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# Moody Men and Malicious Maidens

Gender in the Swedish medieval ballad



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## Abstract

Syftet med den här uppsatsen är att granska hur genus och genusrelationer uttrycks i svenska, medeltida ballader. Genom att förstå balladkaraktärernas handlingar som performativa, ämnar uppsatsen undersöka hur maskulinitet och femininitet etableras och omförhandlas i balladernas narrativ genom att kartlägga handlingsmönster. Av betydelse är att belysa hur karaktärernas handlingsmöjligheter påverkas av faktorer såsom kön, social status och familjerelationer, men även jämföra hur genusmönster i balladen reflekterar eller utmanar normer och ideal i det senmedeltida samhället. Som teoretiska begrepp används kulturell och personlig framgång respektive kulturellt och personligt misslyckande, vilket syftar till att åskådliggöra hur män och kvinnor har möjlighet att utöva och förhandla om makt på olika sätt. Genom detta kan man röra sig bort från uppfattningen om passivitet och maktlöshet som analogt med femininitet, och aktivitet och makt som synonymt med maskulinitet. Resultaten uppvisar en problematisering och nyansering av genusuttryck i medeltida ballader som saknas i tidigare forskning, och framhäver fördelarna att bedriva ett mer inkluderande synsätt gentemot den här typen av källmaterial inom historievetenskapen.

Key words: Swedish medieval ballads, gender performativity, masculinity, femininity, power relationships, gender studies, late medieval Sweden.

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Scandinavian ballads have mainly been orally passed down through the centuries, and can therefore be described as a form of memorised poetry.<sup>4</sup> Today, Denmark has over 500 ballad types preserved, Norway around 240, Iceland approximately 100, and 200 ballad types on the Faroe Islands.<sup>5</sup> The 263 Swedish medieval ballads known today are published in five editions, *Sveriges medeltida ballader*, henceforward abbreviated as SMB, and totalling around 2700 pages.<sup>6</sup> They have been documented in essentially every part of Sweden, which also includes Åland and several Swedish-speaking parts of Finland, although to various degrees of frequency.<sup>7</sup>

Traditionally, the ballads are divided into categories depending on their overall theme: chivalric, supernatural, legendary, historical, heroic and jocular ballads. Anders Sörensen Vedel was the first historian to collect and publish medieval ballads in his 1591 *It Hundrede vduaalde Danske Viser*, originally establishing this classification in the very same edition, although the categorisation of the jocular ballads came about later on.<sup>8</sup> Between these categories, there are differences as well as similarities. Supernatural ballads often portray magical or otherworldly beings such as the sea witch, the neck, or trolls, while historical ballads refer to historical, or supposedly historical, events. Legendary ballads are connected to (often Christian) legends, where the legend of Saint Stephen is perhaps the most well known example. Chivalric, or knightly, ballads are often set in an environment closely associated with the environment of the medieval landed aristocracy, where love and chivalric ideals are present to a certain extent. Heroic ballads portray heroes on adventurous quests, battling against overwhelming armies. In contrast to chivalric ballads, love and its courtly contents are lacking. The last category is the jocular ballad, which has a somewhat frivolous tone, and represents more of the medieval concept of the world-turned-upside-down.<sup>9</sup>

But what exactly is a medieval ballad? They have existed alongside other kinds of songs for centuries, but there are a few characteristics that make them distinct from other sorts of

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<sup>4</sup> Otto Holzapfel, *Det balladeske. Fortællemåden i den ældre episke folkeviser*, Univ.-forl., Odense, 1980, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Lars Elleström & Sigurd Kværndrup, "Den intermediala balladen", in Elleström (red.) *Intermediala perspektiv på medeltida ballader*, Gidlund, Möklinta, 2011, p. 14-15; Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> This edition does not include the recently discovered 'George Stephenson collection'.

<sup>7</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 14; Bengt R. Jonsson, Margareta Jersild & Sven-Bertil Jansson (red.) *Sveriges medeltida ballader Bd 1*, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, 1983, pp. 6.

<sup>8</sup> SMB 1: Introduction, p. 1-4. For a detailed survey of this, see, Bengt R. Jonsson, *Svensk balladtradition 1. Balladkällor och balladtyper*, Svenskt visarkiv, Diss. Uppsala, Univ., Stockholm, 1967, chapter 1 & 2.

<sup>9</sup> Gunilla Byrman & Tommy Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt och annat konstigt i medeltida skämtballader*, Atlantis, Stockholm, 2011, p. 13-16; Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 15; Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 36-42, 58-60, 81, 167-171.

medieval literature and genres.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, the ballad genre has been defined in accordance with the following formal features. Firstly, a ballad is an epic song consisting of several scenes following each other quite abruptly, in which the characters meet and confront each other in a dialogic and dramatic way.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, a narrator's comments or reasoning is not present within the ballads. Instead, dialogue between the protagonists is a prominent feature, but they never reveal their feelings, thoughts or intentions. While using 'eloquent silence', in other words, the ballad allows the audience to do the overall reasoning.<sup>12</sup> To describe situations, the ballad uses a typical formulation - a formula - to build up the narrative. This is characterised by the use of certain recurring linguistic elements, i.e. it uses fixed expressions, sentences or stanzas in a similar way throughout the genre.<sup>13</sup> In turn, these stereotypical formulas create a register of actions, which is characterised through the same linguistic expressions.<sup>14</sup> In Scandinavia the ballads containing two- or four-lined stanza models are the most common. In the latter, the second and fourth line usually rhymes, while the first and second line rhymes in the two-lined stanza.<sup>15</sup> A dominant feature for Scandinavian ballads in particular is to include so-called *incremental repetition*, which is when one lingers in a certain scene or situation by using several stanzas without much variation. This implies that something important is happening. Incremental repetition sometimes adds significant length to the overall ballad, but it can also be a key component of the ballad as a singer marks out certain parts as essential, thus engaging the audience.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2. The origin of the ballad and its use as historical source

### 1.2.1. Medieval traces of the Swedish ballad

Ballads have, as previously mentioned, been orally passed down through the centuries into present day, and were occasionally written down in different contexts, mostly during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Consequently, even though the genre derives from the Middle Ages, a ballad may not necessarily originate from that period,<sup>17</sup> and there are only fragmentary traces of the ballads before the 1550s.<sup>18</sup> In *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballads*,

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<sup>10</sup> Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, s. 21-22. Supernatural: p. 36; Legendary: p. 18; Historical: p. 11; Chivalric: p. 131; Heroic: p. 23; Jocular: p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Hildeman, *Tillbaka till balladen*, p. 196-197.

<sup>13</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, s. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Holzapfel, *Det balladeske*, p. 26-27; Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 216-225.

<sup>15</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, s. 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 212-216.

<sup>17</sup> Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Holzapfel, *Det balladeske*, p. 11-12; Jonsson, SMB 1, preface; Jonsson, *Svensk balladtradition I*, p. 15.

the authors admit that an index of the medieval ballad must be based on post-medieval sources, and the question of the ballads medieval origin is therefore largely dependent upon its linguistic and stylistic features.<sup>19</sup>

In a direct medieval context, however, traces of the ballad can be found in several Swedish chronicles and other types of literature. The earliest reference to a ballad, “Riddaren i hjorthamn”, was found in a manuscript from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> During the famous battle at Brunkeberg in 1471, a “sancti örians wijsa” was sung to raise the soldiers’ morale, according to the *Sturekrönika* (c. 1481), which probably is the same medieval ballad we today call “Sankt Görän och draken” - a legendary ballad about Saint George and the dragon. In Olaus Petri’s *En Svensk Cröneka* (c. 1530-1540), the author likely writes about medieval ballads, where he amongst other things concludes that men in these songs fight each other or various supernatural beings to show off courage or manliness – probably referring to heroic ballads.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, balladesque expressions has been detected in both the *Erikskrönika* and the *Eufemiavisor*, which has lead previous scholars to conclude that the ballads were a part of the Nordic medieval culture as early as late 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> It has been suggested that the ballad genre provided the bridge from the foreign courtly literature to the Swedish romances, consequently regarding the ballad to represent the literary background of the *Eufemiavisor*.<sup>23</sup>

By examining the content of the medieval ballad, its origin can also be ascertained. Typically, the social milieu and the environment described is that of the landed aristocracy in the Middle Ages,<sup>24</sup> and furthermore, certain actions and expressions in the ballads only make sense when comparing them to a medieval society.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a few medieval church paintings in Scandinavia have been interpreted as representing ballad motifs.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the presence of

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<sup>19</sup> Bengt R. Jonsson, (red.), *The types of the Scandinavian medieval ballad. A descriptive catalogue*, Univ.-forl., Oslo, 1978, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Roger Andersson, *Postillor och predikan. En medeltida texttradition i filologisk och funktionell belysning*, Sällsk. Runica et mediævalia, Diss. Stockholm, Univ., Stockholm, 1993, p. 30, 174-177.

<sup>21</sup> Jonsson, *Svensk balladtradition I*, p. 19-21.

<sup>22</sup> Jonsson, *Svensk balladtradition I*, p. 15; Kværndrup & Olofsson, ”Den intermediala balladen”, p. 15. The *Eufemiavisorna* consist of three medieval romances translated into medieval Swedish: *Herr Ivan lejonriddaren* (1303), *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* (1301 or 1308), and *Flores och Blanzefflor* (1312); The *Erikskrönika*, the oldest surviving Swedish chronicle, written between 1320-1335.

<sup>23</sup> Olle Ferm, ”The emergence of courtly literature in Sweden. A critical discussion of Swedish research”, in Ferm, Olle (red.) *The Eufemiavisor and courtly culture. Time, texts and cultural transfer. Papers from a symposium in Stockholm 11-13 October 2012*, Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, Stockholm, 2015, p. 113-114.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example: Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 15-16; Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 58-60.

<sup>25</sup> Holzapfel, *Det balladeske*, p. 105-106.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this, see, for example, Sigurd Kvaerndrup & Tommy Olofsson, *Medeltiden i ord och bild. Folkligt och groteskt i nordiska kyrkomålningar och ballader*, Atlantis, Stockholm, 2013.

Catholic beliefs places the ballad genre in the time before the Reformation. For example, there are ballads of individual saints such as Saint George and Saint Stephen, which reflect the general importance of saints in the medieval era. The saints' culture was very prominent in Sweden before the conversion to Protestantism.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.2.2. The ballad as social practice and source material

Of importance is to understand the ballad genre as social practice. In *Den dubbla scenen*, Lars Lönnroth describes oral tradition and the ballad genre. Lönnroth argues that every literary genre creates its own universe more or less influenced by emotions, values, and ideologies of the society in which they were produced, consumed, and transmitted. Furthermore, he argues that when an oral genre's popularity remains steady throughout a long period of time, as in the case of the medieval ballads, it might relate to the fact that the environment in which they have been transmitted has remained relatively stable. Therefore, medieval layers of meaning are still present within the narratives even today.<sup>28</sup> The ballad genre's intrinsic universe is henceforth called *the balladesque world*, a concept I will develop further later on. It is also important to recognize the ballad genre as *performance* – its existence is, and has been, completely dependent upon its practice in a social context. However, Lönnroth is writing within literary science rather than history, and does not further problematize how material such as this must be used with caution.

To use literary source material written down during post-medieval eras in medieval research is not something new within this field, nor to use material with uncertain provenience or tentative dating. Scholars often use compilations of different textual sources, or copies of older, now lost, originals, which overall is highly characteristic for medieval studies. Professor Janken Myrdal offers important aspects of using problematic source materials when reliable conclusions can be difficult to ascertain due to lack of material, using indirect materials, or employing many different sources of various types to answer the research question at hand.<sup>29</sup> Despite its difficulties, Myrdal promotes a more inclusive attitude, stating that large parts of medieval history would otherwise remain unknown if historians did not try to find a way where uncertainty could be accepted. He concludes that claims of *accuracy*, in these studies, will be fewer than those that are *probable*, and suggests that the use of

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example: Anders Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult. Linköpings biskopsdöme under senmedeltiden*, Univ., Diss., Uppsala, Univ., Uppsala, 1992.

<sup>28</sup> Lars Lönnroth, *Den dubbla scenen. Muntlig diktning från Eddan till ABBA*, Prisma, Stockholm, 1978, p. 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> Janken Myrdal, "Källpluralismen och dess inkluderande metoder", *Historisk tidskrift*, 127:3, p. 496-501.

reservations to be of importance when discussing the probability of the phenomena at hand. Likewise, a method to assure a higher degree of reliability is to create an overall picture around a certain theme. Separate entities will not provide a reliable conclusion, but the overall picture might strengthen the result.<sup>30</sup>

It is evident that the exact conditions of the early period of the ballad genre remain unknown. However, its spread throughout Scandinavia, across geographical boundaries and through time, shows the genre's sustainability in the types preserved for us today. Indeed, as the French historian Evà Guillourel has argued, orally transmitted folksongs bring an alternative and complementary dimension to the written records usually studied by historians.<sup>31</sup> Even though they have to be critically analysed with caution and transparency, to consider the medieval ballads to be of absolutely no interest to historical research could mean overlooking valuable source material – or, in Myrdal's words, be overly exclusive. Moreover, ballads have previously been used to reflect medieval society. Karl-Ivar Hildeman, for example, examines the ballad both from a literary and a historical point of view. He has argued that historical ballads were possibly late medieval state propaganda, which aimed to influence public opinion in their favour.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, Hildeman uses the ballads to reveal something about the political context in which they were produced and transmitted.

To sum up, previous research has placed the ballad genre's origin in late medieval Sweden. The first traces of a ballad formulaic expressions can be found in the *Eufemiavisor* and the *Erikskrönika*, written down during the first decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, while the first written records of complete ballads are from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the Catholic content reaffirms its status as pre-Reformation. I would like to stress, once again, that the ballads have survived because of its relation to society. Unlike many other traditional medieval sources, ballads have arguably been sung all over Scandinavia and remained an active part of broad societal layers. Therefore, the sustainability of the ballad genre can at least be said to reflect the spread of beliefs, such as gender.

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<sup>30</sup> Myrdal, "Källpluralismen och dess inkluderande metoder", p. 503-504.

<sup>31</sup> Éva Guillourel, "Folksongs, conflicts and social protest in Early modern France", Dieuwke Van der Poel, Louis P. Grijp & Wim van Anrooij (red.), *Identity, intertextuality and performance in Early Modern song culture*, 2012 (electronic resource), p. 305.

<sup>32</sup> Karl-Ivar Hildeman, *Politiska visor från Sveriges senmedeltid*, Geber, Diss. Stockholm, 1950, p. 9-16, 281-283.

### 1.3. Scandinavian medieval gender studies

In the last few decades, the number of studies regarding the social construction of gender amongst European medieval historians has increased sharply.<sup>33</sup> This thesis is placed within a corpus of gender studies in a Scandinavian context. There has been a considerable amount of studies concerning women's legal and political rights during the medieval period, as well as research on women as political actors.<sup>34</sup> Recently, gender theories have been employed to problematize masculinity and femininity as a social construction.<sup>35</sup>

In the cross-disciplinary anthology *Medeltidens genus*, Hermansson & Magnúsdóttir discuss how medieval society is nowadays studied from many different angles after it came to encompass a wider variety of source materials than previously.<sup>36</sup> Firstly, this has led to a partial blurring of the distinction between for example history, literary science and art history. Secondly, they point out that scholars have gradually been getting interested in a broader and multifaceted way of understanding power relations. Here, the implementation of gender theory is considered a vital tool. Common perceptions within historical research on the roles of women were that they previously were at the mercy of men or acted as mediators of power, but here, the authors strive towards understanding the variety of ways in which gender is experienced, performed, and lived, and how this relate to power.<sup>37</sup>

Agneta Ney has also made use of a cross-disciplinary approach in her publication *Drottningar och sköldmör*.<sup>38</sup> Ney has examined how women in fiction and reality could transgress medieval gender norms, and discusses what function these stories might have filled. For example, she has argued that changes in society made way for a new feminine ideal: from a

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<sup>33</sup> Nancy Partner, *Writing medieval history*, Arnold, London, 2005, preface. Here, Partner conveys a brief recount on the developments within medieval studies since the late 1800s.

<sup>34</sup> Gabriela Bjarne Larsson, *Laga fång för medeltidens kvinnor och män. Skriftbruk, jordmarknader och monetarisering i Finnveden och Jämtland 1300-1500*, Institutionen för rätthistorisk forskning, Stockholm, 2010; Mia Korpiola, *Between betrothal and bedding. Marriage formation in Sweden 1200-1600*, Brill, Leiden, 2009; William Layher, *Queenship and voice in medieval Northern Europe*, 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010; Britt Liljewall; Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar. Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120-1400*, Historiska institutionen, Univ., Diss. Göteborg, 2001; Kirsti Niskanen & Maria Sjöberg (red.), *Kvinnor och jord. Arbete och ägande från medeltid till nutid*, Nordiska museets förl., Stockholm, 2001; Birgit Sawyer, *Kvinnor och familj i det forn- och medeltida Skandinavien*, Viktoria, Skara, 1992.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Henric Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom. Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island*, Institutionen för historiska studier, Göteborgs universitet, Diss. Göteborg, Göteborg, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Lars Hermansson & Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Medeltidens genus. Kvinnors och mäns roller inom kultur, rätt och samhälle, Norden och Europa ca 300-1500*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Hermansson & Magnúsdóttir, *Medeltidens genus*, p. 11-15, 17-18.

<sup>38</sup> Transl.: *Queens and shield maidens. Transgressing women in medieval myth and reality, c. 400-1400*.

warrior-like shield maiden to a woman confined to her maiden's bower.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Henric Bagerius examines the relationship between men and women in the Icelandic sagas and medieval Icelandic legislation.<sup>40</sup> He remarks on how scholars have previously perceived the roles of men and women in the sagas to be static and dichotomous, where men were seen as active and women as passive. However, Bagerius stresses the dynamics of sagas and society, where the strict opposition between "active masculinity" and "passive femininity" can be blurred and challenged.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, I would argue that concepts of gender are unstable and open for negotiation and renegotiation in terms of power and influence.

Swedish legislation has also been examined from a gender point of departure. Christine Ekholst investigates how gender influenced Swedish medieval law, how women gradually emerged as legal subjects, but also how punishment for different crimes was segregated by gender.<sup>42</sup> Ekholst also demonstrates that many crimes concerning violence and illicit sexual activities were intimately connected to honour codes in medieval society.<sup>43</sup> In the balladesque world, the presence of violence practices and sexual activities are abundant. Consequently, Ekholst provides both important aspects on gender in relation to crime as well as offering a methodological approach for the thesis at hand, which will be further discussed later on.

## 1.4. Previous ballad research

### 1.4.1. Ballads and society

The classic research field concerning the European ballads in general, and Scandinavian ballads in particular, is cross-disciplinary within musicology, literary science and philology.<sup>44</sup> During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have mainly been concerned with the question of the ballad's history and medieval origin, its formulaic expressions and narrative content.<sup>45</sup> For example, one of the most influential scholars within the Scandinavian ballad research, Sven-

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<sup>39</sup> Agnety Ney, *Drottningar och sköldmör. Gränsöverskridande kvinnor i medeltida myt och verklighet, ca 400-1400*, Gidlund, Hedemora, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Henric Bagerius, "I genusstrukturens spänningsfält", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 2001(116), 2001, s. 21-64.

<sup>41</sup> Bagerius, "I genusstrukturens spänningsfält", p. 40-43, 56-58.

<sup>42</sup> Christine Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal. Gender and crime in Swedish medieval law*, Brill, Leiden, 2014 (electronic resource).

<sup>43</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 210-212, 218-219.

<sup>44</sup> Holzapfel, *Det balladeske*, p. 11; Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup> Ann-Mari Häggman, "Balladen. En forskningstradition" in Ronström, Owe & Ternhag, Gunnar (red.), *Texter om svensk folkmusik. Från Haeffner till Ling*, Kungl. Musikaliska akad., Stockholm, 1994, p. 217. See, for example: Andersen, *The ballad as narrative* (1982); Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, (1989); Hildeman, *Tillbaka till balladen* (1985); Holzapfel, *Det balladeske* (1980); Jonsson, *Svensk balladtradition I* (1967); Sigurd Kværndrup, *Den østnordiske ballade. Oral teori og tekstanalyse. Studier i Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, Museum Tusulanums forlag, Diss., København, Univ., 2006, København, 2006.

Bertil Jansson, highlights the importance of conflict and conflict-resolution in the narratives, while also comparing the narratives to medieval societal structures.<sup>46</sup> Even though his statements are not based on a particular theory or method, I consider Jansson's emphasis on actions as meaningful to be of importance. As previously discussed, the ballad narrative consists of a register of actions, characterized through similar linguistic expressions.

But of key interest to this thesis is how ballads can be employed to understand how ideas about gender were spread through medieval society, a perspective that is lacking within the classic research field. Recently, the research questions have broadened and made way for a revival of the classic ballad research in Scandinavia.<sup>47</sup> In the 2006 research project "Intermedialitet och den medeltida balladen"<sup>48</sup> scholars want to emphasise the ballad as *performance* and its relation to other art forms, such as dance, music, and art.<sup>49</sup> For example, they compare medieval church paintings to ballad motifs, emphasising how the ballad's conceptual world could be recognizable by a medieval audience.<sup>50</sup> These publications offer innovative and interesting perspectives on the ballad as a performance, and thus, as social practice.

Gwendolyn M. Morgan has argued that English ballads can reflect medieval society, but also propose a challenge to social hierarchies. Since courtly love and chivalric behaviour do not necessarily lead to rewards for the characters involved in chivalric ballads, they offer social criticism to the dynamics of theory and practice in knighthood.<sup>51</sup> Although not comparing it to a historical situation, which makes her results somewhat arbitrary, Morgan proposes the existence of conflicting layers of meaning within the narratives. Likewise, it would be interesting to consider how the Swedish ballads affected the society in which they were consumed, or what purpose they had. Indeed, this is a very difficult discussion considering the nature of the source material.

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<sup>46</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 212.

<sup>47</sup> This was mainly because of the discovery of a previous lost ballad collection, the so called George Stephenson manuscript.

<sup>48</sup> Intermediary aspects on medieval ballads.

<sup>49</sup> This project has to far resulted in several publications, including: Gunilla Byrman & Lars Elleström (red.) *En värld för sig själv. Nya studier i medeltida ballader*, Växjö university press, Växjö, 2008; Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt* (2011); Elleström & Kværndrup (red.), *Intermediala perspektiv på medeltida ballader* (2011); Karin Eriksson (red.), *I fräst och källe. Texter från nordiskt balladmöte, Växjö, 2008, 2009* (electronic resource).

<sup>50</sup> Kværndrup & Olofsson, *Medeltiden i ord och bild* (2013); Tommy Olofsson, *The lost shoe. A symbol in Scandinavian medieval ballads and church paintings*, Medievalists.net, Toronto, 2015 (electronic resource).

<sup>51</sup> Morgan, *Medieval balladry and the courtly tradition*, p. 1-5.

### 1.4.2. Ballads and gender

Although studies of the ballad genre from a gender theoretical point of departure are overall lacking, a few articles on this subject have been made. On a more general level, a lot of focus has been given to how male characters dominate their balladesque surroundings at the expense of female characters. Dana M. Symons summarizes the general view in arguing that it is mainly men who carry out acts of violence. As such, the ballad genre in Europe is said to frequently portray vulnerable women, and therefore serve to contain femininity and assert masculine power.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, it has been stressed that even though women can perform violent actions, they are predominantly targets for violence. Likewise, ballad scholar David Colbert claims that when women exert a fair degree of agency (like choosing her own partner against the will of her family) the consequences are often dire.<sup>53</sup>

There have been two contributions that highlight gender and power in Danish chivalric ballads: *Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser – to tendenser*, by Lise Præstgaard Andersen<sup>54</sup>, and “Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads”, by Michèle Simonsen.<sup>55</sup> Præstgaard Andersen’s focuses on distinguishing two types of women often portrayed in the Danish chivalric ballads: (1.) The active and independent woman, which the author claims to be connected to women depicted in older Norse literature (2.) The vulnerable and passive woman, which she argues represents the Christian and chivalric ideals that came during the later Middle Ages, in which femininity was more contained and sexuality was demonized.<sup>56</sup> Simonsen examines homosocial and heterosocial bonds in a few chivalric ballads. While she stresses the vulnerability of unmarried women in the ballads, she also highlights male and female spheres of activity, where women can breach societal roles more easily than men.<sup>57</sup> However, neither of them uses a gender theoretical framework, nor study more than a limited number of ballads.

Ingrid Åkesson has made a fruitful academic contribution from a gender and historical point of departure onto Swedish material. In a minor selection of ballads, she discusses the relationship between male and female honour, the use of violence, and how honour and

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<sup>52</sup> Dana Symons, ”Ballads”, in *Women and gender in medieval Europe: An encyclopedia*, [electronic resource], p. 58-59.

<sup>53</sup> Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 162.

<sup>54</sup> Lise Præstgaard Andersen, *Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser – to tendenser*, Samfundet för visforskning, Stockholm, 1978.

<sup>55</sup> Michèle Simonsen, ”Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads”, in Peere, Isabelle, Top, Stefaan & Rieuwerts, Sigrid (ed.) *Ballads and diversity. Perspectives on gender, ethos, power and play*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Trier, 2004, p. 242-249.

<sup>56</sup> Præstgaard Andersen, *Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser*, p. 16-17, 20-22.

<sup>57</sup> Simonsen, ”Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads”, p. 242-244, 246-247.

violence relate to power. For example, she underlines how fathers, husbands, and brothers have the power to decide the fate of their daughters, wives, and sisters, and how they consequently get punished for disobeying, relating the narrative content to Pre-modern societal structures. But she also points out that there is a general lack of gender analysis and aspects of gender and power in ballad research.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Gunilla Byrman has made one contribution to incorporating gender theory onto medieval ballads, where she examines how male superiority and female subordination is challenged in a few ballads.<sup>59</sup> In a similar fashion, scholars have recently been taking a keen interest in jocular ballads.<sup>60</sup> Tommy Olofsson, for example, stresses how the heteronormative sexuality in jocular ballads differs from the other ballad categories.<sup>61</sup>

So far, attention has been given to how women and men in the ballads relate to the opposites of passivity-activity, and subordination-domination. In Lynn Wollstadt's "Controlling women. Reading gender in the ballads Scottish women sang", the author introduces a model in order to address how power is not static, and can be viewed differently by defining how female characters can reach "cultural success" (meeting male expectation in the narrative) and "personal success" (averting harm or reaching a personal goal). This is contrasted with "personal failure" and "cultural failure". Consequently, every ballad has four possible outcomes; a character can reach personal success, but cultural failure, or personal failure but cultural success, etc. In this way, she asserts how "narratives not only describe women who lack control over their lives, but demonstrate by example ways of circumventing that lack".<sup>62</sup> Her theory opens up for possibilities to understand how power and control can be viewed differently in the narrative, thus moving away from a static perception of female agency.<sup>63</sup> I have reason to come back to Wollstadt's model later on.

Conclusively, there are several authors who make use of ballads as a way to understand a medieval or pre-modern society. While ballads might provide reflections of existing norms, they can also challenge dominant ideas and beliefs. When studying ballads from a gender point of departure, the emphasis lies mainly on human relationships as related to love, sexual

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<sup>58</sup> Åkesson, Ingrid, "Mord och hor i medeltidsballaderna. En fråga om könsmakt och familjevåld", *Noterat (Stockholm 1995)*, 2014, 21, s. 47-69, 2014, p. 6, 12-14.

<sup>59</sup> Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt*, p. 161-185.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt*; Olav Solberg, *Den omsnudda verda. Ein studie i dei norske skjemteballadane*, Telemarks distriktshøgskole, Diss. Oslo Univ., Bø, 1990; Olav Solberg, "Kropp, kjønn og komikk i danske skjemteviser", *Svøbt i mår*, Bd 2., s. 161-182, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt*, chapter 3.

<sup>62</sup> Wollstadt, "Controlling women", p. 296.

<sup>63</sup> Wollstadt, "Controlling women", p. 297.

activities and violent practices. However, as Åkesson has pointed out, there is still a general lack in gender perspectives on Swedish medieval ballads. Furthermore, while the papers mentioned above stresses the overall disempowered female characters versus the dominant male ones in chivalric ballads, I argue further investigation is needed in order to fully grasp the power dynamics between the characters in the balladesque world. Of interest might also be to consider how power could relate to factors such as social belonging, marital status and family relations, but more importantly, to connect issues of gender and power firmly in a historical context. Finally, while segregating ballads into categories might be convenient for modern scholars, these categories certainly would not have had any meaning or significance to people singing or listening to them in the past. Therefore, I argue it is important to look beyond the traditional categorization of the Swedish medieval ballads. By doing this, one can get an overall picture of gender is expressed in the ballads.

### **1.5. Aim of thesis and research questions**

The Swedish medieval ballads have, so far, not been systematically examined from a gender point of departure within historical research. Neither has enough attention been given to whether male and female characters' activity/domination and passivity/subordination always represent femininity and masculinity, or if there is room for negotiation.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how gender and gender relations are expressed in Swedish medieval ballads. More specifically, I aim to understand how gender is established through the actions of the characters in the balladesque world, and how they through their actions negotiate masculinity and femininity. By doing this, I intend to provide a more problematized and nuanced picture of the roles of men and women in the balladesque world. Moreover, I wish to consider in what ways the ballads might have served as reflections of medieval society, or whether they offered a challenge to medieval gender norms.

The research questions are:

- Which gendered acts are being performed in the ballads, and which character performs them?
- How do female and male characters interact with each other and what are the consequences/outcome?
- How do marital status, family relations, and social status impact the actions of the characters?

It is important to underline that my intention is not to search for a single, coherent ideal form of masculinity or femininity. Rather, it is the diversity of gender relations I wish to explore, where gender is connected to acts and inactions, interdependently constituted in the narrative of the ballad.

## 1.6. Methodological approach

### 1.6.1. Method and selection

For this thesis, my approach has involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Drawing on previous research' emphasise on actions as meaningful, I carefully read the 263 ballads to ascertain which actions were the most frequently occurring between the characters. Since I wish to explore how female and male characters act and interact, I focused on narratives where the relationships portrayed are human ones. The most common types of acts revolved around violence and sex; activities that has been of interest to gender studies previously as well. Moreover, several ballad scholars within philology, literary science, and history have emphasised these two themes, albeit from generally different viewpoints than I intend to.<sup>64</sup> Narratives containing violence and/or sexual activities provide a categorical, empirical point of departure for analysing how gender is expressed in the balladesque world. These themes are not absolute, objective actions, but change meaning depending on the narrative and historical context, and serve as a means to structure the source material in accordance with the aim of this thesis.

The qualitative method consists of a close reading of the selected material by the use of my theoretical approach, which will be discussed below. In light on my interest in human relationships, I have not selected narratives in which violence practices (or sexual activities) are directed towards (or only portray) animals, supernatural beings, or enchanted male or female beings. Moreover, ballads that are lacking in a distinct narrative have not been of interest to this particular thesis, and by this I mean a ballad without a beginning or end. Ballads written in first-person singular have been excluded as well.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Violence and sexuality is discussed in, for example: Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 142-145; Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt*, p. 120-140; Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 58-81, 82-135; Kværndrup, *Den østnordiske ballade*, p. 327-342, 342-349, 367-376; Kværndrup & Olofsson, *Medeltiden i ord och bild*, p. 32-33, 64-71, 71-76, 79-91; Præstgaard Andersen, "Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser", p. 20-23; Simonsen, "Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads", p. 242-249; Symons, "Ballads", p. 58-59; Åkesson, "Mord och hor", p. 1, to name a few.

<sup>65</sup> Since they do not represent an objective style, I argue that several of these narratives do not fulfill the formal feature of a ballad. Furthermore, they rarely represent a proper storyline.

As previously mentioned, every Swedish ballad has been transcribed on various occasions throughout history. In SMB, 25 types of each ballad (named A-Z) have been printed (even though some ballads are known in up to 400 different versions), where the A-type represents the oldest version preserved.<sup>66</sup> I have consistently examined the A-types. In those few cases when I have looked at other types, it is mainly because the A-type has been too fragmentary for a close analysis.

### 1.6.2. Structuring violent acts and sexual activities

Amongst the 263 ballads initially surveyed, it became evident that 127 narratives contained violent practices, while 71 ballads related to sexuality. Overall, this survey covers 137 ballads, which equals 52 % of the total amount. My quantitative analysis in combination with Ekholst's study of gendered crimes resulted in the following categories: Sexual activities were divided into the act of initiating intercourse, fornication, adultery, and incest; Violent practices were divided into the act of rape, murder, homicide, assault, suicide, and threat. Not only will this categorisation offer a more manageable outline of the investigation, but it also provides a direct link to the Swedish medieval society. These categories will be further explained in the first part of the investigation.

There are however some difficulties with this method. The balladesque world is not known for its detailed descriptions of events that take place, or has taken place beforehand. Circumstantial details and explanations are frequently missing, which is overall typical of the ballad genre. In most cases, there are several violent actions evident – often complicated by sexual activities – in the same ballad. I have, as far as possible, taken into account the medieval view on justice and crime, in accordance with Ekholst's publication.

Of importance to this thesis is how kinship, social status and marital status are represented in the ballads. While kinship relates to whether the family of the main protagonists is present, social and marital status deserves further clarification. Social and marital statuses are mostly made explicit by the use of epitaphs:

- Married noblewoman: “fru”<sup>67</sup>
- Unmarried young noblewoman: “stolts”, “liten”, “jungfru”<sup>68</sup>
- Married or unmarried nobleman: “herr”, “hertig”, “riddar”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Jonsson, *Sveriges medeltida ballader 1*, p. 4-10. Sometimes, they have deviated from this, see p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Transl.: Wife.

<sup>68</sup> Transl.: Proud / little / maiden.

<sup>69</sup> Transl.: Lord / duke / knight.

- Unmarried younger nobleman: “ungersven”<sup>70</sup>

There are certainly other character types, such as commoners, kings and queens. Epitaphs are not always employed consistently. When epitaphs are not used, the characters involved are most likely connected to the landed medieval aristocracy.<sup>71</sup>

## 1.7. Theoretical approach

### 1.7.1. Gender performativity and agency in the balladesque world

Previously, I have used the term *balladesque world*, which needs further explanation. By balladesque world, I mean the ballads’ built up, intrinsic conceptual world: the various places visited in the narrative, the characters that inhabit it, and how they interact with each other and their surroundings. In a way, the balladesque world is a fictional scene on which the characters perform, using their bodies as a medium for action, while scenography equips them with the means to perform them. In this thesis, *the balladesque world* – or, in Lönnroth’s words, the ballad genre’s universe – will be used as an analytical tool to examine how gender is *performed* within it. Of importance is also the term *agency*, which will be used to describe the different characters’ possibility for action within the balladesque world. Moreover, I will also discuss *passivity and activity* in relation to agency. *Performativity* and *agency* will be discussed below.

This thesis’ purpose is to examine how gender is expressed in the balladesque world. In short, gender can be defined as the meanings that society puts on a person with a male or female body, which is historically situated and change over time.<sup>72</sup> To accomplish this, the theoretical framework of *performativity* will be applied to comprehend how gender is expressed through the actions of the characters that inhabit the balladesque world. However, performativity as a concept has multiple origins and connections to a variety of fields within philosophy, linguistics, performance studies, and gender studies. During the 1950s, the English philosopher J. L. Austin developed a theory of performativity, as a way of understanding how language not only is used in describing social reality but, rather, the uttering of a sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action. Linguistic acts, or speech acts, in his view, did not simply reflect a world but had the power to make a world.<sup>73</sup> The performative aspects of

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<sup>70</sup> Transl.: Youngling.

<sup>71</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 43-53.

<sup>72</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From boys to men. Formations in masculinity in late medieval Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> James Loxley, *Performativity*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 7-8.

speech acts were later on re-formulated prominent scholar Judith Butler, who used the concept of performativity as a theoretical resource within feminism activism.<sup>74</sup> Butler argues gender identity to be an effect of a stylized and repeated set of speech acts, so called performative acts, which turns the individual into a gender subject through interpellation.<sup>75</sup> Interpellation forces the subject into an identity through acts: the “doer” is constructed in, and through, the deed.<sup>76</sup>

Butler’s agenda is that of addressing the performativity of gender in the social world, constituted through language. Here, performativity in the balladesque world is of interest to the purpose of this thesis. Since the ballad characters’ actions, reactions, interactions, or passivity, constitute the narrative as such, they provide a way to understand how gender is performed through the doing of actions. Like actors on a stage, the balladesque characters have the possibility to perform in certain ways, which in turn create gendered patterns of behaviour. It is important to underline the difference between performativity in the balladesque world and the ballad genre as *performance*. Considering the ballad as a social practice connects the existing transcribed sources to medieval society. However, I focus on the fictive balladesque world and the transcribed literary sources.

Here, *agency* is of importance to describe acts and inaction. The concept of agency has, as performativity, multiple origins within both philosophy and sociology. Agency can be defined as the capacity for individuals to act independently within a social structure. The structure consist of factors of influence that determine or limit an individual’s decision making – such as social class, religion, sex, etc.<sup>77</sup> Hermansson & Magnúsdóttir describe agency as the ability for an agent to exercise control over the social relations he or she is a part of, and serves to highlight how both men and women could impact societal structures.<sup>78</sup> I use agency to describe the possibility for a character to act within the structural framework of the balladesque world: a way of describing which acts or inactions certain characters can perform, and how a character’s marital status, kinship, and social status, might be of significance for which actions a male or female characters is able to accomplish.

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<sup>74</sup> Loxley, *Performativity*, p. 113.

<sup>75</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York, 1999, p. 9; Butler, ”Performative acts and gender constitution. An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory”, *The performance studies reader*, 2007, p. 519-522, 527; Nina Lykke, *Genusforskning. En guide till feministisk teori, metodologi och skrift*, Liber, Stockholm, 2009, p. 64-66, 100.

<sup>76</sup> Butler, *Gender trouble*, p. 181.

<sup>77</sup> Chris Barker, *Cultural studies. Theory and practice*, Sage, London, 2000, p. 180-183.

<sup>78</sup> Hermansson & Magnúsdóttir, *Medeltidens genus*, p. 16.

Gender theory is ultimately designated to address unequal power relations. Performing gender in the balladesque world renders certain characters in diverse situations seemingly more or less powerful, creating different power hierarchies. But how can we understand power in the balladesque world? To reach further understanding of this, I will discuss the theory proposed by Wollstadt in the following section.

### 1.7.2. Wollstadt’s model of personal and cultural success or failure

As stated above, gender is created and negotiated through actions and inactions of the characters in the balladesque world. Agency is used to describe characters’ possibility for action, and if agency is limited by his or her social status and social bonds. By solely looking at the actions performed by the characters, the gender analysis tend to end up much in lieu with previous research – that men are violent and active, women are passive and submissive. I argue that the narratives are more complicated than that. Here, Wollstadt’s theoretical model will be employed to reach further insight into agency in relation to men and women in the balladesque world.

Wollstadt’s model is divided into the concepts of personal and cultural success, in relation to personal and cultural failure. Cultural success is, as previously mentioned, meeting male expectation (that is, acting the way male characters want female characters to do) while personal success is averting harm or reaching a personal goal.<sup>79</sup> Wollstadt’s model is strictly applied to female characters, but I have decided to adapt her model for my own purposes. I define cultural success as meeting existing cultural norms in medieval society, which is applied both to female and male characters. Personal success is reaching a personal goal or averting harm, and is not necessarily connected to cultural expectations at all, but rather reflects the character’s individual agenda. Cultural failure is when characters do not conform to societal expectations, whereas personal failure is when characters fail to accomplish their personal mission or get hurt. Wollstadt’s model can be summarized in a chart:

	<b>Cultural success</b>	<b>Cultural failure</b>
<b>Personal success</b>		
<b>Personal failure</b>		

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<sup>79</sup> Wollstadt, "Controlling women", p. 297.

By applying Wollstadt's theory on the narratives, it presents an possibility to not only examine which actions different characters have the agency to perform, but also the consequences of the actions involved. This can give rise to interesting questions. For example, does cultural failure always lead to personal failure? Or, if a character opposes existing norms, can they get away with it in the balladesque world? Moreover, there is a possibility for characters to accomplish initial personal success, but still fail later on. If one assesses both actions performed by the characters as well as the consequences of them, it provides an opportunity to estimate the multi-faceted approach that the balladesque world have in relation to medieval norms.

In conclusion, different gender performances are created through the characters' actions. Agency describes the individual characters' possibility for action in relation to their sex, social/marital status, and family relations. Wollstadt's model can shed light on power negotiations, and how the narratives relate to a medieval society. In this context, power can be understood and attained in two ways: 1.) Power to affect another characters' agency, and 2.) Power to achieve personal success. While the former relates to power as social, the latter regards power to be a matter of safeguarding and maintaining, or restoring, a personal, physical, and/or emotional integrity.

Action, or *activity*, stands in contrast to inaction, *passivity*. Ideas about activity and passivity have previously been known to correlate to beliefs about masculinity and femininity, as was discussed in previous research. Activity seems to have been more intimately connected to a male sphere, while passivity relate to a female sphere in ballad research, and, as we shall see, when it comes to medieval ideas about gender.<sup>80</sup> They can be viewed as an analytical oppositional pair to understand how passivity and activity is related to gender. However, this is not my main theoretical focus. Rather, I will compare my results to this previous notion on masculinity and femininity.

## **1.8. Background – Violence and sexuality in the Middle Ages**

### **1.8.1. Honour and social hierarchy**

This section provides a brief overview on medieval views on sex, marriage, kinship, and violence – aspects of medieval life that were interconnected with gender. It therefore also

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<sup>80</sup> Butler briefly discusses this: Butler, *Gender trouble*, p. 139, 173. Otherwise, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Europe. Doing unto others*, Routledge, New York, NY, 2005; Cordelia Beattie, "Gender and femininity in medieval England", in *Writing medieval history*, p. 156.

provides reference to the concept of cultural success, discussed above. Even though the human body and its reproductive biology may have been the same during the Middle Ages, ideas about the body were grounded in classical and medieval authorities.<sup>81</sup> The general view on the body was that female and male bodies were basically the same, but female bodies were less developed, imperfect versions of male ones. This theoretical and scientific understanding of the natural order legitimized women's subordination to men.<sup>82</sup> Sexual activities also reflected the hierarchal order of men and woman. Ruth Mazo Karras has argued that the sexual act during the medieval period was not seen as a mutual act, rather, it was an act done by one person to another. This was based on ideas of activity and passivity: the man was the active participant, the woman the passive one. To feel desire or lust had, on the other hand, nothing to do with this. Women were often considered to be more lustful (and sinful) than men.<sup>83</sup>

Medieval people were not supposed to have sex unless they were married, and marriage was indeed the expected norm.<sup>84</sup> According to the Church, this union formed a base for society, in which the conception of children justified the otherwise sinful activity of sex.<sup>85</sup> Between nobles or royalty, marriage was a political and economical agreement between two families. Consequently, materiality and property founded the basis of marriage, which was especially true for the wealthier, landowning factions of medieval society.<sup>86</sup> Men were generally expected to be the head of the household, while the women were expected to obey – thus forming the very epitome for how gender relations should be organized.<sup>87</sup> As Ekholst puts it, the “basis for gender relations was male dominance and female subordination”, where the sexual act was seen as the symbol for this.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the significance of marriage and offspring meant that husbands' control of their wives' sexual activity was indeed very important.<sup>89</sup>

The medieval society was based on intricate codes of honour, where the upholding of individual and family honour was of the utmost importance. According to Karras, a man's honour and virtue during the Middle Ages could derive from many sources, for example his

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<sup>81</sup> Jaqueline Murray, “Historicizing sex, sexualizing history”, *Writing medieval history*, p. 133; Partner, *Writing medieval history*, preface, XIV-XV.

<sup>82</sup> Murray, “Historicizing sex, sexualizing history”, p. 134-135.

<sup>83</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 1-4, 26-27.

<sup>84</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 28-29.

<sup>85</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 59.

<sup>86</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 58-61.

<sup>87</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 64.

<sup>88</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 151.

<sup>89</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 66.

military success, while a woman's virtue was primarily sexual. Women were supposed to preserve the family honour by being chaste, since her misbehaviour affected not only herself, but also her entire kin, whereas men generally did not have that same obligation.<sup>90</sup> Chastity and female virginity during the Middle Ages was idealised in the image of the Virgin Mary.<sup>91</sup> Cordelia Beattie has concluded that in the medieval societies that we know about, chastity was fundamental in all constructions of femininity.<sup>92</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Pre-modern Europe was highly patriarchal in the sense that women had lesser opportunities to attain wealth, status and power than men of their own class. Through all life-cycles stages and careers, women were subordinate to men. Amongst men, on the other hand, there was sometimes an expectation to prove themselves dominant over others, which resulted in gradations of dominant and subordinate masculinities.<sup>93</sup>

During the Middle Ages, violence also formed an integral part of the medieval honour system. Violence permeated most levels in society, and formed a strategy to achieve and to keep honour. It was often used for retribution and revenge, but there were definitely both acceptable and unacceptable forms, as well as legal and illegal types of violence. No matter what form, the use of violence was highly gendered since it was mainly expected to be carried out by men.<sup>94</sup> In general, the most honoured way of being man was to never appear weak or cowardly, but physically strong, courageous and virile. As Ekholst puts it, "a man was his ability to defend himself and his dependants", and failure to live up to this could lead to a man being labelled as effeminate, or weak.<sup>95</sup> Violence and power were intimately connected – power was equated to the ones who had the possibility to use violence, forming a connection between violence, power, and masculinity.<sup>96</sup>

### 1.8.2. Ideal vs. practice

People during the Middle Ages had ideas about romantic love that was not necessarily in harmony with either the transaction of property, nor politics. A prevalent idea that differed from the socio-economical reality was that of courtly love, which is a particular form of love

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<sup>90</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 87.

<sup>91</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 35-37.

<sup>92</sup> Beattie, "Gender and femininity in medieval England", p. 164.

<sup>93</sup> Beattie, "Gender and femininity in medieval England", p. 159. See also, Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed., Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, for a discussion on the notion of hegemonic masculinity.

<sup>94</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 76-79.

<sup>95</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 80.

<sup>96</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 82; Jonas Liliequist, "Från niding till sprätt. En studie i det svenska omanlighetsbegreppets historia från vikingatid till sent 1700-tal", in Anne Marie Berggren (red.) *Manligt och omanligt i ett historiskt perspektiv*, Forskningsrådsnämnden, Stockholm, 1999, p. 77-80.

detected in medieval literature (especially French and English romances), and can be described as “a situation in which the object of the lover’s affections was a married lady of high rank whom the lover could adore only at a distance, his devotions finding practical expression in chivalric deeds of valour performed in her honour”.<sup>97</sup> This ideal certainly permeated the higher social classes, who had the opportunity to get a hold on and read this sort of literature. Courtly love became an integral part of the chivalric ideals that developed in Europe during the medieval period.<sup>98</sup>

Medieval knightly ideals, chivalry, were, in short, a collection of qualities made into a coherent ideal, where skills in weapon and courage were central to the pursuit of glory and honour. A knight was also supposed to behave courteously towards ladies, be magnanimous to a defeated adversary, and, most importantly, to keep his word. To break an oath or promise was to lose honour, and sully one’s name.<sup>99</sup> It has been suggested that during the later Middle Ages, there were distinct models of knighthood. They embodied different ideals, where skills in arms, bravery, and loyalty formed one part; piety, chastity, and humility formed another, and a third consisted of love and courtly accomplishments. Even though social organization and military practice of knighthood differed across Europe, an international chivalric culture of shared values gave the aristocracy common ideological features.<sup>100</sup>

## 1.9. Disposition

In Part I, my quantitative analysis is presented, which provides a starting point for further discussion in Part II (Violence in the balladesque world) and Part III (Sexuality in the balladesque world), where the different acts are discussed separately. Following this, there is a summary discussion in the final chapter.

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<sup>97</sup> Pamela Porter, *Courtly love in medieval manuscripts*, British library, London, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> The relationship between courtly love and chivalric ideals has been much debated amongst scholars. See, for example, Bouchard Brittain, Constance, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble. Chivalry and Society in Medieval France*, Ithaca, New York, 1998; Kay, Sarah, *Subjectivity in Trobadour poetry*, Cambridge, 1990.

<sup>99</sup> Christopher Corèdon & Ann Williams, *A dictionary of medieval terms and phrases*, Cambridge, 2004 (electronic resource), “Chivalry”, p. 72.

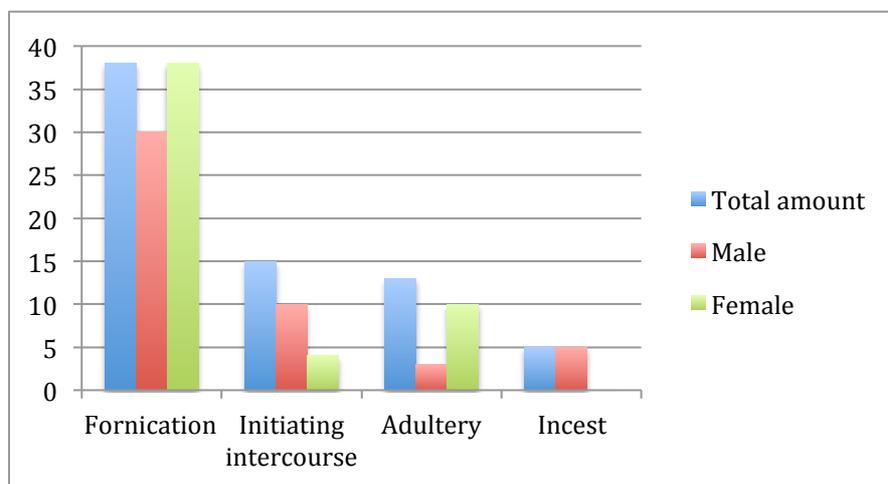
<sup>100</sup> Karras, *From boys to men*, p. 20-24.

## 2. Investigation

### 2.1. Part I. Violent practices and sexual activities in the balladesque world

This section will be dedicated to a statistical overview of actions in the balladesque world. Violent practices and sexual activities (with its subcategories) are presented in two diagrams, where the blue column represents the total amount of narratives in which this particular act can be discerned. The red and the green columns display how many of these were performed by male or female characters. A few ballads are represented in several categories, which have to do with the complicated chain of events that constitute the narrative as such.

#### 2.1.1. Sexual activities



The most common type of sexual act is **fornication**. According to the Church, sexual activities between unmarried couples were a sin, which in theory applied both to men and women.<sup>101</sup> In medieval law, on the other hand, only men were punished for fornication. This usually meant paying a fine to the guardian of the woman, since it constituted an insult to the woman's family. The diagram shows that out of 38 cases of fornication, it is evident that 30 male and 38 female characters perform this particular act.<sup>102</sup>

After empirically studying my source material, I have chosen to include the act of **initiating sexual intercourse** in the investigation, since it turned out to reveal interesting aspects on

<sup>101</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 155.

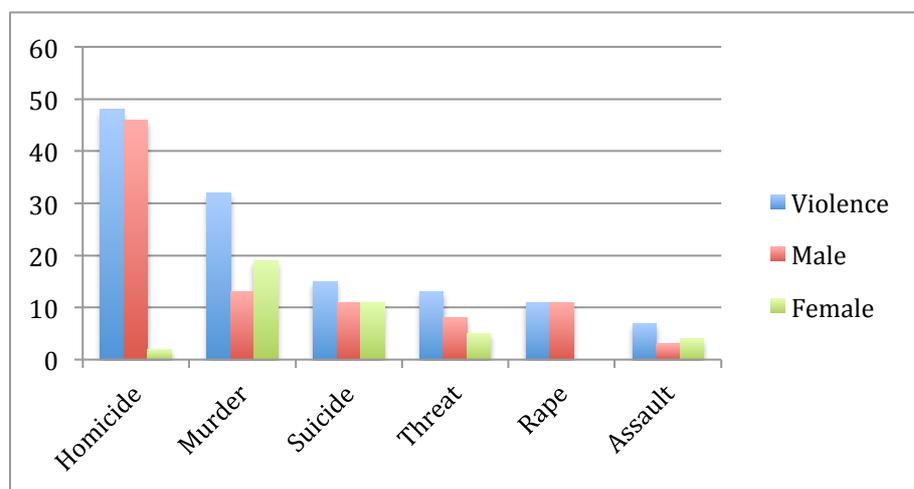
<sup>102</sup> SMB 9, 14, 15, 16, 70, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 82, 91, 92, 93, 96, 103, 106, 111, 120, 122, 126, 138, 156, 158, 160, 178, 183, 184, 185, 193, 229, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237.

gender relations. Out of 15 cases of initiated intercourse, male characters are responsible for 11 cases, while female characters performed this act 4 times.<sup>103</sup>

When people had intercourse outside of marriage it was termed **adultery**. Regulated by both the Church and secular law, it was regarded as a very serious crime.<sup>104</sup> The reason for this was, as previously mentioned, because of the Church' disapproved of all sexual acts that did not lead to reproduction within wedlock. As with fornication, matters of honour were an integral part of this crime when a man or a woman was convicted of adultery. If a man walked in on a female relative committing adultery, for example, he had the right to perform revenge killing, i.e., to kill the male intruder.<sup>105</sup> Female characters in 13 narratives committed adulterous acts, whereas men performed 3.<sup>106</sup>

**Incest** is evident in a few narratives, which was deemed a crime during the medieval period. Prohibitions against incest were extended to include not only intercourse with biological relatives, but also social and spiritual ones. Incest was considered to be very sinful, and could be severely punished.<sup>107</sup> Five cases of incest were discernible, but not all of them were completed acts of incest.<sup>108</sup>

### 2.1.2. Violent practices



**Homicide** was an act committed in public and where the perpetrator did not try to hide the deed. It was generally related to combat involving equal men, and is described as killings that

<sup>103</sup> SMB 1, 2, 42, 44, 86, 94, 100, 101, 102, 110, 119, 169, 177, 180, 181.

<sup>104</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 173, 176.

<sup>105</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 178-179.

<sup>106</sup> SMB 113, 116, 117, 118, 121, 123, 129, 157, 176, 194, 240, 243, 262.

<sup>107</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the medieval imagination*, Clarendon, Oxford, 2001 (electronic resource), p. 11-12, 230, 244. For a complete overview on this, see Chapter 1.

<sup>108</sup> SMB 46, 52, 85, 88, 194.

took place “when men meet in anger”.<sup>109</sup> Within the context of feud and revenge, a homicide could require a response in the form of a revenge killing carried out by the slain person’s male relatives, where vengeance could be regarded as duty. If a homicide was preceded by another crime, such as adultery, the killing could be judged legitimate or excusable – and therefore not punishable.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, I have deemed killings that take place after another crime to be homicide, which mainly relates to the act of fornication or adultery. Out of 48 homicides, men performed 46 of them, while only two female characters committed the same act.<sup>111</sup>

**Murder** was defined as a violent act with a deadly outcome that was planned and performed in secret. Any form of deadly violence could be defined as murder if it was carried out in a devious way, or in a non-public sphere, and where the victims in general were in a defenceless position. Murder was therefore considered to be very dishonourable.<sup>112</sup> For example, it was a *nidingsdåd* (a heinous act) to kill someone who was sleeping or swimming. Not giving a man a chance to defend himself using weapons would have been both unmanly and cowardly, while fighting man to man was a more acceptable way of using violence.<sup>113</sup> In light of this, women were expected to commit murder (which included lethal witchcraft and infanticide) to a higher degree than men, because women normally were considered more cowardly.<sup>114</sup> Except for the criteria mentioned above, I have also deemed killings that take place at weddings as murder, since the victims are portrayed as defenceless. Out of 32 murders or attempted murders, male characters committed 13 of them, while female characters performed 19.<sup>115</sup>

**Suicide** is a self-inflicted act of violence, and placed in its historical context it can be asserted that voluntary death was well known during the Middle Ages. However, medieval people had a dualistic view on such acts. In Christian doctrine, suicide was both praised and condemned, and while some suicidal acts could be considered as “self-murder” (which sometimes lead to punishment inflicted on the dead body and the confiscation of the deceased’s estates) it could

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<sup>109</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 109, 149.

<sup>110</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 109-110,

<sup>111</sup> SMB 15, 16, 28, 42, 44, 47, 55, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82, 85, 88, 95, 103, 104, 105, 118, 119, 121, 123, 124, 126, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 152, 158, 160, 165, 172, 193, 197, 198, 199, 200, 203, 204, 208, 209, 211, 216, 217, 259.

<sup>112</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 149, 154-161.

<sup>113</sup> Charpentier Ljungqvist, *Den långa medeltiden*, p. 142-143, 152-155; Ekholst, *För varje brottsling ett straff*, p. 168-169.

<sup>114</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 108-109.

<sup>115</sup> SMB 13, 34, 36, 45, 46, 47, 50, 52, 82, 88, 93, 96, 117, 120, 125, 127, 128, 129, 131, 141, 143, 151, 153, 154, 155, 157, 166, 185, 186, 193, 194, 234.

also be sanctioned if the means and motivation were right.<sup>116</sup> This was highly connected to social class, where the altruistic, honourable death of a nobleman or hero was not the same as a peasant's suicide, which was looked upon as an act of egoism and cowardice.<sup>117</sup> Suicide was evident in 16 narratives, and both male and female characters performed it 11 times. Here, I have also included narratives in which characters die from a broken heart or grieve themselves to death.<sup>118</sup>

**Threatening** someone is not a violent act in itself, but is rather an inclination for violent acts directed towards another character. After my initial empirical groundwork, I decided to include it in this investigation since these narratives displayed overall similarities with the act of homicide. Out of 13 cases of threats, men performed 8, while women carried out 5.<sup>119</sup>

The act of **rape** joins together sexual activities and violent practices. Medieval society had a twofold understanding of this crime, originating in the Roman legal concept *raptus*. Initially, *raptus* meant abducting a woman against her guardian's will. This did not have to include intercourse, rather, the crime was the act of stealing a woman from her parents, guardian, or husband. During the Middle Ages, *raptus* could mean both abduction and having intercourse with a woman against her will, as part of the same continuum. Violence was an integral part of this crime, but it could be directed at the victim or her family. The legal consequences for *raptus* were severe, and lead to harsher punishment than any other sexual offence.<sup>120</sup> Male characters rape, or attempt to rape, female characters in a total of 11 ballads.<sup>121</sup>

**Assault** is any form of lesser violence, usually blows and hits, which was depicted in 7 different narratives. Out of a total of 6 assault crimes, female characters performed 4 of them, while male characters carried out 2.<sup>122</sup>

### 2.1.3. Conclusion, Part I

In this section, it becomes evident that men commit acts of violence more frequently than women do, especially when it comes to homicide. Women, on the other hand, commit murder and adultery more often than men. Both men and women, however, commit suicide to the same extent. But by solely looking at which acts the characters perform the analysis does not

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<sup>116</sup> Minos, *History of suicide*, p. 7-10.

<sup>117</sup> Minois, *History of suicide*, p. 16, 41.

<sup>118</sup> SMB 49, 83, 84, 96, 108, 118, 119, 122, 128, 132, 138, 140, 145, 172, 193.

<sup>119</sup> SMB 14, 33, 68, 74, 76, 77, 78, 86, 148, 163, 201, 202, 233.

<sup>120</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 190, 205-206.

<sup>121</sup> SMB 77, 104, 105, 107, 108, 130, 151, 186, 187, 188, 189.

<sup>122</sup> SMB 92, 117, 138, 241, 242, 244, 246.

reach far. Violence could be regarded as something honourable, just as easy as it could be deemed cowardly, which all relates to the circumstances in which the acts were carried out. To reach further understanding on violence practices and sexuality, it is necessary to broaden the analysis to include how these actions relate to the entire narrative.

## 2.2. Part II. Gender and sexuality in the balladesque world

As concluded in Part I, it became evident that female and characters in general carry out different actions more frequently. This section will further investigate how these acts relate to the narrative context, and include acts of initiating intercourse, fornication, adultery, and incest.

### 2.2.1. The Act of Initiating Intercourse

#### 2.2.1.1. Unreciprocated desire

As became evident in the statistical overview, it is mainly male characters that carry out the act of initiating a sexual act, but not to fulfil it. Overall, the underlying theme of these narratives is unreciprocated desire, where the consequences may vary greatly.<sup>123</sup> There are a few examples of where the character that refuses to have sex is killed, either through execution or suicide.<sup>124</sup> In SMB 42, for example, a maiden named Karin refuses to have sex with a king, after which he has her rolled in a spiked barrel.<sup>125</sup> Although the protagonist initially succeeds in a personal goal, namely that of controlling who gains access to her body, it directly results in violent practices as punishment. The reason for Karin's rejection is explicitly mentioned, since she asks the perpetrator to let her go with her honour intact: "låt mig med äran gå".<sup>126</sup> Even though she achieves cultural success, it is at the cost of her life. But denying other characters sexual intimacy can also lead to other narrative developments. Several ballads revolve around how a young man tries to enter a maiden's bower, and in SMB 94, the maiden refuses to let him in:

Riden bort, riden bort, min fager ungersven  
mig lyster intet älskogen sätta  
för ingen stolts jungfru prisar nu er  
i riden så sent ut om nätter<sup>127</sup>

The young man initially gets upset for being rejected, but returns the following morning and gives thanks to the maiden's parents for teaching their daughter how to behave herself honourably: "i går tänkte jag er till min frilla ha men idag till min äckte qvinna",<sup>128</sup> i.e. yesterday he wanted her for a concubine, but since she upheld her honour, he now wants to

<sup>123</sup> SMB 1, 2, 42, 44, 86, 94, 100, 101, 102, 110, 119, 169, 177, 180, 181.

<sup>124</sup> SMB 119, "Falcken avrättas"; 42, "Liten Karin"; 44, "Fru Gunnel och Eluf väktare".

<sup>125</sup> SMB 2: 42, "Liten Karin", p. 93. In SMB 119, a woman commits suicide rather than becoming the concubine of a king, while in SMB 44, a man is rolled in a spiked barrel when refusing to share bed with the queen.

<sup>126</sup> Ib. Transl.: Let me go with honour.

<sup>127</sup> SMB 3: 94, "Det ärbara frieriet", p. 283-284. Transl.: Ride away, ride away, my fair young man / I wish not to make love / For no proud maiden will praise you / If you ride out late at night.

<sup>128</sup> Ib., p. 284.

marry her. Controlling her sexuality gained her both cultural and personal success, and refusing intercourse became an indirect way of exerting power over the situation at hand. A similar example can be found in SMB 100, but here the reason for keeping the bower's doors locked is explicitly explained by the maiden's handmaiden:

Men om I släppen then undersven in;  
Så råder han Eder ett frille-barn;  
Så Råder han Eder ett frille-barn;  
The andre till glädje och Eder till harm;<sup>129</sup>

While the young man is longing for the sexual act itself, the female characters are worried about the consequences of the act, that is, illegitimate children. It is also implied that others might look down on the maiden being a concubine and having a child outside of marriage. The consequences of the sexual act for the maidens in these examples are portrayed as dire, or at least unwanted, both for her social status and overall future. Likewise, in SMB 86, the brother of a maiden tries to trick his sister into eloping, which usually leads to extramarital sex. He reveals his true identity only after she has refused him on behalf of her honour, and in one version, he states that he would have killed her if she had agreed to elope.<sup>130</sup>

In all these examples, female honour and family honour are strongly connected to women's sexuality. Implicitly, if she gives in, losing honour is not only socially degrading for the maiden herself, but also for her family. These examples highlight an interesting feature of the balladesque word, namely that of concubines. Having concubines was a well-established custom during during the Middle Ages, and can be described as a mistress, or, more commonly, a sort of informal wife. This sort of alliance was not temporary but rather a long-term relationship, which had some legal aspects to it, as well. Even though the Church tried to abolish this custom (since it was against the sacrament of marriage) it was still discernible in all layers of society in medieval Scandinavia.<sup>131</sup> In the balladesque world, they can exert a fair degree of agency, but the social status of a concubine also seems to be equalled to the status of being a whore.

What it means for a male character to be let inside a maiden's bower but not fulfilling the sexual act itself is described in SMB 2. Here, the maiden casts a runic spell over a young man when they lie in bed, which makes him sleep for three days. After waking up, he tries to offer

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<sup>129</sup> SMB 3: 100, "Den försmådde friaren", p. 298. Transl.: But if you let the young man inside / He would want to make a bastard child / He would want to make a bastard child / To others' delight and your harm.

<sup>130</sup> SMB 3: 86, "Broder prövar syster", p. 235. See also type Ba, p. 236.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, Dübeck, Inger, "Women, weddings and concubines in medieval Danish law" (1992); Gadd, Pia, *Frillor, fruor och herrar. En okänd kvinnohistoria* (2009); Magnúsdóttir, Auður, *Frillor och fruor. Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120-1400* (2001).

the maiden a golden saddle and a horse if he can say that she “slap eij ifrån mig möö”<sup>132</sup>, i.e. he did not let her walk away a virgin. Personal success for him equals having intercourse and playing an active part in deflowering her, proving sexual boldness and potency which functions as a means for a young man to prove manliness. However, his activity is turned to passivity, achieving cultural success, but personal failure.

This stands in sharp contrast to when a female character tries to enter a man’s bower. In the first example, duke Stig accidentally casts a runic spell on the wrong maiden, making Proud Adelin to attempt a love meeting. When the king hears that Stig did not let her in, he offers Stig his daughter to wed.<sup>133</sup> By not accepting the sexual invitation, Stig has proven himself to be honourable, and in the end, both personal and cultural success has been achieved. In the second example, a maiden’s unsuccessful attempt of seducing a herder makes her father, the king, to disown her. But when it turns out the herder is actually a prince, the king allows them to wed. The conflict is only solved when the male protagonist has a higher social status than previously known.<sup>134</sup> When a maiden tries to initiate a sexual act, the family is present in form of a father. The father, in the end, has the agency to determine the fate of the young protagonists.

#### **2.2.1.2. *Gambling for love***

So far, there has been a significant focus on controlling a maiden’s sexuality, which can be directly related to the ideal of chastity in medieval society. In SMB 110, the importance of virginity is unmistakably represented. Proud Adelin persuades her handmaiden to bed her new husband on their wedding night to hide the fact that she has already lost her virginity to her true love. But when the lover in turn marries another, his former love affair to the maiden poses no threat to his future, and is instead treated with indifference in the narrative.<sup>135</sup> Physical contact is both longed for and feared, but characters can also have a more practical attitude towards it. In SMB 169, an orphaned maiden enters a convent so that knights and young men (“Riddar’ och Swehner”<sup>136</sup>) cannot deprive her of her honour. But when she has faced hunger, thirst and sleepless nights inside the convent, she once again longs for life outside the walls, and for a man who could provide for her. It is noteworthy that her emphasis lie on the material aspect of marriage.

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<sup>132</sup> SMB 1: 2, ”Sömnrunorna”, p. 19. Transl.: Did not let you leave a maiden.

<sup>133</sup> SMB 1: 1, ”Hertig Stigs runor”, p. 17.

<sup>134</sup> SMB 4:2: 177, ”Per Svinaherde”, p. 85-86.

<sup>135</sup> SMB 3: 110, ”Torkel Tronesson”, p. 351-359, 357.

<sup>136</sup> SMB 4:1: 169, ”Klosterjungfrun”, p. 323. Transl.: knights and young men.

Sexuality is sometimes portrayed as a gamble, where the stakes are honour and virginity on the maiden's behalf. This is explicit in SMB 180 and 181, where a king gambles with a maiden. The stakes get higher, and finally, they gamble for the king's life and the maiden's virginity. In the first narrative, the king decides to marry the maiden.<sup>137</sup> In the second, the maiden loses her virginity when gambling with a sailor, and consequently despairs. However, when the sailor turns out to be a king's son, her misery turns to happiness:<sup>138</sup>

Är J den ypperste Konungs-son som i riket går,  
Så skal J få min Mödom fast jag hade tiugu två<sup>139</sup>

Deception can be a way of manipulating a situation to one's advantage when it comes to avoiding intercourse. In SMB 102, a king wants a maiden to become his concubine against her will. In order to circumvent this, she pretends to be dead. When the king realizes her pretence, he is impressed by her cunning and immediately marries her: "Och hade Du inte hittat på detta Fund / Du hade ej blifvit Drottning i denna stund".<sup>140</sup> While the maiden and her family are worried about the social consequences of the maiden becoming a concubine, the king is more interested in the act itself. Indeed, in another narrative, a female character commits suicide rather than becoming the king's concubine.<sup>141</sup> Deception could be a way for female characters to increase their agency, and gain personal success.

### 2.2.1.3. Summary

In this section, men are generally the ones who actively initiate the sexual act. When a female character controls her sexuality, i.e. denies a male character access to her body, it could be a way to increase her odds of personal success – such as gaining a higher social status, or getting married. Passivity in the sexual sense can therefore be understood as a sort of indirect way of exerting power, which could function the same way for men. However, virginity is intimately connected to a woman's honour, while the outlook of losing virginity does not affect men's honour. Female characters seem to have a more practical attitude towards the consequences of fornication. Losing honour could result in a woman being lowered to the status of concubine, thus impacting her future in a negative way. If the suitor turns out to be a

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<sup>137</sup> SMB 4:2: 180, "Kung David och stolta Malfred", p. 139-140.

<sup>138</sup> SMB 4:2: 181A/B, "Liten båtsman", p. 141-142.

<sup>139</sup> *Ib.*, p. 142. Transl.: If you are the finest son of the King in the realm / You shall have my maidenhead, if I had twenty-two.

<sup>140</sup> SMB 3: 102A/B, "Konungen och hertig Henriks syster", p. 310-312. The B-type offers a more elaborated narrative, which is why I have chosen to look at both types. Transl.: "If you had not come up with this deceit, you would not have become my queen."

<sup>141</sup> SMB 3: 119, "Falcken avrättas", p. 400.

person of higher social status, the fear of losing one's virginity is not as problematic, which also becomes evident in the narratives where female characters try to initiate sexual contact.

### 2.2.2. The Act of Fornication

As the statistical overview concluded, fornication is the most common sexual activity, where female characters are slightly more represented than male characters.<sup>142</sup> The situations in which sex between an unmarried couple occur are very diverse, thus offering many different aspects on this motif. Generally, the act of fornication functions as to instigate conflict between the different balladesque characters, and it is not uncommon for these ballads to develop into violent chains of events. Consequently, many of the narratives examined in this section will be further discussed in part III of the investigation.

#### 2.2.2.1. Family matters

In several ballads, the act of fornication takes place in the greenwoods or in the rose garden, and not inside an estate. A typical narrative can be found in SMB 15, where a man encourages a maiden to elope with him. Despite being afraid of her father, she agrees, and when they reach the greenwoods, they lie down. The sexual act is never described in detail, but is implicitly understood:

Dhe rijda sigh i Rosenlund  
Där lyste Herr Ballder hwijla en stund  
  
Herr Ballder lade sigh i Stoltz Ingeborgs skiött  
lopp honom på en Sömbn så söth<sup>143</sup>

Resting near the maiden's bosom is a circumscription for the sexual act. Interestingly enough, sex is generally associated with the inactivity of resting, or sleeping. Even so, the male character initiates the sexual act, while the maiden is portrayed as passive. While personal success is initially accomplished, with cultural failure as a result, narratives such as these are unlikely to lead to further personal success. Most commonly, they end violently when the maiden's family catches up with them, and a fight breaks out.<sup>144</sup> But if the young man proves

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<sup>142</sup> SMB 9, 14, 15, 16, 70, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 82, 91, 92, 93, 96, 103, 106, 111, 120, 122, 126, 138, 156, 158, 160, 178, 183, 184, 185, 193, 229, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237.

<sup>143</sup> SMB 1: 15, "Redebold och Gullborg", p. 147. Transl.: They rode to the greenwoods / There, Ballder wanted to lie down for a while / Ballder he laid himself down next to Proud Ingeborg's chest / and fell into a sleep so sweet.

<sup>144</sup> SMB 15, 16, 76, 78, 79, 80, 82, 103, 158, 193.

himself an able fighter, or if he kills the maiden's family, the narrative ends with marriage, increasing the opportunity for the lovers to be with each other.<sup>145</sup>

That the virginity of a maiden is deemed very important is obvious. A maiden who has lost her virginity is generally not desirable. In SMB 183, a man refuses to marry a king's daughter because she has bedded another: "eder äldsta dotter passer jag ej på / för hon har sufvit hos min morbror i år".<sup>146</sup> Likewise in SMB 9, a father journeys to rescue his daughter from her husband. The husband states that while he gave her and her family gifts, she was not a virgin when she came to him, and she therefore deserves to be treated badly. The maiden denies his accusation, and the narrative ends with the father bringing her back.<sup>147</sup> This example also highlights that family does not have to constitute a negative force in the balladesque world.

Fornication can also lead to personal success when it functions as prelude to marriage.<sup>148</sup> In SMB 91, for example, the king converses with the young man who spent the night with his daughter in the greenwoods. When the young man declares that he should marry the maiden since he has taken the most beautiful thing from her, the king responds: "Ja! Har du plockat rosor af trä / Så får du velle ta bålen med",<sup>149</sup> i.e., if he has taken her virginity, he might as well marry her. That the man is the active sexual partner is evident, since he is the one who has "taken" something from the maiden, that is, her maidenhead. This reflects a more non-violent solution to the conflict roused by fornication, and perhaps illustrates a more practical view towards illicit love affairs. Other ballads problematize practical consequences of fornication, by which the most evident is that of illegitimate children or pregnancy.<sup>150</sup> In most of the narratives where this happens, personal success is rarely achieved after the secret pregnancy is discovered, as will become evident below.

#### ***2.2.2.2. Disciplining maidens and punishing lovers***

Several ballads concern themselves with the relationship between the female protagonist and her mother or close female relative.<sup>151</sup> In "Konung Valdemar och hans syster", the king's sister accuses little Kerstin, the king's daughter, to have given birth to a illegitimate child. The king summons her to court where she is forced to perform a "Möjaredans" – to dance with the

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<sup>145</sup> SMB 76, 80.

<sup>146</sup> SMB 4:2: 183, "Allebrand harpolekaren", p. 202. Transl.: I do not want your eldest daughter / She has bedded my uncle this year.

<sup>147</sup> SMB 1: 9, "Ravnen Rune", p. 57.

<sup>148</sup> SMB 75, 91.

<sup>149</sup> SMB 3: 91, "Ros Elin och kejsare David", p. 254.

<sup>150</sup> SMB 92, 93, 96Ab, 106, 126, 138, 156, 160, 178.

<sup>151</sup> SMB 92, 138, 156, 160.

king's men in order to prove that she is a maiden in good condition, and has not recently given birth. Even though she passes this test, her aunt tricks her into loosening her belt, whereupon milk starts emanating from her breasts. After this, the king himself stabs Kerstin to death: "Och konungen tog sin Silfboda knif / och den kjörde han i Liten kjerstins lif".<sup>152</sup>

This motif, evident in several ballads, shows overall similarities with the custom of "milking the maiden": a medieval practice that served to control whether an unmarried woman had given birth.<sup>153</sup> The reason for a mother to disown her daughter is mentioned in a similar ballad: "Å horor och skjörkor skal hon basa med ris / Tjufwar och skjälmar skal hon hänga på qwist".<sup>154</sup> To lose one's virginity, for a female character, ruins her reputation and can be socially degrading – her mother compares her actions to that of a whore. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the mother judges her sexuality, while the male participation in the sexual act is compared to the activity of stealing. Indeed, it serves to reflect the sexual act as something a man does to a woman – and by doing this, he also takes away something from her, namely her virginity.

This sort of narratives end with the maiden dying in childbirth, or they end happily with the father of the child agreeing to marry.<sup>155</sup> Maidens are particularly dependent upon other characters actions and intentions, where it is evident that her agency is restricted and her actions judged by an older, female relative, her father, or, her lover. Moreover, fornication before marriage can lead to a more deadly outcome. In SMB 126, a maiden is pregnant on her wedding night, and reluctantly follows her husband to their wedding bed. When they lie down, he discovers her secret pregnancy: "Han lade liten Cattrin på sin arm, / Så fick han kienna barnet i hennes barm".<sup>156</sup> After this, he kills her. Although I will return to situations similar to this in part III of the investigation, I would like to emphasise how killings such as these, according to medieval law, were considered justified. But the balladesque world offers different reactions to this. Interestingly enough, once a maiden's virginity is taken, it can be restored. In SMB 185, a maiden elopes with a man whom she discovers to be a thief and a murderer. After murdering him in his sleep, she states:

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<sup>152</sup> SMB 4:1: 160, "Kung Valdemar och hans syster", p. 215-216; Åkesson, "Mord och hor", p. 9. Transl.: The king took his silver knife / he ran it through Kerstin's chest.

<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Wessnert, Gudrun, "Kvinnoliv i medeltidens Stockholm", *Populär Historia* 6/2002.

<sup>154</sup> SMB 4:1: 138, "Lisa och Nedervall", p. 70. Transl.: Whores and harlots she shall whip / Thieves and rogues she will hang from a twig.

<sup>155</sup> SMB 92, and some types of SMB 160.

<sup>156</sup> SMB 3: 126, "Herr Ingevald dödar sin brud", p. 469. Transl.: Little Cattrin rested on his arm / Then he could feel the child inside of her.

Du ligg nu där för hundar och ramn  
nu reser jag hem till min faders land

Du ligg nu där du simm i ditt blod  
jag rider hem en jungfru lika god<sup>157</sup>

Personal success can be accomplished through acts of violence, and her virginity is restored through her personal revenge. So while a woman's virginity can be taken from her, indicating that she is playing a passive role, she might re-take it by partaking in violent action.

#### *2.2.2.4. Deception as strategy for personal success*

Deception is employed by many characters in order to get away with the act of fornication. In SMB 178, a maiden dresses herself as a stable boy in order to share bed with the duke in secret. When she gives birth to a child, the queen reveals their illicit love affair to the king. Unlike the other narratives, they are allowed to marry. But the king only agrees after the duke tells him that the maiden is, in fact, a king's daughter: "Och är hon en konungadotter så god / Så skall du ock hålla henne ära och tro."<sup>158</sup> The consequences of sex are solved by the maiden's raise in social status, which in the end legitimises their secret love affair. Of interest is also how the maiden herself is portrayed as the active, shrewd one, who reaches her personal goal by means of deceitfulness.

In a few ballads, a young man of (usually) lower social status tricks a maiden into letting him inside her maiden's bower.<sup>159</sup> In one of these, a king's son murders the maiden's lover, so that he can steal his wooden leg. When the maiden hears the sound of her presumed lover's wooden leg, she unlocks her maiden's bower. She realises her mistake the morning after, and exclaims: "Å herre gud nåde mig arma mö / å nu är vist min stölter död!"<sup>160</sup> Similarly, in SMB 236, a beggar tricks a maiden into believe that he is a noble man. After the sexual act, he admits that he has never owned estates, horses, and servants, but indeed a few hundred canes.<sup>161</sup> In SMB 233, the pun is explicitly mentioned:

Jungfrun stod vid fönstret, hon gret och hon svor:  
Nu har du min mödom, och jag dina skor.

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<sup>157</sup> SMB 4:2: "Rövaren Rymer", p. 209. Transl.: Lie there, like a dog and not a man / I will journey back to my father's land / Lie there, swimming in your blood / I will return as a maiden proud.

<sup>158</sup> SMB 4:2: 178, "Kerstin Stalldräng", p. 109. Transl.: If she is a kings' daughter / you shall be faithful and keep her honour.

<sup>159</sup> SMB 233, 234, 235, 236.

<sup>160</sup> SMB 5:2: 235, "Klampen", p. 2. Transl.: Oh god save me, poor maiden / and now I believe my wooden-legged lover to be dead!

<sup>161</sup> SMB 5:2: 236, "Tiggargubbens brud", p. 9. A cane is a symbol for beggars in this context.

Väl så får jag ett par fingerlappa skor;  
Men aldrig får Jungfrun sin mödom så god.  
- Hon trodde det var en Herre.<sup>162</sup>

Here, the female characters are portrayed as proud and material. While they think the sexual act provides them with a raise in social status, the male characters reason for the sexual act is rather the act itself, or that of humiliating the female character. While personal success is achieved for the male characters, female characters reach personal and cultural failure.

Manipulation also constitutes a way to get away with fornication.<sup>163</sup> In SMB 231, the protagonists pretend to swoon every time marriage is mentioned. Since the maiden's family believe they are sick, both end up in the same bed to recover. After this, a dialogue is played out between them, which reveals their mutual intentions. She says that he shall have a spring ("Du skal få en Källa"<sup>164</sup>), and upon examining his body, she asks what sort of "dingeldangel" he has got. He, in turn, enlightens her that it is in fact a horse ("det är en Fohla"<sup>165</sup>). This exchange is followed by action, where the sexual act itself – and the body parts of interest to it – is paraphrased:

Om det är en Fohla  
uti her Faders Gård  
Släpp honom til Källan,  
Låt honom dricka så,  
  
Pigan i grimskafvet tog,  
och ledde Fohlan til,  
När han kom på brädden,  
Stalp han mitt uti.<sup>166</sup>

Inherent in this is, however, the female as the passive partner, and the male as the active one. While her genitals are compared to a static spring, his are associated with an active horse. The major part of these narratives are so called jocular ballads, which previous research has deemed to be an effect of the medieval concept of the world-turned-upside-down, in which a carnivalesque mode and frivolous behaviour rules. Here, fornication can be dealt with in a

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<sup>162</sup> SMB 5:1: 233, "Bonddrängen och jungfrun", p. 352. Transl.: The maiden was standing by the window, crying and swearing, saying: Now you have my maidenhead, and I your shoes / I can get another pair of shoes, but you shall never have your maidenhead returned to you / She thought it was a nobleman.

<sup>163</sup> SMB 70, 229, 231, 232.

<sup>164</sup> Transl.: You shall have a spring.

<sup>165</sup> Transl.: It is a horse.

<sup>166</sup> SMB 5:1: 231, "Bonden borrhade hjul", p. 318. Transl.: If that is a horse in my father's house / Let him drink from the spring / The maid took him by the the lead, and he then steeped within.

more light fashion since there are usually no consequences, and the narratives (unlike the other ballads) focus more on the bodily aspects of the sexual act.<sup>167</sup>

#### 2.2.2.5. *Lustful women*

Women can take a more active role when it comes to fornication as well. In “Den förförde ungersvennen”, a maiden successfully seduces a young man. When they arrive at the ting, the maiden receives honour, but the man shame: “Jungfrun fick heder, men Ungersven skam”.<sup>168</sup> In light of sex as an act that one does to another, shame is brought on the young man for playing the passive role, when medieval society expected it to be the other way around. The maiden is the active partner, which does not make her unwomanly in the same way playing the passive role effeminates the male character. The last example I wish to highlight is SMB 111, which also offers a complementary way of portraying female sexuality in the balladesque world, and in a similar fashion to the example above emphasize the sexual act as lustful for a woman too. In this narrative a young man wants to ride to his betrothed, but since it rains and storms outside, he decides to postpone his journey. When he finally arrives and enters her house, she is in bed with another man. Because of his late arrival, she decided to bed another:

Rijdh bårt rijdh bårt fager vngersuen  
Tw gör migh ingen qwijdhe  
Thet skall then swennen haffua som fore kom fram  
Han torde I regnet vthrijde<sup>169</sup>

The maiden clearly is in control of whom she wants to bed, and when her lover did not make it in time, she chose another. Family is not present within this narrative, and it seems like the setting is not that of a noble woman’s estate, rather a smaller cottage. When the act of fornication is carried out in the lower social groups, sex is not connected to honour in the same way as in the narratives discussed at the beginning of this section.

#### 2.2.2.6. *A case of attempted sodomy*

There is one example of attempted intercourse that relates to sodomy. While Swedish medieval laws did not have any regulations against same-sex intercourse, there are however reference to male same-sex intercourse that resemble the Old Norse crime *nið*: it was not the same-sex intercourse in itself that was punishable, but the fact that “a man, by being penetrated, was ready to take on the passive role and thereby be subordinate to another

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<sup>167</sup> SMB 14, 70, 93, 106, 111, 185, 229, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236.

<sup>168</sup> SMB 5:2: 237, “Den förförde ungersvennen”, p. 39.

<sup>169</sup> SMB 3: 111, “Ungersvens klagan”, p. 375. Transl.: Ride away, ride away, fair young man / You shall not have me / The young man who came first shall / he who ventured out in the rain.

man”.<sup>170</sup> Through this act, then, his manliness could be questioned.<sup>171</sup> In SMB 101, Proud Gunnela journeys to the knight Perleman, and on her way, she switches clothes with her male charioteer: “Honom kläder hon i sabel och mård / men sig klädde hon i vallmaret grå”.<sup>172</sup> When they arrive, the knight drinks wine and mead with the “Gunla körsven”, i.e. the charioteer-dressed-as-Gunnela, while Gunnela stables the horses. Afterwards, when the charioteer and the knight lie in bed together, the charioteer finally reveals his true identity, infuriating the knight, who tries to kill him. Both Proud Gunnela and the charioteer quickly ride away, but to scorn and humiliate the knight, she sends him a cradle.

Clearly, she implies that a sexual act has been taken place between the two men, and that a child is the result of such a pregnancy. By doing this, she is suggesting that he has been the passive partner. During the Middle Ages, a man was deemed effeminate and less of a man if he lowered himself to the female, penetrated role.<sup>173</sup> His shame is underlined by stating that the maiden has done him much “harm”, i.e. damage, for her deception. When Gunnela dresses herself in men’s clothes, however, she avoids losing her virginity. Using men’s clothes, then, increases her possibility for action. In the balladesque world, women can transgress into masculine activities and spheres without becoming threatened with a sub-feminine status.

### 2.2.2.7. Summary

To sum up this rather wide-ranging section, a few points can be made. Cultural success, in this section, is almost never achieved, but depending on the circumstances the fornicators might achieve personal success. Controlling women’s sexuality is overall portrayed as crucial when it comes to upholding family honour, and a maiden who has fornicated clearly has a restricted possibility for agency in most cases. The sexual act itself mostly deems the man to be the active partner, while women are portrayed as passive. In this way, losing one’s maidenhead can result in a loss of power. However, a woman’s lost maidenhead might be restored through means of violence. An active response to the initial “taking” can once again shift the power balance. When men take on a passive role it might deem them effeminate, which renders the construction of masculinity an unstable one. Of importance is also to emphasise that women and men might get away with fornication, often by the means of

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<sup>170</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 182.

<sup>171</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 182; Lilliequist, ”Från niding till sprätt”, p. 77.

<sup>172</sup> SMB 3: 101, ”Jungfru Gunnela och riddar Perleman”, p. 300-301. Transl.: She dressed him in sable and marten fur / but she dressed herself in grey frieze.

<sup>173</sup> Beattie, ”Gender and femininity in medieval England”, p. 159.

deception. A high social status indicates an increased agency, just as a low social status could result in the sexual act being reduced to selfish acts of pleasure for both men and women.

### 2.2.3. The Act of Adultery

In the balladesque world, there are two different attitudes towards adultery that is clearly gender related. As the statistical overview concluded, adultery is much more common amongst female characters than male ones.<sup>174</sup> Narratives in which adultery is evident usually unravel a violent chain of events, which overall leads to the adulterer and the lover being punished for their actions. But there are also interesting deviations from this, all of which shall be discussed below.

#### 2.2.3.1. Female consequences of adultery

When a male character learns about his wife's adulterous behaviour he usually kills the male intruder.<sup>175</sup> In SMB 121, the male protagonist brutally kills his wife and lover when he catches them having intercourse, stating that "så skall huar enn hora och hor kar gå".<sup>176</sup> While this might appear harsh, to say the least, it is important to understand how central honour was to the medieval society. As reflected in medieval law, revenge killing was employed to restore a man's honour if his spouse had intercourse outside of marriage, and adultery by women was far more serious than that by men.<sup>177</sup> In SMB 116 and 118, the rumour of a queen's adulterous affair is enough for the king to kill her presumed lover. Simonsen means that the woman in these triangle dramas merely functions as a pawn in a male conflict.<sup>178</sup> I would like to put it differently: Women are portrayed as rather passive, and the consequences of the cultural failure, that is adultery, does not lead to personal success. The man, on the other hand, represents cultural success.

Adultery can also lead to disownment, which becomes clear in SMB 113. When the maiden arrives at her fathers estate after being rejected by her husband, she tells her father that she has been lured by a stable boy to commit adultery, whereupon he answers: "Gudh tröste Migh arme Man / så skamlig du nu kommer här / Du skynda dig snart vthaf min gård, / och kom alldrig för migh mehr".<sup>179</sup> In some types, she dies alone on the wooden floor while giving

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<sup>174</sup> SMB 113, 116, 117, 118, 121, 123, 129, 157, 176, 194, 240, 243, 262.

<sup>175</sup> SMB 116, 118, 121, 123.

<sup>176</sup> SMB 3: 121, "Herr Wonge", p. 415. Transl.: This is the reward for whores and whoremasters.

<sup>177</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 88.

<sup>178</sup> Simonsen, "Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads", p.

<sup>179</sup> SMB 3: 113B/C/D, "Herr Peder och fru Margareta", p. 378-379. Transl.: God help me, poor man / Such shame you bring upon me / Leave my estate in haste / and let me never set my eyes upon you again.

birth to twins.<sup>180</sup> The female character's sexuality is connected not only to her personal honour, but to her family's as well. For female characters, then, it is very hard to achieve personal success after committing adultery. Their male relatives serve to act as representations of cultural success, stressing the importance of women's virginity and obedience.

An interesting deviancy from this is SMB 176 in which we meet another type of female character. A man called Knut Huling is summoned before the king because of a reputation about Knut fornicating with an exceedingly high amount of maidens. He initially denies this, but unfortunately, a few of the maids he has bedded enlighten the king of his sexual activities. But then Knut also states that he has been lying with the queen, after which she also is summoned to court. Following this, the king cuts off the queen's dress by the knee, and says that she can leave with Knut and herd cattle for a living. Her response clearly marks out her opinion on the king's ultimatum: "Och heldre vill jag Knut Holings vallekulla vara / Än jag vill stålkronan i Dannemark bära."<sup>181</sup> This queen is portrayed as headstrong and wilful, and stands in sharp contrast to the other female characters that commit adultery. However, adultery with a low status character does result in disownment, even for a queen, where the cutting of her clothes marks out the queen's social degradation.

### **2.2.3.2. Male consequences of adultery**

When a male character commits adultery, the situation is rather different. A male character will most likely abandon or kill his wife and end up with his concubine instead.<sup>182</sup> These narratives focus on homosocial bonds between two female characters: the queen, and her rival, the concubine. When the king commits adultery, the queen does not show aggression towards her husband, but the concubine. In SMB 117, the queen fears that her husband's lover will take the throne from her: "Du önske mejj vara döder å laggder i lull / Så skulle du få bäre mitt röda gull".<sup>183</sup> Although the queen tries to eliminate her rival, the narrative ends with the king choosing to be with his concubine instead. It is important to recognize how a woman's personal honour was also at stake when her husband was unfaithful, which could result in revenge acts.<sup>184</sup> But there is a difference between the consequences of female and male

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<sup>180</sup> *Ib.*, p. 379.

<sup>181</sup> SMB 4:2: 176, "Knut Huling", p. 81-82. Transl.: I would rather be Knut Huling's herdess / Than wear the crown of Denmark.

<sup>182</sup> SMB 117, 129, 157.

<sup>183</sup> SMB 3: 117, "Liten Kerstin och drottningen", p. 392. Transl.: You wish me buried and dead / So that you could have my gold so red.

<sup>184</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 181.

adultery, where the latter is not problematized in the same way as the former. In light of this, male honour and personal success is not jeopardized by extramarital affairs.

The status of a concubine in the balladesque world has been touched upon before. There is a highly dualistic view on these types of female characters. While it seems like a maiden many times tries very hard not to become a concubine, relating concubinage to the status of a whore, concubines in narratives as the one discussed above has a fair amount of agency. In the battle between a queen and a concubine, the queen always loses. Perhaps this reflects the conflicting view on concubines that became more evident during the course of the medieval period.

### 2.2.3.3. *Lustful adulterers*

Amongst the jocular ballads, we find examples that are indeed very different from how adultery is portrayed in the examples above. They all address female lust, and here, the female characters are in control of the situation, longing for a man to satisfy their sexual needs.<sup>185</sup> In SMB 243, for example, a peasant wife favours a lover instead of her husband. While she gives her husband herring, porridge, and sour beer, she treated her lover with delicacies. Finally, she beds her lover, stating that the husband can share lodging with pigs. Here, he calls her a whore:

Jag tror du blir en hora sade Bonden,  
Hora war Mor, och Mormors mor, Swarade Bondens hustru.

/:Nu tror jag f..n rider dej sade Bonden,:/  
/:Nej f..n dej och Sjudaren Mej, Swarade Bondens hustru.:/<sup>186</sup>

Scholars have given a keen interest to these jocular ballads, where an alternative approach to societal structures is characteristic to the medieval popular humour.<sup>187</sup> In the example above, the sacrament of marriage, as well as the subordination of women, is completely turned upside-down. To call someone a whore was a demeaning and punishable act, but here, his insult backfires – not only does his wife call her own mother and grandmother a whore, but she happily indulges in adultery despite his efforts to scorn her. He is, on the other hand, portrayed as achieving neither personal nor cultural success. Jansson also points out the

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<sup>185</sup> SMB 240, 243, 262.

<sup>186</sup> SMB 5:2: 243, ”Bonden och hans hustru”, p. 79. Transl.: I think you will become a whore, said the farmer / A whore was my mother, and mother’s mother, the farmer’s wife answered / I think the devil got the best of you / No, the devil got you and my lover got me, the farmer’s wife answered.

<sup>187</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 167.

husband's degradation from master of the house to animal level.<sup>188</sup> Likewise, Byrman suggests that this ballad provides a warning for a man who neglects his guests and his wife.<sup>189</sup>

#### 2.2.3.4. Summary

To sum up, adultery as a crime in the balladesque world is treated very differently depending on the relation the adulterer has with his or her family or spouse, and the social status of the adulterer in question. If a female character takes an active part in a sexual relationship outside of marriage, a male spouse will react with violence, while a female spouse in the same situation will react in similar fashion – but violence is directed towards her rival instead. This clearly emphasizes the sexual sphere of male characters to be more inclusive than a female sexual sphere, which becomes more contained when adultery cannot lead to personal success. However, it is important to recognize the examples when female adulterers do achieve personal success and actively initiating sexual contact in front of her husband's eyes, and where the husband is portrayed as passive and indecisive.

#### 2.2.4. The Act of Incest

Incest as a motif is only evident in four Swedish ballads, but shows overall similarities with narratives surrounding illicit sexual acts, where violence is the consequence of such actions. In the balladesque world, incest is only played out in sexual activities between sister and brother, or, between a mother and her son. In SMB 46, Peder wants to have sex with his sister, whom refuses:

Icke will iagh godh wilian din  
Wij äre tw sysken för gudh allen  
  
Och wil du icke göra godh wilian min  
Och dichta wil iagh en lögn vpå tigh<sup>190</sup>

Because of her refusal, Peder falsely accuses her of fornication and murder, an accusation that leads to her being burned at the stakes. Similarly, in SMB 88, the brother Axel lures his sister to have sex with him, after which she gives birth to twins. Axel is executed, but this is rather for the murder of his children – whom he slaughters and feeds to his dogs. That Axel is committing a sinful act, however, is evident in this particular narrative since it says that he lured his sister with ill intent: “Han lockade henne medh så mång ond råd / Däth wiste

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<sup>188</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 187.

<sup>189</sup> Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt*, p. 118-119.

<sup>190</sup> SMB 2: 46, ”Herr Peder och hans syster”, p. 147. A similar narrative can be detected in SMB 52. Transl.: I do not want your good will / We are siblings, for God's sake / If you reject my good will / I shall cast a lie onto you.

hwarken Fader eller Moder deraf”.<sup>191</sup> It is uncommon for the ballad genre to convey direct judgement of a character, which does highlight his wrongful behaviour. But the incest act itself is not addressed at all, and does not lead to actual punishment in the balladesque world. In SMB 46, Peder is brought down to hell and his sister to heaven.

Incest is almost committed in SMB 194, where a young man named Wattenman unknowingly marries his own mother. At the wedding, she reluctantly follows him to their bridal bed. After revealing the truth about their kindred, Wattenman tells the maiden’s father, the king, about it. To this the king replies: “och kära mina hofmän huggen ett bål / min dotter skall brinna der uppå.”<sup>192</sup> Wattenman himself throws her into the fire, but similarly to SMB 46, she is brought up to heaven. However, is it unclear whether this punishment is carried out because of the maiden’s adulterous affair, or because of the sin of marrying her own son. In Scandinavia, burning was employed for crimes requiring “extreme purification by the total elimination of the offender’s body”, which included sodomy, incest, sorcery and infanticide.<sup>193</sup> But since the woman is falsely accused, at least in SMB 46, their wrongful deaths lead to an ascending up to heaven, which rather connote the death of a martyr. These narratives display similarities with SMB 42, “Liten Karin”, a ballad about a maiden who is executed for rejecting the sexual invitation of a king. This particular ballad is based on the legend of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a woman who suffered martyrdom by being broken on the wheel at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>194</sup> All three maidens refuse, or try to refuse, to commit a sexual act, which means standing up against a male perpetrator. A satisfactory solution, then, is to connect them to Christian faith, as indicated by the implied martyrdom of these women.

Finally, the last motif that relate to incest and what it might lead to, can be found in “Axel och Valborg”, where a young couple cannot marry because “J ären nu alt för när i Slächt”:<sup>195</sup> they are too closely related. A king, who wants Valborg for himself, uses this to his advantage and summons a priest to testify that they indeed “äro i Tredie Slächt”.<sup>196</sup> Here, incest is used to

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<sup>191</sup> SMB 3: 88, ”Herr Axel och hans syster”, p. 251. Transl.: He lured her with wicked words / Neither father or mother heard.

<sup>192</sup> SMB 4:2: 194, ”Karl Vågeman”, p. 320. Transl.: Dearest courtiers, prepare me a wooden stake / On it, my daughter shall burn.

<sup>193</sup> Riisøy, *Sex, Rett og Reformasjon*, p. 99. See, also, Trevor, Dean, *Crime in Medieval Europe*, London, Harlow, Longman 2001, p. 124.

<sup>194</sup> Pegelow, *Helgonlegender i ord och bild*, p. 140-141.

<sup>195</sup> SMB 3: 85, ”Axel och Valborg”, p. 193. Transl.: You are too closely related.

<sup>196</sup> *Ib.*, p. 196. Transl.: Are related to each other within the third degree.

prohibit the main protagonists to marry, very much in accordance with how the medieval Church could indeed ban marriages for that reason.<sup>197</sup>

Personal success is overall achieved when male characters try to commit incest, however, this victory might appear as a hollow one since the female characters are executed by mere accusations of other serious crimes. Moreover, the male perpetrators achieve either personal or cultural success. Their wrongful behaviour is underlined by their descent to hell, a very strong indication of how incest – or false accusations – is judged in the balladesque world. But even though the male characters are punished in the after-life, it shows how vulnerable maidens might appear within a family constellation, where the word of a brother counts for more than his sister's.

### 2.2.5. Conclusion, Part II

When it comes to the sexuality and gender, men in general are portrayed as the active partner: they are either initiators, or portrayed like they are actively *taking* a woman's virginity away. Interestingly, the sexual act itself is commonly referred to as a rest, or sleep, which contradictory enough denote a passive attitude. Women may also play an active part, resulting in the man in turn is deemed passive and unmanly. Of importance is also to emphasize that even though a woman's virginity might be taken away, it can be restored by actively committing acts of violence. By doing this, women are re-taking what has belonged to them, as well as regaining their honour. What the balladesque world provides, then, is a blurring between subordination and domination, activity and passivity, where men and women might transgress these boundaries in certain contexts. Power can work in many ways, both direct power through the sexual act – dominating another characters by raping them, for example. Or, it can work indirectly – that is, through controlling one's sexuality and still achieving personal success.

However, at the core of sexuality often lies a question concerning honour. Femininity is to a larger extent defined on the base of her sexual activities than masculinity, where a women's lost honour is almost always equivalent with that of a lost virginity. A maiden's personal honour reflects upon her family as well, and many times family serves as direct representations of the concept of cultural success. The consequences of having sex are generally portrayed as more dire for women than for men, where pregnancy, an uncertain future, and sometimes even death follows when they commit fornication or adultery. But

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<sup>197</sup> Sawyer, *Kvinnor och familj*, p. 44-45.

controlling one's sexuality can lead to reward, just as easily as it can result in a tragic outcome. There are several narratives where women indulge in sexual activities without being punished by kin or spouses, where female lust is not problematized or poses a threat to their honour. Overall, it seems like deceitfulness is a strategy to achieve personal success and a higher degree of agency.

Men usually never have to be concerned about the consequences of unlawful sexual activities, and they do not lose honour for having children outside of marriage, or losing their virginity. Men do have to deal with the consequences of illicit sexual activities if they are brothers or fathers of a maiden, where upholding family honour means violent interventions. However, sexuality is indeed an important component when performing masculinity. If a man does not take the active role in the sexual act, that is, if he is submissive, he might be deemed unmanly or effeminate. Showing manliness by means of sexual domination can be understood as a way of acquiring control over another person. Consequently, masculinity in the balladesque world many times seems to have issues of control at its core, and when not being able to control a woman through means of their sexuality, they resort to violence instead.

Social status can likewise be important when understanding the consequences of sexual activities. A higher social status can legitimise illicit sex, which also serves to highlight the importance of material wealth in the balladesque world. However, the impact social and marital status have on agency are very diversified, for example when observing the relationships between maidens, concubines and queens. The presence of the phenomenon of concubinage reveals the multi-faceted approach to gender relations in the balladesque world as opposed to medieval society. For young maidens who try to maintain their virginity, to become a concubine is connected to shame and equals attaining the status of a whore. On the other hand, concubines possess the agency to outmanoeuvre a queen, and are many times successful in attaining personal success.

### **2.3. Part III. Gender and violence in the balladesque world**

The second part of the investigation concluded that there is an ambiguous attitude towards the meaning of sexuality and its consequences, as well as its relation to medieval society. This part of the investigation will turn its attention towards violent practices, which can be carried out in various situations, but often occur in relation to preceding sexual activities. Here, violent practices include rape, homicide, murder, suicide, threats, and assault.

### 2.3.1. The Act of Rape

The act of rape brings together sexual activities and violence.<sup>198</sup> Since the genre is overall lacking in circumstantial detail, it can sometimes prove difficult to understand whether the crime portrayed is actually a non-consensual sexual act. In the narratives examined, there is certainly a high degree of ambiguity when it comes to sexual violence, its consequences, and the question of the raped woman's honour.

In SMB 107, the maiden Sigrid is raped by the uncle of her groom-to-be while riding in the bridal procession on their way to the wedding. When Sigrid and her new husband lie in their wedding bed, she says: "Skam få dine Brudmän wore mig intet huld / Dhe refwe sönder min Grå skind och så mit hufwud guld".<sup>199</sup> Although being raped by the groom's relative, not having her virginity intact on the wedding night results in her being disowned. The responsibility of controlling one's sexuality, and the consequences of not being able to, is put solely on Sigrid, instead of holding the uncle accountable for his actions.

But a marriage plot can replace a rape plot if the "right" man rapes a female character.<sup>200</sup> In SMB 187, a king asks a pregnant maiden in distress what has happened to her. The maiden reveals that she was deprived of her honour ("hwad feck du då för äran din"<sup>201</sup>) in exchange for a dress and a harp. She was also given a knife, and states that she wishes to plunge it into the chest of the unknown man. As it turns out, the king is the perpetrator and the narrative ends with marriage.<sup>202</sup> Likewise, in SMB 189, a maiden tells her new husband about her being raped. He becomes displeased hearing this, and bursts out that while he thought he received a maiden, he got a whore instead: "bytt bort en Mö fått en Skiöka igen".<sup>203</sup> But this narrative also ends happily, since her husband realises that it was he who took her honour. The ambiguous attitude towards sexual violence in the balladesque world is also evident in SMB 108, where the maiden Proud Hilla turns down Jöde, saying her family would not approve. In return, he rapes her on her way to church, even though she pleads not to shame her: "Hören j

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<sup>198</sup> SMB 59, 60, 61, 77, 78, 104 (attempted rape), 105 (attempted rape), 107, 130, 186, 187, 188, 189. This section is similar to a few narratives where incest was evident, more specifically, SMB 46, 52.

<sup>199</sup> SMB 3: 107, "Väna Sigrid", p. 346. Transl.: Shame on your brides' men, they did not treat me well / they ripped my cheek and took my golden crown (i.e. virginity).

<sup>200</sup> SMB 77, 187, 188, 189.

<sup>201</sup> SMB 4:2: 187, "Dankungen och guldsmedens dotter", p. 219. Transl.: What did you receive for thy honour.

<sup>202</sup> Ib. See also SMB 188, 189.

<sup>203</sup> SMB 4:2: 189, "Riddar Olle", p. 231.

Göde Gunnarsson / i görer mig ingen Skam”.<sup>204</sup> After the rape, however, Hilla’s attitude changes, and she now wishes to wed Jöde.<sup>205</sup>

According to Jansson, sexual violence in the ballads does not seem to be a violation to the woman’s integrity *per se*, rather, the risk of consequences for the woman and her family. The conflict can be solved by marriage, while the rape itself does not seem to be a devastating and horrible experience for the abused woman.<sup>206</sup> Since the ballad genre is not famous for illuminating details, it can be difficult to assess the rape as experience. But an incentive to the underlying emotional tension of being raped can be found in a couple of narratives. In SMB 186, a king forces himself inside a maiden’s bower and rapes her:

Konungen in genom dören steg  
liten Kierstin sig till wägen wred  
  
Konungen up i sängen Språng  
liten Kierstin wred åth wäggen så wrång<sup>207</sup>

Here, it is most definitely an involuntary sexual act underlined by the fact that the maiden tries to turn from him to face the wall. However, she carries out her revenge when the king has fallen asleep, since she cuts his head off with her silver knife. The ballad ends with her stating that she now can keep her maiden name. In light of Jansson’s statement, I argue this to be the closest representation of the experience of rape, where strong emotion is symbolized by her violent revenge act. Interestingly enough, her honour is restored after murdering the perpetrator. In light of medieval legislation, rape was one of the very few cases where a woman expressly had the right to the revenge killing of a man, which, under those circumstances, did not count as homicide.<sup>208</sup> Similarly, a maiden can successfully fight off rapists using violence, as in SMB 105. In this narrative, a maiden kills the king’s men after they attempt to rape her. For this, she is rewarded with a marriage to the king himself.<sup>209</sup> In these narratives, rape is something that a man does towards a woman, and serves to highlight male power, even though the act itself is a cultural failure.

But what about the male experience of rape? Their motifs are either that of the sexual act itself, or, an incentive to marry. In SMB 77, a warrior called Grimborg rapes an unwilling

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<sup>204</sup> SMB 3: 108, ”Jöde Gunnarsson och stolts Hilla”, p. 347. Transl.: Hear me, Jöde Gunnarsson / do not bring shame upon me.

<sup>205</sup> *Ib.* p. 347-348; See also SMB 3: 77, p. 111-112.

<sup>206</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 118.

<sup>207</sup> SMB 4:2: 187, ”Guldsmedsdottern som dräpte kungen”, p. 218. Transl.: The king went through the door / Little Kerstin turned to face the wall / The king took a leap into her bed / Little Kerstin turned to face the wall again.

<sup>208</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 204-205.

<sup>209</sup> SMB 3: 105, ”Lussi Lilla”, p. 325.

maiden, after which the maiden changes her mind and agrees to follow Grimborg. When lying down in the greenwoods, he asks her what she thinks about a man such as himself (“Hwad tycker min Jungfru om sådan en Man?”<sup>210</sup>). The maiden answers:

Eder wil jag hålla för Kiämpe och Man,

Som mig tog genom siu Konunga land

Eder wil jag älska Herre båld,

Skiönt j mig tagit med macht och wåld<sup>211</sup>

The sexual act leads to Grimborg being described as manly and powerful. In this way, the rape plays a part in enhancing his masculinity by reasserting his power over the maiden through sexual violence. When it comes to rape, then, the female characters are in general portrayed as powerless, while male characters are the ones who pass judgement and decide the fate of female characters.

### **2.3.1.1. Summary**

Overall, there is a blurring between the distinctions of forced and voluntary sex, and between love and violence. When a man agrees to marry the raped woman, the rape plot can easily become the basis of a romantic narrative. A woman’s agency is restricted, since it is dependent on other characters’ actions. As such, the balladesque world suggests a strong judgement on a woman’s sexuality and her honour in regards to rape. Ekholst discusses three different aspects of rape: the bleeding body, the deflowered body, and the abducted body. The first aspect underlines the woman’s physical injuries, while the other two focuses on the loss of property value for a man.<sup>212</sup> While the balladesque world does not focus on the physical injuries, it seems like it is more probable that the harsh treatment of raped women have to do with the loss of the woman’s value on the marriage market. Being raped results in lost honour, and is an insult to her husband. However, the liability of the sexual act befalls the passive woman, which underlines rape as a display of power. Of importance, however, are the narratives in which a woman kills the rapist in order to restore her honour. In those ballads, her increased agency allows her to gain some sort of personal success through revenge.

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<sup>210</sup> SMB 3: 77, ”Kämpen Grimborg”, p. 111-112. Transl.: What does my maiden think of such a man?

<sup>211</sup> *Ib.*, p. 112. Transl.: I now hold you for a warrior and a man / Who brought me through seven Kingdoms / I now hold you for a nobleman, so bold / You have taken me with power and force.

<sup>212</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 191. Here, Ekholst Carolyn Dunn’s survey of English common law and a conflation between abduction and rape in legal practice.

### 2.3.2. The Act of Homicide

As previously mentioned, homicide did not imply the same secrecy or planning as murder. In fact, violence during the Middle Ages was in many ways connected to achieving glory, or showing off social status through weapons and weapon skills, in accordance with chivalric ideals.<sup>213</sup> Since most of the ballads portray the landed aristocracy, the balladesque world is filled with knights or nobility, where carrying swords, riding on horseback and duelling through open sword-fights are very common. Homicide is the most frequently occurring type of violence performed in the balladesque world, often intimately connected to previous acts of fornication, adultery, or portrayed as an act of revenge. This act is highly gendered, since it is almost exclusively male characters that perform this type of violence.<sup>214</sup>

#### 2.3.2.1. Shamefully fleeing or fighting honourably

Homicide is often the direct consequence of illicit love affairs between a maiden and a young nobleman.<sup>215</sup> In SMB 80, the maiden and her young lover Hillerström are having a secret love meeting in the greenwoods. When Hillerström leaves, the maiden begs him to be careful and watch out for her brothers, but on his way back her seven brothers catch him up. They challenge him to fight or to flee with shame for taking their sister's virginity. Hillerström accepts a duel, kills them all with his sword, and then rides back to his lover. The ballad ends with the maiden asking Hillerström to be hers and to keep his promise of betrothal.<sup>216</sup> Hillerström proves himself to be an able fighter by committing this homicide, while the maiden's brothers try to uphold their family honour through means of violence. Honour lost to the female character implies honour being lost to her entire family. To be a honourable man is explicitly formulated; it is a matter of staying to fight or fleeing, indicating a man loses his honour when not accepting a duel. But violence also opens up a possibility for the maiden, which did not exist before, namely, she can now choose to be with her lover without interference. Consequently, violence has gained them both personal success, but cultural failure.

However, this sort of violent encounter between family and a young nobleman usually have tragic consequences if the lover fails to kill the entire family. Interestingly enough, this

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<sup>213</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 87.

<sup>214</sup> SMB, 15, 16, 28, 47, 55, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82, 85, 88, 95, 103, 104, 105, 146, 148, 149, 158, 160, 118, 119, 121, 123, 124, 126, 147, 150, 152, 165, 172, 193, 197, 198, 199, 200, 203, 204, 208, 209, 211, 216, 217, 259,

<sup>215</sup> SMB 15, 16, 80, 82, 158, 172.

<sup>216</sup> SMB 3: 80, "Ung Hillerström", p. 145. See also SMB 15, 16, 80, 82, 151, 158, 193, for violence between a male lover and the maiden's family.

consequence only occurs when the maiden interferes during the fight. When she calls out his name, or begs him to spare her father or youngest brother, this momentarily distraction results in the lover receiving a mortal wound. In SMB 15 for example, Ingeborg wants her father or youngest brother to be spared in the midst of the fight, stating he does not deserve to die in this way, which results in the lover receiving his fatal wound.<sup>217</sup> In a few types of this particular ballad, the lover kills the maiden as punishment for speaking out, and so that she will never belong to another man: “Sitt svärd han därvid ränner uti Gyllenborgs liv / Så hon ej någon annans älskarinna ej bliv.”<sup>218</sup> The maiden is portrayed as an object that belongs to him, but it also exposes interesting conflicts of loyalty, as the maiden wants her family to be spared, thus revealing her individual struggle between personal and cultural success – personal success being that fulfilling her love, and cultural success as obeying her family:

Han högg iahn flerre ihiel ähnnu  
han högg ihiel Stoltz Ingeborgs bröder siu.  
  
han giorde stoltz Ingeborg mehre qwahl  
han högg hennes eigen Fader ihiel.<sup>219</sup>

To choose between a lover and family is not certain, and getting parts of her family slain is portrayed as something negative. Even though these narratives are influenced by chivalrous and courtly ideals, these ideals are not overwhelmingly obvious. To stay and fight your opponents for the love of a maiden might be considered chivalrous, but it is not considered courtly to deflower maidens, or to kill her family. Young men never woe from a distance in the balladesque world, rather, the narrative conflict often surrounds the consequences of the physical aspects of love. In this way, similar to what Morgan has argued about English chivalric ballads, the Swedish medieval ballads underline a schism between practice and ideal of courtly love and knightly ideals.

Another type of ballad where homicide follows fornication features a more warrior-like ideal.<sup>220</sup> In SMB 76, Samsing kills fifty of the king’s men: “Hann slog i hæl fyra han slogh ij hiæl fem, han slogh ij hiæl femtiijo konungens hoffmen”.<sup>221</sup> Similarly, in SMB 77, a hero kills no less than twelve thousand warriors.<sup>222</sup> Female characters usually have a less prominent role, and the emphasise lie on homosocial bonds between males. In two of them,

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<sup>217</sup> SMB 1: 15, “Redebold och Gullborg”, p. 147.

<sup>218</sup> Ib. V. Transl.: He ran his sword through her chest / So no other man would have her as mistress.

<sup>219</sup> SMB 1: 15, “Redeborg och Gullborg”, p. 147. Transl.: He killed more than that / He killed Proud Ingeborg’s seven brothers / He added further harm on Proud Ingeborg / He killed her own father.

<sup>220</sup> SMB 76, 77, 78, 79, 103, 193. In SMB 103 and 193, however, the male protagonist is killed.

<sup>221</sup> SMB 3: 76, “Herr Samsing”, p. 105. Transl.: He struck down four, he struck down five / He struck down fifty of the king’s courtiers.

<sup>222</sup> SMB 3: 77, “Kämpen Grimborg”, p. 111.

on the other hand, the king's men defeat the warrior, and they also portray the female character more. In SMB 103, the reason for the hero Palle Bosson's quest is explicitly mentioned:

Rida skal iag i konungens gårdh,  
och vinna skal iag den möö,  
jag håller dhet för ingen kiempe vara,  
som redder är han skal dö<sup>223</sup>

To win a maiden and not to fear death is, according to this character, how he will achieve personal success. This warrior ideal is therefore dependent upon being a man amongst men, that is, proving manliness by fighting other men. Warriors are always fighting against the king, that is, the father of the maiden they are trying to elope with or marry. While personal success includes both proving physical prowess and winning a maiden, cultural success is achieved through fulfilling the warrior ideal. Interestingly, the king (who usually has a high degree of agency) is defeated in several of these narratives.

Personal success can also be achieved through being loved or desired by a female character. Remembering his heroic deed is important as well, and Palle Bosson's lover ends the entire narrative by stating "aldrig så lefver iagh dhen dag, / iag glömer herr Palles dödh".<sup>224</sup> Likewise, in SMB 193, it is mentioned that a man should die for his love. In this narrative, the maiden commits suicide after the death of her lover by setting herself on fire inside her maiden's bower.<sup>225</sup> Both heterosocial and homosocial bonds are therefore important when understanding how manliness is performed.

Several narratives solely revolve around fighting for honour, glory, or to prove one's manhood.<sup>226</sup> In SMB 165, for example, a knight called Stig fights against the king and his army. When the king demands that he takes down his banner and surrender in order to save his young life, the knight replies:

Det skall Alrigh Spörias wthi mit land,  
det iagh skall sleppa phannann wthur min egenn hand  
Det skall Alrigh spörias till vår by,  
det iagh skall sleppa phannann med skammenn till at fly<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> SMB 3: 103, "Palle Bossons död", p. 316. Transl.: I shall ride to the king's court / And win the fair maiden / I do not call him a warrior / Who fearful is of his death.

<sup>224</sup> *Ib.*, p. 317. Transl.: I will never live another day / without remembering Palle's death.

<sup>225</sup> SMB 4:2: 193, "Habor och Signild", p. 294, 296.

<sup>226</sup> SMB 28, 55, 85, 148, 150, 197, 198, 199, 200, 203, 208, 211, 217.

<sup>227</sup> SMB 4:1: 165, "Riddar Stigs fall", p. 307. Transl.: It shall never be heard in my land / That I let the banner out of my hand / Never shall it be said in our village / that I surrendered and fled with shame.

Shame is intimately connected to fleeing, and Stig rather dies than surrender. In these sorts of narratives an important part is loyalty, courage, skills in weapons and horseback riding, much in lieu with some of the knightly ideals. Closely aligned to this is the warrior ideal, which features more of physical strength. These narratives show overall similarities with the Old Norse sagas, where male protagonists fight overwhelming armies in order to prove physical strength and aggressiveness.

### *2.3.2.2. The consequences of fornication and adultery*

There are several examples in which a male character kills his betrothed, his daughter or newly wedded wife if preceded by the act of fornication.<sup>228</sup> In SMB 160, a king kills his daughter upon the discovery of her extramarital pregnancy. The maiden's lover is not present within the narrative, so here the conflict is played out solely within the family. However, after the deed is done, he comes to regret his actions: "Ack! jag har dödat mit enderste barn".<sup>229</sup> While brothers and fathers are most commonly representatives of the medieval honour system, his exclamation might be interpreted as a conflict between this and the role he has of being a father. Cultural success for him meant killing his daughter, but it seems like it resulted in personal failure. Breaking a promise between a female and a male character can also result in homicide. In SMB 124, a male character returns from a journey that has lasted eight years. Upon discovering that his betrothed has abandoned him and married a merchant only two months after his departure, he kills both the merchant and his love:

Och tafvel han drog sin bruna brand  
hand högg å stolts adelin i medjesvang  
  
och tafvel han stod och såg deruppå  
huru fostret tvingades sin moder ifrå.<sup>230</sup>

Brutally, he cuts her in the waist, and watches how the foetus is separated from its mother. Following this, however, he rides away and dies of grief, alone on an island. In the end, none of the characters involved achieve personal success, and his deed is not portrayed as positive. Similarly in SMB 126, Ingevald kills his wife on the night of their wedding, upon discovering that she is pregnant: "Her Ingevald tog sin Silf bodde Knif, / Så stack han honom i lill Cattrinas lif."<sup>231</sup> The following morning, however, he has died of grief, too. Male characters

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<sup>228</sup> SMB 124, 126, 160.

<sup>229</sup> SMB 4:1: 160, "Konung Valdemar och hans syster", p. 216. Transl.: Alas! I have killed my only child.

<sup>230</sup> SMB 3: 124, "Herr Tavel och stolts Adelin", p. 445-446. Transl.: Tavel his brand drew / he cut Proud Adelin's body in two / Tavel then stayed to view / How the foetus left its mother.

<sup>231</sup> SMB 3: 126, "Herr Ingevald dödar sin brud", p. 469. Transl.: Ingevald took his silfver plaited knife / He plunged it inside little Cattrina, ended her life.

carry out homicide as a strategy to restore honour or punish a maiden for betraying him, but they also show an ambiguity towards the concept of the price paid for achieving cultural success. Even though the maiden's agency is portrayed as limited, and her position vulnerable, neither the male nor the female characters achieve personal success.

When adultery precedes homicide, the male protagonist can end up brutally killing the wife's lover, his wife, or both of them. Sometimes, this type of homicide is almost depicted as an execution since the male protagonist usually hangs his rival.<sup>232</sup> As previously mentioned, homicide could be judged legitimate or excusable if adultery had been taken place prior to the killing, and was therefore not punishable. This is perhaps why the balladesque world offers so many aspects of the relation between love, honour, and homicide. In SMB 121, a spouse breaks into his wife's maiden's bower to find her with another man. He cuts off the head and the right hand of the intruder, and also decapitates his wife: "Her wrånge togh stålz margrete i gälle lock / hann hugg hennes huffuedh aff wedh senge stäck".<sup>233</sup>

This stands in contrast to when a male character commits adultery: it never leads to homicide. During the Middle Ages, female adultery was indeed considered far more serious than male adultery. Her male partner could be prosecuted too, but it was independent of his marital status, and the emphasis lay on the violated marriage of the woman. Officially, the Church did preach that violating a marriage with adultery was equally serious, but in practice women were punished harder for adultery.<sup>234</sup> In the balladesque world, then, the view on adultery and its consequences follow this general outline.

### **2.3.2.3. Homicide as duty**

To commit homicide can also be portrayed as a rigorous revenge act, directed towards the family as well as outsiders.<sup>235</sup> In SMB 149, Blekman is on his way back from a feast when the son of a man he recently killed turns up, stating that he wants to revenge his father: "Blekman du slogh min Fader ihiel / Jagh lährer wist at löhna tigh här".<sup>236</sup> Revenge serves as a way of restoring family honour by punishing the perpetrator, and it does not seem to matter whether the revenge is directed towards one's own kin. Similarly, in SMB 204, a mother tells a young

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<sup>232</sup> SMB 118, 121, 123, 152 (this narrative is fragmentary, but my interpretation is that it has been preceded by adultery or fornication).

<sup>233</sup> SMB 3: 121, "Herr Wonge", p. 415. Transl.: Wånge grabbed Proud Margret by her golden lock / He cut off her head on the bed made of stock.

<sup>234</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in medieval Europe*, p. 88.

<sup>235</sup> SMB 47, 88, 149, 204, 209.

<sup>236</sup> SMB 4:1: 149, "Blekman", p. 151. Transl.: Blekman, you struck my father down / I intent to reward you here and now.

man about the death of his father. She equips him with armour and a horse, and he then rides to the estate of his sister's sons. After being greeted courteously by his uncle, he replies:

Jagh pasar Ey på thett klare win  
och Ey den södte miödh  
men iagh söker Effter mine syster söner siu  
iagh will hempnas min faders död<sup>237</sup>

Fines as compensation for a slain relative is never enough in the balladesque world. Instead, vengeance is regarded as duty, which is rewarded with personal success. This becomes even more evident in SMB 209, where a mother tells her son Helleman that his father was not killed in battle, but slain with a knife. Upon hearing this, Helleman rides to the ting where he demands compensation from his father's killer. Instead of accepting to pay a fine, the father's killer takes out his sword. In the fight that follows, Helleman cuts both the head and the right hand off his enemy.<sup>238</sup> The sons of the fallen fathers usually carry out vendettas, but it is important to recognize the mother's active role here, too. In the examples above, it is she who reveals to her son the wrongful acts committed against their family. A father can also commit homicidal acts, but in those situations it is directed towards his son. In both of these cases, homicide follows when a brother has murdered his sister, or killed children he conceived with his sister.<sup>239</sup> In SMB 146, a homicide has a more realistic outcome, when the killer is deemed an outlaw: "Oluf Strångesson är een fredlöös man / och Skougen tjänar honom best".<sup>240</sup>

#### **2.3.2.4. Women and homicide**

Female characters are underrepresented in this section, and there are only two cases of homicide carried out by women. In SMB 105, the maiden Lussi kills the king's men for trying to rape her. Initially, her brother tries to protect her, but when he fails, he throws his sword to Lussi who successfully kills everyone. For this, she is rewarded with marriage to the king himself.<sup>241</sup> Through violence, she achieved personal success, and managed to keep her virginity. In the second example, an old woman kills a courtier after he has robbed her. She then takes his horse and rides to a priest, wanting to confess her crime: "Skrifta mig Präst (...)

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<sup>237</sup> SMB 5:1: 204, "Sivert Snarensven", p. 31-32. Transl.: I do not wish to drink your wine / Neither the sweet mead you provide / But I do want to know where my nephews are / I want to revenge my father's death.

<sup>238</sup> SMB 5:1: 209, "Helleman unge", p. 72.

<sup>239</sup> SMB 47, 88.

<sup>240</sup> SMB 4:1: 147, "Olof Strångeson", p. 147. Transl.: Oluf Strångeson is an outlawed man / The forrest will best serve such a man.

<sup>241</sup> SMB 3: 105, "Lussi lilla", p. 325.

jag stack ihjäl en hofman igår”.<sup>242</sup> He replies that she will end up in hell for killing a courtier – but when in hell, she bosses the devil and his companions around.

However, women can impact the narratives in other ways, serving as instigators of violence. Interestingly enough, it is the relationship between the maiden and her aunt Sofia that is featured the most in SMB 160, which was discussed above. Simonsen points out that a woman is a woman’s worst enemy in the balladesque world, since they always turn against one another.<sup>243</sup> This is not always the case, but it is true that many conflicts that highlight homosocial bonds between women clearly stress unequal power relations. A mother, stepmother or, as in this case, an aunt, often try to expose unmarried maidens to male relatives after they have committed illicit sexual activities. But this can also lead to dire consequences for the female relative, too. In the example above, the king threatens to kill his sister for accusing his daughter of fornication: “Tvy vale dig Sophia när du skall dö / Så vist som du har jugit på en friboren mö”.<sup>244</sup> If the aunt falsely accuses a maiden of fornication, this could have consequences for the maiden’s personal honour as well as family honour. Indeed, in some types of this particular ballad, Sofia is killed by being rolled in a spiked barrel – even though she was right about the illicit love affair.<sup>245</sup> When the king regrets his choice of killing his daughter, he takes it out on the instigator of violence, rather than on himself.

Mothers and elder female relatives in the balladesque world can play diverse roles. They can be mourners to dead sons, or, as above, serve as instigators of violence and thus turn completely against their sons and daughters. In SMB 148, for example, the king’s men arrive at the estate of Dalebo Jonsson. When they question his mother about his whereabouts, she initially lies and says that he is on a journey. But after they bribe her with a golden ring, she reveals that he is in fact home, which leads to Jonsson killing the king’s men.<sup>246</sup> While men actively carry out homicides, it is important to recognize this in-direct form of power performed by women.

### 2.3.2.5. Summary

Homicide is strongly connected to a male sphere of action, where violence is performed to win a maiden, carry out revenge, or uphold family honour in different ways. As Ekholst has

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<sup>242</sup> SMB 5:2: 259, ”Kärringen och hovmannen”, p. 319. Transl.: Priest, I wish to confess (...) / Yesterday, I stabbed a courtier to death.

<sup>243</sup> Simonsen, ”Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads”, p. 243.

<sup>244</sup> SMB 4:1; 160, ”Konung Valdemar och hans syster”, p. 216. Transl.: Shame on you, Sophia, indeed you shall die / If you cast on a freeborn maiden such a lie.

<sup>245</sup> *Ib.*, type F, O.

<sup>246</sup> SMB 4:1: 148, ”Herr Dalebo Jonsson”, p. 148. See also SMB 44, 76 and 77.

argued, homicide during the Middle Ages was understood as a combat “when men meet in anger”.<sup>247</sup> Masculinity is dependent on homosocial as well as heterosocial bonds: to prove that one is dominant over another man, or woman. But it does not, however, always lead to personal success, which shows an ambiguous attitude towards this form of violence. Moreover, men can be equally vulnerable when opposing a maiden’s family, revealing a struggle between personal and cultural success.

While women are generally lacking a greater possibility for agency in these sorts of narratives, they are very much a part of the situations in which homicide occurs. Since their sexuality is intimately connected to the concept of honour, women form the basis of violent practices – which perhaps becomes the most evident when they are killed after committing fornication or adultery. Medieval legislation stated that a man had the right to kill both his wife and her lover if they are caught in the act – very much in line with the balladesque world.<sup>248</sup> However, women can wield indirect power in order to achieve personal success, when they serve as instigator of violence.

### **2.3.3. The Act of Murder**

While homicide was described as a sort of open act, murders are instead carried out when other characters are in a defenceless position. Similar to homicide is, on the other hand, that this type of violence generally is preceded by another crime, such as rape or fornication. But there are also many other situations where murders take place, and the consequences that have led up to, or follow, this particular act.<sup>249</sup>

#### **3.3.3.1. The many-sided murder**

Similar to the act of homicide, murders are committed in various situations and with different motifs, motifs that sometimes are difficult to ascertain with the limited information the balladesque world offers. There are, however, a few cases when murder is more or less clearly formulated.<sup>250</sup> An interesting development can be seen in SMB 47, where three maidens on their way to church are murdered and robbed by three men. These men later show up at the maidens’ parents, trying to sell clothes that once belonged to the maidens. Upon recognizing their daughters’ garments, the father kills two out of three brothers, but when the last brother

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<sup>247</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 109, 149.

<sup>248</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 211.

<sup>249</sup> SMB 13, 34, 36, 45, 46, 47, 50, 52, 82, 88, 93, 96, 117, 120, 125, 127, 128, 129, 131, 141, 143, 151, 153, 154, 155, 157, 166, 185, 186, 193, 194, 234.

<sup>250</sup> SMB 13, 45, 47, 50, 125, 128, 131, 141, 143, 153, 154.

reveals his background they all realize the young men to be his sons.<sup>251</sup> When the perpetrators turn out to be his close kin, this presents him with a difficult moral dilemma where loyalty stands against revenge killing. However, it ends with the father building a church for the murder of his sons, and the question surrounding his daughters' deaths are not addressed. Personal success is difficult to achieve, and stands in contrast to revenge killing as part of cultural success. In SMB 153, on the other hand, a brother who murders his brother is deemed an outlaw.<sup>252</sup>

There are a number of examples of when the murders take place at a wedding feast. In SMB 128, a man called Salmon gets inebriated during the wedding feast, and consequently kills his guests and his bride. The reason for his violent action is not fully explained, as is typical for the ballad genre.<sup>253</sup> Jansson has argued that it is a triangle drama about jealousy, and that Salmon goes berserk because of the food and wine served to him by his concubines. The concubines try to eliminate each other by means of poisoning Salmon, which emphasise Salmon's innocence.<sup>254</sup> It is difficult to assess whether this is accurate or not, since the narrative is too fragmentary. However, I argue his uncontrolled violence to be an expression of unmanliness. He does not achieve personal or cultural success, since he has got no motif for his deed. Moreover, after he has performed the murders, he commits suicide.

Likewise, Ebbe Skammelsson returns home to find his betrothed Lussi married to his own brother. Following this, he splits the woman he loves in five pieces, kills his brother, gouge out the eyes of his father, and cuts off his mother's right hand.<sup>255</sup> In some types, Ebbe's brother falsely spreads the rumour of Ebbe's death, which is the reason for Lussi to marry Ebbe's brother instead. Since Ebbe's family is responsible for the changed marriage plans, it makes them victims for the scorned lover's violence too. However, Ebbe is not rewarded for this, but (depending on which type) becomes an outlaw, grieves himself to death, or becomes a pilgrim to atone for his sins. This exemplifies how the victims and the situation of the deadly violence performed affect whether the male protagonist achieves personal or cultural success. When performed in a cowardly manner, he fails on both accounts.

There are a few examples on when female characters murder other females. One widely spread and popular ballad is that of "De två systrarna" (also known as "The cruel sister")

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<sup>251</sup> SMB 2: 47, "Herr Töres döttrar", p. 175-176.

<sup>252</sup> See also SMB 4:1, 153, "Sven i Rosengård", p. 160-161.

<sup>253</sup> SMB 3: 128, "Salmon", p. 482.

<sup>254</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 106-107.

<sup>255</sup> SMB 3: 125, "Ebbe Skammelsson", p. 447-448.

known in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and of course in Scandinavia.<sup>256</sup> It begins with the elder sister pushing her younger sister into the water, after which the youngest offers increasingly valuable gifts for her sister to help her. The last gift she offers is her own betrothed, but the elder sister repeatedly answers that once she is dead, everything will belong to her anyway. A musician finds the drowned sister, and turns her into a harp. Arriving at the elder sister's wedding, he plays the harp – and the bride falls down dead, hearing her younger sister's voice in the music.<sup>257</sup> Here, the elder sister's motif for murder is explicitly explained. She is jealous of her younger sister and murder provides a strategy to obtain the material things she desires. Undeniably, this ballad does not end happily, since the eldest sister is punished for her act. In some types, she is dragged down to hell, indicating the sinful and cowardly act she has performed. The younger sister, reincarnated as a musical instrument, punishes her sister from beyond the grave, a form of indirect retribution.

Female characters are the only ones who commit murder by the use of poison. In SMB 154, a mother poisons a maiden, probably to prevent her from marrying her son.<sup>258</sup> In the other example, a mother tries to poison her stepsons with mead. She is, however, forced to drink the mead, and her scheme is revealed when she dies from her own poison.<sup>259</sup> Personal success seems hard to achieve when performing murder, and there is also a difference between male and female murder in the examples above. Female characters tend to murder in a more private sphere, while male ones murder other characters openly.

### **2.3.3.2. Murder and illicit sexual activities**

Murder can be the direct consequence of illicit sexual activities, which serves to instigate the conflict.<sup>260</sup> As previously mentioned, a common conflict is when family opposes a maiden and her lover. In one of them, SMB 82, we find a complicated chain of events. The male protagonist Hjalmer and the maiden are having a secret love meeting in the greenwoods. On his way home, the maiden's brothers catch him up and a sword fight follows. Hjalmer kills six brothers but since the youngest pleads for his life, Hjalmer agrees to spare him. However, the brother cuts Hjalmer's head off while he is sleeping, after which he rides back to his sister and reveals to her the death of her lover. As revenge, she serves him both wine and mead, waits

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<sup>256</sup> Garry & El-Shamy, *Archetypes and motifs in folklore and literature*, p. 447.

<sup>257</sup> SMB 1: 13, "De två systrarna", p. 17.

<sup>258</sup> SMB 4:2: 154, "Den lillas testamente", p. 184.

<sup>259</sup> SMB 4:2: 131, "Fru Gundela", p. 1.

<sup>260</sup> SMB 34, 82, 88, 96, 117, 120, 129, 151, 155, 157, 185, 186, 234.

until he falls asleep – and then cuts his head off with a silver knife.<sup>261</sup> All the characters involved perform violence for different reasons and in diverse circumstances. Hjalmer performs violence to defend his honour in battle and to prove fealty towards his love, while the brothers' fight to uphold family honour. Since the brother murdered her lover, she murders him in similar fashion – gaining (albeit a hollow) personal success, but cultural failure.

Similarly, in SMB 185, a maiden agrees to elope with Rymer. However, it turns out that Rymer is both a thief and a murderer. After making her promise not betray him in his sleep, he lays down to rest. But while he is sleeping she ties him up, and when he wakes up, she says that she at least did not kill him in his sleep – then quickly cuts his head off with his own sword before returning to her family.<sup>262</sup> There are several interesting premises here. Firstly, she has eloped with a man against the wishes of her family. Second, she has committed fornication, and therefore lost her honour. Thirdly, she has murdered a man in a defenceless position. However, she gets away with murder because Rymer himself is a thief and murderer. In the dynamic of the narrative, and compared to other cases where violent female characters are involved, it can also be understood as a way of restoring her individual honour by killing the man who challenges it, or has taken it. This also means she can return to her family with her honour intact:

Du ligg nu där för hundar och ramn<sup>263</sup>  
nu reser jag hem till min faders land

Du ligg nu där du simm i ditt blod  
jag rider hem en jungfru lika god<sup>264</sup>

In similar fashion, a female character can perform this act towards a male after he has raped her, even if that character is a king.<sup>265</sup> Murdering a man without honour, then, is not considered to be dishonourable. Instead, the situation in which violence is used legitimises her course of action in the examples above.

However, this is not always the case. If the murdered character has not achieved cultural failure, the female characters are not portrayed as reaching personal success in the same way. In both SMB 34 and 155, a wife murders her husband in his sleep in order to be with her

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<sup>261</sup> SMB 3: 82, "Herr Hjalmer", p. 151-152.

<sup>262</sup> SMB 4:2: 185, "Rövaren Rymer", p. 209.

<sup>263</sup> Ramn = raven.

<sup>264</sup> Ib. Transl.: Hounds and ravens will feast upon you / But I will go to back my father's realm / While you lie there, swimming in blood / I will return a maiden so good.

<sup>265</sup> SMB 186, 151 (this narrative is quite fragmentary. My interpretation is that the male protagonist rapes the maiden, after which she cuts him with her knife. On the other hand, it could be that her family has intervened.).

lover. In the first example, the murdered husband comes back to haunt her.<sup>266</sup> In the second, the lover whom she wants to be with tells her off for disobeying her lord, and that she has done a shameful act: “Skam få du stoltz Magdelijn / moth din here giöra så, (...) alldrigh skal Jagh tigh troo”.<sup>267</sup> When killing a man in this context, it serves to emphasise the rightful place of an obedient woman, subordinate to her husband or kin. By trying to reject traditional gender roles (such as that of wife) through acts of violence, it presents a threat to the social hierarchy between men and women.

Likewise in SMB 120, the concubine Kerstin stabs her lover Magnus with her silver knife, after finding out that he is about to marry another. Magnus rides back home, and is greeted by his mother who asks him why he is bleeding. Initially blaming it on a root in the forest, she soon understands what has happened and the narrative ends with his death.<sup>268</sup> Since Magnus is not a murderer or a thief, Kerstin is called false: “Och aldrig jag trodde din falskhet så stor”.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, I argue that the act of trying to hide the fact that his concubine stabbed him in his sleep is significant. In another type, his mother warns him about telling Kerstin about his up-coming marriage, and to watch out for her knife. Magnus answers: “Och jag hafver varit i kamp och i strid / Jag aktar ej min frillas kniv”.<sup>270</sup> To fear a woman’s knife and allowing him to get stabbed by her is not something he expects to be subjected to as a man who has proved himself an able warrior.

Of interest in the examples mentioned so far are the different means of conducts, which differs depending on whether a male or female character commits murder. While male characters commonly employ swords, female characters are keener on using knives and killing her victim in his sleep. During the Middle Ages, the view on murder as cowardly was in fact connected to the using of everyday tools to attack a person. A knife, for example, was considered less honourable since it was shorter, less visible, and could be used without forewarning. Swords and spears, on the other hand, were “public weapons”, which was intimately connected to a man’s identity.<sup>271</sup> In the balladesque world, then, this general view on men and women is reflected as well.

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<sup>266</sup> SMB 1: 34, “Gengångaren”, p. 484.

<sup>267</sup> SMB 4:1: 155, “Tove Slätt”, p. 201. Transl.: Shame on you Proud Magdelin / Since you treated your master so / I shall never put my trust in you.

<sup>268</sup> SMB 3: 120, “Frillans hämnd”, p. 402.

<sup>269</sup> *Ib.*, p. 402. Transl.: I never believed your falseness to be as grave.

<sup>270</sup> *Ib.*, B. Transl.: I have been in battle and to war / I do not fear the knife of my whore.

<sup>271</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 83-84.

Adultery can also lead to attempted murder, where the main focus lies on the relationship between a queen and the king's concubine.<sup>272</sup> In SMB 117, the queen discovers that the king is interested in little Kerstin. She accuses Kerstin of trying to steal her title and property, after which she sends her off to a foreign land. When the king hears about this, he sails to Karin and marries her after offering her gifts of land, jewellery, and, finally, himself.<sup>273</sup> In the other two surviving types of this ballad, the queen tries to burn Kerstin at the stakes.<sup>274</sup> I have interpreted this as an attempted act of murder, since it is my impression that the attempted murder is carried out in secret, when the king is away. However, the queen's deed is punished when the king not only marries Karin, but also kills the queen.

In a similar ballad, the queen tries to murder the concubine by convincing her male servants to burn her.<sup>275</sup> The female character is, once again, the instigator of violence, but does not carry out the deed herself. Instead, she manipulates the situation to her advantage. However, her efforts are not enough, since the king favours his concubine. The rivalry between the two women can be understood in two ways: a love dispute, and a dispute over the social status attended through marriage with a high status figure such as the king. Being a concubine does not have to mean less agency than being queen, but in this case their respective relationship to the king determines their possibility for action. Kerstin's social advancement is only realised when the king himself resolves the conflict, also through acts of violence.

### **2.3.3.3. Murder and capital punishment**

There is an ambiguity when it comes to how the murderers are portrayed, and which consequences it might lead to. But in several ballads, different medieval capital punishments are used to execute the perpetrators, which also underlines the gravity of the committed act. Mostly, murderers in the balladesque world are executed by hanging, being buried alive, broken on the wheel, or burned at the stakes.<sup>276</sup> However, these death penalties are highly gendered. For example, being broken on the wheel is something exclusively done to male characters, while being buried alive is only done to female characters.

In SMB 166, the mother of Herren Båld tells him that his wife Kerstin is a sorceress who rides on bears and wolfs. Upon hearing this, the enraged Herren Båld quickly rides back to his estate where he lets Karin write her last will before cutting her head off with a sword. Even

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<sup>272</sup> SMB 117, 129.

<sup>273</sup> SMB 3: 117, "Liten Kerstin och drottningen", p. 392-393.

<sup>274</sup> Ib. B/C, p. 393-395.

<sup>275</sup> SMB 3: 129, "Kung Valdemar och Tova", p. 483.

<sup>276</sup> SMB 36, 42, 44, 46, 52, 93, 127, 157, 166, 193, 194.

though he tries to run away, he eventually gets caught and is executed by being broken on the wheel.<sup>277</sup> By solely looking at who performs violence in this ballad, it is the male character that remains the perpetrator. However, it is rather Herren Båld's mother who actually instigates the conflict at hand. Although the reason for her actions remains implicit, my interpretation is that she does not approve of her son's choice of wife. By manipulating her son she can eliminate Kerstin, but since her son is executed for his crime, she does not achieve further personal success.

To be broken on the wheel was a capital punishment only used on men during the Middle Ages, and could be a possible punishment if a man intentionally killed his wife.<sup>278</sup> This is also suggested in SMB 157, where a male character murders his wife after she accuses him of having a concubine. For this act, he receives neither personal nor cultural success, since he is later on broken on the wheel.<sup>279</sup> The act of murder can also occur before marriage or betrothal. In SMB 127, little Lena harshly rejects Hillebrand when he wants to marry her, and in turn, he threatens to kill her. Lena compares Hillebrand's proposal equally distastefully to dirt underneath her shoes: "Intet mera acktar jag Herr Hillebrands ord / än jag acktar skarn under mina skor".<sup>280</sup> Lena does not leave her estate until nine years later, when rumour has it that Hillebrand is dead. When Lena finally leaves her home to attend church, she is attacked by her scorned suitor, who binds her to his saddle and drags her behind his horse all the way back to his estate. Arriving at his manor, Hillebrand's mother condemns his behaviour after Lena has died from her wounds.<sup>281</sup> Hillebrand is later on executed by being broken on the wheel, achieving neither cultural nor personal success. Here, Hillebrand's mother functions as a moral compass, enhancing the wrongful behaviour of her son.

Another form of execution is that of being buried alive, which only female characters endure. Interestingly enough, this is only done to handmaidens of low social status, in narratives where she stands in the way of two (fornicating) lovers to unite. In order to do this, she

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<sup>277</sup> SMB 4:1: 166, "Herren Båld", p. 308-309. 'The breaking wheel' was a capital punishment and torture device used for public executions, from antiquity into early modern times. Saint Catherine of Alexandria was believed to have been broken on the wheel, therefore this punishment is also known as the Catherine wheel.

<sup>278</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 126.

<sup>279</sup> SMB 4:1: 157, "Hustrudråpet", p. 211.

<sup>280</sup> SMB 3: 127 B, "Apelbrand och lilla Lena", p. 271. Transl.: I do not esteem the words of Hillebrand / than I value the dirt beneath my shoes.

<sup>281</sup> SMB 3: 127 B, "Apelbrand och lilla Lena", p. 271-272. The A-type has probably been mixed with another similar narrative. Since the other types show more uniformity, I chose the B-type in this particular case.

manipulates her surroundings by means of deceitfulness.<sup>282</sup> In SMB 93, it is insinuated that the handmaiden is buried alive for murder:

De lade på tärnan så ynckeligt mord,  
de satte henne qwicker i jord.

De lade på tärnan så ynckeligt straf,  
De satte henne qwicker i marck,

Sådan lön skulle hwat och en få,  
Som wille två hiertan skillja åt<sup>283</sup>

Similarly, in SMB 193, the handmaiden is buried alive for helping the king's men to defeat a man who is fornicating with the king's daughter: "J tagen nu kirstin tienest quinne / i Sätten henne quik vthi Jord / hon haff[uer] skilt migh från min dotter idag / och så min mågh Så god".<sup>284</sup> The king himself decides to execute the handmaiden since he blames the killing of his daughter and her lover on her, even though she did not kill them herself. The handmaiden's agency in relation to her lower status perhaps makes her situation more vulnerable, and such a punishment more legitimised in the balladesque world.

Sometimes, the mere allegation of murder is enough for a maiden to be executed. In all three examples, the conflict revolves around incest. In SMB 46, for example, the maiden refuses to have intercourse with her brother. Because of this, he accuses her of fornication and murder for which her family burns her at the stakes. However, after the burning she is miraculously brought up to heaven while her brother ends up in hell.<sup>285</sup> The sister-brother relationships underlines the unequal agencies of men and women – even the rumour of a woman committing murder and fornication is enough to make her own family execute her, which highlights the importance of family honour as related to a woman's sexuality and behaviour.

#### **2.3.3.4. Summary**

Murder constitutes an interesting feature in the balladesque world. Murder is an action, but an activity that is generally carried out in a more private sphere. While men were intimately connected the open act of homicide, women are overrepresented when it comes to murder. Indeed, during the Middle Ages, women were expected to commit murder to a larger degree than men because of the nature of the crime. It was a hidden, shameful and cowardly act, and

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<sup>282</sup> SMB 93, 193.

<sup>283</sup> SMB 3: 93, "Den falska tärnan", p. 266. Transl.: They said the handmaiden was guilty of murder / She was buried alive deep under / The handmaiden had such a wretched penalty / She was buried alive deep under ground / This is the reward for each and every one / Who dare separate two hearts apart.

<sup>284</sup> SMB 4:2: 193, "Habor och Signild", p. 296. Transl.: Bring Kerstin, the handmaiden / Bury her alive deep under ground / She has separated me from my daughter today / and also my son-in-law

<sup>285</sup> SMB 46, 52, 194.

since women in general were believed to behave more cowardly than men, murder was more connected to women. The balladesque world reveals an ambiguity towards female murderers. When murder is committed towards a husband or a honourable man, it is sometimes deemed unjust and a challenge to male domination – but the murderers still achieve personal success and exercise power over men. If the victim is a person of low social status, or if he has committed a heinous crime, murder can on the contrary be portrayed as a rightful revenge act. And, once again, women can exercise in-direct forms of power, by deceiving male relatives to carry out murder for them.

Male characters, on the other hand, usually commit acts of murder more openly, using swords. What becomes evident is that male characters are not supposed to murder. Since uncontrolled violence directed towards persons unable to defend themselves (according to the view on honour and violence during the Middle Ages) is cowardly, they are portrayed as dishonourable and unmanly. To mark out the cowardly use of violence, the narrative uses execution and the condemning of the crime from a female character – to single it out from situations in which violence is just and honourable. Moreover, female characters, in general, use knives and murder their opponent in their sleep, within the private sphere. They are also the only ones who attempt to murder other characters through poison. If the focus lies on homosocial bonds between women, rivalry or fear of losing ones social status is at the core of the conflict, creating power hierarchies between women, too.

Capital punishment for committing murder is evident in a number of ballads, which closely resembles the medieval understanding of the male and female body. Since the male body belonged to the open and public sphere, men were executed in public, for example by being broken on the wheel. The choice of death penalty for women was on the contrary meant to hide the female body away, which included being burned at the stake, stoned, or buried alive. Burning at the stakes also implied a strong link to purification by fire.<sup>286</sup> The female body was understood as being impure in itself, and the body of a female criminal was therefore “the pinnacle of impurity and horror”.<sup>287</sup> Interestingly enough, female characters that do carry out murder are not executed. In the balladesque world, low status characters are buried alive for accusations of murder, or wrongly accused female characters might get burned at the stakes. The latter has indications of the death of a martyr, suggested by a direct ascend to heaven.

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<sup>286</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 135, 216-217.

<sup>287</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 217.

Male characters are publicly broken on the wheel, as a direct consequence of cowardly use of violence.

#### 2.3.4. The Act of Suicide

In the balladesque world, it is the aristocracy who possess the agency of committing suicide, where it is solely connected to tragic love narratives. There are a number of ballads where true love causes the death of one, or both, of the lovers.<sup>288</sup> Similarly, there are a few other narratives where characters die from a broken heart, which here will be interpreted as a sort of suicide as well, although it is important to recognize the difference between these acts.<sup>289</sup>

An interesting development of the theme connecting violence to the triangle drama of a maiden, a lover and family can be found in SMB 172. After the king hears about duke Fröjdenborg courting his daughter, he denounces his daughter and imprisons the duke. After fifteen years, she is once again summoned before her father, since he has heard the couple still has not forgotten about each other. To prevent their love, the king kills the duke – as “Bönder slachta Fä”<sup>290</sup> – and serves his heart to the maiden. When she learns about the death of her beloved, she drinks herself to death.<sup>291</sup> Here, a higher social status implies a higher degree of agency, since the couple does not achieve personal success. However, the king comes to regret his actions after his daughter’s death, indicating he does not achieve personal success either in the end. The motif of a father or, more commonly husband, tricking his daughter or wife to eat her lover’s heart is not unusual in medieval and post medieval literature. For example, it is evident in the famous *Romance of Tristan* (1150s) and in Boccaccio’s 14<sup>th</sup> century novel *Decameron*.<sup>292</sup> Ironically, the woman’s father provides her with a pervasion of exactly what she wanted in the first place, more specifically, her lover’s heart to belong to her. Perhaps this could be understood as a way for the father to reassert his power over his daughter through a pervasion of intercourse.

There are a few ballads that portray tragic love stories, where the lovers get separated for different reasons before they take their own lives. In SMB 49, a maiden finds her dead lover by the sea front, and consequently stabs herself to death.<sup>293</sup> Abandonment can also be a cause of suicide. In SMB 138, little Lisa’s mother disowns her daughter after the discovery of her

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<sup>288</sup> SMB 49, 83, 84, 96, 108, 118, 119, 122, 128, 132, 138, 140, 145, 172, 193.

<sup>289</sup> SMB 83, 84, 108, 145, 172.

<sup>290</sup> Transl.: as a commoner slaughters kettle.

<sup>291</sup> SMB 4:2: 172, ”Hertig Fröjdenborg och fröken Adelin”, p. 9-10.

<sup>292</sup> Burgess, Brook & Poe (red.), *The old French lays of 'Igaure', 'Oiselet' and 'Amours'*. See p. 22 onwards for a survey over the 'Eaten Heart tales', p. 37 for post-medieval 'Eaten Heart tales'.

<sup>293</sup> SMB 2: 49, ”Isa lilla mö”, p. 233.

secret pregnancy, after which Lisa journeys to meet her lover Nedervall. However, she dies from giving birth to twins in the greenwoods,<sup>294</sup> and because of this, Nedervall commits suicide by plunging his sword into his chest: “Riddar Wal drager ut sit förgyllande Swärd / Då satte han Fästet alt emot en Sten.”<sup>295</sup> In a similar ballad, the maiden dies from shame after her mother has revealed the secret pregnancy. While the lover is away, she begs her mother for forgiveness, after which her heart breaks. When hearing about this, the maiden’s lover plunges his sword into his chest.<sup>296</sup> It is not uncommon for the suicide to take place at a wedding. In SMB 83, two lovers are forced to separate because of their difference in social status. When the young man comes back, it is only to see his beloved getting ready to get married. They both die of a broken heart when they look upon each other.<sup>297</sup>

Fornication is intimately connected to suicide in the balladesque world. In the examples above, neither personal nor cultural successes are achieved, and both female and male characters are almost equally vulnerable when it comes to tragic love narratives. While female characters more often has to deal with the practical consequences of illicit love affairs, that is, children or pregnancy, a male character most commonly commits suicide upon hearing of her lover’s death. However, they perform the act in different ways. While male characters plunge themselves onto their swords, female characters usually hang or grieve themselves to death. An exception is “Salmon”, in which the male protagonist commits suicide because after he has killed his bride and wedding guests.<sup>298</sup> Though not dying because of a heroic act or true love, his suicide can be understood as self-punishment for the dishonourable deed of murder.

### 2.3.5. The Act of Threat

The act of threat is not a violent action *per se* in the balladesque world. It is however an intimidation, opening up the possibility of performing violent acts of various kinds on opposing characters.<sup>299</sup> Overall, threats are predominantly used to try to submit other characters’ to the will of the perpetrator, in order to achieve personal success. With threat, then, follows a shift in power relations between the characters involved, which has the opportunity to turn abiding social hierarchies upside down.

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<sup>294</sup> In the Swedish ballad genre, giving birth to twins is a symbol for extramarital sex.

<sup>295</sup> SMB 4:1, 138, p. 70. Transl.: The knight Nedervall takes out his gilted sword / He put the hilt towards a stone.

<sup>296</sup> SMB 3: 108, ”Jöde Gunnarsson och stolts Hilla”, p. 347.

<sup>297</sup> SMB 3: 83, ”Rosea lilla”, p. 162. Also, see SMB 84, ”Herr Niklas och stolts Adelin”, p. 190-192.

<sup>298</sup> SMB 3: 128, ”Salmon”, p. 482.

<sup>299</sup> SMB 14, 33, 68, 74, 76, 77, 78, 86, 148, 163, 201, 202, 233.

### 2.3.5.1. In pursuit of fornication

Threat as an expression for male domination is one general motif with various outcomes, but it does not always lead to personal success. For example, in SMB 68, a king threatens a farmer's family so that he can enter the daughter's maiden's bower and rape her. Although succeeding in the sexual act, she, in turn, murders him in his sleep.<sup>300</sup> In a few of these ballads, the narrative revolves around a male character threatening a king in pursuit of the king's daughter. This usually happens after the male and the female protagonist have committed the act of fornication.<sup>301</sup> In SMB 77, the king's men attack a warrior called Grimborg, since he has bedded the king's daughter without permission. After killing them all (twelve thousand, to be exact), he rides to the king's estate. The king then asks Grimborg where his men are:

Hofmän dem du sände mig i går,  
De ligga slagna alla som Fåår

(...)

Sen torckar Grimborg sitt blodiga Swärd,  
Wor' du ei Konung, det wore du wärd,

Kiära min Grimborg j stillen Ehrt Swärd,  
Min Dotter skal j få, henne är j wärd,<sup>302</sup>

After proving himself a worthy warrior, he threatens the king and says that he would have killed him too, was it not for his kingship. In a similar narrative, the warrior states that his lover has gotten herself a man: "at dhu och fåt man".<sup>303</sup> These narratives are so-called heroic ballads, which overall focus on depicting the male protagonist as a hero, able to prove his manhood by means of sword fighting skills, bravery and overcoming every obstacle in his path. Threatening a king, with means and status above that of the hero, poses a challenge to the hierarchical, feudal relationship between them. However, they usually never harm the king, and during the Middle Ages the suitability of monarchy as such was never seriously questioned.<sup>304</sup> But in the balladesque world, threats of violence might serve to underline some of those societal tensions in textual representations of these relationships. Above all, threatening the king results in personal success, since the warriors are usually given the king's daughter to marry.

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<sup>300</sup> SMB 68.

<sup>301</sup> SMB 74, 76, 78, 148.

<sup>302</sup> SMB 3: 77, "Kämpen Grimborg", p. 112. Transl.: The courtiers you sent me yesterday / They lie dead and beaten like sheep / Grimborgs wiped the blood of his sword / If you were not a king, this would be your reward / Dearest Grimborg, silence your sword / I will give you my daughter, you have my word.

<sup>303</sup> SMB 3: 78, "Herr Grönborg", p. 141.

<sup>304</sup> Bergqvist, "Debating the limitations of kingship in fourteenth century Sweden", p. 69, 80-81.

### 2.3.5.2. Masculine strategies and personal success

Female protagonists can also perform this type of act, as is evident in both SMB 201 and 202. In the former, little Kerstin sets out to rescue her betrothed who has been captured by a king. Arriving at his estate, she demands to get her beloved back. In turn, the king inquires where Kerstin's army is:

Hör du liten Kierstin,  
mädan du har så spåsk ordh,  
hvar är nu dine håfmän  
som ska ta igen din fästeman.

Jag är mig 1. Fattig. Jungfru  
iak mäktar inga håfmän löna,  
men alt har iag 8000. Jungfrur,  
uppå dina vallar gröna

Hålstens landz konung,  
han såg sig om vinögat Sågh.  
han såg hvarken, himmel eller jord  
för Kierstins håfmän blå,<sup>305</sup>

Kerstin has an army of eight thousand maidens dressed as knights. When the king realizes this, he lets her betrothed go. That she moves outside the traditional boundaries of her gender becomes evident in the final verse: "tacka liten Kierstin, som tog på sig manna sinn".<sup>306</sup> She is not assumed to either have an army, or to be able to back up her threats with violent action. Furthermore, to be able to accomplish this she needed to employ a man's mind. While this indicates that a female character indeed has the agency to force a king to surrender, it still becomes evident that it not expected of a woman. Likewise, in SMB 202, a sister rescues her brother from the dungeons. She asks him how he was imprisoned, and when he says he was imprisoned by 30 of the king's men, she replies:

Iag står här en Möö och icke en Man  
de skulle icke binda min ena hand,

Iag är ingen man, men iag är en Qwinna  
trettiyo Hoffmän skulle mig icke binda<sup>307</sup>

In other versions, she kills the king's men and then goes on to threaten the king himself.<sup>308</sup> Finally, in SMB 163, a maiden dresses as a knight in armour and threatens to burn the king's

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<sup>305</sup> SMB 5:1: 201, "Fästmö befriar fästman", p. 14. Transl.: Hear me, little Kerstin / You use such bold words / But where are your courtiers / To bring back your betrothed / I am a maiden poor / I cannot pay for arms / But I do have 8000 maidens / Upon your lands / And the king looked out / with eyes wide open / He could not see the sky or lands / for Kerstin's courtiers, dressed in blue.

<sup>306</sup> *Ib.*, p. 14. Transl.: Thank little Kerstin who put on a manly mind.

<sup>307</sup> SMB 5:1: 202, "Syster befriar broder", p. 16. Transl.: I stand here, a maiden and not a man / They could not even bind me by the hand / I am no man, but indeed a woman / Thirty courtiers could never bind me.

<sup>308</sup> *Ib.*, type B, C, Fa.

lands and the king himself unless he releases her beloved.<sup>309</sup> Female characters can adopt a masculine strategy by using typical masculine attributes, such as armour, and swords, in order to increase her agency. Personal success, then, can be achieved without the help of other (male) characters, and threats are employed to achieve personal success. Simonsen has also discussed cross-dressing of male and female characters in Danish ballads. She points out that this phenomena is more likely to lead to reward when a women acts like a man, than men generally do when attempting to embrace feminine qualities or activities.<sup>310</sup> That unsuccessful men might slip into femininity, whereas successful women can encroach on masculinity, suggests a hierarchy of systems. But it is to be expected from a society that privileges the male. Embracing feminine features would effeminate a man, but a woman is never threatened with a sub-feminine status by adapting male strategies. However, during the medieval period, female cross-dressers were perceived as a threat towards the social hierarchy between men and women. Since clothes and attributes were important symbols for gender identity, transgressing these boundaries could have dire consequences.<sup>311</sup> In Nordic medieval law, women were forbidden to wearing men's clothes and weapons.<sup>312</sup> In light of this, the balladesque world offers an interesting aspect to this: women venturing into a traditional masculine sphere are accepted, and not punished. On the contrary, adapting a male strategy provides her with the means to achieve personal success.

Finally, there is one example on when a female character threatens another female character. In SMB 1, a deceased mother comes back from beyond the grave to threaten her husband's new wife, her children's stepmother. The dead mother says that unless the stepmother starts treating the children better, she will be dragged down to Hell: *Och vill du ej blifva dem en Moder så from / J Hälfvitet skall du få din dom*".<sup>313</sup> After this, the stepmother changes her ways, and the deceased mother achieves personal success. While her husband is present within the narrative and bears witness to his new wife's neglect, he does not intervene. Taking care of children could be understood as a female sphere of activity, which restricts the agency of the husband. Indeed, women in general were more connected to household duties during the medieval period, and in contrast to the previous examples, this narrative equivalent personal success with cultural success.

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<sup>309</sup> 4:1: 163, "Riddar Malkolm fångslas för häststöld", p. 245.

<sup>310</sup> Simonsen, "Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads", p. 246-247.

<sup>311</sup> Ney, *Drottningar och sköldmör*, p. 63-65.

<sup>312</sup> Ney, *Drottningar och sköldmör*, p. 113-114.

<sup>313</sup> SMB 1: 33, "Styvmodern", p. 454. Transl.: If you do not behave like a devout mother / You shall be punished in hell.

### 2.3.5.3. Summary

Conclusively, by means of threats men and women both reinforce as well as challenge traditional social roles. Women can increase their agency by adapting the masculine ideal of the warrior or knight in order to achieve personal success. This strategy always include embracing male symbols, such as swords and armour, thus emphasising the importance of material equipment as signifiers of male and female attributes in the balladesque world. It also provides women access to a public sphere, but significantly, this is legitimised by their masculine appearance. When men perform the same action, they do not have to take on a role. Threat can likewise change the power hierarchy between royalty and nobility, where physical prowess provides warriors with the means to achieve personal success.

### 2.3.6. The Act of Assault

Assault can be described as a form of lesser violence directed towards another character. In the balladesque world, it is characterized by the use of minor blows and hits, in sharp contrast to homicide or murder, where the use of weapons is evident.<sup>314</sup> In medieval Sweden, this form of violence might have been the most common crime.<sup>315</sup> Even though this category contains a low number of ballads, it does, however, reveal interesting power hierarchies in relation to family and social status.

#### 2.3.6.1. Fornicating maidens and useless husbands

When a female character assaults another character, it is either a mother hitting her daughter, or a wife beating her husband. In SMB 92 and 138, a mother hits her daughter on the cheek for discovering about the maiden's illegitimate child.<sup>316</sup> Her mother asks her why milk is emanating from her breasts ("vhi rinner hvita mjölken ur bröstena din"<sup>317</sup>), and the maiden answers that it is but wine:

Det är väl ingen mjölk fast eder tyckes så  
det är väl det vin som vi drack igår

Och modern slog dotren på blekan kind  
skall du så ljuga för modern din<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> SMB 92, 117, 138, 241, 242, 244, 246.

<sup>315</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 108.

<sup>316</sup> SMB 4:1: 138, "Lisa och Nedervall", p. 70.

<sup>317</sup> Transl.: Why is milk emanating from your breasts.

<sup>318</sup> SMB 3: 92, "Rosilias sorg", p. 256. Transl.: It is not milk, whatever you think may / I am sure it is the mead we drank yesterday / And the mother struck her daughter on her pale cheek / How can you treat your mother with such deceit.

The relationship between a mother and a maiden is, overall, intimately bound to questions of the maiden's – and thus, the family's – honour. Here, violence serves to mark out two things. Firstly, the disgraceful act of the maiden's behaviour, and secondly, the social hierarchy within the family structure. Whereas women are generally subordinated to their husbands or male relatives, the daughter in this example is also subordinated to her mother, and to strike her is a manifestation of that notion. Maidens are often subjected to remarks from the lover's mother, too. In SMB 92, the narrative continues with the maiden arriving at king Olof's estate. There, the king's mother wonders what the king might want with such a poor maiden: "hvad vill han med en så fattig jungfru".<sup>319</sup> Making remarks about the social status of a maiden implies that she is not good enough for her son, which once again relates to how mothers can be portrayed as highly responsible for upholding family status and honour.

In SMB 117 and 242, a male character hits his wife on the cheek. These situations are completely different from the ones above. In the first narrative, a king hits his queen after she sent his concubine away without his permission. Violence serves to emphasise the queen's wrongful act, which also can be said to reaffirm the hierarchy between men and women. Her role as an obedient wife is also underlined by the fact that her husband is referred to as her lord: "Jag talte intet annat med er Herre i går".<sup>320</sup> The second example in similar fashion confirms this hierarchy, while stressing that a woman's rightful place is in the household, performing household duties.<sup>321</sup>

Two of the ballads within this category are rather different. In SMB 241, a husband carries out traditional duties normally connected to women during the medieval period: sweeping, bringing eggs, and milking cows. Finally, his own wife beats him up when tripping over a pile of excrements.<sup>322</sup> In the other ballad, a female character beats her husband after he has sold their only cow for a violin.<sup>323</sup> Cultural success in this context would mean that the man acts like the dominant leader of the household, so in light of this, he achieves either personal or cultural success. Female characters hit their spouses for being worthless, asserting power through assault, which might appear to propose a challenge to the unequal relationship between male and female characters so often encountered in the balladesque world.

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<sup>319</sup> SMB 92 : p. Transl.: What would my son want with such a maiden poor.

<sup>320</sup> SMB 3: 117, "Liten Kerstin och drottningen", p. 392. Transl.: I did not speak about such things with your lord yesterday.

<sup>321</sup> SMB 242, "Käringen på bröllop", p.

<sup>322</sup> SMB 241, "Håkan Hök", p.

<sup>323</sup> SMB 244, "Per spelman", p.

Lastly, there is an example on a male character assaulting a king in SMB 246. A servant called Truls is displeased with the wage paid by the king, who in turn argues that he does not deserve more: “Ingen löön tu hafwer förtient”<sup>324</sup>. In the end, he once again arrives at the king’s estate, where he grabs the king by the beard and throws him against the wall: “Truls han nappa i Hiettens skägg / han slog honom emoot hwar femte vägg”.<sup>325</sup> In the B-type, Truls exclaims that everyone who gives lousy pay deserves such punishment: “Sådant straff sku alle wäl få / Som tienarens löön förhålla må”.<sup>326</sup> The assault functions as to mark out the king’s unjust payment, which turns the social hierarchy upside-down.

These three examples of jocular ballads possess a way of challenging male and female ideals, as well as social hierarchies. Female characters do have an increased agency in these narratives, since they dominate their male counterparts. Otherwise, assault serves to emphasise and strengthen the hierarchy between men and women, while also connecting female characters to the private sphere.

### 2.3.7. Conclusion, Part III

Why do men and women carry out acts of violence in the balladesque world? As we have seen, violence in this part of the investigation is carried out in many different situations, and is often intimately connected to sexuality and questions of honour. However, these concepts mean different things, for different characters, and in diverse situations. While it is important to remember that the medieval patriarchal framework surrounding the balladesque world has an overall influence on these constructions, within the narratives there is also room for gender performances that both abide by this, as well as challenge it.

There are many situations in which women are involved in situations that emphasise their vulnerability in relation to violence. In these narratives, much like the view summed up by Symons, domestic ballads suggest a need to contain femininity and assert masculine power. Brothers and fathers are mostly representations of the medieval honour system, where their duty is that of upholding honour by means of violence. Men kill women for not being virgins, or execute close female kin by mere accusations of murder and fornication. Many narratives enhance the warrior ideal, where fighting can serve as bonding between two men, or to prove manliness through physical prowess.

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<sup>324</sup> SMB 5:2: 246, ”Truls med båggen”, p. 127. Transl.: You have not deserves such reward.

<sup>325</sup> Ib. Transl.: He took a hold on the king’s beard / And threw him into the walls.

<sup>326</sup> Ib., Bb, p. 128. Transl.: This is the reward for each and every one / Who gives lousy pay.

However, men can also be portrayed as vulnerable. Just as women are punished for disobeying kin, men often fail to achieve personal success when the narrative revolves around love. In this regard, both men and women are equally disadvantaged. Likewise, there is an anxiety of being deemed effeminate and cowardly. Even though violence could function to dominate others, the balladesque world shows an overall strong judgement on men who perform violence in the wrong way. Here, there is certainly a difference between conducting open, public violence, and non-public. Homicide, for example, strongly connects men to public violence. Murder, on the other hand, is portrayed as a cowardly act, and leads to capital punishment for men. Women are in general more bound to a non-public sphere, where murdering characters constitute a way of achieving personal success, and in contrast to men, they can achieve personal success through this.

Women are also portrayed in various ways in heterosocial as well as homosocial bonds. As Praestgaard Andersen has suggested, there are examples on rather passive women with very restricted agency in contrast to women who are portrayed as more powerful.<sup>327</sup> But it also varies depending on the social status and marital status. Mothers, for example, are often in control of their surroundings and instigate conflict. Similarly, female agency does not always have to lead to dire consequences, as been suggested. There are, as mentioned, situations where women murder or kill both men and women without experiencing personal failure. Another successful strategy is the in-direct form of exercising power over other characters by using deception as a strategy. And, unlike men and effeminacy, women are never threatened with a sub-feminine status when employing masculine strategies as to increase their agency.

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<sup>327</sup> Præstgaard Andersen, *Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser*, p. 9.

### 3. Summarizing discussion

#### 3.1. Moody Men and Malicious Maidens

The aim of this thesis has been to examine how gender and gender relations are expressed in the Swedish medieval ballad. By exploring the actions of the characters in the balladesque world, i.e. the ballad genre's intrinsic universe, it focused on understanding how masculinity and femininity was negotiated through the action and inaction of the characters. Significantly, this thesis was not exclusively dedicated to a particular ballad category, but looked beyond the traditional categorization. The theoretical framework was that of *performativity*, mainly drawing from gender theory as developed by prominent scholar Judith Butler, where the actions of characters were understood to create gendered patterns of behaviour. Furthermore, by using *agency*, this thesis also considered how the possibility for action could be related to factors such as sex, family relations, marital status and social status.

Of importance was also to connect gender performativity and agency to power. Here, Wollstadt's theoretical model of *personal and cultural success or failure* was employed to assess the consequences of actions. Personal success was reaching personal goals or averting harm, while cultural success was meeting existing norms and expectations, thus connecting the balladesque world to the late medieval society. Power was understood as both the ability to affect other character's agency, and as the ability of characters to achieve personal success. In other words, the actions performed by men and women, as well as the consequences of these actions, were understood at an individual and on a cultural level. By approaching the ballads in this way, it provided an opportunity to estimate the multi-faceted approach that the balladesque world has in relation to medieval norms.

Narratives demonstrating violent practices and sexual activities served as locus points around which gender was analysed. The quantitative part of the investigation demonstrated that the acts themselves were gendered, while the second and third part put these actions into their narrative context. As the investigation disclosed, the balladesque world did not offer a coherent, ideal form of masculinity and femininity. Instead, gender and gender relations were expressed in various ways, both aligned with and opposed to medieval norms. Transgressing medieval expectation of how men and women were supposed to act suggests that the balladesque world provides a problematized picture of gender in relation to violence and sexuality. Furthermore, masculinity and femininity are not analogous systems, but they co-exist and impinge on each other. Below, I will further discuss my results in relation to how

previous research has debated gender and power in the ballad genre. Moreover, I will also consider how the ballad genre represents and mediates medieval beliefs on gender.

### 3.2. The balladesque world and medieval Scandinavia

The ballad genre was affected by the historical context in which it was formed, and the narrative content indeed reflects and problematizes societal structures. Even though previous research has deemed the genre itself to be of medieval origin, it has also been concluded that over 500 years of oral tradition has most likely changed certain elements of every ballad. The *stability* of the narrative content relates to the stability of the peasant environment, in which the ballads were mainly transmitted, which went through only slow and gradual change from the late medieval period to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the *variability* of the narrative content has to do with oral tradition as such. Consequently, within each ballad there is the possibility of multiple layers of meanings.<sup>328</sup>

Moreover, the balladesque world is a fictive world, grounded in social reality, but a fictive universe nonetheless, characterized as a distinct genre. Åkesson has argued that historians cannot link ballads directly to a medieval legal system or societal structures, since the ballad world is not equivalent to a historically authentic society. But she does, however, stress that the narratives demonstrate societal structures and beliefs that would have been familiar to those listening to, or singing, these songs.<sup>329</sup> Other historians have, on the other hand, made more direct connections to medieval society. Præstgaard Anderson has claimed that the ideals about gender evident in the Danish chivalric ballads have remained relatively untouched, compared to what we already know about medieval Denmark and other medieval literature of that time period.<sup>330</sup> There is indeed uncertainty in regards to how to bridge the gap between fictive stories and social reality.

I argue that the medieval ballad genre as a fictive source should be viewed as a possible source for historical research. To once again stress the opinion of Myrdal, an inclusive attitude towards problematic material, such as the ballad, involves the acceptance of a certain degree of uncertainty. A method employed by me to ensure a higher degree of reliability was to create an overall picture around the themes of sexuality and violence practices. I did not only focus on a few ballads, but examined the whole genre of the Swedish medieval ballad both from a quantitative, as well as qualitative, perspective. Being fully aware of the

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<sup>328</sup> Jansson, *Den levande balladen*, p. 33-35; Åkesson, "Mord och hor", p. 5-6.

<sup>329</sup> Åkesson, "Mord och hor", p. 7-8.

<sup>330</sup> Præstgaard Andersen, *Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser*, p. 9-10.

complexity of the material at hand, the ballad genre provides an opportunity to generate new perspectives on medieval society.

In the introduction to this thesis, I emphasized the Swedish ballads' medieval origin and the significance of understanding the genre as *performance*, that is, how the genre's survival was dependent upon its function as a social practice. I also maintained that the balladesque world had the opportunity to convey *ideas about gender*, where the characters in the narratives performed gender through their actions. In light of my investigation, I argue that the ballad genre can represent and mediate *medieval ideas about gender*. Comparing my results to the late medieval period in Sweden, there were indeed interesting connections and discrepancies to medieval society in regards to the attitude towards sexuality and violence.

### **3.3. Performing gender in the balladesque world**

#### **3.3.1. Gendered spheres of activity – passivity and activity**

Masculinity in the ballads has previously been associated with activity in a public sphere, contrasted with a passive femininity in a non-public sphere. I would like to nuance this picture. Violence and sexuality are relative concepts; their respective meanings are created through the narrative and gain further significance in relation to a medieval societal context. Actions such as violent practices and sexual activities are inscribed with meanings that can alter depending on the situation in which they are carried out. When it came to actions in the balladesque world, they did indeed display a general separation between male and female spheres of actions. For example, the open act of homicide constituted a male arena while the non-public act of murder was associated with women. Violence was repeatedly directed towards women, who were frequently given a more passive role in the narrative.

Performing different actions certainly displays power, while passivity can imply that a man or a woman is victimized as a consequence. However, the link between action and power, and passivity and victimization is not always applicable. Women could employ a sort of indirect power in order to make men perform those acts, and women do manage to exercise power both within a non-public and public sphere. Actions carried out within a non-public sphere, such as murder, still provides a way of negotiating power relations. However, venturing into a “masculine” sphere did not make women less feminine, while there is a constant anxiety among men about slipping into passivity and be deemed effeminate. This, of course, suggests a hierarchical system of gender. But it is important not to make broad generalizations that suggest activity is always equivalent of male empowerment, and passivity is the equivalent of

female dis-empowerment. A nuanced understanding of men and women in the balladesque world includes addressing how power can work in different ways. Of importance is also to understand how these gendered acts can be interpreted by comparing them to the medieval view on the elusive concept of honour.

### **3.3.2. A question of honour**

The balladesque world's patriarchal framework is hard to overlook. Medieval society was based on codes of honour, honour that individuals and families strived to uphold. The ballad scholar Colbert has argued that while male honour in the ballads is bound by context, usually related to kinship and fealty, female characters uphold their honour by being chaste.<sup>331</sup> Indeed, honour is crucial to understand violence as well as to comprehend the attitude towards sexuality. It is true that there is a strong connection between women, virginity and honour. In numerous ballads, a woman's lost virginity is explicitly described in terms of lost honour. Moreover, men performed violence to uphold individual or family honour by punishing a female relative, or a maiden's lover, while homicide was intimately connected to revenge acts in order to restore honour. Of importance is to recognize that honour is not a static state of being, rather, something that can be gained, lost, and restored. It is also highly contextual, and the attitude towards the significance of individual honour is indeed very diverse. Consequently, even though medieval honour codes are very important to understand why men and women perform certain acts, honour does not prevent characters from carrying out acts that challenge these norms – that is, they relate to cultural and personal success or failure differently.

### **3.3.3. The meanings of cultural and personal success or failure**

Wollstadt's theoretical model was employed to find insight into the consequences of characters' actions, and how their actions related to medieval societal norms and expectations. The overall structural framework of the balladesque world is patriarchal, and in this respect it indeed recognizes a male system of hegemony. Perhaps a combination of personal failure and cultural success is to be understood as the strongest confirmation of medieval gender roles, since it emphasizes the consequences of not abiding societal expectations. In contrast, personal success and cultural failure would instead propose a challenge to societal expectations. By using cultural and personal success or failure, I have illuminated that men and women inside the narrative relate to the structural framework in many different ways.

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<sup>331</sup> Colbert, *The birth of the ballad*, p. 19-21.

Through Wollstadt's model, power and control can be viewed differently in the narrative and it also provides the opportunity to further problematize domination, subordination, and the roles of men and women. Power is not only the ability to gain influence or dominate another character, but it can also be understood as achieving a personal goal. It is through each character's individual agency within the narrative that gender relations are established, negotiated, and re-negotiated. Consequently, this thesis has highlighted the ambiguous attitude of gender roles in the balladesque world.

### 3.4. Performing femininity

#### 3.4.1. Virgin, concubine, or whore?

In the balladesque world, women are maidens, mothers, lovers, warriors, daughters, and sisters. The balladesque world shows overall similarities with medieval society in that sexuality often is intimately connected to constructions of femininity, depending on female honour as connected to the ideal of chastity.<sup>332</sup> Likewise, ballad scholars such as Åkesson and Simonsen have highlighted how maidens are frequently portrayed as passive and helpless, referring to narratives where women are victimized by violent, male displays of power. Although they focus solely on a minor selection of chivalric ballads, the same notion has been discerned in my investigation as well. Furthermore, women tend to be portrayed as passive in the sexual act itself. In the words of Karras, sex is something one *does* to another, and in the balladesque world, a woman's virginity is something that a man actively can take away from her. Women are frequently subjected to the agency of men, but also to the agency of elder female relatives. When women are in another stage of the medieval life cycle, that of keeper of the household, they many times functions as representations of cultural success. A part of this role is to punish younger women who jeopardize family honour.

Ekholst has argued that medieval legislation does not put that much emphasis on the loss of virginity.<sup>333</sup> Likewise, honour does not have to be of importance to every woman in the balladesque world. There are plenty of examples when women do not experience the consequences of breaking societal norms when having illicit love affairs. The ambiguous attitude towards women's sexual behaviour can be exemplified by the tension between the status of virgin, whore, and concubine. There is definitely an anxiety towards being degraded from virgin to whore when a woman has lost her virginity. But the presence of concubines

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<sup>332</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 172-173.

<sup>333</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 162.

also suggests that having extramarital sex does not have to be problematic. In fact, concubines have a fair amount of agency in comparison to other female characters. In this way, Swedish ballads might reflect the conflict in Scandinavia aroused by the Church's views and regulations that were in contrast to the previously prevailing norms in Sweden.<sup>334</sup> This has also been suggested in Præstgaard Andersen's survey of the two different types of women portrayed in Danish chivalric ballads. The ballad genre represents both wilful concubines in some narratives, while they portray vulnerable maidens in others. In the latter group, sexuality is demonized and women are sinful, which Præstgaard relates to how the Church came to influence the ballad genre in the later Middle Ages.<sup>335</sup> Similarly, in Swedish ballads, concubines can be equalled to an informal wife in some narratives, just as easy as they can be compared to a whore in others.

### 3.4.2. Transgressing boundaries

Violence plays a part in the construction of femininity as well. We encounter maidens who not only restore or defend their honour by using violence, they also rescue other characters or employ violence as a strategy for personal success in other ways. The most obvious act of violence as a strategy for personal success was murder, which provided women with an opportunity to restore their honour, to carry out revenge, or punish a man who wants to marry another. Even though the performance of this act would be deemed cowardly according to the medieval view on murder as a non-public, devious act, it does not lead to personal failure for the women in question. Within a non-public sphere, women have increased agency and the opportunity to attain power over men. In light of this, I wish to nuance the view Symons has suggested, namely that women's increased agency does not have to lead to dire consequences.<sup>336</sup>

Women could also adopt masculine strategies in order to achieve personal success, which was most evident in narratives where maidens performed the act of threat. However, it was explicitly expressed that they took on a masculine identity in order to do this, by equipping themselves with male coded weapons and armour, participating in open combat, and employing a "man's mind". Simonsen has argued that women can act like men and get away with it in a few Danish ballads, while the consequences for men who transgress gender boundaries are more severe. Women can cross-dress, but men cannot dress themselves as

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<sup>334</sup> Sawyer, *Kvinnor och familj i det forn- och medeltida Skandinavien*, p. 40-41.

<sup>335</sup> Præstgaard Nilsen, *Kvindeskildringen i de danske ridderviser*, p. 16-17, 20-22.

<sup>336</sup> Symons, "Ballads", p. 58.

women without getting punished for it.<sup>337</sup> She does not, however, discuss how this in itself suggests a hierarchical system of gender, grounded in the medieval view on men as dominant and women as subordinate. If a man transgressed into a female sphere of action, he could be deemed less of a man – that is, effeminate. When women in the balladesque world transgress into a male sphere of activity, such as open combat, she does not risk being deemed as less of a woman.

Women have another strategy to achieve personal success, and that is to manipulate other characters into doing their bidding. By doing this, women can indulge in sexual activities, or influence a close male relative to perform violence. Women can play the active role in the sexual act, creating a power shift in relation to the oppositional pair of passivity-activity. Here, women are taking something away from men, namely, their manliness. In light of this, I would argue that even though men and women generally perform violence to a different degree and in various ways, women have opportunities to be dominating – over other women, as well as over men. Instigating conflict or using deception remain important strategies for attaining power for women in the balladesque world.

### 3.5. Performing masculinity

#### 3.5.1. Male expectations

In the balladesque world, men are lovers, fathers, sons, brothers, knights, and warriors. Similar to how femininity can be expressed, the construction of masculinity is very diverse as well. It is important to recognize masculinity as created through homosocial as well as heterosocial bonds. As Beattie has argued, an integral part of masculinity during the medieval period was to show domination over both women and men, where masculinity was something to be achieved, not given.<sup>338</sup> This is especially true for the balladesque world. Acts of violence were in general intimately connected to men in the ballads, where physical prowess, courage, and skill in sword fighting were displayed in order to dominate other men and women. As Symons has argued, many ballads suggest a need to contain femininity and assert masculine power.<sup>339</sup> In my view, this generalization is indeed supported in this investigation as well. Fathers, brothers, and husbands are frequently representations of cultural success, and aim to punish women for transgressing the normative limits put on them by medieval society. This

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<sup>337</sup> Simonsen, "Gender and power in Danish traditional ballads", p. 246-247.

<sup>338</sup> Beattie, "Gender and femininity in medieval England", p. 158-159. See also, Karras, *From boys to men*, p. 10-11.

<sup>339</sup> Symons, "Ballads", p. 58-59.

becomes evident in narratives where women fornicate, or when husbands kill their wives and lovers for committing adultery.

When it comes to sexuality, men are commonly portrayed as being the active partner who initiates sexual contact, or actively takes a woman's virginity from her. In contrast to women they do not have to deal with the same consequences of illicit sexual activities, since a man's lost virginity does not imply shame and the loss of honour. In this way, the sexual act is definitely a display of power, which perhaps becomes most apparent in narratives portraying rape. There is an underlying sexual aggressiveness inherent in the balladesque world where taking a woman (occasionally by force) is sometimes equivalent to becoming, or acting like, a man. Consequently, there is definitely a connection between violence, power, and masculinity.<sup>340</sup> However, even though men do perform these acts to show dominance, it does not always lead to personal success. There are many examples on when violence does not correspond to a positive masculinity. On the contrary, masculinity can be understood as unstable.

### 3.5.2. The unstable masculinity

Control seems to lie at the heart of masculinity in the balladesque world. Men control other men and women through means of violence, or control women through their sexuality. When men cannot control a woman's sexuality, they might resort to violence instead. However, as the investigation concluded, there are many cases where violence does not align with either cultural, or personal, success. Within the narratives there is a constant risk of appearing weak or cowardly by losing that very same control. Therefore, it is not as simple as stating that performing violence *is* equivalent to being a man in the balladesque world.

Karras has suggested that medieval masculinity was not only dependent on the subjection of women, but rather, that being a man was to not be seen as a woman.<sup>341</sup> This can be understood as relatively true for the balladesque world. When a man commits murder, for example, he definitely deviates from the cultural expectation of how to behave as an honourable man, in contrast to performing homicide as a part of feuding. Men who perform this act are severely punished: they are the only ones who are subjected to capital punishment. The balladesque world judges this act harshly by hanging them or breaking them on the wheel. I have suggested that this has to do with the understanding of murder as a cowardly

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<sup>340</sup> Ekholst, *A punishment for each criminal*, p. 82.

<sup>341</sup> Karras, *From boys to men*, p. 10-11.

act, an act that mainly women were expected to carry out. Simonsen has stated that men cannot transgress a male sphere of activity without suffering consequences.<sup>342</sup> If one understands the act of murder as connected to a female sphere of activity, this is definitely true. Likewise, the use of uncontrolled violence towards men or women unable to defend themselves rarely leads to personal success for men. A man who commits acts of violence that are considered dishonourable, can be portrayed as unmanly.

Passivity can also lead to a man being deemed effeminate, which becomes clear when women control men in different situations. Several so-called jocular ballads, for example, turn the social hierarchy between men and women upside down when women take on the active role, and men the passive, in relation to sexual activities. Scholars such as Solberg and Olofsson have suggested that these narratives display contradictory power plays in heterosexual relationships, and that they were a part of a medieval culture of laughter.<sup>343</sup> However, it is important to recognize that even though jocular ballads might challenge female and male roles, they would not be considered to be humorous unless their content related to the overall patriarchal medieval society. In other words, the “joke” would not be recognizable without norms and ideals to disrupt. However, it is important to underline how men can be vulnerable in other situations, when they are not controlled by women. This is especially evident in tragic love ballads where young men face the maiden’s family. Men commit suicide or grieve themselves to death, displaying a situation where men and women are perhaps equally disempowered when opposing representations of cultural success.

### 3.4. Final refrain

The jovial individuals who were joining hands and performing a ballad dance on the picture of the front-page picture give testimony to the ballad as a social practice during the Middle Ages. Throughout the medieval period, men and women sung ballads as entertainment and pastime on various occasions and in diverse contexts. Perhaps these particular men and women on the fresco sang a ballad about a moody man who were longing for his true love, but ended up plunging himself onto the hilt of his own sword when he was not able to marry her. Or maybe about the malicious maiden who murdered the man to whom she should have remained loyal. What is certain, however, is that these ballads spread ideas about gender relations that both conformed to, and problematized, existing norms in medieval society. It would be of interest to future ballad research explore how these meanings changed over time

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<sup>342</sup> Simonsen, “Gender and power in Danish medieval ballads”, p. 246-247.

<sup>343</sup> Byrman & Olofsson, *Om kvinnligt och manligt*, p. 99, 109, 115; Solberg, *Den omsnudda verda*, p. 91.

and compare this to the social context in which they were transmitted. It is important to recognize the overall patriarchal framework of the balladesque world, but also how men and women in the narratives constantly negotiate and re-negotiate issues of gender and power.

## 4. Sammanfattning

Syftet med den här uppsatsen har varit att undersöka hur genus och genusrelationer uttrycks i svenska, medeltida ballader. Genom att förstå karaktärernas handlingar som konstituerande för genuskonstruktioner har uppsatsen kunnat visa hur mäns och kvinnors handlingsmönster medfört ett skapande såväl som omförhandlande av maskulinitet och femininitet. Att diskutera relationen mellan balladvärldens genuskonstruktioner och det senmedeltida samhället har även inneburit att fokus lagts på huruvida balladerna reflekterar eller utmanar medeltida normer. Frågeställningarna har varit:

- Vilka handlingar realiseras i balladerna, och av vilken karaktär?
- Hur interagerar kvinnliga och manliga karaktärer med varandra?
- Hur påverkas karaktärernas handlingar av deras sociala status, familjerelationer och civilstånd?

Utgångspunkten var inte att söka efter en ideal, sammanhängande bild av maskulinitet och femininitet, utan snarare att undersöka de många olika sätt som genus uttrycks på och omförhandlas. Av betydelse har varit att undersöka hela balladgenren istället för att koncentrera sig på enskilda balladkategorier. Sexualitet och våld fungerade som noder kring vilka genusrelationer undersöktes, två teman som även tidigare forskning har framhävt som väsentliga för balladgenren i stort. Av de sammanlagt 263 bevarade svenska ballader har den här uppsatsen berört 137 av dem, där 127 ballader innehöll våld medan 71 ballader innefattade sexuella aktiviteter. Handlingarna kategoriserades sedan efter brott i medeltida lagstiftning. Den kvantitativa delen av uppsatsen visade hur många män respektive kvinnor som utförde handlingarna, medan del två och tre bestod av en kvalitativ analys, där handlingarna kontextualiserades i balladernas narrativ.

Uppsatsens syfte stod i ett komplementärt förhållande till tidigare forskning. Den skandinaviska balladgenren har blivit grundligt undersökt inom filologi, musik- och litteraturvetenskap, där balladens formella egenskaper, genrens medeltida ursprung, samt innehållsmässiga teman har belysts. I det tvärvetenskapliga projektet ”Intermedialitet och den medeltida balladen” har den klassiska balladforskningen nyligen fått ett uppsving, vilket inneburit att forskningsfrågorna breddats till att inkludera hur balladen kan betraktas som en genre- och medieöverskridande konstform. Genusrelaterade studier har genomförts i mindre omfattning på både svenskt, danskt och norskt material. Emellertid har man inte utgått

från någon specifik genusteori, eller problematiserat hur aktörerna i balladen relaterar till samhälleliga strukturer.

För att undersöka genusrelationer i balladvärlden användes Judith Butlers teori om performativitet, vilken kombinerades med en teoretisk modell som Lynn Wollstadt nyttjat i en studie om skotska ballader. Personlig framgång var när en karaktär lyckades uppnå ett mål eller undgå att skada sig, medan personligt misslyckande var när man misslyckades med detta. När en karaktär handlade i enlighet med medeltida normer och förväntningar kallades det kulturell framgång, medan kulturellt misslyckande var om karaktären gick emot gängse förväntningar. Fördelen med Wollstadts modell var att man kunde problematisera agens och makt i narrativen, och samtidigt belysa hur mäns och kvinnors handlingar förhöll sig till det medeltida samhället. En viktig utgångspunkt var att förstå maktutövning på två sätt: dels huruvida en karaktär hade agensen att dominera en annan karaktär, dels hur makt kunde förstås som ekvivalent med personlig framgång. Medan en kombination av kulturell framgång och personligt misslyckande möjligtvis utgjorde den starkaste bekräftelsen på ett medeltida normsystem, var kulturellt misslyckande i kombination med personlig framgång de narrativ som mest problematiserade balladvärldens patriarkala strukturer.

Den första undersökningsdelen visade på att våldshandlingar och sexuella handlingar var genusrelaterade, d.v.s. att kvinnor och män generellt utförde olika typer av handlingar. Till exempel var mord och äktenskapsbrott mer kopplat till en kvinnlig sfär, medan männen var överrepresenterade när det gällde dråp och våldtäkt. Undersökningens andra och tredje del diskuterade dessa handlingar i den narrativa kontexten, vilka jämfördes med medeltida lagstiftning och det senmedeltida samhället. Heder var ofta intimt sammankopplat med våldshandlingar och sexualitet, men män och kvinnor relaterade till detta på olika sätt. Medan en man aktivt kunde ta en jungfrus mödom, och därigenom förolämpa kvinnans såväl som hennes familjs heder, kunde en förlorad mödom återställas genom våldshandlingar från kvinnan. Samtidigt fanns det flera exempel på kvinnor som begick hor utan konsekvenser. Män använde ofta våld för att dominera både män och kvinnor, men det behövde inte nödvändigtvis leda till personlig framgång. Likaså straffades mäns ohederliga våldshandlingar synnerligen hårt, medan kvinnors ohederliga våld inte ledde till personligt misslyckande.

I den sammanfattande diskussionen framhölls hur femininitet inte tvunget innebär passivitet och maktlöshet, medan maskulinitet inte var synonymt med aktivitet och maktutövande. Medan de patriarkala strukturerna är starkt närvarande, fanns det inuti narrativen möjligheter för förhandling av maktpositioner för män och kvinnor. Kvinnor kunde utöva makt i den

privata, såväl som i den offentliga, sfären, och de kunde dessutom utöva indirekt makt, vilket innebar att kvinnor kunde uppnå personlig framgång genom att manipulera män i deras omgivning att utföra våldshandlingar åt dem. En annan strategi var att ikläda sig en mansroll genom att utrusta sig med vapen och ”manna-sinne”. Däremot var konstruktionen av femininitet mer avhängig en kvinnas sexualitet, emedan det fanns en stark koppling mellan en kvinnas heder och hennes mödom. Att överskrida genusnormer framstod emellertid inte som lika problematiskt för kvinnor som för män. Maskuliniteten var starkt kopplat till kontroll, där män förväntades kontrollera kvinnors sexualitet eller dominera män och kvinnor genom våldshandlingar. Men en man som framställdes som passiv, eller som utförde våldshandlingar på ett okontrollerat sätt, riskerade sin manlighet och blev därigenom feminiserad.

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