

Lawrence M. Clopper

The study of literature has productively engaged theoretical questions and approaches across the past 40 years, many of which have come and gone in due course, while the varieties of historical inquiry that Larry Clopper has pursued in his scholarship and teaching have held the abiding interest of scholars in and beyond the field of medieval studies.

Larry grew up in a rural community on the eastern shore of Maryland, where he learned to plow behind a mule, and pursued an early interest in medicine at The Johns Hopkins University. He took his bachelor's degree in 1963, having settled on English as his major field. His M.A. and Ph.D. followed in quick order from The Ohio State University, and he came to Indiana University in 1969, where he has served both the institution and the field of medieval studies ever since. Although he arrived intending to work in Old English studies, he soon expanded his engagements with medieval literature to include most of the major sources other than Chaucer from the late medieval period, devoting a large part of his energies to medieval drama and to the great alliterative poem contemporary with *The Canterbury Tales*, *Piers Plowman*.

Larry's first book was a volume in an ambitious series documenting the evidence for play productions in England during the medieval and early modern periods. Drawing on a number of research visits to archives in England, Larry compiled *The Dramatic Records of Chester, 1399-1642*, for the Records of Early English Drama series (REED), from the University of Toronto Press. It is a work of scholarship in the purest sense, presenting the findings of painstaking efforts at documentary discovery, recovery, and interpretation for modern readers.

At about the same time—1979—Larry began to investigate the formal and polemical strategies of *Piers Plowman*, an inquiry that would carry him, other projects notwithstanding, across more than 15 years. The result of careful research into the politics of late medieval religious dissent was *Songs of Rechelesnesse: Langland and the Franciscans*, published by the University of Michigan Press in 1997. Among other provocative arguments concerning the structure and essential integrity of this complex poem, Larry's important book makes the case for how the author, William Langland, incorporates in his reformist poem criticisms first voiced more than a century before within the divided Franciscan order.

Larry's next book, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), offered a culmination of nearly 30 years of researching, teaching, and thinking about the nature of early English drama, winning the David Bevington Award from the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society. The book offers a multidisciplinary reappraisal of the origins and development of medieval drama in specific sites, challenging earlier, evolutionary accounts and emphasizing remarkable cultural continuities across centuries usually divided into the medieval and early modern periods.

In addition to these works, Larry has co-edited a volume of essays in honor of his friend and dissertation director, Martin Stevens, and has authored over 40 articles in scholarly journals, including essays addressing all four of the poems by the anonymous author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Larry's formative essays on medieval romance, drama, and Langland engage many sources of evidence and inquiry, including manuscripts, monastic orders, and theological issues. He has also written more than 25 book reviews, given dozens of papers at conferences, and he continues to serve as a referee to numerous academic presses and journals. His writing is a model of informed scholarship communicated in clear and unpretentious prose. His work has won him prestigious support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Philosophical Society, as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship during the 1994-95 academic year, and numerous awards of support from the university.

Larry has served the IU community three times as the director of the Medieval Studies Institute, and he co-directed, with historian Barbara Hanawalt, a National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar for College Teachers in the summer of 1985. He has also served as both vice president and president of the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society. In addition to all of these accomplishments, he has directed the research of a number of doctoral students who, at present, teach across the country, from Alaska to Florida and numerous locales in between.

Larry Clopper has contributed substantially to Indiana's longstanding reputation as nurturing one of the top medieval studies programs in the country. A department or college never really replaces such a teacher-scholar, but rather hopes to carry on his many good works at the standard of excellence he has helped create.

Tom Goodmann