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Horizons of Enchantment

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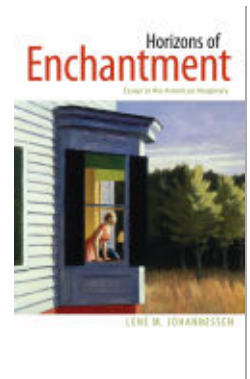
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“PERPETUAL PROGRESS” IN DRUDE KROG JANSON’S
A SALOONKEEPER’S DAUGHTER

DRUDE KROG JANSON’S novel *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* was originally published in Minneapolis in 1887 with a similar-sounding title in Norwegian, *En Saloonkeepers Datter*.¹ The story of protagonist Astrid Holm’s journey from Norway to late nineteenth-century America, moving from adolescence to adulthood and from failed actress to Unitarian minister, is a detailed and critical description of and from the Minneapolis of the 1880s that speaks to us across the centuries and contributes to our understanding of late-nineteenth-century Atlantic and American literary history. It is, however, only recently, more than a century later, that this story, coming from a Norwegian immigrant community in the American Midwest, has become available to a broader, English-reading audience. As Orm Øverland, who has edited and introduced the new edition, comments, “Drude Krog Janson is hardly a forgotten name in American literature: she fell into oblivion so rapidly that she seems never to have been noticed much in the first place.”² She may not rank as a must-read, but since its restoration in 2002, her novel has secured a place among other recovered literary works.

A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter lends itself to a number of different readings, and here I briefly sketch a few possible approaches.³ One immediate focus is the role and revision of religious ideologies. The novel’s representation of religion speaks to the tension between liberal religion and Norwegian Lutheranism in Norway, as well as its relationship to similar discussions in the United States, as much as it speaks to corresponding tendencies among the Norwegian immigrants in the American setting.⁴ *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* also

reflects the intensifying relevance of the woman question and highlights the intimate transatlantic connections between women's movements in the United States and those on the European continent. In these contexts Astrid Holm and her journey toward maturity are also emblematic of more general cultural, political, and ideological tendencies and productions of her time.⁵ And then, of course, we must remember that, when it was initially published, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* would most likely not have been considered American literature at all. Not only was it written in a language other than "Anglo-Saxon," it also pertains to that branch of literature commonly referred to as local color, the less-esteemed cousin of realism, and one that in general has been "marginalized by critics . . . for [its] focus on places outside the centres of literary power."⁶ Naturally, this injustice has been righted in the past several decades, and the inclusion and appraisal of literatures formerly excluded from American literary history continue to create a deeper understanding of American literary and social history. We need only think of other restored works such as María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), which both offer glimpses into the scarcely described realities of the newly annexed Mexicans of the American Southwest. Perhaps the most frightening example of local color's marginalization is Kate Chopin's now-classic *The Awakening*. While it is not aesthetically comparable to *The Awakening*, *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* nevertheless finds a place in the pantheon of those works that survived the dusty repositories of oblivion.

However, the novels just mentioned have different geneses from that of *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*; they were written in English by writers who resided permanently in the United States. By contrast, Drude Krog Janson, who had arrived with her children in Minneapolis in 1882 to join her husband, the priest and writer Kristofer Janson (at the time a household name both in Norway and in the Norwegian immigrant community in Minneapolis), did not stay. After her marriage came to an end, she decided to leave the United States in order to pursue her writing and personal independence back in Europe. This was in 1893, and Drude Krog Janson's life in America had lasted eleven years. And here is the curiosity I men-

tioned in chapter 1: Janson’s novel is generally and without much comment assumed to be an American work. This is also echoed in the assessments by the translator Gerald Thorson and the editor Orm Øverland, who, along with other critics, classify it as such. Thorson comments that “Drawing on the realistic and literary movements in Europe and in America, Janson has written an American novel that anticipates the works of such writers as Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and Sarah Orne Jewett.”⁷ Øverland, a scholar specializing in Norwegian immigrant history and literature, has introduced and comprehensibly annotated the new edition. He appraises Janson’s forgotten novel in the context of “American literatures in languages other than English”: “One reason [Drude Krog Janson] has been neglected is the multilingual nature of American culture. Literary histories are silent on the fiction, drama, and poetry that came out of the late-nineteenth-century Midwest, partly because so much of it was in languages other than English.” He goes on to observe that “For an important period of her life, she was an American writer. She can now be considered, in translation, for the distinctive qualities of her contribution to American literature.”⁸

My own interest is not in whether or not *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* is an American novel, because I fully agree that it is, and it is certainly not my intention to raise doubts thereof. The novel’s status is connected to the concerns raised in the past couple of decades among scholars who painstakingly have undertaken the project of including non-English literatures in their American histories. Such inclusion necessarily also raises questions about what kind of processes of transculturation *cum* transvaluation accompany the belated arrivals on the shelves of American literature. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage that problem in a comprehensive way, an excursion into one of its literary spaces may yield the contours of at least one route of elucidation. Hence my question about *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*: What is going on in this novel that makes it American, even in Norwegian? For consider the novel’s contexts: Drude Krog Janson spent a relatively short time in the United States; the narrative itself has few references to America as such and mostly takes place in “little Norway over there.” Add to this that the novel was written in Norwegian for a

Norwegian-reading and Norwegian-speaking audience, and the question becomes rather insistent. As I explore in detail in what follows, the answer is intimately connected with the ideological impetus for and implications of the principle of the *Bildung* narrative, on the discursive, individual level but also, by extension, on the cultural-logical one. I furthermore propose that if we focus on this particular genre as a way of seeing the world and its engagement with the American social imaginary, we can calibrate a very particular articulation of the latter at a specific time and place. At this intersection, between the principles of formation in *Bildung* and its carrying out of the American imaginary, lies a possible answer to why *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* is an American novel.

It is really quite simple. There is in Janson's work a narrative orientation that we do not recognize from Norwegian literary imaginations of the same period (or any other, for that matter), and it can tentatively be described as a sensibility of the very *real* actualization of the promise of transformation, a sensibility that pertains to the New World. The element that makes *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter* unthinkable as a Norwegian novel is the complete and individual make-over the protagonist goes through, vaguely hinted at shortly before she embarks on her journey across the ocean: "In America she would begin to live again, and she dreamed of endless sun-lit plains where people were happy, where one could follow a call, and where no one treated others harshly because of prejudice."⁹ Much could be said about these lines, but I draw particular attention to the quite remarkable echo of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's depictions of the "constitution" of Americans, approximately one hundred years earlier. In his third "Letter" he declares that "The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared, and which will hereafter become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit."¹⁰ It is an oft-quoted sentence that may be taken to mean that those who are now Americans and residing within the borders of the United States were at one time dispersed everywhere. It can also, however, more interestingly be read as labeling people as "Americans" even prior to departure, identifying a precondition, a disposition, or an inher-

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ent potential that can only come to fruition and actualization once the move to the physical place has occurred: *Americans-in-becoming*, awaiting their incorporation into their destined and natural land. It seems inconceivable that a sentence of this magnitude and sheer magic attraction could originate in any other societal structure than one driven by “enchantment.”

As we saw in chapter 1, the idea of America, coupled with a new conception of how humans live and interact, marks the contours of a very powerful version of what Charles Taylor defines as the modern social imaginary. It denotes, briefly speaking, a way of fitting together that is founded on ideas of the inherent rationality of the individual; a system of mutual benefit; and a thoroughly secular anchoring of society, its institutions, and the relationship between these and the people whom they seek to govern and guard. The argument, or rather, the long march of modernity, begins with the birth of a new moral order, which, Taylor says, “was most clearly stated in the new theories of Natural Law which emerged in the seventeenth century” by deriving “the normative order underlying political society from the nature of its constitutive members. Human beings are rational, sociable agents who are meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit.”¹¹ Of greatest relevance to the present discussion is what Taylor says about how an idea of our actually living together emerges gradually, through numerous adaptations and mutations. I quote the following at length, since it bears directly on the question of the Americanness of Janson’s novel:

The picture of society is that of individuals who come together to form a political entity against a certain preexisting moral background and with certain ends in view. The moral background is one of natural rights; these people already have certain moral obligations toward each other. The ends sought are certain common benefits, of which security is the most important.

The underlying idea of moral order stresses the rights and obligations we have as individuals in regard to each other, even prior to or outside of the political bond. Political obligations are seen as an extension or application of these more fundamental moral ties. Political authority itself is legitimate only because it was consented to by

individuals (the original contract), and this contract creates binding obligations in virtue of the preexisting principle that promises ought to be kept.¹²

In the reflections of both Crèvecoeur's "Letter" and Janson's protagonist Astrid, the "underlying idea of moral order" is already firmly in place, but it is geared toward a very particular space and direction that adds to Taylor's imaginary one crucial element: the utter rejection of things past and the embrace of the new, a contract informed by more than the secular, moral economy that would come to frame the West. The contract that *Americans-in-becoming* such as Astrid must enter into demands a future orientation with the individual as centerpiece, since only in such isolation can futurity be kept pure, as it were. Cultures of the communal, in order to stay so, must follow and abide by practices and habits formed by the collective (albeit always more or less under revision), as Astrid's reference to prejudices suggests. With the new land, dreamt into being before it was a reality, a very potent imaginary thus comes to fruition. While its birth as a nation is informed by similar processes as those leading up to the French Revolution, one element in particular causes this one imaginary to stand out. In Taylor's words, "Liberty is no longer simply belonging to the sovereign people, but personal independence. Moreover, this kind of liberty, generalized, is the necessary basis of equality, for it alone negates the older forms of hierarchical independence. . . . Independence is thus a social, and not just a personal, idea."¹³ This is essentially the promise held out by the Declaration of Independence, but it is more than a promise. It also becomes an obligation in order to better serve the greater good.

Progress and the unbridled pursuit of aspiration and potential happiness thus come to canvass imaginations everywhere as an irresistible version of modernity, as they do to this day. The American imaginary draws into its fold spaces far away, and it both feeds and is fed by that part of imaginaries elsewhere that dream of aspiration's free reign, as indeed Astrid Holm dreams. As a consequence, we will see that her story is not really conceivable in a context where older orders still prevail. This is very clearly revealed through

the genre in which her transformation into an American is accomplished. The generic mold interestingly replicates this very constituent of the American imaginary: the independent individual who is simultaneously socially bound. The *Bildung* genre as scaffolding or cast turns out to be a perfect vehicle for this design. One of its main ideological characteristics is, as Franco Moretti reminds us, the projection of “the biography of a young individual [as] the most meaningful viewpoint for the understanding and the evolution of history.”¹⁴ In narrating the story of the young immigrant girl and her journey toward maturity in the New World, the author taps into and describes a double movement in terms of an American topological circumstance. The imaginary is both constitutive of and constituted by the participants’ willingness to embrace this future-oriented, unfettered contract: individualism and personal independence as socialization into the larger society. In no small measure, this resonates with the ideology of the institutional frameworks that traditionally underlay the study of literature in the *Bildung* genre’s place of birth, Germany. For, rather than being relegated to its own academic department, literature was instead “subsumed under the comprehensive discipline of *Germanistik*, the study, reinforcement, and transmission of the presumed cultural values of the nation. Thus, a question such as the definition of the *Bildungsroman* is an issue not confined to academic discourse, but spreads into the ideological self-understanding of the culture as a whole.”¹⁵

In its origin, then, the convergence of narrating the self in relation to nation or society is embedded in generic requirements and a corresponding institutional confluence between a society’s literature and culture. The *bildungsroman* works as a cast in a double fashion: it shapes from the outside, from the perspective of culture as overarching structure, into which its members are socialized and acculturated; and it shapes from the inside, as the protagonist aspires to the realization of herself or himself as an acculturated member of the community. As Richard Koselleck puts it, “It is characteristic of the German concept of *Bildung* that it recasts the sense of an upbringing offered from the outside (which still belongs to the concept during the eighteenth century) into the autonomous claim for a person to transform the world.”¹⁶

The textual manifestations of the genre and the imaginary's working alongside each other and eventually merging begin early on in *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*. Following the death of his wife, August Holm, a failed businessman from a well-off family in Kristiania (now Oslo), decides to immigrate to the United States. He tells his oldest daughter Astrid that "There a man with knowledge and experience can get ahead . . . I belong there where one is free of all this aristocratic nonsense." To Astrid the decision comes as something of a surprise, but she is quickly reconciled to the idea and agrees to join him after a year has passed. After all, she reflects, "there is much freedom there. Maybe there could be freedom for her, too."¹⁷

Astrid harbors a secret dream of becoming an actress, as her mother had been in her youth, and has spent her childhood and adolescence playacting with her mother's old costumes and reading every play she has been able to get her hands on. She is particularly taken with the character Hjørdis in Ibsen's play *The Vikings at Helsingland* (1857). Astrid's fascination with Hjørdis, who is commonly considered the forerunner of Ibsen's more famous female character Hedda Gabler of the play of the same name, indicates an early if unarticulated sense of independence and determination. To Astrid, immigrating to America opens up the possibility of pursuing her own dream of acting in front of people, not rats, as she used to do in the attic of her family's house in Norway. The contours of a trope are taking shape here, but they do not yet pertain to a uniquely American context. Astrid is simply reflecting the desire and dream embedded in all migratory projects, of creating a better life and a better future. To Astrid's father, America presents an escape from the humiliation of having failed at home, and the opportunity to start over again. His is the typical emigrant story, in which financial ruin is the main motivation for leaving. When Astrid, her younger brothers, and their nanny arrive a year later, it turns out that the "wine business" that her father has written and told them about in his letters is nothing fancier than a simple saloon regularly visited by other Norwegian immigrants. When she realizes the true nature of her father's business, Astrid despairs: "Dear God, dear God, . . . What shall I do? What shall I do?"¹⁸

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The new beginning is thus framed by shame, for Astrid as well as for her father. To Mr. Holm, “it was a disgrace that he, a well-bred gentleman, the scion of an old patrician family, should sink so low.” He takes comfort, however, in the fact that “none of his old acquaintances and friends saw him in these circumstances.”¹⁹ We see here that the novel’s discourse has not left the imaginary and auxiliaries of the old country and the past, and that the potential and promise of the new imaginary are not yet available. We could perhaps rephrase this and suggest that the filter through which the participants are seen and through which they themselves see is not yet accessible and hence cannot provide their constitution into the imaginary’s “conversation” as enabled participants in the game.

Immigrant literature generally displays a narrative oscillation between the potential of the future and nostalgia for the past. Past and present coexist uneasily in a complex space of simultaneity, and it is ultimately left to the immigrant alone to find her way out of this confusion. This is also true of Astrid Holm. From that point in the story that has just been described, the narrative of the protagonist’s coming of age alternates between unbridled enthusiasm for the possibilities she sees lying ahead and acute bouts of homesickness, disgust, and disillusion with her new environment and life. An incident that takes place not long after Astrid’s arrival illustrates this dialectic. Urged on by her suitor Meyer, she agrees to act in a play, which also pleases her father, who sees a way out of his own mire by attempting to find his daughter a suitable and respectable husband. Astrid is happy, dreaming as she still does of following her calling to become an actress. The play is by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, a famous Norwegian writer who will assume a critical role toward the end of the novel.²⁰ The play, however, turns out to be a mere excuse for a dance and a beer brawl orchestrated by Mr. Holm and his business interests, and Astrid’s disappointment and repugnance at the audience’s vulgarity and disregard for the play itself all but crush her. She realizes how naïve she has been, and there and then abandons her dreams of the theater. When the play is over, she unhappily joins the others in drinking and dancing. The evening ends with her getting sick, from alcohol as well as the disgust and horror at Meyer’s making inappropriate passes at her. The incident throws

Astrid into a fever and also changes something inside her. The following passage marks the first turning point, or moment of crisis, in the *Bildung* process:

When Astrid got out of bed the day after, she was well again. Anyone looking at her closely, though, would have noticed that those two days had brought about a great change. Something cold, almost stony, had come over her. Her blood-red mouth now had a firm and determined look. She had buried her childhood with its happy memories, her bright youth with its jubilant premonitions, dreams and hopes.²¹

The conventions of the *Bildung* genre demand such moments of crisis, and typically they function as episodes of potential meaning: “The novelistic episode is almost never meaningful in itself. It becomes so because someone—in the Bildungsroman usually the protagonist—gives it meaning.”²² These are, in other words, encounters with the surrounding world that potentially and eventually will constitute the protagonist’s final *Bildung*. In Astrid’s case, however, the real meaning of her submission to societal norms is only revealed later, in a second moment of crisis. Before that, she agrees to become engaged to the well-respected lawyer Mr. Smith. When he asks her to be his wife and tries to kiss her, she reacts very much as she did when Meyer tried to kiss her. She faints, and only when she arrives home safely do we realize how desperately unhappy she is: “what had become of her in this one year? A tearless woman who with a bitter smile walked toward her humiliation.”²³ Astrid’s father is of course delighted with the prospect of marriage and fails to note that his daughter, like Dame Margit in Astrid’s favorite Ibsen play, *The Feast at Solhaug*, marries out of resignation, not love.

Astrid’s acquiescence to marrying Smith, however unhappy the prospect may be, fulfils an important requirement. The *Bildung* genre traditionally demands that the protagonist comply with the wishes and expectations of society and family—in this lies the pedagogical lesson. The entire purpose of the crisis is to have the hero choose which path to follow, and this choice must be one that ideally marks, as Walter Sokel puts it, “the utopian synthesis of indi-

viduality and socialization.” True to form, then, *The Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* centers on the individual’s negotiation of the dichotomy between autonomy and socialization in such a fashion that the individual’s formation at least seems to “[coincide] without rifts with one’s social integration as a simple part of the whole.”²⁴ In Astrid’s case, her agreement to marry the unsympathetic but solvent and socially acceptable Smith signifies this integration and synthesis. For the *Bildung* process is not entirely complete and the ending is not entirely happy without marriage. An unsurpassed “metaphor for the social contract” in the bildungsroman tradition, marriage stands for far more than the agreed bond between two individuals; it is also the ultimate contract between the individual and the world.²⁵ Astrid’s decision puts her father at peace and satisfies Smith as well as the expectations of society. The community of mostly Norwegian immigrants applauds her finally coming to her senses: “Everywhere she was received with open arms and a friendly smile. . . . All were delighted to see the ‘sweet Miss Holm.’”²⁶

Just as Astrid’s fate seems sealed and the date for the wedding has been set, Bjørnson himself arrives in town to give a lecture. To Astrid, “It was as if everything was torn up in her again just at hearing that Bjørnson was coming to town. . . . Now in her humiliation, when she had given up everything, he was coming. What should that mean? If he had only come a year earlier, then, perhaps, he could have saved her. Now it was too late.” The lecture and subsequent personal meeting with Bjørnson will mark the second moment of crisis in Astrid’s *Bildung*. To hear him speak fills her with joy, “a new sense of faith,” but one that quickly dissipates when she goes home to the rooms above the saloon: “It was impossible for her to be saved.”²⁷ The next evening, however, she is introduced to Bjørnson at a dinner party. Against the pact with Smith and society, a life led as possession, Bjørnson emerges as a powerful reminder of a life led in and by faith. The meeting awakens Astrid, who then writes a note to Smith telling him the marriage is off, and, despairing at the predicament she is in, goes to see Bjørnson in private to seek his advice. The most significant lesson that crystallizes from their conversation is the poet’s warning that Astrid not bow down to conventions:

“A woman in our day has no excuse if she gives up,” said Bjørnson firmly. “God forbid! That time is past, especially here in America. Here a defeated woman does not have to take her own life or give herself in an immoral marriage, that is no better than another form of prostitution. That is the history of barbaric ages and it has demanded millions of sacrifices. Now that must come to an end.”²⁸

Bjørnson here voices a conception that pits old world and New World against each other in a dialectical pairing in which the former is barbaric and past, the latter civilized and new. It is quite intriguing that a Norwegian, not an American, projects this view, and Bjørnson here breaks with standard mores in both Norway and the United States at the time. However, Øyvind Gulliksen argues that Janson here lets Bjørnson carry ideas that he may not have had in real life, but that the American context of the novel made possible. Gulliksen, moreover, concludes that “*A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* is a novel of religious thought, inspired by the new liberalism of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the Norwegian poet, and a testing in fiction of Unitarian views in the New England tradition of William E. Channing.”²⁹ This is a compelling point, which further strengthens the idea that the novel remains, even at this late point in the narrative, steeped in moral and cultural outlooks that have not yet been “enabled,” adapted and transformed into primers of the American imaginary, although they are now close.

Bjørnson’s final advice to the unhappy and confused Astrid is that she become a minister, “a minister like those found here in America—gentle, loving, men and women who proclaim peace on earth, who do not believe that people are little devils created for hell’s fire. Instead, they have a glowing faith in the victory of goodness in the world and in perpetual progress.”³⁰ At this point it becomes clear that Astrid’s fulfilling of the *Bildung* ideal, by agreeing to marriage and the demands represented by the *Bildung* framework, is valid only in the context of one part of the society that she is acculturating into, namely the Norwegian-American community. As I said initially, the novel makes few references to sources or events outside this enclave, and as Astrid has painfully come to experience, the traces of an imaginary whose social institutions and

expectations remain entrenched in an older temporality still hold sway. We can read the two moments of crisis, therefore, as necessary discursive and strategic nodes for the projection of personal and cultural transformation.

For it is the second moment of crisis, with Bjørnson as catalyst, that marks Astrid’s true conversion, in more senses of the word than one. We return here to the idea of genres as forms of seeing and interpreting the world, as structural molds or grids. The transition from one model of *Bildung* to another is not antithetical to generic conventions; instead it echoes the very nature of any genre as never finalized. As Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us, genre “lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginnings. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development. Precisely for this reason is genre capable of guaranteeing the *unity* and *uninterrupted continuity* of this development.”³¹ It is this transference from one imaginary to another that the two moments of crisis together project, also thereby convincingly refracting Astrid’s conversion from *American-in-becoming* to enabled participant.

The decision Astrid now makes stands out in American literary history. After a few days in the home of her father, she announces that she is leaving for good: “Astrid walked hurriedly up the street, never looking back.”³² She then seeks out Helene Nielsen, a female doctor she has met on occasion and found sympathy from. Here she finds a haven:

“You have severed all ties?” There was deep joy in [Helene’s] voice.
“And you come to me? Then I haven’t lived in vain when the unfortunate and forlorn turn to me. This is the happiest moment of my life. It makes up for many, many disappointments. . . . You have no idea how I have been drawn to you ever since the first time I saw you. Oh, how it cut my heart when I saw you being destroyed. Yes, you would have been destroyed if you hadn’t broken it off. But now all will be well.”³³

The path Astrid chooses reverses and invalidates her first path in a final act of rejection and withdrawal from society. Her refusal is further augmented by the fact that she chooses to live with another woman. Janson does not fail to give this aspect due notice: “Thus

did these two women, who had both left their places in society, make a pact for life.”³⁴ The companionship is not in itself unheard of in American literature, and as Axel Nissen shows, “Janson’s novel relates to and intersects with a similar rhetoric of gender in works by authors such as Maria Cummins, Sarah Orne Jewett, William Dean Howells and Henry James.” Where the story of Astrid’s coming of age *is* unique, however, is in its denouement: “None of the main female characters die. None of the main female characters marry. And the two romantic friends, the novel strongly suggests, will live happily ever after.”³⁵ The radical break with the established backdrop pertaining to gender roles does not mean Janson’s representation detracts from the master trope of the American imaginary, for it is Astrid’s found freedom to pursue her own interpretation of it that prevails in the narrative, not really her romantic friendship with Helen. The imaginary has not lost its power to engender other, new participants in its conversation, and it is at this juncture that Astrid’s trajectory analogizes the real marvel of the trope: the promise of unbridled aspiration can be pursued over and over again, by means of new members who join to participate. This moment in the novel thus also illustrates what Charles Taylor suggests about the dynamism of the modern social imaginary in general, namely that “the relation between practices and background understanding is therefore not one-sided. If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding.”³⁶ In a case such as the American one, these practices are differently informed precisely because “background understandings” stem from a slew of different, old-world imaginaries. Hence the carrying of practices leaves behind residues that, in the encounter with the master trope, respond in a variety of ways. Astrid’s case is thus not unique, but in leaving no scar in the rift between old and new, her conversion illustrates an extreme model of conversion to the pursuit of one’s own happiness. Sacvan Bercovitch’s comment in relation to the privileging of opposition as personal radicalism applies to this model, for “whether the choice is the right to live or the rights of dissent, and whether (as a dissenter) you say ‘No in thunder’ or ‘I would prefer not to,’ subjectivity is reified as the ‘I’ of eternity, like the eye of

God on the dollar bill.”³⁷ (I will come back to this proposition in chapter 6.)

I mentioned other recovered and regional literary works earlier, and it may be useful to revisit *The Squatter and the Don* in order to gauge with precision alternative outcomes to the one we are dealing with here. Ruiz de Burton wrote that novel in the same period as Janson wrote hers, and to an extent it refracts some of the same generic elements, in particular the melodramatic, discursive sentiment and the traits of the roman à clef: *The Squatter and the Don* is set in California, it engages explicitly and at times crucially with historical and political events of its period, and includes references to real-life participants, notably the “Big Four” (Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins, who were mainly responsible for building the Central Pacific Railroad and California’s railroad system between 1861 and 1900). The differences, however, are still greater than such similarities. Most significantly, *The Squatter and the Don*’s narrative orientation never compromises the ideological and discursive grounding it retains in a different past, a period when California was still Mexican and the Don a real Don. Ruiz de Burton’s novel thus occupies a position in the cultural-discursive border space that opened up after the Mexican-American War of 1848, and it comes down to us as an early articulation of the dialogic exchange of the borderland. In this it also lodges itself firmly within a different strand in the American literary tradition, namely that which comes with a hyphen, in this case “Mexican-American.” These two components mark the currents that inform the discursive product, not as conversion, but as persevering negotiation of the encounter with the imaginary.

This is not so in *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter*. In the seven months that follow Astrid’s meeting with Bjørnson, she assists Helene in her work and devotes the rest of her time to studying English and history. Much of the misery she sees on house calls with her friend is caused by drunkenness, and she decides to give a public lecture on temperance. The attempt fails when the crowd, cheered on by Meyer, drowns her speech in loud remarks regarding her background: “Away with the saloonkeeper’s wench!” The experience leaves Astrid in a state of hopelessness, feeling that she will never be

able to shed her past, no matter what choice she makes: "Wherever I turn," she tells Helene, "my past follows me."³⁸

It is difficult at this point in the novel to see how the protagonist's second moment of crisis might generate anything but withdrawal, far removed from the contract with society that would fulfill the generic requirements of crisis and the pedagogy of choosing correctly. And yet, the resolution that now ensues turns isolation and rejection into precisely that, a contract and a path that are culturally, aesthetically, and socially acceptable. For after the bitter disappointment at the temperance lecture, which is in many ways a repetition of the episode of the play, Helene advises Astrid to leave town and begin her training as a Unitarian minister in Pennsylvania. And so it is that Astrid receives an audience after all. The transformation progresses from following a calling of the secular to that of the sacred, from despair to hope, from confusion to clarity, from adolescence to maturity, and, most importantly, from Norwegian immigrant to enabled American. If the protagonist's moments of crisis gain significance only in the fullness of time, then it is now that we see the true meaning of Astrid's journey. As it turns out, her final choice brings her a peace of mind and a sense of self that are in fact recognized through her ordination as a minister. The very last lines of the novel read: "Now she saw before her a sea of friendly faces, tear-filled eyes, as all welcomed her and waited, quietly and expectantly, to hear what she had to say. . . . She was at home here. She had not mistaken her call. She had reached her destination." The utopian synthesis between individual and society is consequently no longer utopian, and before Astrid lies a future that may still be "veiled in uncertainty and mystery," but one that must yield to her faith in the self's power to overcome those very uncertainties.³⁹

The contract between self and society is furthermore based on a very specific trope, namely what Bjørnson calls "perpetual progress," and it is what connects the path of the individual with that of society at large. For the novel's denouement also speaks directly to the culturological setting for Astrid's *Bildung*, namely the *Bildung* of the nation itself, along with its social imaginary. In leaving behind "degraded" Minneapolis to become a minister somewhere out

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West, Astrid emulates the grand design embedded in the perpetual: the idea of the everlasting clean slate and new beginnings, forever stretching into the future, Bercovitch’s newness as a “continual movement toward endings that issues in an endless affirmation of beginnings.”⁴⁰ Astrid’s personal journey toward maturity and completion merges with the culturological master trope of the New World. Conversations and experiences converge and are finally given meaning, and the protagonist chooses without suffering a debilitation of self.

Finally, the second moment of crisis may be seen as a literal as well as metaphorical act of conversion that, on the individual and personal level, replicates the larger culturological context. Herein lies the connection between Bjørnson’s “perpetual progress” and the reason why we read *A Saloonkeeper’s Daughter* as an American novel. Following the second crisis, the narrative discourse changes and refracts an orientation of faith in the new self and the newly found mission that resonates with the design of the burgeoning nation. Having recovered from the Civil War and experiencing tremendous economic and demographic growth, the United States in this period confirms its position as site for the aspiration of individual and cultural coming into being, and destination of unprecedented immigration. Of equal importance, both energies are consolidated and confirmed as virtuous in and of themselves, corresponding to the paradoxical redaction of the modern social imaginary as personal independence that is socially beneficial. This confirmation constitutes and is constituted by a culturological orientation that embraces present and future potential rather than the past and its nostalgia. David Lowenthal remarks:

In severing imperial bonds, Americans discarded not only the mother country but many of its traditions. Three interrelated ideas helped justify dismissal of the past: a belief that autonomy was the birth-right of each successive generation; an organic analogy that assigned America to a place of youth in history; and a faith that the new nation was divinely exempt from decay and decline.⁴¹

In Astrid’s personal journey and severing of bonds with the past, her choice is consistent with that of society. Her gaze, as that of

the culture she is becoming a part of, is directed not toward the homes left behind on the other side of the Atlantic but toward the future, represented in this case by the American West. The night before Astrid leaves she tells Helene, "My body belongs to me, and no one else has a right to it. Just think! I am saved." Her salvation comes about through religiosity, but within an American context in which religion is transformed into the empowerment of the individual—in relation to herself and to society as much as to God. Astrid goes into the future, and as the novel ends there is no indication of her looking back. She will "go west and take over an American congregation,"⁴² and the past indeed becomes a foreign country.

Drude Krog Janson's narrative is so emblematically American that it stands as an ideal template for the kinds of encounters with the American master imaginary that are so often handed down to us. Moreover, the protagonist-individual in her own personal story allegorizes the very constitution and institution of the modern social imaginary's disembedding and dehierarchization of its participants or members into a different arrangement of ideas of equality, liberty, and what Taylor refers to as mutual benefits. Øverland's statement, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that "for a period of her life Drude Krog Janson was an American writer," now seems beyond doubt an accurate assessment, and it is also worth noting that the text in and of itself comes to stand as testimony to the American imaginary as enabling filter. In the course of the eleven years Janson spent in Minneapolis, she internalized practices and understandings to such a degree that she was able to refract them, very precisely, as a cultural conversion carried by generic as well as ideological conventions and grids. What she tapped into was a template for individual and culturological self-fashioning that had already been scripted into existence by, among others, the national bard Walt Whitman.

Astrid Holm's turn of spirit comes after Whitman's magic, as do all the other texts in the present selection, and chronologically as well as thematically, it may seem a little backward not to let Whitman lead and the other readings follow. However, the sheer immensity of Whitman's aesthetic and ideological outlook may be better

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gauged after we have seen in Drude Krog Janson the actualization of the imaginary. Secondly, Astrid’s story is only *one* story, for advancement is not for all, as we know all too well, and performances and interpretations do not always accept and fit so neatly onto the scripted expectations.