

EXPANDING A TRADITIONAL BALLAD: *TAM LIN*  
IN THE PICTURE BOOK FANTASIES OF  
JANE YOLEN AND SUSAN COOPER

JANIS DAWSON

O I forbid you, maidens a,  
That wear gowd on your hair,  
To come or gae by Caterhaugh,  
For young Tam Lin is there.

There's nane that gaes by Caterhaugh  
But they leave him a wad,  
Either their rings, or green mantles,  
Or else their maidenhead.

Janet has kilted her green kirtle  
A little aboon her knee,  
And she has broded her yellow hair  
A little aboon her bree,  
And she's awa' to Carterhaugh.  
As fast as she can hie.

-*Tam Lin* (Child 39A)<sup>1</sup>

*Tam Lin* is one of the better known of the traditional Scottish fairy ballads. This highly romantic story of a young woman who rescues her lover from the Fairy Queen was noted in written sources as early as the sixteenth century. Although the ballad itself, set in the wild border lands of Scotland, appears to be unique to the Scottish people, folklorists have connected the story with Greek popular traditions older than Homer (Child 336)<sup>2</sup> The story has also been linked to other traditional ballads and tales, including *Thomas the Rhymer*, *The Faerie Oak of Corriewater*, *Alice Brand*, *The King's Daughter Jane*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, and it has been described as *the* canonical ballad ("Legends"). In more recent times, the story has continued to inspire artists, writers, and musicians.<sup>3</sup> *Tam Lin* has even entered the electronic age with an extensive web site devoted to the discussion and interpretation of the ballad.<sup>4</sup>

Romance aside, however, *Tam Lin* is a dark, violent and highly complex story that in its various manifestations deals with rape, abortion, abduction, torture, and human sacrifice. It also draws on primal fears of abandonment, darkness, madness, and the power of evil. This is adult material, to be sure; nonetheless, the ballad has inspired a number of fantasy stories and novels for children and young adults including *The Gold of Fairnilee* (1888) by Andrew Lang, *Thursday* by Catherine Storr (1971) *The Queen of Spells* by Dahlov Ipcar (1973), *The Perilous Gard* by Elizabeth Marie Pope (1974), and *Fire and Hemlock* by Diana Wynne Jones (1984), as well as illustrated children's books by Jane Yolen (1990) and Susan Cooper (1991)<sup>5</sup> Many of these authors have been drawn to the character of the determined young woman who redeems her lover from the Fairy Queen.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the fair Janet, or Margaret, as she is variously known, has been represented as a kind of profeminist in a number of modern discussions of the ballad. John Niles writes that

In its portrait of Janet, a young woman willing to venture her life in defiance of all restrictions in an attempt to win her lover back to human form, the Scottish ballad reflects an ideal of feminine behavior which is refreshingly unlike that which is reflected in most polite literature of recent centuries. The ballad itself has no use for pale, passive princesses. It shows us a spunky and defiant young woman who is both willing and able to help herself. The song is rooted in rough soil, and its protagonist shows the kind of toughness necessary for survival in such terrain. (346).

Colin Manlove expresses a similar view, noting that, "it must be said that there is a strong 'feminist' element to many Scottish (not Gaelic) fairy tales" (22). Manlove seems to see feminism as women pitted against one another, however, for his discussion is as much about the Fairy Queen as Janet. "The whole tale is a picture of feminine resolution-and even dominance," he writes, "for Tam is the slave of the Fairy Queen and cannot escape by himself" (32). Not surprisingly, authors who have used this ballad to structure their own works have emphasized female strength, boldness, perseverance and independence.<sup>7</sup> This search for the female hero, at the expense, perhaps, of other elements in the traditional story, naturally raises the issue of how authors use traditional literature in the creation of fantasy for young readers. However, as C. W. Sullivan III notes, "little attention has been given to the work of authors of fantasy for children and

adolescents who have drawn directly on traditional plot structures upon which to expand and build whole novels" ("Traditional Ballads" 145).

Sullivan has identified three major ways in which authors have used traditional materials to structure or help structure their novels: expanding, interweaving, and inventing (*Welsh Celtic Myth* x)<sup>8</sup> It is understood that regardless of the method used, a careful writer will use the materials conscientiously and respect the essence of the traditional work. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will refer to Sullivan's first method, expanding, in my discussion of modern versions of the ballad by Jane Yolen and Susan Cooper. The version of the traditional ballad that will serve as the reference point for this examination will be the one listed as number 39A in Francis James Child's collection of English and Scottish popular ballads published between 1882 and 1898. Child's 39A appears to be one of the oldest printed versions of the ballad.<sup>9</sup>

According to Sullivan, expanding refers to the way in which a modern author "expands upon the original material-adding, as it were, flesh to the skeleton [. . .]." In this manner, the modern author "adds detail and texture, filling in the background, developing major and minor characters more fully, borrowing from other compatible sources, and creating new material that complements the original" (*Welsh Celtic Myth* 13). Jane Yolen and Susan Cooper, both well respected authors of fantasy for children, have followed the traditional ballad closely in their respective works, but each has expanded the ballad in interesting ways. Both publications are illustrated and designed for younger readers. In addition to expanding the ballad, however, both Yolen and Cooper have chosen to omit some traditional material because they are writing for a younger audience. The ways in which these omissions affect the retelling of *Tam Lin* will be discussed in this paper.

Although there are some fifteen versions of the ballad (including fragments) in Child's collection, the general story line may be described as follows: A young man (Tam Lin)<sup>10</sup> haunts a wild area (Carterhaugh)<sup>11</sup> threatening young maidens by demanding things of value including rings, green mantles, and even their maidenheads. One young woman, Janet or Margaret,<sup>12</sup> refuses to heed the warnings and proceeds to visit the dangerous place. She plucks a rose, thereby summoning the young man. He challenges her, but she declares her right to be there because it is "my ain, /My daddie gave it me." She dallies with the young man, and when she returns home, she is with child. She returns at a later time, summons him again by plucking a rose, and asks his identity. He explains that many years ago, he was

abducted by the Elfin Queen (or Queen of the Fairies), but now he is about to be given up as a "tithe to Hell" unless the young woman agrees to save him. The young man's instructions are explicit: she must meet him at the crossroads on Halloween night (or Midsummer's Eve) when the Queen and her court ride abroad and pull him from his horse. She must then hold fast to him while he undergoes successive terrifying changes of shape ending in a burning rod of iron. Once he has returned to his human form, she must immerse him in a body of water and then wrap him in her mantle. The young woman follows her lover's instructions and thereby wins him for herself.

Yolen begins her retelling of *Tam Lin* not with the familiar warning to maidens but with a description of a ruined castle, "strange and forbidding," set on "a weedy piece of land called Carterhaugh." Readers are told that, "many years had passed since humans had lived there," and that "now all the children were warned against it." Yolen has thus expanded the ballad to include an eerie atmosphere and a warning to all children, not just maidens. She alters the warning still further by having older boys go secretly to Carterhaugh on dares, "leaving tokens of their passing-garlands or rings, and once a fine green mantle." While Yolen's addition of atmospheric detail enhances the supernatural aspects of the tale and effectively prepares the reader for the appearance of the enchanted knight and the Faery Queen, her alterations are, in effect, omissions—*Tam Lin* does not demand a toll and there is no reference to the loss of maidenheads (rape or seduction)—and they deprive the story of its ability to function as a cautionary tale. These changes, dictated, one must assume, by the fact that Yolen is writing for a younger audience, also affects the nature of the relationship between *Tam Lin* and the young maiden called Jennet.

Yolen expands Jennet's character by describing her beauty and emphasizing her boldness. Yolen also makes Jennet's determination to claim her inheritance the motivation for her otherwise unexplained journey to Carterhaugh in defiance of the warning:

Jennet always had a mind of her own, even as a wee girl. The villagers all said she would never marry, no matter that her father was chief of the clan. No man would want her, even for all her beauty and her father's name. For she always spoke what she thought. And *what* she thought was never quite proper for a young lady.

"I will go," Jennet said, "for I am not afraid. I will go when I am old enough to win back Carterhaugh for our clan."

In the ballad, however, Jennet's reference to her inheritance is presented simply as her defiant answer to Tam Lin's demand to know why she is plucking a rose at Carterhaugh:

Carterhaugh, it is my ain,  
 My daddie gave it me;  
 I'll come and gang by Carterhaugh  
 And ask nae leave at thee. (Child 39A verse 7)

Yolen has thus expanded the original narrative to make Janet's actions more understandable and to present her as a determined, strong-willed young woman—a female hero. Yolen also gives Jennet a last name which further identifies her as a strong woman determined to claim her rights.

True to her promise, Yolen's Jennet goes to Carterhaugh on her sixteenth birthday to claim her inheritance. Yolen embellishes the ballad's reference to Jennet's dress and again emphasizes her reason for going to Carterhaugh:

On the day she turned sixteen, the day she came into her inheritance, Jennet twisted her long, red-gold hair into a braid and pinned it to the top of her head. She put on her brand new birthday gown, as green as a young willow. She fastened the MacKenzie plaid across her shoulder and secured it with a golden brooch. [. . .] Jennet pulled the plaid up over her hair. She put on her walking shoes, tucked her skirts above her knees, and bounded up and over the heather hills toward the tumbledown towers of Carterhaugh.

Once at Carterhaugh, "In a voice that was strong, though the echo of it trembled," Jennet announces her claim to Carterhaugh *before* she plucks the rose that will summon Tam Lin:

This reversal of events allows Yolen's Jennet more power in her encounter with Tam Lin; she is in a less vulnerable position than her counterpart in the ballad. A further significant addition is Jennet's claim that Carterhaugh was stolen from her ancestors by the fairies. By plucking the rose, Jennet states that she is making a pledge that she will "take back Carterhaugh and restore it to humankind."

There is, of course, no sexual encounter between Jennet and Tam Lin, and Yolen's Jennet has no need to make a second journey to Carterhaugh to either confront her lover or gather herbs to induce a miscarriage (depending on the version of the ballad used). Jennet and

Tam Lin quickly fall in love, and as in the traditional ballad, he describes his enchantment and tells her how she can win him away from the Fey. Yolen follows the ballad closely up to Jennet's victory over the Faery Queen, combining details from different versions that require Jennet to carry holy water and earth from her own garden as additional protection from the power of the Fey.<sup>13</sup> However, rather than end the story with the Queen's angry curse,

Shame betide her ill-fared face,  
 And an ill death may she die,  
 For she's taen way the bonniest knight  
 In a' my companie. (Child 39 A verse 41)

Yolen's Tam Lin laughs at the Queen's curse, and dismisses her power:

"We stand here protected by a circle of earth, with holy water upon our heads. Your curses return from us to thee, O Queen of the Ever-Fair. And look!" He pointed to the horizon where the sun was just dawning. "Your power is over. Be gone."

Yolen then provides a fairy tale conclusion:

And so Jennet and Tam Lin were married. It is said in Selkirk that they lived a long and happy life together in the great stone castle Jennet restored and renamed Carter Hall. And that their children's children's children lived there happily ever after.

By ending her book in this way rather than with the curse, Yolen removes the possibility that the Queen will return to harm Jennet, Tam Lin, or their future offspring. Where the ballad leaves the reader or listener conscious of the lingering threat of evil and danger, Yolen provides a "happily ever after" picture. This removes the tension and upsets the fine balance in the ballad which begins with a warning and ends with a threat. Tam Lin's original audience would have understood that the Queen's threat was no idle utterance; it is powerful and malevolent, and it carries with it the weight of traditional lore rich in stories of changelings, stolen children, faery possession, and human sacrifice. In terms of Jennet herself, the ending seems to diminish her character as if her struggle with the Fairy Queen has robbed her of her essential boldness and vigour. The image of Jennet at the end of the book is inconsistent with the strong-minded young woman Yolen establishes in the opening paragraphs.

Evelyn Perry argues that Yolen's ending diminishes the ballad by downplaying the struggle between Good and Evil that is an essential part of the story. In Perry's words, "The Fairy Queen's final threat to the couple, the understanding that we must never relax our fight against Evil, and the touching appeal to the hero in all of us, have been plowed under by the promise of happily ever after and the distillation of Evil" (40).

Unfortunately, however, Perry, preoccupied with the hero's journey, is less than clear about what this Good and Evil might represent, and consequently her critique of Yolen falls short. If the ballad is read through its symbolism, however, Good and Evil are not vague and amorphous; what is represented is a struggle between Christianity and the still powerful ancient gods and spirits of nature. The symbols are Janus-like; they may be Christian or Pagan, and this creates a powerful tension in the ballad. The rose, the central image here, represents virginity, passion and seduction, but in Christian symbolism, it also represents the blood Christ shed on the cross. The thorn, as dominant in the illustrations as the rose itself, also recalls Christ's crown of thorns. The Christian symbolism, indeed, cannot be downplayed without violating the integrity of the ballad. In the ballad, Janet's action turns on her desperate hope that her lover is a mortal and a Christian. Pregnant with their child, she returns to Carterhaugh to confront him:

O tell me, tell me, Tam Lin, she says,  
 For's sake that dies on tree,  
 If e' er ye was in holy chapel,  
 Or Christendom did see. (Child 39A verse 21)

Once she receives the assurance she seeks, she is prepared to follow his instructions. This sequence is important because it helps to explain Janet's action from this point forward. Janet is motivated not just by love but also by her real need for a Christian union for the sake of her unborn child.

Although Yolen has reduced the ballad through her happily-ever-after ending, in her defense, it must be said that she has, nonetheless, preserved a sense of the religious struggle at the heart of the ballad by having Jenet bring a bottle of holy water (blessed by the priest) and earth from her garden (earth from a Christian precinct) to her meeting with the Faery Queen. In Yolen's retelling of the ballad, the holy water and the earth play a crucial part in the redemption of Tam Lin. Tam Lin, in thrall to the dark powers of the Faery Queen, is indeed a

fallen man; by claiming him from the Queen, Jennet, a Christian woman, redeems not only his body but also his soul. His immersion in the holy well is his baptism.

Charles Mikolaycak's full page lavish illustrations are well suited to Yolen's retelling of Tam Lin and contribute in their own way to the expansion of the ballad. His illustrations, in fact, provide the sexual imagery that Yolen's text omits. He uses strong lines and bold and vivid colours that complement and emphasize Jennet's strong character. Gray and black are used to emphasize the darkness of the story and the eeriness of the setting, but red and green predominate, reinforcing the Christian and Celtic symbolism in the story: red for the rose that symbolizes virginity, seduction, passion, fertility, and the blood of sacrifice; green for fertility, renewal, envy, and deceit. Green is also the colour traditionally associated with the fairy folk. The central image in the ballad, the rose, becomes a focal point in Mikolaycak's illustrations, expanding from a small rosebud crushed in an old woman's hand, to a full blown rose in the wilderness at Carterhaugh. It is the full-blown rose that Jennet picks to summon her lover; it also signals her deflowering. The thorn joins the rose as a dominant image in the illustrations, representing not only the blood and Passion of Christ, but also untilled soil, and by association, virginity. In Christian symbolism, "Christ's crown of thorns celebrates the marriage of Heaven with the virgin Earth"; it is "the wedding ring of the Word—the Son of Man—and the Earth, virgin and still to be made fertile" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 990). The colours are woven into the lovers' clothing, reinforcing the dual nature of the symbolism of the ballad. Jennet's gown is green and her mantle is a red and green plaid when she first goes to Carterhaugh; when she returns to confront the Queen, she wears a rose/blood red gown and a green mantle. Tam Lin's plaid is black and white; his colours recall the black thorn, but in the final illustration of the text, the artist has added the colours of Jennet's plaid. Through colour imagery, the union of Jennet and Tam Lin represents the marriage of Heaven and Earth and the victory over the dark forces represented by the Faery Queen.<sup>14</sup>

Susan Cooper's retelling of Tam Lin is based on several versions of the ballad rather than on the better known Child 39 A. Here Jennet is called Margaret, and she is presented as the king's daughter rather than the daughter of a clan chieftain. Cooper follows the outline of the traditional ballad closely, but like Yolen, Cooper expands the ballad by adding details that provide atmosphere and texture and contribute to the development of the young woman's character.

Cooper begins, as Yolen does, not with the traditional warning,

but with a description of the setting; however, Cooper's setting is pleasant rather than eerie and forbidding:

The clouds marched over the blue summer sky, and the cloud-shadows slid purple and grey across the hills of Scotland, as Margaret sat beside her window, sewing. She was not fond of sewing. She longed for adventure. But because she was the daughter of the king she was supposed to set a good, gentle example to all the other girls. Every morning they sat with her in the great tower of her father's castle, sewing, listening to the stories told by Margaret's old nurse and waiting to be married.

True to the spirit of the ballad, Margaret is presented as bolder than other girls, but Cooper's maiden seems to lack Jennet's vivacious manner. The soft tones of Warwick Hutton's watercolour illustrations contribute to this impression of a less confident, more subdued character for Margaret; unlike Mikolaycak's Jennet, she strikes no bold poses. Her sudden decision to go to Carterhays is prompted not by her determination to claim her estate, as in Yolen's retelling, but rather by her rebelliousness. She does not want to sit and sew and listen to instructions about maidenly behaviour.

"Rub your skin with cucumber for softness," said fat Jana, the steward's daughter.

"Behave modestly with young men," said soft-voiced Alison, "as is fitting for a maid."

The old nurse nodded in approval. "And never travel the roads alone, or go near Carterhays."

"I don't see why not," Margaret said. "Carterhays is the prettiest wood in my father's kingdom. Roses grow there. We rode by it last week."

"But it's haunted!" Jana said. "The Elfin knight waits there, to trap young girls!"

"Tam Lin," said Margaret. "Yes. But have you ever seen him?"

"If once you saw him it would be the end of you," the old nurse said sharply. "No man would marry you then."

Margaret jumped up impatiently. "Marry, marry, marry! Can't you think about anything else?" She flung down her embroidery and ran out of the room.

"Where are you going?" cried the old nurse in alarm.

"To pick roses!" Margaret shouted back up the curving stairs. "At Carterhays!"

Cooper's Margaret, keeping to the detail in the ballad's refrain, hitches up her green skirts (she wears no bold plaid), loops up her hair, and runs away to Carterhays. Once there, she enters the wood. "Oak, and ash and thorn grew in the wood," Cooper writes, introducing or interweaving (to use Sullivan's term), details that are not included in the ballad but which are, nonetheless, significant elements in traditional literature and therefore not out of place in her retelling of the ballad. The oak, ash, and thorn, sometimes referred to as "the magical trilogy," are often associated with fairies, spirits, and the supernatural generally (Briggs 159).<sup>15</sup> The thorn, as already noted, also has Christian connotations.

Cooper describes the old gardens of the former estate where wild red roses ramble up into the apple trees. The rose is the central motif in the ballad, as already noted, but Cooper's addition of the apple tree, found only in two lesser-known versions of the ballad (Child 39G and K), adds another significant detail from fairy lore. This fruit tree is thought to have particularly magical properties associated with power, knowledge and youth, and, of course, the temptation of Eve in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, according to traditional literature, there is some danger associated with this particular tree, because a "ymp-tree" or grafted apple tree was considered to be under fairy influence (Briggs 160). Those who rested or fell asleep under such trees were particularly vulnerable to capture by the fairy folk; Sir Lancelot and Thomas the Rhymer are just two examples of fairy capture in this manner. Cooper, by referring specifically to magical trees, links her retelling of Tam Lin to other examples of traditional literature and subtly weaves an atmosphere of enchantment and the supernatural.

When Tam Lin appears after Margaret plucks the rose, she is surprised to see that he does not look like an enchanted or "Elfin knight," for "he wore a country tunic, and his feet were bare." Yolen's knight, on the other hand, is "dressed in velvet and kilt." Here the illustrations in each case work to reinforce the descriptions provided by the authors. Enhanced by the strong lines and colours of the accompanying illustrations, Yolen's Tam Lin looks every inch the romantic knight while Cooper's knight, outlined in pen and washed in soft browns, looks nondescript and even bewildered by his situation.

Margaret defends her right to pluck roses at Carterhays in the usual way, saying, "Why should I ask leave of you? [. . .] Carterhays belongs to my father the king, and I can come and go as I please. And pick roses." But, in an interesting departure from the traditional ballad, Tam Lin pulls a red apple from the tree to offer to Margaret:

"Margaret bit into the crisp, juicy flesh. She smiled back at the young man, quite forgetting that apple trees do not normally bear ripe apples in June." Enchanted fruit is a common motif in folklore, and the significance of apples in particular has been noted. But the fact that Tam Lin offers a ripe juicy apple to Margaret is an important detail, for this is, in fact, Cooper's method of dealing with Margaret's sexual encounter in the traditional ballad. Although there is no overt reference to rape or sexual activity here, Margaret lingers at Carterhays.

They spent all day together in the wood, happy with one another, until the sun dropped low in the sky and all at once the daylight was gone—and so, in a flash, was the young man with the golden skin and curly hair. Sorrowful, Margaret ran home through the glimmering twilight [. . .].

Margaret arrives home to find that the household has been looking for her not just for one day but for a week; time passes differently in the other world according to fairy lore.

Margaret's enchantment is consistent with one version of the ballad (Child 39G). Here the sexual encounter is described, not just implied:

When he had got his wills of her,  
His wills as he had taen,  
He's taen her by the middle sma,  
Set her to feet again.

She turned her right and round about,  
To spier her true-love's name,  
But naething heard she, not naething saw,  
As a' the woods grew dim.

Seven days she tarried there,  
Saw neither sun nor meen;  
At length, by a sma glimmering light  
Came thro the wood her lane. (Child 39G verses 8-10)

In the ballad, Margaret is presumed to be pregnant sometime after she returns home; in a number of versions (Child 39A, B, I, K), she is actually described as looking "As green as onie glass" (A,B) and "pale and wan" (I). The household is concerned, prompting "an auld grey

knight" to express his fear that "we'll be blamed a'." Margaret denies that anyone of her father's men is the father of her child.

Because no sexual encounter, real or implied, occurs in Yolen's Tam Lin, there is no need for any discussion with members of the household. Cooper, however, recreates the scene with the old grey knight. Since Margaret has stayed with Tam Lin for a week, she has disgraced the household and cannot expect to marry any man in the kingdom. Cooper has managed to remain faithful to the spirit of the ballad without stating outright that sexual activity has occurred and that a child is expected.

Cooper's Margaret returns to Carterhays to see Tam Lin and question him about his history. He tells her that, when he was just three years old and asleep in his father's garden, he was stolen by the Elfin Queen. Hutton's hunched and furtive looking Elfin Queen, represented in the accompanying illustration, presents a striking contrast to Mikolaycak's proud and commanding Queen of the Fey. Cooper's detail of Tam Lin's abduction, while consistent with three versions of the ballad (G; I, K),<sup>16</sup> also links Tam Lin to traditional lore about changelings and lost children. Yolen's Tam Lin, by contrast, was older when he was carried off by the Fairy Queen after falling from his horse. After hearing Tam Lin's history and learning how she might save him from being sacrificed to Hell, Margaret returns home.

Although Cooper follows various versions of the ballad closely through to Margaret's confrontation with the Elfin Queen, she does make one notable change. In the various Child versions of the ballad, Halloween is given as the occasion of the Fairy Ride and the sacrifice,<sup>17</sup> but in Cooper's retelling of the ballad, the ride takes place on Midsummer's Eve. There seems to be no reason for this change apart from consistency; the descriptions of scenery—the summer sky outside Margaret's window, the green fields, the old orchard at Carterhays—all suggest midsummer. However, because Midsummer's Eve was, like Halloween, a significant Celtic festival and a time when the Fairy Folk were abroad, Cooper has remained faithful to the sense of the ballad.

Cooper emphasizes the regenerative aspects of the ballad in the final scenes of her book. Tam Lin's emergence from the well following his final transformation is clearly a resurrection:

Then light was growing in the eastern sky, and Tam Lin was climbing out of the well where Margaret had dropped the [burning] iron. His hair dripped wet and he wore no clothes; he was naked as the day he was born. She swung her mantle

from her shoulders and he wrapped it around himself, and through the greyness of the night the cloth shone suddenly brilliant green, as the sun rose behind the wood and brought color back into the world.

Margaret looked down at her hands. The palms were pink and clear with no sign of any burn at all.

Tam Lin said, "You have brought me to life again. One day we shall have a child, you and I, as naked and glad as the knight born today out of this well."

"We'll teach her to pick roses," Margaret said.

Cooper, like Yolen, chooses a happy ending for Tam Lin. Without even a hint of a curse from the Elfin Queen, Tam Lin and Margaret ride back to the castle, "through Carterhays wood and the green fields of Scotland, as the clouds marched over the blue summer sky and the cloud shadows slid purple and grey across the hills." By returning to her opening sentences, Cooper tells her readers that the story has come full circle.

Bringing the story back to the beginning in this way, however, has the effect of diminishing the ballad in Cooper's work. Cooper's conclusion seems to contradict entirely the significance of Margaret's struggle, and, as Perry might argue, it ignores or dismisses the tension between good and evil that is an essential aspect of the ballad. Hutton's water colour washes in soft earth and pastel tones give a dream-like quality to Cooper's Tam Lin and this has the effect of further diminishing the ballad.

Although Cooper's Tam Lin is more complex than Yolen's in terms of the ways in which she deals with the traditional materials, Cooper's work is far less compelling. Neither the prose style nor the illustrations seem to adequately represent the elemental power of this traditional ballad. Both Yolen and Cooper attempt to present their heroines as strong female characters that dare to challenge traditional female roles and expectations, but neither character is very successful as a feminist model because the happily ever after endings that both authors adopt rob their female protagonists of any power they might have acquired through their struggles with supernatural forces. Jennet and Margaret live happily ever after with their respective Tam Lins.

But there is still another reason why these characters do not work as feminist heroines. While Yolen and Cooper have remained faithful to the outline of the ballad, they have failed to adequately represent the real nature of the young woman's heroism that relates to her sexual encounter with Tam Lin and her resulting pregnancy. Yolen and Cooper

the real nature of the young woman's heroism that relates to her sexual encounter with Tam Lin and her resulting pregnancy. Yolen and Cooper have given readers twentieth-century female characters who may be admired for speaking their minds and flouting convention, but the traditional Janet, a sixteenth-century woman, must worry about more fundamental problems. She is pregnant and unmarried and she must deal with the moral and social consequences of her boldness. She has violated the norms of her society not only in terms of her pregnancy, but also by her dalliance with an enchanted knight, she has had commerce with the Dark Side; this puts her at serious risk of being named as a witch. Will she abort her child and risk censure by the church and her community, or will she dare to struggle with dark powers to redeem its father? What if her courage fails? Will she damn herself and her unborn child to Hell? In the end, Janet's strength and courage prevail and she does redeem Tam Lin from Hell, but there is no happy ending because the Faery Queen's curse lingers even after Janet's victory is acknowledged.

Yolen and Cooper have provided faithful outlines of the ballad, but they have failed to capture its essence and complexity. In terms of their ability to represent Janet's sexual encounter, both authors are constrained by the consideration that their books are directed toward younger readers, and this raises the inevitable issue of the appropriateness of the ballad for this audience. But even more troublesome is the fact that in their determination to see Janet as an assertive modern female hero, they have removed her from her historical context, glossed over her religious and moral struggles, and misrepresented her character and her achievement; they have, in effect, reduced her and remade her as the heroine of a romantic story.

## NOTES

1. These first verses are taken from Francis James Child's five volume collection, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, first published between 1882 and 1898. Tam Lin appeared in the first volume as ballad no. 39 with ten versions (A - J). Some of the versions collected by Child are fragments. Further additions and corrections to the ballad were included in later volumes.

2. Child connects the ballad to a Cretan fairy tale "through the principal feature in the story, the transformation of Tam Lin" (336).

3. Two of the better-known recent recordings of the ballad are by Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention.

4. See "The Tam Lin Pages" by Abigail Acland (<[tam-lin.org](http://tam-lin.org)>). This site makes no claim for accuracy, but it includes useful references and links to

other sites dealing with fantasy, folklore and mythology. It is probably the best place to begin to investigate this ballad.

5. Related works by Pamela Dean, Ellen Kushner, and Patricia McKillip, though not marketed as young adult novels, have also attracted the interest of young readers.

6. See, for example, Jones's essay, "The Heroic Ideal—a Personal Odyssey."

7. A feminist interpretation of the ballad is adopted by Ethel Phelps who includes the story as "Janet and Tam Lin" in *Tatterhood and Other Tales*, a prose collection of feminist folk and fairy tales published by Feminist Press that portrays "active and courageous girls and women in the leading roles." According to Phelps, "The protagonists [in *Tatterhood*] are heroines in the true and original meaning of the word—heroic women distinguished by extraordinary courage and achievements, who hold the center of interest in the tales" (xv).

8. Expanding refers to the way in which modern authors add "detail and texture" to a traditional narrative (Sullivan, *Welsh Celtic Myth* 13); interweaving refers to the way in which authors select materials from a tale or from a group of complementary tales and then "weave these materials together into a cohesive whole" (35); and inventing refers to the way in which authors create their own plots and characters but use traditional materials "to give their novels mythic and legendary depth and texture" (x).

9. Version A was collected in Johnson's Museum (1792).

10. Various known as Tom-Lin, Tam Lien, Tam Lane, Tom Line, Tomlin, Tam o Linn, Tam Blain, Thomas, True Tammias, Earl Thomas, and Lord Robinson's only child. Variations on the names of the characters and setting are summarized by John Niles in "Tam Lin: Form and Meaning in a Traditional Ballad."

11. Also Kertonha, Charter's ha', Cartershay, Charter's Wood, Chester's Wood, Chaster's Wood, Gordon's wud, Moorcartney, the greenwood.

12. Also Jennet, Lady Margaret, Leady Margat, Fair Margret, May Margery, May, the maid of Katherine's hall.

13. Although these symbolic items are not mentioned in Child 39A, reference is made to holy water in versions D, G, and J.

14. Mikolaycak created the tartans for the story because, as Yolen writes in her background notes, "a faery tale demands its own colours and plaids." The plaids emphasize the fact that Tam Lin is a Scottish ballad.

15. Briggs provides an extensive discussion of these magical trees and others, including apple trees, under "Fairy Trees" in her *Encyclopedia of Fairies, Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and other Supernatural Creatures* (159-161).

16. In Child G, three-year-old Tam Lin falls asleep under an apple tree.

17. In Child G, Tam Lin refers to Halloween as the night of the Fairy Ride, but Acland suggests that the last verse of the story places the activity in May based on her reading of the lines:

She borrowed her love at mirk midnight,  
 Bare her young son ere day,  
 And though ye'd search the world wide,  
 Ye'll nae find sic a may. (verse 59)

See her notes at <<http://tam-lin.org/storyline.html>>. It seems more likely that "may" is a textual error or a misreading on Acland's part. There is no other reference to May in the ballad. Nonetheless, May Eve, also known as Beltaine, was an important Celtic festival (Briggs 108).

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