The Nordic Storyteller

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Essays in Honour of Niels Ingwersen

Edited by

Susan Brantly and Thomas A. DuBois

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NIELS INGWERSEN: AN APPRECIATION

SUSAN C. BRANTLY

Fig. 1-1: Niels and Faith Ingwersen, 2004. Photo: Scott A. Mellor

Niels Ingwersen retired as Torger Thompson Professor of Scandinavian Literature at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 2004 after nearly 40 years of service. Professor Ingwersen is known to virtually everyone in the field of Scandinavian Studies simply as Niels. Niels is appreciated by his colleagues as an inspiring teacher, a dedicated servant to his profession, and an inventive and critically astute scholar.

Niels was born in Horsens, Denmark in 1935, and for many years was able to use his childhood memories of the Nazi occupation to connect younger generations of students with a piece of history that threatens to become just a piece of the distant past. Niels began his university studies in the 1950s, spending some time in Stockholm and then moving on to the University of Oslo, where he met a young American student from Wyoming named Faith Boswell Sloniger in a course for advanced language students. This was the beginning of a fruitful scholarly partnership that has lasted a lifetime. Faith moved to Denmark and attended the University of Copenhagen while Niels finished his *cand. mag.* degree in Danish and English. Niels and Faith were married in 1961. Shortly afterward, both Niels and Faith enrolled in the Program of Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago, where they took classes for a year and passed prelims before returning to Denmark. Faith received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1975. Niels finished his minor at the University of Copenhagen and then completed sixteen months in the military as a member of the Signal Corps. After the military, Niels got a job at Hellerup Seminarium, and was shortly thereafter offered another job at the University of Wisconsin by the chairman of the Scandinavian Department, Harald Naess. Niels and Faith moved to Madison in 1965 and have been there ever since.

Niels' natural gift for storytelling has made him a legendary teacher at the University of Wisconsin. According to Niels, an important moment in his teaching career occurred the day he forgot his notes. He had conscientiously and meticulously prepared every class in advance and asked Faith to go over his notes to be sure that the language was right. The day he forgot his notes and was forced to speak off the cuff turned into the best class he had ever taught. Niels possesses the rare talent of making complex issues seem simple, and the backbone of his teaching method is telling stories that engage students and get the message across. By the 1980s, Niels' wildly popular introductory literature courses, "The Tales of Hans Christian Andersen" and "Masterpieces of Scandinavian Literature," were attracting hundreds of students. In the spring of 1988, the Scandinavian Department did not limit the enrollment of "The Tales of Hans Christian Andersen" and close to 900 students signed up for it. There was not a classroom on campus large enough to accommodate such a crowd. Niels has received a number of teaching awards throughout his career, including the William Kiekhofer Teaching Award.

Although Niels is the master of the conventional classroom, he saw early on the value of exploring options for non-traditional students. He turned "The Tales of Hans Christian Andersen" into a correspondence

course, the course guide for which won a Distinguished Course Award from the National University Continuing Education Association in 1991. He was the driving force behind the Scandinavian Department's early attempts to teach Norwegian at other System campuses using videoconferencing technology. In the late 1990s, Niels received funding to turn "The Tales of Hans Christian Andersen" into a high-tech distance course. Lectures were filmed on location in Denmark and in a campus studio, and the end product was broadcast on Wisconsin Public Television. The video lectures were accompanied by an elaborate web site, and students were shepherded through the course by "Virtual T.A.s," who guided online discussions. Niels became a local celebrity in Madison, because of his television lectures; however, the online lectures routinely receive more "hits" than any other site on the university streaming servers, indicating that his audience is vast and global. Niels is both a pioneer and an innovator in the field of distance education.

It should come as no surprise that Niels' dynamic speaking style has made him a popular presenter at professional meetings and a much-sought-after speaker on the public lecture circuit. Niels applies the "forgotten notes" lesson even in these contexts. He is one of a scant handful of presenters who can speak a SASS paper extemporaneously from a written outline—and make it a success. His topics can range from the *Bildungsroman*, to Kierkegaard, to Romanticism, to Faulkner and Ibsen, to Andersen, to folktales.

Niels and Faith have performed considerable service to their profession, most notably as the co-editors of *Scandinavian Studies* from 1985 to 1990. *Scandinavian Studies* is, of course, the most prestigious journal of Nordic studies in North America. Niels served as President of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study from 1969-1971. He has many times been Chair of the Scandinavian Studies Department and has reviewed every major Scandinavian program in the country and three in Denmark itself. In the 1980s, Niels was one of a small group of faculty members who established the Folklore Program at the University of Wisconsin. Thanks in large part to Niels who acted as Program Director in the early years, the Folklore Program has blossomed into a flourishing enterprise on campus.

Both Niels and Faith have worked valiantly as editors and translators in order to make Danish literature available to the English reading public. Niels has served as series editor for the Wisconsin Introductions to Scandinavia (WITS) series, which provides translations of Scandinavian literature for use in the classroom. Many of the WITS books, in addition to several other scholarly volumes, have benefited from Faith's careful

editorial eye. Niels' volumes on Andersen and Blicher contain translations by Faith, an award-winning translator who has also translated works by Ulla Ryum, Simon Grabowski, Martin A. Hansen, Mette Newth and Bodil Bredsdorff.

As a scholar, Niels is a particularly attentive and detailed reader of texts. This is clear in a number of the more than fifty articles he has penned over the years, such as his studies of J.P. Jacobsen's "Pesten i Bergamo" and Knut Hamsun's *Pan*. He has also kept his eye on critical theory as it is practiced on both sides of the Atlantic, writing about the impact of structuralism on Danish literary criticism, the problems with textual analysis, and the tension between literary history and various critical schools. He is one of only a few scholars in North America with a research interest in the Scandinavian Baroque. Niels and Faith Ingwersen have co-authored two definitive monographs on major Danish writers: Martin A. Hansen and Martin Andersen Nexø. These works—*Martin A. Hansen* (1976) and *Quests for a Promised Land: The Works of Martin Andersen Nexø* (1984)—have remained for many years the only complete overviews of Hansen's and Nexø's literary careers. During the 1990s, Niels turned his attention more and more frequently to a new area of interest: folklore. His latest book project, *The Scandinavian Magic Tale and Narrative Folklore: A Study in Genres, Themes, and Sources* (2009), attests to Niels' unique way of applying his literary training to the reading of folklore. Niels' lengthy and productive career promoting Danish culture in America has been recognized by the Queen of Denmark, who made him a Knight of the Dannebrog in 1997.

The present volume, *The Nordic Storyteller*, pays homage to Niels' diverse research interests. The contributors to this volume represent a handful of Niels' many admirers who toil in the same academic fields. The initial essays focus on folklore, especially ballads (which Niels has written on himself), but also the tales that people tell about their lives and those of others in order to better understand themselves and the world. From there, the essays transition into literary and artistic appropriations of folklore, which then lead naturally to Hans Christian Andersen and other prominent literary figures in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, a field to which Niels has made many valued contributions. This volume is offered in appreciation of Niels Ingwersen and all that he has done for his students, his colleagues, and his profession.

SONGS AND TALES IN ORAL TRADITION

"RIDDAR SANCTE ORRIAN": BALLAD TRADITION AND THE MEDIEVAL SWEDISH CULT OF ST. GEORGE

TRACEY R. SANDS

For researchers interested in the religious life of the Middle Ages, the Nordic countries offer both great advantages and special problems. In comparison to many other European countries, the Nordic countries have preserved a far greater proportion of their medieval churches, along with, in many cases, wall paintings and inventory. For scholars interested in medieval iconography, this region can be a treasure trove. Scholars who focus their attention on manuscripts, however, are likely to consider themselves less favored than their colleagues in England, for example. If the Protestant Reformation did relatively little damage to the churches themselves, it brought about wide-scale destruction of liturgical books and other important medieval manuscripts, many of which ended up as covers for collections of royal accounts – if they were not used for making fireworks (Brunius 1993). In spite of these losses, however, and in spite of the changes in religious practice brought about by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, there is a great deal to be learned about the religious life of the region during the Middle Ages, and not least about the cult of the saints. The materials that can contribute to this study include various kinds of charters and other texts, as well as iconography, naming practices, and other kinds of evidence of devotion. Of particular interest for this study, however is oral narrative tradition, especially that of the ballad. Although almost no ballads were recorded in writing until well after the Reformation, I would argue that these narratives can often provide important information concerning medieval interests and values.

The purpose of this paper is to draw on a variety of sources, including written and oral ballad tradition of the post-Reformation period, in order to understand the nature of the cult of one particular saint in medieval Sweden, St. George. While this cult appears at first glance to have much in common with other cults popular in medieval Sweden, I will argue that it

is in fact quite different in nature. Indeed, one of the most illuminating clues to the special nature of this cult comes from the unusual nature of the ballad tradition associated with the saint.

Together with a handful of other important international saints, St. George is one of the earliest saints to appear in Swedish liturgical calendars. It must be noted, however, that early in Swedish terms is relatively late for the rest of medieval Christendom. Compared with the rest of Europe, Sweden was very late to accept Christianity. Although Saint Ansgar led two separate missionary expeditions to the trading center of Birka, in central Sweden, the first in 829-30, the first Swedish king known to have accepted baptism did not do so until around the year 1000. This king, Olof Skötkonung, was, according to roughly contemporary sources, eventually forced to retreat into the far western part of his kingdom by disgruntled non-Christians, and not until 1080 did a Swedish monarch have contact with the pope. Even King Inge the Elder, to whom the pope wrote in 1080, and who sent a bishop to Rome at the pope's request, was apparently forced from his throne for a time by a heathen rival.[1] By 1100, though, the status of Christianity as the dominant faith of Sweden seems clear, and a list of Scandinavian dioceses compiled at about this time includes seven sites in Sweden. Of these, at least four (Skara, Linköping, Strängnäs and "Aros" – either Östra Aros (modern-day Uppsala) or Västerås) can be recognized as the seats of Swedish bishops throughout the Middle Ages (see Redelius 1975: 10; Nilsson 1998).

Saint George, then, is among the earliest saints to appear in medieval Nordic sources. In the *Necrologium Lundense*, begun in 1123, the feast of St. George does not appear in the original hand, but it appears to have been added before the middle of the 1130s (Svärdström 1963: 35). An altar of St. George was consecrated in Lund Cathedral in 1126, which also establishes an early date for the cult (Kilström and Odenius 1981: cols. 268-272). Although the medieval diocese of Lund was part of Denmark, not Sweden, in 1103 or 1104 it gained archepiscopal authority over the whole of Scandinavia, which had previously been under the authority of the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. Thus the Danish calendar from Lund may convey a degree of information about early Swedish circumstances as well. The earliest known Swedish medieval calendar is from the year 1198, from the parish church of Vallentuna. The feast of St. George appears on the 23rd of April, which is its usual date in the western church.

[1] Two communications from Pope Gregory VII to the Swedish king(s) have been preserved, and are published as numbers 24 and 25 in the *Diplomatarium suecanum*.

Although the notation is made in black ink, rather than the red ink used for the most important feast days, it appears to be original, and is not among the additions later made by another scribe (see Helmfrid 1998, Schmid 1945). Another very early calendar, a rune stave from Lödöse, a trading center near present-day Göteborg, does not appear to include the feast of St. George. However, this object, which has been dated to the middle of the 12th century, appears to have originated some distance from where it was discovered, possibly in western Jutland (Svärdström 1963: 65). Thus the absence of St. George does not necessarily reflect local practices.

Certain images of St. George also testify to his cult's early introduction into Sweden. Källunge church, on the island of Gotland, includes what may be a depiction of St. George and the dragon among its suite of late 12th century murals. These paintings are in Russian Byzantine style, which, although rare for the rest of Sweden, was not unusual for Gotland during this period (Lagerlöf 1984: 123-132; Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 29). Jan Svanberg has also argued that carvings of a mounted soldier fighting a monster (which actually looks like a gigantic wolf) on a late 12th-century baptismal font from the parish church of Vattlösa, Västergötland, should be interpreted as a representation of St. George and the dragon (Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 29-30).

The legend of St. George is found in several different medieval Swedish versions. The oldest version is found in the *Fornsvenska legendariet* (Old Swedish Legendary), a translation of the *Legenda Aurea* usually dated to around 1300 (Stephens 1847-58: 491-96). A legend of St. George is also included in the early 15th-century translation of the Low German *Seelen Trost*, though the translator has included motifs borrowed from the Old Swedish Legendary (Klemming 1871-73: 122-27; Jansson 1981: cols. 27-29). A rhymed old Swedish *vita* from the second quarter of the 15th century emphasizes the saint's function as a helper in battle, and at least one scholar has suggested that this text may have originated among the circles closest to Karl Knutsson (Bonde), who was king of Sweden for several periods during the middle of the 15th century (Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 185; Klemming 1881-82: 185-89).

Saint George is also one of a handful of saints whose legends have given rise to ballads which were collected both from written sources dating from the middle of the 16th century onwards, and from later oral tradition. Although the late medieval Swedish calendars were full of saints, and though visual images in (and from) medieval churches confirm this wide range, only a few saints' lives seem to have made such an impression that their memory was kept alive in oral tradition long after the

Reformation. In Swedish tradition, these saints, in addition to St. George,[2] are St. James the Greater,[3] St. Katherine of Alexandria,[4] St. Stephen,[5] St. Mary Magdalene,[6] and St. Olaf.[7] For most of these ballads, there is good reason to believe that the existence of a ballad based on the saint's legend in 19th and 20th century oral tradition is a direct reflection of the saint's popularity, especially among the laity, before the Protestant Reformation. For many of these saints, there appears to be a direct link between the saint's general prominence in the Middle Ages, as seen in liturgical calendars (and also in post-Reformation secular ones), dedications of churches, altars, bells, and the like, naming practices and other evidence of devotion – and the existence of ballads several hundred years later. For Saints Olaf, James, Stephen, Mary Magdalene and Katherine, it is easy to see how ballads could have arisen out of popular devotion. The shrine of St. James at Compostela was a major goal for the medieval Swedish pilgrims, including such prominent figures as Birger Persson, who was the father of St. Birgitta. As an apostle – and indeed, one of the most prominent, even among that exalted company, St. James is widely portrayed in medieval Swedish churches, and his feast, the 25th of July, was written in red ink and celebrated with a high degree of veneration in all surviving medieval Swedish calendars. St. Olaf, the martyred king of Norway who is given at least partial credit for the Christianization of that country, was also widely venerated in medieval Sweden. His relics in the cathedral at Nidaros were frequently visited by Swedish pilgrims, and his image – often including detailed scenes from his legend – is one of those most frequently encountered in medieval Swedish iconography. Like St. James, St. Olaf is regularly celebrated with a high degree of veneration, and his feast, 29 July, appears in red ink in the Swedish calendars. St. Stephen's day, 26 December, also appears in red ink, and is, like the other two, celebrated with high degree. St. Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church, is also regularly depicted in Swedish churches (see Grotefend 1891-8: 217-249; Schmid 1945: 119-130).

The two female saints, St. Katherine of Alexandria and St. Mary Magdalene, were among medieval Sweden's most popular, and the extreme popularity of the ballads based on their lives in the 19th and 20th

[2] (*The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad* (TSB) B 10, *Sveriges medeltida ballader* (SMB) 40, *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (DgF) 103)
[3] (TSB B 7, SMB 38, DgF 100)
[4] (TSB B 14, SMB 42, DgF 101)
[5] (TSB B 8, SMB 39, DgF 96)
[6] (TSB B 16, SMB 43, DgF 98)
[7] (TSB B 12, SMB 41, DgF 50)

centuries reflects this. Both saints were favorites of the mendicant friars of the Dominican and Franciscan orders, who were enormously influential in medieval Swedish religious life. "Katarina" together with its variants (including "Karin") is perhaps the most popular name for Swedish women throughout the Middle Ages (Otterbjörk 1981: cols. 214-216). "Magdalena" is also well-represented in medieval sources. Both are frequently depicted in Swedish churches – some 300 images of St. Katherine, for example, survive or are documented. Both saints are celebrated with a high degree of veneration in all medieval Swedish dioceses, and their feasts are generally written in the calendars in red ink, indicating that the laity, as well as the clergy, were expected to be present at their masses (Grotefend 1891-8: 217-249, Schmid 1945: 119-130).

In spite of his early appearance in medieval Swedish calendars, the importance of St. George in Sweden for most of the Middle Ages is not as clear. While his feast, 23 April, appears in Swedish calendars throughout the period, it seldom appears in red ink, and is usually accorded a lower degree of veneration than the feasts of the other saints noted above. In the missal for the diocese of Åbo printed in 1488, for example, the feast of St. George was celebrated with the degree of Simplex, that of St. Mary Magdalene with Duplex, and the feast of St. Katherine with the degree of Totum duplex (Grotefend 1891-8: 27-219). Sometime during the end of the 15th century, however, St. George received a promotion, and his degree of veneration was raised to Duplex. His feast received a similar promotion during this period in the bishoprics of Västerås and Strängnäs, but in other sees, such as Skara and Linköping, it seems to have retained the degree of Simplex throughout the period (Kilström and Odenius 1981: col. 269).

The distinctions between the position of St. George and other saints in the liturgical calendars can also be observed in the Swedish ballad tradition. The ballads deriving from the lives of Saints James, Olaf, Stephen, Mary Magdalene and Katherine have several traits in common. None of them is among the ballads known from 16th- and 17th-century manuscripts, but all of them were collected from oral tradition in the 19th and 20th centuries. Each of these ballad types also displays traits generally associated with what ballad scholars like to call the "traditional ballad" – narrative songs whose primary mode of transmission through time is presumed to have been oral, rather than written. These traits include 1) concentration of action – the narrative tends to focus on a single episode from the saint's legend, rather than telling the whole story; 2) "leaping and lingering" – large chunks of the plot may be related in a few words, while other segments (often descriptions) are expanded, often in dialog form; 3) use of formulaic language, or commonplaces, which are often not

exclusive to the ballad being performed, but may occur in a wide variety of ballad types. Although refrains are not universal among "traditional" ballads, they often include refrain-like structures. For example, though "Liten Karin," the Swedish St. Katherine ballad, has no distinct refrain (i.e., no single line of text repeated within or following each stanza), in most variants of the ballad the second line of each stanza (in some variants, both lines) is sung twice.

The ballad of St. George, however, appears to be distinct in several ways from other Swedish ballads about saints. While the other ballads exhibit typical oral traits, the style of the George ballad more closely resembles that of the so-called "broadside ballad." Although this term, like the "traditional" ballad actually denotes style rather than origin, it refers to ballads that contain traits more closely associated with written than with oral transmission. Thus broadside ballads are characterized by more even pacing, rather than "leaping and lingering." They tend to relate longer, more comprehensive narratives, and to provide greater, and more evenly distributed detail. Their scope sometimes seems chronicle-like, or even journalistic (see Wilgus and Long 1985: 437-8). Thus, while the ballad of St. James relates a single miracle, that of St. Katherine focuses on her conflict with her would-be seducer, and that of Mary Magdalene on her recognition of her sins, and on her penance, the Swedish ballad of St. George relates the entire dragon-slaying chapter of the legend of St. George. Where the other ballads tend to portray a single encounter between two characters, often in dialogue form, the George ballad has long passages of description and a large number of speaking characters. For example, in the Swedish C variant, a text printed and distributed as a broadside in the late 17th or early 18th century, various lines of text are placed in the mouths of God, the king of the city besieged by the dragon, the people of the city, the princess, and St. George himself. In addition, there are passages of third person narrative not attributable to any of the characters. While descriptions in the other ballads are often short and formulaic – St. Katherine is simply "Little Karin," and her adversary is "the young king" – the St. George ballad offers long descriptive passages. We learn, for example, that "His banner was white/his cross was red/he carried it in his hands/his armor shone like the sun/for the maiden did not know him."["Hans baner was hwijt/hans Kors war rödt/Thet förde han i sina Händer/Hans Harnesk thet Skeen alt som en Sool/Ty Jungfrun honom eij kende."] (SMB 40 C, v. 20).

Interestingly, the distinctions between the ballad of St. George and the other ballads discussed here go beyond style. The other Swedish ballads depicting known, internationally recognized saints are known primarily

from oral tradition, usually no earlier than the early 18th century. One of the reasons that a link can be inferred between the popularity of a saint's cult during the Middle Ages and the popularity of a ballad about that saint in oral tradition several hundred years later, is that the Protestant Reformation, starting shortly after 1520, put a stop to the public and official veneration of saints in Sweden. While the simple attraction of a good plot cannot be overlooked as an explanation for the presence of these narratives in folk tradition, it also seems logical that the saints most likely to be remembered (though this does not mean that they continued to be venerated) would be those that were already familiar before the Reformation.

At the same time that we make the connection between the popularity of a given saint in the Middle Ages and the popularity of a ballad about that saint in later oral tradition, it is necessary to acknowledge certain facts about the collection of ballads before the early 19th century. Bengt Jonsson has made the important point that early ballad collectors were very aware of what kinds of ballad texts they wanted to collect. The collectors of the 15th and 16th centuries strongly favored so-called "heroic ballads" ("kämpavisor"), which could be incorporated into the general antiquarian project of the period, to construct a glorious Swedish national past. At the same time, ballads that could be seen as expressing peasant superstition – or that smacked of "popery" would not have appealed to the collectors or audiences (largely aristocrats and students) of the period. By the 18th century, the broadsheet had become established as an important means of ballad transmission.[8] Jonsson notes that the greater proportion of legendary ballads in this material than in the earlier ballad collections probably reflects the tastes of the principal consumers of this medium, who were to be found among the lower socio-economic classes (Jonsson 1967: 797-798). These factors, too, suggest that the Swedish ballad of St. George was perceived as being different in nature than other legendary ballads by the ballad collectors of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Like the other legendary ballads, the Swedish St. George ballad has been collected from 19th century oral tradition. However, a large number of the texts appearing in the published edition of Swedish ballads were not recorded directly from performance, but are instead written copies of older written texts.[9] Unlike other legendary ballads, the George ballad is found in early manuscript sources. Indeed, the oldest written text of the ballad is

[8] It must be emphasized that BOTH ballads in the "traditional" (or as they are called in Sweden, "medieval") style AND ballads in the "broadside" style are found in the form of broadsheets.

[9] e.g. SMB 40 J, K, M, N.

among the earliest documented ballad texts in the Swedish language, and is found in a manuscript of unknown provenance from the middle of the 16th century. The text is even accompanied by a short passage of musical notation, making it clear that this was a song, and not simply a poem.[10] The ballad is also found in a ballad book from the late 1590s or around 1600, and was published repeatedly as a broadside during the later 17th century and throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (SMB 40 B and C). Although these early texts of the ballad are not precisely identical, the similarity of content, wording and description is so great that it is quite clear that the later texts derive from the earlier one (or a version thereof) as written texts. This is clearly a written tradition, not an oral one. Perhaps the most notable difference between the mid-16th century text and the later ones is that the first line of the early text praises the Virgin Mary ("Loffuat warde jomfrv maria/och henne welsignade son/jack uill eder en viso queda/hon är giordt om riddar sancte orrian."), while from the 1590s onward our praise is directed instead toward God the Father: ("Loffuat wari gud fader vdi himmelrijk/Och hans welsignade son/Iag will eder en wijsa queda/Hon är giordt af Riddar Sancte Iören."). Still, this relatively minor change is the ballad's most apparent adaptation to Protestant religious sensibilities. Otherwise there is very little difference in content between the later variants of the ballad, the earliest manuscript version, and the medieval, explicitly Roman Catholic written texts of the legend of St. George from which the ballad clearly derives.

Why do we find the ballad of St. George in the early manuscript sources that otherwise do not contain ballads about saints? Why do the style and the textual history of this ballad indicate transmission largely by means of written texts, when other Swedish legendary ballads are clearly primarily oral? There is good reason to believe that the anomalies of the ballad tradition of St. George reflect the unusual nature of his cult in late medieval Sweden. In spite of his early appearance in Sweden, St. George does not appear to be one of the country's most fervently venerated saints for most of the medieval period. As in other parts of the medieval world, he was a relatively frequent patron of hospitals, especially those devoted to the care of lepers (Kilström and Odenius 1981). Other saints could also be invoked in this context, however. The "Helgeandshus" – "House of the Holy Spirit" was a well-known concept.[11] St. Gertrude was not infrequently referred to as a patron saint of hospitals and lodgings, while

[10] See SMB 40 A.

[11] It should be noted that chapels dedicated to St. George were found in a number of Swedish "Helgeandshus," including several from the late 14th and early 15th centuries (Kilström and Odenius 1981: 270).

St. Katherine of Alexandria was the patron of the hospital in the town of Skänninge. For most of the Middle Ages, veneration of St. George is not reflected in naming practices. Allan Etzler notes that an investigation of surviving medieval documents shows that Swedes were rarely named for the saint before the 1460s-1470s. Until that time, bearers of the name Jörgen, Göran, Örjan, Georg, etc., are usually Germans (Etzler 1931: LLI). Images of St. George occur relatively infrequently in Swedish churches before the later 15th century. For example, only four images of the saint are known from the 14th century: two now-fragmentary wall paintings, an engraving on a chalice, and an embroidery on a chasuble (Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 30). For the sake of comparison, we might note that some twenty known images of St. Katherine date from this period, including wall paintings, sculptures, engravings on chalices, and embroideries (Sands 1998: 98).

By the second half of the fifteenth century, however, St. George was clearly experiencing a renaissance. From the later fifteenth century through the first quarter of the sixteenth, 125 images of St. George appear in Swedish churches, and another 37 from Finland (which was a province of Sweden). Of these, a large number are free-standing sculptures depicting the saint's battle with the dragon, usually with the princess looking on (Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 199-210). As both Allan Etzler and Jan Svanberg have pointed out, there are specific reasons for the cult's remarkable surge in popularity. Beginning in the late fourteenth century, Sweden, Norway and Denmark had come under the common rule of a single monarch, in what is known as the Kalmar Union. Several of the kings who ruled during this period (ca. 1389-1520) were of German origin, though the earliest and most effective regent of the period was Margrethe, daughter of King Valdemar of Denmark and mother to Olof, the heir of all three kingdoms, who died as a youth. Some of the German-born Union kings, notably Albrekt of Mecklenburg and Erik of Pomerania, made themselves unpopular with certain factions within the Swedish nobility by awarding important fiefdoms and giving general influence to newly-immigrating German nobles, rather than to the native Swedes. Whether the German overlords were much worse for the average farmer than the Swedish ones can be discussed, and there were certainly factions of the Swedish nobility who favored the Kalmar Union as well. Still, resistance to non-Swedish rule was a fact in Sweden from a very early point in the history of the Union, and later monarchs of more or less Danish origin hardly enjoyed more success or cooperation than their German-born predecessors.

Although the reign of Queen Margrethe seems to have been relatively peaceful, after her death in 1412, there were several periods during which members of the Swedish high aristocracy seized power and ruled the country in defiance of the Kalmar Union. The first such figure to come to power was Karl Knutsson (Bonde), who ruled during three separate periods (1448-57, 1464-65, 1467-70)[12]. According to Etzler, the specific veneration of St. George as the pinnacle of knightly excellence, not just as the great martyr, was introduced into Sweden by Karl Knutsson, who came into contact with this aspect of the cult during the time between his first and second periods of regency, which he spent in Danzig (Etzler 1931: XLVIII ff.) Perhaps even more important for the cult's increase in popularity, though, was Karl's nephew, Sten Sture the Elder, who succeeded him as regent, though he was never elected king, and clearly also inherited his devotion to St. George.

The battle of Brunkeberg in 1471 is often seen as a crucial point in Swedish history. The two sides in this battle, which was fought just outside of Stockholm (within the modern-day city limits), were the nationalist Swedish troops, led by Sten Sture the Elder, and Unionist forces (including a number of Swedish aristocrats) led by King Hans of Denmark. According to a rhymed chronicle apparently composed within twenty years after the event (Westin 1981: cols. 353-355), the Swedish troops "sang St. George's song" before they entered the fray. Etzler has shown quite convincingly, in my opinion, that the "song" in question was not the same one later collected and published under the same title. Rather, he notes, the song whose first two lines are quoted in the chronicle is a translation of an old German pilgrims' and crusaders' song, which does not actually mention the saint, but may well be associated with him (Etzler 1931: LIV).

Be that as it may, the battle turned out well for the Swedish side, and in gratitude, Sten Sture commissioned an enormous and remarkable sculpture by the North German artist Bernt Notke, which was consecrated in the Great Church (Storkyrkan) of Stockholm in 1489. This sculpture seems to have served as a model for later sculptures, paintings, and possibly even narratives, and there is no doubt that in addition to its religious content, the sculpture of St. George defeating the dragon could also be interpreted in political terms (see Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998 for an exhaustive description and numerous photographs of this sculpture group).

[12] Although Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson led a series of successful peasant uprisings against the Kalmar Union beginning in 1434, and was elected Captain of the Realm ("Rikshövitsman") in January of 1435, he did not rule as king of Sweden (see Pernler 1999: 132-5).

Jan Svanberg has suggested that certain details in the sculpture make it likely that the sculptor derived his portrayal from the ballads, rather than from any other narrative source (Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 186). It seems more likely, though, that the sculpture is primary in relation to the ballad.

The struggle over the rule of Sweden did not end with Sten Sture's victory at Brunkeberg, but continued for another half century, until Gustav Eriksson Vasa seized power in the 1520s. Though this king was the motivating force behind the introduction of the Protestant Reformation in Sweden, which led to the suppression of the veneration of the saints, images of St. George continued to be produced in and for Swedish churches during and after his reign. Mereth Lindgren has suggested that the frequency of such post-Reformation images of St. George would seem to indicate that he was the saint whose cult had been most strongly anchored in popular piety (Lindgren 1983: 240; Svanberg makes the same statement a decade later, see Svanberg and Qwarnström 1993/1998: 157). As I have argued in this paper, however, medieval evidence does not support the claim that St. George was more commonly turned to as an intercessor or viewed as a model of ideal Christian behavior than, for example, St. Olaf or St. Katherine. At the same time, however, Lindgren notes that the image of St. George fighting the dragon lends itself especially well to an allegorical interpretation. St. George may be seen as an ideal Christian knight, defending the church and the faithful against every form of evil, as represented by the dragon. Indeed, he may be seen as a representation of any good Christian faced with evil in all its forms. Both of these interpretations seem to fit without trouble into the iconography of an evangelical church (Lindgren 1983: 241). Although Lindgren makes an important point here, it seems likely that the image of St. George also has more specific meanings not only for Karl Knutsson and Sten Sture, but for Gustav Vasa and his successors as well. Without doubt, the image of the saint came to be closely associated with the image of Sten Sture, or any other king or regent fighting on behalf of his kingdom and his people. In his resistance to Denmark and the Kalmar Union, Gustav Vasa was clearly interested in linking himself to this image of a righteous, even saintly defender. The political symbolism of St. George, who could be seen as Sten Sture or Gustav Vasa fighting the evil and fearsome dragon, perhaps itself interpreted as a personification of Denmark, was too powerful to be discarded.

The ballad of St. George, I suspect, is likely to have been composed as a written text, not an oral one, sometime after the battle of Brunkeberg, and probably after the consecration of the sculpture group in Stockholm.

Chances are that it originates in the circles around Sten Sture. Bengt Jonsson has noted that ballad collectors in different periods have had specific goals in selecting ballads, and that the collectors of the 17th century tended to focus on heroic ballads. The fact that the legendary ballads – those about saints – do not turn up in collections until the 18th century does not mean that they did not exist in oral tradition, but only that the collectors were not interested in their content. That the ballad of St. George *does* turn up in the early post-Reformation manuscripts suggests that its political/nationalistic message (along with its heroic appeal) was not only well understood by the ballad collectors of the period, but that it met with their approval. The narrative about the saint must thus have had a function and meaning equivalent to those of the images of St. George in post-Reformation Sweden.

Unlike other legendary ballads, then, the ballad of St. George does not necessarily reflect the existence of a broad, popular devotion to the saint before the Reformation. On the other hand, it certainly reflects the political concerns and ambitions of a particular group among the leaders of late medieval Swedish society. The fact that the transmission of this ballad appears to have taken place primarily through the medium of writing, rather than through oral performance provides an important clue that the ballad of St. George, like his medieval cult, was mainly of interest to a relatively limited segment of Swedish society. This case should serve to remind us of the complexities of the various kinds of source materials that we draw upon as we attempt to understand an incompletely documented past.

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TRAUMATIC TRANSFORMATIONS: VILLY SØRENSEN'S INTERPRETIVE SCHEMA AND FOUR ENGLISH-SCOTTISH BALLADS[1]

LARRY SYNDERGAARD

The recent death of the Danish man of letters Villy Sørensen should remind us that he is one of the few people in the last half-century bold enough to offer a comprehensive interpretive schema for a significant part of one of the great traditional balladries. His 1959 essay "*Folkeviser og forlovelser*" ("Ballads and Betrothals") in fact combines a thesis on the meaning of many Danish ballads with a thesis on the evolution of art itself.[2] Sørensen was critic, fiction writer, philosopher, and adapter of myth.

In the present study I present what I consider to be Sørensen's key thesis and then discuss four English-Scottish ballads in those terms – a kind of test application of his interpretive schema to another major balladry.

I should begin with certain assumptions shared by Sørensen and myself. I simply acknowledge that some may be controversial and will not enter into those debates on this occasion.

First, certain traditional ballads are culture artifacts of serious and intense meaning.

Second, some ballads are to be interpreted in part figuratively, often symbolically.

Third, some ballads have significance their own creators in tradition may not see, although other commentators may.

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[1] An earlier version of this study was presented at the Thirty-Third International Ballad Conference, Kommission für Volksdichtung, June 24-28, 2003, Austin, Texas. Thanks are due fellow participants James Moreira, Jon Bartlett, and Rika Ruebsaat for their helpful responses.

[2] It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Professor Niels Ingwersen, the honoree at the Nordic Storyteller Symposium, who originally introduced me to Sørensen's work and to its importance.

Fourth, the unconscious is a powerful reality both accessed and expressed through verbal art, including certain ballads.

Fifth, more attention from academia is needed as to what ballads mean – yes, ballads as literature. This is merely a call for parity with several other necessary approaches to this culture artifact and is not meant to disvalue them.

Before my analysis I offer a capsule account of Sørensen's larger schema, much oversimplified. In his essay we can identify four phases in the evolution of certain ballad symbols – usually "demons" broadly defined, or magical elements – based on how consciously they seem to be employed. I borrow here from James Moreira's useful summary:

> - The earliest, essentially unconscious use, "near the mythic," is of demons and magic to express inner fears.
> - The demons next are seen as more tangible entities, suggesting erotic attractions.
> - The demons then become consciously constructed metaphors or symbols for sin, tied to erotic themes.
> - Finally, the demons are used in a deliberate, sometimes reflexive or parodic way with humorous or moralistic themes (2003: 1).

Sørensen's discussion is complex and comprehensive, involving 36 of the Danish *folkeviser*. He defines various thematic groups, with most or all of the four evolutionary stages represented in each.[3]

I do not attempt here a comprehensive review of the scholarly response to Sørensen's essay, but I find it significant that the keen and learned sensibility of Erik Dal, dean of Danish ballad scholars, invites an interpretation of certain ballads through Sørensen's lens in his anthologies in Danish and English (Dal 1962: 15-16; Abrahamsen and Dal 1965: 9-14, 40), as does editor and critic Sven Rossel (1982: 65). The schema receives the ultimate establishment endorsement when it is referenced in *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (10: 550, 705, 713, 723, 842). In an earlier article I have extended it to a ballad outside Sørensen's initial list. The most carefully developed adverse criticism is from Flemming Harrits, who objects, for example, that Sørensen is sloppy in his use of texts and that the chronology of his evolutionary stages will not stand up (1969: 37-45).

[3] In addition to presenting a brief introduction to Sørensen's larger interpretive system in his paper at the International Ballad conference, James Moreira is proceeding with an English translation of the entire essay.

These criticisms are altogether justified, but they do not greatly reduce the worth of Sørensen's contribution. The diachronic evolution of symbolic function is indeed not demonstrable, but I would insist that the four "stages" are in fact four differing uses of the ballad symbols which may appear in various eras, and that Sørensen has advanced the cause of ballad criticism by defining them. Call it differentiation, not evolution.

And no commentary I have seen can detract from the importance of Villy Sørensen's central thesis, the focus of my analysis here. This proposes that, on a figurative (and sometimes literal) level, many of the "classic" Danish ballads express various combinations of the factors in a basic and difficult life-transformation. This arises from the need to proceed from the child's "understanding of life," in which the family is the emotional center, to an adult understanding of life in which the emotional center of being becomes the beloved. Love drives this transition. Paradoxically, the transformation is frightening, because to lose the old self is a kind of death, and yet enormously attractive, even "driven" or involuntary. Out of the great tension between fear and attraction, between old self and future self, comes, in life, *angst*, and in art (such as the ballads), demons, or "demonic" or inexplicable actions (Sørensen 1959: 160-68). For "the demonic is precisely the perilous that frightens and yet entices the imagination" (Sørensen 1959: 160).[4]

Art is one way in which humankind has dealt with the difficulty of this transition. Sørensen almost sees the art of certain ballads as therapy: "We pacify the demons by singing of them" (1959: 167).

He calls this transition crisis *forlovelsessituationen*, the betrothal situation. However, I emphasize that he is referring to involuntary commitment driven by love, not formal "engagements" as announced in the newspaper. Sexual initiation is not a given, although sexuality, in its simultaneous attractiveness and destructive potential is sometimes a key element.

In these ballads the old ties are sometimes represented by the family or home, and that which is simultaneously attractive and threatening will often appear as the demonic. Thus either the beloved or the condition of love itself – because either draws one out of the childhood self and "slays" it – may appear, for example, as a mermaid or a troll. In other cases inexplicable actions or situations that make no literal or rational sense reflect the inner struggles. To illustrate Sørensen's central thesis I include, as Appendix B, excerpts from his essay which together comprise (I would

[4] Translations here and elsewhere are mine, sometimes developed (with thanks) in consultation with James Moreira.