48). Ager points out the more serious consequences of such relations, especially as children grow older. For example,

the ethnic group values education for its material benefits, its promise of upward mobility, and its mark of middle class status. Unfortunately, practical considerations and a realistic perspective seem to fall by the wayside. The plumber points out that children learn to further disrespect their parents and immigrant origins at school, as they mix with rich American children become “educated” (in contrast to their working-class parents):

The boys were too good for a trade and the girls for housework. The girls learned to figure out how long it would take a man to ride a bicycle to the moon, but they didn’t know how long the potatoes ought to cook. They could figure out how many times  $28\frac{3}{4}$  can go into  $101\frac{1}{2}$ , but they couldn’t figure out how much work they could save their mothers by learning to mend their own stockings. (47)

Without the financial resources and long-term commitment to learning that college would involve, the Norwegian-American youth end up with a half-baked and impractical education.

Even for young children, school often represents the “dividing line” that separates parent and child. This is the case with Mrs. Skare, who cannot speak English and eventually becomes no more than a servant in her own home. Mrs. Skare is the most severe example of language loss in the novel, as she is eventually rendered mute within her own family (her husband and children all speak English). Mrs. Skare speaks to herself at night, after the household is asleep, expressing all the maternal love, care, discipline, and advice that she cannot share with her children. Late in the novel, she suffers a mental breakdown and goes to an asylum. She remembers everything about her children up until school age, when they literally and metaphorically left her; “[a]part from this, she appeared to be normal” (99). Ager does not mean to demonize the school or

suggest that children should not be educated. Rather, he points out that the parents leave the children's entire education to the school and do not teach their children other life lessons. Again, it is the plumber who clarifies the situation:

And none were in a worse position than the children of Norwegians: they had learned language and manners and their way of thinking from the street because their parents thought their language and their manners and way of thinking were much too simple for their fine children. [. . .] They thought it was so wonderful that their children learned about Columbus and Patrick Henry and Alfred the Great, but they took it as totally natural that the children didn't know a thing about their own parents or their own family background. They could recite Moses and all the prophets, [. . .] but they sometimes didn't know their father's full name or the name of the place he came from. (47-48)

Ager reveals that the problem of ethnic preservation and Norwegian-American identity is indeed one of education—an education that it is the parents' right and duty to provide. Although the school teaches American traditions and does exert some influence on students' values and behaviors, the parents and the Norwegian-American community are more to blame when young people are ignorant or disrespectful of their ethnic heritage.

Another problem with the children's education and resulting attitude is the middle class sensibility to which their parents aspire. Sophy Omley's education, for example, resembles that of nineteenth-century women who were trained for the parlor. She can sing and play a little, possesses "fine bearing" and lovely clothes. Newcomer Lars admires the "high-flown stiffness" of the Norwegian-American girls (118) and finds Sophy to be a fine lady. His homespun Norwegian fiancée, Karoline, cannot compare (she laughs too loudly and has rosy cheeks) as Lars ponders his attraction to Sophy:

[. . .] something else about her [. . .] had made an even deeper impression on his soul, and that was her helplessness—that purely luxurious quality

about her. It was as though she had been created and raised to be an adornment for her husband, something to show off—something one had great honor in possessing. But at the same time he understood of course that it would be very expensive to keep such a wife [. . .]. (100)

Although his admiration is misplaced, Lars' reading of Sophy as a material possession is right on the mark. For when Lars begins to court Sophy, her parents are horrified—marriage to “a common Norwegian” (73) is not what they have in mind. After Lars' uppity moustache, this is the final straw for Omley, who finally turns against his loyal employee, the man he had once assisted. Lars is no longer welcome in the Omley home and the family regularly insults him. Sophy will marry the son of an upstanding American (Scottish) family in the town, and Lars will eventually break his engagement with Karoline and instead marry Mabel Overhus; although Lars has never like Mabel, he gets “a fine, well-educated girl on whom much had been spent” (158) and inherits the family store. Lars' mixing of financial, social, and personal aspirations, as well as his choice of Mabel over the morally superior Karoline predicts his march to the melting pot.

The intermarriage between Lars and Mabel is also frowned upon in the community, as Mabel had been considered destined for finer things. Similarly, the parents object to the socializing of their children at the Good Templar lodge, the one real site of community and fellowship for town's young people:

It came to light that young men whose parents were determined they should become professors, architects, civil engineers, employees of fine office firms, and such had accompanied some of the servant girls home from the lodge—and—oh, horrors—girls who took music lessons and could play both this and that had allowed themselves to be accompanied home by some newcomer boy who worked at the sawmill or in one of the factories. (109)

In addition to revealing the parents' snobbery and short-sightedness—the lodge keeps their children engaged in wholesome activities and away from the saloon—Ager pokes fun at the concept of intermarriage since the girls and boys discussed in the passage are all Norwegian-Americans.

In terms of cultural preservation, the parents' boycott of the lodge is extremely harmful:

It also became apparent that many of them [young people] could handle Norwegian quite well when they realized it was not shameful to be able to speak two languages. It even became fashionable to speak Norwegian in the lodge. A choir was started which sang only Norwegian songs. When the lodge had parties, there were always many people who attended. The young people came to understand that Norwegian was more than just the catechism and crudeness. (108)

Not only do the parents fail to provide their children with the education they require, but when the young people manage to build Norwegian-American institutions and forge ethnic community on their own, the parents dismantle it. The elders seem to prefer American conformity to Norwegian vitality. Moreover, members of the older generation are portrayed as hypocrites; in an echo of A Saloonkeeper's Daughter, town elders bemoan the state of things from their seats in the bar:

That there was a need for even more entertainment was yet another sign of the depravity of the times was the opinion of many of the older members when the subject happened to come up at Finstad's saloon, where such things were readily discussed, since Finstad was himself a member of the congregation and was interested in the welfare of its youth both for time and for eternity. (109)

This saloon scene appears to be the final nail in the coffin with regard to the credibility of the parents and community leaders. However, although Ager directs intense criticism at them and holds the first generation largely responsible for loss of the ethnic heritage, he

also reveals a reason more noble and sympathetic than greed and social climbing: “But behind it all lay the fear that the parents would lose their children—that in the end it would just be too simple for them at home” (122). In addition to pride, materialism, and conformity, fear is a great motivator in the decisions and actions of the parents. Indeed, it is fear of losing his family that drives Omley to build a new house—fear and hope that he might foster pride, respect, “honor,” and “attachment” among his children (122).

Ager’s criticism of the “American values” adhered to by so many of the Norwegian-Americans is directed not only at the ethnic community. In the case of Henry Nelson, for example, both the ethnic group and the larger American society are at fault. Echoing his description of Sophy, Lars attributes an admirable “helplessness” to his friend: “Henry’s helplessness and clumsiness impressed Lars. There was something so fine and gentlemanlike about him when he couldn’t even manage to light a fire in the stove” (49). The sarcasm of this statement is only amplified by the fact that Henry does no work and is supported by his mother, a washerwoman. Lars’ description is all the more ironic given that Henry is the high school football star and local hero:

He was referred to as an example of a sound soul in a sound body and much of his ability as a football player was attributed to his ancestry in a direct line from the old Vikings, whose courage, strength, and presence of mind turned defeat into victory. Their well-known berserk fury was not a kind of combat blindness, but the result of cold-blooded calculation. (131)

First, Henry is indeed a “sound soul in a sound body” in that he is a good person utterly devoid of imagination: his smile is “meaningless” and his sleep is “dreamless” (29).

Second, it is interesting that the locals like to invoke Henry’s Norse ancestry when it provides a useful sports analogy, yet his own mother does not want him to speak Norwegian at home (even though it is the only language she knows) because it is too

“simple” (a good description of her good-hearted but slow-witted son). Similarly, Henry could be accused of many things, but “calculation” would not be one of them, both in terms of general intelligence and planning for the future. He is content to let his mother do laundry and continue to support them both. Finally, the community’s celebration of Henry as a local sports hero is marred by the reality that he is a seemingly-permanent fixture on the football team: he has not succeeded in graduating high school in a number of years. When he finally does graduate, the same situation occurs at the university level; although he is completely unqualified for higher education to begin with and cannot complete the required work. Henry is kept on as a football player. He only manages to graduate when his prosperous and powerful Anglo-American father-in-law buys him a diploma from another university. Henry’s situation reveals that the Norwegian-Americans are not always guilty of misreading American customs and institutions; there are larger problems with American values, particularly when it comes to education and the American sports machine. Henry is a caricature of the good-looking but intellectually lacking American athlete. Moreover, as an uneducated, unemployed loafer, Henry is of little use to his ethnic or American communities.

Ager does provide a better model for both the Norwegian-American and the larger Anglo-American culture in the figures of newcomer Karoline Huseby and her friends the Highbees. The Highbee family is wealthy, educated, well-respected, and “a leader of fashion in the town” (110). Although the Highbees’ background appears overly aristocratic, Ager presents the judge as “a New Englander of the old school” and “the epitome of righteousness” (110-11). As his professional title suggests, Judge Highbee is one of the few wise, sensible and noble characters in the novel. The mutual respect he



shares with Karoline, even though he first comes to know her as a servant in his household, is a model for both Norwegian-Americans and Yankees. Indeed, Karoline does “not have the feeling of being a servant” (110) and marvels at the Highbees’ lack of “arrogance” and “friendly condescension” so typical of the upper classes in Norway (179).

One of the few expressions of outright Anglo-American superiority and nativism occurs in the Highbee household, during a party at which Karoline is in attendance as a servant. The first instance takes place when the elder Highbee son, talking of a family trip to Europe, hands Karoline a German beer stein with an inscription and says to her, ““You who are German, or maybe something worse, you can probably read these hieroglyphics, because no Christians can”” (111). The disdainful tone and racist remarks of the son are checked, however, when Karoline returns with the stein and reports that the inscription is in Latin and has been translated by the Alsatian cook (who speaks French, German, and English). The son blushes and the judge bursts into a hearty laugh, replying, “Here sit half a dozen people with a university or college education, and when an academic question is to be answered we turn to our cook” (111). The judge then goes on to question the American educational system, his comments reminiscent of remarks made by the Norwegian-American plumber.

On another occasion, which happens to fall on the Seventeenth of May (Norway’s National Day), Karoline is serving tea to Highbee family guests. Mrs. Smith questions Karoline’s American loyalty when she notices the maid wearing a patriotic Norwegian ribbon:

“There ought to be a law against such a thing,” she said. “Daughters of the Revolution and Women’s Relief Corps should take up this matter. When people come here from lands where they have been oppressed and can take advantage of all the freedom our people have fought and suffered for, then they should be forbidden to go here and wave the colors of other countries right in our faces. (113)

The woman’s nativism and ignorance—reminiscent of the anti-immigrant sentiment revealed in Simon Johnson’s story “Citizens,” discussed in Chapter Two—are all the more disturbing when it is revealed that “Mrs. Smith” is actually a Scandinavian-American. Once again, the worst oppression of the Norwegian-American community comes from within its own ranks. Karoline makes a courteous but firm response, explaining that she was not oppressed in Norway, that people in Norway honor the American Independence Day, and that had she remained in Norway, she would have had the right to vote. She is moved to tears and Judge Highbee comes to her rescue. Unlike the Norwegian-Americans themselves, Judge Highbee honors Norwegian customs and insists on raising the American flag in honor of the day. He admits that foreign countries are, in many ways, “further ahead” than the United States. Mrs. Highbee emphasizes the point by asking Karoline’s permission to wear the ribbon: ““May I clip a little piece from it and wear it in honor of the land which does not consider women to be idiots or dumb animals?”” (114).

Late in the novel, after Karoline and Lars break off their engagement and she spends a period of time in Norway, Karoline returns with her Norwegian husband to visit the Highbees as equals. Although the judge’s identity as a New Englander might at first appear to support theories of Anglo-American superiority, Ager uses the New England Americans as models of distinction to support his concept of cultural pluralism: “The fine

old New England culture will no doubt disappear just like the strong, religiously inclined Norwegian pioneer” (181). Gulliksen adds that “Ager was certain that if the idea [of the melting pot] was enforced it would kill ‘the creativity’ of all subgroups in America, including the New England Americans” (Gulliksen 235). Ager clearly idealizes both Karoline and the Highbees in order to make his point: both remain true to their core values and convictions yet consider new ideas and beliefs as well. The Highbees, for example, “were fond of Norwegian music and literature and the wife played Grieg and the husband read Henrik Ibsen, while in the Norwegian homes they busied themselves with ragtime and dime novels” (155). Meanwhile, Karoline is the model Norwegian-American: she not only maintains and honors Norwegian traditions but emulates American models of integrity, in contrast to the low-brow or middle-brow cultural touchstones of her peers.

Ager does not give up completely on the small-town Norwegian-Americans, however. At the end of the novel, several of the characters who have been the most conspicuous examples of materialism and provincialism have a change of heart, particularly Overhus and Omley. As the characters get older and wiser, a strange thing happens: “The remarkable thing about Overhus was that he seemed to get more and more ordinary as the others became finer” (118). In response to the spoiled whining and conspicuous consumption of his wife and children, Overhus becomes frugal. He is also troubled: “There was something wrong, something had failed, a foothold was missing. Was he slipping away from his own, or were they slipping away from him?” (142). Overhus contemplates the reasons his family has grown apart and why he feels “poorer than ever before” (124). He realizes that his home is “not a genuine home—it was a

counterfeit—a bungled copy of a number of other homes” based on families named “Cameron or Smith or Jones or something like that” (124-25). His children are “also bungled copies of other people’s children, with other upbringing, other presuppositions” (1440). Overhus realizes the cost of conformity, but the lesson comes too late. He spends less time in the fashionable yet foreign parlor with his family and more time drinking in his office or sitting alone on the back stoop:

His own place was really out on the back steps—as far back in the house as it was possible to be, and then out the door. They did not come there to ask him to move, and there he could, when he was tired, lean against the railing. (125)

The Norwegian Adam or “buried life” in Overhus comes to the surface again, and he constantly retells the story of the old days when he was poor and lived in Chicago. He reminds his wife of this before going to his office and dying from mixing pills.

Like Overhus, Omley also begins to assert himself in ways that his family does not recognize, meeting their plans for lavish expenditures with thrift and practicality. Omley even regrets his own past extravagance: having moved into his enormous new house “with a tower in one corner” (122), he realizes that the building is expensive to heat and becomes stingy with the coal. Ager invokes melting pot imagery to describe Omley stoking the expensive fire: “he felt as though it was a part of himself which was hurled in to be devoured in the insatiable chasm” (123). Omley spends more time in the cellar—“outside civilized order”—with the furnace. Like Overhus on the back steps, Omley can once again be his Norwegian self: “But down in the cellar he was Norwegian to the very marrow of his bones and grieved over the coal that was never enough” (123). Omley has flashes of insight and clarity that stem from his old ethnic ego: “There was

deepest within him some genuine Norwegianness which now and then played the trick of suddenly appearing as good logic—the Old Adam that was not quite dead and lay in hiding [. . .] (124). Omley’s divided self often emerges when money is involved: the American in him pays while the Norwegian Adam complains, curses, and fights to get out (125). Eventually, Omley suffers a financial blow from which he cannot recover, having invested in a mining venture recommended by his “English” son-in-law that goes bad. Omley gets sick, and his final days are spent with his youngest child, Melvin Clarence, the American son whose christening opens the novel. However, Omley now speaks Norwegian to the child and tells him all about Norway. Omley’s final wish is that the boy learn his catechism in Norwegian so that he will not forget his father and mother. Like Overhus, Omley dies, but there is some hope: Melvin Clarence grows into a “rare young man,” who provides for his mother and sister and takes over his father’s painting business with skill and intelligence.

The ray of hope symbolized in Melvin Clarence is absent in Lars Olson. He becomes obsessed with “bisnissen” (the business) in Overhus’ store, and his only interest is to “mæka monni” (make money). Throughout the novel, Karoline senses Lars’ transformation:

To her, it was as though he gradually put himself at a distance and moved into something hazy and foreign—or that little by little he was being pulled into a whirlpool or onto some kind of grindstone that would pulverize her Lars into an unrecognizable and unrelated substance or make him disappear altogether. (154-55)

By the end of the novel, Karoline’s premonition has come true, and Lars has lost nearly all of his rough edges of ethnic distinction. Lars Olson has transformed into Louis Olson, co-owner and manager of the Overhus store. Lars marries Mabel Overhus and has a

fashionable wife he can show off. Unlike Overhus, who looked back at his early days as a newcomer with belated yet earnest nostalgia, Lars looks back to his evening at the Omley party with conceited satisfaction. Instead of looking up to the Norwegian-American men who advised him then, Lars looks down on them with a “twisted smile.” He savors his superiority and wishes “for a newcomer whom he could impress” (163). Lars is the picture of middle class, middle border mediocrity, reveling in his supposed achievement. In stark contrast, Karoline sees the Midwestern town in all its conformity, dismalness, and repressed pain and realizes that Lars has “[m]elted down to money and prestige, [. . .] finely planed himself down to be small enough to appear great in his own eyes” (197).

The novel closes with Lars and Mabel trapped in a cycle of insatiable materialism and smug provincialism while Karoline contemplates the process of the “great leveling”:

Then they were ready for the great melting pot. First they stripped away their love for their parents, then they sacrificed their love for the one they held most dear, then the language they had learned from mother, then their love for their childhood upbringing, for God and man, then the songs they learned as children, then their memories, then the ideals of their youth—tore their heritage asunder little by little—and when one had hurled from his heart and mind everything which he had been fond of earlier, then there was a great empty void to be filled with love of self, selfishness, greed, and the like. [. . .]

Some danced themselves into the great melting cauldron, others went calmly and quietly, because they understood that they no longer had any value as individuals and that they could at least help to fill it up. Others again marched to a full orchestra because they regarded themselves as having so much value that they would create an entirely new metal [. . .]. Some still went into it thoughtlessly and simply in laziness followed “*the line of least resistance*” and it led them there at last. But Lars was among those who prepared his own unraveling and melted down by ridding himself of his best qualities first. And this was only natural, because the melting pot was precisely for the spiritually stunted, those who no longer had qualities that let people see what they were or what they had been. (198)

Ager's images of the melting pot and its various paths reveal assimilation to be the ultimate conformity. The author makes clear that it is not just the dominant Anglo-American culture or other outside forces that exert pressure on the ethnic individual to assimilate; it is the inattentive apathy or eager willingness of the ethnic American that leads to the cauldron as well. A lack of vigilance and a forfeiting of native values and customs are all that is required. Rather than contributing to their American context, these ethnic Americans are a negation, absorbed into an amorphous concept called "America" that they do not even understand. Ager reminds the reader, however, that there is another option, concluding the novel with a slim glimmer of hope: Karoline looks forward to a honeymoon visit with the Highbees, who plan to fly the Norwegian flag for the occasion.

### **Conclusion**

In the opening of Main Street, Sinclair Lewis presents the Midwest's past and present through the eyes of Carol Milford, who stands "[o]n a hill by the Mississippi where Chippewas camped two generations ago [. . .]" (1):

The days of pioneering, of lassies in sunbonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot; and a rebellious girl is the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest. (1)

Nearly thirty years earlier, Janson anticipated the scene with another rebellious girl, Astrid Holm, who pauses for a reverie on Lake Minnetonka. Surveying the "rich, lush banks on which the white tents of the Indians had shone thirty years earlier," she now sees pleasure boats, villas and summer homes, and fashionable people enjoying a Sunday excursion. The scene leads Astrid to consider the meaning of civilization:

The lake alone remembered the old days. It alone could not forget. Civilization had made its entry. It had come with its all-ruling, all-crushing power, and it had been in a hurry because all this had been done in thirty years. What did it care about what it had crushed under its feet or that blood and tears sprouted in the path of its victorious progress! Thirty years! How much had changed! A long time, and yet only a drop in the larger stream of evolution. (88)

In many ways, Janson's novel as a whole takes on the perspective of the narrator in this particular scene: that of the European American stopping for a pause in the work of "civilization" in order to consider what one is working for, what stands to be gained and lost, and what has taken place over a generation.

Ager's novel, like Lewis' Main Street, performs similar work thirty years on. Ager questions civilization and progress in an era even further removed from pioneering, settlement, and nation-building, yet the stakes for Ager are just as high as for Janson, if not higher. Indeed, despite their economic, social, and political foothold in America, Ager's characters begin to realize and tally the cost of "progress." If Janson's novel ponders what Norwegian-American culture could and might become, Ager's story questions whether or not the Norwegian-American community he portrays is the one to which a previous generation aspired and the writers and readers of *Jul i Vesterheimen* celebrated. In his darker moments, Ager also seems to question whether or not it was worth it, especially as he perceives increasing apathy among the ethnic group and growing nativism within American society. In this respect, both novels function as cautionary tales, revealing in disturbing detail the backwards, isolated, provincial, and self-defeating aspects of Norwegian America. At the same time, the authors insist on the potential of Norwegian-Americans to forge meaningful lives and communities in America, but only if they do so deliberately and thoughtfully; the path of the uninspired



and the uninformed leads to the saloon, the loveless marriage, moral and spiritual bankruptcy, the melting pot, and Main Street. Like Lewis, Janson and Ager speak through rebellious girls—Astrid and Karoline—who warn readers to beware of accepted social norms and smug complacency, of Main Street’s “comfortable tradition and sure faith.” Finally, both the novels of both Janson and Ager suggest problems of audience, particularly in Astrid’s ill-fated performance scene in *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, but also more implicitly in Astrid’s final calling to an American (not Norwegian-American) congregation. The loss of linguistic, cultural, and communal bonds demonstrated so severely in both texts suggests concerns about the long-term viability of Norwegian-American culture—particularly literature—in the United States.

<sup>1</sup> O. E. Rølvaag, The Third Life of Per Smevik, trans. Ella Valborg Tweet and Solveig Zempel (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1987) 126.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Thorson, preface, A Saloonkeeper's Daughter, by Drude Krog Janson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001) x. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> The Modern Breakthrough refers to the period in the late nineteenth-century during which realism and naturalism became the dominant modes in Scandinavian literature. Although these literary movements developed later in the Scandinavian countries (generally the 1870s and 1880s) than in other parts of Europe, they nevertheless produced some of the region's (and indeed the world's) best literature. Leading Norwegian writers like Ibsen, Bjørnson, Lie, Kielland, and Garborg came of age during this period, producing literary texts that turned away from the romantic tradition and toward realistic societal debates and problems. The style and themes of Janson's novel (and its emphasis on Bjørnson and his philosophy) signify Janson's awareness of and participation in the larger literary trends of her time. See Harald S. Naess, ed., A History of Norwegian Literature, *A History of Scandinavian Literatures 2* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993) 110-11, 167, 203-05, 209, 359.

<sup>4</sup> Ingrid Urberg, "A Sense of Place: America Through the Eyes of Norwegian-American Women Novelists," diss., U of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996, 98.

<sup>5</sup> See Blanche H. Gelfant, "Sister to Faust: The City's 'Hungry' Woman as Heroine," Women Writing in America: Voices in Collage (Hanover: U P of New England, 1984) 204-221.

<sup>6</sup> Urberg argues that many of these "hungry heroines" are found in success stories (common to Norwegian-American literature in general) patterned after Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's peasant tales. Bjørnson's narratives reflect aspects of the folktale model, the basic formula of which follows: the protagonist begins with a lack, embarks on a quest, encounters magical helpers and opponents in that quest, submits to a test, succeeds in the test and receives a reward. Urberg applies the fictional folktale model to the quests of "the hungry heroines" as well. See Urberg 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Urberg points out that although the protagonists initially arrive in cities because of circumstance, they choose to remain, in order to be close to the sources of opportunity (schools, jobs) necessary to the fulfillment of their quests. She also suggests that this prevalence of urban settings in Norwegian-American female fiction has to do with the locations of the authors themselves: Janson, Ulrikka Feldtman Bruun, and Aileen Berger Evanson, for example, all lived and worked in American cities (Minneapolis and Chicago). See 42-43.

<sup>8</sup> Blanche Housman Gelfant, The American City Novel, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1970) 11. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>9</sup> Urberg 102. Norwegian author Camilla Collett, actually [Jacobine] Camilla Wergeland Collett (1813-95), is credited with writing the first Norwegian novel, Amtmandens Døtre (The District Governor's Daughters), published in two parts in 1854 and 1855. The novel was controversial in its feminist message and received much attention when it first appeared. Because of this, Collett is often referred to as the instigator of the women's movement in Norway. She was a sister of the famous author Henrik Wergeland and her work influenced leading Norwegian authors like Bjørnson, Ibsen, Lie, and Kielland.

<sup>10</sup> Drude Krog Janson, A Saloonkeeper's Daughter, trans. Gerald Thorson, ed. Orm Øverland, Longfellow Ser. of American Languages and Literatures (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001) 3. First published in Copenhagen in 1887 as En ung Pige (A Young Girl) and subsequently published in

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Minneapolis and Chicago by Rasmussen as En saloonkeepers datter (A Saloonkeeper's Daughter) in 1889. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>11</sup> The original Norwegian title of the play is Hærmændene paa Helgeland.

<sup>12</sup> This phrase is repeated, to emphasize the loneliness and fragility of the characters and to invoke the reader's sympathies. See Jason 20, 22.

<sup>13</sup> The Norwegian title is De nygifte. The play was performed by Norwegian-American theater companies in Chicago's Scandia Hall in 1891 and 1926.

<sup>14</sup> James L. Machor, Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideals and the Symbolic Landscape of America, History of American Thought and Culture (Madison, U of Wisconsin P, 1987) 154-55.

<sup>15</sup> This is another example of the folklore imagery that recurs throughout the novel. The red gold of the ring refers to the legend of Dame Margit who was taken by the Mountain King. The rhyme appears in the novel when Astrid receives Smith's engagement ring: "Red-gold ring, surround my life,/ With gold did the Mountain King secure his wife." See Janson 99. Ibsen featured Dame Margit in his play Gildet på Solhoug (The Feast at Solhoug; 1855-56); this is one of the plays that Astrid sees with her father in Norway, and Dame Margit is her favorite role to act out when playing in the attic. See Janson 4. Ballads about Margit (and others like her who are taken away from the human world by mountain trolls, elves, or other supernatural beings) also exist as tales and songs in Norwegian (and Scandinavian) folklore.

<sup>16</sup> Gelfant, The American City Novel 53.

<sup>17</sup> Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), whose "contemporaries referred to him on occasion as 'the uncrowned king of Norway,'" (see James McFarlane, "Norwegian Literature 1860-1910" in Naess 130-40), was a major figure in Norway and Europe, both as a prolific author—dramatist, novelist, poet, and polemicist—and as an activist and spokesman for progressive social movements. Bjørnson was a powerful presence and a compelling orator. He visited the United States in 1880-81 and, after a visit in Cambridge, Massachusetts with members of the American literati and social elite, pursued a lecture tour in the Midwest. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1903. Bjørnson is still considered a major figure in Norwegian National Romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century, particularly his development of the *bondefortelling* (peasant tale or rustic tale), and it was in this respect that he influenced a number of Norwegian-American writers. The Jansons were close friends with Bjørnson, and Drude confided in him about her writing and her life. Bjørnson gave three lectures in Minneapolis, one of them on Grundtvig. The Jansons helped organize his visit.

<sup>18</sup> N. F. S. [Nicolaj Frederik Severin] Grundtvig (1783-1872) was a Danish author, hymnist, theologian, and educator in the nineteenth-century. Of the romantic tradition, Grundtvig brought a more liberal and nationalistic form of Christianity to Scandinavia, as well as the *folkehøjskoler* (folk colleges or folk high schools, the latter being a direct translation which does not carry the American meaning of "high school"). Grundtvig's brand of theology and education emphasized folk culture, history, and nationalism; he respected the integrity of the "common man" and worked to bring educational opportunities and religious and social reform to the lower classes. Bjørnson dedicated an epic poem cycle, *Arnljot Gelline* (1870) "to Scandinavia's folk high schools." Given Astrid's eventual calling as a Unitarian minister and her work with the poor, Grundtvig is a fitting topic for Bjørnson's lecture, which ignites Astrid's spirit. For more information on Grundtvig and the Folk School movement (which spread throughout Scandinavia and Europe), see Steven M. Borish, The Land of the Living: The Danish Folk High Schools and Denmark's Non-Violent Path to Modernization (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> Marcus Fabius Quintilian (ca. 35-96 C.E.) was born in the Roman province of Calagurris in Spain. Quintilian practiced law and taught rhetoric in Spain and Rome. Quintilian's ideal orator or rhetor

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was a good man speaking well. This idea that the good speaker must also be a person of integrity and morality links Quintilian to the works of Plato, Isocrates, and Cicero. This attention to the relationships between eloquence, integrity, and education make him an apt model for Bjørnson and Astrid Holm. See Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present (Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's P, 1990) 293-363.

<sup>20</sup> Bjørnson recommends that Astrid read the works of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), both associated with Utilitarianism. The work of both men informs and explains some of the impulses of Janson's novel. Their philosophical leanings also help to account for the various strains of thought and style in A Saloonkeeper's Daughter (romanticism and idealism, realism and naturalism, etc.).

<sup>21</sup> Bjørnson was indeed liberal in his outlook on religion in comparison with the fundamentalist strains of Lutheranism that developed in Norway (and were in many instances transported to America) in the nineteenth-century. Marcus Thrane, a Norwegian-American radical, held progressive views on education, religion, and universal suffrage. Rolf H. Erickson points out that "Thrane used the controversy surrounding the visit of the great Norwegian libertarian, poet and orator Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, to jeer at the Lutheran leaders' attempts to censor Bjørnson for his unorthodox views and influence church members to boycott the Bjørnson lectures." Bjørnson's comments and his suggestion that Astrid become a minister therefore represent serious breaks with tradition and popular opinion among both Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans of his time. See Rolf H. Erickson, "Chicago: Writing in and About the City by Norwegians," Norse Heritage Yearbook (Stavanger: Norwegian Emigration Center, 1989) 23.

<sup>22</sup> This part of Janson's novel probably refers to Bjørnson's real life visit to the "Congress of Women" in Boston, during his 1880-81 visit to the United States. Bjørnson recorded his impressions of the event: "The first two hours I was there, were, I believe, the finest I have experienced; for I sat as if in the future, and had difficulty controlling my emotion. The finest women of America, with a cultural background equal to that of the best men, well-travelled and well-read, several of them with university degrees, as doctors, etc., arose, one after the other, to express their views on the matter at hand with *ability*, *sincerity*, and *moving conviction*" (emphasis added in italics). The last line inspires my title of this portion of the chapter. The original source is the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet, 16 Nov. 1880; translated and quoted by Einar Haugen in Land of the Free (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Assn., 1978) 68.

<sup>23</sup> Einar Haugen, Immigrant Idealist: A Literary Biography of Waldemar Ager, Norwegian American (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Assn., 1989) 87. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>24</sup> Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (1920; New York: Penguin, 1995) 240.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Thaler, Norwegian Minds—American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1998) 43.

<sup>26</sup> Øyvind T. Gulliksen, "Double Landscapes, Midwestern Texts: Studies in Norwegian-American Literature," diss., U of Bergen, 1999, 236. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Channell Hilfer, The Revolt From the Village, 1915-1930 (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1969) 7. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>28</sup> The novel was originally published in Norwegian as Paa veien til smeltepotten by Fremad in Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1917. It was also serialized in Ager's Norwegian temperance weekly, Reform, from January 9-July 24, 1917. I will refer to the 1995 English translation by Harry T. Clevén.

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<sup>29</sup> Carl Van Doren, "The Revolt from the Village: 1920," The Nation CXIII (October 12, 1921): 407-12.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in the Penguin edition of Main Street (see note 26); no attribution is provided.

<sup>31</sup> In the Nobel Prize speech, Lewis refers to Garland as a "harsh and magnificent realist" and describes Main-Travelled Roads and Rose of Dutcher's Coolly as "valiant and revelatory works of realism." See Sinclair Lewis, "The American Fear of Literature" 15. Quoted in Ronald Weber, The Midwestern Ascendancy in American Writing, Midwestern History and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992) 150.

<sup>32</sup> Solveig Zempel, rev. of On the Way to the Melting Pot, by Waldemar Ager, trans. Harry T. Cleven, Journal of American Ethnic History 17.1 (1997): 111-113. The quotation appears on page 112. Hereafter page numbers are provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>33</sup> Ager ruses this reference to the melting pot in his various critiques of assimilation.

<sup>34</sup> Ager uses a Norwegian-American verb form—*å mixe*—of the English word "mix" in order to describe the corrupted combination of English and Norwegian used by characters in the novel. For example, "They were fellows who could *mixe*" (Ager 12).

<sup>35</sup> Gulliksen refers to the three main types of assimilation theorized by Milton M. Gordon: anglo-conformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism. See Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 85.

<sup>36</sup> Ager utilized this term in his essay "Den store udjævning" (1917), translated by Liv Dahl as "The Great Levelling" in Odd S. Lovoll, ed., Cultural Pluralism versus Assimilation: The Views of Waldemar Ager (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Assn., 1977).

<sup>37</sup> Solveig Zempel, rev. of On the Way to the Melting Pot, by Waldemar Ager, trans. Harry T. Cleven, Journal of American Ethnic History 17.1 (1997): 111-113. The quotation appears on page 112. Hereafter page numbers are provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>38</sup> Waldemar Ager, On the Way to the Melting Pot, trans. Harry T. Cleven, Prairie Classics 4 (Madison, Wisconsin: Prairie Oak P, 1995) 1. Hereafter quotations from this source have the page number cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>39</sup> The italics appear in the translation and are used to emphasize the mixing of English and Norwegian. Ager interspersed English words in the original Norwegian text to reveal the English loan words and/or mixing of Norwegian and English forms in his characters' speech, as well as to point out the confusing or silly language used by the immigrants. Unfortunately, this is one vital aspect of Ager's original text that does not translate well. Solveig Zempel stresses that "[. . .] it is devilishly difficult to convey the same effect in an English translation" and "[. . .] this does not at all convey the intended literary effect." See Zempel 112.

## AFTERWORD: THE CLOSING DECADES OF *VESTERHEIMEN* AND LITERARY LEGACIES

In the discussion of Waldemar Ager's On the Way to the Melting Pot (1917), the previous chapter suggests that Ager's frustration, irony, and sarcasm are largely directed at his fellow Norwegian-Americans who, in their apathy, march toward the melting pot with little to no resistance. While Ager's satire is largely directed at his ethnic group, it is important to note that he is also reacting to larger forces at work in the United States. For although Norwegian-American literature was still reaching its high point and many of the best works of literature were yet to be written, Ager and his contemporaries could already look with a sense of foreboding toward the future, particularly when the United States entered World War I and a period of increasing nativism and decreasing immigration ensued. If Ager chided his peers a bit harshly on occasion, it was surely because he sensed that Norwegian-Americans and other ethnic groups were reaching a crucial crossroads and that, more than ever, ethnic Americans needed to advocate for their cultural vitality and rights as citizens.

N. N. Rønning's essay "Når et folk mister sitt morsmål" (When a People Loses its Mother Tongue; 1943) is a fitting postscript to Ager's novel and other polemical writings

against melting pot ideology and in favor of cultural pluralism. With the vitality of Norwegian-American literature waning, Rønning describes a scenario similar to that which Ager predicted anxiously nearly twenty years before:

Yet there was a time—not so very long ago—that there was not only a living Norwegian-American literature, but that this literature had a beautiful and prolific flowering. Now we who were at the heart of that movement remain, feeling as though there has been a party in the house and the guests have said farewell—and one light after another goes out. It becomes so empty and so sad.<sup>1</sup>

Rønning's image of a light that fades and eventually goes out echoes the quotation by Marcus Bøckman that opens my discussion of *Jul i Vesterheimen* (Chapter Two). Bøckman asks Norwegian-American readers directly whether they will “protect” the tree and its radiance or let it “whither” and its lights go out. In Bøckman's case, the Christmas Tree stands as the symbol of a Norwegian-American cultural legacy in his call for cultural preservation among ethnic readers. Indeed, preservation of ethnic identity and culture—supported by writers and editors like Ager, Rølvaag, and Sundheim—was a major impetus for the production of Norwegian-American literature in the first place.

Rønning, who envisioned and formulated the movement for “A Literature of Our Own” (Chapter One), attempts to reconfigure his hopes and expectations for a Norwegian-American literature that might continue in the “post festum” period of the mid-twentieth century. However, he admits outright, “the outlook is not especially bright” (37). He poses the question, “Can a Norwegian-American literature be fostered in the English language?” (37). Rønning's implicit answer to the question seems to be a “not likely” if not an outright no. This is understandable, given the romantic and essentialist theories posed by Rønning earlier in the essay. As discussed in Chapter

Three, Rønning views language, and by extension culture, as inextricably linked to place and community: native ground and native customs. Thus, a literature in a language other than Norwegian lacks immediacy and fails to capture the “soul of the people.” However, there is also an eminently practical strain in Rønning’s arguments about the fading of Norwegian-American culture. Similar to his essay “A Literature of Our Own,” Rønning discusses factors that shape the “literary-social” world of a Norwegian-American culture of letters. For example, the major themes of Norwegian-American literature—“memories from Norway, homesickness, or religious themes”—are no longer appealing or relevant to most Norwegian-Americans (with the exception of first-generation immigrants who have a history with the homeland), particularly Norwegian-American youth.

Rønning’s emphasis on the younger generation also reveals his anxiety about a future audience for Norwegian-American literature: “But the *big* question in this case is whether we have a reading and purchasing public among our *own* people” (37). The increasing marginalization of *Jul i Vesterheimen* and the decreasing use of Norwegian in the Augsburg Publishing House catalogs during this same period suggest the answer to this question would also be negative. Rønning is clearly aware of this as he specifically discounts the likelihood of support from the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. The church would not likely provide financial support for secular literature (as in Augsburg’s literary heyday when Sundheim was at the helm); moreover, church leaders had typically taken a position of pragmatism when it came to language policy. Whichever language the majority of parishioners preferred would likely carry the day. Given that Norwegian was fading as the language of both the literary and the practical, there would be little incentive to support publications in Norwegian. For Rønning, the



only relevant institutional support might come from the Norwegian-American colleges, which should have the intellectual manpower and milieu necessary to nurture new writers.

In addition to expressing concerns about audience, Rønning questions the support for writers within the literary community of *Vesterheimen*. As mentioned in the introduction, the critical, artistic, and financial support for Norwegian-American authors was extremely limited and the community of writers quite small, even in the vigorous years of literary production within the ethnic group. Rønning recognizes this problem and suggests that veteran writers should encourage younger writers in their artistic aspirations. Additionally, he calls for some concrete form of material and communal support: a “literary society,” for example, that might function like the historical associations that had already been successfully formed.

The one bright spot appears to be the output of books in Norwegian in America, particularly periodicals. Rønning points out that there are “still hundreds of thousands of Norwegian men and women who read one or another Norwegian newspaper each week” (37).<sup>2</sup> He suggests that, with cooperation and organized planning, it might be possible to circulate a few thousand copies of a new Norwegian book each year to these subscribers. However, Rønning also points out that there is no point in going to such trouble if there is no one in the community to produce quality literature: “But of course, the books must be written by someone who has something to say, who dares to say it, and who can take the time to say it *well*” (37). Here Rønning implies two challenges that always faced Norwegian-American literature: finding a quantity of qualified, even exceptional, writers

and allowing those writers artistic and philosophical freedom. Here the marginalization and isolation of *Vesterheimen* as a culture of letters and the provincialism of the Norwegian-American community stand as a tremendous obstacle.

The final passage of Rønning's essay articulates the darkest possibility in the literary and ethnic imagination of Norwegian-American writers and intellectuals:

One more thing: it would be sad—horribly sad—if the time came when no one of Norwegian blood in America could, through the Norwegian language, experience living contact with the inspiring thoughts and intellectual trends that, without a doubt, will pour forth from the fatherland's cultural life [. . .]. Then we will have lost more than our mother tongue. (37)

Rønning's prediction of a dynamic and progressive culture in Norway in the twentieth-century (and beyond) has indeed come to pass; fortunately, his fear that Americans of Norwegian descent would not partake of this culture has not come true. Although Americans of Norwegian descent who speak and/or read Norwegian and travel to Norway are in the minority overall, remnants of *Vesterheimen* still remain and legacies persist. Although the literary legacy has not played an active role in the latter half of the twentieth-century—due primarily to the language issues previously mentioned—other Norwegian-American institutions have. Indeed, the communities and institutions—churches, schools, colleges, publishing houses, societies, clubs—which many of the leading writers and citizens of *Vesterheimen* worked to create are still in existence. With regard to Rønning's mention of historical organizations, the Norwegian-American Historical Association has become a repository of history (social, political, literary) and collective memory. Moreover, in the organization's scholarly meetings and publications, there remains a trace of the Norwegian-American culture of letters that existed in the

past. Given the current work in Multilingual American literature, it is possible that the literary legacy of these writers will enjoy a renewed vitality. Yet Rønning's comments point to a curious irony and circularity in *Vesterheimen* and the cultural work of Norwegian-American literature. Rønning's fear—that descendents of Norwegians in America would no longer be able to know and experience the cultural and spiritual life of the fatherland—attests to the success of Norwegian-American writers and ethnic activists in creating “a home in the west” for their people. This very success, along with the changing nature of immigrant ethnicity and the transitional status of *Vesterheimen* as a community, ultimately makes *Vesterheimen* obsolete.

Rønning's arguments also come full circle in that the tension that characterized his proclamations for “a literature of our own”—claiming both a distinct Norwegian-American experience and a common American life—continues to haunt his later essay as well as scholarship in ethnic literatures in general. In contemplating a Norwegian-American literature in English, Rønning cites O. E. Rølvaag as an example of a writer who was able to capture and convey key elements of the Norwegian-American experience in such a way as to be interesting and marketable to a wider American audience. However, if this is to be the model for Norwegian-American literature in the twentieth-century, Rønning acknowledges that the major themes and forms of ethnic literature must be situated in close proximity to a broad American context and experience. These comments point to a current tension in the scholarly endeavors to recover, translate, and interpret ethnic literatures. One hopes that we are still in the early stages of work in multilingual and multicultural literatures; however, it is not too early to consider the implications of such work. The pull between ethnic distinction—the

linguistic, historical, regional, and cultural specificity that responsible scholarship in ethnic literature and culture requires—and American commonalities is one that will need to be addressed as scholars increasingly move from their individual investigations of specific cultures of letters into comparative and/or collective studies. In the meantime, it is vital that we keep unearthing and interpreting missing pieces of the puzzle, for ethnic literatures have much to tell us about our real and imagined American past, present, and future.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> N. N. Rønning, "Når et folk mister sitt morsmål," Jul i Vesterheimen 1943: 35-37. Hereafter page numbers of quotations appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> I have not yet located circulation information in order to verify Rønning's assessment with an approximate figure. I am curious as to whether this number would fall in the thousands or the hundred thousands in the 1940s.

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