

railroads. For one thing, journeys by sleeping cars altered or modified luggage requirements. Gordon also makes good use of literary sources such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Home as Found* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Celestial Railroad and Other Stories* for her coverage of social history. Similarly, she taps legal cases.

What is troubling about *Passage to Union* is the large number of errors that mar the narrative. This is a manuscript that scholars, particularly ones knowledgeable about railroads, should have carefully reviewed prior to publication. Gordon's credibility is damaged when she inaccurately suggests that the Erie (actually New-York & Erie) Railroad paralleled the Erie Canal (20); that the Illinois Central began building south from Chicago (43); that the Northern Pacific completed its transcontinental line in 1874 rather than 1883 (158); and that the Grangers were politically active in the 1860s rather than the 1870s (192). Some of her generalizations are likewise disturbing. Comments about traveling salesmen, "robber barons," and the narrow-gauge building craze of the 1870s and 1880s are cause for concern; they are either stereotypical or simplistic.

Although there is need for a good one-volume history of the first century of American railroads, *Passage to Union* fails to fit the bill. Works by George Douglas, Albro Martin, and John Stover, while flawed, are more useful. Even though Gordon includes some good social history, much is presented better in other studies. Perhaps she would have been more successful if she had looked at how railroads continued to transform American life. Even though Amtrak service hardly equals what carriers provided prior to the 1960s, the industry exerts an enormous economic impact on Americans of the 1990s. The obituaries of railroads, written by the press in the 1970s, were certainly premature. That is a story that has largely not been told.

*The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America*, by Orm Øverland. Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1996. xiv, 442 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JAMES S. HAMRE, WALDORF COLLEGE

The foreword of *The Western Home* describes the book, whose author has been a professor of American literature at the University of Bergen, Norway, since 1970, as "the first comprehensive scholarly treatment of Norwegian immigrant fiction" (v). A term used throughout the book is *Vesterheimen*, a Norwegian word meaning "the Western Home." The author uses it in two related senses: to designate "the Norwegian-

American social and cultural community" and to indicate "the dream that gave life to this community, the idealistic vision of a vital and lasting Norwegian-American culture within the larger American culture" (5). The locus of *Vesterheimen* was primarily the upper Midwest. Thus many of the newspapers, books, and other publications Øverland discusses reflected the experiences of persons who came from Norway to spend their lives in that part of the New World.

The author contends that he is writing a history of American literature. Most such histories, he says, "are based on the theory that Americans did not really become Americans until they forgot the languages they had brought with them." He argues instead that "American literature is the literature of those who are American by choice or by birth regardless of language" (xi). Thus he regards the literature of *Vesterheimen*, while written in Norwegian, as a chapter in American literature, even though it "has yet to become accepted" as such (380).

The book is divided chronologically into six parts. Part one treats *Vesterheimen* as a marginal and transitional culture. The author uses those adjectives for immigrant cultures, for they constitute "a halfway house for individuals in transit" (9). Part two contains several chapters discussing the letters, first books, newspapers, and the beginnings of commercial publishing from the early period of the nineteenth-century Norwegian migration. The third section deals with an emerging literature in the years 1865-1880, noting such things as historical works, poetry, drama, and theater. Part four consists of a number of chapters on developments from 1880 to 1914, a period that saw an emphasis on preserving the culture brought from Norway. Part five deals with the early decades of the twentieth century, with its increasing tension between cultural pluralism and the melting pot ideology, between preservationists and integrationists. The transitional character of *Vesterheimen* is indicated in the statement that for all practical purposes it had "ceased to exist by the early 1930s" (262). The final part consists of six chapters devoted to six authors: Simon Johnson, Dorteia Dahl, Jon Norstog, Johannes B. Wist, Waldemar Ager, and O. E. Rølvaag.

The book is based on extensive research and is carefully edited. The author has performed a valuable service by making available in English an informed discussion of this extensive body of literature. His book has some points of contact with Dorothy B. Skårdal's *The Divided Heart: Scandinavian Immigrant Experience through Literary Sources* (1974), but her work is thematic and employs material from three Scandinavian immigrant groups, whereas Øverland focuses on the Norwegians and uses a chronological approach.

Øverland acknowledges that the writers of *Vesterheimen* were in a sense as transitional as the culture that defined them and that they

helped to create. Yet, in his words, this "does not . . . diminish their achievement" (380). Perhaps studies such as his will contribute to the acceptance of the literature of immigrant cultures as chapters "in the literary history of their chosen home" (380).

*Contented among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest*, by Linda Schelbitzki Pickle. Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island Centennial Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. xii, 311 pp. Illustrations, tables, graphs, charts, notes, appendixes, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SUZANNE SINKE, CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

*Contented among Strangers* is the first book-length attempt to examine the lives of rural German-speaking women as a whole in the Midwest in the nineteenth century. It draws on a multitude of studies of German-American life, as well as many primary sources by and about women, including letters, diaries, wills, church records, and some quantitative material such as censuses. The focus is on what the author terms "the representative Midwest" (8)—Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska—and on all German speakers, which lumps together Germans from Russia with Swiss Germans and Luxembourgers with Prussians, among others. It is a mixed group to say the least, a diversity that is complicated further by their various religious and political views, from the bourgeois "Latin farmers" of the 1830s to Missouri Synod Lutherans. Add to this the span of the study—the entire nineteenth century, with many comments going into the twentieth as well—and the category "German-speaking," which can encompass several generations, and you have a recipe for disaster. Schelbitzki Pickle manages to avoid the worst pitfalls, and in the process provides other scholars with insights into midwestern life.

The book divides into five chapters. The first chapter gives a brief introduction to life and attitudes prior to migration. It does not go into as much depth as many immigration studies do, but it does give information they generally lack: basic laws regarding women, which were generally far more conservative than in the United States. It also provides some indication of attitudes toward women, using collected proverbs and sayings that are for the most part vividly misogynistic, such as "Women and eggs, the more you beat them the better they get" (24). The next chapter turns to "adaptation," which covers everything from inheritance patterns to aspects of everyday life. The succeeding chapter relates what women thought of migration, often based on their own writings. One chapter on special groups (Germans from

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