

# Research Plan

## Intermediality and the Medieval Ballads

Many of today's media – music videos on MTV or Internet websites – are built up of interacting media: music, images, lyrics and dance in the former case; text, images, film etc. in the latter. The phenomenon is not new. Artists have often been open for dialogue, encounters and interaction between different branches of the arts. Artistic renewal has often taken place by transcending boundaries in this way, and some traditional art forms, such as the theatre, are basically multimedial.

Academic research has not traditionally shown the same openness. The demands of the different aesthetic subjects for autonomy have in fact often closed the door to cross-aesthetic research. However, a number of universities in Europe and the US have now established permanent programmes or courses in intermediality. Interrelations of this kind refer to direct or indirect encounters between two or more media – text, image, sound and movement – in communications, the broadcast media and art, in both high and popular culture.

The concept of *intermediality* is fairly open, including a number of aspects that have been given different names in the research traditions of different disciplines. The aesthetic disciplines thus talk about *interartiality*; in other contexts, for example in linguistics, terms like *multimodality* and *interdiscursivity* are common.

In the School of Humanities and the School of Education at Växjö University, intermediality has aroused an interest that crosses subject boundaries. The Forum for Intermedial Studies (Ims – see <http://www.hum.vxu.se/forskn/info/ims/>) has a series of seminars, and on 27–30 October 2005 an international conference in the field will be held in Växjö (see <http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/konferens/NorSIS2005/>).

Intermediality studies have been pursued by researchers employed by Växjö University in various subjects, and in the immediate future it is planned to devote efforts to the field of the medieval ballad, based on a recent manuscript find in Växjö (strategic funding has been obtained for planning purposes). The ballad is a traditional art form, found in both high and popular culture, in which text and music interact. Originally, the performance was furthermore connected to dance (as the term *ballad* reveals). It thus requires intermedial competence to study it. Since the ballads are partly a common Scandinavian phenomenon, special knowledge in the Scandinavian languages is required as well, such as philology and palaeography. All these criteria are satisfied in that the members of the research group are working in the subjects of music, literature and Scandinavian languages and have experience of intermedial research.

In the long run, our goal is to establish a wide research competence within the rather open field of intermediality. Our first delimitation consists of focusing on the medieval ballad, and in particular on investigating some newly found manuscripts in Växjö from philological, literary and musical angles.

## Background

In February 2005 a manuscript collection of about 800 medieval ballads was found in Växjö City Library. The collection is probably connected with George Stephens (1813–1895), a British philologist, archaeologist and collector who from 1834 lived in Sweden and Denmark (from 1855 as professor of English in Copenhagen). At the end of the 1860s Stephens moved to his son's newly acquired estate of Huseby, south of Växjö, bringing with him his large

collection of manuscripts. The recently discovered ballads almost certainly come from this collection. From his earliest years in Sweden Stephens collaborated with the cultural historian, librarian, etc., G. O. Hyltén-Cavallius (1818–1889) and together they planned a major edition of a treasury of ballads with ancient roots, which they had collected from tradition bearers all over Scandinavia. This project was abandoned, mainly for financial reasons, after only one volume had been published (*Sveriges historiska och politiska visor* I, 1853). Hyltén-Cavallius's ballad records (about 300 items) were transferred after his death to the Royal Library in Stockholm. The latter collection is one source for the five-volume edition *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader* (*SMB*, 1983–2001, edited by Bengt R. Jonsson and Sven-Bertil Jansson and published by the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research).

## Aim

Our initial goal, as occasioned by this find of ballads, is to revive a dormant intermedial research field. With the ballads as a research area, the aim is to build up cooperation and intermedial competence at Växjö University. Already during this term Gunilla Byrman is heading a seminar in Scandinavian languages for third- and fourth-year students, and Boel Lindberg is heading one in music. At both seminars there are students who intend to do their essay projects on ballads.

In the long term we envisage an orientation towards ballads being combined with other intermedial specialities. One such field which is under development is the project “Visuality in Swedish modernist and postmodernist lyric poetry: A study in interaction between word and image”, for which Lars Elleström has applied for funding together with two presumptive doctoral candidates. This application has been shortlisted by the Swedish Research Council.

The ballad project is intended to study the links between the records now found in Växjö and previously inventoried material in Nordic archives and libraries, particularly the records left by Hyltén-Cavallius, and also to study the Växjö material in its own right. A preliminary scrutiny has already been done by Magnus Gustafsson, archivist at the Småland Music Archive and also guest teacher on courses in ethnomusicology at Växjö University. Some of the records in Stephens's collection are of previously unknown ballads. Others are variants of already known ballads but with interesting distinctive features. A particularly remarkable feature of the records now found is that there are notations of the tunes made by a competent musician. This distinguishes them in particular from Hyltén-Cavallius' material, in which the tunes are generally notated in an amateurish way.

Yet another aim of the project is to prepare a larger research application in the field. Like the earlier project, the end product of which was an edition of all the Swedish medieval ballads, *SMB*, this new project is planned as a cooperative venture between musicologists and scholars of language/literature. There are several reasons why this research field should be opened again. One is that a significant number of hitherto unknown ballad texts have now been found. Moreover, the new tunes in the Växjö find allow interesting angles for musicological research in this field. We also want to examine how the medieval ballad has left its mark on more recent art forms. In addition, our aim is to add a gender perspective, which has been neglected in previous research on the medieval ballads. There is strong justification for this in the fact that the oral tradition of singing ballads, on which the entire material rests, was primarily passed on by women.

## Research Issues

A possible approach for literary research in the project would thus be to adopt a gender perspective on both the newly found manuscripts and on the medieval ballad as a whole. In

several of the ballad categories there are texts where women and men are portrayed in terms of traditional gender patterns, but there are also deviations from this. In particular, the rather indecent comical ballad, which seems to be an important sub-genre in the new material, can be illuminated from a gender perspective. Yet another issue in gender theory concerns the composition and transmission of the ballads. Research on the gender of early, anonymous authors exists, and there is concrete knowledge about the sex of the tradition bearers. For the sociology of literature it is of great interest that the ballads have often been handed down by women.

From the perspective of Scandinavian philology the language of the ballads can be studied and also the link between text and music. From the perspective of “new philology” it would also be interesting to investigate how, why, when, where and by whom the ballads were recorded – in other words the functions of the ballads in different contexts (social, political and religious). In relation to this it would also be worth studying differences and similarities in text and music in recorded versions of one and the same medieval ballad, to see whether these are functionally conditioned. Ballads are still being written today, but these differ significantly from medieval ballads, while there are also similarities. Charting differences and similarities between old and new material would therefore be rewarding. In our research environment we should especially discuss which theories and methods can be relevant to apply and develop in this interdisciplinary milieu.

The link between text and music is also of vital interest for musicological research, not least because the most common and universal appearance of music is as an inseparable part of singing and chanting. The relationship of music to the semantic features of texts has historically been a special concern of both practitioners of music and musicologists. It is also bound up with views of the expressive and representational powers of music generally. The new find of ballads in Växjö represents a substantial addition to known ballad melodies from the 19th century. In addition to this, they generally seem to have been recorded by persons who were competent musicians (compared to many of the recorders of ballad melodies in the 19th century ) and therefore we now have a more solid ground for studies on the links between text and music in the ballads. The melodies now found will also be of great help to the study of medieval ballad melodies generally. Furthermore, they can serve as valuable material for the study of the stability of oral traditions. With this new find better comparisons than those hitherto undertaken can be made with the rather extensive sound recordings of ballad singers that the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation carried out in the 1960s.

From around 1970 a trend among Scandinavian ballad singers and folk-music groups is to make use of the medieval ballads in sound recordings and as part of their concert repertoires (artists like Lena Willemark, and Ale Möller, groups such as Folk & Rackare, Garmarna, Ranarim or Sågskära). Within the intermedial research field we now are planning, studies of this new phenomenon will also be undertaken. Questions that can be raised are for instance: Is the interest that both interpreters and the audience have demonstrated in this genre a manifestation of an exotic approach to the medieval period and its culture? Is it the texts or the melodies that appeal most? Which ballad categories (i.e. natural myth ballads, legendary ballads, champion ballads, etc.) are most popular? This area of research can be broadened to a more general comparison between the motifs of modern popular song (romance, family, friendship, gender relations, social conditions, morality, folk heroes etc.) and similar motifs found in the Scandinavian medieval ballad.

## Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

As a point of departure for the study and for the presentation of the results, we follow the textually oriented discourse analysis propounded by Norman Fairclough (1992, 2001). This

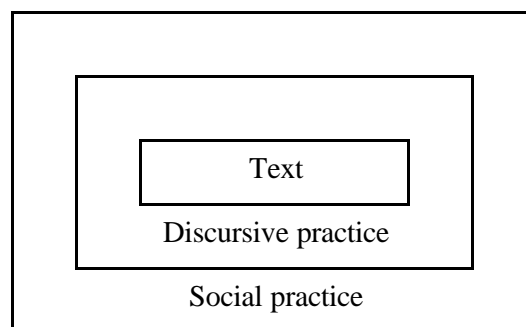
analytical model involves ideology, hegemony and terms of production, distribution and textual analysis. The project will apply an extended concept of text, which comprises linguistic and literary analysis as well as musical analysis. The analysis will be performed on three levels.

*Social practice* reveals the social and political consequences following from the use of a text. In this context it is important to discuss the relationship between sources, transmitters and recipients. One idea is that much of the ballad material derives people with religious, economic and political power. The ballads can thus be viewed as an important channel for those with power in society to influence the people, even if this is done in an entertaining way. Ballads can be an instrument for rulers to control and teach the recipients what reality can or ought to be like.

*Discursive practice* involves the analysis of how different ballad texts are related to each other: why they were written and how they were handed down. The value of the ballads as sources of information, control and entertainment will be discussed. The transmitters can acquire material for the ballads in different ways. They can borrow from more or less professional tradition bearers, take material from other ballads or make up their own. Regardless of how it is done, the majority of the ballads will almost always come from some source that can be more or less directly derived from the ruling strata of society. This inevitably has consequences for the content, message and form of the ballads. The production and transmission conditions for ballads have probably changed over time, as the sources, the transmitters and the *Zeitgeist* naturally influence the musical and textual form of the ballads. (Present-day ballads are presumably written and performed to satisfy a need among the audience, but the economic reality is always lurking in the background and sometimes plays a crucial role for the form and content of the ballads. The recipients consume ballads in order to be informed, controlled and entertained, all at the same time.)

*Analysis of the content and form of the ballads* involves a linguistic, literary, musical and ethnological analysis of the text. The events, facts and characters we meet in the ballads can also be mentioned in other sources, but all texts entail a selection of facts and attitudes to or perspectives on what is communicated. For this reason it is important to study the picture the ballads paint of the reality, to examine the messages that are passed on and how they are transmitted in different periods. We will investigate how the social and discursive practice is revealed in the material. The textual analysis will concentrate on the literary, linguistic and musical form of the ballads, their textual patterns and messages. In addition, special emphasis will be placed on how the gender system is expressed in the texts.

Fairclough's theory, where the different levels of analysis are dependent on each other, can be visualized as below (1992:73).



We will also consider the relevance of the theory of *oral formulaic composition* that was formulated early in the 20th century by Milman Parry and later developed by his student

Albert Bates Lord (and after the death of the latter in 1991 completed by his wife Mary Louise Lord in 1995 in *The Singer Resumes the Tale*). Following Parry's initial study of the epics of Slavic bards, Albert and Mary Louise Lord have demonstrated that several ancient epics such as the Homeric epics, Gilgamesh, Beowulf, The Nibelungenlied, the Edda, the Song of Roland and the Bosnian Yugoslavian heroic epics, not only are recordings of a tradition of oral performances but also of oral composition. The professional or semi-professional singers that performed those long poems never learned them by heart. Instead, they improvised their performances on every occasion, using the fixed stock of formulae belonging to the genre.

It is not possible to apply this theory mechanically to the Scandinavian ballad tradition because there is a fundamental difference between a poem in stichic, continuous form, with each line a unit of its own right, and a strophic song like the ballad, where the end rhyme is a unifying element. However, we know from the studies that have been carried out on ballad singers with a large repertory (as for instance on Svea Jansson, 1904–1980, from Åland who could recall more than 800 songs), that they often were able to improvise and give a song their own imprint, within the given formulaic framework. In the context of ballads we can assume that the individual bent, the general setting and the contemporary conditions played an important role in the representation of a specific ballad. Most ballad texts, unlike the Edda or the Nibelungenlied, are short enough to be memorized without difficulty. Nonetheless, the rich occurrence of formulae in the wordings and melodies of the ballads justifies a consideration of the theory of *oral formulaic composition*.

## Beneficial Effects of Interdisciplinary Cooperation

Apart from the three applicants, the intermediality environment in Växjö comprises several lecturers in literature, art, music and film studies (in the School of Humanities, the School of Education and the School of Technology and Design). Four doctoral candidates in the Language and Literature section at the School of Humanities have intermedial perspectives in their research. If funding is granted by the Swedish Research Council for the above application, a further two doctoral candidates with a clearly defined intermedial orientation will be added. There are other forthcoming doctoral students in the fields of musicology (there is a promise of external financing) and Scandinavian languages.

The project is based on multidisciplinary research. Växjö University offers a good opportunity for the scholars involved to cooperate: we have our offices in the same building, and with our competence in music (Boel Lindberg, Magnus Gustafsson), literature and gender studies (Lars Elleström) and Scandinavian languages with philology (Gunilla Byrman) we can complement each other in a way that is certainly advantageous for intermedial research. The theoretical and methodological framework in the sphere of intermediality may be developed in such a way that benefits all the disciplines involved.

In 2001 Lindberg initiated discussions among colleagues in art history, film studies, political science, law and business economics to develop a study programme for cultural leaders/administrators. The discussions led Växjö University to start *Kulturledarprogrammet* in 2003/2004. The programme runs over three years. This autumn the third new group of students entered the programme and there are now altogether 90 students following the programme. The aim of the programme is to educate students who are competent in many forms of art but who also accomplish advanced studies in musicology, art history or film studies. This autumn the students in the third year of the programme have reached the C-level in their specialization and they are at present writing their candidate thesis. Some of them have chosen topics within the field of intermediality. This is for instance the case with six students in musicology who all study different subjects related to the Växjö ballad find.

*Kulturledarprogrammet* (KUP) can most certainly be considered a valuable resource for the research programme within the field of intermediality that we are now building up.

A specifically beneficial effect for the university of Växjö is that the ballad project will be developed within the framework of international cooperation. A network is already under construction. Yet it is based on a unique discovery of manuscripts in the city of Växjö itself – a discovery that was immediately echoed in the media. The fact that the source material is located close to the university makes it easy to get at the primary material. This is a great advantage, which can ultimately attract other researchers at both national and international level. Cooperation between the different disciplines will ultimately lead to useful interdisciplinary contacts and research, which can profit the whole university.

## Further Comments

In the ballad project we plan to cooperate with Smålands Musikarkiv and its director Magnus Gustafsson. He is the initiator of this archive and has since the 1970s developed its activities – mainly documentation (sound recordings, interviews, and written sources including music notation) of the musical folk traditions of the county of Småland. He is at present finishing his master's degree in musicology at Växjö University. During 2006 it is further planned that he will submit a comprehensive thesis on the content of a fiddler's repertory documented in a handwritten manuscript from around 1810 for the degree of Licentiate of Philosophy at the University of Lund. The theoretical approach in this thesis as regards the melodic formulae found in fiddlers' music of the 18th century will be of great help in developing new theoretical perspectives in the ballad project. It will most probably be possible for him to find funding for doctoral studies in musicology within his employment at Smålands Musikarkiv. A natural topic for those studies is the newly discovered find of ballads in Växjö.

It was Magnus Gustafsson who initially found the ballad collection left by George Stephens that has initiated this research application. At present he is completing a rough inventory of the 880 records in the collection. In his earlier studies into the local music history of this region he has gathered much insight into the lives of transmitters of the musical traditions in the 19th century and also of the persons who collected those traditions, such as Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius (see "Background", p. 2). This knowledge has already been very valuable in the development of this project. His good and long-standing contacts with Scandinavian folklorists is also very valuable for us. It is this network of his that we have been able to become a part of through our invitation to the two-day symposium that will be held at Teleborg Castle on 28–29 November 2005 (see paragraph 4 in our activity plan).

Because of Magnus Gustafsson's important role in this project we have included his CV in this application in order to demonstrate that he, although not included as an applicant, is an important member of the research milieu we now are building up.

Gunilla Byrman, associate professor of Scandinavian languages, School of Humanities

Lars Elleström, professor of comparative literature, School of Humanities

Boel Lindberg, professor of musicology, School of Education