

within which the needs of a democracy rather than a state of emergency become apparent. To do so, for her, is not to dismiss the existence of a state of exception, or of an emergency situation. It is to reconceptualize these within a narrative wherein it becomes clear that they are tragic in nature, and that what is at stake is how to engage with the existence of this tragedy. Emergencies, and the issues around survival they raise, tend towards legitimating any action for the sake of survival itself without concern over the long-term effects and ethics of these actions. However much this might be justified within the context of the state of emergency, Honig cautions that it needs to be supplemented with a tragic understanding of the situation in which the politics of emergency puts us. Bluntly, the tragic perspective she views as necessary demands the recognition that the best thing to do in tragic situations is “remaining around for the cleanup” (7), which is to say it demands reflection on how to live what has been done for the sake of survival—this question Honig claims rightly as being the paradigmatic question of the torturer and those who in one way or another allow torture to take place in the first instance. The working out of a response to a question like this can only take place in a time during which the relation between the state and its citizens is being negotiated and renegotiated. The question itself, however, cannot be posed from within a state of exception theoretical framework. It depends on a theorization of survival as also allowing for the possibilities of more life, a better life than is currently available to democracy and its citizens.

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Charles H. Russell, ed. *Light on the Prairie: New Writings of Elise Wærenskjold*. Houston, Texas: Shining Brightly Books, 2010. 226 pages. ISBN 978-0-978-0-9800061-8-6. \$ 20.00 paper.

Two very different women have had a canonical status in the historiography of Norwegian immigration in the US: Elise Wærenskjold and Gro Svendsen. Letters by both are published by the Norwegian-American Historical Association (Wærenskjold in 1961 and Svendsen in 1950) and both have made frequent appearances in the work of immigration historians. There all similarity ends. Gro Svendsen was a farmer's wife from one of Norway's valleys and did not become a public figure until Theodore C. Blegen found

her letters on a visit to Hallingdal in Norway in the late 1920s and brought her into view in his writings. Elise Wærenskjold hailed from the upper echelons of mid-nineteenth century Norwegian society and took part in the public discourse on emigration in Norway before she herself became a settler in Texas and continued to play a public role, contributing to Norwegian-American journals in the Midwest while tending her fields and animals on which she depended for her livelihood. Along with Clarence Clausen, the editor of the 1961 edition of her letters, *The Lady with the Pen*, Charles H. Russell has contributed significantly to our knowledge and understanding of Elise Wærenskjold, first in his excellent biography, *Undaunted: A Norwegian Woman in Frontier Texas* (Texas A&M U.P., 2005) and now in this selection of her writings, most of them presented for the first time in English translation.

His first section of Wærenskjold texts consists of her letters to a postmaster in Løiten, Hedmark (some written before her emigration) and her dispatches to the newsletter *Norge og Amerika* (Norway and America) that she had edited before emigrating in 1847. These are valuable texts for our understanding of early emigration from Europe. Her narrative of her journey via Le Havre and New Orleans to Kaufman and Van Zandt Counties in Texas that she wrote for the newsletter as well as her informative letters to the postmaster are written as advice to prospective emigrants. In Russell's book these texts are followed by useful information on the "People in the Letters and Dispatches," organized by the dates of the letters in which they are mentioned.

Perhaps the single most valuable text in Russell's volume is the translation (by C.A. Clausen and Nora Solum) of Wærenskjold's "Confession of Faith," a series of handwritten notes on faith, theology and ethics written for her sons that has remained unpublished in the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. The manuscript is undated but Russell argues convincingly that it must have been written in February or March 1861, after the public debate in the US on Darwin's theory of evolution in January, and before the outbreak of the Civil War in April (122). Her "Confession" is a fascinating document of an intelligent American woman's religious and ethical views. She tackles with the then very controversial topic of the Holy Trinity, a dogma that she is unable to accept, as well as the highly topical issue of evolution versus creation where she on the one hand accepts the account in the Book of Genesis but on the other argues against all literal readings of the Bible. Wærenskjold was aware that her views

on several issues were controversial. She opens her personal confession of faith with words of admonition to her “dear and deeply beloved children,” explaining that she writes in the hope that “it might serve to strengthen your faith and fundamental beliefs when you come in touch with scoffers and doubters, seducers and offenders ... but *only* for you because my belief in the Trinity might become an offense unto many since it diverges from that of the Church” (125). The most controversial section of this document, considering that it was written by a Southern woman just before the outbreak of the Civil War, is her denunciation of slavery as “absolutely contrary to the law of God” (163). In her abhorrence of a system under which slave owners sold their own children, Wærenskjold brings to mind the diary of another Southern woman, Mary Chesnut, in C. Vann Woodward’s fine edition. While she feels powerless to abolish the system, Wærenskjold admonishes her sons “to keep ourselves free of the whole slavery system” (165).

Wærenskjold’s “Confession” is all the more valuable because it was written as a personal document from a mother to her sons rather than as a contribution to a public debate. Her “Confession” thus documents what a mid-century Southern woman actually believed and thought rather than what she may have wished to have known by her neighbors. As a conclusion to his volume, Russell has an English translation of a letter Wærenskjold wrote about her husband’s murder in 1866.

Charles Russell’s 2005 biography of Wærenskjold gave us a more complete account of her life than had been available and with *Light on the Prairie* he has now published a series of personal documents that give us further insight into this fascinating nineteenth century character in American history.

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