

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

“BUT HOLD ME FAST, AND FEAR ME NOT”:
COMPARING GENDER ROLES IN THE BALLAD TAM LIN
AND MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE SCOTLAND.

Charlotte E. Conant, Master of Arts, 2023

Thesis Directed By:

Associate Professor, Dr. Janna Bianchini, History

Tam Lin, a medieval Scottish Ballad tells the story of an unusually forceful young Lady Janet. Janet does many of the feats of strength in her story, defies her father, refuses to behave as a ‘good Christian woman’ might and suffers no consequences for her actions. She ends her story successfully married to a noble Christian man, having saved him from the evil pagan Fairy Queen. This ballad has been popular for centuries, and has been cited as a ballad unique to Scotland that represents Scottish culture. The ballad contains ideas that one might think contradictory to the ideas of a medieval Christian society, yet the ballad was so popular it had a ballet (now lost) and has survived for at least four hundred years. This dissertation examines the differences and similarities between the lack of consequences Janet suffers and what real women in Scotland from the Medieval Ages to the Early Modern period would have experienced. It also will delve into the various cultural groups that contributed to the ‘Scottish Nature’ of the ballad. Stories are told by humans all across the world, a ballad, likely sung in a group, in order to continue being told, must not go against the inherent social rules of the people performing it, or else act as a cautionary tale. However, since Janet does not end her story suffering, Tam Lin is not meant to be a cautionary tale. Why then, was this ballad, that might appear to be so contradictory to the society that was telling it, have managed to survive (and be so popular) to the current day and age.

“BUT HOLD ME FAST, AND FEAR ME NOT”: COMPARING GENDER ROLES IN THE BALLAD TAM
LIN AND MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE SCOTLAND.

By

Charlotte E. Conant

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Advisory Committee:
Professor Janna Bianchini, Chair
Professor Alejandro Caneque
Professor Christopher Halsted

Foreword

Tam Lin 39 A

“O I forbid you, maidens a’,
That wear gowd¹ on your hair,
To come or gae² by Carterhaugh³,
For young Tam Lin is there.

There’s nane⁴ that games by Carterhaugh
But they leave him a wad,
Either their rings, or green mantels,
Or else their maidenhead.

Janet has kilted her green Kirtle
A little aboon⁵ her knee,
And she has broded⁶ her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree⁷,
And she’s awa to Carterhaugh,
As fast as she can hie⁸.

When she came to Carterhaugh
Tam Lin was at the well,
And there she fand his steed standing,
But away was himsel.

She had na pu’d⁹ a double rose,
A rose but only twa¹⁰,
Till up then started young Tam Lin,
Says, Lady, thou’s pu nae mae¹¹.

Why pu’s thou rose, Janet,
And why breaks thou the wand?
Or why comes thou to Carterhaugh
Withoutten my command?

‘Carterhaugh, it is my ain¹²,
My daddy gave it to me;
I’ll come and gang by Carterhaugh,
And ask nae leave at thee.’

Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has snooded¹³ her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree,
And she is to her father’s ha,
As fast as she can hie.

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the ba,
And out then cam the fair Janet,
Ance the flower amang them a’.¹⁴

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the chess,

¹ Gold

² Go

³ A forest near the town of Selkirk in Scotland. It is not very far from the southern border of England and Scotland.

⁴ None

⁵ Above

⁶ Braided

⁷ Breast

⁸ go

⁹ Had not pulled

¹⁰ Two

¹¹ Pull no more

¹² Own

¹³ “The key is in the subtle modification from stanza 3 to stanza 8, where the original 'broded' becomes 'snooded', denoting 'a fillet with which a maiden's hair was bound up' (Child 1965, 5:377). That piece of adornment to arrange her hair could well be a gift from her lover. Alternatively, wearing a headpiece might imply that she is now a married woman and needs to cover her hair accordingly.” Ana Belén Martínez García, “Formulaicity in Child Ballads as a Means to Express Assertiveness,” *Folklore* 128, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 175–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.2016.1270612>.

¹⁴ Once the flower among them all.

And out then cam the fair Janet
As green as onie glass¹⁵.

Out then spak¹⁶ an auld¹⁷ grey knight,
Lay oer the castle wa,
And says, Alas, fair Janet, for thee
But we'll be blamed a'.

'Haud your tongue, ye auld fac'd knight,
Some ill death may ye die!
Father my bairn¹⁸ on whom I will,
I'll father nane on thee.'

Out then spak her father dear,
And he spak meek and mild;
'And ever alas, sweet Janet,' he says,
'I think thou games wi child.'

'If that I gae wu child, father,
Mysel maun bear the blame;
There's neer a laird about your ha¹⁹
Shall get the bairn's name.

'If my love were an earthly knight,
As he's an elfin²⁰ grey,
I wad na gie my ain true-love
For nae lord that ye hae.

'The steed my true-love rides on
Is lighter than the wind;
Wi siller he is shod before,
Wi burning gold behind.'

Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has snooded²¹ her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree,
And she's awa to Carterhaugh,
As fast as she can hie.

When she came to Carterhaugh
Tam Lin was at the well,
And there she fand his steed standing,
But away was himsel.

She had na pu'd a double rose,²²
A rose but only twa,
Till up then started young Tam Lin,
Says, Lady, thou's pu nae mae.

Why pu's thou the rose, Janet,
Amang the grove sae green,
And a' to kill the bonie babe
That we gat us between?

'O tell me, tell me, Tam Lin,' she says,
'For's sake that died on tree,²³
If eer ye was in holy chapel,
Or christendom did see?'

'Roxburgh he was my grandfather²⁴,
Took me with him to bide,
And ance it fell upon a day
That wae did betide me.

'And ance it fell upon a day,

¹⁵ As green as any glass, this is a reference to Janet's morning sickness.

¹⁶ Spoke

¹⁷ Old

¹⁸ Baby

¹⁹ There's no lord in your hall

²⁰ fairy/ elf/ fae. These terms are interchangeable but I shall try to stick to elfin grey for Tam Lin since that is how he is identified in the ballad. Piotr Spyra, *The Liminality of Fairies* (Routledge, 2020).

²¹ Has a slightly different meaning than the earlier broded, potentially signifying her change from a maiden to a married woman. Martínez García, Ana Belén. *Formulaicity in Child Ballads*: page 175–88.

²² The rose can be a stand in for numerous plants and flowers in ballads. Since she seems to be attempting an abortion this rose is some kind of contraceptive. The exact plant is difficult to determine, but there were many different plants that medieval Scottish women could have used to achieve an abortion. (to some success)

²³ A reference to either Jesus's death that also has echoes of Odins death on Yggdrasil.

²⁴ There are some other names mentioned in other versions namely earl of forbes or lord of foulis, however the majority name him either as the grandson of Roxburgh or the earl of murray. These two are also supported by the historical figure of the second earl of Murray being named Thomas, or sometimes Tamaline.

A cauld day and a snell,
When we were frae the hunting come,
That frae my horse I fell;
The Queen o Fairies she caught me,
In yon green hill to dwell.

'And pleasant is the fairy land,
But, an eerie tale to tell,
Ay at the end of seven years
We pay a tiend to hell;
I am sae fair and fu o flesh,
I'm feared it be mysel.

'But the night is halloween²⁵, lady,
The morn is hallowday;
Then win me, win me, an ye will
For well i wat ye may.

'Just at the mirk and midnight hour
The fairy folk will ride,
And they that wad their true-love win,
At Miles Cross²⁶ they maun bide.'

'But how shall I thee ken, Tam Lin,
Or how my true-love know,
Amang sae mony unco knights
The like I never saw?'

'O first let pass the black, lady,
And syne let pass the brown,
But quickly run to the milk-white steed,
Pu ye his rider down.

'For I'll ride on the milk-white steed,
And ay nearest the town;
Because I was an earthly knight
They gie me that renown.

'My right hand will be glove, lady,
My left hand will be bare,
Cocky up shall my bonnet be,
And kaimd down shall my hair,

And the's the takens I gie thee,
Nae doubt I will be there.

'They'll turn me in your arms, lady,
Into an esk²⁷ and adder²⁸;
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
I am your bairn's father.

'They'll turn me to a bear sae grim,
And then a lion bold;
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
As ye shall love your child.

'Again they'll turn me in your arms
To a red het gaud of airn²⁹;
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
I'll do to you nae harm.

'And last they'll turn me in your arms
Into the burning glead³⁰;
Then throw me into well water,
O throw me in wi speed.

'And then I'll be your ain true-love,
I'll turn a naked knight;
Then cover me wi your green mantle,
And cover me out o sight.'

Gloomy, gloomy was that night,
And eerie was the way,
As fair jenny in her green mantle
To Miles Cross she did gae.

About the middle o the night
She heard the bridles ring;
This lady was glad at that
As any earthly thing.

First she let the black pass by,
And syne she let the brown;
But quickly she ran to the milk-white steed,
And pu'd the rider down.

²⁵ Samhain is a commonly celebrated festival on the same day as our modern halloween, that was practiced among both irish and scottish people of this time. It is considered to be the time when the otherworld is open (when creatures like fairies can easily travel through).

²⁶ A bridge in the town of Selkirk.

²⁷ Lizard

²⁸ Snake

²⁹ Red hot rod of iron

³⁰ Fire (specifically coal)

Sae weel she minded what he did say,
And young Tam Lin did win;
Syne coverd him wi her green mantle,
As blythe's³¹ a bird in spring³².

Out then spak the Queen o Faries,
Out of a bush o boom³³:
'Them that has gotten young Tam Lin
Has gotten a stately groom.'

Out then spak the Queen o Faries,
And an angry woman was she:
'Shame betide her ill-far'd face,
And an ill death may she die,
For she's taen awa the boniest knight
In a' my companie.

'But had I kend, Tam Lin,' she says,
'What now this night i see,
I wad hae taen out thy twa grey een,
And put in twa een o tree.'³⁴³⁵

³¹ happy/ mirthful

³² Birds frequently symbolize freedom.

³³ Likely *Cytisus scoparius*, a scottish broom

³⁴ This threat in particular is very interesting, as she is threatening to put his eyes on a tree, which may be because she hopes that would take away his ability to recognize the fae and therefore be forced to stay with them however it

has echoes of Odin's and Hod's loss of their eyes in norse mythology.

³⁵ Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Child ballad 39 A, which he recorded from Robert Burn's museum version from 1796

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Introduction

For centuries ballads have been an important part of society's culture. Ballads are used to introduce and uphold societal standards, and in rare cases show people how they can avoid these standards. Some are told to subvert social norms or to remember previous historical events. But the study of ballads can be difficult because they generally do not come with a time frame, or the context of who told them. Ballads are generally an oral tradition and recorded centuries after the first version was ever told. In Scotland specifically, ballads are typically performed by women, even if they are composed by men, and frequently have a dance or other social component to them.³⁶ They are a community tradition of utmost importance, often sung with large groups or people during work or when sitting around at night. This makes them a difficult record for historians. Often details are modified to fit more recent audiences and since they are rarely written down over the centuries they become difficult to truly link to a time period. Music was vitally important to Scottish people, and was praised by other nations. Gerald de Barri(1146 – 1223), a chaplain, and historian of Henry II of England, especially praised Scotland as surpassing England in music.³⁷ In addition it can be difficult to simply read them as text, since they would have been performed for a large audience. There would have been many social clues beyond just the words we now have that added numerous layers of meaning. But despite this, many methods of reading ballads historically have emerged. This is because ballads truly offer us a glimpse into the social understanding of the historical world from various points of view. The potential for this as a resource is worth overcoming the obstacles that come with them, especially when they can be connected to time periods where there are very few records, “given the lack of written historical reference we must turn to

³⁶ Deborah A Symonds, *Weep Not for Me : Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

Carol M Meale, Helen Wilcox, and Vivien Jones, *Women and Literature in Britain*. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Elizabeth Sutherland, *Five Euphemias: Women in Medieval Scotland, 1200-1420* (St. Martins Press, 1999).

³⁷ Sutherland, Elizabeth, *Five Euphemias*. Page 133

the sources we do have, such as balladry, which is traditionally sung by women, to look at how love, marriage, gender roles, and communities would have been conceptualized.”³⁸ Without the traditional forms of primary source documents, other ones must be examined to understand how a community functioned, especially when we seek to understand women and their historical understanding of cultural norms. Historians seeking information about women already have to look to the margins for sources and understanding. Ballads are just another potential source.

Anthropologists have looked at the changes of a ballad over various cultural groups to find out what beliefs may be specific to one group. An example of a microhistory would be Robert Darton’s, *The Great Cat Massacre*. The event that Darton is looking at is a group of apprentices who become fed up with their master’s horrible treatment of them. They decide to take revenge by killing his wife’s cat and then every other cat they can find. A single event can be indicative of greater patterns in history³⁹. Other historians such as Deborah Symonds compare various ballads from a single region to see how an idea such as infanticide was understood, especially from women’s point of view. Since ballads are an oral tradition, they are a form of cultural transmission and expression, and can be used to see the changes in cultural ideas of a people. Ballads, despite the potential pitfalls, offer a unique chance to look at the beliefs of those who have been ignored by history, as well as look at how cultures changed over time. They can show how various people interacted with one another, when we see a story slowly spread across nations. They are an integral tool, if used properly, to better understand the larger historical socio-cultural map. Much like Clifford Geertz’s theory of thick description, the further understanding of social practices by seeking to know all the various cultural signals of the group that is being studied,⁴⁰ ballads need to be considered within their cultural practices. In order to extract their full cultural meaning historians should seek to understand the various social practices of the time period and cultural group who told these stories.

³⁸ Elizabeth Ewan and Janay Nugent, *Finding the Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Routledge, 2017). Page 3

³⁹ Robert Darnon, *The Great Cat Massacre : And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books/Perseus Books Group, 2009), 75–104.

⁴⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For further reading see the final chapter of this book.

The benefits of studying ballads add to our understanding of a society and its culture, ballads and popular culture contain the multitudes of the people spreading those pieces of culture. In this case Tam Lin, is very unusual because of the voices it may be speaking for, whether it is written by women or simply influenced by women is unknowable but either way it adds cultural layers to the otherwise almost unheard medieval Scottish women. These stories, be they oral tales that are later written, or ballads sung at night as a community⁴¹ offer historians the rare glimpses that are so often lacking from the historical record. Sarah Dunnigan a cultural historian of Scottish literature and, author of *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Traditional Literatures*, discusses the ways that people add more and more layers to folklore over the course of its life: "We can become more alert to the 'layering' in medieval and early modern literature – its folkloric and mythopoeic materials and heritage as well as its more familiar classical and scholastic aspects. Awareness of what we might call 'popular culture' within these periods opens up its parameters to include more neglected subjects such as saint's lives, legends, otherworld visions and the origin legends (in essence marvel tales) embedded in historiographical works."⁴² While working with works of fiction can be difficult due to their nebulous nature, the grains of truth and the reflection of a larger social belief is so rare in historical times where very little written record survives.

With this in mind I am focusing on Tam Lin, one of the ballads collected by Francis Child, also known as the Child ballads, that tells a very unusual story. Francis James Child was a folklorist and ballad collector of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century there was a wave of educated elite men trying to collect and preserve folklore that they feared would disappear otherwise. Sir Walter Scott being another major name which will appear in chapter one. Child was an incredible collector and conducted extensive ethnographic work to make his collection, each of his ballads is preceded by his best attempts at historical context and a comparison between the different versions. Child strove to never change or edit the ballads he collected, going out of his way to attempt to preserve them as closely to the telling as he could. Within his collections he ordered the ballads chronologically. He also would mention other ballads that have similar themes or stories. Some of his work was published posthumously because he never considered it finished enough. His collection was highly influential in his field and also in preserving the

⁴¹ Elizabeth Sutherland, *Five Euphemias*.

⁴²Sarah Dunnigan, *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Traditional Literatures* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013). page 2

ballads themselves. Though it does create some complications as balladry is a living ever changing form of culture and once they are written down there is a stagnation.

Unlike many ballads, including most within the Child ballads, the woman of this story, Janet, is the main actor. Her lover, the titular Tam Lin, has very little agency over 'his' story, spending nearly all the story sitting in the forest. It is Janet who performs the acts of strength and who takes action against the Fairy Queen's curse. She stands up to her family and even attempts an abortion when faced with raising a child alone. This ballad is also a fairy story⁴³, which is unusual for scottish ballads, fairy stories are not typically sung, and are instead told without song.⁴⁴ Since the plot of this particular ballad is not very well known, I have summarized it below. I have also included the original⁴⁵ poem above.

Janet, a young noblewoman⁴⁶, is warned in the beginning of her story not to travel to Carterhaugh, a nearby forest that is on her father's land. She and the other ladies are not supposed to go to Carterhaugh because Tam Lin is there, and he will force them to pay him in "Either their rings, or green mantles, or else their maidenhead." Janet listens to this warning before setting off running towards the forest. In Carterhaugh Janet summons Tam Lin by plucking a rose and she declares Carterhaugh to belong to her. Tam Lin claims Carterhaugh as his own. They share an intimate encounter, off screen so to speak, which could be because it was improper to do more than hint about it. A few months later some of the nobles and knights comment on Janet's morning sickness and growing belly, fearing that they will be blamed for her pregnancy. Janet responds that she would never treat any lord in her father's court so well. Her father and (in some versions) her brother express their worry.⁴⁷ In all the versions that include

⁴³ A fairy story is a form of folklore classification. It is also called a magic story, a wonder tale or, a fairy tale. The classification means that quite literally a story with fairies, or the fae in it meaning it relies heavily on magic. It involves mythical beings and enchantments.

⁴⁴ David C Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 1968).

⁴⁵ Original here meaning written version, since we cannot know the context of the ballad before it was published.

⁴⁶ She may be the daughter of a duke, however it is unclear and changes from story to story. Typically she is referred to as Lady Janet or Lady Margaret.

⁴⁷ They are never angry, most versions say that they speak up 'meek and mild'. When her mother or sister speaks (in a very limited amount of the ballads) they are angry. In this case they want to find out who is the father and blame him for it. To which Janet points out that it takes two people to do so. They may simply want to make sure that her unborn baby will have a family name, but the tone of the line in the ballad makes it seem like they are blaming whomever got her pregnant. .

her being asked who the father is she refuses to name the baby's father and demands that if she dies in childbirth the baby be given her family name instead of the name of the father.

Janet returns to Carterhaugh with the hopes of finding an abortive plant, intending not to be a single mother.⁴⁸ Instead Tam Lin appears and asks her why she is about to abort their child. He then tells her that he is to be sacrificed to the Fairy Queen in a few days on Halloween/Samhain night, and reveals that he is in fact a human who was captured by the Fairy Queen⁴⁹. He asks her to wait for him that night and when she sees him ride past, to pull him from his horse. He tells Janet that the Fairy Queen will change him into many fearful shapes, many of which are some form of aquatic creature, but to save him she must hold tight and not let him go. In these various forms Tam Lin is made to attack Janet. Janet succeeds in doing all this and frees Tam Lin from the Fairy Queen, who though bitter admits defeat. Tam Lin again becomes a human, and Janet covers him with her green⁵⁰ mantle, an outdoor cloak worn over dresses. Tam Lin and Janet marry,⁵¹ legitimizing the baby, and in true fairytale fashion they live happily ever after together.

Tam Lin is a ballad made up of exceptions. It is one of the oldest ballads that Child collected. Though the exact date of composition is unknown,⁵² it is often called a medieval ballad. However, the version we have must be understood to have been collected and written out by an early modern historian. In addition, it is a border ballad, meaning it takes place at and likely originated from the Scottish-English borders, and it has the weight of the conflicts that occurred there. But perhaps the most interesting part of this ballad is that Janet, though not the titular character, is truly the main character. She is the source of action, the only person to really do anything in her story. She breaks many 'rules' of society, certainly ones that would have doomed another woman in her time, yet she escapes unharmed, triumphant even,

⁴⁸ When he asks why she is refusing to bear the baby, she demands to know if Tam Lin is Christian/ a human, and not an 'elfin gray,' implying that if they could be wed and happily married in a Christian manner she would happily raise the baby.

⁴⁹ In some versions, such as the Child 39A, he reveals his family name, which will be relevant later.

⁵⁰ Green is a color that is repeated over and over in the poem, both as Janet's color and sometimes as a link to nature. I only specify it here because of the continued theme.

⁵¹ In most versions this is only implied to have happened after. However, given both that it is a romantic ballad and that Tam Lin is pretty enamored of Janet, it is unlikely that this would not occur.

⁵² It was mentioned by name in the *Complaynt of Scotland* published in 1549. The historical figure that Tam Lin may have been based on was killed in 1332, and it was not until the 18th century that a written copy was published.

and what's more very successful with a healthy baby and a noble husband. She also, it seems, owns the forest of Carterhaugh: "Carterhaugh, it is my ain, // My daddy gave it to me." Now perhaps this would be given to her future husband as part of her dowry, but she certainly thinks of it as her own when Tam Lin tries to claim it. In fact she is one of only four women in the entire collection of the Child ballads to have both a personally and economically successful ending.⁵³ At the end of the ballad, she is secure in her life, with a husband whom she loves, her inheritance intact, and her child safe. In a time when things like marrying for love or trying to get an abortion would not have been approved of, Janet manages to do them without much standing in her way. Janet's obstacles are less social and more physical. Her husband forgets imperative information which is that he is in fact a kidnapped Christian noble human and not a pagan fae and the Fairy Queen, who aside from cursing and transforming Tam Lin, only talks to make her speech of defeat. Janet's story does not truly fit into an archetype; perhaps she could be the knight of her own story. She is herself an exception, chasing down her lover's horse while being visibly pregnant⁵⁴ and then performing the acts of strength in this story. Tam Lin, on the other hand, fits well into the selkie, nymph, swan woman or kelpie archetype. He is highly associated with a well, and in several versions he transforms into aquatic creatures, and is only saved by a coat being thrown over him.

This story was written down (not necessarily created, scottish medieval women would have had much more freedom than their early modern counterparts) at a time in history with restrictions on women's rights. Janet does not face the consequences, which will be discussed in chapter two, of a woman who sought an abortion, despite infanticide laws, such as the Scots Act Anent which dealt with child murder and existed from 1690-1809.⁵⁵ There was also England's Common Law that almost entirely prevented women from being the heirs to their family estates based on male-preference primogeniture.⁵⁶

⁵³ Polly Stewart, "Wishful Willful Wily Women: Lessons for Female Success in the Child Ballads," *Massachusetts Studies in English* 10, no. 2 (1985): 54–71.

⁵⁴ She is likely somewhere between four and eight months (this only occurs in Child 39G) pregnant given that, in the versions that include a conversation about her pregnancy (Child 39A, Child 39 B, Child 39F, Child 39G, Child 39 I, Child 39 K, Child 39 L) her household has noticed both her morning sickness and her baby bump, but in some versions (Child 39 G) she successfully has her son at the end of the poem in the moments after the Fairy Queen delivers her speech. Thus the large range. In the version I have cited above she is likely on the earlier side of this range.

⁵⁵ Symonds, Deborah A. *Weep Not for Me*.

⁵⁶ Christine Churches, "Women and Property in Early Modern England: A Case-Study," *Social History* 23, no. 2 (May 1998): 165–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071029808568029>.

But when Janet is questioned about who her child's father is, she demands that the baby be given her name, to be a member of her household, in a time when inheritance was generally through the male line⁵⁷. The question is, what group of people were writing and singing ballads such as this one? In what cultural setting did Tam Lin come to exist? The ballad also has an accompanying reel, though no one knows exactly what the dance would have been, nor do we have the original melody of the song itself⁵⁸. But the existence of a dance adds to the confusing nature of this ballad.⁵⁹ That would mean it was at least a semi-public ballad, and thus it was likely not performed just for women, though women may have still been the largest target audience. To understand how and why Tam Lin came to be, it is important to try and understand the historical cultural context around the ballad. There are numerous factors that need to be understood, as this ballad is not only influenced by Scottish cultural traditions, but also by Norse, Anglo-French, Celtic and Pictish culture. Scotland is a place where many cultures meet, and Tam Lin reflects that.

In Chapter one I shall breakdown the numerous cultures that contribute to Scottish culture and make up its population. I also discuss the cultural importance of the ballad and break down the historical references to real people in history. We cannot know truly why these historical figures are chosen in particular but we can look at congruent historical events to see some influence on Tam Lin. In chapter two I focus more on the change in women's rights and freedoms from the medieval time period, when we estimate Tam Lin was first performed, to the early modern times, when Tam Lin was written out. Specifically I take a close look at pagan/christian intermarriages, abortion and illegitimacy. Lastly, in

⁵⁷ This time is considered to be 'the dark ages' of Scottish law, so while Scotland sort of follows the laws set by William I and English common law, they also were in the middle of two succession wars. In addition, previous Scottish laws tended towards male inheritance but were more loose and allowed for localized customization. Certain types of property (generally land and houses) were automatically inherited by men, whereas others were assumed to go to women, following the "jus relictæ" laws. (these laws stated that even if not put in the will the widow was entitled to at least one third of the net estate of her husband) Scotland also had inherited some preference towards men inheriting from previous Norse influence.

Cynthia J Neville, *Land, Law and People in Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ Child, Francis James. 1860

⁵⁹ Very little is known about the actual steps of medieval dance, however the Carol was the most popular and could be a formal or informal dance with men and women. Narrative dances were performed by professionals and would have been for the purpose of entertainment. Tam Lin's dance, being based around a narrative, was more likely this second kind, as many romances were.

Margaret Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe : An Encyclopedia* (New York ; London Routledge, 2016). Page 188

chapter three I focus on Scottish women as ballad performers and keepers, and Tam Lin and Janet's gender performances throughout the ballad.

Chapter 1 Context

The Importance of Ballads

In 1549 *The Complaynt of Scotland* was published. It was dedicated to the regent queen of Scotland⁶⁰ Mary of Guise and compared her to numerous heroic female figures of myth. It was widely regarded as a very important piece of Scottish literature. One of many cultural references made in the *Complaynt* to support Scottish independence from England was the tale of Tam Lin. Tam Lin is one of the medieval ballads cited as culturally unique to Scotland⁶¹.

While dating Tam Lin's initial creation can be difficult, it is commonly believed that at the very latest it was created by the 16th century.⁶² This is largely in part because of the *Complaynt*, but also because of a licensed ballad by the same name, lost to time. Scottish national poet Robert Burns was able to collect some history on Tam Lin, "few of our ballads have earlier or more historical references. The tale of the young Tamlene, and a dance Thorn of Lyn are named in the *Complaynt of Scotland*, 1549. In 1558 a license to print a ballet of Thomalyn was granted to Master John Wallye and Mistress Toye, but now there is no evidence it ever was printed"⁶³ The first publication of Tam Lin was in 1796, in the form of the museum version that was originally published by James Johnson in his book *The Scots Musical Museum*. It is this version that Sir Walter Scott favors and puts in his later book, *Contributions to Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This is the first version that Child also included in his book later in 1860 (making it Child39 A). Johnson did not include variations but Child included numerous versions of all his

⁶⁰ Having been the second wife of James I of England when he died she was sharing regency with the Earl of Arran while they waited for Mary Queen of Scots to come of age. She replaced Earl of Arran as regent and remained the regent until Mary was old enough.

⁶¹ Robert Wedderburn and David Lindsay, *Complaynt of Scotland*. Page 389

⁶² Burns, Robert. "Manuscript Songs Collected by Robert Burns." *British Library*, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-songs-collected-by-robert-burns>.

⁶³ Robert Burns, *The Complete Works of Robert Burns* / 6. (New York: Bigelow, Brown & Co, 1909). Page 493

ballads. Further complications include “that most ballads come to us in the forms in which they were collected in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in collections like Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Sir Walter Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3); their versions were often ‘improved’ to fit modern tastes – itself an exercise of cultural power.” Changes such as these would have been in order to modernize something to the current beliefs of the collectors and the ballad performers themselves. Any written version we have is filtered through multiple people’s beliefs. It is highly likely that this happened with Tam Lin, despite the best efforts of the collectors to find the most ‘original’ version. However many of these changes could have been caused by the informants themselves, as had happened many times before with the same ballads. Each informant will perform a ballad differently every single time, to fit their audience and any social changes. This is why ballads are often referred to as ‘alive’; they are constantly being changed. Once they have been written down then the changing slows down massively, as now there is a version everyone can reference, but changes still occur. The only versions that are known, exist because of these collectors writing them down, so even knowing that they have likely been altered, they are invaluable as a way to study cultural deviance and norms. If we look specifically at Tam Lin we can see a ballad full of unexpected social interactions. Janet’s choices are almost always in opposition to what would have been considered social norms, and yet the social consequences she experiences are nonexistent. This dichotomy makes Tam Lin a fascinating ballad to study.

The *Complaynt* was a political manifesto written to prove the uniqueness of Scotland during the Rough Wooing⁶⁴, or the Eight Years’ War. Henry VIII hoped to pressure the Scottish government to agree to marry his son Edward IV to the newly born Mary Queen of Scots. The English government published numerous short pieces about why Scotland and England should be united, and the *Complaynt* was an anonymous response from the Scots.⁶⁵ It contained numerous stories, myths and legends, in an attempt to prove Scottish independence and cultural distinction from England. It is within this context that Tam Lin first appears in the written record. Before then the tale existed only by word of mouth. The exact age

⁶⁴ A horrifying name for a war. One could perhaps use the ongoing historical conflict between Scotland and England as a lens to look at Janet and the Fairy Queen’s fight over Tam Lin, who was kidnapped and now is in danger of being killed.

⁶⁵ There are several potential authors of the *Complaynt*, however no one is agreed upon. The author was an educated elite man who was in favor of Scottish independence.

cannot be determined, but it is significant that Tam Lin was included in a collection of culturally unique stories.

There is no real way to know when any ballad was written, since they were typically oral performances and would have been passed around for generations before being written down. Identifying any references to them in print is one of the few ways to date the composition. Another major problem is the variations of the name of the ballad. Tam Lin is now considered the standard version but it has also been called Kertonha,⁶⁶ Tamlane, Tamlin, Tambling, Tomlin, Tam Lien, Tam-a-Line, Tam Lyn, Tamelan, and Tam Lane.⁶⁷ However, we have no versions of Tam Lin that were written out until the late 18th century and it is unlikely we will ever know the original time of composition. There have likely been previous versions such as the ballet but we have no remaining copies. We cannot know the author either, not their gender, nor social status, nor even economic level. Dunnigan, the Scottish Literature cultural historian has a few thoughts on how to deal with these unknowns;

It is often impossible to chart a date or origin of composition, and we rarely know the 'author' of a song or ballad or narrative (indeed, its 'teller' or 'performer' frequently chooses to remain anonymous). The extraordinary range of variants or versions by which a single ballad or tale can be known destabilizes any assumptions about textual stability or uniformity, and nurtures our awareness that behind every textual variant frequently lies a different singer or teller, a 'tradition-bearer' or 'informant'.⁶⁸

These are fairly serious problems in a historical study, having a source that is devoid of the context that is normally relied upon to fully understand a primary source. Child considers it an earlier ballad, since he grouped his ballads by estimated age.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ An alternate way to spell Carterhaugh

⁶⁷ Joseph Jacobs and John D. Batten, "Tamlane," in *More English Fairy Tales*, ed. Joseph Jacobs (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 159–62.

David Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, Etc.*, vol. 1–2 (John Wotherspoon, 1776). Herd's collection comes from Lord Hailes's *Ancient Scottish Songs*, which was a re-edited version of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).

Richard Pearse Chope, "Tamlane," in *Ballad's Weird and Wonderful* (Hanson & Co, 1912), 53–60.

⁶⁸ Sarah Dunnigan, and Suzanne Gilbert. *The Edinburgh Companion*. Page 3

⁶⁹ Tam Lin is 39th out of 305 ballads. Scholars generally call it a late medieval ballad, though we will never truly know when it was written.

Most of the informants⁷⁰ of Child's ballads are female.⁷¹ This is even more so the case with Tam Lin. Though whether this is because more women sung ballads, or because of personal female preference to sing Tam Lin specifically, is difficult to determine. There are still telltale patterns and repetition of certain ideas. Though a ballad will change to accommodate local preferences this is actually more informative than if it were completely static. For example, we can learn more by knowing what group of people wanted to emphasize Janet's strength in chasing down the horse by repeating the stanzas where she does this instead of just saying she followed Tam Lin's instructions. We know more if she says that she will not raise the child alone, instead of just saying she will not have "an elfin gray's" child. The subtle differences can be a vital source of information, and while we cannot know the 'original' author, the value of a ballad is not in its original form, but in how it was changed to represent various cultures and beliefs. The goal of studying ballads is seeing how they define the imagined rules of a society, either to break them or to uphold them. Tam Lin is especially valuable because it is a border ballad, meaning it is found most commonly along the English and Scottish border—a place where conflicting cultural ideas met, and skirmishes were frequent. This is a place that experienced a great amount of turmoil, and had to deal with pressure from both Scotland and England to conform to the values of each state, especially during the Rough Wooing.

Returning to trying to date Tam Lin's creation, *The Complaynt of Scotland* is the first instance where Tam Lin is mentioned in writing. Many other pieces of literature were mentioned. In the preliminary dissertation, added to the *Complaynt* in 1801, John Leyden, another Scottish poet, adds the note "'The Tale of young Tamlene.' This seems to have been originally a romance of Faery, and was probably converted, by popular tradition, into a historical ballad, which is still preserved and published in Scott's Minstrelsy of the Border."⁷² Fragments of it first appeared in Herd's Scottish Songs, 1776, and Johnson's museum under the titles Kertonha' and Tam Lyn."⁷³ This is the only context we have around the

⁷⁰ Specifically in this case I am referring to the people who told the tales to Child or Scott in the 18th and 18th century. They may not have been overwhelmingly the performers historically.

⁷¹ See Francis Child's collection. However, women were also historically the keepers and performers of ballads.

⁷² Schaus, Margaret. *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*. Page 58. There is a large history of romances inspiring ballads, as well as epics.

⁷³ Robert Wedderburn, and David Lindsay. *The Complaynt of Scotland*. 1550. A bit later I will discuss what I think was meant by a historical ballad, however it is unclear why they refer to Tam Lin as such/

Complaynt's inclusion of Tam Lin, and this was added two and a half centuries later.⁷⁴ Even with this lack of clarity over when Tam Lin was originally composed compared to when it was first written down, the value of Tam Lin as a cultural historical source should not be doubted. Tam Lin should be treated as a source in the same manner as the *Iliad*, which we cannot ever definitely conclude when it was composed, and who Homer may have been.

However, it can still offer some information to unpack. First of all, it is important to note that Leyden calls it a faery romance. Tales of faery are uncommon in Scottish ballads, at least until the eighteenth century.⁷⁵ Tam Lin is a rare case of a faery ballad. The *Complaynt of Scotland* listed it under its list of medieval romances.⁷⁶ Oral ballads were enjoyed by both the elite and the poor, yet the ballads that were popular depended on the audience.⁷⁷ This differs from the historical ballad, a slightly confusing category of ballad, which is typically sung by the lower classes, and a romance, which was performed for the upper class. Historical ballads [as their name implies] tell the story of a historical event, though this is rarely an accurate depiction of what actually happened. Nineteenth century cultural historian John Finlay, who wrote on the 'ancient ballads' tried to break down the different categories of ballad, "some, it is probable, are to be referred to the minstrel romances; episodes, and interesting fragments of which would find their way to the people, and either degenerate into ballads in their progress through a race of unlearned reciters, or be at first translated from the " quaint Inglis" of the minstrels, into a language intelligible to the ruder audience for which they were intended."⁷⁸ The original form of Tam Lin, whatever it may have been, could have been transformed from a ballad for the elite to a ballad for the common people. The reference to it becoming a historical ballad would have meant the inclusion of historical

what is needed to officially qualify a ballad as historical. In this case I believe since Tam Lin and Janet are connected to people who actually lived by the lines that speak of their fathers and grandfathers that could technically qualify it as a historical ballad.

⁷⁴ We also know of the lost ballet that has been mentioned previously. Unfortunately there is very little information to be gained about the ballet itself, but we can note the popularity of the story to have it be both a sung ballad and a ballet, a production requiring much more effort, time and money to produce.

⁷⁵ Fowler, David C. *A Literary History of Ballads*. Page 278

⁷⁶ Robert Wedderburn, and David Lindsay. 1550. The *Complaynt of Scotland* and its foreword refer to it as a romance of fairy. This is under the section called medieval romances.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Ewan, and Janay Nugent. *Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. page 25

⁷⁸ John Finlay, *Scottish Historical and Romantic Ballads, Chiefly Ancient; with Explanatory Notes* (Legare Street Press, 2022). Please note the version I was referencing was originally published in 1808, this is the republished version. .

reference. Typically a historical ballad would draw upon historical events and people, even in a fictionalized way. Perhaps Tam Lin's historical context is thin because it was added much later. Historical ballads are a perhaps more organic form of storytelling. Instead of being inspired by elite stories, they are stories about the non-elite's lives, on this John Finlay says, "the origin of the historical ballads of Scotland requires no investigation; they have sprung up, like the greater part of the popular poetry of all uncivilized nations, among the people themselves, as the record of their most interesting events; and little can be collected regarding them, but a few incidental notices, from successive historians, of those which were popular in their time."⁷⁹ This would imply, according to both Leyden, the historian who wrote the 19th century edition of *The Complaynt* introduction, and Finlay agrees that the references to Tam Lin and Janet's parents were possible additions once the lower classes were telling this tale. While this sharing of culture and adapting it to various people may not be unique to Scotland, Tam Lin itself is a curious blend of many cultures, much like medieval Scotland.⁸⁰

Historical inspiration

There are some interesting historical contexts that can be considered in dating Tam Lin. The following quote is from Walter Scott's, a Scottish historian, novelist and poet, collection of ballads. It should be noted, Scott was adamantly against citing his sources, so I have done my best to find out where his information could have come from, but ultimately some of it is untraceable.

A corpus of ballads survives tied to incidents and individuals from sixteenth-century Scottish history; as Hamish Henderson observed, '[n]early all of the best known of the Border ballads' belong to this period. Characteristically, the versions that we know almost all stem from post-1700, but this in itself sheds interesting light on the way in which historical memory is transmuted and transformed through the power of oral tradition; and there are extant tunes for a number of these ballads."⁸¹ Tam Lin is connected to a historical individual, but one from the fourteenth

⁷⁹ John Finlay. *Scottish Historical and Romantic Ballads* Please note the version I was referencing was republished in 2022

⁸⁰ Edward J. Cowan et al., *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland. 1 : A History of Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland, 1000-1600*, ed. Edward J Cowan (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).<https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=386098&site=ehost-live>. Page 91

⁸¹ Sarah Dunstanning *The Edinburgh Companion*. page 69

century, and not the sixteenth. He is connected to a very minor Earl. "Randolph, Earl Murray⁸², was my sire, Dunbar, Earl March, is thine."⁸³

This line comes from Tam Lin trying to explain to Janet that he is human and has been kidnapped by the fairies. This could be an original line, or a line that has been added into the ballad. Looking at Earl Murray's children, the eldest being named Thomas,⁸⁴ the line above is likely calling Tam Lin this Thomas, who became Earl Murray II. The National [Scottish] Records of Historical Monuments list a Tamlane's well in Selkirk, the town next to Carterhaugh: "This well, and Tamlane (son of Randolph, Earl of Moray) are referred to in a fairy ballad (W Scott)."⁸⁵ Unfortunately it is not known when this well was created. This Thomas became the second Earl of Murray. His father held stewardship of the Scottish throne while the young David II was growing up. It is believed that he was considered such a threat to the English that they poisoned him⁸⁶. Tam Lin is sometimes referred to as the grandson of Roxburgh and not the son of Earl Murray, which is further evidence to identify him with Earl Murray II: "Roxburgh he was my grandfather"⁸⁷. *Roxburgh* refers to Earl Murray I's father, who was the sheriff of Roxburgh, therefore making Roxburgh Earl Murray II's grandfather. It is interesting that Earl Murray II appears to be the one this line is referring to, as he was significantly less important historically than his father. Earl Murray II became Earl after his father died, and was only Earl for twenty three days before dying at the battle of Dupplin Moor, leaving his brother to succeed him. He was never married and had no children, and was likely in his early twenties when he died. If taken at face value this places the time period at 1310(ish)-1332 for Earl Murray II's life span and potentially the time period that Tam Lin takes place.

No matter who the historical inspiration was, Tam Lin is always an Earl when his family is mentioned. Murray is mentioned the most, with either Lord Foulis or Earl of Forbes being mentioned a single time. The importance of this is not that one of these people really went on some odd quest, but that the people who sang this ballad chose to associate the titular character with a historical person. In the

⁸² Murray and Moray are the same place but have a spelling difference.

⁸³ Walter Scott, *Sir Walter Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Blackwood and Sons, 1902). page 406

Very rarely is Janet's father mentioned in the ballad, typically we only know Tam Lin's family line.

⁸⁴ Tam is a shortened version of Thomas in Scotland.

⁸⁵ "Tamlane's Well." Canmore, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/54304/tamlanes-well>.

⁸⁶ Clifford J Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp : English Strategy under Edward III, 1327-1360* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK ; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2000).

⁸⁷ From the Francis Child version.

case of both earls of Murray, this was a historical person who died fighting against English control of Scotland. Once again adding to the layers of how important culturally Tam Lin has historically been. The second Earl Murray's death was an especially tragic one as he was in his early twenties, had only been earl for twenty three days and died in the battle of Dupplin Moor. This battle was a true tragedy for the Scottish forces. In the morning of August 11/12, 1332, the much larger Scottish forces broke ranks and attacked in a chaotic manner. Several earls tried to regain control of their men, including Earl Murray, but could not. The Scottish forces had exceptionally high rates of casualty, whereas the much smaller English army only had around forty. Thus the young Earl of Murray died, a tragic heroic death. The battle of Dupplin Moor was the first battle of the Second War of Scottish Independence.⁸⁸ It is quite possible that Tam Lin has been associated with this historical figure because Earl Murray II, was the successor to Earl Murray I, a leader of Scottish independence, as well as a young and by all accounts an honorable man who died tragically. Certainly it is odd that such a minor and unimportant figure in history has been linked to this ballad. The only written record of him is as follows,

Thomas, second Earl of Moray, succeeded his father on 20 July 1332, but his career was very brief, as he was killed at Dupplin on 12 August of the same year. What led to that conflict is a matter of history, but the account of the battle given by the chroniclers⁸⁹ serves to show that the young earl had inherited his father's coolness and courage. Even in the surprise of an early morning attack on a sleeping camp, he was able to rally his men and check the English onset. But the rush made by the main body of the Scots overwhelmed their defenders, and a rout followed in which Moray was slain, with many others of rank. It appears that he was unmarried and left no issue. He was succeeded by his brother.⁹⁰

Despite being a very minor historical figure, his death while quite young, was caused by the first battle of a very important war for Scotland and its identity.⁹¹ Tam Lin is a character that it would seem, no one had noticed was missing, yet he is someone important when someone finally bothers to ask. The fact

⁸⁸Pete Armstrong, *The Battle of Dupplin Moor 1332* (Lynda Armstrong, 2000).

⁸⁹ James Henry Ramsay, *Genesis of Lancaster; Or, the Three Reigns of Edward II, Edward III, and Richard II, 1307-1399* (1913; repr., Andesite Press, 2015).

After some searching I concluded that Douglas was referring to these chronicles in particular, though he does not specify in any way which chronicle. This one mentions the battle and specifically Thomas and another young earl taking a rather risky charge in order to reorganize the chaos of the Scottish forces.

⁹⁰James Balfour Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, vol. 1–9 (David Douglas, 1904). Internet Archive, Edinburgh <https://archive.org/details/scotsppeeragefoun06paul/page/294/mode/1up?view=theater>. Page 140–167

⁹¹ It is curious that another young man was also doing the same thing during this battle, Murdoch Earl of Menteith III, who was perhaps leading the charge that got both himself and Thomas killed, both are noted for their bravery in the chronicles, mentioned in footnote 66.

that he may have been Thomas II places additional levels of importance to this character who is rescued from the evil Fairy Queen who has kidnapped him for being the most beautiful. He is now a symbol of Scottish rebellion, someone who was taken away too young and quite suddenly, forced into captivity by a cruel and powerful being.

Janet's family line is almost never mentioned in the ballad. Scott's version mentioned "Dunbar, Earl March, is thine." This is especially interesting because Dunbar the tenth earl of March (1338–1422) had a daughter named Janet.⁹² However, Dunbar's mother was Isabell, the daughter of Thomas first earl of Murray, which would mean that the Tam Lin in our story is either her great grandfather or great uncle.⁹³ Which makes the fact that in Walter Scott's version Tam Lin is mentioned to be one of these two earls of Murray even more alarming. Perhaps the choice to make these characters these two people was not analyzed, but if the audience had known it likely would have not been approved. They are far too closely related to have a romantic story about them, even by medieval and early modern Scottish standards. The general cultural belief of the early medieval period was that relatives included families of the people whom one had married, as well as godparents, and it was forbidden to marry someone related to you by up to seven degrees.⁹⁴ However Janet and Tam Lin's identities are not always the same, which eliminates this problem in numerous versions. Also these rules were broken innumerable times, especially by the elite. As Edward J. Cowan notes, this limit, even with the slight relaxation would make finding a partner difficult in smaller communities, "Even after a relaxation of the rules in 1215, canon law still prohibited marriage with a blood relative in the fourth degree: that is to say, within the fourth degree of descent from a common ancestor. To express it differently, parties who shared a common great- great-grandparent could not marry each other. Indeed, in the eyes of the canon law, if they married or had intercourse, they committed the ecclesiastical offense of incest."⁹⁵ This may not always have been enforced, but it is

⁹²Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical History of the Dormant, Abeyant, Forfeited, and Extinct Peerages of the British Empire* (Harrison, 1866). p.606

⁹³ Public Record Office General Register Office (Scotland) , *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland: 1357-1509, Addenda 1221-1435*, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh : H. M. General Register House, 1881).

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). page 28

T. M. Devine and Jenny Wormald, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Page 271.

⁹⁵ Edward J. Cowan, and Lizanne Henderson. *Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland*. Page 98

important to note that these beliefs were present during this time. Quite frequently ideals are not followed even if the culture largely believes in them. In this case we cannot speculate too much especially since Janet's pedigree is almost never mentioned. In this case it is important to note that a person was selected who had a daughter with the same name. Another theory is that either Janet or Tam Lin may be somehow connected to the Lynn family of Peeblesshire, which is the county next to Selkirk's⁹⁶ own, but the only argument behind this is the proximity and the similarity in Lin and Lynn. These names are pronounced the same. However, Lin/Lynn is a very common Scottish last name, with both last names still being used today.⁹⁷ The local Duke who owns Cargtherhaul is the Duke of Buccleuch.⁹⁸ There is no reason to connect them to Tam Lin, even by proximity, as Janet is the owner of Tam Lin.

There is also a Dunbar II Earl March who was the son of Dunbar Earl March. Because the reference to Janet's family is very limited, this being the only version I could find with her family even referenced, it is much harder to examine her potential historical connections. Women were generally less likely to leave much of a historical footprint, so it can be hard to know much about someone even when their name and family is known. Even if women are the ones who pass along the ballads and stories their footprints are marginal. Sir Walter Scott believed her family to be the local lords of Selkirk, but this was more due to proximity than any real evidence⁹⁹. We know she is a member of the elite, and she is a woman. The audience understands her to be a noble woman, an elite member of society. Much like the fairy tale princess, she is important even if her origins are not known, or if she were to have been the ruler of a fictitious kingdom. She is a character whose life is consequence-free and idealized, and was created to be this way. In a world where women were restricted (especially by the time of the early modern period), Janet has the freedom to tell off her father and an old knight, sleep with whomever she wants and attempt an abortion, with no consequences.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ This is the town next to Carterhaugh and that has Tam Lins well in it.

⁹⁷ *Most Common Surnames* (no date) *Scottish National Records*. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/common-surnames/most-common-surnames-bmd-registers-16.pdf>.

⁹⁸ "School of Scottish Studies Archives." The University of Edinburgh, 3 Nov. 1970, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/cultural-heritage-collections/school-scottish-studies-archives>.

⁹⁹ I believe this is why he has made this conclusion, however as previously mentioned, he is not fond of citations.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter two for further discussion

These names are also important because it adds layers to the potential time frame that Tam Lin may have first been created. Though these lines are likely later additions, it does help us understand the singer's understanding of the tale. Even if it is not a genuine medieval story, it was thought of as one. In addition the choice to connect Tam Lin to either of the Earls of Murray,¹⁰¹ both heroes of the Scottish wars of independence, is quite possibly one of the reasons why Tam Lin is cited as a ballad of Scottish independence and uniqueness; this could be why it was mentioned in the *Complaynt of Scotland*. Scotland is also interesting in that the idea of a Scottish nation developed within the context of invading forces, such as English or Norman invaders.¹⁰² Normans never conquered Scotland (unlike England) but many intermarried and many nobles in Scotland were Anglo-French.¹⁰³ There are many cultural influences in Tam Lin, just as there were many cultural influences in the Scottish nation.

Cultural influences

The story of Tam Lin has almost exclusively been found in Scotland¹⁰⁴. More recent historians have been trying to puzzle out Janet and her unusual fierceness, Janet's courage and independence as a character has been attributed to the harshness of Scottish medieval life: "It may be no accident that the ballad has been recovered almost exclusively from Scottish soil. 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 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

"Legally most women were on the same level as a child or a mad person." page 569. Schaus, Margaret. *Women in Medieval Europe. For the General Conditions of Women in the Medieval Period.* (reference encyclopedia.)

Lynn Abrams et al., *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland*. Women were expected to be largely silent and obedient especially to their fathers. Page 125

¹⁰¹ This choice is especially interesting if he is connected to the second Earl Murray, who was such a minor historical footnote.

¹⁰² Kristen Post Walton, "Scottish Nationalism before 1789: An Ideology a Sentiment, or a Creation?," *International Social Science Review* 81, no. 3/4 (2006): 11–34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41887280>.

¹⁰³ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. Page 44

¹⁰⁴ Sometimes Tam Lin has been found across what we would call the United Kingdom. There is the occasional tale in historically Viking settlements that has similar themes, such as the transformation sequence in "East of the Sun, West of the Moon."

rooted in rough soil, and its protagonist shows the kind of toughness necessary for survival in such terrain.”¹⁰⁵ But why is Scotland more likely to have a stronger female character?¹⁰⁶ Why is Janet just so defiant? In part it comes from the many cultures that have influenced this story, blending together into something so quintessentially Scottish because of all the other influences: “The ballad and the song were indigenous cultural forms which, through performance in the community, were means by which people (and perhaps especially women) could shape a sense of themselves and their place in Scotland’s past and in the present. Others, of course, used these traditional forms (as well as folktales, fairy stories, superstitions and so on) to make a statement about difference and identity.”¹⁰⁷ Fiction is a way of quietly announcing one’s beliefs or trying to change the minds of those around us about issues. Ballads like any other form of fiction provide this salve for their performers.

Medieval Scotland was a turbulent place to be and Tam Lin is a border ballad, a ballad most found near the border of Scotland and England. The borders were a harsh environment, and their citizens were seen as, “on the one hand, poor, inferior and backward, and, on the other, innovative, self-reliant and resilient. Pollard stresses the ‘otherness’ of upland communities in the perceptions of both contemporaries and modern commentators. The pastoral society of the hills was viewed as tough, warlike, healthy, and independent, the demands of survival in difficult terrain leading to the growth of cohesive and collaborative communities.”¹⁰⁸ These places would have been difficult to live in, being rural and difficult to harvest. People would have had to work constantly to survive, meaning that women as much as men had to be able to do a large amount of physical labor. We can see Janet, though nobility,

¹⁰⁵J. D. Niles, “Tam Lin: Form and Meaning in a Traditional Ballad,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (January 1, 1977): 336–47, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-38-4-336>. Page 346

¹⁰⁶ While many Child ballads do not have a happy ending for their female characters (when they even have them) very few of the women in the ballads are idle in their own story. Mary Hamilton (Child 173) who commits infanticide after bearing a child she cannot provide for, Geordie’s wife in Child 209 who threatens to shoot a judge if he sentences her husband to death, Clyde Waters heroine May Margeret (Child 216) who defies her mother to try and save her lover from a flooded river. None of these women achieve their goals, Mary Hamilton is executed, Geordie’s wife is unable to prevent her husband from being hanged, and May Margaret ultimately drowns with her lover in the river, but everyone of them took direct action to try and prevent their fate.

¹⁰⁷Lynn Abrams, *Gender in Scottish History since 1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006). *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=163364&site=ehost-live. Page 34

¹⁰⁸ Angus J. L. Winchester, *The Harvest of the Hills: Rural Life in Northern England and the Scottish Borders 1400-1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), <https://search.ebscohost.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=80991&site=ehost-live>. Page 3

being one of these resilient women. Since it is likely that her story was passed down to the lower classes, they would have wanted to see themselves in her, potentially adding to her independence and ferocity. Those who study the ballad note that Janet is unique even among the women for being so independent and sexually free within the context of ballad women.¹⁰⁹

Even among independent female characters she is especially fierce and free. There is, however, a precedent for Janet's independence as a character. In other Anglo-Nordic tales we can find some women with at least some autonomy. One of these is Iodine, from *Sir Amadace* Carol Meale, who studies women in English literature offers the following analysis of Sir Amadace's heroine: "Iodine, in contrast always self-possessed and resourceful, rescues her lover and restores him to sanity by the constant repetition of her name, as if it had divine powers. In short, these two ladies [another woman from a medieval romance was being discussed here] at times assume the traditional male role of taking action and displaying enterprise. In other Anglo-Norman romances this 'masculine' quality is most often in evidence when it is a matter of sexual choice....in six out of the fourteen extant romances, it is the woman who woos."¹¹⁰ Iodine is also unique because her romance, *Sir Amadace*, is not one that originated in France;¹¹¹ most often it is credited with being English. This is very rare for medieval romances. *Tam Lin* is not without its references to France. *Tam Lin* also shares a lack of male wooing, and though *Tam Lin* also unlikely to have been French in origin, there are mentions of themes that would likely have been French influenced. Since many of the elites in Scotland and England would have connections to France, this is not surprising¹¹². "Much of the material in this ballad, as in the Scottish ballad world generally, came a good while earlier from France, the great center of luxury and ceremonial. The Queen of Elfland's silver bells, for instance, reflect occasions like the entry of Louis XI into Paris in 1461, when the horses of his great nobles were ornamented with large silver bells, while the retinue of four-and-twenty ladies that mark Janet's rank as a noble woman come from France's fifteenth-century habits."¹¹³ In addition to providing a little bit more information of the date of *Tam Lin*'s creation, or at least these details in the ballad, our

¹⁰⁹ Cowan, Edward J., and Lizanne Henderson. *Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland*. Page 20

¹¹⁰ Carol Meale, *Women in Literature in Britain*. Page 15

¹¹¹ However many of the French romances were translations and adaptations of Celtic tales. Schaus, Margaret. *Women in Medieval Europe*. Page 716

¹¹² Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. Page 44

¹¹³ Willa Muir, *Living with Ballads* (Oxford University Press, 1965). Page 138

understanding of these minute details is expanded. The Elfin procession is supposed to be otherworldly and elegant, as in mythology Elfin Lords and Ladies are both powerful and wealthy, and to convey this Louis XI's procession is referenced. Even if the listener had very little understanding of the historical context of this reference, they would know that it was there to convey fabulous wealth, and to illustrate the power of the Elfin in the ballad.

There is also a heavy Norse influence in Tam Lin as we saw in the similarities between Janet and Iodine. Also holding on to one's lover while they change shape is typically accredited to Norse cultural stories, though obviously not completely unique. Since the ballad is older than any written version we have it can be difficult to pull back the layers of context: "...the ballad seems Norse in spirit. Tam Lin and Janet were none the worse of their peculiar experiences because they had the strength of spirit, will and courage that belong to the old Norse world. Janet's anxiety about christening and Tam Lin's assertion that he had been 'ill-sained' show an archaic magical cast of feeling belonging to the old gods rather than to Christianity. A later Presbyterian infiltration into the ballad, which makes Janet carry a Bible with her to Miles Cross, embroiders but does not destroy this basic attitude."¹¹⁴ These various potential cultural influences show the same cultural influences as Scotland's own culture and people. There are hints of older pre-Christian magic and beliefs in Tam Lin, as well as references to the Bible which are much more recent additions. The Scottish people's understanding of their own cultural influences, conscious or unconscious, is visible in the changes to ballads, as they represent change in both views and understanding of the world. The addition of Christianity in Tam Lin was likely to help people understand that cultural change in their own past, from pagan to Christian society. Despite the performers of Tam Lin being Christian, they would have needed to understand their own cultural past as pagans. Janet and the Fairy Queen are representations of that change, and Tam Lin is rescued from his pagan captors by a Christian woman. The stories a culture chooses to keep alive and adapt are able to change with the social views.

Tam Lin has likely been changed numerous times in order to keep up with these societal shifts, which is how it has strong Norse influences as well as references to Christianity and the Bible. Since Tam Lin was likely written after Scotland was Christian, these Norse and pagan undertones are likely cultural

¹¹⁴ Willa Muir. *Living with Ballads*. page 141

memories, adapted to live alongside day to day Christian ideology. Despite changing from a pagan to Christian society, the echoes of those previous beliefs are still culturally present and make themselves known in fiction and culture, even if not intentionally. Interestingly the inclusion of Halloween is another instance of a cultural reference to pre-Christian days. Tam Lin is set to be sacrificed on Samhain, referred to as Halloween, or All Hallows Eve in the ballad. Samhain (sometimes Samhuinn) was an important pre-Christian holiday, celebrating the new year in both Scotland and Ireland. It is also the day when our world and the world of fairy (or the otherworld) are closest, hence why Tam Lin is scheduled to be sacrificed on this day. In the ballad we never learn exactly what Tam Lin's sacrifice will do for the Elfin queen, nor why they only have to sacrifice someone once every seven years. It is interesting that Tam Lin, who we now know is a kidnapped Christian Earl, needs to be rescued from the pagan Fairy Queen. A literal war of cultures is occurring with Janet being the main force for Christianity and the Fairy Queen being her pagan opponent, whom she ultimately bests. The ballad shows this cultural battle in a few quick lines, the imagery of two ways of life being simplified to a single couple's fight for happiness.

Another potential Nordic influence is seen in Janet's independent character¹¹⁵. Women in medieval northern Europe appear to have been able to leave behind the confinement of womanhood with enough martial power, money, status or force of will. In other terms women could escape gender roles if they were determined, and privileged enough, meaning that being a woman did not necessarily mean they had to live a life of a woman. This is a much weaker system of gender roles than many places at the time. In various laws and customs a daughter could substitute for a son if no son had been born to the family (most notably in vengeance pacts). This would also work the same with inheritance.¹¹⁶ These women were still the exception to the rule, but they did exist, "but it is at the same time a system in which being born female was not so damaging that it could not be offset by other factors. A woman may start with debts and a man with credits, but any number of other considerations—wealth, marital status, birth

¹¹⁵ See literature on viking shield maidens, such as Ragnar saga, which features Lagertha a shield maiden and wife of Ragnar Lothbrok, or Erik the red's daughter, Freydis Eiríksdóttir, mentioned in Erik's saga's and the Saga of the Greenlanders. "The Real Valkyrie: the Hidden history of Viking Warrior Women" By Nancy Marie Brown looks into a famous warriors grave that was misinterpreted as a mans, and recently has been declared a womans. "Valkyrie : the women of the Viking world" by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, deals with the intersection of the myth of the Valkyrie and the reality of women warriors.

¹¹⁶Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Representations* 2, no. 44 (October 1993): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928638>. Page 4-5

order, historical accident, popularity, a forceful personality, sheer ambition, and so on—could tip the balance in the other direction.”¹¹⁷ Janet herself is certainly not lacking in a forceful personality; and if she does not appear to be substituting in for a male family member in the political or economic system, she certainly is socially.¹¹⁸ She is not legally fulfilling any of the male roles in society for her family. She is not taking on debts or managing an estate for anyone. However she is acting as the hero of the story and saving her lover. She is also strong physically. It cannot be determined how much of this would have drifted into Scotland from Norse occupation, but since Tam Lin itself has a lot of Norse cultural undertones, it is possible that some of Janet’s genderfluid actions are representative of the Nordic understanding of gender during this time¹¹⁹.

Janet’s strong will could also be simply a fairly socially acceptable Scottish thing for fictional women.¹²⁰ In both John Barbour’s *The Bruce* (written 1375) and Blind Harry’s *The Wallace* (written before 1488) women feature heavily as active characters. These poems both concern Scotland’s Wars of Independence and the struggle to gain independence from England.

Bruce and *Wallace* reflect the amount of female participation in the societies which produced the poems, as well as the roles women played during the Wars of Independence, while illuminating gender issues and the gender variances in the period. While women obviously possessed a large amount of control within the domestic arena, they also played a role within the political and marital realms in which they were ‘viewed in a generally positive and active light, not negatively as temptresses or passively as ideals’. Women were active social participants, and were not outsiders who failed to do more than feel the effects of male actions.¹²¹

Bruce and *Wallace* are two romances that feature women participants in the Scottish Wars of Independence, often helping the men as much as they could. Both of these poems are fictitious retellings

¹¹⁷ Clover, Carol J. *Regardless of Sex*. Page 13

¹¹⁸ An argument could be made that since no brother is mentioned in most versions, Janet could potentially become her father’s heir, however I do not think there is enough evidence to make this argument structurally sound, as a more distant male relative could also be the heir. Choosing a more distant male relative is more frequent in the later medieval period, whereas earlier a woman could have inherited if she had no older brothers. We do know she is the heir to Cargtherhaul though this could end up being part of her dowry to Tam Lin. Female ownership of land could be potentially complicated during this time period. (see previous section of chapter one, and chapter two.)

¹¹⁹ Amusingly Iceland is one of the only places where more men were tried as witches than women during the witch trial scare. Part of the reason for this has been theorized that even though the Icelandic peoples believed that both men and women practiced witchcraft, they believed that one needed to read and be educated to be performing nefarious magic.

¹²⁰ As previously mentioned even though many women were not successful they did still often act in their own stories in the ballads, See Child 173, 209, 216.

¹²¹ Cowan, Edward J., and Lizanne Henderson. *Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland*. Page 177

of real events that occurred in Scottish history. There is a precedent culturally for Janet's strength and agency. It is still a rare thing to see a woman with this much agency, acting as a male character would.

The women in Bruce and Wallace's poems are able to act but not nearly to the extent of Janet. Among the Child Ballads, Janet's sexual freedom and her success at the end of the ballad is unique.¹²²

Especially since Tam Lin was performed and kept alive through the witch hunts in Scotland, a time when women's sexuality was highly controlled. "As Julian Goodare has shown, the witch-hunt in Scotland was directed overwhelmingly against women and involved an intrusive effort by the godly commonwealth to control women and their sexuality."¹²³ She is one of only four women who is both socially successful, not ostracized and has ended up with all the expected things a woman should have, a husband and a child, as well as being economically stable. While there is a precedent and strong cultural influence for Janet's independence and spirited nature, she is still an exceptional character.

The Ballad of Tam Lin is ultimately a Scottish ballad that can be studied to see the cultural changes and influences of Scotland. The ballad is unique to Scotland, even with the influences from other cultures, much as Scotland had many outside cultural influences over the course of the Medieval period. Though the exact dating of Tam Lin's origin can be extremely difficult to determine, there is a plethora of evidence that implies the ballad existed long before it was ever fully written out. Between the references to Tam Lin in the *Complaynt* and the lost ballet, we know it was popular enough to be listed and have a ballet made of it by the middle of the sixteenth century. Since the *Complaynt* references it as a medieval ballad, and a romance on top of that, it is likely even older, and either there never was a written record from the medieval times or it has since been destroyed by the entropy of history. There have been numerous cultural and historical references added to the ballad, though we do not have any idea what the original would have contained. Because the ballad was not written out until the late eighteenth century, there is no way to compare our early modern versions to the older ones. However, there is still context that can be found for medieval socio-cultural beliefs in Scotland. Janet's behavior is above and beyond any other extranet Scottish instance of female agency in medieval ballads or romances, even when other fairly active women are visible: "though [ballad] women may exert a fair

¹²² Stewart, Polly. Female Success in Child Ballads, Page 71

¹²³ Devine, T. M., and Jenny Wormald. The Handbook of Modern Scottish History. page 81

degree of agency, it is often with dire consequences.”¹²⁴ Janet receives no punishment or consequences for her actions, making her an exception in ballads. Her feisty nature and independent streak are calmed by Tam Lin’s more passive role. He is a gentle noble man, a good Christian, and potentially a reference to an obscure historical Scottish hero. The two of them form a strong couple willing to take on the pagan Elfin Queen herself to ensure their happiness, completing physical acts of strength and enduring hardship. At their core they represent Scotland, in all its changing cultural nature, with many outside forces leaving imprints on their lives. Yet they are at their core unique and independent.

¹²⁴ Schaus, Margaret. *Women in Medieval Europe*. Page 58

Chapter 2

Gender Roles

Some of the most surprising things about Tam Lin are Janet's actions and the lack of consequences for them. She has sex out of wedlock, attempts to abort a child, speaks back to her father and his knights and overcomes the physical trials. Her child is in danger of being born illegitimate. Some of these things would have been frowned upon. Some were permitted under special circumstances. Others would have meant a potential death sentence. Yet the only thing that seems to cause Janet genuine distress, causing her to flee from her home and attempt the abortion, is when she reveals that Tam Lin is an 'elfin gray' and not a man. When Tam Lin confronts her about the abortion attempt she demands to know if he has ever been to a church. She fears both his potentially pagan nature and the fact that their child would not be entirely human. Though these things are clarified, and Janet finds out her beau is both a human (and a noble man) and Christian, this does appear to be the only real moment when Janet is upset and worrying about social consequences. The sum of her actions shows her to be a fiercely independent woman who faces essentially no consequences for flaunting the rules of her society. In this chapter I will discuss which of Janet's actions are exceptional, and which were more socially acceptable. As previously mentioned, even among the Child Ballads, Janet's social and economic success at the end of her story is highly unusual. Numerous other women in the ballads die from either killing their bastard infant or from attempting abortions.¹²⁵ Women also suffer and die for sleeping with men out of wedlock. And yet Janet is able to escape any real consequences, and by her own strength.

¹²⁵ See Mary Hamilton (Child 173), Sheath and Knife (Child 16), the Cruel Mother (Child 20), the Maid and the Palmer (Child 21), Bonnie Annie (Child 24). There are innumerable examples in the Child Ballads. Often women are also punished for sleeping with men out of wedlock, who normally turn out to be the women's long lost brothers. The brother then either kills the woman, she kills herself or she dies from shock. (Sheath and Knife, Lizzie Wan (Child 51), The Bonnie Hild (Child 50), The King's Daughter Lady Jean (Child 52). Mary Hamilton, as we shall discuss later, is an especially interesting story, with more sympathy towards the woman than most, even if she still dies at the end of her story.

Abortion and Fairy children

Had Janet and Tam Lin not (presumably) married at the end of their tale, their child would have been considered illegitimate by society. There were exceptions for children whose parents were married years after the children were born, but for the time being the child would have been illegitimate. In addition, Janet is not sure if Tam Lin is Christian, something that would be required for a wedding during this time. In a letter to Pope Innocent I in the fifth century about a marriage that contained at least one non-Christian, the potential for a marriage largely accepted as legitimate was discussed. A historian of medieval law Sara McDougall examines the hazards of interfaith marriages; “as that marriage involved at least one non-Christian, possibly two non-Christians, such a union presumably might not comply with the contemporary Christian ideas of valid marriage in the time and place in question. Nevertheless, any offspring were not to suffer as a result.”¹²⁶ This refers to the illegitimacy stigma. Socially, a person whose parents were two different religions may have been stigmatized. In the late medieval times these ideas were still prevalent. Christian doctrine declared any marriage between a Jewish person and a Christian to be invalid, though it recognized marriages between two Jewish people.¹²⁷ To marry outside of one's religion was often to be socially isolated from both groups, and the couple was often ultimately separated by this.¹²⁸ Tam Lin was not Jewish, but in Janet's mind, he may not be Christian, and she would have knowledge of laws about marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian. Though these marriages seem to have occurred on occasion, the fear of them was much more prevalent than the actual event.¹²⁹ Janet's worry about Tam Lin's religious (and potentially non-human) status stem both from a fear for her unborn child and a fear for herself.¹³⁰ In the conversation with her father she says she would swear to

¹²⁶Sara McDougall, *Royal Bastards : The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1230* (Oxford ; New York (Ny): Oxford University Press, 2017). page 37

¹²⁷James A. Brundage, “Intermarriage between Christians and Jews in Medieval Canon Law,” *Jewish History* 3, no. 1 (March 1988): 25–40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01667346>. Page 27

It should be noted that while marriages between Jewish people were recognized, they were not considered the same as christian marriages, because divorce was allowed.

¹²⁸ Brundage, James A. *Intermarriage between Christian and Jews*. Page 28

¹²⁹ Brundage, James A. *Intermarriage between Christian and Jews*. Page 30

¹³⁰ Socially Janet would have been required to marry, and marry a Christian, in order to legitimize and protect herself and her child. Since Janet puts so much emphasis on Tam Lin having set foot in a church we can presume her society will need them both to be Christian in order for a marriage to be accepted.

always love him if he were a human knight, meaning a man of her own status. Even if Janet is afraid for herself and the child, it seems that more often than not there was more forgiveness for the child than their parents.¹³¹

She could have faced numerous consequences for the attempted abortion as well, especially if it took place after the quickening, which was considered at about half way through the second trimester when the child would begin to move in the uterus.¹³² In thirteenth century Irish secular law, “A man could divorce his wife if she dishonored him, procured an abortion, was unfaithful or a scold.”¹³³ These traditions would have been present in Scotland since it was conquered by Ireland in the ninth century. That makes the fact that she attempted the abortion in Carterhaugh even more curious. Christian canon law would not have approved of this tradition, but likely women were attempting to end unwanted pregnancies during this time. We have no idea how often they succeeded or were attempted. Janet is alone in the Child ballads for attempting an abortion. Other women in the Child ballads commit infanticide, but not abortions. In fact, no other Child ballad mentions so much as mentions abortions, showing just how much of a social sin it was. Janet is not able to actually have an abortion, likely this would have taken her from our unique heroine to a real villain in the eyes of the audience of the ballad. Indeed since her father and all his knights and lords already know she is pregnant, so if she returns to her home no longer pregnant she will need to convince them that she lost the baby and did not abort it.¹³⁴

In some versions her pregnancy is noted because she is “as green as any glass”, and in others (Child 39F, K) no reason is stated for why everyone knows she is pregnant, one could assume her

Though not surprising, it does show that the people singing this ballad would have been fearful of interfaith marriages, and their legitimacy.

¹³¹ See later discussion on illegitimacy.

¹³² This was the moment when a baby was thought to first be ‘alive’. This was when the baby first began to move inside the womb, typically at four to five months, though it varies for each pregnancy.

¹³³ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. Page 62

¹³⁴ “When Do Pregnant Women's Baby Bump Start Showing?” WebMD. WebMD. Accessed May 4, 2023. Janet at this point has to be at least four months pregnant in order for them to notice her baby bump. Typically people begin to show at 16-20 weeks. This is also when quickening is believed to take place and therefore after the time period when an abortion would have been excused. “Morning Sickness.” Mayo Clinic. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, September 28, 2022.

She had also already had morning sickness, which the knights have also caught on to. This typically starts at six weeks and is certainly happening by nine weeks. In Child's version 39G she in fact gives birth right after rescuing Tam Lin, and the ballad says eight months have passed since Janet and Tam Lin first met.

pregnancy has begun to show, meaning she has to be at least four months pregnant. In Child 39 G she is directly stated to be eight months pregnant. In one version collected in 1959, her mother informs her of what herbs to take to remove the pregnancy, "Out then spoke her mother dear/ And ever alas, said she/ I know an herb in the merry green wood/ That will scathe thy babe from thee."¹³⁵ In this version at least, the baby is not far enough along for it to be socially unacceptable to end the pregnancy, at least in her mother's eyes. In Child ballad 39F, both Janet's mother and sister are furious with her for getting pregnant, though her mother still offers the knowledge of herbs to Janet. In this version called Lady Margeret, "Up starts Lady Margeret's sister,/ An angry woman was she: /If there ever was a woman wi child./ Margaret, you are wi'// Up starts Lady Margaret's mother./ And an angry woman was she:/There grows ane herb in yon Kirk-yard/ That will scathe the babe away."¹³⁶ They react poorly but still offer advice, telling her to get rid of the child. Janet's brother shows up in 39G to give a similarly scathing order, though his tone is leaning towards violence and in this version Janet is eight months pregnant at this point, "Then out it speaks her brither¹³⁷ dear, /He meant to do her harm: /There is an herb in Charter wood /Will twine you an the bairn."¹³⁸ In this version Janet's family is not happy with the damage to her reputation. Janet's brother seems to be planning to harm her which is an alarming implication. Though the type of harm is never explored, he does tell her to get an abortion at eight months pregnant. Many instances of domestic abuse show up in the legal record, which while astounding should also be taken as a hint of the amount not recorded or reported. Familial relations, brother, husband, parent or other, shared reputations, creating a disincentive to report abuse as it was a character flaw¹³⁹ Since it appears that the abortion method is a 'poison rose', trying to abort the fetus at this stage would only succeed at great risk to Janet herself. It is interesting that her brother is the only person aside from the Fairy Queen who ever threatens Janet with harm. She speaks out against her father and he simply responds quietly, but Janet's brother, when present in the story, is a volatile man.

¹³⁵ Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, Volume 1 (Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹³⁶ Child, Francis James. 2014. *Child Ballad 39F* page 467

¹³⁷ Brother

¹³⁸ Child, Francis James. 2014. *Child Ballad 39F* page 468

¹³⁹ Devine, T. M., and Jenny Wormald. *The Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, page 274 these records are pulled from the early modern period.

In this ballad Janet's abortion attempt appears to be to consume a poison rose; however, likely it would have been too late to have an abortion. The rose in this poem is likely a stand-in for a lot of plant species, there were a few in Scotland that people used as abortifacients such as; tansy, yarrow and, feverfew.¹⁴⁰ The people of medieval Europe were aware of abortions, though many of their abortion attempts may not have worked. Some parts of the church frowned heavily at abortions,¹⁴¹ while others went as far as to attempt to create contraceptives and publish works on them.¹⁴² *Hildegardis Causae Et Curae*, a manuscript written by a twelfth century abbess, was one such text that had numerous potential contraceptives and abortive solutions listed. However, due to how far into her pregnancy Janet is attempting this, even if it was only that she was showing her pregnancy, it is unlikely that even if one of these cures did work generally, that she would abort the child¹⁴³. Since it is difficult to know what she would have had access to and the ballad simply describes it as a poison rose, it could be that it would have worked fine, maybe even aided by magic. It is impossible to know how many women attempted abortions and how many were successful. Successful here being defined as no one knowing she was pregnant and no longer pregnant. An unsuccessful abortion would be if she either did not succeed in ending the pregnancy or if people were aware of her pregnancy and she had been at the quickening state as this would potentially have legal consequences. The most common abortion in the seventeenth century was to take herbs or drugs.¹⁴⁴ Typically these worked by poisoning the mother and hopefully killing the child before the mother died. Other methods were used, such as trying to overexert oneself, but since Janet pulls a rose to use for her abortion, it would seem she is trying the poison method.

In attempting an abortion, Janet was risking her own death for something that might or might not work. Since when Janet is attempting to abort the child she believes the child's father is a elfin-grey, and that the child will be a hybrid, she is following a socially acceptable loophole. Piotr Spyra, a historian of

¹⁴⁰ Sainte Hildegarde and Paul Kaiser, *Hildegardis Causae et Curae*. Edidit Paulus Kaiser. (Lipsiae: B.G. Teubner, 1903).

¹⁴¹ Generally it was frowned upon to attempt an abortion if the fetus was past the quickening stage, which was considered at about half way through the second trimester. So Janet's father noticing her pregnancy at four months at the earliest could mean that this was still before quickening.

¹⁴² Sainte Hildegarde and Paul Kaiser, *Hildegardis Causae et Curae*.

¹⁴³ This is because she would be poisoning herself, essentially, so at this point to successfully abort the fetus she would need to risk her own health.

¹⁴⁴ Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Sexuality and Social Control* (Blackwell, 1989). Page 210

medieval romance, writes on the treatment of fairies as liminal beings, “Additionally, it [the risk of changeling children]¹⁴⁵ provided parents with a loophole in the generally upheld moral code, allowing them to mistreat the child with impunity due to its supposedly alien nature.”¹⁴⁶ This could be why the ballad passes no judgment on Janet. To society around her, the baby would have potentially been a monster. When Tam Lin asks her why she wants to harm the baby, she counters by asking if he has ever been in a church. The reason Janet seeks to rid herself of the child is because of its potentially non-human/non-Christian nature, as she currently thinks her lover is an elf.¹⁴⁷

Janet's fear seems to be stemming from Tam Lin's nebulous paganism and inhuman nature. Earlier she says to her father and his lords that if Tam Lin were not an 'elfin gray' she would be with him. When she questions him about whether he was ever in a church, his humanity is tied to his Christian faith in her eyes. Elves and fairies would have been interchangeable with devils in Christianity, and Janet would have been experiencing a very real fear that her child could be half devil.¹⁴⁸ The fear of the fairy seducer is how the term incubus came to be, a creature whose only desire is to ruin young maidens.¹⁴⁹ However, Janet has been warned at the very beginning of the story that Tam Lin is a fairy who has been appearing, and she still chooses to seek him out. Perhaps Janet does not fear Tam Lin because he is an elfin gray and therefore occupies a liminal space within social values. Richard Firth Green, a medieval historian who focuses on medieval literature and christian doctrine observes that, “there seems to have been a popular belief that sex with incubi posed no threat to a woman's virginity.”¹⁵⁰ Though this is not befitting a Christian lady, she may have seen it as an opportunity to not damage her reputation while also having sex out of wedlock. If this is so, Tam Lin being human and getting her pregnant prevent her plan from working. It would seem that her fears come from his unnatural state potentially causing the social suffering she would face. She is not able to marry him because he is an elf and potentially a non-Christian. Indeed it is unclear if the fear of an illegitimate child is the only reason that Janet wants to abort

¹⁴⁵ A fairy child swapped with a 'normal' human baby, which was often used to explain mental or physical disability and unfortunately was used as an excuse to abandon or kill the child.

¹⁴⁶ Piotr Spyra, *The Liminality of Fairies* (Routledge, 2020). Page 7

¹⁴⁷ Elf and fairy are interchangeable within British belief. Piotr Spyra. *The Liminality of Fairies*. Page 9

¹⁴⁸ Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars : Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Page 1

¹⁴⁹ Green, Richard Firth. *Elf Queens and Holy Friars*. Page 82

¹⁵⁰ Green, Richard Firth. *Elf Queens and Holy Friars*. Page 88

the child or if it is a more complex issue. But given that her response to Tam Lin asking why she wants to abort the baby is to ask him if he has ever stepped foot into a church;

“Why pu’s thou the rose, Janet// Amang the grove sae green// And a’ to kill the bonie babe// That we gat us between?

‘O tell me, tell me, Tam Lin,’ she says//“For’s sake that died on tree//If eer ye was in holy chapel// Or christendom did see?”¹⁵¹

Since her immediate response to his question is to ask him about his potential christianity, it would seem that she is worried about not only their status as a couple but also what potentially might be the child's fate.

While Scottish folklore features many human and fairy couples, their children are not often spoken of. But there have been instances of women using fairies as a way to cover up who the human father may have been, as Green states, “after all, fairy insemination offered medieval women a convenient way to account for any pregnancy that, for whatever social reasons, could not safely be attributed to a specific human father.”¹⁵² Fairies continue to be able to occupy a liminal state within society, even providing a way for a woman to avoid giving the name of the father. The most common fairies mentioned are selkies, mythological creatures that could change form between a human and a seal by shedding a coat of seal skin. Selkies often showed up in fairy tales and folktales in Scotland, but they are much rarer in ballads.¹⁵³ Their human relationships follow one of two patterns. Female selkies were often kidnapped by having their skin stolen, forcing them to live on land and to marry the man who stole their coat. A selkie mother who has been kidnaped and eventually remembers herself might abandon her children and return to her home. Or a male selkie might have children with a human woman, in which case the father will attempt to raise the child as a selkie.¹⁵⁴ But it was rare for medieval ballads to speak of the children of interracial marriages such as between a human and a selkie.¹⁵⁵ In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, of the *Canterbury Tales*, a man is falsely accused of having a monstrous half-fairy child,

¹⁵¹ A pagan fairy in most tales could not have entered a church the same way a demon cannot. Once a child was baptized they could not be stolen by the fairies and would have some protection. Christianity was a fairy repellent.

¹⁵² Green, Richard Firth. *Elf Queens and Holy Friars*. Page 84

¹⁵³ Fowler, David C. *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad*. Page 278

¹⁵⁴ See the selkie wife, the selkie and the hunter, the selkie bride. These are all fairy tales/ folk tales, not performed ballads. They were also later than medieval.

¹⁵⁵ Rosanne P. Gasse, “Mixed Ethnicity in the Romances of Medieval England: The Hybridity of Ethnic Identity,” in *Hybridity in the Literature of Medieval England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 21–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31465-0_2. page 23.

though this turns out to be a plot by an evil mother in law spreading false information.¹⁵⁶ It is entirely possible Janet is worried either that the child will be taken away from her by Tam Lin or that the child might be some kind of monster. Rosanne P. Gasse, a medieval literature historian who focuses on fourteenth century english literature, offers us a way to understand the way in which supernatural children were understood:

A link to the supernatural is a far more instrumental signifier of disruptive ethnic difference than the simple fact of illegitimacy, which can, of course, occur without the need for any unacceptable cultural or social divide to be crossed. Moreover, the literature presents such supernatural hybridity, where it happens, as a problem for the afflicted character to narratively resolve.¹⁵⁷

To be a child of mixed supernatural and human birth was a more dangerous thing than to be illegitimate, and Janet has every reason to fear for her child, who could either be a monster or be treated as one. In tales, hybrid children often cannot control their violent nature or experience a curse that results in them being unable to have a happy ending.¹⁵⁸ And since Janet is also not certain if Tam Lin is human or not, their child could end up being a human/elfin gray mix. In Chaucer's *Man of the Law's Tale*, a man is accused of producing a half faery child that was described as so horrendous that people could not look at it. It would also seem that she is worried about Tam Lin being neither Christian nor human, both things he quickly resolves once she asks him. Gasse once again offers us some insight, seeing the supernatural and human relationships as some kind of cultural divide, with the supernatural being so completely other; "some Middle English texts indeed go to great lengths to suggest the monstrosity of sexual pairings too far removed from one's own European and Christian culture." The couples and the children of these unions are often killed in these texts, such as in *Othello*, *The Tale of the Tempted Monk* (from *Handlyng Synne*), and *Ipomaon*. It seems likely once these issues were resolved and since Tam Lin seems willing enough to marry her, that her child will either not be born illegitimate, or will shortly after birth no longer be illegitimate. This was not always true for a lot of mothers who found themselves in this situation, and in fact infanticide was a fairly common solution.

In addition the child of Janet and Tam Lin (as a non-Christian) could also be socially discriminated against. When pulling from other medieval romances, Gasse observes that we can see "the

¹⁵⁶ Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*.

¹⁵⁷ Rosanne P. Gasse, *Mixed Ethnicity in the Romances of Medieval Europe*. page 61

¹⁵⁸ See *The Romance of Mélusine*, and *Of Arthour and of Merlin*

children conceived between Christians and converts found it difficult to escape their mixed origins and to function socially in the same manner as the offspring of long-time Christians.”¹⁵⁹ Even if Tam Lin was a non-Christian who converted to be with Janet, their child could still be treated poorly due to Tam Lin’s conversion. Children whose parents were both born Christian would have been treated better than children who had a converted parent. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, a medieval treatise on the rules of love, it is stated that if one person strays from Christianity then the love they share ends¹⁶⁰. Children whose parents were both born Christian would have been treated better than children who had a converted parent. And since Janet is also not certain if Tam Lin is human or not, their child could end up being a human/elfin gray mix, which there is also precedent for in Chaucer’s *Man of the Law’s Tale*, where a man is accused of producing a half faery child that was described as so horrendous that people could not look at it¹⁶¹.

Janet’s marriage to a non-Christian and her child with him were both things Scottish society may have feared at the time. As we see reflected in other medieval stories, there was societal anxiety around the actions and choices she made.¹⁶² Janet may not seem to have much fear of breaking the social rules of her time, but she does seem to fear Tam Lin’s non-Christian nature. No further discussion is had about aborting the infant once it is established that Tam Lin is a human prince kidnapped by the Queen of Fairies, and no more seems to be needed. Once Janet learns that Tam Lin is human, and on top of that a noble,¹⁶³ Janet seems to have no more fears about the future.

Interfaith marriages and illegitimacy

Illegitimacy in medieval times was treated differently in Scotland than most other European countries. Illegitimate children were often able to inherit, especially since Scottish inheritance in medieval times, and beyond, was not based solely on birth order. Generally the closer to modern times, the more

¹⁵⁹ Rosanne P. Gasse, *Mixed Ethnicity in the Romances of Medieval Europe*, Page 23

¹⁶⁰ Andreas Capellanus. *The Art of Courtly Love*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2008. Page 156.

¹⁶¹ Rosanne P. Gasse, *Mixed Ethnicity in the Romances of Medieval Romances* page 33, Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Norton, W.W., and Co., 2004.

¹⁶² See *The Romance of Mélusine*, and *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, the lack of mixing of faiths in *King Horn*.

¹⁶³ By most accounts see chapter 1.

inheritance is based on birth order. There were some fears that illegitimate children would have negative personality traits because of their birth but generally this was ignored.¹⁶⁴ Illegitimate children were still seen as part of the family, and were valued and loved.¹⁶⁵ Janet does not need to worry about her child's status, as it seems likely her family would accept them and care for them no matter what. This is also evident because Janet's father asks who the father of the baby is, whether to legitimize them or to ensure that there is a person who will take care of the child should Janet die in childbirth. The double standards still applied. It was much worse for women than men to have an illegitimate child and could render the woman unmarriageable, to anyone except the person who had fathered the child.¹⁶⁶ But, illegitimate children could become legitimate if their parents married, no matter when in the child's life this occurred.¹⁶⁷ So even if Janet and Tam Lin were not married right away, as long as they married at some point their child would be considered legitimate. Sometimes these marriages did not occur for upwards of ten years. Before the thirteenth century illegitimacy was not a major worry; after that it was much more considered a stigma.¹⁶⁸ However this began to change in the later medieval period, when inheritance became more about birth order and sons inheriting.

The later medieval period and early modern period were more patriarchal than previous times, focusing more on the eldest male.¹⁶⁹ Since Tam Lin is likely a later medieval ballad, inheritance could have been one of Janet's fears in giving birth, another being the social isolation. In her book, *The Five Euphemias*, Elizabeth Sutherland, a medieval Scottish historian notes that, "in the late medieval period estates and titles were usually inherited by the owners' sons in order of seniority and failing these, as were often the case in these precarious times, by their daughters."¹⁷⁰ In Janet's own family she may be the only child. The ballad differs from version to version. Some instances include mention of a sister or brother but the details are never clear. Even with an increased focus on having sons inherit, Janet could

¹⁶⁴Susan Marshall, *Illegitimacy in Medieval Scotland, 1100-1500* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv136bxqk>. Page 112

¹⁶⁵Marshall, Susan. *Illegitimacy in Scotland*. page 118

¹⁶⁶ Marshall, Susan. *Illegitimacy in Scotland*. Page 114

¹⁶⁷ Marshall, Susan. *Illegitimacy in Scotland*. Page 113

¹⁶⁸ Marshall, Susan. *Illegitimacy in Scotland* page 192

¹⁶⁹ Devine, T. M., and Jenny Wormald. *The Handbook of Modern Scottish History*. Page 280

¹⁷⁰ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. Page 144

still end up being the one to inherit.¹⁷¹ And since there was less focus on the illegitimate child and more on the parents, specifically the mother, it seems that Janet's fears are likely for herself and not the child. Janet's choice to attempt an abortion is not something the ballad chooses to explore in depth. However, from examining the social influences and laws of the time, it would seem that her fears are for her own reputation and not how the child will be treated even if the entire court already knows she is pregnant.

It was more common for infants to be murdered by their parents than for women to be executed for killing their kids in the early modern period.¹⁷² In 1690 Scotland passed a law that set the punishment for killing one's child as execution, called the Scots Act Anent Murthering of Children, which lasted until 1809. Lower-class women had fewer resources to be a single parent and raise a child. Establishing a household was very difficult as a tenant farmer, and marriage connections were one of the only ways to escape tenant farming. Despite the potential harsh punishments, many mothers of illegitimate children killed their infants.¹⁷³ Despite the letter of the law stating that the punishment for infanticide was death, many communities instead decided upon exile.¹⁷⁴ In addition it was unlikely for these women to marry the father of their illegitimate children, even if that would have then legitimized those children. While statistically women were not murdered that often, murders of newborns was very common in Scotland during early modern time.¹⁷⁵ In addition some women who were pregnant out of wedlock were recorded to have been killed by their own spouses because of the pregnancy. Economically a woman who gave birth to a child without a spouse was not likely to be able to support herself or the child, hence they often killed the child.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Most versions only have her interacting with her father, but on occasion she interacts with her mother or sister. In a version collected in 1959 by Bertrand Harris Bronson Janet's mother is the one who tells her about the herb that could be used to cause an abortion, "Out then spoke her mother dear/ And ever alas, said she/ I know an herb in the merry green wood/ That will scathe thy babe from thee" Bronson, Bertrand Harris. *The traditional tunes of The Child Ballads*

When another family member shows up in this ballad, it is only to comment on Janet's pregnancy, just as her father does. They all have different reactions depending on the ballad. In Child 39F Janet's mother and sister are angry, but still tell her about ways to end the pregnancy. In the above mentioned version from Bronson, Janet's mother is not angry, and offers abortion advice.

¹⁷² Symonds, Deborah A. Weep Not for Me. Page 3

¹⁷³ Symonds, Deborah A. Weep Not for Me. Page 5

¹⁷⁴ Symonds, Deborah A. Weep Not for Me. Page 9

¹⁷⁵ Symonds, Deborah A. Weep Not for Me. Page 3

¹⁷⁶ Symonds, Deborah A. Weep Not for Me. Page 4

In the early modern period, there was a very low rate of premarital pregnancies, usually less than a quarter of the illegitimate births, and less than two percent for the entire birth rate. The rest of illegitimate births were either between two people with no intention of marriage or from adultery. Therefore infants who were conceived outside of a marriage were almost certainly born illegitimate, with their parents not getting married during the course of the pregnancy. These children had very little chance of their parents getting married.¹⁷⁷ The lack of premarital sex leading to marriage “makes it unlikely that any sizable part of the population regarded sexual intercourse as a normal prelude to marriage”¹⁷⁸ Whereas in the medieval times this may have been the social expectations. Perhaps the rise in sexual freedom, in the early modern period, came from women's ability to be at least semi-independent financially and find paying work¹⁷⁹. Since this is the period that all our written copies of Tam Lin come from, perhaps the lack of social disdain for the potential illegitimate child came from this time period. While Child claimed he recorded the ballad exactly as it was told to him, the storytellers may have changed some things to make them more socially palatable. In the early modern time period there was a rise in illegitimate births.¹⁸⁰

Even if this is not the case there is evidence that sex became something to enjoy instead of a means of getting a marriage or child.¹⁸¹ Sex in the early modern period was not just about marriage and children, as reflected by the amount of illegitimate children who were born whose parents did not marry. Janet differs in this, as we can assume Tam Lin is going to marry her.¹⁸² But much like all of her other social problems, Janet seems to be able to brush this one aside without any consequences. Perhaps the difference is in her elite status, allowing her not to worry about the resources needed to raise a child on her own. However, premarital pregnancy was stigmatized in the landed gentry. Among the elite it carried

¹⁷⁷ Mitchison, Rosalind, and Leah Leneman. *Sexuality and Social Control*. Pg 176

¹⁷⁸ Mitchison, Rosalind, and Leah Leneman. *Sexuality and Social Control*. page 182

¹⁷⁹ Edward Shorter, “Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution, and Social Change in Modern Europe,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, no. 2 (1971): 237, <https://doi.org/10.2307/202844>.

¹⁸⁰ Edward Shorter, *Illegitimacy*, page 238

¹⁸¹ Mitchison, Rosalind, and Leah Leneman. *Sexuality and Social Control*.. Page 5

¹⁸² For one he seems entirely besotted by her and her fierce personality as he sleeps with her after she tells him that he is not the owner of the land, it is hers and she has every right to be there. In addition she rescued his life, telling her that if she does so she will love her child, implying that the child will have two Christian human parents. Tam Lin also worries about the health of their child, and assures her that the child will be human. Also it seems unlikely that Janet's family would allow Tam Lin to walk away and not marry her.

the potential weight of social consequences.¹⁸³ Or perhaps Janet represented an idealized reality, as Mitchison and Leneman comment upon in their book, *Sexuality and Social Control: Scotland 1660-1780*; “the ballad of Tam Lin I can only call sexually positive in that a strong vein of realism informs it. Janet seeks Tam Lin, accepts his child in spite of the implied stigma, and ultimately restores Tam to human shape; the tale ends, not with wedding bells but with the chagrin of the outwitted Fairy Queen.”¹⁸⁴ The early modern change to being a more sexually positive society could be the reason Tam Lin is so positive.¹⁸⁵ The ballad could have been altered to fit the new societal values. During the industrial revolution, around ten percent of girls, not fully grown women, were employed in the domestic sphere, and were extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse by their male employer. Evidence for this is found in female servants having the highest rate of illegitimate births.¹⁸⁶ However since every single version we currently have has the same attitude towards premarital sex, it seems less likely. For every version to have been changed to fit this then all the versions would have to have one common ancestor, or every version would have had to be changed in nearly the same way. It could be that society changing to be more accepting of premarital sex resulted in everyone changing the ballad to reflect that independent of one another, but the fact is that of the twenty to thirty versions collected, no version blames Janet or punishes her in any way.

It could be that Tam Lin has always been a ballad with a sexually positive attitude, but if that is the case, and it was not reflecting societal beliefs, why was it being told this way? Anglo-Norman literature of the twelfth and thirteenth century had strong and powerful women, but real women were given much less freedom than Janet, even if they had more freedoms than we might expect.¹⁸⁷ A fictitious story generally has more freedoms than a real person. The narrative can accommodate a hero more than

¹⁸³ Mitchison, Rosalind, and Leah Leneman. *Sexuality and Social Control*. Page 235

¹⁸⁴ James Reed, *Border Ballads : A Selection* (1973; repr., New York: Routledge, 2003). page 176

¹⁸⁵ A large number of the illegitimate births in the early modern period were from women who were coerced into sex by someone more powerful than them, typically a master/servant or a wage laborer and their employer. Part of the reason these could occur is because young women were entering the workforce/ being separated from their community and were much more isolated in these situations. The industrial revolution resulted in many country women leaving their homes to work in factories in cities. Without the protection of a tight knit community that would apply social pressure to anyone who conceived out of marriage these women were far more vulnerable.

Edward Shorter, *Illegitimacy*, page 245

¹⁸⁶ Devine, T. M., and Jenny Wormald. *The Handbook of Modern Scottish History*. page 279

¹⁸⁷ Meale, Carol M. *Women and Literature in Britain*. Page 7

the real world can. Is Janet an example of this? A fictional woman being allowed to do traditionally male things and still achieve happiness at the end of her story? It is hard to determine for sure, but we do know that Janet was able to upend numerous social structures with no consequences and her ballad ends not with the traditional wedding but with the Fairy Queen giving an angry speech about how she will have revenge. Once the fact that Janet's goals are not those of a traditionally feminine hero are placed center stage; her story does not end in marriage because it is not about marriage or children. She ends her story with the villain giving a concession speech and vowing revenge. Because Janet is the one to take away her prize, the one to physically defeat her and break the spell. In a reverse of the more traditional narrative, she acts as the prince rescuing the damsel in distress from the evil queen.

Changing marriage rules between 14th century and 18th century.

Gender roles would have changed fairly significantly over the course of the years in which Tam Lin existed but before it was written down. Though it is impossible to know how much of the ballad was altered over the years, some of the changes can be observed culturally. The Infanticide Act reflected an interesting change in the economy to a dependence on tenant farming,¹⁸⁸ which offered very little chance for the lower classes to be anything but tenant farmers. Because of this, women needed the economic connections that a marriage could possibly offer, and could not afford the potential social damage or economically afford to take care of a child without major support. Another place where gender roles changed was with inheritance, where women went from being able to inherit and birth order not being particularly important, to the focus being on the first male heir¹⁸⁹. In addition, the early modern period brought about Jus Mariti, which said that a woman lost all her legal status once married. Her husband was the authority and was now in charge of their property and where they lived.¹⁹⁰ Early modern women

¹⁸⁸ Increase in illegitimacy resulted in more children being killed by their parents. Tenant farmers needed every single social opportunity they could get so if the marriage would not offer economic benefits the man would likely not marry the woman who was pregnant.

Symonds, Deborah A. Weep Not for Me page 5

¹⁸⁹ Ewan, Elizabeth, and Janay Nugent. Finding Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland page 14, gaelic medieval women could and did inherit.

Sutherland, Elizabeth. Five Euphemia's page 144, late medieval ideas were beginning to shift towards the oldest male heir.

¹⁹⁰ Devine, T. M., and Jenny Wormald. The Handbook of Modern Scottish History. page 273

could sometimes in urban places claim the 'femme sole' status as a non married independent woman but this was rare. Women's legal status was extremely limited.¹⁹¹

In the early medieval period, before the Norman conquest of England, gender roles were less delineated. As Carol Meale writes in her book, *The Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, "in pre-Conquest England, women of the property owning class would seem to have had comparatively greater independence, education, status and freedom of choice in marriage."¹⁹² From the twelfth century onwards both parties were required above all else to consent to a marriage, in fact even if a marriage had no witnesses, if both husband and wife testified that they consented, they were legally wed.¹⁹³ As wives, women were considered on some levels the same as their husbands, particularly from a legal standpoint.¹⁹⁴ This again flips in the early modern period when the church wanted parents to have to consent to a marriage, but legally from medieval times till early modern there were very few legal repercussions if children chose to get married without parental consent.¹⁹⁵ Parental consent was still socially desired and children who married without that consent were technically able to get married but may experience social pressure and or consequences from their family. Women before Norman conquest were able to choose their spouse. But after the conquest, it was considered the role of a father, uncle, brother or other older male family member to make that choice. Then again in the early modern time period it was again the choice of the woman, or at least not preventable by the parents. Women went from either marrying someone their parents had chosen or joining a convent to not needing parental consent in the marriage. Perhaps Janet's lack of deference to her father was because the version of Tam Lin that is written out is from the early modern period, when women did not need their parents' consent to marry. Maybe before this version Janet and her father had more of a contentious relationship. But perhaps he was always 'meek and mild". We cannot know how much has been changed in the ballad

¹⁹¹ Ewan, Elizabeth, and Janay Nugent. *Finding Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. Page 87. (concerns early modern and medieval women)

¹⁹² Meale, Carol M. *The Handbook of Modern Scottish History*. Page 7

¹⁹³ Sara McDougall, "Women and Gender in Canon Law," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford, England ; New York, New York : Oxford University Press, 2013), 163–78. Page 167
Complications for such action could occur when one party later tried to claim that this had not happened or they had not consented to the marriage.

¹⁹⁴ Sara McDougall, *Women in Canon Law*, Page 165

¹⁹⁵ Mitchison, Rosalind, and Leah Leneman. *Sexuality and Social Control*. Page 83

itself, but we can see the changes that women in Scotland would have experienced. And perhaps Janet's freedoms and choices are the desires of the female population in Scotland.

Gender roles, illegitimacy laws and inheritance all underwent major changes between the early medieval period and the early modern period. Women could not do many legal activities without their husbands consent, such as sue, make business contracts or sell property (even if a woman owned property her husband was the estate manager.)¹⁹⁶ Given the potential timeline of the ballad of Tam Lin, we can imagine how these social changes would have impacted the ballad, and led to the current version we now have. Undoubtedly the product we now have is reflective of the early modern period, when it was first written down, however it also has hints of the previous ages. It is also important to note that all the versions we currently have from the early modern period share much the same plot. Janet always has premarital sex, she always becomes pregnant and attempts an abortion, she always talks back to her father and challenges Tam Lin. It seems that Janet's many social faux pas can be forgiven except her loving and having a baby with an elfin gray. Whether this is because Janet thinks he is a pagan, and represents the fears of the Christian society, or because their child could be half human, is unclear. However these elements do cause Janet genuine distress and fear, whereas her sleeping with Tam Lin out of wedlock, talking back to her father and attempting an abortion do not seem to trouble her much. Even for the child to be born illegitimate is less forbidden than for Janet to be in love with a pagan elf. To marry or love a non-Christian and have a child who may be either interfaith or half elf were truly alarming to Janet, and may show the uncrossable social rules of Janet's time.

It is also important that the ballad almost always ends with the Fairy Queen vowing vengeance. The pagan queen of the elves speaks out against Janet for stealing her most handsome knight. It does not end with the marriage of Tam Lin and Janet, but instead ends by further highlighting Janet's success in defeating the Fairy Queen and winning back her love, as well as the difference between Christians and non-Christians. Janet, a noble born Christian woman, is able to save the kidnapped Christian Tam Lin from the evil pagan Fairy Queen. Janet's triumph represents more than just the life of one person being saved, she is also winning against paganism. Tam Lin's purpose among the fae is to be sacrificed, and instead he is saved and wed to a noble Christian woman, to presumably live out the rest of their lives as

¹⁹⁶ Devine, T. M., and Jenny Wormald. *The Handbook of Modern Scottish History*. page 275

good Christian people. Even if the singers and listeners of this ballad had little chance of encountering and marrying someone outside of their faith, this fear permeated their entertainment and represented a line that was absolutely forbidden to cross. Perhaps as a leftover from an earlier age when Scottish faith was more varied, or because of news of other locations struggling with these issues, the fear of an interfaith union was extremely strong in Scottish minds.

Chapter 3

Ballads and Scotland

Scotland has a rich history of ballads.¹⁹⁷ They are a culturally vital resource, giving historians the chance to gain incredible data on social views and changing patterns. In ballads we see much more realistic women (as compared to some other forms of cultural representation). Francis James Child wanted to find the original uncensored ballads.¹⁹⁸ Though this is an impossible goal, it did result in him collecting an incredible amount of variants, as well as providing his own annotations to the various slight differences between them. There are a lot of very powerful women in these ballads, women who refuse to be passive in their own stories. One of the potential reasons for this is that ballads were likely at least partially collected, sung, and performed by women as much if not more than men. Ballad historians, such as Ana Belén Martínez García, theorize that, “as for ballad transmission, a widely-held theory suggests that women were in charge (Buchan 1972), which serves to emphasize why certain topics or tropes have stayed alive in the oral tradition right up until the twentieth century. Thus once women are granted a voice of their own, the stereotype of passivity does not hold any longer, or at the very least it becomes unstable.”¹⁹⁹ One of the reasons the ballad of Tam Lin is so sexually free and Janet is able to break so many social rules (or at least bend them), is because women were performing and spreading this ballad. The versions we have written out are not always connected to the person who provided this version to a collector such as Walter Scott or Francis Child, but if we look broadly at the study of ballads we find the trend of women performers is very common. Tam Lin is a ballad where the gender roles of the two characters are flipped. Janet is our hero; she is the person who completes the physical challenge and earns the ire of the Fairy Queen. Tam Lin is a classic damsel in distress, and is highly associated with water, his very name meaning Tam of the water. He is also generally forced to become an aquatic or

¹⁹⁷ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. Page 133

¹⁹⁸ Symonds, Deborah A. *Weep Not for Me*. Page 11

¹⁹⁹ Martínez García, Ana Belén. *Formulaicity in Child Ballads*. Page 177

semi aquatic form²⁰⁰ and the well he must be thrown into, which associates him with the archetype of the water bride.²⁰¹ Many cultures from the ancient Greeks to the Celts, had a feminine spirit of water who would appear in stories to be the bride of the hero. These figures typically needed rescuing and had little other effect on the story.²⁰² Throughout western mythology water is associated with women and the feminine. Tam Lin is passive²⁰³ and agrees with Janet, who is a louder, more argumentative character. While women often get to be active participants in their ballads, Janet goes above and beyond any of the other women. She is such an active participant she steals Tam Lin's spotlight. In this chapter I will explore both women's roles as ballad performers, and the ways in which this has probably led to some of the more unique choices in Tam Lin.

Women's Role as Storytellers

Women in Scotland had an unusually high rate of performing and collecting ballads compared to other places where such folk traditions were popular.²⁰⁴ Women sang seventy-five percent of all ballads in one early modern collection.²⁰⁵ While there is little extant literature from women, there may be a massive

²⁰⁰ "Minor Variations in Tam Lin Transformations." Minor variations in Tam Lin. Accessed June 10, 2023. https://www.tam-lin.org/analysis/transformations_minor.html#transformations.

Tam Lin is most commonly transformed into a snake and a flaming coal that must be tossed into water before he can be saved. Some have postulated that putting out the fire into the well is a metaphor for rebirth.

²⁰¹ Throughout western mythology women are often associated with water, in these myths and stories these women need to be rescued by the hero and as a reward he marries them. See Selkies, Mermaids, Nymph which is derived from the Greek word meaning wife.

²⁰² Eleanor Ruth Hayman, "Shaped by the Imagination: Myths of Water, Women, and Purity.," RCC Perspectives, no. 2 (2012): 23–34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26240358>.

²⁰³ Lynn Wollstadt, "Controlling Women: 'Reading Gender in the Ballads Scottish Women Sang,'" Western Folklore 61, no. 3/4 (2002): 295, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1500424>. Page 296

Interestingly, in the ballads collected in the twentieth century a pattern emerged of women finding the powerless men more attractive as love interests.

Lynn Wollstadt, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find: Positive Masculinity in the Ballads Sung by Scottish Women," The Flowering Thorn: International Ballad Studies, 2003, 67–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nrm0.8>.

²⁰⁴ Wollstadt, Lynn. Controlling Women: 295–317. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1500424>.

Much like the fairytale genre women were often the ones who passed down stories and it was the men who wrote them down and collected them. Interestingly many ballads appear to be gender-specific.

Arthur A. Pearson, "European Balladry," Proceedings of the Musical Association 53 (1926): 1–14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/765527>. Page 7-8

In both Spain and Italy narrative songs were not popular, except in the north of Italy, where a male collector, Count Constantino Nigra, is responsible for the primary ballad source.

²⁰⁵ Ewan, Elizabeth, and Janay Nugent. Finding Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland. Page 23

collection of women ballad singers and creators. Though once again it is difficult for anyone to truly know who first wrote a ballad, and who made changes, we do know that women played a large role in ballad telling. Ballads were vitally important to Scottish people, and were praised by other nations. Gerald de Barri, a chaplain of Henry II of England, especially praised Scotland as surpassing England in music.²⁰⁶ As previously mentioned, Scotland is one of the few places outside of France where medieval romances originated. Scottish ballads were sung by all classes of people and dealt with everyday issues. There are very few records of people's lives, but the oral tradition is one of the largest in Europe. Since ballads were so culturally important, and a large majority of them were performed by women, we can use them as a way to fill in some of the gaps of women's history.

It was a medieval²⁰⁷ traditional to tell stories, poems and music in the evenings.²⁰⁸ Perhaps, as Sutherland suggests, occasionally these ballads were even performed by women for women: "when the men were away-more often than at home-the stories would change. Others would take their turn to tell tales of faery and romance, of magic and the second sight, of talking birds and kelpies and ghosts, of the blue men of the minch, the giant bodach that slept under the mountain and the cailleach Bheur²⁰⁹ with her blue black face, her matted hair 'white as aspen covered with hoar frost' and her rust-red teeth."²¹⁰ These stories may have idealized life and provided an outlet for women, or simply a chance to talk about womanly topics without men present. Indeed, Sutherland notes that the stories told during these times were of trickery tales and stories of clever witches:

It may be that the ballads as much represent the world view of women as they do of men. While it is anachronistic to attempt to determine 'female topics', it is hard to believe that men were the source of information on such subjects as childbirth or midwifery, both of which were clearly female issues. Furthermore, the near absence of themes such as witchcraft, the witchhunts, rape and wife beating, might suggest that the ballads represent woman's idealised view of her world with much of the pain expunged. As one of us has suggested, the ballad genre provides an entire cosmos with its own inherent system of checks and balances. Intriguingly the ballad evidence presents an almost mirror image of the conventional view of the submissive female enduring the patriarchal system. Thus, the popular tradition completely contradicts the 'official' view, the

²⁰⁶ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. (Page 133)

²⁰⁷ This tradition exists almost universally among humans in any social group, prior to the invention of the television, however it was a very important nightly ritual in Scottish medieval society.

²⁰⁸ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. (page 36)

²⁰⁹ Scottish and Irish gaelic word for old hag, witch, goddess, or giant, literally translates to "the veiled one." Bheur is specifically the divine hag of winter. She is not inherently seen as evil, but rather a force of nature not to be insulted. She is deeply connected to the land, specifically mountains.

²¹⁰ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. Page 37

documented evidence of Church and state, as well as those of contemporary historians and commentators.²¹¹

Ballads allowed for female agency and more realistic discussions of childbirth, and were often told by women to other women. They show us a rare insight into women's thoughts and feelings, as well as a refutation of the more commonly held beliefs about women.

Much as many historians such as Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson, the authors of *A History of Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland*, have used legal records to understand women's history and how they pushed past the margins, ballads offer us a similar peek, "from the outset, scholars have speculated on what unusual notion of womanhood might account for such startlingly strong female figures in a culture that seems otherwise to hold femaleness in such contempt."²¹² The ballad and the song were indigenous cultural forms which, through performance in the community, were means by which people (and perhaps especially women) could shape a sense of themselves and their place in Scotland's past and in the present. Others, of course, used these traditional forms (as well as folktales, fairy stories, superstitions and so on) to make a statement about difference and identity.²¹³ Since cultural performances such as a ballad were adapted to fit the social views of the audience,²¹⁴ if women were performing just for other women, or in a group that was more tolerant or perhaps used to stronger women, the ballad representations we now have recorded would make sense.

Yet, this is not necessarily indicative of a universal national identity, but instead a much smaller, more local identity, potentially contained within villages/ cultural groups. Though these ballads are used to define Scottish identity, they are reflections of one person's understanding of national identity, as Lynn Abrams, a historian who focuses on women and gender studies in Scotland says;

Female writers and performers of the premodern era, and especially those who practiced their craft within the ballad tradition, were not themselves explicitly concerned with expressing a national identity, but they and their songs have been used subsequently to define a Scottish cultural identity. The ballad, like all forms of oral culture, was a fluid and flexible form, and thus it was socially and historically contingent. Female balladeers and storytellers were able to use these forms to tell stories that reflected their own experiences. Kerrigan goes further in arguing that 'in its power to tell a story, in providing a place for unrecorded experience, the ballad became for many women poets the home of their history'²¹⁵

²¹¹ Cowan, Edward J., and Lizanne Henderson. *Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland*. Page 21

²¹² Clover, Carol J. *Regardless of Sex*. page 18

²¹³ Abrams, Lynn. *Gender in Scottish History* Page 34.

²¹⁴ Muir, Willa. *Living with Ballads*.

²¹⁵ Abrams, Lynn. *Gender in Scottish History*. Page 33-34 .

As historians, we are the ones adding the context of Scottish national identity to the layers of meaning these ballads express. This is not to say that these ballads are not Scottish in nature, but that they were not intended to be read as Scottish national cultural representations. “Certainly, the subject matter drew on the everyday, on the banal life-cycle events affecting most women and men in rural Scotland, but it is this very groundedness in the Scottish everyday that gave them such a resonance, especially for those who had migrated far from their homes.”²¹⁶ The ballads reflected the beliefs of the Scottish people in a small snapshot. The uncommonly high rate of female performers and ballad keepers in Scotland means that they were able to express their particular cultural views through these ballads. The fact that so many women were performers and likely adapted their ballads to the audience with every telling lets us know that they were aware that some of their ideas were subversive, or would not receive a good reception, “and finally the cultural arena, which has arguably offered women the most freedom to explore their identity as Scots through self-expression in oral or written performance.”²¹⁷ Women were frequently the cultural caretakers of ballads, which in turn were a common everyday form of entertainment and self expression.

Ballads were sung during work, to help pass the day, and at night around the fire in larger groups. They were sung for important events and at dances. Every performance would have contained a massive amount of context that cannot be expressed by the words alone. We cannot know how every performance was adapted or changed to fit the audience, but we do know that a large amount of these ballads had flawed, active women who did things that were illegal, or socially frowned upon, such as Mary Hamilton²¹⁸ killing her own child, or Janet seeking out an abortion. Sarah Dunningan, a Scottish literary historian states, in reference to Mary Hamilton and the sympathetic versions of this story “That many early modern ballads envisaged a female audience might in part explain the possibility of sympathetic, if not

²¹⁶ Abrams, Lynn. *Gender in Scottish History*. Page 33-34

²¹⁷ Abrams, Lynn. *Gender in Scottish History*. Page 22-23 .

²¹⁸ Child ballad 173, Mary Hamilton, is the story of a woman who kills her infant and is convicted of infanticide; however, the story has a sympathetic view towards her circumstance because the child was born out of wedlock and perhaps because the relationship may not have been consensual. Mary laments her own parents losing their child (since she will be executed for killing the baby), and regrets killing her baby. She admonishes the father, the king, because he is shaming Mary while having had the power to save both the baby and Mary herself by offering support.

empathic, space opened up here for the woman protagonist."²¹⁹ If women were a large part of the audience, or the sole audience, a good ballad teller would want to make sure the ballad was sympathetic to the female protagonist.

Interestingly the ballads that women are more likely to sing often are ones where the female protagonist grapples with her lack of power and control of her own world and narrative.²²⁰ Janet is once again an outlier here. Like these powerless women she faces impossible odds, but she overcomes them all. The powerless women would give the ballad singer a way to vent their frustrations at their own lack of control over their husbands, or at their inability to talk back to men around them.²²¹ Sometimes the only control a woman in a ballad experiences over her own life is in choosing the manner of her death.²²² Janet does not experience these struggles. In this way her narrative shares more with a fairy tale than a ballad and we can draw upon Marina Warner's research in *From the Beast to the Blonde : On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* to understand this lack of struggle: "Fairy tales feel out the rules: the forbidden door opens onto a terra nova where different rules may apply."²²³ She may be an example of a ballad protagonist being used to test the metaphorical waters of gender equality, or perhaps she is the ballad performer's wish for a different reality, perhaps one where women had more freedoms and choices. Janet is the exact opposite of the powerless woman grappling with her place in the world, she knows exactly who she is and what she owns, and she tells Tam Lin as much the first time she meets him. She does not fit into the trope that female ballad performers seemed to prefer, that of a powerless woman struggling against her fate.

Ballads became one of the most important cultural forms for Scotland, and the fact that women were most often the performers should tell us that they were able to either create these ballads for self-expression or that the ballads were modified to better represent their lives. Willia Muir, a prominent ballad historian explains how the audience would relate to both ballad and performer, "the listeners have the same background as himself [the performer]; their likes and dislikes, fears and prejudices, come from

²¹⁹ Dunnigan, Sarah, and Suzanne Gilbert. *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Literature*. Page 71

²²⁰ Wollstadt, Lynn. *Reading Gender in Scottish Ballads*. Page 302

²²¹ See chapter two, illegitimacy and inheritance.

²²² Wollstadt, Lynn. *Reading Gender in Scottish Balads*. Page 304

²²³ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde : On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Noonday Press Printing, 1999). Page 415

experiences similar to his own, and out of an underworld of imagination common to all he does not need to persuade or cajole or explain; he can concentrate on the story he is singing. For this reason Ballads must flourish best in a close, small community."²²⁴ In order to focus on the story being shared, instead of persuading the audience to listen, one must be telling a tale that the audience will buy into. They have to accept the social rules of the ballad that is being performed. Elizabeth Ewan and Janay Nugent, two family historians of Scotland, also point out that when women were the storytellers they were singing about women, "women preferred to sing ballads that involved women in active roles....Tamalin, where a pregnant woman rescued her love from the Fairy Queen so she could marry him, were popular works."²²⁵ We know that women listened, and told these ballads, which means they must either have reflected their beliefs or influenced them.²²⁶ The oral stories told when the men were away would have influenced her understanding of how relationships were to work. Since the women in these stories were active and able to at least partially make their own choices, perhaps their real life counterparts had more freedom than previously thought, but perhaps these were fantasies of how they wished things were. This may be why romances and other ballads themselves tell us women enjoyed these tales as much as men. Again Meale observes, "the reference in *Sir Tristrem* to Ysode's taste for reading romances (lines 1257-8) is a small piece of evidence that points to female consumption of such narratives".²²⁷ *Sir Tristrem* is a 13th-century story, with Celtic roots. Even in the instances where the storyteller was likely a man, they took the time to make sure the tale would also suit women's taste, perhaps reflecting a fantasy of how women might wish the world was, but perhaps to reflect the intricate details of how it was in reality. Women were certainly consumers and enjoyers of these forms of entertainment and would have wanted stories that appealed to themselves, so some of the ballads and romances we still have must have been influenced by women

²²⁴ Muir, Willa. *Living with Ballads*. page 35

²²⁵ Ewan, Elizabeth, and Janay Nugent. *Finding Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. page 32
 women of the medieval ages would have understood romantic relationships by looking at the people around them and ballads or other stories shared. The ballads women told for female audiences were likely very different from the ones that were shared with everyone, as we know people change their stories for an audience. The impact of someone like Janet on a listener may have been cathartic, or could have been inspirational.

²²⁶ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. page 71

²²⁷ Meale, Carol M. *Women in Literature in Britain*. Page 38

even if they were written out by men.²²⁸ The sexes could be unequal in the writing of the law and the social understanding, but on a day to day, person to person interaction this could have differed.

Tam Lin and Janet's gender roles

But how does knowing that Tam Lin was likely influenced or entirely created for women by women affect the story? Janet and Tam Lin swap traditional ballad gender roles. Tam Lin reads not unlike a heroic ballad,²²⁹ where Janet acts as the knight, rescuing her damsel in distress from the evil queen. Tam Lin himself is connected to water over and over again, being turned into both a lizard and a snake/adder before being thrown into the well.²³⁰ The adder and the flaming coal are the two most common transformations of Tam Lin. *Adder* is traditionally a general term for snake but in this case specifically refers to the European Adder, as this is the only snake native to Scotland. The Scottish Gaelic word for adder is *nathair*²³¹, which means water snake, or water serpent, and is derived from the Latin *natrrix*, meaning water snake²³². Since this is the only native snake in Scotland, and it is derived from the word for water snake, it is a snake that is associated with water.²³³ The flame is also an interesting transformation because Tam Lin must be thrown into the water to end the transformations, and when he is a flaming coal (or a flaming ring of gold) he is tossed into the well in that form. His story always ends

²²⁸ We know for example that the Grimm brothers edited their collections of fairy tales. However, in the case of the ballads, collectors such as Child prided themselves as not editing their collections at all.

²²⁹ A ballad where the hero faces impossible odds and the focus is on overcoming them with fighting.

²³⁰ Previously mentioned, this well can be found to this day in Selkirk, under the name of Tamelane's well.

²³¹ This word can also refer to the Beithir, the only mythical snake in Scottish mythology, whose venomous bite can only be cured by washing it in the nearest body of water to where the person was bitten.

²³² Ivana Bojčić and Bernard Dukić, "Black N Adder—Indo—European Ancestry of the English Language through Words," *Školski Vjesnik* 71, no. 2 (2022): 92–101, <https://doi.org/10.38003/sv.71.2.8>. Page 97 this specific language connection is vital to Scottish Gaelic studies, as it proves the Latin influence. "The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology explains that the word 'adder' comes from OE naed(d)re corresponding to Old Saxon natra, Old High German natara, Old Norse nadra, Gothic nadrs and is in turn related to Latin word natrrix meaning water-snake (CODEE, 1987, p. 5). As is stated in Collins Latin Dictionary and Grammar, word natrrix, natricis, f. denotes snake, but a water-snake (CLDG, 1997, p. 138). By this we have so far established the relationship between Old English naed(d)re and Latin natrrix, both which refer to a kind of snake. This fact leads us to conclusion that Indo – European ancestors of ancient Romans and Anglo – Saxons lived together and developed this notation for a snake."

²³³ In addition the Celtic goddess Sirona is the goddess of healing and is often symbolized by a snake and bodies of water.

with him becoming some form of fire (be it a ring of goalen flame, a piece of coal or just fire) and then being tossed into the well, passing from the possession of the Fairy Queen into Janet's protection, as she immediately covers him with her mantle.

Fairies, that is a mythological creature or spirit with some sort of magical ability often connected to the natural world, have a rich history across the globe. The Greek and Roman nymphs have had a strong influence on the western idea of nature spirits. We can understand their powers through a lens of older myths. The myths of fairies were also often created by women to represent the women in their lives who helped save them, protect them and delivered children.²³⁴ The trope of the water spirit bride is a common one in European myths.²³⁵ These women are often rescued or taken from their natural habitat and become the bride of their kidnapper or rescuer. This trope is not as common with the man being the water spirit. There are some male selkie stories but the human woman normally joins him in the water, not the other way around. But Tam Lin is linked to water several times and inverts this tradition. He is often connected to water imagery. Tam Lin's name means "Tam of the water." He gets turned into an adder, and must be thrown into the water in order to be saved. It is Tam Lin who is brought to the human world and rescued, not Janet. In late medieval Scotland water would have held a special significance. "Water from pagan times had a magical significance for Celts and certain wells or springs could harm or heal, grant wishes, or ward off the evil eye in return for a gift to the guardian spirit of the water."²³⁶ Tam Lin is always only freed from his curse by being thrown into the well²³⁷, passing from being an elfin gray, back to a man. He is a passive bystander in a story named for him. He does not even try to save himself from the Fairy Queen or run away. In this way he behaves more like the damsel in distress, waiting her knight to come and save her instead of taking action herself. Tam Lin does not even argue with Janet when she tells him she owns the woods and instead seems to be enchanted by her response. He is very calm and

²³⁴ Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale : The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²³⁵ See nereids, mermaids, sea nymphs, selkie, Rusalka (can be hostile towards people or fit this trope), finfolk, Kopakonan, Selshamurinn, the swan maiden, and undine. These women were 'seductresses' and fell into the supernatural lover trope.

Schaus, Margaret. *Women in Medieval Europe*. Page 560

²³⁶ Sutherland, Elizabeth. *Five Euphemias*. page 33-34

²³⁷ I have found mention that in one case it was a bucket of milk, but I do not know which version this refers to.

soft spoken when Janet debates an abortion, only asking why she is upset and means to harm the baby.²³⁸ He, like the rest of the men in this story, simply lets Janet do what she wants, including yelling at him, without responding in kind.

It is Janet who fulfills the role of the knight in this story, dashing in and fighting for her love. Though the ballad begins with a warning against seeing Tam Lin, she very quickly makes it obvious she is the one in charge, and refuses to be restrained; “Although the song takes its name from its male hero, Janet is its true protagonist. On her our attention is centered from beginning to end, and we see the action through her eyes. Through her the ballad works out its main implicit themes: the resolution of sexual fears and the release of the young from the tyrannical hold of elders.”²³⁹ Janet never pauses or backs down, she shows unfaltering courage and enormous physical strength, running down a horse and holding on to many fearsome animals, while possibly extremely pregnant. Even the Fairy Queen sees Janet as her adversary, going as far as to end the story with a hateful speech, declaring her rage and anger at being foiled. In Tam Lin, Janet seeks out a sexual encounter; she is told by her father that Tam Lin is in the forest, and that he has requested the virginity from the women who encounter him. She does not hesitate once her father leaves, to go running to Tam Lin, leaving no doubt that she is seeking not only Tam Lin out but the encounter itself.

Every action Janet takes with her clothing and appearance conveys her consent and agency in her story. Janet braided her hair with golden ribbon, a motif that is used to “indicate readiness for sexual activity”.²⁴⁰ Janet also plucks at least one rose to summon Tam Lin, the plucking of a rose is a symbol of claiming one's sexuality, as she is literally deflowering herself.²⁴¹ In addition, when she is getting prepared

²³⁸ He also does not seem very distressed by the fact that the two of them are going to have an illegitimate child which could be in part because he is a man, and less affected or because he knows it is fine if they get married in the future. (see chapter two)

²³⁹ J. D. Niles, Tam Lin: Form and Meaning in a Traditional Ballad. Page 345-346

²⁴⁰ Martha P. Hixon, “Tam Lin, Fair Janet, and the Sexual Revolution: Traditional Ballads, Fairy Tales, and Twentieth-Century Children's Literature,” *Marvels & Tales* 18, no. 1 (2004): 67–92, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mat.2004.0010>. Page 73. This is because golden hair was seen as a motif for purity and virginity, in ballads the braiding of hair is often a metaphor for sexual activity. So combining her golden hair and ribbon with the braiding is her expression of her desire to have sex.

See also Warner, M. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. Chapter 21, The Language of Hair.

²⁴¹ Hixon, Martha P. Tam Lin, Fair Janet, pp. 67–92.

to leave for Carterhaugh, she 'kilts her kirtle' (ties up her dress so she can move easier). Kilting up one's kirtle "is primarily related to the idea of urgency. So, while the formula is sometimes associated with traditionally transgressive actions, like eloping with a lover or an illicit sexual encounter, it also appears associated with a character claiming her rights facing desertion, saving others, or even saving herself from harm: all situations in which she needs to move quickly. In all cases, instead of being submissive, these women decide to act.²⁴² From the beginning of the ballad the listener is prepared for Janet's subversions and actions. She hitches up her skirt in order to first move faster to go meet with Tam Lin, immediately after being warned that he will try to sleep with her. Later, when she is distressed by her father and his knight's response to her pregnancy, she "kilts her kirtle" again. In both cases her need to move quickly defies the expected behavior of a young lady. She is repeatedly acting as the hero of the story, unapologetically, even going so far as to place her mantle on Tam Lin in a protective action that is traditionally masculine, "Taking their mantles, women appropriate a male symbol, proving that they can be more powerful than, and even protective of, men."²⁴³ When Janet pulls off her mantle, a heavy cloak, and puts it on the now human Tam Lin, she is claiming him as her own. Mantles are often used this way in ballads, but with men giving them to women, as an act of kindness to shelter them.²⁴⁴ Once again Janet is taking the role of the man in her relationship with Tam Lin, using her mantle to symbolically protect a now human and mortal Tam Lin from the Fairy Queen's wrath. It is Janet whom the Fairy Queen yells at for foiling her evil plans, and Janet who she swears revenge upon. And even though Janet acts as the more masculine figure in this ballad, she is not treating Tam Lin as a lesser person; he needs to be rescued but not restrained. Janet does not become a domineering character, at least not in the way that some literary women with power become.²⁴⁵ She is not so exaggerated as to become a parody or

Jessica Greenlee, "No Longer Divided: Wholeness in Winter Rose," *Extrapolation* 42, no. 1 (2001): 75–86. The rose symbolizes love and purity and she is plucking it which is her literal deflowerment. Interestingly, she is the one who chooses to pluck this flower, not Tam Lin.

²⁴² Martínez García, Ana Belén. *Formulaicity in Child Ballads*. Page 178

²⁴³ Martínez García, Ana Belén. *Formulaicity in Child Ballads*. Page 185

²⁴⁴ There are two different kinds of mantles. One, the cloak version, is older and was worn by both sexes; the other is an indoor coat or shawl more commonly worn by women in Victorian times. Given the age of this ballad the first mantle is likely what is being thought of here. It is also more likely to be this kind because this kind of mantle has strong roots in Ireland, which as previously discussed influenced Scottish folklore. Interestingly this mantle shares the same roots as the expression 'to take up the mantle', so when someone exchanges a mantle in a ballad it could be read as being given this mantle.

²⁴⁵ See "The Wife of Bath's Tale" by Chaucer

warning of what happens when women are powerful, but instead acts as the main hero. At the end of the ballad she is still the same person she was at the beginning, having suffered no character changes nor consequence for her bold actions. She is the one in this ballad that causes the action to continue moving forward. It is by her strength that Tam Lin is freed, and she chooses to visit him in the first place even after hearing her father's warning.

In ballads and literature, the characters are symbolic representations. They are written to reflect the author's views on the world, and this means that women are written as weaker side characters. Janet does not fall into this, unlike many other of the romance women as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, a historian of late medieval women, states: "both Joan of Kent, in the chronicles, and Guenevere, in Arthurian romance, seem primarily important as symbolic representations of aristocratic social structures, validating hierarchy in their very weaknesses."²⁴⁶ So what is Janet's existence validating? What does the continued presence and popularity of the ballad of Tam Lin tell us about medieval and early modern Scotland? Perhaps it is simply the exception that proves the rule. Since we do not know where this ballad was first created, nor who sang it, this is a very likely possibility. But then why is it so popular as to appear over and over again, in the form of a ballad, a dance and even a ballet? It is impossible to know for certain, but perhaps this was a ballad written with women in mind, or perhaps it was sung primarily by women. If so, perhaps the reversal of roles between Janet and Tam Lin could be read through the eyes of women wishing for more power and control over their lives. Janet's eagerness to break the rules and her lack of consequences might be a desire to not have a double standard, and to allow women to have more control over their own lives. Janet's lack of consequences and her loving partner are certainly desirable things for anyone, but especially someone whose life is defined by the lack of these things. If Tam Lin is a ballad meant for women, or created by women, it would tell historians a lot about the desires of women. It also shows an understanding that gender inequality is not set in stone. It is a malleable thing that people can change in their lives. Either way, the prevalence of such an independent heroine and her very tolerant lover in Scottish balladry forces historians to ask themselves many questions about the cultural practice of singing ballads. Even considering that Janet's behavior may only be accepted because of its fictitious nature, this ballad was still performed and spread enough to make it a very popular ballad.

²⁴⁶ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Medieval Women* (Brepols Publishers, 2000). Page 4

Conclusion

Humans are the only creatures that tell fictional stories. We tell stories to express ourselves, our hopes, dreams and fears to the others around us. We dream of a better world, and curse the one we live in, all in the same tale. Our stories are deeply rooted in the reality of our own world, even the ones that are purely fantastic, including Tam Lin.

Tam Lin is only one of many Scottish ballads. It represents a fraction of one group of people's understanding of their reality. It is not a complete representation of medieval and early modern Scottish culture and should not be treated as such. But it has some very interesting things to say, especially regarding women in this time period. Janet seems impervious to consequences, and is able to push aside gender roles and propriety with a wave of her hand. Perhaps, drawing a conclusion from a genre similar in nature to the Scottish ballad, the fairy tale, we can say that fairy tales "remake the world in the image of desire,"²⁴⁷ These stories force us to see the world not as it is but as it should be. The tellers can hide behind a fictional world with magic to imagine their own a better place. Do we not see a plethora of strong women in fairy tales, women who chose their own husbands, and outwit the witches of their lives, much like Janet did? Fairy tales, Warber tells us, are "characterized by 'heroic optimism', as if to say 'one day, we might be happy, even if it won't last'."²⁴⁸ And perhaps the ballad of Tam Lin, shares this same optimism, being shared primarily by women to see the world with some hope. Janet certainly faces every threat to her personal happiness with a fierce certainty that she will not fail, as though failing is not even in her thoughts. The character of Janet could very well be a hopeful imagining of a world where women choose their spouses, and enact agency on their lives. Janet's story takes place in a time where she was expected to be quiet, and allow others to make major life choices, but she is defiant of all those around her. Ballad historian J.D. Niles observes, the ballad of Tam Lin, much like Janet herself, is not to be restrained by any rules.

The walls which prevent human success, separating lover from lover and kin from kin, but rather it celebrates the power of love to break down, transcend, or undermine walls: the rose and the briar whose roots or whose branches so firmly intertwine. On the one side is Tam Lin, a young man being "kept" by the Queen of Fairies. On the other side is Janet, a young woman being

²⁴⁷ Warner, Marina, *From the Beast to the Blonde*. Page XVI

²⁴⁸ Warber, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde* Page xx

"kept" by parental restraints. Release for both is made possible when Janet determines to act in defiance of all prohibitions: act, whatever the cost. First she willfully sets out for the forbidden realm of Carterhaugh. Then she plucks a rose, violating an apparent taboo, in a gesture which seems to imply acquiescence in her own deflowering. Finally and most dangerously, she dares to interfere with the fairy troop at the time of its annual ride. Continually forcing her way beyond the limits set by custom or authority, Janet commits herself to a course of action which takes her to Miles Cross and the utmost terrors of the unknown.²⁴⁹

It is a ballad of hope, and resistance to the rules. Tam Lin is likely a ballad that younger people were more drawn to, given the rebellious aspects of Janet. Both she and Tam Lin succeed in rebelling against the adults who control their lives. Tam Lin is a ballad of youthful choices, but without negative social consequence. Perhaps the faux pas and social transgressions were permitted because of the magical framework of the story, as happens with numerous fairy tales. It is fictional after all, but it was still a ballad that was performed frequently. It would have been a potentially encouraging ballad for rebellious strong minded young women, and it certainly did not lack in popularity.²⁵⁰

The titular character appears to be named after a promising young noble man who died very early during the second war of Scottish succession. Even today in the town of Selkirk there is a small memorial to him.²⁵¹ But in reality it is Janet's story—she is the hero, the driving force, the reason anything in the ballad occurs. It is Janet's direct rebellion of her father's request that leads to her and Tam Lin meeting, and her attempts at aborting the baby that leads Tam Lin to belatedly tell her that he can be saved. She performs the feats of strength, while heavily pregnant, that lead to Tam Lin being rescued. Perhaps hard working lower-class Scottish women saw their own daily labor in Janet's actions: her struggles to fight for her family's survival are not hindered by her own feelings of discomfort. We may never know why Tam Lin, a ballad written long ago, has remained popular over the many centuries of its existence. But it certainly must be an accurate reflection or at least relatable to some of the people of Scotland for it to have survived for so long.

²⁴⁹ Niles, J. D Form and Meaning in a Traditional Ballad, Page 345

²⁵⁰ Indeed it continues to be a very popular if in more of a cult way. Tam Lin has shown up in movies (including a horror retelling from 1970), several video games including a 2002 Japanese game that was not translated to English until 2014, which lists Tam Lin's origins as Welsh and English. The song Tam Lin has been performed and recorded by several notable folk singers, as well as by Anais Mitchell, author of *Hadestown*. Tam Lin is in fantasy novels, and retellings as well as children's illustrated books. There is an article on Tam Lin's popularity published in the *Economist* in 2022. Tam Lin has survived and even continues to thrive within the collective imagination, often on the margins but no less present, even after all these years, the story holds some human truth that captivates our imaginations over and over again.

²⁵¹ See Tamalane's well mentioned in chapter one.

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