

*The Nynorsk Language in the United States*. Studia Humaniora 3, Oslo: NAVF/Universitetsforlaget, 1991. 165 pp. Nkr. 120.

*The Nynorsk Language in the United States* is the title of a recent book by Universitetsforlaget published with financial support by the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF). The author, Peter Hallaråker, associate professor in Norwegian at Møre Romsdal College in Volda, discusses the use of and the debate concerning nynorsk language among Norwegians in the USA from the 1870s till the present. Professor Einar Haugen's book *The Norwegian Language in America* (1953) will forever remain the major study on the history of Norwegian language among Norwegian-Americans. Other scholars have also written about nynorsk in America. A collection of articles entitled *Norwegian Language in America* (edited by B. Helleland) has recently been published by NAHA-N and Novus Publishers (Oslo 1991).

Hallaråker presents the development and growth of the nynorsk language in Norway from the language reformer Ivar Aasen's days until the present time, before he turns to the immigrants language situation and the language debate in some Norwegian-American newspapers. A presentation of the nynorsk magazine *Norrøna*. *Det fyrste blad paa Norskt Maal i Vesterheimen*, published in Minnesota from 1900 to 1901 and in North Dakota from 1914 to 1915 is also given. Some of the most well known nynorsk writers in Norwegian-American culture are given short presentations, others are barely mentioned, before Hallaråker again turns to *Norrøna* for a discussion of language and content in the magazine. The final chapter presents answers to a questionnaire to American academic institutions about present courses in nynorsk.

The nynorsk language, or the New Norse movement, never got many supporters in America. The vast majority of the immigrants had been taught riksmål or Dano-Norwegian in school, and the national, social, geographical and cultural conditions which were the basis for the language movement in Norway had very little relevance in America. The interest for nynorsk was maintained by a little group of idealistic men, and this small movement turned out to have a more splitting, than a uniting effect on Norwegian-Americans. While the riksmål-adherents quite early established a distinct immigrant language culture well helped by the church, the press, the publishing houses, authors and the schools, the nynorsk language was from the very beginning a minority in the minority; a counterculture which had to fight an impossible battle both against riksmål and English. The Norwegian-Americans felt they had difficulties enough by preserving one language in the New World. Authors like Ole Rølvaag and Waldemar Ager wrote emotional essays about preserving a Norwegian language in America. Norwegian-American language and culture were neither exclusively Norwegian nor American, but developed in its own peculiar way in a special environment. It is from this perspective Norwegian language in America has to be studied.

Hallaråker's perspective, however, is basically Norwegian. In his book he evokes parallels to the language situation in Norway, but fewer to the Norwegian-American language situation in general. Hallaråker's background chapter on the development of the nynorsk language in Norway is too extensive for the approach whereas his chapter on the language situation of the immigrants is too short and insufficient.

Professor Einar Haugen has called the early language dispute in the Norwegian-American newspapers the first cultural debate among the immigrants (Haugen, 1953, page 158). Hallaråker presents the greater part of this dispute in the newspapers, but in several sections his presentation becomes an unnecessary paraphrase of chapter eight in Haugen's book. Hallaråker pays too much attention to minor characters. Kristofer Janson, a Norwegian writer, who spent a few years in America, did not promote an interest for nynorsk among immigrants. Therefore a six page presentation of him is too much compared to the rather sketchy presentation given to Jon Norstog, a Norwegian-American writer who spent his life in the Midwest, writing, publishing and selling books in nynorsk. By and large, however, the coverage of the time up to the turn of the century is the best part of the book. Hallaråker's presentation of the nynorsk movement after the turn of the century is vastly insufficient and seriously maimed by a good many errors.

In regard to some of the contributors to *Norrøna* there are some evident errors. Hallaråker is wrong when he writes: "Like K.K. Rudie, Ola J. Rise did not publish any collection of poetry ..." (p.120). In fact, Rudie ran his own little publishing house where he published his own work and books in nynorsk by the popular writer John Lie from Telemark among others. Rise published two books (*Lasarus Geistus* [1908] and *SNØ. Forteljingar fraa nybyggjarlive paa dei villaste vidder i Vesterheimen*, [1909] in addition to prose and poetry, and important articles on the language cause in Norwegian and Norwegian-American newspapers which Hallaråker does not mention. Furthermore Hallaråker overlooks the meeting of the literary society "Fram" in Minneapolis in June 1902. On this occasion Dr. Ragnvald Leland held an enthusiastic speech called "Den norske maalreising" promoting the use of nynorsk language. This speech was printed and spread as propaganda for the movement and later published in *Ung-Norig* (1923) together with an article by Rise. In connection with the unveiling of the statue of Ivar Aasen in Fargo in 1913, a special booklet was published which unfortunately is not mentioned in Hallaråker's book. Moreover, Hallaråker frequently refers to articles about nynorsk in America in Norwegian magazines, like *Syn og Segn*, *UngNorig* and *Den 17de. Mai*, without pointing to a single article. If Hallaråker had taken the time to refer to these articles, he would have guided the reader to book reviews and presentations of some of the most well known writers and articles on the nynorsk interest in America. A more thorough study of for example the "bygdelag"-magazines, immigrant songs and ballads, prose and poetry in a much wider sample of magazines and newspapers, would have given Hallaråker more material to work with. A survey of all Norwegian-Americans who enrolled as members of the publishing house "Det Norske Samlaget" in Kristiania before the turn of the century and before an American chapter was established, would have been of great sociological value for the book. It is no easy task to write about a subject that has been treated before. When, for the first time, a full length study is published on the subject one would expect new approaches, material or findings but this is unfortunately not true. On the contrary, the presentation contains some annoying errors and lacks professional handling of sources and quotations. The bibliography is also somewhat deficient.