

unity in the stories in O'Connor's last collection, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. Skei also makes a provocative connection between the biographical context for O'Connor's writing and her aesthetic choices in suggesting that "O'Connor had every reason to stick closely and almost exclusively to what we may call an aesthetics of brevity. The most obvious reason, seldom acknowledged, was the threat of sudden death" (143).

Finally, the two biographical pieces at the end of the anthology deserve more attention than the limits of this review allow: Ashley Brown's "Life at Andalusia" and Jean W. Cash's "Flannery O'Connor as Communicant: A Constant Devotion." In an essay that is arguably the most personal one in the anthology, Brown narrates some of the ways in which O'Connor's personal life was intellectually and socially rich in spite of her physical limitations. Jean W. Cash's "Flannery O'Connor as Communicant: A Constant Devotion" is also a sympathetic portrayal of O'Connor as friend and mentor to the author. Cash gives a perceptive analysis of the ways in which the spiritual convictions at the center of O'Connor's life influenced her writing.

At the end of *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality*, the biographies of the contributors attest to the international, interdisciplinary scope of the book. Gretlund and Westarp's index, too, is valuable in light of intention of the editors to signal new directions for research. However, it would have been helpful if the individual story and book titles had appeared in separate entries rather than being put under the subcategories of O'Connor "as short story writer" or "as novelist." I found it cumbersome to have to search the subcategories, and then to have to look for the collection where a story appeared, before I located a specific title.

If R. Neil Scott's *Flannery O'Connor: An Annotated Reference Guide to Criticism* (2002)⁷ demonstrates the sheer quantity of O'Connor studies in the past half a century, this volume illuminates particular examples of the depth and breadth possible, and it suggests the humanity of both the author and her readers. I left my reading of *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality* with a sense that I could almost hear O'Connor's voice, both speaking through the articles themselves, and responding to them.

Laura Castor

University of Tromsø

Charles H. Russell. *Undaunted: A Norwegian Woman in Frontier Texas*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. ISBN 1 58544 453 7. \$29.95.

Charles H. Russell's *Undaunted: A Norwegian Woman in Frontier Texas* is a biography of Elise Wærenskjold (1815–1895). It is the first book length study of the life and writings of a lady who belongs in the canon of Norwegian-American Studies, along with younger female voices such as Elisabeth Koren (1832–1918), Gro

7. R. Neil Scott, *Flannery O'Connor: An Annotated Reference Guide to Criticism* (Millidgeville, Georgia: Timberlane Books, 2002).

Svendsen (1841–1878), Drude Krog Janson (1846–1934) and Agnes Wergeland (1857–1914). Unlike most immigrants from Norway, however, Elise Wærenskjold chose to settle in the South, and it is the historical context of her life in Texas which is the focus of Russell's biography, not her position in Norwegian-American culture. This is a very useful perspective. Even though Elise Wærenskjold kept in touch with readers in Norway and with leading Norwegian-American figures in the Midwest like Rasmus B. Anderson, the frames of her American life were organized, if indirectly and distantly, by such men as Sam Houston of Texas. The author is of course indebted to the study and translation of Wærenskjold's correspondence and newspaper essays, edited by Clarence Clausen as *The Lady with the Pen: Elise Wærenskjold in Texas* (1961), but Clausen – whose scholarship was always based on a meticulous reading of both Norwegian and American sources – did not have access to the wealth of local material on which Russell is able to construct his biography. The author received the East Texas Historical Association's annual award (2006) for *Undaunted*. He is presently working on a new edition of Elise Wærenskjold's early letters and reports.

Russell's account of the life of Elise Wærenskjold has all the ingredients of a classic immigrant story. Her life is divided in three parts; first her background in Norway, then her voyage across the sea to her inland destination, and finally her life in the new country. The start of the second phase of her life, her voyage out of Norway, is told briefly and dramatically, typical of American immigrant stories of the early 1800s: "She would never see it [her home country] again" (15). Russell has consulted a variety of sources for his study, such as conversation with Wærenskold's descendants, local archives and protocols, legal documents, cemetery records and epitaphs, maritime history, registers of sailing ships, files of military service, letters, newspaper entries, and criminal records.

In the very first paragraph Russell aptly defines his story of Elise Wærenskjold as a saga. Sagas, he argues, "tell stories of real people turned into heroes" (3). In many ways Russell takes on the role of a writer of sagas as he sets out to reconstruct his version of a biography of an American immigrant. As in any Old Norse family saga, the writer turns to genealogy and to the early history of the region in which the story is set, even if he misses the first point of the classical saga when he does not include the real name of the main character in the title of his book. Yet, as in a typical saga, the main character of *Undaunted* gradually takes on heroic, even saint like proportions. In fact, she comes to share the most common profession of the typical family saga character; she ends up as a pioneer farmer, whose memories involve experiences of rough ocean crossing and painful love.

The author may also have applied the implicit edifying elements of the saga, because his story of an immigrant woman does not only function as a well researched historical narrative, but a story of an exemplary life, a life that may guide both the narrator and his readers to a fuller understanding and appreciation of their own lives. The life of his main character belongs to the 1800s, yet her values are valid. This is all the more convincing since his heroine's story is an epic narrative of a lived life, not a romantic tale, nor a story of success. It is a story of how decisions sometimes lead to disasters, how choices made may have unforeseen consequences, how dreams run counter to reality, how implementations of personal plans may lead to the faulty

notion that life is essentially controllable, how periods of vast hopes interchange with tragedy and sudden deaths, and, how the blessing of work sometime fade into a dire travail and hardship. Yet, we are convincingly led to think that all this is understood, accepted, and lived through by the heroine in an integral system of religious stoicism and vivid pragmatism of hers. If that is what Russell had in mind when he called his biography of Elise Wærenskjold a saga, his choice of genre is well made.

Indeed, Elise Wærenskjold's life had the quality of drama of which sagas may be written. Born Elisabeth Tvede and brought up in Southern Norway as a daughter of a Lutheran minister in the state church, she was taught writing as well as the arts and crafts associated with her status. At a very young age she became a journalist and a promoter of schools for girls. Her marriage to Sven Foyn (1809-1894), then a master of a ship – who was later to end up as a wealthy and famous Norwegian inventor and investor in the modern whaling industry – was short lived and, at the time, a social scandal. On her own, she started out in progressive circles; she published a pamphlet against the abuse of alcohol; and with the help a friend from her youth, Johan R. Reiersen (1810-1864), she took to journalism. Reiersen soon became a staunch promoter of emigration from Norway to the United States, and after his first visit to the United States, he published his very influential book, entitled *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants to the United North American States and Texas* (1844; English translation in 1981), a book that changed Elise's life.

For a period of time she took over the editorship of *Norge og Amerika*, a paper Reiersen had started in Norway and – influenced by his ideas – she decided to emigrate to Texas in 1847, at the age of 32. A year later, she married William Wærenskjold, a fellow Norwegian immigrant six years her junior, who had come with her on the boat from Europe. He belonged to a renowned family in Norway, and had spent a few years in prison before he emigrated. In 1866 he was brutally murdered in a local store, close to their home in Texas. Elise continued as a farmer and as a writer of letters and when she died in Hamilton, Texas, in 1895, she had been a widow for almost thirty years.

Naturally, the author is led to reflections on the second marriage of his heroine. Her marriage in Texas was certainly different from her marriage in Norway. Her first husband lived a life of fame and retired with pockets full of money, as his ex-wife was eking out a life as a widowed farmer in Eastern Texas. (Russell points out that late in life he sent her \$400.) Her second husband joined the Confederate army, whereas Elise openly opposed the institution of slavery. Russell has also detected that her divorce in Norway was not formally signed until some time after she married in Texas, and he convincingly assumes that her second marriage may have been hastened, not due to unplanned pregnancy, but a desire to acquire a larger land grant given to married couples. But when this apparently rational idea of a beginning union, leads him on to speculate “whether romance and physical attraction existed between the two,” he ends up in trouble. Of course Elise had all reasons to be skeptical of a second marriage, yet she married, and the couple produced after all three children (one died as a six year old), and a modern reader should note – as the author admits – the topic of “physical attraction” never entered the kind of nineteenth-century correspondence that Elise produced and enjoyed.

Despite her two marriages, her childhood friend and mentor Johan R. Reiersen may have been the most important man in Elise Wærenskjold's life. He trusted her and must have had a strong belief in her and her accomplishments. As Russell points out, her style of writing reveals a more realistic approach to both Norwegian society and American culture than Reiersen propounded. She was certain that the United States would offer her more freedom as a woman than she would have had in Norway, but she was horrified by frontier violence. In Texas she discovered that Reiersen's "statements were not always quite accurate" (59), and that he was so eager to beckon immigrants to Texas that he sometimes overlooked the hardships they encountered. Here Russell clearly demonstrates how Elise, as Reiersen's one-time female assistant, in fact deflates his views "with light stiletto jabs" (59). This use of metaphors gives an amusing touch to Russell's portrayal of his heroine as a frontier farmer!

When Russell writes that she spent her life as a farm woman in Texas, but that "*yet through the years*" (3) [my italics] she was able to produce newspaper essays, write a large number of letters, and read books, he depends on the notion that farmers (or farm women) usually did not spend time in such intellectual pursuits. But many of them did. In fact Elise kept up a tradition of the farmer-writer or the farmer-reader, which was not uncommon, at least not in the country she left. The most remarkable feature of her life was not that she raised hogs and devoted time to reading – she read American writers as well as Norwegian writers like Henrik Ibsen and Camilla Collett – and writing at the same time, but that she kept up her journalistic essays and her private correspondence for such a long time. She must have had a notion that her life was not fully lived until she committed at least parts of it to writing, published or unpublished.

Russell describes Elise as having been inspired by ideas of the Enlightenment. In a confession of her religious belief she wrote in the mid-1860s, she questions the idea of trinity and adopts a liberal stand on religion. The document was a religious manifesto, intended for her sons to read. It may not be as original or as important as Russell argues it is, but clearly the thoughts of New England liberals had reached the immigrant woman on the Texan frontier. We knew that she had read Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and that she based her anti-slavery stand on *The Declaration of Independence*. Her view that slavery was "contrary to the will of God" had also been preached by the ordained layman Elling Eielsen (1804–1883), who had visited the Norwegian settlement in Texas in the winter of 1860. She respected him, even if she did not like his report from his visit to Texas (185). Russell points out that she liked his zeal and his preaching, yet she was shocked by American revivalist open-air preaching. Interestingly, she must have been able to incorporate ideas of a Norwegian Lutheran pietist preacher and New England reformers in her religious thoughts. She must have become more eclectic in her religious views than her upbringing in Norway should have predicted. Russell has attempted to underscore her religious sensitivity at a very early age when he presents her embroidery of the face of Jesus in black silk, made when she was a thirteen year old girl, still living in the parsonage with her parents (illustration on p. 94). He notes that her Jesus-figure has a blur in his right eye, just like the blank spot Elise always had "in her right eye" (95), so that her representation of Jesus has a secret reflection of her own injured eye! It may not be

entirely convincing, but the reading fits Russell's presentation of a deeply religious woman.

Elise Wærenskjold had a farm in Texas. Her reading connected her to a home country she never saw again after she emigrated. Her writing kept her in touch with friends in the old country and with a Midwestern Norwegian-American literary culture of which she was never a part. In his *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration*, published in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1896, a year after Elise died, Rasmus B. Anderson regretted that he "never had the good fortune of meeting Mrs. Wærenskjold," but "his correspondence with her caused me to esteem most highly, this gifted, scholarly, kind, brave and noble woman" (386). Charles H. Russell's biography of her is written in the same spirit. Even if he has placed the object of his study in the context of the history of Texas from the 1840s till after the Civil War, the book is a wonderful example of the bilingual and bilateral research necessary to construct immigrant biographies.

Øyvind Gulliksen

Telemark University College

Johannes B. Wist. *The Rise of Jonas Olsen: A Norwegian Immigrant's Saga*. Translated by Orm Øverland, Foreword by Todd W. Nichol. University of Minnesota Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8166-4750-X.

Johannes B. Wist, a Norwegian immigrant to America, wrote in the years 1919 to 1922 a saga about another immigrant from Norway, a fictional character that he called Jonas Olsen. These stories were written in Norwegian and first published as an installment series in the Norwegian-American newspaper *Decorah-Posten*. It was also published in Norwegian as a trilogy during the period of 1920-1922. *The Rise of Jonas Olsen: A Norwegian Immigrant's Saga*, has now been translated into English by Orm Øverland and published in 2005 by Minnesota Press, in cooperation with The Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA) and editor Todd W. Nichol.

The publication is important because it demonstrates the ceaseless search for the great immigration novel. Johannes Wist's immigrant story exceeds the boundaries of time and offers a unique insight into the processes immigrants went through upon their arrival in America in the years before and after 1900.

Johannes B. Wist lived between 1864 and 1923. He emigrated to America in 1884 and worked as editor of the *Decorah-Posten* for many years. In *The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America* (1996), a work on the Norwegian culture and literature in America, professor Øverland portrays Johannes B. Wist as a "bemused spectator," a talented author, and a gifted satirist. Moreover, Øverland argues that the trilogy about Jonas Olsen is "one of the most interesting and entertaining literary products of *Vesterheimen*."

The theme of *The Rise of Jonas Olsen* – not an accidental title – contains three different storylines. Book I, entitled, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Years in America*, captures – according to Solveig Zempel's characterization in an essay from 1986 – "the urban Norwegian-American milieu of the 1880s in a por-