

Navigating Scandinavian Memory Culture in a Shifting World

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At the time when this collection of scholarly articles on memory and remembrance in Scandinavian cultures was being composed, the world found itself at a precarious juncture. Russia's aggression against Ukraine had unleashed a profound threat to the democratic world order and the fundamental principles of sovereignty and human rights, signalling a troubling attempt to reassert an imperialist "right of the strong." Alongside with causing immense human suffering and destruction, it undermined the global security and impeded the vital supranational cooperation needed to address global challenges, such as the climate crisis. In this moment of danger, but also a moment that feels like the beginning of a new history, explorations of cultural memory, as it is shaped, negotiated, and carried forward by discursive and institutional practices take on heightened significance. By analysing literature and other cultural phenomena where the past is confronted or (re)imagined, and patterns of memory work emerge, and by critically re-examining institutional mechanisms and traditions, such studies may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of factors that determine our conceptions of national and transnational identities, and may reveal the complexity of motives, compromises, and contradictions that often underlie historical and political processes, as well as cultural and social developments. No less important, by exploring various ways in which cultural memory is constructed, transmitted, and received, they bring to the fore the potential of literary texts and other cultural media to create affective connections and shared sense of heritage, but also to frame historical and cultural identities in multiple, even contradicting ways.

All the articles in the collection have been written by scholars affiliated with International Association for Scandinavian Studies (IASS) and are a result of the conference *Memory Culture in Scandinavian Studies*, which was held in a hybrid form in Vilnius in summer 2021 (instead of 2020 due

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to the COVID-19 pandemic). Its theme had sprung naturally from the host city's cultural topography. Vilnius, "a 'polycultural and polychronic text' (to quote the poet Tomas Venclova), with its dramatic, multi-ethnic and multilingual history, and pregnant with memories – complementary and conflicting, concealed and forgotten, constructed and de-constructable" (Vilnius IASS Team 2021), offered a perfect setting for contemplating the intricate entanglements of memory and culture. In the context of Scandinavian Studies, the choice of conference location reflected their current spatial dynamics, with former East European countries gaining a prominent role (Mendelytė and Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė 2024; Jelsbak and Körber 2023). More narrowly, it reinforced the ambition of the Baltic countries to be part of the broader, Nordic-Baltic region, based on shared cultural values, and partaking in a common history. The timing of the conference also proved significant. The year 2021 marked the 65th anniversary of the first IASS conference, held in Cambridge, UK (Bredsdorff et al. 2003, 113). Since then, IASS conferences have been taking place every two years, alternating between Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian countries. As a long-lived and meaningful academic tradition, these conferences themselves have become a form of commemoration, providing Scandinavianists with an opportunity to reflect on, celebrate, and sustain the ongoing practice of building the academic legacy of Scandinavian Studies (Mendelytė and Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė 2024).

After hearing a plethora of academically brilliant conference talks, we invited the authors to rework their papers into scholarly articles for a special issue on *Memory and Remembrance in Scandinavian Cultures*. The accepted articles organically grouped themselves under three distinct subtopics: politics, mediation, and history, and as a result, a three-volume peer-reviewed issue was published in the academic series *Scandinavistica Vilnensis* – ahead of print in 2023, and, finally, in 2024.¹

The issue draws from multiple theoretical perspectives within memory studies, depending on its author's individual choices and academic traditions, but as a composite work it can be said to enter into a dialogue with G.W.F. Hegel's thoughts on memory and history. In his Preface to *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel famously writes: "History thus corroborates

1 Five shortlisted papers from the conference were expanded into articles and published in April 2024 as a special issue of *Scandinavian Studies*, a journal of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies (Mendelytė and Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė 2024).

the teaching of the conception that only in the maturity of reality does the ideal appear as counterpart to the real, apprehends the real world in its substance, and shapes it into an intellectual kingdom. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering” (2001 [1820], 20). For Hegel, to fully reflect and philosophically understand a historical period and its culture in all its facets, one needs to occupy a historically distanced analytical position – when a mode of life is about to fade away. Partially in agreement with Hegel, we then will examine ways of Scandinavian life that are mostly relatively distant from the present-day realities. Yet, as a challenge to Hegelian philosophy of history, we, together with our authors, will be arguing that the realities discussed permeate the contemporary moment and, furthermore, self-conscious reflection is possible and necessary to fully understand and position ourselves in relation to the present. The difficult and alarming situation we mentioned in the beginning, Scandinavia and the entire world being forced to witness the return of past horrors presumed to be gone forever, necessitates critical thought in relation to the present and its implications for our future.

The first area to be explored in our special issue is *political memory* – not in the simple sense of remembering politics – although period-specific political issues are also addressed – but in terms of how various forms of memory (collective, individual, literary, etc.) are permeated by the political/ideological. Politics as such is closely entwined with the idea of national identity and nation-building, entailing not only a general historical factuality, scientifically understood, which might be subject to narrative truth, but always implying an interpretation and a specific, even Hegelian, teleology – the use-value of history; therefore, examining political/ideological aspects in different Scandinavian cultures reveals how such interlinking of forces – the historical, the experiential, the social, and the political – affect our understanding of Scandinavia. “Political Memory” gathers a variety of articles that explore how the political manifests in Scandinavian cultures where the first set of studies address the political in explicit ways. Fittingly, “Political Memory” is opened by Torben Jelsbak’s essay “Skandinaviske studier og geopolitik: IASS og den kolde krig” [Scandinavian Studies and Geopolitics: IASS and the Cold War], which presents a critical examination of our association’s history, rethinking its role and self-perceptions during this

politically challenging period and incorporating eyewitness accounts – carriers of “communicative memory” (Assmann 1995, 127), understood as “a short-term memory of a society” and “an interactive practice located within the tension between individuals’ and groups’ recall of the past” (Welzer 285). Anita Soós in her article “Den ensomme helt mod magtens og storpolitikens skamfulde forsømmelser. Den individuelle projektion af en nations kamp i FN-embedsmand Povl Bang-Jensens minde” [The Lonely Hero against the Shameful Negligence of Power and Big Politics]: Projecting a nation’s struggle into the memory of UN official Povl Bang-Jensen] presents a detailed examination of how a prominent public and political figure’s, a Danish UN diplomat’s, memory has been continuously reshaped to serve changing Hungarian politics as the individual memory becomes ideologically instrumentalized. Anker Gemzøe in “Kaj Munk’s ‘De Faldne’ – Memorial Poem and Monument Inscription” details how a memorial poem by the controversial and tragic Danish author is interlinked with its engendering personal, historical and political context, and traces its various incarnations in a number of monuments that continue constructing the Danish collective memory of World War II. Other articles in the volume broaden the perspective on how the political might infuse the cultural in a less direct but equally significant manner. Beata Agrell’s “Kroppsminne och kollektiv erfarenhet. Objektiveringens betydelse för produktionen av arbetarlitteraritet” [Body Memory and Collective Experience: The Significance of Objectification in Producing Proletarian Literariness] reads some examples of Swedish literature (texts by Dan Andersson (1888–1920), Maria Sandel (1870–1927), and Karl Östman (1876–1953)) as expressions of working-class collective body memory – the literary and the bodily are seen as infused with the political. Relatedly, Magnus Nilsson in “Stig Sjödin och minnets politik” [Stig Sjödin and the Politics of Memory] shows how a specific renowned Swedish working-class literary author is remembered politically, likewise stating that public memory is inevitably political – both literature and the ways in which literary figures are remembered are politically inflected.

Finally, our special volume on “Political Memory” moves to question the often-presumed solipsistic nature of various literary and cultural phenomena and institutions, seen as independent from any political context. It further demonstrates that the political is never limited to a nation-state or a specific region but profoundly affects the cultural and political landscape on a continental, pan-European scale. Regional realities and

cultural politics have always been part of a complex supranational sphere, shaped by and in its turn shaping “transcultural” – or “travelling” memory, as suggested by Astrid Erll (2011) – a matter powerfully illustrated by the following articles. Gábor Attila Csúr’s “Skandinavien som imago i det ungerske litterære tidsskrift *Nyugat* (1907/1908–1941): En kritisk læsning af nogle nationale stereotyper og deres efterliv” [Scandinavia as Imago in the Hungarian Literary Journal *Nyugat* (1907/1908–1941): A Critical Reading of Some National Stereotypes and Their Legacy] analyzes how the influential Hungarian literary journal *Nyugat* constructed and popularized a specifically ideologically pregnant image of Scandinavia, which is still seen as characteristic of the Nordic countries in Hungary to this day. Adéla Ficová’s “Shaping Literary Memory. Norwegian Literature in Czech Translations 1945–1968” further delves into the subject matter of how the process of simply selecting which literary works to translate and popularize inevitably relates to a political agenda and constructs a certain type of idealized imaginary region – translation is seen as ideological cultural labour. More positively, Auksė Beatričė Katarskytė in “The Feminist Potential of Beatrice Helen Barmby’s *Gísli Súrsson*: A Drama” explores how a literary intertext linked to a rich Scandinavian cultural and historical heritage was used to think gender in more politically progressive ways in Victorian Britain. In a complementary manner, the last three essays show that how one writes about foreign literatures, what one translates, and how one incorporates texts in new cultural biotopes are not only a matter of remembering but of ideology, encouraging one to become more aware of the inevitable intersection between different social and cultural spheres – to think memory is less about invoking an image and more about thinking the relation.

Our second volume of the special issue is entitled “Mediating Memory” and focuses more explicitly on *the modes and means of preserving the past*. As a result, the articles in this issue problematize the idea of a seamless documentation and in multifaceted ways highlight how the medium itself – be it a literary convention, a specific genre, an artform, etc. – refracts and (re)constructs the memory that is being documented, showing that one needs to critically examine the mode of remembering itself (in Hegelian terms, both *Vorstellung* and *Mitte*). Just like the process of memory selection (“what” is to be preserved for posterity) has inevitable political implications, the form of preservation (“how” and “where” it is to be preserved) dictates its own memory logic, reshapes the remembered – there is no unmediated access to the past.

Subsequently, even though our special issue touches to some degree historical and political aspects, such as Sami history and the traumatic realities of the Second World War, the dimension most deeply examined is the medium of remembering. “Mediating Memory” opens with the three essays that analyse the mediation aspect most straightforwardly. Jürg Glauser’s “Pre-modern Nordic Memories in their Literary Contexts” examines mnemonic phenomena in Old Norse texts – how eddic and skaldic poetry, historical writings, and ancient sagas are permeated with mnemonic aids and imagery, and how this literature can be seen as a mnemonic medium in itself. Patrizia Huber’s “Writing a Letter to One’s Muse: Genre Memory and Epistolography in C.A. Thielo’s *Enveloppens eller Saloppens forunderlige Hændelser* (1763)” further addresses the notion of literature as a mnemonic medium by discussing genre memory, i.e., how a literary text preserves/reinvents its generic conventions or, alternatively, how literature remembers literature. Bergur Moberg’s “The Faroese Cultural Archive: The Archive as a Constitutive Writing Convention and a Source and Theme in Local Historical Writing” develops the idea of the significance of the medium in remembering by focusing on the archive as another mnemonic aide which both preserves but also (re)invents/(re)orders the preserved – much like the other essays, the creative, (re)structuring aspect of the medium is highlighted and investigated as well.

“Mediating Memory” then slightly shifts to the diverse remaining essays that explore the relationship between the medium and the “rememberer” more closely by bringing out the dialectics between how one remembers and who the remembering subject is. Zsófia Domsa’s “Trauma og minne i Jon Fosses *Stengd gitar*” [Trauma and Memory in the Novel *Closed Guitar* by Jon Fosse], for instance, explores how traumatic memories manifest in and affect the whole structure of a literary narrative; these subjective traumatic eruptions and refractions of history introduce their own literary/traumatic logic. Johan Almer questions the distinction between autobiography and autofiction in “Minnenas magiska lykta: Om Ingmar Bergmans berättelse *Laterna magica*” [The Magic Lantern of Memories: On Ingmar Bergman’s Story *Laterna Magica*] showing that Bergman’s memory-telling is creative and fictional – an unavoidable aspect of literary remembering. Then, the significance of the hometown as a special type of memory image for the preserving of the past and identity in migrant literature is taken up by Radka Stahr in “Hjemstavn som erindring i migrantlitteratur” [Homeland as Memory

in Migrant Literature]. Aleksandra Wilkus-Wyrwa goes on to closely examine the role of the photographic medium and narrative storytelling in constructing a personal life story in “Photoliterary Memoryscape of Tomas Espedal: *Mitt privatliv* (2014) – a Starting Point in a Journey to One’s Past,” revealing how theoretically complex the combination of photography and narrative literature in remembering truly is. How Sami cultural identity is preserved and honoured in a form of modern epic literature is addressed by Magdalena Wasilewska-Chmura in “Minnets mönster och former. Om Linnea Axelssons epos *Ædnan*” [Patterns and Forms of Memory: Memory and Identity in Linnea Axelsson’s Epic Poem *Ædnan*]. And, finally, Gitte Mose in “Memories for the Future? An Ecocritical Reading of Andri Snær Magnason’s *On Time and Water. A History of Our Future* (2019)” explores the role of literary tradition and intertextuality in rethinking the past, present, and future of one’s own place in the planetary context, inviting one to think the remembering subject not only in relation to the medium of remembering but as part of a larger, interconnected universe and its shared history.

Our final volume of the special issue “Recollecting History” in its emphasis on *historical memory*, as the title suggests, takes partial inspiration from Hegel’s famous philosophical thoughts on collective and individual memory (*Gedächtnis*) and recollection (*Erinnerung*) which imply an inversion of subject-memory relationship as “Hegel presents the process of memory – the very activity of remembering and recollecting – when the ‘subject’ who remembers is not presupposed as the condition of such activity but is seen instead as the very result of such activity” (Nuzzo 2016: 34). Namely, (historical) recollection constitutes the remembering subjects and thus what is recollected has immense implications for the present and future Scandinavian, or Nordic, identity. And so, the complex workings of historical memory need to be critically examined as it “opens up the possibility of conceiving of different types of ‘subjects’ that are first constituted and determined by such activity – the individual, to be sure, but also the collective, social subject, political institutions, history itself, and works of art” (Nuzzo 2016, 34). “Recollecting History” thus first starts with Janet Garton’s personal recollection of IASS’ institutional history (thus rhyming with the opening article of the first volume). Her essay “IASS’ historie: En personlig fortelling” [History of IASS: A Personal Story] reveals the complex interplay between the personal, the institutional, and the historical, and calls for ongoing efforts to document the organisation’s memory,

enabling future generations of Scandinavianists to actively engage with it and carry it forward.

The volume then moves to the three articles that directly deal with the complex histories and traumas of Second World War and the Holocaust, and their continued effect on the present. Unni Langås's "Hva kan arves? Om skyld, vold og seksualitet i to nordiske krigsminneromaner" [The Inherited War: On Guilt, Violence, and Sexuality in Two Scandinavian Postmemory Novels] and Henrik Torjusen's "Listening to the Enemy: Challenging the National Narrative of World War II in Contemporary Norwegian Fiction" – explore the so-called perpetrator literature. Through close readings of two novels – *Jeg har arvet en mørk skog* (2012) by Morten Borgersen and *Stormen. Enberättelse* (2016) by Steve Sem-Sandberg – and using Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (Hirsch 2008; 2012), Unni Langås demonstrates how the narrators' choice of narrative strategies such as metaphorizing and mythologizing rather than rational means reveals their failing attempts to grapple with inherited generational guilt. In his turn, by employing the framework of "agonistic memory" (Bull and Hansen 2016) to analyse five contemporary novels that challenge the Norwegian master narrative of WWII as a struggle between heroes and aggressors, Henrik Torjusen advocates the need to embrace diverse, even conflicting perspectives, including that of the perpetrator, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of historical conflicts and identities. Karolina Drozdowska's "Å utsette den andre døden. Snublesteiner i norsk litteratur" ["Postponing the Second Death": Stolpersteine in Norwegian Literature] discusses how a public commemorative object – a *Stolperstein* (a "stumbling stone," a brass plate honouring the Nazi persecution victims) is used as a literary motif and a storytelling device, with the novels themselves taking on its function and becoming communicative and affective bearers of WWII (post)memory.

Continuing the same path, the remaining articles in "Recollecting History" focus on how historical events are documented and preserved in different forms of media but highlighting the treatment of historical truth rather than the role of mediation itself. Since Hegelian memory "is the process that progressively and immanently weaves together the story that, once it is remembered or re-collected as a 'story' first institutes the subject who can then claim the story as her own" (Nuzzo 2016, 34), the articles in this issue continue to trace the contents of the story that institutes the individual and collective Scandinavian subjects. For instance, Siri Hempel Lindøe in "Lidelse og frigjøring. TV som minneaktør

i 70- og 75-årsmarkeringene av den siste krigsvinteren i Nord-Norge” [Suffering and Liberation: Television as Memory Agent in the 70- and 75-Years Commemorations of the Last War Winter in Northern Norway] investigates how Norwegian television dealt with representing the end of the Second World War and how such documentary practice contributed to creating the public memory of the said events. Petra Broomans in “Writing Sámi Memory and Trauma into Swedish History. Linnea Axelsson’s *Ædnan. Epos* (2018) and Elin Anna Labba’s *Herrarna satte oss hit. Om tvångsförflyttningar i Sverige* (2020)” analyses how Sami history has been recovered – collected anew – in the aforementioned works of literature which offer ways to present a colonial victim’s history using the victim’s own cultural and epistemological tools – indigenous methodology – to understand these experiences; this way the approach challenges the tendency of ethnic minority narratives to be subjugated to the colonizer’s epistemology and ability to produce the historical truth of the colonized. As such Broomans’s article touches upon another issue of historical accounts – a need to rethink the implications of the ways we write history. And this idea is further addressed in Krzysztof Bak’s “Från nationalhjärte till rikstyran: Karl XII i det svenska 1800-talets litterära minneskultur” [From National Hero to National Tyrant: Charles XII in Swedish Literary Memory Culture of the Nineteenth Century] which deals with how the figure of the Swedish King has been represented in Swedish literature which might be seen as actively (re)constructing the heroic myth as historical memory/truth as well as radically changing and reinventing the historical figure depending on the culturally specific historical circumstances and, by doing so, revealing how intricately the literary, the historical, and the individual are entwined in this process of collective recollection.

The closing article in the third volume, as well as the collection as a whole, “En svensk röst från Kaunas och Vilnius 1939–1940: Lennart Kjellbergs brev” [A Swedish Voice from Kaunas and Vilnius 1939–1940: Lennart Kjellberg’s Letters] builds on the living and personal memory of Ērika Sausverde, a pioneer of Scandinavian Studies in post-Cold War Lithuania, and her unexpected and fateful meeting with one of the first Swedish lecturers in pre-war Lithuania – Lennart Kjellberg. It presents a series of his previously unpublished letters that not only provide valuable insights into the cultural and political life of the country and the city during that period, but also serve as a crucial personal link to Lithuania’s fragmented past.

It is our hope that the three volumes of *Memory and Remembrance in Scandinavian Cultures* will deepen one's critical understanding of the role of the political, the medium, and the historical in the process of remembering and further reinvigorate the study of memory specifically in relation to Scandinavia, including the memory of Scandinavia's relation to the rest of the world. By examining the Scandinavian past, we likewise wish to encourage to critically engage with the present – to think of memory as relational, not only imagistic. After all, it is questionable whether “the owl of Minerva only takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering” as one of the most common owls in Scandinavia – the short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) – is entirely diurnal (Suthers 1978, 229).

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