Prairies Within: The Tragic Trilogy of Ole Rölvaag, by Harold P. Simonson. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987. viii, 104 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. $15.00 cloth.

In this slender volume, Harold P. Simonson, professor of English at the University of Washington, presents a critical study of Ole Edvart Rölvaag's epic trilogy of immigrant life: *Giants in the Earth* (1927), *Peder Victorious* (1929), and *Their Fathers' God* (1931). Simonson argues that Beret, who, along with her husband, Per Hansa, leaves Norway to carve out a farm on the Dakota prairies, is the central character in Rölvaag's great work and serves as the author's alter ego. In describing her life, Rölvaag, himself an immigrant, reveals the psychological anguish associated with emigration. Although some readers find Beret weak and ill-suited for pioneer life, such criticism, Simonson believes, misses the point. "The issue is not that Beret was weak but that she recognized the psychological danger of uprooting oneself from the soil of one's origin" (21). Thus through her Rölvaag develops what Simonson calls his "greatest theme," that of "a heart made strong by its nurturing connection with voices of the past that join the present in essential continuity" (8).

This is a timely book. In recent years there has been a sustained revival of interest in America's rich immigrant heritage. Moreover, the economic upheavals of our times have "uprooted" many midwesterners and in the process created an anguish in some of them similar to that experienced by Beret. *Prairies Within* belongs on the book shelf alongside Rölvaag's trilogy. All four are worth reading.

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