

Singing the News in the Eighteenth Century

A Media Perspective on Norwegian Skilling Ballads

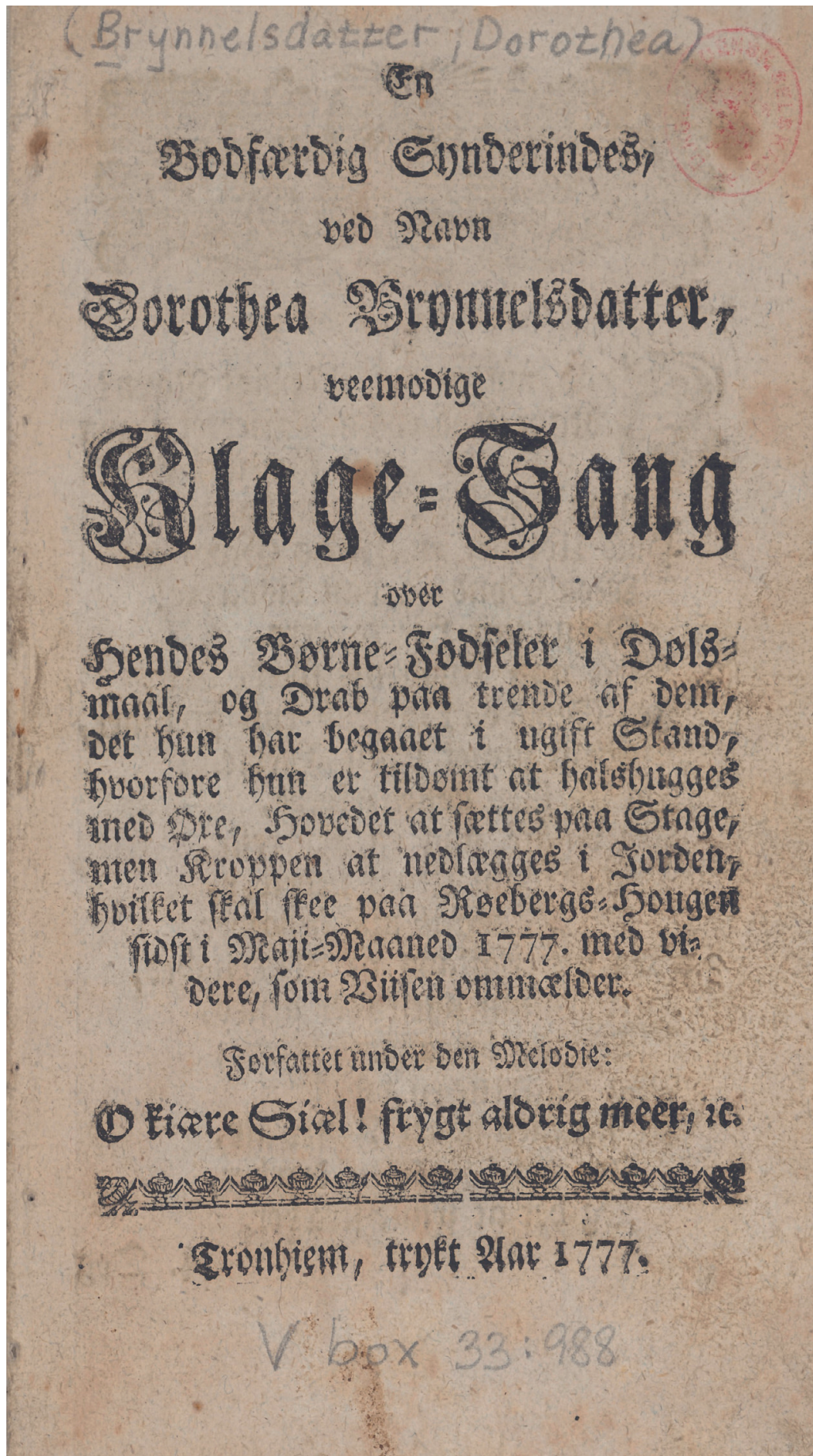
Siv Gøril Brandtzæg

Abstract

This essay delineates the role of the *news ballad* in the development of an early modern media culture in Norway. By defining the news ballad as a conveyer of accurate intelligence, the essay shows how skilling ballads conveyed news before the newspapers, and it asks to what degree skilling ballads changed after the coming of the first printed newspapers in the 1760s. The essay explores the functions the earliest news ballads may have had in eighteenth-century society, and it argues that these multifaceted but entirely unstudied texts should be given recognition in the history of the development of a Norwegian media culture.

Keywords: news ballads; eighteenth-century news culture; accurate intelligence; execution ballads; nascent social media

In the small municipality of Fosen in Trøndelag on 22 May 1777, a woman's head is severed from her body and placed on a stake. Her name is Dorothea Brynnelsdatter, and the decapitation was her punishment for the infanticide of her three bastard children. This story is certainly extraordinary from a modern perspective, but it was also newsworthy in its eighteenth-century context: although neonatal infanticide was not uncommon in the period – society's condemnation of extramarital sex and its consequences made murderers of many desperate women – a decapitation was a fairly rare occurrence in the kingdom of Denmark-Norway, even after the infamous death of the liberalist reformer Johann Friedrich Struensee.¹ However, despite its potential public appeal, the story of Dorothea's crime and punishment actually does not appear in the extant copies of the newspapers that were circulating in this period. The only surviving print item which does report her cruel fate – i.e. the only publication that communicated her life and wrongdoings to contemporaries – is a skilling ballad (*skillingsvise*) kept at the Gunnerus special collections library in Trondheim, Norway.



1. En bodfærdig synderindes, ved navn Dorothea Brynnelsdatter, vemodige Klage-Sang over hendes Børne-fødseler i Dølsmaal, og Drab paa trende af dem... (printed in Trondheim, 1777).

This skilling ballad is a small and unassuming print item of four leaves, measuring 11 × 18 cm, dried and browned with age. The title page gives the name of the woman, the place and the approximate date of the execution. She is “sentenced to beheading at the ear, her head to be put on a stake, but her body to be laid in earth, which will happen at Røebergs-hougen in late May 1777.”² When we open the ballad, we get a unique perspective on contemporary views of bastardy and infanticide. The song in 27 stanzas is narrated by the “delinquent sinner” herself, and thus pretends to offer a first-person account of the killing of the three infant sons: “As they were born/I laid my hand on their Mouths,/and thus separated them from the life/given to them by God.”³ As the ballad approaches its climax, the execution, the narration is given in the present tense, dramatizing the moment of beheading: “Here I kneel before the Axe,/my Head will be placed on a Stake/as a warning-sign for others.”⁴

Although the ballad is rich in details about the wrongdoings and cruel fate of its protagonist, it leaves us with multiple questions: who wrote the text – it goes without saying that this defamatory ballad was not written by Dorothea herself – who arranged for it to be published, and who printed it? What motivated its creation: was it purely sensationalist – feeding the minds of a public hungry to see a fellow citizen pay for her wrongdoings? Or was it primarily created for informational, didactic or commemorative reasons? Does the paratextual record of the place and approximate time of the execution imply that it could have been produced prior to the beheading and that it functioned as an *advertisement* for the upcoming event? Was it, as the dramatic present tense of the narrative tempts us to imagine, a ballad written for the *occasion* itself, i.e. the execution, and was it sold and even performed in connection with the decapitation? Was this ballad perhaps the last thing Dorothea heard as her head was placed on the block? Less macabre, albeit equally important, are questions of a more general nature: how does this particular ballad relate to the genre in general, and is it representative of European print culture in the period? How were ballads read, sung and circulated by a contemporary audience, and how should modern readers approach these precious print items and the histories they convey?

These questions are important for one reason above all others: they have not been previously addressed. The current field of research on the Norwegian skilling ballads is marked by longstanding neglect. Unlike in other European countries, where scholars from various disciplines have studied the ballads for decades, the genre has been marginalized in Norwegian research to the degree that we can talk about a scholarly lacuna. Not a single academic book about the Norwegian skilling ballads has ever been published. The texts have not been subject to any thoroughgoing research projects, and the scholarly output on the genre is confined to a handful of articles, mainly published in non-scholarly outlets, plus a few small collections

of transcribed ballads, published in the 1970s and 1980s, with short introductory material.⁵ Most of what is written on skilling ballads has been aimed at a non-academic and regional audience; they have mainly concentrated on mid-nineteenth-century ballads, and they have had a limited impact in describing the significance of the genre with regard to Norwegian cultural heritage. In Norway, then, the skilling ballad has been ignored in scholarship and, literally, been reduced to a footnote in the history of Norwegian literature.⁶

The marginal position of the skilling ballads in academia is at odds with its position in the national cultural history. The skilling ballad might very well have been the most popular literary genre the country has ever seen in terms of spread across time and wide geographic circulation: the first known Norwegian skilling ballad was printed by Christiania's first printer in 1643, but already in the sixteenth century, ballads from Denmark (and possibly Sweden) probably circulated in Norway, indicating that the history of the skilling ballads in this country spans more than 400 years.⁷ The genre was born two centuries before other popular genres such as the novel, and – because of their unique systems of distribution and circulation – many of these ballads travelled across the country and sometimes beyond the national borders. The longevity of the genre might be because of the diverse practice of skilling ballads in early modern society: before the establishment of the print press in Norway in the mid-seventeenth century, the ballads circulated in oral culture, as one of the main channels of entertainment for a broad public. As the ballads were printed they continued to be performed with well-known melodies by the publishers themselves and by hawkers and travelling singers, who sold them for a skilling or two (hence the generic title “skilling ballads”, where a skilling equals approximately a penny in the early modern period). In the transition from oral to printed culture, the skilling ballads retained many of the qualities from the oral culture in which they originated, such as the inclusion of memory-triggering devices, rhymes and rhythm, narrative formulas and openness to variations and adaptations.

In addition to this dual role as both printed texts and musical performances, many of the ballads had a third and equally important purpose in the sense that they conveyed easily comprehensible news stories and gossip on domestic, regional and national topics: crimes and executions, state elections and small political matters, major city fires and minor fires, major shipwrecks and small boat accidents, natural disasters and minor accidents, and so on. In fact, because of the late development of printed newspapers in Norway – the first of which were established in the 1760s – the news ballad *predated* the newspaper in reporting news: it provided the public with intelligence of a varied nature several decades before the printed newspaper entered the scene, and this alone should give the skilling ballad an extremely important position in the national history of the development of media cul-

ture. Even after the instigation of the printed newspaper, the skilling ballad offered an alternative take on news conveyance: carrying simple and often highly personalized news stories that were probably sung and sold in public places, the ballads transmitted news and gossip for the illiterate and poor, and they could thereby function as substitutes for the less accessible, more expensive printed newspaper.

The following essay will discuss this important subgenre of skilling ballads, the news ballad. I have chosen to focus on the eighteenth-century news ballads from the Gunnerus special collections library in Trondheim since these works are on the brink of a new phase in their history because of a current project to digitize this collection.⁸ The digitization is underway but not completed, so the following essay is based on investigations of the physical material as well as studies of the printed catalogue (Molde 1981). The corpus of eighteenth-century news ballads in this archive is fairly small, but I would suggest that the material from this exact period is particularly interesting for what it might tell us about the role of skilling ballads in the development of an early modern media culture: how the news ballad conveyed intelligence before the instigation of the printed newspaper; in what ways the mediation of news changed after the newspapers entered the scene in the 1760s; what kinds of news were prioritized by the ballad authors, and how a reading of the news ballads can bring us closer to understanding social tendencies, temperaments and cultural mind-sets from our distant past.

This article discusses these issues, whilst at the same time offering a basic account of the news ballad as a genre – its paratext, its formal features, its themes – as well as a tentative analysis of the primary functions of the news ballad in an eighteenth-century context. The first part of this article is concerned with defining the genre, and in the second part I perform close readings of a selection of news ballads, emphasizing the ballads from the latter part of the eighteenth century. Defining and classifying all the different *types* of Norwegian news ballads is a task for the future: we need a fuller overview of the approximately 28,000 skilling ballads in the five major collections,⁹ and, ideally, access to digitized facsimiles of the currently unavailable material across several collections in order to fully grasp the characteristics of the genre. But for the time being, an investigation of the eighteenth-century news ballad in the Gunnerus collection can serve as a starting point to shed light on a highly neglected part of Norway's national cultural heritage.

A Brief Note on the Translation of the Scandinavian Term “Skillingsvise” as “Skilling Ballad”

Before defining the news ballad, it is necessary to say a few words about the Norwegian *skillingsvise* as such, not least since the translation from Scandi-

navian to English complicates a straightforward generic characterisation. First of all, a *vise* is distinct from a *ballad*, which in a Scandinavian context refers to an older tradition of medieval balladry, i.e. ballads with a strict metrical pattern that circulated as part of an older folkloric tradition. Second, a Scandinavian *skillingsvise* is not a broadside: it is not printed on one side of a single sheet of paper, as is the case with the British early modern equivalent, but rather carries printed text on both sides of the paper. Moreover, a *skillingstrykk* – which is the preferred term for a skilling ballad qua print product – could, and indeed often would, consist of a gathering of songs, often two or three, which required more than a single sheet.¹⁰

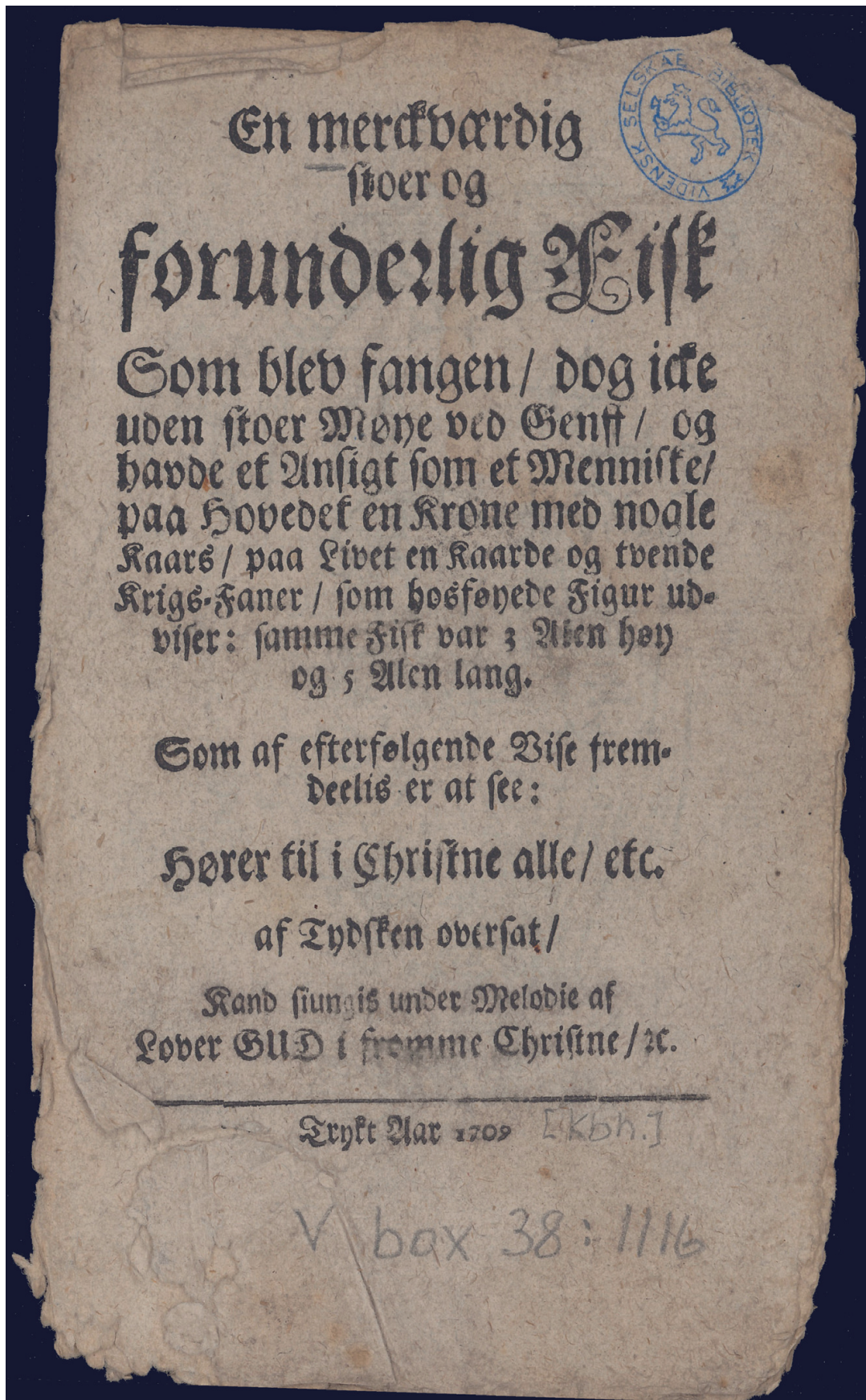
Given that a *skillingsvise* is not a broadside we should, I suggest, refrain from using that term. *Chapbook* is one alternative term, particularly appropriate for those prints that contain a collation of songs, some of which were bound. The binding process was, in most cases, performed after the songs had been sold, and (as is the case with the Gunnerus corpus), was usually done by librarians for preservation rather than by early purchasers. The British chapbook could be both bound and unbound, so in terms of format the Scandinavian skilling ballad is close to the chapbook. However, the term chapbook fails to capture the performance aspect of the genre. *Slipsong* is another contender, referring to a small collection (slips) of song. The term “song” is more in line with the Scandinavian use of the term “vise” than the stringent term “ballad”, and “slip” is (at least from the outset) less connected to the broadside format. The problems with using the term slipsong in a Scandinavian context arises when we consider the Anglophone genre which this term is meant to cover: according to scholars, the slipsong proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and is generally considered to be a later development of the seventeenth-century broadside ballad (Jones 2002, Nebeker 2007). The Scandinavian *skillingsvise* also proliferated in the same period – the heyday of the genre was in the latter part of the nineteenth-century – but, importantly, there are much earlier examples of *skillingsviser*, stretching as far back as the 1550s, and even these earliest examples are collections of songs. Another important differentiation between the Anglophone slipsong and the Scandinavian *skillingsvise* is that the slipsong is differentiated from the traditional broadside ballad in that they were mostly printed in white letter, i.e. with modern, roman types rather than black-letter (gothic) letters, whilst they retained the tradition of one-sided printing (broadsheets).¹¹ The Scandinavian skilling ballad, on the other hand, retained black letter well into the nineteenth century and (in Norway) even into the twentieth century, and it was always published as a two-sided print. Lastly, the term slipsong has not really caught on in Anglophone scholarship – even recent accounts of the generic terms (for example Jones 2002) refrains from using the term and instead chooses to discuss the late tradition of broadside ballads – which means that dubbing the Scandinavian texts

“slipsongs” could linguistically alienate the Scandinavian tradition from the Anglophone one.

In conclusion, we might say that the Scandinavian tradition is not really comparable to the Anglophone tradition, at least as far as format is concerned. In lieu of a better term, this article chooses to use the term *skilling ballad*, but an Anglophone reader can choose to think of it as the Nordic equivalent of the English broadside ballad. The Scandinavian skilling ballad undoubtedly shares with the English broadside ballad important similarities in terms of themes, distribution practices, assumed audience and functions in society: as is the case with the Anglophone broadside ballad (both the early, black-letter ballads and the later white-letter ones), the Norwegian *skillingsviser* were cheap prints circulating in large numbers and they were aimed at a broad audience. Like their Anglophone broadside ballad sibling, the Scandinavian skilling ballad provided a unique perspective on early modern society, and the popularity of the skilling ballads, as well as their unique hybrid character as literary texts, media texts and musical compositions, makes them historically exceptional. As such, they deserve to be included and studied in the Anglophone tradition of the broadside ballad. When I have chosen to use the term *skilling ballad* in the following article – and *skilling print* when referring to the ballad qua print item – this is mainly to avoid confusion for English scholars of the broadside ballad, many of whom are deeply concerned with format, as well as to retain an element of the Scandinavian generic term, referring to the low retail price with which they were associated.

The News Ballad: A Preliminary Definition

A news ballad (*nyhetsviser*) in a Scandinavian context can be defined as a literary text that reports, mediates, comments upon or moralizes about particular incident, whether it be an accident, a crime, an election, a war, and so forth.¹² The news reported could be of a domestic, local, regional, national or international kind; what matters for the definition I want to pursue in the following is the texts’ suggestions of the actuality of the event through indications of time and location. In the strictest sense, a news ballad gives an exact date and place of the incident in the title page and/or in the text itself, emphasizing both temporal and spatial specificity. Those skilling ballads which lack a dating of the event can, I suggest, still be categorized as a news ballad when other details are in place, such as information about the exact location and/or the names of the people involved; the same can be applied to prints which mention the date but refrain from naming the location, though this is more rare. Of the total of 95 skilling ballads from the eighteenth century held in the Gunnerus archive, 35 are news ballads in the strict definition referred to above, but the number is higher when the undated texts



2. En Merkværdig stor og forunderlig Fisk som blev fangen/dog icke uden stoer Møye ved Genff, og havde et Ansigt som et Menniske... (printed in Copenhagen, 1709).



are added to the equation: 745 of the ballads in this archive are undated, i.e. they give no date in the imprint line and/or in the title (Molde 1981). Although the majority of these undated texts are from the nineteenth century, further research is likely to bring forth a greater number of eighteenth-century news ballads in the Gunnerus archive.

The obvious question that arises from the above definition of news ballads as a conveyer of “accurate” intelligence is: accurate according to what? Does accuracy equal reliability, i.e. do the news ballads report true things from real life? A brief look at the Gunnerus skilling ballads from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, most of which are printed in Copenhagen, suggests the opposite. Eight of the eleven ballads printed before 1750 indicate that in the earliest phase authors were prone to report on fantastical and sensational news the truth of which is easy to discard in hindsight. A Copenhagen ballad from 1709 reports on a “strange fish” with a human face (see figure 2); another one from 1719 reports on a calf born with a human head.¹³ In spite of the meticulous details, the given location as well as the lavish (and, for many modern readers, hilarious) illustrations, none of these are news ballads: in addition to being fantastical to the highest degree, they lack a date in the title page and/or main text. There are, however, borderline cases from the same period. A ballad on the birth of a malformed child in Copenhagen in 1720 displays a meticulous attention to detail: in addition to a lavish woodcut showing the grotesque lumps on the head and deformed feet, the title page gives the exact place and time of the happening, down to very street and the exact hour of the day.¹⁴ Whether this is a fantastical tale of a monstrous child, or a sensational report on an actual medical case, is hard to tell. However, in some cases, the *insistence* on the truthfulness of the account is a warning signal, at least to the modern reader, as is

the case with the 1720 Copenhagen print called *A truthful and very strange and great miracle seen on a boy child born this year in Dantziger Werder by Dantzig, who was three times transformed before the priest during baptism*.¹⁵ The song is laden with medieval religious symbolism (the child is transformed into a lamb, a fish and a scythe), and the “truthfulness” here should be seen in the context of a society in which religious belief still dominates culture.

The news ballads from the later eighteenth century, which is the main emphasis of this article, are also deeply spiritual and often tendentious, offering consolation and conveying moral lessons. I would argue, however, that the late eighteenth-century news ballads differ significantly from the earlier ones in their engagement with accuracy. The truthfulness of the story conveyed in the ballad which introduced this essay, on the execution of the woman accused of infanticide, is confirmed by the local church book for the year 1777, where Dorothea’s death is inscribed; surviving criminal records establish the details of her crime, and a handful of books on regional history suggest that her fate has been well-known in her municipality.¹⁶ All of the news ballads analysed in the following relate incidents the truthfulness of which can be confirmed by historical documents and/or more recent secondary sources. Not only do historical documents confirm the *content* of the news items – the number of casualties and the nature of the event – they also show that the ballads gave accurate dates and locations of the events they report.

As we shall see, the adherence to truthful news reporting is often balanced against the tendency to moralize and defame, particularly in the news ballads relating criminal acts and punishment. In these news ballads, many authors were clearly under an obligation to provide a moral lesson, which would involve speculating about the motivation of the crime. But where the reporting is coloured by the didactic regimes of their day, the details that are given are generally truthful, as shown by scholars working with the genre in Denmark and Sweden. As pointed out by Iørn Piø (1969) the two foremost features of the Danish news ballads are “contemporariness and truthfulness”; the news ballads “are in most cases very credible”.¹⁷ In her recent book (2016) on Swedish skilling ballads, Karin Strand has done meticulous research into historical documents and she convincingly maps the correlation between events described in Swedish skilling ballads and the reality they relate to. What I would like to suggest, then, is that the material studied in this article, the eighteenth-century news ballads in the Gunnerus special collection, is comparable to the Danish and Swedish news ballad in terms of accuracy, and as such we might conclude that there is a collective, Scandinavian tradition of news ballads in this period. The fact that Norway was under Danish rule in the eighteenth century is also acutely important, particularly with regard to the news ballads on crimes, where the laws of the king-

dom of Denmark-Norway affected the sentencing and punishments described in the Norwegian ballads.

Emphasizing the shared generic features and cultural and societal context of the Scandinavian news ballads does not, however, mean that we should rule out a national or even regional perspective. With regard to the news ballads, it is particularly interesting to consider the instigation of Norwegian newspapers in the 1760s, founded more than a hundred years after the first papers were printed in Sweden and Denmark.¹⁸ How did the establishment of official printed organs for news affect the transmittance of intelligence in the news ballads, and what was the relationship between the two genres? These questions are too complex to be answered in the context of this short article, but for now I would suggest that the corpus of news ballads in the Gunnerus archive indicates a correlation between the establishment of a regional newspaper in Trondheim in 1767, and a rise in the publication of news ballads in the same town. The decade following the instigation of Norway's longest running newspaper, *Kongelig allene privilegerede Trondhiems Adresse-Contoirs Efterretninger* (*Adresseavisen* for short), is by far the most prolific in terms of extant news ballads in the Gunnerus collection: 13 of the 35 ballads, i.e. more than a third of the corpus, were printed in the 1770s. As will be discussed below, most of these 1770s ballads deal with local incidents – executions, murders and accidents from the region – and they were probably issued from the same press as the newspaper, although this is not stated in the title page.

Intriguingly, none of the news stories conveyed in the Trondheim-printed ballads are recorded in the local newspaper. This means that the ballads provide *exclusive* reporting of certain events, some of which involve state affairs that would have been in the interest of the public to hear about, such as executions. Why were these events not reported in the newspapers? Future studies will hopefully establish the relationship between the printed newspaper and the news ballad; for the Gunnerus collection, for example, it is necessary to investigate the business of Trondheim's first "privileged" printer, Jens Christensen Winding, and his involvement in the printing of eighteenth-century skilling ballads alongside the printing of *Adresseavisen*. Perhaps the newspaper refrained from reporting executions because it was restrained by the strict rules of censorship that prevailed in eighteenth-century Denmark-Norway – or maybe they "delegated" this form of news conveyance to ballad authors.¹⁹ For now I hope to contribute with a conclusion on the most important similarity between the two mediums, and again it concerns the issue of accuracy. The shared adherence to truthfulness in newspapers and news ballads from the late eighteenth century, is, I suggest, where we find the most interesting point of distinction between news ballads and other types of ballads as well as news ballads and fiction in general: where realist fiction aims for the plausible or credible – to reflect or mirror

reality in order to create a sense of verisimilitude – newspapers, on the other hand, are expected to be *truthful*.²⁰ If we give the news ballads a place alongside the newspapers as conveyers of accurate details on contemporary issues, we risk undermining their generic status as fiction, but at the same we open up the possibility for these ballads to function as micro-historical portals to our past.

What the Title Page Can Tell Us: Paratextual Features in Eighteenth-century News Ballads

The title page of a skilling ballad contains details that can help us identify generic features as well as speculate about the way in which a contemporary audience comprehended the genre. The news ballad shares the paratextual patterns of most other ballad types of the period, emphasizing the title with bold typefaces and providing the title of one or two suggested melodies with which the ballad can be performed. The melodies mentioned on the title page were usually known in their time, and one particularly popular melody could appear on numerous title pages. McIlvenna (2016) refers to the use of familiar tunes as a musical basis for the news ballad lyrics as *contrafactum*, and states that this was “more than merely a technique to aid in memorisation; it was used by ballad writers in a conscious attempt to manipulate the memories of their listener-singers” (277). Moreover, certain melodies were chosen “because of the cultural and emotional association they carried with them” (277–278). In the case of Norwegian news ballads depicting deaths or crimes, we can observe that the title pages often suggest that they are sung to the tunes of much-used hymns. The execution ballad that illustrates this article, for example, proposes “O Kiære Sjæl! Frygt ikke meer” (“Oh dear soul! Fear no more”), which might have served the purpose of strengthening the didactic content of the lyrics within the ballad.

Most of the prints have decorative elements on the title pages, but few of them have elaborate illustrations in the form of woodcuts. The decorative elements are rarely a good match to the content of the song: a 1749 ballad from the Gunnerus corpus with a male name written in particularly beautiful gothic, ornamented letters and decorated with a lemon tree, turns out to be a defamatory execution ballad where the named man is beheaded for incestuous crimes with his daughter.²¹ All of the ballads have an imprint line which contains various information about the year and place of printing. Moreover, the titles in news ballads function as miniature tales, giving the main outlines of the news story depicted in the ballad, as well as often providing the chronology of the events. The degree of details given in the titles varies according to the nature of the event. Unusual murders depicting gruesome crimes could be described in meticulous detail, with titles sometimes appearing like court reports:

En Kort Betragtning

over den

gruesomme Tildragelse paa Gaarden Grøn-Svea i Leuthen Sogn paa Hedemarken,

hvor en Pige, 14ten Aar gammel, som gruesomt havde faaet i Sinde at vilde tage sine egne Forældre af Dage, for siden at kunde raade sig selv desbedre, har overtalt en Dreng af elleve Aar, hvilken var i Huuset tilligemed Hende og var Hendes Sødfkende-Barn, for en Belønning af 40 Knappesnaaler, til at slaae sin Møster, hendes Moder først i Hovedet med en Øxe, hvilket skeede; da hun med en Jern-Hakke gav det andet Slag, og continuerede siden indtil Konen efter over 30 Slag døde, og siden af dem blev henlagt i Færhuser, indtil Mandens Hiemkomst, som aabenbarede denne fæle Gierning.

Synges efter den Melodie:

Med Sorgen og Klagen holdt Maade.

Trykt Aar 1777.

V. box 40: 1186

A brief Reflection on the gruesome Event at the Farm of Grønsvea in Leuthen Parish, where a Girl of fourteen callously got into her mind to kill her parents so she could take control of her own life, and she persuaded a Boy of Eleven who was in the House with her and was her cousin, for a reward of forty Pins, to beat his aunt, the girl's Mother, first in the Head with an axe, which happened; and the girl gave the second blow with an Iron hatch, and continued until the Woman died after receiving thirty blows, and was then placed in the Hen-House until the return of the Husband, who revealed this horrible deed.²²

The imprint line does not give a date for the event, but a sense of accuracy is nevertheless provided in the details naming the locality (the farm, the parish, the county) as well as the age of the perpetrators and the relationship between them. The macabre details are part of the news ballad's paratextual scrupulousness, but this feature is also clearly a promotional device. Iørn Piø writes that news ballads "seek out the sensationalist in everyday matters, emphasizing morbid and morally despicable details from which ethical principals or warnings can be drawn."²³ A fourteen-year-old girl turned murderer is hardly an "everyday matter", but Piø's argument about sensationalist content and despicable details is certainly apparent in the print above, and so is Piø's point about the ballad's propensity to engage in ethical debates. Like many other news ballads, the one above balances on a knife edge between accurate reporting of events and moralistic campaigning: the emphasis on the words "gruesome", "callous" and "horrible" shows how objective news reporting gives way to condemnatory attitudes on criminal affairs. The ballad author also assuredly establishes the motivation behind the crime (the young girl had "callously got into her mind to kill her parents so she could take control of her own life") – a statement which could have been extracted from official criminal records, but is more likely to have been taken from gossip, or (just as likely) have been the creation of the author, eager to pass judgement for promotional purposes. Thus, the news-laden paratext shows how authors would blend the "objective" and accurate discourse of a newspaper with the sensationalist and moralistic discourse that belongs to contemporary popular and didactic literature, the result of which is a synthesis unique to this genre.

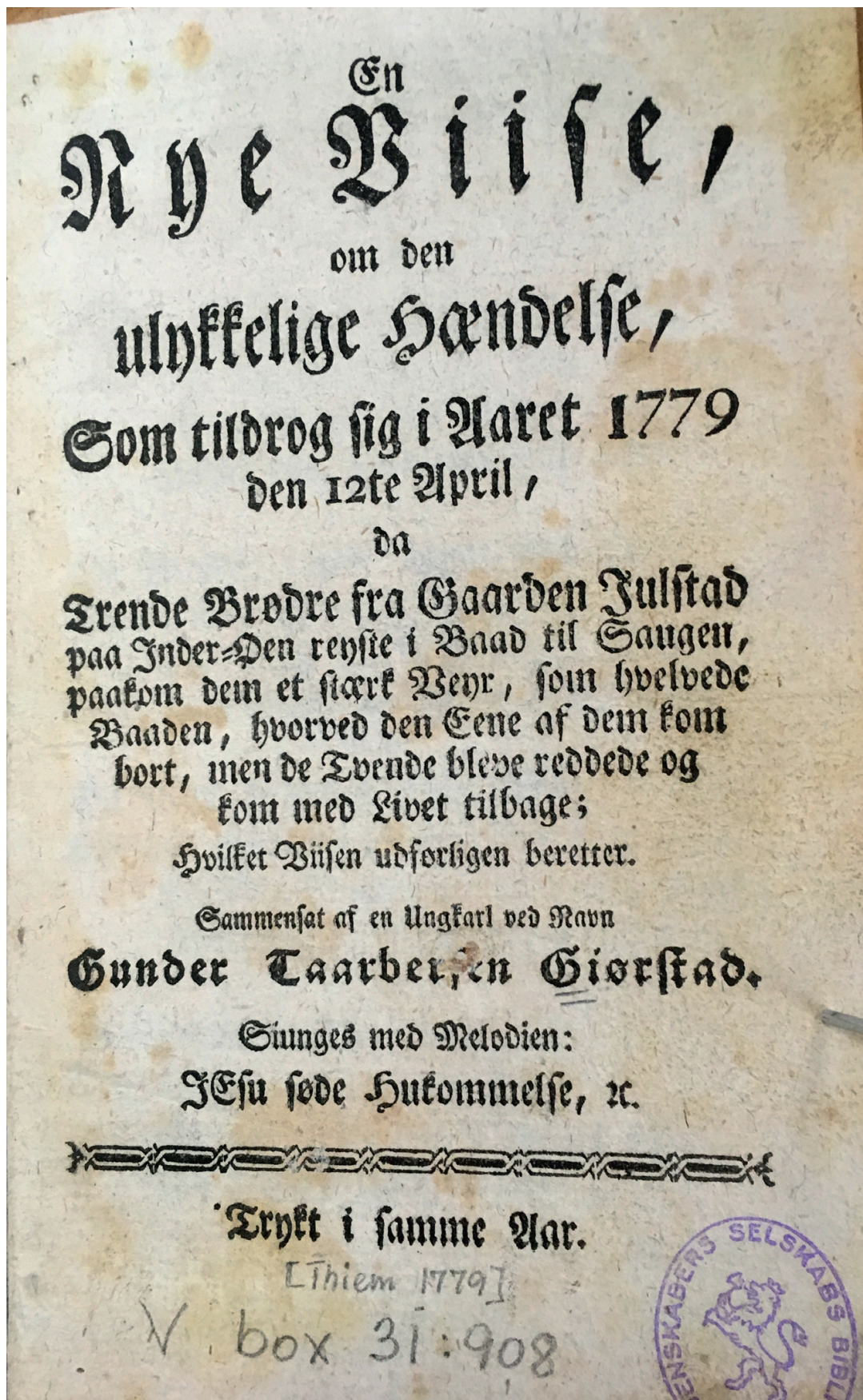
Another noticeable paratextual feature that the ballad above shares with most other news ballads of the period is the extremely long title. Torunn Eriksen (1986) suggests that the long titles are indicative of the way in which oral culture and storytelling has influenced the printed ballads, indicating that they take their cue from folktales (66). This argument is important with regard to the hybrid quality of the skilling ballads and their place in a longstanding folkloric tradition. But it also ignores the skilling ballads' status as print items, and we should thus consider the resemblance to other works within contemporary international print culture: popular continental and British prose stories (such as the eighteenth-century bestseller, *Robinson Crusoe* from 1719) were presented with title pages containing long, de-

scriptive titles, including detailed catalogues of content as well as what we would now call spoilers. As was the case with the promotion of British novels, the long, often sensationalist titles of news ballads were perhaps a way to draw in a browsing customer at a market stall or a window of a printer's office where a purchase could be made – or the titles could function for performance-based advertising: like newspapers, skilling ballads are known to have been hawked on street corners and in market places, where a flamboyant vendor was given the task of shouting out the titles (“hear, hear, about the gruesome murder...”), or even singing them. More research is needed to unravel the logistics of vending skilling ballads in Norway, but there is little reason to believe that the peddling was less colourful in Norway than in other Nordic countries with similar traditions that have been investigated by scholars (see, for example, Danielson 2015).

Most news ballads have titles which are unique to the content they are conveying, i.e. there is a correlation between the title and the particular incident described within the text itself. Nevertheless, there is one recurring *main* title worth noting for its specific relationship to the concept of news, namely the title head *New Ballad (En Ny Viise)*, which appears on numerous prints from the Gunnerus corpus.²⁴ The title can even be found on some of the oldest prints from this collection, from 1593 and 1623.²⁵ Variants of this title could be *A brand new song (En splinterny Vise)*, or *A very new song (Engandske Ny Viise)*. My suggestion is that these titles are part of the news ballads' emphasis on contemporaneity, which is echoed in another recurring paratextual feature: many ballads state that they are “printed this year”, or “printed the same year” (“trykt i dette Aar”, “Trykt i samme Aar”). The motivation behind this phrase is clearly to create a sense of novelty, but the idiom should not be taken at face value: future scholars can be sure to find texts which have been reprinted with this phrase years after its initial release, demonstrating that an old skilling ballad could sometimes be declared to be fresh from the press when it was, in fact, conveying old news.

Whilst most of the title pages of skilling ballads give details about the place and/or time of printing, there is one element that is often missing: the name of the author. In the case of the eighteenth-century ballads, the lack of an author's name is part of that particular period's practice, where authors were rarely mentioned in relation to their literary works. But in a broader context of printed ballad culture it is also fair to say that the question of actual, named authorship is of less importance for understanding the skilling ballads than is the case with more erudite literature throughout history: the ballads take their cue from oral culture, where the idea of collective creation and adaptation is favoured over individual originality. This does not mean that the issue of ballad authorship should be ignored, but it must be approached and investigated on its own terms.

Those news ballads specifically relating local accidents or the deaths of



4. En Nye Viise, om den ulykkelige hændelse som tildrog sig i aaret 1779 den 12te April... (printed in Trondheim, 1779).

private citizens sometimes name a local person as the author. In a ballad about a boat accident involving six people in the municipality of Stod, Trøndelag, the title page gives Baard Andersen as an author, and he is styled “the oldest school-master in the municipality of Stod.”²⁶ There are also examples of news ballads where grieving parents are mentioned as the authors: a 1796 commemoration ballad about a young man is “through Song depicted by the dead Boy’s Father, Jacob Johansøn Kiilen.”²⁷ A news ballad about a boat accident in 1777 names “a good friend” as an author.²⁸ A ballad reporting on the small boat accident in the municipality of Trøndelag names a “bachelor” on the title page, and it is worth noting that he is styled a “compiler” (“Visen er *sammensatt* av...”, see figure 4).²⁹ This phrase – a fairly frequent one on skilling ballads – signals a humbler, more practical approach to authorship than is the case with more erudite literature with named authors; it portrays the author as a journalist, “compiling” the available information into a text. Even more outspokenly modest, albeit potentially less honest, are the title pages where the author declares him- or herself to be the one who has “naively authored” (“Eenfoldig forfattet”) the ballad in question.³⁰ This is a much used paratextual device in British and continental popular literature of the early modern period – “naive” or “simple” is, in this setting, easily translated into “unassuming” and “natural” – and, as was the case with the eighteenth-century novel, it might have been a posture to sell more prints, or a device to avoid repercussions from the tribunals of criticism.

A Bridge between the Private and the Public, the Specific and the General: The Purpose of the Eighteenth-century News Ballad

Most of the eighteenth-century news ballads dealing with accidents and deaths have, unsurprisingly, one crucial element in common: they are deeply spiritual, and – as is made clear both on the title page and in the stanzas – the main motivation behind these publications is consolation and didacticism. Many skilling ballads appear to have been written for specific, semi-private occasions such as funerals, and can be thus be defined as occasional poetry (*leilighetsdiktning*). A ballad concerning the death of six people in a boat accident in the parish of Stod (1751) – the earliest news ballad printed in Trondheim to survive in the Gunnerus archive – makes the motivation behind the publication clear on the title page: it is meant “as encouragement for all, but most importantly as comfort to the grieving families”.³¹ Another song about a boat accident in the same area some decades later (1779, see figure 4) has some resemblance to a dirge, which suggests it was written for the funeral service of the dead man.³² In one stanza, the writer speaks directly to the grieving family: “You who are his parents/and

who loved your son dearly/You saw him leave/never to return again.”³³ But in the last ten stanzas, the writer speaks to a broader religious community, preaching, as it were, the importance of patience in the face of adversity. In this discourse, we clearly see the way in which these types of news ballads have inherited some of their phraseology from medieval Latin Christian discourse, particularly with its insistence on *memento mori*: remember your own mortality, and resist your desire for earthly goods and vain pursuits. However, in the last stanza, the ballad changes mode from spiritual longing to more public issues concerning contemporary calamities: “Many examples we have/of incidents which also took place *this year*,/Incidents involving fire and water:/and in Trondheim, a man was murdered.”³⁴ This ballad is certainly an example of occasional poetry written for a specific event, but the author also turns to more general themes, broadening both the thematic horizon and the range of addressees.

The blurred lines between public and private discourse – and a joint attention to both the occasional and the general – are typical of many news ballads. Although they are concerned with a *specific event* (indeed, we have already identified this as a main feature of news ballads), this does not necessarily mean that they are aimed at a very specific audience. In fact, the act of printing the ballad in itself signals non-specificity with regard to a potential audience. The skilling print discussed above might, perhaps, have been distributed in relation to the funeral in question, but it was probably sold elsewhere as well: given that printing was a costly undertaking in the period, it is unlikely that ballads were printed solely to be handed out at a private event, like more modern funeral programmes or keepsakes. There was an eighteenth-century version of this kind of “private” print matter, the funeral verse (*Liig-psalme*), but this genre was mostly reserved for a prominent and affluent segment of the public. A common man from a small parish dying in a fjord, on the other hand, was more likely to be memorized in a skilling ballad which could be appreciated by his peers.

The most extraordinary cases of public matters depicted in news ballads are those texts that deal with executions. As McIlvenna (2017) reminds us, in the early modern period “execution was performed in the most public of places and indeed its public, visual, didactic role was central to its purpose [...] early modern public execution existed to benefit its viewers morally and spiritually through the destruction of the body of the criminal, both during life and after the moment of death” (279). The ballads written in relation to specific executions can be read as a printed extension of the punitive ritual itself. The execution ballads convey a warning about the importance of living a life free from sin and crime, and they do so by dramatizing the voice of the repentant criminal about to be executed for his or her wrongdoings.

The Norwegian execution ballads found in the Gunnerus archive share this trait with execution ballads published across Europe in the early modern

period onwards, where the main function of the ballad was to provide a warning of divine retribution. There is, however, one astonishing element of the Norwegian (and also Danish) execution ballads I have found so far which separates them from other European execution ballads: some of them announce beheadings that have *not yet taken place*.³⁵ In a print reporting a murder of a Russian man in Trondheim, the perpetrator – a local man named as Erik Hansen Rokstad on the title page – is sentenced to “beheading by sword, and his body to be laid in earth at the place of the execution, which will happen in Trondheim on 10 January 1776.”³⁶ The provision of an exact future date suggests that the text might have functioned as an advertisement for the upcoming event. The phrase highlighting events “which will happen” is also found in other execution ballads from the same period. The title pages of ballads on infanticide by two women in Trøndelag both suggest that the ballads were written some time between the sentencing and the actual execution: in 1775 Margretha Halstad “is sentenced to beheading and her head will be placed on a stake, but her body laid in earth; the rightful punishment of *which will happen* at Steenberget outside Trondheim in February 1775.”³⁷ On the title page of the ballad about the aforementioned Dorothea, the woman who suffered the same cruel fate two years later, we read that the execution “*will happen* at Røebergshougen in late May 1777.”

Intriguingly, there is some evidence to suggest that ballads relating to executions in most European countries were retrospective, and that the use of the future tense in execution ballads is exclusive to the Scandinavian tradition.³⁸ Further study is needed here, but for now we can at least conclude that the use of the phrase “which will happen” as well as the absence of a specific date on the title page suggests that the ballads were written some time between the sentencing and the execution itself, and that the ballads might have functioned as a promotional device to draw an audience to the event. An interesting question is whether the use of the future tense also means that the songs were sold where the decapitation took place. Swedish scholars have established that location-specific vending was fairly common, particularly with ballads relating to crimes or disasters (Danielson 2015:30–32), but the Swedish examples mainly concern retrospective news ballads, i.e. ballads which depicted an event that had already taken place, and where the ballad performed *in situ* served a commemorative function. In lieu of studies on location-specific vending in Norway, we can choose to take our speculations even one step further and ask whether the ballads might also have been *performed* at the scene of events. The libellous tone in these songs suggests they are *nidviser*, judgment songs that might have been used to defame and shame the criminal subject. The question, then, is whether these defamatory songs served a function as part of the punitive ritual. Was there a ballad singer/vendor in place at the execution site, selling these songs as a form of merchandise, and possibly performing them?

This remains an open question, but there is at least one thing we can perhaps rule out, namely, that the audience took any part in performing these songs. According to McIlvenna (2016) the news ballads that promoted audience participation were mainly those with a refrain or with repeated lines at the start and at the end of the song, because they were easy for an audience to memorize (324). The absence of these performative elements in the Norwegian execution ballads – none of which include a refrain or repeated lines – means that audience participation is highly unlikely. We can also assume that the criminal subject herself took no part in the singing of these songs, should they have been part of the punitive ritual – in spite of the fact that they were indeed written in the first person, present tense: “I, poor Sinner! Here, solemnly step forward,/With tears on my Cheeks,/for my evil sins” opens the ballad about Margretha, and it continues: “I now bid farewell/to this World; I now have to die/for my infanticide.”³⁹ The voice of Erik Hansen Rokstad, likewise, is highly dramatized: “Now for such hasty wrath/I suffer here today”, and he bids: “Come Death! Come Sword/cut off my pitiful Head.”⁴⁰ The motivation behind the first person narrative in execution songs and other ballads on crime, as well as their specific place in eighteenth-century ballad culture, has been briefly but convincingly argued by Strand (2016), who concludes that the use of first person narrative is first and foremost a rhetorical device (125). I have found evidence to suggest that the Norwegian material also uses present tense for sensational and didactic effects. The ballad of the man executed for incest can serve as an example. The title page introduces this ballad as *A Delinquent Sinner’s Farewell-Song, namely Ole Nielsen Hindbjørgen, who had engaged in incestuous activities with his own Daughter and was, therefore, on May 1749, in Singsaas Parish, executed by Sword, and his Body laid in the Fire to be burnt.*⁴¹ The execution has (as stated in the title page) already taken place, but in the stanzas the beheading is dramatized in the future tense, as something about to happen: “Therefore, I must now walk/to receive my fair reward/To have my head cut off/and then a Fire will be my Grave.”⁴² Perhaps the ballad was printed for the upcoming event, but then reprinted with a different title page referring to the event of the (near) past – but, it is more likely that the rhetoric of contemporaneity is first and foremost a device aimed to sensationalize and moralize. The appearance of the future tense in such retrospective news ballads can thus serve as a caution for historians: skilling ballads can be gateways to the past, portals that carry voices that are rarely mediated elsewhere – but they were also, essentially, produced for entertainment. Future scholars will undoubtedly have to negotiate between the alluring discourse of contemporaneous and subjective melodrama and the more mundane issues of saleability that is a unique part of the eighteenth-century news ballads.

Conclusion: The Eighteenth-century News Ballad in the Context of Modern (Social) Media

If newspapers write the first draft of history, then skilling ballads record the histories that did not find a place within this foundational narrative: none of the incidents referred to above – the executions, the stabbings, the incestuous crime and the boat accidents – were recorded in the newspapers circulating at the time. Perhaps it is here, then, that we can consider the skilling ballads as Norway's very first mass medium. As alternative mediators of news in their day, these texts are the closest we come to an historical equivalent to the mediation of news in social media today, both in terms of accessibility, popularity – and controversy. A modern equivalent to the news ballads could be the individual spectator recording a severe accident or a crime on his phone, and broadcasting it on platforms without the normal rules of decorum, which shape (or are supposed to shape) the practice of official media outlets. Like the early modern skilling ballad, the news items on social media are enjoyed on their own terms: spread and shared in a semi-private sphere, and adapted and tweaked according to the subjective preferences of the mediators and re-mediators.

The variable degree of adherence to editorial rules, journalistic norms and accuracy forms another point of comparison between news ballads and modern social media. The eighteenth-century news ballad could be marvellous to the point of absurdity, as is the case with much of the news spread and falsified in social media – or, it could be profoundly accurate, as is also the case with much of the news spread on social media (despite their bad reputation). The eighteenth-century Scandinavian news ballad seems to have gone through a development from the former to the latter outlook, and perhaps we can adapt this progress to predict one possible evolution of today's volatile media landscape. As I have tried to suggest above, the news ballad in its nascent phase (in the early eighteenth century) presented mostly spectacular news on fantastical animals or monstrous children, but from the mid-eighteenth-century onwards – and corresponding exactly with the instigation of the printed newspaper and the emergence of Enlightenment ideas – the producers of news ballads changed their discourse. From this period onwards the news ballad appears, at least in paratextual terms, as a go-to medium for accurate news reporting. Whether the propensity for false or inaccurate news conveyed in today's social media will prevail, only the future can tell, since we are still very much in the midst of a paradigmatic media shift.

In any case, we can conclude that the news ballads might have functioned both as serious rivals to and important substitutes for the printed newspapers for an eighteenth-century audience, and for this reason alone they deserve a chapter of their own in early modern Norwegian media history. Importantly, the news ballad also shares with the newspaper what we might call the curse

of ephemerality: that which is news also quickly becomes *old* news. The ephemeral quality of the news ballads might be the main reason why this type of ballad has not survived the wear and tear of time to become national evergreens, as is the case with some of the more universal and timeless skilling ballads. Who wants to sing about a minor boat accident in the district of Trøndelag, when you can perform an ageless song about undying love? The news ballad is different from many other ballad subgenres – love ballads, drinking songs and shanties – most of which are invested with a more universal, timeless appeal. Thus, the usual survival mechanism of the skilling ballads – their safe haven as part of a performative, oral culture – does not fully apply for the news ballads. As I have tried to show in this article, however, these texts are all the more interesting for what they can convey about historical events, social conditions and cultural mind-sets of our past.

Siv Gøril Brandtzæg

Post doctoral researcher

Department of Language and Literature

Faculty of Humanities, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

7491 Trondheim

Norway

siv.brandtzæg@ntnu.no

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¹ Sørnes (2014) estimates that 31 executions took place in the years 1772–1783, which is, roughly, the period under scrutiny in this essay. See also Kjus 2010 for a discussion of judicial practices and execution ballads (*skafottsanger*) from the nineteenth century.

² “Hun er tildømt at halshugges med Øre, hovudet at sættes paa Stage, men Kroppen at nædlægges i Jorden, hvilket skal skee paa Røebergs-hougen sidst i Maji-Maaned 1777.” From *En bodfærdig synderindes, ved navn Dorothea Brynnelsdatter, vemodige KLAGE-SANG over hendes Børne-fødseler i Dølsmaal, og Drab paa trende af dem* (printed in Trondheim, 1777, V Box 33: 988). The term “V Box” refers to the physical location of the ballads in the Gunnerus collection.

³ “Jeg udi deres Fødsels-Stund/Min haand lagt paa deres Mund,/Og skildte dem ved Livet,/som Gud dem dog har givet.”

⁴ “Nu jeg for Øxen knæle maae,/Mit Hoved skal paa Stage staae/Til Varsels-Tegn for andre.”

⁵ The most important collections of transcribed skilling ballads which include brief introductions on the genre, are Eriksen 1973, Amundsen & Kvideland 1975, Eggen 1981, Solberg 1996 and Storsve 2002. There are also some articles where specific subgenres of skilling ballads are discussed in brief: Espeland 2007, Alver 2003, Kjus 2010 and Christensen 1993. In his book *Trivialiteter: Fra Den norske masselitteraturs historie*, Willy Dahl has a short chapter on the skilling ballad (1986:9–18). Two master’s theses have been written on the genre (Eriksen 1983 and Gunnes 2008). For an analysis of the reasons why the genre has been neglected in Norwegian cultural heritage, see Brandtzæg 2018.

⁶ The skilling ballads are not mentioned in the most important books on the history of Norwegian literature, the six-volume *Norsk Litteraturhistorie* (1923–1955) by Bull, Paasche, Winsnes and Houms; neither does it appear in Beyer and Beyers *Norsk litteraturhistorie* (1970). In the monumental, eight-volume *Norges Litteraturhistorie* (ed. Beyer), only four pages are dedicated to the skilling ballad (volume 3, 568–571), and in the most recent book, Per Thomas Andersen’s *Norsk Litteraturhistorie* (2012, 1st ed., 2001) skilling ballads are not mentioned at all.

⁷ The religious ballad “En Merckelig Viise om den yderste Dommedag” (1643) was one of the first print items from Tyge Nielsson (1610–1687), the Dane who established the first print press in Christiania in 1643. See Melhus 1943:14 and 16.

⁸ I am currently involved in a project to digitize this collection, in collaboration with the Gunnerus special collections library. The digitization will result in a database, and the work is part of the project “Skillingsvisene i Norge, 1550–1950: Den forsømte kulturarven”, financed by the Norwegian Research Council (project number 274962).

⁹ For estimates and information about the collections, see Brandtzæg 2018.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the term *skillingstrykk* versus *skillingsvise*, see Brandtzæg 2018 where I present the case for choosing the term *skillingsvise*, arguing that this term is best suited for capturing the unique hybrid quality of the genre in a Norwegian context. See also Karin Strand in this volume.

¹¹ According to Angela McShane Jones, the roman-letter type ballad completely replaced the black-letter ballad by 1700, and this, together with the fact that from then on the ballads were “printed on slips of paper rather than folio sheets”, led important ballad collectors such as Pepys to lose interest in the genre (2002:140–141). As Jones convincingly argues, though, these changes in format and typography did not mean a decline in the production of ballads in England: “though black-letter ballads certainly declined in number from the end of the seventeenth century, this was a change in typeface and format, not a decline in the genre” (ibid., p. 141).

¹² The generic term *news ballad* has been convincingly criticized by Jones (2002) who contests earlier views on the functions of the eighteenth-century political broadside ballad as “news intelligencers”; rather, she argues, they were “doing something different” from the newspapers: “the ballad functioned primarily as entertainment, instruction, comment, explanation and complaint, not as a vehicle for information” (p. 146). While I agree with Jones that the function of the broadside ballad is more complex with regard to news conveyance than is the case with the printed newspaper of the period, I also suggest that national differences need to be considered. Jones writes, for example, that the eighteenth-century Anglophone ballads “were rarely dated”,

whereas exact dating is very much present in the Norwegian variants. I would thus argue that the Scandinavian term “nyhetsviser” might be used with less caution than is the case with the English term “news ballads.”

¹³ *En Merkværdig stor og forunderlig Fisk som blev fangen/dog icke uden stoer Møye ved Genff, og havde et Ansigt som et Menniske...* (printed in Copenhagen, 1709, V box 38: 1116), and *Et underlig Spectacel hvorledis en Koe haver født en Kalf her uden for Staden paa Vester Broe/og samme Kalf haver haft et stort støcke Kiød i Panden/og derunder sad tvende Øyen/og en Mund hafde hand efter et Menniskis mund* (printed in Copenhagen, 1719, V box 38: 1118).

¹⁴ *En underlig skabning, seet paa et Barn som blev født til Verden den 13 Sept. 1720, Kl. 7 om Aftenen i Teylegaardsstræde udi Kiøbenhavn...* (printed in Copenhagen, 1720, V box 38: 1119).

¹⁵ *Et Sandfærdigt og meget forunderligt stort Mirackel seet paa et Dreng-Barn, som indeværende Aar er født udi Dantziger Werder ved Dantzig, hvilket blev tre Gange forandret for Præsten ved Daaben førend det blev døbt...* (printed in Copenhagen, 1720, V box 39: 1121).

¹⁶ *Ministerialprotokoll for Stadsbygd prestegjeld, 1751–1790* reveals that her full name was Dordi Brynjulfsdatter Råsshållan, and that she was executed on 22 May 1777. Historians Sørnes 2014 (190–195) and Rein 1999 (671) have brief notes on Dordi’s biography.

¹⁷ “Aktualitet og troværdighet” er skillingsvisens “to væsentlige karakteristika, de vil være og er i mange tilfælde også sande” (Piø 1969, 48).

¹⁸ *Ordinari Post Tijdender* was the first weekly newspaper established in Sweden in 1645, and in Denmark the first newspaper is considered to be the monthly *Den Danske Mercurius*, established in 1666. Even though the early modern Danish newspapers circulated in Norway at the time, the establishment of a national media culture should not be overlooked. The first newspaper in Norway was *Norske Intelligenz-Seddel*, first published in Christiania in 1763. The same decade saw the establishment of a number of regional newspapers, including one from the municipality of Trondheim. For the most recent account of the development of the Norwegian newspapers and journals in the eighteenth century, see Krefting, Nøding & Ringvej (2014).

¹⁹ Another issue is whether skilling ballads were published on a regular basis, like the newspaper, and perhaps even published by subscription. Christensen 1993 suggests that printer Winding monthly distributed skilling prints to regular customers (p. 179), but it is difficult to know the veracity of this since it is not clear where Christensen takes this information from.

²⁰ For this distinction between newspapers and fiction I am indebted to Warner (2018:27). The parallel I draw from newspapers to news ballads is, however, entirely my own construction.

²¹ *EN bodfærdig Synderes Afskeeds-Sang, navnlig Ole Nielsen Hindbjørgen, som havde bedrevet Blodskam med sin egen Slegfred-Datter, og derfor den 20. Maji 1749, udi Singsaas Sogn, blev henrettet med et Sverd, og Kroppen lagt paa et Baal at opbrændes...* (printed in Trondheim, 1749, V box 35: 1022).

²² *En Kort Betragtning over den gruesomme Tildragelse paa Gaarden Grønsvea i Leuthen Sogn paa Hedemarken, hvor en Pige, 14ten Aar gammel, som gruesomt havde faaet i Sinde at vilde tage sine egne Forældre af Dage, for siden at kunde raade sig selv desbedre, har overtalt en Dreng af elleve Aar, hvilken var i Huuset tilligemed Hende og var Hendes Søskende-Barn, for en Belønning af 40 Knappenaaler til at slaae sin Moster, hendes Moder først i Hovedet med en Øxe, hvilket skeede; da hun med Jern-Hakke gav det andet slag, og continuerede siden indtil Konen efter over 30 slag døde, og siden af dem blev henlagt i Fæehuset, indtil Mandens Hiemkomst, som aabenbarede denne fæle Gierning...* (1777, V box 40: 1186). See Sørnes 2014 for a discussion of this criminal case.

²³ “Nyhetsviserne søger med forkærlighed sensationen i hverdagen, den gruopvækkende, den moralsk forkastelige eller en sådan hvorudaf en morale eller advarsel kan uddrages” (Piø, 66).

²⁴ See for example *En Nye Viise om den forunderlige og mærkelige spaadom af Martin Zadeck en Svidser ved Solothurn* (printed in Trondheim, V box 31: 919.); *En Nye Viise om Juule-Aftens Feyde i Kiøbenhavn 1771* (printed in Trondheim, 1772, V box 31: 912); *En Nye Viise i anled-*

ning hvad der er skeet i Kiøbenhavn den 17de Januarii 1772... (printed in Trondheim, 1772, V box 31: 929); *En Ny Viise, til Efterretning om hvad der skede i Aaret 1793...* (printed in Trondheim, 1794), and *En meget artig Nye Historisk Viise om et par Ægtefolks ulige Kiærlighed...* (V box 32: 934).

²⁵ *En ny deilig oc gudelig Vise...* (printed in Copenhagen, 1593), and *En ny Viise om Guds Ord oc sin Lemmers elendige Vilkaar...* (printed in Copenhagen, 1623). See also the oldest surviving ballad printed in Norway: *Tvende nye lystige, men sømmelige Viiser...* (printed in Trondheim, 1750). None of these are news ballads in the strict definition of the term, but they show the currency of the titular phrase emphasizing novelty from the earliest period.

²⁶ “Sangviis forfattede af Baard Andersen, ældste Bøygde-Skolemester i Stoeds Gield.” From *Døds Tanker over den hastige Døds Tilfælde som skeede paa Bye-Fiorden den 7 Octobris Ao. 1750...* (printed in Trondheim, 1751, V box 31: 904). The veracity of the boat accident in Stod is confirmed in the surviving church book for the local area of Stod, where the names and ages of the four men and the girl and the boy, are given.

²⁷ “Under Sang forestillet af den Dødes Fader, Jacob Johansøn Kiilen” (printed in Bergen, 1796, V Box 34: 1001).

²⁸ *En Sørgelig nye Viise om ... Karl Roland Olsøn Ulstad...digtet af hans gode Camerat* (printed in Trondheim, 1777, V box 10: 273).

²⁹ “Visen er samensatt av Gunder Taargersen Giørstad.”

³⁰ See for example *En Veemodig Nye Viise* about a fire in 1755, “Eenfoldig forfatted af en blind Karl udi Biongen, ved Navn Christen Olsen Tindberg” (V Box 9: 267).

³¹ “Til Opmuntring for Alle, men i sær til Trøst for de igienlevende Bedrøvede.” From *Døds Tanker over den hastige Døds Tilfælde som skeede paa Bye-Fiorden den 7 Octobris Ao. 1750...* (printed in Trondheim, 1751, V box 31: 904).

³² *En Nye Viise, om den ulykkelige hændelse som tildrog sig i aaret 1779 den 12te April, da trende Brødre fra Gaarden Julstad paa Inder-Øen reiste i Baad til Saugen...* (printed in Trondheim, 1779, V Box 31: 908). The veracity of this accident is confirmed by the *Ministerialprotokoll for Inderøy prestegjeld 1762–1802* where the name and age of the deceased is given.

³³ “I som hans forældre er,/og havde eders Søn ret kiær,/Skulde see ham at drage hen,/men ikke komme meer igjen.”

³⁴ “Exempler har vi mange faa,/Som har og hendt i dette Aar,/Der har nue skeed med Ild og Vand:/I Trondhiem blev og myrdt en Mand.”

³⁵ Some examples of Danish news ballads depicting future executions are given in Lone Nielsen, Camilla Søs Krarup and Ewelina Szyburska Solgaard 2011 *De melankolske mordere*, a student assignment published online which provides a handful of examples of Danish execution ballads. See also Krogh 2000.

³⁶ “Han er tildømt at miste sit Hoved med Sværd, hans Legem at nedgraves i Jorden paa det Stæd han bliver henrettet; hvilket skeer udi Tronhiem den 10de Januarii 1776.” From *En veemodig Klage-Sang af Erik Hansen Rokstad...* (printed in Trondheim, 1776, V box 35: 1021).

³⁷ “Hun er dømt til at miste sit Hoved, som skal sættes paa Stage, men Legemet nedgraves i Jorden; hvilken velfortiente Straf hun skal udstaae ved Steenberget uden for Trondhiem i Februarii Maaned 1775.” From *En bedrøvet Synderindes navnlig Margretha Nielsdatter Halstads veemodige Klage-Sang, over hendes begangne Barne-Fødsel i Dølsmaal, og udøvede Mord paa sit eget Foster...* (printed in Trondheim, 1775, V box 35: 1023). See Christensen 1993 for the criminal proceedings of Margretha Halstad.

³⁸ This was the hypothesis in a collaborative paper on the European execution ballad written by Una McIlvenna, Juan Gomis and myself, and presented at the conference European Dimensions of Popular Print Culture (EDPOP) in Utrecht in June 2018. McIlvenna has worked extensively on pan-European news ballads, and has not seen any other examples of the use of the future tense in execution ballads.

³⁹ “Jeg arme Synderinde!/Veemodig kommer frem,/Med Taarerne paa Kinde,/For mine Synder

slem” // Nu maa jeg Afskeed byde fra/denne Verdens Jord; nu maae jeg Dø/den lide, som begik Barne-Mord.”

⁴⁰ “Nu for saa hastig Vrede/Jeg lide maa i Dag”, and “Kom død! Kom Sværd at meie/mit usle Hoved af.”

⁴¹ *EN bodfærdig Synderes Afskeeds-Sang, navnlig Ole Nielsen Hindbjørgen, som havde bedrevet Blodskam med sin egen Slegfred-Datter, og derfor den 20. Maji 1749, udi Singsaas Sogn, blev henretted med et Sverd, og Kroppen lagt paa et Baal at opbrændes...* (printed in Trondheim, 1749, V box 35: 1022).

⁴² “Derfor maa jeg nu hen gaae,/Min fortiente Løn at faae:/At mit Hoved hugges af,/Siden er et Baal min Grav.”