

Department of Scandinavian Studies Newsletter

University of Wisconsin—Madison
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Heading for the Hills: Professor Niels Ingwersen Retires

After 38½ years of teaching at UW-Madison, Professor Niels Ingwersen is ready to head for the hills of Wyoming. Niels came to the department in 1965 after receiving a letter from Professor Emeritus Harald Næss. Prior to receiving this offer, Niels had an exceptional and varied education. He began his later studies at gymnasium, with a focus on science and engineering. When he arrived at the University of Copenhagen, however, his seven semesters of Old Norse grammar led him instead into Nordic literature. He gained funding by passing his exam (“with a B-,” as he tells it) and moved into the Regensen, a house from the 1650s that lodged 100 young men of various disciplines. While here, living among law students, theologians, engineers, Niels emphasizes that he received “another education”—where he learned about Freud from a medical student and gained an appreciation of classical music. During this period, he spent one semester of study in Sweden and one year of study at the University of Oslo, where he met a young American woman named Faith. Conversations with this young woman were in Norwegian, since Niels had not yet learned English. By 1961, Niels headed for the University of Chicago (where Faith was working on her doctorate). Here he studied for one year, flunking his first classes in literary criticism with professor and author Norman McLean. After heading back to Denmark, writing his thesis on Sigurd Holm, and finishing school, he was immediately drafted into the Danish army for 16 months. Upon completing his mandatory military time, Niels had his first job teaching at a teachers’ college and high school. Around Christmastime of 1964, he received the letter from Harald. Niels accepted the position and began teaching the next fall.

Niels has taught many courses throughout his years here, including Danish, 19th century fiction, theory of the Scandinavian novel, Kierkegaard and Lagerkvist (later only Kierkegaard), the Danish section of contemporary Scandinavian languages, literary criticism classes, and graduate level survey courses, as well as the large lecture courses Masterpieces of Scandinavian Literature to 1900 and Hans Christian Andersen. It was through the survey of Romantic literature course that Niels gained an interest in folklore, saying, “folklore renewed my interest in literature.” Niels helped to begin the University’s folklore program in 1982 and through this program taught folklore of the world, ballads of the world, and an epics class on the sagas.

Niels credits the folklore program with helping him connect with people campus-wide. As a union member of United Faculty, he also met many other

professors and faculty members from different disciplines, especially during “the difficult years” of the Vietnam War. Also during these years, Niels noticed a dissolving of the traditional separation between the professors and students and the forming of a bond between these two groups. He remembers a march from Memorial Union to the capitol building, with students and faculty together carrying candles in protest of the war. It was at this point that many people in the humanities questioned the relevance and importance of their area of study. Niels, however, maintains the importance of literature to life. Literature, and especially folklore, shows how people cope with life and it teaches ethics through a narrative. About his particular pedagogical philosophy, Niels says, “my teaching has to be existentially relevant to my students.”

In this, his final semester, Niels is teaching an overload of credits, as he says is often necessary in such a small department. He finds teaching particularly interesting when students bring to light ideas that he had not seen or thought of himself. His impending retirement set in when he began to realize that he will not get the chance to present what he has learned from his students this semester to students in future semesters. He’ll miss “the intensity of the classroom” and “the daily atmosphere of the department,” noting, “we have the best possible of all worlds—a small department in a big university!” Niels admits that, in the past few years, when Sunday evening has come around, he’d kind of like to have another Sunday. In addition to having as many “Sundays” as he wants, he won’t miss “the perennial worrying about the economy, the memos, the budget talks, or the griping about grades.”

After Niels’ retirement, he and Faith are excited to spend a lot of time visiting their ranch in Wyoming, “the cats like it there too, of course,” but also relaxing at their home in Madison. Pre-retirement, Niels has been writing on Danish author and hymnist Thomas Kingo. Post-retirement, Niels plans to do a lot of reading, since, even as a literature professor, he says “I often don’t have time to read enough books!” He muses about fusing both his articles on the 1890s and articles on folklore into two separate books, but states in true Ingwersen spirit: “I will do it if I feel like it, otherwise I won’t!”

Some memories and testimonials from former students and colleagues:

“I simply remember Niels as being the sweetest, kindest man anyone could ever want as a professor, colleague and friend. He has a passion for his subject and a passion to see his students learn and progress. Besides stimulating amazing conversation, he had such a non-threatening pedagogical approach that learning came easily.” – Peter Stone

“Niels taught me how to think. Niels challenged my upbringing and gave me the skills to discover how to become an adult.” – Gracia Swensen

“He is a fine teacher and researcher, a generous supporter of students, and continues to stretch his limits and explore new territory.” – Karen Hayden

The Faith and Niels Ingwersen Fund!

If you have ever taken a class from Niels or enjoyed the hospitality of the Ingwersen household, please consider making a gift to this fund, established to honor both Niels and Faith. We would like to have as many contributors as possible and welcome all gifts great and small. A long list of donors is one way of telling Niels and Faith just how many lives they have touched. Please be sure your name is on that list!

Checks should be made out to U.W. Foundation—Ingwersen Fund and sent to: Chris Glueck, University of Wisconsin Foundation, 1848 University Avenue, P.O. Box 8860, Madison, WI 53708-8860.

You can contribute online via the Scandinavian Department Web Site: <http://www.scandinavian.wisc.edu>. Either follow the links through the blue box featuring Niels or go straight to the Funds and Donations link at the bottom of the front page.

Further memories and testimonials:

“Any appreciation for literature and literary criticism that I have I owe to Niels.”
– Norman Spencer

“Niels immediately and constantly extended guidance, confidence, and freedom for me to find my own way and my very own style, and he enabled me to become a fine teacher, an even more astute and insightful scholar, and a better, more empathetic individual.” – Lanae Isaacson

“Like all the rest of Niels’s students my own learning benefitted from his *responsiveness*, his ability to build upon his students’ comments and questions, no matter how partial an understanding the comment might reflect. . . . This quality of his teaching [was] a powerful lesson in pedagogy for those of us who have followed Niels into the profession and are now his colleagues. It certainly stood as a model to me for 32 years.” – Larry Syndergaard

“My experience in the Department of Scandinavian Studies was a positive one, due to the high degree of camaraderie, professionalism, and respect that existed among the faculty at that time, and due to Niels’ enthusiasm for and knowledge and love of his subject matter and his genuine concern for the personal and academic well-being of his students, both graduate and undergraduate.” – David Iversen

A Big Thank-You to our Donors
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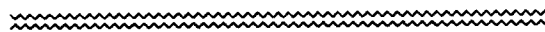
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Katarina Tucker Wins ASF Translation
Prize!

Katarina Tucker, a Ph.D. student in the Scandinavian Studies Department, has just won the American Scandinavian Foundation Translation Prize for 2003. She received the prize for her translation of Sven Delblanc's novel, *Jerusalem natt*.

For the past 23 years, The American Scandinavian Foundation has been awarding translation prizes for the best translations of Scandinavian works into English, with this year being the 24th year of the competition. The prize is awarded for the best translation of poetry, fiction, drama or literary prose written by a Scandinavian author after 1800. The original language of the text may be Danish, Icelandic, Swedish, Norwegian, or Finnish, and the work must not have previously been published in English.

The main prize includes a \$2,000 honorarium and a bronze medallion. Further, an excerpt of the translation is published in an issue of *Scandinavian Review*.



Dissertator Michael Lange in the Orkney Islands

Mike Lange is currently conducting research into the origins and uses of cultural identity in the Orkney Islands, which are located off the north coast of Scotland. He is using narrative as the window into cultural identity, and as such, spends a good bit of time talking to people and sharing in their stories. The Orkney Islands, basis for the *Orkneyinga Saga*, have a long historical link with Scandinavia, and the culture is a complex mixture of influences from the North as well as Scotland, England, and elsewhere.

Mike is having an excellent time exploring that culture on the streets, in the houses, in the pubs— anywhere people are found—and he wishes to thank the department for its continued support as he does so.

Department Helps Host The Nordic Storyteller Symposium

Over Halloween weekend, the department of Scandinavian Studies hosted the Nordic Storyteller symposium along with the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as the Folklore Program and the Center for European Studies, both at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The symposium was partly in honor of Professor Niels Ingwersen's upcoming retirement. Professor Harald Gaski from the University of Tromsø, in his opening lecture entitled "The Sami Storyteller: The Purposes of Stories," made mention of and gave thanks to Professor Ingwersen's continued commitment to storytelling throughout his 39 years of teaching. This lecture was followed by a reception hosted by organizer Professor Tom DuBois.

The event continued on Saturday, November 1, with coffee and a welcome by Professor Tom DuBois. Morning speakers addressed various forms of storytelling active in the Nordic countries, including Patricia Conroy, from the University of Washington, Seattle, talking about new ballads in the Faroe Islands; Larry Syndergaard, from Western Michigan University, speaking about Villy Sørensen's Interpretive Schema in English-Scottish Ballads; and John Lindow, from University California, Berkeley, addressing interpretations of the Strong Wife (Legend Type ML 5090).

During the Saturday luncheon,

alumnus Carol "Orange" Schroeder (M.A., 1974), announced her and others' fruitful efforts in establishing a fund for the department, honoring Niels and Faith Ingwersen's commitment to the scholarship and teaching of Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison.

Four speakers continued the symposium after the lunch break, presenting their scholarship on various topics related to storytelling in the Nordic countries. Professor James Massengale, University of California, Los Angeles, gave his interpretation of the Reindeer Hunt at Rondale in Asbjørnsen and Moe's legend, and his colleague, Mary Kay Norseng, addressed the loss of forests and the meaning of this loss in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. Barbro Klein, of the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study, spoke on her work for the Swedish National archives. She has worked with stories that have been collected over the past 80 years through surveys sent to the Swedish public. The final lecturer of the afternoon was Kirsten Thisted, from the University of Copenhagen, who spoke on storytelling in contemporary Greenland.

The symposium was well attended by undergraduate and graduate students alike, as well as by department alumni, colleagues from other departments, and the general public. The event ended with a celebratory reception at which Niels was guest of honor.

University of Oslo Professor Harald Bache-Wiig

This fall, the department has had the pleasure of working with University of Oslo professor Harald Bache-Wiig. Bache-Wiig's wife, Silvi Penne, is in Madison on a Fullbright scholarship, doing research in the department of education. While here, Harald has graciously taught a seminar on two contemporary Norwegian authors open to both undergraduate and graduate students. The students read Lars Saabye Christensen's *Halvbroren* and Dag Solstad's *Professor Andersens natt*. In addition, Harald taught in the graduate level Survey of Romanticism course, comparing poets Welhaven and Wergeland. Both lectures were taught in Norwegian, creating a valuable experience for students.

Danish Author Peter H. Fogtdal Visits Madison

Danish novelist Peter H. Fogtdal left his home in Copenhagen to visit the University from October 20 to 23, 2003, thanks to an invitation by Visiting Assistant Professor Nete Schmidt. Peter gave lectures on two consecutive evenings, with a reception hosted by the colloquium committee after the first. Fogtdal's opening lecture covered the more general topic of "The Historical Novel in Scandinavia" while the second, "Pomp, Popes, and Powdered Wigs," focused on his most recent novel, *Lystrejsen* [The Grand Tour]. He was kind enough to speak to many classes including Danish, Kierkegaard, and Masterpieces of Scandinavian Literature sections. These talks

included such topics as religious trends in the 18th century, the advent of the Age of Reason, and a particularly impressive impromptu focus on the Scandinavian Circle in Rome. After presenting in Madison, he flew to Seattle to lecture at a regional conference for Danish professors in Canada and the United States which was sponsored by the Danish Ministry of Education.

Peter has attended both the University of Florida and California State University. He has authored nine novels, including various satires and tragi-comedies in addition to his well-known historical novels. A versatile writer, he has also written many stageplays, TV-plays, and sitcoms.

Congratulations!

The department congratulates Mike Lange, who passed his preliminary exams for his Ph. D. in May.

The department also wishes to congratulate Vendula Cachotska, David Drake, Jeff Hancks, Thor Templin, Katarina Tucker and Susan Vincent, all of whom passed their master's exam in 2003!

Students Abroad During Summer 2003:

-Ph.D. student Mike Lange received a summer FLAS for his study at the University of Oslo summer school. Mike also received funding from the Graduate School and the Grace and William Larsen Memorial Fund.

-Ph.D. student Milda Ostraukaite attended the University of Oslo summer school where she focused her study on pedagogy for teaching the Norwegian language. Her studies were funded by NORTANA.

-M.A. student Jim Miksche studied at the University of Oslo this summer. He also spent time in Bergen doing research. His studies were funded in part by the Grace and William Larsen Memorial Fund.

-Undergraduate Jamie Yuenger received funding for study in Norway from the Idun Lodge Sons of Norway.

-Undergraduate Kellie Trepton received funding for study in Norway from the Grace and William Larsen Memorial Fund.

-Undergraduate Jennifer Yttri received funding for study in Norway from the Ygdrasil Fund for Norwegian Culture.

Annual Autumn Retreat

The weekend of September 12-14, the department held its annual fall retreat. This year's retreat was held in Lake Geneva. The retreat serves as a time to welcome the department's new graduate students and also as a place for graduate students and faculty to reconnect with each other after the summer break.

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