

Waldemar Ager, *Sons of the Old Country*, translated from the Norwegian by Trygve M. Ager, with a foreword by Odd S. Lovoll. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. 254 pages.

Waldemar Ager (1869-1941) is one of the many American writers who is unknown even to specialists in American literature and American studies. Yet he published six novels and eight collections of short stories in addition to popular history and countless essays, mostly in the journals to which he devoted

most of his time as editor. For those who are interested in expanding their knowledge of American literature Ager may be a good starting point. Not only is he one of the better American novelists who wrote in Norwegian, but a substantial body of his work is available in English. His last and best novel was published in translation as *I Sit Alone* by Harper in 1931 and his early (1910) *Chrzt Before Pilate* is also available in some libraries in a somewhat wooden translation from 1924, published by Augsburg Publishing House, at that time largely an ethnic publishing company with Rølvaag and many other Norwegian-American novelists and poets on its list. Also two of Ager's collections of short stories have been translated. Odd S. Lovoll's selection of essays by Ager and others, *Cultural Pluralism versus Assimilation* (1977), is a useful introduction to the cultural ideology Ager shared with his friend and fellow writer Ole Edvart Rølvaag. The only important work by Ager that now is untranslated is his *Paa veien til smeltepotten* (On the Road to the Melting Pot) from 1917.

The University of Nebraska Press is to be commended for publishing Trygve M. Ager's translation of his father's novel from 1926, *Sønner av gamlelandet* or *Sons of the Old Country*. In spite of the novel's melodramatic incidents and somewhat crowded plot it deserves attention as an account of the immigrant experience written from the immigrant's own point of view. While the vast majority of Norwegian-American novels are set on the agricultural frontier and the farm-lands that replaced it, Ager most often uses an urban or small town setting for his fiction, reflecting his own urban background in Norway and in the United States. *Sons of the Old Country* is set in a multi-ethnic Michigan lumber town in the 1850s and 1860s and follows the careers of several immigrants from contrasting backgrounds. It is atypical of most Norwegian-American fiction in that several of the characters return to Norway in the end, but the effect is to underline the possibilities for growth offered by the new world rather than to evoke nostalgic feelings for the land left behind. The value of this edition is enhanced by the useful introduction by Odd S. Lovoll, placing the novel in the context of Norwegian American literature in general and the work of Waldemar Ager in particular.