

Their Minneapolis

Novels of Norwegian-American Life in Minneapolis

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1. Introduction

My motivation for writing about Norwegian-American immigrant literature stems from a life-long interest in Norwegian-American history. My great grandfather was one of the over 800,000 Norwegians who emigrated to the United States. In the spring term of 2004, I attended a course at the University of Bergen called “the Immigrant Experience in Fiction”, and one of the set texts was *Giants in the Earth* by the Norwegian-American Ole. E. Rølvaag. In this course I wrote an essay on the Norwegian immigrants’ experiences on the prairie, and in order to get a different perspective, I chose to focus on the urban experience of Norwegians in this thesis.

Norwegian emigration to the United States began in 1825 with 53 people on the sloop *Restauration*. These Norwegians were soon followed by others and by 1925 more than 800,000 had emigrated, the majority with economic and material motives. Many of the later immigrants were also inspired by “America letters” from friends and family, describing their success and the American conditions in their area of settlement. This is of course a stereotype and a simplified account of the “America letters,” not all Norwegian immigrants were successful, and many also returned to Norway. However, several of the “America letters”, tempted Norwegians who struggled to make a living in Norway, and functioned as incentives for some of those who chose to emigrate.

The majority of Norwegian immigrants in America settled in rural communities and on the prairie, but some moved to the bigger cities. “The Dillingham Commission reported that in 1890, only 20.8% of Norwegians were residents of cities of 2,500 or more.”¹ The immigrant experience for these Norwegian urban dwellers differed greatly from that of those on the prairie, and the urban immigrant experience for Norwegians is the main focus of this thesis. Minneapolis in Minnesota was one of the larger cities where Norwegian immigrants settled, and these immigrants formed a larger portion of the city’s population from the 1880s to the early 1960s than that of any other American metropolis in the same period. They were present in large numbers, moreover, when Minneapolis was a young frontier city which exploded in size to become one of the nation’s largest commercial-industrial centers. Because of this, as well as other reasons, the city arguably became the most important center for

¹ L. DeAne Lagerquist. *In America the Men Milk the Cows: Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1991), 41.

Norwegian Americans in the country and a central place for the development of a self-conscious Norwegian-American identity.²

Immigration experience is a subject which is of interest today, in particular as Norway welcomes new immigrants each year. Research done over the last ten to twenty years has focused on the Norwegian Americans' history, while the immigrant literature has played a smaller part. The prairie experience of the Norwegians in America has been the material for many researchers and also the setting for many of the novels written by the Norwegian Americans, perhaps to some degree overshadowing the fact that Norwegian-American authors also wrote about the urban communities.

This thesis examines four novels in order to investigate what light they might shed on the urban Norwegian-American immigrant community in Minneapolis in the period between 1880 and the early 1900s. The main emphasis is on how these authors have chosen to portray the Norwegian urban immigrant experience. The thesis discusses to what extent these novels can be considered mimetic, that is "an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is the 'truth' and 'adequacy' of its representation to the matter that it represents, or should represent."³ The hypothesis that these novels depict useful reflections of history will also be examined, comparing the information in the novels to different historical sources and material, such as contemporary newspapers and books, in order to investigate whether the authors have portrayed the experience "realistically." I will also be examining the scholarly literature concerning the formation of a Norwegian-American identity in order to evaluate whether the Norwegian-American novels were as important in this process as some of the authors hoped and believed.

The immigrants had different experiences due to location, numbers of Norwegians in an area, climate, and exposure to other immigrant groups and to "native" Americans. In order to reduce the number of variables that would occur if two or more cities were the object of study, only novels set in Minneapolis have been chosen. The stories in the four novels do not take place at the same time, thereby adding a time aspect which makes it possible to investigate whether there are any significant changes in the portrayal of the Norwegian-American urban immigrant experience in the early 1880s and early 1900s in the novels.

The four novels discussed are *En Saloonkeepers datter* by Drude Krog Janson (*A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, translated by Gerald Thorson), *Bag gardinet* by Kristofer Janson

² The information on Norwegians in Minneapolis in this paragraph is extracted from conversations with David Mauk, who is in the process of writing a book about Norwegians in the Twin Cities in Minnesota.

³ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2005), 51.

(“Behind the Curtain,” not translated into English), *Nykommerbilleder: Jonas Olsens Første Aar i Amerika* by Johannes B. Wist (*Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America* in the translated trilogy *The Rise of Jonas Olsen* by Orm Øverland), and *Længselens baat* by Ole E. Rølvaag (*The Boat of Longing*, translated by Nora O. Solum). Except for Janson’s novel, which has not been translated into English, the works are named with the title of their English translations. These four novels have not, as far as I have been able to establish, previously been subject to research into the urban immigrant experience.

1.1. The Novels

The four novels are all written in the USA by Norwegian first-generation immigrants. Drude Krog Janson and Kristofer Janson returned to Norway after more than 10 years in the USA, while Johannes B. Wist and Ole Edvart Rølvaag remained in the USA for the rest of their lives. Kristofer Janson’s novel *Bag gardinet* is the only novel not translated into English, but it is no less than the three others considered American literature. As Orm Øverland says in his book on Norwegian-American literature, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*,

this is a history of American literature. It aims at presenting the literary history of one of the many groups who have entered this country, those who came from Norway. For more than a century a significant portion of this group continued to use the language of their European past even as they were exploring and building their American future.⁴

Drude Krog Janson’s *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* was first published in Copenhagen in 1887 under a different title (*En ung pige* (“A Young Girl”)), but was serialized in *Illustrert Ugeblad* with the current title in 1888.⁵ The novel was first published in the US in 1889, in Minneapolis. The setting is Minneapolis in the early 1880s and the reader is presented with a young female immigrant’s life in the city. The main character is Astrid Holm, a Norwegian girl from Kristiania, who immigrates to America with her family. Astrid rejects what she feels is a degrading life in her father’s saloon. Her father had hoped that Astrid would benefit his saloon by attracting many young, gifted men as customers. Astrid faces the differences between USA and Norway, but also the class differences among the Norwegians in Minneapolis. The novel deals with the woman question as well, since Astrid is a female immigrant who breaks with her family and enrolls in school to become a minister after having

⁴ Orm Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America* (Urbana, Illinois: The Norwegian American Historical Association, 1996), ix.

⁵ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 168-169.

refused to marry her fiancée. The temperance cause, an important issue in American society at the time of writing, is another sub-theme, and the novel paints a less than rosy picture of the saloon and the life around it.

In the preface to the first edition, the author's husband, Kristofer Janson, trying to convince people of the novel's importance, wrote: "The descriptions of Minneapolis are rendered with photographic accuracy,"⁶ and Astrid's walks around the neighborhood are indeed described in great detail. Gerald Thorson suggests that the novel contains hints of autobiography, for although Astrid's situation is very different from that of Krog Janson's, they share "a realization of the confinement, the limitations of life for the gifted and sensitive immigrant in Minneapolis in the 1880s."⁷

Kristofer Janson's novel *Bag gardinet* was also published in Minneapolis in 1889, after being refused by publishers in both Norway and Denmark, he decided to have it printed at his own expense.⁸ The novel criticizes the American class society by displaying different Norwegian immigrants and their daily struggle against the rich American Plummer family. Everybody in the Nilsen family, the protagonists in the novel, are employed by this family in one way or another. Janson explicitly wanted his novel to "become a book for the working class,"⁹ a proletarian novel. In *The Western Home*, Orm Øverland states that the opening of the novel

serves an important purpose and represents a new departure for Norwegian-American fiction in that the immigrant characters are gradually introduced in their relations to the Plummers and thus are seen as part of the social structure of Minneapolis and not as an isolated group.¹⁰

In this way, the novel differs from the other three, which focus on the Norwegian immigrant status of the characters. In *Bag gardinet*, the Nilsen family consisting of Daniel, Dina, and Arne, came to USA in the 1880s after the death of Daniel's wife. Daniel initially left his two children with the neighbors in Norway while he went to America to earn enough money to send for them. He struggles to make a living for his family, and both Arne and Dina have to work as well. The novel displays a grim future for the hard-working family and contradicts the American dream or illusion that everyone can become rich and successful if they only work hard enough.

⁶ Ibid., 169.

⁷ Gerald Thorson, "Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s: Tinsel and Dust." In *Minnesota History: the Quarterly of the Minnesota Historical Society*, 45 (1976/77) 6. 218.

⁸ Nina Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America* (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers, 1976), 229, 232.

⁹ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 165

¹⁰ Ibid.

Johannes B. Wist's novel *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America* was published in Decorah, Iowa, in 1920. This is another novel which takes place in Minneapolis in the mid 1880s, and it portrays the daily life of a young male Norwegian immigrant. *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* is an indirect satire because the characters, especially Jonas, "make themselves and their opinions ridiculous or obnoxious by what they think, say, and do," and because of Wist's comments and use of third-person narrative.¹¹ Through an intrusive narrator who comments and evaluates, Wist makes fun of stereotypical immigrants, but the novel nevertheless deals with immigrant experience. The novel illustrates among other things how the foreign language was a problem for the Norwegian immigrants as Jonas not only has difficulties understanding English but also his Norwegian cousin's mix of English and Norwegian.

The novel was written and published approximately fifteen years after the period in which the story takes place, and although this gives Wist a distanced perspective, the time span may also be perceived as a disadvantage. One might ask how well the author remembers the period in question, but one cannot overlook the fact that Wist came to Minneapolis as a young man in 1884 and that this experience must have made a great impact on him and consequently been a memorable phase of his life. The novel is the first in a trilogy about Jonas Olsen. The other two novels are *Hjemmet på prærien. Jonas Olsens første aar i nybygget* (*The Home on the Prairie: Jonas Olsen's First year in the settlement*) (1921) and *Jonasville* (1922). The translated trilogy is entitled *The Rise of Jonas Olsen: A Norwegian Immigrant's Saga*, and this is the source for the English quotes in this thesis. Only in instances where I feel that the translated and the original version do not concur will I be using my own translations.

Ole Edvart Rølvaag's novel *Længselens baat: Film-billeder. Første bok* was published in Minneapolis in 1921. The English version, *The Boat of Longing*, was published posthumously in 1933. *The Boat of Longing* portrays a young Norwegian man who migrates to America in order to make something more of his life rather than just being a fisherman. According to Solveig Zempel, Rølvaag wrote to his fiancée that his own reasons for leaving Norway were similar to his fictional character's, saying that he wanted to

fulfill his ambition to become something great in the world. Already at an early age he had developed a sense of calling and a desire to become something more than a fisherman.¹²

¹¹ Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 286.

¹² Ole E. Rølvaag, *Concerning Our Heritage* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1998), 4.

The novel is set in the early 1900s and depicts Nils Vaag's arrival in Minneapolis. Nils' thoughts and his experiences in America are the main themes in the novel. It also portrays another immigrant's story, since Nils travels with another Norwegian, Per Syv, and the two of them represent different aspects of the urban Norwegian immigrant experience. The temporal aspect mentioned in connection with Wist's novel is present here as well, the novel being written and published nearly fifteen years after the period in which the story takes place.

Rølvaag describes Minneapolis in the early 1900s by using actual names of streets, places, and people. Nils lives in a tenement house called "Babel", where he meets immigrants from other countries than Norway, and this boardinghouse is believed to have existed in Minneapolis at the time.¹³ The reader is shown how Nils struggles to learn English in order to get a better job. The reason why Nils went to Minneapolis was that his friend Per's brother, Otto, worked as a bartender there. Otto helps them both find jobs, in Nils' case washing the floors of four saloons and four stores on Cedar Avenue. The temperance cause is also an important issue in this novel. Nils does not drink, but his friends, Per, Otto, and his roommate do. Instead of saving their money, they spend them on drinks. Prohibition was enforced in 1920, the year Rølvaag wrote this novel.

This thesis focuses on the main protagonists in each of the novels, namely Nils Vaag in *The Boat of Longing*, Astrid Holm in *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, Jonas Olsen in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, and the Nilsen family, Daniel and his children Dina and Arne, in *Bag gardinet*. Since the latter novel portrays several families and persons, only the family that clearest expresses Janson's themes of the "plight of labor" and "women's rights"¹⁴ is being treated in detail. Where appropriate and necessary, other characters are also discussed.

1.2. Literature vs. History

The relation between literature and history is a much-debated topic, the main disagreement being whether or not literature can be used as a source of historical information. In my view, all literature reflects the time in which it was written in one way or the other, and the four novels discussed here can be seen as historical novels because they "make use of events and personages from the historical past to add interest and picturesqueness to the narrative."¹⁵ The novels portray the lives of some Norwegians and social issues in Minneapolis in the 1880s

¹³ Jon Gjerde and Carlton C. Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), 27,28.

¹⁴ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 166.

¹⁵ Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 201.

and early 1900s. Since these novels are verging on *romans à clef*, or key novels, this thesis will regard them as containing useful information or reflections about the period in which the novels take place. A *roman à clef* is

a narrative that represents actual historical characters and events in the form of fiction. Usually in this fictional setting, the author presents descriptions of real contemporary figures but uses fictitious names for them. However, the character's common traits and mannerisms would be so well-known that readers "in the know" would recognize them.¹⁶

In *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, the Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson encourages Astrid to end her loveless engagement and become a Unitarian minister. Whether this is a realistic portrayal of Bjørnson is difficult to determine, but the Jansons were close friends with Bjørnson and his wife in Norway and Bjørnson had such an impact on Krog Janson that she included him in her novel, marking the turning point in Astrid's life. The lecture tour among Norwegian Americans and in Minneapolis conducted by Bjørnson is a historical fact. The main character Astrid is supposedly partly based on Mathilde Ilstrup, a young Norwegian American who played in amateur theatres and was the daughter of a saloonkeeper, and partly on Drude herself.¹⁷

The Norwegian-American judge Andreas Ueland appears as himself in *Bag gardinet* and is also mentioned as one of the most important Norwegian-Americans in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*. In addition, Nina Draxten claims that the characters Mrs. Prytz, Agnes Prytz, and Dina Nilsen in *Bag gardinet* are modeled after Janson's sister-in-law, Wilhelmine Blehr and her two daughters. Draxten claims that several other characters also have been modeled after actual persons, though they appear under alias.¹⁸

In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, important Norwegian Americans such as the ministers Sven Oftedal and Falk Gjertsen appear as characters. Other actual people and places are also included, for example the saloon Stockholm-Olsen on 1209 Washington Avenue South.¹⁹ Øverland observes that Wist portrays the real-life characters positively, while the more vicious satire is reserved for the fictional characters in the novel.²⁰

¹⁶ Dr. L. Kip Wheeler, "Dr. L. Kip Wheeler's Website. Literary Vocabulary", http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_R.html, Last updated October 25, 2007 (Accessed October 27, 2006).

¹⁷ Sigrun Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian author" (Unpublished Cand. Philol. thesis, University of Oslo, 1983), 51.

¹⁸ Minneapolis Public Library, "A History of Minneapolis: Religion, Social Services, and Medicine", copyright 2001. <http://www.mpls.lib.mn.us/history/rs2.asp> (accessed January 15, 2007).

¹⁹ Orm Øverland, "Notes to Book I" in *The Rise of Jonas Olsen* by Johannes B. Wist, translated by Orm Øverland (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 419.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 422.

The boarding house where Nils in *The Boat of Longing* lives, is supposedly the real boarding house “Noah’s Ark”. Real Norwegian-American newspapers such as the *Minneapolis Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* are also included in the novels reporting from trials, funerals, and parties. Solveig Zempel says that “*The Boat of Longing* was reputedly Rølvaag’s favorite of all his novels, and the one into which he said he put more of himself than any other.”²¹ Rølvaag used his own immigrant experiences while telling the story of Nils.

According to Dorothy Skårdal, in *The Divided Heart* Norwegian-American literature “has preserved much of the complex web of interpersonal relations otherwise lost to history: the individual in continuous reaction to social pressure of past, present, and future.”²² The strength of this literature as source material is that it has “described and expressed the lives of average people, and of the failures who otherwise have lived and died leaving little trace to history.”²³ Although I agree with Skårdal that fiction cannot be used for “establishing objective facts,”²⁴ I believe that immigrant fiction can be used to explore ideas, reflections, and debates from the time it was written. Odd S. Lovoll mentions in his preface to Øverland’s *The Western Home* that

like other imaginative literature, immigrant fiction reflects the society and the circumstances in which it was created. (...) It was the need to explain and to define their changed existence in America, as well as memories of a painful departure from the homeland, and even a yearning to transcend their experience as an immigrant people in the making of a new society, that led to an amazing flourishing of ethnic writing.²⁵

One might not find a true and objective history of all Norwegian immigrants in fictional literature, but one can access subjective experiences through the fictional characters. The historian Kristian Hvidt claims that “the novel or the short story can be used as an illustration of reality but that it cannot be used as a historical source,”²⁶ and he is of the opinion that fiction and history together cover reality, because fiction sees and describes the things that history is not able to.²⁷ Hvidt emphasizes the differences between fact and fiction, but Dorothy Burton Skårdal rejects this sharp division because she does not “accept the

²¹ Solveig Zempel, “Introduction” in *Concerning Our Heritage* by Ole E. Rølvaag (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1998), 12.

²² Dorothy B. Skårdal, *The Divided Heart: Scandinavian Immigrant Experience through Literary Sources* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 293.

²³ *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

²⁵ Odd S. Lovoll, “Foreword” in *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America* by Orm Øverland (Urbana, Illinois: The Norwegian American Historical Association, 1996). v.

²⁶ Kristian Hvidt, “Fact and Fiction: A Case for the Complementary Study of History and Literature.” *American Studies in Scandinavia*, Vol.16 (1984): 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

absolute objectivity of ‘fact,’” and because she has “read so much Scandinavian-American literature that describes the historical life of that group so vividly and accurately.”²⁸ In reaction to Hvidt’s statement that literature cannot be used as a historical source, Skårdal replies that “enough illustrations *become* evidence,” but that one has to treat the “aesthetic elements in literature” with the methods from literary criticism.²⁹ According to Skårdal, the historian Edvard Bull believes that literature can offer history

“[i]nformation about how human beings in the past experienced the reality of their time,” “information about conventional and typical attitudes, opinions, and moral values,” “information about ‘external things’” (eg. how people from different social classes behave towards each other), and how literature is “evidence of how people in the past were subjected to ideological influences, such as indoctrination (children’s books) and propaganda (poetry of protest).³⁰

This thesis will to a certain degree follow an extrinsic approach to literature, an approach combining close reading with biography, history, sociology, psychoanalysis, and myth. An intrinsic approach, on the other hand, is rooted in formalism, linguistic criticism, structural analysis and narratology.³¹ The intrinsic approach is a depth study of the text itself, its autonomy, while the extrinsic approach sees the text as referring to the world outside it, in this case the immigrant experiences of the characters in the novels in relation to real-life immigrant experience. This thesis will compare the portrayals of these experiences to research material and historical sources available, and thereby check the representativeness of the novels.

In the discussion of literature and history, both Skårdal and Hvidt argue that

literature cannot be used to establish *specific* facts - who did what, when, where. *Typical* facts, however, general conditions, the external and shared experiences of groups in many matters (such as family and institutional life – schools, churches, friendship groups, clubs and organizations): these aspects of life are reflected with considerable reliability in literature.³²

In this quotation, Skårdal does not seem to include key novels (*roman à clef*) and documentary novels, where facts and real people appear in the plot. Ingeborg R. Kongslie claims that fiction writers can “dramatize and individualize man’s meeting with the historical

²⁸ Dorothy Burton Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material?” *American Studies in Scandinavia*, Vol.16 (1984): 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76, 77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

³¹ The definitions of extrinsic and intrinsic approaches are from Patricia Waugh, “Introduction: Criticism, Theory, and Anti-Theory.” In *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. 1-33. Edited by Patricia Waugh. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006. 25.

³² Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material?”, 79.

conditions.”³³ The fictional characters’ experiences can mirror those of real-life immigrants and the authors themselves. Whether or not the authors are considered representative for the majority, they are nonetheless immigrants. The Norwegian-American novels convey historical knowledge and an understanding of the period and the community in which they are set. Peter Thaler argues that

[L]iterary authors undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of the immigrant psyche, but they also confront the researcher with the problem of separating fact from fiction. (...) a novel’s plot can become forced and unrealistic in order to accommodate the author’s intentions. (...) Lack of historical accuracy need not be based on intentional misrepresentation. The author might indeed be convinced that he portrays a situation truthfully – without genuinely accomplishing this feat.³⁴

The majority of the Norwegian immigrant writers wrote about their own contemporary period, about people and events they themselves had met or experienced. One must also keep in mind that although historians supposedly deal with hard facts, even historians have a point of view, an angle from which they choose to see matters and events. It is all a matter of degree.

This thesis looks at the importance of the Norwegian-American novels in the historical formation of a common identity, and their status as a part of the processes through which this identity took shape. Many Norwegian-American authors wrote for political purposes, dealing with subjects such as temperance, feminism, socialism, and to keep the Norwegian-American culture alive. Thaler believes that the difficulties that arise when treating Norwegian-American literature as a source of historical material is connected to the fact that the literature was often involved in the cultural debate, but clarifies that this in fact “does not in itself diminish the literary quality of a text.”³⁵ The novels of the Norwegian-American preservationists “provide an insight into Norwegian-America as seen through the eyes of its most ardent supporters, illustrating their sentiments in view of an ongoing process.”³⁶ In order to establish this literature as representative illustrations of history, one must compare it to other forms of history.

³³ Ingeborg R. Kongslien, “Fiction as Interpretation of the Emigrant Experience: The Novels of Johan Bojer, O.E. Rølvaag, Vilhelm Moberg and Alfred Hauge” *American Studies in Scandinavia*, Vol. 18 (1986), 83-92.

³⁴ Peter Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 130-131.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

1.3. Literary trends and periods

The years 1865 to 1914 are dominated by two major literary modes of literature in the US. The period from 1865 to 1900 is known as the Realistic period because much of the literature that was written in America at this time was realistic in contrast to the works of the previous Romantic Period. Realistic fiction gives “the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader.” The years 1900 to 1914 is often called the Naturalistic period, where the fictional characters in literature are “victims of their instinctual drives and of external sociological forces.”³⁷ As a professor of Norwegian language and literature, Rølvaag paid attention to the literary trends in Norway. The literature of the early 1900s were influenced by the desire for Norwegian independence from Sweden, something which took place in 1905, but also of social problems due to increased industrialization and urbanization. The authors became more interested in the lives and choices of the working class than earlier.³⁸

The connection between the emergence of the regional American literature and interest in a unique Norwegian-American literature in the years during and just after the Civil War, has been pointed out by the literary historian Gerald. H. Thorson.³⁹ The local-color writers aimed at realistically portraying the lives of various sections of society to promote understanding among the people in the country.⁴⁰ The literature of the local-writers was, however, not completely realistic because of a tendency to write about the past in a nostalgic fashion rather than concentrating on the present, because they omitted the less glamorous aspects, and because many wrote stories with emphasis on sentimental and humorous aspects.⁴¹ However, “these fictional works were transitional to realism, for they did portray common folk sympathetically; they did concern themselves with dialect and mores; and some at least avoided older sentimental or romantic formulas.”⁴²

In the Norwegian-American literature, one can find many of the same concerns and themes. The writers concerned themselves with experiences that their audience recognized from real life. The Norwegian-American writers treated contemporary and social issues in their novels, which included aspects of realism but were also often permeated by nostalgia,

³⁷Information on American literature is from Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 216-217.

³⁸*Aschehoug og Gyldendals store norske leksikon*, 4th edition, 2005-2007,

<http://www.snl.no/article.html?id=696694&search=nyrealisme#70>, (accessed December 20, 2007).

³⁹Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 213.

⁴⁰*Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-42264/American-literature>, (accessed December 10, 2007).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

“the longing for Norway – the life the immigrants had left behind,”⁴³ which at times strikes a melodramatic and sentimental note. Lovoll is of the opinion that it is this longing and yearning, whether stated or just hinted at, that makes the Norwegian-American literature unique, the reason why it differs from both contemporary American and Norwegian literature.⁴⁴ Odd S. Lovoll also observes that many immigrant writers used the Norwegian writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson’s peasant tales as model for their own writing.⁴⁵

1.4. Structure

The first chapter is a brief introduction to Minneapolis and its Norwegian community in the 1880s and early 1900s. A short introduction of each of the authors’ immigrant background is presented to illustrate their experience as immigrants to the United States. The protagonists’ living conditions and housing is discussed, and their relations with other characters is investigated, as this to some degree can help determine which stages the protagonists are at in the process of an eventual assimilation into the American society.

The second chapter, deals with jobs and education possibilities for the protagonists, and how realistically, compared to historical works and contemporary newspaper articles, their situations are portrayed in the novels. The language discussion and its connection to employment, and the changing of names, also an important step in an assimilation or accommodation process, are discussed here. Church and temperance, important issues at the time, are also treated in this chapter.

The third chapter takes on the definition of ethnic identity. The chapter investigates the role of literature in the formation of a Norwegian-American identity. The reception of the four novels will also be investigated. Placing them in their contemporary society and assessing their degree of realism and their possible role in the issue of ethnic identity.

The fourth and final chapter will form a conclusion, summarizing the findings of this thesis.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 216.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

2. Their Minneapolis

This chapter depicts the setting for the four novels, describing Minneapolis and including a brief introduction to the “Norwegian” area of Minneapolis at the time. The authors of these novels were immigrants, and a look at their experiences comparing them with the experiences of the characters in their novels is in keeping with the extrinsic approach. This chapter sets out to briefly describe how, when and why the four authors left Norway for America. The main focus, however, is on whether or not the fictional characters’ lives in the city resemble the authors’ and, more importantly, on the degree to which the circumstances and events in the novels are historically accurate and representative of the Norwegian-American immigrants’ experiences. The protagonists’ living conditions and housing are discussed, as well as their relationships with other people, who they socialize with, since this fact to some degree can illustrate how far the protagonists have come in the process of accommodation to or assimilation into American society. Assimilation is defined as “the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society,”⁴⁶ and this process will also be discussed further discussed in chapter four, “Norwegian Americans.”

2.1. Minneapolis

Minneapolis was officially recognized as a city in 1867, and three years later the population of Minneapolis reached 13,806 people.⁴⁷ Many Yankees (people from the northern part of New England) moved westwards to seek economic opportunities by the falls of the Mississippi in this early period, and they were followed by a flood of European immigrants, who found work in the mills and related crafts and commercial concerns these early settlers established. The mills fuelled the development of other businesses, several founded by immigrant entrepreneurs, and as a thriving industrial center Minneapolis attracted thousands of people looking for work.⁴⁸ The Yankees continued to compose the main part of the industrial-business elite that controlled energy and transportation resources, and they consequently also controlled access to jobs and public opportunities for employment.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9009936/assimilation> (accessed December 20, 2007).

⁴⁷ Isaac Atwater. “Municipal History” in *History of Minneapolis and Hennepin County, Minnesota* vol.1 (New York & Chicago: Munsell Publishing co., 1895). 90, 96.

⁴⁸ Kate Roberts. “Introduction” in *Mill City: A Visual History of the Minneapolis Mill District*, ed. Shannon M. Pennefeather (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003), xi.

⁴⁹ David Mauk, draft of chapter 5 of “The Heart of the Heartland” manuscript, a forthcoming history of the Norwegian-American experience in the Twin Cities between 1840 and 2000.

During periods of unemployment in the surrounding countryside and small towns, as well as in foreign countries, millions of people migrated to find work in American metropolitan areas such as Minneapolis and its twin city, St. Paul.⁵⁰

Small numbers of Norwegian immigrants started to settle in Minneapolis in the 1850s but the Norwegian immigration did not escalate until shortly after the Civil War, and

[b]etween 1865 and 1873, the migration from the countryside and directly from Norway fostered the first distinct Scandinavian commercial districts, the initial Scandinavian secular societies, and the church congregations that became the basis for the urban church.⁵¹

In the early years of Scandinavian immigration, Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians gathered and formed Scandinavian organizations of various kinds. John R. Jenswold mentions that in the 1870s and 1880s, Norwegians and Swedes were popularly called “Yon Yonsen” by the Americans who saw them as one group, and stereotyped the Scandinavians as “slow-talking and stoic.”⁵² But as the immigration to Minneapolis from each of the three Scandinavian countries increased, the immigrant leaders saw the potential for organizing themselves in more country-specific groups, and Norwegian organizations of various kinds, for example athletic clubs and choruses, started to increase in Minneapolis. In 1895, for instance, in North Minneapolis, Norwegian residents founded the Sons of Norway, striving to unite Norwegian Americans “through the preservation of their common cultural background.”⁵³ This organization is still thriving today.

The largest wave of immigrants arrived in the city in the 1880s, but the great majority of the Norwegian-born among them did not come directly from Norway, but from the rural Upper Midwest after having left their homeland some years earlier. In the years between 1880 and the early 1900s, Norwegian-born immigrants formed a larger portion of the population in Minneapolis than they did in any other American metropolis. They were present in large numbers when Minneapolis was a young frontier city which exploded in size to become one of the nation’s largest commercial-industrial centers. Those who settled in the city were for the most part former farm people, and they took jobs wherever they could find them, as often

⁵⁰ Joseph Stipanovich, *City of Lakes: An Illustrated History of Minneapolis* (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, Inc, 1982). 214.

⁵¹ David Mauk, in chapter 3 of “The Heart of the Heartland”, traces the earliest Norwegian bachelor society in Minneapolis in the 1850s. The quotation comes from Jon Gjerde & Carlton C. Qualey. *Norwegians in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), 26.

⁵² John R. Jenswold, “The Rise and Fall of Pan-Scandinavianism in Urban America”, *Scandinavians and Other Immigrants in Urban America: The Proceedings of a Research Conference, October 26-27, 1984*. Edited by Odd S. Lovoll (Northfield, Minnesota: Saint Olaf College Press, 1985), 160.

as possible using skills they had acquired in Norway or in the American countryside. Just outside the city were vast areas of farmland, stretching north to Canada, south to St. Louis, west to the coast or the fledgling city of Denver or east to Chicago.⁵⁴ Minneapolis held a prime location for transportation and the railway lines “provided shipping facilities for the burgeoning Northwest.”⁵⁵

The first residential areas were within walking distance to the factories.⁵⁶ New buildings and new areas were added to the slightly older areas of the earliest settlements. Kristofer Janson wrote in the 1880s about Minneapolis that it was hard to tell if you were in a pioneer settlement or in a capital because in the outskirts of the city were shabby wooden houses with large empty estates between them, and in the center of the city were large brick palaces next to poor cottages.⁵⁷ Most businesses were established along Hennepin and Nicollet Avenues in the 1880s, and by 1884 almost all the private housing left in the center of downtown consisted of boardinghouses.⁵⁸ With the improvements of transportation it was possible to live farther from the city center, and as the immigrants earned money and got better jobs, they tended to move out to the outskirts of the original commercial and boardinghouse districts into newer residential areas with Yankees and immigrants from other countries. The city’s residential neighborhoods became increasingly distinct in this period as the most successful in socio-economic terms congregated in enclaves farther from the city center and newcomers from both Norway and other countries took over earlier arrivals’ old jobs, flats and boardinghouses closer to downtown.⁵⁹ Eventually the immigrant quarters, including the early Norwegian communities, were watered down, as first- and second-generation immigrants rose to standards of living more like those of old-stock Americans.⁶⁰

When Carl G. O. Hansen, journalist and local historian, came to Minneapolis as a child in March in 1882, there were no paved streets in the city, and “the mud was knee

⁵³ Leola Nelson Bergmann, *Americans from Norway* (Philadelphia, New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1950), 199.

⁵⁴ Information from David Mauk, draft of “The Heart of the Heartland.”

⁵⁵ Arlow W. Anderson, *The Norwegian-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 141.

⁵⁶ David A. Lanegran, “From Swede Hollow to Arlington Hills, From Snoose Boulevard to Minnehaha Parkway: Swedish Neighborhoods of the Twin Cities”, http://www.macalester.edu/geography/mage/curriculum/goMN/tc_geog/From_Swede_Hollow_to_Arlington_Hills.pdf (accessed November 5, 2007).

⁵⁷ Kristofer Janson. “Fra Amerika” in *Nyt Tidsskrift* (Date not given) “Kristofer Janson Papers”, Box 1, Folder 2 at the NAHA Archives, Northfield, Minnesota. My translation. 22.

⁵⁸ Larry Millet, *Lost Twin Cities* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992), 114, 115.

⁵⁹ Information from David Mauk, draft of “The Heart of the Heartland.”

⁶⁰ Mauk, chapters 4-6, “Heart of the Heartland.”

deep.”⁶¹ By 1890, however, 50 miles of streets had been paved,⁶² a point which illustrates how rapid the expansion and development of the city was. As the city grew, it had to be organized and modernized to accommodate all classes of its new citizens, which meant that new areas of housing sprang up and the means of transportation were modernized. With the expansion came the problems of keeping pace with the development. Larry Millet mentions “complaints about foul air, dirty, unpaved streets, inefficient garbage collection, overflowing sewers, badly maintained sidewalks, poor street lighting, overcrowded schools, and inadequate police and fire protection.”⁶³ In other words, those who governed the city had their work set out for them. The construction work, transportation facilities, and the paving of the streets in turn created jobs for the many job-seeking immigrants. Children of rural immigrants in America moved into the city, and the Norwegians who arrived in the US in the first years of the twentieth century were more likely to settle in the cities than those who had come earlier.⁶⁴

In this period, some major developments in technology took place in the city. According to *Minneapolis Daglig Tidende*, the first telephones in Minneapolis were installed in 1880, electric lighting in 1881, and electric streetcars in 1890.⁶⁵ Before 1890 the streetcars were pulled by slow-moving mules. All the new inventions created possibilities and workplaces for the inhabitants, as the city’s population expanded enormously during these years. Immigrants coming directly from more urban parts in Norway were not completely unaccustomed to the process of industrialization since this was in its early stages in Norway at the time. There were also some professionals among the Norwegian immigrants, and their children also wanted to avail themselves of the opportunities in the US.⁶⁶ In 1881 Kristofer Janson wrote that the only professionals that were needed from Norway were doctors and priests, and all the rest had to take whatever jobs they could get, at least in the beginning, but if they were young and strong and willing to work, they would make it in America.⁶⁷ In 1880

⁶¹ Carl G. O. Hansen, *My Minneapolis A Chronicle of What has been Learned and Observed About the Norwegians in Minneapolis Through One Hundred Years* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1956), 50.

⁶² Mauk, chapter 5 of “The Heart of the Heartland”, 23

⁶³ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 108.

⁶⁴ Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows: Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women*, 55.

⁶⁵ From *Minneapolis Daglig Tidende* March 23, but unknown year. The article may be from 1920 because the article compares “today” with when *Minneapolis Daglig Tidende* first came out, and the year 1887 is mentioned in this context and it is referred to as “33 years ago”. Local History Collection, P1523 at the NAHA Archives.

⁶⁶ Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows: Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women*, 38.

⁶⁷ Kristofer Janson, “Fjerde Foredrag: Nordmændene i Amerika” *Fem Foredrag*. (Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1881). 114. My translation.

the population of Minneapolis reached 46,887 and ten years later it had soared to 164,738.⁶⁸ The 16,401 Norwegians in Minneapolis in 1910 constituted almost 16% of all the Norwegian-born immigrants in the entire state of Minnesota.⁶⁹

An undated article from *Minneapolis Daglig Tidende* reports that there were two Norwegian colonies in Minneapolis that came into being about the same time, in the 1860s. One was in the southern parts and the other in the northern parts of the city. The northern colony consisted at first mostly of people from Trøndelag in Norway, and was located on Second Street from Eighteenth to Twentieth Avenues North.⁷⁰ In North Minneapolis, large numbers of the immigrants worked in the lumber yards and related businesses that were located by the river falls, a typical Norwegian area of expertise due to the lumber and wood-working crafts that were in common in Norway.⁷¹ The southern colony was located in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood boarded by the Mississippi River to the north and east. Both colonies increased in size each year with people from Norway, but also with Norwegians from rural areas of the Upper Midwest and other parts of USA. In addition, Swedes, Danes, Finns, Germans, Irish, Russians, Lithuanians, Italians, Greeks, and Poles were also present in the city in the period between 1880 and the early 1900s.⁷² The Swedes were the dominant foreign-born group in Minneapolis from 1880 to 1930.⁷³

The article from *Minneapolis Daglig Tidende* affirms that the block on Washington Avenue South, between Third and Fourth Avenues, was the place in Minneapolis with the most Scandinavian businesses. Another article gives an account of the story of Normanna Hall, which was built to be the Norwegian gathering place in Minneapolis.⁷⁴ This hall was on Third Street and Twelfth Street South, in the sixth ward, which was where most south-side Norwegians lived around 1885. Like the Swedes, described by Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck in *Swedes in the Twin Cities*, Norwegians originated mainly from rural areas and were not necessarily used to the noise, neighborhoods and commercial enterprises of the city.⁷⁵ In the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood one could find low-cost housing near the river in the Bohemian Flats, and there was an area of somewhat better constructed housing towards

⁶⁸ Atwater, "Municipal History", 96.

⁶⁹ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 27.

⁷⁰ Undated article from the NAHA archives, "Local History Collection P1523" in box on Minneapolis History

⁷¹ Mauk, chapter 4, "The Heart of the Heartland" manuscript.

⁷² Calvin F. Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities: An Ecological and Statistical Study of Social Trends in Minneapolis and St. Paul*. Vol ix. (London, Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997) 129-136.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁴ "En Drøm som Svandt", *Minneapolis Daglig Tidende*, October 21, 1908.

⁷⁵ Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck, *Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier*, (Uppsala: 2001) 5.

Franklin Avenue.⁷⁶ In *The Boat of Longing* Nils Vaag's friend, Kristine Dahl lives in a small cottage in the Bohemian Flats, and he "had often wondered how human beings could endure living down here."⁷⁷ Kristine explains the name of the area to Nils: "They're Bohemians, mostly. They call this the Bohemian Flats. But there are quite a few Scandinavians, too." This was a very poor area inhabited by the working class and poor.⁷⁸

By 1900, the Bohemian Flats were settled by 1,200 people, because the land was so cheap, with an annual house lot rent of \$12, so that anyone could build their own homes there.⁷⁹ Although it was cheap, life there was grim because the area lacked sewer and water service, there were annual spring floods, and a devastating poverty among the residents that "sometimes manifested itself in violence and alcoholism."⁸⁰

David A. Lanegran distinguishes between two "Snoose Boulevards" in Minneapolis, a popular name which originated in the Scandinavians' use and import of *snus* (snuff).⁸¹ The two thoroughfares mentioned are Washington Avenue, which according to him was where lumberjacks, farmworkers and other seasonal workers, homeless and the unemployed lived, and Cedar Avenue, the main commercial street, which was full of Scandinavian-American businesses, such as saloons, stores, and theaters.⁸²

David Markle explains that in 1884 the mayor, George Pillsbury, got approval for his liquor patrol limit, which aimed to geographically segregate liquor establishments in order to keep saloons out of most residential areas and make it easier for the police to patrol the saloons.⁸³ The result was that the immigrant quarters in downtown and northeast Minneapolis, where the main characters in the novels studied lived, were allowed to continue to have saloons, while more attractive neighborhoods were saloon-free. Markle observes that even though the sixth ward was full of rooming houses and low-cost hotels, it also contained 500 more houses than any other ward in Minneapolis in 1885, and by 1902 a "two-mile stretch of

⁷⁶ Lanegran, "From Swede Hollow to Arlington Hills, From Snoose Boulevard to Minnehaha Parkway: Swedish Neighborhoods of the Twin Cities", (accessed November 5, 2007)

⁷⁷ Ole. E. Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, translated by Nora O. Solum (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985), 108.

⁷⁸ Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 110.

⁷⁹ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 82.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸¹ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 28.

⁸² Lanegran, "From Swede Hollow to Arlington Hills, From Snoose Boulevard to Minnehaha Parkway: Swedish Neighborhoods of the Twin Cities" (accessed November 5, 2007).

⁸³ David Markle, "Dania Hall: At the Center of a Scandinavian American Community" in *Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2001), 175.

Washington Avenue, had 101 of the city's 360 saloons."⁸⁴ The whole area of Cedar-Riverside was filled with saloons, and there were also shops and theaters in the area.

Dania Hall in this district was an important Scandinavian meeting place in the early days of the "colony". Markle has come across a program for a theater production of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *De nygifte* (The Newlyweds) there, which was followed by a dance.⁸⁵ This may be the production Krog Janson had in mind when she had Astrid starring in the same play in her novel:

The new dramatic society was to make its first appearance with a performance of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *The Newlyweds*. (...) There were no curtain calls now, for the people sat impatiently waiting for the dance to begin.⁸⁶

Theaters were an urban institution, unknown to many rural immigrants.⁸⁷ In Minneapolis the immigrant theater groups were for the most part composed of amateurs, and they performed in theatrical evenings such as the one Krog Janson has portrayed here in *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, where the play usually was followed by a dance and other entertainment to attract a broad audience.⁸⁸

2.2. The authors' backgrounds

2.2.1. Kristofer Janson and Drude Krog Janson

Kristofer Nagel Janson, the author of *Bag gardinet*, had been on a lecture tour among the Norwegians in America in 1879 where he "so fascinatingly interpreted old Norse myths and folk tales, and so vividly described recent historical events in the 'old' country."⁸⁹ According to Per Sveino, Janson's lecture tour was motivated by his interest in the country, his recently acquired knowledge of American Unitarianism, and his wish to "get to know the free religious thought in America."⁹⁰ Janson had recently changed his view on the Norwegian Lutheran faith, he no longer accepted the divinity of Jesus or an everlasting hell, and had been dismissed from the "folk high school" Vonheim in Gudbrandsdalen because of his new liberal

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁸⁶ Drude Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, translated by Gerald Thorson (Baltimore, Maryland: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 47,52.

⁸⁷ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 87.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 87-96.

⁸⁹ Per Sveino, "Kristofer Janson and his American Experience," *Americana Norvegica. Studies in Scandinavian-American Interrelations*. Vol.III. Eds. Harald S. Naess and Sigmund Skard (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971) 91.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

views.⁹¹ Sveino explains that the Unitarianists believed in a personal God, did not agree with a puritanical attitude toward life, and did not put supreme trust in the Bible.⁹²

In the fall of 1881, Kristofer Janson moved to Minneapolis to work as a Unitarian minister, after Rasmus B. Anderson at the University of Wisconsin wrote a letter asking him if he would be interested in working for a liberal religious movement among the Norwegians in Minneapolis. According to Sveino, Janson indicated that he left Norway because he felt the state church was narrow-minded and dogmatic and contradicted the thought of religious freedom.⁹³ He traveled to America alone at first, in order to be ordained and settle things for his family. In the spring of 1882, he went back to Norway to get his children and wife Drude Ulrike Petra Krog Janson, the author of *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*.

It was common that immigrant men traveled across the Atlantic alone to get a job and earn money before the rest of the family followed, but Janson was in a different position than most other immigrants, since he was offered a job while still in Norway.⁹⁴ Another point which sets him apart from the average immigrant was that the job he got was in the professions and not manual labor, which most people had to settle for when they arrived as newcomers in Minneapolis. Janson's class and educational level in Norway were also unusual.⁹⁵ Drude Krog Janson supported her husband in his decision to leave Norway. In a letter to a friend she wrote:

Maybe later I will feel what it really means to leave everything at home, but right now I am glad that Kristofer will have the kind of work that his soul longs for, and, I believe and hope, a kind of work through which his gifts will develop, and where he can be of more real use than here. (...) And I hope there are greater possibilities for the children than here. Finally, the conditions that we are living under here are very limited and difficult, so it seems that a change would not be so hard.⁹⁶

Drude Krog Janson exemplifies here her sense of a woman's position and shows that although she worked for the woman cause, she was no wild radical but supported her husband. This point is also developed in her novel *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, where Astrid's actions are examples of Drude's opinion of a woman's possibilities. While Drude and her family stayed in Minneapolis, a Norwegian-American woman divorced her husband, something which

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 92-93.

⁹³ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁴ Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 43.

⁹⁵ Information from discussions with David Mauk.

⁹⁶ Letter to Stina Hedlund in Gothenburg written January 6, 1882, cited in Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author" (1983), 27-28.

caused massive reactions in the Norwegian community.⁹⁷ Astrid's choice of leaving her fiancée Smith was therefore decidedly controversial but not unheard of at this time. Drude was involved with feminism and attended all sessions of a convention of the Women's Suffrage Association in Minneapolis in October, 1885.⁹⁸

On the voyage to America, Kristofer had paid extra so that he and his family could stay in the infirmary on board the ship, a good place to avoid seasickness. They may have avoided seasickness, but on arriving in New York City, they discovered that they all had lice. Immigrant ships were often plagued with lice and contagious diseases, such as typhus and cholera, as a result of poor hygiene facilities and crowded rooms.

In Minneapolis, Drude worked as Kristofer's secretary and at the same time took care of their six children and the house, with the help of a housekeeper they had brought with them from Norway. This was not common practice among Norwegian immigrants, who sometimes could barely afford their own ticket to the USA. Drude came from an upper-class family in Norway with the best educational opportunities a girl could have in the middle of the nineteenth century,⁹⁹ and she was therefore neither a typical Norwegian woman nor a typical female immigrant. Orm Øverland points out the fact that there were few women, both Norwegian and American, with Drude's education and background in Minneapolis at the time,¹⁰⁰ and this could have had an influence on her dislike of the city. Drude taught children in the Universalist church's religious school and had sewing classes for girls. The Janson family's first flat was on Franklin and Thirteenth, near the southern Norwegian immigrant settlement of Minneapolis but in an area with good housing compared to the many boarding houses and the houses by the river. Kristofer Janson was a very controversial and popular speaker and minister, his sermons were sometimes reported in the newspapers, and he traveled a lot, being minister for several congregations outside Minneapolis, including churches in St. Paul, Hanska, Underwood, Brown and Hudson, Minnesota.¹⁰¹ After some time, the Jansons could afford to move into a house farther from the city center, on 2419 Nicollet Avenue, and here they organized musical and literary evenings for their educated acquaintances.

⁹⁷ Information from discussions with David Mauk.

⁹⁸ Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author," (1983), 44.

⁹⁹ Sigrun Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author," in *Essays on Norwegian-American Literature and History*. Edited by Dorothy Burton Skårdal and Ingeborg Kongslie. NAHA-Norway, Oslo, 1986. 49.

¹⁰⁰ Orm Øverland, "Introduction" to *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, by Drude Krog Janson. Translated by Gerald Thorson. 151-158. (Baltimore, Maryland: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), xvii.

¹⁰¹ The names of places where he organized Unitarian churches is from Bergmann. *Americans from Norway*, 203.

According to Sveino, the Jansons accommodated poor people without payment in their basement,¹⁰² but, like many other Norwegian-American homeowners in Minneapolis, the Jansons also took in paying boarders to make ends meet. Later, the Janson family moved to a house on Ninth Street, closer to their church, the Nazareth Church on Twelfth Avenue South and Ninth Street. The Jansons were not the typical immigrants, but belonged to the Norwegian-American elite in Minneapolis. Among their acquaintances were also the American Unitarianists in Minneapolis. According to Gerald Thorson, Janson was more readily accepted by the Americans than were most Norwegians because he was a poet, an intellectual, a liberal, and a non-Lutheran.¹⁰³ The Janson marriage did not last, and they left America in 1893, although the divorce was not finalized until 1897.¹⁰⁴

2.2.2. Johannes B. Wist

In April 1884, at the age of twenty, Johannes Rasmus Benjaminsen Wist traveled to the U.S., just like his fictional character Jonas Olsen in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*. Wist's journey was by direct steamboat, unlike most Norwegian immigrants, who traveled to America through England and then perhaps lived in a rural district of the Midwest before coming to Minneapolis. Jan Eirik Imbsen suggests Wist's older brother's immigration to America the year before as a possible reason for Johannes' decision to leave, but according to Imbsen, Wist left no clear information for why he chose to emigrate. When he arrived in America, he got his first job in a lumber yard in Minneapolis, along with many other Norwegian immigrants who were willing to take these hard and low-paid jobs. In Wist's novel, Jonas Olsen digs ditches for the sewer system in Minneapolis, another typical job for greenhorn immigrants. Just like Jonas, Wist was also employed in a grocery store for some time.

After a while, Wist moved out of Minneapolis to Pope County in Western Minnesota and started working as a teacher, which was his occupation in Norway before he emigrated. He was able to use his profession from Norway in the Norwegian-American community to rise from the common laborer stage. He later worked as a journalist for different Norwegian-American newspapers and magazines, and in 1885 he started editing the weekly magazine *Fakkelen*. He believed the Norwegian-American newspapers eased the transition to American society for the newcomers. In 1885 he married the America-born Norwegian Josephine Aasre,

¹⁰² Sveino, "Kristofer Janson and his American Experience", 95.

¹⁰³ Thorson, "Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s: Tinsel and Dust", 212.

with whom he had four children. He became editor-in-chief of the Norwegian-American newspaper *Decorah-Posten* in 1900 and remained its editor until he died in December 1923. He was very active in the Norwegian-American society, not only by writing in and editing Norwegian-American newspapers and magazines, but also by taking part in and founding different organizations that worked for the maintenance of the Norwegian language, culture, and traditions.¹⁰⁵

2.2.3. Ole E. Rølvaag

Ole Edvart Rølvaag emigrated from the island Dønna in Northern Norway at the age of twenty. Like his father before him, Ole Rølvaag was a fisherman, but after experiencing a violent storm at sea he asked his uncle in South Dakota for a ticket to America. According to Theodore Jorgenson and Nora O. Solum, Rølvaag later wrote to his fiancée, Jenny Bardahl, about his decision to emigrate, explaining that he wanted more from his life than being a fisherman.¹⁰⁶ This is also the reason why Nils in *The Boat of Longing* decided to leave Norway. In the summer of 1896 Rølvaag received a pre-paid ticket from his uncle and left for South Dakota, keeping a diary of the journey. Rølvaag left from Kristiania to New York directly by the steamer *Norge* on August 6, 1896. Like many other immigrants he had little money with him. He arrived in New York on August 20, and took the train from New York to Elk Point, South Dakota, a trip that lasted three days. Rølvaag was a typical immigrant in that he chose a destination in the United States where he had family. Jorgenson and Solum are of the opinion that the personality Rølvaag displays in the diary is very much like the nature of Nils Vaag in *The Boat of Longing* because “the Rølvaag of the diary is hypersensitive, moody, and restless.”¹⁰⁷ Rølvaag used events from his own life to give an authentic revelation of one individual’s soul.¹⁰⁸ During his first years in the US, Rølvaag worked as a farmhand earning enough to repay his uncle the 60 dollars his ticket had cost, and in the evenings he studied English. Just like his protagonist, Nils who washes floors, Rølvaag’s first job was a typical immigrant job, but unlike Nils, Rølvaag started his career in rural USA.

Reverend P. J. Reinertsen of Elk Point helped Rølvaag continue his education by lending him books and teaching him English, something which led to Rølvaag enrolling in the

¹⁰⁴ Røssbø, “Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author” (1983), 83.

¹⁰⁵ The information on Johannes B. Wist’s immigrant experience is extracted from Jan Eirik Imbsen, “Johannes B. Wist: Norwegian-American Leader.” Unpublished Cand. Philol. Thesis, University of Oslo, 1977)

¹⁰⁶ Theodore Jorgenson and Nora O. Solum, *Ole Edvart Rølvaag: A Biography* (New York and London: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1939), 31

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 279.

Augustana Academy, a school operated by a Norwegian-American church body in Canton, South Dakota. All the formal schooling Rølvaag had received as a fisherman's son, were the terms prior to his confirmation, a typical situation for many immigrants from Norway. They often had practical jobs and little or no theoretical background. In November 1898, only two years after Rølvaag first came to the country, he began at the academy, as one of the 148 students in the year 1898-1899.¹⁰⁹:

Finally I am standing here at the first rung. Wonder if I shall see the day when I am at the top! At any rate this is the wisest decision I to this day have made. (...) Any man with a little pride and ambition in his soul will want to be the first in the group. The struggle for mastery may be hard in proportion as the competition is keen, but there is growth in a life of this kind.¹¹⁰

Rølvaag shows here that he knew the importance of education and even though he encountered some difficulties because of his imperfect English, he still managed to graduate in 1901 and continued his education by going to college. In the year Rølvaag enrolled, the academy had only 148 students, an indication that education was not the first priority of most immigrants. The typical immigrant jobs were low-status but at least they paid, and quick money was important to many.

Reverend Reinertsen wrote Rølvaag a letter of recommendation, making it possible for him to enroll at St. Olaf's College in Northfield, Minnesota, though he still struggled with the foreign language. To earn money for his education, Rølvaag took summer jobs as a farmhand, school teacher in Norwegian settlements, and book salesman, and at the college he cleaned out the ashes of the stoves. At St. Olaf's he joined the Norwegian literary society *Normanna* and the English literary society *Gamma Delta*, and in 1905 he graduated from St. Olaf. After a year studying at the University of Kristiania in 1905 in Norway, Rølvaag started working in the Norwegian department at St. Olaf specializing in Norwegian language and literature, and in 1908 he married Jennie Bardahl. Rølvaag worked his way up the social ladder to the Norwegian-American educated elite. Rølvaag was certainly able to fulfill his dream of becoming more than a fisherman in his work for the Norwegian-American community.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹¹⁰ Ole E. Rølvaag cited in Jorgenson and Solum, *Ole Edvart Rølvaag: A Biography*, 44.

¹¹¹ The information on Ole E. Rølvaag's immigrant experience is extracted from Jorgenson and Solum *Ole Edvart Rølvaag: A Biography*.

2.3. The Protagonists' Minneapolis

In Drude Krog Janson's novel *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, Astrid Holm and her family leaves Bergen, Norway, because her father, August Holm, had gone bankrupt. Her mother was recently deceased and her father had the sole responsibility for three children. Because of his incompetence, the Holms' wholesale business did not go well after August took over from his father: "His sly business sense, together with the respectable name of the firm, made it possible for him to keep the company going for some years even though he lacked any real competence."¹¹² August Holm left his three children, Astrid, August, and Harald, with relatives in Norway and immigrated to America to earn money, after hearing about America through the many Norwegians who had already emigrated. As he explained to Astrid,

[b]usiness 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. (...) It's a republic and a land of free institutions. I belong there where one is free of all this aristocratic nonsense.¹¹³

Krog Janson lets Holm voice the impression of America held by many Norwegians. They saw America as the land of opportunities, a place to get jobs and achieve economic improvement.¹¹⁴ Holm sends for his children and his maid about a year later, in 1879, when he has settled in Minneapolis. Krog Janson does not explain why Holm chose Minneapolis, but since she lived in Minneapolis in the 1880s the author knew the city well. The city also offered many opportunities for a business-man like Holm, as people poured into the city to find work. Here he could find his niche and earn money without having to resort to farm labor, a field he had no previous experience in since his family was a wealthy, urban Norwegian family. In Gerald Thorson's preface to the translated version of the novel, he says that

although Astrid's status and experiences are far different from Janson's, Janson expresses her reactions to her own situation through the mind of Astrid. The novel is in that sense autobiographical. This helps the reader to see the narrative as an authentic story of life in Minneapolis in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁵

In the novel we meet a upper middle class immigrant family, a situation familiar to the author. Krog Janson grew up in an upper-class family in Norway and belonged to the Norwegian-American elite in Minneapolis. She had a hard time in the new city because there

¹¹² Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, 13-14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 2-4.

were few women with her background and interests and because everything was different from back home in Norway.¹¹⁶ Krog Janson describes these feelings through Astrid, who also feels out of place in this new city. Compared to Bergen, Kristiania and other European cities with their paved streets, old institutions and impressive buildings, Minneapolis looked “raw” and unfinished.

Krog Janson describes Holm’s descent in social class after his bankruptcy in Norway. He is not used to being poor and in America the requisite to belong to the upper class is money. Old and respected family names were not as important to the American elite as they had been back in Norway. As a result, some immigrants who had been extremely poor in Norway but who had succeeded in the US, mingled with wealthy and respected people from Norway.

In order to avoid hard manual labor and because his only skills are in the wholesale business from Norway, he goes in to the saloon business. Holm’s saloon is on Cedar Avenue, a typical location for Norwegian business because of the establishment of the Scandia Bank on the corner of Cedar and Fourth Street South in 1883.¹¹⁷ The reality of making a living in America does not turn out to be as easy as he hopes:

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. (...), 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 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. (...) He took it as something he could begin with and hoped that in time he would be able to move up to the more fashionable part of the city and develop his present saloon into a wholesale business.¹¹⁸

Holm is content with his present position and no longer feels the need to move out of the saloon business, but he does not tell Astrid this because he knows she does not approve of his occupation. They were well-respected and wealthy in Norway, and Holm wants to be accepted by the Norwegian upper class in Minneapolis as well. He therefore attempts to make his saloon a place where “dashing young men who had the urge to get together to chat over a

¹¹⁵ Gerald Thorsen “Translator’s preface,” in *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* by Drude Krog Janson (Baltimore, Maryland: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), iv.

¹¹⁶ Røssbø, “Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author “ (1983), 51.

¹¹⁷ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 28.

¹¹⁸ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, 31-32.

glass of beer” will assemble. When arriving in Minneapolis, Holm’s hopes were that his daughter Astrid would assist him in his business by attracting such customers, but he understands quickly that she wants nothing to do with the saloon.¹¹⁹ The reputation of a saloonkeeper was not favorable in this period, since selling alcoholic drinks to poor people was not considered appropriate and the temperance movement was expanding. Holm believes he is better than the other saloonkeepers because he was forced to take this job in order to make a living and not because he wanted it, which he believes to be the motivation of other saloonkeepers.

As a saloonkeeper, however, Holm meets all kinds of customers:

He would have to tolerate the simple customers, of course, for they were necessary if the business was to yield an adequate profit. So he would shrug his shoulders and talk about them as “a necessary evil” and “society’s dregs” or observe that, “we who are well bred must try to keep our distance as well as we can.”¹²⁰

Holm illustrates how some of the immigrants in the upper middle class looked upon the common worker. He also exposes his desire to distance himself from them to hide his descent in social class.

Astrid, her brothers, and the maid, Annie, come to America with prepaid tickets from their father. Since they were wealthier in Norway than most immigrants had been, they were able to bring their housekeeper from Norway, just like the Jansons had done themselves in real life. As the Holms were from the capital of Norway, Kristiania (now Oslo), they were, unlike most other Norwegian immigrants, used to the urban setting. When Astrid arrives in Minneapolis, she already knows some English, because she had tried to teach herself while she was staying with her aunt and uncle in Norway. Contrary to most young Norwegian female immigrants she has no experience with housekeeping and although her aunt had tried to teach her, she showed no interest in it. In Minneapolis she does not work, not even in her father’s saloon, and her father must therefore earn enough to feed, house and clothe his three children and a housekeeper.

In Minneapolis they live in a crowded and small flat above her father’s saloon, and Astrid complains about the smell rising up from the saloon below. The saloon is situated on Cedar Avenue, which was one of the busiest streets in Minneapolis, and heavily populated by Norwegian-Americans at the time. Cedar Avenue was the main commercial street for

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Scandinavian Americans and an excellent place for Holm's business since most Norwegians came here to shop.

Unlike most immigrants who arrived in Minneapolis in this time period, the Holm family can afford to rent their own apartment, but as the apartment is small and situated above the saloon it has little value. Astrid complains about the smell of alcohol rising up from the saloon. The apartment has two bedrooms, one for Astrid and one for her father and brothers, and the maid sleeps on the couch in the kitchen. They do not have to take in boarders to make ends meet.

Astrid looked around her little room. It was small and square, with white walls and a single window from which the sun was shut out by the wall of the neighboring building.¹²¹

Astrid is not impressed by the city nor her room, as the view from is very limited. She has also noticed that in the area they live "[t]he attractive buildings became fewer and fewer and the shacks more numerous as they drove down the street."¹²² Drude Krog Janson never liked Minneapolis, and in this novel she clearly voices her dislikes through Astrid.

By describing how other characters in the novel live, the author depicts how some richer Norwegian immigrants lived. Young, single and educated men rents rooms in the homes of other Norwegians. Private housing was considered better than living in a tenement house. Richer men and women could also afford renting their own apartments or buy houses in nicer neighborhoods and outside the city center.

Krog Janson discusses diphtheria in the novel, depicting the living situation above the saloon and in its neighborhood. Diphtheria "is most common in areas where people live in crowded conditions with poor sanitation. Persons, especially children, who are not immunized or who did not receive adequate immunization are most at risk."¹²³ Astrid's brother August contracts diphtheria and dies after ten days. Since the disease spreads easily by droplet infection, their flat is washed to get rid of any bacteria and the building is marked by a "Diphtheria"-sign to make sure that other people do not get ill. Astrid's other brother, Harald, is also infected, but he recovers. It is easy to imagine that living above a saloon and playing out in the streets are not the best conditions for a child growing up. According to Ingrid

¹²¹ Ibid., 29.

¹²² Ibid., 28.

¹²³ Directors of Health Promotion and Education, <http://www.dhpe.org/infect/dip.html>, (accessed 22 August, 2007).

Semmingsen, diphtheria, measles, and scarlet fever took their toll and especially among children in both Norway and the US in this period.¹²⁴

While in Minneapolis, the Holm family mainly socializes with other Norwegian Americans as their customers for the most part are Norwegian Americans or Scandinavian American, and this shows that they have not come far in the assimilation process. They are more concerned about acceptance in the Norwegian American upper class than with fitting in with the American society. Holm is so eager to be accepted here that he is thrilled when his daughter makes friends with a young Norwegian-American lawyer. Astrid and a couple of other friends fill their days by putting on a play and by walking in the neighborhood and in the shopping area. Krog Janson depicted a social class she knew and took part in herself, unlike the many Norwegian immigrant women who for example worked as domestic maids or clerks.

When Astrid refuses a suitor, the disappointed man spreads rumors about her, claiming that she is promiscuous, and the rumor ensures that she is no longer accepted by the immigrant elite her family wants to belong to. She consequently accepts a proposal by Mr. Smith because he is well-respected, and not because she loves him. In the beginning she finds him interesting and amusing and he makes her feel less alone. When she is with him everyone treats her well:

In his company she was safe from contempt. What kind of society was she living in? A man could be whatever he wanted, and he was still accepted. (...) 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 just adjust. And that is precisely what she did.¹²⁵

In this period, a woman's right to marry the man of her own choice was still not recognized by society, and Krog Janson depicts a professional career as an alternative to marriage for women.¹²⁶ She exemplifies this through Astrid's choice of career as a minister and her friend Helene Nielsen who is a doctor. Both these professions were male dominated in this time period.

Holm is delighted with their engagement as it brings the family better status. Smith takes the Holm family sailing on Lake Minnetonka, where the wealthy inhabitants of Minneapolis had summer houses or stayed at hotels in the summer. It was a popular recreation

¹²⁴ Ingrid Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*. Translated by Einar Haugen. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 68-69.

¹²⁵ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, 81.

¹²⁶ Sigrun Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author," (1986), 55.

area just a short train ride away from the city.¹²⁷ Astrid feels she has sold herself and that accepting the proposal makes her no better than a prostitute. Mr. Smith introduces her as his fiancée to all his acquaintances and Astrid feels like a trophy, shown off at parties. He promises her a big, beautiful house in a nice neighborhood, but after meeting the Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson she can no longer go on with the engagement. She is encouraged by Bjørnson to achieve her true potential and take charge of her own life. This conversation leads to her becoming a minister and at the very end of the novel she is ordained in a church in Chicago. Krog Janson was inspired and involved with feminist issues, evident her novel as she portrays Astrid refusing two marriages to develop herself as a human being, not just as a wife. Her decision to attend college to become a minister will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

In Kristofer Janson's *Bag gardinet*, the Norwegian immigrants are presented through their relation to the nouveau riche American family, the Plummers. Mr. Plummer made his fortune by dishonest business, yet his family is now one of the respected families in the city. He started as a captain on a steamboat on the Mississippi, which he set on fire and then spent the insurance money he collected on a sawmill. He married an Indian girl and they had one son, but when he falls in love with the housekeeper, the second Mrs. Plummer, he kicks both his wife and son out. The Nilsen family from Norway came to the United States to seek economic opportunities and in Minneapolis they work for the Plummers. According to Nina Draxten, Mr. Plummer's background is similar to that of a real-life millionaire lumberman in Wisconsin.¹²⁸

The Nilsens all start their career in the US with typical immigrant jobs. Dina, the daughter, works as a maid in the house, while her father Daniel and brother Arne work on the railroad where Mr. Plummer is the boss of one of the employment offices. Mr. Plummer is also an important stockholder in one of the main railroads. A further discussion of job situations will be found in the following chapter.

Since the Nilsens are presented to the reader through their relations to the Plummers and thereby their jobs, Janson does not specify what they do in their spare time. However, they know other Norwegian families in the city, and Dina socialize with other Norwegian-American unmarried girls who work as maids. Outside their job situations, the Nilsens mainly consort with other Norwegian-American, and this shows that they have not assimilated far into American society. Like the father in many other immigrant families, Daniel went out in

¹²⁷ Carl G. O. Hansen, "Glimt fra Livet i det norske Amerika," in *Minneapolis Tidende*, March 21, 1926.

¹²⁸ Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 238.

advance. Because he was a widower, he left his children with the neighbors when he left for Chicago. After working on a boat on Lake Michigan, he is hired as a worker on the railroad and can send for his children. He has made money for a little cottage by working long days, and their small house is situated in the Bohemian Flats in the southern parts of Minneapolis. When Dina hires out to the Plummers, she shares a room with the other servants and maids in the Plummers' house. The Nilsen family's living situation is thus typical to that of the working class immigrant.

Mrs. Plummer is of the opinion that Scandinavian girls make great maids, but that it is not a good idea for her son Frank to marry one of them. She says of the Scandinavians:

Do we not see them arriving by the loads to this city and fill up the train stations so that decent people cannot enter? Their clothes smell, their food trunks smell and they have lots of dirty children? They are the ones that shovel the streets, that work in the sewer, that do the lowest jobs, and they are the ones that fill up the saloons and the prisons. And you want to drag people like that into the Plummer household?¹²⁹

These were stereotypes Janson felt were used to describe the Norwegian immigrant. The Norwegian-American judge Andreas Ueland says the same thing

it was (...) inevitable that when the immigrant arrived, poor and bewildered, in the hottest summer season in his heavy woolen homespun of strange make and too clean after many weeks on the way, the American should consider him not only less fit but in every respect inferior to himself.¹³⁰

Frank Plummer rapes Dina and offers her to be his "kept woman", promising to pay for her and her family. Daniel is furious and takes Frank to court. It seems that Janson aims to highlight what he felt was the low position of the immigrants in society and hints that money can buy everything, even justice, by having the Plummers' bribing the jury in the trial

After losing the appeal trial, Dina drowns herself in the Mississippi. Daniel pulls her out of the river. The scene that follows shows a desperate father who uses his dead daughter as a symbol of the injustice done to the workers by the capitalists. The scene is very sentimental, Daniel brings the dead body to Bridge Square and speaks to a gathering crowd of the cruelty done to his daughter. Daniel leans her daughter on the electric light mast "so the white electric lights from the small shops around flowed over the pitiful and stiff figure, who

¹²⁹Kristofer Janson, *Bag gardinet* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: C. Rasmussens Bogtrykkeri, 1889), 97: "Ser vi dem ikke komme i Ladningsvis her til Byen og fylde Depoterne, saa skikkelige Folk neppe kan komme ind? Det lugter af deres Klær, af deres Madkister, og fuldt af skidne Børn hænger omkring dem? De er det jo, som skufler Gaderne, som gaar i Kloaken, som gjør alt det simpleste Arbeide, de er det jo, som fylder Kneiperne og Tughthusene. Og slike Folk vil du drage ind i det Plummerske Hus?" My translation.

¹³⁰ Andreas Ueland, *Recollections of an Immigrant* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1929), 48.

stood there speechless like a ghost.”¹³¹ An angry mob runs after Frank Plummer and when the police come to arrest Daniel, the workers in the crowd protect him. Daniel was a union man who always spoke the workers’ case and now they help him. Gerald Thorson states that Janson indeed used melodramatic manipulations of the action and obvious proclamations of the novel’s message.¹³²

Janson was not the only Norwegian-American who focused on workers’ rights. In *Budstikken* in February 12, 1890 in a letter to the editor someone called “E. B.” writes that the Norwegians had proven themselves hardworking and efficient in organizing unions, both workers’, social and temperance unions.¹³³

Another novel which discusses the class issue in the Norwegian community in Minneapolis is *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* by Johannes B. Wist. The author uses satire and exaggeration in depicting Jonas’ social class climbing. Jonas left for America as a single twenty-year-old man in the 1880s. Wist does not specify where in Norway Jonas is from, but when he gets his first job working on a sewer crew in Minneapolis it is hinted that he might be from Kongsvinger:

‘*Ju’ban* worked on a *suer* before?’

‘*Ju* bet – in Kongsvinger.’ Jonas realized that the *basen* knew he was lying, but never mind; here in America you had to make do as best as you could.¹³⁴

At the job interview, Jonas does everything he can to get the job, even pretending to have worked on a sewer before. Jonas moves directly to Minneapolis, an untypical journey for Norwegian immigrants, but his choice of destination is commonplace in the sense that he chooses Minneapolis because he has a relative, a cousin, there. This man “was said to be almost a millionaire. He had more or less said so himself in his letters home, so there could be no reason to doubt it.”¹³⁵ Jonas believed getting ahead and making a living would be easy in America, so he did not worry about his lack of working skills: “America was the land of the future, and Jonas, who had drifted here and there without much success at anything, wanted his share.”¹³⁶ Since his cousin was rich, Jonas did not worry about how he would make a living in Minneapolis: “His cousin had written that he was the manager of public buildings in

¹³¹ Janson, *Bag gardinet*, 233: “(...) saa det hvide elektriske Lys fra de omliggende kramboder flød udover den sørgelige, stive Skikkelse, der stod der maalløs som et Spøgelse.” My translation.

¹³² Thorson, “Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s: Tinsel and Dust”, 218.

¹³³ *Budstikken*, February 12, 1890. Letter to the editor from E. B. : “Arbeiderspørgsmaalet er noget, som Nordmændene befatter sig meget med, og de har vist sig virksomme og strævende med at faa stiftet Foreninger, baade Arbejderforeninger og Selskapslige, ja Totalafhold ogsaa.” My translation.

¹³⁴ Johannes B. Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, translation by Orm Øverland (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 18.

¹³⁵ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 5.

Minneapolis and had his office in the town hall.”¹³⁷ In reality, the cousin was the second assistant janitor in the courthouse in Minneapolis. Jonas heard stories about people making it in America from letters they sent back home, but his cousin had lied in his letters to make himself one of the success stories:

In American fashion Lars Salomonsen had become Lewis Salmon and Jonas had been told that Salmon’s name was respected all over Minneapolis and even as far east as *Sankte Paul*, where his influence in state politics had caused fear among the many Swedes there. He had written all about it in his letters.¹³⁸

Wist has described Lewis and his lies to exaggerate the lies that sometimes occurred in the “America-letters”, making fun of some Norwegian immigrants’ need to show that they are successful. The typical “America-letters” usually included personal circumstances, surveyed American conditions, and they often stressed that in America one had to work harder than in Norway.¹³⁹

In Minneapolis, Jonas first stays with his cousin and his cousin’s family in South Minneapolis, and the cousin’s wife Marja is not too happy with having Jonas as a freeloading house guest. According to Gjerde and Qualey, relatives and friends often lived together like in rural areas.¹⁴⁰ Both the family, the house, and the neighborhood indicate a working-class area and Wist has portrayed the Salmons’ as rather rough, fighting loudly and throwing things at each other. The neighborhood the cousin lives in is described when Jonas takes a walk: “The street didn’t look at all like the fine residential areas he had heard so much about. The houses were not well kept and the Norwegians in South Minneapolis didn’t seem particularly well-off.”¹⁴¹

After a fight with Mrs. Salmon, Jonas is thrown out and he rents a room in a boarding house. He is very pleased to have enough money so that he does not have to share a room like many others had to. The boarding house is not far from the sewer where he works, on the corner of First and Second Street North. Living this close to the sewer can in addition to being physically unpleasant, be seen as a metaphor of an undesirable neighborhood and living situation. In the northern colony, many of the Norwegians worked in and lived around the lumber yards. Jonas’ boarding house, in the part of the northern Norwegian colony closest to downtown, is owned by a Swedish man and his Norwegian wife, and the boarders there are

¹³⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

¹³⁹ Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 166.

¹⁴⁰ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 28.

¹⁴¹ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 14.

mostly Scandinavians, but also some Irishmen and a couple of Americans, “who were always reminding the others that they were Yankees and making fun of their English.”¹⁴² Even though these Americans are in the same situation as the immigrants, they try to be superior by making fun of the immigrants’ English. Jonas does not speak much English and socializes therefore mostly with the Scandinavians at his boarding house, thus showing that he has not come far in the process of assimilation into the American society.

Nils Vaag in *The Boat of Longing* also lives in a boarding house. That both Rølvaag and Wist chose to place their protagonists in the boarding house situation illustrates how common the boarding house experience was for the urban Norwegian immigrant. Most workers did not have enough money to rent or buy their own house. For some living in boardinghouses was also temporary, because they were moving back to Norway or to the countryside after having earned enough money. Nils’ plan is to return rich to Norway after some years in the US. According to Semmingsen, “the majority of emigrants about the turn of the century probably thought that their American adventure was temporary, that they would look around, earn some money, and then go back home.”¹⁴³ In fact, “after 1880 about one-fourth of all emigrants returned to Norway.”¹⁴⁴

Nils lives for next to nothing in the rooming house Rølvaag has named “Babel.” According to Jon Gjerde and Carlton C. Qualey the fictitious “Babel” is based on the 60-apartment building, Beard’s Block, informally known as “Noah’s Ark,” a building which was situated on Twelfth Avenue and Second Street South.¹⁴⁵ Nils saves money by sharing the room with another Norwegian, a poet called Karl Weissman. Their room has “two beds, separated by a screen; a small dining-table in one corner; and a stove in the next. The walls were papered, but their hue was at present so uncertain that it would be difficult to say just what the original had been.”¹⁴⁶ The state of the room shows that living in boarding houses was not luxurious and that privacy was almost unheard of. Nils’ rooming house is situated on the street corner of Fourth Street and Thirteenth Avenue South, covering an entire block just like “Noah’s Ark” in reality. Rølvaag describes the living condition in the “Babel”:

In the smallest rooms, with their single window, it might of course, become unbearably hot in summer; (...) But in winter it was worse! The cold might then

¹⁴² Ibid., 24.

¹⁴³ Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 119-120.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 120.

¹⁴⁵ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 85.

become so severe that it was almost impossible to live there. And wood and coal being expensive, poor folk had to be as sparing of such items as of kitchen to their food.¹⁴⁷

During the cold Minnesota winters, wood and coal were luxury goods that were used sparingly until most necessary. Yet “Noah’s Ark” offered “decent low-cost housing, with gas, running water, privies, and woodsheds”¹⁴⁸ for its inhabitants. Rølvaag does not describe these facilities in the novel, but he focuses rather on the lack of privacy. Nils is woken up a Saturday night due to noise in the building: “[t]here had been bedlam enough during the night, though perhaps it had not been greatly worse than usual of a Saturday night,”¹⁴⁹ showing that the lives of the other tenements affect all inhabitants.

Many poor families and single immigrants, like Jonas Olsen and Nils Vaag, rented rooms in boarding houses. These houses were usually two to four stories high and had long fronts to provide light and air for the inhabitants, and there were shared bathrooms.¹⁵⁰ Rølvaag does not present a neutral and balanced evaluation of the living conditions in boarding houses since he omits the facilities of the buildings and focuses more on what he sees as the psychological aspects of living so close to others.

In Nils Vaag’s boarding house there are, besides Norwegians and Swedes, Irish, Jewish Poles, Russians, Germans, Americans, and African Americans. “Some one had dubbed the rooming house he lived in ‘Babel.’ (...) Nils’s supposition was that it must have been on account of the variety of tongues which had been spoken by its occupants,”¹⁵¹ but he does not socialize with them. He has not come far in the assimilation process, socializing mostly with Norwegians. Although he does not socialize with people from other nationalities, he does meet them in the hallways and backyard of his boarding house, on the streets, in the shops, and restaurants, because they are a part of the city and the neighborhood too. Meeting other population and immigrant groups on a regular basis is one of the greatest differences between urban and rural immigrants and something that Gjerde and Qualey discuss in their research on Norwegian-Americans in Minnesota. They observe that in the 1890s Ward 11, from Sixth Street to Twenty-fourth Street South along the river, contained more Norwegian immigrants than any other ward, but that this group only made up 15.9% of the same population in 1895.¹⁵² But still, these scholars claim that the Norwegian Americans associated very little

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 95.

¹⁴⁸ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 105.

¹⁵⁰ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 119.

¹⁵¹ Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 93.

¹⁵² Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 29.

with people outside the Scandinavian countries except from in the school and work situations.¹⁵³

On the sewer crew Jonas works with Swedes, he courts the Danish-American girl in his Scandinavian-owned boarding house, he attends Scandinavian and Norwegian dances and meetings, he visits Norwegian and Swedish saloons, and he attends a Norwegian church. After working some time on the sewer crew, Jonas is employed in a grocery store in North Minneapolis. He starts out his career in this store as an errand boy until the owner thinks his English is good enough and is then hired as a store clerk. Although the customers are mainly Norwegian, the owner, Jenkins, is an American. Jonas is introduced to the Norwegian-American upper class by his colleague and store manager, Lars Simonsen. Simonsen has a good reputation among the Norwegians Americans in Minneapolis because “he was evidence that a Norskie could be as smart as an American.”¹⁵⁴ From him Jonas learns the dirty tricks of the business, for example “how to sell a shipment of spoiled fruit by carefully blending it in small portions with fresh fruit.”¹⁵⁵ Simonsen owns a house where he lives with his wife and daughter Dagny.

2.4. Summary

This chapter has dealt with the immigrant experience that involves the protagonists’ living conditions and who they socialize with. The authors have described similar immigration patterns for their characters as they experienced themselves. The Janson left as families, while Wist and Rølvaag left young and unmarried, so the authors write about a situation familiar to that of other Norwegian immigrants.

The four stories deal with first- stage immigration, the first point of destination where the immigrants arrive and live. The authors’ focus on first-stage immigration might be because this is the relocation that had the biggest impact on them. However, most Norwegian-born immigrants emigrated to Norwegian settlements in the Upper Midwest before they moved into the city. In this sense, all the protagonists dealt with in this thesis are untypical immigrants because they emigrated directly to Minneapolis. However, later immigrants were more likely to settle in the cities than the earlier arrivals.

Like many immigrants did, the main characters see America as a land of opportunities, and in Minneapolis they find work. As clusters of Norwegian Americans settled in the city there was a market for ethnic stores, saloons, and businesses of various kinds to cater to the

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Wist. *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 58.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 59.

needs of the members of the ethnic group. In this development two Norwegian ethnic neighborhoods came to being. Jonas Olsen is the only of the characters that live in the northern colony of Norwegians in Minneapolis. The newcomers followed rural living patterns when they settled with people they knew. Jonas Olsen and Nils Vaag live in boarding houses where they share living space with other Norwegians, Scandinavians and other ethnic groups. This was very common for the working class immigrant. At first, Jonas stayed at his relative's house in the southern Norwegian colony, and then he moved into a small room at a boardinghouse in the northern colony. Unlike Nils Vaag's boardinghouse in the southern Norwegian colony, Jonas' is owned by Scandinavians and is inhabited by mostly Scandinavian boarders. Nils lives in a big tenement building with people from many different countries. Rølvaag's descriptions of the Bohemian Flats are detailed and seem representative which is also the case with Astrid Holm, Jonas Olsen, and Nils Vaag's walks in the neighborhoods. All the novels include street names, places and people that existed in the 1880s and early 1900s Minneapolis.

The Nilsen family live in a small cottage by the river in South Minneapolis, where immigrant groups found cheap living accommodations in real life. In *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, the middle class is depicted. The Holm family live above their saloon on the busy Cedar Avenue, which for the most part was occupied by businesses and boarding houses. In the novels the protagonists socialize for the most part with other Norwegians and Scandinavians outside their job situations, and this suggests that neither of them have come far in the assimilation or the accommodation process in American society, however, in all novels, except for *Bag gardinet* the protagonists are newcomers. Even in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, Jonas has not moved far into American society when the first novel ends. In *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* Mr. Holm is more concerned of being accepted in the Norwegian-American upper class than the larger American society, and Astrid's engagement leads to invitations to this elite. It is likely that the level of competence in English would bring them further in the process of assimilation.

The Jansons were not like most other Norwegian immigrants because they belonged to the Norwegian elite in the city. Because of their status they socialized more with Americans than other Norwegian newcomers did. All the authors have experienced being newcomers and even though not all of them have experienced difficulties like their protagonists, they manage to portray living conditions and relations that are true to life.

3. Linguistic and social aspects of immigrant life in Minneapolis

This chapter will be investigating the close relationship between work and language as well as language and church among the Norwegian immigrants in Minneapolis. The issue of social class will also be discussed in view of the different jobs and stages in the assimilation process bringing with them different stages of social acceptance and social stigma of various kinds. Temperance is also discussed, being a central theme in the novels. The focus of the chapter is on how the main characters in the four novels illustrate these important aspects of the urban Norwegian immigrant experience.

Learning to speak and write English was a crucial part of the Norwegian Americans' assimilation or accommodation process in the United States, and the shift from Norwegian to English occurred more quickly in the cities than in rural settlements, probably because it was practically impossible to hold on to the Norwegian language in all situations in an environment of English-speaking people. In addition, the English language was the only means of communication between Scandinavian and other immigrants. English expressions and words were also adapted into conversations in Norwegian through for example education and work, and among the Norwegian immigrants this mixing of languages became a step towards the shift to English. This language mix went to some degree both ways as the Norwegian immigrants also influenced the English language in Minneapolis with expressions such as "lefse," "lutefisk" and the exclamation phrase "Uff da," all of which are still in use in Minnesota today and are even considered symbolic phrases for "Norwegianness."¹⁵⁶

3.1. Language and Names

The new language was a barrier the immigrants had to overcome in order to be assimilated and integrated in American society, but evening classes and books were available to guide the newcomers. One such book was the *100 timer i Engelsk* (One Hundred Lessons in English), and evening classes were provided by the city. Jonas Olsen in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* attends evening school three nights a week to learn English. A well-known Norwegian-American judge in Minneapolis, Andreas Ueland, also went to evening school as a newcomer in America. According to his daughter, the author Brenda Ueland, he worked as a day laborer on the sewer crew that dug the first sewer in Minneapolis on Washington Avenue

¹⁵⁶ "Lefse" is a "thin pastry served folded and spread with butter and other foods." "Lutefisk" is "cod treated with lye and served boiled." "Uff da" is an exclamation phrase with a meaning equivalent to "oh!" or "oh dear!" The explanations are from *Kunnskapsforlaget*, <http://www.ordnett.no/ordbok.html> (accessed January 5, 2008).

while studying law for six years in evening school.¹⁵⁷ While the immigrants were learning English, they often mixed the two languages extensively. Most of the mixing was a muddle of Norwegian with English words and conjugations. Einar Haugen has investigated the Norwegian language in America and he has noticed that in Norwegian conversations, official and economic terms were

overwhelmingly English. In these the contacts of the immigrants with the English-speaking world were necessarily intimate, and their behavior had to be guided by English precedents. (...) The chief foci of influence were the store, the government, and the American neighbor. But in home and family life, in church and religion, the English expressions penetrated more slowly; nor did they affect the immigrant's emotional and general behavior to the same extent as his economic life.¹⁵⁸

Wist has incorporated this language mix in his novel, which makes for interesting reading, especially since he attempts to write phonetically. Solveig Zempel has written her Ph.D. on the language use in Wist's novels, and she observes among other things that Wist avails himself of different languages and vernaculars for his individual characters. Zempel has noted that by manipulating language variations in the novels about Jonas, "Wist is able to differentiate between dialogue and narrative, between various characters and their social and cultural status, and between different social situations."¹⁵⁹ Lewis Salmon, who is uneducated and belongs to the poor working class of immigrants, is one of the characters who mixes languages, Jonas' boss on the sewer crew speaks Swedish, and the Norwegian snob Karl Johan Arndt Lomwiig, in the boardinghouse, speaks high Dano-Norwegian. This language variation is a means of illustrating the stages at which the characters are in the assimilation process, as well as their sense of identity and social status. According to Zempel, this way of using language is the ideal illustration for the message Wist wants to impart to the readers, "a humorous, satirical yet warmly realistic portrayal of the Norwegians in America."¹⁶⁰ Zempel also believes Wist must have intended his novels about Jonas to be read only by Norwegian-Americans due to the many English loan words and the extensive use of language mix that only bi-lingual readers would be able to understand.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Brenda Ueland, *ME* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), 12. Ueland, *Recollections of an Immigrant*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Einar Haugen, *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior. Vol.1: The Bilingual Community* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), 93.

¹⁵⁹ Solveig Zempel, "Bilingualism in Norwegian-American Literature: The case of Johannes B. Wist", in *Scandinavians in America: Literary Life*. Ed. J. R. Christianson (Decorah, Iowa: Symra Literary Society, 1985), 224.

¹⁶⁰ The information in this paragraph is extracted from Zempel, "Bilingualism in Norwegian-American Literature: The case of Johannes B. Wist," and the quotation is from page 224 of the same essay.

¹⁶¹ Zempel, "Bilingualism in Norwegian-American Literature: The case of Johannes B. Wist", 224.

Jonas' first encounter with the English language is when he, on his way to America, learns six English phrases from a Norwegian sailor. Throughout the novel he uses these phrases excessively, especially in the beginning, in order to hide the fact that he does not speak English:

They were *yessør* for yes, *nosør* for no, *don'tno* when he was uncertain, never mind when he wanted to hide his ignorance, *gudness* when he wished to express his wonder all right, that could be used on all occasions, and one more that he could use when he was angry but that the sailor had advised against using if a pastor was near.¹⁶²

As a newcomer, Jonas Olsen has a hard time understanding his cousin, who has already lived in Minneapolis a while. Lewis Salmon has anglicized his name from the Norwegian Lars Salomonsen, and he imports and borrows heavily from English in his speech:

Jeg har getta saa jused te' aa speak English, at jeg forgetter mig right'long naa jeg juser Norsk (...) It takes time for a newcomer to get enough *hæng af languagen* to *kætche on te'de' most comment English*, but it will come so *bey* and *bey*.¹⁶³

Lewis Salmon mixes languages unintentionally, but Jonas employs the same mix consciously to fit in as soon as he has learnt some words of English: "We are in a free *kontry* (...) and we may *spike* whatever language we want."¹⁶⁴ A Norwegian man from the upper class in Norway, Karl Johan Arndt Lomwiig, comments on this pidgin, exclaiming that it makes him sick: "Awful language! This mixture of English and Norwegian is terrible. It makes an educated man want to puke."¹⁶⁵ Wist does not provide the reader with much information on Lomwiig's background, only that he held some kind of public office in Norway but had not achieved the promotion he expected and for some reason had to leave the country. Even in the US, he believes he is better than everyone else. Lomwiig has, through his connections, been able to try out different jobs such as parish clerk, bartender, clerk in a lumber company and typesetter for a Danish newspaper, most of which were much better than the jobs other immigrants could expect, but he does not take to any of them.

Jonas Olsen shows that he is determined to be assimilated as quickly as possible and immediately starts using the little he knows of English in conversations. He believes he is learning really fast, yet he struggles when he wants to ask a girl to a dance: "*Ei vil to Harmonia Hall Saturday. (...)* *Ei vant ju to gaa. (...)* *Ei and ju gaa.*"¹⁶⁶ However, at least he shows willingness to learn English in order to get ahead in Minneapolis, even to the point of

¹⁶² Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 6-7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

bringing his English book to work and studying during his break. After eight months in Jenkins' grocery store, Jonas knew the business and was quickly learning the language. Zempel believes that Wist has succeeded in rendering a realistic portrayal of the Norwegians and their lives, basing her judgment on contemporary reviews of his novels, all of which praise "the genuineness of the story and the living reality of the characters."¹⁶⁷

In *Bag gardinet*, the degree of English competence in the Nilsen family is simply not an issue and the reader is never told how fluent they are. The question of language is hardly mentioned at all, and the Nilsen family communicates with Americans without problems in the novel, actually not a very realistic representation. However, in the trial over the rape of his daughter it is mentioned that Daniel's English is not very good: "(...) he is just a worker, who does not speak our language fluently."¹⁶⁸

In *The Boat of Longing*, Nils is eager to get ahead and leave the living and working conditions he finds himself in. He works, saves money, and lives on next to nothing by sharing a room in a boarding house, and he is determined to learn English because "[i]t wasn't this kind of life he had come to America to live...oh no! It was the fairer life uptown."¹⁶⁹ Annie, a Norwegian-American teenage girl, teaches Nils English because he understood that "[l]ife here required it, both the part which was worth having and that which might be passed by; until he could command the language, he must of necessity stand outside, be an alien."¹⁷⁰ Nils' friend Per learns English faster because he works in a saloon where speaks to customers, and his English echoes the kind of language they speak in saloons: "Per had taken to swearing a good deal when he spoke English. (...) There was one in particular to which he seemed to have taken a fancy – namely 'Jesus Christ!'"¹⁷¹ Per tells Nils that swearing is an important aspect of the English language.

Drude Krog Janson does not deal with the question of language in her novel *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, her characters socialize for the most part with other Norwegian-Americans in Minneapolis and language choice or mix therefore does not become an issue. Both Kristofer Janson and Drude Krog Janson, who wrote and published their novels towards the end of the 1880s, have chosen not to focus on this issue of the immigrants' lives, possibly because the group of Norwegian Americans in the city during the 1880s was more compact

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁶⁷ Zempel, "Bilingualism in Norwegian-American Literature: The case of Johannes B. Wist", 231.

¹⁶⁸ Janson, *Bag gardinet*, 205: "(...) han er en slet og ret Arbeidsmand, som bare ufuldkommet kan bruge vort Sprog (...)." My translation.

¹⁶⁹ Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 98.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 195.

and it was therefore easier to hold on to their mother tongue. Yet the immigrants would still have to deal with Americans and people from other nationalities, and the fact that the question of language is hardly mentioned in the two novels may indicate that the Jansons regarded other aspects of immigrant experience as more important. Kristofer Janson being a minister, the Jansons had more to do with Americans who belonged to their status and class than with immigrants such as the characters they write about in their novels, the Jansons belonged to a different social strata than the regular working immigrant.¹⁷²

A letter from the Norwegian-American immigrant and teacher Carl Raugland in Minneapolis to his brother in Norway in 1900 shows that second-generation immigrants perceived both the Norwegian and the English language differently from first-generation immigrants. He writes that

Our children's language is almost exclusively English but they understand every word they are spoken to in Norwegian, it is difficult to teach the children Norwegian in this country, since English comes more naturally to them.¹⁷³

Anglicizing of names was often a first step towards recognition of the new language and assimilation for Norwegian-Americans immigrants. Wist's *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* is the only of these four novels that deals specifically with this issue. In the beginning of the novel, the reader gets to know that Jonas' cousin Lars Salomonsen has changed his name to Lewis Salmon. Øverland's translation excludes a boasting letter Jonas wrote to his sister. The letter explains that he has changed his name: "I have for the time being changed my name to John."¹⁷⁴ He continues:

When I first came to America I did not like this name changing that they do all the time. I thought it so un-Norwegian. But now I see that it is a part of the game; because I have experienced for myself that the Americans cannot pronounce the Norwegian names.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Thorsen, "Translator's Preface" to *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, xviii.

¹⁷³ Letter from Carl Raugland, Minneapolis, to his brother Martinius, Norway, January 20, 1900. "Carl M. and Sara K. Raugland Papers: Folder 1, correspondence (In Norwegian) 1877-1909" at the Minnesota Historical Society. "Vore Børns Sprog er nesten udelukket Engelsk mend de forstaar hver Ord, der tales til dem i norsk, det er haardt at faa lære Børnene norsk her i landet, da Engelsk falder dem lettere." My translation.

¹⁷⁴ Wist (Arnljot), *Nykommerbilleder: Jonas Olsens første Aar i Amerika* (Decorah, Iowa: The Anundsen Publishing Co., 1920), 34: "Selv har jeg foreløbig forandret Døbenavnet mit til John." My translation.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.: "I Førstningen jeg kom til Amerika, saa likte jeg ikke denne Navneforandringen, som dem driver med stødt og stadigt. Jeg syntes det var ligesom saa unorsk. Men nu indser jeg grangiveligen, at det hører med til Valsen; thi jeg har selv Erfaring for, at Amerikanerne ikke paa Sæt og Vis kan udtale disse norske Navnene." My translation.

When Jonas and Simonsen have bought the grocery store from Jenkins, Simonsen introduces Jonas to his family as his partner and the reader understands that Jonas has also anglicized his last name: “Simonsen & Olson will open business tomorrow, he said.”¹⁷⁶

At the railway station in Minneapolis, Nils meets a Norwegian-American woman who has answered a job ad in the Norwegian-American newspaper *Skandinaven*. A Norwegian-American widower in Minot, North Dakota, is in need of a housekeeper, and since he advertises in a Norwegian-American newspaper, he clearly wants a Norwegian-speaking housekeeper. The woman has five children, all with American names: Le Roy, Imogene, Teddy, Kenneth, and Earl, because their recently deceased father “simply couldn’t bear these Norwegian names. Now we’ve come to America, we’ll be Americans, he always said.”¹⁷⁷

The two novels written and published in the 1880s do not even mention the issue of name changing. The authors obviously felt that other aspects of Norwegian immigrant experience were more important. However, in one of Mr. Plummer’s dialogues in Krog Janson’s novel, he pronounces Dina’s last name as “Nelson.” The narrator, however, uses “Nilsen” consequently. This signals either that the Nilsens used “Nelson” among Americans but “Nilsen” within the family and the Norwegian community, or that Mr. Plummer has difficulties pronouncing the Norwegian name.

People from rural Norway often had their farm name as a middle name. Many Norwegian farmers stopped using this name when they came to the United States, and this is also the case with Jonas: “My farm name Aasbak was useless in English.”¹⁷⁸ He signs the letter “John.”

3.2. Language, Work, Education, and Social Class

Language and jobs were closely connected in the immigrant community of Minneapolis. As newcomers with limited knowledge of English, the majority of the Norwegian-American immigrants had to settle for the jobs that were available and often the ones no Americans wanted, low-paid jobs that involved hard manual labor. This is also often the case for immigrants in Norway and other countries today. Typical jobs for male immigrants were working on sewer or other ditch-digging crews or in one of the many mills, washing floors in stores and saloons, railroad construction and repairing, factory and brewery work, and house

¹⁷⁶ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 75.

¹⁷⁷ Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 233.

¹⁷⁸ Wist (Arnljot), *Nykommerbilleder: Jonas Olsens første Aar i Amerika*. 34: “Mit Gaardsnavn Aasbak, (...) var ubrugelig on English.” My translation.

construction. These types of jobs were to a great extent unfamiliar to the Norwegian immigrants, who for the most part came from the countryside in Norway and were not used to the urban way of life. Many of the immigrants who were employed in seasonal jobs in the sawmills, lumber yards and in the house construction business had a hard time finding paid work during the winter, and quite a few sought the opportunity to hire out to lumber camps.¹⁷⁹ Rølvaag's Nils Vaag in *The Boat of Longing* does this. In *Bag gardinet*, Daniel Nilsen's first job was on a boat on Lake Michigan, he later works in a brick factory and lumber yard. A chief purpose of both jobs was to send money to his children in Norway. When the immigrants had saved up enough money, many chose to buy land in the outskirts of the city where they could build a house and start a family. Several immigrants also bought farmland to live and farm outside the city and in other places both within and outside Minnesota.

After acquiring some knowledge of English, an immigrant could advance to jobs such as clerk, bartender, and saloon or boarding house keeper. Some also opened grocery stores or worked as shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and tailors. Wist's Jonas Olsen, after working on the sewer crew for some time, starts working in a grocery store on Second Avenue as an errand boy and is later hired as store clerk when his English has improved. It is the Norwegian snob, Lomwiig, who recommends Jonas to the grocery store owner, Jenkins.

Young boys could earn money by selling newspapers or work as office boys, and this is what the sixteen year old Arne Nilsen in *Bag gardinet* does. After some time, the boss moves him out to work on a railroad construction crew with his father, Daniel, who is also a union man for the railroad construction workers. Later Arne is hired as an office boy at an engineering office and Dina makes a living selling her needlework. In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, Jonas' cousin Lewis Salmon sums up what jobs the Norwegian-Americans do in Minneapolis:

Oh, for the most part they *peile lumber* and some of them *vorker* in the sawmills and others in the flourmills. About two dozen are *klerker* in *storum* but they are in a sort of class by themselves – not much more than their collars and ties and clothes, you know, and walking sticks and shiny shoes and a brass front. There are many Norwegian *bartendera*, and they are pleasant and nice people. I know them all.¹⁸⁰

Female Norwegian-American immigrants worked as maids for rich American or better off Norwegian-American families, as clerks, factory workers, housekeepers, seamstresses, and many also worked as untrained midwives and nurses for the poor. In the 1890-census, 80 percent of all female Norwegian immigrants who worked outside the home were listed under

¹⁷⁹ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 23.

“domestic and personal services.”¹⁸¹ Kristine Dahl, Nils Vaag’s friend in *The Boat of Longing*, works as a midwife in the Bohemian Flats, although she has no education from neither Norway nor the US. According to a contemporary Norwegian-American observer, Scandinavian-American girls were popular hired girls in both American and Norwegian-American homes. They were paid from \$1.50 to \$2.50 a week, a salary which could be difficult to live on for some Norwegian city girls who were used to a higher standard of life in their home country.¹⁸² Dina Nilsen in *Bag gardinet* earns \$3 a week working as a hired girl for the Plummers. She was recommended to the Plummers by their previous Norwegian-American maid, Agnes Prytz. Before this, she worked in a paper factory sorting rags. According to Lovoll, statistics indicate that the number of Norwegian-American women who sought factory work was low compared to immigrant women from southern and eastern Europe.¹⁸³ The immigrant women in Nils Vaag’s rooming house in *The Boat of Longing* work as shop assistants, shirt factory workers and clerks in department stores. They are from Scandinavia, Russia, and Germany. Both Dina Nilsen, Jonas Olsen, and Nils Vaag all get jobs through earlier immigrants who have lived in Minneapolis for some time. It was common practice that the earlier arrivals, often friends or family, helped the newcomers get started in the new country.

The high unemployment rate that at times existed in Minneapolis meant that some Norwegian-American girls had to resort to working as prostitutes, and as early as 1880 the city had four brothels.¹⁸⁴ Prostitution tends to segregate to certain sections of the cities, and from 1880 the lower streets along the west bank of the Mississippi from Third Avenue to Hennepin Avenue, was considered the “red light district” of Minneapolis.¹⁸⁵ Prostitution was actually a fairly common trend among women in many European immigrant groups, most often serving as a source of supplemental income when money ran short rather than as the main source of income.¹⁸⁶ In order to get rid of this problem, Norwegian-American newspapers warned girls not to come to the cities before they had secured work there, because recruitment to brothels was done among poor, unemployed women.¹⁸⁷ Odd S. Lovoll

¹⁸⁰ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 18.

¹⁸¹ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 252-253.

¹⁸² Andreas Ueland, “Af vore Indvandereres Liv: Før Minneapolis blev Storby”, *Decorah-Posten* March 6, 1923.

¹⁸³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 312.

¹⁸⁴ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 50.

¹⁸⁵ Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities: An Ecological and Statistical Study of Social Trends in Minneapolis and St. Paul*, Vol ix, 361.

¹⁸⁶ Discussions on e-mail with Ken Luebbering, scholar, lecturer, and co-author of *Immigrant Women in the Settlement of Missouri* (Columbia and London: Missouri University Press, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 253, 254.

mentions that in the bigger cities “[homes] were built to receive immigrant women, and societies were organized to save them from the sinister activity of the brothel proprietors.”¹⁸⁸ Some families and single women also rented out rooms to boarders to earn money, a custom common among all immigrant groups.

Byron J. Nordstrom examines the immigration work patterns using the following categories: high white collar, low white collar, skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled, and his conclusion is that the Norwegians in the sixth ward in 1910 had occupations that fall in under the categories skilled, semiskilled, or unskilled.¹⁸⁹ This illustrates that the Norwegian immigrants for the most part were workers, but Nordstrom points out that many more second-generation Norwegians belonged to the low white collar group or were in the education system than were their parents.¹⁹⁰ According to David Mauk’s preliminary statistical results, a little more than 40% of Norwegian-American men (first and second generation, 203 men total) were skilled labourers, while almost 16% were unskilled. Men in the professions worked as ministers, physicians, professors, teachers, in addition to lawyers, newspaper editors, and engineers.¹⁹¹ Of the 62 women in the survey, 43.5% of the women were skilled workers, such as dressmakers and seamstresses, while 25.8% were semi-skilled and in service, such as cooks, housekeepers, servants, and secretaries. Almost 20% were unskilled workers, e.g. laundresses, office girls. Women worked in the professionals as teachers and nurses (almost 10%).¹⁹² Information on the website of the public library in Minneapolis reports that in 1900 the city had more working women, mostly immigrants, living in rented rooms, than most other cities in the country.¹⁹³ This may have been partly because young Norwegian-American girls, as well as other immigrant girls, from the adjacent countryside and towns hired out to families in Minneapolis when they were considered old enough to provide for themselves.

The Norwegian-Americans who had the capital and the opportunity to start their own businesses often hired other Norwegian-Americans to work for them. They also, as Odd S. Lovoll points out, depended on the support and money from the rest of the Norwegian-

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 253.

¹⁸⁹ Byron J. Nordstrom, “Ethnicity and Community in the Sixth Ward of Minneapolis in 1910”. *Scandinavians and Other Immigrants in Urban America: The Proceedings of a Research Conference, October 26-27, 1984*. ed. Odd S. Lovoll (Northfield, Minnesota: Saint Olaf College Press, 1985),41-42.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹¹ This data is taken from another census sample of Mauk’s, from his preliminary results for *The Heart of the Heartland*.

¹⁹² Statistics in this paragraph come from Mauk’s preliminary results for his book in process, *The Heart of the Heartland*.

¹⁹³ Minneapolis Public Library, “A History of Minneapolis”, <http://www.mpls.lib.mn.us/history/re1.asp> (accessed November 9, 2006).

American community.¹⁹⁴ The existence of these stores and saloons were conditioned by the Norwegian Americans' money, but the Norwegian-American customers also appreciated being able to speak Norwegian on the premises. The Scandinavian-American stores used the Norwegian-American newspapers to advertise sales and new products, and this in turn helped finance these newspapers. When Jonas and his colleague Simonsen go into business together and buy the grocery store from Jenkins, Jonas turns to advertising in Norwegian-American newspaper in order to sell cod and potatoes: "A few days later no one spoke of anything but cod and potatoes in the Scandinavian homes in Minneapolis."¹⁹⁵

There were a few Norwegian-Americans in important positions in Minneapolis as well, but in 1881, Andreas Ueland was the only attorney-at-law of Scandinavian birth in the town, and he subsequently got many clients from the Scandinavian countries.¹⁹⁶ He appears as a character in Kristofer Janson's *Bag gardinet*, when the poor Norwegian-American alcoholic and ex-lawyer Linner visits Ueland at his office in the city hall on Christmas Eve: "I have always had respect for you, Mr. Judge. Your name is one of the proud names in Norway's history, you see."¹⁹⁷

Around 1900, there were more Norwegian-American lawyers and police men in Minneapolis. "As their numbers grew during the 1880s, Norwegians and Swedes also held prominent positions in local civic life, serving as judges, commissioners of city agencies, and leaders of the city and county school systems."¹⁹⁸ Political office gave social status and influence among the Norwegian-Americans but also among the rest of the city's population.¹⁹⁹ In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, the politicians are very interested in getting the Norwegian-Americans' votes in an upcoming election, making appearances and giving speeches about the greatness of Norway and its population, but they use the same approach with the Irish Americans to collect *their* votes. At the dance in Harmonia Hall, a man is giving a speech when Jonas and Ragna enter:

Ragna told him it was Ames, the mayor of Minneapolis. There is a city election in the fall, she said, and Ames developed a great love for Scandinavians when elections drew near. (...) It was said that Ames was to speak at a Catholic church auction later that evening, an event that also would be concluded with dancing and some kegs of beer. It

¹⁹⁴ Odd S. Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930* (Champaign, Illinois: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1988), 157.

¹⁹⁵ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 79.

¹⁹⁶ Ueland, *Recollections of an Immigrant*, 50.

¹⁹⁷ Janson, *Bag gardinet*, 116: "Jeg har altid havt Respekt for Dem, hr. Dommer, Deres Navn er et af de stolte Navne i Norges Historie, ser De." My translation.

¹⁹⁸ Mauk's preliminary draft of *The Heart of the Heartland*, 21.

¹⁹⁹ Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930*, 179.

was also important before an election that the Irish were told what great and marvelous people they were.²⁰⁰

Albert A. Ames was mayor of Minneapolis in 1876, 1883-84, and 1887-88.²⁰¹ Andreas Ueland says the same thing in his memoirs as Ragna does in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, “we Scandinavians were always highly flattered at such meetings.”²⁰² To be able to vote in the 1880s you had to be male, over 21 years old, have lived in the United States one year, in the State for four months and have a declaration to become a citizen, and the party leaders were active in getting the immigrants qualified for voting by paying for their declaration to become citizens.²⁰³

According to L. DeAne Lagerquist, the Norwegian immigrants had the reputation of being far more literate than many other immigrant groups, and she suggests that the linkage between religion and education in Norway is the reason.²⁰⁴ In Norway, people were encouraged and taught to read their own Bibles and psalm books.

Arne Nilsen in *Bag gardinet* decides towards the end of the novel to get an education: He wants to study engineering. After Dina drowns herself in the Mississippi after losing the trial against Frank Plummer, Daniel hangs himself in front of the Plummers’ home because he feels that the Plummers have taken everything from him. Arne is now alone in the world, except for Dinas baby, the result of the rape. Arne leaves the baby with some Norwegian while he sells the house and everything he owns to pay for his education. Arne also hopes to be able to continue his father’s union work for the workers and the poor as well.

In *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, Astrid’s friend, Helene Nielsen, is a doctor. Drude Krog Janson may have had in mind that Helene got her education at the Woman’s Medical School in Chicago. This school opened in 1870, and we know for a fact that Scandinavian women attended it and graduated in the late 1880s.²⁰⁵ The Norwegian women in the novel are very skeptical toward a female doctor, and at a tea party some of the women present discuss Helene after she has left them: “‘I wonder if she has any kind of practice as a doctor,’ said Julia. ‘Doctor!’ said Mrs. Falanger contemptuously.”²⁰⁶ Odd S. Lovoll mentions that the prejudice against female physicians was slowly being overcome in this period,²⁰⁷ and Drude

²⁰⁰ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 33,34.

²⁰¹ Øverland, “Notes to Book 1” in *The Rise of Jonas Olsen*, 420.

²⁰² Ueland, *Recollections of an Immigrant*, 52.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰⁴ Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows: Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women*, 154.

²⁰⁵ Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930*, 223.

²⁰⁶ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, 71.

²⁰⁷ Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930*, 222.

Krog Janson and her husband were passionate about the role and situation of women. Krog Janson describes how Astrid Holm attends the seminary and eventually becomes a minister for an American congregation in Chicago. In a letter to her friend Helene, Astrid writes that she hopes to someday “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.”²⁰⁸ In reality, women were not ordained “into the ministry of word and sacrament in Norwegian-American Lutheran churches until 1970.”²⁰⁹

Many immigrants saw the United States as the land of opportunities. Norwegian immigrants usually left home to achieve financial security through employment or further education. This way they could climb up the social ladder, something they thought they had no chance at in their home country, and they believed that America was the place where “everyone” succeeded. Yet, many immigrants got their dreams crushed when they met the harsh reality in their new country. Several men and women had to settle for worse living and working conditions than in Norway. For many, however, this was only the first stage, and after learning the language they were actually able to avail themselves of the ample opportunities the country had to offer. For others, day laboring remained the only offer because they were never able to save up enough money to attend school or go back home to Norway. Some saw returning to their home country a sign of defeat.

Long and hard days was the normal way of life for the working immigrants. Usually they had only one day off and not much time for anything else. Nils Vaag in *The Boat of Longing* spends his Sundays off walking around the neighborhood and along the river. Andreas Ueland was one of the immigrants who *did* go to church, and he remembers spending his Sundays in the 1870s-80s attending evening services either at a Norwegian or a Swedish church when the Norwegian hired girls who had the evening off could come too.²¹⁰ On the way to and from church the young immigrants spent the time to get to know each other, flirt and ask each other to dances.

As time passed and the immigrants earned more money, they tended to move away from downtown Minneapolis and buy houses farther from the center. They were soon followed by new immigrants from both Norway and other countries who settled down, and the Norwegian and Scandinavian neighborhoods were watered down. It is believed the Norwegians assimilated more easily than immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. This

²⁰⁸ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, 149.

²⁰⁹ Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows: Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women*, 153.

may have something to do with the fact that the Norwegians were mostly Lutherans, as opposed to the many Catholics from other European countries, and the Norwegian immigrants did not differ much in appearance and temperament from the “Americans.”

All the four novels in this thesis focus in some way on social class. As newcomers, the protagonists start at different rungs at the bottom of the social ladder, but they all intend to climb higher. In *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, August Holm, a failed businessman from Norway, has enough capital to start his own saloon. The author of the novel was an upper class immigrant in Minneapolis, and she writes about the immigrants of her social class. The Holm family was respected in Norway and they want to be accepted by the Norwegian upper class in Minneapolis, and thus August Holm rejects manual labor to go into the saloon business. Manual labor had a certain social stigma to it, something which was also true of saloon keepers, but this business benefited from a larger the economic profit.

Astrid Holm is not a representative female immigrant, since she does not work. When she leaves her family, she decides to become a minister, also not a representative female immigrant vocation. Drude Krog Janson also depicts the Norwegian-born upper class in the city, particularly through the tea party at Mrs. Hammer's: “Mr. Hammer's business was prospering, and his wife knew how to spend the money. She loved splendor around her and on her, and her home was always open to guests.”²¹¹ Mrs. Hammer and friends attend banquets, dances, and balls, all arranged to gather the elite.

In *Bag gardinet*, the hard working Nilsen family never manage to become self-sufficient. Employed by the rich American Plummer family, Arne hurts his back due to heavy lifting on the railroad repairing crew, Dina is raped by the son of the house and commits suicide by drowning, and Daniel loses his hearing and hangs himself outside the Plummer's home after the death of his daughter. At the end the novel there is some hope, because Arne, after seeing how dependent they had been on others, decides to go to school and become an engineer. The depiction of their jobs and circumstances is realistic, no matter how tragic and sentimental the end of the novel is.

In *The Boat of Longing*, Nils never climbs the social ladder, but remains a common laborer throughout the novel. He starts off cleaning saloons and stores, typical immigrant-work. During the winter he works in a logging camp and towards the end of the novel he is employed on a traveling railroad repairing crew, a tramp-like life which does not allow for settling down and therefore he does not participate much in society.

²¹⁰ Ueland, “Af vore Indvandrerers Liv: Før Minneapolis blev Storby”, *Decorah-Posten*, March 6, 1923.

²¹¹ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, 63.

In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, Jonas Olsen is the “black sheep” of his family. He is lazy and craves fame and fortune, but is shocked to see the average immigrant’s reality in Minneapolis. His first job is working on a sewer crew, but he is recommended to a grocery store by another Norwegian “black sheep,” Lomwiig. In his new job, Jonas cheats the customers and manages to run another grocery store out of business. Being such a “good” businessman is rewarded with partnership in the store, and he is now welcomed into a higher class, as a contrast to earlier in the novel when “Jonas had been keenly aware of the social gap between himself and the Simonsen family. (...) [Mrs. Simonsen’s] arrogance was evident and he could see that she looked down upon a working man.”²¹² While spending time with his new business partner and his daughter he neglects church and previous friends. He is even considering moving out of the boarding house and into a better flat now that he has money. But before he manages to make this into a reality, the grocery store goes bankrupt due to his partner’s bad investments and Jonas has to start all over again. The story of Jonas continues in volume two and three of the trilogy.

3.3. Church

Most Norwegians remained Lutherans after their arrival in America.²¹³ Several researchers, among them Jon Gjerde and Carlton C. Qualey, have claimed that the absence of a state church and the more tolerant religious freedom made it possible for different Lutheran churches to come into existence, and many churches competed for new Norwegian members in America, among these both Norwegian-American and American churches. The fact that there were more churches to choose from probably made it possible for more Norwegian Americans to stay Lutheran instead of joining Baptist or Methodist churches if they were not satisfied with the church they belonged to. The many different congregations made it possible for the immigrants to join one that suited them and their theological understanding of Lutheranism and Christianity.²¹⁴

The history of Norwegian Lutheran denominations in America is a complex one, with name changes, separations and unions of the different churches. In and around the 1880s the most important Norwegian Lutheran churches were the Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853, and the Conference, founded in 1870. Others worth mentioning are the Norwegian Augustana Synod, founded in 1870, Hauge’s Synod, founded in 1876, and Eielsen’s Synod, founded in

²¹²Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 71.

²¹³Semmingsen. *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 80.

²¹⁴Information in this paragraph is from Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 35, 36.

1846. In 1890, the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood (1887) joined the Norwegian Augustana Synod and the Conference and formed the United Church. In 1917, the Norwegian Synod, Hauge's Synod and the United Church joined to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, which was later known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church.²¹⁵

A Norwegian newspaper article on the history of Minneapolis reports that the first Norwegian congregation in Minneapolis was founded in 1868, but the identity of this congregation is not revealed.²¹⁶ Andreas Ueland writes in an article in *Decorah-Posten* in 1923 that the Norwegian Synod was the most popular church in the beginning of the 1870s and 1880s, because the name convinced people that the doctrine was "all right."²¹⁷ He also explains that the Conference's popularity increased when its college, the Augsburg Seminary, moved to Minneapolis in 1872. Two influential Norwegian professors worked at this college, namely Sven Oftedal and Georg Sverdrup,²¹⁸ and they also contributed greatly to the Conference's popularity. Sven Oftedal is mentioned in Wist's novel as an influential and popular professor in Minneapolis, just as he was in real life.

Andreas Ueland believes that Kristofer Janson played an important role in making more people interested in "høiere Aandsliv," (intellectual and cultural life) especially those who regularly attended the cultural events and meetings at his house.²¹⁹ Janson was known as a great speaker in Minneapolis, and people came to his services to hear him speak even though they did not belong to his Unitarian congregation. In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, Jonas is invited by the Norwegian store clerk, Lanberg, to the Church of the Nazarene and Kristofer Janson's sermon. Lanberg says that Janson is an interesting lecturer:

'For my part I don't care all that much for the religious aspects of his work,' Lanberg remarked. 'but there's much to learn from Janson. He's an expert in history as well as literature. And he's always entertaining. You should hear him knock down old gods. It's quite a picnic. I would rather listen to him than go to the Theatre Comique. And the way he makes fun of the other pastors,' continued Landberg. 'That is a regular comedy!'²²⁰

²¹⁵ Dates in this paragraph are based on information from Todd Nichol, "Introduction" in *Vivacious Daughter: Seven Lectures on the Religious Situation Among Norwegians in America*. By Herman Amberg Preus. Edited and translated by Todd W. Nichol (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990).

²¹⁶ Unknown newspaper and date. Found in the Local History Collection, p1523 at the NAHA archives in Northfield, MN.

²¹⁷ Ueland, "Af Vore Indvandreres Liv: Før Minneapolis blev Storby", *Decorah-Posten*, March 6, 1923.

²¹⁸ Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 135.

²¹⁹ Ueland, "Af vore Indvandreres Liv: Før Minneapolis blev Storby", *Decorah-Posten*, March 6, 1923.

²²⁰ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 54-55.

The Theatre Comique mentioned in this quote was a place with all-male customers, very attentive hostesses, and female dancers “who did not always adhere to Victorian standards of decency.”²²¹

Kristofer Janson moved to Minneapolis in 1881 to start a Unitarian congregation, because “American Unitarianism was primarily a reaction against Calvinism and Puritanism with their stern doctrines and ascetic ideals of life.”²²² Jonas in Wist’s novel *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* thought it best to stay clear of the Unitarian minister:

He didn’t want to be tempted away from the correct doctrine now that he had become a church member. Jonas had rather vague notions of just what this doctrine might be. Nor did he feel it was necessary for him to know much about it. Actually, he thought it sufficient that the ministers – who had religion as their *bisnis* and moreover were well paid for their trouble - should understand it.²²³

Of the four novels investigated in this thesis, this novel most extensively includes the church issue, an important aspect of life for many Norwegian immigrants. Krog Janson writes about it from a different angle. In her novel, Astrid, becomes a Unitarian minister for an American congregation, after attending a school in Pennsylvania. Kristofer Janson felt that the Norwegian state church was too narrow-minded and he preferred the Unitarian beliefs in a personal God and the fact that they did not put supreme trust in the Bible, and Krog Janson shared her husband’s beliefs, working as a secretary to her husband, and teaching Sunday school for the children. Both the Jansons were concerned with women’s position in society, so it is not surprising that Krog Janson makes her character receive an education.

The Norwegian immigrants’ church functioned as a meeting place and as a place of prayer, but the churches also provided Sunday school, choirs and women’s societies and many also published books. The Lutheran church played an crucial part in keeping up ethnic self-awareness with the help of its many institutions,²²⁴ as long as it “remained divided along cultural lines, whereas it developed an integrative role as soon as these barriers had come down.”²²⁵ After some time, the churches began to Americanize their activities and social events, and started to arrange picnics.

When Jonas Olsen in Wist’s novel *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* arrives in Minneapolis in the 1880s, The Norwegian Synod and the Conference were the most popular

²²¹ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 50.

²²² Sveino, “Kristofer Janson and his American Experience”, 91.

²²³ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen’s First Year in America*, 54.

²²⁴ Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows: Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women*, 6.

Lutheran churches among Norwegian-Americans in the city, and subsequently the two congregations are the ones Jonas considers. He has planned to become rich by graduating from the seminary as a pastor, and has read in letters from America that the ministers preached in Norwegian in America, so he is surprised when his cousin Lewis says that this is changing:

'But don't they preach in Norwegian?' Jonas asked in surprise. In the letters from America it had appeared that the church was almost more Norwegian than in Norway. 'Yes *o'kors*,' answered Mister Salmon, but seemed unsure. 'Up to now they have been bound te [sic] preach Norwegian *ud af konsideration* for the newcomers. But in five or ten years Norwegian will be a dead language, and it will altogether be *spika* only English. As for me now, for instance, if I'm to be edified by a sermon it must be on English. 'Oh, you fool,' said his wife. 'You've never *attenda en meeten*' since you were confirmed.'²²⁶

The church issue and the language issue were as we can see closely related. Cousin Lewis Salmon represents here the opinion of many of the second- and third-generation Norwegians in America, who did not feel the same strong connection to the Norwegian language as the first generation. More and more churches saw the inevitable language change approaching, and to keep the later generations coming to church, they needed to preach in English. When Jonas finds out that there is little money to be made in being a pastor, he decides not to become one after all.

Jonas falls in love with a Danish hired girl, Ragna Riis, who works at his boarding house. He is told by his Swedish boss Nels that she only speaks English, and she becomes his motivation for learning English as quickly as possible because he wants to ask her to a dance at Harmonia Hall. Such events often gathered all Norwegians in the area. Harmonia Hall was built in 1884 on the corner of Third Street and Second Avenue South and designed by the Norwegian-American Carl F. Struck.²²⁷ The night of the dance Jonas discovers that Ragna understands Norwegian as well. His Swedish boss just wanted to make fun of him and had told Ragna to speak nothing but English to Jonas. None of the Norwegian-American pastors came to the event at Harmonia Hall: "He regretted that Professor Oftedal, Pastor Vangsnes, and Professor Falk Gjertsen didn't make an appearance. Ragna believed that they had stayed away because dance was included in the program."²²⁸ The pastors were real people who lived and worked in Minneapolis at this time. While contemplating his future marriage with Ragna,

²²⁵ Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 127.

²²⁶ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 10.

²²⁷ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 136.

²²⁸ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 35.

because he is confident that she will accept a proposal from him, he decides that he should join a congregation:

As he strolled around downtown he thought of his coming marriage and that he should then be a member of a Norwegian congregation- preferably the Synod congregation where Vangsnes was pastor, since he didn't want to be in a Conference congregation along with the unpleasant Mrs. Salmon.²²⁹

In other words, his reasons for choosing denominations were not religious, but rather practical, namely avoiding his cousin's wife. The Norwegian Synod was the more conservative of the two denominations. Jonas meets Professor Oftedal from the Conference in a store on Cedar Avenue, and the store clerk delivers a lecture on the "theological squabbles" the Norwegian Americans have had in America:

'Aren't they all Lutherans?' he said.'

'*O'kors,*' answered the clerk, 'and that's why they are always fighting among themselves. They stand together when it comes to *dæmonitioner*, but they are always at each other. This is the way in the best of families. The children fight and argue among themselves but as soon as they are among strangers they behave in an exemplary fashion.'

'But why do they fight if they all agree?'

'Agree? Are you crazy? Of course they don't agree. They are only in agreement on the main issue – they disagree about everything else.(.....)

'(...)The thing is, you know, that they can all prove – with reference to scripture – that the others have the wrong doctrine, and since a church must obviously be controlled by those who have the right doctrine, this is an issue of the highest importance.'²³⁰

Jonas finds it difficult to believe what the clerk has just told him, so he introduces himself to Professor Oftedal after the clerk has finished. Jonas has decided that he wants to find and join a Lutheran congregation which resembles the state church in Norway. But Professor Oftedal says that the Conference is nothing like the Norwegian state church and that Jonas should join the Synod because it is "the spitting image of the Norwegian state church."²³¹

In the state church there is room for everyone and everything. It is much like a flexible ostrich stomach that can consume any rubbish you feed it. But that has nothing to do with a true Christian faith and a free church, my lad!²³²

The Conference, on the other hand, was, according to Oftedal, "a free church with free congregations."²³³ Neither the Conference nor the Synod wanted to be compared to the

²²⁹ Ibid., 26.

²³⁰ Ibid., 36-37.

²³¹ Ibid., 38.

²³² Ibid.

Norwegian state church. Jonas, who does not understand Oftedal's irony, decides to join Pastor Vangsnes' congregation, he had after all heard that Vangsnes was "a far better man than Oftedal."²³⁴ Jonas admits to himself that he only pretends to be interested in church issues because everyone else appears to find them so interesting, and because it seems to be instrumental in getting ahead. He has, at the end of the day, only been to church once since his confirmation and that was because of an attempt "to flatter the dean's wife."²³⁵ Jonas was probably not the only immigrant with a pragmatic view of religion, and according to Lovoll, many immigrants just attended the nearest Lutheran church, not developing a loyalty to any specific congregation.²³⁶ They did not prioritize traveling across the city to go to a particular church because it was not necessarily very important what kind of congregation they belonged to. Though most Norwegian immigrants were Lutherans, the Lutheran Church was not as strong among urban Norwegians as it was among the rural, but the ethnicity that gathered the rural Norwegian-Americans through church, was compensated for by clubs and organizations of all kinds that "provided a social bond for the urban inhabitants and fostered an identification with Norway and things Norwegian."²³⁷

After a drinking bout with an old friend from Norway, Jonas has to report to the police. His friend, Nikolai Skummebekk, is robbed and Jonas has to defend himself. The robbers are arrested but the event scares Jonas into calling on Pastor Vangsnes and becoming a church member as soon as possible. Vangsnes greets him and says he will take care of Jonas' application. Ragna, on the other hand, is not exactly thrilled about Jonas entering the Synod: "'Don't you approve?' he asked. 'Oh yes, there is nothing wrong in it, as long as you are a man,' she said."²³⁸ After this, Ragna keeps her distance to him and instead of telling her the truth about the drinking bout, which she opposes, he avoids her and the confrontation:

He sought comfort in the church, which he regarded as an indisputable sign of his personal honesty and righteousness. He had joined the congregation of his own free will, and this was irrefutable proof that he walked the path of a Christian. (...) Jonas wanted to make it in this country. This had always been his intention. But the first condition for promotion was the possession of a good name and reputation, and here the church was so powerful that it was practical to wear its cloak of respectability. It would certainly do no harm during a business transaction to drop a reference to membership in the Congregation of Our Savior."²³⁹

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago Before 1930*, 117.

²³⁷ Stanley S. Guterman, "The Americanization of Norwegian immigrants: A Study in Historical Sociology", *Sociology and Social Research* (Ottawa, Canada: Carlton University, 1968). 266.

²³⁸ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 46.

²³⁹ Ibid., 46-47.

Jonas also tries to use the church to get a date with Ragna, but she is not interested in going to Our Savior's church with him. Ragna was brought up in the Hauge Synod, which was a pietistic low-church named after the Norwegian lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge. In the Hauge Synod, lay preachers were common and the pastors did not wear the cassock and the ruff which other Lutheran pastors wore.²⁴⁰ The Hauge Synod "de-emphasized formal worship and stressed personal faith experience."²⁴¹ In the Synod, the congregation determined who could be members and the pastors gave a "rigorous examination of the faith and life of applicants (...) and required the congregations or congregational councils to vote on the admission of prospective members,"²⁴² whereas in Norway, baptism was enough. The Norwegian Synod was "characterized by adherence to theological orthodoxy and strong ties to the Church of Norway 'high church' tradition."²⁴³ Ragna's Haugean upbringing is probably the reason why she disapproves of Jonas' membership in the Synod.

Jonas is, as mentioned earlier, employed in a grocery store in North Minneapolis. The rumor spreads that the store is cheating the customers and they lose more and more business in this area:

To make up for their loss of customers in North Minneapolis, Simonsen had acquired some new ones in a small Scandinavian area in South Minneapolis. In part this was thanks to Jonas, who had made advantage of his church membership and advertised among the members of Our Savior.²⁴⁴

After Jonas starts working in the store he has less time for the church and he is afraid that his absence is noticed. At work Jonas is busy ruining the rival store's business, he goes to the length of paying an author to write a novel that badmouths the other store and its owner and distributes it around the neighborhood. Jonas contemplates this on his way to church:

He also had a vague notion that his recent activities may not have been fully in keeping with the orthodox observance of his religion. So he now wished to establish that he nevertheless stood on a good footing with the Synod. (...) But he went to the extraordinary step of dropping a whole quarter in the box, and after the service he took Vangsnes aside and gave him two dollars for the Zulu mission. The pastor smiled and was quite friendly, and Jonas's conscience was redeemed."²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Øverland, "Notes to Book II" in *The Rise of Jonas Olsen*, 425.

²⁴¹ Luther Seminary, "Record Group 4: Hauge Synod", <http://www.luthersem.edu/archives/Collections/4-Hauge.asp> (accessed November 14, 2007).

²⁴² Nichol, "Introduction" in *Vivacious Daughter*, 16.

²⁴³ Luther Seminary, "Record group 3: Norwegian Synod", <http://www.luthersem.edu/archives/Collections/3-Norwegian.asp> (accessed November 14, 2007).

²⁴⁴ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 63.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

Drude Krog Janson's novel *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* does not emphasize the church or the church issue among the Norwegian Americans. It is not mentioned whether Astrid or other characters in the novel attend church or church meetings. The immigrants were often more concerned with making a living in the new country, something which often required working on Sundays. This could lead to neglect of the church in periods. Some took the time to go to church on the holidays but not during the rest of the year, although some fortunate few had money and jobs that enabled them to afford to spend time, energy and money on the church and its social events.

Towards the end of the novel, when Astrid has broken up with her fiancée Smith, she meets the Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. He was a famous Norwegian writer in this period and spent some time in America giving lectures, and was a friend of Krog Janson in real life. In this novel, he plays the role as Astrid's savior. She is depressed and in despair after breaking with her father and the life above the saloon, and turns to Bjørnson for advice. He tells her to read and gain insight into her and other women's situation and to find her place in life. Krog Janson uses the voice of Bjørnson to criticize the state church in Norway in the novel. He says:

And Christianity, as it is proclaimed at home, does its part to obstruct us. It says, 'Think about yourself. See to it that you are saved, that you rescue your little soul. Then the others don't matter.' (...) All they care about is to have people in their last moment to swear upon Pontoppidan's explanation of Luther's catechism. (...) Instead of being guardians of morality and apostles of human love in our country, they have become appointed servants in the state church, which every Sunday consigns those to hell who do not swear by the Trinity or on God's need for blood for redemption.²⁴⁶

This is a strong reaction to the state church and what Krog Janson considers to be the lack of religious tolerance in Norway. Bjørnson, in the novel, further suggests that Astrid should become a minister in America. Female ministers in Norway at this time were very rare, if not non-existent. Bjørnson says,

I mean, naturally, not like those I just spoke about, but a minister like those found here in America –gentle, loving men and women who proclaim peace on earth, who do not believe that people are little devils created for hell's fire. Instead, they have a glowing faith in the victory of goodness in the world and in perpetual progress. They don't stress faith, but life – the way ministers of a liberal persuasion do.²⁴⁷

Astrid follows Bjørnson's advice. She reads history and religion and comes to the conclusion that she does indeed want to become a minister: "She would be a minister who

²⁴⁶ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, 120.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

took as her mission the defense of the oppressed and who taught her fellow beings that the main purpose in life was a noble life.”²⁴⁸ Helene Nielsen, the female doctor and Astrid’s friend, takes her to St. Paul to see a Unitarian minister, Reverend William Gannet, who is able to help Astrid get into the Unitarian University in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Gannet was a prominent Unitarian minister of the Unity Church in St. Paul in reality when Kristofer Janson started working in Minneapolis, and Meadville was the University where several Norwegian Americans were educated to become Unitarian ministers.²⁴⁹ In the last chapter of the novel, Astrid writes a letter to Helene, explaining what God and religion means to her and reveals that she will be working in Chicago.

Beyond that I am not sure, but 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.²⁵⁰

The last scene of the novel is Astrid’s ordination as a minister in Unity Church in Chicago, and she feels like “[s]he had reached her destination.”²⁵¹

3.4. Temperance

Even though the Norwegian-American Lutheran clergy condemned the use of alcohol, the Norwegian immigrants carried with them from their home country the tradition of drinking alcohol at solemn occasions, like baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and at Christmas.²⁵² In America, however, there were fewer restrictions on personal conduct and thus drunkenness was probably greater among Norwegian-Americans than among Norwegians.²⁵³ Many were exhausted from working and living in a foreign country and found comfort and entertainment in the saloons with Scandinavian owners and customers. The temperance movement among Norwegians in the US had its breakthrough in the 1880s, and the newspapers supported the cause.²⁵⁴ The Norwegian-American temperance movement in Minnesota was dominated by the Lutheran clergy.²⁵⁵ Many immigrants, both among the poor and the more affluent, blamed alcohol and the saloons for the poverty and miserable conditions in some areas. The temperance movement was the inspiration for sentimental and

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 140.

²⁴⁹ Orm Øverland, “Notes” in *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, by Drude Krog Janson, translated by Gerald Thorson (Baltimore, Maryland: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 158.

²⁵⁰ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, 149.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 150.

²⁵² Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 152.

²⁵³ Ibid., 154.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 155.

often didactic fiction and prose.²⁵⁶ All four authors in this thesis were also engaged in the movement for temperance, and this is reflected in the novels.

In *Bag gardinet*, Mrs. Plummer has recently engaged herself in the fashionable temperance movement. However, she has not yet had the time to enroll in a temperance association and feels no remorse after having served alcohol at a dinner party. Janson thus depicts the shallow involvement and double standard of Mrs. Plummer concerning temperance through the use of satire.

Kristofer Janson was one of many who saw the indifference and injustice that the immigrants experienced in American cities, and exemplifies this in his novel with the hand-to-mouth existence of the Nilsen family. Lloyd Hustvedt claims that the title of Janson's novel implies that "behind the curtain" of the civilized city "exists a ruthless power structure, indifferent to the suffering it causes."²⁵⁷ The novel deals with the exploitation of the workers, while the rich American family reaps the benefit of their workers' toil. But as also suggested by the title "Behind the Curtain", there is a focus on the less savory sides of immigrant life and of the city Minneapolis. Janson takes the readers "behind the curtain" of the city:

There is something called: "behind the curtains" – and there is a lot in Minneapolis that take place behind the curtains. In the newspapers they say that this and that evil has been eradicated, but it has only been moved – behind the curtains. And the city proudly displays its moral, decent face, which is as moral as an American Sunday – but no one talks about what takes place behind the curtains²⁵⁸

The things Janson explicitly mentions as society's "evils" are the theater variete (where the men admire the women's legs), saloons, and gambling in a hotel room in Nicolett House, one of the city's best hotels.²⁵⁹ Janson may also have intended the secret underground bars that existed in Minneapolis in this period as one of the evils "behind the curtain."

In *Bag gardinet*, the Norwegian ex-lawyer successful before he started drinking, now violin-playing and alcoholic bum Linner, is the example of what alcohol can do to a person. He teaches Arne Nilsen to play the violin and warns him against alcohol:

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 124.

²⁵⁶ Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 141.

²⁵⁷ Lloyd Hustvedt, "The Urban Scene in Norwegian-American Literature", *Scandinavians and Other Immigrants in Urban America: The Proceedings of a Research Conference, October 26-27, 1984*. Edited by Odd S. Lovoll (Northfield, Minnesota: Saint Olaf College Press, 1985), 153.

²⁵⁸ Janson, *Bag gardinet*, 65-66: "Der er noget, som hedder: "bag Gardinerne"- og der er meget i Minneapolis, som foregaar bag Gardinerne. Det hedder i Aviserne, at det og det Onde er utryddet, og saa er det bare flyttet – bag Gardinerne. Og Byen bærer stolt sit sædelig, pene Ansigt til Skue, ligesaa sædeligt som en amerikansk Søndag- men ingen snakker om, hvad der foregaar – bag Gardinerne." My translation.

²⁵⁹ Janson, *Bag gardinet*, 66.

Be careful, young man, that is how I started as well. A merry glass among merry friends, singing and speeches – that is how it starts. Before you know it, you are trapped by the habit. (...) Do you know, what drinking destroys annually in America? More than a third of all the worker homes in need and misery, have become that way because of alcohol.²⁶⁰

In *The Boat of Longing*, a Norwegian girl takes Nils to a secret saloon hidden in a house that looks deserted, where they can buy alcohol and food. The city gave the impression that all such things were wiped out, when they in reality were merely hidden from the public. Larry Millet states that most of these underground bars, or “blind pigs”, apparently were “spectacularly vile, offering rotgut liquor, gambling, and other vices in an environment of filth and stench.”²⁶¹

In *The Boat of Longing*, the author makes it very clear what he thinks of alcohol abuse. Nils clean the floors in saloons on Cedar Avenue, and these were especially dirty after a Saturday night. “Nils couldn’t understand how people could make such beasts of themselves; they scarcely resembled human beings any longer – no, not even animals. (...) Again and again he would say to himself that he’d never touch strong drink.”²⁶² He shares a room in the boarding house with the alcoholic Poet from Norway, who shows Nils all the sides of drunkenness as he rambles on and get angry or sentimental, and probably contributes to Nils’ negative attitude towards alcohol.

In *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* the saloon is not depicted as something positive and Astrid is ashamed to be the daughter of a man who sells alcoholic drinks to people. After breaking with her father and accompanying Dr. Helene Nielsen on house calls, she involves herself in the temperance movement. On these house calls to people in the poorer areas in Minneapolis she saw

how often drunkenness was to blame for this misery. (...) To her it was dreadful to see how this vice was so ingrained in the Norwegian character. When she realized that her father was prospering on this misery and how she herself, even if against her will, had lived on it for a long time, then she felt the need to atone for her sin by helping poor and forsaken wives and mothers (...) She became convinced that she should speak publicly for temperance.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Janson. *Bag gardinet*, 128: “Vær forsigtig, unge Mand; saaledes var det ogsaa jeg begyndte. Et lystig Glas i en lystig Vennekreds, krydret af Sang og Tale – det er Begyndelsen. Før man ved det selv, sidder man i Vanens Snare. (...) Ved de, hvad Drikken aarlig ødelægger her i Amerika? Mere end en Trediepart af alle de Arbejderhjem, som sidder i Nød og Elendighed, er blevne det ved Drikken.” My translation.

²⁶¹ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 124.

²⁶² Rølvaag, *The Boat of Longing*, 97.

²⁶³ Krog Janson, *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*, 140.

In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, the Danish hired girl at Jonas' boarding house is strongly against alcohol:

Ragna said that she liked to dance if the crowd was decent but that she hated drink: she would never marry someone who drank. Jonas argued that a glass of beer with your meal must be acceptable, but when she declared with great determination that this would never be permitted in her home, he thought it would be best to agree with her.²⁶⁴

Rølvaag and Wist's novels were published during a different stage of the temperance movement. The Volstead Act became effective in 1920 and prohibited "the manufacture and sale of intoxicating beverages."²⁶⁵ Odd S. Lovoll has also discussed the saloon in Norwegian-American novels, explaining "[n]o issue concerned the immigrant authors more than the temperance cause. Many of the best writers became advocates for it; the American saloon intrudes almost every novel."²⁶⁶

3.5. Summary

The two novels by Wist and Rølvaag that were written around 1920 discuss aspects of the urban Norwegian immigrant experience that are different from that of the novels from the 1880s. The most important issues that are not discussed by the Jansons are the language question and name changing. Odd S. Lovoll has also mentioned this "shift" in themes among the Norwegian-American writers, stating that "[s]everal of the later authors display greater literary powers than the first generation, and they concern themselves with new aspects of the immigrant community."²⁶⁷ Lovoll explains this partially by the fact that the second-generation surpassed the first-generation immigrants in numbers and "[t]he literature is therefore concerned with the question of preserving Norwegian culture and language in the coming generations."²⁶⁸ The later authors were more aware of the existence of or the need for a Norwegian-American identity than earlier. The Jansons, for example, were more concerned with depicting the injustice immigrants experienced at the time.

All four novels discuss the social difference between the Norwegian immigrants in Minneapolis. Drude Krog Janson's immigrants belong to a different class than those of the three other novels. Jonas Olsen, however, manages to climb the social ladder contrary to the Nilsens and Nils Vaag. Astrid Holm does not work while she is living under her father's roof.

²⁶⁴ Wist, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Year in America*, 35.

²⁶⁵ Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago Before 1930*, 290.

²⁶⁶ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 217.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

She does nothing but walk around the neighborhood daydreaming. Not until she meets Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson does she decide to become a minister, an uncommon occupation for women at the time. In comparison to the “typical” female immigrant, Astrid’s education and job experiences are not representative.

In Minneapolis the immigrants found work in the mills, in the lumber industry or made a living by skills learned in Norway or in the American countryside, for example shoemaking, carpentry, and bricklaying. As the city grew enormously both in size and in number there were jobs available for those without any skills as well, for example in transportation development, construction work, and digging sewers. Nils Vaag, Jonas Olsen, the Nilsen family, and August Holm all take typical immigrant jobs at different stages as they work as janitors, lumber industry, on the sewer crew, in the ethnic grocery store, on the railroad crew, as office boys, as hired girls, and as saloonkeepers. In Jonas’ boarding house, he socializes with the other Scandinavians, he works with Swedes, he attends Norwegian gatherings and dances, drinks in Norwegian and Swedish saloons, and is member of the Norwegian Synod, one of the most popular Lutheran denomination in Minneapolis among Norwegians at this time. But he is also eager to learn English to get a better job and to fit in, and he immediately try to mix the two languages like “everybody” else did around him. This shows that Jonas tries to get acquainted with America through the “Norwegianness” in the city. He wants to be wealthy and well-respected but uses his position in the Norwegian community to achieve this. Most Norwegian immigrants to America became farmers or earned their wages as laborers in lumbering, handicrafts, fishing and shipping.²⁶⁹ The majority of Norwegian immigrants did not live in abundance and affluence but managed to survive on their salaries.²⁷⁰

Even though all four novels take place within the time span 1880s to the early 1900s, the focus of the novels illustrate that they were written at different times. This will be dealt with more extensively in the next chapter.

²⁶⁹ Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 129.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

4. Norwegian Americans

This chapter will look at the themes of ethnicity in relation to the formation of a Norwegian-American identity. The chapter also investigates the importance of the Norwegian-American literature in the formation of such an identity by looking at the reception, sale figures and contemporary reviews for the four novels where available. The authors' views on the Norwegian-American identity and its importance and/or presence will also be discussed, as their opinions can be a key to understanding why these authors chose to write these kinds of novels.

4.1. Ethnic Identity

Becoming American was a gradual process. The immigrants did not automatically lose their “Norwegianness” and become Americans when they entered the USA. There was also no linear progression from ethnic to American, the development was a constant process changing over time.²⁷¹ The Norwegians were forced to change their food habits, clothing, customs, and language as they settled around the US. After some time they were no longer Norwegians, but also not yet considered Americans by the old-stock Americans. Most Norwegians were eager to learn English and to be assimilated or integrated into the American society as quickly as possible. Assimilation was of course not the only way of accommodating to the American society. Some, mostly those living in rural and secluded places, preferred to speak Norwegian and continue their lives as they done in Norway as much as possible, and they only had to speak English when they went into a bigger town to sell their farm products. Eventually, these Norwegian clusters were watered down.

As previously mentioned, it was much more difficult for the urban settlers to hold on to their Norwegian customs and language because they were surrounded by English-speaking people. However, the Norwegian neighborhoods of Minneapolis contained “conditions for preserving Norwegian speech beyond the immigrant generation.”²⁷² The Norwegian institutions, stores and saloons made it possible for the Norwegian language to survive for some time. Norwegian-American speech became a mixture of Norwegian and English, discussed in the previous chapter.

The leaders in the Norwegian-American community debated the community's future in the USA. Some believed Americanization was the only way to go, with full assimilation as

²⁷¹ April R. Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 13, 20.

²⁷² Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 212.

a goal, others were cultural pluralists believing that America would benefit from diverse subcultures, and yet others believed in the melting pot theory that eventually would result in a new type of American. Rølvaag and Wist wrote their novels in the heat of this debate.

According to Odd S. Lovoll, most immigrants “if they reflected on the problem, considered integration to be natural and inescapable.”²⁷³ It was the natural result of becoming a citizen in a new country, where they wanted to be integrated and earn a living. But the immigrants had not supposed that living in the US would demand of them to leave their old way of life, and in this way the experience “fortified the wish to retain specific aspects of the old life.”²⁷⁴

Heirlooms and traditions became important in their new life in America, something which is reflected in *Bag gardinet*, where the Nilsen family celebrates a Norwegian Christmas with friends from Norway and traditional food, mead, toddy, and games.

A more positive and active approach to the problem of identity, is discussed by Odd S. Lovoll. He focuses on the fact that the Americans, the immigrants and their descendants are all taking part in creating their own environment by participating in an interaction, “a dynamic interplay, with the new environment and their own transplanted cultural heritage.”²⁷⁵ He observes that the immigrants did not simply lose their national background and cultural identity when they assimilated into the American society, but that their identity survived all the changes “so that a socialization through the generations produced a reinterpretation of Norwegian-American ethnicity in order to give it a new content and to create an acceptable ethnic identity dictated by where Norwegian Americans were in the historical process.”²⁷⁶ This is the view this thesis supports. Ethnicity can be viewed as

a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories. (...) it is grounded in real life context and social experience.²⁷⁷

This means that the immigrants are gradually losing their original “Norwegianness” and inventing their own Norwegian-American identity, an identity different from any other group or collective identity, to accommodate themselves to American society. However, this identity is not static, but constantly changing accordingly to its members’ needs. April R. Schultz points out the fact that this ethnic group is also divided along lines of class, gender, and the

²⁷³ Ibid., 326.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 314.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Kathleen Neils Conzen et. al., “The Invention of Ethnicity in the United States”, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History*, ed. Jon Gjerde (Boston, New York:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 23.

varying degree of involvement in the group.²⁷⁸ At least two of the novels investigated in this thesis focus on the different classes in the Norwegian-American immigrant community in Minneapolis, namely *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, first published in the US in 1889 and *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, published in 1920.

The social psychologist Donald M. Taylor observes that “a clearly defined collective identity arises where a culture provides its members with clear reference standards upon which to build a strong collective identity.”²⁷⁹ The Norwegian Americans built their collective identity on their cultural expressions and memories of Norway as well as the Norwegian-Americans’ history and achievements in the US. Taylor continues by saying that a “culture arises when members of a group come to share the same values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral patterns.”²⁸⁰ Even though the Norwegian Americans were not a homogenous group, they all had in common at least a Norwegian background and often also a Lutheran Faith, and this united them in some way. Although larger clusters existed in some areas, the Norwegian Americans were spread throughout the USA, and this scattering did not hold the best conditions for a lasting collective identity. Taylor says that “[w]here group members are dispersed geographically or do not have the benefit of their own institutions, naturally they have to make an extra effort to maintain a clear collective identity.”²⁸¹ The Norwegian Americans, however, did have their own institutions, press and newspapers and this made it possible for the members of the group to connect easily. As previously mentioned, most Norwegians remained Lutheran in the US and the majority of these joined Norwegian-American Lutheran Churches, thereby creating a religious bond and supplying them with meeting places.

The three largest Norwegian-American newspapers, *Skandinaven* (Chicago), *Decorah-Posten* (Iowa), and *Minneapolis Tidende* (Minneapolis), had large circulation also outside their cities of origin,²⁸² and in addition to newspapers, the Norwegian-American community had a large ethnic press. According to Lovoll at least 200 novels were published in addition to essay collections, poetry anthologies, plays, newspaper literature, religious literature, pamphlets, etc, all of which for the most part were social documents of the immigrants’ lives.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration*, 19.

²⁷⁹ Donald M. Taylor, *The Quest for Identity: From Minority Groups to Generation Xers* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 13.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁸² Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 181.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 228.

Towards the end of the 1800s, the Norwegian communities in Minneapolis and other major urban settlements were large and wealthy enough to

create and maintain a class of leaders – professional men, journalists, teachers, preachers, and businessmen – who dominated the public life of the *koloni* [sic] and claimed to represent the group in its dealings outside the neighborhood.²⁸⁴

These ethnic leaders used the Norwegian-American newspapers to advertise their activities throughout the colonies. Odd S. Lovoll observes that ethnic leadership functions at two different levels, namely

in the local community with its special institutions such as church, saloon, singing groups, and various societies; and in the larger ethnic subculture, bound by newspapers, organizations, political leaders, and other well-known persons. The former belong in the realm of everyday life; the latter combine the scattered communities into an ethnic unity and represent it to the outside world.²⁸⁵

Taylor discusses how minority groups in society define their own culture and collective identity, and that it is the group leaders who must instigate this process.²⁸⁶ The identity includes a process called *autostereotype*, which is when “members of a group attribute characteristics to their own group,”²⁸⁷ and thereby compare themselves to other groups. Immigrant groups find certain characteristic that they share among themselves. This corresponds to Orm Øverland’s discussion of “homemaking myths”: Foundation (“we were here first or at least as early as you were”), blood sacrifice (“we fought and gave our lives for our chosen homeland”), and ideological gifts (“the ideas we brought with us are American ideas”).²⁸⁸

These “myths” were assigned to prove that the Norwegian-Americans had a rightful place in the US, thereby excluding other immigrant groups and creating a stronger bond within the group. The “homemaking myth” tradition was applied by all immigrant groups, according to Øverland.²⁸⁹ Norwegian homemaking myths were for example that Norwegians were the source of democracy, that the Vikings discovered America and that Norwegian soldiers fought in the Civil War.²⁹⁰ Norwegian-American heroes and leaders such as Knute Nelson (the first Norwegian-American governor of Minnesota) were honored and celebrated

²⁸⁴ John Jenswold, “Becoming American, Becoming Suburban: Norwegians in the 1920s.” *Norse Heritage* vol.2. Stavanger, Norway: The Norwegian Emigration Center, 1991), 85.

²⁸⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 190.

²⁸⁶ Taylor, *The Quest for Identity: From Minority Groups to Generation Xers*, 126.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸⁸ Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 8.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

as the symbol of the success of the entire Norwegian-American group. These “myths” were all elaborated by the Norwegian-American leaders in order to claim the Norwegians’ rightful place in the United States. Peter Thaler observes that “[i]mmigrants might argue that their spirit makes them real Americans – the average American tends to judge them by more pragmatic criteria, such as their accent.”²⁹¹ In other words, the “homemaking myths” functioned more as a self-esteem boost within the Norwegian-American community than as justification to other immigrant groups and old-stock Americans.

Orm Øverland discusses the Norwegian-American culture, describing it as a transitional culture because it

began with the first arrivals in the 1820s and then grew and developed until it underwent such significant changes with the end of mass immigration in the 1920s that it gradually became an integrated American ethnic culture rather than a separate, transplanted immigrant culture.²⁹²

John Jenswold singles out American patriotism and skepticism of foreigners during World War I, the advances in mass production, marketing, advertising, and suburbia, as potential threats to the transitional Norwegian communities.²⁹³ With the increase in advertising in the 1920s, the immigrants were presented with pictures of the nuclear family owning their own home and car, and this, in addition to increasing wealth, also inspired many to move out of the city centers.²⁹⁴ Jenswold explains the importance of owning one’s own house, as “the acquisition of the right home, of the right style, in the right location was a gauge of an individual’s rise above the urban housing of tenement house and apartment building.”²⁹⁵ The relocation was a big step up from the newcomer situation.

Another problem in maintaining the distinct identity was, according to Jon Gjerde and Carlton C. Qualey, the changing nature of the immigrant population:

Later-arriving Norwegians were better educated and adapted more easily to urbanized America (...) The greater prosperity and education of the immigrants’ children pushed Norwegian American [sic] institutions to improved intellectual and literary activity, but these young people lacked their parents’ personal attachment to Norway.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 5.

²⁹¹ Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 122.

²⁹² Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 8.

²⁹³ Jenswold, “Becoming American, Becoming Suburban: Norwegians in the 1920s”, 86-99.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 91-99.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 92, 93.

²⁹⁶ Gjerde and Qualey, *Norwegians in Minnesota*, 60.

As time passed and new generations grew up, it became more difficult to hold on to the Norwegian language and culture, and the result is a “symbolic ethnicity”, where the “Norwegianness” is only expressed through traditions, food types, clothing, and music, often in an American packing to keep up the appeal for the younger generations. According to Peter Thaler, the “Norwegian-Americans generally preserved more emotional attachment to their ancestral homeland, and organizations that express this symbolic ethnicity, such as the Sons of Norway, remain popular even among later generations.”²⁹⁷ Norwegian-American holidays, for example Leiv Eiriksson Day, a celebration of the Viking discovery of North America, were also encouraged by the ethnic leaders. Jenswold explains that ancient Norse values, the Norwegian-American history and the “celebration of a rural immigrant past” that was found in many immigrant novels, were means by many ethnic leaders to deal with the challenges that faced the Norwegian-American community.²⁹⁸ Since these factors are not evident in the novels investigated in this thesis, these will not be examined further.

Øverland distinguishes between people of Norwegian-American descent and those who were also “assenting inhabitants” of the Norwegian-American community,²⁹⁹ people who participated in the community and had an interest in things Norwegian. Øverland observes that the Norwegian-American culture was perceived as an isolating culture by some but by others as a supportive system during the Americanization.³⁰⁰ The more efficiently an ethnic community is able to cater to the needs of its inhabitants, the more likely individuals are wont to associate with it.³⁰¹ Peter Thaler notes that almost two-thirds of Norwegian-Americans “remained outside either secular or religious ethnic institutions.”³⁰² However, this does not necessarily mean that two-thirds resigned completely from the community, they could for example still be reading Norwegian-American newspapers or going to Norwegian-American shops.

Wist believed in the importance of organizations and groups in unifying the Norwegian-Americans and making them proud of their heritage. He was member of several organizations, among others Det Norske Selskab (1903) (the Norwegian Association), The Symra Society, and the bygdelag Det nationale Trøndelag in 1908. From 1906 to 1917 he was

²⁹⁷ Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 129.

²⁹⁸ Jenswold, “Becoming American, Becoming Suburban: Norwegians in the 1920s”, 99.

²⁹⁹ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 9.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 9.

³⁰¹ Anderson and Blanck, *Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life in Minnesota’s Urban Frontier*, 8.

³⁰² Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 129.

the Norwegian vice-consul for Iowa and he was awarded the Royal Order of St. Olaf by the King of Norway in absentia and also became Knight of the First Class.

Norwegian Americans were considered easily assimilable because they were white, Nordic Protestants (often Lutheran) with customs similar to the “old-stock” American of Anglo heritage,³⁰³ but full assimilation is not possible to achieve during the first generation. As previously mentioned, the immigrants did not immediately dispose of their “Norwegianness,” this is a gradual process which occurred through the generations. Accommodation to American society is perhaps a better description of this first part of the process. Norwegian and other European immigrants, “through relocation, the influences of the public-school systems, and other forces in American life, became almost completely assimilated within two or three generations.”³⁰⁴

4.2. The role of literature in the formation of a Norwegian-American identity

In a review of *The Boat of Longing in Skandinaven* in 1921, D. G. Ristad writes that the Norwegian-American literature is in a period of growth. At the same time, it became more and more difficult to publish works in the Norwegian language because the younger generations favored English texts. Ristad’s view of the reason for the expansion of the Norwegian-American literature is that the Norwegian Americans’ awareness as an emigrant/immigrant people is constantly being clarified, “we are not just a mass of emigrants; we are an emigrant people with character, peculiarities, experiences, longings, virtues and vices.”³⁰⁵ Taylor also emphasizes the importance of a group’s genuine awareness of itself because only then can the group’s collective identity be clarified.³⁰⁶ Ristad and Taylor both remark on the importance of a group’s self-esteem and realization of their condition.

Odd S. Lovoll observes that although the immigrant writers often suffered under the immigrant community’s indifference to their work, he has found “much evidence of the great importance reading had in the lives of the immigrants, even though the modest products of immigrant authors were not sufficiently noted or appreciated.”³⁰⁷ The religious literature and Norwegian-American newspapers were widely circulated, and Lovoll points out that many

³⁰³ Knight Eugene Hoover, “Organizational Networks and Ethnic Persistence: A Case Study of Norwegian-American Ethnicity in the New York Metropolitan Area” (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, City of New York University, 1979), 10, 14.

³⁰⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9009936/assimilation>. (Accessed December 20, 2007).

³⁰⁵ The information in this paragraph is from D. G. Ristad’s review of *Længselens baat* in *Skandinaven*, December 16, 1921. My translation.

³⁰⁶ Taylor, *The Quest for Identity: From Minority Groups to Generation Xers*, 39.

³⁰⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 207.

authors serialized their novels or wrote short stories and poems for these newspapers.³⁰⁸ In settlements, both urban and rural, literary societies and reading clubs were organized, and money was collected to purchase different kinds of books in order to create local libraries.³⁰⁹ The authors Kristofer and Drude Krog Janson, for example, hosted literary meetings in their home in Minneapolis with readings of Norwegian literature. Johannes B. Wist wrote literary pieces and serialized the story of Jonas Olsen for *Decorah-Posten*, the newspaper he edited. Both Wist and Rølvaag, who wrote their novels more than twenty years later than the Jansons, were active in the Norwegian-American community that now had changed its focus to the preservation of the Norwegian language and literature in the US. All four authors used the Norwegian language for their novels, but three of the novels were later translated. *The Boat of Longing* was published in its English version in 1933 and *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* in 2006. I have not been able to establish when *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* was first published in translation.

Lovoll points out that after 1920, the Norwegian-reading audience was so small that it became more and more difficult to get Norwegian-language books published in the US, a point that, as Lovoll says, “explains the urgency with which Norwegian-American authors worked.”³¹⁰ This also shows that the Norwegians were assimilating or at least being integrated into the American society, and that many of the second and third generation were not as fluent in Norwegian as the first generation immigrants had been. Other important factors are immigration restrictions, as well as the xenophobia following World War 1, that undermined the overt ethnicity of many immigrant groups.³¹¹

According to Peter Thaler immigration literature is of importance

to the continuance of symbolic loyalties. The literary documentation of group presence – particularly during the settlement period – enhances the desirability of group identification. Rølvaag’s successful novels evoke ethnic pride both through the author – a Norwegian immigrant who became accepted into the American literary pantheon – and through their subject matter, which immortalized the Norwegian participation in the colonization of the prairies.³¹²

This means that the author’s novel and its subject matter, whether a rural or urban setting, made it possible for immigrants to relate to the content and evoked ethnic pride in the group’s accomplishments in the United States. The novels gave the Norwegian-American community

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 208.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 209.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 224.

³¹¹ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 370-372.

something to gather around. Thaler notes that literature also functioned as a preservation of the historical memory of life in Norwegian America and as documentation of the group's presence in pioneer America.³¹³ The Norwegian-writing authors were actually accused of stalling the assimilation and Americanization process by some of their contemporaries,³¹⁴ who saw this language culture as isolating itself from the rest of the US.

As has already been observed by many literary historians, "the Norwegian-American literature recorded and interpreted the immigrants' lives and experiences as the authors observed and understood them."³¹⁵ Many of the Norwegian-American novels are set on the prairie or in other rural communities, and Jenswold explains that somehow even these novels "responded to the complexities, alienation, and dangers of life in modern America."³¹⁶ The urban Norwegian Americans could relate to the feelings and experiences of the rural fictional characters. This is also the case with the novels discussed in this thesis, whose subject matter was experiences other immigrants had gone through, with recognizable characters and settings. But as Lovoll states, in the immigrant writers'

agitation for the preservation of Norwegian culture, and in their opposition to assimilationist zeal, the authors did not always represent the immigrants' attitude. (...) At times the authors were likely too concerned about the tragic aspects of immigrant experience: the longing, the nostalgia, the loss of cultural values, inner strife, toil, and poverty.³¹⁷

Lovoll also observes that tragic events and characters are the main focus of the Norwegian-American literature.³¹⁸ According to Lovoll's statement, Wist's humorous trilogy is an exception in the Norwegian-American literature. Not every immigrant could relate to Krog Janson's middle-class immigrant family, Janson's unfortunate characters, Wist's stereotypical characters, nor Rølvaag's Nils Vaag, who is very nostalgic about Norway. The Swedish-American historian H. Arnold Barton states that the authors' own experiences as immigrants, "regarded as a tragic repudiation of the homeland, caused them in their writing to attribute their own sense of defeat and loss to the immigrants as whole."³¹⁹ Peter Thaler also claims that the authors focused on the emotional costs of assimilation,

³¹² Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 137.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 138.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

³¹⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 228.

³¹⁶ Jenswold, "Becoming American, Becoming Suburban: Norwegians in the 1920s", 99.

³¹⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 228-229.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

³¹⁹ H. Arnold Barton discussed in Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 229.

which they viewed as an aspect of American history that could not be reconstructed from other sources. (...) Most common people seem not to have shared the sense of tragedy in the emigration and assimilation process to the same extent as did these ethnic intellectuals. Their goals and desires revolved around more materialistic concepts, and their economic accomplishments contributed to a basic satisfaction with their situation.³²⁰

Rølvaag's *The Boat of Longing* is a novel that focuses on the cost of immigration and Nils' encounter with "the land of opportunities" as a grim reality compared to the success stories and his vision on how it would be. Thaler claims that no matter how many immigrants who focused more on wealth and material gains, "there can be no doubt that a segment of the immigrant population felt that the cultural loss outweighed the material gains or at least put their worth into question: the authors themselves prove the existence of these considerations."³²¹ According to Ingrid Semmingsen, many authors "tended to moralize and underline a little too obviously how they believed the immigrants should handle their problems: it was harder to create figures that would live on in their readers' hearts."³²² Semmingsen also observes that the bestsellers in this period were not always of the best literary quality, using the Norwegian rural tale *The Cotter's Son* by H. A. Foss, which was serialized in *Decorah-Posten* in 1884-85 and then went through several editions as a book as an example.³²³

According to Lovoll, Dorothy B. Skårdal argues that the reason why most Norwegian-American novels are strongly realistic and include factual events and personas is because most Norwegian-American authors were "amateurs as literary artists" and because they "lacked sufficient imagination to free themselves from models."³²⁴ Skårdal also explains that few authors could earn a living from their literary work since the number of prospective book buyers was so small.³²⁵ As writing fiction and poetry only could be a part time job, Semmingsen says, it is

difficult to distinguish between the amateur and the professional. One can determine this only from the number of works a man produced, the seriousness of his intent as an artist, and his reputation among his own people.³²⁶

³²⁰ Thaler, *Norwegian Minds – American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 132.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, 141.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Dorothy B. Skårdal quoted in Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 228.

³²⁵ Dorothy B. Skårdal, "The Scandinavian Immigrant Writer in America," NAHA Online, http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume21/vol21_2.html (accessed 27 December 2007).

³²⁶ Ibid.

But although there were many amateur writers among the Norwegian immigrants, that is not the case for all authors in this thesis. Øverland states that although Wist worked as a journalist, he was a true literary amateur and therefore hid behind his pseudonym “Arnljot.”³²⁷ Wist, despite of his satirical tone, focused on realism in his novel, and Øverland states clearly that the trilogy about Jonas Olsen is “one of the most interesting and entertaining literary products” of Norwegian America.³²⁸ *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* was Drude Krog Janson’s very first novel and it was heavily influenced by her surroundings in Minneapolis. Kristofer Janson was already a writer in Norway and was awarded a poet’s pension from the state. Rølvaag is widely considered the greatest Norwegian-American writer. He wrote novels, short stories, essays, and also edited an anthology of Norwegian and Norwegian-American literature with his colleague at St. Olaf, P.J. Eikeland.³²⁹ Skårdal’s statement might therefore be more true of the earlier immigrants and their literary endeavors.

Orm Øverland observes that the decline of Norwegian-American literature started in the second and third decades of the twentieth century due to previously mentioned reasons, but also because of Norwegian language reforms concerning spelling and capitalization.³³⁰ Øverland notes that the majority of the Norwegian-Americans identified strongly

with a language that would strike most of their contemporaries [in Norway] as quaintly old-fashioned. Language conservation, which many had regarded as the *sine qua non* of a Norwegian-American identity, had become one of the many factors that marginalized *Vesterheimen* [Norwegian America], making it seem irrelevant from the perspective of Norway.³³¹

The Norwegian-American press still used gothic letters and old Norwegian spellings that were no longer in use in Norway, and in addition, English loan words and syntax also influenced the written language.³³² The English language eventually conquered the Norwegian-American press as the first generations faded out.

4.3. Reception

Reception, book reviews, sales figures in the Norwegian-American community are possible approaches to the investigation of the novels’ importance in the formation of the Norwegian-American identity. The novels investigated in this thesis were all published in Norwegian and

³²⁷ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 323.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid., 351.

³³⁰ Ibid., 370-372.

³³¹ Ibid., 373.

³³² Ibid.

their audience was therefore only had Norwegian-speaking, at least before the translation. years later. Kristofer Janson's *Bag gardinet* has not been translated into English. *Bag gardinet* and *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* were published in the late 1880s and had a contemporary audience. *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* and *The Boat of Longing*, however, were published in 1920 and 1921, some time after the events in the novels take place.

The Norwegian newspapers *Morgenbladet*, *Dagen* and *Dagbladet* did not review Drude Krog Janson's *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* (1889) favorably.³³³ In America the novel was received more positively, and even reprinted six times by 1894.³³⁴ Drude herself said about the novel:

I am very fond of it myself, but I guess I am not the right person to judge it. One thing I know better, though, than all the people back home, that the conditions here are described as true-to-life as they can possibly be; (...) all here who have read it, and whom I have talked with, say that it is a true description.³³⁵

This is of course a subjective view, but in her opinion, the novel was realistic. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the novel had been serialized in *Illustrert Ugeblad* in 1888 as well. The numerous reprints indicate that it was a popular book among the Norwegian Americans, a popularity perhaps due to its negative stance on alcohol in a time of temperance movements. Sigrun Røssbø believes that the popularity of the novel was due to its anti-saloon message and not the discussion of the feminist issue.³³⁶ According to Øverland, the novel had been published in four American editions by 1894, partly as a result of its reputation as a *roman a clef*.³³⁷

Kristofer Janson's *Bag gardinet* (1889) was reviewed in *Budstikken*, and the reviewer observed that the novel was similar to "other mysteries in that it dealt with the corruption of high society."³³⁸ The reviewer focuses on the aspects he dislikes, for example that all the women, except Mrs. Plummer, are portrayed as "angels in human form" and the men, except the Norwegian immigrants, as the opposite, and he is of the opinion that the novel should be seen as a contribution to the feminism debate.³³⁹ The reviewer does not agree with Janson on the woman issue, he finds the oppression of women exaggerated in the story. Despite these "flaws", the reviewer recommends the book as it has many good points and excellent

³³³ Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson, Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author," (1986), 54.

³³⁴ Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author" (1983), 52.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson, Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author", (1986), 54.

³³⁷ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 162.

³³⁸ Ibid., 165. The quotation is from *Budstikken*, February 12, 1890.

³³⁹ *Budstikken*, February 12, 1890. My translation.

language. A week later the same newspaper printed Kristofer Janson's answer in defense of his novel. He stresses that his focus was on the dark sides of America and that he criticizes moral decay. He cannot see why the reviewer found the women angelic, as he merely intended them to be normal, honorable women, and the men in the novel all have their flaws.³⁴⁰ The characters' personalities may not be as representative as Janson claims, but their typical immigrant jobs are realistically portrayed. According to Nina Draxten, Luth Jaeger in *The North* reviewed the novel to be below Janson's usual literary standard.³⁴¹ Gerald Thorson says that even though the novel lacks subtle character portrayal, it nevertheless is a spirited, imaginative glimpse of several aspects of life in Minneapolis in the 1880s.³⁴²

In the review in *Duluth Skandinav*, Wist's trilogy *The Rise of Jonas Olsen* (1920), was perceived as "an affront to all Norwegian Americans, suggesting that a book without 'a single honest person' could hardly have a [sic] honest author."³⁴³ Ole A. Buslett praises Wist for using the Norwegian-American vernacular, saying of Wist's trilogy that "[h]ow can intelligent people who understand the nature of literature imagine that real people may be portrayed accurately in print without the use of the language they speak?"³⁴⁴ Language is often considered an important factor in distinguishing an ethnic group, because it is a very tangible indicator of where you belong.³⁴⁵ Lewis Salmon in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* is a character who has no interest in retaining his Norwegian cultural heritage or language.³⁴⁶ He mixes English and Norwegian extensively and is only concerned with wealth and social importance. The Norwegian Karl Johan Arndt Lomwiig in the same novel, considers this mixing of languages horrible and wants to retain the pure Norwegian language in America.

Wist says in *Decorah-Posten* in December 1922 that

it should not surprise us that Norwegian reviewers at times find that Norwegian-American Norwegian is impoverished, awkward, and abundant in Anglicisms, even when we try not to mix the languages. It is regrettably all too true that much of the Norwegian written here is not the spontaneous and living Norwegian spoken and written in Norway today. (...) We live far away from the Norwegian-speaking society

³⁴⁰ Kristofer Janson's reply in *Budstikken*, February 19, 1890. My translation.

³⁴¹ Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 236.

³⁴² Thorson, "Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s: Tinsel and Dust", 222.

³⁴³ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 321. The quotation is from "Bjarne Blehr", *Duluth Skandinav*, October 16, 1922.

³⁴⁴ Ole A. Buslett quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 374.

³⁴⁵ Taylor, *The Quest for Identity: From Minority Groups to Generation Xers*, 46.

³⁴⁶ Solveig P. T. Zempel, "Language Use in the Novels of Johannes B. Wist: A Study of Bilingualism in Literature" (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Northfield, Minnesota, 1981), 84.

and are constantly exposed to influences that lead us away from the essence of a Norwegian national culture.³⁴⁷

The Norwegian-American community in the US developed a necessary form of bilingualism to be able to participate outside their own sphere, an issue discussed in detail in the previous chapter and thus not further developed here.

Rølvaag's *The Boat of Longing* (1921) was reviewed favorably by Norwegian-American critics. Almost everyone preferred the part that takes place in Norway, which they thought was beautiful and masterly written. The second part of the novel, Nils' life in Minneapolis, pulls the reader back from the magic scenery in Norway and onto the streets in an urban American reality, and most of the reviewers found this part to be a realistic portrayal of immigrant life in the city. *Folkebladet* states that the boarding house and area Nils lives in is the part of the city that most newcomers encountered and the characters in the novel are also people who lived in Minneapolis on Seven Corners or Cedar Avenue at the time,³⁴⁸ which was an area that expanded as a center of working-class housing.³⁴⁹ The magazine *Sønner af Norge* states that the novel is an important contribution to Norwegian-American literature.³⁵⁰ Jersing Thompson writes in *Visergutten* that the novel ought to be read by all Norwegian-Americans because it portrays the process they have all been through.³⁵¹ Johannes B. Wist agrees with these other reviewers regarding the realistic portrayal of Minneapolis and states that he can vividly picture the boarding house "Babel". He thinks Nils seems too good to be true, but does find that the novel contains plenty of other characters who are more believable. He recommends the novel.³⁵² Waldemar Ager, a Norwegian immigrant author and journalist, writes in *Reform* that "[n]ow we have a literature!"³⁵³

After Rølvaag's death, the Twin City Norwegian Literary Society denounced him for misrepresenting Norwegian Americans in his trilogy *Giants in the Earth*, saying that Norwegians "were sentenced to be represented by such paper men and women as Per Hansa and Beret, whose saga had been presented as the Saga of Norwegian Americans."³⁵⁴

³⁴⁷ Wist quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 374.

³⁴⁸ *Folkebladet*, February 8, 1922.

³⁴⁹ Millet, *Lost Twin Cities*, 57.

³⁵⁰ *Sønner af Norge*, January, 1922.

³⁵¹ Jersing Thompson, *Visergutten*. Unknown date.

³⁵² Johannes B. Wist's review of *Længselens baat* in *Decorah-Posten*, under his pseudonym "Arnljot", unknown date.

³⁵³ Waldemar Ager quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 370.

³⁵⁴ Gustav Marius Bruce quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 379.

Øverland, however, believes that “[a] handful of philistines and conservative clergy do not make or break a culture. The storm around Rølvaag was on a small scale (...).”³⁵⁵

The Norwegian-American newspapers reviewed the literary contributions of the immigrant authors. Peter Thaler observes that the literary critics in the Norwegian-American newspapers and magazines often were amateurs,³⁵⁶ but as they were a part of the community they would nevertheless recognize the presence of or lack of realism portrayed in the novels. There were of course some trained journalists working in the newspapers as well, for example Johannes B. Wist and Waldemar Ager.

Sales figures are one way to investigate the reception of the novels in the Norwegian American community. But it is important to keep in mind the fact that one copy of a novel might have several readers, since an entire family and friends could share the book. One must also take into consideration the uncertainty regarding the number of copies printed of each of the novels.

As previously mentioned, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* was reprinted six times by 1894. However, it has not been possible to find out the exact number of copies sold. Kristofer Janson's novel was, as previously mentioned, printed at the author's own expense and it has not been possible to find sales figures for *Bag gardinet*. It was not difficult to get books printed at that time, not even before “the establishment of Scandinavian publishing houses in the major cities of the Middle West. Newspaper presses did the work, at the printer's cost and profit or subsidized by the author.”³⁵⁷

According to Øverland, Wist was worried about the sales of the last book of the trilogy since the one reviewer wrote that his trilogy was an affront to Norwegian Americans, and because the second novel only had sold about half as much as the first.³⁵⁸ The different books of the trilogy had variable sales, but all of the 1,200 copies of *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* had sold out by October 1922,³⁵⁹ so the first novel was successful.

In 1922, the magazine *Nord-Norge* reports that *Længselens baat* had only sold about 700 copies, mainly to people in the author's home town of Northfield, Minnesota.³⁶⁰ Letters to Rølvaag from Augsburg Publishing House in Minneapolis confirms this. By June 1922, the

³⁵⁵ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 379.

³⁵⁶ Thaler, *Norwegian Minds- American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*. 110.

³⁵⁷ Skårdal, “The Scandinavian Immigrant Writer in America,” NAHA Online.

http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume21/vol21_2.html (accessed December 27, 2007).

³⁵⁸ Øverland. *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 321.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Julius B. Bauman, *Nord-Norge*, no.25, 1922.

novel had sold 754 copies and by April 1927 the novel had sold 1211 copies.³⁶¹ The sales figures reveal the small number of book buyers in the Norwegian-American community. Only 1,200 people bought Wist's novel, while there lived 16,401 Norwegian-Americans just in Minneapolis in 1910. Rølvaag found it more difficult to sell his novel than did Wist's satirical and Krog Janson's anti-saloon novels. The account of the tragic losses of immigration was perhaps not as sellable to the audience as a humorous satire of immigrants and a *roman à clef* of contemporary Minneapolis.

Øverland discusses the importance of the Norwegian-American literature in *The Western Home*:

In the course of a few generations the writers (...) made of their native Norwegian an American literary language, a language in which they could express American experience to an American audience. In so doing they collectively created a record of the emotional and social life of one ethnic group on its way from being migrant Europeans to integrated, indeed largely indistinguishable members of American society.³⁶²

The fact that this immigrant literature of American history was not written in English does not make it less American. This transitional literature is filled with American experiences for an American, but not necessarily English-speaking, audience.³⁶³

4.4. The authors' views on literature

Kristofer Janson was a minister and firmly believed that newcomers should be preached to in their native language in church if they were to benefit from the sermon.³⁶⁴ He was aware of the fact that many of those who came to the US were adults, and from his own experience he knew that adults learned English slower than the younger ones, who attended schools.³⁶⁵ He was aware of a cultural difference between himself and the old-stock Americans, and he wrote:

If I stayed here a hundred years, I would never be Americanized (...) The rules of society, of politeness, the mode of thinking, reasoning, speaking, and writing are of another kind. They are against my nature, my education, my customs. I may love and admire many Americans, but I will never become one of them.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ Letters to Ole E. Rølvaag from Augsburg Publishing House/ attn. A. M. Sundheim, Manager, between June 6, 1922 and April 13, 1927. Found at Minnesota Historical Society (A/m. R755. Ole Edvart Rølvaag Papers. Microfilm, roll 10.

³⁶² Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 380.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 306.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Published letter in *Unity*, July 13, 1893. Printed in Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 306-307.

Janson felt like an outsider in the US and believed he always would, because of the difference in character between Norwegians and Americans. He did not think that the Americanization of Norwegian immigrants would succeed, but he also rejected the notion of an artificially maintained Norwegian community. In his view, the culture had to be sustained naturally.³⁶⁷

In Norway, Janson had treated contemporary and historical subject matters based on national-romantic ideas and attitudes, but in the US, his novels focused on the problems of modern society,³⁶⁸ such as the dark aspects of the capitalist society and advocating the workers' case in *Bag gardinet*.

According to Sveino, Janson was skeptic to the literary trends of realism and naturalism that were manifesting themselves in Europe at the time, but appreciated authors like Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman.³⁶⁹ Knut Hamsun described Janson as an educator of the people at the expense of the artist, claiming that moral was the active principle in Janson's writing and preaching the most important in his life as a poet.³⁷⁰

Drude Krog Janson wrote her very first novel in the city of Minneapolis, a city she never quite liked.³⁷¹ She was homesick, longed for Norway and Norwegian culture and compensated for this in her writing.³⁷² She was familiar with the writings of Camilla Collet, the Norwegian advocate for women's rights, but it was only after the Women's Suffrage Association convention in Minneapolis that she became really enthusiastic about feminism,³⁷³ which along with an interest in social reform inspired her to write the story of Astrid Holm who, like many other women at that time, feels the pressure of entering a marriage of convenience.³⁷⁴ She also used the novel to criticize the richer immigrants' milieu, describing them as uncultured, ignorant, greedy with sharp elbows and claims that they "let the ministers look after cultural life."³⁷⁵

About thirty years later, Ole E. Rølvaag, on the other hand, criticizes the ministers for their lack of interest in literature, saying that "[i]f you try talking to them about a famous piece by a great author, you might be embarrassed to find that they have not heard of the work

³⁶⁷ Sveino, "Kristofer Janson and his American Experience", 101.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 93-100.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 100.

³⁷⁰ Knut Hamsun quoted in Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 272.

³⁷¹ Røssbø. "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author" (1983), 31.

³⁷² Thorson, "Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s: Tinsel and Dust", 214.

³⁷³ Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author" (1983), 44.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 44, 49.

³⁷⁵ Drude Krog Janson in a letter to Stina Hedlund before she wrote *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*. Quoted and translated in Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author" (1983), 47-48.

and perhaps not of the author either.”³⁷⁶ Rølvaag was frustrated with the lack of interest in literature among the Norwegian-Americans, and said that “it is not because our people don’t read *us*, that we complain, it is because *they don’t read*.”³⁷⁷ He was of the opinion that the existence of a Norwegian-American literature would benefit the Norwegian-American identity and community. Rølvaag’s view of America was of “a mosaic of ethnic communities, each preserving and promoting its own language, culture, and traditions, which could be united around American political ideals.”³⁷⁸ Rølvaag believed that language, national characteristics, and the faith of the forefathers were essential to a culture.³⁷⁹ However, Rølvaag knew the English language would eventually replace Norwegian and that knowledge of Norwegian heritage would have to be passed on to new generations using English.³⁸⁰ But he stressed the importance of learning the Norwegian Americans Norwegian, so they would be able “to drink from the wells of three great cultures: The American, the English, and our own.”³⁸¹ According to Solveig Zempel, Rølvaag portrays the fate of the sensitive soul who cannot find a new culture to replace the one left behind, the dangers of rootlessness,³⁸² and hence the importance of a sub-culture, the Norwegian-American culture. This is symbolized in Nils Vaag’s vagabond-like life working on a railroad repairing crew, constantly travelling around Minnesota.

Rølvaag wanted to write because he thought that by using literature he could “do something for the Norwegian American on a large scale.”³⁸³ Gudrun Hovde Gvåle claims that Rølvaag’s cultural criticism is hidden in the story of Nils Vaag, visible in the difference between the poetically portrayed life in Norway and the grey and cold prose of Minneapolis.³⁸⁴ Rølvaag aims at portraying how America does not appreciate the immigrant who represents the finest of the cultural inheritance of the old world.³⁸⁵ The musically gifted Nils has to struggle with other immigrants in the lowliest jobs just to earn a living in the money-driven society to which he has emigrated. His aspirations to become more than a

³⁷⁶ Rølvaag, *Concerning Our Heritage*, 142.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁷⁸ Zempel, “Introduction” in *Concerning Our Heritage* by Ole E. Rølvaag, 17.

³⁷⁹ Charles Boewe, “Rølvaag’s America: An Immigrant Novelist’s Views”, *Western Humanities: Review*. 11. 3-12 (1957). 6.

³⁸⁰ Zempel, “Introduction” in *Concerning Our Heritage* by Ole E. Rølvaag, 21.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³⁸³ Ole E. Rølvaag quoted in Jorgenson and Solum, *Ole Edvart Rølvaag: A Biography*, 90.

³⁸⁴ Gudrun Hovde Gvåle, *O. E. Rølvaag: Nordmann og amerikaner*, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1962), 330.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 330.

fisherman seem to be fading away. The lack of fulfillment of Nils' dream is "Rølvaag's realistic recognition that dreams usually do not come true."³⁸⁶

According to Thaler, Rølvaag was also aware of the importance of literature as historical source material.³⁸⁷ Rølvaag believed that "[n]o other form of education can take the place of literature. Not sociology, or economics, not any of the social sciences, no, not even the study of history can teach us so much about life, give us such great insight into it."³⁸⁸ This thesis considers Norwegian-American literature as a reflection of the society in which it was created, and with their discussion of important contemporary themes, Norwegian-American literature can also be seen as a contribution to the larger social debate of its time.³⁸⁹

Wist also contributed to the writing of Norwegian-American history, which he considered vital to the preservation of the ethnic consciousness of his people. According to Øverland, Wist also regarded literary fiction as a way of writing history.³⁹⁰ He was a realist and local colorist, and considered his fiction an "insight into immigrant society not available in historical accounts."³⁹¹ As an editor and journalist he knew the importance of the Norwegian-American newspapers, he was convinced that they acquainted the newcomers with America as a stage in their assimilation process.³⁹² In Øverland's view, Wist's fear was that the Norwegian-American literature gradually became more isolated and that it would eventually be forgotten in the US and disregarded in Norway because the literature was

adapted to the needs of an immigrant people, a people in transition from one nation to another. The literary needs of such a people and their standard of style and narrative are naturally different from those of an older and more literary culture.³⁹³

In other words, Wist predicted that Norwegian literature could not survive in the United States and would not be considered Norwegian nor American. The Norwegian-American literature was an immigrant people's literature, and would cease to exist once the immigrants were assimilated and integrated in the larger American society. Wist anticipated the tendency that the Norwegian-American literature would not be included in Norwegian nor American anthologies and literary canons, and although he felt that the Norwegian heritage should be

³⁸⁶ Charles Boewe, "Rølvaag's America: An Immigrant Novelist's Views", 5.

³⁸⁷ Thaler, *Norwegian Minds- American Dreams: Ethnic Activism among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, 130.

³⁸⁸ Rølvaag, *Concerning Our Heritage*, 156.

³⁸⁹ Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 228.

³⁹⁰ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 313.

³⁹¹ Øverland, "Translator's Introduction" to *The Rise of Jonas Olsen*, xv, xx.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, xiii.

³⁹³ Johannes B. Wist in *Decorah-Posten* 04.10.1921 quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 373-374.

preserved, he knew that the American culture would triumph and the Norwegians would be Americanized and eventually use only English. They were after all living in America.³⁹⁴ Skårdal believes that authors who were motivated by the need to tell the story of their people, “depended on membership in a group which was aware of itself as a unit and had developed pride in its own accomplishments.”³⁹⁵ The four authors discussed in this thesis were all conscious members of the Norwegian-American community and wanted to write literature of and for the other members in this group.

4.5. Summary

The importance of literature for the formation of a Norwegian-American identity is clear. Through its various genres and qualities, it helped form a common ground for the immigrants, giving them something to relate to, both in content and as a group. Through the documentation of Norwegian-American achievements and presence, the literature could evoke pride in being Norwegian-American. The individual’s pleasure in reading is also important, since the Norwegian-Americans could read about experiences similar to what they had gone through, especially since much of the Norwegian-American literature was realistic literature. The literature often depicted stereotypical characters instead of individuals, which not everyone appreciated, and some readers felt they were being misinterpreted. In the 1920s the community was becoming more and more concerned about preserving the Norwegian language and literature in the US, something which is reflected in the literature. The authors consequently focused on the losses, longings, poverty, and nostalgia suffered, perhaps to a larger extent than the average immigrant did. The literature was often didactic in its form, telling the readers what to do and think of certain issues, like for example alcohol and temperance in the four novels discussed in this thesis. In discussing these ideas, the immigrant literature reflected its society and period.

As previously mentioned, Kristofer Janson wrote novels focusing on the problems of the modern, industrialized, and urbanized society,³⁹⁶ and he wrote in Norwegian for the Norwegian-Americans because he knew from his own experience how difficult it was for adults to learn a new language.³⁹⁷ Drude Krog Janson longed for Norway while living in

³⁹⁴ The information in this paragraph is extracted from chapter two of Jan Eirik Imbsen, “Johannes B. Wist: Norwegian-American Leader” (Unpublished Cand. Philol. thesis, University of Oslo, 1977).

³⁹⁵ Skårdal, “The Scandinavian Immigrant Writer in America.” NAHA Online, http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume21/vol21_2.html (accessed December 27, 2007).

³⁹⁶ Sveino, “Kristofer Janson and his American Experience”, 100.

³⁹⁷ Draxten, *Kristofer Janson in America*, 306.

Minneapolis and compensated for this through her writing.³⁹⁸ Wist and Rølvaag wrote their novels in 1920 and 1921, in a period much more concerned with the preservation of the Norwegian language, as the second generation was using English to a much greater extent. Rølvaag was convinced that a Norwegian-American literature was of importance to the ethnic identity and community and wanted to contribute to the upholding of this. He was aware of the possible use of literature as historical source for the immigrants' experiences in the US for future generations because in contrary to history, literature could depict subjective feelings and experiences. Wist considered literature a way of writing history, which he believed was vital to the preservation of an ethnic identity because it gathered the individuals.³⁹⁹ He was certain that the literature could not survive through the generations because it belonged to a transitional group of immigrants that would eventually assimilate into American society.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Thorson, "Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s: Tinsel and Dust", 214.

³⁹⁹ Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 313.

⁴⁰⁰ Johannes B. Wist in *Decorah-Posten* 04.10.1921 quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 373-374.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to examine the degree of realism and representativeness of the portrayal of urban Norwegian immigrant experience in four Norwegian-American novels, using an extrinsic approach with extensive use of sources such as contemporary newspapers and reviews, memoirs of contemporary Norwegian-Americans, letters, and research material on the history and literature of Norwegian America.

The four novels include autobiographical aspects as the authors included their own experiences in varying degrees. Drude Krog Janson and Kristofer Janson emigrated as a family, while Johannes B. Wist and Ole E. Rølvaag belonged to the large group of young, single immigrant men who came to the US to find work. The authors have described immigration patterns for their characters similar to what they experienced themselves and situations that were familiar to other immigrants. Even though the Jansons were not average newcomers, belonging to the Norwegian-American elite in Minneapolis, socializing more with Americans, and coming from wealthy, educated upper class families in Norway, they nevertheless had experiences similar to others of their class. Astrid Holm, is as previously mentioned, supposedly based on the author Drude Krog Janson herself and partly on a popular Norwegian-American girl in Minneapolis. Drude Krog Janson's dislike for the city is mirrored in her main character, as they both feel out of place. Ole E. Rølvaag is said to have put a lot of himself as a young immigrant in *The Boat of Longing*, and as previously mentioned, the Rølvaag of the diary he wrote on his journey to America is in many ways similar to his protagonist Nils.

Since few immigrants moved directly from Norway to Minneapolis, most immigrants had a stay in rural settlements with friends or relatives before they relocated to the city, the immigrants portrayed in these novels are untypical. As previously mentioned, However, as both Nils and Jonas have relatives in Minneapolis, and since most immigrants chose to move to places where they knew someone, their direct move to the big city cannot be seen as lacking in representativeness. The four novels contain reflections of the urban Norwegian-American experience at different levels. In *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, the present reader gains insight into how the upper middle-class lived, through the eyes of an educated female author who felt that the rich Norwegian-Americans were only concerned about wealth and prosperity, not art and culture.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰¹ Drude Krog Janson in a letter to Stina Hedlund before she wrote *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*. Quoted and translated in Røssbø, "Drude Krog Janson: Norwegian-American and Norwegian Author" (1983), 47-48.

Some of the novels have autobiographical characteristics. The novels are all verging on *romans à clef*, since authors have included factual details and events to describe and to add realism to their stories. Øverland has suggested that *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* sold well due to its status as a *roman à clef*.⁴⁰² Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson was touring Norwegian America at the time described in *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* and he was also a personal friend of the Jansons. In *Bag gardinet* Kristofer Janson uses Bridge Square, a commercial center in Minneapolis towards the end of the 1870s, as the setting for an important scene towards the end of the novel. The well-known Norwegian-American judge Andreas Ueland appears as himself in the novel as well as being mentioned in *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*. Whether the portrayals of Bjørnson and Ueland are realistic is difficult to determine, but the fact that they are included illustrates their importance at the time. Bjørnson and Ueland are persons who would be recognized by contemporary readers.

In *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, Jonas is invited to listen to Kristofer Janson giving a lecture, but declines. Janson was a controversial Unitarianist minister in Minneapolis in the 1880s and 1890s, and his speeches were often reported in Norwegian-American newspapers. The characters in this novel also encounter other real-life contemporary personalities.

An important aspect of realism in the novels is the descriptions the two Norwegian neighborhoods in Minneapolis. Jonas is the only one that lives in the northern and smallest colony, but both Jonas and Nils live in boarding houses situated on the blocks and street that were indeed filled with such buildings in reality. In their vicinities are Norwegian and Scandinavian stores and saloons. Holm's apartment and saloon is situated on Cedar Avenue, which would be a natural setting in real life, since this was the main commercial street in the southern colony, and the sale of alcohol was allowed here.

Social class is a central theme in all four novels and mirrors the situation in the Norwegian community. The Nilsen family, Jonas and Nils all belong to the working class while Astrid is more well-to-do, even if she and her family has experienced a descent in social class from Norway. Astrid is not an average immigrant, but neither was Krog Janson. The characters in the books, except Astrid, take typical immigrant jobs being among others janitors, ditch-diggers, railroad repairer, and hired girls.

The Jansons, who wrote for a contemporary audience, focused to a greater extent than the other two authors on temperance, social injustice, feminism, and the workers' position in

⁴⁰² Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 162.

society. The importance of temperance in the novels is a realistic depiction of the movement's significance in the Norwegian-American community at the time. All the novels portray drunkenness as a problem and in *Bag gardinet*, one of the characters even explicitly warns Arne Nilsen of the dangers of alcohol.

The fact that *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* and *The Boat of Longing* were written and published in 1920 and 1921 but are set in the mid 1880s and early 1900s, give the authors different perspective of the period than that of the Jansons. Wist and Rølvaag did not write for a contemporary audience and would have to chose real-life characters from the past who were still famous. These two authors also focused more on language and name changing as they wrote in a period concerned with the future of Norwegian in America.

The temporal aspect, the difference in the portrayal of Norwegian urban immigrant experience from the early 1880s and early 1900s, does not seem to be significant. Skårdal also observes this of other literary works, stating that all the immigrant authors have, taking time and place into consideration, a surprisingly similar understanding of the immigrant experience.⁴⁰³ However, as the city was rapidly expanding with new immigrant groups and acquired new technological advances as discussed in the second chapter, there must have been some difference in the experience for immigrants who arrived in the beginning of the period and for those who arrived at the beginning of the next century. But perhaps the human experience of such a life-changing upheaval still remained the same, and overshadowed any changes due to developing technology.

The novels were all written in the Norwegian language in the US, which made their audience there limited. The sales figures do not speak the whole truth, however, they do not reveal the number of readers, since it is safe to assume that a copy of a novel had more than one reader.

As far as realism goes, contemporary reviews of the novels generally conclude that these novels were realistic portrayals of the urban immigrant experience, even though some of the characters are one-dimensional. *Bag gardinet* was criticized for its flat characters and the question of realism concerning other aspects of the novel have not been focused on. *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* was received positively by Norwegian-American reviewers and was apparently popular because of its stance on alcohol as well as its status as a *roman à clef*. Wist was praised in reviews for using the Norwegian-American vernacular in the novels of Jonas Olsen, and also for including the church issue that concerned many Norwegian Americans.

⁴⁰³ Dorothy B. Skårdal discussed in Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, 1999. 228.

The Lutheran church and its activities were important for the preservation of the ethnic identity, even after the English language made its entry.

The Boat of Longing was reviewed favorably by Norwegian-American critics, and they thought it represented a realistic portrayal of immigrant life in the city. Waldemar Ager, Norwegian-American author and journalist, even exclaimed in the newspaper *Reform* that “[n]ow we have a literature!”⁴⁰⁴, meaning that a Norwegian-American literature was born.

Neither of the main characters are depicted as being far advanced in the assimilation into American society, as they are all newcomers. One of the first steps towards accommodation to the new environment is learning the language, and the characters show varying degree of awareness of this point. In *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* and *Bag gardinet* the question of language does not seem to be of importance. The main characters in Krog Janson's novel only speak with other Norwegian Americans while Janson's characters speak with others without difficulties. The novels thus contain varying degrees of realism concerning the linguistic situation in Minneapolis at the time.

As previously mentioned, Donald Taylor observes that a collective identity arises when a culture provides its members with reference standards upon which to construct a strong collective identity, for example cultural expressions, common memories, history, in addition to values, attitudes, and beliefs.⁴⁰⁵ This identity, which is a constantly changing process according to the needs of its members, is not homogenous, a group is divided in accordance to class, gender, and degree of involvement in the group.⁴⁰⁶ Taylor mentions cultural expressions as one of the reference standards on which to construct an identity, and literature is indeed an important cultural expression. Novels, short stories and poems were often printed in the newspapers that had large circulation throughout Norwegian American and united the Norwegian settlements across the states.

I therefore believe that the Norwegian-American literature was important to the formation of a Norwegian-American identity. It was clearly essential to those who wanted to belong to this ethnic group, as it gave them something to gather round and relate to. The four novels investigated here tell stories of immigrants, a subject matter which appealed to the immigrant audience who wanted stories that were of importance to them. The documentation of Norwegian-American achievement and the ethnic group's experiences in America could evoke pride in being Norwegian-American. As previously mentioned, most of the Norwegian-

⁴⁰⁴ Waldemar Ager quoted in Øverland, *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, 370.

⁴⁰⁵ Taylor, *The Quest for Identity: From Minority Groups to Generation Xers*, 13, 44.

⁴⁰⁶ Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration*, 19.

American literature had realistic tendencies, like the novels discussed, so although fashion was to write more about losses, longings, and poverty than the immigrants perhaps felt, the audience could still relate to the difficulties and experiences.

In addition to being a central contribution to the creation of Norwegian-American identity, these four novels also act in retrospect as primary sources of subjective immigrant experiences. Such subjective experiences cannot be explored in statistics and facts concerning the immigrants, their occupations and migrations. They may also function as a creator of identity today for the many descendants of Norwegian immigrants in their attempt to understand where they come from. The target group of this literature also includes Norwegians with relatives who emigrated to the US and either returned or stayed there, because as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said:

Wer nicht von dreitausend Jahren
Sich weiß Rechenschaft zu geben,
Bleib im Dunkeln unerfahren,
Mag von Tag zu Tag leben.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ "Whoever cannot give themselves an adequate account of the past three thousand years, remain in darkness, ignorant, living from day to day." From *West-östlicher Divan*, 1819.

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