

# The 34th Conference of the International Association for Scandinavian Studies

UiT – The Arctic University of Norway

Tromsø, 2–5 August 2023

## *Health and Happiness in Nordic Literature and Culture*

Literary history is full of stories of tragedy and death. Many who work with Nordic literature are used to teaching literature that is characterized by doom and unhappy endings. It is easy to find examples among canonized and contemporary authors, in genres such as realism, horror or *Nordic noir*, and in both children's and young adult literature and adult literature. In novels such as Astrid Lindgren's *The Brothers Lionheart* or plays such as Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* illness plays a central role. In other media such as cinema or graphic novels it is easy to find examples of stories focusing on disease, from the perspective of the ill person or their next of kin. Works that thematize illness and death tell us something about how important physical and mental health is to human well-being. There are also glimmers of light in the darkness. Anyone who goes through a life-changing experience, who survives a serious illness or moves on after the death of a loved one, can come to gain a greater resilience. And works of literature, cinema and other media that aim to spread joy, such as romance and humor, reach wide audiences.

The theme of the 2023 IASS conference will examine how the concepts of health and happiness, and the relationship between them, are understood and depicted in Nordic literature and culture. The conference wishes to illustrate how notions of happiness are formulated and communicated, from the medieval and early modern era until today, by highlighting a number of central questions. How have concepts such as satisfaction, joy, and happiness been understood, yesterday and today? Has the view of the relationship between health and well-being changed over the course of history? Is it possible to discern a uniquely "Nordic" view of the relationship between health and illness, and between happiness and unhappiness? And can a perusal of literature, film etc., dealing with illness and other difficulties make the reader or viewer more resilient when faced with similar situations in his or her own life?

We welcome proposals for presentations and panels within the framework of the overall theme of the conference. We particularly welcome contributions related to the following areas:

**Illness stories about life and death.** We are interested in fictional stories and autobiographical works of literature and in other media that deal with themes such as illness, convalescence, physical and mental health and ill-health. We welcome submissions that examine diverse genres in different historical periods. Contributions to this area can preferably be linked to the broader field of the medical humanities.

**Teaching health and happiness.** We want to shed light on the relationship between teaching and health, and welcome contributions with a didactic focus. We are particularly interested in contributions that reflect on how teaching about illness stories in a school setting can promote an increased understanding of health and illness among children and young people.

**Minority and indigenous literatures and well-being.** We wish to focus on how concepts such as health, welfare and quality of life are communicated in literature in various media (incl. graphic novels) written by authors with minority and indigenous backgrounds in the Nordic countries. We want to investigate literature's health-promoting potential and ability to establish new and constructive relationships between underprivileged groups and the surrounding society. In particular, we want to shed light on the relationship between culture and well-being in Sami literary and cultural contexts.

**Resistance and resilience in crisis situations.** In troubled times, concepts such as joy and happiness can suddenly take on new meanings. We are interested in how different crisis situations, for instance war and natural disasters, can strengthen people's ability to handle adversity and contribute to cohesion, empathy and resilience. We particularly call for contributions that examine the potential of culture to contribute to liberation, resilience and healing in connection with difficult situations.

#### **Submissions:**

We accept proposals for presentations (20 min.) and panels related to the above subject areas, but also other related subject areas. The deadline is 15 December 2022.

Proposals for presentations must contain information about your university affiliation and which language you intend to use during your presentation. Panel proposals must also indicate which of the four above subject areas the panel adheres to.

Conference languages are the Scandinavian languages and English.

Abstracts (max. 250 words) should be sent to **henrik.johnsson@uit.no**

#### **Conference committee UiT:**

Henrik Johnsson (president IASS)

Morten Auklend

Hella Veierud Busch

Linda Nesby

Ingri Løkholm Ramberg

**Note on IASS:**

IASS (International Association of Scandinavian Studies) is an international organization for research in Nordic literature and culture. IASS was founded in 1956 with the aim of promoting international exchange and cooperation between researchers from the Nordic countries and Scandinavian research environments outside the Nordic countries. The organization holds a conference every two years, which takes place alternately in a Nordic and a non-Nordic country.