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O.E. Rølvaag

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Giants in the Earth (Norwegian: *Verdens Grøde*) is a novel by Norwegian-American author Ole Edvard Rølvaag. First published in Norwegian as two books in 1924 and 1925, the English edition was translated by the author and Lincoln Colcord, each of whom also wrote prefatory matter.

Part of a trilogy, the novel follows a Norwegian pioneer family's struggles with the land and the elements of the Dakota Territory as they try to make a new life in America. The book is based partly on Rølvaag's personal experiences as a settler, and on the experiences of his wife's family who had been immigrant homesteaders. The novel depicts snow storms, locusts, poverty, hunger, loneliness, homesickness, the difficulty of fitting into a new culture, and the estrangement of immigrant children who grow up in a new land.

Giants in the Earth was turned into an opera by Douglas Moore and Arnold Sundgaard; it won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1951.

Giants in the Earth Details

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From Reader Review Giants in the Earth for online ebook

El says

I came across this book a few years back when we visited Washington, DC (a shout out to Second Story Books in Dupont Circle). I picked it out because I had never heard of it. Then I find out while I'm reading this that at least two people I know on Goodreads had this book assigned to them in high school as mandatory reading.

This doesn't even make sense to me.

This book, written by Norwegian-American author O.E. Rølvaag, was published in 1927 though it tells the story of a Norwegian immigrant family's trials and tribulations starting in 1873. There were a crap-ton of trials and tribulations, too, and eating porridge day and night was only one of them. (Seriously, there's a *lot* of porridge-eating here. I'm not saying this isn't accurate to the time and circumstances; I'm just saying it was a surprise at how frequently Rølvaag felt the need to share this information with us.) I eat oatmeal almost every day for breakfast, but I don't feel compelled to tell you about each occasion.

But there are other, much more important horrible things this family endures. The most impressively told parts, in my opinion, featured the snowstorms, blizzards, and all things snow-related. This is where Rølvaag really excelled as a writer, creating the visual of being trapped in a small space with ones family, sometimes not being able to open the door due to the amount of snow piled against it, utilizing their children to help plow a path (because that's fun for kids, dontcha know), etc.

Unfortunately I had a hard time connecting with any of the characters. It didn't help that Rølvaag had a dry style of writing and that he used a lot of ellipses throughout his paragraphs. The ellipses are a tricky form of punctuation marks because if it's done well, it works, and if it's not...

See what I did there?

My point is that if you overuse ellipses, whatever your point might have been, it's lost because I for one can't tell if you're trailing off because you're uncertain what else you want to say, or if you want the reader to guess what you're trying to say, or the author removed sections of the text for whatever reason. I mean, there are so many reasons, but the end result is that over-utilization of ellipses looks like sloppy writing and/or that the author is not very confident in his own story.

"God, if a fellow had thirteen barrels of this stuff of yours, Gurina!...You don't happen to have another little drop in the pan?"...She gave him a second bowlful, which he emptied as greedily as the first...All at once, something occurred to him. He turned to ask a question...Had any of them seen him drive past them in the storm?

Drive past them!..."You're talking wild, Per Hansa," said Tonseten, with an anxious look.
p316

I mean, that's an excessive use of ellipses, don't you agree? And the entire text is like that, so if the book is 531 pages in paperback, and there are at least seven or more instances of this on each page, then that means there's a gatrillion ellipses used in this novel. A GATRILLION, I say.

What I did especially appreciate about this book is the extensive footnotes. Not extensive in a quantitative sense, but in a qualitative. There's a lot of fantastic information in the footnotes of this novel, helpful in the sense of what actual immigrant pioneers experienced (this book was partly based on Rølvaag's own experiences as a child, so he would definitely know what it was like to live in the Dakota Territory in the late 19th century), Scandinavian mythology, artifacts that were used, and details about Norwegian names, and how they came about. I mean, really interesting, mostly useless (except to nerds like myself), information. It's because of the footnotes that I bumped this up to a 3-star rating. Otherwise I feel the text by itself would be a solid 2-star for the reasons stated above. (Okay, primarily the ellipses. There's just way too many of them.)

I understand there are two sequels, *Peder Victorious: A Tale of the Pioneers Twenty Years Later* and *Their Fathers' God*. I am fairly certain I own one, if not both, of them. I didn't dislike this one enough to sell back the others without reading them, and I also have a sick curiosity to know if Rølvaag ever learns about other forms of punctuation.

Phillip says

This sits atop my most recommended. It is an intense tale of struggle and determination. It follows a family and their group of friends as they establish a settlement on the prairie. As always I am moved by something the author may not have intended, a story within the story; I regard this among the best love stories I've read. The protagonists' dedication and sacrifice cuts so deep that the love is more bitter than sweet... in the face of their hardships the smallest kindness is a triumph, gentle moments a symphony. The story teems with adventure and hope but if tears don't pool at your feet then you're already dead because this one is too honest and too tragic... but a must read, just keep tissue at hand.

L. Frockcoat says

"A small caravan was pushing its way through the tall grass. The track that it left behind was like the wake of a boat - except that instead of widening out astern it closed in again."

This sentence, on the first page of *Giants in the Earth*, captures many of the conflicting emotions that the book's Norwegian immigrant characters face as they homestead in South Dakota during the 1870s. The settlers are moving forward into new experiences, adventures, and the possibility of wealth and status not available to them in the old country. At the same time, they are cut off from family, lost in a trackless prairie, and subject to the sometimes brutal turns of nature.

This isn't a particularly cheery book; the closing chapter is entitled "The Great Plain Drinks the Blood of Christian Men and Is Satisfied." Still, between the hardships, the book paints a comprehensive picture of everyday pioneer life that is deeply moving and convincing, as alien as it is from our way of life only 140 years later. Rolvaag also finds time to drop some heavy questions about religion, family, and heritage into the mix.

Highly recommended.

gaudeo says

"The month of July wore on. The small patches of fields in the Spring Creek settlement were slowly ripening and made a brave showing. Never had one seen finer fields! The grain had started to head out long ago; the kernels were already formed, tiny bodies wrapped in the most delicate green silk. With every day that passed the wheat filled out more and more; the heads grew heavy and full of milk; as soon as the breeze died down in the afternoon, they would tilt toward the setting sun and slowly drop off to sleep, only to dream of the marvellous life that was now stirring within them."

I have read numerous novels of the European settling of the West. Many of them are very good. But none could better this one, in my view. Rolvaag, in addition to capturing the adventure, the hard work, the natural disasters, and the ultimate success of the settlers, also vividly portrays the immigrant experience, the sense of camaraderie and neighborliness, and the exhausting struggle of a determined and resilient people. Most rewarding to this reader, he inhabits the mind of a woman who fights both depression and insanity when faced with the desolation of the endless plains, and that of a despairing preacher who feels impotent in the face of the lives of the people to whom he ministers.

My copy of this book (a first edition) touts it as "one of the few books on American pioneer life which will endure." I know it has endured among readers in the Dakotas, but it deserves to be read much more widely.

Rachel says

When I was a little girl, I loved to read books about the pioneers heading west. What little girl doesn't like Little House on the Prairie? I had forgotten my enjoyment of such books. But Giants in the Earth was so much better. I was glad it was a longer book, so there was more for me to enjoy.

Mmars says

There's lots of books about settlers of the American Prairie out there but Rolvaag does one thing remarkably well. Read this about 15 years ago, but still clearly remember Rolvaag's portrayal of the grueling solitude of early settlers of the northern plain. Especially of the wife, often left with her children while her husband went for supplies. Not unlike a sailor's wife, but without the near companionship of other women. Rough living quarters, coping with illness, scarcity of food, etc. Also, remember, these were stoic Norwegians. The men bear their own hardships and are constantly physically challenged. Having been caught in blizzards (and whiteouts) in my lifetime it was evident that Rolvaag wrote them only as one who has been through them could. Frightening - then & still. Some things about nature do not change.

If you're in the mood for a longish classic I highly recommended this for long winter nights by the fire.

Derekka says

We reached Wall, South Dakota on our ride and I was desperate for a book. Trying to find a book while riding a bicycle across the country turns out to be much harder than one would expect. When asked whether

there was a nearby bookstore, most hotel clerks looked at me as if I were asking for a brothel. Bookstore? No, they didn't have any idea. Or, yes, there might be one out in the mall, twenty minutes away (by car!)

At Wall Drug, however, they had a surprisingly good selection of books about Native Americans, pioneers, wagon trains, westward exploration, etc. and I was able to buy both this book and Ian Frazier's "Great Plains".

GITE was especially interesting when I read it because we were very near the area in SD where the fictional family settled and we also rode through the very county in Minnesota that they have left on their way west. I have obtained the sequel, "Peder Victorious".

Kim says

Giants in the Earth is a novel by Norwegian-American author O.E. Rølvaag. First published in the Norwegian language as two books in 1924 and 1925, mine is only one book and in one language which isn't Norwegian, I think you can guess what it is. I gave the book two stars for a reason I never remember giving a book a rating for, and it has nothing to do with the plot.

But first to our author Rølvåg, he was born in the family's cottage in a small fishing village on the island of Dønna, in Nordland county, Norway and is situated about five miles from the Arctic Circle. Five miles from the Arctic Circle, I wonder if it is as cold as it sounds, I wonder if I would finally be far, far away from the heat, I would feel so much better if I wasn't fainting from the heat once or twice a year. And if I could get rid of the sunshine, my migraines would thank me. But, I'm not at the Arctic Circle, I'm in Pennsylvania and our author isn't there either, he died in 1931. He came to America in 1896, working as a farmhand until he enrolled in Augustana Academy in Canton, South Dakota where he graduated in 1901. He earned a bachelor's degree from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota in 1905, and a master's degree from the same institution in 1910. He also had studied for some time at the University of Oslo. I never heard of any of these schools, but there are many, many things I've never heard of. In 1906, Rølvaag was recruited as a professor by St. Olaf College where he was made head of the Norwegian Department at St. Olaf in 1916. In 1925, he became the first secretary and archivist of Norwegian-American Historical Association. He held both positions for the rest of his life. That had me picturing a 90 year old man still holding whatever those positions were his entire life, but when I remembered he died when he was 55 it didn't seem so surprising anymore.

Getting back to the book, this is what I can tell you about the plot, the novel follows a pioneer Norwegian immigrant family's problems with moving west and dealing with land and the other elements, weather, farming, Indians, dirt, lots of dirt, in the Dakota Territory as they try to make a new life in America. One thing I would find hard would be not to know a word of the English language. I guess when you needed anything in stores and such places you just pointed to it, and who knows what the storekeepers were charging them. Then there is the bathroom problem, or lack of one, and what about hot water, or cold for that matter, and where is my air-conditioning? Then there is the dirt. Oh well, back to the story, in 1873, Per Hansa, his wife Beret, and their children settle in the Dakota Territory. They are joined by three other Norwegian immigrant families—and have to go through all sorts of things. The worst (possibly) is the homes they build, they are built of dirt. Dirt and grass that is, here's what I found:

"The sod house or "soddy" was a successor to the log cabin during frontier settlement of Canada and the

United States. The prairie lacked standard building materials such as wood or stone; however, sod from thickly-rooted prairie grass was abundant. Prairie grass had a much thicker, tougher root structure than modern landscaping grass.

Construction of a sod house involved cutting patches of sod in rectangles, often 2'×1'×6" (60×30×15 cm), and piling them into walls. Builders employed a variety of roofing methods. Sod houses accommodate normal doors and windows. The resulting structure was a well-insulated but damp dwelling that was very inexpensive. Sod houses required frequent maintenance and were vulnerable to rain damage."

I don't want to live surrounded by dirt, with dirt comes bugs and worms and all kind of other things I don't want to think about. I found out only later that the book is part of a trilogy which makes it a little more difficult, now I have to decide if I want to read the entire trilogy or just move on. And that brings me back to the two star rating, and my being no help as to what the book is about when that last page is read, because I never got to the last page.

The book was interesting enough when I began the story, now keep in mind that my copy of the book looked very, very old - or perhaps, very, very worn. So I began the story, got to page 50 or so and page 12 fell out of the book. I hate when that happens and usually make sure it doesn't before I bring the book home in the first place, but the book is here so I decided it must just be a one time thing and read on. Until pages 25 and 27 fell out. Around page 100 I laid the book down and went for a drink, when I picked the book up again, the first 40 or so pages fell out. And a few pages later the last two or three pages of the book fell out and that was it. I couldn't take it anymore and closed the book. I even threw it away, something I don't think I've ever done before, and so it gets two stars, but perhaps if I would have got any further, say to page 200 I would have moved it up to three, and by the end up to four or even five. We may never know. I wonder if the floors were dirt or did they leave them grass? Another thing I may never know.

Katie Schuermann says

Is there another fictional story so truthful as this? If so, I have not come across it. Rølvaag is frighteningly just in his storytelling, fearlessly depicting the saint and sinner in each of us. I would like to write so well as him in one language let alone in two.

Mike says

I hated this book. It felt like counting sand. Or corn. Or whatever the hell they were growing. Oh and everyone is named Hansa. Seriously, this book moves so slow, you could literally skip entire chapters (maybe even 2 or three), and NOTHING WOULD HAVE HAPPENED.

Maybe I'm being a bit harsh. To be fair, there is a lot of depth and meaning to the story and it does resonate with many Americans because for some, the story of the prairie life is the story of their ancestry. Most people don't consider America's Heartland much of a wilderness any more, but once it was wild and untamed. And it could be at times brutal, beautiful, and even evil. The story of the Norwegian family led by Per Hansa struggling to not only survive in this brave new world, but to try and make a place for themselves

is truly the story of the American spirit. The wild west may get all the glamor, but the true story of America's coming of age is told in stories like this one.

That sounds all well and good but damn, did Rolvaag have to make it so dry? To put this in perspective, I've read "Paradise Lost" just for fun. And believe me, that is not something to be taken lightly. And that was easier to get through than this.

Here's an example of what it's like to take just about any 200 pages in the book at random and read through them:

"Today Big-Hansa tended the corn with Little-Hansa. It is growing. Soon we will have corn. To eat. We will eat the corn. Then we will grow something else. Ma-Hansa and Boy-Hansa put sod on the roof. Then we looked at the grass and made deep, philosophical conjectures about the meaning of life. Then it rained. The next day, we tended the corn some more. Hansa and Hansa took some corn to Hansa and then went to see Hansa to Hansa Hansa and get some more Hansa Hansa Hansa Hansa with his Hansa Hansa. It was a good Hansa today. Hansa Hansa Hansa Hansa Malkovich Malkovich Malkovich Hansa Hansa corn. The next day, Hansa went outside and sat on the porch and died. Probably from too much corn. We ate some corn."

Randomly change the weather, the crops, and maybe have them get buried in the snow for 6 weeks, and you'll have written "Giants in the Earth."

Wendy says

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this book. I first skimmed it 25 years ago, looking for good quotations to insert into a paper due the next day for a college immigration history class. Of course, the assignment had been to read the book, not skim it, but no such luck. Since then, I've remembered it as bleak and cold and brimming with Hans and Hansas. Now that I've actually read the book, I realize that my earlier assessment didn't do the novel justice. The psychological drama that plays out between Beret and Per Hansa is fascinating, and the South Dakota prairie is one of the best drawn characters in American literature. Like "My Antonia," "Giants in the Earth" is on the surface a simple tale of pioneer life. Look more closely, however, and you discover a squirming mass of existential questions.

Stenjohnson says

It took me years to read "Giants in the Earth"; the novel felt over-familiar, since I grew up across the street from Ole Rolvaag's house in Northfield, Minnesota near the campus of St. Olaf College, where he taught and where a library bears his name. His descendants still lived in the house, and my parents were friends with his great-great granddaughter and her family. I spent many hours there in the 1970s, and the fabled shadow of "Giants of the Earth" hung heavily over the residence in the form of original posters and a reverent display of the first editions. Rolvaag's own library and office, accessible through a pair of French doors, remained buried in a deluge of papers and books; it had likely been untouched since his death in 1931 and had the unmistakable, pharaonic gloom of a shrine. It was forbidden territory, but we still entered it often.

That dusty room, with its framed quotation from Dante, fencing swords and antique volumes, suggested

something of “Giants” mythic immensity. When I finally returned to the novel, a cursory glance at Rolvaag’s title, biblical epigraph, and chapter titles alone confirmed its vast, heroic ambition. There’s no question that Rolvaag plans to align the story of Norwegian pioneer Per Hansa and his family with heroic archetypes and eternal themes.

But the novel’s prose style and execution offer something more nuanced, if still ambitious: In an opening scene overflowing with bold sensory impressions, Hansa travels with his wife Beret and their children through an ocean of prairie grass as Rolvaag’s prose churns with formidable energy, punctuated by ellipses, exclamation marks and vigorous fragments of observation. The technique is remarkably similar to the technique of Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s 1932 “Journey to the End of Night,” where disconnected language and exclamations evoke a world exploded by the author’s solipsistic energies. Rolvaag’s world is similarly menacing and uncontrollable, but his protagonists subsist on the blind faith that it can be reordered and subjugated.

Douglas Moore composed a Pulitzer prize-winning opera based on Rolvaag’s novel in 1951 and I’ve been unable to find a recording. In the absence of Moore’s music, I choose to imagine the work as a natural expression of Giants’ truly operatic material: larger than life, bursting with epic emotion in the best sense of the ideal, as tragic and bravely expressive as Rolvaag’s extraordinary prose.

Debbie Zapata says

Giants In The Earth is the first of a trilogy by O. E. Rolvaag that deals with immigrant and pioneer life. As usual in this type of story, we see the characters dealing with a long trek, the insecurities arising from being in a new land with an unknown language, and not much more than their dreams to live on from day to day. But Rolvaag has also captured the isolation that comes from living many miles away from 'civilization', and the loneliness of life itself, whether it is lived in a city or in the wilderness.

Per Hansa and his family move from Norway to the Dakota Territory to start a new life. Beret, Per's wife, immediately feels the threatening Otherness of the prairie, and does not see the beauty of the grasslands so much as the fact there is nothing to hide behind in all that open space around her. But she does not say anything to Per, for she thinks she must go where he goes and accept everything. These two feelings become the main force in Beret's life, affecting everyone around her, and pulling her into a frightening darkness that is never completely conquered.

Per himself does not register the changes in Beret; he is too busy dreaming of more. More land, more crops, more animals, more houses. He must be the first of the little community to do anything: first to get his wheat planted, first to limewash the inner walls of his house, first to do anything and to do it in a bigger and better way than any of his neighbors could. This is Per's blind approach to life, and it keeps him from connecting completely not only with his neighbors but with his own family.

I was totally transported while reading. I felt the snow, could imagine the horror of the locust swarms. I could see the beauty of the prairie, which Beret shied away from. But I do still wonder about one comment about birds and insects in the area. Our family settles in at their chosen plot of land, and there is no noise: no birdsong, no insect noises, nothing but mosquitoes. This prompts a footnote by the author saying that the early pioneers never heard birds or insects during their first year on the Plains. And later in the book, he talks of the meadowlarks that are singing and he repeats the statement that in the first year there were no birds. I

know the author talked to many old-time settlers, including his father-in-law, but still. How could a rich habitat like the Great Plains not have bird life until after the farmers came?! That simply does not make sense to me and I refuse to believe it.

In the opening pages Rolvaag describes the sounds of the ox-carts moving through the countryside, and I felt as if I were walking alongside the cart, taking my first steps into a new world:

"Tish-ah!" said the grass... "Tish-ah, tish-ah!"...Never had it said anything else -- never would it say anything else. It bent resiliently under the trampling feet; it did not break, but it complained aloud every time -- for nothing like this had ever happened to it before.... "Tish-ah, tish-ah!" it cried, and rose up in surprise to look at this rough, hard thing that had crushed it to the ground so rudely, and then moved on.

For me this passage reveals another theme of the book: Man against Nature. Who will win in the end?

Sketchbook says

A giant of a pioneer novel. Isolation, loneliness and death in the stark midwest states...I have never forgotten the ending, first read when 15, of humble pioneer, 1870s, whose wife sends him into a blizzard, because--you see.... the horrid wife became a (red state) religious crackpot...and thus, out of religious - evil, America develops...with too many deaths.

Joyce says

Thought I would re-read this book about Norwegian pioneers in South Dakota, in anticipation of the arrival of our exchange student from Norway.

I love this book. It answers many of the adult questions I had when re-reading Little House on the Prairie with my kids. How did the mother bear the intense isolation? What was the psychological impact of that endless horizon? Did bugs crawl out of the sod house walls? (However, like the Little House books, Giants is silent on the subject of frontier outhouses.)

This could be subtitled "Manic-Depressive on the Prairie". The hero, Per Hansa, provides the manic side: relentlessly optimistic, boundlessly energetic, canny, outgoing. His wife, Beret, is depressed: forlorn without her birth family, frightened by the limitlessness of the landscape, haunted by a sin. The children are sunny and untroubled. All the security they know or want – their parents – is right there.

Religious fervor plays a major role in the book. For Beret, it is salvation; for Per Hansa, doom. I wonder if the religious theme was considered at all controversial when this was originally published.

I am sympathetic to reviewers here who complain that this was 400+ pages of milking cows and feeding chickens (though in fact the chickens don't appear until about page 200). And there are an awful lot of

characters with some variant of the name Hans. I will have to ask our exchange student what is up with the troll phobia, too.

Iva says

This is a true American classic on many levels. Like My Antonia or O Pioneers, it treats the harsh reality of early life on the plains. Written in Norwegian as Rolvaag emigrated to the midwest as a young man, and then returned to Norway for some of his education. He spent his life as a professor at St. Olaf College. The novel (actually two books combined in one volume) captures the hard work, the harsh weather, the importance of cordial relations with neighbors, fear of Indian attacks and most of all, the emotional hardships of those who left everything behind. Rolvaag gives most of his attention to the physical work; raising children, birthing, and household management, not as much. A compelling and fast moving plot and interesting characters will make a memorable impression on any reader interested in early immigrants.

Alison says

It took me a long time to get through this book the second time around, I think because I knew what was going to happen. But it was more meaningful to read it this time, having just returned from a visit to Slip Up Creek in South Dakota. I stood on the land where my great-great-great-grandparents were among the original settlers in this area of Dakota Territory. The characters in the novel were based on my ancestors, as the author, Ole Rolvaag, married into the family and got much of his information for the novel from his wife. It's fascinating to get a taste of what life was like for these pioneers. It was not an easy life, living in such isolation and punishing weather conditions. I have special admiration for my great-great-great grandmothers, as the women had it especially hard, a fact which was not much recognized by the men. Living in such difficult conditions, some of the settlers could not imagine the area every becoming permanently settled, "... nothing but the eternal, unbroken wilderness encompassed them round about, extending boundlessly in every direction; that these vast plains, so like infinity, should ever be peopled and settled, would be a greater miracle than for dead men to rise up and walk." Things can change a great deal in just a few generations!

?Emily says

This book about a pioneer family from Norway was originally written in Norwegian and later translated into English. Many people in the USA view our pioneers as brave, well-adjusted citizens who were patriotic Americans. This novel creates a more realistic view of our ancestors and, in the process, the author shatters those illusions.

How do you handle the loneliness of being one of only a few people in a settlement? How do you handle the uncertainty of unfamiliar weather, animals and people? How do you handle the fear of a possible Indian attack? Can you handle the overwhelming prairie and its tall grass and extensive skyline? Some people will handle all the pressure, but some do not.

I found this book so readable and yet so powerful. It is sad and uplifting, but like many Scandinavian novels, you know it is building inexorably to a massive tragedy.

MaryJane says

I have read this book several times, the first time I was on my way to South Dakota to a funeral in about 1975. A cousin had died and I was reading it in the car on the way. Later that day I found myself in a cemetery on the prairie among my ancestors, most born in Norway, some of the stones inscribed in Norwegian, my great-grandfather, and great-great grandfather were buried in that cemetery. The book is a classic pioneer tale, written in Norwegian, translated later into English. The author emigrated as a teenager, worked on farms in Minnesota and the Dakota's and eventually went to college and became a professor of Norwegian studies at St. Olaf. Just his story is amazing! This book is actually the first of a trilogy, but the later two are not as good, and never became as well known or well respected.

Chuck says

Published in 1927, this stark, slow-paced novel mirrors the pace of life experienced by Norwegian immigrants as they staked claims and started settlements in the western territories of the United States during the last half of the 19th century. There was nothing romantic about those times; life was undeniably hard, and Rölvaag doesn't sugarcoat his account of it.

At the center of Rölvaag's story are Per Hansa, a strong-willed, independent, and resourceful man, and his wife Beret, who grows increasingly unhappy with her decision to have left Norway in order to assume the spartan life of a pioneer woman. Each day is pretty much consumed with basic necessities; there's no real luxury to be found, although the characters themselves might regard a bumper crop of wheat or a newly whitewashed wall as such. Entertainment consists primarily of shared meals and story-telling, or (in rare instances) perhaps a fiddle tune or two. The psychology of these people isn't very complex, but their focus on the rhythms of seasonal change, birth, survival, and death doesn't leave much room for the neuroses that are often prominent in "advanced" societies. If there's any exception to this, it's Beret, who for a time appears to suffer from a rather debilitating depression, but ultimately nothing that a little frontier religion can't cure. (Interestingly, religion does not play a very central role in the lives of the community at large, although an itinerant preacher manages to insinuate himself temporarily into the group and stir up some feelings of sin and guilt before fading away.)

A plodding tale, *Giants in the Earth* is hardly a "must read", but it does offer an antidote to anyone who harbors a nostalgic yearning for prairie life in the days of yore. For a more entertaining account of Norwegian farmers, however, Garrison Keillor may be preferable.
