



Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+

# Scandinavian Studies Newsletter

Spring 2021

Volume xxiv, Issue 2





## A Message from the Program Chair

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Greetings to you from the Nordic unit in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+. We hope that our newsletter finds you COVID-free and vaccinated.

This has again been an unusual semester to say the least. Some instructors were brave and taught in-person (although it meant testing for COVID every eight days); most of us, however, taught remotely. Regardless of how we taught, I think we're all tired of staring at a computer screen. All of our meetings were remote, and some of us have not seen each other in person for over a year. In addition to that, we're currently sort of homeless. A large slab of concrete fell from Van Hise Hall onto the front entrance of the building, which has now been deemed unsafe until further notice. Fortunately, no one was hurt by the accident.

Still, we have many things to celebrate. These include (but are not limited to) the HEAL Grant; Dr. Todd Michelson-Ambelang's well-deserved promotion to Senior Academic Librarian; the launching of the Nordic World Series by the University of Wisconsin Press, which employs one of our former students, Dr. Amber Rose Cederström; books published by faculty; and interesting and impressive research projects in progress. We've also heard from two of our former students, Drs. Carrie Roy and John Francis Eason III, who in this newsletter share with us what they have been up to after graduating from UW-Madison. Sadly, Nete Schmidt has decided to retire. Claus Elholm Andersen sings Nete's praises in this newsletter. We're now actively looking for a replacement for Nete, although we realize that Nete is probably irreplaceable.

We wish you a good summer. Stay well and stay safe.

*- Program Chair, Kirsten Wolf*

### Photo credits

Cover photo: Lake Mendota and the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, including Bascom Hill and Bascom Hall, are pictured in an early morning aerial taken from a helicopter on Oct. 23, 2018. (Photo by Bryce Richter / UW-Madison)

Above: The Graduation Bucky statue is pictured wearing a face mask in the rotunda of Bascom Hall at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Nov. 21, 2020. The replica of UW-Madison mascot Bucky Badger was practicing physical distancing as the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues. (Photo by Jeff Miller / UW-Madison)

Right facing page: Steam and heat hit minus 24-degree Fahrenheit air at dawn on Jan. 31, 2019, as the sun begins to rise over the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus and downtown Madison isthmus. The brutally-cold low point was the result of a "polar vortex," a weather phenomenon that brought several days of frigid temperatures and high-wind chill from the North Pole down south into the Midwest. Notable facilities along the horizon from left to right include Van Hise Hall, dome of Wisconsin State Capitol, the Discovery Building (WID), and Union South. The dawn view is from the roof of the Engineering Research Building. (Photo by Jeff Miller / UW-Madison)

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[gns.wisc.edu/gns-newsletters](https://gns.wisc.edu/gns-newsletters)**

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## In Memoriam

**Rachel Feldhay Brenner (1946–2021)**



ABOVE: Van Hise Hall on a cool winter evening. If you look closely, you can see the solitary light of Rachel Brenners 13th floor office still lit up.

Rachel Feldhay Brenner, the Elaine Marks WARF Professor of Jewish Studies, died of cancer on February 4th in Madison at the age of 74.

Born in Zabrze, Poland, one year after the end of WWII, Rachel moved to Israel with her family in 1956 when they were expelled for being Jewish. She studied at the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and the University of York in Toronto before coming to Madison, where she joined the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies in 1992.

Rachel shared the 13th floor of Van Hise Hall with her colleagues in Scandinavian Studies for almost 30 years. In her corner office, she composed her seven books and eighty articles on topics related to the Holocaust. Despite this diligence, she always found time for a chat in the hall about family, campus, or world events. She was a dedicated teacher as well as a brilliant scholar, and she will be sorely missed.



## HEAL Grant

Scandinavian Unit Librarian, affiliate to the department, and Scandinavian Studies alum, Dr. Todd Michelson-Ambelang is a part of a five-million-dollar grant, which will run from 2021 to 2024. This grant is one of the Mellon Foundation's Just Futures Initiatives, in this case to study and better understand race and racism in education in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM). The study focuses especially on the University of Wisconsin–Madison, but also elsewhere in the country, and even the world. Todd is a part of an eleven-member team of Co-Principal Investigators, who applied in 2020 for the grant. The title of the project is Humanities Education for Anti-Racism Literacy (HEAL), and Todd serves as the liaison to the libraries and heads the libraries' efforts with two colleagues in the libraries: Robin Rider, the curator for Special Collections, and Troy Reeves, the archivist for Public History.



The team comprises eleven people from around the university and beyond. The team is collaboratively structured and includes the following folks:

Top row, from left: Maxine McKinney de Royston, (Learning While Black); R. Justin Hougham, (Environmental Education & Equity); Cheryl Bauer-Armstrong, (Native Education); Erika Marín-Spiotta, (STEM Higher Education); Second row: Robin Rider, (Special Collections and Archives); Todd Michelson-Ambelang, (Libraries); Christy Clark-Pujara, (Higher Education); Cleo Woelfle-Erskine, (Native Education); Third row: Monica M. White, (Community Engagement); Troy Reeves, (Oral History Program, Archives); Elizabeth Hennessy (Coordinator and Higher Education).

The aim of the project is to center the educational experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students to build more accurate narratives about histories of racism in the sciences and medicine to better understand persistent underrepresentation and to develop educational tools for building a more equitable university and society.

The project is based on the belief that the work of anti-racism cannot be left only to Black, Brown, Indigenous and other minoritized people. This is why there is a large, cross-racial and interdisciplinary collaborative team of humanities scholars, social scientists, natural scientists, librarians, evaluators, and community partners who each bring different personal and professional experiences and expertise to the project.

The libraries' efforts will be to create bibliographies of work pertinent to the project, including for classes, for reading lists, and for faculty, staff, and student research. The libraries will also be creating various physical and digital exhibits on the project and the history of BIPOC communities in STEMM fields at UW–Madison. Finally, we will be collecting histories of students, stories, and various other items, so that they are kept for study and memory in the archives. This project can be taken into the Nordic perspective by looking at Indigenous peoples, like the Sámi, the Greenlanders, as well as other underrepresented peoples, like the Kven and Romani, as well as new migrants from elsewhere in the world to the North.

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## Congratulations Todd Michelson-Ambelang



A big congratulations to Dr. Todd Michelson-Ambelang, who was promoted to Senior Academic Librarian last January (2020). His job duties already began to change in Fall 2019, when he took on a more active role as the General Library System Americans with Disabilities Act Liaison for Public Services. This position makes him the point person for intervention on behalf of library patrons who need equity of access to UW–Madison's collections. In Spring 2020, COVID began to present more barriers for patrons with disabilities to access the collections, making Todd's duties even more important than ever. It is his hope, however, that the library will continue to use these models to a great extent once we are able to return to a more "normal" life. This increase in work also meant he had to drop Classical Humanities from his portfolio, which he will miss, but he is excited for new adventures. Still another aspect of his new position is to study data collected from among other surveys, a survey of graduate students given last semester by the Graduate School to study how the pandemic has affected students' ability to continue their research, classes, and teaching. He is undertaking this with Associate University Librarian for Public Services Lesley Moyo.

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## Nordic World Series at UW Press

The University of Wisconsin Press is pleased to announce the launch of the new Nordic World series. Published in collaboration with the University of Aarhus Press, these books explore history, culture, and values in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland. Each title focuses on a particular cultural aspect or phenomenon and is written by scholars in the region, collectively forming an insight into the structure of Nordic society.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic's dangerous worldwide spread, staff members from Aarhus University Press visited Madison to discuss our new partnership, which carries great promise for future joint work and will help establish the University of Wisconsin Press as a leading publisher of books in Scandinavian and Nordic studies.

The first three books in the series are forthcoming this spring: *Equality in the Nordic World* by Carsten Jensen, *Happiness in the Nordic World* by Christian Bjørnskov, and *Economic Performance in the Nordic World* by Torben M. Andersen. Future book topics include children's literature, social trust, urban planning, pensions, and the people of the Nordic world.

More information can be found at <https://uwpress.wisc.edu/series/nordic-world.html>.



## Norwegian Heritage Learning

About five years ago, my grandma gave me a notebook in which my great-grandma had written lists of Norwegian words. From the moment I got it, I was fascinated by the language and wanted to learn as much as I could, but I struggled to find the resources to learn independently. While I was considering universities, I made sure that they had a Norwegian program, and UW–Madison was the best fit for me. Growing up, I did not have a strong connection to my Norwegian heritage other than making lefse every Christmas with my mom and my grandma. This is because after immigrating to Minnesota from Bergen in the early 1900s, my great-grandma stopped teaching the family how to speak Norwegian and focused mainly on preserving their culture through food traditions. Learning Norwegian has deepened my connection to my heritage and it means a lot to me to be able to bring the language back to my family.



At the start of the pandemic, I was slightly nervous to transition to online language learning because I did not know what to expect, but overall, it has been a great experience. You can get a lot out of online class by participating often and watching and reading outside resources in your free time to reinforce what you know. I think that from learning online, I have gained more knowledge as I feel more comfortable volunteering and have more time to view outside resources. After I graduate, I hope to use Norwegian to do translation work and potentially work abroad. I also hope to inspire my family members to learn Norwegian so we can further connect to our roots.

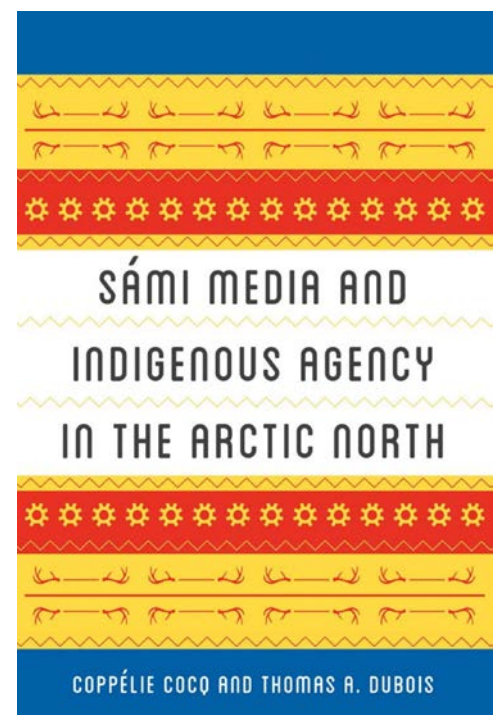
Author: Sydney Mueller

LEFT: Sydney Mueller and her grandmother, who inspired much of Sydney's interests in Norwegian culture.

## Sámi National Day at Nordic National Museum

On February 6, as part of a Sámi National Day book talk hosted by the National Nordic Museum in Seattle, Washington, Tom DuBois and co-author Coppélie Cocq discussed their new book on Sámi media entitled *Sámi Media and Indigenous Agency in the Arctic North*. Published in 2020 by the University of Washington Press, the book examines the way Sámi have used “media”—books, films, albums, YouTube videos, Twitter, Facebook, etc.—to advocate for Sámi rights and a valuing of Sámi culture in a Nordic and global context. DuBois and Cocq describe a “Sámi way” of using contemporary digital media, one that connects back to traditions of communication within Sámi culture prior to the invention of electronic media or the internet.

You can pick up a copy of the book for yourself here: <https://uwapress.uw.edu/book/9780295746609/sami-media-and-indigenous-agency-in-the-arctic-north/>



RIGHT: Cover of Thomas A. DuBois and Coppélie Cocq's book *Sámi Media and Indigenous Agency in the Arctic North*.

## Research in 2020: The Very Edge of Fiction

Norwegian literary star Karl Ove Knausgård and his six-volume autobiographical novel *My Struggle* has had a profound impact on the transatlantic literary scene. Originally published in Norway from 2009–2011, *My Struggle* has today been translated into more than 20 languages. The monumental novel is one of the most important literary achievements of the 21st century, widely hailed for its heroic exploration of selfhood, compulsive readability, and restless experimentation with form and genre.

As other critics have pointed out, contemporary literature is undergoing a “post-fictional turn” where the line between fiction and reality can seem impossible to establish. Knausgård, I argue, is defining that turn. By challenging the assumption that novels are fiction, he renews and revitalizes the genre.

While my project is the first book-length study of Knausgård in English, it is also a study of the novel in the 21st century. *My Struggle* is one of a number of new novels that makes it impossible to maintain the kind of clear and fundamental distinctions between fiction and nonfiction that critics like Dorrit Cohn endeavor to maintain. In this, writers such as Ben Lerner, Sheila Heti, and Rachel Cusk, all of whom I also investigate as part of my project, follow Knausgård’s lead. Lerner and Heti, in different iterations, both experiment with form and genre, while Cusk uses the novel to explore a new sense of authenticity. Sharing these experiments and explorations, Knausgård’s work also stands apart, in that he situates narrative consciousness with the experiencing character and not, as is typical in an autobiographical novel, retrospectively with the narrator. This, I argue, is, along with the monumental aspect of the novel, a defining characteristic of *My Struggle*.

Author: Claus Elholm Andersen

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## Research and Teaching in 2020: Susan Brantly

2020 – Whew!

How do you create community when everyone has to remain socially distant? As Faculty Director of the Bradley Learning Community that has been my greatest conundrum during the pandemic. I have been assisted by some spectacular faculty fellows and creative peer mentors, and we have had both failures and successes. The current cohort of first-year college students has missed out on so much ceremony and celebration. Normally, we would have been meeting for dinners and listening to talks by campus and community leaders. Those dinners became transformed into Roundtable Gatherings. An odd perk to living in a Zoom world is that speakers who might have been out of the question because of travel and cost are able to Zoom in without difficulty. We heard inspiring presentations from Michael Johnson of the Boys and Girls Club of Madison, Brian Stack, actor and writer for the Late Show with Stephen Colbert, our Chancellor Rebecca Blank, and Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes. My personal favorite moment was when autumnal weather smiled and my Roundtable spontaneously decided to meet in person (masked of course) and walk through the neighborhoods near campus looking at Halloween decorations and glorious fall foliage. Casual chatter is something that is sorely missed.

Research has taken a back seat to my efforts as an educator. I am still editing *Scandinavian Studies*, and the pandemic seems to have made some folks more productive. Further, I agreed to edit a special issue of *Humanities* titled: “The Faces of Swedish Modernity: Social Realism, Decadence, Modernism, Postmodernism.” The issue summary reads: “That modernity should possess multiple faces is a useful metaphor put forward by Matei Calinescu. This special issue argues that in the case of Sweden the faces of modernity include social realism, decadence, modernism, and postmodernism. This claim is not undisputed. Seldom is social realism included as a facet of modernity in studies oriented towards the Western world, but in Scandinavia and Sweden in particular, the Nordic Modern Breakthrough of the late 19th Century has left a strong legacy of socially engaged literature that continues into the present. Moreover, postmodernism is viewed with distrust in some Swedish critical circles, primarily because of its perceived lack of social engagement. This volume is intended to explore these terms, their relationship to each other and the Swedish context, as well as their individual manifestations.” I am delighted by the submissions I have already received, but there is room for more...anyone have something in their back pocket?

Author: Susan Brantly

## Alumni: Carrie Roy, Ph.D.

I graduated in 2011 with a Ph.D. in Scandinavian Folklore and continued as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries pursuing digital humanities research. I also found a home in The Virtual Environments Group (formerly the Living Environments Laboratory) of the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery. In this role, I helped design digital tools for researchers in both the humanities and sciences. The opportunity to explore data in the humanities from a computational angle—inspired me to create data-inspired art exhibitions. I collaborated with statisticians, Victorian scholars, journalists, the Dictionary of American Regional English, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and won a Knight Foundation Award for work with the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism. My 2016 TEDx talk “When Art Collides with Data,” has amassed over 67,000 views.

I then joined the KPMG Ignition office to help design innovative research tools using machine learning and natural language processing. Upon moving to St Louis with my family, I focused on the user experience aspects of my prior work in a product designer role within Bayer Crop Science. I am using augmented reality tools to advance innovative approaches to plant research. I have been a featured speaker at international augmented reality and digital humanities conferences.

My M.A. and Ph.D work in the Scandinavian Studies Department has played a critical role in my career. Ethnographic work is key to my user experience role, and my dissertation exploring important technologies from Viking and Medieval Scandinavian culture and how they were integrated in various social, legal, medical, and religious concepts has given me a unique perspective on modern technologies and their influence on culture. My dissertation work also rekindled my passion for woodworking, and I have enjoyed working with my father, designing and creating heirloom furniture for friends and family.

I see my emerging technology work as a type of modern craftsmanship. A successful craftsman understands their customer in detail. With in-depth knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the material they work with (wood, data, algorithms, sensors, hardware, etc.), a successful craftsman can push their craft to new, innovative forms. I value the form and function of Viking ships, and mixed reality devices. Viking ships are a more advanced, elegant form to date, but augmented reality has the potential to reshape our relationship to data and information. I hope to play an important role in shaping that work—using the lessons from my graduate studies to do so.



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## Alumni: Dr. John Francis Eason III

I graduated in May 2011 with a Ph.D. in Scandinavian Studies from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. From 2011 to 2013, I worked as a freelance translator in Stockholm where I had been residing with my partner since 2007. In 2013, we returned to the US, and in 2014 we relocated to Edmonton, Canada, where I started a new job as “Scandinavian Studies Instructor” at the University of Alberta. Fellow Madison alum, Dr. Natalie Van Deusen and I make up the Scandinavian Program, the only program in Canada to offer both a major and minor in Scandinavian Studies.

Today, my official title is “Scandinavian Studies Associate Lecturer,” and I teach eight courses a year in the areas of language, literature, and cultural studies. In addition to beginning and intermediate Swedish and Norwegian, I teach “Scandinavian Children’s Literature,” “Scandinavian Crime Fiction,” “Scandinavian Cinema,” “Women in Scandinavian Literature,” “Madness, Myth and Modernity,” a course on literary classics; and “Mamma Mia! ‘Queer’ I Go Again,” a course that explores gay iconography through the analysis of ‘70s supergroup ABBA. Based on a chapter of my dissertation, “Mamma Mia! ‘Queer’ I Go Again,” caught the eye of the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company), which conducted a radio interview with me about the course in 2016.



Teaching and curriculum-based projects I have undertaken include writing a Swedish textbook (along with online exercises), combining intermediate Swedish and Norwegian into one course (to circumvent increasingly stringent enrollment requirements) and transitioning both beginning classes to blended learning. In fall 2019, my department recognized my work by awarding me the Jan Chalk Award for Contract Instructors, as well as nominating me for the Faculty of Arts Contract Instructor Award. Little did I know at the time that this would be the last full semester of in-person teaching for quite some time.

When COVID-19 hit, like most educators, I had little grasp on what it would mean for me or my students. Fast forward a year, if I had to choose the one way the pandemic has changed my life the most, I would say my job. What concerned me most following shutdown was not that I suddenly had to transition eight courses to Zoom, but rather how my interactive approach to teaching would translate to a virtual format. While I think the year has gone well, I have missed my students terribly and am overjoyed to return to in-person teaching next fall.



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## SSFAUM and FinnFest

As organizations across the country have turned to creative ways of delivering public programming and productions in response to the pandemic, the Sustaining Scandinavian Folk Arts in the Upper Midwest project team has been working with a variety of community partners to assist in their programming efforts. One such community partner is FinnFest, a national Finnish American organization that hosts an annual gathering bringing together artists, musicians, academics, and community members from across the country. In response to the pandemic, FinnFest has gone virtual. Instead of meeting in person over the course of one weekend, FinnFest has turned to a year-long online gathering. It now hosts monthly events that are free and open to the public and in line with the organization's goal of fostering a community of Finnish Americans and offering continuing education and cultural opportunities to all interested.

This year, in partnership with FinnFest, Anna Rue, Marcus Cederström, Nate Gibson, Tom DuBois, and Mirva Johnson, in collaboration with professor emeritus Jim Leary have organized an online folk music series featuring Finnish American music and dance. Beginning back in February featuring a live performance by the Twin Cities-based Laulu Aika and a discussion of *Songs of*



ABOVE: Laulu Aika at Heikinpäivä 2018.

Ralph Tuttila, Lotta Kiuru-Ribar, Eric Platt, Luca Ciletti, Karen Ba, Daniel Kiuru-Ribar, Jaana Tuttila

*the Finnish Migration* with Cederström and DuBois, the folk music series features new events every other month. The series will also host Elizabeth “Lyz” Jaakola performing and discussing original compositions in a range of musical genres encompassing her dual Anishinaabe and Finnish American experiences as well as Diane Järvi sharing the voices and experiences of Finnish and Finnish American women who came to the United States. All performances will be made available online, for those who can't join live: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwChImUyWQ\\_rZpVUV7pelmuRrWT2Br8zA](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwChImUyWQ_rZpVUV7pelmuRrWT2Br8zA).

While the pandemic has created difficulties in coming together in-person, the commitment of cultural organizations to continue to build community, to create ongoing educational opportunities, and to share performances, experiences, and a variety of events with people around the world is an inspiring reminder of the importance of culture in our daily lives.

For the full schedule of FinnFest events, check out the website: [finnfest.us/pages/virtual-event](https://finnfest.us/pages/virtual-event)

And for more on the Sustaining Scandinavian Folk Arts in the Upper Midwest project, be sure to visit the website: [folklife.wisc.edu](https://folklife.wisc.edu).

# Nete Schmidt Retires

It is difficult to imagine Scandinavian Studies at UW–Madison without Nete Schmidt. But that, nevertheless, is what we have to do as she announced that she will retire at the end of this academic year.

Dr. Schmidt—or Nete as she is known by most everyone—came to UW–Madison 23 years ago as visiting lecturer in Danish. Quickly, she made her mark and become an indispensable part of what was then the Department of Scandinavian Studies. After her tenure as a visiting lecturer, the department convinced the dean to let her stay.

Nete is an engaged and beloved teacher of Danish and Scandinavian Studies. Students flock to her classes and are eager to return whether it is a class on Scandinavian science fiction, feminism, or the Danish language. Her door in Van Hise is always open—and you rarely walk by without seeing Nete engaged in conversation with a student.

Throughout her years at UW, Nete has taught more than 3,400 students and impacted just as many lives. Students speak in unison about her engagement and enthusiasm. She encourages her students to strive for more and has always gone out of her way to find new and exciting ways to engage the students.

While it is impossible to capture Nete’s enormous influence on her students in just a few words, it is equally hard to describe her extraordinary service to the university and the community. She served as the undergraduate advisor for two decades, promoted Danish and Scandinavian studies across campus, worked with international students as an activities coordinator for the Scan Design Foundation, and gave numerous talks to campus organizations and across the state. In addition, she has invited and organized visits from an impressive list of Danish authors and academics—many of whom also get to visit the book club that she has spearheaded for 12 years in addition to their campus visit.

To me, the hardest thing about losing Nete as a colleague is in daily life in the department. Every morning, she would step out of the elevator with a big smile on her face and a loud “Good morning” in Danish. And that always made my day just a little better.

I could sing Nete’s praises from here to eternity. I have known her for more than two decades—and there is not a single thing I have not seen her able to do and impressively so. She has inspired me—and continues to do so. She is encouraging and she always has a good, pragmatic solution to any problem that might arise. And with the many projects and work she takes on, I know I am not alone in wondering how she manages it all.

While Nete will be able to spend more time on projects and grandchildren, Van Hise will feel a bit emptier without her. The university will miss her dedication and hard work. The students will miss her enthusiasm and skills. We will miss her engagement and ideas. And I will miss her being around every day.

*Author: Claus Elholm Andersen*



## Thank you Nete for all your service!



# Norwegian Literary Translations

If you combined *Monty Python* with Joyce or Nabokov, you might get a book like *The Red Handler* (2019) by the Norwegian novelist Johan Harstad. Its protagonist is an author of extremely difficult experimental literature (think *Finnegans Wake*) who, when his impenetrable work fails to garner notice, decides to write cheap, so-bad-they're-good crime novels starring a detective hero dubbed Ferskenen in the Norwegian. A sampler:



*The clouds resembled coagulated blood. For the public at large it was just another glorious summer day, but not for Ferskenen. For him it was the prelude to one more night among the town's seedy criminals. The air was already thick with their misdeeds.*

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*Ferskenen burst from his car. A short chase ensued. Then it was over. Before the thief could so much as protest, Ferskenen had laid him smack on the ground.*

*"Now I've got you," hissed Ferskenen.*

*The thief knew at once the jig was up.*

The hero's moniker comes from the idiom *tatt på fersken*, which is untranslatable directly but roughly equivalent to the English "caught red-handed." Hence the title, which was suggested to me by Harstad himself: *The Red Handler*.

My translation of *The Red Handler*, which will be published by Open Letter Books as early as next year, is one of the projects I've been working on of late. Before coming to UW–Madison, I earned an MFA in Literary Translation at Iowa, with a focus on Norwegian

literature. For my thesis project I translated an excerpt of *Novel 1987* by Dag Solstad, about a Norwegian Maoist who decides to quit his job as a university professor to foment revolution in a Lillehammer cardboard factory. (Spoiler: he fails spectacularly.)

At present, I am also translating a collection of short stories by the classic Norwegian writer, Tarjei Vesaas. If you haven't read Vesaas, drop everything. His *The Birds* (1957) and *The Ice Palace* (1963) are among the best Norwegian novels of the past century. My translation of the stories (again, a likely publication date in 2022) will be the first completely new English translation of Vesaas in nearly four decades. In it, you will encounter "A Bold Ant," which is a story about, well, an ant, and his daily toil in a merciless dog-eat-dog (bug-eat-bug?) existence. And "The Gingerbread Man," a story in which nothing happens besides a little girl drooling over the cookie she's not yet allowed to eat on Christmas morning, and which somehow ends up being one of the best literary depictions of desire you'll ever read.

This semester I've been fortunate to work with professor Dean Krouk and my fellow students in his seminar on Nynorsk literature, where a week was devoted to workshopping my Vesaas translations. This was a rare opportunity to work with smart literary scholars who could not only comment on the quality of my English, but also analyze the nuance and thrust of Vesaas's difficult Nynorsk. Overall, the Nordic unit has been an ideal intellectual home during this difficult year. Tempting though the life of a Maoist revolutionary may be, I look forward to devoting many more happy years to my translational and scholarly endeavors in Madison.



ABOVE LEFT: Cover art of *Ferskenen*, by Johan Harstad and soon to be available in translation by David M. Smith.

Author: David Smith

BOTTOM RIGHT: Graduate student David M. Smith is working on two translations, one of Johan Harstad's *Ferskenen* and another collection of short stories by Tarjei Vesaas.

# Saints and Their Legacies in Medieval Iceland

## Saints and their Legacies in Medieval Iceland



Edited by Dario Bullitta and Kirsten Wolf

The Icelanders in the Middle Ages venerated a large number of local and imported saints. Although the literary elite was well acquainted with contemporary Continental currents in hagiographic compositions, theological discussions, and worship practices, much of the history of the learned European networks through which the Icelandic cult of the saints developed and partially survived the Lutheran Reformation remains obscure.

The essays collected in *Saints and their Legacies in Medieval Iceland*, edited by Kirsten Wolf and Dario Mario Bullitta, address this lacuna by exploring the legacies of the cult of some of the most prominent saints and holy men in medieval Iceland (the Virgin Mary along with SS Agnes of Rome, Benedict of Nursia, Catherine of Alexandria, Dominic of Caleruega, Michael the Archangel, Jón of Hólar, Þorlákr of Skálholt, Lárentíus of Hólar, and Guðmundr the Good) on the basis of selected examples of Old Norse-Icelandic and Latin hagiographic literature, homilies, prayers, diplomas, sacred art, place-names, and church dedications. By placing the medieval Icelandic cult of the saints within its wider European context, the authors trace new historical routes of cultural transmission and define the creative processes of accommodation and adaptation of foreign hagiographic sources and models in medieval and early modern Iceland. The volume provides a clear picture of an Icelandic hagiographic literature and culture that celebrate the splendor of the saints through contemporary worship practices and the creation of a highly captivating literary genre that became immensely popular on the island throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

You can pre-order the book here: <https://boydellandbrewer.com/9781843846116/saints-and-their-legacies-in-medieval-iceland/>

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## Teaching During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work here on campus, from how we conduct research to how we teach our classes. Everyone in the department was thrust into an unexpected and ever-changing situation and adapted quickly. As chair of GNS+, Tom DuBois saw firsthand the many different challenges and opportunities in this historic situation that we as a department went through from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic a year ago to the spring of 2021. To put the challenge in perspective: in the spring of 2020, the department was offering 99 courses, or sections of courses, to some 1,786 students. About a quarter of those (25 to be exact) were in the Nordic unit, serving a total of 393 students. Of those many department courses, a few were already online: Tom had just taken over the teaching of the department's ever-popular online course on Vampires (LITTRANS 329) and learned the ropes of planning and providing for an online course. Some of our Scandinavian courses were already established online offerings, such as Susan Brantly's Nineteenth-Century Scandinavian Fiction (SCAND ST 424), the course on Vikings (SCAND ST 430) that Scott Mellor developed for summer terms, and the intensive online Norwegian course (SCAND ST 404) that Peggy Hager developed for summer enrollment. But aside from these, most of our courses in the department were being taught in-person.

On March 11, 2020, anticipating that a lockdown might occur, Tom spent the bulk of time in the department's monthly meeting covering some tricks of the trade for providing online courses: how to use some of the features of the university's course management system, Canvas, to provide recorded lectures and to have synchronous online discussions. The very next day, on March 12, Chancellor Blank and Provost Scholz invited department chairs from the College of Letters & Science to an emergency meeting in which they

>>> Continued on next page



informed chairs that most courses were going to have to go immediately online. All instructors would need to spend their spring breaks figuring out a workable plan for “pivoting” to online instruction.

By the Monday after that all-too-brief Spring break (i.e., March 29) we came back to teaching with 100% of our department’s courses online. Think about that. The magnitude of that pivot and how much fast learning had to occur is staggering! Thankfully, faculty are expert learners. A fact we saw in action as 99 courses with 1,786 students were learning online after only a week’s worth of preparation. It wasn’t exactly seamless, but learning never is. We learn by trial and error.

In the fall of 2020, the situation was even more complicated: we needed to plan for some courses to be in-person, some to be entirely online, and some to be a combination of these two options. Plus, we had to make sure that every in-person course could switch to online delivery if needed. Just a few weeks into the semester, that is precisely what occurred! We offered 108 different courses, with some 2,193 students, with the Nordic unit again making up about a quarter of that number—25 courses and 430 students.

The pandemic made immense demands on all of us. But we also learned many things. Students and faculty alike are today much more comfortable in an online meeting than we were this time last year. We know how to share a screen and we know how to make breakout groups in a large online lecture. Those are the basics. We also understand better how to engage students in online discussions, how to take active learning skills from the physical classroom to the digital, how to ensure accessibility for all learners. That is to say, we understand better that online teaching, lampooned by some and heralded by others, is a skill that must be learned, developed, and refined, and that it is a skill that can be an effective way to help students learn and achieve their goals. By and large we still would prefer to teach in-person, but we’ve got the hang of the online mode, and that is essential for educators in our fast-changing and unpredictable world.

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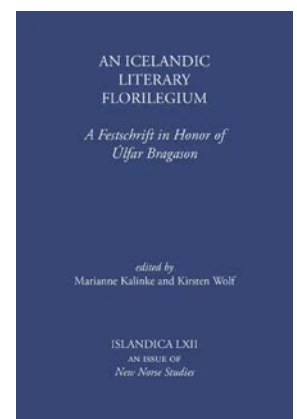
## Frode Helland Lecture

On March 3, 2021, Professor Frode Helland held a guest lecture via Zoom, entitled “The Rhetoric of Racism in the Norwegian Public Sphere.” Helland is a professor of Nordic literary studies at the University of Oslo, where he is also the Dean of Humanities. His research on this topic combines digital and quantitative methods with rhetorical analysis of historical and contemporary examples. In his talk, Helland examined the blindness to racist discourse that he claims characterizes the Norwegian public sphere. He showed how historical anti-Semitism has functioned as a rhetorical template for today’s Islamophobia and racism against cultural minorities. He also explained how certain contemporary right-wing populist figures ground their ethos in feminism and human-rights universalism, while still preserving exclusionary or bigoted rhetoric. Helland’s lecture offered the audience tools for understanding and combating this type of damaging rhetoric, wherever it appears.

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## An Icelandic Literary Florilegium

*An Icelandic Literary Florilegium*, a special edition of *New Norse Studies* edited by Marianne Kalinke and Kirsten Wolf, is a smorgasbord of noteworthy studies and brings together twelve original articles. The various authors examine topics within the field of Old Norse-Icelandic and deal with a variety of literary genres, including the Sagas of Icelanders, kings’ sagas, saints’ lives, contemporary sagas, skaldic poetry, and post-Reformation compositions in verse and prose. There is no unifying theme, but all articles are written with Professor Úlfar Bragason in mind. Collectively, they present a heartfelt offering to him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in gratitude for his friendship and scholarly support through many years. This book will be welcomed not only by specialists and scholars in adjacent fields, but also by avid general readers.



# Book Recommendations

**As we head into the summer months, faculty, staff, and students offer up a few Scandinavian book recommendations for your summer reading list. Enjoy!**

## **In Every Moment We Are Still Alive**

**By Tom Malmquist**

**Translated from Swedish by Henning Koch**

Recommended by Claus Andersen

The Swedish author Tom Malmquist's *In Every Moment We Are Still Alive* is one of those novels that stays with you long, long after you have finished it. In the novel, we follow how the narrator arrives at the hospital with his pregnant wife, who suddenly has become sick. What they initially suspect is a case of pneumonia soon turns out to be acute leukemia and doctors decide to perform an emergency C-section to save her life, sadly, to no avail, which leaves the narrator as new father and widower within the same day.

This tragedy—described on the first 100-pages of the novel—is simply phenomenally described with an unparalleled intensity. It is impossible to put down. It is claustrophobic and makes you feel as if you, as a reader, are moving along the corridors of the hospital along with the narrator. And the story only becomes more tragic when you realize that this is Tom Malmquist's own story.

## **Karate Chops**

**By Dorte Nors**

**Translated from Danish by Martin Aitken**

Recommended by Claus Andersen

It is not every day that Oprah Winfrey recommends a collection of short stories by a new Scandinavian writer. Nevertheless, that was the case when Danish author Dorte Nors' collection of stories, *Karate Chops*, was published in English a few years ago. And when you read the stories, you understand why.

In most of the stories in the collection, Nors manages to zoom in on a seemingly insignificant moment and show how, contrary to what we often think, it is in these moments that the most significant happens. These stories center around vulnerability, grief, and loss. In their quiet minimalism, they are stories you return to again and again.

## **The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy**

**Edited by Johanna Sinisalo**

**Translated from Finnish by David Hackston**

Recommended by Tristan Mattias Mueller-Vollmer

This collection of 20 short fantasy stories by various Finnish authors (including Aino Kallas, Aleksis Kivi, and Tove Jansson) makes for an interesting and varied read. Some stories are quite unusual and imaginative, and a few evoke imagery that really sticks with the reader for a long time. The topics run the gamut from talking animals, lycanthropy, and furniture with a mind of its own, to darker reflections on politics and human nature. Overall, it is a great book to reach for when you want something a little different.

## **Bernard Foys Third Castling**

**By Lars Gustafsson**

**Translated from Swedish by Yvonne Sandström**

Recommended by Susan Brantly

This is one of my favorites...a very playful novel (and one for which it helps to brush up on your Baudelaire at [fleursdumal.org](http://fleursdumal.org), particularly "A Passerby" and "A Martyr."). Lars Gustafsson taught at the University of Texas at Austin, and that has left its mark on the novel, but I mustn't spoil it by saying too much. When SASS was a UT Austin many years ago, Lars Gustafsson attended a session on himself...never had that happened before or since: An author was there to comment on what scholars were saying about him. It was great!



**Dog, Cat, and Mouse****By Bárðar Oskarsson****Translated from Faroese by Marita Thomsen**

Recommended by Emily Beyer

This is a fun children's book by Faroese writer and artist Bárðar Oskarsson and is a great addition to a personal library for you or the little folk in your life. In this book, a dog, cat, and mouse live in the same house and get bored with their daily routines. Then, they consider what to do about it.

**A Stranger at My Table****By Ivo de Figueiredo****Translated from Norwegian by Deborah Dawkin**

Recommended by Dean Krouk

The subtitle of Ivo de Figueiredo's brilliant memoir is "the postcolonial story of a family caught in the half-life of empires." He brings the knowledge and sophistication of a professional historian and acclaimed biographer to his own family's story: a Norwegian mother and a father whose family emigrated from Goa to west Africa to Britain.

**Se Dagens Lys****By Svend Åge Madsen****Not Translated**

Recommended by Nete Schmidt

*See the Light of Day (Se dagens lys)* has long been a favorite of mine. It draws a fascinating picture of a society—utopian or dystopian depending on your point of view—in which humans constantly change. Every day, you wake up with a new partner, a new family, a new job, a new life. By defeating inherent boredom, the hope is to create ultimate happiness and contentment for everyone. Naturally, some "deviators" begin to feel a sense of loss—of the past, of memories, of identity—and that sparks a minor rebellion that leads to a fascinating discussion of the purpose of life. Inspired by Kierkegaardian existentialism, it is a thought-provoking book, clothed in the garb of science fiction, that questions the purpose of human existence in a humorous and relevant way.

**The Keeper of Lost Causes****By Jussi Adler-Olsen****Translated from Danish by Lisa Hartford**

Recommended by Nete Schmidt

*The Keeper of Lost Causes (Kvinden i buret)*, part of The Department Q series, is very thought-provoking. It is a crime story about revenge, forgiveness, redemption, and finding meaning in your life. It has many political, ironic commentaries about contemporary Denmark—and the world—and the protagonist finds himself torn between despondency following a tragic event, and a desire to make a difference in his job and his life. It is definitely a part of the Scandinavian Noir concept with its dark and at times depressing topics, but it is also very funny and concise in its criticism of the welfare society and man's search for meaning. The series now consists of eight books that are all best-sellers translated to numerous languages. The author plans to write two more books in the series.

**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Millennium Series)****By Stieg Larsson****Translated from Swedish by Steven T. Murray**

Recommended by Rebecca Forbes Wank

Probably pretty cliché but I really enjoyed them: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy. Someone recommended them to me because I love murder mysteries. I loved the suspense in them, such as scenes when the main character is trying to figure out what another character saw across the street when he found a photograph of her looking terrified.

## **The Story of a Marriage**

**By Geir Gulliksen**

**Translated from Norwegian by Deborah Dawkin**

Recommended by Claus Andersen

Norwegian Geir Gulliksen's novel *The Story of a Marriage* sounds like the title of a Bergman film. That is by no means a coincidence. But where Bergman seems heavy, Gulliksen's seems light. This lightness, however, is traitorous. Even though this short novel is a quick read, the lightness functions as a contrast that alone shows the depth and tragedy behind the story that is being told about a marriage that falls apart.

The novel follows Timmy and Jon who have been married for twenty years and have three kids. But one day, Timmy becomes friends with another man—a friendship that develops until she one day tells Jon that she is leaving him for this other man. Gulliksen is not trying to make us feel sorry for Jon, who is the narrator of the novel. Instead, he wants to show what happens when we sense the catastrophe closing in on us. For years, Gulliksen has mostly been known as an iconic editor for a generation of newer Norwegian writers—most famously as Karl Ove Knausgård's editor—but in recent years he has published a number of novels that have been positively received by critics and readers alike. And when you read *The Story of a Marriage*, you understand why.

## **The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared**

**By Jonas Jonasson**

**Translated from Swedish by Rod Bradbury**

Recommended by Susan Brantly

This book is hilarious (Everyone needs a chuckle...the book is way better than the movie!) and the Swedish answer to Forrest Gump that I read because of my interest in Swedish historical fiction. Be warned, don't believe everything (anything) you read!

## **Oneiron**

**By Laura Lindstedt**

**Translated from Finnish by Owen Witesman**

Recommended by Claus Andersen

Laura Lindstedt's *Oneiron* won the Finlandia Prize—the top literary prize in Finland—in 2015. And it is not hard to understand why. It is the kind of novel that it is difficult not to be impressed by. It has depth, is full of literary references and allusions, and is a novel that brings the reader in from the very first sentence. The story itself is simple: seven women meet each other in the moment they pass from life to death where they start telling their stories before disappearing into nothingness. While listening to their stories it slowly, but surely, becomes clear that these women, despite having led very different lives in different parts of the world are, in fact, connected.

The novel—a sort of female equivalent of one of the most canonical Finnish novels, Alexander Kivi's *Seven Brothers*—gives an insight into what it means to be a woman today. The stories the seven women tell are about sexual assault, loneliness, insecurity, and never feeling good enough. They are sad, but also funny and uplifting. As such, the novel brings to mind international bestsellers where we similarly find a truly original story told in an indeterminate cultural environment such as Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*.

## **The Other Name: Septology I-II**

**By Jon Fosse**

**Translated from Norwegian by Damion Searls**

Recommended by David Smith

This is one of the best books I have read in the past year. It centers upon a painter, Asle, who comes to the aid of an ailing, mysterious doppelgänger with the same name in Bjørgvin (Bergen). Memories and identities flow in and out of each other in winding, hypnotic prose, which is just as riveting as the story itself. As the title implies, this is a seven-part work, and it's being released in installments over the next couple years. Any new book by the Nynorsk master is a special event, and I expect *Septology* will one day be viewed as Fosse's magnum opus. Give this man a Nobel, already!



# GNS Graduates and Award Winners

Congratulations to all of our amazing graduates and award winners!

## Graduate Students

- *Collin Connors, Scandinavian Studies Ph.D.*
- *Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, Scandinavian Studies Ph.D.*
- *Bridgette Stoeckel, Scandinavian Studies M.A.*
- *Fatima Sartbay, Comparative Literature & Folklore Ph.D.*
- *Jared Schmidt, Folklore Ph.D.*

## Undergraduate Students

### Majors

- *Kendall Allen*
- *Adam Gunnarsson*
- *McKenna Mulvey*
- *Linus Weissbach*

### Certificates

- *Sophie Beckfield*
- *Brianna Forsman*
- *Ellen Robison*
- *Connor Jones*

## Awards

Holly McArthur: The Wisconsin Idea Award, Summer 2021 European Studies FLAS (Norwegian)

Mirva Johnson: Fulbright-EDUFI Fellowship, American Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship, The Excellence in Engaged Scholarship Graduate Student Award, The Wisconsin Idea Award

Laura Moquin: *The Wisconsin Idea Award*

Michael Knudson: *The Wisconsin Idea Award*

Tristan Mueller-Vollmer: *The Wisconsin Idea Award*

Emily Beyer: Summer 2021 European Studies FLAS (Norwegian), 2021–2022 Academic Year European Studies FLAS (Norwegian)

Svea Larson: Summer 2021 European Studies FLAS (Finnish)

Linnea Kronzer: 2021–2022 Academic Year European Studies FLAS (Swedish)

Scandinavian Studies  
T-Shirts! **\$20**



Interested in getting a Scandinavian Studies t-shirt?

The Nordic Graduate Student Association (NGSA) is giving out t-shirts as thanks for any donation of \$20 or more. T-shirts are available in black, blue, and red from S to XXL. For more information, email Bridgette Stoeckel at [bstoeckel@wisc.edu](mailto:bstoeckel@wisc.edu). All donations go to the NGSA and support graduate students in their research, teaching, and professional development.

## Support Scandinavian Studies

Our sincere thanks to the many alumni and friends who have generously supported Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Private gifts are increasingly critical to ensuring that we maintain our stature as one of the nation's best Scandinavian Studies programs. Your donations help us attract top faculty and graduate students, support our amazing undergraduate majors, and host a stimulating series of lectures, symposia, and other scholarly activities. Gifts of any size are most welcome and gratefully received.

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- David M. Smith
- Kirsten Wolf

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for past newsletters and our upcoming issues.

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