“Both Me and Mine He Causd to Dine”¹

Sandra Ballif Straubhaar and Richard Firth Green

ANY ACCOUNT OF LARRY Syndergaard's contributions to academia must begin with his more than forty years of work, planning, promoting, and participating in the International Congress on Medieval Studies, held first biennially, and then annually, every spring, at Western Michigan University since 1962.² Larry began this work in 1971, only three years into his new job as a junior professor of English. His undergraduate degree from Iowa State College had been in forestry and general science, but following this, he and his wife Ardis had spent a gap year in Copenhagen researching European forests along with family genealogy. It was there that Larry had caught the ballad bug and changed his academic alignment to the liberal arts. After returning to the U.S. to pursue a PhD at the University of Wisconsin in English and Scandinavian Studies, in 1968 he and his family arrived in Kalamazoo for the new job.

Larry's involvement in the International Congress on Medieval Studies can be documented, via archived conference programs, from 1971 onward. From 1976 to 1989, and probably in numerous other years as well (the records are incomplete) he participated on the Congress program committee (reading proposals and abstracts, as well as organizing sessions), while his wife Ardis, too, worked intermittently with the Congress committees and in the Medieval Institute office. Over a period of thirty years, Larry organized and/or presided over paper sessions on (among others) Old English Literature; *Beowulf* and the Idea of the Heroic; Viking Studies; Saga and Epic; General Medieval Literature; Critical Approaches to Chaucer; The Pearl Poet; Chaucer and Women; Jungian Approaches to Medieval Literature and Culture; Texts, Transmission and Editing; and Archetypal Theory and Medieval Literature.

But from the early 1990s onward Larry began to organize the sessions on the ballad for which he is so fondly remembered by the contributors to this volume. These attracted scholars, not only of Anglophone balladry, but also of Hispanic, Nordic, Slavic, Celtic, and Sephardic ballads,

among others. Paper topics included not only ballad texts, but also tunes and illustrations; ballad genre boundaries; Norse saga connections; Eddic poetry connections; connections to metrical romances; connections to the *cantefable*; women singers and informants; social class and singing style; ballads as cultural markers; ballads as cultural resistance; Robin Hood and other outlaw heroes; unquiet graves; abductions by elves; church frescoes; anti-Semitism; just and unjust queens; tragedy and gender; affect and emotion; and ballads in Jacobean drama. In connection with the ballad sessions at the Congress that he indefatigably organized and presided over through the years, Larry was made a Fellow of the International Ballad Commission / Kommission für Volksdichtung, and in that capacity tirelessly networked within and without the international community of ballad scholars. It delighted him to introduce like-minded “ballad-mongers” (as he called them) to one another.

In 1995 Larry published the work for which he is best known, *English Translations of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballads*—a volume that includes an exploration of the connections between Anglophone and Nordic ballads and remains an invaluable reference work for scholars of both (closely related) ballad corpora.³

Larry retired from his post in Western Michigan’s English department in 2000, but remained on the list of affiliated faculty for WMU’s interdisciplinary medieval studies MA for some years, and stepped up his activity with the IBC / Kommission für Volksdichtung. Larry and Ardis attended IBC conferences in Austin, Texas (2003); Ukraine (2005); Germany (2006); and Scotland (2007). After Ardis’s death in 2008, Larry went solo to the IBC in Portugal (2011); Turkey (2012); and South Africa (2013). In 2009, ballad sessions at ICMS were held in memory of Ardis; and in 2016, they were held in memory of Larry himself. Larry’s daughter Jennifer brought ballad-related books from Larry’s extensive library to the 2016 sessions and generously invited the attendees to take home whatever they liked.

One ongoing and unforgettable tradition for ballad scholars attending the Medieval Congress were Larry’s and Ardis’s annual dinners at the Syndergaard home near the WMU campus. From the very beginning, these dinners were determinedly inclusive affairs. Whether you were a senior rock-star academic or an independent unaffiliated scholar or a young ballad enthusiast with serious impostor syndrome, Larry and Ardis would make you welcome.

There follows our attempt to re-create the experience of a typical Ballad-Mongers’ Dinner. First, participants would receive an e-mail (“with apologies for its form-letter nature”), reminding us that the “International

Congress on Medieval Studies [was] bearing down upon us," and inviting our participation in "a kind of tradition that has developed over the last years, an informal dinner at our house for the ballad session participants and other friends of the ballad." In due course we would all meet in the lobby of the Hadley-Britton student dormitory, since it was closest of all the conference buildings to Larry's house, and while the lobby dutifully changed its furniture, floors, and wall treatments over the years, Larry himself never seemed to change. At the appointed hour, right on cue, Larry would walk in, tall and lanky (6'2" and 155 pounds, his family confirms); chances would be good he'd be wearing a plaid wool sport jacket, in mustardy colors. Larry would lead us eastwards across the damp evening grass, studded with dandelion and fleawort, through the gap in the chain link fence, and into a neighborhood of older houses, forest-like in its tall trees but garden-like in its plantings. Daffodils or tulips might be in bloom, depending on the year.

The Syndergaard home on Prairie Avenue had been built in 1913, but there were trees on its lot far older than that. One had blown down in a recent year, and Larry, the ex-forestry student, had painstakingly counted the rings and nailed in little metal signs to mark dates, including the Revolutionary War, his and Ardis's wedding, and the births of their children. We would visit and admire the playhouse Larry had built for his granddaughters Ellie and Maisie, a true miniature of the same era as the big house with many of the carpentry detailings of an actual residence.

Then, we went inside to be greeted by Ardis—Ardis Carr Syndergaard, who had been Larry's sweetheart since he took her to his senior prom in 1953, and whose printed memoir of her upbringing in rural Wisconsin Larry would proudly show his guests. She served us maybe a half-dozen different types of hors d'oeuvres—savory and sweet, beautifully presented: nuts and dates, bacon-wrapped water chestnuts, cheeses—as we sat in the pale-green-painted screened porch, perhaps in its two-seater porch swing. We had dinner in the dining room, its wood-beamed ceiling like something out of Rivendell, with the early-evening spring sun streaming through the high windows. Local wine from Paw Paw, local morels from the forest in the meat sauce, fresh asparagus on the side: beautiful presentations, on vintage china. Was the silver table service engraved with a C for Carr? No, said Ardis, laughing: we got it at an estate sale! We admired Ardis's custom kitchen, with sink and range heights adjusted to Ardis's petite proportions; the upstairs bathroom, with its claw-foot bathtub and books of Danish cartoons to peruse; and the living room, with its Chinese screen, and its solid wall of dark hardwood bookshelves built by

Larry himself, where we retired after dinner for stories and laughter and sometimes singing. These dinners continued even after Ardis's death in 2008, with Jennifer Syndergaard Snyder and family friends cooking from the recipes Ardis herself had used.

In the days and weeks following the various Congresses down the years, Larry would send emails out to the participants in the ballad sessions, praising the papers and suggesting like-minded scholars to contact, actively nourishing the international ballad community, as he also did after the annual IBC meetings all over the world. As Jennifer wrote to a group of us shortly after Larry's death:

You may know that my father collected many things (have you seen his library?). But by far his favorite "collectible" was people. He simply loved getting to know new people. Whenever it was that you and Larry first met, I have no doubt that he was genuinely interested in you—in your interests, your history, and your outlook on life—and he remembered what you talked about. And you probably found that he kept in touch! Correspondence was central to who Dad was. [5/14/2015]

Ample evidence that an international ballad researchers' (and sometime singers') community continues to thrive, and continues to owe an inestimable debt to Larry Syndergaard, can be seen in the varied banquet of ballad- and song-lore served up in the articles which follow in this volume.

While this introduction, as its title suggests, is primarily intended to memorialize Larry Syndergaard himself, it must also serve to introduce the larger memorial to him that is *Ballads of the North*. Our title reflects Larry's interest in the relationship between the ballads of Scandinavia (particularly Denmark) and those of Scotland, England, and the United States, and unsurprisingly many of the contributions to this volume began life as papers presented at the sessions he organized for WMU's Medieval Congresses. This interest of Larry's has a long scholarly pedigree (it reaches back at least to F. J. Child's extensive correspondence with the famous Danish ballad scholar Svend Grundtvig),⁴ but, unlike Child, Larry was also fascinated by the cultural legacy the traditional ballad has bequeathed to the modern world—its ongoing presence in the literature, the music, and the art of our own day. This particular fascination of his is reflected in our subtitle, *Medieval to Modern*, and particularly in the essays that make up the final part of our volume.

The introductory part of *Ballads of the North, Medieval to Modern* turns on the perennial question of how the ballad genre is to be defined and how far it resembles, or is distinct from, other forms. James Massengale's

"Swedish Ballad Authenticity and Its Gatekeepers" measures Bengt R. Jonsson's five-volume *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader* [Sweden's Medieval Ballads] (1983–2001) against the corpus of ballads included in earlier collections, and interrogates the grounds upon which some have been excluded; though, as he concedes, any selective enterprise of this kind must entail some kind of gatekeeping feature, its inevitable consequence is the large "shadow-corpus" of Swedish balladry on which Massengale concentrates. The two pieces that follow, by Shaun F. D. Hughes and Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, are more narrowly focused but both discuss the features that distinguish ballad versions from those of other genres. Hughes's "The Relationship of the Anomalous Ballad *Dorgeirs rímur* [*Stjakaarböfða*] to *Áns rímur bogsveigis*" discusses the relationship of an Icelandic ballad about the wrestler Thorgeir to a *rímnaflökkur* (set of *rímur*) about Án Bow-bender, and suggests that the reason that the ballad of *Dorgeirs rímur* is so unusual in an Icelandic context is that the continuing popularity of formal *rímur* inhibited the development of ballads (such as those we find in the Faroe Islands) that might have been felt to be in competition with them. In the final piece in this part, "Hervör, Hervard, Hervik: The Metamorphosis of a Shieldmaiden," Straubhaar concentrates, not on a male wrestler, but on a female warrior called Hervör, who appears in two Old Norse sagas and three later ballads (two Faroese and one Danish); to what extent, she asks, can we attribute the differences in the way Hervör is treated in these sources to the very different generic demands of saga and ballad?

The first of the essays in our second part (which examines various aspects of the ballad cultures in both Scandinavia and the English-speaking world) is Sarah Harlan-Haughey's "Uncanny Cetology in the Sagas and Later West-Scandinavian Balladry." Harlan-Haughey covers material similar to that treated by Hughes and Straubhaar, but from a different perspective. She compares the literary trope of the beached whale and its butchering in the Icelandic Sagas with the appearance of this motif in later Icelandic and Faroese folklore. She shows how overtones of malevolent pre-Christian magic permeate the sagas' treatment of whales, whose beached carcasses are often the impetus for social dissension and feuding, whereas the ceremonial aspects of the modern Faroese Grindadráp (and also later Scandinavian ballads and folktales) perform a quite different function—reaffirming order, efficiency, and community. Tom Pettitt's "If You Go Down to the Woods Today ... Fateful Locations in the Ballad Landscapes of Three Kingdoms," combining as it does the study of a single formulaic setting, the *rosenlund*, across a wide range of both Danish and Anglophone ballads, forms an appropriate centerpiece to this tribute to Larry Syndergaard. The *rosenlund* (perhaps better translated as "flowery

grove" than "rose grove") provides a "fateful location" for the action of many Danish ballads, and by examining the setting for such action in a handful of English and Scottish analogues to these ballads, Pettitt reveals far greater diversity in their Anglophone counterparts; whether this diversity is a result of topographical or generic differences he leaves an open question. James Moreira's "'His Hawk, His Hound, and Lady Fair': Social Symbols and Ballad Metaphors" explores another set of ballad motifs, those of "hawks and hounds as agents of characterization," but he restricts his investigation here to English and Scottish sources. His analysis exposes "the manner in which balladry plays on pre-established symbols in order to create unique effects in its own fictive universe," in this case, how "references to hawks and hounds illuminate the *potential* for character weakness and vulnerability." Continuing the investigation of Anglophone balladry, David Gregory's "Balladry and Social Mores: An Exploration of Attitudes to Sexual Relations in Songsters, Broadsides, and Oral Tradition" concludes this section by comparing the attitudes of traditional ballads to sexual license with those of broadsides, drolleries, and popular songs. In an exhaustive examination of all the ballads in the Child canon, he concludes that while there is a small group of moralistic ballads in which adultery or premarital sex is explicitly condemned, a far greater number elicit our sympathy for the lovers or even condone their activities.

The two essays that conclude this part offer readings of individual ballads, one Danish the other Anglo-American. Lynda Taylor's "The Agnete Ballad of Denmark: Cultural Tool or Protest Song?" discusses the supernatural ballad of "Agnete og havmanden" [Agnete and the Merman]. Taylor finds the emotional core of this ballad to be the relationship between Agnete and her domineering merman—itself a reflection of a marital relationship in the human world—and she asks whether this is not a ballad that "to all intents and purposes, could have been used as a protest song, shared amongst the sisterhood and presented in a subversive way?" Richard Firth Green's "From *Sir Eglamour* to 'Old Bangum': The Travels of a Ballad Hero" traces the history of the ballad of "Sir Lionel" from its origins in a fifteenth-century romance to its emergence as a popular Appalachian ballad. How, Green asks, do the varied social and cultural contexts in which this story has resurfaced over time reshape and modify its meaning? He suggests that American versions of "Sir Lionel" (often called "Old Bangum") are doing quite different cultural work from their British counterparts, and concludes that the common interpretation of "Old Bangum" as primarily a frivolous children's song constitutes a serious misrepresentation of the latter.

Our final part represents an aspect of ballad study particularly dear to Larry Syndergaard's heart—the influence of traditional ballads on later forms of artistic expression. This part begins with Hans Kuhn's "Writing Romances for Amateur Singers: A Nineteenth-Century Danish Example," a study of the parlor songs of Joseph Glæser (1835–1891). It is useful to be reminded that America in the 1960s was not the only time that old folksongs were revived and set to new uses, and just as the protest songs of the Vietnam War era are only dimly foreshadowed in the corpus of traditional ballads, so, too, the sentimental lyrics intended for communal singing in nineteenth-century middle-class Danish households seem to be far removed from Grundtvig's great collection of medieval and early-modern ballads, despite the fact that some of their motifs (such as spring's awakening, or the lovers' farewell) are indeed very old. Sally Ann Schutz's "The Secret Lives of Ballads: Fan Fiction as Folk Space," presents us with a fascinating analogy between the traditional ballad and modern fan fiction. She speculates that fan fiction may function as a "folk space," and suggests that it actually has "much more in common with oral performance than it does with conventional print authorship"; by comparing the process by which fan-fiction writers "create and perform their identities as they interact with each other in their digital space" with the creation and performance of ballads in an oral context, Schutz offers us new insights into the nature of the ballad genre. Our final contribution, Jennifer Goodman Wollock's "A Game of Crows: Poe, Plagiarism, and the Ballad Tradition," finds the inspiration for Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" in the related traditional ballads of "The Three Ravens" and "The Twa Corbies"; Wollock makes this insight the starting point for an extended investigation into Poe's relationship to the larger field of American and European romanticism, and into the poet's internal struggle between the two sides of his creative persona, one beholden to the idealist Kant, the other to the traditionalist Herder.

When William James Entwistle essayed a taxonomy of European ballads in 1930, he divided his category of "Nordic balladry" into two: the ballads of Scandinavia and the British Isles, and those of Germany and Central Europe: "with the ballads of Scandinavia go our own ballads," he asserted confidently.⁵ It is this conjunction that informed the whole of Larry Syndergaard's scholarly enterprise and it duly informs the collection, *Ballads of the North*, that is offered here as a tribute to his memory.

But before we turn to this scholarly main course, here is a small appetizer, in the form of one of Ardis Carr Syndergaard's memorable recipes, written down by Jennifer Syndergaard Snyder and annotated by Larry himself:⁶

Larry: Here's Jenny's e-mail of the recipe. It's Ardis's, based on something from a cookbook, then modified by Jenny (the pineapple juice, I think). Do enjoy.

Jennifer: Here is Curried Coconut Chicken:

8 small chicken breasts (I used 4 XL ones, cut in half, fatter half flattened somewhat)

6 tablespoons butter, melted

One 14-oz bag of Baker's Angel Flake sweetened flaked coconut

Approx. 3 tablespoons curry powder (to taste)

1 teaspoon salt

Sauce: 2 cups Apricot preserves, warmed and thinned with a little fruit juice (I used about $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cups pineapple juice. Could also use orange or apple). Stir in approx. $\frac{1}{2}$ cup yellow raisins and 3 tablespoons [melted] butter. You can add a little ginger, curry, salt and pepper, to taste. [Serve this in gravy boats, on the table.]

Melt butter in shallow bowl. In another shallow bowl, mix curry and coconut. Dip chicken pieces in butter, then coat on both sides with coconut mixture. Pat it back into place if it falls off. Place in greased casserole dish and sprinkle with salt. Bake at 350 degrees for about 35 minutes. Serve with rice. [5/18/2012]

NOTES

¹ "The King's Disguise" (Child 151:38).

² The 1962 conference lasted one day, and consisted of two plenary addresses, six paper sessions, and an evening showing of Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal*. The 2017 conference, by contrast, lasted four days, and contained 574 paper sessions, several plenaries, and more evening performances and events than could be easily listed here.

³ Turku [Finland]: Nordic Institute of Folklore, 1995.

⁴ Reprinted in Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, *Ballad Books and Ballad Men: Raids and Rescues in Britain, America, and the Scandinavian North Since 1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930).

⁵ *European Balladry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 203.

⁶ I have added two additional instructions in brackets [SBS].